

**The ‘In-Betweeners’: Politics of power, resistance, and
agency in second-generation desi Muslim migrant
narratives in London**

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As my dear father recited to me:

*Aankhon mein raha dil mein utar kar nahi dekha
Kashti ke musafir ne samundar nahi dekha
Jis din se chala hoon meri manzil pe nazar hai
Aankhon ne kabhi miil ka pathhar nahi dekha...*

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Abstract

This ethnography intimately explores the construction and development of responsive ‘in between’ subjectivities that transform and challenge static notions of identity and belonging, particularly in the context of second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London. Drawing upon Foucault’s (1980; 2000) notions of power/knowledge in conjunction with Butler’s (2004) theory of performativity, the thesis asks: what discourses constitute and coordinate second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ multiple subjectivities and the ways in which they can enact and express them, and how do we recognise the dual processes of being subjected but also of becoming an agentic subject as playing themselves out in the narratives of their everyday lives? The thesis argues that the informants’ ‘in between’ subjectivities emerge as continuously done, undone and redone via their performances of multiplicity (which include multiple religiosities as well as multiple modernities) that occur within competing discourses, power relations, historical and contextual experiences, cultural and religious practices, and material conditions. The thesis hopes to serve a dual purpose- while offering a critique of the dominant secular and neoliberal frameworks that currently shape British, and to a large extent ‘Western’, politics and society (via its argument for multiple modernities), it is also a call to suspend judgement within diasporic Muslim communities themselves (via its argument for multiple religiosities), thus emphasising a dialogue of ‘living with difference’ both within the minority communities as well as with the majority. Bearing this in mind, I argue for the ‘but also’ positioning to move beyond an ‘either/or’ or ‘both and’ approach to identity; for the term ‘desi’ to move beyond the limitations of overarching ‘South Asian’/‘British Asian’/‘British Muslim’ formulations; for the study of ‘lived religion’ to move beyond homogenous depictions of ‘institutional’ or ‘official’ religion; and for the idea of ‘situational agency’ to move beyond essentialised oppositions of agency versus structure that persist within official and demotic (as well as other) discourses.

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This thesis is for all of you.

I. Introduction

*“Bismillah¹,
Don't make me smash your melon up
Try throwing shade on melanin
Bona fido like 7UP
They too sweet I put the lemon in
They put their boots in our ground
I put my roots in their ground
And I put my truth in this sound
I spit my truth and it's Brown.
I don't give a fuck about the cash you stack
Or the crown on your skull, you ain't Basquiat²
Or the Prince of Denmark,
Rizzy boy piss on their benchmarks till white kids wanna be Paks
Brown planet. It's gonna be that.
The man frown, panic and wanting me out
But I'm outstanding 'cause I stand out
And where I was standing, there's gonna be plaques.”*

(Ahmed, 2020, track 4, verse 1).

It is the 5th of October, 2018. I am casually scrolling through Instagram when I come across this post by Riz Ahmed³ featuring a snippet of his song ‘Fast Lava’⁴. My jaw drops as I say “whoa”, turning up the volume and playing it again. And again. The visuals bring back childhood memories of summer holidays visiting my grandparents in India, of my late grandfather’s *kushti* (wrestling) stories, and of the many sunsets we saw from our *chhat* (open terrace). Set to the beat of a *dhol*⁵, the audio reminds me of celebrations, of clapping and dancing in our weddings. But it is the lyrics that hit me the most, reminding me of my colour,

¹ In the name of Allah (an invocation used by Muslims at the beginning of any undertaking). From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/bismillah>.

² Referring to the American artist of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent, Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose work focused on ‘suggestive dichotomies’ including integration versus segregation, wealth versus poverty, and inner versus outer experience; the crown symbol appears as a recurring motif in almost all of his paintings (Emmerling, 2003; Fretz, 2010; Saggese, 2011; Rodrigues, 2011).

³ Born in Wembley, London, Riz Ahmed (also known by his stage name Riz MC and birth name Rizwan Ahmed) is a British Pakistani actor, rapper, and activist. He famously appeared in the Bafta-winning movie, Four Lions. From: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1981893/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm.

⁴ From: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bog5tQXB-kl/>. This song’s first verse is also heard at the beginning of the music video to ‘Mogambo’, which is the 11th track of Ahmed’s album, ‘The Long Goodbye’. This is the version that I refer to here, which contains some minor differences in lyrics to ‘Fast Lava’ (for example, ‘Bona Fido like 7Up’ versus ‘Send them 7Up’).

⁵ A large, barrel-shaped or cylindrical wooden drum, typically two-headed, used in South Asia. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/dhol>.

my colonial history, and my contested position in Britain. As it turns out, I was not the only one who was moved by his work; in an open letter to Riz Ahmed, my informant, 24-year-old Syeda, thanks him for his latest album ‘The Long Goodbye’⁶:

The track draws out how the place so many of us call home is growing increasingly hostile towards us, reminiscent of our ‘othering’ during the era of the glorious British empire. In just three and a half minutes, you lay out the gritty but common crisis of being a Pakistani, born and raised in a nation that never really wanted to make us kings or queens, just colonies... Much like Toba Tek Singh’s⁷ displacement, I felt an all too recognizable feeling of being out of place. It is part of human nature, as social animals, to crave a sense of belonging. But for many second-gen immigrants, the repercussions of the Brexit referendum, the Trump administration and the rise of right-wing nationalism globally, pushes this sense of belonging just out of reach, leaving you where Manto’s⁸ titular character lay – neither here nor there, in no man’s land. Over and over, I played lyrics like “if you want me back to where I’m from, then bruv, I need a map” and “hope my people don’t just end up as a memory”. These snippets bring out an element of support and comfort, a feeling that I am not alone here; a feeling of being represented.⁹

I begin this thesis with these reflections because in many ways Syeda ‘sets the scene’ for my ethnography on second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London. She introduces us to its key themes of belonging and the politics of recognition, representation, and resistance that we shall engage with throughout the study, as we explore the tensions between the ‘here’ and ‘there’, the ‘then’ and ‘now’, and the ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ that constitute diasporic productions of identity (Mallapragada, 2014). Following Fredric Jameson’s (1982, p. 9) imperative call to “Always historicise!”, Syeda does just that as she considers the cultural legacy of Britain’s colonial and imperial economic and political domination, particularly in the South Asian subcontinent. Her Said (1979) style postcolonial critique acknowledges “our ‘othering’” as the human consequence of “the glorious British empire”, the effects of which are felt till today (for example, “the repercussions of the Brexit referendum, the Trump administration and the rise of right-wing nationalism globally”). The heritage of British colonialism still (perhaps latently) works through the creation of categories and classifications of how identity should be defined (Marranci, 2011). Although identity in the postmodern world is argued to be discursive and

⁶ Released on 6 March, 2020, the album is about Riz being dumped by an abusive lover- his home country, Britain. From: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/mar/08/riz-ahmed-the-long-goodbye-review>.

⁷ This is the title of the second track on Riz’s album, ‘The Long Goodbye’.

⁸ Referring to the Pakistani author, Saadat Hasan Manto, who wrote his short story titled ‘Toba Tek Singh’ in 1955, reflecting on the anguish and loss associated with the India-Pakistan Partition of 1947. From: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jun/11/saadat-hasan-manto-short-stories-partition-pakistan>.

⁹ From: https://www.mangobaaz.com/an-open-letter-to-riz-ahmed-from-a-british-pakistani-thank-you-for-your-breakup-with-britain?utm_source=urlshare

self-referential (given the claim that self-reference is a symptom of postmodernity (Balázs, 2010; Nöth, 2007; Schrag, 1997), it is often informed by the presence of the Other- with regard to their integrity, the truth of their religion, their ‘authenticity’, and so on (Cohen, 2012). As the informants reflect on the many ways in which the power of colonial knowledge operates on their neo-colonial present, thus producing them as ‘second-generation immigrants’ (Schinkel, 2018; Du Bois, 2003), the thesis in turn maps the multiple power relations and inversions across their narratives. Perhaps we can never fully escape a history characterised by Orientalism inspired discursive formations (Breckenridge & Van Der Veer, 1993), but we can escape reproducing essentialist abstractions by studying the informants’ multiple, contradictory, and performative religio-cultural practices as they disrupt stable binaries, dominant knowledge systems and normative constructions of identity categories such as ‘migrant’, ‘Muslim’, ‘South Asian’, and ‘British’.

The thesis draws from Foucault’s (1980; 2000) notions of power/knowledge in conjunction with Butler’s (2004) theory of performativity as it explores the construction and development of responsive ‘in between’ subjectivities that transform and challenge static notions of identity and belonging, particularly in the context of second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London. I dub my informants as the ‘in betweeners’ because they continuously find themselves in between categories such as ‘*desh*’ (native land) and ‘*videsh*’ (foreign land), in between ‘British’ and ‘Muslim’ and ‘South Asian’, in between religion and secularism, in between an upper and lower class, and so on, all the while breaking open each of these categories and blurring the boundaries drawn between them. Having obtained approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury (HEC)¹⁰, the primary data (which includes the narrative voices, experiences, feelings, stories, and opinions of the informants) is analysed via a mixed-methods approach to study their on-going engagement and negotiation with the multiple competing discourses that attempt to regulate and contain them (including gendered discourses of acceptable masculinities and femininities, religious discourse of ‘*halal*’ (permissible) and ‘*haram*’ (impermissible), secular discourses of neoliberal agency and modernity, and so on). Foucault’s (1978, 1991) central theses of power as productive is

¹⁰ I have attached the HEC approval letter in the Appendix. My research proposal at the time was titled ‘*Crossing Boundaries - Exploring the Importance and Interplay of Identity, Religion, and Transnationalism in Muslim Indian and Pakistani Cross-Cultural Marriages*’, and that was indeed the starting point for this thesis. But as so often occurs with ethnographic research, the thesis developed, expanded, and refocused into studying ‘*The ‘In-Betweeners’: Politics of power, resistance, and agency in second-generation desi Muslim migrant narratives in London*’. I discuss this evolution further in Chapters II and III.

particularly useful here, to help recognise how multiple ‘forms of imperatives’ are imposed on the informants’ emerging subjectivities, thus shedding light on various power structures and their complex (and often) contradictory ‘regime of truth’.

However, the thesis is not just concerned with highlighting the conflicting discourses and structural constraints that second-generation desi Muslim migrants are subject to, but more importantly, what they are able to do to these norms and discourses in return via their performative acts for/against recognition. As the informants continuously make, unmake, and remake their subjectivities, they emerge as unfinished products of power and discourse rather than as stable subjects that fit neatly into the boxes or identity categories available to them. So not only does the thesis ask what discourses constitute and coordinate second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ multiple subjectivities and the ways in which they can enact and express them, but it pushes that question further by asking how do we recognise the dual processes of being subjected but also of becoming an agentic subject as playing themselves out in the narratives of their everyday lives? These are the main research questions that this study is concerned with.

The thesis explores the perpetual and mutually reinforcing dynamic between structure and agency via an ethnography of the everyday (Hine, 2015); ethnographers hold that an appreciation of the ‘extraordinary-in-the-ordinary’ helps understand the ambiguities and obscurities of everyday life which may otherwise go unnoticed (Ybema, et al., 2009, p. 2). While part of my research design does include semi-structured qualitative interviews¹¹ (which have undoubtedly offered deep insight), there are also multiple instances throughout the chapters where I refer to the uninhibited and seemingly mundane daily exchanges that me and my informants have with the people and world around us (gained, as part of the ethics approved ethnography). As Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 196) writes in his three-volume *‘Critique of Everyday Life’*: “It is in the everyday and its ambiguous depths that possibilities are born and the present lives out its relation with the future”. The everyday is the space in which all of life occurs, between which all social activities take place. Power is exercised in microrelations and micropractices every day, in every interaction and every sphere of society (Mills, 2003). The shaping of identities through ‘micropractices’ (Shankar, 2008) is often beautifully uncovered through the process of ethnographic research. By paying attention to ‘micropractices’ and

¹¹ All interviews were conducted and transcribed by me over the course of the ethnography.

everyday dialogues and experiences, we begin to unpack how normative identity categories such as ‘desi’/‘Muslim’/‘British’/‘migrant’ can become a terrain of struggle between different and competing claims to the ownership and expression of those terms, where class, family/community, religion, and gender also emerge as key factors to how such categories get reimagined. As the informants reflect on the embedded, embodied, everyday experience of navigating through the multiple social textures of their lives, they touch upon a range of themes that span across identity and diasporic belonging (including the sub-themes of home, family and community), issues of class and representation, religion (along with sub-themes of morality, ‘halal’/‘haram’, intention, and interpretation), and gender (including roles, relations, expectations, sexuality, and emotions). But above all, I would argue that the core of this thesis is really about the politics of recognition, resistance, and agency- how it is understood, articulated, negotiated, exercised, and restrained.

Intimate matters such as religiosity, conjugality, family, domesticity, sexuality, and emotional work consistently emerge as central features in the informants’ self-narratives, having a profound impact on their processes of meaning making and everyday life. Intimacy is both an intra-psychic as well as an interpersonal process- it is about how we make sense of our interior selves but also about the ways in which we connect with others and the outside world (Sehlikoglu & Zengin, 2015). Throughout the ethnography, we see how the productive effects of power become most visible via the engagement with an intimate other (whether it be a partner, parent, or friend), as articulations of gender, sexuality, love, and marriage emerge as sites of contention and controversy. The everyday realm of the intimate is integral to the formation of human selves and subjectivities, as well as communities, publics, collectives and socialities, because it has the potential to forge distance and/or proximity by creating bonds, attachments and new meanings (Wilson, 2012). Rather than exclusively applying the perspective of structural functionalism or symbolic interactionism, studying everyday life via ethnography enables researchers to address both ‘big’ and ‘small’ questions (Miall, et al., 2005), as it considers the dynamic between the micro of individual agency and the macro of institutional structures (such as religion, family, education, government, etc.) and their power relations. The thesis therefore sets out to explore the entangled relationship between intimacy and agency in approving/rejecting the articulation of particular subjectivities at the intersection of competing discourses, while also taking into account hierarchical differences and power differentials. I repeatedly refer to ‘articulation’ throughout the thesis because it entails the ongoing process of signification, of putting things together while letting them be diverse and

perhaps even in friction with one another and themselves (Haraway, 1992). For second-generation desi Muslim migrants, the articulation of agency and subjectivity is fluid, contradictory, and conditional, produced in relationships with others and everyday practices.

Since I have not outlined a distinct ‘Literature Review’ section, I have decided to engage with the literature that follows as a framing device for the discussions of the thesis¹². This thesis sits within the context of the wealth of literature and empirical research that has been done in the field of immigration and diaspora, particularly in the U.K., which saw a marked rise in ‘South Asian’ immigration post World War II (Dobbs, et al., 2006). Discussions and debates around ‘acculturation’, ‘integration’, ‘identity’, and ‘belonging’ have been prominent since then, both within and beyond academia; the British discourse on racialized minorities has steadily evolved from ‘colour’ in the 1950s and 60s; to ‘race’ in the 1970s and 80s; to ‘ethnicity’ in the 1990s; and finally to ‘religion’ in the new millennium (Abbas, 2004). In 2015, analysis of latest census data showed that the Muslim population of England and Wales is growing even faster than the overall population¹³. Kabir (2014) notes how ‘British Muslims’ are predominantly of ‘South Asian’ descent (43 per cent Pakistani, 16 per cent Bangladeshi, 8 per cent Indian, and 6 per cent from other Asian origins), accounting for approximately 75 per cent of the total ‘British Muslim’ population. So issues of race and religion become particularly pressing for the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study - while they certainly address the ‘Muslim Question’ (Norton, 2020) that plagues contemporary Europe, their narratives also reveal how they continue to be confronted with the “problem of the colour line” (Du Bois, 1989/1903, p. xxxi). Just as the discursive positioning of Muslims as a ‘security threat’ or ‘enemy within’ is maintained in government policies and the media (Dwyer, et al., 2008; Archer, 2001), the formations of cultural citizenship in Britain continue to be informed by the logics of race and orientalism (Qureshi & Zeitlyn, 2013). Werbner (2004) argues that the ‘South Asian’ public sphere in Britain is divided into two opposing diasporic discourses - one that satirises the parochialism and conservatism of the South Asian immigrant generation while the other emerges as a conflictual diasporic Muslim public sphere - and the consequent messages emanating from both these discourses create ambivalent stereotyped images of ‘Muslims’, ‘South Asians’, and ‘migrants’. This ethnography works to problematise such stereotypes as

¹² This ‘literature review’ is placed here within the Introduction because it also enables a discussion of the informants, as well as my own positionality as researcher.

¹³ From: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/11/muslim-population-england-wales-nearly-doubles-10-years>

the informants undo normative constructions of these categories via their reiterative and citational practices, which bring to light internal diasporic politics, majority-minority power relations, and competing systems of knowledge.

There are a number of contemporary scholars who have dedicated their life's work to studying ethnic minority communities, and 'British' 'South Asian' 'Muslims' in particular. For instance, we cannot talk about the 'politics of difference' in the UK without acknowledging political theorist and sociologist, Tariq Modood, and his extensive work on 'multiculturalism' (Modood, 2005; 2007; 2010a; Uberoi & Modood, 2015; Meer, 2016; Triandafyllidou & Modood, 2017), particularly in relation to second generation 'British Asian Muslims' and their national, ethnic, and religious identities. Despite the intense critique of official or state multiculturalism's 'failure' to foster dialogue and a sense of inclusion amongst immigrant communities in Britain¹⁴ (Mathieu, 2018; Pišev & Milenković, 2016; Jones, 2015; Gabriel, et al., 2012, for example), I still appreciate Modood's anti-essentialist theoretical orientation, his emphasis on the need for an on-going discursive engagement with minority communities, and his ideas around the fluidity and multiplicity of meanings- all of which I build upon throughout this thesis. Modood (2019; 2016; 2012; 2010b; 2009; 2004) also critiques secularism (specifically political secularism) at length, as he reflects on its relationship to religion and the implications this has for 'British Muslims'- issues that I too reflect upon in my conclusion. Another important scholar who engages in these discussions is Tahir Abbas (2020; 2019; 2011; 2007; 2004a; 2004b; 2003; Ijaz & Abbas, 2010; Abbas & Siddique, 2012), who focuses on British South Asian Muslim minorities while addressing issues of ethnicity, religion (including radicalisation and Islamophobia), multiculturalism, education, and politics. I particularly appreciate his application of Foucauldian perspectives and his multi-level macro-meso-micro style analysis, which I also put to work in my writing. In terms of ethnography, it is social anthropologist Pnina Werbner's (1997; 2000; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2015; Liebelt & Werbner, 2018; Werbner & Johnson, 2019) body of work on 'Muslim South Asians' in Britain which stands out, as she addresses cultural hybridity, gender, migration, religious identity, radicalism, multiculturalism, citizenship and difference. Her attention to gendered concerns and feminist arguments, her development of 'vernacular'

¹⁴ Pišev & Milenković (2016) argue that the main consequences of multicultural policies in Europe have weakened the contact between cultures, robbed individuals of the right to change and choose their identities, and strengthened intra-cultural mediators of power with patriarchy, violence against women and children, religious fundamentalism and even terrorism.

cosmopolitanism, her analysis of culture and identity as ‘performance’ which is both creative and reflexive, her championing of ‘situationalism’ (the situational framing of cultural action (Werbner, 1997, p.42)) as one of the key conceptual tools of anthropological analysis- has all been deeply inspirational in guiding my own ethnographic endeavours.

There is no shortage of ethnographies when it comes to studying the ‘South Asian’ ‘Muslim’ population in Britain; a wide range of issues have been covered, including identity (especially in dual, hybrid, and transnational forms, e.g. Ballard & Banks, 1994; Jacobson, 1997; Raj, 2003; Burdsey, 2004; Marranci, 2011; Shannahan, 2011; Bolognani, 2014; Khan, 2016); schooling and education (e.g. Sai, 2018; Hoque, 2018; Bhatti, 1999); healthcare (e.g. Garrett, et al., 2012); family and parenting (e.g. Franceschelli, 2017; Becher, 2008); marriage practices (e.g. Charsley & Shaw, 2006; Pichler, 2007); men and masculinities (e.g. Kalra, 2009; Randeree, 2013; Hoque, 2019); the gendered experiences of girls and women (e.g. Meeto, 2019; Basit, 2017, 1997; Bano, 2007; Ahmad, 2001; Dwyer, 2000); and the politics of ethnography as methodology when studying these groups (e.g. Ahmad, 2003; Kalra, 2006; Bolognani, 2007; Hampshire, et al., 2014). But far from being an overworked subject, the politics of colour, class and identity find renewed relevance post Britain’s 2016 referendum to leave the European Union (popularly called ‘Brexit’), where general anti-immigration populism and anti-Muslim rhetoric has been on the rise (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017).

For example, just within the first six months of my fieldwork in the U.K. (February to July 2017), I witnessed the London bridge terror attacks (the terrorist, Khuram Butt, was identified as a ‘British citizen who was born in Pakistan but lived in Barking, east London’, and had previously appeared in the Channel 4 documentary titled ‘The Jihadis Next Door’)¹⁵; the suicide bombing during Ariana Grande’s concert in Manchester arena (again, the bomber Salman Abedi, was identified as ‘the son of Libyan parents, who reportedly fled their native country and sought refuge in the UK’ and was ‘thought to have attended the Manchester Islamic Centre’ regularly)¹⁶; the Grenfell tower fire incident (where there was some positive, albeit brief, media coverage as ‘Muslims awake due to Ramadan may have saved lives’)¹⁷; the Finsbury Park mosque terror attack (this time the perpetrator was a white British man, Darren Osborne, who was identified as ‘a “complex” and “troubled”

¹⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/03/london-bridge-everything-know-far/>

¹⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/manchester-terror-attack-everything-know-far/>

¹⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/14/local-heroes-saved-lives-helped-residents-grenfell-tower-fire/>

individual known for “flipping his lid” when he drank too much, as his mother said he is “no terrorist” and sister “denied that her brother is political”¹⁸; as well as multiple acid attacks all over London (with victims including ‘Syed Nadeem, Resham Khan and Jameel Muhktar’)¹⁹. The surge in xenophobia and Islamophobia was not only specific to the U.K.- I was equally troubled by U.S. President Donald Trump’s 2017 Muslim ‘travel ban’ (which is still expanding to target prospective immigrants from additional countries even now in 2020)²⁰, and the Christchurch mosque shootings of March 15, 2019 left me heartbroken, to say the least, as I personally knew the *imam*²¹ and some of the victims and their families. There is no doubt that the current landscape of global politics is such that it warrants a re-evaluation of majority-minority relationships, especially in terms of power, representation, and resistance.

While acknowledging its relevance and timeliness, I would argue that what truly sets this ethnography apart and makes it innovative is who is being studied and how (i.e. the population), as well as who is doing the studying (the researcher). First, we discuss the population. As I engaged with the available literature, I noticed recurring patterns - scholars often used ‘British Muslim’ as shorthand for ‘British Pakistani’ or ‘British Bangladeshi’, and while the U.K.’s largest percentage of Muslim population do hail from Pakistan, followed by Bangladeshi backgrounds (Warren, 2019; Iqbal, 2016), to claim that they alone account for ‘British Muslims’ runs the risk of representing the U.K.’s Muslim community as a single homogenous entity²². Similarly, while some articles refer to ‘British Asian’ or ‘South Asian’ Muslims, upon reading them I realised how only the accounts of select Pakistani (Mirpuri²³) Muslims were documented (Dwyer, 2000; Werbner, 2004; for example). The ‘South Asian’ ethnic population in Britain includes Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi diasporic groups (Peach, 2006); but I even find the term ‘South Asian’ problematic because it threatens to paper over the multiplicity within those communities, their turbulent history, and their divergent socio-economic profiles. The development of collective identities of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983) invariably includes processes of abstraction from more particularist, local,

¹⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/darren-osborne-everything-know-finsbury-park-mosque-suspect/>

¹⁹ <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/london-acid-attack-capital-uk-10795265>

²⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/ban-expand-groups-slam-trump-travel-ban-200131172918069.html>

²¹ The person who leads prayers in a mosque. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/imam>.

²² The top 15 countries of origin for U.K. Muslims include (as listed in descending order): Pakistan, Bangladesh, Somalia, India, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Kosovo, and Cyprus (Iqbal, 2016).

²³ Referring to people originating from the Mirpur District in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. Majority of the first-generation Mirpuris who migrated to the U.K. were not highly educated, having little to no experience of urban life in Pakistan (Werbner, 2005).

regional, ethnic, and religious identities (Bader, 2001). As Baumann (1996) recognises in his ethnography, dominant discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London can produce internally highly diversified groups of migrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and East Africa in Southall as ‘Asians’ or even ‘Blacks’; these discourses are then contextually countered by demotic discourse which draw attention to the daily processes of ‘making culture’ (p. 6).

Considering diaspora as a type of consciousness and mode of cultural production (Vertovec, 1997), I would also like to add that in my entire diasporic life I have never actually heard any ‘South Asian’ individual actively referring to themselves as ‘South Asian’. It would therefore seem to be very much an ‘outsider’ term, imposed and inscribed upon a multiplicity of nationalities, ethnicities, and histories. In response, this thesis strives to offer a critique and careful examination of such taken-for-granted notions of subjectivity and identity categories by attending to the specifics of ‘desi Muslim’ as a responsive diasporic identity that includes second-generation Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims living in London. What needs to be recognised is that ‘second-generation’ ‘male/female’ ‘desi’ ‘Muslim’ ‘migrants’ are not neutral discursive constructs or analytic terms- they all bear historical legacy and a contextual reference which makes them deeply emotional labels of identity and non-identity, that are continuously done, undone, and redone.

Another recurrence that caught my attention is how the majority of sociological and anthropological Muslim migrant studies are preoccupied with the ‘working’ class²⁴ (for example, Ballard, 1983; Baily, 1995; Bolognani, 2014; Cressey, 2006; Din, 2016; Shaw, 2001; Qureshi, et al. 2014; although there are some exceptions such as Modood & Ahmad, 2007, who interview Muslim ‘public’ figures and ‘intellectuals’, or Bhimji, 2008, who interviews mainly middle class professionals and university students), as well as with documenting the experiences of young children and adolescents in particular²⁵ (Meetoo, 2019; Franceschelli, 2017; Basit, 2017; Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2017; Kabir, 2014; Hoque, 2010; Dwyer, et al.,

²⁴ Under liberalism, the working class, the lower class, and the poor became ‘the poverty problem’, a project for social science to solve (often unsuccessfully, as can be seen from the consequences of America’s welfare repeal under President Clinton’s administration in 1996, for instance, which then set the stage for neoliberalism to emerge) (O’Connor, 2009). The pre-occupation with the working class is further complicated by issues of gender, race, and representation, since it is possible that a white upper-class or middle-class male carrying out research within a BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) working-class community may create barriers to understanding (consider the ‘white saviour complex’ discourse, for example) (Bhopal, 2000; Straubhaar, 2015).

²⁵ Given that young people (along with Muslim women) are perceived to be the most ‘vulnerable’ segments of the Muslim population in the U.K. (Billaud, 2016).

2008; Abbas, 2003; Archer, 2001; for example). I do not wish to imply that these studies are not important because they certainly are, but what about those second-generation migrants who have already made the transition into adulthood, those who are highly educated or in professional and managerial occupations- how does the politics of their positionality play out?

This thesis ventures beyond a ‘coming of age’ or ‘woes of the working class’ style narrative, by presenting the voices of my informants (who all, in accordance with the HEC research requirements, agreed to enable the following data to be used in the thesis), who are all between 20 to 30 years old and who identify themselves and their families as ‘middle class’²⁶. They are all university educated and the majority of them work full time. I conducted 24 interviews in total, out of which I would identify 17 as key informants, comprising 11 females and 6 males whose narratives and excerpts are showcased throughout the ethnography. Out of these 17, 5 are married and the remaining 12 are not, and 16 of them identified as straight/heterosexual with only one male identifying as gay. In terms of ancestry and ethnicity, 8 of them had origins in Pakistan (with parents moving from cities such as Islamabad and Karachi), 5 originated from India (including cities such as Delhi and Hyderabad), and 4 were from Bangladesh (including Dhaka and Sylhet). With the exception of 3 informants (who were away at university or flatting in Central London), the rest of them all lived at home with their parents or in-laws (and even grandparents in some cases) in Greater London, including the boroughs of Ealing, Hillingdon, Harrow, and Hounslow. In terms of religion, all the key informants identified themselves as *Sunni*²⁷ Muslim, without any further denominations. Now while I have outlined the demographic characteristics of the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study, I would also like to remind the reader that their narratives serve to cut through these simplistic identity markers and the dominant discourses that surround them, revealing the complex range of contemporary diasporic identity politics.

Referring to what I mentioned earlier, the second aspect that sets this ethnography apart is also who is doing the studying (the researcher). I am deeply vocal and transparent about my own positionality throughout the thesis, and while I critically engage with this further in Chapter

²⁶ To qualify as middle class via Pew’s income-based model, a family of four in the UK would need a cumulative disposable income of between just over \$29,000 and \$87,300 (£19,000 - £57,350 in 2010 rates). Source: <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-4443694/UK-middle-class-one-smallest-poorest-Europe.html#ixzz4takrympw>

²⁷ ‘Sunni’ Muslims make up one of the two major branches of Islam and consist of the majority (at least 85% of the world’s 1.2 billion Muslims), as distinguished from the minority denomination, the ‘Shi’ah’. From: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2280>

III, I would like to declare from the outset how I am very much part of the population that I am studying as a ‘second-generation desi Muslim migrant in London’ myself. That is not to say that there are no other scholars like me who also study the cultures of which they are a part; for example, sociologist Fatima Khan (2016, p. 3) recognises her own position “as a second-generation British-Muslim of Pakistani descent” in her PhD thesis on negotiating British-Muslim identity, which focuses on the criminalisation of the British-Muslim population through targeted counterterrorism and security policies. But barring the sections on methodology and the rationale behind the thesis, her own voice takes a backseat as she presents her work in a detached-outsider style research format. Another example is Aminul Hoque (2010, p. 70), who shares Bangladeshi ethnicity and heritage with his third-generation respondents from East London, but also recognises the differences with him being more educated, more well-travelled, older, and from a different generation than them.

While I appreciate that I belong to a different gender from my male informants, and am slightly more educated (if I take this PhD into account), I would still argue that I am a full member of the population under study- in terms of age (I was 26 years old when I began this research four years ago), class (middle class), religion (Sunni Muslim), generation (my parents were the first generation to migrate to England), ethnicity (of Indian descent), and where I live (the London Borough of Hillingdon). The issues my informants highlight, the concerns they harbour, the questions they raise, have in many ways featured in my own life narrative, making this work partially auto-ethnographic in nature. I say ‘partially’ because I want to emphasise my reluctance to employ evocative autoethnography that promotes a “narrative text [that] refuses to abstract and explain” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 44), and instead strive to apply a more evaluative analytic/critical approach by being self-observational in my method and self-visible in this text (Anderson, 2006; Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). My honest thoughts, opinions, reactions, reflections, and experiences are all at the forefront of this study as points of entry, affirmation, and contention. Hayano (1979, p. 102) reminds us that “cultural ‘realities’ and interpretations of events among individuals in the same group are often highly variable, changing, or contradictory”- it is precisely this ambivalence and complexity of multiple subjectivities that I wish to highlight through the process of ethnography.

Writing from and as the ‘in between’ has been crucial for the development of my thesis, for it allowed it to mature into a critique that brings to light that which may be known, but is not often spoken of outside of specific ‘insider’ contexts. As Butler (2004, p. 4) writes:

Critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility for different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation.

As the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study interrogate the terms that define them, their narratives undo (and redo) normative categories that attempt to place rigid structures on how they live out their lives. The ethnography explores and exposes how ‘in between’ subjectivities emerge as continuously done, undone and redone via the informants’ performances of multiplicity (which include multiple religiosities as well as multiple modernities, as I discuss in the conclusion) that occur within competing discourses, power relations, historical and contextual experiences, cultural and religious practices, and material conditions. The thesis aspires to move beyond multiculturalism’s rhetoric of celebrating difference (which scholars argue does little more than facilitate assimilation within the dominant ideology (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001; Kundnani, 2002; Grillo, 2007; Boucher & Maclure, 2018)), by alternatively suggesting integrationist processes that champion parallelism in order to facilitate living *with* difference and encourage dialogue *despite* difference. Bearing that in mind, I argue for the ‘but also’ positioning to move beyond an ‘either/or’ or ‘both and’ approach to identity; for the term ‘desi’ to move beyond the limitations of overarching ‘South Asian’/‘British Asian’/‘British Muslim’ formulations; for the study of ‘lived religion’ to move beyond homogenous depictions of ‘institutional’ or ‘official’ religion; and for the idea of ‘situational agency’ to move beyond essentialised oppositions of agency versus structure that persist within official and demotic (as well as other) discourses.

The thesis covers this data across eight chapters, which are organised as follows. The current Chapter I introduces the purpose, rationale, relevance, and context of the ethnography, including my own positionality, and addresses some of the key issues in the literature. Chapter II outlines the conceptual framework of the thesis, with reference to Michel Foucault’s (1995) power/knowledge, discourse and subjectivity, and Judith Butler’s (1990) performativity, which are applied extensively throughout the analytical chapters. This chapter also problematises the ‘either/or’ and ‘both/and’ styles of thinking and analysis, offering an alternative approach to the study of identity by introducing what I call the ‘but also’ frame of reference. Chapter III discusses the methodology; in this chapter, I offer critical engagement with ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ researcher positions and describe myself as a ‘desi’ ethnographer who is an insider

but also an outsider. I highlight the postcritical nature of this ethnography, with an emphasis on reflexivity and the relationship between Self and narrative. I also include my own experience of narrative writing in an attempt to reveal the underlying mechanisms in sense-making, while exposing the questioning that generates creative overturning and the production of knowledge. Having established the introduction, theoretical framework, and methodology, Chapter IV to VII are then dedicated to data analysis.

In Chapter IV, the ‘in-betweeners’ argue against hyphenated identities such as ‘British Asian’ or ‘British Muslim’ by articulating the ‘but also’ as they express their desire for non-conformity and emphasise self-expression. Using ‘but also’ enables the contextual reconfiguration of identity, granting an opportunity for movement and multiplicity that neither the ‘either/or’ nor the ‘both/and’ statements in dominant discourse have been able to offer. The informants also discuss their experiences of ‘othering’ in London and address the politics of discursive representation, particularly in relation to their own subjective middle-class status. This chapter also touches upon the ‘return of religion’ discourse, but in the form of the informants’ nuanced cosmopolitan understanding and practice of Islam as they critique the notion of an all-inclusive ‘*ummah*’ and the emergence of ‘Wahhabist/Salafist’ movements. It then attends to ‘desi’ as a responsive diasporic identity that has the potential to supersede traditional cultural alliances, but also recognises everyday forms of difference within this category via the intra-ethnic markers of ‘*pendus*’ and ‘coconuts’. This chapter encourages the rethinking of desi Muslim diasporic identities as lived and embodied experiences that are performative projects and therefore inconsistently constructed.

Having explored the more general aspects of belonging, religion, and ethnicity, we then turn our attention to the more gendered experience and implications of second-generation desi Muslim migrant subjectivities in Chapter V. This chapter highlights the narratives of the female informants as they navigate through multiple competing discourses (including patriarchal discourse and the public/private dichotomy), and emerge as active participants in their own creation as subjects who inhabit multiple, and possibly even contradictory, positions at the same time. Their gendered performances continuously move in between defiance and compliance, not as revelations of a true self, but rather as excerpts from their life-in-process, their multi-layered lives unfolding. This chapter also recognises family and community as the dominant structural parameters which influence experience via the creation of gendered cultural scripts and ‘double standards’ (particularly in relation to dating, marriage, sexual

activity, and agency). The informants in turn counter this through their development of ‘double’ (and indeed even multiple) lives, and articulate sexuality by re-signifying religiosity through self-governmentality, self-responsibility, and self-reflexivity, as they focus on internal rather than external religiosity. This chapter reveals how the performances of multiple, alternating, and even paradoxical ‘lives’ or ‘selves’ are not just influenced by structural conditions and limitations, but are also deeply affective affairs that are invested with emotion. Although the second-generation desi Muslim migrant women of this study are quick to critique and actively endorse critical thinking, this chapter illustrates how religion, family and culture continue to hold importance in their lives and are not fixed or rigid concepts, but are continuously being reassessed, reworked and reimagined by them as (contextually) agentic individuals.

Chapter VI studies the informants’ experiences of mobile app dating (particularly ‘muzmatch’²⁸) as a new mode of matchmaking. It takes the reader on a journey along the process of setting up a profile on muzmatch, through which we unravel the politics of religion, ethnicity, class, and gender amongst its users. This chapter is important because it pays attention to the everyday discursive interactions of young single Muslims and what those are able to tell us about seemingly heterogeneous sets of cultural norms and systems, as well as the contemporary understanding and framing of love, relationships, and marriage, particularly amongst second-generation desi Muslim migrants. The chapter engages with the concept of ‘halal dating’; the informants recognise that ‘halal’ is no longer just a purely religious issue, but appears in the realm of diaspora, business and trade as part of a ‘globalised religious market’ that is imbued with ethics, politics and power. They express an appreciation for muzmatch’s marketing campaign which combines multiple competing elements to compose a story that is reflective of the complexities of ‘British Muslim’ culture, exemplifying how ‘halal’ has steadily moved from the pure domain of worship (*ibādah*) to adapt to the larger sphere of human transactions (*mu‘āmalāt*). At the micro level, the informants underline the ambivalence of everyday religious and moral practice, arguing that ‘halal’ is ultimately dependent on an individual’s intention (*niyyah*) as they search for partners who share their understanding of Islamic religiosity on a scale between ‘halal’ to ‘haram’ (what they refer to as the “halal:haram ratio”). The chapter also highlights how the politics of a desi Muslim diasporic identity has a discernible impact on intimacy and partner choice, as parental approval and familial cultural influence continue to play an important role, and the informants themselves suggest a

²⁸ <https://muzmatch.com/> is a niche mobile app catering to the single Muslims market.

preference for a partner who also shares their understanding of ethnic identity on a scale between ‘*pendu*’ to ‘coconut’. Lastly, the chapter discusses user experience on muzmatch as the informants move between superficiality and depth, constructing their own boundaries for intimacy that are constantly open to change.

Chapter VII then considers the second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ perceptions of gender and generational relations and explores how these have an impact on their experiences and expectations of marriage and intimacy. Since I dedicated Chapter V to showcasing the narratives of my female informants, I commit a significant portion of this chapter to the voices of my male informants as they find themselves negotiating between competing ideals of hegemonic alpha and subordinate beta masculinities while engaging with feminist discourse and religio-cultural scripts. Men and women are both seen to re-inscribe certain traditional understandings of gendered practices, despite connecting with and navigating through cultural structures which call for gender equality. The chapter recognises a type of ‘sexist equality’- whereby the informants advocate equality between men and women on the one hand, yet also adopt sexist stereotypes about gender roles on the other. This chapter also showcases the accounts of some of my married informants who are living with family in patrilocal or ‘joint family’ structures, and in so doing examines desi Muslim gender identities via their role within the home/family. It attends to multiple hierarchies of power within the household, and explores how second-generation desi Muslim men and women manage their domestic, sexual, and emotional lives and perform emotion work while navigating through multiple discourses and boundaries between traditional heteronormative performances of masculinity and femininity and other alternative ways of being and expressing themselves. The chapter recognises how gender accountability exists not only towards the opposite gender and/or family structures, but also within the same shared gender identity, thus creating gendered hierarchies of power.

Finally, Chapter VIII serves as the conclusion, drawing on information and examples from all the previous chapters as it presents the thesis’ dual argument for multiple religiosities as well as multiple modernities. It invites its readers to rethink dominant structures of knowledge and recognise the complex and sometimes contradictory circulation of power and agency, the continuous back and forth processes of being subjected and of becoming an agentic subject. Second-generation middle-class desi Muslim migrants find themselves in between a secular-religious binary and emerge as religious *but also* secular, secular *but also* religious, thus blurring the boundaries between both and claiming their place within post-secular

understanding. The ‘but also’ articulation of identity holds a great deal of significance here, as the informants highlight how they can be religious/believing/practicing, but also secular, or at least have the capacity to self-secularize in certain contexts. This chapter also champions the study of lived religion and emphasises how (far from being hostile to secularism) much of the practice of Islam in its lived form is intertwined with particular discourses of secular norms, and vice versa. It traces how the informants’ ‘lived Islam’ is not experienced in opposition to apparently ‘Western’ secular values (such as cosmopolitanism, environmentalism, peace-making, justice, human rights, women’s rights, etc.), but rather as complementary to and within such values. The chapter also questions popular assumptions of ‘agency’ and ‘modernity’ as inherently ‘Western’ concepts²⁹, by evaluating the conjuncture of multiple notions of agency and modernity that play out in the informants’ lives, thus demonstrating the many ways in which ‘desi’ ‘Muslim’ and ‘Western’ modernities relate to one another. Approaching agency from a poststructuralist lens, it highlights the informants’ accounts to argue that agency does not have to be studied in opposition to structure and culture but can (and should) also be studied from *within* structure and culture.

The thesis hopes to serve a dual purpose- while offering a critique of the dominant secular and neoliberal frameworks that currently shape British, and to a large extent ‘Western’, politics and society (via its argument for multiple modernities), it is also a call to suspend judgement within diasporic Muslim communities themselves (via its argument for multiple religiosities), thus emphasising dialogue both within the minority communities as well as with the majority. Ultimately, the thesis seeks to inform the development of theory and policy (for the U.K. and elsewhere), which can contribute to what this thesis describes as ‘living with difference’, by working towards a more nuanced understanding of diasporic identity as marked by multiple micro-processes of racialized, religious, and gendered positioning.

²⁹ While I acknowledge this has been critiqued in the social sciences and humanities for decades now, I revisit these assumptions in the specific context of the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study since these assumptions resurface in their lived experiences as imposed demands of normative discourse.

II. Pushing theoretical boundaries- An argument for a multitheoretical approach to research

“Things do not begin to live except in the middle”

(Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 55)

Researchers across the social sciences are encouraged to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to their study, their strategy of inquiry, and the chosen method which translates their approach into practice (Creswell, 2014). As Jackson and Mazzei (2012, p. 719) state, “to think with theory is not only useful, but essential, for without theory we have no way to think otherwise.” In this chapter, I engage with questions of ontology and epistemology to create a holistic view of the theoretical orientations and underpinnings of this thesis, to discuss how knowledge is/can be viewed, and articulate how we (this includes me as well as my audience) can then potentially see ourselves in relation to this knowledge. Some of the key questions I consider are as follows: How do I make sense of theory, and how do I position myself and my research in relation to it? To what extent do I blur or break down competing knowledge claims, and how do I produce knowledge? Is my personal biography, that now includes my own PhD journey, peripheral to, or constitutive of, knowledge production?

This chapter is framed in a ‘discourse of vulnerability’ (Mumby & May, 2005) to show how theories come to life in research, and in so doing, offer a vivid description of the many ways in which the personal and the scholarly are inextricably interwoven. The chapter begins by explaining how the theoretical approach evolved over the course of my research journey, outlining the conceptual framework of the thesis; it then focuses on Michel Foucault’s (1980; 1995) power/knowledge, discourse and subjectivity, and Judith Butler’s (1990; 2004) performativity as conceptual tools that are applied extensively throughout the analytical chapters; and lastly, it problematises the ‘either/or’ and ‘both/and’ styles of thinking and analysis, offering an alternative approach to the study of identity by introducing what I call the ‘but also’ frame of reference. Considerations regarding the methodological strategies are then discussed in the following Chapter III.

As mentioned, the main aim of this chapter is to outline the ideological worldview proposed in the study, the basic considerations of that worldview, and explain how this worldview consequently shapes the approach to research and knowledge. The concept of an ideological worldview can be encapsulated via the term, ‘conceptual mindset’ (Underhill, 2011, p. 7), and is expressed through ‘paradigms’ as “overarching philosophical systems” (Lincoln, 2005, p. 230) that can exist and be used as “frameworks that function as maps or guides” (Usher, 1996, p. 15) within the research context. Theoretical research paradigms are generally divided into three major categories: positivism (which guides ‘conventional’ inquiry), interpretivism or constructivism (for ‘naturalistic’ or ‘interpretive’ inquiry), and critical theory (for ‘critical’ inquiry) (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). While these seem to be distinct approaches, Guba and Lincoln (2005, p. 192) argue that “indeed, the various paradigms are beginning to ‘interbreed’” (they stand by this argument in their 2011 chapter as well; Lincoln, et al., 2011, p. 97). And so, while I began my PhD journey with a rather constructivist mindset, i.e. there is no single reality or truth (Osborne, 1996), over the course of my research I developed and applied the critical inquiry stance, recognising that realities are socially constructed entities which are under constant internal influence (Scotland, 2012).

My approach thus evolved into a blended genre of an interpretive style of critical inquiry - supporting a way of looking at information that honours an inductive style with its focus on the multiplicity of individual experience and meaning, but also questioning this multiplicity by attending to the power relations within which it occurs. Rather than applying theoretical frameworks as exclusive rigid structures, the research process made me realise that it would be a far more fruitful endeavour to use some of these qualitative approaches in combination with each other. Just as me and my interlocutors exist within a ‘combination’ of discourses and experiences that are never singular, I too apply a combination of theoretical and methodological approaches to best help render the complexities within my informants’ narratives. It was Foucault (1994, p. 523) who first compared his work to “a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area,” thus encouraging individuals “to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner” (as cited in O’Farrell, 2005, p. 68). To explain myself further, let us first take a closer look at both the interpretivist and critical theory paradigms and the conceptual tools they have to offer in the context of my own research.

'Blended' - in between multiple theoretical perspectives

Although they are not entirely homogenous positions, constructivism and interpretivism do share a common intellectual heritage (Schwandt, 1994), and are rooted in various fields and philosophies including hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism (as espoused by the Chicago school of Sociology) (Yanow, 2003). Interpretivism historically emerged in opposition to positivism's deterministic philosophy (in which causes are likely to determine effects or outcomes), by proposing a relativist worldview of multiple realities that are constructed and co-constructed by the mind(s) and therefore must be studied as a whole (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 88). Interpretivism/constructivism is useful because it lends itself to understanding individual experiences and ways of making meaning more than positivist approaches which assume only one reality and can therefore potentially box people into pre-existing normative categories (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Interpretivist researchers are interested in their informants' subjective interpretations of the world, so knowledge and meaningful reality are constructed through interaction and mutual negotiation which is developed and transmitted within a given social context (Chen, et al., 2011; Crotty, 1998). I considered this to be particularly relevant since I was interested in uncovering some of the power-laden assumptions in the dominant characterisations of 'South Asian' 'British Muslim' 'migrant' identities. Therefore, addressing the informants' own self-perceptions by studying how they choose to describe themselves became an important consideration. Not only does the interpretivist approach emphasise self-perception, it also takes into account an individual's perceptions of the relationships among their multiple subjectivities and social identities (such as religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social class, all of which feature prominently throughout the informants' narratives). I began to view the interpretivist lens as both appropriate and valid for my research because it is specifically focussed on how the multiple aspects of a person's identity and the contexts in which they are situated mediate their day to day existence.

The value of the interpretive paradigm lies in the fact that it can accommodate multiple perspectives and versions of 'truths', and considers the context in which any form of research is conducted as critical to the interpretation of data (Willis, 2007). Marsh, et al. (2014) argue that the interpretivist and constructivist turn is crucial because it recognises the importance of ideas/narratives/discourses in affecting outcomes in the British policy field and elsewhere.

However, there are also a number of scholars who argue against the interpretivist/constructivist turn (particularly critical realists), suggesting that this approach tends to reduce culture(s) into narrative discourses, processes, and identities, often leading to counterproductive political consequences including ‘strategic essentialism’ (Bader, 2001, p. 252). Interpretivists may ignore or deny the possibility of generalisation, but generalisation is inevitable in interpretive research and this constitutes the limits of interpretivism itself (Williams, 2000). Williams (2000, p. 221) calls for ‘methodological pluralism’ as the inevitable conclusion, for “if particular methodological approaches have limits then we must attempt to transcend them through an openness to alternatives which might help us move beyond those limits”. While I wanted to make sure that I did not fall prey to essentialism or generalisation, for me the ‘limits’ of the interpretivist approach was not so much its methodology. In fact, I found narrative inquiry to be an incredibly useful methodology to study lived experience (Clandinin, 2006); this meant I conducted in-depth, open-ended, conversational style interviews in which my informants took the lead regarding the direction of the interview, thus allowing for multiple possibilities in how the informants made meaning of their subjectivities and chose to story their own life experiences (Chapter III discusses this in greater detail) (Atkinson, 2007).

It was after these initial set of interviews that I came to fully realise the extent to which my second-generation desi Muslim migrant informants struggle against and within the normative discourses and power relations that attempt to produce and contain them, and the multiple ways in which they try to push back against dominant social structures, engaging in complex and sophisticated internal and interpersonal pursuits. Multiple contextual influences emerged consistently across their narratives - such as family (via the domestic desi familial panopticon), community (via the desi communal panopticon), gender (through gender hierarchies and gender accountability), for example - and the informants found themselves negotiating with and within these structures through continuous back and forth processes of being subjected and of becoming an agentic subject. I quickly began to realise that the interpretivist perspective might not be enough for the purpose of this research, as it fell short in lending itself to a detailed exploration of such power structures. Studies that apply the interpretivist paradigm tend to formulate their aims in terms of the participants’ perspectives on ‘things’ or how the participants ‘deal with’ ‘things’ (O’donoghue, 2006).

The interpretivist paradigm inspired me to consider questions such as, what are the informants’ perspectives on belonging, religion, ethnicity, or even gender and generational relations? How

do the informants deal with othering and the politics of difference, patriarchal discourses, or gendered double standards? But in the process of answering such questions, it soon became clear that the narratives weren't just about how the informants were constructing their identities, their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, but more importantly, how they were continuously engaged in processes of deconstructing and reconstructing them. I concluded that I needed to step outside of an interpretivist/constructivist framework to incorporate the informants' efforts at deconstructing normative ideals and practices, and to appreciate how diasporic identity and belonging might be more complex than an interpretivist perspective can reveal. Interpretivist theories may reveal a rich understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, but they do not necessarily reveal societal power structures (Abes, 2009). If I was interested in issues of power, resistance, marginality, and emancipation, I had to turn to critical theory.

The paradigm of critical theory comes from the 'Frankfurt School' including philosophers such as Horkheimer (inspired by Marx) in the 1930s, Adorno in the 1940s, followed by Habermas and Marcuse (Berman, 1989), and later theorists as diverse as Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Freire, and Butler who have all helped shape this paradigm through their postmodern, deconstructionist, and feminist influences (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Subjects as diverse as postcolonial/subaltern studies, gender studies, feminism, and neo-Marxism, can all be placed within the tradition of critical theory and its broad collection of different styles of thinking critically (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). However, I wish to reiterate that critical theory is not to be confused with critical thinking, which is a pedagogic movement to embed systematic reflection within the broad assumptions of liberal humanism (Prasad & Caproni, 1997). Although critical theory retains this drive towards systematic reflection and empowerment, it does so within the framework of a different set of assumptions which place asymmetrical power relations, the role of ideology, and an obvious commitment to fundamental change at the centre of such reflections (Honneth, 1991). Critical theory, in a broad sense, is the reflective assessment and critique of society and culture, conducted with the purpose of revealing and challenging power structures by making aware any form of oppression based on social, cultural, political, economic, ethnic, racial, gender, and/or sexual values (Guess, 1981; Schwandt, 2001). Critical theory "makes possible the concrete analysis of structure and of contingently staged social action" by locating actors "within more encompassing structural settings of relations of power and control" (Forester, 1985, p. xiii).

An important contribution made by critical theory is towards the study of social ‘totality’ (Thompson, 2011; Fischer & Tepe, 2011), that is, the commitment to understanding a particular social phenomenon with regard to its multiple interconnections and its location within holistic, historical contexts (this is bearing in mind that the influence of totality should not be hypostatized, or as Heitmann & Blumenfeld (2018, p. 589) write, in agreement with Adorno, “the whole is the false”). Critical theory argues that many of our collective and established patterns of meaning are shaped by various relations among powerful vehicles of culture (Held, 1980), including financial, political, and socioeconomic systems at the macro level, the media, educational institutions, work and community organizations at the meso level, and families and intimate relationships at the micro level (Münch & Smelser, 1987; Prasad & Caproni, 1997). This directs us to recognise the complex, ongoing, and interlocking interaction between macro structural features, meso socio-cultural features, and the everyday activities of individuals. Wendy Brown (2006, p. 4) insists that critical theory has questioned conventional economic causality, traced capital’s socio-cultural effects, given subjectivity its due, and paid attention “to forms of power that exceeded the capital-relation”. So, the research agenda is not just about recognising the ‘repressive structures of society’ (Alexander et al., 1987, p. 30), but also considering the role of subjectivity in relation to these structures. Social life is historical and made by human action, however, human action is neither unconditioned nor unconstrained (Calhoun, 2001).

Critical theory examines how we construct our everyday realities and problematizes knowledge, ideology, and cultural assumptions by questioning them (Bohman, 2019). The central tenet is that all knowledge (no matter how ‘scientific’ or ‘commonsensical’ it may appear to be) is historical, political, and shaped by human interests which are multiple and often times contradictory, therefore knowledge itself is understood as fundamentally pluralistic, incongruous, and contextual, rather than unitary and constant (Brookfield, 2004). Critical theory transcends a generalized hermeneutic concern with the situatedness of all knowledge by focussing, more specifically, on the question of how oppositional, antagonistic forms of knowledge, subjectivity and consciousness may emerge within a socio-historical setting (Brenner, 2009). Interrogating knowledge emphasises an engagement with normative questions; critical theory has always had a concern with how things had come to be the way they are and what they might be in the future, a concern with the wider truth or validity of what is currently the case (How, 2017). As a researcher, critical theory encouraged me not to take individual or social ‘realities’ at face value, but to consider why and how these realities are

continuously being created, contested and/or reinforced, to recognise dialectical oppositions and consider the lived human consequences of such given realities, and to explore the potential of an alternative reality which may better serve the individuals and social organizations under study. Critical theory offers a mediating quality to the realm of practice; while it is not an explicit formula or road map for social change, it is intended to inform the strategic perspectives of progressive, or indeed, revolutionary, socio-political actors (Brenner, 2009). These are the reasons why critical theory emerges as an engaged practice rather than just a theory, as a diagnosis of the present which calls into question the relationship between discourse/knowledge and power (Honneth & Rancière, 2016). This means that, for the purpose of the thesis and what it discusses, we can draw upon the section of critical theory known as critical ontology. Foucault (1987, p. 174) writes:

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment [*épreuve*] of their possible transcendence [*de leur franchissement possible*].

Not only does critical theory propose a historically reflexive approach to social science, but it is also an arguably self-reflexive theory, conscious of the social conditions under which it unfolds. It does not operate as a rigid straightjacket; just as the ‘critical’ thrust of critical theory is historically conditioned and oriented, so too is its *theoretical* orientation continuously shaped and reshaped via ongoing social and political transformations (Brenner, 2009). While critical theory demands reflection upon institutionalized practices and their norms of cooperation, it also encourages reflection on the mode of inquiry itself, to recognise any underlying social norms and relationships established within inquiry and examine if/how power intersects with these (Bohman, 2003).

This notion of ‘critical ontology’ is what influenced me to confront my own ways of meaning making as researcher but also research participant. I am not separate from the object of investigation, rather *I am* the object of investigation in my complex role as both ethnographer and second-generation desi Muslim migrant (I address my positionality extensively in the following Chapter III). Given that I am deeply embedded within the same practical social context as my informants, the proposition of reflexivity became even more important. My concern was not just limited to how qualitative inquiry can be interpretive and explanatory

(Thorne, 2016), but how it can also be simultaneously descriptive and normative (Bohman, 2003). I had to use critical theory to escape the complacency of seeing, hearing, thinking, and understanding as I always had, to ask myself time and time again- why do I think the way I do (especially in relation to all the various dimensions of social life, including culture, gender, religion, politics, economics, and so on)? Thinking in this format allows the researcher to move beyond a pure ‘insider’/participant perspective (in the manner of hermeneutics), and a pure ‘outsider’/observer standpoint (in the manner of naturalistic social inquiry)³⁰ (Cooke, 2005). My engagement with normative questions and ideologies was abundant but cultivating the mindset to address such ontological questions was one of the greatest conceptual exercises that critical theory offered me.

This is not to say that critical theory is without criticism, as it has been attacked on account of intellectual obscurity, cynical pessimism, solipsism, and even Eurocentrism (Hohendahl & Silberman, 1979; Bottomore, 2002; Hobson, 2007; Finlayson, 2009). It has been criticised for offering a ‘utopian moment’ that fails to lend itself to the ‘real-world’, a utopian moment based on the promise of modern society and its ideas of freedom and equality (Benhabib, 1986; Klinger & Knapp, 2008; Kurki, 2011). Scotland (2012) acknowledges that while the utopian aspirations of the critical paradigm may perhaps never be fully realized, a more ‘civil society’ may emerge where alternative democratising movements, resistance and opposition to oligarchy, to populism and to politicised religion can develop (Arato & Cohen, 2018, p. 113). The utopian concern with ‘alienation’ is valuable because of its potential to inspire the imagination and generate action by creating an awareness of new systems and experiences of oppression (Bronner, 2013, p. 66). In fact, I would argue that far from being unrealistic, I have found critical theory to be quite a pragmatic approach as it focuses on unmasking patterns of oppression and hegemony, and considers action and change whilst having a realistic appreciation of social and cultural constraints (for example, the role of familial interests and the power of ideology in the case of my informants).

The task of critical theory is to not only investigate forms of domination, but equally, to unearth the emancipatory possibilities that are embedded within, yet simultaneously suppressed by such systems (Brenner, 2009). By alerting me to the intricate movement and relationships of power, and the politics of resistance that occurs in the everyday, using the critical theory lens

³⁰ Hence my position as an insider but also outsider ‘desi’ ethnographer, which I discuss at length in Chapter III.

informed my questioning of modernity itself, along with its hegemonic boundaries that shape normative ideas of freedom, equality, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and so on (I discuss this more thoroughly in the conclusion, Chapter VIII)³¹. Kincheloe and McLaren (2011, p. 286) assert that qualitative research which has critical theoretical concerns produces “undeniably dangerous knowledge, the kind of information and insight that upsets institutions and threatens to overturn sovereign regimes of truth”. And so, “we can be against critical theory or for it, but, especially at the present historical juncture, we cannot be without it” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p. 286).

As mentioned earlier, my approach evolved into a blended style of interpretive critical inquiry precisely because I began by studying the existence of my informants’ multiple social realities, which then led me to identify the role of power and agency in structuring those realities and multiple subjectivities. Dissolving my approach into the in-between space of these two paradigms opened up a vast space of creativity and experimentation; here the interpretivist lens enabled me to explore how the informants made meaning of their subjectivities in multiple, and even contradictory ways, while critical theory pushed me to recognise the many ways in which they were challenging normative assumptions about how such subjectivities developed in the first place. I gradually came to realise that the two research paradigms are not entirely in opposition to each other; in fact, critical theory takes as its starting point the position that all reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966), but develops this point further by arguing that it is not spontaneous or arbitrary, as the social construction of reality is continuously influenced by power relations within a particular culture (McLaren, 2015).

Demps, et al. (2011) claim that the “blurred genre of interpretive critical inquiry” emerges as a response to the criticism that interpretivists’ efforts of understanding the lived experiences of those researched stops short of questioning just how and why their world is so, and what can be done to address any asymmetries of power and privilege in their social world. This format of inquiry became appropriate as it rightly serves the purpose of the thesis - it explores the lived experiences of second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London and addresses the role of power in producing and shaping those everyday experiences, while also acknowledging concomitant agency and resistance. So, not only does the thesis focus on the particularities of

³¹ The Frankfurt School also embraces a dialectical critique of capitalist modernity; it affirms the possibilities for human liberation that are opened by this social formation, but also criticises its systemic exclusions, oppressions, and injustices (Therborn, 2008).

the informants' everyday lives, but it also pays attention to the multiple interlocking intimate and social power dynamics at play.

While the 'traditional' model of research chronology tends to be rather linear and deductive- establish the purpose of the study, select the relevant theoretical perspective, which then determines most other aspects of the research design including methodology, methods, and analysis (Crotty, 1998)- in practice, I found my engagement with theory, research questions, data, analysis, and interpretation to be an "emergent, recursive relationship" (Talmy, 2010, p. 130). I did not assume any epistemic superiority as social scientist because the research journey was very much a learning curve for me, a continuous cycle of moving from theory to observation, and back again to theory, to readjusting questions and re-examining data, and so on. I soon recognized what Jackson and Mazzei (2012, p. 717) argue, that "there is no formula for thinking with theory: It is something that is to come; something that happens, paradoxically, in a moment that has already happened; something emergent, unpredictable, and always rethinkable and redoable".

My research process involved an honest combination of the 'top-down' approach (which moves from the general to the specific) and a 'bottom-up' approach (which begins at the specific and then moves to the general) (Bickman & Rog, 2008), since I started with a general idea about the 'who' and 'how' to research, which then led me to recognise the informants specific pressing concerns (i.e. 'what' to research), and those in turn enabled me to address more macros issues of power, knowledge, and resistance (the 'why' to research). As a second-generation desi Muslim middle-class migrant in London, I was already embedded in the general socio-economic, political, and cultural systems within which my informants too found themselves, but upon applying the interpretivist lens to study the day-to-day interactions across both public and private spheres (at work or with family, for example), I was able to recognise and appreciate both my own and my informants' multiple subjectivities and ways of being, becoming, and belonging in the world (via performative practices or articulations of values and beliefs, for example), which then again redirected me to make use of the critical lens to critique the historical, structural, and contextual conditions of our existence (including ideas about 'Britishness', Islam, gender, and diasporic 'South Asian' culture). And so, I found the relationship between the theoretical, individual, social, and structural to be deeply intertwined, connected, and circular in nature.

I also had to learn how to be flexible in my approach to research, to not become paralyzed by theoretical boundaries or confined by rigid ideological alliances, to find what works and let go of what doesn't (and ask why). Abes (2009, p. 141) insists that researchers should be encouraged to "consider experimenting with the choice and application of theoretical perspectives, bringing together multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data". She refers to this style as researching 'in the borderland' between multiple theoretical perspectives (Abes, 2009). There are several other scholars who also support a cross-boundary approach to qualitative research. For example, Lather (2006) makes the compelling argument that given the multiplicity of reality, the use of multiple paradigms becomes essential and inevitable. She stresses that the research process should involve the "freeing of difference", and this can only happen by "saying yes to the messiness, to that which interrupts and exceeds versus tidy categories", to work towards "thinking difference differently" (Lather, 2006, pp. 48-52). Jackson and Mazzei (2012, p. 717) also offer 'thinking with theory' as an analytic for qualitative inquiry that does not limit itself to follow a particular format or singular method, "rather, it relies on a willingness to borrow and reconfigure concepts, invent approaches, and create new assemblages that demonstrate a range of analytic practices of thought, creativity, and intervention". Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 316) have also advocated for a multimethodological/multitheoretical approach to research through their use of the postmodern idea of 'bricolage', which involves the process of putting multiple theoretical and methodological strategies to work "as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation". The notion of bricolage celebrates chaotic multiplicity and diversity, it "exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world and complications of power" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 317). In keeping with these scholars, I am not necessarily endorsing an abandonment of existing paradigms or the creation of new ones, neither am I supporting the random application of theoretical perspectives on whims and fancies, instead I wish to emphasise how embracing multiple possibilities of difference and experimentation within the research process and design can garner richer, deeper, and more critical results.

In terms of my thesis' specific research topic, there are other doctoral dissertations within this field of study which also draw upon multiple theoretical frameworks to discuss their data. For example, in Khan's (2015) thesis on young 'British-Muslim' identity she covers literature as diverse as Homi Bhabha's (1994) work on hybrid identities, Michel Foucault's (1980) power/knowledge, Edward Said's (1978) 'Orientalism', Iris Marion Young's (1990)

‘differentiated citizenship’ and Will Kymlicka’s (1995) ‘multicultural citizenship’, and finally Erving Goffman’s (1963) work on stigma and impression management. These scholars come from different schools of thought including continental philosophy, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminist social theory, and symbolic interactionism- and while this may seem unsystematic or overwhelming at first glance, she methodically goes through each author’s work to justify the theoretical application in relation to her data. Hoque (2010, p. 12) also uses “four interrelated schools of conceptual thinking” to frame the findings of his ethnography on third generation British Bangladeshis in East London, which include the theoretical concept of the ‘other’ (drawing on Said, 1978; Foucault, 1980; Butler, 1990; Hall, 1996), the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983), the politics of ‘recognition’ (Taylor, 1992), and postmodern identity. Alternatively, some researchers continue to choose to work within a given theoretical perspective, such as Franceschelli’s (2013) thesis on young South Asian British Muslims where she adopts Bourdieu’s (1930-2002) structuralist theory of habitus and social fields to study identity negotiation and the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital. My point is there is no prescribed ‘correct’ way to apply theory, theory is useful as long as the researcher is able to justify its application in serving the scope and purpose of the thesis’ specific social inquiry.

Theory itself is not exhaustive or irrefutable; Plummer (2016, p. 33) explains that behind every major social theory there is an imagery, a way of seeing the social world, and “each imagery provides one way of seeing- and *every way of seeing is also always a way of not seeing*”. Similarly, Tyson (2014, p. 3) encourages researchers to think of theory “as a new pair of eyeglasses” through which certain elements of the social world are brought into focus while others fade into the background. Part of the paradox of doing research is that in trying to understand certain aspects of a phenomenon more clearly, we must restrict our focus in a way that highlights those particular elements, hence “all theoretical perspectives that guide research are incomplete” (Abes, 2009, p. 141). This further warrants integrating multiple perspectives as conceptual apparatus to cut across research differences, revealing new processes, relationships, and interconnections among phenomena.

Additionally, some theoretical perspectives such as ‘critical’, ‘feminist’, ‘postmodern’, or ‘globalisation’ theory cannot even be discussed in the singular, as they combine approaches which “ostensibly draw on the same tradition, but appropriate that tradition in very different ways” (May & Mumby, 2004, p. 10). For example, feminist theory and critical theory share a common thread in terms of intellectual heritage (the continental philosophical tradition), and a

research focus on power, identity, voice, and resistance (Case, 1990; Gur-Ze'ev, 2005; Crethar, et al., 2008). However, while feminist research invokes some critical theoretical constructs like ideology or hegemony, critical theory itself comes under feminist criticism for not paying enough attention to the relationship between gender and power. The idea that critical theory can be addressed to a universal or gender-neutral human subject can be problematic because ignoring the relevance of gender discounts a primary way in which difference, subjectivity, and domination are configured (Ashcraft, 2005). So, there are enough points of convergence and divergence to suggest that 'incommensurability' is not an appropriate way to describe the parallel relationship between feminist and critical theory (May & Mumby, 2004). In fact, the conceptual framework of this thesis relies heavily upon two key thinkers from within those traditions- critical theorist Michel Foucault's (1980; 1995) power/knowledge, discourse and subjectivity, and Judith Butler's (1990; 2004) post-structural feminist notions of performativity, both of which are applied extensively throughout the analytical chapters.

Setting the foundation- Why Foucault? Why Butler?

As mentioned earlier, it was only after my initial fieldwork that I began to recognise the productive effects of power in the informants' life narratives- not only power as it is exercised by some over others, but also power as it circulates through local relations. One cannot research modalities of power without some reference to Foucault's (1980, pp. 27-32) work on 'power', which he conceptualises as:

a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess... this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them.

Foucault's model of power holds value because it enables the researcher to recognise power as being embedded in relationships, in a 'net-like organisation' (Foucault, 1980, p. 98) that permeates all of society. Following Foucault's commitment to a relational analysis of power offers insight into the everyday ways in which power is enacted and contested at multiple levels of analysis including the macro, meso, and micro. According to Foucault, power is not something that is exclusively localized at government or state level, rather it is omnipresent and exercised throughout the social body (including the economic, familial, and sexual

body/bodies, for example) (O'Farrell, 2005). Foucault also argues that power is an active and interactive exercise rather than a tangible or stable possession, and so, power emerges as not just a mode of oppression or domination but also as bearing the productive potential for change and emancipation- "power relations are thus mobile, reversible, and unstable" (Foucault, 1994, p. 292). Instead of asking who holds power or who exercises power, the question then becomes what practices actualise the relations of power in the informants' lives? (this includes practices of classification, normalisation, surveillance, exclusion, and so on, as we shall see in the later analytical chapters). Engaging with these questions facilitates a mapping of practices of power (since power exists in action), as well as power relations (since power is always on the move), across the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' social, political, cultural, and familial spheres.

Foucault (1995) also inspires us to view the individual as a vehicle of power, and to pay attention to how power operates on, through, and from them within specific discursive fields. The concept of the 'discursive field' was developed by Foucault as part of his journey to study the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power. Foucault (1972, p. 48) identifies discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak... discourses are not about objects, they don't identify objects, they constitute them and in doing so, they conceal their own invention." Discourse is more than just language, text, vocabularies, and signs (or signifiers) which represent reality; according to Foucault (1997, pp. 11-16) discursive practices involve:

a type of systematicity which is neither logical nor linguistic... [and] are characterised by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories.

Understood in this sense, discourses are not just a set of coherent statements, but are a historically and culturally specific set of rules for organizing and producing different forms of knowledge (O'Farrell, 2005). A discourse is a system that structures the way we perceive reality and consequently it also constrains our perceptions; discursive practices work to keep particular 'truths' in circulation whilst restricting the circulation of others (Hook, 2007). Foucault's analytical innovation was to historicise 'truth', materially in discourse as 'regimes of truth' and in practices as 'games of truth' (Peters, 2003, p. 208). The 'truth' is not something that already exists waiting to be uncovered by the researcher, and so Foucault was more interested in how norms are established within discourse, how discourse creates a normative

context for possible thought and action, which in turn becomes legitimised and canonised as ‘truth’ (Olssen, 2016, p. 137). Foucault’s analyses reveal the many ways in which the ‘effects of truth’ are produced within discourse and how different ‘regimes of truth’ hold power in time, space, and place (Hall & Noyes, 2009).

Elder-Vass (2011) further argues that it is not so much discourse itself but ‘discursive circles’ that hold causal power- discursive structures become important when they are normatively endorsed and enforced by specific groups of people, so the social meaning and preferred solution of any given event can be controlled according to the interests of the dominant group. According to Foucault, power is exercised over those who are ‘known’ through discourse, therefore those who produce discourse have the power to enforce its validity and those who are known through discourse become subjected to it (Hall, 1992). This subjection is not a simple process of external determinations being imposed directly upon people, rather it is a matter of a system of rules which (similar to the grammar of a language) generate thought patterns and allow certain statements to be made or subjectivities to be developed as acceptable and desirable, while rendering others as nonnormative and suspect (Elder-Vass, 2011)- for example, consider the ‘War on Terror’ narrative and its effects on foreign policy discourse (Hodges, 2011; Holland, 2012), or the U.K.’s Prevent strategy and its production of the ‘radicalisation’ discourse (Heath-Kelly, 2013; Powell, 2016).

The methodological consequence of adopting Foucault’s theoretical approach is that it requires a detailed engagement with the specificities of particular practices and systems while also exploring people’s different ways of understanding them, all in an effort to make the familiar visible (Chambon, 1999). This thesis therefore extends Foucault’s analysis of the historically contingent production of power/knowledge to consider the discursive creation of second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London; such an approach works to undermine the givenness of certain knowledge as ‘truth’ by questioning and contextualising it. In keeping with Foucault, I engaged with the following questions: What truth-claims informed the interviewees’ accounts and what discourses/discursive circles are they subject to? On what grounds are some subjectivities and perspectives considered more credible or sensible than others? What can we learn about the nature of the specific second-generation desi Muslim diaspora in London from the discrepancies and commonalities in the stories told about them and the stories they choose to tell about themselves?

Who is authorised to speak, who is silenced, whose voice is heard and valued and whose is not, are all important considerations, as this can reflect but also reproduce power relations in society (Power, 2011). Ball (2012, p. 30) reminds us that the exercise of power is as much about what can be said and thought as it is about what can be done- it is discursive in nature, and so, discourse can be (quoting Foucault) both an ‘instrument of power’ and a ‘stumbling block’ to it. Foucault (1995) argues that a new configuration of power emerges in modernity, one that is informed by a fundamentally different physics of systematized, hierarchized, and structured power relations. Foucault’s critique of modernity and the dominant idea of ‘rationality’ associated with the Enlightenment period has been influential in the questioning of normalised knowledge which forms the foundations of ‘Western’ thought. While Foucault was generally committed to transformation and progress, he worked to ‘problematize’ modernity, to “provide a counterpoint to enlightenment narratives of progress” (Power, 2011, p. 37)- that is, ‘progress’ for whom, by whose standards, at what cost, and to whose benefit?

One of the most iconic applications of Foucauldian theory can be found in Edward Said’s (1979) *Orientalism*, who brought together the themes of Foucauldian power/knowledge and discourse in questioning the West’s historical production of knowledge (specifically in relation to the Islamic ‘other’), to help create the intellectual space for the revival and recharacterization of the ‘colonial question’, which scholars such as Talal Asad (1986; 1993; 2001; 2003; 2011) and Tariq Ramadan (1999; 2004; 2013) have then revisited in a postcolonial context. Following Asad’s slogan- “where simple or fixed opposition appears, let numerous connections across subtle differences emerge” (Rafudeen, 2014, p. 61)- I too apply the Foucauldian notions of discourse and power/knowledge to attend to the complexly interrelated categories of the ‘secular’ and the ‘religious’ by questioning the modern secular agenda in my conclusion, Chapter VIII. Discussions around the historical discursive construction of ‘Muslims’, ‘South Asians’, and ‘migrants’ find renewed importance in light of recurring debates around immigration policy in Europe, particularly in the U.K.’s post Brexit climate.

At any given point in time there exist a multiplicity of discourses, some competing or in tension with one another, while others in relationships that are broadly reinforcing (Weldes, 2006). As we shall see in the upcoming analytical chapters, my informants’ narratives reveal how they continuously find themselves caught between, and thus subject to, multiple discourses: of being middle class, of being migrant, of being British, of being Muslim, of being desi, of being a heterosexual man/woman, and the list goes on. Foucault not only implicates us in institutions

and interactions, but also in our relations to the multiple forms of knowledge via which we constitute ourselves (Bevir, 1999). A Foucauldian research ethic is useful because it urges us to think and author ourselves differently, to consider how discourse can be an inhibiting factor to desire but also question how discourse works to install those desires in the first place, i.e. to problematize how we have come to understand ourselves as ‘subjects’ to begin with (Zemblyas, 2006). Foucault paves the way towards a deeper understanding of the production of knowledge which embeds the subject, but more importantly, he also encourages the subject to seek its freedom through that knowledge (Mayo, 2000). Despite his critics’ long-standing tendency to view Foucault as offering minimal possibility for personal agency, this critique has now been debunked by various scholars (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997; Bevir, 1999; Allen, 2002; Tobias, 2005; Caldwell, 2007, for example). As Bernstein (1992, p. 154) writes:

One might think, for example, that Foucault is heralding the death of the subject, that he is claiming that the subject itself is *only* the result of the effects of power/knowledge regimes, that he completely undermines and ridicules any and all talk of human agency... But it is also clear, especially in his late writings when he deals with the question of the self’s relation to itself and the possibility of ‘the man who tries to invent himself’ that he is not abandoning the idea that ‘we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others’.

Foucault does not ignore the possibilities of individual subjects’ freedom and autonomy but is instead more interested in the discursivity of power and practice (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997; Kelly, 2013); that is, how is one constituted by discourse, but also, in what ways can one constitute themselves to gain access to or enable freedom and autonomy? So, even though much of the second-generation desi Muslim migrant experience is imbued with normalizing power, there are places where their active negotiations of identity, religiosity, gender, and sexuality, inevitably force these concepts to remain open. It is precisely this openness, multiplicity, and questioning of knowledge and discourse which creates space for resistance; hence, while “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1988, p. 101). Each informant’s refusal to participate in a given discourse opens up a movement, often unauthorized, which in turn has the potential to productively invite unexpected, messy, and creative work. Applying a Foucauldian approach offers a detailed analysis of how power is exercised and the specific ways in which discourse and power relations are not entirely consuming- but are, at least at certain times or in certain contexts, escapable.

As we progress through each analytical chapter, we begin to realise the nuances of how the informants are enmeshed in multiple discourses as they engage in practices of self-determination and self-reflexivity, and actively evaluate their positioning as subjects particularly in relation with others. However, as I also discuss in the conclusion, Chapter VIII, what remains to be articulated more strongly is the active problematization of taking responsibility for their own power effects. While one's positioning and relationships may never exist outside of power, they may be reconfigured into different, less problematic ones (Mayo, 2000). Since there is no single, normative, final, or arrived at way of being, instead of a research focus on *being* a 'second-generation desi Muslim migrant in London', the focus shifts to studying the multiple, complex, and contradictory ways of *becoming* a 'second-generation desi Muslim migrant in London' (a becoming that is both individual and communal, at one and the same time), to keep open and broaden our ideas of diaspora, culture, religion, and sexuality, in an attempt to foster community and possibility.

This 'becoming' quality of liminality- where an individual performs identity in resistance to but also as part of hegemonic discourse (Halberstram, 2005)- emphasizes the unstable meaning of identity categories such as gender and sexuality, for example. Foucault's work inspired a serious reconsideration of identity politics as he pushes us to understand subjectivity in a two-fold sense- that of being a subject and that of being subject to (Mayo, 2000)- and has therefore been popular with feminist and queer theorists (Green, 2010; Huffer, 2010; Callis, 2009; Downing, 2008; Glick, 2000; Spargo, 1999; for example). This was an important consideration for me because I quickly realised the relevance of gender as a primary identity category through which difference, subjectivity, and domination are configured in the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' lives (for instance, Chapters V and VII specifically focus on issues of gender). Feminism- and gender theorist Judith Butler in particular- has maintained a long-standing theoretical commitment to the Foucauldian project (Erlenbusch, 2013). Butler (1997), in agreement with Foucault, recognises that the subject and its agency are mediated by and negotiated through power and its techniques of discourses and norms. She writes:

power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence... subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency (Butler, 1997, p. 2).

The paradox of agency- as both constrained and dependent on normative categories imposed on individuals, in a social world that was never really chosen by them (Westerlund, et al., 2019, p. 63)- becomes the very “condition of its possibility” (Butler, 1997, p. 3). For instance, in Chapter V, the female informants’ performative contestations against gendered religio-cultural scripts would not be possible if they had not been expected/demanded to perform the role of ‘good daughter’/‘good wife’ by their ‘plausibility structures’³² (Berger, 1990), which conflicted with their own subjectivities and self-interpretations of gender roles, religion, and culture. Both Foucault and Butler recognise human actions and agency, including struggles and resistances, as reactive and responsive rather than intentional. For Foucault, agency lies in the constant interplay between strategies of power and resistance; there is no rational subject presiding over practices, but the rationality of practices is found in the relations within which they are inscribed (Taylor, 2017). People’s practices become important because of the ways in which they can disrupt and/or sustain power relations and knowledge. As Sawicki (1991, p. 43) recognises: “if relations of power are dispersed and fragmented throughout the social field, so must resistance to power be.” This is what allows for a range of different modes of subjectivity to emerge. Weedon (1987, p. 32) describes ‘subjectivity’ as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world.”

Post-structural theories of subjectivity propose a notion of the self as a site of disunity and conflict that is always in process and produced within specific and shifting relations of power and everyday practices (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Butler (1995, p. 135) makes the following argument:

if a subject were constituted once and for all, there would be no possibility of a reiteration of those constituting conventions or norms. That the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance. Hence, the insistence of finding agency as resignification.

Using Butler’s theory of performativity, the iterative process of making, unmaking and remaking subjectivity is what produces individuals as unfinished products of discourses and relations of power (Salih, 2007). Butler (2004) rethinks gender by providing a Foucauldian

³² Peter Berger’s (1990) ‘plausibility structures’ refer to the social networks which maintain the plausibility of religious beliefs even when these beliefs may be challenged by competing articulations (Hjelm, 2018). A significant other, family, and community, emerge as the most powerful plausibility structures for the informants of this study (I discuss this further across the analytical chapters, and at length in the conclusion, Chapter VIII).

style ontological critique of seemingly knowable categories such as ‘man’/‘woman’; she draws upon Foucault’s notion of subjectivation to consider how the performative is implicated in processes of subjectivation- in ‘who’ the subject is, or might be subjectivated as, via discourse (Youdell, 2006). These discourses are simultaneously called into question and reiterated the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice (Butler, 2004). The desire for recognition- and the choices made to be recognised (or not recognised) within the constraints of normativity- produce performative acts (McQueen, 2015).

Butler’s Foucauldian focus on discourse enables us to see how categories like ‘diasporic’, ‘desi’, ‘Muslim’, ‘migrant’, ‘male/female’ are constituted as proper objects with dense historical meanings that are routinely iterated in attitudes, utterances, gestures, and other performative acts. Her theory of diaspora³³ (Butler, 2004; 2012) imbues the political interpretation of the historical experience of uncertainty, vulnerability, and dispossession with a ‘queer’ epistemology that exemplifies post-secular social existence because it attests to a failure of representation (Dickinson & Morgan, 2015). In discussing the politics of cohabitation, Butler (2012, p. 1) offers “a meditation on the necessity of tarrying with the impossible”; an ambitious aim also undertaken by this thesis as it strives to move beyond ideas of ‘Western’ secular modernity as a framework for conceptualising ethics, agency, and the identity politics of second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London. This thesis also highlights how diasporic identity (with its gendered, religious, and cultural implications) is an act of both problematic being and unfulfilled becoming particularly for the population under study, thereby offering the ‘but also’ as an intellectual and communicative practice of acknowledging and engaging the multiple viewpoints that form everyday experience. As the informants acknowledge their simultaneous situatedness and homelessness, it is Butler’s reconceptualization of identity as resistance which offers myriad possibilities for rethinking the ways in which we address, or even *fail* to address, what it means to be a second-generation desi Muslim migrant in London.

³³ As the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution to the Israel–Palestine conflict have dwindled, Jewish scholars, such as Judith Butler, have increasingly invoked the concept of diaspora to counter a purported Jewish consensus regarding Zionism (Cooper, 2015). Butler strives to derive a principle of cohabitation from the Jewish history of diaspora by emphasising the ‘relationality’ of Jews and Palestinians (Klee, 2020); “exile is the name of separation, but alliance is found precisely there,” in the cohabitation of language, territory, memory, and identity (Butler, 2012, p. 244).

Butler's paradigm of performativity views identity as a type of 'doing' that is only made manifest at the point of action; actions do not necessarily represent identity, rather, actions create identity (Nayak & Kehily, 2006). Butler's (2004) conception of 'doing/undoing' gender also involves considering the body more seriously as the corporeal signifier that gives shape to inner dramas and the 'doing' in stylised performances (Lloyd, 2007), for example (in the context of my own research)- of being 'brown', 'desi', and 'Muslim'. Inspired also by Deleuze, Butler (1991) explains how the repetition of a performative act is never identical, sometimes conforming to, and other times disrupting normative categories; that is, an individual can never repeat actions in precisely the same way, therefore, identity is not static or stable but dynamic and continuously changing. This 'failed' (or rather, nuanced, in my opinion) performative repetition is what signals the undoing of an identity category- "it is precisely the repetition of that play [of taking up an identity] that establishes as well the *instability* of the very category that it constitutes" (Butler, 1991, p. 18).

Following Butler, we may then ask: in what ways is identity performed, embodied, subverted, regulated, and contested, and what are the implications of this in the informants' daily lives? Attending to this question highlights how the informants may perform a seemingly contradictory performative in ever-changing ways; so, while certain aspects of the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' performativity may compel them to fit in to certain ascribed norms, they are not necessarily locked into that category as their performative practices can produce different ways of them understanding themselves and others within their multiple discursive fields. As we go through each chapter, we see how (both variously and intertwined) national/ethnic/religious/gender identity remain realisable in different, competing forms within the informants' lives as they at certain times rehearse and repeat, but also at other times, resist and reimagine dominant norms and meanings inherent in both public and private hierarchies.

Tracing Foucault's anti-foundationalist approach through Butler's notion of performativity enables us to see these ambivalent performative practices as technologies for the production of multiple subjectivities and contextual/situational agency. The idea of 'situational agency' helps us move beyond binary oppositions of agency versus structure that continue to persist within official and demotic discourses (Keane, 2003), as (contrary to normative assumptions about the 'Western' autonomous subject) the informants' accounts emphasise how agency can, and indeed should, also be studied from *within* structure and culture (Chapter VIII discusses this in greater detail). Approaching identity, power, and agency from this poststructuralist lens

opens up a range of possibilities for the thesis- it enables us to understand the functioning and effects of power at multiple levels of analysis; it allows us to recognise the various techniques and performative practices used by the informants to shift the balance of power as they navigate through asymmetrical power relations; it reveals the informants' critique of ideology (including secular, neoliberal, religious, diasporic, and patriarchal ideologies, as we shall see in the analytical chapters), while also acknowledging their visions of alternative practices. This thesis emphasizes the importance of shifting attention from an ideological critique based solely on identity relations to instead considering the multiplicity of relations possible both within diasporic communities as well as with the majority, including the potential that performativity and fluidity can create in manifesting affective connections/disconnections towards different communities of belonging. Not only do Foucault and Butler suggest ways around the issues of identity, but both their bodies of work point to the ethical stakes in maintaining a greater freedom in the play of identities and subjectivities (Callis, 2009; Youdell, 2006). The task at hand then is **not** to reconstitute or re-appropriate a discourse that legitimates new and more subtle forms of exclusion, especially in terms of religious, political, and diasporic belonging; instead, we must acknowledge and embrace ideas of difference, subjectivity, interdependency, and the bodies that make up such relations.

While the thesis acknowledges identity-based claims, it does not advocate the return of liberal individualism- rather (in line with Foucault), it encourages the consideration of subjects formed in relation to others (Burkitt, 1998). Identity is not the exclusive property of an individual but “something that is realized strategically and circumstantially” through reciprocal interaction (Weigert in Côté & Levine, 2002, p. 49). Rabinow (1997, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii) further explains Foucault as suggesting that “what was needed was not a means of making everyone the same, but of creating new modes of being together.” Similarly, by attending to the universality of queerness, dispossession, and precariousness (Dickinson & Morgan, 2015), Butler also provides a strong criticism of the various categories used to organize different types of individuals into recognizable groups. Butler's theory of performativity offers an appreciation of the ambiguities and paradoxes of contemporary identities at work by examining how individuals come to understand and navigate their own social worlds, and by considering what is meaningful and relevant to them in how they experience their own daily life (McKinlay, 2010). These are the makings of a theory that remains relevant and useful; after all, social science theories are powerful everyday explanations that are used by ordinary people (Miller, 1984), and a theory is also the description of how a group's meaning system is generated and

sustained (Geertz, 1973; Overton, 1994; Barker, 2003). Research should therefore be aimed at identifying these theories rather than trying to create or enforce them. One such theory emerges over the course of my own ethnography- what I term the theory of the ‘but also’ frame of reference.

Neither ‘either/or’ nor ‘both/and’, ‘but also’ instead

A growing global concern over ‘identity politics’ has now created a strong suspicion of any universalising claims to a common humanity (Ang, 2003, p. 141). The fact that differences exist in the world- whether understood as contradictory, oppositional, or incommensurable- often leads to the following in practice: we can attempt to select exclusively one or the other (“either/or”) or we can try to select both (“both/and”) (Berliner, et al, 2016). Already fairly prominent in philosophy, psychology, religious and cultural studies, discussions around the ‘either/or’ and ‘both/and’ styles of thinking have also been revived in sociology and anthropology because of intersectionality (Gunnarsson, 2017), intersubjectivity and member identities (Anthony-Stevens & Stevens, 2017), gender studies and transgender politics (Roen, 2019), pluralism and qualitative inquiry (Mahalik, 2014; Probst, 2016), and so on. However, each of these approaches has their own paradoxical consequences: within the application of the ‘either/or’ thinking, the discarded difference resurfaces in various disguises, while within the use of ‘both/and’ it becomes apparent that ‘both/and’ comprises *both* itself *and* the ‘either/or’ option (Berliner, et al, 2016).

Let us consider Michael Lambek’s (1993) argument in his acclaimed book ‘*Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: local discourses of Islam, sorcery and spirit possession*’ as an example. According to Lambek (1993), Islamic discourse (which he considers as certain arguments made by Muslims and as Muslims from within an Islamic tradition) requires its followers to choose ‘either/or’ with respect to certain practices. On the other hand, local discourses of sorcery and spirit possession in Mayotte allow ‘both/and’- a Muslim can be both a spirit medium practicing possession, and some of the spirits themselves are Muslim. Herein lies a practical articulation between two competing discourses, one of which sees sorcery and spirit possession as mutually exclusive and even contradictory to Islam, while the other does not. The relation between these local traditions is not one of outright contradiction but of ‘incommensurability’, that is, they have different starting points and cannot be logically measured against each other point by

point (Lambek, 2011). ‘Incommensurability’ is a philosophical concept wherein things cannot be ordered according to a set of binary differences because they are not in stable relation to one another (for example, science and religion, or nature and culture) (Berliner, et al, 2016). Furthermore, local traditions themselves develop internally differentiated conversations with respect to their relation to one another (Lambek, 2011).

This thesis addresses such binary differences- over the course of the chapters, I argue for the ‘but also’ positioning to move beyond an ‘either/or’ or ‘both and’ approach to identity; the term ‘desi’ to move beyond the limitations of overarching ‘South Asian’/‘British Asian’/‘British Muslim’ formulations; the study of ‘lived religion’ to move beyond homogenous depictions of ‘institutional’ or ‘official’ religion; and the idea of ‘situational agency’ to move beyond essentialised oppositions of agency versus structure that persist within official and demotic (as well as other) discourses. The thesis then works towards further breaking open each of these categories by taking into account the internal differentiations within such local traditions, for example, ‘desi’ with its scale of ‘pendu/freshie’ and ‘whitewashed/coconut’ (as discussed in Chapter IV), or ‘Muslim’ religiosity with its scale of ‘halal’ to ‘haram’ (as discussed in Chapter VI).

The opposition between the mutually exclusive ‘either/or’ and the overly comprehensive ‘both/and’ is widely prevalent in practice, and sometimes explicit in thought (Berliner, et al, 2016). The ‘either/or’ thinking is problematic precisely because it has the potential to lead to essentialism and polarisation. Essentialism searches for the intrinsic ‘nature’ of things as they are, in isolation, in and of themselves; it makes either/or distinctions, rather than variable distinctions in degree, postulating polar opposites, instead of gradations and empirical continua (Fuchs, 2009). As discussed in the previous section, Butler (2004) has been particularly critical of essentialism and challenges it through her re-conceptualisation of gender which focuses more on the ‘accidents’ of performativity. Essentialism becomes truly problematic because it does not allow for difference, for variation, and as Fuchs (2009, p. 15) argues “where nothing is allowed to vary, nothing can be explained”. Of particular concern is ‘cultural essentialism’, which Grillo (2003, p. 158) describes as “a system of belief grounded in a conception of human beings as ‘cultural’ (and under certain conditions territorial and national) subjects, i.e. bearers of a culture, located within a boundaried world, which defines them and differentiates them from others”. This form of essentialism breeds anxiety about a culture and what is happening to it; for example, although ‘fear’ and ‘anxiety’ are not newcomers to the English cultural

landscape (Morgan, 2017), the moral panic and cultural resentment surrounding the 2016 Brexit referendum serves as a strong reminder of the dangers of essentialist discourse (Knight, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Such discourses produce binary oppositions and propagate ‘Othering’ (Dervin, 2012), drawing lines between us and them, here and there, same and different, local and foreign, ‘Western’ and ‘Asian’, and so on (Ang, 2003), creating considerable pressure upon diaspora communities and ethnic and religious minorities to have to continuously prove their allegiances and choose between their British and Muslim or British and Asian identities, for example (Brah, 1996; Werbner, 2004; Abbas, 2007; Shibli, 2010). Consider Tory party grandee Lord Tebbit’s infamous ‘cricket test’, for instance, used to measure the loyalty of ‘British Asians’/‘British Muslims’ by looking at who they supported in international cricket matches (Randeree, 2013); Fletcher (2012), however, makes the argument that it is unfair to place British Asians in an either/or situation as their alignment to cricket teams from the subcontinent cannot automatically be simplified in dichotomous terms as either a statement of defiance, or as a reflection of their insularity, since diasporic identities are far more complex and negotiable. Essentialism and the either/or dichotomy tends to emerge as a by-product of how a network³⁴ operates when it protects its foundations, but as Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 29) recognised, our foundations too turn out to be “turtles all the way down”³⁵- infinitude, incompleteness, and inconsistency are all prominent features of the human condition. According to Geertz (1988, p. 148), we now live in a globalised world in which there is “a gradual spectrum of mixed-up differences”, and so in an effort to accommodate these features comes the ‘both/and’ thinking, often championed by discourses of duality and hybridity.

We know that saying I am *either British or Muslim/either British or Asian* becomes absolutist and essentialist, a recipe for increased social segregation and discrimination. To combat that, ‘multiculturalism’ with its hyphenated and hybrid terms including ‘British Muslim’ and ‘British Asian’ became increasingly popular, as surveys and research claimed second and subsequent generations of Muslims in the U.K. are defining themselves using such hyphenated

³⁴ Here I consider ‘network’ as “a field of relationships between nodes that vary with their relationships” (Fuchs, 2001).

³⁵ “There is an Indian story- at least I heard it as an Indian story- about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked (perhaps he was an ethnographer; it is the way they behave), what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? ‘Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down’.” (Geertz, 1973, pp. 28-29).

self-descriptive labels, rather than defining themselves exclusively in terms of national or religious identity (Maxwell, 2006) (however, my informants argue against hyphenated identities at length in Chapter IV). In contrast to essentialist accounts of identity and culture, ‘hybridity’ acknowledges that identity is formed via an encounter with difference (Ahmed, 1999). Homi Bhabha (1994) theorises the notion of hybridity as not just the fusion of existing cultural elements, but rather as the process of the emergence of a culture whose elements are being continually transformed or translated through irrepressible encounters, thus offering the potential to destabilize existing forms of cultural authority and representation. Compared to the previous either/or, saying that I am *both* British *and* Muslim becomes inclusive and conciliatory; Hopkins (2011) suggests that contrary to there being any inherent tension between British and Muslim, by articulating dual identifications ‘British Muslims’ appear to perceive their national and religious identities as both complementary and intertwined.

As a predeterminer, ‘both’³⁶ is used for emphasis to refer to two people or things, *regarded and identified together*; as an adverb, it is used before the first of *two alternatives* to emphasize that the statement being made applies to each, with the other alternative being introduced by ‘and’. This is where the problem begins- categories such as British and Muslim or even British and Asian are generally not regarded or identified together (consider the ‘failure of multiculturalism’ discourse, particularly in the U.K. (Mathieu, 2018; Jones, 2015; Werbner, 2009, for example)). If such was not the case, there wouldn’t be a non-Muslim or white majority who felt that their sense of common identity is being threatened by distinctive subgroup identities, and there wouldn’t be a Muslim or ethnic minority who felt that their ability to express their subgroup identity and practice the norms and values associated with it is often challenged and compromised in relation to the superordinate group (Hutchison, et al. 2015). Maintaining particularistic identities is important to groups in general (in keeping with the basic need for psychological distinctiveness as postulated by social identity theory), and any attempt to replace particularistic identities with an overarching transcendent identity tends to be experienced as highly threatening and therefore met with great resistance (Kelman, 1999). If there is any sense that it is impossible to express and show commitment to *both* British *and* Muslim identity, or if they are perceived as seemingly incompatible (which they often are perceived and/or experienced as being), then British Muslims may still feel constrained to choose between their national and religious identities (Hutchison, et al. 2015).

³⁶ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/both>

The stress on synchrony and ‘integration’ in the modernist project tends to appeal to metaphors of continuity and cultural reproduction (Caglar, 1997, p. 170). Notions of ‘hyphenated’, ‘hybrid’, and ‘creolised’ identity have been criticised for many reasons- they create a ‘confused essentialism’ by ‘museumise’-ing culture as a thing (Friedman, 1995, p. 82), they fail to transcend frameworks founded on empires/nations/societies (Dutta, 2019; Bartels, et al., 2019), or destabilise existing hierarchies between groups founded on unequal power relations (Rambukwella, 2019). So here we turn to the politics of the hyphen- who imposes it and why, and what needs to be hyphenated and what does not? The hyphen is theorized as a dynamic social-psychological space that is substantially informed by power, history, media, surveillance, politics, nation of origin, gender, biography, longings, imagination, and loss (Fine & Sirin, 2007). The condition of hybridity and ‘hyphenated’ identities emerges as a prominent concept in a lot of the literature on postcolonial migrant cultures, but is it really useful in dissecting the power relations which produce social differences and political antagonisms? Gayatri Spivak (1988) has sharply criticised Homi Bhabha’s earlier suggestion that hybridity has value in both the Third World post-colonial arena and within the diasporic condition of minorities in the First World, for it fails to account for the social differences of categories such as class, gender, and location (Kapoor, 2004). Chow (1998, p. 156) further argues that the popularity of concepts such as hybridity, pluralism, dialogism, heteroglossia, heterogeneity, and cosmopolitanism continue in the postmodern realm as part of a global capitalist discourse which works towards ignoring the legacy of colonialism, white supremacy, systematic exploitation and oppression³⁷.

We can see how using the both/and approach inevitably creates a superordinate group and a subgroup (Moura, 2015); it requires the development of a larger, transcendent identity as a necessary condition for effective cooperation and peaceful coexistence (Jacobson, 2006). So, I can be *both* British *and* Muslim, or *both* British *and* Asian, but I am always British *first* (this form of articulation becomes even more striking when compared to Canada’s hyphenated ‘Italian-Canadian’ or ‘Chinese-Canadian’, for example (Rummens, 2001)). This brings us to another important point (and there is a wealth of literature addressing the following questions that I shall engage with throughout the thesis)- what do the terms ‘British’ or ‘Asian’ or

³⁷ This also aligns with Nancy Fraser’s (2017; 2019) model of ‘progressive neoliberalism’ which argues that socially progressive rhetoric has now become dominated by market economics, that is, neoliberalism has colonised progressive discourses (Cummins, 2020).

‘Muslim’ even mean, and what do they *not* mean? Scholars including Foucault (1980), Butler (1990), and Hall (1996) argue that identity is constructed only through its relation to the ‘other’, the representable, the symbolic, the relation to what it is not. Paul Gilroy (1994, p. 54-55), therefore, expresses his distrust in the notion of hybridity precisely because:

the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities... I think there isn’t any purity; there isn’t any anterior purity... that’s why I try not to use the word hybrid... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails.

Even though hybridity may denote important developments and challenges to essentialist notions of ethnicity and identity, it is still not able to transcend ‘old ethnicities’ (Hall, 1988) given its reiteration of the ethnic boundary. As Deleuze and Parnet (1987, p. 54) write, “whenever one believes in a great first principle, one can no longer produce anything but huge sterile dualisms”. Hybridity often ends up delineating forms of belonging and has the potential to paper over hegemonic practices, hierarchies, multiplicities, and the true struggles and contestations around migrant and diasporic identity; the argument about multiple belongings in the modern state rests largely on dismantling the notion of a unitary identity, “partly through a critique of unitary notions of the self and partly through a critique of unitary notions of cultural identity” (Anthias, 2001, p. 621). Hutnyk (1999, p. 39) best summarises the criticisms of hybridity as follows:

... the heritage of hybridity’s botanical roots: the sterility of the hybrid mule, and its extension to Mulatto, mixed race, half-breed and other obscene racisms; the reclamation of the term reconfigured as creativity at the margins and as advent of vibrant intersections that cannot be otherwise incorporated; the hegemony of the pure that co-constitutes the hybrid; the inconsequence of hybridity in the recognition that everyone is hybrid, everyone is ‘different’; the commercial co-option of multiplicities; and that if everyone is hybrid, then the old problems of race, class, gender, sex, money and power still apply.

Examined in this context the both/and articulation of identity becomes a circular endeavour that has the danger to bring us back to the either/or, a recurring incompleteness and irresolution in theory and practice. Now how can we resolve whether this opposition (the either/or, both/and dichotomy) is itself mutually exclusive or comprehensive (Berliner, et al, 2016)?

Here I propose a way forward. Both/and fails to do justice to its well-intended purpose because it is unable to encapsulate the complexity of multiple subjectivities that may create seemingly

contradictory arguments. European multiplicity remains under-theorized due to the mainstream tendency of thinking based on dichotomous categories that assume clear boundaries between state and society, Europe and non-Europe, the old and the new, the core and the periphery, the religious and the secular, and so on (Buhari-Gulmez & Rumford, 2016). The multiplicity of European processes involving simultaneously particularistic and universalistic aspirations, renders Europe as “an active site of multiple, and often times contradictory, productions and transformations” (Biebuyck & Rumford, 2012). But the question still stands- how can we articulate such complex, contradictory, and ongoing multiplicities? Buhari-Gulmez and Rumford (2016) note that while ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ Europe-making consists of maintaining clear boundaries between the European Self and non-European Others (although even the notion of a ‘European’ self is being called in to question post Brexit), the ‘parallel’ Europe-making that co-exists with them emphasizes Europe’s constitution by a global society. To move beyond a ‘thick’ and ‘thin,’ we need a ‘parallel’; to move beyond ‘either/or’ and ‘both/and’ we need the ‘but also’. Not only does the ‘but also’ attend to descriptive and explanatory issues, but to political and moral issues as well.

As a conjunction, ‘but’³⁸ is used to introduce a phrase or clause *contrasting* with what has already been mentioned, while the ‘also’ follows in addition to. So, instead of saying I am *either* British *or* Muslim, or alternatively I am *both* British *and* Muslim, I can say I am British *but also* Muslim *but also* desi *but also* middle class *but also* a heterosexual female, and so on. The ‘but’ enables the introduction of a possible contrast, while the ‘also’ makes space for it to be added anyway. These range of categories (from nationality to religion, to heritage, class, gender, etc.) sometimes intersect, sometimes overlap, sometimes conflict, and other times coexist, but together they constitute my subject position. This positioning is never fixed, never linear or in order, nationality does not always come first and neither does ethnicity or religion, i.e., what precedes the *but* and what follows the *also* is always on the move, always open to contestation and reconfiguration (as Saima also questions in Chapter IV, page 76, “Like okay, can’t I be Pakistani but also British? Or Muslim but also Asian?”). This brings us to the importance of agency and context- identities are contextual, they change as we move from context to context (Saylor & Aries, 1999; Reicher, 2004). Intergroup relations of conflict, tolerance and cooperation are predetermined by the social norms of the context (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013) and the ways in which social representations become salient, dominant or

³⁸ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/but>

normative can only be understood with reference to their context (Jovchelovitch, 2007). As we go through each chapter, it becomes clearer that what precedes the *but* and what follows the *also* is often dependent and variable according to the context the informants find themselves in.

Let us take my weekly practice of going for *jummah* (congregational Friday prayers) in London as an example. As I walk along my high street, past the post office, through my local Waitrose on the way to the mosque, I feel very much British *but also* Muslim, with other categories following thereafter. When I enter the mosque and head to the segregated female section, and as I stand in a row of women and bow my head in prayer, I am Muslim *but also* female, with other categories following thereafter. When I come back home in time for lunch, and as I help my mother set the *biryani*³⁹ on the table while my father watches an Indian news channel on the telly, I am *desi but also* second-generation migrant, with other categories following thereafter. Within the course of one hour, the articulation of my ‘*but also*’ has shifted repeatedly based on the context I found myself in, thus making context inextricably linked with agency. The ‘*but also*’ is not without the politics of power and recognition; what precedes the ‘*but*’ and what follows the ‘*also*’ is still a deeply political and affective affair, not just a matter of agential choice. As we progress through the analytical chapters, we shall see the many ways in which the informants’ ‘*but also*’ articulations of identity can be influenced, supported, and/or challenged by different ‘*plausibility structures*’, thus highlighting the circulation of power through local relations and the back and forth processes of being subjected *but also* of becoming an agentic subject.

When speaking of context, it becomes an important exercise to not only consider the context of social structures but also the context of everyday discourses and discursive practices. For instance, Andreouli and Howarth (2013) consider the role of both state and society in the construction of migrant identities in Britain by examining the relationship between the ‘*consensual universe*’ (the context of day to day discourses and practices) and the ‘*reified universe*’ (the institutional context of state policies and practices). Similarly, Scuzzarello (2012, p. 4) notes:

³⁹ An Indian dish made with highly seasoned rice and meat, fish, or vegetables. From: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/biryani>

... while the state has material and discursive power over a society, the interaction between the two gives legitimacy to narratives which provide the normative frameworks that shape and limit the range of possible positions defining 'the good citizen'... These frameworks are negotiated and contested in the lived experiences of people.

The question to ask then becomes: what do these normative frameworks (not of the informants' choosing, but within which they are constituted) do to them, but equally importantly, what are they able to do with/to these norms in return? There are strong echoes of Foucauldian/Butlerian thought and analysis here. The thesis offers an insight into the complex nature of social norms themselves; as we go through the chapters we shall see how the informants are not only subject to the discourse of 'good citizen', but to multiple discourses of 'good desi Muslim', 'good daughter/son', 'good husband/wife', etc., indicating that it is not just the state who holds material and discursive power over them, but also family, community, and gender. Even within my own example of going for Friday prayers (and I only realised this upon reflection), I was moving from the macro context of British society, to the meso context of the local Muslim community, to the micro context of my own household and family.

Articulating the 'but also' allows for such multiple levels of analysis; it enables the mapping of power relations across multiple categories and contexts including (but not limited to) spatial location, socio-economic status, gender, age, etc. Rather than using categories as locked in signifiers for my informants, articulating the 'but also' encourages me to rethink my informants as second-generation, but also desi, but also Muslim, but also British, but also migrants, and so on. 'But also' allows the opportunity for resignification and disruption, so that categories and the way in which they are expressed are never a done deal. Understood in this sense, the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' subjectivities cannot be stabilised or essentialised through identity categories, because their sense of self may continuously shift in response to their social relations and experiences. Additionally, articulating the 'but also' helps break open categories since it can be applied within a category as well, for example, I can say that I am Muslim *but also* I am not very practicing, or I am Muslim *but also* gay, and so on. Using the 'but also' accounts for internal differentiations, granting an opportunity for movement and multiplicity that neither 'either/or' nor 'both/and' have yet been able to offer.

I also want to make a note of my conscious endeavour to steer clear of pluralist claims and generalised conclusions. According to Berger (2014, p. 1), "pluralism is a social situation in

which people with different ethnicities, worldviews, and moralities live together peacefully and interact with each other amicably.” Pluralism in this sense is much like an ideological fantasy—great to think about in theory, but difficult to implement in practice (Deveaux, 2000). One need only look at the many accounts of Islamophobia in the U.K. to know that both state and society have moved on from the dream of “cultural pluralism or multiculturalism” towards the reality of “monoculturalism or cultural imperialism” (Esposito & Kalin, 2011, p. 73). Over the course of the chapters (particularly Chapter IV and VIII), the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study re-evaluate liberal modernity’s claims to pluralism, cosmopolitanism, and secularism via their counter narratives, offering a complementary parallel understanding of ‘living with difference’.

However, I do not wish to refer to parallelism here with its negative connotations of a ‘parallel society’ or ‘social disintegration’ (Heitmeyer & Messner, 2011). While ‘parallelism’ is often studied as a philosophical theory or a literary rhetorical device, media studies has also borrowed the term to discuss the concept of ‘political parallelism’ (de Albuquerque, 2013). Simply put, parallelism⁴⁰ refers to the state of being parallel, or of corresponding in some way. We can conceptualise the difference as follows— pluralism is akin to a deceptive happy marriage, presenting a seemingly united ‘plural’ front but having deep internal fractures that continuously resurface in renewed conflicts. Parallelism, on the other hand, is like a committed relationship between two lovers, they fight and make up, converge and diverge, never entirely apart but also never entirely together. The ‘but also’ inhabits this space of the parallel— it does not delude its way to a romanticised worldview that is not representative of socio-political realities, instead it acknowledges difference as natural, inevitable, acceptable, and above all, workable.

My desire for this thesis is not to morph into a utopian project, but instead represent a project of critique, of reform, or at the very least a project that encourages new forms of discourse and consciousness. I have tried my best to provide an honest overview of my theoretical journey in this chapter— of how my theoretical approach evolved into a blended genre of an interpretive styled critical inquiry; of why I chose Foucault’s (1980; 2000) notions of power/knowledge in conjunction with Butler’s (2004) theory of performativity to explore the construction and development of my informants’ responsive ‘in between’ subjectivities which transform and challenge static notions of identity and belonging; of the problems associated with the

⁴⁰ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/parallelism>

‘either/or’ and ‘both/and’ styles of thinking and analysis, and why the ‘but also’ style of thinking can address those issues, thus offering an alternative approach to the study of identity. Deviating from the ‘traditional’ model of research (Crotty, 1998) enforced tension and contradiction in my work of a useful kind- after all, it is not “as if the system in the end had more critical agency than we do as individual actors within” it (Thorkelson, 2010a, p. 28). I found my engagement with theory in this format to be a much more ‘reflexive pedagogy of theory’ (Thorkelson, 2010b) which has the potential to lead to a different form of theoretical practice, one that is better attuned to the risks of canonization through insularity, one that is better aware of the shortcomings of essentialism, pluralism and hybridity, and thus better positioned to attend to the complexities that often surface ‘in between’.

III. Writing from and as the in-between: Doing ‘Desi’ Ethnography

“My friends and I were talking about the show ‘Extremely British Muslims’ and I was like who made it? And obviously it was white people. I said that’s the problem, that there is one community trying to show the representation of another community and that’s a hard thing to do. I can’t speak for Palestinians, for example, I know nothing about them. Even though I spent more than a year there it doesn’t mean that I know them. I can speak for my culture, my community, my struggles. And so really, if anyone should be representing us it should be people like you. Who are from our community, so when I say things like... this, I’m having cornflakes with desi chai (tea) you’ll get how weird that is. Because you’re a part of that community, I don’t have to struggle to make you understand that that’s not how people do it in the Pakistani culture and it’s not how people do it in the British culture either, and you get that. If it was a white male asking, I wouldn’t have had this conversation. I would never have agreed to do this interview. This is something people should take into consideration when doing research and trying to represent a community.”

25 March, 2017, excerpt from 28-year-old Samira’s Skype interview.

I smiled at Samira as she chewed hurriedly, eager to continue our conversation. While Samira validated my position as researcher, her words later made me think deeply as I repeatedly played and paused her interview while transcribing. ‘The problem... is one community trying to show the representation of another community.’ *Pause*. Samira clearly did not approve of ‘white people’ trying to showcase ‘extremely British Muslims.’ Is this why the Hollywood movie ‘Black Panther’⁴¹, with its African-American director and predominantly black cast, was celebrated as a major milestone in cultural representation (D’Agostino, 2019)? Or why ‘Crazy Rich Asians’⁴², with its all-Asian cast, was considered a ground-breaking moment for Asian representation in Western film (Hatchett, 2020)? Or is it as British Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed writes in his Instagram post: ‘Black Panther isn’t just a win for black people. Crazy Rich Asians isn’t just a win for Asians. When we stretch culture, we all have more room to be ourselves. When we have the chance to relate to a wider range of stories and characters, we stop seeing each other as OTHERS.’⁴³

⁴¹ <http://time.com/black-panther/>

⁴² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/17/crazy-rich-asians-hollywood-romcom-racial-boundaries>

⁴³ <https://www.instagram.com/rizahmed/?hl=en>

The anthropological 'Other' (Rabinow, 1977) often refers to persons and groups whose cultures are different from our own, with their 'fundamental Otherness' being culturally determined. There is an ongoing effort in the social sciences to problematise the notion of non-Western cultures and peoples as 'Other', subject to scientism, positivism and reductionism by predominantly Western investigators (however well-intentioned they may be) (Spiro, 1992). Representing the 'Other' becomes a continuous process of dominance and control, thus making research itself a performance in the arena of the politics of representation (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Who becomes, or rather is made to become, the 'Other', and in what context does this othering occur? Which 'community' was Samira referring to when she spoke of 'my/our' community? How could I as an 'in-between' express the complexities of the in-between, of "that's not how people do it in the Pakistani culture and it's not how people do it in the British culture either", to a reader who wouldn't automatically "get that"? Why would Samira "never have agreed" to do the interview with a "white male", and would it be different if the interviewer was a white female or a desi male instead? I later followed up with Samira and asked this important question over dinner. She responded:

Well... it would depend on the topic, I guess. Some things I might not necessarily tell a guy, but I'd tell another female about it. But this kind of stuff, the stuff we're talking about, I'd still definitely prefer if it was someone from our background doing the research because I don't know, I just don't think any other person could do justice to it if they're not in that environment, you know, especially if they're not the minority. Because then they will always be looking at us from up here (she raises her arm high above her head), and not from here (she gestures back and forth between us, signalling an eye-to-eye movement).

Samira draws our attention to the politics of positionality and reminds us how research processes are sharply influenced by race, gender, personal experience, class, and even content (Bhopal, 2000). Although women interviewing other women can potentially "help each other develop ideas" and bring to their interaction a tradition of 'woman talk' (Devault, 1990, p. 101), as Samira verifies gender congruity alone "is not enough to overcome ethnic incongruity" (Reissman, 1987, p. 190). Samira also expresses the importance of class, a shared 'environment', and a shared 'minority' status to truly "do justice" to research; as Oakley (1981, p. 41) suggests, the goal of understanding people through the process of interviewing is best achieved when "the relationship of the interviewer and the interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship". In this chapter, I begin by reviewing my critical engagement with 'insider' and 'outsider'

research positions, introducing myself as a ‘desi’ ethnographer who is an insider but also an outsider. I then highlight the postcritical nature of my ethnography, with an emphasis on reflexivity and the relationship between Self and narrative. Finally, I move on to detailing my experience of narrative writing in an attempt to reveal the underlying mechanisms in sense-making, exposing the questioning that generates creative overturning and the production of knowledge.

‘Desi’ ethnography as Insider ‘but also’ Outsider

I was first introduced to ethnography in an Introduction to Anthropology course during my undergraduate degree via Margaret Mead’s (1961) ‘*Coming of Age in Samoa*’. I still remember having to look up where Samoa was on the world map, and my young mind was absolutely enthralled by the idea of a woman having travelled so far as a researcher to study ‘other’ women (especially as I grew up in a desi Muslim household where I had to ask for my parents’ consent before I even stepped out of the house). And here Miss Mead was studying the sexual life and social structures of adolescents all the way in Samoa, more than a century before my time. I remember being thoroughly inspired and intrigued, wondering- how did she manage to learn the Samoan language and conduct interviews in such a short period of six to nine months? How was she sure she really *knew* what the villagers in Ta’u were talking about?⁴⁴

At this point, I had lived in Dubai for fifteen years and yet I only had a very basic working vocabulary in Arabic (to be fair, perhaps I could have tried to learn more), but if someone was to ask me to comment on the ‘local’ culture I wouldn’t quite know where to begin. However, if someone was to ask me about the expatriate culture in Dubai, I could probably write an entire thesis. I had undergone the process of becoming an expatriate in Dubai, I lived and identified as an expatriate in Dubai, and if I spoke to another expatriate in Dubai I would *know* (or at least have a reasonably clear idea) of what they were referring to because we had some frame of shared experiences and/or understanding. So, although I was mesmerised by Margaret Mead’s adventurous research undertakings, even back then, I felt that I couldn’t possibly have the authority or authenticity to talk about (let alone speak on behalf of or represent) any given

⁴⁴ Although Mead has had a significant impact on feminist anthropology and gender studies (Lewin, 2009; Newman, 1996), her work is not free from criticism and controversy. Most notable is New Zealand anthropologist Derek Freeman’s (1983) refutation of Mead’s work denouncing her cultural-determinist leanings, which sparked the much documented ‘Mead–Freeman’ debate (consider for example, Hemenstall, 2017; Côté, 1992; Appell, 1984, etc.).

‘Other’, without fear of assumption, ascription, or misrepresentation. This was my first intellectual encounter with the conversation about Self and Other, the debate between Insider and Outsider status, and the importance of positionality in ethnographic endeavours.

Ethnography is essentially a culture-studying culture (Thomas, 1993); it combines ethnographic theory and research techniques to build a systematic understanding of different human cultures “from the perspective of those who have learned them” (Spradley, 1979, pp. 10-11). In this way, the history of ethnography in anthropology is also, to some extent, the history of the colonial encounter (O’Reilly, 2009). By 1970, anthropology was sometimes spoken of as the “child of western imperialism” (Gough, 1968), and as a form of “scientific colonialism” (Galtung, 1967; Lewis, 1973). Over the next decade, the assumption that anthropology was linked to Western colonialism became common in disciplinary discourse, with colonialism even being incorporated into the subject matter of anthropology (as is evident by the emergence of the ‘colonial ethnography’ genre, for example) (Stocking, 1991). It was within this period that cultural critic and postcolonial theorist, Edward Said (1978), published his influential book ‘*Orientalism*’, offering a critique for understanding the cultural misrepresentations that form the basis of the West’s (what he refers to as the ‘Occident’) perceptions of the East (the ‘Orient’). Said (1978) broadly defined Orientalism as a system of constructionism based on epistemological distinctions between the West and the East (the Us versus Them dichotomy)⁴⁵. This is the ideology that enables the construction of cultural imaginaries of Islam in opposition to the ‘Christian West’ till today⁴⁶ (Said, 1978; Asad, 1998). Orientalism is also viewed as the corporate institution that holds authority over, makes statements about, or restructures the Orient (Silva, 2017).

It comes as little surprise then that ‘ethnography’ evokes the exotic; “in more prudish times it promised (and delivered) bare bosoms and frightening fetishes; today it satisfies a new aesthetic of the fantastic and imaginary among some, and the need for ‘inside knowledge’ of the third world among others” (Fabian, 1990, p. 756). In the colonial context, ethnographers came in as

⁴⁵ Said’s work is not without criticism as he is often accused of abstraction, reification, and (given his ambivalence on the question of whether there is an authentic Orient or not) of practicing a reverse form of Orientalism-‘Occidentalism’ (Hart & Hart, 2000). However, despite its flaws, *Orientalism* remains a compelling analysis of a specific configuration of power and ‘modern’ knowledge (Hallaq, 2018).

⁴⁶ Essential to Said’s call for ‘secular criticism’ is his claim that religious discourse cannot engender self-critical cultural practices (Dahl, 2002). However, my informants’ narratives problematise this claim and the secular/religious binary by emphasising the critical potential of religious discourse, as they often speak from within a religious tradition while advocating for self-critical performative practices (as we shall see throughout the data analysis chapters).

outsiders attempting to gradually socialise into a group setting, and thereby gain said ‘inside knowledge’ and understandings. The goal of ethnographic research is to effectively gain an insider’s perspective, collect insider accounts, and render them meaningful (O’Reilly, 2009). Several ethnographers have thus written about their experiences of becoming an ‘insider’, and about the process of merging Self with Other (Coffey, 1999). But what if the Self is also the Other? What happens if the understanding of different cultures comes from the perspective of those who have lived them, instead of those who have learnt them?

‘Outsider research’ (Merton, 1972) is carried out by researchers, including ethnographers, with limited prior knowledge of the research site and its members, while ‘insider research’ is conducted by ethnographers operating either within their own group, or in a group into which they have gained membership on the basis of a shared or closely similar social and cultural identity background (Chavez, 2008). The concept of insider ethnography, ‘native’ ethnography (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1984) or ethnography ‘at home’ (Jackson, 1987) is by no means a new one; in sociology, researchers from the Chicago School often carried out ethnographic fieldwork on the streets of their own cities and communities (Anderson, 1961; Wirth, 1964, for example), and were also in many cases personally involved in the lives or lifestyles of those whom they studied (Atkinson, 2012). However, even though the Chicago School ethnographers commonly had autobiographical connections to their research, they were neither particularly self-observational in their method nor self-visible in their texts (Anderson, 2006). Over time, anthropologists of diverse non-Western nationality and ancestry began making important contributions as professionals to the discipline as well; Dharendra Nath Majumdar (1956) was a pioneering Indian anthropologist, Alfonso Villa Rojas (1945) made significant contributions to Mexican Maya ethnography, and Allison Davis (1965) made history as the first African American scholar studying Southern race and class relationships, to name a few.

Kuwayama (2003, p.9) claims that although in the past “natives were merely objects of representation, today, they not only read outsiders’ ethnography written about their culture, but also protest against it, if objectionable”. However, the moral discourse of anthropology continues to rest on the idea of the moral superiority and sensibility of the West (Marlina & Rahmawati, 2019), on the presumption of the “white man’s (or white woman’s) burden to liberate others from the darkness of their own cultural traditions” (Menon & Shweder, 1998, p. 140). Anthropology is still considered to be a predominantly ‘white public space’, one that continues to hold many institutional and attitudinal barriers for faculty and students of colour

(Brodin, et al, 2011). For example, a 2017 study published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency in Britain, showed that only 12 percent of academic staff at British universities came from outside the EU, and amongst the 535 senior officials who declared their ethnicity, 510 were white, 15 were Asian and 10 were recorded as “other including mixed”⁴⁷. Within the academy, one might conclude that the ‘native’s point of view’ remains largely unwelcomed from the natives themselves (Sanjek, 2013). Even though there may be an increasing number of ‘native’ anthropologists in the field, they are still having to negotiate being ‘professional others’ to their Western counterparts and are having to undertake fieldwork according to ‘Western’ derived and prescribed methods (Trask, 1991; Kuwayama, 2003).

The divide between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ ethnography becomes even more complex in a post-colonial global setting. While local ethnographers studying their own cultures have been labelled as insider, native, or indigenous, anthropologists studying other cultures have been identified as outsider, foreign or Western; and the term ‘halfie’ or ‘hybrid’ (Abu-Lughod & Gomez, 2012) is popularly used for anthropologists who are born into migrant families, receive their academic education in the West, and then return to their ancestral homeland to study their historical roots, people, and culture (Kuchumkulova, 2007). But what about those who are born into migrant families, receive their academic education in the West, and then stay back? Which culture sees us as insiders, and which culture are we positioned as outsiders to? Where does our own culture end and the Other culture even begin? The demarcation line between cultural insiders and outsiders can be very subjective; the delimitation of culture varies with one’s perspective (Schipper, 1999). Even though the apparent “‘hybridity’ of a migrant’s art may well signify a freeing of voices, a technique for dismantling authority, a liberating polyphony of voices... it is a hybridity that remains primarily an aesthetic device, or a source of themes” (Boehmer, 1995, p. 239). Modern day migrant writers are sometimes still accused of being appropriated by the neo-colonial cultural centre, having lost their commitment or loyalty to their country of origin (Boehmer, 1995).

This discussion becomes even more pertinent in the context of my own research; my country of origin is India, but I have never lived there or felt a sense of ‘commitment’ or ‘loyalty’ to it,

⁴⁷ Thirty senior academics either refused or failed to record an ethnicity. From: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jan/19/british-universities-employ-no-black-academics-in-top-roles-figures-show>

and having grown up in Dubai and then in London, I would argue that the ‘neo-colonial cultural centre’ is all I have ever known, but I don’t quite feel any commitment or loyalty to that either. To explain myself further, I shall briefly describe Giazitzoglu and Payne’s (2018, p. 1155) 3-level model of insider ethnography as follows:

Level 1- where the nature of shared identity between researched and researcher is the fundamental, objective, shared markers of identity represented by gender and ethnicity.
Level 2- identities that are shared on the basis of learned cultural acts and rituals; and a mutual agreement between researcher and researched about how to articulate and reproduce the Bourdieusian “rules of the game”⁴⁸ in a given field.
Level 3- totally familiar with the nuances of the culture being ethnographically analysed; with the ethnographer being a competent player, as well as articulator, of the game.

While I refer to this model to illustrate my argument, I wish to reiterate the importance of religion, class, and personal experience as shared identity markers that can also contribute to an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ research status. So, in India, I am a level 1 insider by virtue of my ethnicity but also an outsider because of my foreign NRI (Non-resident Indian) status; in Dubai, I am a level 2 insider to the expatriate community but also an outsider to the local Arab community; in London, I am a level 3 insider to the migrant community but also an outsider to the larger white British community. If I decide to do an ethnography on Indian labour workers in Dubai, I am an insider because of our shared language and ethnicity but also an outsider based on my class and gender; if I did an ethnography on Somali migrants in London, I am an insider based on our shared migrant status and religion but also an outsider because of my ethnicity. Therefore, in any given location or situation, I find myself having to consistently negotiate my position on a continuum of degrees or levels of insider ‘but also’ outsider. It is within this dialogue that the term ‘desi’ finds renewed significance.

The Sanskrit word ‘des’ or ‘desh’ means country, and ‘desi’ which originates from it essentially means from the country, or ‘of the homeland’ (Rudisill, 2018). For example, Bangladesh literally translates to the country of Bengal. The opposite of ‘des’ is ‘pardes’ (par

⁴⁸ Adopting the metaphor of culture seen as a game (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), to play the game (i.e., for an ethnographer to actively participate in and understand a cultural phenomenon) one must know the ‘rules of the game’- the norms and conventions that define a cultural phenomenon, context and the humans involved in it (Giazitzoglu & Payne, 2018).

(other), and des (country)), thus making the opposite of desi being ‘pardesi’ or ‘videshi’⁴⁹ which simply means foreigner, or someone from outside the country. The desi/pardesi, local/foreigner, insider/outsider dichotomy has been reimagined in recent times by South Asian diasporic communities; the usage of ‘desi’ to refer to people of South Asian origin who are not residing in South Asia⁵⁰ exemplifies how ‘desi’ is in itself a diasporic term, formed through the trajectories of movement and places of settlement, rather than in relation to a mythical ‘homeland’ (Kim, 2012). ‘Desi’ as an identity has been popularly adopted in middle-class and upper middle-class South Asian diasporic youth circles as a means of asserting a sense of pride in having a ‘hyphenated’ ethnic and national identity, as a response to the prejudice experienced by South Asians and people of colour particularly in the United States (Shankar, 2008). Not only is class an important dynamic in shaping life in South Asia, but also in South Asian diaspora communities (Mishra, 2016), as there can be significant disparities between ‘desis’ of different classes (as we shall also see in the following Chapter IV).

Even in the United Kingdom, ‘desi’ has become an increasingly relevant term, its emergence and adoption signalling a potentially new shift in British Asian identity formations and its meanings (Kim, 2012). South Asian migrants may be a ‘pardesi’ to their ancestral homeland or country of origin, and they may also be an outsider or ‘pardesi’ in the eyes of their adopted homeland or country of residence, but they use the term ‘desi’ as a form of being and belonging and a source of agency to refer to themselves as seemingly outsiders but also insiders, as theoretically foreign but practically local. Even in my own experience, I have contested being called an Indian, British, or the hybrid British Asian, but I would never refrain from identifying as desi; the construction of a ‘desi’ identity reveals the tensions between the ‘here’ and ‘there’, the ‘then’ and ‘now’ and the ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ that constitute a diasporic politics of identity (Mallapragada, 2014). ‘Desi’, in this sense, can be understood as both a positioning and a sensibility. It is here that I want to describe what I am doing, in many ways, as a *desi* ethnography.

⁴⁹From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/hindi-english/%E0%A4%B5%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%B6%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%B5%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%AF%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%A4%E0%A4%BF>

⁵⁰ While South Asia technically includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Asian Development Bank Institute, 2016), in my experience and over the course of my research I have found that it is mainly Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi diasporas that use the term ‘desi’ when referring to themselves and each other.

I am inspired by Murillo's (2002) use of the term 'mojado ethnography' to illustrate his research with the Latino diaspora community:

Mojado (wetback) refers to Mexicans and other Latinos who cross the nation-state territorial border into the United States, and are socially, politically, economically (as well as legally) constructed as 'illegal entrants', and 'newcomers'... Mojado symbolizes the distrust and dislike experienced in gringolandia, as la raza odiada, 'those damn Mexicans', extranjeros, which literally means 'outsiders'... My experience as an educational ethnographer, to date, can sometimes be described as traveling those blurred boundaries when Other becomes researcher, narrated becomes narrator, translated becomes translator, native becomes anthropologist, and how one emergent and intermittent identity continuously informs the other (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 166).

Murillo uses 'mojado' to not only describe who he is studying, but also to explain his own positionality as a bilingual Chicano ethnographer⁵¹. Conversations about diaspora are deeply intertwined with 'belonging, being and boundaries' (Alexander, 2010, p. 3). My lack or uncertainty of belonging to a specific group creates continually shifting boundaries, opening up spaces in-between that inspire me in being and becoming a desi ethnographer. So not only am I studying a population that is insider but also outsider, the desi in-betweeners, I am also approaching them as an insider but also outsider, the desi ethnographer. As my positionality moves against the seemingly objective, neutral observer, my ethnography moves beyond the critical to being postcritical in nature.

The critical ethnographer digs beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by shedding light upon the underlying and obscure operations of power and control (Madison, 2012). Much like critical ethnographers, postcritical ethnographers also share the belief that "social life is constructed in contexts of power" (Noblit et al., 2004, p.4). But while they attempt to denounce the power structures that surround their subjects, postcritical ethnographers also acknowledge their own power, privilege, and biases through their emphasis on positionality and reflexivity. To the degree that power and authority can be mediated, a postcritical ethnographer may ask questions such as, "how might I interpret differently what I have come to understand? How might I construct representations that reflect multiple realities?" (Lester & Anders, 2018, p. 289). These are questions that I have been deeply concerned with in my exercise of reflexively 'turning back' (Davies, 2012) on myself throughout the course of my study.

⁵¹ <http://emurillo.org/biosketch.htm>

I was worried about my lack of ‘anthropological distance’ (Bachnik, 1987), and having to balance an objective attitude with my emotional subjectivity. However, many anthropologists are now of the opinion that ‘objectivity’ should be replaced by an involvement that is “unabashedly subjective, as it interacts with and invites other subjectivities to actively take part in anthropological productions” (Bulag 1998, p. 9). Anthropologists and sociologists alike are now less wedded to the idea of a *science* of society (O’Reilly, 2009); the notion that research is inherently complicated, messy, personal, and invariably subjective, is becoming increasingly commonplace. My research endeavour thus very much became a circular process of constantly doing and undoing, being and becoming, learning and unlearning. There were moments, both while talking to my informants and while writing and researching, where I questioned everything I thought I knew, other moments that reaffirmed what I’d learnt, and others still that shifted my perspective. As Butler (1990, p.4) writes, “the ‘I’ that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavours to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them.” My positionality as a desi ethnographer is by no means panoptical or nonproblematic, but situated, negotiated, and part of an ongoing process in the production of knowledge.

The trials and triumphs of Narrative writing

I have decided to use the narrative approach to ethnography, to best express the complex nature of my own positionality as well as my informants’ multiple subjectivities. Krumer-Nevo & Sidi (2012) highlight the narrative mode of writing as an important tool to resist Othering, for it enables the retrieval of subjectivity. Narrative inquiry is based on the premise that human beings are essentially raconteurs who experience the world and interact with others through storied lives (Holley & Colyar, 2009). It was Mishler (1986) who first highlighted the need to listen to individuals’ stories in the context of qualitative research methods and cautioned such researchers to be careful not to suppress or undermine these stories. Similarly, Plummer (1995, p. 5) argues that “storytelling... has become recognised as one of the central roots we have into the continuing quest for understanding human meaning.” Cultural experiences are often taken for granted because of modern day seemingly interconnected and multicultural societies; it is only when we privilege individual experiences and corporate realities that we can begin to theorize what we may learn relationally, personally, and culturally through personal narratives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016). Even the academic ‘community’ exists because of the “mutual

exchange of stories” amongst its members (Nash, 2004, p. 2). Now whose story is being told, and who is telling the story and how, are all important questions worth considering, particularly when doing an ethnography of communities that exist outside of the ‘white male’ determined academic world (Abu-Lughod, 1990).

Michelle Fine (1994, p. 17) outlines three distinct stances in qualitative research as follows:

1. The ventriloquist stance that merely “transmits” information in an effort toward neutrality and is absent of a political or rhetorical stance. The position of the ethnographer aims to be invisible, that is, the “self” strives to be nonexistent in the text.
2. The positionality of voices is where the subjects themselves are the focus, and their voices carry forward indigenous meanings and experiences that are in opposition to dominant discourses and practices. The position of the ethnographer is vaguely present but not addressed.
3. The activism stance in which the ethnographer takes a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives.

Given that this is a postcritical desi ethnography, I found myself as an ‘active’ participant in most of my interviews, sometimes agreeing, sometimes disagreeing with my informants, and at times even sharing my own experiences and stories with them. Warren and Karner (2005, p. 144) describe “the ideal interview” as one “in which rapport is established and a rich narrative emerges.” As a desi in-betweener myself, my positionality enabled me to establish strong ‘rapport’ (Lincoln, 2001) that extended beyond emotional closeness to developing a personal identification with my informants’ stories. It was important for this intimate rapport to be present, as it enabled my informants to feel comfortable enough during the interviews to “talk back” (Blumer, 1969, p. 22) and provide insightful reflections of their own experiences.

This personal rapport came with its fair share of challenges as well; because I was part of the population under study, my informants would often assume I knew what they felt, as I commonly heard “you know how it is (*tumhe to pata hai*)”. If the researcher in a foreign culture has to struggle to gain insights; the researcher in her own culture must struggle to withdraw from it (Hennigh, 1981). While I had no desire to withdraw from my stance as a desi ethnographer, I did have to negotiate through the assumptions that were tied to my positionality; I did that by redirecting the attention back to my informant’s story as I’d say “yeah, I think I know, but what do you mean by... or, but tell me about your experience with...”. I had oriented all my interviews as semi-structured in nature, since semi-structured

interviews produce “openings for a narrative to unfold, while also including questions informed by theory... (leaving) a space through which you might explore with participants the contextual influences evident in the narratives but not always narrated as such” (Galletta & Cross, 2013, p. 2).

My ethnography became a rather collaborative (Lassiter, 2005) effort in this way; my informants also became my collaborators as I deliberately involved them in every part of the ethnographic process, from project conceptualization, to fieldwork, including the writing process. As I worked with the data, I often ran my ideas past them, which they were gratefully receptive to. Their feedback was invaluable, sometimes providing a breakthrough when I hit a dead end, and sometimes changing the course of data presentation altogether. There were numerous occasions where my informants would send me links to a relevant article or interview they had come across, or share a blog post or poem they’d written themselves (I’ve included some excerpts and examples in the chapters that follow), or excitedly call me to ask if I’d seen a certain television show or documentary. The collaborative process is beneficial because it yields texts that are co-conceived or cowritten with local communities of collaborators that consider multiple audiences outside the confines of academic discourse, including the general public (Lassiter, 2005, p. 15). This was of prime concern for the research project and perhaps partly the reason why my informants were so involved and invested in the process. As 27-year-old Saima, one of my key informants, said to me:

It’s important to have these conversations, it’s important for other people to know that hey not all Muslims are crazy conservative or blowing things up. And it’s important even for the Muslim community themselves to know that if you’re not conservative or traditional, it doesn’t mean you’ve given up Islam completely and become whitewashed⁵² and gone off the rails. These days everyone thinks that if you’re a second-generation kid living in a Western country, you’re going to be one or the other. But that’s not true. There are so many of us on a... what’s the right word... scale in between all this.

Saima firmly argues against an either/or styled thinking re second-generation diasporic Muslim identity, confirming her positionality as an in-between, where her multiple subjectivities occur on a fluid (often contextual/situational) continuum. An ethnography is successful when

⁵² While ‘whitewash’ literally means “to make (something) whiter by painting it with whitewash” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/whitewash>), it is colloquially used as a derogatory term to describe someone from a minority community who has fully assimilated with Western society, thus behaving like a ‘white’ person. More on this in the following Chapter IV.

it serves as a bridge between our earlier simplistic imagination of how things are to a deepened appreciation of how complex they really can be; it becomes the responsibility of the ethnographer to give this complexity an articulate form (Frank, 2004).

The narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation; people can choose to ‘apprehend’ the world narratively and people can ‘tell’ about the world narratively too (Richardson, 1990, p. 200). Not only is the individual act of storytelling considered in the practice of narrative inquiry, but also how the researcher may select, shape, and present stories to stimulate engagement with a broader audience (Holley & Colyar, 2009). I wanted to use the narrative as a writing strategy to allow my experience of the research process to “become the reader’s experience as well” (Stocking, 1983, p. 106). The ethnographer is “always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it’s trapped” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141). But how does one do that when there is only “a version of reality written to be read, always already diverging from the reality of what happened, always becoming something other than that which happened” (Bright, 2018, p. 754)?

It is in response to this that the narrative form provides an excellent opportunity to move away from mere caricatures and one-dimensional impressions, as it allows for the development of characters and multiplicity of voices to be present. It has been my aim to transport the reader back in time as if they were silently observing the conversations between me and my informants, seeing our hand gestures and facial expressions, hearing our pauses and vocal intonations. Researchers have increasingly become more conscious of “having readers ‘hear’ their informants- permitting readers to hear the exact words (and, occasionally, the paralinguistic cues, the lapses, pauses, stops, starts, reformulations) of the informants” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 209). The reader also has the added advantage of having access to my own feelings and critical reflections, something perhaps even my informants would not have been aware of at the time. So not only am I in an honest conversation with the informants and the material, but with the audience as well; after all, narrative is embodied through the text, the author, and the audience (Potter, 2018).

The tradition of narrative analysis is one in which “researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). As the researcher/storyteller, my narrative construction/composition was (knowingly or unknowingly) very much influenced by my own

life story. The chapters somehow evolved as a reflection of my own life trajectory; ‘Confronted’ is inspired by my experience of arriving and living in the UK as a second-generation migrant, ‘Tangled’ follows my experience of growing up as a female in a desi Muslim household, ‘Muzmatched’ includes my own encounters with Muslim on-line dating platforms, and ‘Challenged’ covers the range of issues that follow in the marital process thereafter. Although the thesis did serve as a bridge between my cultural curiosities and personal lived experiences, I was careful not to fall into the trap of self-absorption; since “the exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise go... It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake” (Behar, 1996, p. 14).

Given that my position is very visible, and my voice is very audible in the text, one might assume that this ethnography has elements of autobiography. However, this is only true to some extent. An autobiographical pact exists when the identity of author, narrator and main character are one and the same (Schipper, 1999), and while I am the author, I am not the only narrator, and certainly not the main character in the ethnography as there are multiple perspectives being offered by multiple characters. Additionally, while autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data (Chang, 2008), I have mainly used my personal experiences as a point of entry in my engagement with the ethnographic material, sometimes supporting what I found during fieldwork and other times contradicting the same. Narrative constructions that offer varied, and at times even conflicting, renditions of social phenomena hold the power to lift the veil of conventionality, as they raise pressing questions about discourses and practices that are considered to be normative (Barone, 2007). By constructing the narrative in a format that is inclusive of multiple voices, the thesis refuses closure to redirect an ongoing conversation about desi Muslim migrants, in an effort to be wary of “romanticized and oversimplified narratives that attempt to veil the fragmented subject that speaks with a voice that can never bear the burden of its weight” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, p. 742).

The word ‘ethnography’ itself has a double meaning- ethnography as product (in terms of ethnographic writings) and ethnography as process (that is, fieldwork or participant observation) (Sanjek, 2014). Similarly, the act of narrative is also viewed as both, a product and a process. As Franzosi (1998, p. 547) argues, “texts do not just index a relation between words and between texts, but between text and social reality”. One must situate the research within wider sociohistorical and socio-political contexts in order to gain a sophisticated cultural

understanding and attend to social hierarchies and power relations (Fitzpatrick, 2013). For storytelling to be an ethical undertaking it must include an attempt to make obvious the connections between political forces and individual lives, connections that may not always be immediately obvious to those whose stories are being told (Barone, 2007). Just as Mazzei and Jackson (2012) reject the idea of letting research participants “speak for themselves”, Bourdieu (2003) rejects the idea of participants as “knowing subjects”. Mazzei and Jackson (2012) also argue against reducing complicated and conflicting voices to analytical ‘chunks’ that can be interpreted free of context, circumstance, other texts and theoretical concepts. Similarly, Bourdieu (2003) argues that research, like other knowledge, is only produced within and by certain social conditions. According to Bourdieu (2003, p. 282), “what has to be objectified is not the lived experience of the knowing subject, but the social conditions of possibility, and therefore the effects and limits, of this experience and, among other things, of the act of objectification.”

Postmodern scepticism regarding the generalization of knowledge claims is a recurring theme in social science; the word ‘truth’ arouses suspicions in postmodern times as it suggests some kind of universal applicability (Frank, 2004). The ‘truth’ is that cultural ‘realities’ and interpretations of events, even amongst individuals in the same group, are often highly variable, changing, or contradictory (Hayano, 1979). As such, there is a growing recognition amongst ethnographers about the importance of the temporal dimension in studying the interrelation between individual lives and social contexts (Elliott, 2005). Rather than deliberating over the meanings of discursive speech events, it is a more fruitful endeavour to focus on “the *movement* of social location, possibilities of understanding, and the status/value/significance of truth” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009, p. 10). The postmodern sense of truth does not require an explanation that serves as a privileged solution; instead, postmodern truth sees too many perspectives to accept the closure of explanation (Frank, 2004). Although the ‘postmodern condition’ has been criticised based on subjectivism and relativism, postmodernists have rightly argued that a widely employed conception of knowledge is not sustainable (Carr, 2003). Rather than adopting a ‘one approach fits all’ mindset (Ife, 1999, p. 60), there is both value and research potential in applying the conceptual markers of postmodernist thinking including particularism, difference, fragmentation, and deconstruction, and critically considering their relationship to the ‘modernist precursors’ of universalism, essentialism, truth, and determinism. It is for this reason that the purpose of the thesis is not to decipher the inherent meanings in the second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ narratives and practices, but rather to explore the effects of

these practices in their social, political and familial spheres that are imbued with power relations.

Even though interpretivism is considered as anti-positivist in nature, we are now aware of the problems associated with trying to discover the ‘meanings’ that people attach to empirically observed phenomena (Elliot, et al. 2016). The methodology for ethnography is suited to the interpretation of cultures within their own worlds of meaning, but there remains a crisis with translating what has been observed for other, including academic, audiences (O’Reilly, 2009). However, just because “an easy truth cannot be spoken does not mean that truths, or narratives, or experiences cannot be represented” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 307). Postmodernists argue for truth as a regulative ideal in research, something to be striven towards if never actually realised (Barone, 2007). As Foucault (1989, p. 308) wrote, “the task of speaking the truth is an infinite labor: to respect it in its complexity is an obligation that no power can afford to shortchange, unless it would impose the silence of slavery”. The poignancy of misunderstanding, or of perhaps never completely understanding, is a constant of the human condition (Young, 1997).

Considering all this, I have particularly appreciated, and indeed attempted to apply, Jackson and Mazzei’s (2013) approach to qualitative research which I briefly summarise as follows- ‘plugging in’ from my theoretical toolbox (what research questions are raised when thinking with theory?), to ‘folding’ (not just of data with theory, but also, and equally importantly, of researcher with data) and ‘flattening’ (a move away from rigid coding processes that situate the researcher at a distance from the data). I did not begin this project with clearly defined research questions, in fact, I didn’t quite know where to begin. Peräkylä (2005, p. 870) admits that many qualitative researchers often “do not try to follow any predetermined protocol in executing their analysis”. I began only with my intellectual curiosities which were primarily fuelled by my own experiences and those of my friends, and with that in mind I set off to do an initial pilot study. Narrative inquiry is useful because it allows the research participants to contribute in determining what the most salient themes in an area of research are (Elliott, 2005). It wasn’t until my second round of fieldwork that I began to wonder what theoretical tools would enable me to make sense of all the information that I now had access to. Given my closeness to the data, I almost had to work backwards to avoid pre-empting any explanations or conclusions; so rather than thinking which data could work best with which theory, I thought of which theoretical tools could best unpack which data. As Bonta & Proveti (2004, p. 12)

write, “it is a truism of contemporary life that there is a relay between theory and practice: not that one first gets one’s theory straight and then applies it, but that conceptual clarification must be linked with practical feedback just as practice is informed by ongoing conceptual work.” Even the nature of my questions evolved accordingly, for example, while I began by asking simple, perhaps even naïve, questions like ‘what is the experience of being a second-generation desi Muslim migrant in London?’, working with theory and data together enabled me to reformulate that as ‘what do the norms (not of the second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ choosing, but within which they are constituted) do to them, but also what are they able to do with/to these norms in return?’.

Postcritical ethnographers think from positions “in critical social theory while at the same time preventing such theory from dictating what is found in research settings” (Lester & Anders, 2018, pp. 103-104). Instead of trying to find the sameness within categories, I tried to focus on finding the difference *across* categories (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), to really break open the categories and experience of ‘second generation’ ‘desi’ ‘Muslim’ ‘migrant’ ‘in London’. One way to do this was to move away from coding in a refusal to look for “pattern or order in a body of data by identifying recurring themes, categories or concepts” (MacLure, 2013, p. 164). The more one decides to “collect data” in a methodological way or “frame the data” within a predetermined theoretical framework, the less objectivity and “givenness” can be attained (Brinkmann, 2014). In all honesty, I have never been an ardent fan of coding, even though I have had to apply it in some group research projects in the past. I find that coding frustrates the retrieval of the nuances of individual experience; once it is institutionalized as a natural method of processing information, coding standardizes our apperception of cultural expression into supposedly common-sensical topic categories (Biernacki, 2014). A lot of writers who deviate from or critique coding tend to follow the Deleuzian notion of ‘assemblage’ (see Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, or Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, for example), “in which objects, utterances, institutions, bodies and fragments relate in ‘unholy mixture’” (Lecerle, 2002, p. 53) rather than in orderly hierarchy. For the purpose of this thesis, I have been particularly inspired by Sharon Augustine’s (2014, p. 753) ‘assemblage’ of data analysis practices which include “writing, creating, and using a theory dictionary, using a parking lot for writing that no longer works, recognizing that analysis even happens at surprising times on dinner napkins, and committing to focused reading”. These practices were not linear, but a circular dance of two steps forward, ten steps back, of reading and writing and rereading and rewriting, over and over again.

I began writing from the interview stage itself, I wrote notes after every interview about the questions and concerns that were raised by my informant and my own reflections or experiences regarding the same. Field notes are important because they involve the critical acts of sense making and interpretation, which inevitably have some bearing on the research findings and results, and therefore require the practice of reflexivity (Eriksson, et. al, 2012). I also transcribed all the interviews myself which was a time-consuming arduous task, but hearing the audio recordings of our ‘naturally occurring talk-in-interaction’ (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017, p. 4), enabled me to analyse the conversations retrospectively again. By the time I finished transcribing I knew some of the informants’ quotes by heart, and so transcribing became an act of ‘folding’ myself with the data. Perhaps it was this proximity to the data, or perhaps I am simply old-fashioned, but I thrived by poring over the physical copies of my transcripts and drafts, putting pen to paper, highlighting, scribbling, and drawing multiple mind maps as part of my analysis. I wrote notes on pieces of paper when I took the underground in London, I wrote notes on my phone when my thoughts about the thesis wouldn’t let me sleep at night, and even when I closed my eyes, I could still see word documents behind them. “There’s something about embodiment in all this, which turns me away from computer assisted qualitative analysis programs such as nVivo,” writes MacLure (2013, p. 175), describing how she appreciates doing analysis ‘manually’ too. It was when I saw the data visually, taped to the wall, peppered across my desk, that I was able to find “something other than what I went looking for in the first place” (Alvermann, 2000, p. 126). I began to draw connections in “a great art of connection and experimentation” (Rajchman, 2000, p. 13), but I was still lacking the academic language to describe them.

It was here that the practice of reading became crucial to analysis, as my supervisor rightfully told me “you need to read until your eyes bleed”. I read both data and theory consciously, actively, simultaneously, taking notes as I went along, waiting, hoping, desperately yearning for that ‘eureka’ moment when it would all fall into place together. But reading is the “exposure to the singularity of a text, something that cannot be organized in advance, whose complexities cannot be settled or decided by “theories” or the application of more or less mechanical programs... reading is an experience of responsibility, but that responsibility is not a moment of security or of cognitive certainty” (Keenan, 1997, p. 1). Despite the copious amount of reading and writing I was doing, I felt the burden of this responsibility as I sat through meeting after meeting with my supervisors filled with uncertainty and insecurity when they asked “so

what is the problem that you are trying to highlight? What is it that you want to argue? Is there a solution to all this?”. I realised that neither the data-driven inductive analysis, nor the theory-driven deductive analysis was working for me, in fact, I was situated in an abductive breakdown driven form of analysis (Brinkmann, 2014). Abduction is a form of reasoning used in situations of uncertainty, when we need an understanding or explanation of something that happens; the goal of the abductive process is not to arrive at fixed or universal knowledge claims through the collection of data, but is rather the acknowledgement that inquiry is a never-ending process that applies sense-making (which may be via a concept or theory) to understand any given situation⁵³ (Brinkmann, 2014). Analysis thus became an ‘assemblage’ for me, a machining or putting together of my informants’ experiences with theoretical concepts with feedback from my supervision team with my own reflections, and so on, in a continuing cycle. Just as voices are partial and incomplete (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009), so is analysis, as they combine to produce multiplicities and excesses of meaning and subjectivities.

Qualitative research is understood as being exploratory in nature; it provides “detailed naturalistic descriptions of tensions, outliers, or challenging parts of human experience” and is “expected to *generate* theories that might explain their problematic character” (Rosiek & Heffernan, 2014, p. 726). Finding myself in this non-linear, all consuming, maddeningly exhausting research process is what led me to recognise the need for and formulate the ‘but also’ articulation of multiple identity and subjectivity. Research can only show different actors’ different ideas about what situations require a solution⁵⁴, and it can show how most solutions precipitate new problems (Frank, 2004). Coming to this realisation is what enabled me to re-orientate my thesis from having to provide a definitive answer to my argument, to re-establishing the argument itself as a critique that exposes and brings to light that which may be known but is not spoken of outside of ‘insider’ contexts and discussions. Perhaps I no longer felt the need to explain, but to deepen complexity instead. I went from simply asking ‘how do second generations of desi Muslim migrants in London negotiate between their religious identity and national or cultural identity?’, to then applying Foucault’s (1980; 2000) notions of power/knowledge in conjunction with Butler’s (2004) theory of performativity to ask: ‘what discourses constitute and coordinate second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ multiple

⁵³ A “situation,” is a result of a breakdown in understanding, when the person (or collective) is unable to proceed (Brinkmann, 2014).

⁵⁴ A “solution” in social science often means being able to recommend a policy that promises to end some trouble (Frank, 2004).

subjectivities and the ways in which they can enact and express them, and how do we recognise the dual processes of being subjected but also of becoming an agentic subject as playing themselves out in the narratives of their everyday lives?'.

The aim was never to make any causal or correlational attributions to the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' experiences, nor to decipher the inherent meaning of their practices, but to explore the effects of these practices in their social, political and familial spheres that are imbued with power relations. The data analysis chapters which follow are dedicated to exploring and unpacking these research questions.

IV. CONFRONTED- Second-generation desi Muslim migrants on belonging, religion, class, ethnicity, and everything ‘in between’

*“What do I tell you about me and my desi Muslim, second generation, confused identity?
What do I tell you about how lost and attacked I feel?
Because even the shows that attempt to humanise me are reminders that the British don’t see
the
human in me
What do I tell you about the constant, countless times I have had to bite my tongue,
For fear of looking extreme, for fear of Prevent and the police looking for me,
Questioning my loyalty to the Queen and the fucked up privileged system stacked up against
me?
What do I tell you about my life as a woman of colour, without ignoring the privilege I have,
but
knowing my true lack of power.
What do I tell you about my identity that you are open and ready to receive?
Do I speak and let my words of tears, heartbreak and desperation fall on deaf ears,
Ears that don’t care and want to live in blissful ignorance under the now fashionable ‘woke’
pretence?
Or do I speak my thoughts silently and continue to smile, politely, showing the world how
quiet us
brown girls can be, that not all Muslims are political and angry, pretending to the world I am
happy
living in the shadow of all the white folk?
Tell me, can you understand me? Do I speak clearly? Is my pronunciation white enough or
can you
hear the brown in me?
Tell me, do you even care to know about this British girl, standing before you vulnerable,
exposing
how Muslim she is, and how that exposure makes her nervous because now she knows there’s
no
one to protect her.
The police don’t care about the likes of me, Prevent is telling you ‘act’,
Act if you see something suspicious
When what they really mean is a Muslim man on the tube with a rucksack.
What do I tell you about my identity that you are open and ready to receive?
What do I tell you about my identity that won’t make you think I’m extreme?
When can I just be me? When can the BBC stop making documentaries about me and my
identity?
When can I just be Muslim? When can I just be free?”*

5 October, 2018 (Samira later sent me a copy of her poem via e-mail).

28-year-old Samira paused and took a deep, audible breath as she looked up at the crowd. Her black t-shirt reads ‘SWAG- Something We Asians Got’ in bold white letters. A split second later, the relatively small crowd- mostly ‘brown’ but peppered with a few ‘white’ faces- was up on their feet, applauding and cheering for Samira. I too cheered for my new friend, even though we began our relationship as informant and researcher, her having invited me to this spoken word event in Shoreditch called ‘Golden Tongue⁵⁵’. The event description read as follows:

Golden Tongue is an open mic night focused on amplifying the voices of South Asian women. It gives them a space to share their stories, and gives everyone else a place to come listen, engage, and learn. They believe in owning their narratives, in celebrating the diversity of their diaspora and identities. Most of all, they believe in being loud.

The issue of diaspora, identity, diversity, narrative and voice is one that has been explored by social scientists across multiple locations. The UK in particular has been a popular site for such studies, especially since the establishment of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CFMEB) in 1998, after which the politics of belonging and ‘multiculturalism’ became key concerns within both public and private debate (Mathieu, 2018). Post the 9/11 attacks such concerns were increasingly directed over Muslim immigration, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) seeking to ‘engage’ with British Muslim diaspora communities through initiatives such as the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme which aims “to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism” (Curtis & Jaine, 2012, p. 381). PVE’s monocultural focus on Muslims appears in stark contradiction to the U.K.’s wider counter-terrorism ‘CONTEST’ strategy with its overriding policy goal of community cohesion (Thomas, 2010).

The Prevent strategy has provoked accusations of the production of the ‘radicalisation’ discourse in the UK, and the subsequent creation of British Muslim ‘suspect communities’ that suffer prejudicial treatment in surveillance, policing and official discourse (Heath-Kelly, 2013). Even Samira laments over this in her spoken word piece when she mentions her ‘fear of Prevent’ and how ‘a Muslim man on the tube with a rucksack’ is viewed as ‘suspicious’ because of it. Billaud (2016) notes that designers of the Prevent programme interpret increased religious practices among second and third-generation Muslims as a sign of ‘radicalization’, hence contributing to the demand placed upon the ‘British Muslim’ community to promote and

⁵⁵ <https://richmix.org.uk/events/golden-tongue/>

develop a more “moderate and progressive British Islam”. The FCO does this via the funding of programs targeting specific segments of the Muslim population that are perceived to be the most vulnerable (i.e. Muslim women and young people) (Billaud, 2016). This chapter explores how the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study are responding to this demand for a ‘moderate and progressive’ Islam, how the politics and performance of being ‘brown’ is played out in their daily lives, and how ‘desi’ emerges as a contemporary cosmopolitan identity that has the potential to incorporate difference.

As I’ve mentioned in the previous paragraph, the case of Muslims in Britain (Hopkins & Gale, 2009; Kabir, 2010; Tatari, 2014; Lewis, 2015; Hamid, 2016, for example) along with the issue of diasporic identities (Werbner, 2002; Marranci, 2011; Mythen, 2012; Moghissi & Ghorashi, 2016, for example) has garnered significant attention from academic circles over the last two decades. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner, to name a few, are prominent contributors in the debate around multiculturalism and the Muslim diaspora. Professor Modood posed the all-important question “what is Britishness anyway?” at a UNISON⁵⁶ meeting in 2007, arguing that “the kind of British we want to be should be woven in debate, with a plurality of voices, not imposed from the top.”⁵⁷ Werbner also shares this sentiment, advocating an analysis of multiculturalism from below, as opposed to a top-down policy (Modood & Werbner, 2015). Modood has also collaborated with the likes of social geographer Claire Dwyer, who has focused on questions of diasporic identity for young British South Asian Muslim women in particular (Dwyer, 2000; Dwyer & Shah, 2009; Dwyer, 2018). Similarly, projects such as “The Role of Higher Education in providing Opportunities for Young South Asian Women”⁵⁸ have been undertaken by Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley (Bagguley & Hussain, 2017; Bagguley & Hussain, 2016; Hussain & Bagguley, 2015). My point is that the research in this field is extensive, but by no means is it exhaustive.

Amongst the vast range of scholars in the field, I found the theses of Dr. Michela Franceschelli and Dr. Fatima Khan particularly relevant and insightful. Khan’s (2016) thesis explores the construction, cohesiveness and articulation of British-Muslim hybrid identities, with a focus on the criminalisation of the British-Muslim population through targeted counterterrorism and

⁵⁶ UNISON is Britain's largest public services trade union.

⁵⁷ https://archive.is/20120701102055/http://21stcenturysocialism.com/article/what_is_britishness_anyway_01540.html#selection-257.110-257.226

⁵⁸ This project is funded by the Joseph Rountree Foundation, a British social policy research and development charity. Find more at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/>

security policies. While I agree with Khan's (2016) 6 key factors of importance in the construction and maintenance of contemporary British-Muslim identity⁵⁹, and even appreciate her highlighting behavioural strategies such as 'chameleonism' and 'performing the moderate Muslim', I am critical of the use of the hyphenated 'British-Muslim' (see my arguments in chapter II against hybridity and the 'both/and' thinking) leading to an overemphasis on discussions around national and religious identity with little attention being paid to the informants' cultural identity and Pakistani heritage. Similarly, Franceschelli's (2013) thesis addresses the following key question: "How do young British Muslims from South Asian backgrounds negotiate between their religious and national identities? Do religious and national identities conflict, co-exist or are mutually reinforcing?". Again, the focus remains on how Islam and Britishness emerge as the most important structural conditions that are negotiated by young South Asian British Muslims. It is here that I want to add to the current literature by considering a third dimension that often gets lost amidst the weight that is placed on religious and national identity- that of diasporic cultural identity, and not just of being 'South Asian', but specifically of being 'desi' and 'brown' in London.

Against Hyphenated Identities- Articulating the 'but also' as nonconformity and self-expression

One of the first questions that I always asked my informants was "where are you from?". I was often greeted with a knowing smile or "hah!", and I recognised how this seemingly straight forward question was a lot harder to answer as a second-generation migrant. Farah shares:

I hate that question! If someone asks me where I'm from I'd probably say... London? (She pauses for a moment to think through her answer). I think it depends on who I'm talking to. I always ask them whether they mean originally or where I was born, if it's the former obviously I say Pakistan. I guess I'm what they call a British Pakistani. Sometimes when people ask you where are you from I think it means your family background, it's a bit hard to answer considering we're not white but live in this country. We're not originally English or British. If a white person asks me, I will probably say yeah my family is from Pakistan but I'm born in this country, I'd have to explain it. But if a brown person- am I allowed to say a brown person in the interview? (She chuckles, raising her eyebrows, looking to me for an answer. I smile and tell her to continue to express herself freely). So yeah if a desi *banda* (person) were to ask then for sure I'd say I'm Pakistani. *Mujhe nahi lagta ke apne log* (I don't think that our

⁵⁹ These are socio-economic conditions, the global-local nexus, State security strategies, the discursive construction of Islam and Muslims, stigma management and acts of resistance (Khan, 2016).

people) care that much about where you were born, they care more about where you are from. It's quite confusing, hard to explain.

Farah has lived in North Harrow at her parent's home for the last 23 years since she's been born. She is studying to become a secondary school teacher, considers herself to be a generally shy person (as she warned me when I first requested to speak to her) and wears the hijab occasionally. Despite her initially cautious demeanour, she raised a number of interesting points to consider in this little snippet from our interview. For instance, I noticed her repeated use of the word 'originally', obviously referring to origins but also indicative of authenticity. For Farah being 'white' is an essential prerequisite to being 'English or British', with the privilege of never having to explain or justify one's belonging. Saeed (2007, p. 445) notes that, "Britain is basically English speaking, Christian and white, and if one starts to think it might become basically Urdu speaking and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened". Whiteness is placed in a position of power that non-white simply does not have access to, as Mohanram (2007, p. 13) asserts "in the name of whiteness, even superpower (and not-so superpower) states such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia have intensified their surveillance over their darker/Islamic citizens... In the name of white fear, Islamic-looking people have been killed by mobs in places as far apart as New Zealand, Texas, and even the Stockwell tube station in London." In thinking of whiteness as hegemonic, Farah situates herself as Other, but she also suggests a sense of belonging that derives from this shared Otherness together with '*apne log* (our people)'. This is not to say that ethnicity acts as an automatically shared form of belonging, as we shall see further throughout the chapter.

Farah was the first of my informants who used the term 'desi' interchangeably with 'brown', drawing my attention to the politics of colour and the experiential meanings of a 'desi' identity. Her assertion that '*apne log* (our people)' care more about where you are from reaffirms Kim's (2012, p. 558) argument that "desiness is a version of diaspora where a focus on one's 'roots' can be a way of establishing and negotiating new 'routes' and spaces."⁶⁰ Here we also begin to see how individual identity is inextricably linked with family and background, as Farah says "when people ask you where are you from I think it means your family background." Even when the second-generation migrants want to identify on an individual or personal level, they're often unable to do so, as 26 year old Shafiq said to me- "if I asked you where you're

⁶⁰ Inspired by Gilroy's (1995) articulation of an 'outer-national consciousness', in Gilroy, P., 1995, *Roots and routes: Black identity as an outernational project*. Racial and ethnic identity: psychological development and creative expressions. New York: Routledge., InH. Harris, ed.

from I wasn't trying to get where your parents are from, I just want to know where you personally define yourself as from. But often when I answer I'm from London I get okay but where are your parents from or where are you *really* from? And then I have to explain that my parents are from India, but I've like never actually lived there, yadda yadda...". One of the most striking things for me from the conversation with Farah was how she said, "I guess I'm what they call a British Pakistani". Who is this 'they' that she was referring to? It appears that Farah understood 'British Pakistani' as an identity category that was assigned to her by others, by a discourse that was clearly external to her. 'British Pakistani' in this sense emerges as a normative identity category as it attempts to regulate Farah through a process of interpellation (Althusser's linguistic act of hailing) that calls an individual into a "certain order of social existence" (Butler, 1993, p. 121). 27-year-old LSE Law graduate, Saima narrates:

I'm very confused about how to define myself actually. I don't really like the term British Pakistani. Or British Muslim, or British Asian, or whatever. One of my friends asked me why do you even say you're British Pakistani, like why does the British always come first? And then I wondered and realised that part of it is just trying to reaffirm to people around me that I do belong here because as immigrants we are constantly questioned about our Britishness, and especially as Muslims we are constantly questioned. Like okay, can't I be Pakistani but also British? Or Muslim but also Asian? Or you know... Why do I need to be labelled in some tiny box? We live in a society where we're being bombarded with messages like oh you can be whatever you want to be! It doesn't matter if you're black or white! But actually, it does matter. It's bullshit that you have to constantly prove yourself, even when my very British accent clearly tells you I'm from London anyway. There is no direct answer to the where are you from question unfortunately. Where I'm from doesn't necessarily tell you who I am.

Conformity is one of the expected outcomes of interpellation, a compulsion that regulates and governs the norms of identity formation and intelligibility (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Calling someone or oneself a British Asian or a British Muslim etc., regulates that the 'British' proclamation would/should be stated first before any other qualifier, as a primary or transcendental identity. This form of articulation becomes even more striking when compared to Canada's hyphenated 'Italian-Canadian' or 'Chinese-Canadian', where cultural identity is expressed before national identity in the hyphen (Rummens, 2001). The framing of a question that assumes a prioritisation such as "are you British first or a Muslim first" provides insufficient creative space for narrating the ways in which people identify themselves or even define their identity in a larger society (Faimau, 2016, p. 3). 'British' as normative is also called into question regionally across locations; for example, Bonino (2017, p. 67) claims that Scottish

Muslims feel much less British (29%) than Muslims south of the border do (57%), and Marranci (2007) emphasises how Muslims in Northern Ireland and Scotland tend to differ from one another. To speak of ‘British Muslim’, or even just ‘British’/‘Muslim’, as an archetype, is over-simplistic and therefore problematic. Similarly, policymakers and researchers who took part in a roundtable discussion at LSE on cohesion, integration and social mobility among ethnic minority communities concluded that the term ‘British Asian’ fails to recognise the diversity of British-born, second-generation Asians⁶¹. Saima was the first of my informants to express her multiple subjectivities by using ‘but also’, which inspired me to conceptualise the ‘but also’ articulation of identity that I initially explored in Chapter II. As a conjunction, ‘but’⁶² is used to introduce a phrase or clause *contrasting* with what has already been mentioned, while the ‘also’ follows in addition to. So, instead of Saima saying I am *either* British *or* Pakistani, or alternatively I am *both* British *and* Pakistani, she proposes a different configuration as ‘Pakistani but also British’ or ‘Muslim but also Asian’. Using ‘but also’ in this sense grants an opportunity for movement and multiplicity that neither the ‘either/or’ nor the ‘both/and’ statements in dominant discourse have been able to offer. 24-year-old Amir, who’s living away from home to attend university in Uxbridge, London, reflects:

I’m not just one thing or the other. Like I can be brown but British. Or Muslim but also gay. Or Indian but not traditional. You know maybe technically I can’t be all those things, but practically it doesn’t change how I feel on the inside. The stereotypes will always be there, the restrictions will always be there, perhaps I can’t even openly or publicly say all this, but it’s about how I see myself not how the world sees me, because they’re just gonna see a brown dude who’s trying to be white.

Both Saima and Amir articulate the ‘but also’ to undo normative ideological and identity categories (such as ‘British Pakistani’, or ‘brown, Muslim, Indian’ versus ‘British, gay, not traditional’), and in so doing expose the dominant discourses and power relations that attempt to regulate them. Both express their desire for non-conformity (“why do I need to be labelled in some tiny box?”) and emphasise self-expression (“it’s about how I see myself not how the world sees me”). These sentiments carry with them the hallmarks of neoliberal ideologies of personal responsibility and individual freedom, which does not come as surprising since the U.K. has been one of the hothouses of neoliberal policy development since the late 1970s (Luxton & Braedley, 2014). Neoliberal reform, now a generation or more in the making, has

⁶¹ From: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/website-archive/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2012/08/britishasians.aspx>

⁶² <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/but>

restructured the most prominent public relationships that constitute belonging- politics, markets, work, and more importantly, self-identity (Greenhouse, 2012). Fisher (2009, p. 16) describes the concept of ‘capitalist realism’ as a way of understanding neoliberal ideology and hegemony- capitalist realism is “like a pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action”. It is important for us to recognise the significance of neoliberal ideology in the making of self, as ideology is what interpellates us, hailing us into a specific world of meaning, value, power, and thereby constituting us as subjects (Wilson, 2017).

Saima clearly identifies neoliberal ideology at play and its attempt to interpellate her as a free acting individual- “we live in a society where we’re being bombarded with messages like oh you can be whatever you want to be! It doesn’t matter if you’re black or white!”. But despite the apparent pervasiveness of this ideology she also recognises the limits in her lived experience as a desi Muslim migrant- “but actually, it does matter”. According to Butler (2004), the choice to be recognised (or not) within the constraints of normativity is a condition of agency in the doing and undoing of subjectivity⁶³. This desire for/against recognition produces performative acts that continuously make and unmake subjectivity, thus producing Saima and Amir as unfinished products of power and discourse rather than as stable subjects that fit neatly into identity categories. Saima mentions her ‘very British accent’ as a performative act that disrupts her ‘immigrant’ ‘Muslim’ status, similarly Amir recognises his ‘gay’ sexual orientation as disruptive of the ‘Muslim’ identity category. However, Amir also notes that he might not be able to explicitly exercise his choice for/against recognition as “restrictions will always be there, perhaps I can’t even openly or publicly say all this...”. Now who has the power to exercise these restrictions, and over whom? What are the structural conditions that limit the desire for agency and self-expression? These are questions worth considering, and we shall explore them as we proceed throughout the thesis.

Politics of Positionality- ‘Othering’ and the voices of the ‘middle’ class

It is essential to situate one’s research within the wider sociohistorical and socio-political context in order to gain a sophisticated cultural understanding of phenomena and attend to

⁶³ Subjectivity refers to ‘the self-conscious perspective of the person or subject’ (Subjectivity, 2014).

social hierarchies and power relations (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Context is instrumental in unpacking the complexity of contact (Patel & Bolton, 2013). My interviews were taking place at a time when an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric was at its peak with Britain's 2016 referendum to leave the European Union (EU), popularly called 'Brexit', followed by a number of emblematic terrorist incidents in 2017 such as the Westminster bridge attack, Manchester arena bombings, the London bridge attack, and the Finsbury park mosque attack, to name a few. Since Brexit, England has been hit by a significant rise in incidents of racist and xenophobic harassment and violence across the country (Iltis, 2016; Burnett, 2017; Colwell, 2019). As 26-year-old Shafiq, who works at a consultancy firm, shared in his interview:

Let's take Brexit for example. It was a hey let's hate immigrants propaganda machine and it won! The nation chose to leave the EU because of a hate campaign. That's sad. It's sad that we are the community that people hate right now. It's intense! I mean we're lucky we're in our late twenties so we're a bit older and wiser and you can perhaps eloquently reply to people but imagine if we were 16 and this was the political climate we lived in. I wouldn't know how I'd deal with it.

While increases in the rate of immigration at the local level coupled with general anti-immigration populism were key predictors of the vote for Brexit (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017), Brexit ultimately reflected deep divisions and inequalities that have their roots in 40 years of neoliberal hegemony (Powell, K. 2017). 'Brexit discontent' can be traced back to the establishment of a neoliberal consensus that eclipsed the left and its arguments against inequality, leading to brutal assaults on public services, welfare and work security. This was framed by a Victorian rhetoric of derogation of the 'undeserving and burdensome', which also included immigrants, fueling anger at the government and leading to a palpable rise in anti-immigrant sentiment (Powell, K. 2017). Similar political uprisings were occurring across the Atlantic too, with the election of Donald Trump in the United States and what Nancy Fraser (2017) recognised as 'the end of progressive neoliberalism'. Fraser (2017) writes, "rejecting globalization, Trump voters also repudiated the liberal cosmopolitanism identified with it. For some (though by no means all), it was a short step to blaming their worsening conditions on political correctness, people of colour, immigrants, and Muslims". My informants and I were no strangers to this blame, especially since we represented all three of the target population categories Fraser mentions in our second-generation 'desi/brown' 'Muslim' 'migrant' status. For instance, Samira texted me the day after the Westminster attack and we had the following conversation:

Samira: Heyyy heard about the attacks that happened yesterday?

Sahrish: Yeah man 😞

Samira: I was like oh for fuck's sake it's going to be a brown person isn't it? And it's going to be a Muslim. We're going to have a conversation about this again. People are going to talk about it, the Muslims are going to condemn it. Like dude why should I have to condemn the act of someone else? I didn't do it, none of my friends would do shit like that. I feel like I should refuse to condemn it because then it associates me with it. I am not that Muslim!

Sahrish: Sigh, I know, I get it

Samira: You know I used to work for an anti-racism charity, the one I told you about in our interview

Sahrish: Oh yeah

Samira: So I remembered after the Boston bombings, I was outside smoking and this white British guy I worked with asked me so what do you think about the Boston bombings?

Sahrish: Lol what do you mean

Samira: Yeah exactly I just thought that was the weirdest bloody question ever, like what AM I going to think? Like even if I agreed with it, which I obviously don't btw, what would I tell him that yeah yeah they did it right... of course not! What did he think I was going to say? It's just ridiculous that people feel like they have the right to ask me that question. Wait, too much to type, I'm gonna call you...

Samira went on to call me and we spoke for a while, exchanging our stories and those of people we knew. She told me about how her sister had encountered a woman who had tried to take her hijab off as she was getting on the train, and I told her about the man on the bus who had overheard me talking to my friends about how difficult Ramadan will be this year, and who then went off on a “these bloody Muslims, bloody Ramadan” rant. In secular western societies where the practice and day-to-day visibility of religion is virtually non-existent (even in the United States, where religion as a cultural and moral reference point is relatively strong), to speak of religiously grounded moral obligations such as daily prayers, fasting, prohibitions and dress codes is often automatically deemed as verging on excess (Ramadan, 2004). It is also interesting to note how a terror incident that had occurred in Boston in 2013 still managed to have an effect on Samira in Britain four years later, proving that diasporas are indeed transnational communities of co-responsibility (Werbner, 2002). Despite Samira's reluctance to “have a conversation about this again,” I asked her wasn't that exactly what we were doing right now anyway? I heard her tut on the phone before she replied, “*yaar* (my friend), it's ok between me and you because obviously you're part of the community and it'll be a very different side of the conversation that we're having. It pisses me off so much how Islam is portrayed on social media and the need for this constant conversation, that's what's so annoying.” The media representation of Islam and Muslims in Britain contributes to the

formation of a group-oriented identity which reinforces a sense of difference, particularly when the media represent Muslims collectively as the “Other” (Faimau, 2016). This Othering is apparent in how Samira sanctions our ‘insider’ conversation because of our shared ‘outsider’ belonging. Samira was only one of many of my informants who expressed their frustrations with media depictions of Muslims in the U.K. 29-year-old accountant Aisha, for example, shared the following:

It’s the unfair media portrayal of the situation that pisses people off. Like the show called *Extremely British Muslims*⁶⁴ on Channel Four. A lot of those lads came from fairly broken homes or they come from very deprived poor backgrounds and they can’t have these conversations about politics and religion at home. Like my rich cousins are very much in their hey we should be grateful for what the British have done for us! I just can’t relate to that (she shakes her head). Like once in our house we were talking about Shashi Tharoor⁶⁵ and how he said that the British government needs to apologise for what they did to India and for dividing us in the first place and for how they divided us and then also for how they came to us when India was successful and they made it poor, ruined it and left us. But my cousin was like nah nah we should be grateful to the U.K. and I was just shocked. Grateful? For what? (I could tell Aisha was getting increasingly passionate as she spoke, her face filled with varying expressions, her hands gesticulating emphatically). They needed us when they allowed us to come over here, they’re not just being kind to you. They’ve fucked you over so many times and they still do. There are so many barriers as a person of colour. My cousin was saying oh don’t have a victim mentality but it’s not about that! You can still acknowledge the struggles you have to go through. Desi Muslim women are the highest unemployed and the hardest to get a job for. I know I’ve struggled as a woman, as a brown person, but I also know I’ve got some privileges like I’m educated and working and my family is still together and not broken (she huffs).

This was the first occasion where one of my informants openly brought social class into the discussion- Aisha highlights the importance of family background, economic capital and social status as factors which provide agency to even be able to have conversations about macro issues like politics and religion. It is important to note that Aisha is not just referring to class in simply economic or Marxist⁶⁶ terms but is including Bourdieuan style distinctions based on social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). We can also see how ‘external’ surroundings such as schools,

⁶⁴ The show claims to offer ‘An intimate look at British Muslim life, beyond the headlines’, according to the show’s description. From: <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/extremely-british-muslims>

⁶⁵ Dr. Shashi Tharoor is a former Indian government minister and Member of Parliament. Details of his viral speech at the Oxford Union (that Aisha is referring to) can be found at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/dr-shashi-tharoor-tells-the-oxford-union-why-britain-owes-reparations-for-colonising-india-in-viral-10407997.html>

⁶⁶ In Marxist terms, class is defined objectively in terms of one's relationship to the means of production (Manstead, 2018).

workplaces and institutions (especially the government) in the wider community have a profound impact on ‘internal’ factors such as family, ethnic and religious community settings (Kabir, 2014). Aisha’s critique of Extremely British Muslims’ focus on the ‘deprived’ and ‘poor’ from ‘broken homes’ is a theme we came across earlier in Samira’s spoken word piece as well (“*What do I tell you about how lost and attacked I feel? Because even the shows that attempt to humanise me are reminders that the British don’t see the human in me... When can I just be me? When can the BBC stop making documentaries about me and my identity?*”). Despite educational studies having a sustained interest in class distinctions and hierarchy, when it comes to sociological migrant narratives it is predominantly the ‘working’ class and the ‘poor’ that make for projects worth pursuing. One need only look at the overwhelming number of studies situated in the borough of Tower Hamlets (see Alexander, 2019; Hoque, 2018; Jevtic, 2015; Gunaratnam, 2013; Gardner, 1998, for example) which is over 36% Muslim (the vast majority being of Bangladeshi descent)⁶⁷ and which also, as of 2017, had the highest rate of poverty, child poverty, unemployment, and pay inequality of any London borough⁶⁸.

The voices of the middle class, or rather those that self-identify as middle class, often go unheard or undocumented in comparison. I’m reminded of an exchange between my mother and brother as we sat watching T.V. and a show called ‘The Men with Many Wives’⁶⁹ was playing on Channel 4.

“Kaun karta hai ye sab? Aisa to ab India Pakistan mein bhi sunnay ko nahi milta. Ye log kyun ye sab dikhaate hain, isi se to baaqi saare sochte hain ke haan bhai humaare logo mein aisi cheezein bahaut common hai, hum backwards hain, ye wo (Who does all this? (Referring to polygamous marriages). You don’t even get to hear about this in India and Pakistan now. Why do these people show all this, this is why everybody else thinks that yes things like these are very common amongst our people, that we are backwards, this and that)” said my mother, frowning at the T.V.

My brother laughed as he responded with “mummy that’s because we’re middle class and you’re mostly at home so you don’t get to interact with people like these. News about us isn’t sensational enough! They don’t want to show Muslims like regular people, there’s always some angle they’re going for”. Research on discursive representation has shown how dominant social institutions frequently socially construct and stereotype the Muslim ‘Other’ (Chomsky, 2002;

⁶⁷ From: <http://www.banglastories.org/about-the-project/the-locations/tower-hamlets.html>

⁶⁸ From: <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/>

⁶⁹ The show is about ‘exploring polygamous life and how it can be reconciled with modern British values’, according to the show’s description. From: <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-men-with-many-wives>

Mythen & Walklate, 2006). The point of contact between performed or mutually constructed Muslim public identities and wider social forces becomes even more interesting in relation to class and ethnicity. There are distinct class fractures running through Muslim cultural production in Britain; as Morris (2019, p. 628) argues, an assertion of middle-class values and tastes can inform notions of ‘Muslimness’ which are also deeply interwoven with the differential experiences of diverse Muslim ethnic communities in Britain. I found this seemingly casual conversation between my family rather profound and I quickly rushed to jot it down in the Notes section on my phone. What my brother said made me realise just how important it is to cut through dominant discourses and narratives in order to understand the true range of identity politics in modern society.

Subjective class identity is associated with quite marked differences in socio-political attitudes (Manstead, 2018), and we can see this to be true in how Aisha talks about the difference between her and her ‘rich’ cousins’ attitudes towards the U.K. and its government. Aisha’s postcolonial account of the cultural legacy of Britain’s colonial and imperial economic and political domination in India is telling of fundamental systemic inequalities that exist till today (“They’ve fucked you over so many times and they still do”). The irony in this is that neoliberal theory does not consider sex, gender, ethnic or racial identity, and religious affiliation to be impediments to competing in the marketplace or aspiring for political power (Luxton & Braedley, 2014). However, based on Aisha’s lived experience “as a woman, as a brown person” in a neoliberal setting, this theory does not hold water. Neoliberalism helps maintain racist regimes that privilege elite cultures and people, with processes of racialization permeating through multiple aspects of daily life and further fuelling racial stereotypes (Gilroy, 2002). Cultural penalties, almost entirely those experienced by Muslims, exacerbate the ethnic penalty in undermining the employability of minorities, though more so for Muslims from some ethnic origins than others (Khattab & Johnston, 2013). Add to this discrimination based on gender, and we can see why Aisha thinks that “desi Muslim women are the highest unemployed and the hardest to get a job for”. According to the 2015 census report released by the Muslim Council of Britain, only 29% of Muslim women between the ages of 16 to 24 were in employment as compared to approximately half of the general population⁷⁰. A government sting operation in 2009 commissioned researchers from the National Centre for Social Research to send out nearly 3,000 applications for 987 actual vacancies across Britain under

⁷⁰ From: https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf

false identities, using the names Nazia Mahmood, Mariam Namagembe and Alison Taylor⁷¹. Each of the applicants had similar experiences and qualifications with a British education and work histories. The results showed that an applicant who appeared to be white would send 9 applications before receiving a positive response of either an invitation to an interview or an encouraging telephone call, while minority candidates with the same qualifications and experience had to send out 16 applications before they received a similar response (Syal, 2009). 25-year-old investment banker, Salman (who had initially introduced himself to me as Sal), enlightens:

This guy at work, he's a *gora* (white) yeah, but he married a desi girl called Nasreen. So now her name is Nasreen Ahmed Smith. So anyway, we're talking at work right and he's like dude my wife has been applying for so many jobs, but she literally gets no call backs even though she went to Imperial College and she's smart and stuff. He even showed me her CV. So, I had a look at it but then I told him that maybe tell her not to attach her photograph and write her name down as Nas Smith instead of Nasreen Ahmed. She did that, and I shit you not, he comes to me the next week and he's like dude it's so weird but she's got 3 interviews now. I was just like yeah bro welcome to institutional racism! He was just so shook, but obviously he's never had to deal with this shit has he.

As I sat writing this chapter, I remembered the countless number of times I had done something similar- introduced myself as 'Sara-ish' instead of Sahrish, because "it's the easiest way I can get white people to remember, or even say my name," I once told my students, much to their amusement. Did I care that my name was difficult to pronounce, or did I just want to sound more 'white'? The sad truth is at that time I (perhaps unconsciously) thought the more 'white' my name and my accent sounded, the more seriously I'll be taken in my teaching position despite my 'brown' appearance. Again, this is a theme that we've come across earlier in Samira's spoken word piece as well- "*Tell me, can you understand me? Do I speak clearly? Is my pronunciation white enough or can you hear the brown in me?*". For South Asians, accent simultaneously connotes both difference and privilege; the privilege to speak in comprehensible English which offers some cultural opportunities for assimilation, but also the difference of speaking with an accent (Davé, 2013). Accent does have an impact on opportunity; a study done by Souza, et al. (2016) found that information about accents was an important criterion for more prejudiced individuals when they made hiring decisions for job candidates because they evaluated native accents as being qualitatively better than accents of

⁷¹ From: <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2009/oct/18/racism-discrimination-employmentundercover>

immigrants, thereby legitimizing ingroup bias. Shankar (2008, p. 283) argues that language practices, including accents and registers for different types of speech, also contribute to how some 'desis' remain model minorities and continue to integrate into upper middle-class white America, while others share more economic, academic, and professional similarities with Latinos and other local populations who have prospered from the tech boom but remain in assembly line jobs. The performance of accents is a means of representing race and national origin beyond visual identification, as accents can potentially embellish or contrast an already established identity and thus operate as a type of racial and cultural formation (Davé, 2013). My 'white' accent, much like my adapted name, became cultural objects when I used them as contrasting details to my otherwise 'brown' appearance. Similarly, the performativity of 'Nas', 'Sal', and 'Sara-ish', function to construct illusory origins of identity categories, thus making recognition "a site of power by which the human is differently produced" (Butler, 2004, p. 145).

I just want to take a quick moment here to address a rather pressing matter, and to attend to what Aisha's cousin criticized her of harbouring- a 'victim' mentality ("My cousin was saying oh don't have a victim mentality but it's not about that! You can still acknowledge the struggles you have to go through"). Minorities have often been accused of having a 'culture of victimhood', which is characterized by concern with status and sensitivity to slight combined with a heavy reliance on third parties (Campbell & Manning, 2014). I want to highlight that in the case of my informants, they are less concerned with a reliance on third parties (whether it be authoritative action, gossip or public shaming (Campbell & Manning, 2014, p. 698)), and more concerned with accumulating knowledge that enables them to map power relations in their discursive fields (as Samira mentions in her spoken word piece, "*What do I tell you about my life as a woman of colour, without ignoring the privilege I have, but knowing my true lack of power*"). It is also interesting to note what constitutes as a 'privilege' for the likes of Samira and Aisha- namely education, income, and family (as Aisha said earlier, "I've got some privileges like I'm educated and working and my family is still together and not broken").

'Cosmopolitan' Muslims and Counter narratives

Having explored these multiple obstacles that are faced by second generation Muslim migrants, the general consensus amongst scholars seems to point towards a resurgence or return of

religion as an important foundation of meaning and identity making. For example, Tariq Ramadan maintains that second and third generations of Muslims born in the West generally wish to re-affirm their identity and live according to Islamic teachings; “after a difficult childhood, they have re-discovered their origins as well as their Religion,” writes Ramadan (1999, p. 114). Decades later, scholars continue to recognise religion as a core identity marker for young Muslims, which plays an influential role in multiple fields across both public and private spheres including family life, gender, political participation, consumption, fashion, and so on (Statham, 2004; Tarlo, 2010; Wright, 2015; Mustafa, 2015; Febrina, 2019, for example). Specific to the U.K., Franceschelli’s (2013) survey conducted with 560 students aged 14-18 years old across three secondary schools in London, confirmed that Islam was the main source of self-definition for Muslim young people. Hoque (2010) too argues that the central conclusion of his thesis is that the religion of Islam (in its many forms) provides a sense of belonging and acceptance to many third generation Bangladeshis against years of systemic and institutional isolation, racism and poverty in Britain, dubbing their reclaimed religious identity as a modern and progressive form of ‘Br-Islam’. Khan (2016) also asserts that many British-Muslims see themselves as part of the imagined Muslim community or ‘ummah’⁷² and as such may react strongly to any perceived unfair treatment of that community. As Shelina Janmohamed (2016, p. 191) writes, “the weight of religious duty to care about the ummah is heavy... The shared values of this global community of purpose lead people in one location to feel intimately connected to those far away. Shared vision, shared beliefs, shared aspirations and shared rituals all lead to a shared identity which in turn creates a powerful sense that what happens to ‘them’ is actually happening to ‘me’”. But contrary to popular opinion, Shafiq shares this brutally honest insight:

People think that all Muslims are in this one big gang, like it’s all one big happy family, but no one talks about racism in the Muslim community. Not only do other people discriminate against us but we also discriminate against each other! Arab Muslims think that they’re superior because the Quran was revealed in Arabic and most of the prophets came to Arabia so it’s like they think they know better and the rest of us are not as worthy. You go to the Middle East and see how the Arabs treat you, they look at your colour first and your religion later. If we’re one big ummah, why aren’t these countries supporting Palestine, why are they all silent? Why, when it comes to dirty money and politics, religion takes a back seat? Like look at black Muslims, they’re still discriminated against so hard. You go to the mosque and everyone is like oh brothers and sisters in Islam! But when that same brother wants to get married to your daughter,

⁷² A fundamental concept in Islam, expressing the essential unity and theoretical equality of Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical settings. From: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2427>

you're like *nahi wo kaala kabhi bhi meri beti se shadi nahi kar sakta* (no, that black can never marry my daughter). So *ye sab kehne ki baat hai* (these are just the things people say), in real life there's no proper unity in the Muslim community, and that's a really big issue.

Shafiq's account directly opposes the rosy picture Shelina Janmohamed paints earlier of the Muslim ummah (although one need only look at the Sunni-Shi'a conflicts which have resulted in extreme sectarian violence as already compromising the transnational framings of the ummah (Abdo, 2017; Gonzalez, 2013)). His critique of Arab Muslims thinking "that they're superior" is understandable, as many early Muslim sources also point towards demonstrating how God had specially chosen the Arabs as His vehicle for spreading Islam throughout the world (Hoyland, 2015). Other critics like Anwar Shaikh (1998, p. 82) argue that Islam was primarily a political movement to bring "imperial dignity to the Arabs," subordinating huge numbers of non-Arab converts and their offspring to "Arab cultural hegemony". In a study examining the role of language in the construction of religious identity, specifically amongst a group of second generation young British-born South Asians, Jaspal and Coyle (2010) maintain that the sanctification of the Arabic language serves as a symbol of religious community, creating ethno-linguistic barriers, a sense of linguistic Otherness, and religious alienation. Even though the Quran describes itself as "a guidance for mankind (2:185)"⁷³, Shafiq realises that it originated in a land and language that is foreign to him, making him feel like "the rest of us are not as worthy", thus cementing his position as an insider but also outsider in his religious field- an insider by virtue of his faith, an outsider by virtue of his ethnicity. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) was known to have an anti-racist ethos; in his last sermon he asserted that "an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab... a white person has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action" (Considine, 2015). But despite the Prophet's desire for peaceful coexistence within his ummah, Shafiq calls out the colour politics that exist till today ("they look at your color first and your religion later").

It is also interesting to note how Shafiq documents the shift in dominant narratives as he moves through macro, meso and micro systems; he questions how the macro level is focused on financial and political capital ("Why, when it comes to dirty money and politics, religion takes a back seat?"), how the meso level seeks to acquire social capital ("You go to the mosque and

⁷³ From: <https://quran.com/2/185?translations=17,18,20,101,95,85,22,84,21,19>

everyone is like oh brothers and sisters in Islam!”), and how the micro level is more concerned with cultural capital and ethnicity (“But when that same brother wants to get married to your daughter, you’re like *nahi wo kaala kabhi bhi meri beti se shadi nahi kar sakta* (no, that black can never marry my daughter”). So, although recent anthropological accounts of the global ‘Islamic revival’ tend to depict Muslims as actors that are mainly guided by religious motivations (Billaud, 2016), we can see through the inconsistencies of everyday life that this is hardly the case. The mobilization of religion as a power resource is often ambivalent, contradictory, and intersected with other social differences, including class and gender (Ramji, 2007; we shall also note numerous examples of this across the analytical chapters). I am not trying to insinuate that second-generation desi Muslim migrants don’t care about the ummah, I am trying to illustrate how my informants repeatedly emphasised that they care about more than *just* the ummah. As Farah said:

As a Muslim in today’s world, we can’t afford to isolate ourselves, it’s the worst thing we can do. If there’s a *hijabi* (woman wearing the hijab) begging for money, and there’s a white homeless guy begging, either I don’t give any of them money, or I give them both change. Or if it’s my neighbour, it doesn’t matter that they’re white, Islam tells you to be kind to your neighbours, kind to strangers, regardless of their religion or race. Islam doesn’t teach you to be unfair to anybody, it tells you to treat people equally whether rich or poor, black or white. I can’t respect anybody who doesn’t do that.

Similarly, Amir adds:

Being a Muslim is first and foremost being a good person. There’s a lot of people you’ll meet that talk about Islam a lot, they’ll say you should do this and you shouldn’t do that, but the way they’ll say it to someone is in a really egotistical manner. They’ll put someone down and embarrass them and you’d think, how is that Islamic? Islam is basic manners and basic kindness, even when other people can’t see or hear you. It’s about being compassionate and helping others. You have to understand that not everyone lives life the way you do. Life is so short man, just live and let live and leave the judgement for God.

It seems that both Farah and Amir embrace a rather cosmopolitan understanding of Islam, echoing Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (2006, p. 15) principle advocating “universal concern and respect for legitimate difference”. Appiah’s (2006) affirmation of the ‘cosmopolitan ideal’ as ‘our obligations to strangers’ is not just an ethical abstraction but an Islamic imperative according to Farah (“Islam tells you to be kind to your neighbours, kind to strangers, regardless of their religion or race”). Similarly, Appiah’s (2006, p. 145) understanding of toleration “means interacting on terms of respect with those who see the world differently”, a value that

Amir also endorses (“You have to understand that not everyone lives life the way you do”). Tolerance is a virtue that is advocated in the Quran as well, as an ayah reads “cultivate tolerance, enjoin justice, and avoid the fools (7:199)”⁷⁴. For Amir, being a cosmopolitan is a social, ethical and religious enterprise, as he draws our attention to what Judith Butler (2004) identifies as the precariousness of life in self and other (“Life is so short man, just live and let live and leave the judgement for God”). In theory, even the concept of the ummah welcomes cosmopolitanism and diversity, but in practice there has always been varying degrees of conflict between different Muslim sects over time and space (as we also assessed from Shafiq’s quote earlier) (Friedman, 2018).

Now, as much as I love Appiah’s (2006) work, I am wary and critical of his use of religion to showcase everything anti-cosmopolitan in his chapter titled ‘The Counter-Cosmopolitans’. He argues that Muslim diasporic neo-fundamentalism is largely a result of “the experience of Muslims as minorities” (p. 137) in the countries to which they have migrated. Even Werbner (2008, p. 11-12) prominently cites the same in her discussion of religion as a fundamentalist and therefore anti-cosmopolitan phenomenon. Roy (2002) too affirms that globalization has caused a reshaping of the relationship between Muslims and Islam in a world where Muslims are having to confront ‘Westernization’ and live in societies where they represent a minority. Appiah (2006) views global Islam, or ‘global fundamentalism’ as he calls it, as a normative rigid frame of ideological reference that unequivocally counters processes of change and hybridization that inevitably come with increased globalisation, thus denying the necessity to develop competences not only to live in a world of strangers but to live in a world with strangers. However, Appiah fails to consider the impact of Saudi Arabia’s decades-long export of its highly conservative Wahhabism (or Salafism) to Muslim countries around the world, the destabilizing effect of these Wahhabist/Salafist enclaves on Muslim politics, or its connection to the rise of terrorist groups such as the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and ISIS (Friedman, 2018). Wahhabism refers to a Sunni Islamic movement that seeks to purify Islam of any innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Ayoob & Kosebalaban, 2009). The emergence of this utopian world view of Islamic purity based on the earliest Islamic sources as the only effective defence against encounters with the ‘other’ (Sunier, 2014), is emphatically criticised by Salman:

⁷⁴ From: <http://quran.wvpa.com/page/verse-7-199>

These wobblers man... (he pauses as he noticed the confused look on my face).

These what, sorry? (I had to ask).

Wobblers, it's a nickname for Wahhabis. I've seen it online and stuff too, like I follow this account on Twitter called Wobbler Busters. (A quick 'ah!' in acknowledgement from me and he continues). Anyway, so yeah, the Wahhabi doctrine is too extreme for me, some of the things they believe in I just can't agree with. Like women can't travel without a mahram beyond a certain radius; like they think it is against Islam to be friends with the *kufaar*⁷⁵- you can be friendly and kind to them as far as promoting the religion and *daawah*⁷⁶ goes, but you shouldn't actually be friends. I mean, what? That's just ridiculous! That naturally leads to a tendency where you're not going to mix in right, I mean it's one thing when you're on the outside because of racism and stuff but this is you choosing to be on the outside. With them you're not allowed to question anything, you're not allowed to criticise the Saudi authorities at all, and all the power is concentrated at the top. My world view is more liberal, more humanist, I can't digest the propaganda.

In a similar vein, Saima adds:

You know how there's so many of these Muslim 'bad boys' yeah (she makes air quotations with her hands), and they just drive around in their dodgy cars and deal drugs and act like gangsters- I've actually heard them justify what they're doing by saying shit like oh yeah, it's ok, we're only selling to the *kufaar* and this is part of their culture anyway, so it's ok. Uh... What the fuck? It's like no you fucking dickhead, dealing drugs, doing drugs, it's all *haram*⁷⁷. If you hate on their culture so much, why are you here? You're just adding to the problems in society, and you're the reason why *goray* (whites) fucking hate us, because they think we're all waste men living on benefits and exploiting their government. Trust me, I'm no fan of the government, but even Islamically we are supposed to respect the laws of the land where we live. You know the rest of us are just out here minding our own business, just trying to be decent human beings, decent Muslims, like actual productive members of society, and we're just caught in between all of this, and we suffer.

When it comes to Muslims living in the West, there seem to be two main tropes emerging- one is Muslims' experiences of racism that allegedly generate disaffection amongst Muslims, and the other focuses on the angst surrounding Muslim incompatibility with supposedly 'Western values' (Dunn, et al. 2016). Both Salman and Saima challenge these discourses via their

⁷⁵ Plural form of 'kafir', meaning unbeliever. Islamic fundamentalists in the twentieth century also applied the term to other Muslims who did not adhere to their strict interpretations of the Quran. From: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1229>

⁷⁶ Meaning call. God's way of bringing believers to faith and the means by which prophets call individuals and communities back to God. Militant submovements interpret dawah as calling Muslims back to the purer form of religion practiced by Muhammad and the early Muslim community. From: http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e511?_hi=1&_pos=1

⁷⁷ Forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law. From: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/haram>

counter-narratives. Salman recognises experiences of racism that attempt to position him ‘on the outside’, but still expresses a desire to ‘mix in’ by condemning the attitudes that would impede the same (“That naturally leads to a tendency where you’re not going to mix in right, I mean it’s one thing when you’re on the outside because of racism and stuff but this is you choosing to be on the outside”). Like Appiah (2006), he too attacks the concept of religious and cultural purity or authenticity in his critique of the ‘Wahhabi doctrine’, voicing his disapproval of the ‘propaganda’ and power relations that seek to control not only actions, but also subjectivity (“With them you’re not allowed to question anything, you’re not allowed to criticise the Saudi authorities at all, and all the power is concentrated at the top”). Saima is also quick to condemn any unfair biases towards ‘*goray*’ (“If you hate on their culture so much, why are you here?”), but laments her position as a target of ‘hate’ because of her status as a Muslim migrant (“you’re the reason why *goray* (whites) fucking hate us, because they think we’re all waste men living on benefits and exploiting their government”).

For Saima, being a ‘decent Muslim’ is synonymous with being a ‘decent human being’ and a ‘productive member of society’, just as Salman sees his ‘liberal’ ‘humanist’ world view in harmony with his Muslim subject position. For them religion does not compete against cosmopolitanism or other ‘Western values’, instead, it provides the very grounds for the expression of those values. Therefore, there is no singular expression of ‘Western’ cosmopolitanism, i.e. cosmopolitanism must become cosmopolitan in itself. Current theoretical understandings of cosmopolitanism which are frequently associated with modern liberal subjectivity and selfhood, fail to consider the multiple ways in which contemporary Muslim cosmopolitans engage with ‘another way of being’ (Iqtidar, 2013, p. 631). It is not possible to examine cosmopolitanism, new or otherwise, without locating it within the discourse of the Enlightenment and its inscription in the project of secular modernity, a project that is historically tied to European colonialism and capitalism (Venn, 2002, p. 77). Friedman (2018, p. 214) identifies four key ideological binaries that are produced by the ‘secularization narrative’ that I will briefly outline as follows:

West = Secular	vs.	Rest = Religious
West = Modern	vs.	Rest = Traditional
West = Progressive	vs.	Rest = Backward
West = Tolerance	vs.	Rest = Intolerance

The politics of difference is deeply entwined with the politics of identity; the relation to the Other and to Others often intersects with religion, class, ethnicity, gender, etc., and is further determined by systems of oppression and exploitation (Dhamoon, 2010). A non-Eurocentric model of cosmopolitanism can only emerge through a philosophical critique that deconstructs hegemonic discourses beyond tired oppositions of Eurocentrism versus anti-Eurocentrism- as Venn (2002, p. 75) writes, “one should be able to think of ways of appropriating knowledge which do not reduce to modes of dispossession and subjec(tifica)tion, as in the model of Western colonialism”. Salman and Saima’s accounts work to disrupt the conventional binaries listed above as they align their religion and traditions with progressive and tolerant ideals. The informants reject the potential of religiocentrism or fundamentalism by understanding and more importantly, respecting difference, thus advocating for ethical sociality, tolerance, and alliances across difference. This proves that the global conditions under which an increasing number of Muslims currently live do not just generate idioms of purity; rather, they create new and diverse forms of sociability that constitute new Muslim migrant self-understandings and religious practices, with an increasing diversification of Muslim world views that function in cosmopolitan ways (Leichtman & Schulz, 2012). The informants’ ‘lived Islam’ is not experienced in opposition to apparently ‘Western’ secular, modern, progressive, tolerant values (such as cosmopolitanism (Winell, 2017)), but rather as complementary to and within such values, occurring as a desi Muslim response.

“For us cosmopolitans it is mankind and our liberal way of life- our sense of belonging- that matters, not so much nations,” writes Brunkhorst (2008, p. 284). However, Appiah (2006) notices a crucial condition in his analysis of social ethics- whatever obligations one might have to a stranger, especially a foreign other, that obligation is unlikely to supersede the obligations one has to those people most familiar to them. Calhoun (2007) argues that there are still a vast majority of people in today’s globalised world who continue to have strong ties to their national origins, neighbourhoods, local unions or religious communities, and especially, to transnational sects and organisations of migrants. I wondered if this held true for my informants as well, and soon found my answer on a casual phone call while catching up with 25-year-old Khalid, who had just come back from a work trip:

Sahrish: How was your trip man, you were gone for quite a while *nahi* (no)?

Khalid: Yeah, it was okay, we did the training during the day, then it was mostly chilling in the evening. They even had halal food which was actually decent, so I didn’t starve, haha!

Sahrish: Oh really? That's cool, were there a lot of Muslims that they gave the halal option on the trip?

Khalid: Not that many, there were a few Arab guys, one Moroccan, one Malaysian dude, umm, there were a few desis there too but they were Gujju so I was like fuck that shit, they're gonna go out late and drink so allow

Sahrish: Ah, so did you manage to make some friends there then?

Khalid: Hmm, there was another desi guy who was Indian but Muslim, so we mainly hung out together and he was cool like we became pretty good mates, but he works in the Reading office so I won't get to see him at work...

Khalid and I hung up after a short while, and as I mulled over the conversation in my head I asked my brother the following- "bro, if you were in a room full of strangers, say at a party or something, who would you hang out with?". "I'd try look for someone familiar, I guess, someone I could gel with" was his reply. "What do you mean by familiar?" I asked. "I don't know man, someone the same age, someone desi probably, I guess," he answered. "Would it matter if they're Muslim or not?" I probed further. "Well... it would be cool if they're desi and Muslim... this is for your thesis isn't it," he said with a smile, as I reached my phone to note this down. Although religion is often viewed as an important aspect of ethnic culture, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish the exact relation between the two- whether religious orientation is a prerequisite to belonging in the ethnic community, or whether religious affiliation comes in secondary to ethnic identity (Peek, 2005). It appears that simply being 'Muslim', or simply being 'desi', did not automatically qualify as 'familiar'; Khalid and my brother were both articulating the importance of a *religio-cultural* identity as desi Muslims, providing a case in point for the complex and diverse relation to religion as a constitutive part of identity. The informants' multiple subjectivities and the boundaries between them are not as clear cut as is often wished by those wanting to impose liberal taxonomies upon them. So, as we have already explored my informants' understandings of what it means to be a 'Muslim' in its various manifestations and contestations, let us now turn our attention to unpacking another key term, 'desi', in all its complexities.

Belonging 'in between'- Desi as a responsive diasporic identity

The Sanskrit word 'des' or 'desh' means country, and 'desi' which originates from it essentially means from the country, or 'of the homeland' (Rudisill, 2018). For example, Bangladesh literally translates to the country of Bengal. The opposite of 'des' is 'pardes' (par

(other), and des (country)), thus making the opposite of desi being ‘pardesi’ or ‘videshi’⁷⁸ which simply means foreigner, or someone from outside the country. The desi/pardesi dichotomy is closely tied to the local/foreigner, insider/outsider oppositions that have now become so prominent in socio-political commentary and debate. ‘Desi’ is popularly used to refer to people of South Asian origin who are not residing in South Asia, thus making it an inherently diasporic term. While South Asia technically includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Asian Development Bank Institute, 2016), in my experience and over the course of my research I have found that it is mainly Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi diaspora communities that use the term ‘desi’ when referring to themselves and each other. As Farah (whose parents are originally Pakistani) explains:

Desi is like slang, but it’s not derogatory like calling someone a Paki. Also, most people think desi is mainly Indian, because you hear it in a lot of Bollywood songs and stuff, but I’ve heard other Pakistanis also using it. So, if you say desi, people will have a general idea *ke haan* (that yes) this person will be from either Pakistan, Bangladesh or India, so they’ll ask *kahaan se hain* (where are they from), to get the specifics. But if you say India *se* (from) then they’ll ask are they Muslim? It’s so silly, like of course there are Indian Muslims! Like my best friend, she’s an Indian Muslim, and I’ve found that our cultures are pretty similar.

Political and religious commitments can be very long term and passionate and are often deeply embedded in the moral narratives of self and community (Werbner, 2002). Indian Muslims have long suffered, and continue to suffer, the consequences of a dominant Hindu nationalist ideology that centres on portraying Muslims as foreigners who remain loyal to an alien holy land, as opposed to the motherland (*Bharat Mata*⁷⁹) (Joshi, 2010). Sectarian violence against the Muslim minority has increased significantly under Narendra Modi’s populist government, further demonising Indian Muslims as the ethno-religious Other (Iqbal, 2019; Khan, 2020). It is common knowledge that Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have often pitted each geographical neighbour as the ‘Other’ in their own social contexts, but does the shared experience of Otherness and outsider in a foreign world encourage them to renegotiate their own biases? 24-year-old interior design student, Mehreen comments:

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From:

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/hindi-english/%E0%A4%B5%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%B6%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%B5%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%AF%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%A4%E0%A4%BF>

⁷⁹ Bharat Mata is the national personification of India as a mother goddess. Not only does it embody a Hindutva imagination of India, it categorises Muslims as a group who are unable to partake in this form of patriotism. From: <https://scroll.in/article/805247/history-lessons-how-bharat-mata-became-the-code-word-for-a-theocratic-hindu-state>

It's very hard to tell Pakistani and Indian Muslims apart. Everyone thinks I'm Pakistani. Even I think I'm more Pakistani than Indian anyway, haha (she gives a short laugh). I sound more Pakistani when I speak Urdu and stuff, I don't really speak Hindi. What I find funny is that when I do tell people that I'm Indian they automatically think that I'm not Muslim. Like you meet a lot of taxi drivers and they are the people who always ask where in Pakistan are you from? So, it's funny to tell them I'm not Pakistani, I'm actually Indian. Then there's that awkward pause where they think I'm not Muslim. And then when I leave the taxi and say *Assalamalaikum*⁸⁰ they're so surprised like ah you're Muslim. I always like playing these mind games with people. Because I've never lived in India, I don't really know what it's like to feel Indian. I don't feel much different to maybe what a Pakistani Muslim feels like when they're living here, or a Bangladeshi Muslim. We're all desi, we've all come from abroad, we're pretty much in the same boat and dealing with the same shit to be honest.

For Mehreen, her combined experience of being a Muslim and being a migrant in London supersedes traditional cultural alliances ("I don't feel much different to maybe what a Pakistani Muslim feels like when they're living here, or a Bangladeshi Muslim"). Shared religion, shared language ("I sound more Pakistani when I speak Urdu and stuff, I don't really speak Hindi"), and the shared struggle of being an outsider make her identify with Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims in a similar fashion ("We're all desi, we've all come from abroad, we're pretty much in the same boat and dealing with the same shit to be honest"). Devalle (1995) calls for an awareness of 'composite identities,' explaining that for some communities religion may combine together with other elements (mostly a consciousness of historical performance, language and often territory), as one of the many components of identity. Similarly, Schielke & Debevec (2012) argue that Muslim subjectivities are not only shaped by religion, and Islam does not serve as the only source of moral guidance in everyday life.

It is in this sense that 'desi' emerges as a term that allows for the articulation of such composite identities and the combined and multifaceted experiences of being a 'second-generation' 'South Asian' 'Muslim' 'migrant' 'in London'. 'Desi' is formed through the trajectories of movement and experiences of places of settlement, rather than in relation to a mythical 'homeland' (Kim, 2012). I still remember when the term first made an impact on me- I was only 18 years old and had started my Bachelor's degree in university when the song 'Desi girl' starring Priyanka Chopra had released in 2008. I heard it repeatedly and sung along every chorus, "*Dekhi lakh lakh* pardesi girl (I've seen many a thousand foreign girls), Ain't nobody

⁸⁰ Peace to you- used as a traditional greeting among Muslims. From: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assalamu%20alaikum>

like my desi girl... Who's the hottest girl in the world? My desi girl, My desi girl!"⁸¹. Despite all my teenage angst and uncertainty, I was certain that I'M a 'desi' girl and this song relates to me, so every time I heard it, I'd feel like the hottest girl in the world. The relevance of 'desi' to music, movies, television networks and popular culture is undeniable, and has garnered the interest of a fair few number of scholars of late (see Sharma, 2011; Mallapragada, 2012; Kim, 2012; Dattatreyan, 2015; Wolock & Punathambekar, 2015; Kim, 2017, for example). Aisha recounts:

I think desi started off like a slang word used to describe the pop culture element of being South Asian. The things that the West in particular identify with India... which we have somehow appropriated (she shrugs). But now you hear it so much more, it's a lot more common. Even my parents know about it, I mean I haven't really heard them using it, but they know what it means.

"And what does it mean to you, Aisha?" I countered.

Well... it's like being in between the East and the West, and somehow trying to have the best of both worlds, even though they collide sometimes. Or a lot of the times. But we're here, and we have to get on with it, we can't let go of the things that are important to us that make us who we are, but we also don't want to stick out like a sore thumb and continuously be labelled as a problem in society. We pay our taxes, we give our dues, but like if I've ever gone out in shalwar kameez⁸² I can literally *feeeel* (she is stretching out and emphasising the word) the difference in how people look at me. Like this one time we had gone to the seaside with a few other desi aunties on a trip, and this old English couple was sitting on a table next to us and they kept looking like non-stop. So, when we were leaving, I had to move past their table anyway and I just casually said hi, it's a beautiful day isn't it! And the lady she was trying to be nice obviously and she said oh I love what you're wearing, so I was telling her about the material and stuff and her husband goes- oh and you speak perfect English too! I was gobsmacked and I told him I speak 3 languages and have a Master's and I'm an accountant, and he goes- oh so you're a smart one! I was just like wow, what the fuck, did he just assume that because I'm brown and wearing shalwar kameez I can't speak proper English and I'm not smart? What else, that I've had a forced marriage and I'm oppressed? I mean, this is the kind of absolute bullshit we have to deal with as second-generation migrants!

O'Connor (2016) argues that the key difference between first and second generation Asian diasporic groups is that most first-generation migrants continue to feel as if they are living between the East and the West, while second-generation Asians have limited primary links with the homeland and are therefore less likely to feel that way. But Aisha's account shows us that is still not the case, as her understanding of 'desi' is inextricably linked to her experience of being a second-generation migrant, of being "in between the East and the West, and

⁸¹ Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDlrvpH8MzE>

⁸² A type of suit, worn especially by Asian women, with loose trousers and a long shirt. From: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/salwar-kameez>

somehow trying to have the best of both worlds”. The construction of a ‘desi’ identity reveals the tensions between the ‘here’ and ‘there’, the ‘then’ and ‘now’ and the ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ that constitute a diasporic politics of identity (Mallapragada, 2014). Aisha also adds value to the assimilation versus integration debate by highlighting that “we can’t let go of the things that are important to us that make us who we are”, while also expressing her frustrations of feeling like an outsider (“but we also don’t want to stick out like a sore thumb and continuously be labelled as a problem in society”). Aisha clearly illustrates how being “brown and wearing shalwar kameez” is associated with the discourse around migrants not being ‘smart’ enough or able to ‘speak proper English’, or having ‘forced marriages’ and being ‘oppressed’. But Aisha’s performativity in her shalwar kameez defies such normative expectations when she asserts, “I speak 3 languages and have a Master’s and I’m an accountant”.

Perhaps it is for this reason that ‘desi’ as an identity has been popularly adopted in middle-class and upper middle-class South Asian diasporic youth circles as a means of asserting a sense of pride in having a ‘hyphenated’ ethnic and national identity, as a response to the prejudice experienced by South Asians and people of colour, particularly in the United States (Shankar, 2008). Not only does class emerge as an important dynamic in shaping life in South Asia, but also in South Asian diaspora communities (Mishra, 2016), as there are often significant disparities between ‘desis’ of different classes (as we shall soon discover in the following section). Even in the United Kingdom, ‘desi’ has become an increasingly relevant term, its emergence and adoption signalling a potentially new shift in ‘British Asian’ identity formations and its meanings (Kim, 2012). Cultural anthropologist Sunaina Maira (2002, p. 2) believes that second-generation youth have “crossed national boundaries to identify collectively as ‘desi’”. Desi migrants may be a ‘pardesi’ to their ancestral homeland or country of origin, and they may also be an outsider or ‘pardesi’ in the eyes of their adopted homeland or country of residence, but they use the term ‘desi’ as a form of being and belonging and a source of agency to refer to themselves as seemingly outsiders but also insiders, as theoretically foreign but practically local. ‘Desi’, therefore, can be conceptualised as a responsive identity performance to being neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’, to belonging ‘in between’ as an insider but also outsider. Even in my own experience, I have contested being called an Indian, British, or the hybrid British Asian, but I would never refrain from identifying as desi.

'Pendus', 'Coconuts' and Mapping everyday forms of difference

The definition or ascription of a group's identity may be the subject and outcome of a cross-boundary struggle for control, and the social identity of a group may also be contested within the group itself (Cohen, 1999). This is true even within the 'desi' identity category; desi may overcome the issues we discussed earlier with hyphenated identities such as 'British Asian', and it may also overcome the assumptions associated with a global 'Muslim' allegiance, but it is still not an all-inclusive identity category. Diaspora can be problematic because members of a diasporic community are expected to rally around a sense of shared identity and ethnicity that can then create a unified collective; however, this ideal fails to consider the internal differences and divisions that continue to exist within any given community (Ang, 2001). While the subcontinent is no stranger to divisions based on caste (*zaat*) and descent group (variously *got*, *qaum*, *patti*, *biraderi* or *tabbar*) (Ballard, 1990), the diasporic desi community also comes with its own set of hierarchies and rules of membership that are continuously constructed, managed and negotiated by its members. Technically, anyone who can claim South Asian ancestry could be 'desi', but desis themselves recognise everyday forms of difference. As Khalid explains:

Given our backgrounds, sometimes we're not a cultural fit in the work environment because we won't go out to the pub after work or whatever. So, you have to work overtime not to come across as some desi *pendu* who's a total freshie who they can just glance over. You have to be well-spoken, have to have banter to be a part of the team, you can't just sit there quietly and do your work because that's not enough. If they start getting rid of people tomorrow, they'll still get rid of you first because you're not the perfect cultural fit. I'm not willing to sell myself out and become a coconut *taake main in goro ke tattay chaat sakoon* (just so I can lick these white people's balls). Sorry, but I know some people who do that just so they can fit in and not be the odd one out, but it's not worth losing your *imaan* (faith) over.

Khalid recognises his desi Muslim positioning in the work environment as belonging outside the 'perfect cultural fit'. He highlights the importance of being 'well-spoken' and having 'banter' as examples of performative acts that grant him the agency to be 'a part of the team'. Most importantly, it was in this excerpt that Khalid outlined two key positions that were different from his, a manifestation of intra-ethnic boundary making- that of a "*pendu* who's a total freshie" and a "coconut". *Pendu* is derived from the Punjabi word 'pind' which literally translates to village, thus 'pendu' meaning someone who is from the village. In modern day

Hinglish⁸³, it is used as an adjective to describe someone who is ‘culturally backward’⁸⁴. Khalid equates ‘pendu’ with ‘freshie’, a term that is often used to refer to a new immigrant from the Asian subcontinent to the UK⁸⁵. Freshie in turn originates from the term ‘fresh off the boat’ or ‘FOB’⁸⁶, signifying difference along perceived social characteristics including linguistic and economic (in)ability. Shafiq elucidates:

When my parents first got here- fresh off the boat, literally, haha- all these other families told them that *bacha zara sa bhi haathh se nikal gaya to wo drugs mein ghus jayega* (if your child gets out of your hands even a little bit, then he’ll get involved in drugs) and all this other scary stuff so they became suffocatingly overprotective. I was a complete freshie when I started school, I had a proper side parting, I used to wear my pants so high, used to bring desi food from home, ugh (he shudders). It was so bad *yaar* (my friend), my mom didn’t even let me shave my moustache till I was like 17. So I was a quiet kid, my English wasn’t that good, I didn’t have many friends, and no one really knew me until I was the only kid in school who passed my 11 plus exams⁸⁷ and then everyone was surprised like bloody hell who’s this *pendu* kid who came out of nowhere! All the other kids had been taking private tuitions, but we couldn’t afford that, so it was kind of a huge deal (he smiles with a reminiscent look on his face).

For Shafiq, being a ‘freshie’ included certain physical characteristics (“I had a proper side parting, I used to wear my pants so high, used to bring desi food from home”) that also had an impact on social traits (“I was a quiet kid, my English wasn’t that good, I didn’t have many friends”). FOBs or freshies are often assumed to lack fluency in the language of the country of settlement or speak in ‘funny’ accents and are seemingly unaware of locally acceptable dress and conduct (McAuliffe, 2008). Shankar (2008, p. 283) highlights the role of language use in shaping racial meaning in diasporic communities; in her study of language practices amongst desi high schoolers, she notes how ‘FOBby’ teens were coded as brown rather than white because of their non-normative use of language, while popular teens distanced themselves from FOB styles by engaging in normative uses of language, thus remaining linguistically unmarked despite being racially marked as ‘Asian’ and ‘brown’. Socio-economic variation between migrants can sometimes also be recognised through variations in aesthetic incompetence; for

⁸³ A blend of Hindi and English, in particular a variety of English used by speakers of Hindi, characterized by frequent use of Hindi vocabulary or constructions. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hinglish>

⁸⁴ From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pendu>

⁸⁵ From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/freshie>

⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that the use of these terms is not limited to the desi population, second generation Vietnamese and Korean Americans reportedly also use ‘FOB’ as a term of abuse for each other (Pyke & Dang, 2003).

⁸⁷ The eleven-plus (11-plus) is an examination administered to some students in England and Northern Ireland in their last year of primary education, which governs admission to grammar schools and other secondary schools which use academic selection.

example, the relevant signifier of the freshie figure for British Pakistanis is not so much the cheapness, as the ‘Pakistani-ness’, or more exactly the un-‘cool’ ness, of the clothing (Charsley & Bolognani, 2017). However, Erel (2010) makes the argument that ‘rucksack’ approaches viewing migrants as bringing in cultural capital which may or may not necessarily ‘fit’ in with the receiving context ignore the potential agency of migrants to develop different and new forms of cultural capital, and the various ways in which migrants can then also negotiate recognition or exchange of existing cultural capital. Shafiq provides a case in point when he talks about how he defied his linguistic and economic limitations to pass the 11 plus exams, which not only granted him recognition in his current primary school (“no one really knew me until I was the only kid in school who passed my 11 plus exams and then everyone was surprised like bloody hell who’s this *pendu* kid who came out of nowhere!”) but also gave him the agency to acquire additional cultural capital by attending a secondary grammar school. We notice how being a freshie is tied to a class positioning in the lower income bracket (“all the other kids had been taking private tuitions, but we couldn’t afford that”), but also that this positioning is never a done deal as an increase in education and economic and cultural capital can allow for movement beyond the *pendu*/freshie/FOB status.

Having said that, an increase in education, financial and social capital, however, does not guarantee social recognition and inclusion with the dominant (in this case, *desi* middle-class) tastes. On the opposite end of the spectrum to *pendus*, *freshies* and *FOBs* lies the ‘coconut’, a racialized construct that has become part of colloquial speech and popular culture, commonly but not exclusively used as a term to describe South Asian diasporic youth who are deemed ‘inauthentic’ as brown on the outside and white on the inside (hence the term ‘coconut’) (Kim, 2014). Funny enough, I have heard my own father call my youngest brother a coconut when he insisted on wearing ripped skinny jeans under his new *kurta*⁸⁸ for Eid, or whenever he cringes and tells my father off for singing *desi* songs in public. Samira also adds:

Ugh, I hate guys who are coconuts (she grimaces). Instant turn off for me. Those guys that act all posh and like won’t eat *desi* food because it’s too spicy but will say shit like ‘oh *naan* bread and *chai* tea’ (she puts on a strong exaggerated British accent as she says this). Dude, like what the hell, *naan* is already bread and *chai* is already tea! (she laughs). I mean I don’t get it, why are you trying so hard? They think they’ve gotten too educated and risen above the rest of us. They won’t even try to speak in Urdu, even though I’m pretty sure we’ve all grown up with our parents speaking it. Basically,

⁸⁸ A loose collarless shirt worn by people from South Asia, usually with a *salwar*, *churidars*, or *pyjama*. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/kurta>

anything white yeah, they'll just lap it all up, but anything to do with their own culture and they'll just run away from it. Like a snake trying to shed its own skin. It doesn't make any sense to me (she shrugs).

If being a freshie is tied to a class positioning in the lower income bracket, then being a coconut is also often associated with belonging to a higher elite class and income bracket (“Those guys that act all posh... They think they've gotten too educated and risen above the rest of us”). Additionally, if freshies are often assumed to lack fluency in the language of the country of settlement or speak in ‘funny’ accents (McAuliffe, 2008), then coconuts are often seen as lacking fluency in the language of the country of origin (“they won't even try to speak in Urdu, even though I'm pretty sure we've all grown up with our parents speaking it”) and speaking in ‘posh’ exaggerated British accents. Samira identifies that another marker of a coconut is by the food they eat (or in this case don't eat), and she also accuses them of describing their ethnic food in an inauthentic manner that tends to exoticize it (those guys... won't eat desi food because it's too spicy but will say shit like ‘oh *naan* bread and *chai* tea’. Dude, like what the hell, naan is already bread and chai is already tea!”). Coconuts are often accused of being ‘whitewashed’, an insult implying that they are behaving in a way that is too ‘white’, and thus forgetting their ethnic ‘roots’ (Pyke & Dang, 2003). This ideology can be seen as another manifestation of postcolonial resentment, making the coconut a traitor, a ‘snake’ like Samira said, or a ‘sell out’, as Khalid also mentioned earlier (“I'm not willing to sell myself out and become a coconut *taake main in goro ke tattay chaat sakoon* (just so I can lick these white people's balls!”). In a similar vein, I've also heard my father say ‘*angrez ki aulaad* (child of an Englishman)’ whenever he's seen one of his children, or any other desi for that matter, acting rather British or white. Conversations around freshies and coconuts tend to reflect a larger set of diasporic concerns of cultural loss and betrayal that continue to haunt a diasporic politics of identity, particularly in relation to second generation migrants. Mehreen comments:

I'd rather be a pendu than a coconut any day. Why would anyone even try to copy white people? Like what is their culture anyway? The culture of colonialism? Where all they've done is take from other people's cultures because they don't have their own. You see white people running off to places like India to try and find themselves, you see them trying to copy things that we do and we take for granted, like praying maybe, and here people are trying to be like them when they want to be like us! Our spices, our customs, our food, our culture, *kayi dafa goro ko in cheezo ki zyada kadar hai* (many a time, white people value these things more) than our own people even. Our people feel embarrassed of their own culture as if it's still lesser than theirs, but it's not and that mindset has to, has to, change! (she repeats emphatically).

Mehreen advocates against having an internal post-colonial inferiority complex, shifting the power narrative by arguing that “white people... want to be like us!”. Contrary to Pyke and Dang’s (2003) informants who reportedly preferred being called ‘whitewashed’ than a ‘FOB’, here Mehreen claims she’d “rather be a pendu than a coconut any day”. There is something to be said here about the negative connotations associated with being a coconut that are “wielded against the next generation, who are forced to feel culturally inadequate and unfinished” (Prashad, 2000, p. 131). Following post-colonial theory, we can consider this reproduction of stigma as signalling an internalization of colonial ethnic/racial discourse and hierarchies. The figure of the coconut is commonly associated with the ‘confused’ or ‘lost’ diasporic second-generation Asian youth, who must find their way back to their ‘roots’ in an attempt to become their ‘true’ self (Kim, 2014). Along with the coconut, we find terms such as ABCD (American Born Confused Desi), or BBCD (British Born Confused Desi), which imply much the same. Such terms, however, are not taken kindly to, as Rayaprol (2005, p. 138) found that when presented with the term ‘ABCD’ many of her second-generation Indian informants in the U.S. were ‘offended’, rejecting the idea that they suffered from an ‘identity crisis’. Amir corroborates:

What. The. Fuck is a BBCD mate (he pauses as he swears). I hate that term, honestly it annoys me so much. It’s saying you’re born here but you’re not really British. Ok, then what am I? You’re desi, but no wait, you must be confused, you can’t even be a desi then. Saying you’re confused is like saying you don’t really belong here or there. It forces you to pick a side. To follow one defined culture. But what if you can’t pick a side? What if you’re trying to belong in some way here but also there? I think that’s where we are, we’re not confused, we’re just... in between. Maybe we can be our own culture, like an in between culture. And maybe that can be good enough, you know (he tilts his head thoughtfully). Because even now, like I’m in between where sometimes I’ll do things that my flatmates will say are so freshie, like when I put oil in my hair, but also I’ll do things that make me such a coconut, like when I speak in Urdu it still comes out with a British accent, haha (he laughs sheepishly). So, I have some cultural beliefs and traditions in me, some religious too. In some instances, I’d be seen as too desi and, in some instances, too white.

Amir’s account shows us how categories like freshies and coconuts are never fixed or absolute, as he offers us a way to rethink desi diasporic identities as lived and embodied experiences that are performative projects and therefore inconsistently constructed. The performance of being ‘desi’ is never the same; Amir’s bodily practice of putting oil in his hair takes up the norms of ‘freshie’ culture, thus producing him as a freshie as an effect of this performance. However, this performance does not fully constitute him as a freshie, as his linguistic practice of speaking

Urdu with a British accent then renders him as a coconut. The shaping of identities through ‘micropractices’ (Shankar 2008) is often beautifully uncovered through ethnographic research. By paying attention to such ‘micropractices’ and everyday dialogues and experiences, we begin to unpack how ‘desi’ can become a terrain of struggle between different and competing claims to the ownership and expression of the term, where social class and religion are also key factors to how desi gets reimagined. Maira (2002, p. 92) maintains that second-generation youth learn as early as childhood itself that they need to negotiate different ideals of behaviour in particular contexts and select certain images or identification within certain social and structural constraints. Desi subjectivity is thus constructed via the knowledge produced in mapping power relations across different social and cultural fields- by being aware of the constraints of being a ‘freshie’ in a dominantly ‘British’ public sphere, and of being a ‘coconut’ in South Asian communities. Farah explains:

I know how to sit and entertain the aunties, but I also know how to hang out with my *goray* (white) work mates. Its like I have multiple personalities, maybe in some situations some people won’t even recognise me, haha (she laughs nervously). Sometimes you’ve just got to put on a face and do what you gotta do, you know.

Farah echoes Goffman’s (1955; 1959; 1967) concept of ‘face-work’ and validates his claims on the interaction order; applying the dramaturgical perspective, Goffman believed that everyday life was created through interactions between individuals within ‘situations’, and in each situation individuals presented the most appropriate version of themselves that was required to achieve their aim within that specific social context, i.e. a ‘performance’ (Barclay, 2017; Manning, 2013). Farah’s subjectivity shifts based on the particular context she is in and the relations of power within each context (the ‘aunties’, the ‘*goray* (white) work mates’). Her ‘slipping subjectivities’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 73) are performative in nature, as the frequent process of making and unmaking subjectivity produce her as an unstable subject, an unfinished product of discourse and power. Farah uses her ‘multiple personalities’ to navigate through different ‘situations’; Superle (2010, p. 131) writes that “shifting from an emphasis on... so-called biculturalism to a picture of multi-layered identifications” can point “to a more complex understanding of the ideologies of ethnicity that are available to and reshaped by second-generation youth and of the strategies they use to manage these cultural and political fields”. Farah’s positioning as desi acts as an advantage for her, as it gives her the agency to move between different circles and thus keep power on the move, the opportunity to have the

‘best of both worlds’ and not be limited to a pendu’s outsider or foreign status, or a coconut’s colonised or whitewashed stereotype.

The varied and ambivalent meanings around ‘desi’ are important sites of analysis because they reveal how significant space, place, histories, and power are in the making, unmaking, and remaking of identities. As Aisha said, “I think identity, with heritage or ethnicity being implicit in that, is a very fluid thing and changes constantly.” Identity is always ‘in process’, always ‘being formed’ (Hall & Du Gay, 1996, p. 122). ‘Desiness’ highlights the continuous reinvention of contemporary diasporic South Asian identities in which white, national bourgeois discourses compete with transnational and ethnic discourses to form conceptions of desiness that are inclusive but also exclusive, open but also bounded (Kim, 2014). Desi thus emerges from, and as, the ‘in between’; as Amir says, from “trying to belong in some way here but also there,” “an in between culture”. Bhabha (1996, p. 54) also notes, “this ‘part’ culture, this partial culture, is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures” signifying “the impossibility of culture’s containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture’s ‘in-between’, bafflingly both alike and different”. In fact, it was Amir’s quote that first inspired me to conceptualise and recognise this ‘in between’, and to then dub my second-generation desi Muslim informants as the ‘in betweeners’- finding themselves in between *desh* (native land) and *videsh* (foreign land), in between British and Muslim and South Asian, in between freshie and coconut, in between fundamentalism and liberalism, and so on, all the while breaking open each of these categories and blurring the boundaries drawn between them. The following chapters are dedicated to the different aspects of how my second-generation desi Muslim informants navigate through the ‘in-between’, the various ways in which this ‘in-between culture’ manifests itself, the challenges they may encounter along the way and the norms and discourses they conform, resist and/or reimagine.

V. TANGLED- ‘In between’ normative expectations and the lived experiences of second-generation desi Muslim women

“Look, look what your daughter is doing!” my mom screamed as they burst into my bedroom. The phone was snatched from my hand as I was dragged from the bed in a flurry of slaps and shoves. “You little slut, you’ve got so much courage have you, to do this right under our noses and think we won’t find out? Now you’ll see the consequences,” snarled my father as he spat at me and slammed the door. This was the first time they found out I had a ‘boyfriend’. I was so bruised, I couldn’t chew my food for three days after.

It has been ten years since this incident, and I still find myself feeling anxious if I have to speak to my parents about the opposite sex. Mind you, my parents are both well educated, middle class working professionals. They’ve travelled extensively and would even be labelled as quite modern and unconservative by most desi⁸⁹ and Muslim standards. So, what could possibly have inspired them to react in this way- where they almost instinctively verbally, physically and emotionally abused their daughter, kept her locked at home and pulled her out of university for four weeks, just to show her the ‘consequences’ of what any 20-year-old girl would arguably, even invariably do, i.e. flirt with a boy. But I wasn’t just *any* 20-year-old girl- I was a 20-year-old girl from a ‘good’ desi Muslim family who was eligible for marriage, and as far as that label is concerned it automatically exempts me from having any elaborate concerns or curiosities about the opposite sex (or worse, the same sex, which in this context, is commonly utterly unfathomable).

Although the concept of diaspora does well in moving beyond existing ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ discourses, there is still a need for greater theoretical and empirical scrutiny in relation to gender and the diaspora, in order to try and theorise diasporic identity by recognising differences and thus avoiding essentialism (Anthias, 1998). In the previous chapter we explored the more general aspects of belonging, religion and ethnicity, and so in this chapter we shall turn our attention to the more gendered experience and implications of second generation desi Muslim migrant subjectivities. I would argue that this chapter has been written by applying a post-structural feminist perspective, however, I have also tried my best to include the voices of any male informants wherever they have offered relevant insight. Poststructuralist feminism is

⁸⁹ ‘Desi’ is popularly used to refer to people of South Asian origin who are not residing in South Asia (Kim, 2012).

a theoretical lens that pays attention to the issues of knowledge, power, difference, and discourse and how these intersect and intertwine in the lives of women by focusing on the minutiae of everyday experience (English, 2010). While Marxist and radical strands of feminism are deeply committed to changing social class, economy, patriarchy, and the state that limit women's opportunity and possibility, poststructuralist feminism instead focuses on how women are shaped or constituted as knowing subjects (by knowledge, discourse, and power within the social sphere (Foucault, 1980)), and how these women in turn exercise power themselves through every day micro-practices of resistance, technologies of power, and discourse (English, 2010). And so, while I began by asking, 'what discourses constitute and coordinate second-generation desi Muslim migrants' sexualities and womanhood and the ways in which they can enact and express them?', applying post-structural feminist thought enabled me to push that question further and ask, 'how do we recognise the dual processes of being subjected and of becoming an agentic subject playing themselves out in the narratives of the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' lives?'.

By recognizing that women are active participants in their own creation as subjects, poststructural feminism makes it possible for women to rework how they have been constructed and realise that they can, and often do, inhabit multiple and possibly contradictory positions at the same time (Honan, et al. 2000). Post-structural feminist ideas of subjectivity point to a construction of the 'self' that is fluid, contradictory, and produced in relationships with others and everyday practices (Jackson, 2004). In this chapter, my informants offer a critique and careful examination of taken-for-granted notions of subjectivity and identity that are available for desi Muslim women, their narratives showcasing how they constantly create new identities and subjectivities, in an attempt to move beyond societal labels, cultural expectations, and norms. Due to the sensitive (and gendered) nature of the discussions in this chapter, I found that my female informants were generally a lot more vocal and forthcoming than their male counterparts. Perhaps it was my own position as a female researcher that encouraged this, or perhaps it was so simply because these issues were more relevant and pressing for them.

There is no shortage of studies when it comes to the subject of 'British Muslim' (or alternatively, Muslim but also British) women, with literature ranging from their belonging (Roald, 2001; Sharify-Funk, 2008; Lyons, 2018; Phoenix, 2019, for example), their education and labour market participation (Ahmad, 2001; Ahmad, 2012; Miaari, et al. 2019), their appearance (Swami, et al. 2014; Allen, 2015), their presence in media and fashion (Kavakci &

Kraeplin, 2017; Warren, S. 2019), their experience of gender based violence (Chantler, et al. 2019), and the list goes on. There are also some interesting and insightful non-academic books such as ‘The Things I Would Tell You: British Muslim Women Write’ (Mahfouz, 2017), which I personally thoroughly enjoyed reading, as a range of voices from different contributors come together to prove that what it means to be a ‘Muslim’ woman is dependent on multiple different factors including, but not limited to, class, ethnicity, age, and even temperament.

Prominent in this field of writing is academic, Claire Dwyer, as a large body of her work is dedicated to studying young British Muslim women, the intersection of gender, ethnicity and religion, and the ways in which migration processes are gendered (Dwyer, 1997; Dwyer & Smith, 1998; Dwyer, 1999; Dwyer, 1999; Dwyer, 2000; Dwyer, 2003; Dwyer, 2008; Dwyer & Shah, 2009; Meer, Dwyer & Modood, 2010; Shah, Dwyer & Modood, 2010; Uberoi, Modood & Dwyer, 2011). Her contributions to the ongoing debates about religion, multiculturalism and the British public sphere are commendable, and she has also paid attention to the experiences of ‘South Asian’ British Muslim women in particular. In her chapter with Shah (2009), Dwyer interviews ‘British Pakistani’ Muslim women in Slough, and in her article ‘Negotiating diasporic identities’ (2000) she interviews ‘young British South Asian Muslim women’ from two schools in suburban Hertfordshire. However, the dominant voices presented in these instances are of women from a Mirpuri⁹⁰ Pakistani background, the parents of whom were generally employed in unskilled or semiskilled jobs, and while some of the respondents’ parents had professional or managerial occupations, their voices appear sparingly throughout the text only to provide “an effective contrast” (Dwyer, 2000, p. 476). Now the issue with this is highlighted by one of my key informants, 29-year-old accountant Aisha (who is ethnically Punjabi):

I fucking hate Mirpuris man, they’re so *jaahil* (illiterate), like I don’t want to be mean but seriously they come here and most of them are taxi drivers or claiming benefits after having so many children and they’re just in this little cultural bubble where they’re even more *pendu* than people in Pakistan. Honestly, you go to Pakistan and you’ll find people in Karachi or Islamabad who are way more advanced than these guys, they’re educated and more liberal, and just ugh, sorry, it annoys me so much because people don’t realise that not all Pakistanis or Punjabis here are Mirpuri cunts!

⁹⁰ Referring to people originating from the Mirpur District in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. Majority of the first-generation Mirpuris who migrated to the U.K. were not highly educated, having little to no experience of urban life in Pakistan (Werbner, 2005).

Aisha is not only recognising regional differences but also class-based differences between Pakistanis. She is quick to criticise Mirpuris for being in a “little cultural bubble”, referring to them as ‘pendu’. *Pendu* is derived from the Punjabi word ‘pind’, which literally translates to village, thus ‘pendu’ meaning someone who is from the village. In modern day Hinglish⁹¹, it is used as an adjective to describe someone who is ‘culturally backward’⁹². Here Aisha does not use ‘pendu’ to describe someone from the ‘pind’ in Pakistan, but rather as a socioeconomic positioning, signifying difference along perceived social characteristics and economic ability. For Aisha, advancement comes from education and having a more liberal mindset- qualities she finds Mirpuris lacking. Aisha’s annoyance at people not being able to recognise “that not all Pakistanis or Punjabis here are Mirpuri” shows us that the politics of recognition is such that it becomes crucial to consider socioeconomic status when it comes to representation. Despite educational studies sustained interest in class distinctions and hierarchy, sociological and anthropological migrant narratives (especially those of ‘British Pakistanis’) have paid more attention to Mirpuris and the ‘working’ class (see for example, Ballard, 1983; Baily, 1995; Bolognani, 2014; Cressey, 2006; Din, 2016; Shaw, 2001; Qureshi, et al. 2014, to name a few). The voices of the middle class, or rather those that self-identify as middle class, often go unheard or undocumented in comparison. This chapter, much like this thesis, contributes to addressing said gap in the literature by presenting the voices and experiences of my middle-class informants, and moving beyond the ‘British Pakistani’ or ‘South Asian’ academic categories by attending to ‘desi Muslim’ as a diasporic identity that includes Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims living in London.

Patriarchy and the Public/Private Dichotomy- Navigating through multiple competing discourses

Social relations that produce gender disadvantages can often be strengthened rather than weakened through the process of migration, with diasporic identifications working to reiterate existing patriarchal relations (Dwyer, 2000). 23-year-old Farah, reflects:

We live in a patriarchal society anyway, so I mean no matter which colour you are, you have more of an advantage than a woman. But when you’re a desi boy versus a desi girl, it’s very different, for example back in the day when a boy was born, they would give out *mithai* (sweets) for the boy but it wouldn’t really happen for the girl. Now

⁹¹ A blend of Hindi and English, in particular a variety of English used by speakers of Hindi, characterized by frequent use of Hindi vocabulary or constructions. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hinglish>

⁹² From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pendu>

things are changing a bit, but it's still, you know- a boy has been born! MashaAllah! Things like that.

I myself have seen this first-hand in my grandmother's different reactions and expressions to hearing the news of two of my expecting aunts who had a boy and a girl respectively. Even when I got married, one of the neighbourhood's desi aunty who came to visit said to me, "I pray Allah gives you a son quickly!", to which I replied, "I pray Allah gives me a daughter first". Just this small exchange is telling of the way power is distributed unequally from the moment of birth itself. Islam has placed significance on the birth of a daughter, as the Prophet (Peace be upon him) famously said, "if anyone has a female child, and does not bury her alive, or slight her, or prefer his male children to her, Allah will bring him into Paradise"⁹³, and "amongst the blessing of a woman is that the first born be a girl"⁹⁴. However, 'South Asian' cultural tradition places an overwhelming emphasis on sons as assets, bringing in wealth and forwarding the family name and lineage, while the daughters are viewed as '*paraya dhan* (foreign wealth)' which means their ultimate place belongs with their husband and in laws, thus making them a temporary fixture at their parent's home (Sangari, 2012). The focus is on men because it is the men who define the household, the society, and the nation; women's status in countries like India, Pakistan or Bangladesh is often purely relational (daughter, wife, and mother of father, husband, and son), thus drawing women into a traditional gender hierarchy (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). These attitudes deeply contradict the status of women in British society and nationhood, which publicly emphasise a global commitment to women's economic empowerment and gender equality⁹⁵, even though 'everyday sexism' may still exist from schools and streets to universities and workplaces (Phipps, et al. 2018).

Farah also acknowledges feminist politics in which women from different ethnic backgrounds may unite on specific issues that address unequal opportunity and gendered disadvantage ("no matter which colour you are, you have more of an advantage than a woman"). She recognises the way in which all women (albeit with differences in class, race and culture) are implicated in dominant power structures, specifically "a patriarchal society". The concept of patriarchy in contemporary feminism has received considerable attention and has been widely analysed as a system that oppresses women. Bhopal (1997) writes extensively on British 'South Asian'

⁹³ Ahmad, authenticated by Al-Hakim, graded Hasan by Ahmad Shakir. From: <https://aboutislam.net/shariah/hadith/hadith-collections/5-hadiths-girl-children/>

⁹⁴ Ibn Asakir. From: <https://www.theislamicquotes.com/islamic-quotes-about-daughters/>

⁹⁵ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-commission-on-the-status-of-women-national-statement> for example.

women experiencing two distinct forms of patriarchy; Muslim women (followed by Sikh and Hindu women) experience an intense form of ‘private’ patriarchy, which is based upon the household as the main site of female oppression and takes place through practices such as arranged marriages, dowries, the distribution of domestic labour and domestic financial organisation. Other ‘independent’ (read educated and employed) women are seen to experience a more ‘public’ form of patriarchy which is based upon the labour market as the main site of female oppression (Bhopal, 1997). And so here the dilemma begins to unfold- in the U.K. women’s status is not purely relational, yet within the desi household a woman’s relational status is still seen as normative- so what does this mean for our educated, employed, middle class desi Muslim women? 30-year-old paralegal Kauser, who is going through a divorce, comments:

Yaar (mate), it was so fucked up because I used to work like a dog all day and then come back home and he used to be like what are you lounging around for, look this isn’t clean, you can’t even cook this or that, and he used to make me feel like a shit mother because I was getting help from a nanny, and I just thought ke (that) wow is this all I am? Meri bas ye auqaat hai (Is this all I’m worth)? Kaam pe log meri izzat karte hain, aur yahaan ghar pe (At work people respect me, and here at home) I’m treated like shit. At work I am this strong woman who knows what she’s doing, who calls the shots, and at home I’m just, what, this useless woman? He used to be like tum kuchh zyada gori banney ki koshish kar rahi ho (you’re trying too much to be a white woman) and I would just think to myself what the fuck does that even mean? And I tried to make it work for so long you know, for my parents, for my kid, just thinking what will everyone think, and at some point you’ve just got to stop and think about yourself in all this because we as desi women we’re not taught how to do that, we’re taught to always put everyone else first, it’s what we’ve seen our mothers do their whole lives (she sighs, dropping her shoulders). That’s why I’m going to teach my daughter to be kind, but also to take care of herself and not take shit from anyone (she says with a nod).

While studies have shown that women achieve greater freedom after they enter the workforce, it remains questionable whether female participation in the work force has equalized gender roles to a large degree (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Although Kauser feels respected in her work environment, her ‘independent’ status makes her subject to an intense form of private patriarchy within the household (Bhopal, 1997). Here we begin to see the entanglement- Kauser is constituted in two discrete positions that require her to take up two different subjectivities at work and at home. Her success in both the public and private sphere is seen to be measured by opposing expectations- at work she was expected to be self-assured, assertive and “call the shots”, while at home she was expected to clean, cook and be a hands-on mother. In

‘traditional’ societies, females tend to be given more domestic responsibilities and males more non-domestic roles (Best & William, 1997). Even the way modern industrial cities are constructed suggests that women are viewed as “belonging” in the private domestic sphere of the home and neighbourhood, while men appear to be more dominant in the public sphere of the market workplace, public institutions, and political influence (Wekerle, 2018, p. 8). This daily back and forth between Kauser’s traditional household expectations and her contrary work expectations has a deep impact on her, making her question her identity and even her worth. Her failure to conform to her ‘traditional’ role of being a homemaker lead her to being accused of trying too hard to be a “*gori* (white)” woman. This is an interesting example of how even white women’s lives are racially structured by ‘whiteness’, which may entail a location of structural advantage (race privilege), a standpoint (a place from which white people look at themselves, at others, and at society), and a set of cultural practices (Frankenberg, 1993). This reiterates an important point- the study of gender must examine the influence of class, colour, culture, race, and ethnicity, and the implications this has for women and their individual experiences (Arrighi, 2007). Kauser’s experience of divorce made her re-evaluate her priorities by shifting her focus from “everyone else” on to herself, along with reassessing how she wants to parent her daughter. She acknowledges the influential role of family and community in gendered socialisation⁹⁶ and the consequent impact that has on individual decision making, even as an adult. 25-year-old investment banker Salman, notes:

You know how with *goray* (white people) once a kid turns 18, like that’s it, they’re an adult, you can’t really tell them what to do. Yeah, that doesn’t exist with desi parents. You can be 40 with your own kids for all they care but they’re still going to tell you what to do or what they think you should do. They’re just so used to micromanaging everything about your life. And they might have your best interests at heart, they usually do, but they just don’t know how it is with you personally. Who you are, what you like, things you do, that you can be different from them, and that it’s okay to be different. That thinking, that doesn’t really exist.

In this account Salman emphasises difference between him and his parents, a difference that becomes even more pronounced when viewed in comparison to “*goray* (white people)”. Intergenerational relationships and ‘conflict’ appear to be a dominant recurring theme in the literature on South Asian migrants, as it also highlights the difference between collectivist ‘desi’ and individualistic ‘goray’ cultures (see Larkin, 2004; Modood, 2005; Singla, 2005;

⁹⁶ ‘Socialization’ may include instilling respect for authority, inculcating differential roles of male and female in society, encouraging conformity to social roles through beliefs, rituals, and customs, and emphasising the validity and significance of ‘cultural truths’ (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000).

Robinson, 2005; Lewis, 2007; Samuel, 2010; Pahl, 2012; Somerville & Robinson, 2016; Lessard-Phillips, 2017; Iqbal & Golombok, 2018, for example). 28-year-old Samira elaborates:

It's a little bit confusing for my generation because my parents were born in Pakistan, so their upbringings are obviously very different to mine. I live in England, I'm exposed to different things and therefore now my desires are different, and my expectations are different. And so, for my generation I would say it is harder because the sense of self is different. And if you're trying to please your parents in the very general desi way, and un-please yourself, it's very hard. It depends on your parents and your relationship with them and how Pakistani you are or how traditional you are, and then religion comes in to play too, so how religious you are. So yeah. It's not just one thing that affects you (she said, as she fiddled with the rings on her fingers).

Diasporic identities are not just materialised through space and place, but indeed through time (Ang, 2001). Samira's second-generation desi identity not only reveals the tensions between the 'here' and 'there' of England and Pakistan, but also the 'then' and 'now' that constitute a diasporic politics of identity (Mallapragada, 2014). Again, much like Salman, she too emphasises difference- in upbringing, desires, expectations, and "sense of self". This is important, and so I shall pin this thought here as we try to unravel the makings of this different 'sense of self' throughout the chapter. Samira also lists multiple factors that have an effect on her- her relationship with her parents, her cultural identity, and religious affiliation. She equates "how Pakistani you are" with "how traditional you are", linking ethnicity with tradition. The ways in which diasporic identities are constructed is also dependent upon how 'traditional' culture is incorporated, with parents and primary caregivers playing a fundamental role in the transmission of religious and cultural values (Samuel, 2010). The significance of parental authority is evident when Samira highlights the difficulty in "trying to please your parents in the very general desi way", which comes at the cost of 'un-pleasing' yourself. The pressure to please parents in order to impress the ethnic community is what second generation youth often find so problematic that it contributes to intergenerational tension (Somerville & Robinson, 2016). We can see that this tension is carried forward into adulthood, but what is interesting is how the second-generation young adults have developed strategies to deal with it. 24-year-old Mehreen, shares:

I think times have changed and there was more of an alignment between parents and their children maybe in the earlier generation. Or maybe there wasn't even an alignment but there was an understanding that you'd basically listen to your parents and just say *jee Ammi, jee Abbu*, just *jee jee jee* (yes mother, yes father, just yes yes yes). When I was younger, I used to argue a lot, but now, I'll just nod my head and agree like an

achhi bachi (good girl). You can't challenge them, otherwise you're *badtameez* (ill-mannered). Sometimes they'll listen and most times they won't. I think most of us just say *jee* to shut them up and then do what we want to do anyway.

In collectivist cultures such as South Asian ones, families tend to be characterized by respect for parental authority and strong, interdependent ties (Bejanyan, et al. 2015). Even in Islam, there are several verses in the Quran where kindness to one's parents is emphasised; for example, the verse that states, "And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], 'uff,' and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word."⁹⁷ (Quran, 17:23). Mehreen, however, documents changes across time- first the generational shift in "alignment" and "understanding" between the first and second generations, and then a personal shift in her own attitude from when she was younger and "used to argue a lot" to now simply nodding her head and agreeing. We see Mehreen taking up the role of "*achhi bachi* (good girl)" rather than being "*badtameez* (ill-mannered)" to position herself in a way that her parents recognize as legitimate and perhaps even laudable. Poststructuralist discourse entails a move from the self as a noun (and thus stable and relatively fixed) to the self as a verb, always in process, taking its shape in and through the discursive possibilities through which selves are made (Davies, 1997, pp. 275). And so, we see Mehreen nodding her head and agreeing not as a performance that reveals her true self, but rather as an excerpt from her life-in-process, her multi-layered life unfolding. 25-year-old Laiba, adds:

You know how in Shrek⁹⁸ he says ogres are like onions as in they have so many layers? I think I'm like that too. My family don't have the slightest clue about some of the things that I've done, or still do, and I'd much rather keep it that way, haha (she laughs). Growing up I went to an all-girls school and a lot of my friends were white, but every time I'd tell my parents my best friend Bianca is doing something so why can't I, the reply I'd get is *humaare gharo mein ye sab nahi hota, unka mahaul alag hai* (this doesn't happen in our houses, their environment is different), yadda yadda. And then in university and when I started work, I realised you have to speak up and have a voice otherwise you won't be heard. But I think the desi mentality is very much still like *larkiyan* (girls) should have some *sharam* (modesty/shame), be soft spoken, gentle, polite, which basically means they should just shut up and take shit *araam se* (calmly), which is bullshit in my opinion. It's funny because you look out here and it's all like hey let's address equality, women can do whatever the fuck they want, go girl power, yay, everywhere around you, but with us I know that at the end of the day, my decisions

⁹⁷ <https://quran.com/17/23>

⁹⁸ A 2001 animation movie about a grumpy ogre, who must go on a quest and rescue a princess. From: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0126029/>

aren't just mine to make because at least the big ones- maybe not the day to day ones like the fags⁹⁹ I have here and there- but the big ones, like who I'm going to marry, that my family will defo (definitely) care about, so, so much for freedom aye.

Laiba documents her metamorphosis by recognising the “layers” to her life as she transitioned from school to university to work. By gaining membership into these social institutions, Laiba also gains access to alternative discourses and subjectivities that make her question (“so why can't I?”) and critique the normative. We see Laiba echoing Kauser's concerns from an earlier excerpt, of finding herself negotiating between competing and seemingly contradictory public and private discourses and behavioural expectations. As Gee (1996, p. 9) writes, “each of us is a member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our ever-multiple identities. These Discourses need not, and often do not, represent consistent and compatible values”. Laiba highlights this incompatibility through her example of female voice; at university and the workplace “you have to speak up and have a voice otherwise you won't be heard”, whereas in ‘desi’ spheres women are still expected to be “soft spoken, gentle, polite”. Prevailing gender stereotypes prescribe ‘modesty’ (*laaj/sharam*, which Laiba also mentions) as appropriate, ornamental female behaviour within the traditional culture, with many studies of South Asian women (including orientalist to feminist accounts) depicting ‘voicelessness’ and ‘submissiveness’ (Gold, 1997). Laiba herself does not prescribe to the idea that women “should just shut up and take shit *araam se* (calmly)”. Hussain (2017) documents more ‘vocal’ identities of South Asian women in Britain in her book, *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*, arguing that this vocalness does not signal a simple move towards adopting a more ‘modern’ British culture; instead, South Asian women claim their right to speak on their own behalf and define their issues according to structural parameters (such as gender, ethnicity, *ghar* (home), and *mahaul* (environment) in the case of Laiba) that influence their experiences (Hussain, 2017). These social structures and processes that shape subjectivity are situated within discursive fields where language, power relations, and discourses exist, intersect, and construct competing ways of giving meaning to and constructing subjectivity.

Laiba also touches upon feminist discourse that she finds “everywhere around you”, which aims to give voice to women's experiences and seeks to reveal and overcome androcentric biases, using research as a tool for emancipation and social change (Sisson & Iverson, 2014). The emancipatory “let's address equality, women can do whatever the fuck they want, go girl

⁹⁹ UK slang for cigarettes. From: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fag>

power” messages equip Laiba with a critical stance against the social contexts of patriarchy, encouraging her to construct new meanings and subjectivities. Such constructions, however, are bound by time and context, as Laiba stresses “with us I know that at the end of the day, my decisions aren’t just mine to make”. Neoliberalism works through the long-standing liberal ideologies of personal responsibility and individual freedom, especially the freedom to choose (Wilson, 2017). This ‘freedom to choose’ is also mobilised as a rallying point in feminist discourse to challenge and resist entrenched forms of gender inequality in all areas of political, social, and economic culture (McKenna, 2015). However, as Fraser (2017b, p. 282) notes, by shifting the narrative from equality to meritocracy, the rise of ‘progressive’ neoliberalism with its liberal-individualist mindset in reality glosses over the “more expansive, anti-hierarchical, egalitarian, class-sensitive and anti-capitalist understandings of emancipation that had flourished in the 1960s and 1970s”. The public rhetoric emphasising ‘freedom of choice’ also has a problematic flipside as it produces self-enclosed individualism, rallying neoliberal subjects against public or collective forms of action (Wilson, 2017).

This can become particularly challenging for second-generation desi Muslim women like Laiba, who find themselves dealing with diasporic notions of collective identity (Vertovec, 1997), religious notions of collectivist community and responsibility (Soutar, 2010), and gendered notions of women as the ‘bearers of tradition’ (Gupta, 1999). The ebb and flow of multiple conflicting discourses, our memberships in and out of them, and the choices we make constitute and coordinate our sense of self and our everyday lives (Jackson, 2004). Laiba navigates through multiple discourses and finds little victories in her “day to day”, such as her decision to smoke “fags... here and there” but struggles with “the big ones” like who she is going to marry. This brings us to our next section, where we will explore how the issues of sex and dating highlight and exemplify the conflicting discourses and structural constraints that second-generation desi Muslim women are subject to, but also what they are able to do to these norms and discourses in return.

Gendered “Double Standards”- Articulating sexuality and re-signifying religiosity as processes of ‘in between’ subjectivity

In 2017, Channel 4 aired the first episode of their ‘Extremely British Muslims’ series, and it was interestingly titled ‘All the single Muslims’. The synopsis read- “This episode meets young men and women who are looking for spouses, while balancing their 21st-century lives with the expectations of an older generation”¹⁰⁰. My informant (who grew to become my friend), Samira, rings me reminding me to watch it. Now here’s what happens. The show opens with a young and cheerful hijabi¹⁰¹, 24-year-old Bella. She has completed a degree in fashion and is now looking to get married. She’s tried meeting people herself but hasn’t been successful and has therefore enlisted the help of the Birmingham Central mosque’s matrimonial service. There are about three men in the room (probably in their 50s or 60s), with folders in front of them and Bella has to decide whether she likes a potential suitor based on their job title, origins, surnames and other facts about their life. She knows nothing about their personalities, and it didn’t appear that she had access to any photos either. One of the older men takes the lead and asks her what kind of a husband she’s looking for. She answers. She wants an outgoing man that doesn’t quite want to ‘settle down’ yet, she wants to travel and do things together first and then think about having children. The man at the mosque says, “but his parents are probably waiting for a grandchild and you’re going to deprive them of that?”. To which she shyly answers, “but it’s my body”.

Next, the show introduces us to Ashrab, the son of a professional matchmaker and her only unmarried, still living at home child. His mother is clearly not happy about this and doesn’t make an effort to hide it either. Ashrab or ‘Ash’ as he is commonly referred to, is now 28 years old and tells the audience about a girl he’s getting to know. We’re not told exactly how they got to know each other but it’s fairly clear that it wasn’t through his mother, as she is soon invited to the girl’s family home so that the two families can meet each other. We’re told that just as Ash’s mum was leaving the house, she placed her matchmaking business leaflets on the coffee table. It comes as little surprise when we later find out that Ash did not end up marrying this girl. The presenter, who was funny, relaxed, and clearly good at his job, asks Ash if he would ever date a girl. Ash hesitates for a while and says no. He would only do it the ‘Islamic’ way (I remember laughing at this bit and wondering what even *is* the Islamic way nowadays?).

¹⁰⁰ From: <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/extremely-british-muslims>

¹⁰¹ A woman who wears a hijab. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hijabi>

Right after that, the presenter speaks to Ashrab's mother (the matchmaker/matchbreaker). She goes on to tell us that it is rare for young Muslims to date and that if they did indeed happen to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, they would be cut off from their families.

As a viewer there were a few key takeaways from this episode- one, that finding a spouse was certainly not a solo venture for 'all the single Muslims', and two, the influence of parents and the older generation has a definite impact on the choices and outcomes of such ventures. And contrary to Ashrab's mother's assertion that it is 'rare' for young Muslims to date, I would instead argue that it is rare for young Muslims *not* to date. Despite popular stereotypes and widespread expectations, many young British Muslims do date, or have dated, always finding new ways of thinking and talking about their intimate relationships (Ali, et al. 2019). Based off my personal observations, conversations and experiences I've seen and known guys with beards date, girls with hijabs date, girls without hijabs date, guys from conservative families' date, girls from liberal families' date, almost everyone dates. Are we supposed to date? Islamically and culturally, no. Do we do it anyway? Most of us, yes. But the implications of dating are gendered, as 27-year-old LSE Law graduate Saima highlights:

When a guy has a girlfriend it's a lot more acceptable than when a girl has a boyfriend. There's lots of different double standards and it's bloody annoying. My older brother has been in many relationships and my parents knew about it. My younger brother is seeing a Polish girl at the moment, but my mom is really horrible about that too to be honest. My parents are like oh look at that *gori* (white woman), she's got herself such a good boy, look how she's secured him, blah blah blah. I mean, it's not her fault that your son has decided to spend his weekends and his free time with her and not you. That's his fault and not the girl's. You don't even know her. His family should be his problem, it's his thing that he needs to sort out and take care of. People always blame the girl in everything. Always (she crosses her arms indignantly).

While gender double standards have been documented in multiple arenas such as alcohol use (de Visser & McDonnell, 2012), job applications (Foschi, et al. 1994; Doerer, et al. 2017), and especially sexuality (Kim, et al. 2019; Ricciardelli & Adorjan, 2019; Allison & Risman, 2013; Greene & Faulkner, 2005), Saima calls out the "double standards" in parental attitudes towards dating, which include significantly more permissive attitudes toward a son's courtship experiences than a daughter's courtship experiences. The persistence of parenting gender double standards is seen to contribute to the persistence of separate and distinct gender roles, making egalitarian gender role attitudes seem unlikely and the gender gaps in family behaviours continue to remain (Axinn, et al. 2011). A gender based double standard, wherein

one set of social and moral norms govern the male and another govern the female, can be linked closely to the prevalence of patriarchal beliefs that afford men the right to exercise power within their family through enforcing and reinforcing the inequality of power between males and females, along with social arrangements that are designed to give males extra privilege (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2019). Saima recognises this privilege when she critiques the power relations within her family, arguing that her brother should be held responsible for his decisions “to spend his weekends and his free time with her... That’s his fault and not the girl’s”. Again, we begin to see a display of feminist politics in which women from different ethnic backgrounds may unite on specific issues that address unequal opportunity and gendered disadvantage (Naples, 1998). Saima expresses a sense of female solidarity with the “*gori* (white woman)”, even though they share neither ethnicity nor religion. In this context, being a woman trumps being desi and/or Muslim for Saima, as she condemns the patriarchal practices that “always blame the girl in everything”. This rhetoric of pinning the blame on women is also apparent in a lot of the accounts of women who have suffered abuse such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, emotional violence, sexual assault, rape and so on (see for example, Gill, 2004; Dasgupta, 2007; Ahmed, et al. 2009; Hasan & Rahman, 2019). Aisha comments:

Because we’re girls I think our parents have been more protective of us, because they see us as more like at risk of going out and getting taken advantage of, or getting raped God forbid, and then that’s a big deal because *phir tumhari shadi kaise hogi* (how will you get married then) and all that crap. I mean I get them being protective, I’d be protective of my kids too, but it’s the reasoning behind it I have a problem with. *Matlab padha dia, likha dia, lekin aakhir mein* (Meaning they’ve taught us, got us educated, but in the end) it all comes down to *tumhari shadi kaise hogi* (how will you get married then), like come on man there’s more to life than getting married and having children. Maybe if our society focused more on making sure the men aren’t entitled shits rather than obsessing over women *to ho jayegi shadi araam se* (then getting married would happen comfortably).

While first generation parents are keen for their children to adopt certain aspects of ‘Western’ culture like education or occupation (what is often considered as ‘structural assimilation’¹⁰²), they also expect their offspring to shed this ‘foreign’ influence at will under other circumstances (particularly when it comes to issues of dating and marriage) (Gupta, 1999). Concerns around marriage and marriageability emerge consistently as a central feature of first and second generation South Asian immigrant women’s meaning making about their gender

¹⁰² Structural assimilation is defined as the immigrant’s entrance into the “social cliques, clubs, and institutions” of the host society at the primary group level, and occurs when immigrants have entered fully into the societal network of groups and institutions, or the societal structure, of the host country (Vacca, et al. 2018).

socialization and experiences, as well as their family and community relationships and interactions (Mehrotra, 2016). The gendered ‘cultural script’ that centres around marriageability and marriage includes ideas of compulsory (heterosexual) marriage by a certain age, messages about whom one should marry, and emphasises qualities and behaviours which make one more marriageable (Mehrotra, 2016). Education and family status emerge as key to marriageability, and so South Asian Muslim women are allowed to pursue an education and a career because it enhances the reputation of their parents, enabling them to find a better marriage partner for their daughters (Ayyub, 2000) (as Aisha corroborates in the excerpt above, “*Matlab padha dia, likha dia, lekin aakhir mein* (Meaning they’ve taught us, got us educated, but in the end) it all comes down to *tumhari shadi kaise hogi* (how will you get married then)”).

However, the belief that the possession of a degree confers greater choice in matrimony for Muslim women (and is therefore highly valuable to ‘secure’ an appropriate match), is challenged by the lived realities around the difficulties in meeting suitable partners due to factors such as increased age or being ‘over-qualified’ (Ahmad, 2012). I myself was subject to these concerns when I decided to undertake my PhD, as I overheard a family friend tell my father over the phone, “*bhaiyya ladki PhD karegi to kahaan se Doctor ladka dhoond ke laoge uske level ka? Aur kya buddhiya hoke shadi karaoge iski?* (brother if the girl does a PhD then from where will you find a Doctor boy who is up to her level? And will you get her married when she’s a granny?)”. Aisha challenges this narrative when she asserts, “there’s more to life than getting married and having children”, echoing the feminist discourse of ‘a woman’s right to choose’ and to ‘control her own body’, promoting both decisional and bodily autonomy (Smyth, 2002). Another arena where this autonomy is expressed and exercised is in second-generation desi Muslim women’s sexuality and sexual activities, making them both ‘bearers of power’ and ‘objects of risk’ (Renold & Ringrose, 2013) (as Aisha also recognises, “because we’re girls... they see us as more like at risk”). Samira reveals:

Life is a constant battle isn’t it. I know in Islam you’re not meant to have sex before marriage, but my personal attitude is it’s fine, just do it. So... I have sex (she pauses confidentially). I know my younger brother does too. He’s bought condoms from my Amazon account! Haha (she laughs, and I giggle along with her). But like I still feel guilty about it- during, even...

“During, as in while you’re having sex?” I asked.

(She gave me a mortified look and nodded, laughing wistfully). Yeah, I know. I’m laying there thinking ohhh my god this is so *haram*¹⁰³ innit. And then I’m like no no

¹⁰³ Forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/haram>

stop thinking that, you need to relax! Otherwise the whole thing becomes so awkward. I swear sometimes I think *goray* (white people) have it so much easier. Can you imagine the sex is still going on, and I'm constantly feeling guilty? But it's weird, at the same time, I don't feel guilty also because I wanted it. But I'm constantly in the middle. It's this constant battle.

Samira frames her sexual encounters through a religious lens that juxtaposes her “personal attitude”. Although the sacred texts of most major religions prohibit premarital and extramarital sex, public opinion research suggests that Muslims place special emphasis on maintaining virginity until marriage (Finke & Adamczyk, 2008). Sex before marriage (*Zina*¹⁰⁴) is strictly prohibited in Islam (thus, “so *haram* innit”) and is considered to be one of the major sins within the religion. However, while Muslim populations tend to hold traditional views regarding sexual norms for the most part, studies have also shown that the sexual practices of Muslims often deviate from proclaimed Islamic standards, which are centred exclusively on heterosexuality and conjugal life (Jaafar, et al. 2006; Dialmy, 2010). Samira deviates from normative standards, finding agency in her personal slogan to “just do it”, but this agency also appears to be conditional as it is accompanied with guilt. Sexual guilt is defined as a type of self-imposed punishment one assigns for either violating or anticipating the violation of one's standards of ‘proper’ sexual conduct (Mosher & Cross, 1971).

What is particularly interesting here though is how Samira tries to negotiate with this guilt via her discursive practice of individual choice and self-governmentality (“at the same time, I don't feel guilty also because I wanted it”). Foucault developed a notion of governmentality that includes all the strategies, tactics and authorities (both state and non-state alike) that seek to shape, regulate, or manage the conduct of individuals or groups (Inda, 2005). And so, while religious governmentality seeks to guide people's sexual conduct by delineating sexual norms and appropriate forms of sexual behaviour, Samira counters this with a neoliberal form of ‘self-governmentality’ (Wilson, 2017). Her sexuality becomes a position of power and a point of resistance, albeit a resistance that is never complete but is instead an ongoing negotiation, a “constant battle”. Samira finds herself “constantly in the middle” of competing discourses, her articulations of sexuality emerging as processes of an ‘in between’ subjectivity. Although an adherence to religion and tradition often tends to be dismissed as ‘passive, static and located in the past’ (Roodsaz & Jansen, 2019), we notice that while Samira is willing to embrace

¹⁰⁴ Zina is generally defined by Islamic Law as unlawful sexual intercourse, i.e. intercourse between individuals who are not married to one another (this encompasses both extramarital and premarital sex). From: <https://www.definitions.net/definition/ZINA>

seemingly ‘modern’ notions of sexual liberty and individual self-fulfilment, she is unable to abandon or even dismiss her religious subjectivity, having to actively negotiate with her normative religious standards. In a similar vein, Mehreen recounts:

One of my friends right, he broke up with this girl he was interested in because she lied to him about her past. He wanted a girl who had never been in a relationship before because he had lived his life a certain way observing certain boundaries and expected the same in return. I’m no one to judge, I’ve had sex before, but fine maybe his rationale seemed fair, I got where he’s coming from. Now what’s not fair is when you’ll get those Indian and Pakistani Asian boys who drink and have sex before marriage and do all that- it’s very double standards- that they will do all that but then they’ll get married to a girl say from back home or they’ll marry the virgin that their parents want them to marry. Either way, they will judge you massively for doing the same thing that they’re doing. And if they don’t judge you, they’ll be the ones that just don’t believe in God anymore and that’s another extreme. I don’t want someone that doesn’t believe in God. I would like my kids to know about Islam, even though I’m not very conventionally religious or practicing myself.

Researchers often argue that individuals who believe religion is important and are religiously ‘active’ are more likely to delay first sex until marriage (see for example, Rostosky, et al. 2004; Gilbert, 2008; Chamrathirong, et al. 2010; Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012). This is true to an extent, as we see in the case of Mehreen’s male friend who “had lived his life a certain way observing certain boundaries” according to religious prescriptions. However, Mehreen defies the aforementioned assumption (that a higher degree of commitment to religious faith is directly correlated with a lower rate of sexual contact experience), as despite having “had sex before” we can see that religion continues to hold importance for her. Mehreen does not “want someone that doesn’t believe in God”; in fact, both Muslim men and women tend to consider spousal religiosity as an important factor in their decisions to choose a mate, even though the influence of spousal religiosity shows little to no correlation with subsequent marital satisfaction (Asamarai, et al. 2008). Mehreen’s desire for her “kids to know about Islam” is a testament to the continued resilience and relevancy of families in the transmission of religious traditions and beliefs to younger generations (Bengtson, et al. 2009).

However, Mehreen does not subscribe to the idea that being a ‘virgin’ is a sign of high moral standing or Muslim religiosity (Eşsizoglu, et al. 2011), for her religiosity is about internal beliefs, not external actions. Brizer (1993) outlined ‘extrinsic religiosity’ to include the observance of a number of religious practices such as fasting, frequency of attending places of worship such as mosques, praying and the observance of religious prohibitions. Mehreen

instead focuses on internal religiosity (her repeated emphasis to “believe in God” for example), and so does not consider her sexuality as a sign of religious piety or purity. She does not position herself outside the folds of Islam just because she has indulged in sex, instead she positions herself outside the folds of ‘convention’ (“I’m not very conventionally religious or practicing”). Recognising the nuances of shifting attitudes in immigrant Muslim sexual cultures in this format allows us to move beyond an understanding of religion as necessarily ‘conservative’ and outside the framework of ‘change’ (Roodsaz & Jansen, 2019). Mehreen understands her religiosity and sexuality on a conventional/unconventional spectrum rather than in religious/irreligious or practicing/not practicing oppositions, enabling her to organise her experiences and consciousness through multiple competing discourses that attempt to constitute her subjectivities.

Mehreen also echoes Saima’s earlier criticisms of “double standards”; and while Saima spoke of the double standards in parental attitudes towards dating, Mehreen draws our attention to the gendered double standards in sexual activity and agency. Weeks (2010) argues that the struggles over sexuality are indeed struggles over power, which promote the expressions of dominance and subordination through the creation of gendered double standards. Multiple studies have revealed the existence of a ‘double morality’ regarding premarital sex, wherein despite considering sex before marriage to be ‘*haram*’, male Muslims generally do not seem to comply with this rule and are not called to account for such transgressions (Smerecnik, et al. 2010). So, while male sexuality generally goes unquestioned and unmonitored, the same cannot be said for Muslim women. Pervasive cultural traditions that underscore the significance of women’s sexual purity in Muslim societies tend to perceive female virginity in socio-physical terms, as a sign of virtue and respect of women (Eşsizoglu, et al. 2011), thus making women who seek and experience the same privileges of sexual freedom as men lose ‘respect’, often becoming victims of social ostracism (Hanassab, 1998). Mehreen argues that these “very double standards” are “not fair”, introducing us to not just collective judgement, but also gendered judgement practices (“they will judge you massively for doing the same thing that they’re doing”). And while Mehreen tries to counter this with her own non-judgmental attitude (“I’m no one to judge”), other social actors tend to be less forgiving. Aisha reveals:

I would never tell anyone in my family. And I wouldn’t tell my friends back home either, because of the judgement. I can’t be bothered to have that whole conversation with them, to be quite honest. I’ve spent so many years fighting, I don’t need to have that conversation of sex before marriage as well. They’re quite religious and this is

obviously not an okay thing to do so I don't see the point of it. There are other people I can talk to about that stuff. Like my Hindu friend, I could talk to her about it. With another close friend of mine, she's a proper practicing Muslim and I think she knows I do have sex, but it's a respect thing where we've never said it out loud. I've said I've hooked up with someone, but I'd never say- 'we had sex' (she makes imaginary air quotation marks with her fingers here). Because she is religious, I know that she'd feel like it is her duty to tell me that this is not right and to continue telling me that this is not right. So, it's easier to just not talk about it. It'll end up putting a strain on the friendship, which can be isolating. When I was younger it used to frustrate me a lot more that I couldn't talk about it. But now I choose friendships where I can talk to them about it- even this Muslim girl at work, she gets really awkward about sex- but I've made that relationship where I've said I'm not going to allow judgement, and if you're going to be that judgemental prick then I'm going to tell you to fuck off (this time she raises both her middle fingers up defiantly).

The importance of family and community in South Asian diasporic discourses cannot be undermined, as key cultural characteristics include: the primacy of family and communal goals over individual wishes; the emphasis on propriety and social codes; the appropriation of sexuality only within the context of marriage; and sexual restraint and modesty (Jaafar, et al. 2006). Rudrappa (2004, p. 96) argues that the immigrant family and normative sexuality are mutually constitutive; "the immigrant home so essential for expressing ethnicity, is based on disciplinary sexuality". But apart from religious doctrines and value systems, many Muslim women tend to avoid premarital sexual activity because of fears surrounding the judgement a Muslim woman may receive from her family, friends, community and Allah (God) (Meldrum, 2014). It appears these fears don't deter Aisha from engaging in premarital sex, but they do influence her decision to keep her sex life hidden from her family and friends. While sexual secrecy creates guilt in most cases of young Muslim women (Ozyegin, 2009), Aisha does not display any signs of guilt. Sexual guilt involves worrying about what one will think of oneself and violating one's own personal standards, whereas sexual anxiety includes worrying about what others will think and violating normative social standards (Ali-Faisal, 2014). Aisha repeatedly voices this anxiety and frustration, with an added weariness ("I can't be bothered to have that whole conversation... I don't see the point of it"). In South Asian social and cultural organizations (where women generally have peripheral roles), there is a high social cost associated with being vocal or expressing dissenting voices in the community (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). This in turn creates a pattern of silence around sex, sexuality and sexual violence (Abraham, 1999). Aisha underlines the barriers to sexual communication as not just limits on *who* the conversation can take place with, but also *how* the conversation may happen.

Aisha reveals the unspoken truth between her and her “proper practicing Muslim” friend (“I think she knows I do have sex”), attributing their silence around the subject to “a respect thing where we’ve never said it out loud”. In South Asian culture, giving respect to your elders is stressed repeatedly and is conveyed via linguistic formalities (such as addressing them with ‘*aap* (honorific you)’ instead of ‘*tu*’ or ‘*tum*’ (informal you)) and other nonverbal gestures of politeness (Baig, et al. 2014). Aisha extends this respect to her peer as well, using alternative linguistic cues to communicate her sexually active lifestyle, showing how the discourse around contemporary Muslim sexuality includes pop culture terminology such as “hooked up¹⁰⁵”. The explicit ‘we had sex’ is left unsaid but understood in this context, as a method of bypassing the need for ‘*naseeha*’¹⁰⁶ (advice/recommendation). Correcting a fellow Muslim’s mistakes is a part of giving *naseeha* and *dawah*¹⁰⁷ (call to Islam), which is a religious obligation on all Muslims, thus making Aisha’s friend “feel like it is her duty” to correct her by telling her “that this is not right”. Islam provides a unique perspective on social control, as it accounts for all the main parameters underlying social control mechanisms- religion, morality, and law (Al-Khalifah, 1994). And so, Islam is not just a personal project, but rather a social, collective, and familial endeavour (as we see in the example of Aisha and her friend). Although the individual is the primary reality which is recognised by both the Quran and the Sunnah (teachings) of the Prophet, there is little doubt that Islam emphasizes the co-operative and collective functioning of human beings as a society (Jalal, 2000).

While Aisha clearly acknowledges that her sexual activity “is obviously not an okay thing to do”, she also shows us how transgressing the normative can be an “isolating” experience. The way Aisha counters this is by arguing for identity politics, exercising individual choice (“now I choose friendships where I can talk to them about it”), and agency (how she claims to actively make relationships where she has created the boundaries wherein judgement is not allowed, and if one does cross those boundaries she has the power to tell them to “fuck off”). Young South Asians often try to reconcile with the secrecy around their premarital relationships by having “trust in themselves as agents, as makers of their own destinies” (Gupta, 1999, p. 30). Aisha thus emerges as an agentic subject that is not simply produced by or bound to particular

¹⁰⁵ To begin a romantic or sexual relationship with someone. From: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hook-up>

¹⁰⁶ From: <http://www.dawahskills.com/abcs-of-dawah/correcting-mistakes-lessons-from-the-quran/>

¹⁰⁷ From: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e511>

discourses and relations of power, as she carefully navigates through, and actively seeks to take control of her relationships, her conversations, and most importantly, her positionality.

Living the “double life”- Mapping space, power, identity and agency via multiple subject positions

Despite second generation desi Muslim women’s conscious attempts to exercise agency, agency itself remains a strategic and provisional response, one that is bound by context and discourse. To illustrate this point further, I’m going to share a recent occurrence with a dear friend and informant, Rumana (who kindly allowed me to share this story). Rumana is a 29-year-old singleton, living and working in London, fiercely independent, and I can personally vouch that she works as hard as she parties. Now she had decided to visit her family home and parents in Slough for the weekend, and we had agreed to meet for dinner and a shisha¹⁰⁸ once my husband returned from work. My husband and I were running a bit late, so we offered to pick her up from her home and the conversation that followed was this (as copied from my text messages):

Me: So where do we pick you up from?

Rumana: Nah, you don't need to pick me up.

Me: We want to go somewhere else outside Slough that's why we said we'll pick you up!

Rumana: Hmm. I can't really stay out that long by the way. My mum won't be that impressed. Also, with no offence intended to your husband of course, but I don't massively want to be picked up because my area (like yours) is full of nosy people.

Sorry, cos I think you two think I can be proper out and about in Slough but I'm mega conservative here. The not being picked up is because he is a man. Obviously.

Me: Okay... are you sure? We can pick you up from the end of the road instead of in front of the house?

Rumana: Sorry that I'm being this way, but Uxbridge or out of Slough is defo not the kind of evening I was imagining. I thought we'd be in Slough so I'd stay local and be home early. Also, I am from Slough so Uxbridge is still local in terms of shisha cafes etc (loads of Slough people go there). Sorry, because I'm being the one with lots of limitations. We can meet another day if you guys want and in London? Then I can stay out as long as you want and go to as many shisha cafes as you want. Lol. Have you left yet?

Me: Nope, we're about to. Getting ready

Rumana: I think we're gonna need to cancel Sahrish. This is late.

¹⁰⁸ An oriental pipe for smoking marijuana, tobacco, etc, consisting of one or more long flexible stems connected to a container of water or other liquid through which smoke is drawn and cooled. From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/shisha>

I'm sorry. This is late for my parents. By the time you guys get here, it will be past 8. Probs quarter past at best, but probs later. I can't really justify that to my parents.
Me: Oh ok, don't worry about it. I get it...
Rumana: I just try and respect their rules when I'm home innit.
Yeah, you get it init. Sorry, cos you just don't know my Slough life.
Tbh¹⁰⁹, even going out at 7 is late for me here. Lol
Me: But your parents, they don't seem that strict...?
Rumana: My parents are fine. They are just traditional, and I am not home much so I like to stick to their preferred home and out times when I'm here.
Me: Hmm, yeah I understand.

I was left rather startled after this exchange- the Rumana I knew was the one who would push me to come out and socialise and give me a hard time if I made any excuses not to. As it turns out, this was only one version of Rumana that I had been exposed to, the Rumana outside of home. Rumana at home was a different version, and I didn't know much about her "Slough life". While in her London life she could "stay out as long as you want and go to as many shisha cafes as you want", in her Slough life she made an extra effort to be deliberately considerate of two things- family and community. South Asian women consistently narrate that family (both nuclear and extended) are the primary communicators and enforcers of a gendered cultural script, and so relationships with family, and often community, become the site of tension if and when scripted expectations aren't met (Mehrotra, 2016).

For Rumana, these expectations included staying indoors after a certain time, and not socialising with members of the opposite sex. Gender segregation remains the norm in many South Asian societies and has led to the creation of separate domains for males and females, both in the home and neighbourhood (Aftab, 2008). Prescriptions for female social conduct include limitations placed on young South Asian women especially when it comes to socializing with men; these limitations can in turn alienate them from other social groups (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Rumana did not want to be picked up by me and my husband, not only "because he is a man", but more importantly because her neighbourhood "is full of nosy people". Slough is located in Berkshire, England, 20 miles west of central London, and has a majority of 39.7% that identify as 'Asian' or 'British Asian', followed by a 35.7% White British population¹¹⁰. Slough has been referred to as an 'immigration town' in the news (Bilton, 2017), and immigrants are known to locate to 'ethnic enclaves' within metropolitan areas for their social and economic well-being (Loury, et al. 2005). Rumana's street in particular is

¹⁰⁹ Acronym for 'to be honest'.

¹¹⁰ From: <http://www.slough.gov.uk/council/joint-strategic-needs-assessment/ethnicity.aspx>

densely populated with desi households; this becomes problematic for her as South Asian immigrant communities use gossip as a gendered form of control and a mechanism of surveillance, where young women are unable to test gendered boundaries because community members would inform families of their movements and transgressions (which could range from wearing clothing deemed inappropriate, to being seen alone in public with men) (Subramanian, 2013). As Farah explains:

There's less than two degrees of separation maybe, haha. Everyone somehow knows everyone, or they'll know someone who knows someone else, and then everyone is in each other's business all the time. Aunties will talk about this one's kid and that one's kid and then show off about their own kids, like they've got nothing better to do. And then news travels fast, *matlab baat kahi se kahi pahaunch jayegi* (Meaning the talk will reach from where to where (i.e. get blown out of proportion)). That's why every discussion with the parents loops back to *magar log kya kahenge* (but what will people say)?

The fear of community gossip and surveillance inspire Rumana to become “mega conservative here”, adhering “to their preferred home and out times” as citational practices that take up the norms of the culture of her home and community in order to maintain social relations within that context, thus producing Rumana as an effect of this performance. Yet this performance does not fully constitute her either, as there will always be another (and perhaps even multiple) versions of Rumana in London and elsewhere. In his study of young Turkish Muslim women, Ozyegin (2009) also found that those who lived away from family either on or off campus had plenty of opportunities to transgress boundaries, and their ‘secret’ lives were often more extensive than those young women who lived with their families in Istanbul and had limited opportunities to transgress, thus making their ‘secret’ lives harder to manage. It is interesting to recognise the politics of space, place and context in this way to study the discursive possibilities that are available to Rumana. Jameson (1991) argues that the individual needs to be mapped by the spatial specificity of their subject positions, to be able to uncover the hidden human geography of power. The spatiality of urban regeneration and the politics of diaspora, for example, demonstrate how space is not simply a passive, abstract arena on which things happen but is itself filled with politics and ideology (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). However, ‘space’ is a tricky concept to deal with as it can become quite difficult to determine whether the space being invoked is ‘real’, ‘imaginary’, ‘symbolic’, a ‘metaphor concept’ or some other combination between them (Keith & Pile, 1993). Let’s take a look at two interview excerpts that explicate this further. Laiba shares:

When I had to choose a university, I chose one that was far enough away from home so that I wouldn't even have to come back every weekend. I went to Leeds because I didn't want to be in London and have the chance of bumping into someone I knew. I wanted to feel completely free, where no one knew who I was or my family or my background. I even had two separate Facebook accounts, one for relatives and family where I wouldn't post much, and one for my friends and stuff where I could pretty much post whatever I want.

Saima also recounts:

I try to not go for dates in Central London anymore, especially busy places like Oxford Street because I've learnt my lesson! I was out with this guy once, and he wasn't even like my boyfriend or anything yeah and guess who comes and sits at the table behind us- one of my mom's friends with her guests from Pakistan! I was like fuckkk (she stretches this word out), I hope she doesn't recognise me, but she did, and it was super awkward because obviously I had to say salaam and then awkwardly be like aunty this is my friend, and I was dying inside, just dying. She obviously told my mom back home and I got sooo much shit for it, like fuck my life, worst nightmare! Now I just look behind my back, I think that experience has made me quite paranoid, haha.

Both Laiba and Saima's accounts undo traditional notions of space as fixed, bounded, and stable (Tilley, 2006), and instead showcase how space has an impact on subject identity and biography. Laiba wanted to establish some geographical distance between herself and her "family" and "background" so that she could "feel completely free". But despite her physical distance, she still had to navigate through virtual space by managing her online presence on Facebook where she had created two separate accounts. 'Imagined communities', such as virtual communities, which are free of the constraints of place and space play an important part in the lives of diasporic individuals, as online space can be used to produce communities that do not require spacial proximity (Wenjing, 2005). Again, similar to Rumana, we see that the presence of "relatives and family" (in this case, online), produce two different virtual versions of Laiba- one that is censored and cautiously curated, the other posts "whatever I want". Saima's account further complicates the idea of space as grounded and absolute, for it moves beyond binary oppositions such as 'here/there', 'home/out', 'Slough/London', for example.

While Rumana's 'London' life offered her considerable flexibility, freedom and agency, Saima shows us how this discourse can be disrupted when an "aunty" makes an appearance. Saima's agency became conditional even though she was away from home in Central London, as her outing with a male was relayed "back home" by her mother's friend, and she was held accountable ("I got sooo much shit for it"). Her account highlights the effects of what I refer

to as the ‘desi communal panopticon’ (inspired by the Foucauldian Panopticon (Foucault, 1995)). As second-generation desi Muslim migrants are placed under watch in school, on the streets, online, etc., they soon realise that:

Each individual is fixed in his place. And if he moves he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment... [in the panopticon] Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere... Hence, the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power (Foucault, 1995, pp. 357-361).

The productive effects of power as exercised by the institution of family and community endorse a continuation of group identity, tradition, values and belonging. Saima’s account illustrates how ‘home’ and ‘community’ with its modes of surveillance are not rooted in space and place, but are in reality mobile and continuously on the move (hence she has to “look behind my back”), encouraging us to rethink notions of what it means to be ‘at home’ or in a ‘culture’ as symbolic and active concepts rather than fixed or stable social spaces. Rumana, Laiba and Saima’s spatialised politics of identity reveal the relationship between space, place, and identity, with space itself emerging as a site of both conformity and resistance.

What appears with certainty in all three of their accounts (along with most of the interview excerpts in this chapter) is the fact that at least in the lives of second-generation desi Muslim women, family and community are positioned in almost inescapable power blocks. This positioning, along with dominant patriarchal power relations, lead to the development of ‘double’ (and perhaps even multiple) lives like Rumana or Laiba’s. Samira adds to this conversation:

I mean where do you draw the line? And how do you live with yourself afterwards? Religion tells you one thing, society another, your heart is telling you something else. Your body wants something else. Your parents have these expectations. Your partner will have these expectations. And then there’s you. And you’re caught in between all this. It tears you apart on the inside (she sighs). So, you live a double life, like I do. You have excess acid in your stomach from stress. And you grind your teeth at night. And you are unable to sleep. I have made my decisions and they have caused me this stress and anxiety. Like the English say you have made your bed, now you must lie in it!

I nodded along and asked her if she had ever considered telling her family about how this double life made her feel. She gave me a tired look in return and replied:

If I were to be completely open about this, with my parents for example, it would be them that would have the excess acid and the stress. I’m not saying that all this is my fault or it’s their fault. To be honest, it’s not anyone’s fault. We are a product of our different upbringings and surroundings and we’re just different. So, either I have the

stress of living this double life or they have the stress of knowing. And I don't want to put them through that. It's hard you know. It's very, very hard.

Young Muslim men and women learn to manage their social relationships from the time of adolescence itself, by developing cognitive abilities that involve perspective taking and self-reflection (Jaafar, et al. 2006). We see Samira doing the same as she takes self-responsibility (“I mean where do you draw the line?”) and holds herself accountable through self-reflexivity (“And how do you live with yourself afterwards?”). This form of ‘reflexive modernization’ is based on the idea that individual actors are capable of self-monitoring their activities, which in turn contribute to the way social situations are perceived, assessed, and challenged (Lee, 2006). Samira represents another level of modernity that is ‘self-confrontational’ (Beck et al., 1994, p. 5), by critically appraising both institutional and individual behaviour. She lists her own competing desires (like her “heart” and “body”) against the power relations between different stakeholders in the making of her identity, such as “religion”, “society”, “parents”, and “partner”. South Asian diasporic individuals’ battles with sexuality, race, and gender are often filtered through their position in their own families and their communities (Bhatia & Ram, 2004). Samira highlights her own “in between” position as a constant process of negotiation and mediation that is connected to a larger set of socio-political and historical practices, which are in turn associated with and shaped by gender, nationality, race, religion, family, sexuality, and power. We also notice how these factors attempt to control not just Samira’s actions but also work towards constituting her subjectivity (“it tears you apart on the inside”).

Samira illustrates the effects of her “double life” as they physically manifest themselves (in the form of acidity or insomnia, for example), affecting her mental health and emotional well-being (“they have caused me this stress and anxiety”). Several large-scale community studies conducted in the U.K. have found higher rates of depression and anxiety amongst Pakistani Muslim women, especially in comparison to their Indian Hindu and white counterparts (Anand & Cochrane, 2005). Acculturation¹¹¹ studies have shown how ‘culture’ exerts an overwhelming influence upon the experience and development of psychological symptoms for South Asian women in Britain (Karasz, et al. 2019). Socio-cultural factors that tend to play a salient role in producing intense distress and mental illness among young South Asian women include (but are not limited to) arranged marriages, family disputes over lifestyle and marriage choices, marital conflict, difficulties with in-laws, social stigma, expectations of submission and

¹¹¹ The development of new cultural traits or identities as a result of cross-cultural contact (Vivanco, 2018).

deference by women to family elders and men, and culture conflict (Anand & Cochrane, 2005). In his study of depression amongst British Pakistanis, Malik (2000) found that affective, somatic and socio-behavioural symptoms of distress were linked to 'external' factors (such as situations and relationships) and were commonly described and expressed in relation to others and to social roles. We see a similar pattern with Samira, who accepts her "stress and anxiety" as a by-product of her fulfilling her role as the daughter who is trying to protect her parents from "the stress of knowing". McClelland, et al. (2014) support the general hypotheses of British Asians having more stigmatising attitudes towards mental illness than British Whites; in their comparative study between British Bangladeshis versus British Whites they found that older British Bangladeshis tend to hold increasingly negative and superstitious beliefs about depression, considering it an illness which brought a sense of shame and loss of dignity to the individual and their family. Samira's "double life" is, in many ways, lived *for* her parents and family, reiterating their significance in how second-generation desi Muslims construct and coordinate their multiple subjectivities. Croll (2006) argues that in 'Asian' societies, it is the familial contract and familial exclusion rather than a social contract and social exclusion that are more pertinent to individual well-being.

The performance of multiple, alternating, and even paradoxical 'lives' or 'selves' is not just influenced by structural conditions and limitations, but are also deeply affective affairs that are invested with emotion. Samira does not paint herself as the victim or her parents as the oppressors, there is no blame to be pinned ("to be honest, it's not anyone's fault") other than the politics of difference ("we're just different"). She herself applies a social constructionist approach, arguing that "we are a product of our different upbringings and surroundings". It becomes important to recognise this difference because it creates the need and space for the "in between", a positioning that moves against holistic integration/assimilation/acculturation ideas of 'culture shedding' or the 'unlearning of one's previous repertoire' (Bhatia & Ram, 2004). Laiba advocates the systematic review and analysis of the nature of boundary construction, and emphasises the power to change such boundaries, as she writes in her Instagram post:

Our customs, beliefs, traditions and values are passed down from our parents who themselves had these passed down to them. As kids we sponge in as much as we can, but as we get older and life kicks us in unpleasant places, we must become more critical of the world and think more before we absorb. Sometimes this has us wanting to revolt from all that was passed down to us as if it was some conspiracy to keep us from being ourselves, but we know it wasn't. Our parents wanting us to be doctors, lawyers, or engineers has much more to do with their desires of security than their hate towards our

other passions. Some of the customs, beliefs, traditions and values passed onto us have lost relevancy in the 21st Century, while others become the core of our foundation. As we grow up, we get to decide what we keep and what we discard. It's important to bring some critical thinking back to our childhood and figure out how much of that needs to stay with us moving forward. We're allowed to give things meaning and value and we're allowed to divorce other mindsets and ideas. Preserve what you want, and thank the rest, as you let it go.

Second-generation desi Muslim migrants often cannot and do not want to entirely give up or "discard" their "customs, beliefs, traditions and values", only to replace them with a new (or Western) set of cultural and political behaviours, thus emerging as agentic subjects who consciously, selectively and reflexively "give things meaning and value" while they "divorce other mindsets and ideas". Although the informants of this study are quick to critique and endorse "critical thinking", this chapter has shown us how religion, family and culture continue to hold importance in their lives and are not fixed or rigid concepts, but are continuously being reassessed, reworked and reimagined by them as situationally agentic individuals.

VI. ‘MUZMATCHED’- mobile dating and the experiences of second-generation desi Muslim migrants

“Bana lo, bana lo, banaaney mein kya harj hai. Wo Nabila aunty ki beti ne bhi to banaya thha, aur unko dekho kitna achha ladka mila. Aaj kal to sab hi aise online dhoond rahe hain, achhey ghar aur khandaan ke log bhi. Kahaan se milenge log varna, aasmaan se thhodi na tapkenge! Tumhaare Papa ne sabko keh to rakha hai pehle se ke nazar mein rakhna agar koi achha ho to, lekin humein khud bhi dhoondna chahiye. Aise hi baithhey rahenge to kuchh bhi nahi milne wala. (Make it, make it, what’s the harm in that? Even Nabila aunty’s daughter had made one and look how they found such a nice boy. Nowadays everybody is looking online, even people from good homes and families. Where will you find people otherwise, they’re not going to fall from the sky! Your father has already told everyone to keep an eye out if there’s someone good out there, but we should look for ourselves too. If we continue to sit like this, we aren’t going to get anything.)”

These words of wisdom came from my mother, as I sat shifting uncomfortably at the idea of having my profile put up on a popular matrimonial website. My younger brother sniggered behind her, clearly enjoying this discussion at my expense. I felt a range of emotions that fuelled my reluctance to give in to her suggestion- disappointment that the suitors they had introduced me to hadn’t quite aligned with my preferences (or me with theirs perhaps), frustration over not having been able to find a partner myself (despite trying), and embarrassment that the time had now come to resort to online resources. But perhaps my mother made a valid point when she raised the question- where will we find people otherwise?

As South Asian diasporic subjects migrate and reimagine space in a globalised world, information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a significant role in the maintenance of social and familial ties, cultural production and consumption, and most importantly, the pursuit of intimacy, love, and marriage (Raja & Renninger, 2015). At the time this conversation took place, we were still relatively ‘new’ migrants to the U.K., living in a North West London neighbourhood where there seemed to be more white than desi people. My father, who happens to be a very sociable man, had indeed exhausted all his contacts “to keep an eye out” for me. And yet, I was struggling to find a match in UK’s ‘South Asian’ population of 4.2 million people (which still makes only 7.5% of the total population)¹¹². In all fairness, my suitor didn’t just have to be ‘South Asian’- he had to be desi, Muslim, educated, and from a ‘good’ middle

¹¹² Based on the 2011 Census data, from : <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest>

class family (this was the list my parents kept rattling off to anyone who would listen, and the list I myself had somehow grown to expect over the years). Sabur (2014) lists age, beauty, educational qualification, occupation, personal reputation and family background as key factors the middle class consider in choosing potential partners, explaining how these criteria become valuable at both the personal and familial level. I remember Uncle Junaid, one of my father's friends, sitting in our living room saying:

Aaj kal to achhey rishtay milte hi nahi, pata nahi kahaan ghaarat ho gaye sab ke sab. Ya to badey high-fy society log milenge jinke bilkul hi dimag kharab hain, jo bilkul hi Islam, culture sab bhool gaye. Ya phir wo log hain jinki abhi bhi wo chhotay gao wali mentality hai, unke saathh bhi nahi jam sakti. Matlab hum jaise middle class families milni bahaut mushkil hai yahaan pe (You just can't find a good marriage proposal nowadays; goodness knows where they've all disappeared. Either you'll get high society people who have completely lost their minds, and totally forgotten Islam, culture, everything. Or you'll get those people who still have that small village mentality, and we can't get along with them either. I mean it's really difficult to find middle class families like ours over here).

My father, nodding his head vigorously in agreement, complied with “*bilkul sahi kaha*, Junaid *bhai* (you said it absolutely right, brother Junaid)”. It became clear to me that discussions around marriage and marriageability often intersect with Islam, culture, class and location. Uncle Junaid was not concerned with typical marital mobility (Charsley, et al. 2012), in fact he outlines the issues with both, marrying up and down, while articulating his preference to find “*achhey rishtay* (good marriage proposals)” within “middle class families”. He critiques “high society” people for forgetting their religio-cultural background, but conversely also criticises what he considers to be low society people for continuing to have a “small village mentality”. There is something to be said about the first generation desi Muslim middle class migrants' acculturation strategy (Berry, 1997) here; Uncle Junaid argues against the higher class' assimilation strategy of not wishing to maintain their cultural identity and seeking daily interaction with other cultures, but also argues against the lower class' separation strategy of holding onto their original culture whilst avoiding interaction with others. He advocates an integration strategy instead, displaying an interest in maintaining one's original culture while having daily interactions with other groups (Robinson, 2009). It is for this reason that non-marital cohabitation and mixed marriages (including both religious and ethnic intermarriages) remain infrequent amongst the 'South Asian' population in the U.K., with South Asians continuing to maintain a high degree of social exclusiveness as far as marriage patterns are concerned (Voas, 2009).

I just want to take a quick moment here to clarify that neither my family nor I was opposed to an ‘arranged’, or ‘love’, or ‘semi-arranged’ (Diamond-Smith, et al. 2019), or ‘arranged love’ (Kapur, 2009), or any other format or combination of marriage- the issue was that regardless of the mode of marriage, it was proving to be increasingly challenging to find a ‘compatible’ match¹¹³ (Davé, 2012). Given the specifications of what we were looking for in a diasporic setting, and the fact that ‘traditional’ modes of matchmaking were no longer serving us efficiently, a move to using online resources became inevitable. It is not surprising then that an increasingly globalized middle class remains the prime target audience of matrimonial websites, and hence becomes the most important class in analysing the changing discourses surrounding marriage and relationships (Titzmann, 2013). Matrimonial websites are still considered to be ‘new spaces of matchmaking’ and a ‘modern’ undertaking as they highlight the importance of ‘choice’ and individual will (Bhandari, 2018). But in a continuously evolving virtual world, finding love and intimacy online has now moved on to GPS (Global Positioning System) based mobile phone dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble and OkCupid¹¹⁴, to name a few. Sumter, et al. (2017) narrow down people’s motivations to use dating apps as a range of the following reasons- love, casual sex, ease of communication, self-worth validation, thrill of excitement, and trendiness. Dating apps are characteristic of a ‘postmodern’, consumer society, where “anyone can be anyone” (Jagger, 2001, p. 42), as these online platforms offer numerous identifications and a range of subject positions for today’s individuals (for example, Tinder allows its users to identify as one of nearly 40 genders). Antonutti, et al. (2019) argue that the emergence of online dating apps has created an ‘incessant’ ‘techno-liquid’ society, listing certain characteristics of the ‘postmodern man in the digital age’ as follows- narcissism, speed, ambiguity, the search for emotions (sensation seeking), and the need for infinite light relationships (p. 321). But what if a person is looking for just one serious relationship- specifically marriage- with a list of added filters such as education, employment, religion, ethnicity, and so on?

The move to using niche dating apps has become a popular trend in the online dating industry, as they target specific niches and offer extremely specialized services that are not available on mainstream online sites or mobile apps (Blackwell, 2016). The three most popular segments

¹¹³ Davé (2012) studies the idea of ‘compatibility’ as more than just about love, or national and cultural identities, as it also includes pleasing and reconciling all parties involved in the process of matchmaking (especially the families) to live and, hopefully even, love without conflict.

¹¹⁴ From: <https://www.independent.co.uk/extras/indybest/gadgets-tech/phones-accessories/7-best-dating-apps-free-london-for-relationships-students-9273415.html>

for niche targeting strategies include religious dating, ethnic dating, and senior dating (Lemel, 2016). One such niche app is ‘muzmatch’, catering to the single Muslims market, where one can ‘join over 500,000 Single Muslims finding their perfect partner in the halal, free, and fun way.’¹¹⁵ Muzmatch was established in 2014 by CEO Shahzad Younas who recognised that “Muslims don’t really date, we get married. Mainstream apps don’t serve this kind of market.”¹¹⁶ We have already established in the previous chapter that Muslims do date and explored the gendered double standards and implications re dating, and so in this chapter we shall turn our attention to ‘muzmatch’ and the experiences of my informants that are using it (along with some of my own experiences of being on the app). I invite the reader on a journey along the process of setting up a profile on muzmatch, through which emerge the politics of identity, religion, ethnicity, class, and gender, as I attempt to analyse the concerns and complexities of its users. Some key questions I engage with include: What makes muzmatch ‘halal’¹¹⁷ and how is ‘halal’ reconceptualised in this mobile dating format? How different or similar is muzmatch to other dating applications in promoting consumption or engaging in ‘pseudo-individualization’¹¹⁸? What does muzmatch’s user narratives tell us about the single Muslims market and intimate partner choice? To what extent does this form of mobile matrimonial seeking perpetuate or challenge traditional socio-cultural norms? It is important to study the everyday discursive interactions in which young Muslims engage, and what those might be able to tell us about ‘heterogeneous sets of cultural systems’ (Morey and Yaqin, 2011) and the contemporary understanding and framing of love, relationships, and marriage amongst second-generation middle class desi Muslim migrants.

Online movements and global digitisation have garnered the attention of scholars from various disciplines for a fair few decades now. Conversations around online dating, romance, and matchmaking, in particular, have been of peak interest (Whitty, et al. 2007). A range of scholarship has emerged on various issues relevant to the subject, including ‘data markets’ and the ‘data cultures’ of dating apps (Albury, et al. 2017; Atkinson, et al. 2018; Wilken, et al. 2019), gender construction and performances (MacLeod & McArthur, 2019; Ahlm, 2018; Bivens & Hoque, 2018; Chan, 2019), self-presentation and authenticity (Ward, 2017;

¹¹⁵ As described on: <https://muzmatch.com/>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/muslim-dating-app-muzmatch-raises-funds-to-expand-overseas-a3753151.html>

¹¹⁷ Halal is an Arabic word that literally translates to ‘permissible’, i.e. sanctioned by Islamic law. From: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/halal>

¹¹⁸ ‘Pseudo-individualization’ is understood as a deceptive technique that creates an illusion of specialization (Blackwell, 2016).

Chamourian, 2017; Schreurs, 2019; Mason, 2016; Duguay & Duguay, 2017), and the social implications of online dating including abuse and harassment (Hobbs, et al. 2017; Hess & Flores, 2018; Thompson, 2018). When it comes to Muslim online dating practices, there are a number of studies focusing on the Muslim American experience, particularly the experiences of Muslim women (for example, Rochadiat, et al. 2018; Al-Mansur, 2018; Hammer, 2015; Rochadiat, 2015; Piela, 2011; Lo & Aziz, 2009; Haddad, et al. 2006). Al-Saggaf (2013) makes an exception when he studies interpersonal trust in Muslim matrimonial sites from an exclusively male perspective, with ten all male participants. In terms of the ‘British Muslim’ online dating applications context, the research available is mostly new (Ali, et al. 2019; Chambers, et al. 2019; Tiller, 2018; Ahmad, et al. 2016), with ‘muzmatch’ itself making an appearance in two books (Bunt, 2018; Kesvani, 2019), two scholarly articles (Ali, et al. 2019; Chambers, et al. 2019), and two thesis projects (Phelps, 2016; Rooij, 2016). While scholars such as Gary Bunt have dedicated their life’s work to studying contemporary Islam, Muslims and the internet in the UK (and abroad) (Bunt, 2000; 2003; 2009; 2018), the issue persists that contemporary mobile dating practices of young Muslims in Britain remains understudied. Similarly, while there is excessive material on ‘South Asian’ online matrimonial systems (recent examples include, Sharma, et al. 2019; Das, 2019; Chattopadhyay, 2019; Rajadesingan, 2019; Samanta & Varghese, 2019; Ramachandran, 2019; Mishra & Jayakar, 2019, to name a few), I address the specific diasporic ‘desi’ Muslim online dating experience of my second-generation informants in London.

‘Halal’ is open for business, and interpretation- A look at muzmatch’s marketing campaign

Online dating, particularly in developed countries, already accounts for a substantial proportion of the initiation of romantic relationships (Finkel, et al. 2012). Prior to the rise of the internet, adopting traditional methods of finding a spouse was a challenge for many Muslims in the United States and across the world (Lo & Aziz, 2009). Traditional sources of matrimonial facilitation, like relying on kinship ties or word of mouth, became increasingly inaccessible especially in the case of migrant diasporic populations (Bernal, 2014). This in turn triggered the development of new social networks and platforms. One of the first sites to cater for a niche single Muslims market was ‘singlemuslim.com’¹¹⁹, developed in the year 2000, by then 20-

¹¹⁹ <https://singlemuslim.com/>

year-old design student, Adeem Younis. The matchmaking site now boasts of nearly a million UK active users, with 50,000 (and counting) SingleMuslim.com weddings recorded (Adams, 2017). Many similar sites have been developed since then including ‘Muslima.com’¹²⁰ in 2006, ‘LoveHabibi’¹²¹ in 2009, ‘Pure Matrimony’¹²² in 2010, ‘Minder’¹²³ in 2015, to name a few examples. However, the app that stood out the most in terms of relevance and popularity amongst my informants was ‘muzmatch’, with 18 people having been on the app, and 12 that were still using it (7 women and 5 men, whose views and voices are featured in this chapter). 28-year-old software engineer, Shafiq, shared:

There are quite a few options to choose from online, but I’d say apps like Minder¹²⁴ and Plenty of Fish¹²⁵ are more like for flings. Pretty casual, it’s more of the hooking up vibe. But if you’re serious about finding someone, I guess that’s when you’d use something like muzmatch. When you’re more ready to be serious or wanting to settle down, you know.

Muzmatch as a Location-Based-Real-Time-Dating (LBRTD) app represents a departure from ‘old-school’ dating sites as it relies on the affordances of mobile media (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). As of 2019, muzmatch has more than 500,000 active users across 190 countries¹²⁶, although Britain still accounts for around half of these (Onita, 2018). I too had made a profile on the app (admittedly not for research purposes), and in fact this is how I came to meet my own husband! I still remember how long I had been deliberating over downloading muzmatch, until one fine night in January 2017, after having a big cry over my singledom and some much needed encouragement from a friend who had had recent success with the app, I bit the bullet and looked it up on my mobile. Muzmatch is easy to download on any smartphone with a 30 second sign up process. Upon opening it in the Appstore, I read that “Photo privacy, *Wali*¹²⁷/chaperone support, and ethnicity/sect/religiosity filters have already helped over 15,000 Muslims meet their ideal marriage partner. Whether you are Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Turkish, Arab, Iraqi, Iranian, Somalian, French, Afghan or Indonesian, muzmatch is the place to find your

¹²⁰ <https://www.muslima.com/>

¹²¹ <https://www.lovehabibi.com/>

¹²² <https://purematrimony.com/>

¹²³ <https://www.minder.app/>

¹²⁴ Minder, also known as the Muslim Tinder, is a location-based dating app that primarily caters to the needs of the western Muslim community. From: <https://www.datingcout.co.uk/minder/review>

¹²⁵ Currently known as ‘POF’, it is a mix of a dating site and a matchmaker service where you can either browse freely and search for other users that match criteria that you nominate, or you can utilize POF’s matchmaking capabilities such as “Ultra Match,” which lists the top 50 most compatible members with you. From: <https://www.datingcout.co.uk/pof/review>

¹²⁶ From: <https://muzmatch.com/en-GB/stories/press/muzmatch-reaches-500000-users-continues-growing/>

¹²⁷ The term *Wali* (loosely translated as guardian in English) can be defined as a person who has the authority to give away a woman in marriage under Islamic law (Mohd., et al., 2015).

partner.” This sounded rather appealing. I then Googled the website for more information (read validation) and read that “there are plenty of online dating apps to choose from but what makes muzmatch unique is our exclusive focus on catering to Muslims seeking dating and marriage while adhering to their Islamic values and beliefs. We genuinely understand the importance of finding someone who shares your cultural or religious background.”¹²⁸ Asamarai, et al. (2008) argue that both Muslim men and women tend to consider spousal religiosity as an important factor in their decisions to choose a mate, even though the influence of spousal religiosity shows little to no correlation with subsequent marital satisfaction. Similarly, while some South Asian men and women do marry out of the community, the majority of South Asians are likely to want to marry someone from their own ethnic group (Bhopal, 2009). While we shall delve deeper into these issues as we move further along, several nuances are worth noting at this point- we are already starting to get a picture of the continued emphasis muzmatch places on its religious quotient but it also consciously markets itself as a diverse platform that is sensitive to cultural boundaries, while actively recognising that its audiences do apply ethnicity, sect and religiosity filters when searching for a partner.

Upon opening the app, before you can sign up or log in, you are greeted with a page that is titled with beautiful Arabic calligraphy saying ‘Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem (In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful)’. It then says ‘muzmatch is for anyone seeking a Muslim marriage,’ followed by the first condition you must accept to continue using the app- ‘Keep things halal. You must adhere to sensible Islamic etiquette with regards to your behaviour on muzmatch, not doing so will lead to a permanent ban from our service.’ But how exactly does one ‘keep things halal’? And what may be considered as ‘sensible Islamic etiquette’ and what isn’t? ‘Halal’ is an Arabic word which literally means ‘permissible’ or ‘lawful’, and is defined against that which is haram, meaning ‘impermissible’ or ‘unlawful’ (Fischer, 2011). While ‘halal’ was traditionally used with reference to food production and consumption, it has now proliferated into a wide range of non-food products (beauty, medication and health products, for example) and services (such as banking, insurance, tourism, education, and of course, matchmaking) as part of a rapidly expanding globalized market (Lada, et al. 2009). ‘Halal dating’ is itself a fairly recent development, a term that describes a model of dating where the couple date with the intention of marriage and do so in a religiously correct way, including limits on physical intimacy (Bendixsen, 2013). But this

¹²⁸ <https://muzmatch.com/>

leaves open to debate the question of who says what is ‘halal’ or ‘haram’ - is it the individual whose conscience is at stake, or family/community members who might judge them, or religious authority figures, or even some higher religious authority such as (a reading of) the sacred Islamic texts and what Allah/God would want (Ali, et al. 2019). One of my desi friend’s mothers, who I lovingly call ‘aunty’ and am quite close to, had the following opinion when I discussed getting on muzmatch with her:

Dating is not halal. How can it be? This style of talking to ten different people at the same time like *The Bachelor*¹²⁹, what is this? Haram Sahrish, this is a Western thing, not a Muslim thing. Muslims don’t do this. In Islam, you consider one *rishta* (marriage proposal) at a time, decide yes or no, and then move on to the next one. It’s not right if you don’t focus on that one person properly and give them a fair chance. This is why we have so many single brothers and sisters right now,” said Aunty Madiha. “This is a failure of our community. We don’t talk to our kids. We haven’t been able to build safe spaces for them to socialise. The mosque isn’t a community centre. Everyone is just busy thinking of themselves and competing with each other, like Westerners do.

I receded in quiet contemplation as my friend and Aunty Madiha went on to discuss this further. One of the reasons for the increasing popularity of ‘halal’ dating services is the fact that parents are no longer able to set up potential spouses (Billaud, 2019). Aunty Madiha acknowledges this as a communal “failure”, especially since marriage is viewed as the collective responsibility of Muslim minority communities who utilize communal structure, social and political activities, online sites, and traditional forms of marriage arrangement through mediators and family networks in order to get married (Hammer, 2015). While Aunty Madiha considers the mosque as a “safe space” to socialise, Bendixsen (2013) makes the argument that new technology may potentially create an acceptable and religiously correct space where people can get to know someone and interact with them. For example, e-mail, messaging applications, and Skype with webcam have made it possible to allow for more intimate conversations, where two young people can interact with each other in a more private setting whilst still upholding the religious boundary of not physically being in the same space without supervision prior to marriage (Bendixsen, 2013). However, the issue still remains- the association of a term derived from Islamic jurisprudence (‘halal’) with one derived from the “Western” matchmaking industry (‘dating’) continues to be incompatible, even ‘haram’, for Aunty Madiha (“Haram Sahrish, this is a Western thing, not a Muslim thing”). She critiques the essentialist ideals of meritocracy, selfishness, and competition that are advanced by

¹²⁹ A reality-tv series where “a single bachelor dates multiple women over several weeks, narrowing them down to hopefully find his true love”. From: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0313038/>

neoliberalism (Biressi & Nunn, 2014) which underpin the matchmaking market. The commodification of courtship and dating are powerful examples of the neoliberal market economy at work (Zheng, 2019), and Muslim dating apps are no exception. 25-year-old Laiba comments:

I don't know if like, dating could ever like, properly be halal, you know? I mean, what is halal anyway, different people consider different things halal right. Like some people will only eat halal meat if its proper certified, but some people think if you are in London or like a predominantly Christian or Jewish country then you can eat all the meat, it's fine, and some other people are like just say '*Bismillah*'¹³⁰ and it's all good. So, you know, I think halal is just about your *niyyah* (intention), isn't it. There will be people on muzmatch who have that genuine good intention of not to fuck people around, and then there'll be assholes on the app as well. I think they push for it to be 'halal' (she makes air quotations with her hands here) as more of a branding thing, oh like halal nail polish you know, so that more Muslims would be like okay yeah cool, now I can buy this or whatever, to make themselves feel better, you know.

Laiba recognises that 'halal' is no longer just a purely religious issue, but appears in the realm of diaspora, business and trade as part of a 'globalised religious market' that is imbued with ethics, politics and power (Fischer, 2010). Islamic branding processes have had a substantial impact on the meaning of halal, moving it away from a spiritual ethos towards more of a business commodity (Wilson & Liu, 2011), "a branding thing" as Laiba says. In fact, the symbolic legitimacy of the term 'halal' reveals the tacit admission that activities thus labelled are, in reality, not entirely aligned with Islamic principles (Yassine, 2014). Not all Islamic brands are entirely or legitimately 'halal', but marketing communications and branding need to encourage and nurture what is halal (even if the status of being halal is temporal), so that they may move beyond selling a 'cultural' product (Wilson & Liu, 2011). Halal is understood as a spiritual need of Muslim consumers (Alserhan, 2010), that plays a significant role in their life choices by sending them a signal to purchase and consume products or services which have been deemed 'permissible' (Ahmad, 2015). But what is 'permissible' remains relevant to consumers, as is the case in the halal cosmetics and toiletries industry (Aoun & Tournois, 2015), which Laiba briefly touches upon as well ("oh like halal nail polish you know"). She also gives us the example of varying attitudes and standards when it comes to halal meat consumption practices to further explain how "different people consider different things halal". In an ethnography focusing on Malaysian diasporic groups in London, Fischer (2016) finds a

¹³⁰ In the name of God (an invocation used by Muslims at the beginning of an undertaking). From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/bismillah>

similar pattern - the differences between the halal practices of the Malaysian state, the secular British state, and Islamic organisations in Britain create an interstitial space in which Malaysian immigrants combine pragmatism and a commitment to halal ideals to produce new and innovative techniques of managing their lives in terms of permissible or ‘halal’ conduct and consumption.

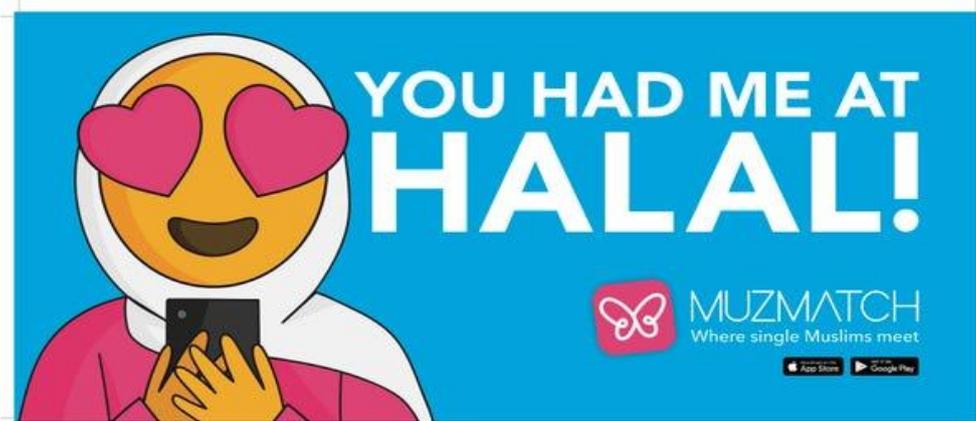
Wilson and Liu (2010, p. 108) argue that ‘halal’ remains inconsistent because “what is deemed *halal* is ultimately governed by the heavens and subsequently therefore can never remain in its entirety within materialist branding frameworks”. Laiba adds to this by suggesting that what is deemed halal is ultimately dependent on an individual’s “*niyyah*”. Within Islam, a person’s intention (*niyyah*) is considered to be the essence of religious practice, and appears as an obligatory object of Islamic ritual law (*ibādah*), the contract law (*Mu‘āmalāt*), personal status law (*Ahwāl shakhṣiyyah*) and Islamic state laws (*Al-Siyāsah-shar‘iyyah*) (Arjan, 2014). The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is reported to have said, “Verily actions are by intentions, and for every person is what he intended. So the one whose *hijrah* (migration) was to Allah and His Messenger, then his *hijrah* was to Allah and His Messenger. And the one whose *hijrah* was for the world to gain from it, or a woman to marry her, then his *hijrah* was to what he made *hijrah* for.”¹³¹ All deeds are preceded by *niyyah* (intention), and if the intention is good then the behaviour will also be good or praiseworthy (*akhlaqul karimah*), however, if the intention is bad then the behaviour will also be classified as such (*akhlaqul madzumah*) (Bulutoding, et al. 2018). Laiba evaluates muzmatch users within this frame of reference- there are those “who have that genuine good intention of not to fuck people around”, and conversely, the “assholes on the app” who don’t hold the same earnest intentions. The practice of halal is not just a public and communal concern, but more importantly, an intensely personal and private matter (Bergeaud-Blackler, et al. 2016). The boundaries around ‘halal’ are always subject to intention and interpretation, and these are judgements young British Muslims now increasingly bring to bear on their own lives (Ali, et al. 2019).

Muzmatch itself has pushed the boundaries around the usage of ‘halal’ with its inventive six-figure marketing campaign launched in October 2018, which ran on the London Underground and on buses across cities including London, Birmingham and Manchester¹³². I remember the

¹³¹ From: <https://sunnahonline.com/library/purification-of-the-soul/217-hadith-of-intention-the>

¹³² From: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/muzmatch-hello-muzmatch/1492094>

first time I saw one of the adverts on the underground, and I smiled and chuckled to myself thinking it was genius. Branding is an act in which an organization uses a name, phrase, design, symbols, or a combination of these to identify their products/services and distinguish them from other competitors in the market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006). Muzmatch announced the launch of its campaign on Facebook asserting, “we think it’ll be the first of its kind for any brand targeting Muslims in the UK.¹³³” Dubbed as “Halal-rious new adverts” (Preece, 2018), the bright posters featured cartoon animations and ‘halal’ inspired puns (attached following):



¹³³ From: <https://en-gb.facebook.com/muzmatch/posts/were-about-to-launch-a-major-six-figure-advertising-campaign-in-london-mancheste/1886388291443954/>.



[In descending order:

Figure 1. (image courtesy: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/muzmatch-hello-muzmatch/1492094>);

Figure 2. (image courtesy: <https://www.standard.co.uk/tech/muzmatch-dating-app-for-muslims-a4198246.html>);

Figure 3. (image courtesy: <https://www.businessinsider.com/muzmach-matchmaking-app-for-muslims-about-to-hit-one-million-users-2018-12?r=US&IR=T>);

Figure 4. (image courtesy: https://www.reddit.com/r/CasualUK/comments/agaem4/found_my_new_dating_site/)
Permission to re-use these figures has been requested.]

The first advert, Figure 1, features a cartooned hijab¹³⁴ wearing British singer, Adele, on her mobile, with the words ‘Halal! from the other side...’, in reference to the chorus of Adele’s chart-topping track ‘Hello’, released in 2015. Similarly, the next advert, Figure 2, shows a thobe¹³⁵ clad American musical icon, Lionel Richie, saying, ‘Halal! is it me you’re looking for?’, which pays homage to his legendary 1984 pop hit ‘Hello’. Next, Figure 3, is a mobile bearing love-struck hijabi emoji¹³⁶, with the text ‘You had me at Halal!’, a spin on Renée Zellweger’s infamous romantic line ‘You had me at Hello’ from the 1996 movie ‘Jerry Maguire’. The last advert, Figure 4, shows a cartooned steak as cupid, wielding a bow and heart-shaped arrow, with the words ‘Halal Meet’, obviously playing on the concept of halal meat. ‘Meme culture’ is no longer limited to the domain of the internet and has indeed become a part of the commercial and political world (Zittrain, 2014). Muzmatch uses the popular meme¹³⁷ format with distinct visuals in the form of cartoons and emojis, combined with minimal text to attract the attention of its young target audience. Most of my informants had

¹³⁴ A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hijab>

¹³⁵ An ankle-length, long-sleeved, gownlike garment worn chiefly by men of the Arabian Peninsula. From: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/thobe>

¹³⁶ A digital image that is added to a message in electronic communication in order to express a particular idea or feeling. From: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/emoji>

¹³⁷ An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/meme>

seen the adverts upon release peppered around London, and it wasn't long before I got a call from 28-year-old Samira, saying:

Oi! Did you see the muzmatch ads yet? (To which I answered affirmative). Bloody brilliant, innit. I saw it on the tube on the way home from work and I was like fuck yes, even white people would see this and laugh a little. They've just made them so simple, and so catchy and relevant, I love it! I love how- you know how people are like oh music is haram and drawing is haram and this is haram and that is haram- but these guys are like no allow that, we're gonna post these anyway, so they're keeping it real which I definitely appreciate, definitely.

A brand's essence is always housed within a cultural context that is sustained by its stakeholders, thus maintaining its strategic value (Holt, 2005). Wilson and Liu (2011) add that Muslim consumer behaviour is largely a cultural construct, which calls for marketers to understand Islam through the multiple and often times, contradictory, lenses of its Muslim consumers. Faith-based marketing, which involves addressing consumers' religious sensibilities, thus remains a complex undertaking with cultural, geopolitical, and operational hurdles (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). Samira praises muzmatch's efforts in "keeping it real" as reflective of their young 'British Muslim' target population who are subject to transglobal flows of popular culture. For instance, even though music is considered to be 'haram' and 'forbidden' in Islamic law due to its associations with sex, drugs and alcohol (Harris, 2002), the emergence of a Muslim public sphere in Britain includes music as an important cultural component (Morris, 2019) and a medium (much like comedy and film) through which young Muslims are addressing a range of socio-political affairs (Hamid, 2017).

Similarly, even though Islam has forbidden image-making, drawing and the sculpting of animate beings¹³⁸- not to mention the cartoon controversies of 2006 and the global conflict potential of religiously inspired or politically motivated visuals (Müller, et al. 2009)- Samira appreciates muzmatch's decision to "post these anyway". Although the ads have been critiqued by some EDL (English Defense League, a far-right, Islamophobic organisation) members who reject any form of Muslim reference, the general reaction to muzmatch's adverts has been considerably positive, garnering a lot of attention on social media (Millington, 2019). Cartoons now bear much resemblance to the format of Internet memes; they demand a contextual

¹³⁸ The Prophet (P.B.U.H.) is reported to have said, "the most severely punished of the people on the Day of Resurrection will be the image-makers", as narrated by al-Bukhaari (5950) and Muslim (2109). From: <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/71170/ruling-on-animated-drawings-cartoons>

awareness from their audience in order to decode the hints and allusions that the author is making (Denisova, 2019). Muzmatch challenges the normative standard and binaries between halal/haram in this way; by taking what is technically classified as ‘haram’ but presenting it in a contemporary and relatable fashion that works well within the specific cultural context, muzmatch, much like its users, is able to reimagine the boundaries around the term ‘halal’.

In an interview with *Business Insider*, muzmatch’s CEO, Shahzad Younas, claimed the company wanted to issue a positive message which was also humorous in nature- “It’s a side that, especially for the Muslim segment, doesn’t get portrayed that often... Sadly it’s nearly always negative. [We wanted] to do things a bit differently, freshen things up a bit” (Millington, 2019). When it comes to the portrayal of Muslims in the British media, Bleich, et al. (2015) found that headlines in right-leaning newspapers are more negative than those in left-leaning newspapers, and that Muslims are consistently portrayed more negatively than Jews and frequently more negatively than Christians. Samira highlights these issues of representation as well, as she rejoices in the knowledge that “even white people would see this and laugh a little”. The humour in memes (such as the adverts) creates intertextual references that rely on both, the cultural heritage of the local society and on global cultural references (Laineste & Voolaid, 2017). Muzmatch deploys both; it uses highly recognisable pop culture references like song lyrics and movie lines but infuses them with its own trademark ‘halal’ feature. Memes form the type of storytelling that entangles recognisable traditional patterns and motifs, but also accepts variation and adaptive modification (Denisova, 2019). We see this pattern in muzmatch’s adverts via their use of the traditional black hijab and white thobe for example, donned by the cartoon depictions of singers Adele and Lionel Richie respectively, to adapt to their target market’s ‘Muslim’ but also globalised ‘British’ sensibilities. Despite muzmatch’s adverts being “so simple” like Samira says, they combine multiple competing elements to compose a story that is reflective of the complexities of ‘British Muslim’ culture, displaying how ‘halal’ has steadily moved from the pure domain of worship (*ibādah*) to adapt to the larger sphere of human transactions (*mu‘āmalāt*) in an attempt to create a lifestyle that is both urban and religiously ethical (Billaud, 2019).

Reimagining Religiosity- in search of the “halal:haram ratio”

After accepting the terms and conditions to ‘keep things halal’, one must input their e-mail address, birthday, gender (since the Islamic worldview of sexuality accords hegemonic status to heterosexuality (Yip, 2009), muzmatch only offers a choice between male/female, and also only male looking for female and vice versa), and a nickname that will appear as the user ID on their muzmatch profile. I kept mine rather basic as the initials of my name, others sometimes use an alias that isn’t their real name, while some others try to get creative with names such as ‘HalalPrince, Halfyourdeen, Bodybuilder’ etc. You then move on to filling out basic information about yourself including your height, marital status (choosing between never married/divorced/separated/annulled/widowed), whether or not you have children, and whether or not you are willing to relocate abroad (which again reminds us of the international outreach of this app). In the next section you are asked about your education level and your profession (both are of significant consideration in the British South Asian Muslim ‘marriage market’ (Ahmad, 2012)), and you also have the option to include your job title and the company you work for (although I’ve never seen anyone including this information, for reasons of privacy).

The next section is titled ‘Islamic Lifestyle’ where you have to subscribe to a sect (Sunni/Shia/Other), select your Islamic Dress (none/modest/hijab/jilbab/niqab), and describe your religiosity. The app asks, ‘how religious would you say you are?’ followed by a scale that grades from not practising, to moderately practising, to practising, and finally very practising. I remember scrolling up and down for a few minutes, confused on which one to settle on. Some people have considered me to be a ‘pretty practicing’ Muslim, while others have often identified me as a ‘moderate Muslim’, so where exactly did I fit in? I ultimately settled on ‘practicing’ as a reasonable middle ground. Next, I had to choose from a scale that indicated my prayer habits from never pray, to sometimes pray, to usually pray, and lastly to always pray. Within this section I also had to check all the options that applied to me amongst ‘Only eat halal, Drink alcohol, Smoker, and Convert/revert to Islam.’ 27-year-old Saima comments:

See this is what pisses me off, yeah. Why should someone judge me on how religious I am when that’s constantly changing. I have days where I pray and days where I don’t. It’s no one’s business really, like Islamically as an adult no one can force me to pray, not even my partner. My religion should be between me and Allah, why do I have to put it out there for everyone else and then be judged over it? Also, we all have different boundaries so it’s weird like someone might be cool with drinking or smoking but only

eat halal food, and someone might be cool with smoking sheesha but not cigarettes, you get me? Also, what if someone like me who has drunk and smoked before or does it occasionally, like I know if I ticked those boxes, I'd get no matches. So, a lot of people lie obviously. What's the point of having that on there then?

Perhaps the answer here is that muzmatch is not just a regular dating app but a self-declared marriage oriented app- and when it comes to Muslim marriages, 'religiosity' (as perceived by the individual as well as their respective families) continues to hold a significant influence in marital selection and satisfaction (Ahmadi, et al., 2008; Chapman & Bennett, 2013; Cila & Lalonde, 2014). However, because of its various dimensions and continuously evolving definitions, 'religiosity' remains reasonably difficult to measure (Achour, et al. 2015). Ul-Haq, et al. (2019) divide Muslim religiosity between the dimensions of *Ibadaat* (individual and collective worship) and *Mu'amalat* (social ethics and relations); the first relates to the more covert dimensions of sincere belief in God and the five pillars of Islam (including profession of faith (*shahadah*), canonical prayer (*salat*), charity (*zakah*), fasting (*sawm*), and pilgrimage to Makkah (*hajj*)¹³⁹), while the other pertains to personal and social conduct, which emphasizes the degree to which the dimension of belief is reflected throughout an individual's everyday actions and behaviour by way of complying with religious commands and avoiding prohibited deeds. Saima argues that the "boundaries" between this compliance and avoidance are individually constructed and negotiated ("we all have different boundaries"). For instance, Fletcher & Spracklen (2014) maintain that British Muslims (the majority of whom are of 'South Asian' descent, they claim) are restricted from consuming alcohol since contact with alcohol is not permitted according to Islam, however, alcohol abuse remains a significant social problem both in Muslim majority countries and amongst Muslim minority communities (Michalak & Trocki, 2006). Similarly, even though majority of Muslims believe that their religion discourages smoking (Yong, et al. 2009), for many Muslims living in Europe, smoking prevalence (especially among men) remains high¹⁴⁰ (Ghouri, et al. 2006). There has always been individual interpretation in both the theology and practice of Islam (Lukens-Bull, 2016), and so religiosity is never fixed but "constantly changing", as Saima says.

Saima highlights the ambivalence of everyday religious and moral practice, drawing our attention to the inconsistencies in people's lives that do not fit neatly into the framework of a

¹³⁹ "Ibadah", In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Ed. John L. Esposito, *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, Accessed 18-Nov-2019, <<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e911>>.

¹⁴⁰ In 2004, the overall prevalence of smoking in England was 40% in Bangladeshi men and 29% in Pakistani men, compared to only 24% among the male general population (Ghouri, et al. 2006).

single given tradition (Schielke & Debevec, 2012). This in turn has led to the development of terms such as ‘everyday religion’, ‘tactical religion’, ‘lived Islam’, ‘everyday lived Islam’, ‘local Islam’, etc. in relation to ‘official religion’, ‘scholarly Islam’, or ‘traditional Islam’, to highlight how everyday lived practices serve to construct, maintain and transform different visions of Islam (see for example, Dessing, et al. 2016; Repo, 2017; Jeldtoft, 2011; Schielke & Debevec, 2012; Manger, 2013; Catto, 2014; Riaz, 2009; Alam, 2007; Ahmad & Reifeld, 2004). Muslim minority communities often reconfigure religious practices (or even no practice at all), and this is usually connected to attitudes of privatization, individualization and pragmatism (Jeldtoft, 2011). Saima also advocates for an individualized religiosity when she asserts, “my religion should be between me and Allah”. She argues against making her individual religiosity public knowledge, not just because it would incite judgement (“why do I have to put it out there for everyone else and then be judged over it?”), but also because she views religion to be a private affair, a personal individualised undertaking, and one that remains contextual, provisional, and “constantly changing”. 25-year-old Khalid adds to this discussion:

You and your wife or girlfriend or whatever need to have a similar halal:haram ratio. We all know that we aren't perfect Muslims and we all do something haram that we think is ok or allowable in our heads. Like I'll pray but I'll go to a mixed gathering where some of my friends are drinking and I'm ok with that, even though technically speaking you aren't supposed to. So, you need someone who's kind of at that level with you. Otherwise if she's nagging you about those things it would get really annoying.

While religiosity is viewed as a personal matter, Khalid highlights how it is still an important consideration for partners to be on a similar “level” or wavelength so that they’re not “nagging” or “annoying”. He displays a preference for ‘assortative mating’ - a theory based on the premise that people have a strong tendency to select mates who are similar to themselves with respect to a variety of demographic characteristics including age, race, religion, nationality, education, and income (Rauch & Scholar, 2004). But it is not just shared religion or a shared Muslim label that is important to Khalid, rather it is a shared understanding of Islamic religiosity as a scale between ‘halal’ to ‘haram’ (“halal:haram ratio”). Khalid moves away from the discourse of being or becoming the ‘good Muslim’, which has been recognised as more of a political category used by the government to decide who is Muslim, what it means to integrate, and which Muslims can/have successfully integrated (Topolski, 2018). Muslims have increasingly been classified into two distinct categories as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘moderate’ versus ‘extremist’, ‘liberal’ or ‘fundamentalist’, ‘secularist’ or ‘Islamist’ (Ramadan, 2010). Opposing such reductive perceptions comes Khalid’s honest and reflexive admission- “we all know that

we aren't perfect Muslims". New generations of European Muslims often individually cherry-pick their religious practices as they try and compensate for their 'traditional' practice with other 'non-traditional' ways, in order to preserve their connection with Islam (El-Bachouti, 2015). Khalid gives his own example of navigating between 'halal' ("I'll pray"), and 'haram' ("but I'll go to a mixed gathering where some of my friends are drinking"), exercising subjective creative agency ("I'm ok with that") as he adapts his religious boundaries while continuing to fulfil his religious obligations. Islam is perceived to be more subject to personal interpretation and agency than either British nationality or cultural heritage (Gest, 2015). Khalid does not forego his religion or break religious restrictions indiscriminately, instead he consciously chooses whether and how to integrate his faith with his subjectivities. Also reimagining religiosity is 29-year-old Aisha, who was of the opinion:

Frankly, religion doesn't mean shit whether that person is going to treat you right or not. Look you have these aunties that cover their head, but when it comes to talking smack about someone, they'll be the first to do it. That's not very Islamic, or nice, now is it? I know husbands who'll literally use the hadith of angels cursing the wife if she doesn't sleep with him to blackmail them for sex¹⁴¹. Mate, the Prophet didn't tell you to be an emotionally abusive shithead! You need someone who's a good person, who's going to be good to you. Sometimes religion makes people a better person, but if someone's an asshole then that's it, they're going to be an asshole. They'll use religion, or culture, or whatever as a tool to justify their asshole behaviour. That's why to me it doesn't matter if you pray five times a day or not, it matters if you're a good person. (I asked Aisha if she would be open to marrying someone of a different faith in that case). Nah, not really... I would still want them to be Muslim... because it's about the values. I don't know, it's hard to explain! (she pauses while thinking deeply).

Parrott (2019, p.4) argues that one cannot be a "good Muslim" and a "bad person" at the same time, as worship and character are meant to be 'two sides of the same coin'. In Islam, faith and morality are supposed to be integrated, but in practice this is not always the case. While religiosity has been associated with cultivating a variety of character strengths amongst Muslim youth, such as kindness, equity, leadership, self-regulation, prudence, gratitude, hope/optimism, spirituality, and forgiveness (Ahmed, 2009), Aisha highlights how religiosity cannot be presumed as an accurate indicator or measure of good character or behaviour. She gives an example of "aunties that cover their head", taken as an overt sign of religious piety (Williams & Vashi, 2007), and their persistent tendency to be "talking smack about someone"

¹⁴¹ The Hadith being referred to here is as follows: "If a husband calls his wife to his bed and she refuses and causes him to sleep in anger, the angels will curse her till morning" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book 59, Hadith 48). Retrieved from: <https://qurananswers.me/2017/01/14/hadith-of-angels-cursing-the-wife-explained/>

or indulging in backbiting and gossiping, which are not permissible according to the Islamic tenet (Savitri Hartono, 2015). Similarly, she critiques “emotionally abusive” husbands who use religion as a tool to “blackmail” their wives, exploiting the commonly held Muslim belief that wives are expected to obey their husbands, an expectation that becomes problematic in the context of family violence (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). Islamic spirituality includes a holistic approach to both inward purification (the purity of heart, compassion, humility, etc.) and outward actions (such as ritual worship) (Nasr, 2008). Aisha argues that outward actions do not necessarily reflect inward purification, or vice versa, shifting an emphasis from the performative and ritualistic aspects of Islam (“it doesn’t matter if you pray five times a day or not”), to placing more significance on internal “values” and being “a good person”. While religion has the potential to make someone “a better person”, Aisha believes it is not religion that defines people, rather it is people who define their religion (“if someone’s an asshole then that’s it, they’re going to be an asshole. They’ll use religion, or culture, or whatever as a tool to justify their asshole behaviour”). So rather than looking at religion as a discursive field that individuals are subject to, she looks at individuals as agentic subjects that have the power to produce, define and contest the boundaries of such fields (Foucault & Gordon, 1980).

Despite her repeated assertion that a “good person” is what matters most when looking for a partner, Aisha still expresses her desire to maintain religious homogamy, which is strongly enforced in Islam (Fieder & Huber, 2016). Religious homogamy refers to the extent to which partners (and to a certain degree, their families) share religious beliefs and practices and has been shown to support the stability of marriages and relationships, while also being positively correlated with relationship satisfaction and marital adjustment (Kim & Swan, 2019; Henderson, et al. 2018). In addition to religious homogamy comes the term ‘socio-ethnic homogamy’ (Collet & Santelli, 2016), which considers shared ethno-cultural references (such as culture, language, sense of belonging to a minority) and social status (including education, employment, lifestyle, family status, and migration experience). Having considered religion and religiosity at length, we shall now turn our attention to these other defining features of marital selection.

Redefining Ethnicity- Politics of a ‘desi’ diasporic identity and intimate partner choice

After completing the ‘Islamic Lifestyle’ section, it comes as little surprise that the next section to fill on muzmatch is titled ‘Language & Ethnicity.’ It begins by asking what languages you can speak, with a dropdown menu allowing you to tick multiple options ranging from Afrikaans to Vietnamese and so on. It also allows you to change the operating language on the app, but in this case not all languages are supported. Muzmatch is available in English, Spanish, French, German, Dutch, Indonesian, Malay, Turkish and Arabic- giving a good indication of its outreach and predominant user base. The next question the app asks is a significant and carefully constructed one- ‘What country best describes your ancestral ethnic origin?’, under which there is a list of the world’s countries and their flags (the selected flag then appears as an icon next to another flag displaying your current location on your profile). This is succeeded by the follow up question ‘which ethnic group do you fall into?’, which has the options of ‘Arab, Bangladeshi, Black/African, Caucasian/White, Far East Asian, Hispanic, Indian, Mixed Race, Pakistani, Persian, Turkish, and Other’. I read over the options again and something immediately came to the fore- while majority of the ethnic variations had been grouped into one, Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani had been mentioned separately. So why not just use the term ‘South Asian’ or ‘British Asian’ here?

“Oh my god, did you notice that? I saw that too and I was like LOL (laugh out loud). It’s probably because us Asians are the pickiest of the lot aye. Pakistanis will think they’re the best, Bengalis will be like no but we’re awesome, like does it really matter that much anymore?” wondered 24-year-old Mehreen, who herself is of Indian origin.

The reality was that it did matter. I noticed it in my own experience; I had swiped for and matched with a man of Bangladeshi origin in London and one of the first things he asked me was-

Imi: So how come you swiped for me?

SK: What do you mean?

Imi: I mean usually ppl (people) will go for someone from their own culture. Will your family be cool with a Bangladeshi?

SK: Oh... yeah, well my aunt is married to a Bangladeshi! What about you, will your family be cool with me? :-P

Imi: We’ll have to see hehe

Our conversation did not go much further after this. Texts, written or spoken, must be interpreted not only in terms of what they ‘say’ but of what they keep silent, and with respect to other texts before and after (Derrida, 1976). While Imi was engaging in an upholding of tradition (by asking me if my family will be accepting of a Bangladeshi partner), I presented him with an alternate structure (by telling him about my aunt who is married to a Bangladeshi), providing an opportunity for deconstruction. However, this destabilizing statement from my end was met with resisted closure from his (“we’ll have to see”). Marriage continues to be a cornerstone of social values for ‘South Asian’ communities in Britain and remains predominantly ethnically and religiously homogamous (Kulu & Hannemann, 2019; Peach, 2006; Voas, 2009; Muttarak & Heath, 2010). Imi validates this with his statement, “usually ppl (people) will go for someone from their own culture”. Even though Imi and I shared a religion, it became clear that me with my Indian descent and him with his Bangladeshi background, did not share a “culture”. This brings us to question collective terms such as ‘British Asian’ or ‘South Asian’, especially since public discourse, media outlets, and social events often tend to promote a British Asian or South Asian diasporic identity, eschewing differences of religion, class, and language, and perpetuating the public’s view of a homogenous, united community with a strong, singular identity (Kalayil, 2019). Samira narrates:

I think like when it comes to dating then people are more experimental, like a lot of desi guys will go out with a *gori* (white female) because it’s probs (probably) easier, plus it’s like a fantasy for a lot of them, you know, *ke vaah bhaie humne gori ladki pata li* (that wow man, I wooed a white girl). But *shaadi ke time pe* (at the time of marriage) most of them- and I’m saying most, but like I know there are some people who would marry someone from a different religion or culture, but I’d say those are the exceptions because it’s not that common- so yeah, most people will look for or end up with someone *desi*, and that’s what the family would want as well. It’s like that saying isn’t it, *laut ke bhuddu ghar ko aaye* (the fool ended up returning home)! (I smiled and nodded along, having heard that saying before). I think the older generation cares a lot more about the back story, like if they’re Indian or Bengali or whatever, but I think our generation is more chill as long as it’s within that subcontinent region and they share the same values. But even then, I think if it’s a North Indian and an Urdu speaking Pakistani, it might be easier to get the parents on board, rather than if a Pakistani wanted to marry a Bangladeshi or a South Indian because then there’s more of a difference in language and food and stuff. So, like it really depends on the person and how strongminded they are, or the family and how chill they are, and what everyone can agree on at the end of the day.”

Samira validates Blackwell & Lichter’s (2004) findings that ethnic and religious homogamy tends to increase as relationships progress from dating to cohabitation to marriage. She gives

the example of ‘desi guys’ who date ‘a gori’, not only because it’s comparatively easier than dating a desi girl (due to the limitations placed upon their social lives and sexualities (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000)), but also because of the status of ‘gori’ as “fantasy”. Far from being an outdated practice or colonialist legacy, the belief that light or ‘white’ skin is better than dark or non-white skin is still commonly held amongst many South Asians, as light skin operates as a form of symbolic capital, one that is especially critical for women because of the connection between skin tone and attractiveness or desirability (Banks, 2015). One need only consider the continued popularity and use of skin lighteners, even amongst young, urban, and educated women in the global South, to realise that this is a true phenomenon (Glenn, 2008). Samira highlights how a ‘gori’ is not only racialised but also sexualised because of her white skin; Caucasian identity is thus constituted as both a colour and a mode of acquiring social and symbolic capital amongst desi men (“*vaah bhaie humne gori ladki pata li* (that wow man, I wooed a white girl)”). This form of capital, however, remains contextual, for when it comes to choosing a partner for marriage it is ‘desi’ that takes precedence. While mixed and interethnic marriages amongst South Asians have been documented in academia (for example, Corral, 2019; Holland, 2017; Feng, et al. 2012; Zapata, 2010; Song, 2010), Samira argues that these continue to be the “exception” and not the norm, which is to “look for or end up with someone *desi*”.

‘Desi’ is popularly used to refer to people of South Asian origin who are not residing in South Asia, thus making it an inherently diasporic term formed through the trajectories of movement and experiences of places of settlement, rather than in relation to a mythical ‘homeland’ (Kim, 2012). However, Samira’s account shows us how ‘desi’ remains a term that is predominantly understood and applied by second generation migrants, who are “more chill as long as its within that subcontinent region”, referring to India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Cultural anthropologist Sunaina Maira (2002, p. 2) believes that second-generation youth have “crossed national boundaries to identify collectively as ‘desi’”. Even in the United Kingdom, ‘desi’ has become an increasingly relevant term, its emergence and adoption signalling a potentially new shift in ‘British Asian’ identity formations and its meanings (Kim, 2012). The first or “older generation”, however, continue to care “a lot more about the back story”, including ethnic origin, family background and migration history (Samuel, 2010). Research suggests that families from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh settled in the UK generally tend to reproduce their caste and sectarian communities, underpinned by regional and linguistic identities (Gangoli, et al. 2006). Samira verifies this as she documents the different ethnic and regional

combinations (ones that limit the “difference in language and food and stuff”) that could potentially be approved by parents, making it “easier to get the parents on board”. Even in my interaction with Imi (mentioned earlier), the question he put forward was “will your family be cool with a Bangladeshi?”, as opposed to if I was personally open to marrying a Bangladeshi. Parental approval and familial cultural influence continue to play an important role in the marriage preferences and outcomes of second-generation South Asian migrants (Lalonde, et al. 2004). Marriage in South Asian culture is understood as a union between two families rather than two individuals (Deepak, 2005), and so family life becomes a dynamic combination of individual and social action (“what everyone can agree on at the end of the day”) (Calhoun, et al. 1993).

Traditions around marriage are an important part of immigrant identity construction (Samuel, 2010), and Samira’s excerpt is telling of how immigrant identity unfolds across two generations. O’Connor (2016) argues that the key difference between first and second generation Asian diasporic groups is that most first-generation migrants continue to feel as if they are living between the East and the West, while the second-generation has limited primary links with the homeland and are therefore less likely to feel that way. Although the older generation of South Asians do hold strong attitudes towards the continuation of traditional cultural values (such as parental authority and obligations, marriage choices, and sexual permissiveness) (Atkin, et al. 2002), I would argue that the second-generation do not necessarily have ‘limited’ links with the homeland, but rather reimagined links, which can be perceived in their articulations of ‘desi’ identity. The Sanskrit word ‘des’ or ‘desh’ means country, and ‘desi’ which originates from it essentially means from the country, or ‘of the homeland’ (Rudisill, 2018). The opposite of ‘des’ is ‘pardes’ (par (other), and des (country)), thus making the opposite of desi being ‘pardesi’ or ‘videshi’¹⁴² which simply means foreigner, or someone from outside the country. The desi/pardesi dichotomy is closely tied to the local/foreigner, insider/outsider oppositions that have now become so prominent in socio-political commentary and debate. Even the way Samira applies the old Urdu saying, “*laut ke bhuddu ghar ko aaye* (the fool ended up returning home)”, with reference to the second generation ultimately preferring a ‘desi’ partner despite their dating history, echoes the

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From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/hindi-english/%E0%A4%B5%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%B6%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%B5%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%AF%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%A4%E0%A4%BF>

narrative of the ‘confused’ or ‘lost’ diasporic second-generation Asian youth, who must find their way back to their ‘roots’ in an attempt to become their ‘true’ self (Kim, 2014).

If the condition of shared religion/religiousity is met, then the second-generation preference for a ‘desi’ partner can move beyond the traditional social hierarchies of caste, regional and linguistic identities. So rather than an outright rejection of parental value systems, second generation desi Muslim migrants adopt partial and contingent acceptance, and reinterpretation of some of them, thus redefining social boundaries without completely disregarding them. It is in this way that the construction of a ‘desi’ identity reveals the tensions between the ‘here’ and ‘there’, the ‘then’ and ‘now’ and the ‘roots’ and ‘routes’ that constitute a diasporic politics of identity (Mallapragada, 2014). Now even though ‘desi’ may overcome certain traditional social barriers, it is still not an all-inclusive identity category and comes with its own set of hierarchies and rules of membership that are continuously constructed, managed and negotiated by its members. Technically, anyone who can claim South Asian ancestry could be ‘desi’, but desis themselves recognise everyday forms of difference via categories such as ‘pendu’/‘freshie’/‘fob’ and ‘coconut’/‘BBCD (British Born Confused Desi)’¹⁴³. These make an appearance in conversations around marriage preferences as well. As 23-year-old Farah, blushing ever so slightly, shares:

See you obviously don’t want a guy that’s too whitewashed, or a guy that’s too freshie. You want someone in between who has a good balance of both worlds. Someone who can go to a Rahat Fateh Ali Khan¹⁴⁴ concert with you, but then also jam to some sick Drake¹⁴⁵ tunes. That’s what you want...

Shafiq adds:

I don’t think I could ever get married to someone from back home, or like a cousin, no, god, just no. They just don’t have the same thinking that we do growing up here in this environment. But even here you know, its not easy, because some of the girls could’ve grown up in a really closed environment so they’re not very mature, they’ll still be a bit traditional or *pendu* and have the emotional intelligence of a 15-year-old, and I don’t want someone like that. But then I don’t want someone who just isn’t in touch with their culture or trying to be too modern like a flippin’ coconut, and then the kids just become completely whitewashed, you know. I’d still want for them to be able to speak

¹⁴³ The meaning of these terms is discussed further on the next page.

¹⁴⁴ Rahat Fateh Ali Khan (born 9 December 1974), is a Pakistani musician, primarily of Qawwali, a devotional music of the Muslim Sufis. From: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/artists/014431e3-c5a3-4a57-b86b-fe8f2e3253ff>

¹⁴⁵ Aubrey Drake Graham (born October 24, 1986) is a Canadian-American rapper, singer, songwriter, record producer, and actor. From: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/artists/9fff2f8a-21e6-47de-a2b8-7f449929d43f>

in Urdu, and have some sense of Islam, and know about the food, the music and culture, because it's beautiful, something to be proud of.

While South Asian transnational marriages and consanguineous marriages continue to be the focus of many studies (Charsley & Bolognani, 2019; Merten, 2019; Qureshi & Rogaly, 2018, Ersanilli & Charsley, 2018, for example), Shafiq emphatically asserts that he would not marry “someone from back home, or like a cousin”. His argument for that stems from his belief that their thinking will be misaligned as they don't have the shared experience of living in a diasporic setting. Diaspora can be problematic because members of a diasporic community are expected to rally around a sense of shared identity and ethnicity that can then create a unified collective; however, this ideal fails to consider the internal differences and divisions that continue to exist within any given community (Ang, 2001). Shafiq and Farah both address this concern when they discuss two different categories that they don't want their partner to occupy (a manifestation of intra-ethnic boundary making)- that of a “freshie” or “*pendu*”, and a “coconut”. *Pendu* is derived from the Punjabi word ‘pind’ which literally translates to village, thus ‘pendu’ meaning someone who is from the village. In modern day Hinglish¹⁴⁶, it is used as an adjective to describe someone who is ‘culturally backward’¹⁴⁷. Farah substitutes ‘pendu’ with ‘freshie’, a term that is often used to refer to a new immigrant from the Asian subcontinent to the UK¹⁴⁸. Freshie in turn originates from the term ‘fresh off the boat’ or ‘FOB’¹⁴⁹, signifying difference along perceived social characteristics including linguistic and economic (in)ability (Pyke & Dang, 2003). Shafiq adds that difference can also be in terms of maturity and “emotional intelligence”, something that ‘pendu’ girls lack if they’ve “grown up in a really closed environment”. Young South Asian girls are heavily influenced by cultural traditions, religious obligations, family loyalties and community expectations whilst living in the parental home (Hennink, et al., 1999), with immigrant families exercising rigid restraint and policing female sexuality and sociality (Durham, 2004). The control and curtailment of female sexuality and social life is tied to national and cultural ideologies in which women's bodies are viewed as the repositories of tradition and weapons of defence against cultural violations (Maira,

¹⁴⁶ A blend of Hindi and English, in particular a variety of English used by speakers of Hindi, characterized by frequent use of Hindi vocabulary or constructions. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hinglish>

¹⁴⁷ From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pendu>

¹⁴⁸ From: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/freshie>

¹⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the use of these terms is not limited to the desi population, second generation Vietnamese and Korean Americans reportedly also use ‘FOB’ as a term of abuse for each other (Pyke & Dang, 2003).

2002). Shafiq sees these limitations and consequent lack of real-world experience as “traditional or *pendu*”, and therefore undesirable (“I don’t want someone like that”).

Also undesirable on the opposite end of the spectrum is the ‘coconut’, a racialized construct that has become part of colloquial speech and popular culture, commonly but not exclusively used as a term to describe South Asian diasporic youth who are deemed ‘inauthentic’ as brown on the outside and white on the inside (hence the term ‘coconut’) (Kim, 2014). Coconuts are often accused of being ‘whitewashed’, an insult implying that they are behaving in a way that is too ‘white’, or “too modern” as Shafiq says, and thus forgetting their ethnic ‘roots’ (Pyke & Dang, 2003) as “someone who just isn’t in touch with their culture”. Conversations around freshies and coconuts tend to reflect a larger set of diasporic concerns of cultural loss and betrayal that continue to haunt a diasporic politics of identity, particularly in relation to second generation migrants. While the influence of immigration on cultural retention and transmission between first and second-generation migrants has garnered the interest of many scholars and studies (Samuel, 2010; Sharma, et al. 2012; Juang, et al. 2018; Drouhot & Nee, 2019, to name a few), here we see Shafiq expressing his desire to promote a sense of religio-cultural identity for the third generation as well.

Cultural retention often embodies notions of language, religion, ethnicity, nationality and a shared heritage (Fenton, 1999). Correspondingly, Shafiq also conveys his aspiration for his children “to be able to speak in Urdu, and have some sense of Islam” so that they are not “completely whitewashed”. Cultural retention and reproduction can offer a form of self-identification, a symbol of belonging, and a sense of pride (“because it’s beautiful, something to be proud of”) (Atkin, et al. 2002), but it can also emphasise difference. There is something to be said here about the negative connotations associated with being a freshie or a coconut that are “wielded against the next generation, who are forced to feel culturally inadequate and unfinished” (Prashad, 2000, p. 131). A response to this is to have a “good balance of both worlds” as Farah suggests, by occupying the position “in between”, i.e. neither “too whitewashed”, nor “too freshie”. Ethnic identity retention can be challenged by ‘environmental’ obstacles and barriers within ‘Western’ society, a loss of familial support, lack of cultural continuity, and/or the inability to have the ‘best of both worlds’ (Inman, et al. 2007). In addition to a shared understanding of Islamic religiosity as a scale between ‘halal’ to ‘haram’, desi Muslim in-betweeners also seek a shared understanding of ethnic identity as a scale between ‘pendu’ to ‘coconut’. It is in this way that the politics of a desi Muslim diasporic

identity and the multiplicities of belonging have a discernible impact on intimacy and partner choice.

In between superficiality and depth- User experience on muzmatch

We shall now turn our attention to exploring the actual user experience on muzmatch. After filling out the 'Language & Ethnicity' section, muzmatch requires one to complete a section titled 'Filters & Preferences.' This allows you to filter your matches by location, where you can limit the profiles you see based on the distance from your current location or by any country (with a choice from a list of all the world's countries). You can also filter by a very specific sect, ethnicity and age range (from 18 to 55 years). For an added premium of GBP 4.65 per week, you can additionally filter by profession, education, height, marriage plans, prayer level and religiosity. Once you are done with this, you are required to upload a main profile photograph that must clearly be of your face, with the option of adding up to four other photos. You have the choice of keeping your photos 'private' or 'visible,' but the app does tell you that 'profiles with visible photos get 300% more matches.' According to Mehreen:

Attraction is very important, anyone who says it isn't is lying. All this oh I want someone with good character, someone *deeni* (religious), *ye wo* (this that), it all goes to shit if they ain't decent looking. But with desi guys even if they're like a little bit good looking it'll go straight to their head!

Similarly, 25-year-old investment banker, Salman, had the following opinion:

The problem with desi girls is that they haven't had enough interaction with males in a normal way outside, so when they come on these apps and start getting a lot of attention from guys even the most average looking girls will have their ego inflated. They'll fucking think they're Katrina Kaif¹⁵⁰ or something (he rolls his eyes). Trust me, I don't know what apps they use to filter their pics but these *kuttis* (bitches) are magicians. They are all A grade technicians. Only one girl, fair enough, she blew my mind when I saw her in person... but then she opened her mouth and started talking (he sighs, a disgruntled look on his face).

Physically attractive individuals are considered to be more desirable as romantic partners when compared to other 'average appearance' profiles, particularly when looking for short-term

¹⁵⁰ Katrina Kaif is an English actress who works in Bollywood cinema. From: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1229940/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm

relationships (Chappetta & Barth, 2016). Li, et al. (2013) argue that men are more likely to choose partners based on physical attractiveness, while women tend to choose partners based primarily on social status (although this only applies when considering a long-term relationship). Mehreen, however, challenges the dominant narrative of ‘deen¹⁵¹’ and “good character” as key influential factors when it comes to choosing a spouse by adding the condition of physical attraction (“it all goes to shit if they ain’t decent looking”). Levine (2000) describes this form of attraction as ‘virtual’ because it is different from real time physical attraction and cues, with a lot more room for misrepresentation. Deception, ‘selective self-presentation’ (Hancock & Toma, 2009), or ‘strategic misrepresentation’ (Hall, et al. 2010) are a common trope in online dating environments, where users can create an ‘illusion of intimacy’ by presenting a profile that is not really representative of the person’s external appearance or of their character or personal situation (Bridge, 2012).

Salman addresses this issue when he refers to the women on the app as “magicians” and “A grade technicians” who use filters on their photographs and therefore don’t look the same in person. Hancock & Toma’s (2009) study found female online daters’ photographs to be less accurate than male photographs, and were more likely to be older, retouched or taken by a professional photographer, and contained inconsistencies, including changes in hair style and skin quality. Men too are not exempt from providing misleading information on dating sites (Couch, et al. 2012), and have a higher rate of lying than women when it comes to categories such as their height, physique, age, income, job type and title (Hall, et al. 2010; Dosh, 2012); in fact, two of the three men that I myself had met from muzmatch did not look anything like their photos in person (one was much shorter than he’d outlined, while the other seemed to have aged another ten years by the time we met). Bargh, et al. (2002) identify four types of self-presentation on dating sites as follows- true selves, actual selves, ought-to selves, and ideal selves. Seeking self-validation has the strongest effect on self-presentation in online dating environments, wherein users with high self-esteem tend to reveal more authentic and less deceptive selves (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Salman reiterates this when he critiques desi girls having their “ego inflated” on dating apps because they’re not accustomed to “getting a lot of attention from guys”. He echoes Shafiq’s earlier concern (in the previous section) of some desi girls having grown up in closed and restrictive home environments, and therefore lacking the experience and social skills to interact with men “in a normal way outside”. While the

¹⁵¹ Religion, especially the religious observances of a Muslim. From: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/deen>

limitations placed on female sexuality and sociality might be successful in protecting their chastity and thereby the family honour or ‘izzat’ (Gillespie, 1995) (or perhaps not, as we saw in the last chapter with the ‘double lives’ of our second-generation desi Muslim female informants), these same limitations do position desi women at a disadvantage in the world of online dating.

In addition to photographs and ‘virtual’ attraction, there is another crucial aspect of a profile that in some cases can even supersede an unflattering photo or physical appearance- the biography. The biography becomes even more important on a platform like muzmatch where users have the option of keeping their photos ‘private’ so they appear blurred out to the general public, but a user can choose to reveal them once they’ve matched with someone. This gives the people who do not fit a stereotypical model of beauty the opportunity to be found desirable, and for those who are considered beautiful by social standards, it gives them the chance to be attractive to others for reasons other than their physical characteristics (such as their intelligence, interests, religiosity, etc.). This is similar to the argument used by a lot of women who wear the niqab in the UK, who understand the choice to cover their face as a form of agency and non-conformity to ‘Western’ beauty standards and consumerist lifestyle and culture (Zempi, 2016)¹⁵². The biography first includes writing a status message where muzmatch encourages its users to ‘enter a short, catchy, or witty status message to capture someone’s imagination.’ The status message is then followed by a section titled ‘More about me’ where you essentially have to write about yourself and what you’re looking for in a partner. Muzmatch recommends filling this in ‘sincerely’ and discussing topics such as ‘favourite books/movies/music, life goals, hobbies/outdoor activities, educational background/career, religious views, family/siblings/parents/pets, and future marriage/family goals.’ 26-year-old marketer, Ali, said:

I find myself swiping if their photo makes me smile, but also if their bio isn’t self-absorbed. If they’ve put an effort into writing a decent bio, this usually shows that they’re legit, they’re genuinely wanting something out of being on here and hopefully won’t waste your time. The bio is basically the make or break point.

While the attractiveness and other qualities of a photograph are the strongest predictors of an online dating profile’s attractiveness, the free-text component also plays an important role in

¹⁵² The findings also suggest that wearing the niqab emerges as a personal choice, an expression of religious piety, public modesty and belonging to the Muslim ‘ummah’ (Zempi, 2016).

predicting overall attractiveness (Fiore, et al. 2008). Ali seconds this when he claims that “the bio is basically the make or break point” and is indicative of intention and legitimacy. Toma & Hancock’s (2012) study confirms that shorter descriptions in online dating profiles are suggestive of deceptions since lying is cognitively taxing. Other indications of deception can also be detected via linguistic cues such as using fewer “I” statements (for example, writing “love to cook” instead of “I love to cook”), as a method used by online daters to distance themselves from their lies (Toma & Hancock, 2012). Chappetta & Barth (2016) found that men tend to place more value on the woman’s picture than the text of her profile, whereas women usually give almost equal value to both the picture and the profile text. Ali proves that this might not be the case for all men, as he outlines paying attention to both aspects of a profile. The biography is the last stage of setting up a profile on muzmatch, after which one is presented with a range of profiles that match their filters and search preferences. You can swipe right if you like someone’s profile or left if you don’t, and if that someone likes your profile as well, then it’s a ‘MuzMatch’ and you get to chat with them. Muzmatch limits the number of swipes per twelve hours to ensure that every profile is fully considered, but you do have the option of buying more swipes or paying for an ‘instant match’ (where you can chat with the person even before they’ve liked you back). While this may initially seem similar to a Tinder style ‘swipe logic’ of simplifying choice by reducing it to a binary yes or no decision (David & Cambre, 2016), CEO Shahzad Younas argues that muzmatch is “not a casual app, it’s not a photo ‘yes, no.’ There’s so much more to it” (Millington, 2019). Muzmatch’s photo privacy options and emphasis on individual biography has the potential to counter the quick, easy, and transient nature of swiping by allowing its users the freedom to move between superficiality and depth (“I find myself swiping if their photo makes me smile, but also if their bio isn’t self-absorbed”), and therefore construct their own boundaries for intimacy that are constantly open to change.

On a particularly uneventful day, out of her desire for ‘banter’, 27-year-old Huma, one of my informants (who quickly became a good friend) decided to sit with me as she went surfing through profiles on muzmatch. Huma opened the app on her mobile phone and was greeted with the smiling face of a bearded 27-year-old man called Abdullah whose status message read ‘Hello’. “Great. This is the most interesting thing he can think of. Hello. Hello... Really? That’s all you got?” wondered Huma, shaking her head. She scrolled through the photos of Abdullah’s car selfie, Abdullah at the beach, and Abdullah with his young nephew. Online dating profiles are carefully curated platforms of self-presentation, with users actively seeking a balance between an accurate form of self-presentation (true self) and a desirable self-presentation (ideal

self) (Ellison, et al., 2006; Goffman, 1959). The ‘profile as promise’ framework enables online dating participants to employ a flexible sense of identity that draws upon past, present, and future selves (Ellison, et al. 2012). “He looks like a decent guy to be honest, like he likes to go out, and he’s probably going to be good with kids which is always a plus,” said Huma, clearly willing to consider Abdullah’s future potential to be a good father. She then scrolled to his biography which read ‘Don’t know what to say here so you can ask me whatever you want. Looking for a good partner, just a simple and beautiful girl. Swipe right, you won’t be disappointed 😊.’ But Huma was already disappointed. The ability to research candidates and gain knowledge prior to an encounter is an important feature for many online daters (Best & Delmege, 2012). “Ugh, I hate it when guys do that! Like why can’t you just friggin’ tell me some basic things about you so I can figure out if it’s even worth a try? Half of the guys on this app can’t communicate. At all. At ALL,” she emphasised. The initial communication between potential partners becomes even more important in terms of online dating because it determines whether a face-to-face (FtF) meeting will be arranged or not (Ramirez, et al. 2014).

Abdullah got swiped left, and then so did the next eight candidates- “boring, boring, this one seems too demanding, nah, nah, they’re not giving me any reason to swipe for them!” she muttered, as she moved from one profile to another. The format of swiping accelerates the skimming of profiles, thus producing an abundance of information as a zone “where all difference collapses towards the greyness of the same” (Featherstone, 2003, p. 443). By her tenth swipe Huma stopped as she looked at Karim, a 29-year-old scientist whose status message read ‘What you seek is seeking you.’ “I’ve seen a few guys write that now but I’m guessing at least he reads poetry or knows who Rumi is. Or maybe he just copied it off of someone else’s profile, you never know! Oh, you won’t believe it, I saw a guy on here once who had copied what I wrote on my own profile and I was like hey what the hell, that’s so lame, go be original loser,” said Huma, rolling her eyes. Almjeld (2014) argues that originality does not seem nearly as valuable in online dating profiles as is the recognition of and ability to wield existing texts and codes. Huma continues, “he’s okay looking, not wow, but not too bad either”, as she flicked through Karim’s photos. She then moved on to his biography which read ‘I would like to find a likeminded individual who is able to organise a halal catch up before moving forward. So what is likeminded? Well ideally you are open minded, hardworking, adventurous, inspirational or passionate about something. A Muslim who perceives life as a balanced system and contemplates things and people around you. If you think you’ve found that perfect

overprotective Prince who will cook for you then you're definitely on the wrong page sista. I'm not going with the status quo but looking for a partner in crime. Thanks for reading! Salam.' Huma hovered between the tick and the cross buttons on his profile for a few seconds before swiping right with a flourish of her thumb. She then turned to me and said:

Look yeah, he's not my usual type, but you can never properly tell with these things, can you? At least he can write in complete sentences and actually knows what he wants. Compare that to the rest of the shit that's on here- you have to flick through fifty profiles to find one decent one. And then you like it because hey there's no guarantee that that dude will actually end up talking to you or making an effort you know. You'll just have to see where it goes and usually, usually it goes nowhere (she says with a shrug). Remind me why I'm doing this to myself again? (she laughs, locking her phone and chucking it into her handbag). I don't know how you did it *yaar* (friend), finding someone on here. You got really lucky, Sahrish. It's like finding a needle in a haystack.

Whilst on the outset it may seem as though online mobile dating is beneficial because it offers its users an abundance of choice that they might otherwise not have access to, the flip side of this is that the increased choice creates an instance of excessive information, too many choices (a key feature of life in 'postmodern' society (Matic, 2011)), and too many potential (and potentially unsatisfying) mates (Wu & Chiou, 2009). Huma highlights how she has to accommodate beyond her personal preferences ("he's not my usual type"), since the outcome of the online dating experience is never guaranteed ("you can never properly tell with these things"). The fact that Karim seems self-aware and "can write in complete sentences" is enough for Huma to make an allowance, especially when she compares his profile to the other options ("the rest of the shit") available to her on muzmatch. The overall dating app experience can be an exhausting process as conversations often turn out to be one-sided, time-consuming and tiring ("there's no guarantee that that dude will actually end up talking to you or making an effort") (Franco, 2019). The prevalence and ongoing practice of filtering creates what Best & Delmege (2012) call a 'shopping culture of dating', which often serves to sap the dating energies of participants as they perceive their unsuccessful attempts as a 'waste' of time, energy and resources (Epstein, 2007; Coleman, 2009; Vandeweerd, et al. 2016). I understood Huma's emotions as I too had lived through her experiences of being on the app- the frustration at swiping left, hope at swiping right, disappointment at failed conversations, the eye rolls at cliché bios, the smiles at interesting ones. I had been there, done that, and somehow got 'lucky.'

But the bigger question remains- despite all the tailored filters and features of muzmatch, why were interactions going 'nowhere' and why had finding a partner become as difficult as

‘finding a needle in a haystack’? With this we turn our attention to the next chapter, where we take a look at second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ perceptions of gender and generational relations and explore how these have an impact on their experiences of intimacy and marriage.

VII. CHALLENGED- the construction, performance, and maintenance of gendered selves in second-generation desi Muslim migrants' intimate relationships

“We, as young single desi Muslims want to find someone that adds to our happiness, someone that makes us smile, that- as cringe and as cliché as it sounds- we want someone to be our better half, and that is not something a lot of our parents understand- of actively searching and seeking happiness. Their lives were different to ours, harder. I think the real problem is that none of us are on the same page- the guys don't get the girls, the girls don't get the guys, our parents don't get us, we don't get them- and maybe none of us even want to or are genuinely trying to get each other. We're all speaking a different language of love and marriage from each other, and none of us are actually fluent in the language of the other.”

(21 January, 2018, excerpt from Aisha's interview).

This was the response from 29-year-old singleton accountant, Aisha, when I asked her what she wanted from a potential partner. Aisha had been on muzmatch on and off for a year now, and despite going on a number of dates still hadn't managed to find her future spouse. We left the last chapter with the question of why, despite all of muzmatch's tailored filters and features, was finding a partner becoming as difficult as 'finding a needle in a haystack'? In this chapter, we turn our attention to second-generation desi Muslim migrants' perceptions of gender and generational relations and explore how these have an impact on their experiences and expectations of intimacy and marriage. Theorists of globalization, as well as activists writing from a range of subject positions, have argued that intimate practices are now taking centre stage and rapidly becoming part of global discourses in the process (Donner & Santos, 2016; Twamley, 2013; Jamieson, 2011; Svašek & Skrbiš, 2007, for example). This stands true especially in discussions around marriage practices and the accompanying notions of appropriate family forms, but also more generally for the ways in which ideas about gendered selves are constructed in relationships based on reflexivity and self-knowledge via the engagement with an intimate other. This is where 'love' and 'marriage' become such a site of controversy, as gender is produced and performed in accordance with, or against, the regulation of relations between men and women through the institution of marriage (Hare-Mustin, 2004).

Aisha outlines three key stakeholders in the heteronormative domain of ‘love’ and ‘marriage’ amongst ‘young single desi Muslims’ as ‘the girls’, ‘the guys’ and ‘our parents’, but complains “that none of us are on the same page”. She argues for the discursive construction of marriage in terms of ‘happiness’, which is currently considered as one of the most important individual goals in human life (Arampatzi, et al. 2018). Although the pursuit of happiness tends to be associated with individualistic cultures which encourage their members to favour personal desires over honour and meeting social obligations¹⁵³ (Ahuvia, 2002), here Aisha articulates happiness in social terms through interpersonal relations with a “better half” and with parents. One of the main factors that affect happiness is an individual’s ‘social capital’, which includes their patterns and intensity of social contacts with other people (Arampatzi, et al. 2018). Social capital is “the idea that individuals and groups can gain resources from their connections to one another (and the type of these connections)” (Paxton 1999, p. 89). Aisha believes that there is happiness to be gained from healthy connections between both genders and generations, and this happiness is jeopardised when “none of us even want to or are genuinely trying to get each other”. Another important dimension of social capital is a ‘sense of belonging’, as there appears to be a positive relationship between levels of happiness and a sense of belonging to one’s local community (Leung, et al. 2011). This brings us to question if, and how, belonging to the multiple and interlocking categories of ‘second-generation’, ‘desi’, ‘Muslim’, ‘migrant’, ‘in London’, has an impact on the intimate lives and the construction, performance and maintenance of gendered selves amongst the members of this study. If “we’re all speaking a different language of love and marriage from each other”, what are these differences and what gives rise to them? What discourses do the second-generation desi Muslim migrants draw upon to make sense of their intimate relationships with both their partners and their parents, and what discourses do they challenge or comply with in their gendered negotiations?

In this chapter I draw on the conceptual tools supplied by both West and Zimmerman’s (1987) early ethnomethodological take on ‘doing gender’, as well as Judith Butler’s performativity in relation to ‘doing gender’ as a situated social practice (Butler, 1990; 1993; 2004). It was West and Zimmerman (1987) who first put forward an early conceptualisation of the social construction of gender identity, which Butler further developed as a poststructuralist view of gendered subjectivity and performativity. In fact, West and Zimmerman (2009) later complain about how scholars such as Butler (2004) have played on their idea of ‘doing gender’ without

¹⁵³ Which is also what is claimed in the discussion on ‘progressive neoliberalism’ (Fraser, 2017).

even acknowledging their work. While both, West and Zimmerman, and Butler, have developed arguably distinct theoretical approaches, articles by other scholars have used ethnomethodology combined with poststructuralist and discursive approaches in relation to 'doing gender' (Mavin & Grandy, 2011; McDonald, 2012; Nentwich & Kelan, 2014, for example). In keeping with the thesis' multi-theoretical approach to research, this chapter also draws upon both approaches to explain the construction, performance, and maintenance of gendered selves in the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' intimate relationships. Regarding gender being 'done', both theorists offer valuable insight- while Butler emphasises how discourses influence the formation of subjects, West and Zimmerman explain how gender is done in interactions. West and Zimmerman (1987) propose that gender is a practice that is continually enacted in social relations, rather than being a stable ontological property that resides in individuals. Butler, on the other hand, challenges the very ontological status of identity itself (Nayak & Kehily, 2006). West and Zimmerman (1987, p.125) define doing gender in the following way:

A complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'.

Butler (2004, p.42) takes this one step further as she writes:

Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculinity and femininity are produced and naturalized, but gender might well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized.

Gender is not considered to be a self-evident category by either of them and is instead theorised as something that is actively 'said and done' (Martin, 2003), as well as potentially 'undone' and 'redone'. West and Zimmerman (2009, p. 118) argue that "gender is not undone so much as redone", thus accommodating resistance and social change. The 'undoing' of gender in an ethnomethodological sense challenges the general assumption that gender is 'omnirelevant', suggesting that it is relevant in every interaction and situation, and that we cannot 'escape gender' (Kelan, 2010). As West and Zimmerman (1987, p.137) write, "(i)nsofar as a society is partitioned by "essential" differences between women and men and placement in a sex category is both relevant and enforced, doing gender is unavoidable". This holds true especially in the case of Muslim and (to a large, but comparatively lesser extent) South Asian societies, where the dominant discourse heavily emphasises a heteronormative gender binary, which in turn

calls for gender to be 'done'. Butler (1990, p. 25) also claims that "gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes... gender is always a doing". Using Butler's theory of performativity, the iterative process of making, unmaking and remaking subjectivity is what produces individuals as unfinished products of particular discourses and relations of power (Butler & Davies, 2008). She argues that just as gender is always a process of doing, it is at the same time also an 'undoing', referring to both an unravelling of the subject as well as the subject's capacity to simultaneously challenge and resist this unravelling via performativity (Tyler, 2019). In her discussion of 'un/doing' gender, Butler (2004, p.1) focuses on the dialectical interplay between "what it might mean to undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life".

So, while we need the ethnomethodological approach to study the process by which social and gender order is accomplished, we need the discursive lens to explore the situations in which this dominant order is challenged through alternative performances. Looking at 'doing gender' in this way enables me to explore the second-generation desi Muslim migrants' active constructions and contestations of what is deemed as 'acceptable' masculinity and femininity, particularly in the context of family and romantic relationships (i.e. who decides or imposes what is considered as 'acceptable?'). Rather than appropriating the concept of 'doing gender' for the purpose of 'ceremonial referencing' (Wickes & Emmison, 2007), I use it to guide my analysis and discussion, thus combining these theoretical insights with empirical application.

There are various other scholars who have also applied the concept of 'doing gender' while studying Muslim populations both at home and abroad. A range of examples include: Karimi, et al.'s (2019) study where they analyse modalities of 'doing gender' amongst second-generation Somali migrants in Canada; Masood (2019) applies this concept in her ethnographic study of Pakistani female doctors as she maps 'doing femininity' within the hegemonic masculine workplace culture of Pakistan; Rao's (2015) study of Muslim converts where she argues that religious subjects perform religious identities at an intersection of "doing religion" and "doing gender"; Mehran's (2009) study of doing, undoing and redoing gender in the Islamic Republic of Iran after the establishment of the "gender appropriateness" of different fields of study post Iran's 'Cultural Revolution'; Sharp, et al. (2003) use 'doing gender' in the context of their Gender and Development work with Bedouin women in Southern Egypt; to name but a few. Nentwich & Kelan (2014) outline five key themes that emerge in the understanding of 'doing gender' as follows: 'structures', 'hierarchies', 'identity', 'flexibility

and context specificity’, and lastly, ‘gradual relevance and subversion’. They also maintain that most studies might not fit neatly or easily into any one of the themes, or that they might engage with more than one theme at the same time (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014).

Inspired by these five key themes, I consider the following questions throughout this chapter: What kinds of social structures can be identified in the field of research and within the data to legitimize the second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ account of belonging and intimacy being gendered/masculine/feminine (these include cultural, historical, religious, economic structures, etc.)? How are differences between masculinity and femininity created in a hierarchical way and made relevant to the informants? How is the gender identity of individuals, but also different tasks and labour (including financial, emotional, and household labour, etc.) made relevant in their relationships? What is the understanding of gender/masculinity/femininity within their specific context, and how might this differ across other varied contexts in the research field? And finally, how are gender differences emphasized, downplayed, or subverted amongst the informants?

In between ideals of acceptable masculinities- dealing with ‘contextual conformity’ and ‘gender accountability’

Since I dedicated Chapter V to showcasing the narratives of second-generation desi Muslim women as they critique the often taken-for-granted notions of subjectivity and identity that are available to them, in the interest of balance and fairness I want to begin this chapter by dedicating this section to the voices of my male informants as they address gender relations from their perspective. While there is a significant amount of literature on ‘British Muslim’ women, there is also a rapidly growing one on men and masculinity in the ‘British Muslim’ context. Scholars have written about the representation of British Muslim men in public discourses (Mac an Ghail & Haywood, 2018; Dwyer, et al. 2008; Macey, 2007), the intersections and their constructions of race, religion and masculinity (Britton, 2019; Ramji, 2007; Archer, 2001), their views on patriarchy (Siraj, 2010) and masculinity (Hopkins, 2006; Hopkins, 2009; Mac an Ghail & Haywood, 2017); their evolving spatial identities (Isakjee, 2016); and even the experiences of homosexual British Muslim men (Jaspal & Siraj, 2011; Jaspal, 2016; Cherry, 2018; Semlyen, 2018).

While the range of topics is varied, I did notice that there seemed to be an overrepresentation of specifically ‘British Pakistani’ men when referring to ‘British Muslim’ men, particularly from areas like Bradford and Slough in England (Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2012; Macey, 1999; Alam & Husband, 2006; Macey, 2007; Dwyer, et al. 2008, for example) or Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland (Hopkins, 2009; Siraj, 2010, for example). Perhaps this academic shorthand, whereby ‘British Muslim’ and ‘British Pakistani’ is applied interchangeably, exists since Pakistani Muslims make up the largest segment of the British Muslim population at 38%, followed by Bangladeshi Muslims at 15% (there are no official statistics available for Indian Muslims) (Warren, 2019). However, this form of (mis)representation can become problematic because it runs the risk of representing the U.K.’s Muslim community as a single homogenous entity, and fails to take into account the diversity and specificity of other minority British Muslim groups, including White ethnic, Black African, Arab, South East Asian, and so on (Akhtar, 2013; Fabos, 2012). I try to deviate from this tendency here by specifically presenting the narratives of my second-generation desi Muslim male informants, and attempt to move beyond the popular ‘British Pakistani’ or ‘South Asian’ academic categories by attending to ‘desi Muslim’ as a diasporic identity which includes Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims living in the metropolitan city of London. I asked them the same basic questions I posed to my female informants- what they wanted from a potential partner, their experiences of dating and muzmatch, and so on. The following excerpts are part of those discussions. 26-year-old marketer, Ali, narrates:

I’ll tell you what the main problem is yeah, women want this unicorn man that doesn’t exist. He has to be this metrosexual beta male half the time, but they also want him to be the alpha male when it suits them. Women initially want a weak man to affirm their whims that actually have no relevance to marriage, then they get bored in the relationship and are naturally attracted to the alpha male who takes control. They want to control the man and the relationship, they want everything done their way because wow, wait a minute, if you give your opinion you might be sexist! Women these days, especially in our culture, they’re whiny, they’re entitled as fuck, and they want to have their cake and eat it too.

Ali frames masculinity in a hierarchical scheme between an ‘alpha’ and ‘beta’ binary. Hegemonic masculinity is personified by the “alpha male”, who is characterized by dominance, machismo, leadership, and competitiveness, as well as physical traits such as a powerful physique, or being tall and strong (De Visser, 2009). The alternative and often less-preferred expression of masculinity comes in the form of the subordinate or “beta male”, who is characterized by more ‘feminine’ characteristics such as being thoughtful, quiet, and intuitive

as opposed to being macho and competitive (Dunlap & Johnson, 2013). Ali reiterates this understanding of masculinity when he considers the alpha male as the one “who takes control” in a relationship, while the beta male is “a weak man” who gives in to a woman’s “whims”. Ali’s account suggests that women seek some form of androgyny (Bem, 1974), supporting the idea that it is possible, or even preferable, to embody both masculine and feminine characteristics. Gartzia, et al. (2019) further suggest the term ‘emotional androgyny’ to move beyond gender stereotypes and emotions (such as ‘boys don’t cry’), equipping an individual with a wider range of emotional competences that enable them to display sex role adaptability across situations and engage in situationally effective behaviour (Bem & Lewis, 1975). Ali argues that women, however, seek to control such situations and behaviour “when it suits them”, alternating their demands through the course of a relationship by “initially” wanting a beta male but ultimately being “naturally attracted to the alpha male”. This format of situational or contextual variation in acceptable masculinity was also found in Talbot & Quayle’s (2010) study, where they found women to advocate nonhegemonic ‘nice guy’ masculinities in social and work contexts, but appeal to predominantly ‘hegemonic’ or traditional masculine ideals in romantic and family contexts.

Ali views relationships along a gendered axis of power and control, articulating the loss of masculine dominance and the resulting power struggle over control when women “want to control the man and the relationship”. Bhopal (2019) understands the relationship between the sexes in South Asian communities as one of inequality, subordination, oppression and difference. While it is mostly women who have been documented as being subject to the above, here Ali draws on sexist discourse to highlight the hostile attitude towards men (Fernández, et al. 2004) who voice their “opinion”, as it is seen to oppose women who “want everything done their way”. However, Ali himself expresses hostile sexism when he suggests that women are often demanding and manipulative (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Similarly, while women are thought to be low in entitlement as compared to men who are seen to have a higher sense of unhealthy entitlement (Welch, 1997; Valian, 2005; McDermott, et al. 2012), Ali asserts that women are “entitled as fuck”. Grubbs, et al. (2014) found that the feelings of deservingness and demandingness associated with entitlement are especially predictive of benevolent sexism in women. Benevolent sexism is characterized by notions of women as special and therefore deserving of special treatment and privileges (Glick & Fiske, 2018), encouraging them “to have their cake and eat it too”. As 28-year-old Shafiq reflects:

See women are all like oh I don't need a man, but then when you're with someone all that feminist crap goes out the window. I was engaged to this girl before and she was like you need to pay me money for maintenance¹⁵⁴, even though she was earning more than me. Sorry love, excuse me? How is that fair? Isn't the whole point of feminism to want equality? Women want to do all of these white people things, but then want to go back to their own culture when it works to their advantage.

Although the Quran depicts women as spiritually equal to men (Beekun & Badawi, 2005), it highlights the differences in their roles and functions in relation to each other and society. Men are considered to be the primary 'protectors and providers' (Hashim, 1999), and are often bound by law and/or custom to bear the economic responsibility for the women in the family (Lamya'al Faruqi, 1998). This can also be seen in the Islamic concept of 'nafkah', which is a man's religious duty to cover the living expenses of his wife and children including food, clothing, a place to live and other essentials like medicine, along with good treatment of the family (Foley, 2004). The enforcement of 'nafkah' responsibility can be traced back to the days of the Muslim Ottoman Empire (Tucker, 1998), and is still applied under Islamic family law and Shariah courts in predominantly Muslim countries, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia (Abdullah, et al. 2015; Mohd Zin, et al. 2015; Van Huis & Wirastri, 2012; Haider, 2000; Carroll, 1982, for example). Gendered religious scripts envision Muslim women as primarily domestic and men as the household authorities and breadwinners (Rinaldo, 2019), and so the economic responsibility of 'nafkah' exists to compensate women for their reproductive and rearing labour.

However, Shafiq questions the fairness of this demand of "money for maintenance" in a different context, one where women have access to increasing educational attainment and actively participate in the labour market, potentially even "earning more" than the man. He criticises his ex-fiancé's demand for monetary support, which is grounded in religious and cultural tradition, as it opposes Western feminist discourse on "equality". It becomes difficult to assess what overall equality between men and women means in terms of life opportunities and prospects, since these differ sharply even amongst men themselves (Cornell, 1998). That is not to say that gender equality is not a goal to strive towards, but the questions of equality for who, according to whom, and in what context, do need to be considered.

¹⁵⁴ The 'maintenance' suggested here is in the form of living expenses and not child support.

This argument is also used by non-Western and Muslim feminists, including those who prefer the term ‘womanist’¹⁵⁵ (Takhar, 2003), when they critique ‘Western’ feminism for ignoring issues related to religio-cultural differences and socio-economic divisions (given that concepts such as intersectionality were not even introduced until the rise of third-wave feminism) (Howe, 2017). The relationship of Muslim women to feminism in Europe, and elsewhere, is deeply bound up in Western notions of agency and the liberal democratic subject (Jaggar, 1998). But as Saba Mahmood (2006) points out in her study of women involved in piety and mosque movements in Egypt, women’s agency exists in ways that do not necessarily promote ‘gender justice’. This can be seen in Shafiq’s case too, as his ex-fiancé tried to use religious allowances that are designed to provide some form of female agency and a balance for the differences between men and women (even though these might encourage benevolent sexism), for the purpose of economic gain while also challenging traditional gendered power relations. Her lack of consideration towards Shafiq and her expression of a self-centred ‘Western’ style individualism is problematic because not only does it go against Western feminism and its alleged motto of ‘equality’, but it also contradicts the South Asian notion of ‘communitarianism’ which refers to the responsibilities to family and community as having priority over the individual (Foley, 2004).

The dynamism of gender relations needs to be studied and situated within a larger understanding of institutions and social structures (Cairns, et al. 2010). Mahmood (2006) notes that in the context of Europe, women are often expected to choose between affinities with Europe and feminism, or affinities with an immigrant or Muslim community, thus making the location of resistance deeply fraught (we also notice Shafiq criticizing this expression of contextual agency by desi Muslim women when he says, “Women want to do all of these white people things, but then want to go back to their own culture when it works to their advantage”). Here womanist thought offers a promising alternative; womanism supports the idea that the culture of the woman (which in this case is the focal point of intersection as opposed to class or some other characteristic) is not just an element of her femininity, but rather is the lens through which femininity exists (Gillman, 2006). That is, for second-generation desi Muslim women their brown-ness/desi-ness/Muslim-ness are not mere components of their feminism,

¹⁵⁵ The term ‘womanist’ was first coined by Alice Walker in 1979, and later evolved into a social change theoretical perspective “rooted in Black women’s and other women of colour’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people...” (Phillips, 2006, p. xx).

instead, their brown-ness/desi-ness/Muslim-ness become the lens through which they can articulate and manage their femininity.

It can be argued that both Shafiq and his ex-fiancé find themselves in between competing discourses at the intersection of gender, religion, culture, context and economics, and the selective endorsement and application of these discourses while ‘doing gender’ by both makes them complicated to navigate through, thus affecting gender relations. When it comes to gender roles, desi Muslim men were perceived to be in favour of maintaining traditional masculinities (and femininities), as can be seen from the following excerpts.

25-year-old investment banker, Salman, shares:

Women take the worst aspects of men and emulate that as their branch of fake feminism. Women should know their role and be the best at it, it’s more important than a man’s because a woman makes the home. But the man has to provide and protect. It’s instinct. You damage that and the central nervous system of the relationship gets affected. I’m not saying that women can’t or shouldn’t work- look at Khadija, she was a businesswoman- but just let the man be a man, you know...

29-year-old accountant, Aisha, adds:

My friend, she’s almost 30 years old, an independent woman, educated, she has worked hard on her career, she’s practicing, all that jazz. She met up with a man from muzmatch and this guy tells her that he wants a woman to consider the house her responsibility, that his wife should cook for him, and the kids should be her duty. Can we just, just LOL¹⁵⁶. Okay mate. We live in England, we are just about surviving to pay rents, we barely exist, and this man wants the woman to do the all-thing-house. This man is not alone in his thoughts, there are many, many others like him. Guys ultimately do want someone pretty traditional, no matter how cool or progressive they are.

Salman echoes Shafiq’s earlier frustrations with ‘feminism’, rendering the feminist label as inauthentic (“fake feminism”) when women attempt to imitate men. I found his usage of this term rather interesting because it begs the question of what constitutes an ideologically pure feminism, and does/can one exist? One thing was clear- Salman’s understanding of feminism did not come from a ‘white liberal’ feminism or ‘mainstream’ feminism (Ferguson, 2017), but rather from within an Islamic paradigm. Feminism based on a religious understanding is not

¹⁵⁶ Abbreviation for laughing out loud: used, for example on social media and in text messages, when you think something is funny or you intend it as a joke. From: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lol>

foreign to the feminist tradition, with the ‘first wave’ of feminism in the West being informed by evangelical Christianity (Banks, 1981). However, Majeed (2006, p. 38) challenges the idea that the language of “God-talk” sufficiently speaks to the realities of Muslim women, as she offers an alternative paradigm of ‘Muslim Womanist Philosophy’¹⁵⁷ (since womanism too has largely been associated with Christianity, especially the Black Church (Maparyan, 2012)).

Islamic tradition outlines men and women as complementary to each other in a multi-function organization, rather than competitive with each other in a uni-function society (Lamya’al Faruqi, 1998). Salman endorses this view, arguing that not only is a woman’s role different from a man’s, but it is even “more important than a man’s”. He subscribes to Mohammad’s (1999) division of public and private space as masculine and feminine spaces, respectively. The feminine space is the space of the home (“a woman makes the home”), while spaces outside the home are largely masculine (“the man has to provide and protect”) (Mohammad, 1999). Hopkins (2006) found that young Muslim men mostly expected themselves to be the primary breadwinner, earning money and providing for their (heterosexual) family. Salman believes that the maintenance of these roles ensures the smooth operation of “the central nervous system of the relationship”. However, he is also quick to point out that he is not opposed to women participating in the workforce, and gives the example of the Prophet Mohammed’s first wife, Khadija, who was a successful businesswoman and whose wealth supported the Prophet’s mission to spread Islam in its formative years (Sidani, 2005). To not work, when one is able, is seen to go against Islamic teachings which encourage self-sufficiency and entrepreneurial behaviour, emphasising the dignity of engaging in labour to support oneself¹⁵⁸ (Davis, 2013). However, the orthodox, and arguably patriarchal, perspective on modesty does not grant Muslim women a role in a nation’s economy easily, resulting in the inefficient utilisation of human resources (Syed, 2010).

Aisha touches upon this as she highlights the economic necessity of undertaking employment in the U.K. where “we are just about surviving to pay rents”, as she critiques her friend’s suitor who wanted a “woman to do the all-thing-house”. Aisha’s account emphasises how these

¹⁵⁷ For the Muslim Womanist, the attention to reconstructed knowledge encompasses Islam and the religious self-identity as Muslim women (Majeed, 2006).

¹⁵⁸ The Prophet Mohammed (P.B.U.H.) is reported to have said: “It is better for anyone of you to take a rope and cut the wood (from the forest) and carry it over his back and sell it [as a means of earning a living] rather than to ask a person for something and that person may give him or not.” (Sahih Bukhari Volume 2, Book 24, Number 549).

particular desi Muslim gendered performances should be understood within the context of their middle class positioning, particularly in relation to a specifically British sociocultural context which is marked by ‘urban inequality’ (Hamnett, 2019), sharp income inequalities and class divides (Atkinson & Jenkins, 2019). Despite this, the predominance of constraints related to patriarchal structures and discourse in shaping migrant women’s participation in public life challenges the idea that migration to Western liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom is emancipatory simply because of contact with ‘modern’ cultural values (Rodriguez, 2007). Similarly, Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (1992) study of gender relations amongst Mexican migrants to the United States found that alterations in patriarchal behaviour are neither attributable to the adoption of feminist ideology nor of ‘modern’ values, but rather to the arrangements induced by the migration process itself.

And so we begin to see a form of ‘sexist equality’ (Hopkins, 2006) emerge, whereby young Muslim men advocate equality between men and women on the one hand (“I’m not saying that women can’t or shouldn’t work”), yet also adopt sexist stereotypes about the role of women on the other (“he wants a woman to consider the house her responsibility, that his wife should cook for him, and the kids should be her duty”). Salman is supportive of women working and being economically independent, as long as they don’t threaten or disrupt his hegemonic masculinity and dominance in the private sphere (“but just let the man be a man, you know”). This suggests that desi Muslim men’s masculinities are constructed around a belief in ‘domestic conformity’ (McDowell, 2002), thus reproducing sexist and heterosexist familial situations. Bearing in mind that gender is relational (Longhurst, 2004), desi Muslim women too have a part to play in the construction of appropriate masculinities and femininities via their gendered expectations. As 25-year-old Laiba relayed:

If I’ve managed to go on a date from muzmatch, I’d offer to split the bill but honestly I’d be a bit surprised or concerned if he just agrees. It might sound cliché, but I do think that the guy should pay. It’s just one of those things, like he should just do it. It’s weird like I want him to know that I can take care of myself, but I also want him to be like yeah I’ll take care of you.

Dating cultural scripts generally dictate that men be proactive in asking for a date and paying for the date expenses, as that is what is deemed to be socially appropriate (Emmers-Sommer, et al. 2010). Men can potentially view paying for the date as a justification for sexually aggressive behaviour and in some cases, this even increases rape justifiability (Harney &

Muehlenhard, 1991). Conversely, splitting date expenses (commonly referred to as ‘going Dutch’) makes women feel more equal and powerful in their relationships (Luo, 2008). Here Laiba presents a “weird” internal dilemma. On the one hand is her desire to present a positive image of herself embodying the feminist ideals of independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency¹⁵⁹ (Fineman, 2000), as she says, “I want him to know that I can take care of myself”. It is this desire that inspires her to “offer to split the bill”. However, Laiba also subscribes to a traditional cultural script where she believes “that the guy should pay” and “take care” of the woman. She endorses a form of benevolent sexism which relates to paternal, patriarchal, and traditional attitudes, the general belief that women are the weaker sex and need to be cared for, cherished and protected (“I also want him to be like yeah I’ll take care of you”) (Chapleau, et al. 2007). Talbot & Quayle’s (2010) study similarly found that women were particularly willing to accept subjugation to engage in ideals of romantic partnership congruent with emphasized femininity.

So while a liberal ‘Western’ feminist lens guides Laiba’s dating behaviour (as she offers to split the bill), a traditional cultural lens constructs her dating attitude (where she’d “be a bit surprised or concerned if he just agrees”), and these two can be seen as conflicting since feminism is an oppositional form of knowledge to patriarchy (Hare-Mustin, 2004). Despite Laiba articulating and performing agency, her personal beliefs ultimately reinforce the traditional “cliché” status quo via her gendered expectations. The discrepancy between what women say and do, and what they actually want is a legitimate cause of concern, as our male informants have also mentioned before. 28-year-old Samira addresses this issue:

Sometimes the females too, they don’t help their own cause. My sister told me she wants a fairly traditional man, a bloke that does the ‘manly man’ stuff (she makes air quotations with her hands here). I mean, that’s not particularly for me but fine, if traditional gender roles is what you want, then, are you cool with being in the kitchen? No? Nah, of course not (she exclaims)! If you’re going to demand traditional gender roles from your spouse, you sure as hell need to be prepared to take them on too. If you want your wife to be responsible for the home and children, you need to earn enough money to make that a reality. If not, you need to think again.

¹⁵⁹ I wish to reiterate that when talking about autonomy and agency, feminists do not deny or ignore the fact that human beings are interdependent and immersed in networks of relationships, as they defend the view that the self is motivationally social (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000).

In the same way that Aisha had previously stated- “Guys ultimately do want someone pretty traditional, no matter how cool or progressive they are”, here we see both Laiba and Samira’s sister express their preference for a “fairly traditional man”, even though Samira herself does not (“that’s not particularly for me but fine”). The “traditional man” in this context is one who “does the ‘manly man’ stuff”, again placing an emphasis on hegemonic masculinity. The way Laiba and Samira understand and discuss masculinity proves that women are not just mere consumers of masculinity, but instead are active agents in its construction (Talbot & Quayle, 2010). Samira argues that men alone cannot be blamed or held responsible for skewed gender relations (“sometimes the females too, they don’t help their own cause”), drawing on the concept of ‘accountability’, the idea that gender is accomplished through situated enactments that are accountable to the prevailing gender order (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 135).

Brickell (2005, p. 38) writes “to do gender is often to do power”, and so Samira maps the troubled power relations that emerge when men and women want their partner to do gender in a ‘traditional’ way, but refuse to do the same. She first gives the example of women who want a ‘manly man’, but themselves would not be willing to be “in the kitchen”, reiterating the traditional view of the kitchen as a woman’s space (Supski, 2006). A woman’s prowess in the kitchen continues to be perceived as a true measure of a woman’s value, not just by society but often by women themselves (McFeely, 2001). Samira’s argument is that if women want to reject domesticity as a tool of nonconformity, then they too ought to be willing to accept alternative masculinities. Conflict occurs when individuals are demanding or seeking a certain subjectivity in their partner, without any desire to change their own. Similarly, she advocates that if a man wants to position his spouse as “responsible for the home and children”, then he too must be willing to adopt the primary provider/protector role. She highlights the need to have the economic capital to be able to make such demands in the first place (“you need to earn enough money to make that a reality”), emphasizing a co-constitution of gender roles, without which there will continue to be a clash in gender and marital expectations. As West & Zimmerman (2009, p. 118) explain:

The normative system involved in gender accountability (including the patriarchal system) cannot be regarded as “free floating” and changes in it involve both changes in persons’ orientation to these norms and changes in social relations that reflexively support changes in orientation.

So, the issue we see here is that while the individual's personal orientation to normative gender roles might be changing, the social relations between the two genders is not evolving in the same way to be able to support the changes in individual orientation. Challenging the status quo is often a paradoxical undertaking, as the defiance of authority and normative behaviour can serve to confirm those very norms just as compliance does (Hare-Mustin, 2004). While the male informants clearly appear to be having more traditional expectations from their partner, the female informants articulate a desire for contextual conformity, as they seem to be wanting someone more 'in between' - someone who doesn't make traditional demands from them, but still fulfils the cultural and religious expectations of a desi Muslim husband. Second-generation desi Muslim women emphasise what West & Zimmerman (2009, p. 118) describe as the "situational character of gender accountability", as they re-inscribe particular traditional understandings of gender practices, despite engaging with and navigating through cultural structures which call for gender equality. Their 'contextual variation' (Talbot & Quayle, 2010) in turn becomes a very important feature in the production of hegemonic masculinity and contributes to the confusion and frustrations articulated by the male members of the study.

Although it is these individual actors who are 'doing gender', they are nonetheless accountable to an audience to do gender in a way that adheres to normative understandings (Kelan, 2010). The audience in the case of second-generation desi Muslims is not just limited to a man or a woman in a relationship, but also includes their respective families (particularly when it comes to marriage). Gender accountability thus exists not only to each other but to the family (especially the parents), and to the wider community as well, who collectively view and impose expectations of 'normality'. Indeed, kinship systems and community living are an important context within which gender relations are constituted and located, and can have a discernible impact on the immediate context of men and women's lives through sustaining a specific gender ideology (Dube, 1997). In the next section I showcase the accounts of some of my married informants who are living with family, and in so doing examine desi Muslim gender identities via their role within the home/family.

Gender begins at home- Navigating through hierarchies of power with parents, partners, and peers

30-year-old paralegal, Kauser, offers insight:

I'm pretty sure *agar tum kisi se bhi poochhogi to zyadatar log yehi kahengi ke humein akele rehna hai* (if you asked anyone, most of the people would say that we want to live on our own). *Kaun apne in-laws ke saath rehna chahta hai yaar* (Who wants to live with their in-laws, my friend)! Living with the whole family, it isn't easy, not everyone can handle it, you need to have a looot of patience (she draws out the word 'a lot' for emphasis). But like, what can you do, either you rent which is a real waste of money, or you have to save up a ridiculous amount to buy a house because houses are so damn expensive in this country! The salaries are shit, and the houses are so bloody expensive, *matlab banda kya karey* (I mean what can a man do)?

I nodded my head in agreement with Kauser, telling her that this was the same reason why my husband and I were still living at his parent's house. The Office for National Statistics reported that workers in the U.K. needed to accumulate almost eight times their annual income to be able to buy an average house in 2018 (given that the average house price to earnings ratio hit 7.77) (Chu, 2018). Dubbed as the 'national housing crisis', the report further showed that based on the regional breakdown houses in London were even more out of reach for the ordinary person, with the average price relative to average earnings stretching to 13.24 (Chu, 2018). Additionally, individuals can only acquire a mortgage of up to 4.5 times their gross salary, however, a home buying couple does have the option to combine their incomes for this measure (thus creating the need for dual income families, a requirement Aisha emphasised in the previous section).

Scholars have shown how despite 'modernisation', traditional family structures such as living in the patrilocal¹⁶⁰ or 'joint family'¹⁶¹ residence, remain a deeply entrenched aspect of South Asian diasporic life (Hoole, 2002; Karasz, 2005). Even if the nucleated family move to a different area, the common expectation is for them to maintain close kinship ties with the original joint family (Hoole, 2002). Family migration in Western literature is generally considered as an individual or nuclear household phenomenon, however the South Asian

¹⁶⁰ Relating to a pattern of marriage in which the couple settles in the husband's home or community. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/patrilocal>

¹⁶¹ The joint family is a family in which parents and their male children with their families live together and are considered as a single unit. From: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/joint-family>.

context includes the strong presence of parents and extended family which remain as central kinship structures (Kōu, et al. 2017). Kauser highlights how this form of family life continues not because of voluntary choice, but because of the current economic structure and housing situation in Britain. The co-residence of elderly parents and adult children is now not uncommon in many European societies and occurs as a response to economic insecurities at both individual and societal levels, with welfare-state arrangements having a significant effect (Isengard & Szydlik, 2012).

Social structure does have an impact on the distribution of power between persons or groups of people (Nadel, 2009), and Kauser's account reminds us to consider how structural reality affects family life and living arrangements for second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London. As Blunt & Varley (2004, p. 3) write, "the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life". Even though living with the in-laws "isn't easy", and "not everyone can handle it", this was the reality for many of my married middle class informants who, like me, couldn't afford to move out of their parents' homes until they had accrued enough in savings. In the meantime, living with family came with its own set of rules, challenges, and gendered hierarchies that had to be navigated and negotiated.

'Manchild' and 'mummy's boys'- patriarchal modes of production and domestic despotism

28-year-old Nayab, who has been married and living with her in-laws for over a year, shares:

At university, my husband used to do things himself, but since he moved back home, his mum just does everything for him. So, when we got married, she pretty much expected me to do everything for him too, like treat him like a baby, this overgrown man-child. She's constantly like oh you should make sure his clothes are ready for work, he doesn't have breakfast before he leaves the house, oh he never takes lunch from home, and I just told her like he's not a child, you know. But if I don't do it then she'll have a moan about it, and it'll make me look bad! Like she said *oh aaj tak maine apne bachey ko koi kaam nahi karne diya hai, kabhi kitchen mein haathh nahi lagaane dia hai* (till today I have never let my child do any work, I've never let him even touch the kitchen), and I'm there thinking wow mate that's not something to be proud of! She's basically an enabler.

Archer (2003, p. 75) found that British Muslim boys constructed the home as 'a place of freedom and autonomy for males' and 'a site of restriction and subservience for women'

(however, not all women are restricted or expected to be subservient in the same way, as there is a hierarchy of power within the household which we shall explore further). Nayab also emphasises how the home is a space of privilege for men by giving the example of her husband and highlights how her mother-in-law has a significant part to play in making it so. She draws our attention to the politics of space between university (which encouraged independence and autonomy) and the home (where “his mum just does everything for him”), which we have explored in the previous chapters as well. While a mother has many responsibilities in Islam, including the physical, mental and spiritual care of her children (Oh, 2010), Nayab recognises that continuing this care into adulthood enables the production of an “overgrown man-child¹⁶²”. The trademark characteristic of a man-child is immaturity, for they are seen to be lacking in virtues such as ‘strength, courage, pride, industry, resolution, self-reliance, discipline, and honour’ (Balducci, 2016, p. 5). Nayab does not articulate the absence or lack of these virtues explicitly, instead she characterises the ‘man-child’ as one who does not partake in any household labour. Housework still very much falls under the domain of women, as Muslim men exhibit little to no interest in household activities which they view as ‘increasingly feminised’, thus conforming to a form of hegemonic masculinity that encourages them to avoid chores at home (Hopkins, 2006).

Nayab refers to her mother-in-law as an “enabler”, because not only does she enable the production of this hegemonic masculinity (and in fact, takes great pride in it as well), but also calls for its continuation when she expects her daughter-in-law “to do everything for him too, like treat him like a baby”. Just as a father transfers the responsibility for his daughter to her husband when he gives her away in marriage (Tapper & Tapper, 1992), here the mother-in-law is trying to do the same. Not only is the transferring of this responsibility of maternal care naturally “expected”, Nayab highlights how in her case it is also “constantly” surveyed, leaving her open to judgement (“if I don’t do it then she’ll have a moan about it, and it’ll make me look bad!”). Even when Nayab expresses resistance against this set-up (as she explains to her mother-in-law “he’s not a child, you know”), her efforts are seemingly unsuccessful. Similarly, 27-year-old Basim shares his dilemma:

I actually want to do things for myself at home, it’s not like I don’t know how to, but literally every time I get up to do something my mom goes *nahi nahi, lao main kar deti*

¹⁶² While the term traditionally refers to ‘a male child’, it is now commonly used to describe ‘a man who has the qualities of a child: a childlike man’. From: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/man-child>

hoon, hato hato (no no, let me do it, move away move away), and I can't say no to her because she won't listen, so I guess I'm just used to that now. I've told my wife though that when we have our own house, if she needs help, I will try and help her around the house.

In the same vein, 29-year-old Aisha adds:

I think the patriarchal system does not help the situation. The boys, they're so used to life revolving around them, it is unreal for them to think a world that doesn't revolve around them even exists. Of course, not all are like that, but most are. Most of them are mummy's boys. I have a friend, even when he wants to help out or do chores around the house his mom doesn't let him. She shoos him away and she'll do it herself or ask her daughter to do it instead. Desi moms are like that, even in my house when I was studying and my brother was just playing PS (PlayStation), she'd rather I get up and do the work than him. So, it's not like girls are just more mature than boys, it's just that girls are punished from an early age for the same type of shitty behaviour that boys are allowed to indulge in well into adulthood.

From a young age, South Asian boys are not expected to do any housework, can go out to play, and are encouraged to grow into men with power, expectations, and thereby, a sense of privilege (Mucina, 2015). Young British South Asian Muslim women, on the other hand, were seen to construct the home as a place where they were expected to reproduce the parental culture which was reinforced through the discourse of '*izzat*' or family honour (Dwyer, 2000). The gendered division of housework emerges as a patriarchal mode of production which systematically undermines women's status at home while simultaneously enhancing that of men (Kynaston, 1996). While the patriarchal mode of production is indeed a social construct (Kynaston, 1996), thereby making it open to change and conquest, both Basim and Aisha's accounts show how deviating from this patriarchal model remains problematic because of the figure of the "desi mom".

Having sons gives women a great sense of power and status within the South Asian community, with the mother-in-law wielding the utmost power in a household, including in the upbringing of her son's children (Bhopal, 1998). Even in Islam, mothers hold a very high status, as they are respected and recognized within the family (Oh, 2010). Immigrant Muslim mothers also feel the heightened need to pass on religious and cultural values to their children to ensure that they are following the 'family rules', particularly in a 'Western' environment which they recognise as non-Islamic and also as comprising of values that can be contradictory to the values taught in their religion and culture of origin (Al-Jayyousi, et al. 2014). Similarly, the

desire to preserve and continue core traditional values remains very strong amongst most first-generation South Asian migrant women (Choudhry, 2001). While immigrant South Asian mothers may be willing to accept 'Western' values that are related to issues of education and work, they are not likely to accommodate those related to marriage, religion, and gender roles (Naidoo & Davis, 1988).

Taking all these factors into account, the immigrant desi Muslim mother (especially in her role as mother in-law) thus emerges as the dominant force within the household structure. Not only does she refuse to take no for an answer ("I can't say no to her because she won't listen"), but she is also responsible for protecting and propagating "the patriarchal system" via the appropriation of female domestic labour. This reiterates the fact that the 'patriarchal system' does not only include the pervasive presence of male violence against women, but contrary to mainstream understandings, can and does also include the subjugation of women by other women themselves (Hunnicut, 2009). Power is exercised in ways that create hierarchy, and the gendered intergenerational hierarchy between a desi Muslim mother in-law and daughter in-law is evidence of this. Different women experience different 'degrees of vulnerability' under patriarchal systems (Hunnicut, 2009), and the position of power that a desi Muslim mother or mother in-law holds proves that simply belonging to the shared category of 'woman' or the female gender does not necessarily imply a shared female experience (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002).

The complex nature of kinship structures must be taken into account to understand how and why women can be constrained and abused by them. Nughmana Mirza (2017) documents British South Asian Muslim women's experiences of abuse by female affinal kin, highlighting how 'domestic despotism' was recognised as the most common form of abuse by her respondents. This included daughters-in-law feeling constant stress to cook and clean for everyone in the household, and in some cases the mothers-in-law would overwhelm them with housework to the point where they would be too physically exhausted to spend time with their husbands, thus creating marital discord (Mirza, 2017). While both Nayab and Basim's accounts provide evidence for such subtle and indirect acts of abuse being perpetrated by the mother in-law, Aisha's anecdote of her friend as well as her own experience at home shows us that it is not just the daughter-in-law, but often times also the daughter who is subject to oppressive patriarchal practices. Aisha relays how her brother's leisure time playing video games on the PlayStation was given greater priority than her own studying time. Hopkins (2006, p. 340) also

notes how young British Muslim men construct the home as a site of consumption and relaxation when they maintain that the home “is a place to have dinner, play the computer and watch TV”. The preferential treatment of sons by their mothers leads to the production of “mummy’s boys” who are “so used to life revolving around them”. 24-year-old Mehreen adds:

The boys are spoilt in terms of opportunity, in terms of freedom, in terms of expectations, in terms of everything. Everything. The double standards are there. And the family will try do it in such a subtle way, but its so obvious. Sometimes neither the parents nor the boys will see it, but you can see it because you’re the girl, you’re not part of that framework. But I think with our generation it’ll hopefully get better. At least for me, I know when InshaAllah¹⁶³ I have a daughter or son, I’m going to treat them equally, because I can’t stand the bias myself.

Mehreen recognises that her gender as “the girl” positions her outside the “framework” of power, where she is subject to multiple power relations, “bias” and discursive constraints, especially in comparison to “the boys” (“the double standards are there”). However, she does not render herself powerless as she outlines her hopes for the future in which the status of motherhood places her in a position of power where she can encourage more egalitarian roles and responsibilities by treating her daughter or son “equally”. It is in this way that South Asian women emerge as potentially powerful forces of change as they become agents of cultural transmission, playing a vital role in the upbringing of their children (Ayyub, et al. 2007). It is also worth noting at this point that second-generation desi Muslims might not have to wait as long as parenthood to alter gender relations, as Basim mentioned earlier “I’ve told my wife though that when we have our own house, if she needs help, I will try and help her around the house.” Even though Basim’s offer of house “help” is provisional rather than a given, he assures his wife that being in their “own house” would at least allow him to “try and help” as opposed to his mother intervening. The sociocultural norms in extended family households, such as the desire to maintain a joint patrilocal household and the preference for sons, can cause conflict and hostility not just between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, but also between mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, and men and women in general. However, as the second generation begin to move towards parenthood and nuclear households, these sociocultural norms and gender relations can potentially be subject to change.

¹⁶³ Meaning “If Allah wills it”. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/inshallah>

Missionary accomplished- sexuality, power, and the expressions of dominance and subordination

Another area where conflict emerges in gender and generational relations is sexual intimacy, which is especially put to the test in joint family settings. 26-year-old Zareen, who has been married for 5 months, shares:

One day my mother in law randomly came up to me and said *waisey, aap roz nahi nahaate paak hone ke liye* (by the way, don't you shower every day to get purified)? And I was just like huh what do you mean? And then she goes, *aapko pata hai na, poori ghusl¹⁶⁴ karna padhta hai uske baad* (You do know that you have to do a full ghusl after that right)? And then I clocked on to it, that riiight, she's talking about us having sex and I was completely mortified! I just told her that umm no, no one has time to do this every day, and she was like oh my god, is that why he's in a bad mood all the time?!? And then she went off on a lecture about how its normal for men to have this need, *aur yehi zaroorat poori karne ke liye to shadi karte hain* (and marriage is done for the purpose of fulfilling this need), and in my head I was just like what the fuck man, why are you talking to me about this, I wouldn't even discuss this with my own mom!

Historically, sex and sexuality feature in all societies but when it comes to the South Asian (particularly Muslim) context, sex remains a taboo subject, and parents are reluctant to discuss sexuality and share sexual information (Kelly, 2016). This makes children themselves uncomfortable when talking about sex (“I wouldn't even discuss this with my own mom!”), and is one of the main reasons why sexual abuse (whether it be child or marital abuse) becomes so difficult to address in South Asian families (Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Durham, 2004; Abraham, 2000). Additionally, Muslims are also taught that it is forbidden for spouses to disclose their intimate sexual experiences to any outside parties (unless it is for the purpose of treatment, counselling or therapy for their marriage) (Abbott, et al. 2012). Despite discussions around sex being off limits especially within the family, here we see Zareen's mother in-law in her position of power, holding the authority to not only address such issues with her daughter in-law, but to even try and demand a particular action from her. However, it can be noticed that she does not explicitly refer to sex or any other sex related terminology throughout the conversation, instead she chooses indirect references to ‘*ghusl* (washing)’ and ‘*zaroorat* (need)’ while enquiring about Zareen's marital sex life. While non-marital sexuality is

¹⁶⁴ The Arabic word *ghusl* meaning ‘washing’ refers to the ritual washing of the whole body, as prescribed by Islamic law to be performed in preparation for prayer and worship, and after sexual activity, childbirth, menstruation, etc. From: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/ghusl>

expressly forbidden in Islam, the exercise of sexuality is emphasised and encouraged within the confines of heterosexual conjugal life (Dialmy, 2010). But even within marriage, the frequency and timing of opportunities for sexual relations remain a legitimate space for social or external control, especially in the early years of marriage when most couples live in a joint family setting (Vatuk, 1992). As Nayab also shares:

It's weird like it's really hard with everyone at home to have sex, you have to time it, so no one randomly knocks on your door and we're both always worried about someone hearing us doing it or something. Obviously, we want to be intimate, but we can't just do it wherever whenever and that sucks because it does take a toll on our sex life.

Both Nayab and Zareen's accounts are telling of how privacy and personal boundaries are compromised in the joint household, and how this consequently affects their sex lives. In Zareen's case her sex life is not only questioned but clearly kept under surveillance by her mother in-law. However, unlike most typical South Asian mother in-laws who emphasise sexual activity for the purpose of reproduction (Char, et al. 2010), here Zareen's mother in-law is more concerned with her own son's sexual fulfilment. Marital sexuality, as outlined repeatedly in the Quran and the hadith, should ideally be characterised by complementarity and give pleasure to both men and women (Beckmann, 2010). However, while scholars do recognise that sexual relations and sexual pleasure are amongst the 'needs' of both a husband and a wife, the overwhelming weight of Muslim legal and exegetical tradition tend to focus on women's obligations to make themselves sexually available to their husbands, rather than the other way around (Ali, 2015). Zareen's mother in-law also articulates sex from this perspective that prioritises the male desire ("she went off on a lecture about how its normal for men to have this need"), arguing that marriage is established for the very purpose of fulfilling this "need". According to the Islamic legal tradition, marriage is fundamentally viewed as the lawful exchange of sexual access for dower, and the wife's continued sexual availability for financial maintenance and support (Ali, 2015). So while complementarity and harmony are indeed underlined as features of a 'good' Muslim marriage (Beckmann, 2010), the husband and wife's status emerges as hierarchical- the husband is encouraged to be the benevolent patriarch, responsible for providing and caring for his family, while the wife should satisfy her husband's requests and ensure all his 'needs' are met. This hierarchy finds its way into the bedroom as well, as Nayab candidly revealed:

I'm probably the only one of my close friends who actually enjoys sex, otherwise most of them have that attitude of like yeah let's just get this done and over with, or ugh he wants sex again, *bas hand job deke khatam karo* (just give a hand job and finish it). Most girls will just open their legs and lie there. They won't get on top or do it from behind, like no, it'll just be plain boring vanilla sex!

The expectation placed upon wives to be readily available for sex even if they are not interested or perhaps may be inconvenienced to do so (the exceptions are sickness or menstruation), puts a lot of pressure on them to ensure their husbands' satisfaction (Abbott, et al. 2012). This can in turn lead to a lot of frustrations and resentment within a marriage (Yasan & Gorgen, 2009), potentially putting women off of sexual enjoyment altogether. Married Muslim women have been recorded describing sex as 'work', the 'duty' of a wife, something to be performed but not particularly enjoyed (Beckmann, 2010). Nayab also notices "most of" her friends expressing a similar disenchanted and uninterested "attitude" towards sex, as something to be "done and over with". Rather than being active participants in sexual endeavours, Nayab criticises 'most girls'' passive approach to sex when they "just open their legs and lie there". Heterosexual romantic discourse positions feminine sexuality as generally passive, and this passivity often leads to decreased sexual satisfaction (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007). Nayab also critiques the lack of variation in terms of sexual positions, as "they won't get on top or do it from behind". While Nayab views the classic missionary position as "plain boring vanilla sex", Muslim jurists and erotologists describe this position as 'normal' and optimal since it facilitates conception for the woman (Dialmy, 2010). Islamic notions of sexuality generally indicate that practices which deviate from the procreative intent of sexuality are 'unnatural' (Hidayatullah, 2003), which is why acts like sodomy are expressly forbidden.

The missionary position is indicative of heterosexual competency and hegemonic masculinity (Fair, 2011), with the husband emerging as the 'sexual master', exerting physical domination and control when he is on top of his wife (who emerges as vulnerable, passive, and subordinate) during sex (Dialmy, 2010). The performative 'man on top' position is symbolic of the hierarchy present in other aspects of conjugal life and overall gender relations. Struggles over sexuality are also struggles over power, which promote or reflect the expressions of dominance and subordination (Weeks, 2010). Consider the following excerpts.

28-year-old Samira, discloses:

See if you'll have sex with a Muslim guy, they will mostly do the missionary penis in vagina sex. They'll just do that. A lot of what they learn is through watching porn. For

example, I have never had a Muslim guy go down on me, BUT (her voice rises) they will always want it the other way. They will want a blow job. And that's in life generally, not just sexually, where they get stuff and they don't have to give. But with girls we are so used to giving, we are sooo used to giving. Now for example when I had amazing sex with a white guy over the weekend, he was doing a lot of giving and I wasn't doing that much so I asked him what he'd like. He was like why are you asking me that, I'm doing this because I want to. Those guys actually get pleasure in giving. And I get pleasure in giving generally in life as well. But when you're constantly giving to people that are constantly taking, that's not okay. And majority of these desi boys are used to that and they don't like hearing about it or being called out on it. They don't even want to have a conversation about it because they get so uncomfortable. I don't want to be in a relationship with someone like that. Honestly, honestly, I'd much rather be alone.

Alternatively, Ali reflects:

I've never really spoken to my friends about this kind of stuff because it's way too personal. But I'd say a lot, and I mean a lot, of the guys if they found out that you lick pussy they'd just make fun of you and call you a pussy, give you so much shit for it, whereas with white guys I guess it's a more normal thing to do, maybe only 10 per cent of them would find it gross. But I guess with desi guys it's just that we come from this culture you know, where women are just there to give you pleasure and have babies, like with the older generation it was more a case of *haan beghum shalwar utaaro* (yes Mrs., take off your trousers) and then they hump for a few seconds and that's it. Now there's a lot more pressure to be good in bed and last long...

Both Samira and Ali's accounts touch upon similar subjects, albeit from different perspectives. Samira reiterates Nayab's earlier observation of penetrative "missionary penis in vagina sex", as the most common form of intercourse amongst desi Muslims. She argues that the men mostly learn about sex "through watching porn", which becomes problematic as exposure to pornography can result in dispositional changes that create difficulties in relationships, as "cynical attitudes about love emerge, and superior sexual pleasures are thought attainable without affection toward partners" (Zillmann, 2000, p. 42). This demand for selfish sexual gratification is evident in the one-way exchange of oral sex, where the men will "always want... a blow job" but will "never" be willing to do the same in return (this also suggests that the men are selective in what they take from porn/the types of porn they watch). Depending upon which school of Islamic jurisprudence one adheres to, sexual behaviours such as oral sex may be permissible, forbidden, or tolerated, but certainly not encouraged (Abbott, et al. 2012).

What we see here though is that men's evasion to oral sex does not come from a religious belief, but from cultural conditioning. Ali reflexively acknowledges the cultural positioning of

women as objects of sexual desire and relief, as well as childbearing vehicles (“with desi guys it’s just that we come from this culture you know, where women are just there to give you pleasure and have babies”). Similarly, Samira parallels the absence or lack of give and take in love making to “life generally”, where “desi boys are used to” receiving, while the girls “are sooo used to giving”. Boys often differ from girls in the importance given to gender-typed benevolence, achievement, and power values, with girls giving higher importance to benevolence and boys valuing power and achievement more than girls (Knafo & Spinath, 2011). Even when men are inspired to be more helpful and benevolent, they are likely to exhibit those traits in contexts where they can display heroism or dominance (Griskevicius, et al. 2007). Oral sex, in particular, is viewed as male submission (Ozyegin, 2016), and therefore does not align with dominant constructions of hegemonic masculinity.

This is further emphasised in Ali’s quote where indulging in oral sex can potentially subject desi Muslim men to humiliation and emasculation by their peers. They apply the misogynistic label of “pussy” for men who “lick pussy”; here the epithet “pussy”, much like the term ‘fag’, functions as an all-encompassing trope for ‘failed masculinity’- the pussy is the feminine, passive, and implicitly penetrated ‘other’, clearly distinguishable from aggressive normative masculinity (Fair, 2011). Dominant masculine discourses produce and govern the ways in which knowledge about sex can, and cannot, be discussed (Foucault, 1990). While men are known to boast about their love affairs and sexual prowess in peer groups (commonly referred to as ‘guy talk’) (Knight, et al. 2012; Smith, 2007), Ali expresses a reluctance to share such information not just “because it’s way too personal” but also because his friends would “give you so much shit for it” and “just make fun of you”. Applying humour when discussing men’s sexual encounters reproduces group solidarity amongst men, while also reconstituting a shared purchase on patriarchal power in which women (and other men) become dominated and marginalised via discourse (Knight, et al. 2012). Here we see desi Muslim men’s ability to meet social expectations and dominant constructions of masculinity as being policed by fellow men. Their collective understanding that the act of giving oral sex to a woman challenges men’s position in the patriarchal gender order suggests that the ways in which men view sexual behaviour continues to draw upon and reproduce idealised masculine expectations of what it means to be a ‘real’ man, particularly in the desi Muslim context.

In this instance, we see that gender accountability exists not only towards the opposite gender and/or family structures, but also within the same shared gender identity, thus creating

masculine hierarchies. Masculine hierarchies represent complex social milieus that cannot be separated from other social characteristics, such as racialised bodies or socioeconomic status (Connell, 1995). We see a form of this hierarchy emerge in both Samira and Ali's accounts as they document racialised attitudes towards sex via a comparison with "white guys". Samira describes her sexual experience with a "white guy" as "amazing" because "he was doing a lot of giving". She goes on to draw a direct comparison between "desi boys" who "are constantly taking" and white guys who "actually get pleasure in giving", thus constructing them as better sexual partners. Ali too commends "white guys" having a more sophisticated and matured take on oral sex as "a more normal thing to do", where "maybe only 10 per cent of them would find it gross" as compared to "a lot, and I mean a lot" of desi Muslim men. Ali also strikes a contrast between the 'then and now' of sexual practices, describing the "older generation" take on sex as quick ("they hump for a few seconds and that's it") and formal ("it was more a case of *haan beghum shalwar utaaro* (yes Mrs., take off your trousers)") routine accomplishments that lacked intimacy. This again reiterates the South Asian (and often times, also Muslim) understanding of sex as an avenue for men's pleasure and gratification within marriage (Ayyub, et al. 2007). Additionally, even though the "now" includes "a lot more pressure" on men's sexual performance, Ali's quote suggests that the idea of being "good in bed" is still only tied to male endurance and longevity ("last long") rather than a focus on female pleasure and satisfaction.

**"Ye kya ladkiyon ki tarah ro rahe ho (what is this, you're crying like a girl)"-
Performativity, reflexivity and accountability in gendered-emotion narratives**

Another area of tension emerges in the exercise of emotional labour in intimate relationships. Emotions¹⁶⁵ are often experienced in relation to others, with different relations producing different emotions that can then potentially direct and affect the outcome of relationships (Gausel, 2011). As Zareen says:

Living with the in laws, like I can't afford to have a bad day. If something is off, everyone starts asking questions. Even when we fight, we can't fight too loudly because then they'll hear us and neither of us really want to tell them our personal problems as a couple because then everyone will get involved and it can get proper messy. Like we might forgive each other and move on, but they will always remember our fight. Both me and Hamza (her husband) know about couples who've ended up getting a divorce

¹⁶⁵ The term 'emotion' includes sentiments, affect, feeling and the like (Turner & Stets, 2005), so I apply it here in a broadly defined manner to consider varied aspects of affect and affection.

because one of them was getting way too influenced by what everyone else was saying. Usually it's the guy whose mom is just trying to control him (she rolls her eyes).

Placed under watch, the informants recognise what I refer to as the 'domestic desi familial panopticon' (inspired by Foucault, 1995), as one that monitors (and indeed, attempts to regulate) gender, sexuality, domestic, and even emotional labour. Zareen's account is telling of the surveillance of emotions that occurs within a joint household. This surveillance in turn inspires a daily performance from Zareen in having to exercise control on the expression of her emotions. Members of collectivistic societies (such as 'South Asian' ones) are often socialized to control their emotional expressions in order to maintain ingroup harmony; alternatively, members of individualistic societies (such as 'Western' ones) are encouraged to express their feelings more directly (Kang, et al., 2003). The way people speak about their emotions is often tied to the local context of interactions (Bamberg, 1997). And so, while we see Zareen and her husband expressing themselves freely within their relationship, marital fights included, we also notice how this expression is hampered by living in the joint family set up ("even when we fight, we can't fight too loudly because then they'll hear us"). Emotional communication has become the basis of intimacy in a globalised world, and the couple emerges as its exclusive site (Giddens, 2003). However, the idea of intimacy and confessional selves is not always exclusively focused on the couple but must also include, and be supported by, a corresponding redefinition of parent-child relationships (Jamieson, 1998).

Zareen therefore articulates her and her husband's desire to keep certain affairs private ("our personal problems"), in an attempt to maintain their identity and autonomy as a separate unit ("as a couple") within the joint household. Rather than investing in a process of hierarchical transformation, both of them consciously endeavour to sustain a sense of intimacy despite the structural inequality that comes with living at home. Even though this may be challenging, it becomes a relationship saving strategy as there is a fear of marital breakdown if emotional boundaries aren't observed. Once again, we see the influential figure of the mother-in-law exerting power and "control" over her son (and by extension her daughter in-law), potentially affecting the quality and success of their marriage. Mirza (2017) also notes the 'constant ear filling' practices of British South Asian mother in-laws as they induced spousal abuse by making complaints about their daughter in-law. There is no doubt that emotions play a vital role in social, interpersonal and intergroup relations (Gausel, 2011), and the extended family's

continued involvement and influence places additional pressure on young desi Muslim couples to exercise caution and control in their emotional work.

The pressures of emotional performance are not just pronounced within a household, but can also be felt within relationships, as Shafiq recounts:

Women say they want someone sensitive, but no one really wants to be with a sensitive guy. My previous girlfriend yeah, I was upset about something and I cried in front of her and I still remember her saying *ye kya ladkiyon ki tarah ro rahe ho* (what is this, you're crying like a girl). And that really hit me. As guys we're supposed to be strong, you can't be a pussy, you're just supposed to man up and get on with it. I think *goray phir bhi* (white people, even then), now they're starting to have these conversations where it's okay for men to show emotion, but with us that's just not even a thing.

The cultural models of men and masculinity are more often than not associated with a lack of emotionality (Galasiński, 2004). However, here we see Shafiq applying a gendered emotional reflexivity that counters the dominant constructions of Muslim men as lacking or incapable of emotional intimacy (Britton, 2019). Holmes (2015, p. 177) describes emotional reflexivity as “relationally reflecting and acting on interpretations of our own and others’ emotions and as describing the way in which emotions are central to how we make our way through the world”. So emotions are not only experienced in relation to other individuals, but also in relation to social structures and/or discourses (de Boise & Hearn, 2017). For instance, McQueen (2017) recognises that male affect within intimate relationships is characterised by the tension between two competing discourses- namely, ‘it’s good to talk’ versus ‘boys don’t cry’. This is especially evident in Shafiq’s account, as he complains about women wanting someone “sensitive” on the one hand, yet rejecting and invariably punishing men for the display of emotions that are considered ‘feminine’ in nature, such as crying (Santiago-Menendez & Campbell, 2013; Peter, et al., 2001). Shafiq argues that as a man he only has access to a certain limited range of emotions, emotions that are commonly associated with hegemonic masculinity (“as guys we’re supposed to be strong”). The heteronormative man is constructed as tough, one who does not share his pain, does not grieve and avoids ‘warm’ feelings (as Shafiq also corroborates, “you’re just supposed to man up and get on with it”) (Jansz, 2000). But despite the frequently encountered association of masculinity with rationality, self-discipline and a distancing from emotions or emotionality (Galasiński, 2004), Shafiq’s account and the lived experiences of many other men like him, offer a considerably more complex view of the relationship between men, intimacy and emotions.

The issue here is not that men are unemotional creatures or that they do not want to share their emotional experiences, rather it is the pervasive sense of vulnerability that becomes rooted in their identification of affect with ‘weakness’ (“you can’t be a pussy”) (McQueen, 2017). Gough (2018) acknowledges the influence of traditional norms regarding masculinity which continue to constrain, police, or downplay expressions of vulnerability. What’s interesting to note is that Shafiq’s expression of emotion is not just curbed by some free-floating heteronormative masculine ideals, but that these expectations are actively reinforced via the processes of gender accountability. Intimate relationships are a space where there is immense pressure to perform affect and emotional participation (McQueen, 2017), yet there are only some performances of ‘manliness’ that remain acceptable. While Shafiq’s emotional display breaks a boundary within traditional performances of masculinity, his success in doing so is short-lived, as his ex-girlfriend’s rebuke draws him back to the prevalent ‘boys don’t cry’ discourse. Her words seem to leave a lasting impression on him (“I still remember... And that really hit me”); instances like these can have a profound impact not only in shaping gendered-emotion narratives, but also on men’s mental health and well-being. Such discourses become especially problematic as they can influence men’s relative reluctance to seek help for psychological issues, potentially causing ‘masked’ depression, and increased male suicide (Gough, 2018).

Shafiq also reveals how experiences of racialisation can have an impact on personal lives within the private spaces of home and family, as he notes how “conversations” around masculinity are characterised by racial differences. For Shafiq, “*goray phir bhi* (white people, even then)” are moving forward with the idea that “it’s okay for men to show emotion”. Indeed, pro-feminist commentators and campaigners have cited an increasing understanding of men’s emotional lives, including encouraging men to understand their own emotions, as essential to tackling gender inequalities (for example, Kimmel & Holler, 2011; de Boise & Hearn, 2017). While this is still a work-in-progress even amongst ‘white’ people, Shafiq laments how within the desi Muslim community “that’s just not even a thing” yet.

Hearn (1993, p.148) argues:

it is more helpful to see discourses as both *producing* people assumed to be ‘subjects’ that are or are not emotional, and *produced* by people assumed to be subjects. In both senses subjects do emotions, they do not just happen ‘automatically’; they have to be *done*” (italics in original).

So just as gender has to be ‘done’, and is indeed always a doing (Butler, 1990) that emerges as relational, so too is the case with emotions and emotional labour. Both Zareen and Shafiq’s accounts encourage us to recognise affect as being socially constructed through interactions, and illustrate (in a rather post-structuralist fashion) how discourses are not just a mere reflection of reality but instead are put to work to actively construct (as well as deconstruct and reconstruct) knowledge, experience and identity (Lupton, 1998). Young desi Muslim men and women must manage their emotional lives and perform emotion work while negotiating with multiple discourses and boundaries between traditional heteronormative performances of masculinity and femininity and other alternative ways of being and expressing themselves. The numerous accounts within this chapter illustrate how these performances in turn have an effect on their personhood, identity, psyche, behaviour and intimate relationships.

VIII. Conclusion- Disrupting knowledge through the everyday politics of recognition and resistance in second-generation desi Muslim migrant narratives

“White people have access to generational wealth, generational resources, they have that generational knowledge to reflect upon. But we don’t have that solid link to the past. We have to be like the first ones to figure it all out, to do it on your own. There’s a huge responsibility because it’s up to you and me to change generational narratives, to overcome this generational trauma. But often we don’t know how to release this trauma, we haven’t been taught, we don’t have the tools to heal what needs healing. Yaar (my friend), the world isn’t just what you make of it, the world is given to you by other people.”

(8 February, 2018, excerpt from Ali’s interview).

These profound words came from 26-year-old Ali towards the end of our long interview. I purposefully chose his reflective excerpt to open the final chapter of the thesis because in many ways it encapsulates the rationale behind this ethnography, and reiterates its significance, validity, and urgency. Ali outlines the task at hand for second-generation desi Muslim migrants like him and I- “to change generational narratives, to overcome this generational trauma”. Trans-generational legacies are often stories of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ that never quite reach their terminus (Grand & Salberg, 2016). Ali sustains a racialised historical subjectivity as the Other to “white people”; while Ali inherits “generational trauma”, white people inherit legacies of “generational wealth, generational resources... generational knowledge”. This is not to say that second-generation desi Muslim migrants have no access to generational wealth, resources, or knowledge; by making the direct comparison to ‘white people’, Ali is just reiterating the claim that knowledge systems of other cultures are often rejected in the Western world, thereby critiquing orientalist knowledge production and the triumph of ‘Western’ (now global) intellectual and socio-political culture (Akena, 2012; Hanegraaff, 2012; Museveni & Appiah, 2005; Iaccarino, 2003).

Marshall Hodgson’s (1993) significant three-volume work on Islam in world history documents how Western societies have managed to retain a deeper and more continuous link with their past. This holds particularly true when considering current dominant Western philosophical dialogue that continues to rely upon the same philosophers, religious references, and texts that it has for several centuries (Turner, 2009). “But we don’t have that solid link to

the past”¹⁶⁶, responds Ali, drawing this sharp contrast through his critical self-examination, a journey he embarks upon as a result of what Talal Asad (1973) has referred to as the ‘colonial encounter’. For many diasporic Muslim societies, the break with their past- whether it is in terms of knowledge, modes of habitation, or philosophical traditions- has had immense consequences, leading to a wide variety of responses (Iqtidar, 2016).

This ethnography is a humble attempt to highlight some of these varied responses as experienced by second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London, as it traces the multiple patterns of difference that can cut phenomena like ‘religion’, ‘culture’, ‘gender’, ‘agency’, ‘modernity’, ‘secularity’, and ‘knowledge’ apart. The thesis invites its readers to rethink dominant structures of knowledge and recognise the complex and sometimes contradictory circulation of power and agency, the continuous back and forth processes of being subjected and of becoming an agentic subject (like Ali, for example, who applies self-reflexivity to locate agency and the potential for change, but also acknowledges the power of “other people” that attempt to constitute him). The dynamic process of narrative can be construed as an exercise in self-determination through reflection, reassessment, and re-empowerment, offering the potential for healing to occur (Aho, 2014). As the informants reflect upon their experiences, and as I in turn reassess their narratives, the thesis hopes to re-empower their voices and visions of multiplicity and open a dialogue that can bridge historical, socio-political legacies of Otherness, “to release this trauma” and to find “the tools to heal what needs healing”.

In all honesty, I did not embark upon this project with a crystal clear agenda as such (or perhaps, my aim kept evolving as I progressed), and in many ways that has been one of the scariest but also most rewarding of undertakings. Scary because I could have ended up lacking clarity and direction and rewarding because it allowed me to diffract meaning rather than foreclose it. Mellander & Wiszmeg (2016) reconfigure ethnography as a diffractive practice, one that benefits the researcher to think beyond what is different, and instead focus on how and in which ways difference is enacted. As I’ve mentioned earlier, my starting point was often my own experiences and curiosities (hence the partially auto-ethnographic nature of my work), which throughout this process have either been clarified or further complicated (both of which serve

¹⁶⁶ Although one could argue that in Muslim society it is the Quran as central text which offers a ‘link to the past’ (Gregg, 2007), albeit one that is open to interpretation and exegesis (*tafsir*). However, Islam faces special difficulties in its confrontation with secularism; while it has its own unique strengths and resources (particularly its scriptural canon), Muslim civilization has no extant philosophical tradition (Akhtar, 2007).

to deepen understanding). I always knew I had something worth saying, material worth sharing, and not just because I was personally invested and passionate, but more so because my informants felt so strongly about all the issues we touched upon during our discussions. And so, rather than enforcing well-defined questions that needed well-defined answers, my thesis developed into a critique that brings to light that which may be known but is not often spoken of outside of specific 'insider' contexts. The discussions with my informants (some of which were formal, while others not so much) spanned across a range of themes such as identity and diasporic belonging (including the sub-themes of home, family and community), issues of class and representation, religion (along with sub-themes of morality, 'halal'/'haram', intention and interpretation), and gender (including roles, relations, expectations, intimacy, sexuality and emotions). But above all, I would argue that the core of this thesis is really about the politics of recognition, resistance, and agency- how it is understood, articulated, negotiated, exercised and restrained.

These issues are current, relevant, valid, and navigated on a daily basis; I myself have engaged with and been subject to many of these issues first-hand in my positioning as a second-generation middle-class desi Muslim migrant in London. However, I do recognise that the thesis only documents the experiences of a few, certainly not all, and perhaps not even many, desi Muslim migrants in London. I have consciously tried to avoid making mass generalisations and blanket statements, and instead have attempted to historicize and contextualise as much as possible. In fact, much of this thesis repeatedly emphasises the situational character of identity categories, interaction, and agency as simultaneously fixed and fluid, ascribed and chosen, depending on the context. Having said that, I would also like to add that whenever I have spoken about my research to another second-generation diasporic migrant, I have always been met with keen interest, affirmation, and support. For instance, Abdullah, a second-generation Somalian migrant to New Zealand, who now works for the Canterbury Refugee Resettlement and Resource Centre, said the following when we met at a mutual friend's birthday dinner last year:

Wow, Sahrish- wait, how do I say your name again?- wow, that's so cool. That's so interesting, aye. I'd love to read it when you're done, I'd love to help! You'd think that there are these big schisms, but I've actually picked up on a lot of the shared commonality of experiences in my line of work. You know, whether you're Afghan or Sudanese or Somali, as a Muslim second-generation migrant in the Western world you're more or less going to have to deal with the same shit, aye. You have these tiers on tiers on tiers that you're forced to engage with, like culture controls you on one level

but then you also have religion, and you also have to go out in to the Western world where people don't look or sound or act like you, but you have to become like them to have the chance to even remotely succeed, otherwise you're socially isolated. You know, I have friends who didn't make it, who've gone through mental breakdowns, who have either indulged too heavily in the Western world, or in the religious aspect of things. I'm not talking about what's right or wrong, yeah, my understanding of religion is very weak, but I'm just talking about how all this stuff operates, the operation of things, this balancing act between these tiers that we all have to navigate just to survive. No regular white person has to deal with this, especially not at this extreme level.

I felt a lot of empathy towards him, and a strange sense of awe and happiness that I unexpectedly had this conversation with a complete stranger who was so different from me in so many ways, and yet we had these "shared commonality of experiences" that connected us. In that moment, our shared positioning as a "Muslim second-generation migrant in the Western world" transcended national, cultural, linguistic, gender and class differences. I quickly asked him if I could write all this down to use in my thesis, and he laughed agreeably, saying, "no worries, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to even talk about this in the first place. Usually I just think about this stuff on my own, you can't really talk to everyone about it. So yeah, can't wait to read your study!". This exchange was very valuable to me- not only did it validate my work, but it reminded me of its relevance and significance on a global scale.

There is a lot to take away from Abdullah's quote, especially his choice of words which I found rather interesting. He talks about "tiers" which is suggestive of levels of structure and hierarchy, hence "tiers on tiers on tiers". While Abdullah identifies some of these tiers as "culture", "religion", visual appearance, "sound" and behaviour, one does wonder- which of these is at the top or bottom tier? Can/do these ever change, and under what circumstances? Abdullah also claims that the engagement with these tiers is "forced", which raises the issue of choice and agency- enforced by whom, how, and why? Is there a potential to resist this enforcement? Abdullah highlights how engagement with these multiple and interlocking tiers calls for a "balancing act" which diasporic migrants must perform in order to "survive" and "succeed". He argues that the only chance a migrant has of succeeding in the "Western world" is by becoming "like them", which signals that the West tends to be blind to how its varieties of culture and religion operate. This further begs the question- what does it even mean to be a "Western" style individual? What would migrants coming from other cultures and backgrounds have to forego or adopt in order to reach this status and what challenges would they face? What makes this status the most dominant or desirable one in the context of 'Western world' migration? While such debates often rest on essentialised notions of an 'Islam' versus 'the

West' dualism (Said, 1978; Kepel & Ghazaleh, 2004; Ramadan, 2009; Samiei, 2010; Cesari, 2013; Fuller, 2018; Green, 2019; are some of the authors who engage with this problematic), it is precisely the tendencies of reductionism and essentialism that this ethnography aims to complicate and oppose via its argument for multiple modernities as well as multiple religiosities (we delve deeper into this further in the chapter).

The issues this thesis highlights, the questions it raises, the approaches it suggests, can potentially also be applied to study other diasporic communities such as second-generation Afghan migrants to New Zealand, or second-generation Mexican migrants to the U.S.A, or any other minority communities living in a majority setting. Of course, the local context, conditions and configurations must all be considered to pay attention to the nuances of each individual and community's own experiences, but there is great value to note the currents of change (if any) as they are happening in order to provide alternative views and parallel understandings of dominant narratives. I am also fully aware that not everybody who reads this thesis will agree with me. What I write and critique might upset, perhaps even infuriate a lot of people, my family and in-laws included. Here I am, a desi Muslim migrant woman, bringing to light the politics of power, knowledge, resistance, representation and relationships, openly writing about religious differences and variations, gender and sexuality, and all the complexities of everyday existence that desi Muslim migrant individuals experience, but don't/can't necessarily address publicly. Like Abdullah, I am thankful for "the opportunity to even talk about this in the first place", but I also feel a certain level of anxiety and fear in bringing these discussions to life on paper- which is interesting in and of itself, further validating the Panopticon claims of family, community, culture, religion, state, and society that my informants are also subject to. Despite my privileged position as researcher and academic, which grants me more freedom to practice power/knowledge differently, I can perhaps never completely escape the multiple power relations that attempt to produce and contain me as a 'desi' 'Muslim' 'migrant' 'woman'. I may never transcend any form of core identity, but this thesis then becomes even more important as my (and my informants') refusal of containment.

The 'desi inbetweeners' thus emerge as central figures who are actively negotiating for a wider and more complex understanding of normative diasporic ethno-religious identity categories.

Contrary to the popular discourse of religion (especially Islam) as ‘problematic’¹⁶⁷ (Beckford, 2019; Mavelli, 2013; Ta & Jacobs, 2006; Juergensmeyer, 2004), ‘intolerant’ and ‘conducive to conflict’ (Clarke, et al. 2013; Casanova, 2009) particularly throughout Europe, here London based second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ lived experiences serve as counter-narratives as they re-signify and reimagine religiosity. I do not wish to reiterate a young, British Muslim “Islamic awakening” (Lewis, 2007, p. 112), or indulge too heavily in the “return of religion” to public life debate (Kettell, 2019), but instead engage with the functional significance that lived Islam offers my informants in the embodied and the everyday. Lived religion becomes the tool and self-interpretation becomes the strategy they can apply in order to harness and practice ‘agency’ as they navigate through the multiple power relations and hierarchies in which they find themselves. Agency, however, remains gendered, contextual, situational, and framed, especially since family and community emerge as occupying positions of power within this negotiated field. The productive effects of power as exercised by the institution of family and community endorse a continuation of group identity, tradition, values and belonging. Their positionality (which is also influenced by class and gender) help determine who can speak, who gets silenced and what performances are acceptable in what contexts. The aim is not to make causal or correlational attributions to the second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ experiences, nor to decipher the inherent meaning of their practices, but to explore the effects of these practices in their social, political and familial spheres that are imbued with power relations. Consequently, the thesis offers a critique of the dominant secular and neoliberal frameworks that currently shape British, and to a large extent ‘Western’, politics and society.

The thesis confirms that what it means to be a second-generation ‘desi’ ‘Muslim’ ‘migrant’ ‘in London’ is open to continual contestation, a site of ongoing struggle. It is the on-going nature of these negotiations which denote an on-going indeterminacy- one that is diverse, relational, always in friction, and therefore can never really be conclusive. Perhaps this is what makes me cynical to write a ‘conclusion’ as such, given that it signifies ‘the end or finish of an event, process, or text’¹⁶⁸. I do not want to pass a conclusive judgement or decision on the case of second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London; doing so would defeat the very point I

¹⁶⁷ I do not mean to do away with problematic forms of religious extremism and its socio-political implications; indeed, I only need to look as far as the current situation in India with its populist Prime Minister who has legitimised violent Hindu extremism, to recognise just how religion can become ‘problematic’ in certain contexts. (For more information: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/25/world/asia/new-delhi-hindu-muslim-violence.html>).

¹⁶⁸ From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/conclusion>

wish to drive home- that of multiplicity in all its glorious, alternative, contradictory, ‘can’t be contained’ forms. So, in a conscious effort to be wary of romanticized or oversimplified narratives, this thesis refuses closure in order to redirect ongoing and important conversations about identity, agency, and belonging in diasporic contexts. I argue for the ‘but also’ positioning to move beyond an ‘either/or’ or ‘both and’ approach to identity; the term ‘desi’ to move beyond the limitations of overarching ‘South Asian’/‘British Asian’/‘British Muslim’ formulations; the study of ‘lived religion’ to move beyond homogenous depictions of ‘institutional’ or ‘official’ religion; and the idea of ‘situational agency’ to move beyond essentialised oppositions of agency versus structure that persist within official and demotic (as well as other) discourses.

In between the secular-religious binary: second-generation desi Muslim migrants as religious but also secular, secular but also religious

One of the key contributions this thesis makes is towards the critique of processes of ‘secularisation’ and subsequent ‘modernity’, by highlighting the continued (and in many ways, redefined and renewed) importance of religion and its role in daily life, particularly in the lives of second-generation middle-class desi Muslim migrants in London. Despite all its colourful claims of ‘multiculturalism’¹⁶⁹ (Triandafyllidou, 2015; Kastoryano, 2009; Dijkstra, et al., 2001; Modood & Werbner, 1997, for example), Western Europe continues to be viewed as the ‘heartland’ of secularity (Apahideanu, 2014; Casanova, 2017). As Holmes (2010) argues, the project of advanced ‘European integration’ has indeed followed a complex secular and cosmopolitan agenda. Living in the secular world and time still calls for secularisation to occur- the process by which all things religious are privatised, contained, excluded (and therefore often marginalised) from the ‘public’ sphere (which usually covers all aspects of social life and governance) (Norris & Inglehart, 2011; Casanova, 2017). Secularisation does not necessarily signify the end of all religious belief and practice, but it does signal the gradual decline in engagement with the sacred on three levels- society; the sphere of religion itself; and the life of the individual (Dobbelaere, 2002). While I am primarily concerned with ‘the life of the individual’, I do not think that these three levels are isolated from each other, for it is individuals who together make up ‘society’, and it is individuals who also impact ‘the sphere of religion itself’, determining religious life, thought and membership.

¹⁶⁹ For a critique of ‘multiculturalism’, consider: Chin, 2019; Besley & Peters, 2019; Alexander, 2013; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010; to name but a few.

The individual is faced with a complex choice within this dominant framework of secularism, a choice between belief and unbelief, religion and nonreligion, religiosity and irreligiosity, etc. (often referred to as the ‘secular-religious binary’ (Hurd, 2011; Hirschkind, 2012; Huss, 2014; for example)). The secular is constituted as a self-enclosed reality wherein people are simply devoid of religion, “having overcome the irrationality of belief”, as Charles Taylor (2007, p. 269) puts it. Following the Enlightenment, this anthropocentric turn positions secularity as “a process of maturation and growth”, a “coming of age”, and as “progressive emancipation” (Casanova, 2017, p. 31). Compared to that, religious belief and practice then become irrational, immature, regressive and suppressive. So, as religion became the inferior ‘other’ (Wilson, 2012), a relic of the past, secularism evolved as the superior, present, and therefore ‘modern’ ideology (Calhoun, et al. 2011). Berger (1996, p. 4), however, notes the decline of secularisation theory towards the end of the 20th century as “secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness”. He also notes two striking exceptions to the de-secularization thesis which include Western Europe and the Western intellectual community (Reaves, 2012); that is, despite the uncertainty brought about by secular modernity, political secularism and cultural secularity continue to thrive because the ‘return of religion’ also signals the return of the ‘religious Other’ as part of identity and diaspora politics (Gutkowski, 2011; Ivanescu, 2010).

The theory of secularisation is inherently so interwoven with the self-understanding of modernity and the theories of development in the modern world, that secular differentiation has now become the marker of a ‘modern’ society (Scott & Hirschkind, 2006). The ‘forces of modernity’, which include the rise of scientific rationalism, technological advancements, and the functional differentiation of the state, have all contributed to the naturalisation of unbelief or nonreligion as the normal human condition in ‘modern’ societies (Kettell, 2019). This understanding of the secularisation process as the inevitable goal of modern society and its individuals is what drives the debate on the status of religion (particularly in relation to politics) in contemporary ‘Western’ liberal frameworks (García, 2018). Secularism then becomes a mode of identity, a political and social practice that is embedded throughout Europe’s political spectrum (Nilsson, 2015). Secularism, especially in its ‘assertive’¹⁷⁰ form (Kuru, 2007), has

¹⁷⁰ “Assertive secularism” does not tolerate the public visibility of religion and aims for its complete separation and exclusion from the public sphere (Kuru, 2007). For example, consider France’s ban on wearing the Islamic veil in public places in 2011, or the banning of Muslim headscarves in French public schools in 2004.

the potential to be deeply problematic as it can be invoked by hard-line right-wing populist movements and promote renewed nationalism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and of course, anti-Muslim discourse (U.K.'s 2016 Brexit referendum, or the U.S.A's 2016 presidential election stand out as some recent manifestations of these consequences) (De Roover, 2019). Religious entrepreneurs of populist politics can then also draw upon these tropes to further their own causes, thus deepening the secular/religious divide (Arato & Cohen, 2018). Despite surface level antagonisms, British secularism, and even 'multiculturalism', is clearly converging with French *Laïcité*¹⁷¹, especially when it comes to discussions around religious and ethnic minorities' 'integration' (Lassalle, 2011).

So, secularism functions to positively differentiate 'modern' Europeans from the 'religious Other', whether it be 'premodern' religious Europeans or other contemporary non-European religious people, particularly Muslims (Casanova, 2009). There seems to be a fundamental opposition between religions which rely on revelation as the primary source of knowledge and God as the key source of law and ethics, versus secular modernity which privileges reason as the main source of knowledge and posits the source of law and ethics in human beings (Hunter, 2009). Islam, in particular, comes under a lot of scrutiny and attack when pitted against secularism, especially because of its apparent inability to separate politics from religion (Asad, 2008; Nilsson, 2015). However, some scholars argue that Islam includes the potential for democratic pluralism since it endorses the idea of civic equality through its key principle which recognises human beings as 'equal in creation', thus emphasising that communitarian membership is not incompatible with civic equality based on human dignity (Sachedina, 2006; Brown & Fauzia, 2019; Moussalli, 2001; Kubba, 1996). The other line of attack against Islam draws upon the notion that Islam is not simply a matter of private individual belief which may or may not be firmly held (unlike contemporary Christianity), but also a matter of revered rituals and practice that often take on a visible, public form (Fox, 2008). This is one of the reasons why issues such as the 'hijab'¹⁷²/ 'niqab'¹⁷³ are repeatedly debated as 'sites' and 'sights' of resistance (Razack, 2018; Tyler, 2013; Hamzeh, 2012; Dreher & Ho, 2009). If Islam embodies such irreducible difference then it becomes structurally incompatible with secularism, posing a so-called 'threat' to the very foundation of modern civil society (Roy,

¹⁷¹ French secularism- or *laïcité*- is usually defined as a system in which there is a separation between religion and the state (Troper, 1999).

¹⁷² A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/hijab>.

¹⁷³ A veil worn by some Muslim women in public, covering all of the face apart from the eyes. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/niqab>.

2007). This contributes to the widespread narrative of the allegedly radical/fundamentalist/extremist ‘Islamist occupation’ in Europe at worst (Pisoiu, 2011; Choueiri, 2010), and at best still creates the problem of deciding between who is a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ Muslim (Topolski, 2018; Ramadan, 2010; Mamdani, 2002). Questions such as, “Is Islam compatible with modernity and democracy?”, or “Can Muslims integrate and be loyal citizens in North America and Europe?”, continue to be raised in the ‘public square’ (Esposito, 2014, p. 294).

Within this conversation also lies the critique of secularism as a predominantly Christian discursive tradition. The term ‘secularism’ derives from the Latin word ‘*saeculum*’, meaning generation or age, and originally meant “of the world” as opposed to “of the church”; ‘secular’ thus conveys early Christianity’s original “requirement of distance, of non-coincidence” between matters of religiosity and matters of the world (Davison, 2003, p. 333-334). Anidjar (2006) argues that secularism is the name Christianity gave itself when it invented ‘religion’, and when it named its ‘other’ or ‘others’ as religions. Indeed, the general response to other religions and cultures is constructed out of a Christian systematic framework that is simply applied to the ‘problem’ of the ‘other’ (Fletcher, 2008). The emergence of ‘world religions’ in modern European thought maintains specific representations of major religions; for example, while Buddhism (with its tradition of Aryan origin) is regarded as a humanistic and humanitarian reform movement, Islam is recast as a prototypically Arab and Semitic religion, “its universalist intentions derive partly from the fact that its founder had drawn considerably from Jewish and Christian sources, partly from the Arab’s own transnational political ambition and their resistance to the advancing universalism of Christianity, modernity, and rationality” (Masuzawa, 2005, p. 205). So, the ‘Muslim Question’ (Norton, 2020) that plagues contemporary Europe is not just theological or political in nature, but also addresses the pressing issues of majority-minority power relations and dominant knowledge systems. This thesis, however, is not as concerned with tracing the genealogy of the ‘secular’ or ‘religious’, or even in deconstructing and reconciling those terms, as much as it is with offering critical insights into the interaction between such ‘colonial categories’ (Kannan, 2019), to try and achieve a more nuanced understanding of ‘Islam’ (especially as embodied and performed by second-generation desi diasporic Muslims) and the structural conditions of ‘secular modernity’ (particularly in middle-class London). As Pellegrini (2009, p. 1345) writes, there remains a need to present and suggest ‘other ways of talking about and enacting the relations between “religion” and “secularism”’.

There are multiple points throughout the informants' narratives where they are confronted with the secular-religious divide, caught between the competing demands of the secular neoliberal British society they live in and their own ethno-religious/communal/familial/personal orientation and expectations. Evidence of this engagement is apparent from the first data analysis chapter itself (Chapter IV), where the second-generation desi Muslim migrants argue against hyphenated identities such as 'British Muslim', 'British Asian', 'British Pakistani', 'British Indian', and the like, questioning "why does the British always come first?"¹⁷⁴. These formulations reflect the secular sensibility of having to declare an allegiance to, and indeed prioritise, the 'British' state, before articulating a 'Muslim' religion or an 'Asian' culture, in order to qualify and be recognised as a civil member of British society. This form of articulation becomes even more striking when compared to Canada's hyphenated 'Italian-Canadian' or 'Chinese-Canadian', where cultural identity is expressed before national identity in the hyphen (Rummens, 2001). The framing of a question that assumes a prioritisation such as "are you British first or a Muslim first" provides insufficient creative space for narrating the ways in which people identify themselves or even define their identity in a larger society (Faimau, 2016, p. 3). The informants then turn to 'desi' as a responsive diasporic identity, a term that allows for the creative articulation of their composite identities and the combined and multifaceted experiences of being a 'second-generation' 'South Asian' 'Muslim' 'migrant' 'in London'. But 'desi' too is not devoid of the politics of recognition that mirror a secular-religious binary system. Consider the following interview excerpts:

Uncle Junaid (Chapter VI, page 134):

Aaj kal to achhey rishtay milte hi nahi, pata nahi kahaan ghaarat ho gaye sab ke sab. Ya to badey high-fy society log milenge jinke bilkul hi dimag kharab hain, jo bilkul hi Islam, culture sab bhool gaye. Ya phir wo log hain jinki abhi bhi wo chhotay gao wali mentality hai, unke saathh bhi nahi jam sakti. Matlab hum jaise middle class families milni bahaut mushkil hai yahaan pe (You just can't find a good marriage proposal nowadays; goodness knows where they've all disappeared. Either you'll get big high society people who have completely lost their minds, and totally forgotten Islam, culture, everything. Or you'll get those people who still have that small village mentality, and we can't get along with them either. I mean it's really difficult to find middle class families like ours over here).

¹⁷⁴ This is an excerpt from Saima's quote on page 76 in Chapter IV.

Farah (Chapter VI, page 156):

See you obviously don't want a guy that's too whitewashed, or a guy that's too freshie. You want someone in between who has a good balance of both worlds....

Aisha:

Of course representation is a huge deal! It's always these two extremes yeah, you always get these two extremes- either the wannabe *gora* (white) crowd, like Tan France¹⁷⁵- oh my god, that guy pisses me off, not because he's gay, I'm cool with that, but because I legit could not have guessed he's *desi* let alone Muslim if I hadn't looked him up, it's like he's almost ashamed of his culture, religion, heritage. Yeah, so either that, or you'll get the other *pendu* extreme- the lot who still think gay is a fucking insult, and that we must unite against the *kaafir* (nonbelievers) even though we're living in their fucking country- like this is ridiculous! Why can't our people be more balanced like... like Mehdi Hasan¹⁷⁶, or... or even Riz MC¹⁷⁷, who are like yeah motherfuckers so what, I'm brown, I'm Muslim, I'm in England, I'm intelligent, articulate, woke- this is the shit I have to deal with on the daily, but I will own it and not run away from all the things that make me, me.

These examples are suggestive of how everyday forms of difference within the 'desi' identity category- "whitewashed" coconuts on the one hand, and *pendu* "freshies" on the other¹⁷⁸- are also based on a secular-religious spectrum of division. The 'coconut' is part of the "wannabe *gora* (white) crowd", and the people wanting to be so are those "*jinke bilkul hi dimag kharab hain, jo bilkul hi Islam, culture sab bhool gaye* (people who have completely lost their minds, and totally forgotten Islam, culture, everything)". The informants realise that to be like the 'white' Westerner one has to adopt a secularist 'stadial consciousness' (Casanova, 2017) which disengages with religious worldviews and culture. On the other end of the scale are the 'freshies', recognised as "*wo log hain jinki abhi bhi wo chhotay gao wali mentality hai* (people who still have that small village mentality)", those "who still think gay is a fucking insult, and that we must unite against the *kaafir* (nonbelievers) even though we're living in their fucking country". 'Freshies' are seen to be lacking in bridging capital, specifically 'open-mindedness',

¹⁷⁵ Tanveer Wasim Safdar, 'Tan' France, is an English fashion designer, television personality and author from Doncaster, South Yorkshire, now based in the United States. He appears in the Netflix revival of *Queer Eye*. From: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm9614109/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm.

¹⁷⁶ Mehdi Hasan is an award-winning British journalist, broadcaster, author and political commentator. He is the presenter of both *UpFront* (filmed in Washington DC) and *Head to Head* (filmed at the Oxford Union). From: <https://www.aljazeera.com/profile/mehdi-hasan.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Riz Ahmed, also known by his stage name Riz MC and birth name Rizwan Ahmed, is a British Pakistani actor, rapper, and activist. He famously appeared in the Bafta-winning movie, *Four Lions*. From: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1981893/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm.

¹⁷⁸ Refer back to Chapter IV, page 98, where we first engage with these terms.

which is considered as one of the main outcomes of international migration and acculturation as one comes into contact with different languages and cultures (Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009; Tuccio, et al., 2016). Aisha emphatically argues against '*pendu*' freshies using religious doctrine to justify discriminatory and intolerant attitudes or behaviour, whether it be towards people of different sexual orientations or people following different religious beliefs/non-belief.

While she criticises extreme anti-Western rhetoric or sedition as expressed by certain members of diasporic 'British Muslims' (Werbner, 2009), Aisha also acknowledges "the shit I have to deal with on the daily" as a "brown" "Muslim" "in England". Throughout the thesis, we notice how being a freshie is often tied to a class positioning in the lower income bracket, whereas being a coconut is frequently associated with belonging to a higher elite class and income bracket (as Uncle Junaid says, "*badey high-fy society log* (big high society people)"). Norris & Inglehart (2011) confirm that the more prosperous strata of society incur a systematic erosion of religious practices, values and beliefs; conversely, religiosity tends to persist most strongly amongst poorer, more vulnerable populations (however, as we shall discuss in the following section, even the middle-class second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study are unwilling to leave religion behind partly because they feel this sense of 'vulnerability', which for them is not so much an economic one but more in terms of their socio-religio-cultural positioning). Hence, the emergence of 'Islamic political radicalism' in Britain is deeply entwined with low social class positions and the experience of structural, socio-economic disadvantage and prejudice against Muslim minority communities (Abbas, 2011; Husain, 2015). Alternatively, those who have successfully assimilated are often recognised as 'liberated'/ 'moderate'/ 'cultural'/ 'secular'/ 'ex' Muslims (Roy, 2007; Hopkins, 2016; Knott, 2018).

However, Aisha redirects our attention to the politics of recognition, reminding us that "you always get these two extremes" in terms of representation. Across their narratives, the informants repeatedly emphasise the desire and need for a "balance", emerging as occupying positions "in between" such given "extremes". So, just as second-generation middle-class desi Muslim migrants find themselves in between an upper and lower class, or 'coconut' and 'freshie', they also find themselves in between secularity and religion. Rather than choosing between either secularity or religion (which can potentially incite radical forms of secularism/Islamism), or struggling to embody both secularism and religion (consider the

‘failure of multiculturalism’ discourse, particularly in the U.K. (Mathieu, 2018; Jones, 2015; Werbner, 2009, for example)), the in-betweeners choose to be- in a Goffman (1959) style presentation of self- some times and in some ways ‘secular’, but also, some times and in some ways ‘religious’. The ‘but also’ articulation of identity holds a lot of significance here, as the informants highlight how they can be religious/believing/practicing, but also secular/have the capacity to self-secularize in certain contexts. As the informants navigate through these multiple contexts and competing discourses (such as, but not limited to, secularism, neoliberalism, religion, culture, tradition, and so on) that attempt to define, contain and regulate them, they in turn problematise, reimagine and re-signify the boundaries of each as they move in between (and thereby, beyond) seemingly stable categories. Neither their practice of secularism nor their practice of religion follows normative standards, and it is amid such disruptions where both give way to interpretation and multiplicity. The thesis therefore puts forward a dual argument for multiple modernities *and* multiple religiosities. While challenging many tacit assumptions about dominant models of secular modernity, the thesis also considers how religious expression and the social significance of religion for young diasporic Muslims is continuously changing and evolving in complex, conflicting and, therefore, multiple ways.

The value of ‘lived’ religion in living with difference- An argument for multiple religiosities

As we go through each chapter, the recurring theme of second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ unwillingness to ‘leave religion behind’ as part of their commitment to processes of secularisation/modernisation becomes strikingly apparent. This isn’t an ‘inability’ caused by their apparent Muslim status, as much as it is a conscious choice based on the proclaimed benefits their various self-interpretations of Islam offer in their sense-making processes. The concept of ‘lived religion’ is valuable here as it approaches individuals’ religions as they are lived in a particular time, within a particular cultural setting, thus allowing for a subjectively grounded and potentially creative space for religious expression and experience (McGuire, 2008). In the case of Islam, particularly in Europe, this approach becomes all the more exigent, as it encourages shifting the focus from hyper-visible forms of institutional religion (which currently dominate social and discursive space), to other alternative, less visible forms of religion that manifest in lived experiences (Dessing, et al., 2016). Williams (2010) argues that despite secular modernity’s attempt to structure religion out of many social fields, individuals continue to make space for ‘God’ (in terms of the sacred, spirituality, religion, transcendence,

and so on) in their everyday lives throughout the varied domains of home, work, relationships, and leisure. A lived religion approach identifies the doctrines, rituals, and signs that have become vital and valuable in a religious culture because its members are actively using them to engage with their immediate world, thus “taking us well beyond empty claims about what a religious culture “means” or what “religious” men and women “believe” or have been taught” (Orsi, 2003, p. 170). Following that, we begin to see how the second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ ‘lived Islam’ is not experienced in opposition to apparently ‘Western’ secular values such as cosmopolitanism, environmentalism, peace-making, justice, human rights, women’s rights, etc. (Winell, 2017; Roy, 2007), but rather as complementary to and within such values, occurring as a desi Muslim response.

For instance, Chapter IV includes an entire section on ‘cosmopolitan’ Muslims as it follows the informants’ counter narratives against the dominant discourse of a seemingly all-inclusive transcendent Muslim ‘ummah’, as well as their critique of the emergence of highly conservative forms of Wahhabist/Salafist Islam in the U.K. Contrary to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (2006) use of religion to showcase everything anti-cosmopolitan (evident in his chapter titled ‘The Counter-Cosmopolitans’), the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study embrace and embody an arguably cosmopolitan understanding of Islam, echoing Appiah’s (2006, p. 15) core principle of “universal concern and respect for legitimate difference”. Appiah’s (2006) affirmation of the ‘cosmopolitan ideal’ as ‘our obligations to strangers’ is not just an ethical abstraction but an Islamic imperative according to Farah (Chapter IV, page 88: “Islam tells you to be kind to your neighbours, kind to strangers, regardless of their religion or race”). Similarly, Appiah’s (2006, p. 145) understanding of toleration “means interacting on terms of respect with those who see the world differently”, a value that Amir also endorses (Chapter IV, page 88: “You have to understand that not everyone lives life the way you do”). For Saima (Chapter IV, page 90), being a ‘decent Muslim’ is synonymous with being a ‘decent human being’ and a ‘productive member of society’, just as Salman (Chapter IV, page 90) sees his ‘liberal’ ‘humanist’ world view in harmony with his Muslim subject position.

Thus, ‘religion’, for the informants, does not compete against modern ‘Western’ cosmopolitanism, instead, it provides the very grounds for its expression. Therefore, there is no singular expression of ‘Western’ cosmopolitanism, i.e. cosmopolitanism must become cosmopolitan in itself. Current theoretical understandings of cosmopolitanism which are

frequently associated with modern liberal subjectivity and selfhood, fail to consider the multiple ways in which contemporary Muslim cosmopolitans engage with ‘another way of being’ (Iqtidar, 2013, p. 631). The notion of ‘Muslim cosmopolitanism’ has historical validity; Alavi (2015) traces the Muslim cosmopolitanism of Indian Muslims under British rule and Leichtman & Schulz (2012) go as far as arguing that ‘cosmopolitanism’ is a constitutive feature of Muslim self-understanding and religious practice, albeit one that is rooted in particular local histories. Generally speaking, cosmopolitan Muslims are committed to a worldview and practice that aims to enliven the spirit of compassion (*rahmah*), justice (*adil*), consensus and consultation (*mufakat* and *mushawarah*), so that public interest (*maslahah*) remains protected (Aljunied, 2016).

Winell (2017) maintains that the secular understanding of the temporality of life in this world is what inspires individuals to ‘live life to the fullest’ and cultivates ideals such as humanism, peacemaking, justice, and environmentalism; alternatively, religious culture understands life to be lived for the purpose of glorifying God and working towards saving others for the eternal afterlife. Contrary to this dichotomy, it is the acknowledgement of an afterlife which motivates second-generation desi Muslim migrants in their humanist efforts, as 25-year-old Laiba relays:

I don’t get guys who are like yolo¹⁷⁹, and then they become so selfish and don’t give a shit about their families or anyone else. We only have this one life to be kind, and do good, and earn as much *sawaab* (reward) as we can, so it’s really simple, just don’t be a dick to anyone!

For Laiba, the temporality of life in this world is what inspires her “to be kind, and do good”, in order to “earn as much *sawaab* (reward)” as she can for the hereafter. The Islamic understanding of ‘*insānīya*’ makes no distinction between ‘humanity’, ‘humanism’ and ‘humanitarianism’ (as Laiba also says, “just don’t be a dick to anyone!”) (Moussa, 2014). Despite the problematic of ‘humanism’ re ethics¹⁸⁰ (considering Foucault’s ‘Kantian humanism’ or ‘post-humanist’ discourse¹⁸¹, for example), many scholars argue that

¹⁷⁹ Abbreviation for “you only live once”: used, especially on social media, to mean that you should do things that are enjoyable or exciting, even if they are silly or slightly dangerous. From: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/yolo>.

¹⁸⁰ The concept of Marxist humanism has been widely criticised as ineffective and self-defeating (Althusser, 2003; Geisler, 2005; Homer, 2000); as Kavanaugh (1980, p. 91) writes, “it is a theoretical error to found a transformative program for social liberation on the pseudo-concept ‘man’- an ideological notion that conceals differences, contradictions, and struggles in the real under the sign of a generalized, shared essence”.

¹⁸¹ Foucault conceptualizes an ethics of immanent and continuous social critique (situated in the enlightenment tradition) in response to humanism, an ethos of limit that is aimed at the unsettling and pluralization of life forms

humanism's core values of justice, dignity and human rights are at the heart of Islamic teachings, and advocate for the renewal and revival of 'Islamic humanism' to encourage interreligious dialogue and cross-civilizational bridging (for example, Bardhi, 2002; Tibi, 2009, 2012; Moosa, 2011; Ibrahim, 2012; Benthall, 2016; Tan & Ibrahim, 2017). Similarly, many scholars document the rise of an Islamic ecological paradigm in environmentalist discourse, arguing that Islam is an environmentally responsible religion and that Muslims are urged to implement environmental ethics within Islam (for example, Foltz, 2000; Islam, 2012; Saniotis, 2012; Chowdhury, 2013, Hancock, 2015; Yildirim, 2016; Abdullah, 2019). Hancock (2017) interestingly notes that even though Islamic environmental groups in Britain struggle to recruit and maintain membership, these groups still find that a rhetoric of Muslim identity and religious tradition is more likely to attract Muslim membership, as opposed to national identity. The point is the relevance of religious discourse and orientation (in all its diverse, conflicting, multiple forms) simply cannot be undermined or ignored, even within arguably 'secular' domains.

That being said, I am equally critical of the idea of an 'Islamisation of Europe' narrative (Ramadan, 2003; Tibi, 2006; Berger, 2013; Hedges, 2015) and am cautious not to push forward stable notions of 're-traditionalization', 'counter-acculturation', or 'de-secularisation' (Smith & Goldberg, 1994; Tibi, 2009, Heper & Israeli, 2014; Abdessalem, 2019), because that simply isn't the whole story. Just as second-generation desi Muslim migrants bring their religious understanding to secular concepts, they also embrace and apply a secular approach to certain other religious ideologies¹⁸². For instance, while Islam insists on the dignity and responsibility of individuals, it also emphasises communal solidarity (Benthall, 2016). Islamic philosophy outlines how every individual being is part of a common humanity that is accountable to God, and how we are all morally responsible towards one another (Aljunied, 2016). This moral responsibility is what inspires the Islamic practice of '*naseeha*'¹⁸³ (advice/recommendation) and '*dawah*'¹⁸⁴ (call to Islam) (as we see in Chapter V, page 124), and has the alarming potential to lead to intra-religious boundary making between people who either fall inside or outside the fold of a particular type of 'Islam'. This predicament is engaged with throughout

through a genealogy of historical problems (Olssen, 2003). Foucault's work within this field has garnered the interest of numerous scholars over time, including Han-Pile, 2010; Valverde, 2004; Paden, 1987; Fraser, 1983, to name a few.

¹⁸² I provide more examples of this in the following section.

¹⁸³ From: <http://www.dawahskills.com/abcs-of-dawah/correcting-mistakes-lessons-from-the-quran/>

¹⁸⁴ From: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e511>

the thesis and specifically addressed in Chapter VI, as the informants critique Muzmatch's 'Islamic Lifestyle' section which requires its members to describe their level of religiosity. Saima (Chapter VI, page 147) argues against making her religiosity public knowledge, not just because it would incite judgement ("why do I have to put it out there for everyone else and then be judged over it?"), but also because she considers her religion to be a private affair, a personal individualised undertaking ("my religion should be between me and Allah"), and one that remains contextual, provisional, and "constantly changing" (as she says). Additionally, Aisha (Chapter VI, page 150) recognises that while religion has the potential to make someone "a better person", it is not religion that defines people, rather it is people who define their religion ("if someone's an asshole then that's it, they're going to be an asshole. They'll use religion, or culture, or whatever as a tool to justify their asshole behaviour").

Here we observe the second-generation desi Muslim migrants adopting the secular viewpoint of 'people are just people', who are not necessarily 'good or bad', and while some interactions prove to be more pleasant than others, there is no need to judge or categorize them (Winell, 2017). The informants reject the pitfalls of religio-centrism or fundamentalism by understanding and more importantly, respecting difference, thus advocating for tolerance and alliances across difference. A significant part of 'Muslim cosmopolitanism' involves establishing successful relationships and interactions *within* the Muslim community, between Muslims of diverse ideological perspectives and orientations (Aljunied, 2016). The cosmopolitan canopy within the Muslim community is the Islamic faith, but this also extends *beyond* the community to include others who are not Muslim; many contemporary Muslim scholars (and not just the self-declared 'reformers' or Sufi style thinkers, but including those who might be considered 'conservative' or 'neo-classical') attempt to provide a meta-ethical approach¹⁸⁵ to establish a relatively thick and rich relationship of moral obligation and solidarity with non-Muslims (March, 2009, p. 92). Not only do the informants exhibit, but they actively endorse the potential for 'multiple religiosities', proposing an understanding of Islamic religiosity as transpiring on a scale between 'halal' to 'haram' (what Khalid refers to as the "halal:haram ratio" in Chapter VI, page 149). In so doing, they move away from the discourse of being or becoming the 'good Muslim' (Ramadan, 2010), and move beyond the rifts and

¹⁸⁵ This 'comprehensive- qualitative' approach to ethics does not appeal to juridical reasoning of the type "is x permissible and in which conditions?", but instead draws upon Islamic ideals of what it means to live a good life, of what believing Muslims *want* to pursue in this world, not only what they *may* pursue without fear of punishment (March, 2009, p. 92).

schisms of traditionalist versus modernist, conservative versus reformist, secularist versus Islamist, and so on, as they work towards assuming a ‘live and let live’ approach (as Amir says in Chapter IV, page 88, “Life is so short man, just live and let live and leave the judgement for God”). Salman, after asking me for the thesis’ working title, adds:

I really like how you just said the in-betweeners, haha, that’s funny (he laughs a little). It’s actually so true because all of us to some extent belong somewhere in this in-between place. We’re put in different situations which elicit different responses from us. Like when a Wahabbi- I don’t know why they think they’re the only real Muslims out there, but anyway- when a Wahabbi dude takes out a mortgage, let’s say, with interest yeah, or when he interacts with so many women at work, technically all of these things I could argue that they’re ‘un-Islamic’ (he makes air quotations with his hands here). *Lekin* (but), someone who we think *arrey ye to bas naam ka Musalmaan hai* (oh he’s just calling himself a Muslim)- which is incredibly judgemental by the way- *kya pata Allah ki nazar mein* (who knows in Allah’s viewpoint) he’s a better Muslim than you or me. We don’t know what’s inside his heart or mind, same as we don’t know what God is thinking or feeling either. Are we God? No. Then who are we to judge? The problem with our Muslim community is that we’re so fixated on petty things and proving who’s right and who’s wrong that we forget the bigger picture. This is why we struggle to make progress. Man, just put your damn differences aside so we can move forward, you know, support one another (he shrugs).

This thesis serves a dual purpose- while attempting to enhance the knowledge of the general public regarding young diasporic Muslims, it is also a call to suspend judgement between Muslim communities themselves. Salman highlights the value of the ‘in-between’ position as a frame of understanding which dissolves the division between categories of “real Muslims” or “*naam ka Musalmaan* (Muslim by name)”. He argues that as a Muslim we should put our “damn differences aside” and “support one another” in order to learn from each other, as the ‘other’. The global conditions under which an increasing number of Muslims currently live do not just generate idioms of purity; rather, they create new and diverse forms of sociability that constitute new Muslim migrant self-understandings and religious practices, with an increasing diversification of Muslim world views that function in cosmopolitan ways (Leichtman & Schulz, 2012). From an Islamic viewpoint, all knowledge originates from God and is acquired by humans through various channels including revelation, the authority of the learned, sense perception, reason, and intuition (Alatas, 2006, p. 168); however, there remains some knowledge which humans simply don’t have access to, like the ‘will of Allah’ (Bryant, et al., 2011) or “what God is thinking or feeling”. This is often referred to as ‘*ilm al-ghayb*’ or knowledge of the unknown/invisible (Mittermaier, 2019). Salman makes use of this Islamic epistemology to address the “problem” within the Muslim community- since God alone is the

‘All-Knowing’ (*Al-Aleem*) and ‘The Judge’ (*Al-Hakam*)¹⁸⁶, and since humans can’t see from “*Allah ki nazar* (Allah’s viewpoint)”, “then who are we to judge?”. God becomes the cosmopolitan canopy that transcends difference, and meaning and value can now be located in the depths of one’s own subjective life (which is ironically the outcome of ‘secularisation’ theory as well (Woodhead, 2008)) as enabled by their individual, personal relationship with God.

So, far from being hostile to secularism, much of the practice of religion in its lived form is intertwined with particular discourses of secular norms, and vice versa (Hedges, 2019). It is because of these complexities and contextual variations that second-generation desi Muslim migrants emerge as religious but also secular, secular but also religious, thus blurring the boundaries between both and claiming their place within post-secular understanding. So, can there be an Islamic secular, or can one be a secular Muslim? Reflecting upon these discussions, the answer is yes, albeit in a new reflexive way that justifies the use of the pre-fix ‘post’.

Complicating power, agency and modernity- An argument for multiple modernities

Let us not make the mistake of falling prey to an overly simplistic cognitive approach to religion by confusing ‘lived’ religion with ‘individual’ religion, for religion is not only experienced in isolation but in relation to power of various kinds (whether it be social, cultural, political, economic, or the power of the religious ‘other’) (Braunstein, 2019; Martin, 2014; Butler, et al., 2011; Asad, 1983). Here we turn our attention to Peter Berger’s (1990) ‘plausibility structures’, the social networks that maintain the plausibility of religious beliefs even when these beliefs may be challenged by competing articulations (Hjelm, 2018). According to Berger, religious belief is not merely the activity of an individual’s mind, as the subjective reality of religion is influenced, supported, or challenged by different ‘plausibility structures’, which often include a significant other, family and community (these are also recognised as the most powerful plausibility structures within this thesis) (McGuire, 2008). This is where the study of ‘lived religion’ finds renewed relevance, since it is preoccupied with the intimate realm of family, relationships, love, imagination, and so on (Orsi, 2003). Plausibility structures do not just serve as shields of protection towards religious beliefs, rather, they establish the very practices by which religious action is embodied (Ammerman, 2018).

¹⁸⁶ From: <https://99namesofallah.name/>

Following from this, we cannot talk about practice, especially religious practice, without referring to power and agency; not only power as it is exercised by some over others, but also power as it circulates through local relations and plausibility structures (Orsi, 2003).

Throughout the ethnography, we see how the productive effects of power become most visible via the engagement with an intimate other (whether it be a partner or parent), as articulations of gender, sexuality, love, and marriage emerge as sites of contention and controversy. Intimate relationships occur on a gendered axis of power and control; second-generation desi Muslim men and women, their parents, and their ‘imagined’ diasporic community (Vahed, 2013), are all seen to mobilise gendered religio-cultural scripts in multiple, competing ways that support/challenge, (but certainly) influence, one another. Throughout the course of the informants’ lives (as retold in their narratives), they are brought to account by various plausibility structures for their multiple interlocking gendered subjectivities (hence ‘gendered accountability’), against normative expectations of acceptable femininities, masculinities, religiosities, ethnicities and other modes of being. Reading second-generation desi Muslim migrants’ practices and performativity as responsive to this allows us to move beyond searching for the inherent meaning of those practices, as it redirects our attention to the varied ways in which they sustain or disrupt power relations and advance knowledge via their unique contextual ‘but also’ articulations of subjectivity. Just as the informants map their multiple power relations, the thesis also attempts to ‘map’ their mapping; power is never stable or stationary, and does not simply empower or oppress once and for all, rather power is always ‘kept on the move’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 56) as it works on, through and from the informants (and myself). The back and forth processes of being subjected and of becoming an agentic subject play out at multiple points across the chapters.

For example, the informants are subject to religious discourse around sex both before and after marriage, as we see in Chapter V and VII. Sex before marriage (*Zina*¹⁸⁷) is strictly prohibited in Islam and is one of the major sins within the religion, and even though the sexual practices of Muslims often deviate from proclaimed Islamic standards (Dialmy, 2010), the outcome of this deviation is gendered in nature. There remains a ‘double morality’ regarding premarital

¹⁸⁷ Zina is generally defined by Islamic Law as unlawful sexual intercourse, i.e. intercourse between individuals who are not married to one another (this encompasses both extramarital and premarital sex). From: <https://www.definitions.net/definition/ZINA>

sex, wherein despite considering sex before marriage to be ‘haram’¹⁸⁸, male Muslims generally do not seem to comply with this rule and are not called to account for such transgressions (Smerecnik, et al. 2010). While male sexuality generally goes unquestioned and unmonitored, the same cannot be said for desi Muslim women who are subject to religio-cultural scripts of female sexual purity and thereby constituted as ‘objects of risk’ (Renold & Ringrose, 2013). Sexual agency is discursively constructed as a positioning made available to some but not to others (Davies, 1990). However, just as there are some women and men who still observe religiously ordained sexual prohibitions, through our informants’ narratives we also recognise the evidence of both men and women who do not. The non-conformitive accounts of some of the interviewed second-generation desi Muslim women *partially* embody a secular stance which views sexual relations as part of broader social relations that are subject to numerous complexities, rather than simply being right or wrong depending on marital status (Winell, 2017).

I emphasise the word ‘partially’ because despite embracing ‘secular modern’ notions of sexual liberty and individual self-fulfilment, they are still unable to abandon or even dismiss their religious subjectivity, having to actively negotiate with normative religious standards of ‘halal’¹⁸⁹ and ‘haram’. It is the practice of lived religion which enables them to make such negotiations as they reclaim their sexuality from within Islam; for instance, Mehreen (Chapter V, page 121) focuses on internal religiosity as opposed to extrinsic religiosity and so does not consider her sexuality as a sign of religious piety or purity. Mehreen does not position herself outside the folds of Islam just because she has indulged in sex, instead she positions herself outside the folds of ‘convention’ (as she says, “I’m not very conventionally religious or practicing”). Understanding religiosity and sexuality on a conventional/unconventional spectrum rather than in religious/irreligious or practicing/not practicing oppositions, enables the informants to organise their experiences and consciousness across competing secular/religious discourses, thus emerging as contextually secular ‘but also’ religious. Religion is not merely a discursive field that the informants are subject to, instead they come to light as agentic subjects that have the power to (re)produce, (re)define and reimagine the boundaries of such fields (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). But the question still stands- who defines

¹⁸⁸ Forbidden or proscribed by Islamic law. From: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/haram>

¹⁸⁹ Halal is an Arabic word that literally translates to ‘permissible’, i.e. sanctioned by Islamic law. From: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/halal>

what is conventional or unconventional in the first place? Who defines the boundaries across public and private fields?

Becoming an agentic subject is never fully complete, and neither is it without consequence; even when second-generation desi Muslim migrants attempt to produce themselves differently, who they are 'in the moment' often remains bound to and influenced by particular discourses (like the structural parameters of gender, ethnicity, *ghar* (home), and *mahaul* (environment), as relayed by Laiba (Chapter V, page 113-114)) and relations of power (including the plausibility structures of "society", "parents", and "partner", as listed by Samira (Chapter V, page 129-130)). So, for example, even when some of the female informants reclaim their premarital sexual agency, we see them going to great lengths to maintain secrecy around such practices from family, community, friends, and even a potential partner. Throughout the thesis we see how these local relations are positioned in almost inescapable power blocks which the second-generation desi Muslim migrants then respond to via their "double" lives and multiple subject positions. Power is continuously kept on the move between these gendered relations; for instance, Saima's account in Chapter V (page 128) highlights the desi communal panopticon as an "aunty" (one of her mother's friends) sees her out on a date in Central London, which is then relayed "back home" to her mother who consequently gives Saima "sooo much shit for it". Even within the household, the informants recognise the domestic desi familial panopticon, one that monitors (and indeed, attempts to regulate) gender, sexuality, domestic, and emotional labour, as we see in the accounts of our married informants in Chapter VII.

Power is also exercised in ways that create hierarchy; for instance, we notice the gendered intergenerational hierarchy between a mother in-law and daughter in-law in Chapter VII as the immigrant desi Muslim mother (especially in her role as mother in-law) emerges as the dominant force within the household structure, often considered responsible for protecting and propagating the 'patriarchal system'. Within the same chapter, we also recognise the emergence of masculine hierarchies that occur between an 'alpha' and 'beta' binary, which are not just policed by women but also by fellow men. Ali reveals how deviating from normative expectations of aggressive hegemonic masculinity and sexuality can potentially subject desi Muslim men to humiliation and emasculation by their peers, as their friends apply the misogynistic label of "pussy" for men who are known to perform oral sex. Similarly, Shafiq's ex-girlfriend (Chapter VII, page 194) subjects him to the pervasive 'boys don't cry' discourse as he breaks down and cries in front of her, rejecting his expressions of vulnerability while

reinforcing heteronormative masculinity and emotionality. So, power is not always exercised in ways that promote justice either; another example we see is Shafiq's ex-fiancé who uses gendered religio-cultural scripts to her unfair advantage as she makes economic demands for '*nafkah*'¹⁹⁰ despite earning more than him (Chapter VII, page 173). The diverse accounts within this thesis allow us to move beyond mainstream readings of predominantly men exerting power over women (although we do see significant examples of this), as we also appreciate the dynamic interplay of power as exercised by women against men, women against other women, and men against other men.

Drawing on Foucault's (1978, p. 82) 'analytics of power', we see how power is indeed fluid, unstable, and multidirectional, continuously circulating between regulation and strategic resistance. Power can reflexively be understood as potentially constraining but also productive; if the constraining capacity of power relations on an individual's actions can be exercised via power/knowledge and governmentality, then the productive capacity of power also enables subjects to create and circulate competing discourses via critical thought, agency and resistance (Foucault, 1980; Mills, 2003). By studying the politics of resistance that occurs in the everyday, we see how second-generation desi Muslim migrants emerge as agentic subjects, albeit *within* discursive constraints, and so agency emerges from *within* discourse, not outside of it. Following Foucault, Butler (1990, p. 195) writes: "Even within theories maintaining a highly qualified or situated subject, the subject still encounters its discursively constituted environment in an oppositional epistemological frame. The culturally enmired subject negotiates its constructions, even when those constructions are the very predicates of its own identity". The on-going negotiations around categories such as 'male'/'female', 'desi', 'Muslim', 'middle-class', 'migrant' that we observe throughout the chapters offers us a way to rethink normative identity categories as lived and embodied experiences which are performative projects (and therefore inconsistently produced/reproduced and managed/undone). This Butlerian (1990; 1995) inspired poststructuralist reading of 'agency' is understood as a performance or an enactment, one that is strategic, tactical, conditional, provisional, and therefore must be related to the focus of its actions (Evans, 2013).

¹⁹⁰ The Islamic concept of '*nafkah*', is a man's religious duty to cover the living expenses of his wife and children including food, clothing, a place to live and other essentials like medicine, along with good treatment of the family (Foley, 2004).

The lived experiences of our informants illustrate how they can be subject to multiple power relations and yet still emerge as a desi Muslim agentic subject with the ability to exercise contextual agency. Contrary to normative assumptions about the autonomous ‘Western’ subject, their accounts emphasise how agency does not have to be studied in opposition to structure and culture (Keane, 2003), but can (and should) also be studied from *within* structure and culture. The idea here is to not impose white Western concepts of definition to ‘agency’ for there is never just one kind of ‘normative’ agentic subject, and implying that would be to deny the agency of others if they do not live up to a set standard of experiences and/or expectations. Approaching agency from this poststructuralist lens opens up the possibility to locate agency in the seemingly irrational, constraining domains of religion, tradition, or culture, without binding a priori its meaning to the normative teleology of ‘emancipation’, ‘freedom’, and ‘resistance’, all of which rely on deeply rooted assumptions about the ‘Western’ humanist expression of free will and the neoliberal autonomous self (both central concepts in the meta-narrative of secular modernity) (Mahmood, 2005; Keane, 2007; Bilge, 2010; Picirilli, 2017).

Despite their consistent critique, the informants’ unwillingness to disregard or abandon their religion, family, tradition, etc., and the subsequent ways in which they reimagine the boundaries of each, complicates the dominant rhetoric of these structural conditions as normative rigid frameworks that unequivocally counter processes of change and hybridization, thus denying their members the ability to develop the competences to live in a ‘modern’ ‘secular’ world. Ironically, the informants seem to find even more agency within their lived Islam than they can with their family, community and society (all of which compete to interpellate and constitute them differently, across multiple local sites, in a myriad of ways); the relationship with God is private and God’s surveillance is seemingly invisible, whereas the relationship with the family/community becomes public and their surveillance a lot more tangible. As Rumana said with a scorn:

Yeah, only Allah can judge, but what about the aunties on the street? What about our parents? Our siblings? Friends? *Humaare logo ne kabhi kisi ko sukoon se jeene diya hai aaj tak* (have our people ever let anyone live in peace)?

Additionally, Farah reflects:

I know it’s probably easier said than done, not to judge people for the shit they do because its human nature right, but ultimately we came into this world alone and we’ll

leave this world alone, like *inna lilaahi wa inna ilayhi raaaji'oon*¹⁹¹ (indeed we belong to Allah and indeed to Him we will return), so I know I have to stand in front of Him and give my *hisaab*¹⁹² (account) for every single thing I've ever done and that's what kind of keeps me grounded, you know. Allah is so forgiving, but this world is not, people are not...

It becomes clear that the second-generation desi Muslim migrants of this study much rather prefer the panopticon of God to the panopticon of family/friends/community/society. Recognising the nuances of shifting attitudes in diasporic Muslim cultures in this format allows us to move beyond an understanding of religion as necessarily 'conservative' and outside the framework of 'change' (Roodsaz & Jansen, 2019). What emerges as particularly interesting in the accounts of informants like Farah (consider Salman's quote in the previous section as well, for instance) is how they repeatedly turn to embrace and embody the old Protestant doctrine (which also influenced Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke) of 'individual responsibility' which stipulates- "individuals are agents because they are responsible for their own souls" (Asad, 1996, p. 271). So, while the informants discursively practice self-governmentality, self-reflexivity, and emerge as self-confrontational (all attributes of the 'secular' 'modern' individual (Gorski, 2016; Pagis, 2009), albeit embodied through a religious lens, thus religious *but also* secular), this 'self' is also framed and fragmented (Goffman, 1981), and remains a collaborative achievement (Goffman, 1969), accountable to its plausibility structures (some of which are more "forgiving" than others, as Farah mentions). Managing the self is not an independent enterprise; while the secular rational neoliberal autonomous self equates freedom with the ability to act on one's own calculations (Gershon, et al., 2011), for desi Muslim 'self work' to be successful requires the cooperation or at least the forbearance of others (bearing in mind that self work occurs in different ways within different contexts, and that self work is also gendered, so female self work is different to male self work) (Smith, 2006). As Goffman (1971, p. 185) writes:

"... the individual does not go about merely going about his business. He goes about constrained to sustain a viable image of himself in the eyes of others. Since local circumstances always will reflect upon him, and since these circumstances will vary unexpectedly and constantly, footwork, or rather self work, will be continuously necessary".

¹⁹¹ From the Quran, Chapter 2, Verse 156.

¹⁹² Referring to the Islamic notion of 'The Day of Reckoning' (*Yawm Al-Hisaab*).

What we can see happening here then is akin to a process of (for lack of a better word) ‘Protestantization’ of Islam, a type of personalised, contextualised secularization that can potentially occur *within* Islam, far more easily than it can within the boundaries of family, community, and society. I want to exercise great caution when drawing a parallel with ‘Protestantism’ here- acknowledging that Islamically while there is no central institution similar to the Catholic Church from which to break free (but there are the institutions of family/community/society that hold positions of power and authority), what is similar is the ideological emphasis on the direct, unmediated relationship between the believer and God (Alatas, 2007). Agency is valued as ‘self-interpretation’ (Keane, 2003); this philosophy features within Islam via the practice of ‘*ijtihad*’, the process of independent scriptural interpretation through direct and unmediated access to the revealed sources, as endorsed by 18th and 19th century Muslim revivalists (Hirschler, 2005), as well as more contemporary scholars like Tariq Ramadan (2006; 2009). The concept of ‘*ijtihad*’ is finding renewed relevance across various domains including feminist discourse (Ezzat, 2019; Keddie, 2018), education (Davids & Waghid, 2019), economics and finance (Shaharuddin, 2020; Khan, 2016), law and public policy (Ali, 2018), and is also adopted by our informants along with an emphasis on ‘*niyyah*’ (intention) (for example, Laiba (Chapter VI, page 141) suggests that what is deemed as ‘halal’ is ultimately dependent on an individual’s “*niyyah*”). I would argue that the informants find themselves in between a perpetual and reciprocal engagement with two distinct regimes of knowledge- Foucault’s (1980; 1991) *connaissance*, which I conceptualise as ‘*ilm*’, on the one hand, and *savoir* or ‘*ijtihad*’ on the other. *Connaissance/ilm* is externally received didactic knowledge (such as religious or family values), while *savoir/ijtihad* signifies actively constructed knowledge that is produced via experience in relation to others (Foucault, 1991; Kennedy, 1979). If *connaissance/ilm* attempts to maintain the stability of the subject, then the activity of *savoir/ijtihad* enables modification and transformation (Mavelli, 2014); as we have studied, the informants constantly navigate through this cycle as they strive to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their multiple subjectivities via the knowledge produced within these relations of power.

A revised understanding of knowledge and lived religion has the potential to revive political recognition of the Christian, and specifically, Catholic foundations of European integration, as it undermines and challenges the European process of secularisation and the religious/secular, private/public divide. Writings in the secular tradition insist that the self-reflexivity, openness, and procedural thinness of secularism give it a decisive edge over all other forms

of modernity in the long run (Katzenstein, 2006). However, the informants' accounts of lived religion disrupt this narrative, revealing alternative manifestations of modernity that do not sit neatly within the framework of the secular modern as they flow back and forth between secularity *but also* religion, thus problematising the normative assumption re modernity as an exclusively 'Western' 'secular' project (Lee, 2006). As the thesis puts forward the argument for multiple religiosities, in so doing it also pushes the argument for multiple modernities.

Shmuel Eisenstadt's (2000) theory of multiple modernities opens the possibility of modernities beyond the so-called 'West', emphasising "plurality, creativity and reflexivity" (Mota & Delanty, 2015, p. 41). As Eisenstadt (2000, p. 2) writes: "the idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world... is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs". Second-generation desi Muslim migrants continually reinterpret and reconstruct the cultural program of modernity via their multiple subject positions, thus creating a "shift in the conception of human agency" (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 609). Change is facilitated and agency is found by consistently readjusting cultural practices; as we have seen, the informants do not destroy or do away with religion or tradition, but redefine their practice through intention, interpretation and innovative action, thus reworking the possibilities of development in relation to modernity. Throughout the ethnography we see the multiple ways in which 'desi' 'Muslim' diasporic culture provides the informants with a large reservoir of symbols, norms, and social practices to call upon as they continually reorganise their identity under different conditions; it is this very exercise in the constant rearrangement and manipulation of available symbols that comes to project an exclusive identity for a specific modernity (Lee, 2006). The project of modernity therefore emerges as performative in a sense, a site of power; that is, if modernity can be (re)produced in multiple ways, it can never be fully constituted, thus enabling agency within the possibilities of its reconfiguration.

To rework modernity is to challenge its historicity, to expose its illusory origins. This is one of the reasons why the multiple modernities perspective is often championed by post-colonial scholars (Friedman, 2006; Welz, 2008; Spohn, 2010; van den Boogaard, 2017; Paranjape, 2017; Jung & Sinclair, 2020; for example); while colonialism introduces modernity from the elite level down, multiple modernities tend to operate from below, involving multi-level interactions between the new and the old (Harding, 2008). While this is a great intellectual triumph, it also forces us to consider *who* defines the appropriate level for the merging of new

and old. The multiple modernities argument presents itself as a double-edged sword- if there are multiple forms of modernity which exist simultaneously, how far can the boundaries of modernity expand before they begin to collapse? Can seemingly ‘anti-modern’ initiatives, including religious neo-fundamentalism or neo-traditionalism, also be classed as modern?

Critics of the multiple modernities thesis engage with these questions extensively (Sinai, 2019; Cheah, et al., 2015; Bhabra, 2013, 2007; Fourie, 2012; Schmidt, 2006; for example); while I acknowledge the legitimacy and significance of these concerns, to even begin to attend to them is well beyond the scope of this conclusion and would warrant further research and investigation. In fact, I would argue that it is this very conflict of values in the construction, maintenance, and expression of multiple modernities which I find most relevant to this study, for it reflects the struggles of identities in redefining the meaning of modernity. By showcasing the informants’ diverse narrative identities and subjectivities, the thesis brings to light their multiple border negotiations and examines the role of modern actorhood in the ongoing historical construction of second-generation desi Muslim migrants in London. Instead of dismissing ‘agency’ or ‘modernity’ altogether as inherently ‘Western’ concepts, this ethnography explores the conjuncture of multiple notions of agency and modernity that play out in the informants’ lives, demonstrating the many ways in which ‘desi’ ‘Muslim’ and ‘Western’ modernities relate to one another. The concept of multiple modernities entails much more than the mere expression of cultural diversity (Thomassen, 2010); the significance of inter-cultural encounters in the construction of second-generation desi Muslim variations of modernity cannot be undermined as we explore the combination of their intimate narratives with competing discourses around gender, racial, and family politics, Islamic piety, and individual agency.

Rather than fixating on whether human autonomy is located in the individual or the collective, the task then becomes to recognise and appreciate the historically, contextually contingent and multiple ways in which second-generation desi Muslim migrants emerge as social actors, engaging in their own modernizing projects via their capacity for responsible agency- for themselves, for their following generations, and for the future of Islam. Secular modernity does not have to be a Nietzschean style ‘ruthless forgetting’ of the past (Friedman, 2006), but rather a critical engagement with it. The conversation to be had is not about keeping religion out or bringing religion back in, it’s about realising and addressing the fact that religion has always been there, and will always be there in its diverse multiple contradictory forms- God is not dead

and religion is here to stay (Boyer, 2008; Broocks, 2013), therefore we must be equipped, ready and willing to engage with it (sometimes by complicating it further and recognising that its complexities enable it to sustain itself despite secular demands), embrace it, and make space for it beyond the well-maintained binaries of private versus public domains. The study of lived religion, especially in a diasporic context, has real-world significance because it attunes us to the potentially explosive consequences it holds for people, families, and political worlds, at the juncture of intimate experience with political and social realities (Orsi, 2003).

This thesis aims to disabuse its reader of any illusory commitment to norms, order, and coherence, especially when it comes to diasporic Muslim identities, and instead challenges them to oppose reductionism and essentialism by accommodating alternative narratives of multiplicity. While I have repeatedly referred to my informants as ‘desi’ ‘Muslim’ ‘migrants’, I wish to reiterate that what these terms fully signify remains permanently unclear (hence, the ‘in-betweeners’). I do understand and appreciate that identity categories are inevitable (and sometimes even necessary), but they are also unstable, and it is precisely the instability of these categories that I have attempted to highlight throughout the chapters. These classifications remain sites of confusion, disruption, and in the words of Judith Butler, ‘necessary trouble’ (1996, p. 372). My hope for this thesis is to contribute to the potential of living with difference by making visible the entanglement of these differences, to facilitate the journey beyond tolerance to mutual respect, to emphasise the importance of dialogue within the diasporic Muslim minority communities as well as with the majority, and to honour the politics of recognition and resistance that occurs in the everyday.

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Appendix: Human Ethics Approval



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
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Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2016/69

2 August 2016

Sahrish Khan
Anthropology
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Sahrish

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "Crossing Boundaries - Exploring the Importance and Interplay of Identity, Religion and Transnationalism in Muslim Indian and Pakistani Cross-Cultural Marriages" has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 21st July 2016.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

R. Robinson
pp.

Jane Maidment
Chair
University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee