The Journeying Self - An ethnography of ethics and change amongst British-born Muslim women in Norfolk

Qudra Goodall

Ph.D. Social Anthropology

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School of International Development

University of East Anglia

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"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,

there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,

the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"

doesn't make any sense.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill

where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep."

Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

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Abstract

For the majority of British Muslims born in Britain profound inter-generational, socio-economic, and demographic shifts are occurring. Yet, ideas of belonging, citizenship and Islam's compatibility with "British values" often leave British Muslims caught in an unenviable position between identities often considered in conflict. The children of convert Muslims or second-generation converts inhabit a liminal positionality demonstrating the push-pull factors they experience, learning to sidestep and negotiate preconditioned and binary ideas, as to who they are and how they present themselves in the world. This study is the first of its kind with privileged access to a relatively hard-to-reach convert Sufi Muslim community, in Norwich, the Murabitun; the first indigenous Muslim community in Britain rooted in both Islamic and Western traditions, imbricated with Sufi cosmology and ideologies of whiteness. The producing of an ethnographic and feminist case study reveals the ways that the next generation of convert Muslim women are deconstructing and decolonizing their particular inherited culture and practice. It is a processual journey marking how an individual becomes a fully responsible and autonomous subject in their own right, allowing long-term participation, life-history interviews, collective memory work and social media analysis to reinstate Muslim women as storytellers of their own journey. Tracing life trajectories from community belonging, through gender justice and experiences of marriage, to representation and work choices reveals how the values of ethics and change are catalysts for re-claiming faith, practice and agency. This process of self-formation seeks to problematise and reimagine reifying, patriarchal and imperialist ideas in order to elicit new meanings and accommodate a full spectrum of emotions. Social relations are shown to be imbued with layers of power and by highlighting the often ambivalent and morally fraught accounts of individual subjectivities, self-realisation and modes of agency provide a necessary theoretical perspective for the way women resist, co-opt or re-articulate religious discourses and practices to their own ends. While case-studies have a limited applicability, they also have the potential to provide significant insight into larger implications and reveal a more intricate tapestry of contemporary British Islam.

Glossary of terms

Aa'r	Shame
Adab	Correct behaviour, both inward and outward; good deportment
Ākhirah	The next life, the hereafter
Amin	"So be it"
'Aql	Intellect or reason
As-salamu 'alaykum	Peace be upon you
Asabiyya	Used by the community in the sense of tribal unity
Awliyāʾ	Has various meanings such as friends, protectors, guardians, or "God's elect friends"
Azadi	Freedom
Baraka	Blessing, any good which is bestowed by Allah, a subtle beneficent spiritual energy which can flow through things or people
Batin	Higher inner knowledge
Bismillah	Meaning "In the name of Allah", used by Muslims at the beginning of any undertaking
Convert Muslim/community	A person who has become a Muslim/a community of convert Muslims
Darqawi	Muslim centre of commerce and learning in Norfolk
Da'wa	Call or invitation to Islam
Deen	Meaning religion, or a comprehensive way of life governed by divine guidance
Dhikr	Invocation or litanies of Allah by repetition of His names or particular formulae
Diwan	A collection of poems
Du'a	Supplications, invocation, or calling out to Allah
Dunya	The temporal world
Emir	Local chief
Faqīr / Dervish	Religious ascetic
Fiqh	Theory, philosophy, or system of Islamic law based on sharia; Islamic jurisprudence.

Fitra	Or fitri being; innate human nature that recognises the oneness of God (tawhid)
‘First-hour’ converts	The parental generation, part of the counter-culture of the 1960s-70s, who discovered Sufism and joined Sufi communities
Fuqara	Literally means “the poor”, or living on alms, but refers to Sufis
Futuwwa	A kind of nobility
Habibiyya	Murids of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib
Hadith	Sayings and behaviours of Prophet Muhammad (oral traditions)
Hajjis, Hajjas	Pilgrims to Mecca
Haram	Forbidden
Ibadah	Worship
Iftar	The meal eaten after sunset during Ramadan
Ihsan	Perfection or excellence
Ijtihad	The “effort” of a qualified Muslim scholar’s independent reasoning to derive rulings for issues not explicitly covered in Quran or hadith
Imam	Refers to the one who “governs” or manages a Mosque
Iman	Faith or belief
Islah	Reform
Islam	Peace, purity, submission and obedience to the will of Allah
Izzat	Honour
Janna	Garden or paradise
Janaza	The funeral prayer and service
Juma (Jumu’ah)	The Friday prayer
Kafirun	Disbelievers
Khalifah	Successor, ruler, or steward
Khutba (khutbah)	A sermon delivered during Friday prayer and other special Islamic occasions
Mahr	Dower or obligatory gift from a groom to his bride
Murid	A novice committed to spiritual enlightenment

Murshid	Spiritual guide or teacher
Muqaddam	Representative or section head
Mutaṣawwif	The person who attempts to purify him or herself
Nafs	Self, soul, psyche, or ego
Qalb	Heart
Qasida	Song of dhikr
Qibla	The direction faced in prayer
Qiwamah	Authority and protection
Quran	The holy book for Muslims, the direct word of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad
Rahiya	Liberty
Ramadan	The ninth month of the Muslim year, during which fasting is observed between dawn and sunset
Riba	Interest or usury
Salat (salah)	The prayer
SAQ	Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi, leader of the Murabitun movement
Shahada	The Islamic declaration of faith: “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger”
Shaytan	Satan
Silsila	Sufi lineage or chain of masters and disciples
Sunnah	The body of traditions and practices of the Prophet Muhammad
Surah	A chapter of the Quran
Surat al-Yasin	The 36th chapter of the Quran, referred to as the “heart of the Quran”
Tafhim	To help someone understand something; a comprehensive commentary and translation of the Quran
Tafsir	Interpretation or exegesis, especially of the Quran
Tahzib al-nafus	Refinement of the self
Tarīqas	Sufi doctrine or path; community of spiritual learning
Tasawwuf	The mystical and inner dimension of Islam, focusing on purification of the nafs and connection with God

Tawbah	Repentance; regretting a sin, ceasing it, and resolving not to repeat it
Tawhid	The oneness of God
Wird	Daily litany
Zahir	A classical education or exoteric knowledge
Zakat al-fitr	A small obligatory head-tax paid yearly at the end of Ramadan by Muslims with sufficient means
Zawiya	A “corner”; small mosque or religious retreat where a Shaykh teaches

Preface

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It begins with a death. The sudden death of a close family friend, who like my parents, had joined a community of Sufi Muslims in Norfolk in the 1970s and established a group of families who would become the foundational links of my childhood growing up as a Muslim in Norwich. The question that surfaced that evening came to reflect the journey I had started, probably years before, but certainly since I had begun to research this unique Sufi community, first for a film project, then for my Research Masters, through to my PhD study, namely: “Who am I and who do I want to be?” I choose to recount the event which reflects not only the subject of this study, but the critical reflective position I have chosen.

My friends and I were gathering to celebrate a birthday, but on arriving we learn the news of our friend’s death and despite a numb silence and uncertainty, we decide to attend the Ihsan Mosque to recite the *Surat al-Yasin.* Like any family or collective of people who have shared history there are tales of challenge and conflict alongside ones of love and companionship. I am nervous about going to the Mosque, I have not been in a long time, and I question my place there; how would I be received, would my hesitancy be obvious? I am not alone in feeling this. As a group of women who have grown up together, shared a history and common identity, gone our own ways and come back together, through all our different life stories and contexts, both painful and joyful, we have remained very close; we call it a soul sisterhood, and have learned to adapt to our changing needs and beliefs, which have been varied. Yet in that moment, in silent agreement, we know we must do this thing together and feel stronger for it. I have not come prepared. I borrow a scarf, as does another. We drive in two cars and speak of how the veil falls at these times, making life more real. While the event makes us feel detached, the feeling of our connection is palpable, we are together. We enter the Mosque. I take off my sandals and leave them on a shelf by the door. I walk up the plastic-covered carpeted stairs to the ladies section, so familiar yet seemingly new; through the first room - where the younger women and children, who always seem to congregate, are laying out the food for the fast-break, it is still Ramadan - and into the main, if small women’s mezzanine above the main congregation hall of the Mosque. So familiar yet so different. I see some familiar faces, I walk to greet them, and they turn and beam smiles, saying my name like something precious; they hug me and express their surprise at how long it has been and how happy they are to see me. Their embraces are warm and solid; each woman taking time and energy to look me in the eye and connect. I was not expecting that, although I’m not sure what I was expecting. We sit on the floor in lines facing the *qibla*, towards the *Ka’ba* in Makka, and the Quran recital begins. I close my eyes and listen attentively. While I do not know all the words, something deeply embodied reverberates as the recital grows louder. It is a slow swirling resonance of remembrance, knowledge, language and mysticism. I know this. I am a little rusty at sitting cross-legged, but remain still, making only small adjustments to my back. I feel the room fill

up behind me as I watch a toddler smile and pull up the sheer fabric that hangs over the banisters, separating the gaze from the men below, or from above, and I remember doing that very same thing. I feel a sting of tears and the inevitable roll back of memories…why is that? The Quran recital ends in a *surah*, which I know and enjoy singing along to. We make *du'a* for our lost friend, and although I can barely hear Shaykh Abdal Haqq, I repeat *Amin* as it echoes around the rafters, hands to face and then to heart. I embrace my neighbour, then turn to see the room full. An older friend in her sixties is sitting wearily in the corner. I go over and embrace her. She cries. They had known in each other since their twenties, they converted together, had children together, through all their life changes, for almost 50 years. Then it is the *iftar* and people collect on either side of plastic tablecloths, on which are placed glasses of milk and water, dates, melon and pineapple. I collect some food for my friend, whom I sit by respectfully, dutifully, not forced, but recognised. Then it is time to do the *salat*. The lines arrange, we stand close together, I take a small step back, as I am not quite in perfect alignment. I am out of practice, but I perform each movement and recite each *surah* as I know how. Afterwards, we greet our neighbours with *as-salamu 'alaykum* and embrace. We speak of the sadness and the beauty of the moment. A friend with cancer is clearly experiencing it at a deeper, more personal level. Those of us who arrived together, now gather close to eat the evening meal. We comment on how we could be 12 years old again, sitting in that exact place, together. It is a rare occasion these days. Harira soup is served, a soup filled with chickpeas, meat and pasta, a stalwart of Ramadan. I eat what I can, and though a vegetarian, I do it for the *baraka* and giggle with a friend when I run out of chickpeas. Why do I do that? I observe one of our group who had insisted on changing before arriving, wearing a grey suit jacket over black trousers and with a pink headscarf. She looks so different from how she did earlier in her green luminous hoody and stripy cropped trousers. She had reassembled in her uniform for the moment. There is trepidation in her eyes. As we leave, we greet the women and make arrangements with a few who have recently returned to Norwich to catch up on a few decades' worth of life. We return to my friend's house whose birthday it is and decide to spend the rest of the evening together. Inevitably, we talk of our unique past; growing up with siblings; the present, our children, and of course the passing of our friend, and remember his family. We speak about how powerful the night has felt, like something had shifted. That we had, ourselves, made a choice. That despite our roundabout ways and divergent paths this moment had brought us to act together; our shared history and context running deeper than the lines which separated us. Why is this important? Against this landscape there is something deeply changing, a seeking to understand who we are, what distinguishes us from a history which took such a particular form. More importantly, "How we are coming into being now on our own terms?".

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Making the familiar strange

"Home, once interrogated, is a place we've never been before" Kamala Visweswaran (1994).

In Visweswaran's (1994) depiction of a feminist ethnography, she urges us to pause and reflect, to know more fully who we are, as who we are is inseparable from the theory we create, and the theory we create enables new and more just ways of living. By examining these connections, those between self and community, community and theory and theory and justice, we are forced to revisit "home" in order to unearth what is at stake in making the familiar strange (Carrille-Rowe, 2005). British-born children of convert Muslims or "second-generation"[1] converts inhabit multiple cultures and identities, intersecting across systems of gender, class, ethnicity and religion (Hall, 1996). They learn from birth to sidestep and negotiate preconditioned and reifying ideas - ideas often considered in conflict, as to who they are and how they present themselves to the world, indicating the push-pull factors experienced in the liminal space they occupy, "We carry a bewildering range of different, and at times conflicting, identities around with us in our heads at the same time. There is a continual smudging of personae and lifestyles, depending where we are (at work, on the high street) and the spaces we move between" (Mort, 1989:169). On the one hand, compared to their counterparts from migrant backgrounds, this group are believed to be more open-minded and adaptive due to their "bi-cultural" upbringing (Suleiman, 2013), and more akin to viewing the world from a non-Muslim perspective, allegedly enabling them to navigate British life more successfully. On the other hand, this largely masks the complexity of British Muslim identity formation and contestation of those born in the United Kingdom, which comes not only from majority society but from within Muslim communities themselves.

Islam is considered one of the fastest growing religions in Britain, with the 2021 Census reporting an estimated 3.9 million believers, an increase of 44% in the last decade (ONS UK Census, 2023). While a large proportion comprises of multiple generations of British-born Muslims (MBC, 2015), and conversion to Islam is believed to be around 100,000 per year in Britain (Lipka and Hackett,

[1] The term "second-generation" in practice is generally used to refer to the multiple generations of migrant and diasporic populations in Britain and the West. While I was reluctant to use this term to refer to the children of converts, it was a term participants used to refer to themselves. Furthermore, if "second or third-generation" helps define how subsequent generations encompass both historical, cultural and religious influences and the ways they redefine these, then using the term in this study is both relevant and pertinent, in spite of its narrow definition.

2015)[2], the majority (50%) are made up of Muslims born in the country since 2019, representing profound inter-generational, socio-economic, and demographic shifts - changes which have been underway for quite some time. Yet, ideas of belonging, citizenship and Islam's compatibility with "British values" (Ipsos Mori, 2018), have highlighted debates around "segregated" communities, a clash between national and religious categories and an equating of Islamophobia with racism, associating Islam with a number of cultural and moral characteristics deemed inborn and immutable. Hegemonic public discourse orientates Islam with community, ethnicity and culture as a reifying and encasing force (Baumann, 1996). As a consequence, British Muslims often find themselves in the unenviable position of being subject to Islamophobic abuse and simultaneously having to affirm their Britishness (Warsi, 2017). Characteristically, Islam and Muslims are seen as traditional, conservative and excessively religious, while Britishness is associated with being modern, liberal, progressive and secular. This perpetuates a three-fold impact on British Muslims' everyday lives: constructions drawing on Orientalist tropes that sideline alternative imaginaries; the explanation of political dynamics through an emphasis on difference; and, in the vernacular, fuelling binary opposition between British and Muslim values (Marsden, Jarvis and Atakav, 2023).[3] Yet, British Muslims themselves report a strong sense of belonging to Britain and reject any contest between their religious and British identities (Ipsos Mori, 2018:57).

Hence, the lived experience of British Muslims is often overlooked against the tide of dominant representations in both the media and popular political imagination (Jeldtoft, 2011; Poole, 2002; 2006; Richardson, 2004), or in academic representations of what constitutes Muslim expression, whereby the hyper-visible *chronotope* (Bakhtin, 1990) - how Islam has been presented as the grand narrative since 9/11 - produces highly selective forms and shapes of Muslim life, such as public religious practices, Islamic political activism and institutionalised performances. British convert Muslim identities, complicated by colonial and historical legacies (Gallonier, 2015), provide a greater challenge to locate in relation to the majority and minorities in society (Franks, 2000), yet draw popular and academic interest as their life-stories provide an opportunity to understand how two seemingly mutually exclusive forms of belonging are combined in one subject. Positioned along lines of (un)belonging and moral questioning (Jensen, 2008; Roald, 2004; Suleiman, 2013; van Nieuwkerk, 2006; Zebiri, 2008), they simultaneously draw from a

[2] Conversion to Islam includes approximately a 62% female conversion rate (Brice 2010). However, according to the Pew Research Centre, conversions both into and out of Islam appear roughly to balance out, with 100,000 also leaving Islam per year.

[3] Dominant discourses on British identity and national belonging have established a narrative of difference projected onto the dominated other by the majority, white British, who have come to epitomise the norm of national belonging (Hall 1996 (1989)). Furthermore, the political and legal perspective constitute minorities as bounded communities defined by cultural characteristics and juxtaposed against the autonomous self (Phillips (2007).

cultural repertoire acquired through their upbringing and education which affects how they perform and practice Islam (Vroon-Najem, 2014), and as such are considered "bridges" between born Muslims from minority backgrounds and a non-Muslim majority (Jawad, 2012; Moosavi, 2015). However, while a convert's resocialisation may never be complete (Kose, 1996), the children of converts are born and raised between these symbolic binaries of representation and are left questioning their sense of belonging and being, across secular and religious entities.

This thesis presents the long-term ethnographic and feminist research with a group of second-generation convert Sufi Muslims in Norwich, who were born and raised in what is considered the longest-standing indigenous British convert Muslim community - The Murabitun or Norwich Sufi Community[4], established in 1970. The study is organised around a generation of women, now in their 30s and 40s, who are engaging in a process of interrogating and deconstructing their inherited culture, the culture of their parents, as the site where boundaries of belonging and ideology are delineated (Bugg, 2014), and their religious practice as demarcated by this particular Sufi movement. Through a process of "decolonising" these discourses they are problematising and reimagining their ideas of self, their relationship with Allah and how they engage and practise their faith. There is a particular positionality that comes from inhabiting the liminal, enunciated by what the Islamic philosopher Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.1111 CE) refers to as the *dihliz* - an interspace (Moosa, 2005), which describes a subjective state, psychological, metaphysical, neurological, conscious or unconscious, of being on the "threshold" of something, or in-between two different existential planes. It describes moments or periods of transition when the limiting boundaries of thought, self-understanding and behaviour fall away, to reveal creativity and imagination, destruction and (re)construction, demonstrating a unique perspective on how human beings experience and respond to change. Van Gennep's (1960) scholarship on *rites of passage* organised this journey as a tripartite structure: *rites of separation; transition rites;* and *rites of incorporation*, the liminal being the middle stage or period in the journey. However, for second-generation convert women, their "liminal positionality" is a twofold experience - Firstly, as a physical description of the in-between space occupied by identities, cultures and belongings as British and Muslim, whereby polarising discourses negate the complexity and complementarity involved. Secondly, it acts as a catalyst in what I am describing as the "journeying self" (Natanson, 1970), the phenomenological exploration of the self as it intersects between

[4] Note on terms: The Murabitun, Norwich Sufi community, Muslims of Norwich, Ihsan Mosque and Islamic centre. Temporal and yet interchangeable terms to refer to the Sufi community established in Norwich. Despite the reluctance to use the term Murabitun due to is political reasoning, for a more generic and diverse label, it continues to be used by subsequent generations and in the literature. Therefore, I will refer to this term in order to encapsulate the socio-political and ideological construction of the Sufi community.

subjectivity, social roles and the ambiguities of personal identity in an effort to become a fully responsible and autonomous subject. As such, it is a circular process, multi-layered and re-reviewed at different stages of life, revealing the continuity of change (Bergson, 1998).

I theorise this journey through both the Western philosophical and Muslim cosmological tradition. Drawing on Foucault's later work, *The History of Sexuality* (1985), and the "modes of subjectification", it highlights the process by which people are led to reflect, interpret and recognise themselves as a domain of knowledge. It also considers how the subject is shaped by memories, archives and power relations which affect the formation of identities. Ethnographic data grounded in these women's narratives shows an expression of agency that is wedded to the concept of the autonomous self, alongside the Sufi idiom of *tasawwuf*. The validity of practices, according to participants, rests on the choice and consciousness of the individual and the rejection of unthinking submission to external social, religious and inherited cultural norms. This draws attention to how agency and structure fuse in these women's lived experience and how, through their liminal positionality they provoke social norms that constrain their identity in order to discover their capacity to live and act. By proposing the "liminar" (Beech, 2011) or "interstructural" (Turner, 1967), the theory on agency can be advanced as a catalyst through which resistance, or a triggering experience, provides the insight for creative expression and reinterpretation. It is a value orientated process that acknowledges the role of trauma and rupture as an important part of a trajectory toward reclaiming a place of their own which differentiates, challenges and develops inherited cultures and mores. Embodied religious practice focuses more on introspection and reflection, realising the good and connecting with God - rather than simply signifying or marking an identity - whereby the individual returns renewed and empowered. As such, these women employ "critique" that merges '*aql* and *qalb* enacting ethical aims to achieve *islah* and *tahzib al-nafus* - the refinement of the self - rather than judgement (Ahmad, 2017). This internalised process is interpreted by them as a kernel of their sense of faith, derived from the *hadith,* "Whoever Knows their Self, Knows their Lord", to mean that God is the very "Inner Self" they are seeking to reconnect with and as a tool of guidance. Therefore "one cannot speak about an 'outside' and an 'inside' without acknowledging how the *dihliz* frames all spaces" (Moosa, 2005:49), which informs the epistemic and political enunciation of their identity.

This study is original in its field as I was born and brought up in this community, which has enabled me to observe and speak with its members openly and freely. It has been a personal journey, one with its own history and bias, whose impact can colour their portrayal, which has to be taken into account (Bectovic, 2011). Life has mirrored creativity and vice versa, calling forth discernment, objectivity, compassion and understanding. I aim to give voice to the way individuals make sense of and live out significant aspects of their lives, expressed in how they tell stories and

recall real past events. As it is not a simple matter of tapping into lived experience through observation alone, words and narratives are the "well of meaning" (Desjarlais, 2003) and evidence in this case. Incorporating ethnography "at home", situational analysis and weaving the methods of reflective life-history narratives, participatory fieldwork and collective memory work (Haug, 1999), it has sought to encourage participants to think about, actively engage with and attain ownership of research and knowledge, to be the collaborators in the creation of new meaning. Only through the discipline of a comparative ethnographic approach that encapsulates both the struggle, power and politics as well as the values, meanings and representations is one "capable of addressing the full range of human possibilities" (Graeber, 2001:xiii), making it possible to envision alternatives to oppressive structures. As Robbins (2013) argues, when we consider the parallel perspectives of "suffering" and "good", it enables all human beings to have the equal right to free themselves of the dark effects of dispossession, trauma or neoliberalism, and to allow for the diverse articulations of how people imagine what ought to and could be. Therefore, despite experiences that may seem to be a shortcoming, inadequate or imperfect, and which may include feelings of struggle, sin, negligence of religious obligation and confidence of faith and belief, attempts at becoming "good" or "better" becomes part of the context of ethical formation (Winchester, 2008). The study of care, values, ethics, morality, wellbeing, empathy and hope is the anthropologist's endeavour to explore "the different ways people organise their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as good, and to study what it is like to live at least some of the time in light of such a project" (Robbins, 2013:457). As al-Ghazālī, writes, "Once one's identity is moulded in the limitations of language, then the terrain of identity has to be constantly reflowered in order to accommodate new foliage" (in Moosa, 2005:123).

In my aim to bind together anthropological threads of belonging, ethics and change I present this journey through three main transformative *rites of passage* or journey stages, reflected in the empirical chapters so that it unfolds in a layered, multivalent fashion, each chapter building upon the last. Beginning with kin and community, where initial identities are established; it moves to marriage and gender justice, where women challenge expectations and reifying standards; before continuing to the creation of new forms of representation and faith practice, how women express their lived religion through their work and social media. Tracing a line in one's life-trajectory from beginning to self-expression allows us to capture more fully the embodied and subjective journey through which these women are making sense of the world. Across the globe, and throughout time and circumstances, rites of passage have thrived, maintaining the myths and legends which bring meaning to our lives honouring our transitional journeys. Life and death, day and night, girl and woman, novice and expert, liminality encapsulates the threshold within a journey. When borders or limits are dismantled or give way to doubt, the liminal offers up this challenge: how do I get through this uncertainty? Who do I become as a result? Who do I follow in this time of

change? In the contemporary world then, liminality leads to the door of modernity, one of overcoming boundaries and questioning the status quo. By exploring the often ambivalent and morally fraught accounts of "individual subjectivities, ethics, self-realisation and modes of agency" (Jacobsen, 2011:78), through lived religion, inheritance and reproduction, I engage in a critical "interpretation of interpretation of Islam" (Bectovic, 2011), to put aside categories and abstract concepts to elucidate concrete data about diverse and contemporary British Muslims. As such this study provides a necessary theoretical perspective to avoid reifying "Islam" as the principal marker or making all Muslims "all about Islam" (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Jeldtoft, 2009). Rather, it makes visible the ways women resist, co-opt or re-articulate religious discourses and practices to their own ends.

While "communities" as a focus of study, are complex, problematic, hard to define (Alleyne, 2002), and at times politically divisive, this case-study encapsulates a unique branch in the European Sufi movement (Brubandt, 2011). The Murabitun was an intentional project to build a community and establish generations of British Muslims. The "first-hour" converts (Hermansen, 2009), the parental generation, who have been defined as European university graduates, artists and musicians, dissatisfied with hereditary religious offerings and generational expectations of the 1960s and 1970s, went in search of meaning and spiritual re-evaluation, discovering Sufism and joining this nascent community. The Murabitun deifies standard Sufi Movements in the West by claiming a radical difference that, in-spite of direct links to the classical Islamic tradition of the *Šaḏilī-Darqāwī ṭarīqa*, Shaykh Muhammed ibn al-Habib (1876-1972), and whilst popularising the influential concept of the Muhammedan Way, it is not an adaptation of an Eastern paradigm in a new context, but rather an original project rooted in both Islamic and Western traditions. This movement is marked by Shaykh Abdulqadir as-Sufi (SAQ) (1930-2021), retaining his Western identity through his publications; the incorporation of non-Sufic ideology such as economic and philosophical theory; and a focus on the spiritual experience, knowledge of the unseen and mystical love superseding the contemporary Islamic landscape. Conversion in the Murabitun prescribes "slow, piecemeal changes to achieve radical ruptures" (Rogozen-Soltar, 2019:1), which despite seemingly mismatched temporalities, irrecoverably means intertwining spiritual and political transformations across personal, national and global scales of belonging. Therefore accepting/submitting to Allah/the Islamic faith is simultaneous with implementing the ethos of political and economic transformation, for example by not being dependent on the state, and espousing the ethics of future-oriented millenarianism, such as social division between the self and the *kafirun* or non-believing society. These teachings have been crucial to the success in spreading Islam to indigenous Caucasian communities in England and other parts of the West (Dutton, 2014), marking the start of a "British Sufism".

Phenomenologically, the world around us takes a certain shape forming the “more or less familiar”, without always being perceived or intuitively present (Husserl, 1969). This familiarity shapes what you *do,* and indeed, what you *can* do, marking as inseparable the “where” and the “what”, conjoining objects and bodies in temporal algorithms. In his work on phenomenology and race, Fanon (1986) infers this to be an implicit knowledge, one which contains racial and historical dimensions that are embodied, and which structure our mode of operation. This is a powerful dynamic which reproduces a particular version of “kin” predicated on “likeness” and “purity”, essentially through proximity or contact, which in turn become the “shared attributes” adopted by the next generation. The concept of inheritance is important in terms of history and generational change, as Ahmed (2007) iterates; the conditions we inherit are passed down not only by blood and genes, but through the labour of generations, that which is both present before we arrive and then “gifted” on arrival. These can be “orientations”, those reachable objects within our orbit or those made available to us. The concept of “whiteness” is considered as the lens through which these orientations are positioned, although these can be physical objects, “styles, capacities, techniques and habits” (Ahmed, 2007:154), becoming part of the lexicon of what is available and perceived. This thesis will argue that the creation of “British Sufism” established by the Murabitun, and by SAQ in his “likeness”, contained an inheritance of “whiteness”, replicating aristocratic hierarchies and allocations of power and elitism - as well as the legacy of Western Protestant Christian language and beliefs, accounting for ideas of sin, punishment, judgement and comparison to others. It was embodied in community structure and reproduced across performative practices, education of the young and traditional gender ideals of marriage and family dynamics. As such I refer to Ahmed’s (2007) definition of “whiteness” as corporal schema, which is not a boundary that we step over and into, nor a substantive creation or force, nor is it limited to white skin or something we can acquire. Rather it is a form of “cultural capital” with a dynamic, composite cultural and historical context.

However, inheritance can be refused; neither does it determine a generations’ course of action regarding reproduction. Social relations are imbued with layers of power, discourse and practice and recognising how language, behaviour and orientations correlate with whiteness motivates the need to “decolonise”, to break patterns of habit, spaces that dominate, and bodies that reproduce, in order to create a new trajectory. When it comes to decolonising research, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) clarify how praxis must begin with un-learning in order to re-learn; to unravel dominant Euro-centric epistemology, ontology and rationality in order to unearth what surfaces in its place, so as to disrupt colonial and racial domination, which continue to divide society. The challenge is replacing the “common ground” with something new, unifying culture and incorporating systems of knowledge that are conscious of history, or as Wynter (1992) explains, the “pre-analytic premises that shaped” the past. “It is the Liminal or boundary-category outcast,

functioning as the Other to the Norm category, who is able to break free of the normative ways of knowing Self, Other and world, mandated by the prescriptive rules. This category's difference generates the principle of sameness. Only this category must call into question the rules of the "native model" of its order in order to attempt to escape its imposed Other role" (*ibid*:19). Engaging "fresh contact" (Cole, 2004) illustrates how every generation can look at the same material differently and, that within this community's history, is the way it is discursively challenged by this liminal generation as they come into contact with these ideas at a different time. Similarly, we see from the respondents in this study, that the earlier generation's construction of ideas of family and women's societal roles becomes part of the discursive space for that younger generation; it addresses the ideological framing of it, not simply reflecting what happened to them growing up. With this comes the possibility for the formation of critical and collective modes of agency and demands for accountability (Rowe, 2005). Highlighting narratives that tell stories from disenfranchised communities can offer a different vantage point of being in the world and aid in de-centring and disrupting dominant and normative positions. I believe this has the potential to be a powerful transformative process, both for the speaker, and the listener, and to create the space needed for new ways of engaging and imagining identities.

Feminist epistemology relates to the relationship between human subjectivity and power relations in the production of knowledge. The concepts of "race" and "religion" are products of European expansion East and West, purposively designed to define one group from another and adept at universalising structures of power and difference. These constructions intersect with gender, so that the discourse on white masculinity is positioned against the feminine "other". Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality highlights how it is in these cross-currents that lives occur, discrimination and violence happen, and power and agency are experienced (Bilge, 2010; Nye, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2011). As such, discourses of race and religion are part of the framing and practice of power of one group over another, such that "race is colonialism speaking" (Wolfe, 2016:117). As Nye (2019) argues, this did not occur in a vacuum, it is part of a long historical appropriation of colonial and imperialist ideology by Western institutional practices, scholarship and education. Interrogating these analytical categories is necessary in order to render visible the inherent instability, contingency and mobility of such categories and the subjects studied, while also acknowledging the collective origins of knowledge and identity (Green, Sonn and Matsebula, 2007). It means analysing the meanings, constructions and values placed on practices and discourses adopted by societies and communities. Indeed, it is this "troubling" (Castelli, 2001), as well as the productive ways feminists engage with the epistemological category of "experience" (Shaikh, 2013), that Islamic Feminist scholars have long pursued in their work on gender justice and male elite textual bias in traditional religious interpretations of the Quran and *hadith*. Scrutinising women's experiences where formulations of power and gender are performed at sites

where Islam is produced tend towards sweeping generalisations and essentialist statements about Islam and Muslim communities, echoing orientalist stereotypes of an unchanging, monolithic religion. However, women's "experience" has been found to be far from homogenous. Since the 1980s assumptions of a universal female experience[5] have been fundamentally debunked, a single focused gender identity seen as both inadequate and non-representative. On the one hand it reflects a middle-class, first-world and heterosexual reality which is not shared by women with other socio-political hierarchies with intersecting nodes of oppression. On the other hand, overemphasising theological debates, religious milieus and piety has produced a reductionist and re-exoticisation effect, which promotes the idea that religious identity and expression is a uniquely Muslim way to be modern (Soares and Osella, 2010), definitions Mandaville (2017) argues constitute discrete modes of governance. In many places Islam has been adopted by patriarchal and traditionalist ideologies, and not all Muslim women are "liberated" or empowered in their religious communities.

There are many studies which highlight the dual potential of religion to empower and suppress, both within religious traditions and within a secular analysis of religion in a Western context (Nyhagen, 2017).[6] The "lived religion" approach, part of what scholars confer as "everyday lived Islam", allows scholarship to capture the *bricologic* notion of religious identity that expresses the fluid and creative nature of identity formation (Dessing, Jeldtoft and Woodhead, 2016; Jeldtoft, 2011; Jeldtoft and Nielsen, 2011; Werbner, 2009). It asks empirical questions about how religious *and* secular women live their lives and if, or how, they understand, resist, reject or embrace notions such as "women's rights" and "gender equality". The implication of a lived religion approach to a feminist analysis of religion means taking seriously attempts to reform religious traditions from the "inside", so that significant advances can be made towards gender equity despite challenges and obstacles, without, as Mahmood (2005) posits, the expectation "to embody the double figure of both insider and victim" (11) that informs the ideological power and popularity of this genre. Engaging "critical scrutiny and the destabilising of the category of 'religion' in this politically fraught context obliges us to interrogate ideological productions of Islam that are narrow, reified, stagnant and irredeemably misogynist" (Shaikh, 2013:18). This study takes a critical gender lens - a feminist stance that enables the exploring of forms of religious experience through ritual, practice and ethics, canonisation and authority for the retrieval of both

[5] For feminist critiques of universalist notions of women's experience, see, for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (eds.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[6] See Fournier, 2014; Scott, 2009; Braidotti, 2008; Fessenden, 2008; Sands, 2008; Braude, 2004; Burke, 2012; Mahmood, 2005; Avishai, 2008; Zion-Waldoks, 2015.

marginalised histories as well as representations of women. Focusing on everyday experiences is vital to understand the nature of religion in women's lives. Furthermore, it challenges the normative ideas of "public" and "private" religion, foregrounding the communicative and public aspects of religion and spirituality, which include social engagement (Orsi, 2003), and caring for others (Nyhagen and Halsaa, 2016). These aspects of religious practice and ethics are central to how individuals live and act bestowing a sense "of moral direction, of conviction, of belonging" that is ultimately social (Woodhead, 2013:96).

The task is to sustain a robust and productive Muslim practice of reflection and debate which responds to internal challenges of gender justice in contemporary Muslim communities, that will strengthen vibrant and productive internal dialogues about the nature of Muslim tradition, while simultaneously resisting globalising forms of Islamophobia. Seeing how second-generation converts challenge the gender stereotypes and re-imagine their positionality as British Muslims through practices, ritual, work and marriage choices puts this ethos into practice, broadening dialogue and the possibilities for women of faith - tracing how they reflect on their own lives, learn from experience and ultimately consolidate their lived realities. Inhabiting a liminal space renders polarising discourses that delineate along the lines of "Britishness" and "Muslimness" as irrelevant and subdue prevalent readings of "orientalisation" and "encompassment" (Mossière, 2016). Although these women narrate a grammar of fusion and unity that exhibits their embodied compatibility with their communities, they risk being defined by others' standards and categories rendering them as semi/invisible to both others and themselves. For some, Islam has been their grounding and strength, and many speak of its transformative nature, without it being the primary aspect of their identity, while issues of sociability, community and people take precedence. Simultaneously, they have experienced traumatic and rupturing events that challenge intersecting identities. While some have remained with their faith, others have had to adapt and leave, breaking away from the community. This liminal positionality unearths interesting perspectives and insight into, and is uniquely positioned to understand, the question of what a British Muslim is, with the potential of becoming vanguards of religious renewal. Part of the decolonisation project is to draw attention to often neglected trajectories of the subaltern, to ascribe their lived realities as told in their own words and actions. This thesis attempts such an endeavour, to encapsulate the subjectivities of these women as an active, embodied subjectivity, seeking out the inherent values and experiential qualities of their self-formation in the liminal space.

1.2 Anticipated contribution to knowledge

The “journeying self” is not acknowledged in studies on British and European Islam, certainly not in research on convert communities and their post-convert families. While various studies cite ethnic minorities and the process of conversion (Brice, 2010; Scourfield, Taylor, Moore and Gilliat-Ray, 2012; Suleiman, 2013) an in-depth engagement with British-born children of converts is lacking, particularly away from major cities and larger, more visible Muslim populations. While scholars have attempted to theorise “hybridity” (Hall, 1990), “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994), “dual identities” or acculturation (Berry, 2005), or “third culture kids” (Pollock, Van Reken and Pollock, 2017), these have become problematic references and do not account for the interconnectedness, negotiation and embodiment of multiple identities typical of second-generation Muslims. As Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman (2005) suggest, “The contested and shifting nature of these boundaries and borders may reflect not only dynamic power relations between individuals, collectivities and institutions but also subjective and situational processes” (521).

More generally there is an absence of texture in the tapestry of British and European Muslim experience; a shortage of open discussion about the complexities of living with Islam, the way challenges, conflicts and doubts are appropriated, articulated and defined in the everyday which play out across life trajectories. I highlight how issues such as psychological notions of wellbeing, womanhood and social media identities are equally important in understanding women’s subjectivities. No matter the hegemonic force, the universalising rhetoric of culture, politics and religion never take the same course in different places, the old and new are not passively deputed, rather they are hybridised, syncretised, localised, and indigenised according to the underlying context. Being born into Islam is not unilinear; labelling Muslims as traditional or pious, as a model of Muslim selfhood, obfuscates broader processes of the re-imagining and re-modelling of a person’s affects and interiority, as well as the multifaceted forms of religious or spiritual faith practices adopted by generations of Muslims. The crucial question is the understanding they have of themselves as Muslims, whether orthodox, non-orthodox, liberal, non-religious, often ignored or not taken seriously. My research shifts the gaze from the “hyper-visible” forms of religiosity, which dominate social and discursive spaces, to less visible, personal and social forms of practice which play out across life trajectories.

While some factual evidence exists, there is little primary or secondary literature on the Norwich Community whose influence remains relatively unexplored, despite its position as an important element of the British Sufi tradition divergent from the perennial experience of certain converts and ethnic South Asian communities (Geaves and Gabriel, 2014). Köse’s (1996) study features a brief analytical case-study of the community and is often cited as an influence on the limited historiography of this under-researched group. More recent work comes from Ahmed Peerbux’s

film *Blessed are the Strangers* (2017), a documentary which charts the early beginnings of the Norwich Sufi Community, as well as his unpublished thesis (2011), which incorporates representations from the local media at the time. While Peerbux's work is original and illuminating as a snapshot of the early stages of the community, it is largely confined only to the views of men. There is no representation of the long-term lived experience of members; and neither is there any analysis of the personal narratives of the women who have been instrumental in sustaining it since its inception.

The academic articles that purview the Murabitun movement follow an almost identical succession of historical events (Brubandt, 2011; Garvin, 2005; Haron, 2005; Hermansen, 2009; Leccese, 2014; Lorente, 2014; Pankhurst, 2013, 2015; Pastor de Maria y Campos, 2015; Rogozen-Soltar, 2019; Roy, 2004). Brubandt's (2011) study on the Norwich community is piecemeal, with a number of (only male) participants. Dutton (2013), an academic with research interests in early Quranic manuscripts and both classical and modern Islamic law, emphasising economic and environmental issues, writes a personal essay on Sufism in Britain, from the standpoint of a "first-hour" convert and close companion to the Shaykh. Bocca-Aldaqre (2021) provides an analysis on the publication of community literature and academic resources within contemporary Islamic studies using a Network Analysis perspective; while Pankhurst's (2013, 2015), compilation of SAQ's literature, based on resources from his personal website, and Murabitun ideologues such as Umar Vadillo, evidence, according to inner circle community sources, that much was written under the Shaykh's guidance. However, confusion persists in attempts to define its categorisation within academia. The explanation of combining "Mysticism, economics and spiritual kinship" (Bubandt, 2011), the "Tempopolitics" of purity and rupture (Rogozen-Soltar, 2019), and the combination of classical knowledge, contemporary philosophical approaches and personal preferences of the Shaykh presents an assimilation as being full of contradictions.

Hermansen (2009) describes as "incomplete or inconsistent" studies on the community's ideology which forces the researcher to abandon the traditional conflation between "Western" and "modern" without clear proposals of an alternative. Furthermore, the idea of "theirs" and "ours", the degree to which Westerners have institutionalised Sufism (ours) and the effect on Muslim societies (theirs), has been the locus of analysis. Yet the merging of Western and Sufi identities has typically been at the forefront of this study's participants' experiences, with all the challenge and complexity regarding belonging, performance and representation. While an evolutionary analysis of the Murabitun may be helpful in comparing dynamics amongst different Sufi groups, the fact is the lived realities of converts, namely women, and their non- or post convert families remains unexplored, without which the depth and consequence of the community's ideology, particularly in relation to its British culture, is absent.

This research fits into a larger interrogation of the effects of religious attachments and practices in the "new" European context and will contribute original and primary knowledge towards the set of scholars studying Islam, converts, agency, feminism, subjectivities and definitions of identity. It will extend previous studies by analysing the experiences of this unique group of second-generation converts, together with everyday-lived religion and the ethics of value and change, which are critically absent in the literature. The ways these women re-articulate Islam on their own terms - whether from within institutions or the private realm - and navigate the cross-section between growing xenophobia and representing an Islam that is free from ethnic or extremist baggage, is a part of the everyday lived experiences of being British and Muslim; an interesting aspect to understanding intergenerational subjectivity that traverses religious and secular ideologies and documents real lived experiences of a community in a particular historical context, with a particular religious formation. The feminist "giving of voice" aims to reinstate the second-generation as storytellers of their own lives, reclaiming agency that can empower the thorough process of dialogue that storytelling enables, whilst simultaneously empowering a pluralist society (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2012).

1.3 Thesis outline

The aim of this thesis is to trace the liminal journey of self-formation across community, family and work life-trajectories and understand how the second-generation navigate place and belonging, inherited ideologies, gendered expectations and social representations in order to come into being on their own terms. While I do not wish to assess the validity of these arguments per se, I incorporate multiple debates to highlight a particular construction of the self that encompasses multiple and often contradictory boundaries and identifications, particularly how participants have actively worked to create ethical and equitable identities in harmony with challenge and change. It is not my intention to relieve the tension but to sustain a discussion of the questions it raises for the practice of anthropology, feminist theory and decolonisation.

Chapter 2 incorporates a comprehensive Literature Review of the context and theoretical concepts that underscore the framework of the journeying self. Firstly, the study is positioned alongside wider debates in Gender and Islam, particularly its manifestation of Muslim and secular feminism(s) as a way to enact gender justice. Theorising the values and ethics of change is strategised to give context to the liminal positionality and take account of the challenges and complexities inherent in the journeying self. This is pertinent for the expansion of definitions of agency, particularly when placed in the British context, away from singular piety and towards creative agency that embraces change. The domains which reflect the empirical chapters are then

discussed, including the concepts of belonging, community and whiteness, the constructions of "good Muslim womanhood" and marriage, and the development of a contemporary Muslim identity, that includes the roles of everyday lived religion, secularisation and progressive interpretations of Islam, and how the digital space, for example, is providing a changing landscape for young British Muslim expression.

In Chapter 3 I outline the methodological framework of the study and its phenomenological and interpretive approach. The importance of women's narratives which account for their reflexive and lived experiences is a central component of this study and the processual nature of self-formation. I explicate the methods and practicalities of the research, using life-history interviews and participation alongside collective memory work, diary extracts and digital analysis, including an outline of the study sample, analysis of the data and ethical considerations. Finally, I discuss my own positionality and its impact on the research process, which has been challenging but ultimately rewarding.

Chapter 4 reveals the context and genealogical history of the Murabitun or Norwich Sufi Community. This includes a review of Sufism and its arrival in Britain which set the scene for the counter-cultural movement and the creation of a purposive Muslim community to bring up generations of British Muslims. It is necessary to explore the ideological and philosophical frameworks of the Western-born Shaykh and the incubation of political and spiritual aims which traverse personal, national and global trajectories of change, in order to understand this unique positionality.

Chapter 5 represents the first stage of the journeying self and the establishment of belonging to place, memory and history. The Murabitun played a particular role in the construction of a British Muslim identity. It reveals the depth of experiences of belonging to community, family and ideology, and how community can be both "home", somewhere to know and be known, as well as a place which constricts and limits agency. Participants traverse multiple ideologies as they negotiate their identities in wider British society.

Chapter 6 presents the second stage of the journeying self and how women are challenging and critiquing gendered social norms and parental expectations, particularly the expression of the "good Muslim woman" and self-sacrificing femininity. These lived realities are then viewed through the domains of marriage and divorce, including polygyny and sexuality. This has resulted in a fluctuating relationship with community and faith, creating conditions for the inference of more fluid and nurturing interpretations of religion and the attainment of gender justice.

Chapter 7 is the final stage of the journeying self, whereby the second-generation are actively creating new ways of being and belonging as British Muslims. Away from the expectations of community and ideology they are fostering new connections across different forms of spirituality and practices that emulate their interpretation of Islam, as inclusive, nurturing and contemporary. Through their career choices and representations on social media, participants are deconstructing orthodox, patriarchal and imperialist ideations, by incorporating the language of well-being and trauma as a means of decolonising their *deen,* in an attempt to know themselves fully.

Finally, Chapter 8, the Conclusion, restates the main contributions of the thesis that are revealed in the empirical chapters, the imbrication of identities, Christianising elements absorbed by British Islam and the capacity of participants to act as bricoleurs in the construction of their identities, highlighting both the synergies and tensions within the process of self-formation which seeks a transcendental knowledge of the self.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Forging a new path - Between theory and practice

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the framework of the journeying self, which aims to deconstruct, decolonise and reimagine this inherited British Islam, it is necessary to piece together various lines of enquiry and theory. This critical review charts the research themes and methods engaged by academics in the field, whilst drawing out the limitations of their studies. I begin with the domain of gender and Islam to demonstrate both the scholarly and experiential complexity this subject presents in the literature, particularly in the context of liminality and embodying religious and secular identities. Highlighting how - although dual configurations of feminism(s) have sought to further intersectional emancipation - they do not account for their amalgamation in the long-term lived experiences of convert Muslims and their own fight for equality. Hence, I include an analysis of the debate around piety as the dominant portrayal of Muslim women's subjectivities, critiquing definitions of agency, such as Mahmood (2001, 2005) and reflecting the British context through the work of Liberatore (2013, 2017), to demonstrate the permeable roles of submission and resistance in the particular case of the second generation. This is part of the process of unravelling the layers that inform the construction of the self, to understand the context of "fresh contact" (Cole, 2004), and creative dynamism to motivate for change.

Following the systematic nature of the review, I then contextualise existing theoretical frameworks through which I construct the journeying self to explain the experiential process embedded in the liminal space which these women inhabit. I theorise agency as creative resilience, whereby, to achieve deeper knowledge and acceptance of both the good and harm, the creative response becomes a conduit for ethical change. In this way rupture or trauma become incorporated in a development arc, an evolving, liminal, process that can become a site for transformation. To reflect the processual nature of the journey and mirroring the stages in rites of passage across the empirical chapters, I include a discussion on the concept of "whiteness" and its interrelationship with belonging, how white Muslim women in particular raise a range of sensitive issues and challenges in relation to Britishness and Muslimness, incorporating constructions of "good Muslim womanhood", self-sacrificing femininity and marriage aims to contextualise the challenges second-generation converts experience in their search for gender justice. Lastly, I show how the framework of everyday lived religion, secularisation and individualisation, and the role of new media and the digital realm as a provision for self-expression, cultural production and the

emergence of new forms of faith, practice, and community: interactions which led the women in this study to rethink and redirect the ways they bring meaning to their religious and performative practices, whether latent or manifest.

2.2 Placing the study in the context of Gender and Islam

Within the literature on gender and Islam, a paradox emerges as to how Muslim women achieve agency and equality - whether by Islamic norms and traditions or via a more secular liberal ideology. A focus on "gender" has sought to redress the imbalance and the extent to which male, elite and white subjectivities have been perceived to be normative within a traditional epistemological canon, "Feminists, like other critical social theorists, have astutely pointed out that knowledge in any one discipline or field can be neither neutral nor innocent, but rather is deeply implicated in hegemonic modes of power - in this instance patriarchal power" (Castelli, 2001:4). This becomes apparent in the process and methods of knowledge production utilised in the study of religion[7]. Feminist scholarship contributes to knowledge by turning the analytical lens not just onto beliefs, rituals, practices, textual canons, but all types of derived institutions and aspects of the everyday to better encapsulate the human condition.

Today, Muslims concerned with justice face having to negotiate comprehensive demands for gender justice in highly charged political and cultural contexts. Islamic Feminists argue that a multi-pronged critique of gender inequality within Muslim traditions, whether embodied by religious proponents of patriarchy or agents of empire (Shaikh, 2013), must be tackled on multidimensional axes of power and hegemony. Muslim women critical of sexism and misogyny in their communities are pressured, in light of public perception of Islam and Muslims, to keep concerns private. While this is an understandable position it is also recognised as dangerous (Wadud, 2006). To silence gender injustice in the face of Islamophobia is a defensive and unproductive position, negating the freedom to critique multiple forms of oppression. Furthermore, such silencing around inequality results in an internal capitulation to "self-definition and authority" proposed by the religious patriarchs of whatever sort. In doing so a vital, dynamic and life-giving impulse that exists within the Muslim tradition is undermined and diverse perspectives and projects opposing imperialist, Islamophobic and reductionist views will be side-lined and silenced.

[7] For varied feminist approaches to the study of religion, see, for example, Darlene M. Juschka's edited collection *Feminism in the Study of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2001).

As Castelli (2001) posits, it is necessary therefore to engender a form of critical reflexivity towards the production of analytical categories, such as class, race, colonial status, and sexuality, to probe the multiple intersections of power and gender within religion and analyse multiple positionalities and how particular forms of feminism may rehabilitate power relations. This is crucial in light of how the second-generation challenge gender stereotypes and inherited mores and re-imagine their positionality and category as British Muslim women, through practice, ritual, work and marriage choices. By putting their values into practice they are broadening the dialogue and possibilities for women of faith in the West. How *they* themselves reflect on their own lives, learn from experience and ultimately consolidate their lived realities demonstrates how both patriarchal and Islamophobic ideations can be tackled in their communities.

2.3 Contesting Islamic and secular feminisms

Women's emancipation can be understood as a process of removing obstacles and empowering women to attain their full potential, through knowledge of social frameworks that may cause oppression or marginalisation (Le Doeuff, 1998). Crucially, this contains its mastery, to attain and embody knowledge, and participate in its creation and dissemination. Women have equal right to fully participate in the Islamic process, teaching and worship (El-Guindi, 1999). The Quran prescribes equality for all humanity, regardless of race, ethnicity, class or gender (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Women and men are created from the same soul, and as believers they are equal in the eyes of their creator, with both opportunity and reward as well as responsibilities. Islam values family structures, positions and genders that are different but equal, with complimentary roles equally important in the development of society (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2012). However, there is consternation about how this egalitarian perspective in Islam's theological cannon is articulated in ordinary people's everyday lives. Traditional interpretations of Islamic theology tend to be homogenous in nature and rather proclaim mens' rights over women that emphasise their marginalisation in some Muslim societies, fundamentally undermining "women's Divinely ordained rights" (Bewley, 1999). Islamic feminists, of both secular and religious perspective, believe that gender discrimination is socially constructed, rather than a natural phenomenon, indeed "the subjugation scene of women in Muslim culture is a product of both patriarchal capitalism merging with Islamism and old Arabism discourses, preserved by virtue of the power of neo-liberalism" (Nayel, 2013:41). Yet the historical and disproportionate access to institutions of Islamic learning by men has, over time, been impacted by contextual and historical determinants, experiential realities, and the gendered subjectivity of the exegete. Thus, feminism, with its awareness and analysis of gender inequality and the deprivation of women's rights, and those efforts, by women to redress the situation, is considered a threat to deep-seated patriarchal power and privilege.

Further complicated and charged by the “Islamist” phenomena, and its associated predominance of theocratic politics, Muslim women have sought a space for agency within the primary ethics of meaning-making; theology and law, to advocate for equal rights for women (Afshar, 1998; Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Najmabadi, 2006; Tohidi, 1998). Islamic and Muslim feminism has been defined as a movement of predominately educated, middle class women that maintains their “religious beliefs while trying to promote the egalitarian ethics of Islam by using female-supportive verses of the Quran in their fight for women’s rights, especially for women’s access to education” (Moghadam, 2002:1147). This theoretical approach critiques the patriarchal Islamic system, and its leadership, by subtly circumventing dictated rules and engaging in feminist *ijtihad* and *tafsir*—together with the production of social, legal, and political frameworks though the interpretation of Islamic texts: the Quran and *hadith* (Hoel and Shaikh, 2013). This is not to be confused with what both Badran (2009), and Tohidi (1998) term Islamist women who advocate political Islam and the establishment of patriarchal norms within the religion. Islamic feminists highlight the ways patriarchal ideologies have devalued sexuality and embodiment, and encouraged the view that Muslim tradition is egalitarian and generally affirming of sexuality, whereby its duty in marriage is considered a form of *ibadah,* which has increasing gained currency among scholars (Barlas, 2002; Kugle, 2003; Hoel and Shaikh, 2013).

El-Guindi (1999) explains how conceptions of gender based on women’s (Islamic) activism and cultural traditions are contextualised in local, regional and cultural history. However, the fact that Muslim women who do not experience the Islamic ideal of emancipation, access to education, economic activity and property rights, likely depends on the cultural values of their communities and women’s own *unawareness* of what is assured them in the Quran and the Sunnah (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2012). The contention has been that approaching Muslim women’s rights through liberal feminist agendas did not effectively represent their lived reality, being based on Western experiences and values. Instead it is argued that feminism within the context of Islam can provide the “only” pathway to empowerment and liberation that avoids challenging the whole culture (El-Guindi, 1999, Mir-Hosseini, 2006). However, the struggle for equality has been fought on terrain variously claimed, constituted and staked over time and space by “the secular” and “the religious”, and has caused an overly restrictive delineation between these dynamic constructs (Badran, 2011). The association of religious with “indigenous” or “authentic”, and the secular with “alien” and colonial reach suggests an irony within Western conceptions of religion. These striking differentiations lie at the heart of the binary that runs the length of both feminism(s). The idea that secular is religions “other” needs drastic unpacking and contextualising as do paradigms that state feminism is a Western imposition on religiosity, and secularism as anti-religious - ideas that have been exploited by Islamists and that persist to this day.

The Islamic feminist position belies somewhat the predicament of Muslim women in general, as with other "third world women", who are caught in the "polemics about cultural authenticity" (Abu-Lughod, 1998:5). In the postcolonial period, nationalist regimes in the Middle East bought into the Western discourse of developmentalism, replacing the "old sexually segregated patriarchal systems" and ushering in "women's rights to public spaces" (Tucker, 1993:40). The introduction of social change to favour women was particularly Western inspired. Modernist-nationalist regimes allowed for "feminist" measures, such as educating girls and enfranchising women to work in specific areas such as education, health and social welfare. The emphasis on the state-sponsored bourgeoise family, particularly middle- and upper-class urban women, masked gender equality within the family, privatising subordination under the guise of "public-liberty" (El-Guindi, 1999). This puts a different perspective on notions of religion and secularity and the subsequent feminisation of social, political and moral issues. Gender roles described as domestic (private) versus social (public) is a better description of Western European society that originates from a Euro-Christian ethos of domination and colonialism, which divorced women's lives from cultural constructions and values leading to segregation in society. This has impacted the perspective of Islam and produced a distorted Islamic view of gender, space, and sexuality. The idea of piety has been mistakenly separated from worldliness and sexuality, toward a focus on seclusion and virginity, which misses the nuanced characteristic of Islamic space and privacy. Issues such as veiling, either abolishing it or forcing it, is a reproduction of Orientalist discourse which established the binary view between the "backwardness" of traditional Islam and the pursuit of the Western modernised model of society (Bewley, 1999) - the argument being, that while Western constructions polarise, Islamic principles insist on integration of dualities.

In this sense, both Islamic and secular feminism(s) have been mutually re-enforcing. Secular feminism has an important historical backdrop to Islamic feminism, and a continuing side presence. Activists have drawn on both secular and Islamic discourses in their campaigns for gender equality and women's rights, while some refer to constitutional and human rights-based argumentation, *fiqh*-backed state enacted family law reform ensures an Islamic theological approach (Badran, 2011). Moroccan feminist sociologist Fatima Mernissi (1985, 1996), considered a secular feminist, wrote her first book on Islamic feminism in response to what she identified as the rampant misogyny committed in the name of Islam supported by the *hadiths*. Using theological methodologies, she exposed as spurious the inherent denigration and intimidation of women, which had become commonplace in Moroccan society. Rhouni (2009) goes further in an analysis of Mernissi's work, to demonstrate how individuals operate and produce within both secular and Islamic frameworks. The terms "liberation", "freedom" and "giving voice" should trouble the assumption that feminism is associated with a Western "liberated" and "promiscuous"

lifestyle and the liberation movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Walter, 2010). Third wave feminism - intersectional and womanist, or the Mujerista movements, link their fight for freedom against social constraints along with their practice of faith. They challenge mainstream feminism by arguing that gender, as derived from theology, acts complimentarily. Concurrently, practicing faith in non-patriarchal social frameworks, focuses on establishing shared knowledge and meaning, challenging patriarchal interpretations and secular notions of backwardness and oppression (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2012). Afshar and Maynard (2000) argue that within the *deen*, women's emancipation and rights, along with an emphasis on honour and gendered positions, identify *rahiya* and *azadi* - whereby liberated women may be seen to have abandoned constraint without becoming libertines. This has been defined as the conceptual quest for purity and nobility of thought and action. Therefore, women who seek their freedom in assuring their access to mosques, for example, guaranteed by foundational texts - whether in the private realm or the social - are challenging the oppressed woman trope.

Such a legacy is profound and continues to be relevant today, particularly when working to dismantle dualistic paradigms, which impact the lives of ordinary British Muslim women who seek to be free of restrictions and usher in change in their lives and communities. Badran (2011) analyses the concept of "Muslim holistic feminism", that like the pioneer secular feminists, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, created in their national spaces, draw upon multiple discourses, including Islamic heritage. While Islamic feminism has made theoretical advances in fusing the domains of private/family and public/society - dismantling the notion that Islam ordains a patriarchal family order - a broad-based political effort is needed to establish the egalitarian model of the family, particularly in the face of revivalist notions of communal identity. Historically Muslim, feminist, locally-grounded movements expanded into international feminism on their own terms; amounting to a reconceptualisation that communalises women's rights activism - emphasising the exporting of ideas rather than localised or ground-up perspectives. However, this stance negates the conceptual, practical, and political implications on the rights of women *in-between* secular and religious spaces, such as second-generation converts, and whose interest they serve: what constitutes the construction of the Muslim family, and the seeming reluctance to confront the reality of religiously mixed marriages (An-Na'im, 2005).

As Beckford (2003) asserts, ideas of what is religious and secular, are "highly contestable social construction[s]" (33) and often vary across different contexts. The multiple contestations and circumstances of religiosity and secularity was premised by Jakobsen and Pellegrini's (2008) critique of this binary, whereby religion meant emotional, irrational and biased, and secularity meant rational, reasoned and liberal - something doubly inferred when it comes to gender, where women are associated with religion and men with secularism, hence constructing the Muslim

woman as subordinate and non-feminist and the secular woman as liberated and feminist. This distorts feminism itself, but also women who embody a variety of contestations. As Aune (2015) contends, not all secularisms reject religion, although there is categorical opposition between "feminist secularism" and "religious inclusion" (71), while Kosmin (2007) creates a continuum across hard to soft versions of secularism and feminism to account for versions that include religion and empowerment. Ultimately, there is agreement that institutional forms of religion which promote gender inequality are apparent yet not pre-determined, each case needing to be studied empirically (Nyhagen, 2017).

Within feminist epistemology then, what is clear is the importance of seeking and mastering one's own knowledge, allowing for creativity and change in both debates about Muslim women and Islam's position in the world. Shaikh's (2007) "*tafsir* of praxis", proposes a re-evaluation of traditional textual understandings and interpretation, particularly through the ways women navigate Islamic teachings, but crucially "how ordinary women engage, interpret, contest, and redefine the dominant understandings of Islam and how their engagement can inform some of the ethical quandaries that might emerge from historical interpretations of the Qur'anic text" (70). While the ability to read Islamic texts strengthens some women in their Muslim faith - one that frees women from pre-Islamic and cultural restrictions - without knowledge of the Arabic language it reinforces the continued reproduction of Arabo-Islamic traditional values and identities. Therefore, in order to expand current debates on gender and Islam, it is necessary to incorporate contemporary Muslim women's everyday lived experiences as a source of meaning-making. In the context of this second-generation in focus, any project of piety is invariably entangled with secular ethics, so the debate must engage both Muslim and secular approaches to analysing emancipation and ethical formation. Such circumspection opens the way for this research to examine how these women seek forms of knowledge which both inform their connection to the Divine, in a way that suits their needs, and which is more nurturing and inclusive, allowing for a more creative agency.

2.4 Complex Muslim subjectivities - towards an agency for change

While feminist anthropology has confronted ethnocentric accounts of Muslim women through "thick" (Jacobsen, 2011:66) ethnographic description, which has proved necessary in order to view identity as "production" that incorporates history, culture and power (Visweswaran, 1997:593) - these too have been influenced by binary politics (Moore, 1994). Women's participation in and support of revivalist movements have caused unease and spurred attempts at theorising, centring around questions of freedom and autonomy engaged in Islamic practices

(Singh, 2015). Despite decades of work by Islamic feminists (see above) who argue against the association of oppressive gender practices being the product of purely Islamic misogyny, liberal feminism has continued to conceptualise the agency of religious women as amounting to resistance of the non-secular. There is a broad body of work which elucidates the way agency and religious argumentation has been used to challenge "women-unfriendly traditional practices" which has enabled some women to negotiate intergenerational gender issues within particular social fields. See Jacobsen, 2011, Hirshkind, 2006; Mahmood, 2001, 2005; Liberatore, 2017; Bilge, 2010; Bracke, 2003, 2008; Braidotti, 2008; Bucar, 2010; Burke, 2012; Korteweg, 2008; Parashar, 2010; Shaikh, 2013; Weir, 2013; Rinaldo, 2014; Zion-Waldoks, 2015 — all of which represent ground-breaking work for feminism, anthropology, and political science. However, what we are faced with now is a different condition under which contemporary Muslim women, and particularly British convert Muslim women, operate and seek the agency to change on their own terms within both Muslim and secular identities.

Mahmood's (2005) seminal and ground-breaking *Politics of Piety* engages with this binary formulation of women's agency, in her study of the Egyptian Women's Mosque movement. She challenges accounts of women's engagement in revivalist Islam and pious practice, as resistance and emancipation rather than victimhood and oppression, achieved through a process of self-fashioning and remodelling of ones affects and interiority. Mahmood argues that normative poststructuralist feminist theory positions agency on the binary model of subordination and subversion limiting comprehension of women's ethical and political action in its complexity. As per her ethnographic mandate, she seeks to elucidate the way neo-orthodox (revivalist) Muslim women willingly submit to Islamic virtues, revealing a "paradox" between submission and agency when framed against the Western feminist context (Abbas, 2013). For these women, acquiring religious virtues, such as patience, shyness, modesty, do not come "naturally" but are actively sought - a process through which women constitute themselves in a particular "mode of subjectivation" (Foucault, 1985), to Divine law, and the active drilling and moulding of their subjectivity through "techniques of the self" reflects an agentive capacity that both resists norms while inhabiting them (Mahmood, 2005). These activities actively discipline their subjectivity within the Islamic moral and ethical frame based on the exemplary behaviour of the Prophet and a submission to God. As with Abu-Lughod (1986) and her work with young Bedouin women, Mahmoud draws on Foucauldian notions of power to explain how reformist politics operates within the intermeshing of "capitalist consumerism and urban bourgeois values and aesthetics" (2005:9).

In this context the liberal conviction of agency becomes equated with resistance. Power is considered a "strategic relation of force" that effects all aspects of life and produces "desires,

objects, relations, and discourses" (Mahmood, 2005:17). The paradox of "subjectivation" is central to how "the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent" (*ibid*). Therefore, agency, which is produced on account of power, is the "capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable" (*ibid*, 18). However, in terms of the sex/gender divide (Butler, 1990), Mahmood proposes the act of subordination contains its subject and that the autonomy of female desire is deleterious. On one hand she proposes that the prohibition of sexuality in Western traditions has been overlooked and that conceptions of freedom, resistance and emancipation have become the vanguards of subjectivity, while on the other hand, she includes Butler's (1990) work with Drag Queens as a comparative gendered performativity, whereby "excellence in piety" consolidates norms rather than challenges them. While both these examples act outside Western heterosexual norms of femininity, the cases differ significantly in terms of comprehending different spheres of action (Abbas, 2013), and in fact negates Butler's (2004a) ambivalent view of recognition, which can be both a critique of ideology (Lepold, 2018) while also essentialising Western gender categorisations (Ahmed, 2006; Lugones, 2007; McShane, 2021). It would be better if mutual destabilisers across cultures produce those who transgress and those who consolidate gendered expectations, engendering a more nuanced view of cultural particularity.

Indeed, Mahmood's decade of observations and analysis of women active in the *da'wa* movement in Cairo has been a fundamental discussion point in anthropological enquiry on Islam, piety and subjectivity and reconceptualised the global narrative of "women as victims who need saving" (Abu-Lughod, 2002). However, the study is historically situated and culturally relativist, embodying challenges and alterity to that cause alone (Bangstad, 2011). In the project to conflate secularism and reformist Muslims with the "hermeneutic" of Western hegemony, Mahmood associates Muslims who advocate for reform within wider secular or reformist frameworks as being complicit with US imperialism, underestimating the implications of certain types of "claims to truth" (Ismail, 2006). Furthermore, by invoking the Egyptian secular feminist, Nawal El Saadawi, there is an apparent critique of any secular feminist in Muslim contexts, while defending conservative varieties of Islamism. This rejects the rich and vibrant history of feminism in Islamic countries and the numerous and various Muslim reformers (Abbas, 2013). Ultimately, it reveals an uncoupling rather than reframing of the analytical, which aligns a critique of Islamist ideology as the wrong kind of politics, so that progressive, secular, Muslim, non-Muslim, or internationalist critique is deemed interventionist. As such, the focus on "piety" side-lines a multitude of Muslims' everyday beliefs and practices in the contemporary world. Scholars (Deeb and Harb, 2013; Fernando, 2014; Jacobsen, 2010; Jouili, 2015; Liberatore, 2017), agree its reductionist approach and argue that other ways of making and remaking oneself into a "good" Muslim through ordinary "everyday"

actions, not obviously religious, are fundamental to the ethical subjectivity many Muslims attempt to cultivate in themselves.

By engaging with second-generation converts the tensions between agency/resistance, liberation/submission, religious/secular is implicitly problematised by their positionality. The fact is that many Muslim women do not wear the hijab, even if religious, and some Muslim men do not impose the hijab, which religiously observant women do not like. The hijab, the foremost and most contentious Muslim "problem" to be theorised, in fact produces results that are more "sinuous, creative, and usually more philic than phobic attempts to deal with the anxiety generated by the veil and by the Islam it is taken to signify" (Abbas, 2013:160). Therefore, women who seek agency through religion and imposed bodily practices often become the women who "represent" Islam in the Western imagination. However, this over-investment of "ethical self-cultivation" (Fadil and Fernando, 2015:60), draws focus on Islamic norms at the expense of political, economic and other variables which mediate Muslim life. As Osella and Soares (2010) argue, ethical self-formation is never a totalising project nor its outcomes predictable — "struggle, ambivalence, incoherence, and failure must also receive attention in the study of everyday religiosity" (11). To develop the evolution of piety in the British context I include Liberatore's (2016, 2017) research with first and second-generation Somali Muslim women in London and the way they engage identity and othering alongside piety, culture, and reformist Islam. In spite of generational difference, Liberatore highlights how the second-generation are making sense of work, marriage, raising children and managing personal crises, so that "being Muslim involves, amongst other things, the implementation of embodied religious practices centred on the fashioning of a pious self through an active engagement with an internally dynamic Islamic discursive tradition (Asad, 1986; Mahmood, 2005), albeit one that is shaped and reconfigured in relation to other values, ideals, norms and practices." (Liberatore, 2017:53). Agency then, or hope and aspiration, are implicated with alternative modalities, such as autonomy, which develop through power relations within norms and structures, motivated by an "ethical imagination" (Moore, 2011). This study highlights the importance of analysing the complexities involved in living with Islam in Britain, to note the internal contradictions, ambiguities and incoherences inherent in the second-generation converts negotiation of faith practices. Furthermore, it accounts for the nuance of how meaning is formed through the personal and social - the imagined, affective and reasoned understandings of self and self-other relations.

2.5 "The Journeying Self" - Theorising the values and ethics of the liminal space

The term "identity" is often conflated with the construction of the "self", yet "the self is at once a thinking, acting, and feeling-agent, bound within his/her subjectivity and an assessment or

description of that subjectivity from the point of view of that which is other than self" (Sammut and Sartawi 2012:560). In essence, identity does not act independently from that which creates it. Varying approaches to conceptions of the self in the Social Sciences range from focusing on the individual (Allport, 1961; Festinger; 1954; Wrong, 1961), its relation to a social world (Mead, 1934), or an emphasis on the production of prescriptive social structures that differentiate it from the psychological and inner workings of the mind (Erikson, 1968). Identity is constructed through *identification* to socially created categories assigned, either by ourselves, or others (Marshall, 1998:294), situated "between, rather than within persons" that are "socially produced and socially embedded" (Lawler, 2008:8). However, as Giddens (1991) argues, more nuanced definitions of the trajectories of the self and constructions of self-identity are needed to include the complexity of the external and internal realms. Indeed, dominant, Western notions of a post-Enlightenment European "self" that involves a distinct and primarily self-conscious individual are now considered the yardsticks by which all is measured (Giddens, 1991:80). Yet, to know one's identity is generally considered as knowing "who we are", a reflex which invariably precedes knowing "who they are", limiting assignable common categories for particular purposes, and reducing the concepts to sameness and difference without contextual or biographical knowledge. Authors Said (1978), Hall (1996) and Foucault (1978), argue that (mis)representing identity facets of minority communities leads to their disempowerment and subjugation, retaining the value-laden act of power in their representation through Orientalist tropes. To avoid this problematic and essentialising concept, which divides groups and encourages discrimination and conflict (Sammut and Sartawi, 2012), it is necessary to view identity as a fluid, negotiable and changing construct.

Categorising British Muslims by predefined national, cultural or religious identities as a primary marker side-lines more complex depictions of identities which adapt and reimagine themselves in relation to their communities, family, and work. It is possible to possess a particular identity and feel as though you do not belong, yet conversely to feel a sense of belonging without claiming a particular identity. This tension is clearly felt and discussed among the second-generation, who by inhabiting a liminal space can feel at one moment fully Muslim, and the next, not at all. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī defines the "liminal" as the *dihliz*, an interspace or threshold that actuates the recognition of the self and dismantles the polarity of subject and object through the construction self-knowledge, bringing in return, self-transformation and ultimately freedom (in Moosa, 2005). This conceptualisation of liminality better reflects an embodied subjectivity and/or sense of self that includes the impact of multiple identifications and obligations that merge within an individual. While it can be said that belonging precedes being - the affective, passionate and political ties that bind us to others - without problematising these concepts however, the self cannot proceed beyond it. Here I use "subjectivity" to mean the experience of self as a subject who acts, who has wants, and who must sometimes act "against the grain" (Mahoney and Yngvesson, 1992:45), in

the face of contradictory desires. Inhabiting the liminal space means you can approach issues of identity and belonging from a converse perspective, you can interrogate "home" without losing sight of what it means. The contention is that a liminal positionality enables a deeper understanding of the construction of the self which explores "the different ways people organise their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as good, and to study what it is like to live at least some of the time in light of such a project" (Robbins, 2013: 457).

In Western scholarship the theory of liminality derives from van Gennep (1909) book *Rites of Passage* and later, from Turner's (1967) *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage*, after studying ubiquitous initiation rites as fundamental cultural experience. The concept relates to "in-between" situations and circumstances characterised by the absence of established structures, inverse hierarchies and the uncertainty of inherited tradition and future outcomes (Thomassen, 2009). In an effort to counter rationalising and modernisation discourses it places value on conditions of uncertainty, fluidity, and malleability, so that the processual journey, where lived experience transforms cognitive, emotional and moral boundaries, enables a transmission of ideas and re-formation of structures. It acknowledges sudden moments of change and existential crises which can signal ambivalence, disorientation and loss of meaning and often result in people seeking codes, rituals and meanings that transform their way of being in the world. Liminality is considered the middle stage in the *rites of passage*, divided into three sub-categories: *rites of separation, transitions rites* (liminal) and *rites of incorporation* (post liminal). However, this is not confined to specific rituals, it can be replicated within transitional or liminal periods (van Gennep,1960; Horvath 2013). Unlike Durkheim's (1912) distinction between belief and rites as *a priori* categories, van Gennep paid attention to forms and *patterns* in rites, integrating the collective and individual and highlighting the crucial roles of difference across generations, gender and status, which allows for change in community and kinship, rather than assimilation into a social body (Thomassen, 2009). The phenomenon of "intergenerational disjuncture" (Fadil, 2015), for example, is a formative characteristic of lived (religious) experiences of many Muslims in Europe, explicitly for those who self-identify as secular and are highly critical of the perceived drift towards religious orthodoxy within the community. The ongoing negotiations involved in determining what counts as "real Islam" reveal how tradition and ancestry, or "genealogical continuity" (Fadil 2015), provoke discourse in new secular and liberal accounts of the self, suggesting a more complex relationship with tradition.

Turner (1967, 1974), reinvigorated the importance of liminality and underscored van Gennep's *rites of passage* as a processual approach. Crucially for this study, was the inclusion of moments of creativity in ritual passages reinvigorating the fabric of society. Hence, the liminal is not simply an in-between period but a way to frame human responses to liminal experiences, how it shapes

personality, the pivotal role of agency and the simultaneity of thought and experience. This helps frame the way participants are (re)claiming modes of faith through contemporary forms of creative expression and technology (See Chapter 7). While many liminal experiences are normalised in everyday life, such as puberty or religious celebrations like Eid, they can become more intense when the personal and societal converge, extended over time or in coordination with place. Interestingly, some people search out liminal spaces, such as artists or writers, or indeed converts, while conversely others are shunted into them on account of being ethnic groups or minorities. In a psychological sense you can argue that many human experiences are liminal, which the rationalising feature of language fails to fully express. For postcolonial and postmodernist thinkers and minority rights literature it presents as a positive interstitial position, articulating diversity, between fixed identifications (Thomassen, 2009). History is filled with liminal moments in-between structured world views, where "man asks radical questions", and where the "unquestioned grasp on life is loosened" (Jaspers, 1957:7). In these periods of uncertainty creative possibilities are born, where individuals rise to the challenge and new leadership is revealed. Consequently, basic rules of behaviour are questioned and doubts radicalised, and the problematisations enacted during liminality are the very channel through which new ways of being and ethical pathways emerge, empowering agency and forging new communal outlooks.

Indeed, the study of care, values, ethics, morality, wellbeing, empathy and hope is the anthropologists' endeavour to understand important aspects of social and cultural analysis, which are intertwined with our everyday lives alongside hegemony and oppositive structures (Ortner, 2016). Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in morality and ethics (Liberatore, 2013; Keane, 2016; Tomasello, 2016), that has explored how participants find the good in their actions and relationships - how they construct and orientate towards particular moral aspirations and imaginings of the world they want, as well as the inherent tensions and subsequent ones that such exploration can create. The "ethic turn" (Ortner, 2016); namely, that which is concerned with "what is considered as desirable and/or good within a society" (Graeber, 2001:1), inclusive of diverse values and value conflict, can be considered as a social universal, that varies across cultures and interwoven with actions, thoughts, experiences and morals. Essentially, thinking about the good is an inextricable part of social and cultural value and can shape people's moral thoughts and actions. Robbins (2022) argues that focusing on the "good" is crucial to balance what is considered as "unreal" - that of values, culture, structure, meanings and representations against what he describes as "real" - the categorisation of politics, practice and resistance that results from corrosive neoliberalism and continued precarity. However, both determinants are simply illustrative of reverse sides of the same coin (Graeber, 2007: 314). Ethnographically then, it invokes exploring both the shadow or "dark" (Robbins 2013), with the good, enriching ontological

meaning through their symbiosis and universal qualities. In other words, it is “a commitment to the idea that the world could possibly look very differently to how it does” (Graeber 2007: 2).

Addressing the shadow side of participants lived experiences includes a recognition of trauma, which Lester (2013) defines as “relational injury”, and I would add, rupture, which sees the breakdown of the social, moral and existential ties that bind people to the world. Critical of the Western intrapsychic categorisation which reduces trauma to a medicalised political-economic discourse, it draws attention to the ways people live through and re-make life after extreme and distressing experiences that “push people to the very edges of their own existence” (Lester, 2013:753). However, it is through a process of “retethering”, a slow and dynamic reconnection with relationships, rituals and cultural practices, that meanings are remade. Here, agency is ambivalent, intertwined with situations of harm, and an ongoing evolving process that reshapes the self over time. This reflexive self - relationally generated, and whose subjectivity is negotiated through embodied, affective, historically and culturally situated biographies (Aranda, Zeeman, Scholes and Morales, 2012; Butler, 1990, 2004a, 2004b; Lloyd, 2005; McNay, 1999, 2008) is a theorisation I wish to inculcate, with particular consideration for those who have experienced traumatic events in childhood or adolescence (Luthar and Brown, 2007; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2007). It is a discursive subject produced through a complex set of internal and external identifications and disidentifications, shaped by stories, history and community (Muñoz, 1999). Indeed, the act of interpellation (coming into being) anticipates a hegemonic belonging and is often overlooked in the framework of identity in the way dominant categories interpellate subjects through performativity to condition their embodied subjectivities (Carrillo-Rowe 2005; Lawler, 2008).

Interrogating identity categories then is essential in order to dismantle the ways they condition how we view ourselves and the world around us in multiple ways. For participants, a concept of an “unfinished resilience” ventures a subjectivity which encapsulates resilience as both found and made, and more crucially one that is continuously evolving, that challenges normative expectations and confronts non-normative or “unnatural” feelings, whose resilience occurs in the presence of adversity (Ungar, 2005, 2008). The latter implements an element of the psychosocial subject, which supports rethinking subjectivity and dissolves the simple separation between the social and individual (Frosh, 2010). This encapsulates the liminal, or processual, subjectivity which encompasses contradictions and why desires are constructed despite intersecting systems of power (Abu-Lughod, 1990), whereby the constant retellings and performances that are “always in flux” (Bruner, 1986:12), enable an active participation to either support or resist power relations. Indeed, a critical anthropology of trauma emphasises the non-linear, embodied, intergenerational,

agentive and everyday work of endurance, which by its “retelling” or “reliving” can become a site for transformation.

Ortner’s (2006) approach to agency, through the context of early nineteenth century German tales, asserts that agency or a lack of, presents through notions of activity and passivity (140). As with Abu-Lughod’s (1986) study of Bedouin women, the connection between practice and passivity is established, between the role of power - “dominance and resistance”, and culturally established projects - “intentions and aspirations” (Ortner, 2006:144). This distinction is useful to explore how each element implements the other, that power relations are intertwined, so that agency is simultaneously religiosity, performativity and embodied practices as well as the ability to resist or reject when desired. As Layder (1997) argues, an investigation of power is necessary to incorporate the way participants apply resources at their disposal to achieve certain ends, particularly regarding gender and race, as they reflect divergent experience from dominant or inherited forms of cultural representation. Forming an explanation of how cultural meaning emerges through relations of power, “even the most autonomous agent is in some degree dependent, and the most dependent actor . . . retains some autonomy” (Giddens, 1979:93). As such the subject actively participates in the construction of her own subjectivity, indicating that identity is neither arbitrarily set within existing systems of meaning nor freely chosen. For feminist theorists the issue of subjectivity is a contested site for the explanation of gender relations and female identity, its definition and redefinition over time and its impact on subject participation. See, e.g., Mitchell and Rose (1982); Henriques *et al.* (1984); Hollway (1984); de Lauretis (1987); Butler (1990); Coombe (1991). These theorists share the assumption that subjectivity is constructed by language, which provides discourses (roles) with which to position oneself. While these are multiple and intersecting, meaning identities are not unitary but contradictory and shifting, there can be no “true self that subjects can pertain to” (Mahoney and Yngvesson, 1992:47). A rejection of a true self for the project of social change means that individual agents manipulate and meander through identity discourses, redefining conventional ideas of fixed gender identity.

While this can go some way to explain agency through submission, and the concept of women embodying positions of power through inhabiting traditional gender observances, does this always lead to self-determination? Does it apply to second-generation convert Muslim women, who reject orthodoxy and patriarchal determinism? Women caught between constraint and freedom in their liminal positionality? Butler’s (1990) argument that a subject’s agency is “enabled by the tool lying there” (145), is used to explain how subversion is considered an inevitable, “necessary failure” (*ibid*) - an incoherent performance from a received or given gender “in the mode of belief” (141). Incorporating the process of cultural invention and gender performativity

requires a theory that accounts for the way preferences, likes, and desires are shaped, and why some are moved to make gender trouble while others are not. Mahoney and Yngvesson (1992) suggest a "third area" that allows for creativity *and* constraint, unchallenged by our belongings. It is in this potential space between self and other, first experienced by the infant and transitional object[8], that play, creativity, and agency (understood as the invention of new meanings) are made possible. Through the tension between constraint and resistance, relations of power open up "a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions" (Foucault, 1982:220). In this gap, between the symbolic and pre-symbolic, a creative space based on ambiguities can produce and shape new meanings and values for subjects whose agency both reproduces existing hierarchies even as they create new forms of relationships. Indeed, Du Bois' (1920) concept of "double-consciousness" reveals how prejudice leads to particular forms of moral experience for the individual who grapples with thoughts, strivings and ideals shaped by particular moral boundaries (Henig, Strhan and Robbins, 2022); pioneering the idea that through experiences of suffering and trauma, power and domination moral ideals are created, extracting powerful expressions of the good in terms of just society.

Foucault's (1985, 1990), project on ethics and the hermeneutics of the subject, in his later work The *History of Sexuality* and 'modes of subjectification' (26-28), has been part of the move to recognise the ethical dimension of human life, "what it means to live in a world with ideals, rules, or criteria that cannot be met completely or consistently" (Lambek 2015: xi) — to seek the good life, to be reflective and act with the ethical criteria about right or wrong (Keane 2016; Laidlaw 2014; Lambek 2010). These present as an amalgamation of aspiration, imagination and practices, a proclamation of what people deem worth pursuing and what makes life worth living. Drawing on Aristotelian virtue ethics and practical activities that pursue a particular way of life, Foucault (2000) proposes ethics as a process of exploration of self-formation which reflects, rather than conforms to constraints and the creative ways "individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other" (300). The "technologies of subjectification" incorporate practices and techniques through which people actively shape themselves as ethical subjects. Incorporating *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1985) highlights the desiring subject, in response to Christian and Classical moralities, which makes space for the process of change. He argues that it is not the content of moral norms and prescriptions that delimit difference but the way in which they are lived, with the relationship between these codes of behaviour or forms of personal subjectification depending on their

[8] This intersubjective view accounts for a tension, again, between the discovery and negotiation of the phenomena that is me and not me, a process coined through the existence of a "transitional object" (Winnicott 1982). Here an object, not represented by the mother or breast, is a conduit between self and other to sustain the paradox, and to reflect agency in both the self and in society it is simultaneously both (Mahoney and Yngvesson 1992:61).

temporal environment (*ibid*: 28). These ethical dimensions present as; *ethical substance* - the part of the self, or behaviour, that an individual works on; the *mode of subjectivation* - those relationships established within historically bound rules and specific sets of practices, inclusive of power constitutive to the moral codes; the *forms of elaboration* or *techniques of the self* - how the subject develops ethical substance and change to become more ethical; and *telos* of the ethical subject - the type of moral being one aspires to be. It is through this process together with the practices and techniques undertaken by the self that individuals give meaning to and interpret their lived experiences (*ibid,* 28).

Like Mahmood (2005) and Liberatore (2017), to theorise a participant's journey of self-formation this study too traces back to Foucault's ethics and care of the self. Foucault's works have been especially influential because his approach invokes freedom as an ethical act alongside the roles of socially and culturally habituated embodied practices that shape ethical subjects (Henig, *et al.*, 2022). However, while the work of piety and agency presents ways of relating to the "self" with personal autonomy, Muslim women diverge in their beliefs about gender roles, perceived masculine and feminine identities, ideas of family, motherhood and work, and while some women appear to legitimise certain patriarchal practices, others oppose and subvert gendered rules and norms (Okuyan and Curtin, 2018). Lloyd (2007) suggests that a performativity that produces a gendered subject is also the site where a critical agency becomes possible. It is this instability of performativity that opens up possibilities for destabilising or subverting the dominant regulatory order. The gendered subject is an effect of power, but in order for power to persist it must be reiterated and the subject is the site of this reiteration. It is this process of activation which produces a subject who can act either to resist, or submit, or even become passionately attached to subjection (Butler, 1997). Indeed, despite critique of Butler's Western gender universalism and absence of material and agentive power structures, when paired with Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality, such orientations can be undone and performativity re-situated as a decolonial methodology capable of exposing and unsettling imperialist definitions of gender (Mc Shane, 2021).

My own theoretical approach combines the symbiotic roles of the good and the shadow to enhance a subject's relationship with agency and the search for emancipation, where ethical change is creativity *through* resistance - a subject constrained by discourse but also able to be creative - it is a *continuity of change* (Bergson, 1998). According to Butler, it is through the "de-contextualisation" of a performative practice, that is, through "the rehearsal of the conventional formulae in non-conventional ways", that sites emerge for re-signification, thereby "assuming meanings and functions for which [they were] never intended" (Butler 1997:147). This study reframes subjectification as the journeying self (Natanson, 1970), where an individual becomes a

fully responsible and autonomous subject in their own right, to articulate how female subjectivity becomes a site of transformation and a passage of becoming. These second-generation convert women mirror this understanding through the Socratic encomium of the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad, "Whoever knows their self, knows their Lord", to mean that the Divine is the *inner self* they are seeking to reconnect with and use as a tool of guidance. Faith adapts to work in harmony with their environment and is congruent with secular ideals. In this way participants are engaging with and reconfiguring beliefs through multiple discourses that are integral to ethical self-formation. This practice dismantles the dichotomy of thought and action, fact and value, by the construction of self-knowledge, in order to attain self-transformation from "the gravitational pull of the lower self so that the subject might experience Divine self-disclosure" (Moosa, 2005: 259). As such ethical practice leads the subject to a proximity of "Divine unveilings and intuitive knowledge" (*ibid*), - connecting them with the full spectrum of emotions they experience in order to become a whole self - producing a more thorough account of agency.

2.6 The concept of "whiteness", converts and decolonisation

Public and political discourse on Muslims in Europe has centred around the question of the alleged compatibility, or otherwise, of Western and Muslim values, seriously undermining the ability to espouse or resist various religio-cultural identifications and issues of everyday citizenship (Abbas, 2007; Ramadan, 2004). While the construction of Muslims as "the ultimate Other" to European-ness is not new (Said, 1979), the revelations that those responsible for the bombings and attempted bombings of the 7th and 21st July 2005 were British Muslims, led to political concern of 'home-grown terrorism' and the resultant government legislation and surveillance conflated the perception of Muslims in Britain as a "suspect community" (Ryan, 2011:1046). Moreover, the "twin phenomena of Brexit and Donald Trump", accompanied by populist nationalism and increased xenophobia, catapulted the idea of a "Muslim Question" into the political limelight (Mandaville, 2017:54). These discourses have enabled more right leaning groups to posit 'Muslim issues', such as, burqas, shari'a, faith-based schools, honour killings and Female Genital Mutilation, as a threat to British identity and values. As a result, Muslims, and more widely Islam, have come to signify something that exists outside the perceived boundaries of Britishness, or more specifically, "whiteness" (Abbas, 2013), drawing a circle around acceptable multiculturalism and homogenising Muslim identity, culture and society as a heterogenous category (Brubaker, 2013). Accordingly, Frankenberg (1993) defines whiteness as "the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (236). Garner (2012), in turn refers to it as a "floating signifier|, which impacts the contingent hierarchies of class, gender, nation, religion and status, and is

subject to constant redefinition and appropriation in different cultures and historical formations (Hall, 2021).

Yet it is Ahmed's *A Phenomenology of Whiteness* (2007), which succinctly constructs the concept as an act of 'reification', whereby whiteness can be *done*, or gifted, over time. Following the architects of "phenomenology of race", such as Fanon (1986), Alcoff (1999) and Macey (1999), Ahmed (2007) defines it as "an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space" (149). As such, it shapes and orientates what bodies "do and can do" as a real, material and lived formation or corporeal schema. Phenomenologically it connects the "tactile, vestibular, kinaesthetic and visual character of embodied reality" (*ibid*:154) and the history beneath it. In line with this theorisation of race, the context of history and memory, and place and belonging, becomes by virtue of its own orientation, a way of thinking the body. It is reproduced by convention and institutions, reinforced by people, culture and place, through resemblance as a familial metaphor, as if it had some "shared ancestry" (Fenton, 2003:2). This sense of "inheritance", which "puts things in their place", often goes unnoticed and yet is inscribed into institutions or spaces, and the bodies which form its edges. It is this approach which lends itself to this thesis, as it accounts for the conception of whiteness in the formation of the Sufi community, and the process of self-formation, which enlists the subsequent process of decolonisation the second-generation journey through. They have never known an Islam as separate from the community, which confounds their sense of becoming (Goffman, 1959). Religious communities can create a sense of home (Connor, 2014; Guest, 2003; Hirschmann, 2004), and the Sufi Community where the potent mix of ideology grew up and religiosity practiced, has become the keystone for participants' relationships with their embodied subjectivity. Close integration with place can help reveal its meaning in people's lives, the unconscious tasks of daily life, which become apparent over time (Jackson, 1995). Their relationship with their community, their parents' generation, and the ways of belonging is similarly membership, obligation, surrender, performativity and longing to belong (Yuval-Davis, 2011), but differs significantly from that of their parents.

Crucially, whiteness it is not limited to white skin, it is not a boundary we enter into nor a substance we can acquire, rather it is a form of cultural capital. As Dyer (1997) noted two decades ago, "racial imagery is central to the organisation of the modern world" (1). Indeed, the terms "race" and "religion" are cultural, imagined, constructed and ideological rather than sui generis - whose reality extents to the ways they are discursively implemented (Ahmed, 2007). Race does not refer to a biological state, it is a form of classification, alongside gender, and exerts power over people and resources, such that religion is not a "thing", but can conversely function as a verb, the discursive and embodied actions performed by those who operate within realities

people live by (Nye, 2019). Yet they have become common lexicon for the ideas of racial difference and imbued in social and political relations, the result of the European project of colonisation in the later fifteenth/early sixteenth centuries both East-and Westward and intertwined with meanings and analysis formed around groups that were either similar or different, who needed pacifying, civilising and exploiting (Asad, 1993, Nongbri, 2013). The narrative of Empire developed the idea of biological and genetic purity against which all others were measured (Du Bois, 1920; Morrison, 1992; Dyer, 1997; Hage, 1998), as part of the creation of new social worlds. Indeed, its language has altered to suit changing historical moments, so that Irish, Greek, Jewish and Italian have at times been considered non-white (Brodkin, 1999). Furthermore, the intersection of racial otherness and whiteness are rooted in constructions of masculinity against the female other, whereby people or groups are gendered and sexualised and positioned against Black maleness as threatening or Asian femaleness as eroticised (Nye, 2019). The power that whiteness upholds means not having to interrogate one's experiential knowledge of the "other" nor have your own subject position disrupted (Green, *et al.,* 2007). Indeed, as Nye (2019) argues, it has become a primary element of English-speaking culture and social organisation, a normative, natural and hence invisible distinction.

Consequently, white converts challenge these constructed boundaries between "Europeanness" and "Islam" by belonging to both at the same time (Roald 2004; Suleiman 2013; Vroon-Najem 2014; Özyürek, 2015; Zebiri, 2008), especially when the convert is a woman in a world where gender boundaries take up a pivotal role (van Nieuwkerk, 2006: 1). Studies on the conversion of European women to Islam in contemporary society show that assimilated ways of dressing, eating, socialising and interacting with the opposite sex, often mean that the convert's national, cultural and ethnic belonging comes under question and they become perceived as immigrants and sometimes they are even regarded as traitors (Jensen, 2008; Vroon-Najem, 2014; Zebiri, 2008). Visibly identifiable as Muslim, the convert who wears the hijab "loses the prestige her Whiteness bestows on her" (Suleiman, 2013: 4), and experiences "an unexpected sudden fall in social status" (Özyürek, 2015: 19). However, Western narratives of conversion often begin with the question of "oppositionality" (Roald, 2006:50), of one culture to another, and that by embracing a minority religion, attitudes from the majority society remain, resulting in the transmutation of Islam across cultures. Suleiman's (2013) report on conversion describes a "double trajectory" in sociological terms: that of "conversion to a new faith and accommodation/conversion to a new culture" (2). Significantly, it is argued that women who convert to Islam are attracted by the highly gendered nature of Muslim lifestyle and conservative family model (Ammar *et al.*, 2004; Vanzan, 1996). For some, embracing Islam or "reverting" is part of a strategy of resistance to social changes or local cultural dynamics (Duncan, 2003; Searing, 2003), while others express political beliefs about modernity and tradition (Brenner, 1996), or the return to values of the previous

generation considered necessary for the re-moralisation of society (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006). In response to the rapid changes to gender roles and sexual behaviour since the 1960s - the expectation that women have to be both women and men, sexy and virtuous, beautiful and clever and everything else, Islam provides a counter point - roles are clear, femininity is recognised, appreciated and valued and working is not restricted.

Such a merging of interesting identities and affiliations do arouse academic interest as to the subjective meanings attached to and emotions which frame the choice of re-appropriating ideologies that are seemingly in conflict. On one hand, conversion to Islam has been seen as an attraction for the "Muslim experience", even a romanticised fascination for the exotic, and as such, an evolved form of Orientalism - a desire to become the Other (Mossière, 2016). On the other hand, discourses of polarisation and assimilation fail to accommodate the "bridge" or liminal space in which this conflict is quietened, and how women's agency which traverses opposed constructions deeply challenges prejudice towards Islam. In particular, the idea that Muslim faith practice transgresses the secular separation of public and private spheres highlights "inconvenient" aspects of social memory, gender relationships and family models as well as religious heritage and the institutions in the West which created such binaries. This assumption is based on the concept of belief as something private, interior, so that the "core" of religion is the sacred texts and the act of "reasoning" - a cerebral process - it does not account for how religion is lived, nor the diverse ways it is practiced. Indeed this "Christianocentrism" also extends to the academic realm of religion, whereby its genealogy, alongside that of race, establishes a particular cultural and institutional form of Western Protestant liberal Christian ideals upon which much of the social sciences is based (Asad, 1993, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2000; Nongbri, 2013). As Beaman (2012) points out, legal and political institutions are labelled as secular, yet they are in fact heavily permeated by residual Christian beliefs. Religion, through its various global propagations, has become an entity that delineates along lines of differences in management. As such, the term cannot be considered a meaningful or universal signifier but rather created by a combination of Christian deliberations on "truth", European exploitation and the creation of nation-states, rather than a description of human life (Nongbri, 2013).

Scholarship, which also contextualises the concept of difference and world religions, is itself a byproduct of rigorous Orientalism, race and British Imperialism, such as social evolutionary theory predicated on the understanding of a superior, and white, Christian West advancing human evolution (Nye, 2019). Our comprehension of religious universality is based on these ideas, particularly once race fell out of favour and religion drew on culture and ethnicity to explore and describe difference, perpetuating the colonial project. It is my contention that these ideas based along lines of difference and superiority, over an "other", both by class and hierarchy, and as a

way of being in the world, also permeated the ideology and practices of this newly created British Islam. As the empirical chapters will reveal, these ideas played out across the lived experiences of the second-generation women. It impacted their relationships with community and belonging, making them question the concept of the Shaykh and disciple, and challenge the institution of marriage and "good" Muslim womanhood and ultimately untangle and reevaluate their role with their own faith practices, recognises its potential for reinterpretation. Wynter (1992) posits that our "public language", in which the object is social order and the inquirer already the subject, reinforces the hierarchical role located by that order. Therefore, any attempt at dismantling it must approach the "acts of communication" which motivate and demotivate specific behaviours and replicate allocations of power as they are the means through which an integrative "common ground" is provided. It is the lay person or liminal perspective that has the ability to call into question the rules which conceptualise generic knowledge and culture. In this way, the second-generation are holding up a mirror to the discrepancies and contradictions upon which their inherited society was based, and contrary to being a threat, they are forging a new path forward.

2.7 Gender performativity, self-sacrificing femininity and the institution of marriage

Yuval-Davis's (1997) *Gender and Nation* claims that in constructing nationhood, specific notions of manhood and womanhood are incorporated, in which "[g]ender symbols" play a particularly significant role towards our understanding of culture or cultural community. It was written in response to the relegation of gender as perfunctory in nationhood, rather than at its heart - and the common conceptualisation that it is an extension of family and kinship relations and most often the basis for the "fundamental and enduring" sexual division of labour (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This biological, cultural, and symbolic reproduction is primarily positioned through women, who are either encouraged or discouraged to bear children through a form of bio-politics. This Yuval-Davis (1997) argues, fundamentally sets up the "us" and "them" divide, which is ultimately maintained through social constructions of manhood and womanhood, and sexuality deemed appropriate to the nation, as epitomised in Huntington's (in)famous "Clash of civilisations" (Bracke and Fadil 2012). The reproduction of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987) through a complex set of socially administered, visceral and micropolitical pursuits deemed as "natural", has the effect of interning society to its production, both individually and institutionally. As such femininity and masculinity become "prototypes of essential expression - something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterisation of the individual" (Goffman, 1976:75). These displays become part of conventionalised behaviour, which feed the deference or dominance narrative. As Goffman (1976) argues, these are "optional" performances, produced within the existing environment,

which become embedded. Identities are active, relational and continuously co-constructed as a result of historically sedimented practices, meanings and interests. Gendered constructs, as with race and religion, are therefore in constant renegotiation and reproduction in relation to history and power (Jackson, 1999).

Communities are sustained by the intentions, actions and commitments of those actively engaged in membership, particularly enacted through women, which is a concurrent theme in the lives of the second-generation, both in re-establishing gendered norms and their implementation of agency. The concept of performance first introduced in Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* and later popularised by Butler (1990) in her influential work *Gender Trouble*, expounds "performativity" as the reiteration and replication of practices in ones life, which acquires power "through the invocation of convention" (Butler, 1993:225). This performative reiteration of social norms constrains and exceeds the performer, whereby individuals "not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed" (Butler, 1993:234). Indeed, as Fortier (1999) argues, people "create" a place performatively through both genealogy and geography and the embodied performance of religious services or rituals, whereby membership and possession are manufactured by a group identity as an effective act of boundary making - transmuting it into a site for the iterated performance of a collective body (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). Its transmission through women and the ways they circulate, articulate and embody thresholds of belonging, as representations of this collective identity is particularly evident in the participants under study, whereby women dress a certain way, perform collective religious rituals and take on the role of service and feminine comportment. Acknowledging Butler's (1993) performativity, with a decolonial praxis that considers the biopolitics of race, nation and empire (Ahmed, 2006, 2017; Puar, 2007), in the framework of the journeying self allows for the way gendered expectations are continuously enacted, assimilated and embodied through experiences of orientation and belonging to place. However, it is a process of becoming rather than being, and while performance is one part, it does not fully account for a participant's motivations of their active service or the power behind it.

2.7.1 The "good" Muslim woman

The women's domain in Islam is understood as being in the private realm, prioritising activities such as motherhood and being a good wife. While motherhood has long-since been constituted by social norms, cultural practices and religious structures, the everyday lived "connections and crossings between secular and religiously framed mothering practices and experiences" (Kawash 2011: 994) of British Muslim women remain under-researched. Van Nieuewkerk (2006) reveals how

for many Muslim convert women traditional gender constructs offer clearly defined and relieving roles away from gender competitive expectations of liberal secular society. A convert's submission to Islam is not immediate, they learn to become Muslim women, and men. In opposition to both non-Muslims as well as the opposite sex; they strive to develop a gender morality or "moral habitus" - in the attempt to become a "good Muslim" - espousing dispositions such as mindfulness, humility, discernment, moderation and modesty (Winchester, 2008; Bourque, 2006). Gender is thus achieved in a relational way, alongside religiosity, through the manifesting of "an authentic religious subject against an image of a secular Other" (Avishai 2008: 413). This, Winchester (2008) argues, is done through fasting, praying and wearing of a headscarf which solidifies a convert's religious morality, where "Habitus is an embodied set of durable yet flexible dispositions . . . that serves to generate practices structured by existing patterns of social life yet able to (re) structure, in turn, these very same patterns" (1758). While "doing religion" may be considered a semi-conscious project, detached from the power relations central to "doing gender" and other such social constructions, it can also serve to subordinate women and limit their claim to equal space in and outside the home (Ingersoll, 2003).

The female body has continuously been constructed along religious boundaries and considered in need of either protection, or domination. As such the idea of modesty through clothing and the hijab, concealing beauty (Abu-Lughod, 2002), particularly its expression in public (Ahmed, 1992), not socialising with men in public and behaving respectfully (El Guindi, 1999), and working in gender-segregated public and private domains (Badran, 1991) has been used to discipline and gauge Muslim women's life (Mernissi, 1991). The verse from the Quran "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things) and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts) and not to show off their adornment" (24.31), illustrates how women are the bearers of purity in relations between the sexes (Mahmood, 2005). This process of protecting and containing a women's modesty in Islam elicits the contention that her body is *haram*, if left uncovered, bringing *aa'r* (Mernissi, 1991). This, Rao (2015) contends, has led to a "self-sacrificing femininity" (414) and an adherence to inegalitarian religious beliefs, which include for example, dressing modestly in Islam (Hadaad, 2006); accepting wifely submission in Evangelical Christianity (Ingersoll, 2003); or polygyny in Islam (Zebiri, 2008). Women's canonisation from sacrificial disposition and subjectivity reproduces moral and religious norms without consideration of the often fraught process it requires, such as accepting polygamy as religiously permissible - "women strive toward concretising a sacrificial disposition that eases their embodiment of a self-sacrificing femininity that is religiously valued" (Rao, 2015:432).

This is a learned acceptance, embodied through practice and memory, that consolidates women into gendered religious subjects, so that feelings and desires are routinely side-lined for the

purpose of enabling a moral way of life. While responsible masculinity is lauded as beneficial to men, indications are that everyday self-sacrificing femininity serves to 'produce and reproduce' social and religious life (Ingersoll, 2003) that privilege the status and rights of men within the religion (Rao, 2015). In Borker's (2018) comprehensive ethnography *Madrasas and The Making Of Islamic Womanhood,* she draws on the concept of communities as imagined entities (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996) to understand the notion of the ideal Muslim woman. She argues that a major building block of moral community building is the image of an ideal Muslim woman who is endowed with preserving and communicating the community's moral sanctity. The epitome of this idealisation of a Muslim woman is one who has "a deep knowledge of her faith and uses that knowledge to help raise a Muslim family and fortify its commitment to the faith" (Sikand, 2005 in Borker, 2018:4). Instead, Borker suggests it as an open-ended question, an aspired ideal, entrusted with access to education (secular influences) which enables young women to redefine social expectations around marriage, education, and employment. On the one hand women value and adopt the markers of womanhood and piety based on religious knowledge (which differs from "pious subjects"), but on the other hand takes a more tactical approach to cultivating their identity as educated - albeit through madrassa education. In this way, the corrective to the everyday and "complex manner in which girls negotiate the multiple constraints posed by parents, madrassa gatekeepers, institutional rules or broader social structures" (Borker, 2018:47), reveals a move from orthopraxy towards greater secularism.

Nascent studies on Muslims living in the West concede there has been an increase in gender consciousness in the way Muslim communities conceptualise and practise Islam and even consider themselves as Muslim (Ali, 2006; Jouili and Amir-Moazami, 2006; Wadud, 2006; Hammer, 2012; Duderija, 2014; Duderija and Rane, 2019). In the context of living in Western liberal democracies and exposure to intellectual feminist thought there is a heightened awareness and sensitivity toward neo-traditionalist interpretations of Islam and their "lack of interpretational awareness and self-reflexivity, or resistance to the idea of the historical and socio-cultural variability of gender and how their conscious or unconscious understandings of gender roles and norms influenced, at times profoundly, their interpretation of Islam" (Duderija and Rane, 2019:121). Having an education with an insistence on critical thinking, generates a new and more individualistic approach to religion, which can result in a new British form of Islam (Vallely and Brown, 1995). This "modern" Islamic interpolation reflects Muslim feminists' political and intellectual development the world over, which through better educational opportunities has engaged knowledge of their faith away from recitation, towards understanding, *tafhim*, and commentary on the texts, *tafsir*. Muslim feminists are not willing to hand over hard-earned opportunities least of all to religious zealots who have a specific agenda that does not include the liberation of women (Afshar, Aitken and Franks, 2005). Critiques of Islamic studies increasingly

endorse a renewed awareness of gender consciousness in areas including marriage, dating, domestic violence, dress and fashion and representation of Muslim women in the media - including social media. As such, this study highlights how this group of second-generation women are threading together these different strands and claiming their own interpretation of Islam, knowledge and emancipation.

2.7.2 Marriage

For the context of this study, it is important to understand the domains of sex and marriage in the Islamic tradition. Much of the understanding on celibacy, marriage and sexuality is constructed from the *hadith*. Despite its contested historical veracity in the theological canon, it does encapsulate the early and evolving cultural and religious imagination (Hoel and Shaikh, 2013). The Prophet Muhammad recommended balance in spiritual and physical health rather than rigid asceticism, drawing a connection between the sacred and sexual, framed as an ethical virtue — it being an extension of the self and reflecting an ethos of benevolence and magnanimity. The thirteenth-century Andalusian mystic and metaphysician Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240), suggests a deep spiritual significance of sexual union, where the individual ego dissolves into another, giving a brief taste of communion with God (Hoel and Shaikh, 2013). An ideal marriage, according to some Muslims, requires the husband and wife to share management of the household through gendered allocated rights and responsibilities, which serve to maintain that ideal (Rouse, 2004). In Sufi metaphysical tradition, the distinction between the feminine and masculine properties in the names of Allah has long been studied, with *al-Rahman* beginning each chapter of the Quran, conferring the same name for the womb *Raham*, drawing contiguity between Allah and the mother, since both create and show mercy (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2016). Of particular interest in the context of this study is that Islamic theology does not include "original sin" and that Christian concept's subsequent impact on women, which according to some readings of the Bible include menstruation and childbirth as punishments (Guzzo, 2012). In the Qura'nic story of Adam and Eve, both share responsibility for eating the "forbidden fruit" and women's journey into motherhood is described as spiritual salvation (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2016). According to Schleifer (1986), while both parents are considered responsible, it is the mother, who is granted more respect, both in the Quran and the sunnah.

In contradiction to the patriarchal European organisation of gender which allocates women to the private and men the public domains, Muslim women are entitled to occupy both[9]. The influence of the European ideation of a 1950s, white, middle-class wife fulfilling her duties complementing her employed husband, is not part of the Islamic ideal of public/private division along gender lines. According to Rouse (2004), within marriage a man has exactly two rights: to know where his wife is going every time she leaves the house (not the ability to restrain her) and to have sex when he so desires. Her rights include the right to distribute her husband's income how she sees fit, the right to work, to keep all her earnings for herself, to own property, to inherit, to educate and raise the children the way she wants. Authorities on Islam generally agree that it is not the woman's role to cook and clean — and when entering marriage these rights are not rescinded, they are merely added to. Indeed, it is considered that women have less to prove than men to get into *jannah* (Rouse, 2004:232). Clearly, gender-biased religious traditions that determine women's sexual compliance are powerful in shaping women's gendered subjectivity; however while some acquiesce in the belief that it makes them "good" Muslim women, other women carve out spaces for contestation and resistance.

Feminists have highlighted the ways traditions that invalidate sexuality are simultaneously suspicious of women, through the association of the body and the spirit. While the sex-positive messages of the *hadith* may be attractive, they coexist, they argue, with gender-biased traditions steeped in patriarchal structures. This complex negotiation between the positive narrative on sexuality in Muslim discourses and the assimilation of being a good Muslim woman, has manifested by including sexuality as an act of *ibadah* (Hoel and Shaikh, 2013). This is an interesting step in understanding the God-believer relationship, and shared in some Muslim circles, however it juxtaposes on one hand the immersion of body and spirit, with on the other hand issues of marital power and coercive gendered construction within a gendered religious and patriarchal framework, which can conflate male desire with worship of the Divine.

If a wife's constant sexual compliance is concurrently interwoven with the view that sex constitutes worship of God, it becomes exceedingly difficult to find her sexual autonomy and agency within a relationship. These dominant narratives eclipse any potential view of woman as a sexual partner with an independent subjectivity requiring individual consideration. Her personal sexual needs and desires, or lack thereof, do not appear to factor into such discourses that frame sex as an act of worship (*Ibid*, 2013:81).

[9] Feminist scholarship that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s often referred to the universality of gender oppression, and to the universal association of women within the domestic sphere. For examples see Rosaldo and Lamphere, eds., (1974) *Woman, Culture and Society* and Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, eds., (1991) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*.

This can transpose as a submission of desires under the internal pressure of religious discourse that frames acquiescence in sacred terms. While the ideal of mutuality and reciprocity may make compliance benevolent, broader marital and sexual dynamics, which are not always mutually reciprocal mean that agency and choice are effectively constrained. This raises important questions about the impact of religious discourses on Muslim women's subjectivity and personhood, "In this hierarchical and dualistic religious anthropology, God is singularly the accomplice of a man's sexual desire without any consideration of his wife's consent, desire, or circumstances" (*ibid*, 2013:82). Such traditions effectively render women's agency as fragile and tenuous, and if we base our contemporary understanding of being human on being able to make conscious choices and the time and space needed to make them, they serve to reduce women's humanity. Kandiyoti's (1988) *Bargaining with Patriarchy* establishes a theorisation of patriarchal bargains which sets out the 'difficult compromises' that are made within a set of defined rules, "regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined and renegotiated" (286). To agree with Hoel and Shaikh (2013), this drastically demands a reengagement of sexual ethics in contemporary Muslim communities.

Within these restraints, women employ various strategies to improve their situations, both through active and passive forms of resistance to male domination. The consensus of the numerous scholars writing about resistance in context (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Hoel and Shaikh, 2013; Kandiyoti, 1988; Mahmood, 2005) posits that a culturally and temporarily grounded analysis of women's coping strategies is necessary in order to avoid ahistorical constructions of patriarchy, enabling more nuanced and distinct understandings of women who embody and enliven socio-religious discourses to their own ends and thus illuminating broader dynamics of power. As Abu-Lughod (1990) argues, rather than a homogenous category of resistance to explain agency, resistance is 'a *diagnostic* of power', whereby the various forms of resistance, which help us discern intersecting systems of power, are produced within and are contingent on the existing structures of power. The narratives of second-generation converts on community, marriage and sexuality, interwoven with religious beliefs and norms and further complicated by intersecting social, economic and racial challenges present ways they process and reformulate authoritative and patriarchal frames in the British Muslim context.

2.8 Everyday lived religion and reimagining faith

At the heart of anthropology there are two central tensions. Firstly, the desire to delineate the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which humans live and make sense of life, and to underscore

the commonalities and shared conditions of seemingly different life worlds in order to define humans. Secondly, is the imperative to identify the powerful social structures that mediate individual actions while attempting to account for individual creativity, agency and resistance (Fadil and Fernando, 2015). The concept of an everyday lived religion begins to address this by presenting a broader framing of religion, falling between a systematic set of prescriptions and practices established and replicated through institutions or a more fluid, negotiated, active and reflexive relationship with faith. This approach aims to understand, "what more there is to religion: whose lives, experiences and associational forms are being overlooked by the dominant gaze...and what other forms of cultural, ritual, domestic, political, and economic practice might be equally worthy of study under the rubric of religion" (Woodhead, 2013:11). Drawing on Ammerman (2007), attention is given to the unconventional practice of religion and how participants themselves define their own religiosity outside of "institutional walls, and where new religiosities are gaining a foothold" (2007:5). This may play out as either "strategic" or "tactical", which tackles the distinction between, "sacred spaces" (Woodhead, 2013:7), such as churches, mosques, scriptures and temples, and the way religion is lived subverting the limits and controls on sacralisation and enchantment, by actively re-enchanting them, such as prayer mats and books, amulets, headscarves and turbans, bottled holy water and fortune cards. The turning of the supposed mundane and unconsecrated places, including trees and wells, and "personal, 'inner' space may become an important part of its domain" (Woodhead, 2013:8).

Britain has seen a decline in religion over time, with 79 percent describing having been brought up in a religion, yet 50 percent not claiming to be affiliated with a religion (based on 2011 Census), although this is likely higher due to households not accounting for the "the none's" (Woodhead, 2016). However, in accordance with the 2021 Census, what is apparent is the rise of "believing without belonging" (Davie, 2015), by those exploring spirituality rather than organised religion. So that what began with the counter-cultural movement led to a "spiritual shopping" of mystical traditions, entitling people to have a direct encounter with the Divine (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Hervieu-Léger, 2006). This "individualistic" turn, driven by personal choice (Motak, 2014), allows people to choose the elements of religion that best suit their cultural and moral values (Turner, 2011). While it shows that many retain a sense of belief it also indicates the effect secularism has had on religion. DeHanas' (2013) conceptualisation of "elastic orthodoxy" implies that young Muslims "accept the local social consensus on what it is to be a Muslim (orthodoxy), and then work tactically within this framework, stretching it to apply to new contexts and situations (elastic)" (2013:82). Islam then is being continuously recontextualised to the different circumstances and conditions, shaping young Muslims' identities. This leads to interesting questions about why and how young Muslims elicit their own spiritual direction while at the same time borrowing from inherited and traditional sources.

This study suggests that as part of the development of British Muslim identities, young Muslims in particular contribute to the formation of new forms of Islamic cultural identity, which amalgamate an evolution of ideas through religious mobilisation, arts, music and sartorial choices — a merging of religious beliefs with cosmopolitan lifestyles (Lewis, 2013; 2015). Indeed, as Turner (1974) suggested, as a result of modern consumer society, the liminal plays out in "liminoid" moments where creativity and uncertainty are expressed through art and leisure activities. Everyday religion is necessary to highlight the ways these participants perform their religious affiliation and practice through internal discourses as alternate forms of agency in order to make sense of Islam in their contemporary lives (Jeldtoft, 2011). Appraising the recent scholarship above demonstrates how the over-investment of "ethical self-cultivation" through Islamic norms has sidelined the complexity and at times struggle involved in a Muslim's self-formation. By decolonizing dominant and patriarchal narratives, these women are reclaiming their concept of religion and refashioning it to suit their interpretation. Kloos and Beekers (2018) respond to the cultivation of religious virtues, mass conversions and piety by those who centre religious claims of the truth on the pursuit of "ethical perfection" (Harding, 2000; Hirschkind, 2006; Mahmood, 2005; Robbins, 2004), by highlighting the "tensions, struggles, paradoxes, contradictions and ambivalences" that accompany these processes. This challenge is necessary to *trouble* the idea, explicit or implicit, that Muslims, or those of faith, lead coherent, consistence or stable religious lives (See Marsden, 2005; Tomlinson and Engelke, 2006; Soares and Osella, 2010; Schielke, 2015). Rather, the idea of "moral failure" is encouraged to evaluate alternative moral frameworks and more sobering realities of everyday lived religion, which include experiences of imperfection, incoherence and, I would add, events deemed to be psychologically harmful - considered outside "proper" religiosity - rather than always analysing the productive interaction of the two.

The children of converts grew up in religious communities that prescribed a particular format of religious practice, interwoven with narratives of both hegemony and action for change. Ahmed and Fortier's (2003) *Re-Imagining Communities* describes community as a belief in universal togetherness in response to liberal individualism or defensive nationalism, and acts as the foundations of kinship, blood relations or a shared system of allegiance (Anderson, 1991; Parekh, 1990). Indeed, imagined communities "are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind but are historical practices through which social differences are both invented and performed" (McClintock, 1995:353). However, community may also represent a failed promise, that certain relations violate principals of alterity, inasmuch as you are either "with me" or "like me" (Ahmed and Fortier, 2003:251). At the heart of intersubjective belonging is contingency and vulnerability, meaning care and affection can be withdrawn, and support cannot be taken for granted. Stasch (2009) asserts that, "Kinship belonging is an impossible standard, (with) the ideal including its own

failure" (136). Everyday religion is often characterised as individualistic and pragmatic with a strong focus on autonomy and personal experience, as opposed to religious authority and fixed traditions. However, it does not automatically signify its manifestation in the private sphere since it can also involve a form of attachment to religious institutions. McGuire (2008) suggests embodied practices that may not appear "religious" enable individuals to make sense of their faith and belonging in their everyday life, asking "what might we discover if…?", instead of looking at affiliation or organisational participation - "focusing first on individuals, the experiences they consider most important, and the concrete practices that make up their personal religious experience and expression" (*ibid*:4). Celebrating the Eid within a religious organisation or fasting Ramadan are part of these young Muslims "loose", "dipping in and out" or reimagined religious practices. Community, as such, can be a site through which the "desire for community" is played out, rather than fulfilling or removing that desire.

Exploring the effects of self-perceived failure or reimagined practices as part of the journeying self enables the way participants acknowledge and incorporate ideas inadequacy or imperfection, feelings of struggle, the perception of sins, negligence of religious obligation, and lack of religious confidence, faith or belief as important aspects in ethical formation. Alongside attempts at becoming a "good" or "better", they are in part a characteristic of the active and "chosen" construction of moral lives and selves within modern societies (Winchester, 2008). However, subjectivities are more than a singular subject positions and are constituted in relation to the self and others through forms of identification/dis-identification which are "discursive, embodied, affective and imagined" (Moore, 2011:76). Our sense of the good is shaped by the learnt, embodied, social habits, with emphasis on care rather than obligation, and the interplay between the individual and the collective in its pursuance, "we determine ideals by our daily actions and decisions not only for ourselves, but largely for each other" (Addams, 2002:112). Liberatore's (2018) study demonstrates this in the way Somali Muslim women attach themselves to different religious ideals as well as newly encountered projects, imaginaries and practices which do not necessarily exist in contradiction to each other. In other words, de-linking from dominant modes of thought and praxis allows space for self expression and agency that can hold two opposing conditions, feelings and experiences simultaneously. While the framework of everyday religion is strikingly absent in the study of British Muslims, it can serve to capture the ways people digest religion on their own terms whether from within institutions or the private realm, whereby the larger framework of Islam is played out at a micro-level of politics and belonging, highlighting aspects of identity which are not primarily Islamic but are equally valued as part of its tapestry.

2.8.1 Contemporary religion, consumer society and the internet

Authors have approached the questions of moral life and identity framed within the narrative of modern decline through a process of "rationalisation" (Adorno, 1978; Marcuse, 1964; Weber, 1958), social differentiation (Berger, 1967; Durkheim, [1897]1951), or individualism (Bell, 1976; Bellah, *et al.*, 1985; Lasch, 1979; Putnam, 2000; Riesman, *et al.*, 1950). The process of secularisation is considered an inevitable result of the modernisation of society (Bruce, 2006; Wilke, 2013), whereby religion is marginalised while beliefs, interpretation and practice diversify and flourish. Although this may reflect the decline of institutionalised religion so that it becomes more privatised (invisible), it does not result in a lack of values, or a diminished search for meaning or practice of rituals (Luckmann, 1967; Beck, 2010). The de-naturalisation of conventional thought reveals how secularism also operates as a moral field in the everyday. In this way "various forms of religiosity, secularity as well, include a range of ethical, social, physical, and sexual dispositions, hence the need to apprehend the secular via its sensorial, aesthetic, and embodied dispositions and not only its political ones" (Fadil and Fernando, 2015:64). Consequent on the "information society", the internet and new media have propelled religion from the private to the public and vice versa (Knoblauch, 2008). In essence, individualisation accentuates experimentation, promotes contemporary spiritual and personal preferences, while drawing on multiple styles and traditions (Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000; Houtman and Aupers, 2010). Indeed, these spaces have enabled the articulation and development of personal identity and provided the grounds in which the "moral self" has been made possible.

The incursion of excessive consumerism and individualisation is not a moot point, however. Janmohamed (2016) notes how young contemporary Muslims - *Generation M* - take this up in a unique way, by adopting individualism and independence as a way to reinvigorate their religion in new and creative ways. So that for some contemporary Muslims, religious experience transcends "the deterministic binaries of traditional religious and modern secular identities" (Echchaibi, 2013:38), which cross multiple aspects of everyday life and activities (Gilliat-Ray, 2012). Wilke's (2013) study on Muslims in Germany posits that visible aspects of religion may hide the individualistic tendency religion itself embodies. From the perspective of the Islamic faith, individualisation is part of one's personal responsibility, the mandate 'to know yourself'. While the collective emphasis of organisations and the role of the Shaykh as spiritual guide is still intellectually considered, there are many contemporary Muslims who do not follow a *tariqa* or seek guidance from multiple Shaykhs and theological resources. However, individuality and independence are not gender-neutral, but are dependent on the sexual contract and gendered division of labour, where the female may often be subordinate to the point of invisibility (Day, 2009). So while the role of community is a powerful and embodied determinant of young Muslims'

sense of identity and belonging, there is a shift away from the more orthodox elements that do not configure with modern life and hence encourage alternative expressions which are interminably more individualised.

Contemporary society is often referred to as “consumer society”, where brands and organisations provide social networks that impact identities (Gautheir *et al.*, 2013), and also expose religion to consumer choice in a global market (Speck, 2013). An interesting feature is the concept of “bricolage”, which defines religion as made up of a diverse range of things, for oneself, as an individual choice (Beck, 2010). Bricolage stems from the idea that religious institutions “lose their hold on individual believers” (Altglas, 2014b:5) and describes the way people can explore internal aspects of their faith whilst combining religious and secular perspectives to create a personal worldview. “[Through] the global marketplace, the individual is *empowered* to create his or her *unique strategy for living in the modern world* - at least according to an implicit code of consumption which suggests that buying into this bricolage is the first step toward responsibility” (Lau, 2000:13 cited in Altglas, 2014b, italics original). This allows a place for individuals to choose elements of religion which best meet their personal and spiritual needs. While scholars of contemporary religion have considered the way spirituality “sells” (Woodhead *et al.,* 2002; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Heelas 2006), Dressler (2009) notes the commodification of Sufism, such as selling Sufi music, clothing, perfume and incense, which, in the Western context has manifested as a form of globalised mysticism. The poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi (bestseller in the U.S), popular Sufi music (most prominently *qawalli* singers like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the Coke Studio Sessions from Lahore), and popular books on Sufi mysticism (the works of Idris Shah), would be good examples.

Sufism can thus be considered as both producer and consumer of cultural trends, whereby religious and spiritual symbols, such as the *tasbih* (rosary beads), are appropriated as fashion accessories, blurring the line between devotion and style (Rinallo *et al.*, 2013). The confluence of youth, religion, consumption, popular culture, and identity provides young Muslims with a means to express their faith in a modern and fashionable way, positioning themselves as active participants in urban consumer culture navigating secular and religious realms to shape a new contemporary Islam (Ali and Hartmann, 2015; Golnaraghi and Daghar, 2017; Williams and Kamaludeen, 2017). According to Roy (2004), however, it is not globalisation that is transforming Islam, but how Muslims relate to Islam in novel ways challenging notions of legitimate Islamic authority. The growing number of Western Muslims has enabled “the spread of specific forms of religiosity, from radical neo-fundamentalism to a renewal of spirituality or an insistence on Islam as a system of values and ethics” (Roy, 2004:19). Young British Muslims can be vanguards of social and religious change. Alongside the census data (2011- 2021), studies show that half a

million Muslims are under the age of sixteen and approximately fifty per cent of the Muslim population are under twenty-five (Lewis, 2007; Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Incorporating their religious identities, young British Muslims are shaped by their surrounding cultures and in turn are keener to present themselves in "complex, contextual, relational and provisional ways" (Dwyer, 1998:54). Furthermore, their access to and use of media networks to explore these identities is far more proactive, offering alternate images and highlighting key issues they face in their public and private lives (Ansari, 2007). As Ansari (2007), explains, young Muslims choose to shed the 'cultural baggage' that does not reflect their lived experiences in Britain, which, in many cases, results in their placing religion above ethnicity or nationality.

The globalisation of media production is a key factor in contemporary religious experience, providing a rich resource for the construction of identities and meaning, a platform on which to communicate to both a peer group and wider society. Janmohamed (2016) discusses the role of new media and the growing middle classes, where young Muslims access knowledge beyond their localities. Accessibility through the internet, v/blogs, online streaming, radio and TV channels creates a personalised and individualised connection to knowledge and guidance (Gilliat-Ray, 2012) — providing both instant access to fields of knowledge and greater awareness of the diversity in how Muslims and Muslim communities practice and find meaning. This increased diversification provides options and the idea of an avant-guard approach to religious practice and learning (Hamid, 2016). The term "digital religion" defines both the articulation of religion and how digital media shapes lived religious practice (Campbell, 2005; 2010; 2013). Cheruvallil-Contractor's (2014) study of online forums (now relatively obsolete in preference for social media) as a format for young Muslims to inquire and discover found that, "deep spiritual understandings and ontological discussions seamlessly co-exist with everyday chit-chat ...These young people were Sufis without knowing or practicing the deep reflective practices that are characteristic of Sufism" (163).

Muslim women use the internet as a "safe space" to voice opinions about society and to counter marginalisation. In particular it has been found to enable the articulation of hybrid Muslim subjectivities (Echchaibi, 2011), performing a non-threatening female visibility (Weber, 2016) and being able to challenge feminist discourses around women's bodies (Baer, 2016). As gender is an increasingly relevant subject in the field of religion and media (Lövheim, 2013), observing the online narratives of participants and how they present themselves to the world through their work can help to better understand the relationship between digital media resources, self-formation and contemporary religion. The case of 'microcelebrity' (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018), defined as celebrity to particular media forms and practices, including branding and marketing strategies, is indicative of the way femininity is mediated by market forces impacting norms around Muslim

women's identities and lifestyles. The ideal of Muslim womanhood is produced and circulated, drawing together Islamic practices with contested new (and old) notions of piety, modesty, beauty, lifestyle, motherhood, professionalism and citizenship (Warren, 2018). As Gökariksel and McLarney (2010) extrapolate, the importance of [Muslim] women to consumption, purchasing, and shopping, as well as the marketing and circulation of commodities, identifies the complex relationship between gendered politics of identity and capitalist Islamic cultural industries. While rational choice theory (Aupers and Houtman, 2006) can be a way of explaining how contemporary Sufism is produced and consumed, it has interesting implications for this thesis in the ways which scarcity, empowerment and entrepreneurship combine through choices around marriage and work to include the importance of financial independence and autonomy.

Women's increased visibility online promoting influential lifestyle content challenges reified stereotypes defining men as breadwinners and women as consumers. Furthermore, it can complicate images of Islamic piety and Muslim femininity as being static, and help to create positioning identities that are fluid and flexible in relation to socio-spacial conditions and cultural norms (Lewis, 2010). This opens up potential for multiple, overlapping scales of identification and belonging, from local communities to international sisterhoods, proffering cooperation rather than conflict. However, whether these articulations of women's power are actually empowering, if female power is entangled with consumer power and "individual choice, independence and modes of expression rooted in the consumer marketplace" (Duffy and Hund, 2015:3), is a question that has to be asked women who embed themselves in post-feminist, normative, feminine expressions, discourses and practices that serve as "self-branding". While Abidin (2016) believes that microcelebrities capitalise on such dis-intermediated relationships through owning the means of production, Hirji (2021) believes no tricks of technology can ultimately change the extent to which gendered and racist tropes are embedded in the collective imagination, nor can they erase intersectionality or the double bind Muslim women face through being expected to perform gendered pious femininity or risk being labelled as unworthy victims (Jiwani, 2010). Despite the potential for change and self-production that the internet has, it may not be the utopian space for women's voices that might be imagined. It is important to be aware of the attempts to oppress, victimise or assert control over women's bodies.

2.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review has been to address the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the study. It is a comprehensive overview of the themes inherent to studies of gender and Islam, which include feminism(s), agency and self-formation, and in this context

ideologies of whiteness, gender performativity and everyday lived religion. The inclusion of Islamic and secular feminisms is relevant as they contextualise both the dichotomy facing British Muslim women in search of gender justice and illustrate their inter and intra-connection, which is applicable to this cohort of women. While Islamic notions of submission and resistance have aided in reconceptualising women's emancipation away from normative Western feminist goals, while critiquing patriarchy, defining piety as a singular model of agency does not account for the way secular or progressive Muslim women challenge, encompass or re-negotiate discourses and practices to meet their needs. Indeed, women's spiritual equality has social and ritual implications (Shaikh, 2012), and the different ways they achieve this is worthy of being validated as a meaningful ethical aim.

The liminal positionality, considered the "in-between" stage in rites of passage is a keen indicator of both the physical and metaphysical experience of inhabiting both Muslim and British cultural identities, which is further compounded by the creation of this unique British Islam and the Christianisation of secular institutions and family models, which establish ideas of female domesticity. However, within this transitoriness, the journeying self engages in a distinct critical reflexivity, deconstructing and decolonising inherited and long-held norms regarding gender, religion, and identity. Facing the complexities and challenges that arise as a result, they begin to unravel the thread of who they were and who they are becoming. It is a way of relating to the self in which the individual is responsible for creating their own identity and where the value of free choice serves as a basis for evaluating the good moral person, so that subjectivities account for iterations of dominant ideologies in order to reveal how constrictions and challenges become constitutive of creative change.

The overemphasising of theological debates, religious milieus and piety, has produced a reductionist and re-exoticisation effect, which promotes the idea that religious identity and expression is a uniquely Muslim way to be modern (Soares and Osella, 2010). Acknowledging the space for lived religion's core themes of meaning, ritualisation and narrative of "non-expert" religious or spiritual practices, draws attention to the ordinary and mundane, and the way it interweaves with "knowing oneself". The impact of neo-liberalism, the digital realm and consumerism has altered the way young Muslims approach their faith and how they present themselves to the world, which is still in its primacy and thus continually adapting and reformulating identities. As a result, young Muslims seek to contribute to new ways of both maintaining, negotiating and ultimately changing religious practices. There is little research on the ways second-generation converts engage with multiple-seeking, moving between groups, denominations, *tariqas*, teachers, and cultural and mediatised sources, in a bid to create their own "Sufi trend", or reimagine the Sufism they inherited. This study aims to rectify that.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological foundations and data collection methods used in this ethnographic study, including its epistemological approach and ethical considerations, which reflect the research focus and underlying theoretical assumptions (May, 2011). It is designed to explore the everyday lived experiences of second-generation convert Muslim women as they negotiate community belonging and authority, performativity and experiences of marriage, and representations through their work and social media. The aim is to discover how their liminal positionality is demonstrative of the journeying self, whereby creative agency is enacted as a force for ethical change through which they problematise and reimagine their identities. It was designed according to the principals of feminism and decolonisation: reflexivity, participation and collaboration, and applied through life-history interviews, collaborative memory work, free-writing exercises and online means to elicit reflective narratives and long-term lived experiences. It entails a focus on the identity of a specific group of actors in a particular structure leading to an exploratory case study approach. Exploratory case studies are often conducted "prior to the final definition of study" (Yin, 2012:29), which allows the case study to emerge from the data and the appropriate method when "empirical inquiry must examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1981:98).

Being a second-generation convert woman myself, on the threshold between Muslimness and Britishness, with a connection to this community and having cultural knowledge and consciousness of its history, gave me both insight, and access, to participants. While this was advantageous for building rapport, it also involved personal narratives, family and collective histories which had the potential to both enable and disable prejudices. Hastrup (1992) notes the theorisation of fieldwork as experiential, intersubjective and the object of anthropological enquiry. While this study's fieldwork and analysis implicated a level of autobiography, I worked to ensure that the "world between ourselves and the others" (*ibid*:117), remained embedded in social relations and cross-cultural encounters, developing a cyclical process of critical reflexivity and a re-evaluation of the aims, collaboration, ethnographic data and literature. The study was not directed by a hypothesis — but allowed the eliciting of more complete answers which in turn formulated the aims and construction of the analysis to better reflect the material. Inspired by Abu-Lughod's (1986) work which empowered Egyptian Bedouin women by giving their narratives a dominant position, this study is influenced by a phenomenological framework to include an

epistemology of the everyday life-worlds, prioritising personal experiences and interpretations (Cloke and Jones, 2001).

3.2 Epistemology

Applying a feminist, interpretive and phenomenological conceptual framework this study aims to give voice to the way individuals make sense of and live out significant aspects of their lives, expressed by how they tell stories and recall real past events. Feminist epistemology provides a key focus for researching the "everyday" which aims to give words to something which cannot always be articulated - a picture, a dance or an object are all modes of communication (Woodhead, 2013). It can also observe their omission, if various activities are forbidden, socially frowned upon or shunned. I wanted to hear and give voice to how women were "meaning-makers" (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005:16) through the way they interpret their world, and our shared world. Engaging this form of collaborative research stems from a feminist-pragmatist epistemological stance and enables the exploration of lived religion and spiritual values, which are revered and experienced by believers but which, outside of these contexts, are difficult to measure. Participants therefore work with the researcher in a collaborative approach to create new knowledge about their lives, prioritising experiences which are constructed as presentations of knowledge, making them the "knowers" (Harding, 1987). As Jackson (1996) argues, the "subject" is the locus where "life is lived, meanings are made, will is exercised, reflection takes place, consciousness finds expression, determinations take effect, and habits are formed or broken" (22).

Bradoitti (1994) suggests the notion of "nomadism" as a form of female subjectivity that reflects not a stance of "being" but a creative concept of becoming that allows for the unsuspected interaction between experience and knowledge. Being is always open to becoming and becoming is a process. Through nomadic interventions, "dogmatic, hegemonic, exclusionary power at the very heart of the identity structures of the dominant subject" is dismantled, and in this way, "margins and centre destabilise each other" (*ibid*:9). The experiences of belonging - marital relationships, work commitments and experiences of trauma, alongside broader socio-political influences acknowledge that the forming of subjectivities is a continuous and unfolding process - on which active and passive, agency and submission, inducible and social forces act sequentially or concurrently to shape their ongoing process where female subjectivity becomes a site of transformation and the passage to becoming. The nomadic feminine subject works to challenge the discourse and practices that have determined the conditions of her existence. The process of narrative selfhood can be creatively described as a "rhizomatic story" (Deleuze in Braidotti, 1994),

so that, “Each time we speak, at the same time a new self in multiple ways is born” (638). In this perspective, fixity and coherence is simply an illusion, the self as a rhizomatic story is a verb, a subject that is always in a “dynamic construction process” one that can include all the “shifting, contradictory multiplicity and fragility”, which includes trauma and belonging (Yoo, 2018:25). Therefore, as a nomad, the female self traverses rhizomatic paths of becoming, from diverse subject positions to the embodiment of otherness and so navigates the multiple paths of her life.

To hear Muslim women’s voices that acknowledge the complexities and diversity of the category “Muslim women” enables new meanings and realities to come to light. Muslim women are often mis-voiced or under-voiced, or have their stories told by others. I set out to work with the second-generation to reinstate them as storytellers telling their own stories. Not as an externally controlled demystification of a mute subject so as to make “them” easier to understand, but rather to challenge the “mystery” surrounding Muslim women (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2012). This allows a dismantling of an epistemic hierarchy, particularly that between “the researcher” and “the researched” and renews thinking around positionality. The intention of collaborative research incorporates a co-creation of new meaning and new knowledge, as one participant elucidated, “I just get a bit depressed and sort of alone. I think that's why it was really nice I could talk to you because I can't really talk to anyone about this stuff…I've got my friends here who have no idea what Islam is, all really spiritually connected people, but they can't understand any of this. And then there are all the people who are still really into Islam. I can't really talk in a frank way to them because it will be kind of upsetting” (Rashida). To give voice to these women, to speak about their myriad experiences of adapting their faith and negotiating the complexities and nuances of the cultural milieu is an integral part of this study. As the author, I too become a conveyor of voice that captures consistencies and anomalies of these diverse women, identifying spaces for solidarity and possibility, so “that women can be believed when they report on their lives” (Brown *et al*., 1994:2).

3.3 Ethnography

Ethnographies are the anthropologist’s principal strategy for studying culture - documenting the “everyday” experiences of individuals by observing or interviewing them (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990; Geertz, 1968). While it is an intensive process involving long durations and multiple observations, it can capture, at some depth, the lived experiences and beliefs of participants (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). It stresses a holistic and contextual approach useful for examining complex concepts and practices due to its interpretive approach. Feminist ethnographers share certain epistemological assumptions and research strategies which bring methodological focus to

the implications of subjects' actions and beliefs and local knowledge, by critiquing doctrine forms of objectivism and subjectivism. Atkinson's (2017) notion of "granular ethnography" encapsulates "the grain of everyday life" (11), which naturally occurs in social order and cultural forms. It considers conventions and codes and how social actors achieve and perform life choices, such as the methodological significance of capturing participants agentive self-formation and the stages through which it is achieved. This is central to the theoretical framework of this study, which also acknowledges that "convention and codes" (Atkinson, 2017:12), can oblige and subsume. As such, complexities are given prominence by providing "thick" descriptions that reflect the "detailed and sustained analyses of how social life is actually enacted" (*ibid*), whereby the challenges and limitations of cultural inheritance are integral to the account of the *bricologic* amalgamation of identities.

I have been collecting real ethnographic data from members of the Murabitun for a period of more than five years, which began with an RCUK funded project on "British Muslim Values", to my Research Master's - a pilot study on belonging - and through to my PhD. The use of multiple methods and long-term engagement is demonstrative both to the quality of research and the methodological aims of collating long-term lived experience of converts and their non- or post-convert families. I collected approximately 500 hours of participant observation; situational activity; collective memory work and group discussions, alongside 40 life-history interviews; approximately 150 hours of meetings and 15 individual free-writing diary exercises, alongside broader contextual data. Further ethnographic evidence comes in the form of fieldwork diaries and written accounts of meetings, diagramming our interactions to incorporate the "double work shift" (Okely, 2012), which aims to record both the visible world and the underlying socio-cultural and political contexts using intelligent guesswork. It has been a vast and intensely demanding project, and one to which my life has been devoted. Participants had the freedom to choose what they wanted to speak about, to share their opinions and experiences about significant elements of their lives, particularly the unspoken and bifurcate parts. At first some women were suspicious about the motivation and funding of the study, questioning the research outcomes and purpose. When I explained my epistemological reasoning, they quickly responded in kind.

Demonstrating the effect of such feminist consciousness-raising, many women commended the cathartic nature of the interviews, the ability to reflect on the multifaceted roles they fulfil in the community, wider society and their gendered positionality. There was a desire to share their journeys, the emotional experiences and traumas they described and the way they illustrated their connection to their faith and to themselves. In group and collective memory work, they discussed the findings of the study, acknowledging their different perspectives, and shared experiences. These were conversations they had not previously had, nor the author privy to, before this

research process. It was an illuminating and at times challenging experience - the act of clearing or voicing of traumas being a particularly delicate and emotional journey. Ethnographic fieldwork inevitably means that the relationship between researcher and participants is never fixed or clearly defined, as the researcher can take on the role of friend, daughter, volunteer, teacher, and so on (Liberatore, 2013). An unexpected outcome was the composite effect of the research from the community as a whole, whereby people came forward wanting to talk openly about the challenges and traumas experienced by younger generations. Parents too were particularly eager to acknowledge that "mistakes had been made", "traumas were real", and what needed to be recognised was tangible as well as emotional. It laid bare the conversations and reflections that were taking place amongst participants and their families, as well as the wider community. While these are unique stories of second-generation Muslims who grew up in the Norwich Sufi community, they are reflective of a broader phenomenon and with those from other denominations. Due to time and space restrictions however, I have selected a smaller number of narratives to demonstrate these themes in the empirical chapters.

3.4 The case-study

The theme of community is central to the participants articulations of religiosity, gender and sense of being in the world. Feminist research aims to destabilise fixed notions of "place" and "home" in order to render them more fluid, to re-emphasise the local as a site of everyday lived experience, which ultimately reflects a broader and intersectional geopolitical climate. Community forms from individuals, families, religious and performative events which link people, and the home is often central to the internal adoption of Islamic life. While Massy (1992, 1994) and Hooks (1991), highlight "home" a site of power and identity, alternatively experienced, it is also simultaneously the site of transition and resistance. This case-study includes the wider Muslim community as the site where boundaries of belonging and ideology are delineated. Inherited culture then is the culture of the parents - the first-hour converts - from whom "embodied, active belonging-in-place through history, memory, family and the liminal moments of ritual and discursive work of boundary making" (Bennett, 2012:26), were established. The history of a place, its biography with all its varying histories, explains how a place evolved into the present moment (Anderson, 2006). Indeed, this hybrid place, a "taskscape" (Ingold, 2000), is an "actant" in its own story, rather than simply a backdrop to the performance of the social, economic or cultural life (Cloke and Jones, 2001:649). However, while it is telling to see your history, memory and belonging reflected back at you through "place" and the way those lives took place (Leach, 2002), it is incumbent upon each generation to interrogate "our" narrative, from the "inside", in order to claim ownership of our own sense of belonging and to mark historical change. The second-generation are co-creating a

history, a story, as relational material beings-in-the-world, enabling the story to unfold from multiple angles and complexities, giving the project context-dependent knowledge and experience (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The primary location for fieldwork was Norwich, Norfolk. Much of the situated activity and participant observation took place at the Ihsan Mosque, and for community events at venues in the area - Ramadan, Eids, weddings, and funerals. Such events or "situations" were primed to assume a supportive role in the study and have been crucial in incorporating observations into the analytical construction. Considered as a methodology which broadly uses a situation as a unit of analysis, it enables the production of a rich analysis of discourses, texts, histories and power (Clarke, 2005). In this way I was able to contextualise situations while simultaneously analysing elements surrounding, producing and affecting the liminal positionality, revealing complexities as they altered, stabilised or produced pattens. As with reflexivity, the researcher is the instrument in the situational analysis and therefore needs to integrate personal and professional experiences related to the topic into the research design and continued analysis (Pérez and Cannella, 2013). However, with the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic halfway through fieldwork, methodological changes were necessary as participation in person was no longer possible. As my research field was based in the UK, participants were equally affected by the lockdown, homeschooling, working from home and the additional physical and emotional challenges it presented. This Covid occurrence threads through the empirical data adding a further level of reflection on women's lives and the debate on the social and political implications of well-being and models of self-hood. It was through these discussions that themes to do with; coming to terms with mental and physical traumas; accessing the Divine feminine within Islam; the conscientious choice of eliciting the "Green Deen" - Islamic teachings on environmentalism; and dealing with the challenges of the Covid pandemic, including denial, conspiracy and an unexpected reduction in religiosity.

3.5 Methods

This study generates a shift towards listening to previously ignored voices using instruments which are more open and responsive to participants, so they can be part of the questioning, the questioner, the theoretical agenda and perhaps see things they themselves had been unaware of before (Woodhead, 2013). Qualitative research utilises a diverse array of interpretive data collection methods and analytical tools to generate and theoretically (re)articulate the thick descriptions and narratives elicited with participants (Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont, 2003). As such, the study incorporated two main qualitative methods of generating narratives and how they are contextualised - life-history or semi-structured interviews alongside participant observation or

shadowing, held as the “gold standard” of qualitative research, as they enable “analysis of the local realisation of generic social processes” (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003:113). These are placed alongside critical self-reflexivity, fieldwork diaries, and written accounts of meetings and the diagramming of interactions. Further ethnographic evidence was collected and triangulated to ensure, as far as possible, internal validity and authenticity. Using digital methods, a free-writing exercise was conducted to elicit more subjective responses to open questions. Other contextual data, through newspaper articles, published material by the community, conferences, blogs, and social media accounts and groups was collected to map the evidence. The comprehensive community material is written from a confessional and learned standpoint and aimed at both Muslims and non-Muslims alike which gives a view into the ideology of the Murabitun.

Long-term participant observation took place over a period of 24 months which involved “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1968), and following participants’ lives through familial, social and work-related interactions, albeit subject to Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions. Situational analyses, where possible, took place at the Ihsan Mosque, women’s organisations and networks, religious festivals and private gatherings. The primary study population were the first-hour parent generation converts and their post-convert families, primarily women in their 30s and 40s. The first stage involved a lighter touch, guided conversation with a cohort of around 50 women, divided across generations to capture variations across class, ethnicity and socio-economic status. It also included women who had left the community setting, who no longer practiced Islam in a conventional way or who had chosen to be non-affiliated Muslims. The second stage involved more in-depth, life-history interviews with 25 women, specifically from the second-generation - the core participants, with whom I had repeated interactions and who were asked to complete the additional participatory methods. As the gatekeeper, I purposefully selected participants from a broad inclusion criteria, interested in the diversity of experience that included age groups, ethnicities and socio-economic status. Despite the potential for demographic bias, as the contacts in my network are similar to each other, I ensured a mixture of life-experience and invited alternative positions by approaching Muslim women’s social networks in Norwich such as the Neesa Project, a multi-nationality women's group, and second-generation Muslims outside of the Murabitun. I argue that this method of recruitment is both valid and useful for this study as I am interested in exclusive narratives which encompass a specific snap-shot of British Islam.

3.5.1 Participation

With a commitment to lived experience comes a pragmatist approach to meaning-making and the practical consequences for individuals, where it can become “more concerned with the problem

that is being investigated than the methods being used to research it" (Creswell 2003: 11). Therefore it is essential that methods are flexible to reflect the complexities of participants experiences and truths, told in their words and presented authentically. Long-term engagement in the field with participant observation was central to the study, to stratify conceptual and methodological data - a method whereby the researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning both the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and culture (Desjarlais 1992; Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Zahle 2012). As Gilliat-Ray (2010) writes, "being there" allows the researcher to share the experiences with their participants, eliciting data of a qualitatively different kind. For Bernard (2011), participant observation is a "strategic method" (i.e., a method that comprises several methods at once) that "puts you where the action is and lets you collect data . . . any kind of data that you want - narratives or numbers" (343). Indeed, bringing awareness to participants emotions and feelings, in response to place, people and history, with reflexivity, enabled this phenomena to be considered for analysis (Crapanzano, 2010).

Participation proved to be an essential part of eliciting data, how participants traversed liminality in everyday moments and understanding the importance of the journeying self. Conducting a granular ethnography allowed me to focus on how people actually perform tasks and actions they narrate and enabled me to experience situations and interactions amongst different social scenes (May, 2011). The study employed an element of "participant shadowing", considered an "observation on the move" (Czarniawska, 2014:43), where the researcher follows the participant as they go about their everyday work. This was principally useful as a way to focus on a single actor operating within a context, rather than on groups or the context itself, more typical of ethnographies (Gilliat-Ray, 2011). Those successful ventures included "following" a participant during the running of a retreat, conducting women's groups gatherings/events, doing work as a therapist and other work encounters. However, while this was possible for a few participants its full potential was not realised due to social distancing and restrictions placed on research during the Covid-19 Pandemic. As a result, the research was adapted to capture the digital workplace and presentation of participants' work online and through social media.

Levels of participation were adapted in accordance with each participant and the essentialness of the experiential experience, particularly when researching "home". My connection with the Murabitun required me to detach and participate in a way to experience it anew - requiring an "active participation" rather than "pure participation" (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010:18), and a "process of physical labour, bodily interaction and sensory learning" (Okely, 2012:107). During fieldwork I attended *iftars* in Ramadan, recitations of *Surat Yasin* for the deceased, several *janaza*, together with the Eid prayers and celebrations, where I helped prepare food and provided

equipment to be used at the event. By participating as a researcher, rather than a member, I was able to discern subjective practice by both the community and participants, along with gendered and religious norms, in a more objective way. The lived religion framework is strikingly absent with British Muslims, especially second-generation converts, but captures the ways these women digest religion on they own terms, dipping in and out of institutionalised practices. Yet, participatory observation within the Murabitun was essential to contextualise and enhance demographic knowledge. Celebrating the Eid within the community or attending Quran classes can be part of participants everyday religious practice and deepens our understanding of the ways faith becomes imbricated into everyday life.

3.5.2 Life-history interviews

The life-history, semi-structured interviews or guided conversations (Yin, 2003) were the foremost research method alongside participant observation. They are used to demonstrate how people seek their personhood over time - how they monitor their successes and failures against the change and turbulence in their lives with reference to their wishes and ideals, particularly how they articulate experiences of religiosity or spirituality (Strathern and Stewart,1998). The narrative structure enables the researcher to "gain access to the interior world of the private and personal" (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003:133), to explore the process of meaning-making by making space for feelings and attitudes to be expressed, not always discernible to the observer's eye and necessary to avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding. As my positionality attests, I felt compelled to look deeper and unravel the "identity affects" emerging from the women's narratives (Mirza, 2013). While a narrative focus may capture marginalised voices, the reading of their narrative is not about establishing a 'truth' about their condition. My aim was to create a text which provided insight into the discourses participants cultivated to make sense of self, and other. The use of this technique to open up women's life-stories enabled participants to set the agenda and identify themes or issues they wished to discuss themselves.

The study takes a longitudinal approach to measure attitudinal change over time, and across generations, to capture how religiosity or spirituality is practiced in this community. Generational differences concerning work and education, experiences of marriage and divorce, how to raise children and inter and intra-community relations. This enabled a comparison among women who choose a more pious life alongside those who worked to problematise their gendered subjectivity and adapt their faith. The inclusion of collective memory work, taken from Frigga Haug (Haug, *et al.*, 1999; Schratz and Walker, 1995), which uses an iterative process of narratives, self-reflection and consciousness-raising to explore themes to be taken as social constructs, is a philosophical

concept that studies how human beings, individuals and groups, construct social meaning by what they remember, and by what they forget (Halbwachs, 2020). While I conducted informal group discussions, participants would engage me too with the professed intention understanding my own experiences on this topic. At first, I worked to keep my involvement to a minimum, raising more direct questions and homing the themes, but as the research progressed, I found myself more entangled. This type of collaboration, interactive and considered, in the manner they chose to share, became part of the research design and provided further insights into experiences, beliefs, feelings, affects and attitudes, which helped develop a more in-depth narrative for analysis and a broader understanding of themes.

Overall, I generated 25 in-depth life-history interviews, between 2-6 hours in length, and conducted in the participants' homes, public spaces or at my house, depending on the interviewee's choice. As mentioned, the unexpected impact of Covid-19 and social distancing led to a large number of interviews being conducted over Zoom or Skype, which created the illusion of the face-to-face interview (Lo Iacono, Symonds, and Brown, 2016). These took place in front of the participants' home computers, outside of their working day. While the participant was happy to conduct the interview online, not normally creating a barrier to the discussion, occasionally issues to do with bandwidth did cause a level of disruption. From my point of view this was a hindrance to a more harmonious and relaxed flow in the conversion - the breaks in connection, mis-hearing and cutting out. The participants however were very accommodating, both in accepting this disturbance and making time around their lives to reschedule attempts when internet availability and time allowed. It would be remiss of me however, not to mention my frustration on the lack of face-to-face interaction and the loss of "bond" between the researcher and the researched during times of intense and personal life stories.

The majority of participants were happy to use their own name, but each was assigned a pseudonym and nonessential facts kept to a minimum to maintain confidentiality and consistency. This was done with consent from the participant to avoid any "epistemic injustice" toward participants, particularly as women and those of minority ethnic identities, by "silencing" their biographies (Berkhout, 2013). As Guenther (2009) argues, the act of naming can become "an act of power" (412), by the researcher over participants in the development of pseudonyms. It was important therefore to use an advocate for a research-determined approach to anonymisation that attended to the specific process, requirements of the data and appropriate representation of participant biographies. Demographic data, such as age, gender, class and educational level were gathered to help contextualise the sample and survey patterns which factor into the analysis. The interviews were voice-recorded or recorded online, with permission, and later transcribed, which enabled me to both focus on the participant during the session and to better record accurate

data. Transcription was conducted by the author and typed up as synopsis with certain sections typed out verbatim. They were left as "messy" as possible, leaving in false starts, long pauses and "um's", "ahhs" and "likes" to better reflect the colloquialisms and to signal expressions of potentially uncomfortable or challenging moments in the interview.

3.5.3 Participatory exercises

Aside from the staple ethnographic methods, some additional "participatory methods" were initiated with core participants to further integrate and triangulate the data — to capture nuanced material aspects of women's lives, such as social relations with families, conjugal relationships and work interactions. I used a free-writing diary exercise with a selection of core participants, which encouraged the everyday as a point of entry. I invoked open questions, such as, what impacted them that week - how it made them feel at the time and after, and what they had learned from it. The intention was to capture perceptions over specific and daily events and the gathering of detailed knowledge through close observations from the participant's perspective (Christensen and Jensen, 2012). This use of participatory methods generated data that would not be possible from interviews alone and provide the "sole" researcher with vastly more detailed and in-depth data than interviewing alone (Plowman, 2016). Furthermore, as a result of some participants requesting to read the thesis before submission, a reflective and intimate validation feed-back loop was established, which revealed the sensitivity and personal depth involved in participating in this research project, with one in particular keen to have parts of their narrative removed for publication.

3.5.4 Digital

To support this study, I conducted research through communication platforms such as social media, focusing on Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp - the more popular forms of social networking as they help cultivate a sense of community and belonging (Svensson, 2014; Storer-Church, 2017), as well as personal blogs, interfaith forums, feminist websites, YouTube channels and digital news outlets. Social media is ubiquitous and is a mode through which identities are shaped, and second-generation Muslim women engage with these platforms as a way to present themselves to wider society through their work, and in turn challenge, reformulate and create new ideas and practices (Chapter 7). The theme of identity as constantly negotiated and performed in a participant's journey of the self was revealed in data analysis collected on their social media presence, as Meldelson and Papacharissi (2011) note, "In everyday life, people consciously and

unconsciously work to define the way they are perceived..[and]..in its many iterations, in contexts that are both virtual and real, mediated or not, offline or online" (252).

Scholarship has argued that the internet augments the opportunities for what Goffman (1959) calls front-stage self-making (Abidin, 2016; Duguay, 2016; Mendelson and Papacharissi, 2011). The advent of web-based image sharing has certainly highlighted self-making as processual through strategic manipulation and posting photos. As a result of the popularity of social media and the use of visual texts in contemporary culture, Highfield and Leaver (2016) argue that more attention should be given to images in the study of online identity performances. While Marwick (2015), asserts that images present a qualitatively different method for identity construction and should therefore generate a renewal of contextual frameworks. However, these spaces have allowed Muslim women to create and circulate their opinions and creations through their own actions. While there is some disagreement on the different forms of production and analysis of images and text online (Chojnicka, 2016; Vaisman, 2016; Spyer and Steedly's, 2013), it is agreed the internet is a social space for both cognition and representation of the world (Fairclough, 1995). Taking into account these differences, I analysed both text and image for their narrative content and include the discursive and visual representations participants used to display and discuss their identity.

The online or virtual dimension has the potential to transcend the physical constraints of the body, both in terms of spatial and temporal boundaries and the social constructs and differences that are immediately present in an embodied encounter. It promises to provide a medium which overcomes judgements of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and age, in a neutral virtual space. Yet as Boler (2007) argues, online communication reflects ingrained social meaning attached to language cues and markers that both describe a social phenomenon, but is also deeply ingrained in the way we comprehend the social world. Rather than transcend social markers, the conduit appears to collapse back into "habitual assumptions and stereotypes about bodies in order to make sense of the other" (*ibid*:156). The virtual sphere entices us to free ourselves from embodied constraints of social categories and structures, yet it does not easily shake off the residue of off-line interaction and meaning. This associated meaning then restricts the potential of this sphere to construct new identities and processes of being, whilst the sensory effects and interactions that stimulate "knowing" through embodied experiences are lost.

3.6 Analysis

To understand participants' subjectivities on the practice of ethics and change, the discursive constructions of their lives and narratives of self-knowledge have been thematically analysed. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to make sense of the data by drawing out emerging themes and patterns (Boyatzis, 1998). While the analysis of ethnographic data begins immediately as an iterative part of the process - asking oneself questions and reflecting on aims transforms it into an interpretive process (Buch and Staller, 2011). Through a process of "encoding" (Boyatzis, 1998:4) the data, themes emerged which complemented the wider literature and research questions to describe the phenomena under study. While narratives make up the "rhizome" (Deleuze in Yoo, 2018), of study, to draw the gaze towards the participants' lived experiences, their in-depth analysis was adjourned to focus on emerging themes and commonalities amongst them. Broader codes were initially filed, but as the analysis progressed, through comparison and contrast, the placing of incidents and experiences into social and political contexts, the themes and questions become more refined, more complex and more interesting. Feminist analysis highlights sustained attention to the ways similarities and differences are organised through sex and/or gender, told through narratives, to reflect discrimination and the more "unreal" (Robbins, 2022) interpretations of everyday life - these included, emotions, feelings and somatic embodied experiences and how they were managed in the community context. It is important that the fieldwork reflected the narrated experiences and understandings of participants while truthfully presenting reduced data through vignettes rather than the full tapestry of ideas.

Part of the analysis was the bringing together of the multiple types of data through a complementary understanding of triangulation (Hammersley, 2008). Rather than seek validation, complementarity provides "different pictures of this object that might not be useful to validate each other but which might yield a fuller and more complete picture of the phenomenon, if brought together" (Erzberger and Kelle, 2003 in Hammersley, 2008:6). The use of participation enriched life-histories, contextual resources enhanced by collective memory work, and free-writing all helped to elucidate the reflexive practices participants had developed. As such, the analysis involved the constant iteration across literature, data and reflexivity to reinterpret and refine my interpretations. This process of reflection and reinterpretation allowed the central theme of the liminal space of rites of passage to emerge. Therefore, the empirical chapters are intended to be read as a collage of these women's lived experiences embedded within the process of identity formation. They present the stages through which participants travel, the journeying self, from nascent belongings and the community project, to challenging social and gendered constructions in marriage, through to a reframing of culture and convention by their own agentive bargaining of self-presentation and thereby contributing greater nuance to the tapestry of British Islam.

3.6.1 The study sample

The final sample size numbered 25 participants after the initial round of 50 guided conversations with the inclusion of first-hour convert parents, which are represented in the context chapter. Although there is no set number for a qualitative study, the suggestion of between 25-30 participants can be considered "normal" for an interview-based qualitative research project (Baker and Edwards, 2012; Dworkin, 2012). However, finalising on the slightly smaller end of the sampling size was due to both the focus of the study and the demand of participation and interviews, which generated substantial and different amounts of data. While I am aware that the statistical generalisability of this study is limited (Seale, 1999), the use of a specific number of stories in the empirical chapters to reveal the themes is representative of the larger socio-cultural phenomena of second-generation convert Muslims in the Murabitun. I maintain that this does not diminish the significance of the findings as the study represents the only qualitative exploration of long-term lived Islam of converts and their post convert families in Britain to date and can meaningfully contribute to current scholarly debates identified in the literature.

It is not in the purview of this chapter to examine debates around the conceptual ambiguity of the term "identity", however as the sample strategy focused on the children of converts, specific to this Sufi community, the concept of "self-identity" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) was employed to identify participants as Muslims. Self-identification that entails a ""situated subjectivity"; one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (*ibid*:17). The criteria therefore was purposive and included self-identifying as a Muslim, in that they would state themselves as Muslim in some format and act in a way they would understand as Muslim. While some of the women observed orthodox Islamic practice, such as the daily prayers, paying *zakat* and doing Ramadan, others performed what they described as the "minimum", while adapting their faith to suit their particular circumstances. The notion of "Muslim" therefore is flexible, determined by the participant's choice and level of adherence, not by an "official" identifier of religion, i.e. visible markers, practices or statements of faith. This compliments the constructivist theoretical underpinnings of the study - the construction of identities and importantly the resisting of reifying forms of identification.

All participants lived or had lived in Norwich, the youngest was 28 years old and eldest was 47 years of age at the time of fieldwork. Of the participants, fourteen were Caucasians, three had African-Caribbean heritage, one of Indian heritage and one of Japanese heritage. All of the participants were born into the Murabitun and had been active and involved during their formative years though not all doing so now. All the participants admitted to being part of a community of convert Muslims which reflected their world-views (at certain times) and mirrored their British

identity. Educational levels were varied, all held A-level qualifications, with twelve completing an undergraduate degree and those that did not pursue an academic trajectory, completed further qualifications in their chosen professions to become fully qualified and certified. Rather than representing privilege, these women's education and career represents a socially mobile and aspirational generation in the community which is in a transitory phase. Of the women, nine were married, six of whom were on their second or third marriage after divorce, one was widowed, while a further four remained single after divorce - three were in polygamous marriages. Four were unmarried at the time of interviewing and five were in non-religious long-term relationships/ partnerships, three of which were after divorce from an Islamic marriage. Almost all participants, married and divorced, had children except for two divorcees who did not, along with those who were unmarried. It is interesting to note that most of the women spoke about motherhood or having children; the importance of educating the next generation and passing on good values, whether they had children or not. Many women, reflected on the experiences of their own mothers and grandmothers, and spoke about how motherhood had changed across generations.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Issues of ethics pertain to the 'codes and principles' of conducting research with integrity (May, 2011:61). Given the sensitive nature of this research, the ethical considerations shaped the research design considerably. The requirements of the UEA and the Association of Social Anthropologists (UK and Commonwealth) were followed and approval attained, particularly in light of changing fieldwork parameters during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Researching religious topics could be considered sensitive from the outset (Lee and Renzetti, 1993), magnified by the political context that has fostered "a general sense of mistrust towards people investigating issues concerning Muslims in Britain" (Bolognani, 2007:282). This specifically concerns the misrepresentation of Islam resulting from these studies (Spalek, 2005), and research fatigue from the growth in studies surrounding British Muslims within the last decade (Hamid, 2017). Therefore, participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time and their confidentiality assured throughout. A verbal consent policy was discussed and procured, and participants acquainted with the aims, procedures and dissemination of the study. Participants were given time to decide and talk with their families before giving their response. Due to privileged access of the community, certain ethical considerations were raised such as - researcher bias and opinion, participant non-anonymity, the responsibility on both parties and concerns about answering more complex questions. I remained aware of these potential issues and dependencies and continued to be open, respectful and reflective with participants

throughout. My responsibilities included explaining the limits of confidentiality parameters, for both public interest information and safeguarding the participant and writer.

3.8 Reflexivity

The principals of reflexivity are incumbent on the participatory methodological framework of this research, an exercise through which meanings are made, and where method, data, analysis and researcher are understood as both independent, and interconnected. If a researcher is the "instrument" "our own frameworks of understanding need to be critically examined as we look for the tensions and contradictions they might entail" (Lather, 1991:80). This study incorporates doing ethnography "at home", which necessitates problematising ones positionality in the construction of knowledge. It is my intention to explore the lived experience and narratives of second-generation Muslim women - and being one myself - I was, despite my reticence, explicitly implicated in its analysis. What began with a desire to be completely objective and in no way an exercise of autobiography nor auto-ethnography, not wishing to put myself in the way of participants' narratives, I came to realise that my own experience and insight enabled me to discern feelings of confusion, conflict and convergence, having grown up in a similar way. Like participants, my parents had been part of the counter-cultural movement of the 1970s and travelled East in search of a more authentic connection with the Divine. Whilst at university they met, converted to Islam and then joined the Murabitun, moving to Darqawi and living with other families in this new and ambitious community. That is where I spent the first year of my life, before moving to live semi-permanently just outside Norwich - barring multiple years spent living abroad before coming back permanently to study for my GCSEs. Coincidentally, this global experience of observing different cultures and societies, modes of language and perspectives on communities and positionality influenced my research interests and garnered me with a passion for collecting and collating narratives of lived realities, the importance of inter community dialogue, and discovering what motivates people to make certain ethical and moral choices about their lives.

With awareness, reflexivity allows time to observe the complexity of patterns and perceptions that shadow critique and doubt without whitewashing. Indeed, at the very least, it allows us to acknowledge "the place of power, discourse and text, that which in a sense goes beyond the personal" (Dunne *et al.*, 2005:22). In this instance it did involve personal narratives, family and collective histories, which can both enable and disable prejudices, of which I was alert to, and worked to keep my perspective" intersubjective and embodied" and "irredeemably social and processual" (Moore, 1994:3). My positionality in the community has always been on the periphery, as enunciated by al-Ghazālī's *dihliz*, and while I could approach questions which an insider may

not attempt, it also caused me to understand my presence in the community like never before. I have experienced and observed both positive and negative aspects of being a Muslim woman, both in Britain and abroad. I have grown up trying to ascertain the balance between my identities - encouraged to behave in one way and yet needing to adapt to society's expectations. It was a learning curve, a baptism of fire, which brought with it both a sense of isolation and resilience, we were made to feel exceptional but removed - it took a while to come down off that pedestal! Yet my alternative education both broadened my perspectives and moderated them, while critical thinking disallowed me to be blinkered by strict parameters or scriptural promises, rather remaining open, listening to others and slowly teaching myself to articulate, for all of which I am grateful. Therefore, I reveal myself to the reader by writing myself into the dialogue, disclosing the origins of situated knowledge to produce a work free from positional factors. Referred to as "critical reflexivity" or "reflexivity of discomfort" (Chaudry, 1997*),* I use vignettes and questioning to challenge readers through honest, vulnerable and insightful summations demonstrating that I did not attempt to "know" myself or my subjects, nor achieve truth or transcendence through writing, but rather to portray multiple voices, ideates and subjectivities. As Mills (1959) asserts "the social scientist is not some autonomous being standing outside society, the question is where he stands within it" (in Letherby, 2013:80). Subjectivity is essential in articulating power-laden, emotional and embodied experiences, it resonates with what is not straightforward and appeals to what feels human - one's resonance with the other.

This study has tested me deeply, forcing me to strip back the remnants of an inherited "story" and focus on what is important to me now. Indeed, at times, writing about participant's trauma brought with it a "retraumatising" (Tantam, 2024) effect, bringing my own experiences to the surface and demanding I "listen deeply", both to others, and myself. It has been an honour and a responsibility to represent participants as they are rather than from a desire to simply present, revealing the treasures of their lives, such as the Divine feminine and knowledge of native plants, or the obstacles they have overcome to achieve their desires. Lather (1991) argues, that "research as praxis" enables researchers to undertake changes which empower and reignite the process in order to know reality and transform it, to be "the changer and the changed" (56). Indeed, as our understanding of our lives changes so does our relationship to the world, which transforms the narrative we use to interpret and frame the past, which also is renewed. This reflective interaction develops a relationship between action, meaning and structure, between the knower and the known (Dunne, *et al.*, 2005), creating a feed-back loop where action re-informs meaning which shapes social structure. Giddens (1991), argues, an individual's biography cannot be wholly fictive it must continually integrate events which occur in the external world and sort them into the ongoing story about the self, the "double hermeneutic" (*ibid*:19). While Jane Addams (1860-1935 in Wilkinson and Kleinman, 2016), posits that in order to truly understand we must immerse

ourselves in the experience we are studying, which enables being reflexive of our own values and how they shape privilege, class and ethnicity so that we are personally affected by the conditions we seek to understand. Knowing and being known could not be separated, but on the other hand it also meant I could capture the voices of these women, tell their stories and produce accurate accounts of their lives to the best of my ability, “incorporating a reflexivity that accounts for multiplicity without making it singular and that acknowledges the unknowable without making it familiar” (Pillow, 2003:181).

Chapter 4: The Murabitun community - the creation of a distinct "British Islam"

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will trace the creation of the Murabitun community, the evolution of its unique Sufi ideology and religiosity in order to locate the theological underpinnings that weave into the lives of the second-generation. Important aspects to consider and which are pertinent to the empirical chapters, are the expectations and prescriptions toward everyday practices of what it means to be a Muslim in Britain and representing your community; the parental role and the importance of raising the next generation of British Muslims; ideas around marriage, family and divorce - integral experiences for Muslim women; and the relationship with work and attaining knowledge. This amounts to a generational relationship to subjectivity that demonstrates changes over time which become part of a discursive space to understand community ideology, history and temporality and to better understand the motivations, and contestations, inherent in the way these women narrate their lived history and experience the liminal space.

To do this I present a brief review of Sufism in Britain and understandings of the Sufi faith. Then, using the narratives of convert women I trace the genealogy of the community, from 1968 to its present day. I analyse early community literature and the writings of Shaykh Abdulqadir as-Sufi (SAQ) throughout his prolific writing history. Furthermore, I look at literature and conference material of the Shaykh's main adherents, published members of the Murabitun, to garner the ideological outreach and the particular Sufi doctrine of the community, which defies other contemporary Sufi *tariqas*. Furthermore, as is the premise of this study, it is crucial to include the voices of women which reflect the lived realities of history, as the bearers of community and tradition, their experience is vital to community evolution. Therefore, I include an analysis of the ideological premises of and for, educating young women, which does not currently exist in any anthropological research on the Murabitun community.

4.2 Sufism in Britain

The settlement of Muslims in Britain and the subsequent transmission of schools of thought has influenced the demography and intra-religious diversity of Muslim communities. Historically, Sufis travelled both for spiritual inspiration and to bring Islam, *da'wa*, to new territories, drawing on international networks across diasporic communities, "Sufi movements originally based in Muslim societies have modified elements of the classical Sufi Orders (*tarīqas*) in the face of modernisation and globalisation and subsequently attempted to export these new forms of Sufism to the West"

(Hermansen, 2009:26). From the 1930s Sufism in Britain was contained and propagated within specific communities (Geaves *et al.*, 2009), such as Shaykh Abdullah al-Hakimi from the Yemeni Alawi *tariqa*, whose congregants derived from the docklands of Liverpool, Cardiff and Tyneside and later in manufacturing cities such as Sheffield and Birmingham (Gabriel and Geaves, 2014). Al-Hakimi's *ṭariqa* helped establish the first *zawiya* in Cardiff which had provisions for women to host own activities and lead female-only congregations (Gilliat-Ray and Mellor, 2010). South Asian migrants were influential in bringing Sufism to Britain, predominately of the Barelvi tradition (Werbner, 2002), and built mosques, seminaries and places of spiritual retreat to host Sufi Shaykhs, saints (pirs) and *ṭariqas* (Werbner, 1996; 2003; 2007). However, it was during the counter-cultural and New Age Movements of the 1960s and 1970s, that a watershed moment for religious and social change in Britain occurred, which saw a rise of new religious and quasi-religious movements, unveiling what was referred to at the time as, a "crisis of meaning" (Bellah, 1976). Rapid post-war material affluence, economic and social security, increased leisure opportunities, relative political freedom, increased choice and opportunity demonstrated for many "the ancient truth that lasting satisfaction cannot be found in ephemeral pleasures" (Geaves, 2000:161). Many indigenous youth chose to move away from Christianity and rediscover spirituality by travelling to India and North Africa (*Maghrib*) (Geaves and Gabriel, 2014). This movement of people led to translations of classical texts into English, which contributed to the rise of "Western Sufism" and later inspired followers of Inayat Khan and Idris Shah. These Sufi teachers promoted new Sufi movements with the message of a "universal" Sufism, which crossed into more orthodox Islamic beliefs and practices (Sedgwick, 2016).

Today Sufism is diverse and transcends mere ethnic loyalties and allegiances (Geaves, 2000), due to communities' increased exposure to new Sufi teachers and associations, and a diverse spiritual legacy. The Traditional Islam network (TI) established in the 1990s, whose aim was to protect Sufism in the face of growing anti-Sufi rhetoric and ideology from within Wahabi and Salafi movements resulted in many young Muslims, from a variety of sectarian backgrounds, to incline towards promoting classical Sufism in an intellectual way, recognising it as being an important and essential part of Islamic tradition (Hamid, 2016). As a result, scholars from Britain, North America, South Asia, Cyprus, Yemen, Mauritania, Syria and North Africa, as well as other regions, who sought to focus on scholarship and learning to promote Sufism were able to create communities of study and practice through the internet and global networking (Hamid, 2014; Gabriel and Geaves, 2014). Indeed, Sufism as a branch of Islam has been most successful at propagating *da'wa* in the non-Arab world due to its flexibility, tolerance and readiness to absorb cultural elements from non-Islamic contexts, traditions that vary according to context and localities. One definition of contemporary Sufism proposes that while "ideals and practices take a particular form in relation to the dynamics shaping global cultures today - the explicit and implicit

ways that Sufism today represents past ideals and contradicts them, *is* precisely what makes contemporary Sufism 'contemporary'" (Sharify-Funk *et al.*, 2017:246). As Sufism adapts to a modern, mediatised, global context it takes on multiple forms, developed and adapted by individuals and groups to changing circumstances. Like a living organism, it is "constantly vernacularised by its interpreters in ways that reflect the living dynamism of human reality more broadly" (Sharify-Funk *et al.*, 2017:260).

While the diversity of Sufi practice results in varied forms of religious expression, research shows how traditional *tariqa* organisations are changing and adapting to a modern global context too, with distinctive styles emerging and different individual articulations of Sufi practice and identity (Voll, 2007; Van Bruinessen and Howell, 2007; Hermansen, 2009). It is however, the younger generation of Western born Muslims who are exploring Sufism in new and innovative ways. In Hermansen's (2012) study of South Asian communities in America, she challenges traditional definitions by stressing "collective behaviour and practice rather than individual spiritual training and initiation to a *tariqa*" (257), considering *post-tariqa* or "*qasi-tariqa"* formations. There is little ethnographic research, and no working definition on this subject in the British context. However, Khan's (2020) unpublished thesis *Sufisticated, Exploring Post-Tariqa Expression amongst Young British Muslims*, uses the term *"post-tariqa Sufism"* to analyse the ways young Muslims are discovering new and diverse pathways for practising Sufism in contemporary Britain. It successfully generates a more comprehensive definition and demonstrates how different types of *tariqas* have found ways to become more effective in British society - best regarded as associational networks rather than structured organisations. Similarly, the women in this study will be shown to have assimilated and problematised inherited ideals in order to broaden their definition of Sufism.

Other terms have been proposed to define the ways Sufi groups function (Geaves, 2014), particularly though engagement with Western culture (Hamid, 2014). Neo-Sufism has been suggested as a description of the way children of migrants reassess their understanding of inherited religion in light of their in-between status, while Universal Sufism suggests an all-encompassing applicability with other traditions such as the Western Sufism of Idris Shah and Inayat Khan (Khan, 1963; Shah, 1968; Geaves *et al.*, 2009). Idris Shah believes no connection to organised religion is needed to adapt to modern conditions, specifically Western audiences (Zebiri, 2012), although he encouraged those who sought a deeper connection to seek out a teacher (Geaves, 2000). Inayat Khan proffered a universalising message which did not necessitate being a Muslim at all. Sufism thus endorsed a perennial philosophy to promote Islam in the West (Sedgwick, 2016), a stance that has been criticised for its disassociation with all the elements of the traditional practice of Sufis, or Muslims. These interpretations however, do not engage with

other sources of religious teaching and spiritual guidance away from a particular group or sect, not to mention contemporary influences such as the internet or virtual spaces, which increase its diversity (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2014; Jackson, 2014). To what point then is it possible to delimit Sufi belief and practice, through Islamic tenets or a particular group alone. These are important questions for the second-generation to consider, inhabiting as they do, the liminal space, and their experience with this particular "British Islam", emphasising non-conformity and self-improvement.

4.3 Sufism as faith

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism, which one could argue is a by-product of modernisation, and its attempt to become the hegemonic discourse of modern Islam and thus is opposed to both the external other of the West and the internal other of tradition. Sufism was relegated as backward-looking while an unenlightened and radicalised Islam sprang up (Weismann, 2011). Yet, such a marginal reclassification negates the vital role Sufism has played and maintains in traversing moderate, apolitical and pacifistic movements alongside more complex reforms (Hill, 2019). Sufism has become interwoven in Islam's history, scholarly and otherwise, adapting to globalisation currents and tutelage of female Sufi leaders and imams. Despite predictions of its demise alongside secularism and the rationalising modern world (Van Bruinessen and Howell, 2007), global Sufi movements and more localised communities still flourish, attracting people from diverse socioeconomic, educational and ethnic backgrounds worldwide. While erroneously identified as a sect of Islam it is considered singularly hard to define and can mean different things to different people, as the famous saying attests, "Sufism today is a name without a reality, whereas it was once a reality without a name" (Ernst, 1992:25). A devotional approach, it is believed to represent the rise of human consciousness which lies at the heart of Islam. At its core is the art of awakening by means of *tasawwuf*, and *mutaṣawwif*, individually and collectively, through a chain of dissemination, cultivating spiritual experiences of the Divine; "A Sufi litany might involve repeatedly asking God for forgiveness (*astaghfiru 'Llāh*), declaring the unity of God (*Lā ilāha illā 'Llāh*), repeating some of the 99 names of Allah mentioned in the Qurʾān, and praying for the Prophet Muḥammad" (Hill, 2019:4). Through *dhikr* and for some, associations with dreams, visions, clairvoyance, intuitive knowledge and miracles, a closeness to Allah is sought.

Fundamentally Sufism extols the importance of the 'journey of the self', the wandering ascetic who traverses the inner locus unbounded by time and space, within the outer form of nature and creation. It acclaims overcoming the lower self - the *nafs* - to attain a better quality of life and experience Divine reality, whereby outer existential challenges are necessary companions to inner

purification and contentment. While Islam is not a technical subscription and enlightenment believed possible for all, its social interaction with Islam is inseparable. Its revival after the First Century of Islam came in response to distortions and misrepresentations of its teachings and the desire to restore the original message of the Prophet Muhammad. The theme of anti-establishment is deeply embedded in its philosophy, bearing facets of ascetic mysticism with an allowance for spiritual militancy, and yet warning of excess esotericism or the rejection of the behavioural boundaries laid out by the Prophet Muhammad (Haeri, 1990). The co-creation of simplicity and extreme renunciation of worldly ties is considered quintessential for those who participate in Sufi meditative practices through initiation by a spiritual guide or master. In fact, "The terms "*faqīr*" (Arabic) and "*dervish*" (from Persian/Turkish) - both meaning "poor" - similarly suggest asceticism, but in many contexts, they designate any initiated disciple/*mutaṣawwif*, regardless of socioeconomic status" (Hill, 2019:3). The concept of self-transformation as a path to God is a relationship based upon one of mutual obligation between spiritual master and student, "The perception that spiritual masters are "God's elect friends" (*awliyā*) and often seen as miracle workers who can dispense God's blessing and mediate conflicts from a position transcending social divisions" (Knysh, 2017:61).

Sufi *ṭariqas* (analogous connected with Christian monastic orders), connect the spiritual transmission of the Prophet through a descendant chain of saintly figures and *ṭariqa* founders to the shaykhs and disciples today and considered identifiable by their manner of reciting *dhikr* from its distinctive melody, rhythm, movement and dress. The shaykh assumes a position of "theological" expertise and jurisprudence and guides followers, in return demanding a commitment and obligation to the process of journeying. While companionship with faithful company or fellow travellers is a fulcrum of Sufi practice, service to the shaykh is mandated, as one participant described; the most lofty expectation is to become like a "corpse in the hands of the washer". Many Sufi communities establish hierarchies of dominance and collective solidarity - termed "redemptive sociality" (Werbner, 2001) - typically adopting a model of leadership based on charismatic authority, "conditional upon a receptive cultural environment and conventional expectations, and supported by bodily practices, narratives of unique individuality and, in the case of Sufi saint, a theory of transcendental connection to a distant God" (Werbner, 2003:282). Such ties are believed to traverse life and death, and such "bonds of spirit" between disciples and their descendants, affecting life-trajectories (Yarosh, 2019). While inner spiritual cultivation is also expected to be combined with family and work obligations, in order to complement the

simultaneity of *zahir* and *batin*[10], there remains a central balancing between the inner ecstatic experiences, a 'drunkenness' in God alongside an outer 'sobriety' of following the *shari'a* (Hill, 2019). While some mystical teachings, talismanic or social practices and forms of cultural production; music, literature and dance, have been contentious under the banner of Islam and dismissed as popular excesses, certain Sufi scholars and shaykhs such as ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) espouse such expression and continue to attract followers and support.

4.4 The Murabitun Community - History and continuity

For this study, the global influence of the Shādhiliyya tariqa, founded by the Moroccan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258 CE) is relevant. Through al-Shādhilī's wanderings he established a disciple community in Egypt with offshoots across North Africa, considered as more "sober" or "orthodox" variants. The Darqāwiyya branch is the most prolific in its spread with Western converts to Islam including American Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller and Scottish Shaykh Abdal Qadir as-Sufi (SAQ), founder of the global Murabitun movement (Hermansen, 2006a; Hill, 2019). The North African *tariqa*, traced from the Shādhilī lineage through Muḥammad al-Jazūlī (d. 1465 CE) is from where SAQ traces his lineage. Popularising the influential concept of the "Muhammedan Way", emulation of the Prophet's ways of life is a central tenet concentrating love and prayers for the Prophet Muhammed as a means to gain the highest spiritual station. Three core books by SAQ provide an in-depth meditation of *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan* - The book of ʿAmal, (as-Sufi, 2008); The book of Tawhid, (as-Sufi, 2006); and The book of Hubb (as-Sufi, 2007). These components of the Shaykh's teachings promote the spiritual experience, knowledge of the unseen and mystical love superseding the contemporary Islamic landscape, which he saw as constrained by reason and judgment and with a focus on "Islamic principals" that fails to truly see the *deen*, "Once you grasp the Tawhid of Allah you are men of knowledge, you know how existence works" (as-Sufi, 2006). A significant part is the supplication of Islam for the "*deen*", as described by as-Sufi (2008:9) meaning "path" (al-Murabit, 1998: 5) or "way" (ad-Darqawi, 1979). This triad of *"amal-tawhid-hubb"* is a foundational aspect behind the narrative and justification of the theological, political and economic positions of the Murabitun. The Murabitun consider the nature of Islam as a complete and perfect system, that does not need reformation. Rather the focus is on revival, socio-political and personal.

[10] The concepts of *zahir* and *batin* were developed and disseminated amongst scholars at the time of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, widely considered a leading scholar and influential figure in amalgamating Sufism into mainstream scholarly Islam (in Moosa, 2005).

The British converts who make up the touchstone for this study experienced the unequivocal historic changes of the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, "Moments of recognition" play strongly during their upbringing and adolescence at a time of visceral change - "we felt like we were going to change the world". Dissatisfaction with social mores and the religious establishment compelled many of the young 'middle-class' to seek alternatives to lifestyles, outlooks and morality, and as a result of the search for a more holistic spiritual experience, many took the "Journey to the East as a mandatory rite of passage" (Whiteman, 2017). They brought back ideas, beliefs and perspectives which became assimilated into esoteric and new religious movements. Hajja Rabea Redpath, a member of the aristocracy and brought up as an atheist, rejected the Church and the doctrine of the Trinity while maintaining a belief in God and spiritual meaning. Speaking of her "coming to the *deen*" is "incomparable" to now; "I was a wild flower of the 1960s, very wild, right in the midst of the in-crowd, but you see… at that point, there was an energy, drugs had started coming out, acid, all these things…[created]…a whole revolutionary energy, amongst which there was a very genuine search of why the hell we were alive, a search for meaning…I think that has been lost nowadays, people don't get that, why are we here, why are we alive...a very genuine search!". However, Rabea was aware that this "wild life" needed containing as peers were beginning to die of drugs and suicide. This emotional plea brought her into the company of Ian Stewart Dallas, a Scottish writer, playwright and actor, who shared the same social circles of London society. She was drawn to a change she observed in Dallas, who had converted to Islam in 1967 and taken the tutelage of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib (b.1871-d.1972), a Qarawiyyin scholar from Fez and himself Shaykh of the Shādhilī' Darqawī ṭarīqa in Morocco. Having taken the name Abdalqadir as-Sufi, by 1968 he was declared Shaykh and *muqaddam* to the Darqawiyya *tariqa*, a transition which legitimised his intellectual, theological and political position.

Rabea tells of travelling to Meknés, Morocco, in 1970 with SAQ and two others, Abdul Aziz, who would become her husband, and Abdal Haqq to visit the *zawiyya* of Sidi Muhammad ibn Al-Habib.[11] During her visit she was enraptured, "They were just light, qualities about them - transmission of love, real miracles, real love; love was awakened in my heart, there was no choice, I wanted to get old like those people, I wanted to be light and love…I knew nothing about Islam in those days, nobody did…there was I, no fixed idea, absolutely no conditioning about what Islam was". Once converted, Rabea was motivated to "want more". While SAQ's intention had been to remain in Morocco to study with his Shaykh, he was required to return to England and entrusted with establishing Islam in Britain. So, in 1972 SAQ called on these early converts to live together,

[11] Shaykh Abdalqadir's The Book of Strangers is considered to have a true telling of this event.

“as one street, as one community”, resulting in a small group of British and American converts numbering around 30 forming a *zawiyya* at 33, Bristol Gardens, a squat in the heart of Little Venice, London. As *murids* of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib, they called themselves the *Habibiyya*. Being devout Muslims, the *fuqarā* practiced a rigorous regimen of *dhikr* and *salāt*. Every Sunday they performed the noon prayer dressed in Moroccan jellabas in Hyde Park in front of curious crowds (Peerbux, 2011).

By 1975 the community had grown to around 100 *Hajjis, Hajjas* and university graduates. Aliya, an Oxford University graduate, who was involved with a Gurdjieff-inspired expressive theatre company with her husband, described her conversion story. She had avoided organised religion due to the restrictive nature of her institutionalised upbringing which had predetermined her purpose in academia and future goals. Experiencing the *wird* in Bristol Gardens and witnessing her husband’s “awakening” became the conduit to her own conversion three months later, aged 23. While there was “something powerful happening around her”, she marks her own story as smaller, less “dramatic” - instead the mysticism of the journey she enjoys re-telling is that of her husband. The Muslims “rang a bell, deep into my being, I had got to a point in my life that I didn't know what was going on, I didn't know what the purpose of life was”. The inextricable link between conversion and community was visceral, “we stepped right into a community - I’ve never know Islam as anything but community - it wasn't this lone thing you did somewhere and then maybe went to a Mosque on Friday, it was full on, these are your brothers and sisters, you’re all in it together, it was a total commitment, that’s the only Islam I've even known, you realise it’s very different to anything else out there…my relatives became the community, because I did, in some way cut off from my family”.

The community left London in 1976 and acquired Wood Dalling Hall, a grade II Elizabethan House in rural Norfolk, with the intention of creating a Sufi village as a centre of Islamic studies and *da’wa*, and the establishment of Islamic businesses and traders where skills such as carpentry, shoe making, tailors and bookbinders to name a few, could be realised. The plans drawn up by Ian Abdal Latif Whiteman for the *Journal of the Darqawi Institute* express, “the conviction that the village will be established in the face of the existing society, which being kafir, is inimical to the survival of true Islam. Islam cannot be reduced to an hour’s ‘religious education’ for the children and the Society of Islam in England is dedicated to creating a complete social nexus in which our Islam can flourish. Thus, the village will be for the whole Muslim community both as a focus and a model on which other similar ventures may be based. The establishment of Islam in England demands a total environmental base from which the noble morality of Islam may be demonstrated both to the English people disenchanted with materialism and the collapse of the church and to Muslims now anxious to recover the full Islam they lost when they left their countries.” (1976). It

was during this time in 1977, that SAQ began to identify as an independent spiritual "master" or shaykh, within the Darqāwī *ṭariqa*, and some time after, the name Murabitun was formally adopted. The intention was that The Murabitun would be the first of its kind pioneering the idea of Sufi Islam as a British social reality, through Muslim education. An early leaflet proclaimed: "For the first time in the history of England…there is an indigenous and unified Muslim community of men and women and children" (SIE, 1975).[12]

It was during this time that Mary met the community whilst studying at the University. Captivated by a "spiritual consciousness" and curiosity of the transcendental, from both her Catholic upbringing and the socio-political and cultural changes that she witnessed unfolding into adulthood. It was not her first engagement with Sufism or collective group dynamics, but her travels in India with Inayat Khan had not furnished her with the spiritual cohesion she sought. Meeting the Sufis in Norfolk offered a more cohesive opportunity; "Those were the people you saw around the city; they'd be wearing dish-dashas and tasbees. I mean, they stood out, you didn't see the women apart from the ones in the Wool Shop. And they were the ones who had money anyway. So, they were quite well dressed, and they seemed to have that…there was something very beautiful about them." On her visit to Darqawi she recalls, "they seemed very different, very separate, but there was something very beautiful [about them]. As a friend recalled, you could not help but be seduced by them. Norfolk and Suffolk were a place where a lot of communes had started in the late 1960s, but these people really stood out. They were beautiful. They were people who seemed to know what they were doing". They spoke to her desire of creating a new way of living, and her belief of an equitable society, "They weren't just hippies, they had a demeanour of aristocracy, they captured the esoteric, but they *were* doing it, they were *really* doing it. Everyone was talking about setting up a new society and these guys were *actually doing it*".

However, there was incongruity between the story presented and its lived realities. While the visual aesthetic summoned a sense of a higher self, elite, beautiful and untouchable, "The Liberty dresses for the women who could afford them, a sort of 'simple' life", there was, "incredible poverty, people boiling and washing nappies over a fire…They combined an upper middle-class life with extreme poverty. So, there was a façade, something SAQ later went on to slate, he called

[12] As Abdalqadir as-Sufi writes in *Journal of the Darqawi Institute* (1977), "The Darqawi Institute is a centre for higher studies based on Qur'anic teaching. The Institute is conducted according to the principals of the Qur'an and the methodology of the Sunna and provides a setting for the complete learning process of Islam to unfold - organic, sane and creative - and vastly superior to the present Pharaonic complexity that passes as knowledge. It is in this setting that the creative work of bringing new life to the sublime teachings of the Book and the Sunna is now taking place." (as-Sufi, 1977).

it ‘country house mysticism’. But he'd helped create that, that kind of aesthetic.” Darqawi was a large country estate, the main house reserved for those closest to the Shaykh, while multiple young families resided in small cottages and barns in the grounds. Amongst SAQ’s teachings was the prism of *nafs,* which was central to the conversion process and surrendering to the *deen*. For Mary this involved casting away all *nafs*, and any difficultly in doing so was “the thorns that will make you into a rose”. Challenges or problems were to be ignored as merely ego, which she denounced as being tantamount to brainwashing, to which “the response was … ‘that’s all right, we need to wash our brains’”. Mary’s conversion was closely followed by her marriage, which involved relinquishing old friends, since keeping their company would pull her away from the *deen*. “At that time books and music were almost *haram*. I was discouraged from finishing my degree”. The project of creating a Muslim village meant faithfully committing to a life-changing regime of religious practice, and physically working on manifesting the building project - many of the Muslim community were effectively unemployed and not in receipt of social security, as mandated by the Shaykh.

In 1979 and the advent of the Iranian Revolution, the Shaykh fervently rejected the term Sufi in favour of a more political, global Islamic stance. By 1980 the intention of creating a Sufi village, equipped with a Hammam, bakery, stables and a Mosque was abandoned[13]. The lived reality of young families, extreme poverty due to lack of employment and the predilection of the Shaykh to rearrange people’s marriages lead to family breakdowns and the expulsion of members. Many left the “project”, and the remaining community established itself in and around the city of Norwich, after acquiring the Ihsan Mosque. Aliya considers the transitions of the fledgling community as comparative with those early converts to Islam, who left their homes and emigrated with the Prophet Muhammad, cementing their bond. For many first-hour converts and subsequently their children, the community became their relatives, not only bonded through kinship but through Islam, “I realise how lucky I am, when something’s wrong, you’re there for them…but you have to invest in it”. It is a subjective investment as belonging demands obligation (Gammeloft, 2018) and in this case the early decrees from the Shaykh in his determination to distinguish this British

[13] Meanwhile the Shaykh turned his attention to establishing community branches in Granada in Spain, with the intention to return its lost Islamic heritage, and in Vermont, USA. By the mid-1980s, the expansion of the community in Granada obtained legal recognition from the Ministry of Justice for its association called “Sociedad para el Retorno al Islam en España” (“Society for the Return of Islam in Spain”) (Dutton 2013). However, according to Lorente (2014) despite the Shaykh’s attempts to increase visibility, the Spanish community were resistant towards integration, due in part to their isolationist approach and practices unsuited to the cultural context, such as, home-schooling/running a community school and arranged marriages, as well as advocacy of the gold/silver dinar project. Moreover, incursions were made into South Africa, with “The intention to work in those areas where the Christian Missionaries are most active - to demonstrate to the indigenous people that Islam is the life transaction for the entire world in this age - and the only way to knowledge Allah and the peace of mankind.” (as-Sufi, 1977).

convert community, also severely impacted some members. As Rabea attests, “we made masses of mistakes … he made masses of mistakes,” yet their fervour enabled a moulding of what a Muslim community might look like, “in those days there wasn't a thing about Islam, we went through lots of ups and downs, visions, ideas of the community, when we were first together, we were raw people who didn’t know each other, it’s like a family, you hate each other and love each other, but you stay together….it grows love or people leave”.

The Ihsan Mosque accommodated the Sufic landscape of weekly *Juma* meetings, reciting the *wird*, practicing collective *dhikr* and upholding the five pillars. It became the main congregation point for the community, as a school, to conduct weddings and spend time together. Indeed, bringing up the next generation of ‘British Muslims’ embodying the ideology of the Murabitun was an active and invested community policy. From the start the Shaykh said; “Educate the children yourselves, don't give them to the state, the system does not have the same outlook for you”. Another educational approach was the active shaping of social ties between community hubs by sending young people (aged 11-17) to live with other families, sometimes abroad. While the ‘internal migration’ (Bubandt, 2011) aimed to promote religious kinship, the movement of adolescents followed what I would describe as a classic ‘ward’ style setup. For some young people this was expected and a chance to flee the nest, be independent and make important friendships. For others it was a difficult and at times traumatic experience to be sent off repeatedly, in some cases to live with others away from family for years at a time.

The 1990s saw a shift in community organisation and diversity. With waning numbers and differing political convictions, the community underwent some ideological challenges - division between Bengali Muslims and the Murabitun had cascaded into the Mosque being closed to non-community worshipers. It was during this time that the community abandoned the name Murabitun, a hiatus which still occurs today (Bocca-Aldaqre, 2021). However, many members continue to refer to the community as such, particularly its socio-political formation and especially by younger generations for this reason. It was during this time, the Shaykh visited a Black Muslim community in Brixton, London, and enthralled by what one participant described as their “fervour and fighting spirit”, invited them to join the Murabitun and move to Norwich. Jamila, a British African-Caribbean convert, came to Norwich in 1992. She had joined the Brixton community after her marriage ended and she and her four children needed support. She observed how the Brixton community had teachings and a process of Islamic education, “it was something I knew nothing about, in the Asian community where I grew up, the men go to Mosque the women stay at home, I thought … Wow! I can learn about Islam”. She felt she had come home “they're Muslim *and* British”. At first just a few families chose to relocate to Norwich - “when we came, the Ihsan Mosque was locked; the men from Brixton started working in the Mosque, we were young

mothers, with young children. It was a bit of shock moving to Norwich". Sariya, another member of the Brixton community, described the social context of being a Black Muslim in the 1980s as a "nightmare", "racial and political divides and activism produced a lot of damage and trauma, so people tried to heal themselves through something else". Many of the congregation were activists, with knowledge and understanding of the politics, which marked for many an exciting pull at the time.

The Shaykh's visit to the community in Brixton garnered mixed reactions, Sariya considers the symbolic absurdity of a white aristocrat coming into a marginalised Black community and offering them another avenue; to join the Murabitun movement and both physically and metaphysically remove themselves to rural Norfolk. While not all the Muslims in Brixton believed the narrative, many found resonance in the anti-capitalist rhetoric and alternative economic ideology and the Shaykh's decree to "Follow the Money" (Clarke, 2014), to understand the crime being committed, particularly in light of the political climate surrounding them. Sariya believes the Shaykh saw in them the future; "His people saw in us our potential - we were fabulous people, we were amazing, we were beautiful. We were Black, we were active, we were intelligent. They wanted that. So they came and did that thing that white people do, they plucked us up and gave us the talk and then we believed it". The addition of the Brixton community to Norwich brought with it a vibrancy, much of the conflicting personal politics of members and the dissolution of the early community and families therein had left a vacuum. Sariya describes these new disciples, "we were *real*…You know, if you co-opt Black people into your struggle, you get everything, because we are soldiers. We are used to hard work. We take nothing for granted". While a fully committed convert to Islam, politically and spiritually, the reality of the social strata within the Murabitun quickly revealed itself; "It's like animal farm, you know, everyone is equal, but some people are more equal than others". The result was, "People elevated themselves to stations that they wouldn't necessarily have had if they hadn't been Muslim. They wanted to follow this "fine" life, because the Shaykh has a *fine* life. But I don't know how they do it. How they pay their bills"**.**

It became clear that the context of thriving in a community established in the image of the followers of Muhammad amplified by Sufi abstinence, renunciation, and poverty for the cultivation of an alternate, mystical and anti-capitalist lifestyle was a struggle for many who did not have the means or advantages to maintain one. A particular area of contention was children's education. While an alternative home-education policy had been adopted for most to provide both Quran teaching and subjects lacking in mainstream schools, such as literature, poetry, the classics, and physical education. It was premised on a private-school model to enhance and specialise young people's minds and *adab*. This approach took different paths depending on the family, capacity and choice. For Sariya this meant that Black people did not send their children to school which

stratified privilege along racial and class lines, that produced layers of opportunity based on the model of white, middle/upper class imperialism, which subjugated the Black Muslim contingent. Part of the creation of the Sufi aesthetic was the way Muslims presented themselves, articulated in forms of dress and comportment. This was a pivotal aspect to assimilation into the Murabitun landscape, a uniform that represented a privileged life, women dressed in beautiful outfits, scarfs worn in turban style, men dressed in smart suits. It created an image of desirability - "people that you wanted to be like". This inculcated a quality of Muslim companion that members aspired to, yet it also contradicted the frugality of the lived reality, so that many struggled to maintain the ideal.

Today the Ihsan Mosque continues to host community rituals and events, managed mainly by the second-generation, which has altered its inward and outward perspectives. It is an open Mosque with congregants from all over the world and new converts regularly attending the *khutbas* given by Shaykh Habib Bewley, also second-generation. With the death of SAQ in 2021, the debate about who takes his place as leader of the movement is yet to be concluded. Perhaps as it has been mooted, it will remain a multi-Shaykh organisation. Having a foundation as a convert community means recent converts often point to the desire of being with people that are like them, who look like them and are spiritually aligned with their understanding of faith. Marking its unique character and continued importance as a place to be a Muslim in Britain.

4.5 The political and economic ideological perspective of the Murabitun

What marks the conversion and community ethos continues to be what marks it as anthropologically distinct. For this reason, I include an analysis of the political and economic ideological motivations of the establishment of the Murabitun to help understand participant subjectivity. While it is not a biography of the Shaykh, it is necessary to compile some understanding of the person, his writings and publications, teachings and proselytising in order to understand the ideology the younger generation have grown up with, absorbed and/or reconfigured. Furthermore, it reflects the sanctioning effect of the organisational order of the community, religious transmission, communal practices, education of the young and expectations of comportment for both women and men.

Much has been "mythologized" (Gebauer, 2019) about SAQ[14] over the years, stemming from his semi-autobiographical *The Book of Strangers* (Dallas, 1988), in which he documents his unconventional quest towards Islam, the role of hashish - a reference to the counter-culture movement he was a part of but proud to leave - and the journey to the annihilation of self, the removal of *nafs*. While some personal and anecdotal reflections make up the literary and anthropological research on the Shaykh, from companions or community members, they are "devoid of context and not anchored in time" (Bocca-Aldaqre, 2021). Yet, the Shaykh's prolific writing[15] sets him apart in the conquest of foreign lands in terms of the deliberate narrative, "to show that it was possible to grasp the meaning of Islam in terms of the European existential tradition" (as-Sufi 1975). While maintaining the central tenet of Sufic mastery, the balance between sobriety and intoxication, he directs followers - "Our way is to be *salik*/*majdhoub* - outwardly sane while inwardly mad-in-Allah" (al-Murabit 1998).

Sufi converts typically organise themselves into groups for particular purposes and the Murabitun is the foremost example of a Sufic Islamic movement in the West. The early Murabitun initially deferred from referring to themselves as a *ṭariqa*, instead using definitions such as "post-modernist platform" (Haron, 2005). This demonstrated a departure from long established Sufi orders' attachment to traditional lineage and as considered within the context of the 1960s counterculture movement, established the movement as both "A Sufi phenomenon targeted *for* the West, but also as an original Sufi experience stemming *from* the West" (Bocca-Aldaqre, 2021:243). While some choose to liken the Murabitun to an Islamist movement (Leccese, 2014), it is nevertheless also considered unparalleled in relation to other Western Sufi orders. Going beyond a simple representation of adapting to an Eastern paradigm, it follows the teachings of its Western founder while claiming direct links to traditional Sufic teachings of the Šaḏilī-Darqāwī *ṭarīqa*, producing an originality rooted in both Islamic and Western traditions, with the Shaykh taking to account both Western economic and political philosophy and a strict cannon of classical and contemporary Sufi hierarchical tradition.

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[14] "A Gustave Doré/Don Quixote-like Scottish aristocrat in appearance, tall, lean and electric, radical intellectual, renowned playwright and BBC TV adaptor and 60s visionary" (Bewley, 2015).

[15] The Way of Muhammad (1975) - the first book written under the name Abdalqadir al-Sufi - described by the author as "a meditation on the five pillars of Islam as viewed by someone who has taken them on and is savouring their meanings". The literary production of Shaykh Abdalqadir started to include translations of Arabic works, such as Meaning of Man - an eighteenth-century mystical manuscript dubbed by Shaykh Abdalqadir "The most important book written by man" in his introduction, or The Darqawi Way, which is a collection of the letters of Shaykh Mawlay al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī, the first Shaykh of the Darqāwiyya.

Its name reveals a crucial ideological component of its identity. *Murābiṭūn* is a reference to the Marabout dynasty of the Almoravid which ruled North Africa and Muslim Spain from the 11th century. It derives from *ribāṭ*, which is a fortress inhabited by Muslims, often Sufi soldiers situated at the frontiers of Muslim land in Christian Europe (De Moraes Farias, 1967, Bocca-Aldaqre, 2021). While espousing the romanticised symbol of reclaiming Muslim Spain (Rogozen-Soltar, 2012; 2019), the Shaykh's move to South Africa attached the narrative of redemption from colonial oppression and recovery to another glorified past (Haron, 2005). Gebauer (2019) posits that Africa itself was seen as a crucial frontier for *da'wa* and the expansion of the Murabitun, in what he describes as "Indigenous Millennialism", the recognition of the continent's important Islamic heritage which must be freed from "Christian imperialist myths". This ideological aspect of being at the frontiers of Christianised Europe is deeply embedded in the Murabitun organisational psyche, it speaks to the Shaykh's personal ideology and political and spiritual philosophy. Furthermore, it makes up the socio-political characteristics that underpin its educational and transmission ethos. While the definition of brotherhood fell out of favour, especially the Neo-communist use of Akhi/Brother (Bubandt, 2011), the ideation of the "Bedouin" and "tribe" or clan became an integral part of this design (in the context of being a European Muslim) which transmitted a hierarchical order along social and communitarian lines. Fundamentally, it came to form the backbone of relationships inherent to both the family unit and religious transmission.

The Murabitun is described as falling outside standard classification of Western Sufi orders, which are described by Hermansen (1997), using a "garden" analogy; "hybrids", who have close ties with Islamic sources in a non-Islamic framework; "perennials", with a belief that truth is in all religions, and; "transplants", a group that remains steadfast amongst themselves without adapting to new environments (28-29). Although as Werbner (1996) elucidates, for some Sufi orders their transmutation of "place" as religiously significant, could also be argued to the contrary. The combination of SAQ retaining his Western intellectual identity (Ian Dallas Publications) and the implementation of perceived non-Sufic objectives such as the economic theory which attributes directly to his personal belief system and teachings, reconfiguring the hybrid model. This fundamental philosophy marks the movement through its propagation of *da'wa* by, "transition, transformation and change" (Haron, 2005), which it aims to achieve through ideological spiritual and socio-political activism. The Murabitun has been characterised alternately as being an anti-globalisation, anti-capitalist movement critiquing the European political-economic system or as a moderate branch of Islam (Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). In particular, conversion espouses a temporal fluidity in what Rogozen-Soltar (2019) aptly describes as slow, piecemeal changes to achieve radical ruptures, which privileges truth and purity over superficiality or simplistic change - envisioning the process as a multi-scalar, tripartite transformation project that propels change from the individual, to the nation-state, to global scales of action - "The

Murabitun conversion project emphasises the need to enact proper cause-and-effect relationships between time, depth, and scale" (2). This spiritual-political philosophy or "tempo-politics" aims to transform society and culture through a return to the ethics and ethos of Muslim society, remaking political and economic values, practices and relationships characterised by the time of the Prophet Muhammed, heralding in a millenarian, utopian future.

However, of particular interest is the inherent fracturing or contradiction contained in the above, the mix-match of ideals, that tip between the individual, national and global, the past, present and future, demanding slow, piecemeal change (purity) alongside drastic and fast measures (rupture), which is a grappling between oppositions. Indeed, this internal tension reflects Sufi philosophy more generally, where the goal of purification and spiritual enlightenment is ultimately challenged by the modern world. Indeed, "lamenting its decline has been part of the definition of Sufism from the beginning, as an illustration of the tension between the ideals of mysticism and the realities of social practice" (Ernst 1992:25). The ideology of the Murabitun incorporates and explicates multiple orientations which link dimensions and qualities of change, such as depth and scale, which is crucial to spiritual awakening. This has become enmeshed into the foundations of a community project, in terms of a belonging-in-place, memory and performance, impacting the identities of those who grew up within it and also marking its exciting and revolutionary doctrine from the outset.

4.5.1 Economics

In a talk entitled the *Colonialisation of the Deen* (2019) given at a conference of women of the Murabitun, and others, Aisha Bewley a first-hour member, set out the ways the *deen*, had been and was still being colonised by the "Big Other" - or rather what she termed digital or surveillance capitalism. Liking the wrongs committed by colonisation, such as imposition of Western values and indoctrination of hierarchical and exploitative systems, the replacement of Sharia laws and secondment of religion from society, and the diminution of women reflecting Victorian English attitudes, she berates the trend towards reparations for the wrongs of the past and their impact on current injustices. Bewley marks instead the event of colonialists now being colonised by their own systems - "It is market logic, in a system fuelled by usury which capitalises the current economic system that another group has replaced the old power nexus" (2019:7). This indoctrination extends from micro targeting, algorithms and subliminal advertising and an education system which has already created "moulded receptors ready for programming" (*ibid*), which social media progresses, rewriting neural pathways away from independent thought. This belief is built around how such powers seek to control autonomy, which becomes interwoven into

everyday life until it is indistinguishable from it, as one participant exclaimed, “It’s an us and them principal”.

A strong tenet and powerful draw for converts has been the Murabitun’s policy on money, “possibly the only religious sect in history whose defining article of faith is a financial theory” (Bubandt, 2011:225). Paper money is considered illegal based upon juristic reasoning in Imām Mālik’s *Muwaṭṭaʾ,* which deems debt and paper money as rooted in forbidden acts and therefore representing *riba* (Yaacob, 2014). Its “economic policy”, or rather policy on trade, has garnered significant reputation inside and outside the Muslim community for its ecumenical aspect (Bocca-Aldaqre, 2021). While conversion in part means the creation of the pure and spiritual through piecemeal actions it coincides with the rupture of global economic systems at large and the rejecting of frameworks imposed by the IMF and the World Bank (Haron, 2005). Indeed, it is not a stretch to define their financial theory as a “defining article of faith”, as SAQ writes, “Alongside declaring the immutable truth of *Tawhid* [...] and establishing *Salat* [...], transactional systems must be set up according to the non-usurious model of bi-metal trading” (al-Murabit 1988: 95). The global financial crisis is taken to be irrefutable proof that the capitalist economy is on the brink of collapse and removing themselves from such a corrupt system and finding independence can be considered a counterpart of the historical and political Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Vieire, 2016).

The concept of a separate currency - the Dinar, was set out in Murabitun literature as the solution to inflation, the corruption of value and to bring stability to obligations and transactions. However, at a certain point, SAQ distanced himself from the Dinar project taken on by Umar Vadillo, as deputed by the Shaykh, through a clash of ideologies. Brubandt (2011) argues that the “fetishism” of money as seen by the Murabitun is almost idolatrous in nature, that the malaise seen in modern secular society amounts to a predominant belief of money over divinity, echoing Marxist criticism, premised on a conviction in the reality of money. Indeed, it is SAQ’s contention that our belief in (a false kind of) money is what prevents us from true unity with Allah. The economic philosophy and consideration toward self-reliance, separate from the state, continues to influence the community and its current members. The Norwich Free Market[16] was founded by Rahima Brandt and Jamal Sealey in 2020 to help recover after the Pandemic. The idea emerged from running a soup kitchen during Ramadan and delivering food to self-isolating households. Based on the Muslim model of Medina, traders were not charged fees or entry with the market acting as a community wide hub hosting small businesses, makers, artists, growers and street food vendors.

[16] For more information: https://www.pointsoflight.gov.uk/norwich-free-market/

4.5.2 Philosophy

In SAQ's *Way of Muhammad* (1975), he declares the dissolution of the whole world picture and value structure which has formed the self be replaced by a "way of being" built on Sufic sciences. He states, "Interposed between you and reality is a functioning conceptualisation of existence that, mingled with your personal, emotional responses to event and personality, make up what you think is both 'you' and 'your' world" (as-Sufi, 1975). Central to the Sufic way of life is keeping the company of the *fuqara*. It is a core practice and organisational design of the project of bringing Islam to the West. As SAQ writes, the *fuqara* must always be in change, "O Allah, keep me in change" … you must always be in a state of renewal; "Keep me always changing because everything is changing and every day Allah is on a new creation". Through a discourse on *futuwwa* the Shaykh delineates how the company of the Muslims is of the highest order and describes how and why the self must be relinquished in order to submit to Allah and become Sufi, "To take the adab of the great ones, you have to sit with them, you have to sit with the people of knowledge. It is by your company that you are purified. *Tasawwuf* is keeping company - then, tasawwuf is listening - then, tasawwuf is acting upon what you hear. There is only one enemy and that is your self. The *nafs* has nothing good in it. The worst of all things to the Sufis is the recognition of their own good qualities over and against that of other people - it is what sets them back and smashes them on the rocks of destiny. You must not look at your good qualities. You must consider them something that in themselves have been spoiled even by your being conscious of them. You do not look at yourself. You do not find fault with others, you find fault with yourself. You must look at yourself and say, "What is wrong with it?" (as-Sufi, 2004).

So, we have the belief that even being conscious of your qualities spoils them, with the only resolution being to rid yourself of the *dunya*, the profane, and be transformed by *tawhid*. Later, the Shaykh identifies the *Der Waldgang*, from Ernst Junger's book of the same name - literally, the "forest goer" - as the non-temporal place which becomes the *tawhid*. This reflects the process of an individual finding his or her identity in relation to this world (the forest); finding his or her relationship to the Divine in a profound and transformational way, which is then taken out into the world to be shared. The Shaykh refers to this as the *asabiyya,* what unites men in the power to act, transform and command, which through a religio-catalyst represents its highest possibility, assuring triumph. Without *asabiyya* the tribe will tend to fragment, with isolated individuals remaining, in which case they cannot pose a threat, except as "criminals", assuring the "bedouin" remains a continued slave, with any impulse to unify considered socially disruptive (Bewley, 2019). The aim therefore is that once you have attained *tawhid*, you must collect with others and bring

tawhid to the wider community. This is defined through the establishment of *zakat*, *emirs* and economic freedom. Thus the call to Islam comes with the call to community, to building a lifestyle, an organisation that imbues this teaching. Bewley stresses that while the Shaykh may have been forceful in his organisational design, it is still a work in progress and the Shaykh's ideology "is simultaneously political and religious, world-renouncing and world-transforming" (Bubandt 2011: 239). This contradicts with other contemporary Sufi authors, who relegate their "world-transforming" beliefs as marginal discourse (Hermansen, 1997). As reflected in the narratives of some first-hour convert women, which explicates how the change the Shaykh aligned with was not only political but anthological.

4.5.3 Politics

Throughout SAQ's writings and teachings, his political theory wandered from Nietzsche to Jünger (Bubandt 2011), to developing a keen attention to Heidegger's critical theory - although renouncing it later on: "It's essential fraudulence lies in its ability to deconstruct everything yet never submit itself and its own evaluation to the same method" (as-Sufi 1996: 84). From apocalyptic to elitist, Dallas (2009) focuses on the political crisis in Britain brought upon by Democracy itself, "Democracy has been the instrument not just of mass exploitation by the financial oligarchs but also the active instrument of providing cannon fodder for its capitalist project". Reflecting an earlier conservative-friendly viewpoint he argues, "In a genetically ordered society the cream rises to the top. In a numerically ordered society the scum rises to the top" (Dallas, 2009). His writings on the political future of the Muslim world - *The Return of the Khalifate* (as-Sufi, 1996), reflects a turn in thought based on what constitutes the foundation of or will to power. While Bocca-Aldaqre (2021) argues this marks a change in SAQ's doctrine and appreciation of Ottoman or rather Hanafi thought, I would suggest this ideology has been transmitted through his teachings of Islam particular to the Murabitun. It forwards a "black-or-white" opposition of two figures, Sultan Abdalhamid II and Mustafa Kemal, who clashed over the method of balance or independence regarding "political, judicial and financial" institutions. The historical debate, which continues today, suggests all Muslims "avoid 'modernism' in its Islamic doctrinal form" (as-Sufi, 1996), in the wake of Islamic institutional corruption and dismemberment. However, there also exists a more aggressive stance by the Murabitun "at war with Capitalism, its instruments, its institutions and its leadership" (as-Sufi 2009). While Bocca-Aldaqre (2021) argues this chimes with radical Islamist movements it does reflect a strong anti-capitalist position adopted by both contemporary Muslims and Western environmental, climate and social justice movements.

However, there is strong political emphasis on reviving tradition rather than following it - present in the Murabitun's adherence to the Maliki school of law, but also from its birth out of the counter-culture movement and its ideological stance towards other religions, particularly Sufi movements, which disassociates it from other Muslims. Whether some believed they were the only authentic inheritors of the Muhammedan tradition, rather than simply another way, is an idea that is extraneous to Sufism, and demonstrates a lack of self-correction. When the Shaykh became the spiritual leader of the Šaḏilī-Darqāwī *ṭarīqa*, it is claimed he obfuscated his own student/master Sufi commitment, meaning there was no one to keep his teachings aligned. Although based on opinion, Whiteman (2017) explains, "It's what happens when teachers set themselves up as guides without the authority, the knowledge and the necessary training. It's not just controversial, it's lethal". While the success of the Murabitun in its *da'wa* is apparent from its estimated number of members in the tens of thousands, there is an element of the Shaykh assuming a "charismatic" religious authority based on privilege and class. The "immense responsibility" of creating an authentic and pure Islam was transferred onto converts and the young people of the community.[17] The expectation was for adherents to be a person of quality and redemption, to carry the banner of Sufic Islam in Britain, in a form of familial "likeness", which became a central ideological tenant of transmission across generations.

4.5.4 Education and Gender

Within Islamic instruction the concepts of *adab* and *baraka* are instilled as foundational teachings in the way to be a "good" Muslim, or more fundamentally, a good human being. These concepts were particularly integrated through the Sufi Community's educational stance on "serving" and played pivotal roles in how convert and born Muslims alike hold themselves and embody their religious and spiritual identity. Education is a central leitmotif in the Sufi Community, life-long learning and a sense of improving oneself is key to Islamic practice and the Community has

[17] "You are the people who must start it and in this continent is where it will begin. It is from your people and from your children, but you must have an adab to them, you must treat them with courtesy. You must treat your children with courtesy, you must treat the young with courtesy just as you must treat the old with courtesy. You must become the people of adab and if you become the people of adab you will be safe. If you become people of adab you will be Sufis. At-Tariqa kulluha-adab. The *tariqa* is nothing but *adab*, that is all it is - *adab*. You must also have some respect for yourself. That respect for yourself is only manifest by the fact that all the people around you are at ease and in harmony with you and pleased that you are there. This is how you must be. You must be a blessing on the earth. You must be a baraka for everybody. You must be ones that when you enter a room it all lights up because of your love of Rasul*, sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, your love of Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*, and because your tongue is supple with the name of Allah and not the matters of *dunya*. Dunya will not fail to happen. All its stratagems and spoils will not fail to crash about your ears, they have always done it and they will continue to do it. When the People of the Cave came out, there they were again faced with the world and all its problems and all its difficulties, but Allah loves the people of *tawhid* and loves the people who love Him and this is the company, the company of the Sufis" (as-Sufi, 2009).

always pursued experimental and holistic forms of education. Aside from Quran classes, and madrassas, young people were often sent to “finishing school” with associates of the community abroad. Programmes in Norfolk for young women were run by women of the community who taught their skill set, ranging from jewellery making, silk screen printing and cooking. These situations also gave young Muslim girls spaces to perform feminine practices and savour the collective embodiment of belonging to the Murabitun.

The Lady Aisha College in Cape Town is a particular example of how gender performativity transpired. In response to a directive from the Shaykh, they devised a curriculum based upon Ibsen, Shakespeare, Princess Karoline Amalie of Hesse-Kassel and female Roman pedagogy. The intention to equip young women with the skills and knowledge necessary for motherhood, marriage, education and work, covered subjects ranging from; “Women in pivotal positions, inspiring women in history, literature, midwifery and *fitra* practices before and after birth, household management (economics) and reclaiming traditional skills for the home and garden”. Leila, a convert and director of the School, believes this empowered women, arguing that their key role of underpinning society was undervalued. She described visiting a non-Muslim school to promote the project; “We were met with such interest; the careers advisor of a private girl’s school had tears in her eyes when she heard what we were doing - reflecting something her own school environment where girls were streamed in a particular academic way - when the girls were told. ‘Maybe you won’t become an international lawyer, maybe you'll have a baby. What is going to prepare you for that?’ There is a whole aspect of womanhood that has been cut off - not to disparage the school system, it’s great but…”. This was further extrapolated in a talk given in 2014 by Hajja Rabea Redpath (d. 2023), also a director of the school, called *Between the Ponytail and the Burka*. Addressing the “modern-day Muslim woman” she decried the hegemony of male-orientated dominant society, where “The only space that women are allowed in the social or political arena in this society is disguised as a man”. Women have ultimately lost out to the “male psyche” - which does not reflect the feminine psyche - through being indoctrinated by Western systems of education.

This she positions against what she calls the “extreme image” of a women in a burka, neither seen nor heard, equating Islam with oppression and the silencing of women’s voices. Evoking the example of the Prophet’s wife Aisha, she enumerates the importance of recognising the handful of historical women who epitomise social influence and feminine quality in the Muslim world as well as the passages in the Quran which clarify women’s equitable position in the family and society. The theological example of women having been created from Adam’s bent rib, she argues, serves ultimately to forge woman’s essence as the nourisher and protector. In *The New Wagnerian* (Dallas, 1990) SAQ writes; “The challenge is not to turn the woman into a man and invite her to

become political, but to have the courage to confront what women see in life and men are blind to. This is the issue. It involves both a sense of compassion and also a sense of reality. Man's will to power is fuelled by both inspiration and fantasy. Without permitting the woman's will to power, fuelled by realism and compassion, man will destroy himself". Rabea argues that it is her biology that differentiates her - "a woman is in constant flow, menstruation, childbirth, whereby the body and 'inner being' are entwined and cyclical, producing innate wisdom and instinct. Without which, along with the protection it provides, she will undergo 'spirit-crushing forces' … 'her light will go out'. Indeed, without "the moving consciousness of woman" a man cannot reach his higher aspiration, which the bourgeois family has short-circuited, so that all she is left with is 'nerve-based feelings'". The solution is ultimately submission to Allah through *dhikr* and "a fresh, intelligent study of women as they appear in the great European literature" (Redpath, 2014:5). This, it is believed, will equip women to be fully positioned within European society as well as their Muslim community.

The Lady Aisha College therefore aims to help women achieve their unique potential, which Rabea and Leila believe will lead to a content woman, "If she is content, she is far more likely to have a happy marriage, and she will not be clinging to and expecting fulfilment from her husband. This is imperative. Instead, along with her own pursuits, she will be walking beside her husband supporting him and encouraging him to go out to do his work". Other educational endeavours established in the community have been made by the Black Muslim women. Salama takes a different approach to the issue of women in Islam. While also acknowledging the role of women in Islamic history, she argues that the integration of more Western and archetypal literation has allowed women to connect to an innate power and wisdom such as that evoked in *Women who run with the Wolves* by Clarrisa Pinkola Estes or the writings of Germain Greer, that challenge the perception of women by men and to encourage women to "know that they are more than just mothers and wives". Widowed with a child, she used the indemnity payout from her husband's death to found a Madrassa in Morocco from scratch. Concerned with the importance that young girls placed on their appearance, she wanted them to see themselves differently, be happier in their own skin. Salama researched how and when women's active role in Islamic culture had stopped, such as traveling alone, and how with the advent of colonisation, Muslim cultures had incorporated its proposed inequities. She considered the girls of the community to have an insular outlook on practices and *tariqas*, and the opening of young minds to the diversity inherent in the Islamic world was also a key motivating factor - "We're all on the same path, just getting there differently, but all wanting to arrive at the door of Allah safely".

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to circumscribe the perspectives on knowledge expressed by the Murabitun through first hand accounts by members of the community and both primary and secondary literature. While the rise of new religious/quasi-religious movements is documented (Vedanta/Zen Buddhism) there is little known of this esoteric and political strand of Sufism originating in Morocco and brought to Britain by a handful of early British converts who established the first British convert Muslim community. The Murabitun is considered Britain's oldest and most variegated convert Muslim community comprising a diverse collection of worshippers, which is partly due to the group of African-Carribean Muslims from London who were invited to take charge of managing the Ihsan Mosque in 1992, but also for its global reach over the past fifty years. The community has established in Mexico (Garvin, 2005), South Africa (Haron, 2005), and Spain (Rogozen-Soltar, 2019), however, there exists no long-term study, especially anthropological, of the Murabitun in Britain, at its original epicentre, Norwich. While it is considered small in number compared to other contemporary phenomena it does proffer a thought-provoking example of a European convert Muslim community with a global reach and a particular theological outlook.

The combination of the spiritual and political which privileges truth and purity over superficiality or simplistic change, has enacted conversion to Islam as "tempo-politics", enacting change over multiple scales of time. This has emerged as an important ideology that stemmed from the Shaykh's personal and Western influenced teachings and directives, differing from other Western Sufi movements. This is an ideology that underpinned the education and upbringing of the second-generation, establishing both ideas of difference - an "us and them" belief, and characteristically presented a gender performativity the young women of the community were expected to embody. This is important as we observe how ideologies and community dynamics are narrated by the younger generation to the degree that particular matrices of ideas around the self produce psychological notions of harm (trauma). What we discover here needs to be part of a wider discussion of British Islam, opening up the complexities and challenges of bridging different cultural centres and inhabiting what it means to be Muslim - how that has been interpreted and who has the authenticity to decide what that should look like.

Chapter 5: Intergenerational narratives on belonging, ideology and British Islam

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Today I am attending a *janaza*. It is an early start and I feel a sense of urgency and focus and hurriedly get the children ready and off to school before making my way to the Ihsan Mosque. It is a crisp and bright morning, and I breath it in as I walk the last part through Chapelfield Park to where the funeral procession will begin. It feels a matter of honour and duty to attend today, a sign of respect and admiration, as well as participation, for a family who have been a huge part of my young adult life in relation to this community. The connections and relationships with the young women and men of this family have been important. They are members of one of the first Black Muslim families who moved from London to Norwich in the early 1990s, who brought with them renewal and a reshaping of the Murabitun as it was then, destabilising the narrative of the "old established familial likeness". Rahima, the matriarch, who we are praying for today, was a beautifully compassionate woman, who always greeted me with kindness and curiosity about my life. It stands out because the connection with this family feels somehow removed from a history which can be a heavy burden to carry. While I am still a bit of an outlier, there is no sense of division, and they smile their welcomes in spite of their heartbreak. I am wearing a blue Moroccan shawl to loosely cover my head, while two friends beside me have chosen not to cover. The immediate family gather behind the hearse, as we set off to walk the 1.5 miles through the city to the cemetery, then the men and finally the women follow. We are singing the Eid *dhikr*, which is also sung at funerals, and continue to do so throughout the journey. This is a large funeral procession, numbering at least 150, and as we walk down the main road, stopping traffic at the roundabout, people stop and watch, and salute, others pop their heads out of upstairs windows, the traffic pauses, some turn off their engines while we pass. I have been to a few *janaza's*, but this one feels different, there is a strong sense of holding a space for the family, their grief palpable, rather than the tension that sometimes comes from being seen so publicly. It feels powerful, hearing our singing echo up the stone walls of the Cathedral as we pass by, the procession so long that the *dikhr* comes in waves. As we enter the cemetery, we slow to allow the coffin to be removed from the hearse by the men who then, taking it in turns, carry it to the Muslim section of the cemetery. As we arrive at the plot we spread out in lines. Men at the front, women behind, facing Mecca. Hajj Abdal Haqq puts on his white dish-dash in preparation to lead the prayer. We shuffle close to each other and do two prayer *rak'ats* standing. We gather closer as her body is so carefully taken out of the coffin and lowered into the ground, whilst we recite *Surat Yasin*. The women bring you into the world, the men take you out, an older woman says next to me as the youngest son is taken aback with emotion, as the women wash the body perhaps the first time he's seen her like this. Her husband and the eldest son stand in the grave and lower her body in, placing it facing right, towards Mecca, then they take handfuls of sand to brace the

wooden struts that hold the sides back. Then taking it in turns, we fill in the grave, first the immediate family, then the older men and then their descendants in order of birth. Women are invited forward to do the same. All are asked forward to participate, to throw in a handful, and make a blessing. As we recite the *wird*, it is an extremely moving moment. It feels as though time has stopped, especially as we make *du'a*, asking Allah to welcome her into *janna*. At the end, people embrace and greet the family, while the children and close family are decorating the grave with flowers and knitted hearts. There are a lot of non-Muslims attending too, her work colleagues, neighbours, and local friends - she was very loved and admired. The family make a special effort to welcome them and thank them individually. In Islam it is said that the spirit of the deceased does not realise it has passed on until the last person leaves the burial site. We remain there for over an hour, no one wants to leave, when we finally do, the immediate family stand by the grave side and bid their farewells.

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5.1 Introduction

Throughout this research journey many conversations have revolved around what the Murabitun community was - is today - and how its distinction has shaped the identities of its congregants. It is a captivating and potent sensation to be a part of the choice of a handful of people who sought a new way of being, the creation of a Sufi community "project" one that espoused spiritual and political change. Many of the first-hour Muslims were "total converts" (Allievi in Hermansen, 2006b: 254), active in promoting their newfound identity and in some cases forcefully by avoiding all things non-Muslim. Their "conversion fervour" instituted a more politicised view of culture and purity, and obliged members to sacrifice and commit to educating the new generation of British born Muslims. Indeed, this highly visible and vocal convert community aimed to develop a framework for a "British Islam", which complicates the popular political discourse of a secular West facing off an influx of non-Western Muslims, an image popularised by Samuel Huntington's "Clash of civilisations" model (Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). Whether you were still a fervent member or had left to pursue an alternative life, whether first, second or third generation, or non-practicing, the existing connections were initially brought together by that choice.

Zainab explains that the Mosque acts as a confluence for the community and those who frequent are responsible for maintaining the connection. As my youngest participant who always attended the congregation, I can understand why she feels this. Indeed, the combination of community and intersubjective relationships with family and friends (Savage *et al.*, 2005) in a "place" can uncover meaning and motive over time through every-day lived experiences (Jackson, 1983) and is crucial

to both our sense of ourselves and acceptance by others - to know and to be known. Those born into community, the Murabitun, acknowledge how it is a “place on the map”, somewhere to be from, a place they can call their belonging to, particularly when travelling to other Muslim communities, as it helps define their British Muslim identity. The practice of *da’wa,* by their parents, has instilled a deep sense of belonging to their community and consequently to their faith. Adding to the crucial theme of ancestors and kin across generations in forging identities in the present, through an intersubjective world of restorable reach and a connection to material place (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:421). I here endeavour to expand the concept to consider the religious community as also being crucial to the production and transmission of culture and belonging, wherein boundaries and identities are delineated (Bugg, 2014), and translated as the “culture of the parents”.

This site, which established a way of being in the world for the second-generation, also institutionalised a particular style of Islam, through the way it was practiced and emulated. Its combination of “tempo-politics” (Rogozen-Soltar, 2019), the dual promise of spiritual and political fields of action, and social segregation from mainstream society, particularly expected of the children, became an embodied orientation that reproduced its likeness and the placement of “things”, such as the domestication of traditional gender roles. This entails the work of membership and an obligation to reinvest in and expand its principals, which, in turn restores and renews that community. A “place” may represent the community, but it is its ideology which is circulated, so that “we” follow the line, consume its texts and forms of communication and inadvertently, or not, delineate its boundaries. To convert and enter the community was to sign up to specific habits and rituals that correlate its “ideal” as working toward and imagining its “character”. While this can mean literally to recruit bodies that situate themselves within that image or embody its ethos - likely to be desired - more crucially it is an orientation of community, so that anybody that entered inhabited its likeness, or indeed its whiteness (Ahmed, 2007).

The “self” is inextricably linked to the dual function of social knowledge systems and social representation, meaning that knowledge construction is motivated by making the unfamiliar familiar. Communities aim to make sense of the world as a whole and enable people to comprehend and enact modes of being unselfconsciously inside daily practices framed as knowledge and beliefs, allowing for historical continuity which in turn maintains its history. The body (Mauss, 1985) is the tacit and pre-reflective subject of our experiences of and engagement with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and can proffer an analytical capacity to deepen our understanding of ontological belonging and performativity. Therefore I use the term “embodied belonging” to encompass this role of place, community and ideology, as a subjective and lived experience, imbued with layers of power, discourse and practice which impact women’s process

of self-formation. While it is important to know where we are from, it can create a "comfort zone" which while it gives comfort, orientation and a sense of home, it also keeps things in their place, or acts as a scaffolding or fortification binding the self to unquestioning membership and obligation. When we loose that belonging or are not admitted, we may notice the unease or discomfort that follows. For participants, that space admitted a particular body, white, male elite, that subtly filled to accommodate that shape, whereby the "'point' that is not seen as it is [is] also 'the point' from which we see" (Ahmed, 2007:158).

By inhabiting the liminal space, both literal and metaphysical, the second-generation traverse multiple identities, responsibilities and beliefs, factors which pull and push at the self and the places of their belonging. While they are part of the same collectivity, they narrate and imagine this exception and experience with community differently depending on their age, class, ethnicity and status. However, as part of the journeying self, whereby they come into being on their own terms, they have all engaged, in some form, in a process of decolonising their lived religion and the British Islam they have inherited. It spans from a belonging to place, memory and history, that brings comfort as well as discomfort to a rejection of orthodox claims of truth, that dominate women's agency and choice. Through the lens of "fresh contact" (Cole, 2004), we can appreciate how each generation responds to contextually shared landscapes differently. Although religious transmission is not absolute, and while the second-generation recognise the positive aspects of community, they contest the punitive and isolationist ideology through which it has been delivered. It is the embodiment or repetition of this ideology, which takes up space, a way of thinking and acting in the world, which they are deconstructing in order to re-imagine community, belonging and religiosity. Adopting an Islam which is more discursive (Asad, 1986), and secularised (Soares and Osella, 2010) they are "electing belonging" that incorporates their interpretations, so that their actions become part of a new boundary making (Bennett, 2012, 2014; McClintock, 1995).

This chapter hears from second-generation women who reflect on relationships with their parents, the community they were raised in and the interrelationship of multiple sites of belonging. Traversing three differing perspectives, including those who are practicing and non-practicing, it explores different, and at times, contrasting experiences that problematise belonging to place, being on the periphery and the role of community in the foundational phase of their journeying self. Then it reveals the generational expectation of exceptionalism or epitomising a "pure" convert and its inherent hypocrisy as young Muslims sought to "fit-in" with wider society. Finally, it looks at this generation's experience with having a Shaykh or teacher, and how the Sufi practice off murid/murshid has not fulfilled its promise. These women's relationship to their embodied belonging is shaped by contemporary debates on religiosity and individualisation as well as the

realisation of how deeply the inherited culture has affected their own self-identity. This Foucault (2000) argues sees as determining the elements that constitute the different solutions that arise as a result, which shape but do not determine the responses they seek in order to distinguish themselves.

5.2 Redefining Community

In conversation with sisters Zahra and Maryam, who are in their early thirties and of African-Caribbean decent, part of the group of Black Muslims who moved to Norwich from Brixton in the mid-1990s - a meeting that took place in Maryam's home, with follow up conversations and observations occurring at multiple occasions, including individual interviews. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the sisters and their families moved in together, a move for financial convenience, but more pointedly to provide a vital system of support for their young families and their capacity to work. It was precipitated by the younger of the sisters, Zahra, who was determined to live "the good life" in a beautiful house and jumped when an opportunity came up to live in a prestigious housing area, and sharing the costs was the only way they could achieve this desired outcome. Zahra laughs while explaining that she characterises the success of the venture, not only to her fortitude and perseverance, but also, and more critically, to her "filling a niche" and using her identity as a Black British Muslim woman to her advantage.

The sisters acquiesce to a seamless British Muslim identity founded on their growing up in a community of Muslims. The practice and establishment of the project of *da'wa* by their parents has instilled a deep sense of belonging, notably to their community, its people and the place but also its consequent relationship with their faith. It has brought a sense of protection, safety in numbers, and a reflection of themselves in the people around them. Growing up in community meant that they could physically "touch" their faith. Their lives revolved around the Mosque, going to Sunday Quran classes and following home education which was imbued with Islam, "organic and holistic", with set classes, homework, and state-aligned holidays, which for them was "a very normal upbringing" and while the sisters recognise an insular aspect to it, they never felt disassociated from wider society. Both were removed from state school aged 8 and 9, effecting the changes their parents wanted for the world and what Burbandt (2009) calls "earthly" Islamic millenarianism and utopianism (113). Zahra worked hard to gain a university degree, pursued a "stable" and practical career that propelled her into being a now well recognised spokesperson for trauma with representation in research, publication and social media (See Chapter 7). Maryam too, further trained as a photographer, runs a successful business and also has an active presence on social media.

For these sisters, being a “British Muslim” was normalised. Maryam exclaims, “It’s a strange thing in this part of the world [Norfolk] if you think about it, but it hasn't felt like it because of all the people I grew up with, everybody around me was doing the same thing, watching my parents pray, seeing people fast, I spent so much time at the Mosque. As I got older I began to see it more as a strange thing, but it never felt like that at all”. There is a seamlessness to how Maryam views herself as a Muslim, in a community of diverse Muslims, with all close friends Muslim, she did not feel discriminated against despite the absence of a physical, visible and discursive landscape that reflected her sense of self against the backdrop of the inherent ‘whiteness’ of Norwich. Despite the ease with which Maryam narrates her British Muslim identity she notes a recent observation, “The other day I was walking in the street, and I saw a Black woman, who was wearing a scarf the way I do it and it was the first time I thought ‘Whoa!’, that’s what I look like! Like how people might look at me, I… she kind of stands out, this is funny! Otherwise, I never thought of standing out”. She reflects on how there is more caution around “saying you’re Muslim to someone”, and that it “carries a lot of baggage”. Today, Muslims have to be more cautious, as the immediate connotation with Islam is a negative one, “People judge you just from that word, before you've had the chance to show them you're not like that, or you’re different, or its not this thing”.

An ontological belonging provokes “a sense of accord with the various physical and social contexts in which our lives are lived out” (Miller, 2002:220). Phenomenologically, belonging supposes the importance of the experience of place (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), as subjective and lived, a qualitatively different relationship which develops over time and enables people to feel they inhabit, feel at home where they are, which is constitutive of individual meaning and identity. We need to feel accepted by others, as part of a group, in order to be fully human, described as a basic universal human need (May, 2011). Belonging to a community enables knowing and being known by others which can transmute into identity, I know who ‘I’ am, the group with whom I identify through having myself reflected back at me when I look around, and when this does not happen, we feel “out of place”. The racialisation of Islam in the UK associates it with a particular ethnicity or minority status in stark contrast to the “whiteness” inherent in constructions of the rural (Neal, 2002). Furthermore, low demographic numbers of BME background in rural locations, means there is an absence of diversity in the popular local imagination. As such, the religious community takes on a particular, and more critical, place in participants “embodied belonging”. It has brought a sense of protection, safety in numbers and a “likeness” which is reflected by the people around them in spite of varied racial backgrounds. While the lack of visual and institutional touchstones available to the parent generation, who when first in Norfolk were considered “strangers” (Peerbux, 2011), differs from young Muslims today, there is an assimilation by

“corporeal schema” (Ahmed, 2007). Being part of the Murabitun, also meant incorporating its ideological and political dis-position towards social separation.

However, the purposeful choice to create a utopian future is not lost on the sisters, the sacrifices their parents made, who previously lived secular, consumer and economically successful lives before conversion, surrendered to a life of the *fuqara*. These choices do not carry the same gravity for these young women, “Growing up, our parents did a lot, for them it was such an intentional thing, to move to Norwich to be part of a community, to be with people. One of the main reasons was for their children to be around other Muslim children, for themselves to learn and to be in company — our education was a huge thing, you could tell, there were always activities set up, summer school, kindergarten, and for parents Quran classes, gatherings, *dhikrs*, they were always together, but it’s different now, they're getting older, in some ways it’s our turn, but our intention, our focus in life is so so different”. Zahra and Maryam decry a loss of community due to the challenges of modern life, remorseful that the community project is not their first priority. While their parents rebuked mainstream jobs for a while, committed to raising their children and keeping with their faith, the second-generation are unable to make such drastic choices, “It’s so different for us, so hard for our children to be together, we barely have time, it’s a big thing, so yea it’s going to affect the community, how it feels”. While Maryam admits her own commitment has dropped off, and with fewer members taking on organisational roles and responsibilities she nevertheless has assumed a formative role in community proceedings, supervising the running of the children’s Madrassa and organising Ramadan activities, “we make it really light, read stories, learn about Ramadan, make the Eid banner and decorations for the party”. This includes organising Eid festivities, managing communal meal responsibilities and ensuring all the catering needs are fulfilled. This is no mean feat, and in fact represents the considerable work that goes into maintaining community.

For these sisters it is a lifeline, “When I’m not spending time in company, I find myself getting more distant from the *deen*. Being with the right company keeps me on that path. I could probably move somewhere where there wasn't community, for a job, or something, but I wouldn't want to”. Zahra describes how from an outsider’s perspective, as non-Muslim or a Muslim from a different place, there is a tendency to look in at their life, and history, and proclaim it as “interesting” or “unique”. This acts as a draw for others, wanting to uncover and understand their background, “when I was thirteen my parents sent me to live in Spain for nine months with another family, I didn’t know them, but all my sisters and friends had done it, so I was thinking, ‘When will it be my turn?!’ So, for me it wasn’t anything strange, but definitely our lives were way more interesting for other people”. Zahra shrewdly admits, she had used her distinctiveness to benefit her life, “I remember going to university and using my upbringing to make myself out to be

way more interesting". The idea of exceptionalism or representing the "good Muslim" is not an uncommon sensation experienced by those brought up in the community project. It combines the ideals of a "fine life" with teaching elite standards and etiquette, so as to embody those qualities and stand apart.

Embodying exceptional behaviour in the Murabitun, reflected both the personal and philosophical dispositions of the Shaykh, and more importantly the Sufic practice of "keeping the company of Muslims", as to be in the company of Muslims keeps you on the right path, the *deen*. In the Quran, Allah commands, "O believers! Be conscious of Allah and keep yourself in the company of the truthful" (9:119), The Prophet Muhammad declares, "A person is on the *deen* of his companion. Therefore, let every one of you carefully consider the company he keeps". It is believed among Sufis that merely sitting in the company of the virtuous is of benefit to those of faith, as the hearts of people are affected by the energy of those they come into contact with or even look upon. Converts to Islam adopt tactical (Woodhead, 2016) ways of immersing themselves into their new cultural and religious life, adapting and "performing" their conformance to a benchmark of norms and practices of a particular community to demonstrate their belonging. The concept of a unique etiquette and performance is an important, and strategic, ideological antecedent of the Murabitun, that imbricated class ideals with the "right path" or "pure" way of being Muslim as a reward for conversion and commitment to community. The "fine life" they aspired to, the emulation of the Muhammedan way, and being in the company of Muslims became part of an elevated way of being. The was often repeated by convert parents so that the second-generation were taught to be mindful of who and what they exposed their hearts to, less it take them from the *deen* or effect their "purity".

The gravity of organising a community and maintaining cohesion is a crucial responsibility for Maryam too, as she has genuine concern for how the community and its members are changing and what that may look like in the future. One of the greatest challenges she insists, is that its young people do not feel they have a place, "We want to help them with that, how can we give them that sense? - particularly young people aged 18-25 who think they'll go off and see what they can do elsewhere, that's concerning, why is it happening?". The maintenance of *da'wa* and education of young people as a means of keeping them on the right path is considered an essential legacy of this community and how to nurture a deep sense of kinship with those who share a similar experience. For some, this is found through family ties, but the foci of strength come from intra-family and community connections. While the sisters ruminate on what makes a successful community and the contemporary challenges it faces, there is a marked difference across generations in the ideology which sustains it and the self-sacrifice expected to maintain it.

5.2.1 On the periphery

While communities thrive on membership and the work of community building - to belong entails being both creator and facilitator, as well as beneficiary, generating accountability and ownership. As Bell (1999) elucidates, one does not simply belong, it is something that has to be achieved on different levels through embodied and performative "doing". This does not come without sacrifice, and surrender, and while community can be fulfilling for some, for others it can be debilitating and repressive, resulting in the sometimes difficult choice to not belong (Block, 2008). Indeed, our belonging is imbued with political, social and cultural intersections; the self adapts in relation to others, family, community, and the commitments we make are all ingrained by functions of power (Foucault, 1982). However, it is possible to "do belonging" (Miller, 2002), without actually feeling one belongs and for some participants this has been a common experience. On one hand those who had a regular connection with the community growing up, predominantly on a social level, felt a greater sense of belonging to community and, in turn their faith. On the other hand, those with a more peripheral or loose connection to the community, and thence their Islamic faith, tended to have a less pronounced sense of belonging or a not knowing where they belonged, going to great lengths in order to fit in.

Aziza is in her early thirties. Her parents converted in the late 1970s whilst university students in Norwich. Part of the counter-culture movement, they were seekers of spirituality and Divine connection, from Taoism to Sufism. They joined the community in its early stages, when it first caravanned into Norfolk taking up residence in Darqawi where attempts were made to create a "Islamic Village". Aziza is one of my younger participants, one of those that came of age in the Millennium, similar to Maryam and Zahra. As the youngest in her family, her experience with the community differed from her siblings. At a young age her parents divorced, and strained family relations and the community's faltering support of her mother after an acrimonious divorce created separation and disengagement with the community. When attending events at the Mosque or the Eid she would often feel separate, or on the outside, "It felt like they projected a 'they haven't quite got it right' attitude, maybe because we were always on edge of the community. The memory of my parents was like, you know, the loony toonies, yea thanks for that! It's not really a very helpful stereotype I know, but that's how it felt to me. It never really felt like we were in it". She describes the scene, in the feeling sense, that although she never felt hostility, there was a distance from the support network. On attending events she would be considered a novelty and made a fuss of, but there was no other deeper sense of knowing. As such Aziza never really felt like she fitted in anywhere, neither the community, nor at school, "So I guess maybe that's where the feeling of working out how to fit in with people came from… It made you feel that you didn't belong". Aziza has a loose connection (Woodhead, 2016) to Islam and an irregular

relationship with the community, by no means a disingenuous connection, and one she quietly ruminates over. She is seeking a way forward from within this legacy to find meaning and her own path.

Aziza did not regularly attend community events, unlike Maryam and Zahra who were enrolled in the madrassa, run by members of the community. She went to a mainstream Church of England school from the age of 4, while also attending some Quran classes and festivities when she was young. For her, an awareness of a Muslim identity came into stark contrast whilst at primary school, where it seemed to be common knowledge, although she is not sure how. She recalls having to speak about fasting Ramadan at the front of the class, “I don't really remember how that was communicated but I remember that the teachers made quite a bit of a statement about it”. She recounts sitting in assembly doing the Lord’s Prayer and instead of pressing her palms together in prayer she unconsciously raised her hands in *du’a* to Allah. As she grew older, students and teachers would feel emboldened to ask probing questions, despite her reticence to represent her faith. These experiences simultaneously affected her sense of separation, from her peer group, alongside a perception that she was “more special” than those around her. As such she felt like a chameleon learning to blend into whichever social group she was in, made to stand out, to be different, and to question her identity at a young age. Having a Muslim name became the example around which the explanation of her identity pivoted and for each social scenario, she would adapt her language, or “judge her audience”, accordingly in order to fit in. She explains, “If I had an audio of myself describing my name, for example, over the years, like how that answer changed, it would be quite interesting. It definitely changed as I got older, because every person I meet always asks where's your name from?”

Being questioned from a young age about their identity elicited a response which meant seeking both meaning, and reason, for possessing such unusual names. A predominantly Christian and white part of England, where diversity was minimal, having to clarify your name often included questions around race, being a foreigner, namely Arab, or a questioning of parental lineage, effectively positioning young people’s experience of their faith around assumptions and judgements about its inheritance. It made people stop or move around them in a different way, impacting development and progression or their ability to “extend their reach” because “you could be a Muslim” and “you could be a terrorist” (Ahmed, 2007). It created a racial, religious and gender disparity alongside non-Muslim peers, who demanded explanations and thereby inclusion or exclusion. Growing up in Norfolk during the Millennium as a Muslim meant you would always be an outsider. It is an uncomfortable experience to be singled out in spaces we occupy and can lead to anticipating fear or defensiveness as we await the response that puts us on the back step. Depending on the audience the second-generation would delimit their justifications, improvising

their response - explanations which fell between their parent's "hippy background" and religious choices. If they did not look "Muslim" or did not exhibit their Muslimness, in certain circles it would add to their credibility yet in others it was to be avoided. To survive and thrive growing up, participants had to negotiate common social and group dynamics, learning a strategy of defence or exhibition of a presumed Islamic identity based solely on their name.

Those on the periphery had a trepidatious start in their experience of being British Muslims, singled out by teachers and students to explicate their identity, and an expectation to be a gatekeeper for their faith, from both the non-Islamic and the community aspects of their life. It was an experience that created a sense of difference from the wider peer group, either through a lack of access to similar cultural references as their peers, or being made to stand out and question their identity at a young age. This questioning and negotiation of belonging epitomises the concept of a liminal place, neither in nor out, not excluded exactly, nor completely accepted. The feeling of exclusion or failure to become habitual has led to questions of self and how one is known. This liminal or "in-between" generation experience identity defined both by their active re-construction and re-evaluation of the relationship between the culture of their parents and inherited religion and their relationship with British culture and identity, which mirrors an ideology of whiteness (Haw, 2010:358). While their parents made the choice to belong to the Murabitun, their children did not elect nor have the capacity to make that choice. One participant reflected on the changing attitudes to Islam amongst the different generations as follows, "for our parents they chose it, whereas we were born into it so it's a very different experience". The role of choice is important as it highlights how each generation has the power to choose. While the context is the same, the social environments differ fundamentally across generations (Cole, 2004), both in terms of the socio-political landscape that Muslims inhabit in the UK, impacting the choice to be a Muslims or not, and the actions undertaken to belong, which are fundamental to identity (Bennett, 2014).

5.3 Exceptionalism and the challenge to community

In Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* (2005) the definition of a Good Muslim is used to underscore differences between modern and pre-modern, a dividing line between generational, racial and cultural differences in order to create two intrinsically opposed and distinct sides. Shadowing the "clash of civilisations" narrative and the distinction between "Western" and "Islamic" civilisation, Mamdani (2005) explians that often "the West must remain a bystander while Muslims fight their internal war, pitting good against bad Muslims" (23). Although the international relations framework is a backdrop to this analysis, it highlights the now familiar discourse, that

Muslims are viewed as contra to Western civilisation. This is based on the cultural and ethnic dichotomy of “good” and “bad” codes of behaviours, which in essence foments “good” as moderate, progressive, liberal, and white, and “bad” as traditional, irrational, violent, and BAME. While the inclusion/exclusion concept in social analysis of national belonging is less prevalent in everyday popular conceptions, people recognise nationality or belonging as being greater for some than others. Hage (1998) links this supposition to attempts to optimise “whiteness” by claiming its naturalisation to achieve aristocratic status, so that belonging to the nation is considered natural and unquestioned (Riley, 2009). It is the persistence of a civilising force which continues through economic success, academic achievement, truth, knowledge, merit and trustworthiness, which Thompson (2003) extends with goodness, fairness, intelligence, rationality and sensitivity. However, it is not Western analysts alone who essentialise Islam and Muslims - Muslims themselves also engage in an ahistorical essentialism.

Bringing up the next generation of Muslims was a central mandate of establishing a British Islam, reflecting the policy of education adopted by many Sufi parents from the outset, including running their own pre-schools, madrassas and colleges. It was an active choice of embarking on the life-project of combining spiritual aspiration with political change towards creating a utopian future. Murabitun “tempopolitics” aims to renew Islamic values of the past to make a better political and spiritual future — to create a group of “pure” converts equipped to lead the charge (Rogozen-Soltar, 2019). For those who experienced the internal model of education, such as home-schooling rather than mainstream education, it was done in a way that did not make them *feel* different from wider society, while those who did attend mainstream education also took part in morning Quran classes and alternative models of learning. This life choice succeeded in creating a generation of young Muslims who sanctioned the changes their parents wanted for the world, in line with the ideology of the Shaykh and the culture of the parents. However, participants relate how growing up they were made to feel exceptional and separate, which on one hand enshrined a sense of untouchability, and on the other bred a false phenomenon that fell short of true authenticity, or perceived reality, with doubt about religious truth claims (Liberatore, 2013).

Saida and Aliya are another set of sisters, in their early to mid 40s and white, whose parents joined the community at its earlier inception in London and followed the Shaykh to Norwich when the Darqawi project disbanded in 1979/80. We are sitting on the floor of their large living room in an old rectory which they have rented for their two plus families. We lean against the sofas, much to Saida’s husband’s despair, who derides our choice of seating, but the sisters smile and announce it is more comfortable to sit on the floor and enjoy our tea and dates, which they have laid out beautifully on the tablecloth, even if there is plenty of seating. The sisters decided to move in together during the Covid-19 Pandemic, when their natural predisposition to regularly be in

each other's lives became an issue, and to set up a business together. They come as a double act and have supported each other consistently through their eventful lives, they are bountiful and joyous in their expressions and deliverance of their stories, which they revel in telling. The success story of their fledgling business is to bear witness to a phenomenon of their own independent and single-handed making. For Saida it is about realising what works best for her, being brought up in a community, and through serious illness, living in a bigger family situation gives her a sense of purpose; she is part of a team, and she excels in it. It has been simultaneously healing and challenging, which she attributes to a lack of boundaries adopted through her history, "I feel like I do better living this way. It's just recognising who I am, you know? But also I have to recognise that I'm somebody that needs boundaries… I need to learn boundaries and learn to centre [myself]". Living and working together is not just a move of convenience, it is a way to be together and support each other as family, fitting in with their sense of the world.

The role of "community" in Saida's life is clearly established, it creates home, kinship and safety as well as obligation, purpose and commonality. Saida describes the need for boundaries and a fear of losing herself in the midst of communal living, while recognising the benefits of embodied belonging - the nurturing of her mental health. This acknowledgement is part of Saida's broader self-awareness, a developing of the self that seeks to learn from experiences and "to know oneself". "I used to get a bit worried, am I just being a little follower or a sheep?…am I making my own life choices enough?...because it was quite strong, the way that we were brought up. If you're not going to do this or that, you're going to go to the fire (Hell). It was quite a life or death. The things that were put on us were quite heavy. It felt like fear induced sometimes. And that's not something that I'm comfortable with, choosing something out of fear or doing it just because my parents did. When I think about what makes me comfortable and I think I'm a very intuitive person, I do things on what feels right. And I've made choices because that feels right for me. I don't make choices intellectually. I kind of make choices based on how something feels in my body, the *right* thing to do." Saida and Aliya do not reject their parents' Islam, it is who they are and it has taught them the importance of faith. Yet, in that transmission the expectation to behave and inhabit a pure and pious Muslim became a burden. The idea that just being "a Muslim was a beautiful gift", negated the "pressure on ourselves to be this ideal person because you wanted to represent your religion. Well, you didn't want to be a bad example of it, especially because we were converts. So, we felt like we were more watched."

Saida explains how the emphasis was to not become "like the *kafirun*", to be separate from mainstream society's behaviours and practices, as they were perceived as an unwelcome innovation to mind, body and spirit. The idea of exceptionalism or being the "good Muslim" who represented her community was inducted from childhood, bringing about a sense of separation

from British society, in a sense, untouchable. When attending middle school, they did not have to join Assembly or R.E. classes due to its largely Christianised curriculum. While Saida turned this to her advantage, a child with Dyslexia and learning difficulties, it made her feel invincible and gave her “an edge”. However, life events in marriage, relationships and health, chipped away at this sense and the less protected she began to feel. Realising “it was quite arrogant, that really it wasn’t a sureness or anything with real depth, it was weird, that false, special thing that we felt”. Consequently, her self-reflexive analysis articulates how this exceptionalism created a conflict of influence and ideology on developing minds, pressurising them to represent a faith and lifestyle which they had not yet fully digested. As a child, Saida admits, she wanted to die before she got her period as she believed that would assure her ascent to *jannah*, otherwise misbehaviour would Divinely punished once her menses began. She recognises how “unhealthy” these beliefs were, and exclaims, “any naughtiness, that of course I really wanted to do, and did do, I felt so terrible about it, I couldn't live with it...not able to explore avenues, feelings or stuff, where, had I…perhaps in a protective way I might've been alright. I think if we had had an environment where our parents said, okay, there's going to be times where these kids are going to want to do [things] and said let's just talk about this, because it is part of the whole person isn't it? There was just so much shame, so much judgment put on it which led to all sorts of difficulties”. Being a Muslim, “It doesn't protect you from any of these things. You have to have… you know… a good normal, balanced life and your trauma needs to be addressed.”

Creating exceptionalism as a standard, with the “them and us” belief system put these women on a symbolic pedestal, which they invariably fell from as they reached adulthood. According to Travisano (1970) conversion comes with a form of “alternation”, within which the past is accommodated, integrated and negotiated in terms of shaping identity. Developed further by Wohlar-Sahr (1999) in the form of “syncretism” versus “combativeness” in terms of converts’ style of living in their natal society. This concept of combativeness entrenched the distinction between Islamic and *kafir* elements in Western society (Hermansen, 2006b), adopted by the fervour of the parental convert generation and compounded by the activist and spiritual seeking movement of the Murabitun. It created a focus for the “project” of British Islam and a generation of children who epitomised an elite of exceptional and differentiated people. For many. this belief created boundaries they were not prepared to challenge - with actions taken to not-belong being uncomfortable, sometimes producing a sense of internal conflict as moral failure linked to self-value (Kloos and Beekers, 2018). For some the embodiment of the ideal perpetuated a type of trauma of the self, whereby they questioned their positionality between distinct and bounded groups of belonging. The use of the term ‘trauma’ surfaces throughout the collected narratives, and a wish to have had the opportunity to explore feelings of complexity, doubt and conflict. The sense of sin or fear of immoral behaviour meant they were unable to explore natural feelings of

confusion, or questioning and processing experiences typical of a young person in their society. The pursuit and performance of ethical perfection does not reflect these verbatim experiences of lived religion (Soares and Osella, 2010). Indeed, most Muslims do not, at least not primarily or continually, engage in the cultivation of a "pious self", or as Ammerman (2014) puts it, they do not "walk around in a religious bubble" (194). Experiences that interweave a range of desires and interests, conflict and confusion, are part and parcel of living with Islam in Britain, where pious practice is an aspect, rather than the sole determinant. Deeb (2015) goes further, suggesting such interactions can in fact affect and invigorate the pursuit of religious ideals, producing a dynamic and creative response to self-formation, and one that questions the *status quo*.

5.4 Without a murshid/Shaykh

The transmission and expectation to epitomise being a "Good Muslim" was at times "severe and in black and white", which affected participants' relationship with their faith, the place of their belonging and their own individual journey of self-formation. A dynamic impulse for this generation is to "do different" from their parents, by crucially problematising the Sufi master/disciple dynamic, which captivated 'first hour' converts. Religious learning and knowledge is a fundamental feature of Islamic mysticism, Sufism contends that *zahir* is only one stage, and *batin* must be acquired under the guidance of a spiritual master by following their training. In classical Sufi philosophy the intimate bond between *murshid* and *murid* is strongly evoked, for fear of becoming lost or following the wrong path, that of the *shaytan*. Under these conditions, masters are doctors for the soul , where the *murid* must submit totally to the *murshid*, follow his doctrine and have faith in his judgement, however disconcerting it may be, and often idealised as "holy foolishness" (Zebiri, 2012). It is not a simple servitude, the master-disciple relationship must be understood as the submission of the *nafs* to pure interiority which only the master can reveal, whereby "The servant must be in the hands of his sheikh as a corpse in the hands of the body-washer." So that in a cycle of death and rebirth, through tasks that test his/her will and sincerity, maturation is achieved and the disciple is reborn. According to Werbner (1996), successfully establishing a *tariqa* in non-Muslim lands speaks to the "charismatic authenticity" (310) of the Shaykh. However, these circumstances can also lead to self-proclaimed, unchecked, masters of charisma who claim to "have seen the future" (Szakolczai, 2000: 218), but who "in reality establish their own position by perpetuating liminality and by emptying the liminal moment of real creativity, turning it into a scene of mimetic rivalry" (Thomassen, 2009:21). Indeed, as Weber (1947) observed, this charismatic authority does not sit comfortably alongside modern processes of rationalisation and bureaucratisation, and the rise of unmediated individualism (Heelas, 1996) has

meant that such authority, even within New Age circles, has been rejected and replaced with investment of the self (Zebiri, 2012).

For Zahra and Maryam, the Shaykh of the Murabitun was an imposing character, elusive yet confronting. It is clear to participants that their parents' involvement with SAQ was historically contextual and the result of a surrendering to community and higher spiritual training by a Sufi Master. Zahra feels that he made the parents "act" a certain way until the consequences of such became apparent over time. Both sisters worked on the film *Blessed are the Strangers*[18] and through its research and preparation were shocked at what they described as the behaviour and delusion of this group of convert pioneers. For them the impact of culture, race, and class was an overriding factor, "the first people in the Murabitun were very different. They often came from money and class, they were educated, but when reading about them they seemed so lost, in another way they were so desperately seeking something that made their behaviour different, and that made some of their decision-making different". For those of African-Caribbean decent, parent converts came from a background of Black Power, Malcom X and Martin Luther King, uniting against white supremacy, and thus marking their conversion as empowerment rather than a typified surrender. This Zahra believes fundamentally impacted how they brought up their children in contrast to those from more affluent, white and privileged backgrounds. In their estimation, a Shaykh's proximity is central to building a relationship with members, and important because of the interconnection and symbiotic nature of the relationship. While their parents followed SAQ and his doctrines, particularly on childrearing, "he [SAQ] was unavailable to the majority of the community, the women, the children, apart from a few elite members of his inner circle".

As a result, the second-generation have a very different relationship with the idea of a Shaykh, which instead fills them with trepidation and resistance, in fact they would not seek one out, without affiliation or closeness. Zahra prefers relating to female companions, family and friends who understand their upbringing and who live by the same values, as a determining factor for support and guidance. Such support she believes should epitomise ease, "rather than feeling any type of judgment, or that it is haram (said in a hushed voice), without the over-the-top Islam on top of a decision that you're trying to make… It just gets so on a different level, it ends up getting into this whole [Islamic] thing, and it can be quite intimidating...I'm just not there". The resonance of the "corpse in the hand of the washer" and having a Shaykh in the guise of a spiritual teacher is

[18] Blessed are the Strangers - https://watch.alchemiya.com/videos/blessed-are-the-strangers (2016). The film was made by a racially diverse group of second-generation Muslims, which told the story of a handful of first-hour converts, who were predominantly white and male (one woman convert was interviewed). It references the utopian vision, the counterculture and political standpoint, but was also critiqued for "white-washing" the lived reality of its history.

not a choice for this cohort. Many participants do not intentionally seek out a Shaykh, a 'guru', or a distant ideologue, rather they enjoy participating in events with different teachers and turning to each other, particularly women in whom they can trust. Some participants relate how they feel self-assured enough in their faith to not need a teacher, indeed an embodied belonging can serve some with a sense of safe boundaries and protection. While for others, it is that burden of history and memory that keeps them away from instances of community. The idea of a Shaykh is intimidating, as questions, failings or misgivings come with judgement based on morality which justifies their self-value. Fundamentally, these women wish not to defend complex feelings or decisions in order to present as a "good Muslim" nor accommodate the communities' ideology. Rather they wish to explore contradictory feelings in a safe space, with people they trust.

For Saida, faith has remained constant throughout her life, "to have always prayed, always felt connected to Allah, even though I wasn't necessarily behaving in a way that was "proper", or "naughty" as I would say it, even when I felt guilty about those things, I couldn't live with myself if I didn't pray". Despite these challenges, or sense of moral failure, Saida has been reassured by her unremitting faith. By her own admission she never "rebelled" because she never stopped praying, it has been a grounding ritual practice. Rather, what she admits is the need to have explored her own needs and desires. While being Muslim feels authentic, she insists, "I don't want to feel that expectations are being put on me, to be somebody *for* a community". She insists, "You're not your mum, you're how you do it…when I see my mum pray, she seems really small, so humble, tiny … I'm sort of worried sometimes, do I look like that? How is my prayer, what's authentic about how I pray. I've never stopped praying so I feel like I haven't really found my own way". The result being she sought out other spiritual practices, such as shiatsu and Qui Gong, which she practices daily alongside the prayer. This imbrication of practice has been the catalyst for healing, from what she calls a "fundamental rage", built up from years of not having agency to make her own choices. In a palpable, overwhelming and electrifying confession, she explains how "for years and years and years of people saying, 'the Shaykh thinks you're a bad person' and you're like, how dare you! how dare you shame a young person, what's wrong with me? Who says things like that? I actually feel incredible rage". She believes the Shaykh's opinions, actions and moral policing set people against each other, for no other reason than to divide, create fear and establish hierarchy.

Saida describes this as a trauma, that a *murshid* in a position of power foretold her worth and value based on their interpretation of *da'wa* has caused harm, and loss of agency. She explains, "handing over too much power to what the Shaykh said, handing over my own body, my own opinion of myself to somebody, allowing what the Shaykh thinks of me to alter my opinion of myself, has made me feel worthless. That I gave my power to that, had to rein it in, when it's not

what I think. Really! Who is he to say anything about me?" While Aliya believes Saida's anger is a human response to inequality, that it reflected the behaviour of elite families epitomising perfection, Saida perceives her preclusion could be dangerous - considers herself someone who has a propensity to follow without question, a "total guru candidate" drawn to charismatic people, to whom she puts on a pedestal and relinquishes power to. When this image shatters there is a grief that "magic can't happen" and that their "special gift" won't transfer to you. As such, the master/disciple relationship does not make her "feel safe. I don't feel like I'm being authentic. I think they might take my power…I have to watch who I am with them". As her relationship to her faith remains strong, she does not equate this transgression with Islam. However, having an unchecked, unregulated power over others can, she believes, be extremely destructive, a narcissistic quality, which should not be cultivated. It detracts from the capacity to have a good relationship with faith and her own life journey. Furthermore, it is a power which ought to be held accountable.

The concept of "tactical" Islam involves the administration and the retraction of power, played out along lines of class, race and gender. While religion can be treated as a set of patterned practices and relations, there are those which serve to perpetuate various forms of inequality, particularly when reminiscent of imperialist and colonial patterns of behaviour and imagery. The power of the Shaykh derives from the organisation he leads and has a stake in its power, in a way that a disciple rarely does. The predominantly paternalistic transmission model delimits the second-generations subjective experiences, determined relational patterns and the "story" they inherit. This has multiple, multi-scale implications for Muslim communities run by charismatic leaders, in terms of transmission and accountability. While certain aspects of community policy and behaviour have been adopted cross-generationally, the original hierarchical structure of the Murabitun and *murshid*/*murid* relationship is not a relevant practice for this generation. Rather, what we see is a wish to destabilise history, to trouble the power model and create something of our own. This materialises through a spiritual, or religious boundary, that seeks to "know oneself" by accepting all faults and misgivings, so as to more fully represent their own journey of faith. Driven by this desire to be more authentic they are taking elements from their faith which best suit their moral and cultural values (Motak, 2014; Turner, 2011). While retaining a sense of belief (Davie, 1994), they are shifting their purview from orthodox and restricted, towards a more "liberal" and secular proclivity (Davie, 2015), what DeHanas (2013), describes as "elastic orthodoxy". However, the extent to which they are simply reconfiguring tradition or eliciting their own spiritual direction, remains to be seen.

Aziza's connection to the community came predominantly through her father. After her parents' divorce the community's influence also retreated, "I just think that was the end of youth really, the

end of any kind of idealism of what the fairy tales or storytelling from religion gave … all that world ended, and it wasn't me, it was as if it was attached to my father". Despite the top-down effect of transmission and community initiation, she is grateful for the intrinsic value and understanding of belief. "Having faith means trust in something bigger, that is good, and the balance between life and death". Today she associates this more with an understanding of the cycles of nature and the earth, yet the influence of Allah, the prayer and predestination is something she carries with her daily. It frames "something good" coming out of a difficult emotional situation and has given her a sense of structure, a guide, "I still say b*ismillah* when I do most things, I still say *Audhu Billahi Minashaitanir Rajeem*[19] when I've had a bad dream or bad thought, and I like that, it helps me deal with *shaytan* or the feeling of negativity…I still have an affinity with the idea of praying for others, but I don't do a specific practice like the prayer. I think it would be in moments of stillness, to allow myself to think and pray, or if I'm on a walk on my own, I will put some prayers out there or some intentions, but I wouldn't sit at the same point of day and do the prayer. Although Aziza shies away from religious requirements, her spiritual instinct seeks out similarities and patterns, across religions and philosophies, as a means to guide her life and fortify her knowledge. In this way she precludes any oppressive sense that determines her value as a "proper Muslim", or to practice Islam or behave in a way which feels narrow — a policy which she associates with the Murabitun rather than Islam itself. It is a "journey" to know herself, one that evolves and changes over time. Despite Aziza's irregular interaction with the community growing up, she keeps in contact with friends, sometimes working together on collaborative projects and networking through her work. She ruminates on enjoying the seamless connection with those who have a deeper, more spiritual connection to the Divine in all its forms, and that perhaps if she spent more time with them, it would develop a different part of her, open her up to a more regular spiritual practice.

In the modality of Sufi transmission by the parents of this community, was the deliberate use of imagination, fables and storytelling to illustrate theological philosophy and Quranic history, rather than by rote or strict doctrine. This choice - romanticised Islam - I believe has contributed to the way the second-generation seek meaning through their spiritual expression, as well as their sense of self and their capacity for change. For these women, despite aspects of uncompromising discipline, they have embodied a way of believing which encapsulates a more inclusive and more nurturing connection with Allah. While some do not follow the formative Islamic practice of five daily prayers, and fasting Ramadan, they continue to implement practices or phrases they were taught as a child into daily life. There is a curiosity for connections, patterns and symbiotic

[19] I seek refuge in Allah from *Shaytan* the outcast (the cursed one).

relationships between nature and the Divine, “as a means of guiding oneself through life or teaching a higher sense of self” (Aziza). Davie (2015) coins the phrase ‘believing without belonging’, whereby many simultaneously explore spirituality rather than organised religion. Through the participants’ upbringing they were endowed with an abiding sense of faith in a Divine energy as their interpretation of Allah - whether through ideas of predestination, being protected by the Angels or repeating lines from the Quran to hearten - has fortified an imagination which captures values and sees the good in the world. This “fore-sight” becomes the building blocks of self-formation, the capacity to imagine a way of being in the world that is supported and safe.

Traditional *tariqa* organisations are changing and adapting in line with modernisation with more individualised articulations of Sufi practice and identity (Voll, 2007; Van Bruinessen and Howell, 2007; Hermansen, 2009). While “post-tariqa Sufism” has not been theoretically interrogated, studies show distinctive ways, particularly amongst younger generations, they are evolving their *tariqas* more in harmony with contemporary British society (Voll, 2007). Other authors believe that this further reflects the decline of institutionalised religion rather than of religious values (Luckmann, 1967; Beck, 2010), whereby religion becomes more privatised (invisible) and individualised, transforming belief, the search for meaning and the practice of rituals. Part of the process of individualisation, away from institutionalised religion, is the ability to exercise choice and experimentation, consequently the very same choice the first-hour converts made in the 1970s and 1980s in *their* search for enlightenment. Inhabiting the liminal space provides this cohort with a plurality of identities available to them and spaces in which to develop and question their own personal and moral values, that reinvigorates and reconditions their inherited faith in new and creative ways. The constant negotiations and contestation involved in determining what counts as “real Islam” reveals how tradition and ancestry, or “genealogical continuity”, are implicated in new authorising discourses in secular and liberal accounts of the self, revealing a more complex relationship with tradition (Fadil, 2015). The reframing of “moral failure” and perceptions of sin, failure, negligence, faith or belief (Kloos and Beekers, 2018) is integral to their ethical self-formation and demonstrates their attempts to know themselves better, to develop a creative agency through resistance to, rather than in spite of, experiences of harm and trauma.

5.5 Conclusion

Growing up in Britain alongside their Muslim culture, second-generation converts, unlike their parents, did not create a conscious distinction between themselves and others. Yet, the concept of difference, alienation, both from within the community and the wider British society, created a schism of the self and a destabilised sense of belonging. Communities have to be constructed,

nurtured and maintained through physical and emotional labour, without which they would cease to exist. The Murabitun community played a particular role in the construction of participants self-formation due to the style of Islam it espoused and the project of creating a generation of British Muslims. While home education for example is still considered an ideological and practical choice by converts in the community, the majority of the second-generation have not opted to educate their children in this way. A commitment to an alternative education feels impossible to achieve in today's Britain, which demands balancing the pressures of modern life, comfortable living standards and working to build successful businesses. While they simultaneously resist history they reminisce the joys of community life, perhaps a site in which the 'desire for community' is lived, rather than one which fulfils or resolves that desire. Indeed, the 'self' goes beyond the interiority of the self, it yearns to connect, to live 'on the skin', in contact with others (Carrille-Rowe, 2005).

However, hierarchical expectations and judgements on how a "good Muslim" ought to be caused a rupture of the self, impacting participants relationship both to their community and their faith. The insistence to "keep the company of Muslims" was not always available to all participants, which instigated a sense of failure and isolation. The idea they were in some way superior and separate to wider society created a false sense of safety and privilege. This generation of British Muslims are deconstructing these inherited ideas, decolonising an ideology of whiteness that became interwoven with ideas of community and behaviours that sought to divide and control based on fear. Janmohamed (2016) argues that implicit transmission across generations is not commonplace, instead young Muslims "are not requesting religious segregation, rather they seek the opposite; to be included in society. They wish to uphold their cultural heritage, but this is not how they wish to be defined in their entirety" (*ibid*: 82). The value of belief is concurrent with how participants wish to move through the world, while also choosing more inclusive, nurturing and benevolent practices in which to connect to the Divine, adapting inherited values to suit their needs (Borker, 2018). These may be seen as coping mechanisms and a way to enchant both private and public aspects of everyday life (Woodhead, 2016), but in doing so, this liminal generation, seek to differ from the culture of the parents, to reclaim agency and prioritise their own creative journeys of self discovery.

Chapter 6: Womanhood, marriage and challenging tradition

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It is *Jummah*, which the majority of heathy-bodied Muslims, particularly men, are obliged to keep. Unusually, I have come to the Mosque on a Friday, in the hope of speaking with some of the women, and to catch my father while he is in town, I have some paperwork for him - he resides abroad mostly, and the letters are piling up. It's February and rather cold, my breathing feels stuttered as a walk through Chapelfield park and my heart beats a little faster as I approach the building. I push open the heavy Victorian doors of the former Saint Peter Mancroft School (1876), turned Mosque in 1977, painted Sufi green, in honour of the lush verdant gardens of *jannah*. As I walk in, a gentleman stares at me, I do not recognise him, nor he me, and after an uncomfortable greeting, I walk upstairs to the ladies mezzanine. This is the smallest part of the Mosque, a 45 m2 space that looks over the large hall, of the buildings' original design, which serves as the main prayer room occupied by the men. There are a few women in the ladies section, sitting quiet and solitary on chairs dotted across the room. It is more often than not a very busy space, where women squish up into the corners and the children clamber over the bodies trying to find space. I smile and speak my greetings and go over to sit next to a family friend. She is a little abrupt as I ask after her family, seemingly not wanting to engage in conversation, but follows up with a question about my research. I explain the parameters of the study and my aims, the importance of hearing the voices of women about their lived experiences. The concept of "subjectivity" causes consternation, how can you base anything on whims and feelings rather than being objective about oneself and review your actions, she proclaims. I explain the need for subjectivities that reflect real lived realities and experiences, so as to tell the whole story. I ask if she'd be willing to conduct an interview and talk about her conversion to Islam. She declines, stating that her journey, her Islam, is private and occurred in her own space and not for others to scrutinise. I thank her for her time and walk over to the banister which looks down below to see if I can see my father, and sit against the wall and gaze through the netting at the congregation filling up. The *khutba* is being given today by a second-generation convert, who has trained and prepared for his position as Shaykh. I listen as he speaks about the importance of the *deen*, of striving to be a "pure Muslim" as the ideal way to be, and that everything else, pleasure, anger, frivolity, idleness, distress, are distractions from what really matters. I am tired and so perhaps I am caught off guard, but this statement does not sit easy with me. The rhetoric feels dichotomous, binaries between good/bad, saved/denied, pious/sinful, and that by not achieving this ideal you are failing, you are not good enough in the eyes of Allah, and will hence be denied entry into *jannah*. It feels painful to hear this, the challenges of this generation have brought up all of the above and their grappling with it has been traumatic for many. When I catch up with my father afterwards, I mention the *khutba* and that perhaps it would be "interesting" to debate some of its ideas. He

replies with, “debate is just another word for argue”, which shuts down the potential for challenging perspectives.

After *Jummah* I have an interview planned with a friend, when I arrive she has gone to the trouble of laying out a lovely meal and I disdain myself for not having brought more of an offering apart from a bottle of homemade elderflower cordial. The table is beautifully laid with a printed Kantha tablecloth, flowers in a small vase and orange juice decanted in a cut glass jug. The care and generosity is evident in this spread of simple foods and I am humbled by it. It is juxtaposed against the transitory sense of a home with the bare minimum furniture, and a tiny cramped kitchen stacked with bottles and tubes from brewing kombucha. She is a second wife and lone parent of three children, the husband residing abroad with his first wife. She works three jobs, her intention to ensure her children can attend a local privately funded alternative school. As we speak she becomes emotional for the burden she carries in maintaining all of this by herself, to bring her children up and mend their grievances, - she apologises profusely for being so moved. Then she beams with enthusiasm about a business startup, applying for funding and business training, doing market research and perfecting recipes. She has big plans. I reflect on this scene, from the one I came from earlier in the day, here, in this modest house is a woman striving to attain the ideal for herself and her children, with little resources and no one to hear of her challenges and struggles. The concept of the “ideal or pure Muslim” neglects or rejects subjectivities which reflect a lived reality that is far from ideal, that is pitted with obstacles and yet strives for perfection, beauty, the “fine life” irregardless of the mental, emotional and financial burdens it encompasses.

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6.1 Introduction

In the years preceeding this research, I heard narratives and discussions amongst women of all ages and collectives, reflecting the ways in which women were expected to behave, perform and emulate traditional gender roles. Divulging these in the course of this study validates the critiquing of the traditional parameters and the direct correlations and contrasts between the expectations of a “good” or ideal Muslim womanhood and the actual experiences of marriage and family relations, and how they impacted their relationship with faith. Relationships of power “intersect” at the body and how we inhabit a given category depends on how we inhabit others (Ahmed, 2007; Brewer, 1993; Lorde, 1984). While the female body is often constructed as a religious boundary in Islam, particularly in debates around clothing, such as the hijab (Abu-Lughod, 2002), and modesty seen as a virtue to maintain moderation, humility and respect (Mernissi, 1991), such attitudes are considered to normalise dominant discourses which seek to discipline women’s lives. In the West

for example, the headscarf has become an elaborate public representation of modesty (Ahmed, 1992) an explicit symbol of piety and/or her belongingness or isolation from a community (Bewley, 1999). Consequently, the participants expressed a desire for alternative constructions of womanhood, which incorporate feminist ideals and equity delineated in the Quranic texts, in a bid to move beyond narrow definitions adopted in some Muslim communities.

The Murabitun is unique in comparison with other Sufi movements for its particular embodiment of *silsila* and the Shaykh's personal Western inspired philosophy, which were imbued in the creation of an indigenous "British Islam". The early construction of the Sufi community, its ideology, identity performances and gender constructions were standardised and commodified for new converts joining the fray, whereby paternalism expanded to fill the space. While women were central to its creation, and innovation, both spiritually and in practice, division of labour and sex-based segregation in places of worship were commonplace, an established mode of dress, comportment and performativity (Butler, 1990) was adopted by converts as a means to demonstrate their newfound religious discipline and membership of this community, in contrast to their natal British one. As an early convert professed, the community embodied a "country house mysticism" an aesthetic that emulated a particular refined beauty and untouchability which made it stand out. Women's primary roles in the community were in the private sphere and in education and childrearing, while the public sphere was the domain of men and elite women. Inheriting (class) privilege means you are likely to have a greater share of resources and in turn capital, propelling you to be upwardly mobile by inhabiting the bourgeoisie body (Ahmed 2007). This entails inhabiting that body, its style and outlook, which is aided by what you have behind you. This hierarchical structure positioned the attainment of "ability" and "beauty" as a way of being in the world. Rather than a measure of competence, it is a form of privilege by bodies which in turn are not affected by the bodily extensions of others.

For some women, conversion to Islam offers a return to a traditional gendered lifestyle and family model, an adoption of the Muslim *habitus* (Winchester, 2008) and as a form of social resistance or re-moralisation of modernity (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006). While the question of "oppositionality" (Roald, 2006) of one culture for another, can mean the adaption of Islam across cultures, the challenges of belonging can create an inflated sense of separation. This is a dynamic process and as such, culture too can become a performative part of the operation (Baumann, 1999). This study posits that this process of becoming is an attraction for a romanticised exoticism, a subtle continuation of the Orientalism project (Mossière, 2016), whereby conversion to Islam can be considered as a desire to become the Other. Participants were raised by convert women who made conscious choices to embody Islam and Islamic prescriptions, through dress and practice, part of a conspicuous rejection to differentiate themselves from their pre-convert lives

(Hermansen, 2006b; Neilsen, 1993; Palmer, 1994). The Murabitun project to create a community of British Muslims was unambiguous; to bring up Muslim children in a prescribed Islamic way, through education, discipline and expectation. While the study's participants emphasised a contrast between different generations' adoption of Islam and womanhood, in accordance with their socio-cultural and historical environments, the first generation of women converts also appeared both as resistors-to-change and as agents-of-change who supported and inspired the younger women to aspire for social roles beyond the home.

Simone de Beauvoir argued long ago, "One is not born a woman, but made one" (2015 [1949]). Yet, the way one is made and the active participation required for that can both account for and perpetuate the effect of power which may contain its production. Indeed, communities are constructed and sustained through performative and gendered expectations and women are central to its transmission. The patriarchal foundations of cultural norms and practices are fundamental obstacles to achieving gender equality (Bartelink, *et al.*, 2022). Its existence enables male family and community members to assert control over the lives of women and girls, legitimising and in some cases triggering violence and harm. Religious[20] and cultural values are deeply intertwined and can act as a conduit through which family and community approval hangs, particularly in relation to marriage, and shapes how "violence" (Hamilton, 2022) may intersect with marriage arrangements not always evident to the community or the woman herself (Bradley and Kirmani, 2015). The impact of the community's gendered approach has had profound repercussions for the second-generation who have had to circumvent harmful consequences in their home and married lives. The evidence that theological Islam has been, and is, emancipatory for women, emphasising roles beyond motherhood and marriage (Rouse, 2004), has not necessarily materialised in these women's lives. Indeed, their "embodied intersectionality" (Mirza, 2013:7), where Western Islamophobia and patriarchal Islamic dominance is mediated through Muslim women's embodied experiences, be they of marriage or womanhood, offer a more nuanced, complex and fragile story.

By inhabiting the *dihliz,* participants encompass multiple identities that adapt and intersect in fluid and informed ways. Educated across secular and religious systems enables them to critically engage with their faith and inherited ideology. This positionality allows them to question and

[20] Critiquing religion as a concept that frames, problematises and indeed solves oppressive gender practices is important to understand its role and impact. Practices such as, female circumcision, early marriage, or veiling tend to be considered as "Islamic" practices in Muslim majority contexts or populations. However, in non-Muslim contexts these incidences are blamed on culture. It is therefore relevant and interesting to explore why, and when, religion is framed as "good" or "bad" in relation to culture as with other intersecting identities (Bartelink, Longman, and Bradley, 2022).

discuss the role of religion and its impact on gender roles (or the other way around). While culture is not experienced as a Muslim majority, it takes the form of the inherited ideology of the community and hence can also be interrogated. It is a form of reconfiguring and reimagining culture and religion that is sensitive to the desires and hopes of participants. This part of the journeying self captures the ways women have had to discover, or recover, gender justice through constraint, critique and challenge. First, it presents the emulation of "good Muslim womanhood" by young women in the community, where marriage was the expected outcome. However, what we see here is how marriage also becomes a way for young women to claim independence from narrow prospects. Then I present the status of Islamic marriage in Britain and wedding practices in the community, while delving into the practice of polygyny. Analysis from this domain reveals how the implementation of colonial and traditional gendered ideals has led to a Christianisation of Islam and how this has negatively impacted women's sexuality and marriage dissolution. Finally, as a result of these experiences, women are reworking conditions that motivate creative agency; demanding accountability; embodying choice; and replacing self-sacrificing with self-love.

6.2 Good Muslim womanhood in the community

The Islamic concepts of *adab* and *baraka* are invoked to enhance what it takes to be a "good" person. These practices have been especially integrated into the Sufi Community's educational stance on "serving", which emulates the master/disciple relationship and plays a pivotal role in how the second-generation carry themselves and embody their religious and gendered identity. The expectation of becoming a fully operative member of the community begins at a young age. Latifa remembers as a teenager she would be expected to serve during meals at gatherings or *dhikrs* in the Mosque, a process organised by "aunties" who would put you in teams, train you on how best to cook and serve, and when ready, allocate you your own team. The training and organisational legacy is something all young women in the community have grown up to be accomplished in, and some have capitalised on the role, indeed it is considered *a rite of passage*. As Latifa exclaimed, "Allah never gives you more than you can handle", and hence a capacity to succeed in that role, "if anything needed doing I would just do it and I would feel a sense of completeness from doing the job, and an incompleteness for not doing it, like I was letting myself down…it's amazing how people fulfil their own needs". It is a site in which women have fun, connect with each other, feel part of a sisterhood and find a sense of empowerment in service. It is an active involvement that arose out of the project of communal living and imbricated into women's self-formation.

Butler's (1990) gender "performativity" addresses the ways women reiterate socially constructed religious and gendered performances within the context of their belonging, albeit ones constructed by Western philosophical prescriptions. During fieldwork at events, I was acutely aware of how a "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1990:140) had been instilled in my own gendered subjectivity, and how my belonging was being assembled and performed before me. In her analysis, Butler references the materialisation of gender in space, which Lefevbre (1991) refers to as the heterosexual matrix, whereby men and women are compelled to materialise action in gender differentiated ways and how women occupy performance in a more tentative way in order to be perceived as feminine. In the community, women's relationship to food-work and serving can be seen as a gendered responsibility but also as a social asset as a form of power. Social production in and of a place implies a process of signification where subjects either recognise themselves or lose themselves (Lefevbre, 1991). In Avakian's (2005) study of Armenian-American women, she reveals that despite an innate acceptance of their work as a practice of subservience, they also recognised it as "an act of love" (246). Similarly, at Eid events, I observed cultural and religiously embodied, iterative acts expressed as a form of belonging (Fortier, 1999). It can also be stated that the simultaneous subordination and assertion of women's authority in repeated action also allows for homosocial bonding and affection which foments a women's embodied belonging.

However, hierarchical power structures are not always easy. The experience of being hand-picked or not, to carry out certain ceremonial rituals, such as shaking the rose water at *dhikrs* was a conflicting experience. As Amina recounts, "I remember it well, aged 12/13, I was picked, favoured, not every time, but I was very aware of those who didn't get picked, I think this happens in cults…it may not have been called that, but the behaviour was cultish". She rankles at not having been similarly encouraged "to be free and independent, to follow my own path, to explore, in fact it was the absolute opposite, we must want to be a good mother, a good wife … you get all the rewards for being a good wife, education was considered bad, university was *kafirun*". Had she been "feistier" she believes, she might have done differently, but "I was too scared to discover that part of myself, I felt I needed to comply or I would be shamed or shunned". While the concept of *izzat* establishes boundaries for both men and women, and transcends religious parameters, it is part of the general lexicon among Muslim communities. The term *kafirun* is often used by parents, for example, to describe the "shame" of being a non-believer or behaving dishonourably and often paraphrased as a retort to castigate untoward behaviour. Certainly, iterations of what embodies 'good conduct' or 'modesty' are particularly used to furnish what is to be a good Muslim woman (Siddiqi, 2005). According to Feldman (2010), the regulation of boundaries around honour and shame through codes of conduct and rules governing behaviour, become legitimised by "religious or moral codes" (306). The implication is that codes which primarily assert control over women's bodies and rights are a form of surveillance and policing through broader kin and

community concerned with other's morality (Chakraborty, 2009). Reducing morality to the embodiment of certain identities also invites a sexualisation of culturally defined spaces (Fortier, 1999) where belonging is possession and membership, and which a group manufactures to demarcate community, political and social boundaries, becoming the privileged site for the iteration of that collective "body" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992).

The link between ideal Muslim womanhood and piety has been established throughout history and illustrated through role models such as the Prophet's wives, considered to embody the ideal representation of maternity, sweetness, modesty, shyness and elegance. Aisha espouses the perfect and seductive feminine model in the private and intimate domain that Muslim women who aspire to piety wish to emulate (Mossière, 2016). As such dress and appearance become the measure of women's virtue demonstrated in their daily lives — to fulfil their role of protecting their menfolk and maintaining social harmony (Mossière, 2016). As Lamb (2000) notes in her ethnographic work in West Bengal, "a girl's first menstruation marks the beginnings of a state of openness, and thus her readiness for marriage, sexual relations, and pregnancy" (185). Similarly, puberty for Muslim women signifies a move closer to marriage, and thus adulthood. The young women in this study attest to an alteration of responsibilities once they reached their menstrual cycle. While service was still a substantial task, the new duties included meal preparation, childcare of younger children, running madrassa activities and attending a finishing school in France and Switzerland which involved cooking, cleaning and service. Many activities related closely to marriage preparation and motherhood and included the establishment of serving the men of the community, fathers and sons first - both in the public and private domain - and as such establishing a support for patriarchal systems of "good", obedient and loving behaviour (Borker, 2018). As Sikand (2005) asserts, "This ideal Muslim woman is widely regarded as one who has a deep knowledge of her faith and uses that knowledge to help raise a Muslim family and fortify its commitment to the faith" (in Borker, 2018:4). All the young women I spoke with were in part brought up to aspire to the creation of a domesticated femininity and outward construction of docile subjects as a form of piety, as part of their Islamic education.

The construction of the ideal Muslim community (Anderson, 1991), is the imagined and moral ring-fencing of "good Muslim womanhood", to preserve and uphold the community's religious and moral character (Borker, 2018). While responsible masculinity confers certain benefits to men, a self-sacrificing femininity serves to organise social and religious life to produce and reproduce religious parameters (Ingersoll, 2003), which ultimately privilege the status and rights of men within the religion. Rao (2015) describes "self-sacrificing femininity" as the privileging of traditional lifestyles - with women's adherence to inegalitarian religious beliefs - rather than being an obstacle, is part of the ongoing quest for religious subjectivity, whereby sacrifice is framed as

enabling a morally distinguished individual self. Women who have chosen to incorporate a gender morality or "moral *habitus"* (Winchester, 2008) find empowerment within the scripture of idealised femininity which can endow them with positions of power within collective and patriarchal structures, giving them a sense of belonging alongside regulatory norms that are religiously valued and communally revered. However, orientating women toward a sacrificial disposition is not a conflict-free process - mentioning the practice of polygyny. Performing religiously obligated behaviours can mean sacrificing feelings and desires as a justification for a moral life as well as a resistance to dominant power. While some women acquiesce in the belief that it makes them "good Muslim women" (Mahmood, 2005), other women carve out spaces for contestation and resistance.

6.2.1 Marriage as catalyst for autonomy

I introduced Maryam and Zahra in Chapter 5 - here they discuss marriage, community and parental expectations. While they were not forced to marry young, it was understood that relationships outside marriage were not permitted by Islam, with marriage the only option for romantic relationships or to gain one's own autonomy. These sisters, along with others in this cohort, were married between the ages of 18-20 years old. Zahra and Maryam agree, "It was a case of knowing that Islamically I needed to be married. Like it was the correct thing to do, but also wanting to take control of who I married and how I went about it". Zahra describes herself as the "one in the family who would always push boundaries", it was about choice, she saw potential in her suitor in terms of family and attraction and knew her father would agree. It was not as she put it, a "head over heels 'love-at-first-sight' scenario, it was the wider vision". She met her now husband at 15 years of age during one of the several 'kinship' arrangements initiated within the Murabitun community, whereby young people were sent to live with community families elsewhere, in this case Spain. He had been studying at the Madrassa, and during a walk with friends one evening proclaimed his intention to marry her. Part of the agreement with Zahra's father was that she complete her degree before starting a family, a choice Zahra admits was harder for her husband. Had she simply moved to Spain and become a housewife, life would have been far easier for him. Instead, she stayed in the UK, completing her degree.

Zahra applauds the stipulated condition of her marriage, and her father for protecting it - nor forcing her to marry. The hard work to attain her degree is not taken for granted, going back into the education system after years of homeschooling through the community meant adapting and putting in the hours, "The sense of self-worth that comes from an education and comes from being able to do something, having something that's mine. No one can take that away". This is

particularly important with regard to her children and her marriage, she is bringing something to the table, rather than simply a nice meal, she is setting an example. Zahra explains how in the perspective of being married to a Spaniard, whose upbringing was “chauvinistic” and where the woman has a defined matriarchal role, she feels emboldened to say, no. The women laugh in synchronicity, the sisters agreeing that on one hand is the expectation to serve a husband in the Islamic sense, while on the other, it is part of the cultural expectation of being a Black woman. Maryam declares they prioritise “self-worth”, rather than replicating their mother’s choices and being subservient to their husbands. They believe, this is not so straightforward anymore, servitude can come in many forms, “self-worth and love as a unit, as a family is imperative”.

In terms of reproducing behaviour, they proclaim they were conditioned to expect more from themselves, to value themselves more, “my upbringing certainly showed me that I was worth more, like my dad putting an emphasis on education and on independence”. This does not diminish their role or input as wives and mothers, and their ‘duty’ to make their husbands happy. However, they have been witness to their mother’s generation, the sacrifices they made and its effect on their children, “… probably not the greatest decision and we're just learning from it”. These young women recognise inter-generational contrast, “they were in different situations, different mindsets, different people, different financial means, different educational levels or whatever…I feel like it's rude to say it was a mistake, but I certainly won't be doing that for my own children because I've seen the result of it”. Zahra feels that if she blindly followed her parents and the community’s expectation on her to be a “good Muslim woman” what kind of lesson would she be setting for her daughter - her view of marriage or how relationships work, and whether it would be worth it? Zahra does not want to sound patronising but does not believe their mothers made much of their rights, these were not discussed, either through naivety or indifference. She mentions how their mother was not even involved in her own wedding, was not even in the building.

The sisters reflect on how, before converting their mother was a powerhouse, with a career, plans to move and make money, wore designer clothes and always did her nails. Becoming a Muslim meant rejecting all of that, everything from their previous life was gone and they had to rebuild. Zahra and Maryam feel they have learned something from that, to have the confidence to say “no, I’m not going to do that”. Zahra laughs at an encounter where a woman asked whether she would get a drink for her husband, to which she responded with “Why what’s happened to him? Like, has he lost his arms?” They remember as children how their mother would cook them all pasta and then make their father an *a la carte* meal, which they liken to servitude, adding “There’s no disrespect in it. If it makes you feel happy, then you can, you should do that”. However, Zahra wishes to be different and clarifies her belief saying, “I am the most important person in my life …

because actually I am … I'm going to own it, and I'm going to be unapologetic about it." This she maintains comes from the security of knowing your worth, that is claimed through education, experiences, upbringing and wisdom gauged from observing others. Zahra feels a confidence as a woman who can exist without a man, without the stigma around divorce and by being financially independent, "I always said to him [husband] just in case you're confused, I'm not with you for your money, and I can do that because my dad made sure that I went and got an education. I wouldn't have that if I didn't have my job or that job security."

The concept of a "self-sacrificing femininity" and adherence to traditional feminine roles is not something these women avail themselves of, having lost its fervour in their lives. Indeed, as Maryam exclaims, "It is not possible in today's Britain for women to stay at home or surrender their time to full-time childcare, life is too expensive, with both parents needing to work, as well as wanting to further career choices and their own self-development. The sea change of this generation begins from a place of self-worth, it is an active learned behaviour, in response to, and a result of, experiences of gender injustice. This recognition of self-worth as based on the choice not to serve the domestic arena alone, to fulfil an education and a career, and more importantly consider the happiness of the woman, as equal - if not exceeding that of the husband and its impact on children - is a marked change from the parental generation. The act of relinquishing all traces of their pre-convert life, career, interests, modernity, and surrender to a life of faith and austerity, an *ascetic spirituality*, prioritised a self-worth rooted in serving Allah and community. While participants grew up within this ideology, they do not feel able, nor are willing, to make the same choices. Agency requires the acknowledgment of how power enables the ability to choose and the ability to choose otherwise (Giddens, 1991). While there is a deep sense of love enmeshed within service and *adab* reflected through community events such as the quintessential Bake-off at the Eid, and the importance of family care, the idea of "servitude" as self-sacrificing does not appeal in the same way. Reflecting on their mother's experiences (Cole, 2004), there is a sense that the cost of conversion has been too great, too much precarity, poverty, and a lack of choice.

On the one hand participants are choosing to focus on their careers, attain qualifications and degrees and to become artful with their skills, not only for financial independence but for creativity, interest, and to have a place in the world as women rather than just mothers and wives. They are emboldened by these achievements and abilities. Ultimately their service comes in other forms and taking care of oneself is considered a primary imperative. Coincidentally, I would argue that this too reflects the values they were brought up with, the ideology of exceptionalism (See Chapter 5) instilled as unique British Muslims, as though, the foregrounding of a life which rejects modern comforts and materiality and expects servitude as an act of gendered submission,

betrays their view of themselves. Indeed, as Foucault (1982) argues, power can only be exercised over a free subject, a subject "thoroughly recognised and maintained... as a person who acts" (220). By contrast, where "determining factors saturate the whole there is no relationship of power" (221), whereby the subject is able to function outside of that relationship and act according to their own categorisation. While this recalculation of the effects of women's domesticity is not concurrent with the previous generation, it does reflect a more contemporary aspect of women's liberation and autonomy (Duderija and Rane, 2019; Wadud, 2006). In this context participants are engaging a secular paradigmatic shift, whereby increased educational and work opportunities have created more individualised standards to reach. Within the debate on piety and revivalist recasting of women's agency within the religious context, it has to be asked whether women who choose not to relinquish their self to religious submission are less agentive because they may reflect an individual autonomy? A critical and contemporary approach to Muslim studies increasingly endorses renewed awareness of gender consciousness in areas including marriage, dating, domestic violence, dress and fashion, and the representation of Muslim women in the media - including social media, to name a few, which will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

6.3 Experiences of Marriage and Polygyny

Marriage is considered the nexus of physical desire, culture, and Divine law in Islam, indeed according to some traditions "The man who marries perfects half his religion"[21] (Rouse, 2004:152). In the Murabitun, marriage is prophesised to be "half the *deen"*, meaning half of life's importance is put in the act of marriage and raising a family. It is given high status, besides the worship of Allah. In classical Muslim legal texts (both Sunni and Shi'a), jurists understood and defined marriage not as a sacrament but as a contract that automatically places a woman under the husband's *qiwamah*[22]. While jurists from different schools differ on detailed elements of marriage,

[21] *al-Mishkatal-Masabih,* by Shaikh Walial-Din Muhammadibn AbdAllah. In Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam, 1990:* 446.

[22] The term 'qiwamah' is derived from the word qawwamun in Surah an-Nisa' 4:34. This verse has been a particular interest for Islamic feminists as it epitomises how successive Muslim jurists interpret the main textual bias for male authority and hierarchical gender relations in Muslim societies over several centuries. In this iterative process 'qawwamun' evolved into 'qiwamah,' a core construct that shapes the framework for gender responsibilities and rights in the family. Qiwamah, as a juristic construct, is not simply confined to men's responsibility to provide in exchange for their spouses' obedience. It has been used to justify and legitimise men's right to control the mobility of their wives, unilaterally repudiate their wives, take multiple wives (up to four), manage the affairs of their dependents in the family, and inherit double the share of their sisters. Yet qiwamah, both as a term and construct, does not occur in the Qur'an or the Sunnah of the Prophet. In fact, in the two other Quranic verses where the related term qawwamun/qawwamin occurs (5:8 and 4:135), the term refers to a Qur'anic call to both women and men to stand firmly for justice. Similarly, in verse 4:34, 'qawwamun' in the sense of men being providers

they generally share the same overall view, that husbands provide for their wives, and wives in turn must obey their husbands (Al-Attar, *et al.*, 2021). The regulation of unmarried relationships, sexual intimacy between genders, is conditioned by both cultural and religious edicts and, as dating is not considered acceptable, most young Muslim women married young. In the Murabitun there are few arranged marriages by parents or the Imam, most are chosen by the couple for love, or its potential, although the parents have a definitive say in whether the match is suitable. Due to the isolation of the Murabitun among other Muslims communities, many marriages occur intra-communally, within the extended communities in Spain, Germany and South Africa. However, it is important to note that many of the participants described how men of the community had unabashedly and deliberately pursued marriages with the younger women as they became of age. Some men would ask each eligible young woman, in turn, in hope of a positive response, which for these young women growing up, was overwhelming.

Marriage has signified a freedom, for some, giving them a sense of legitimacy to ascend the gendered hierarchy but also giving them the confidence to choose their own life paths without parental involvement. This was particularly relevant in cases where women would choose a husband based on their potential as a reliable and stable husband rather than a love match. Often, those choosing a love match was the result of a relationship with a non-Muslim who then converted, upon which occasion the marriage had to contend with a fresh conversion interlinked with a fresh marriage, all at a young age. A typical Muslim marriage would entail an Imam or male community leader or member overseeing the union. A contract is signed between consenting parties with the condition of a *mahr*, offered to the bride. While juristically, witnesses required to determine consent is unconfirmed, in the Murabitun, ceremonies involve a minimum two witnesses. However, a Muslim marriage is not recognised by English law, rather it is considered a religious marriage, although this is something Muslim women, feminist and legal jurists have been working to change as it can disadvantage women, such as the Register our Marriage Campaign (2014) led by Aina Khan OBE[23], and the Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) (2020).

There is a predominance of the idea that a Muslim marriage, in terms of divorce at least, is more stable, due to any relationship outside of marriage being prohibited. This may be juxtaposed

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and protectors of women, is part of a broader Qur'anic call for a just allocation of family responsibilities, which was particularly relevant at the time of revelation (Musawah 2021).

[23] The campaign focuses on changing legislation to update the Marriage Act 1949. The ultimate objective of the Register our Marriage Campaign is to ensure that all religious marriages are legally registered to protect the family unit. The campaign has two aims: Raising awareness of the lack of legal protection for unregistered religious marriages; Reform of the Marriage Act 1949 so all religious marriages must be registered under civil law. An ever-increasing trend is that a large proportion of young British Muslims are not registering their religious marriage in the UK.

against the idea that if love is absent in a secular marriage, divorce is inevitable, because an Islamic marriage promotes responsibility and respect - love alone is not the only thing that matters. A Muslim marriage is about cooperation with an end, the *Ākhirah*, and therefore stands apart from a secular union due to a shared philosophy of life. If culture meets nature and Divine order in marriage it therefore requires the balancing and nurturing of all three in order to be successful. Despite this prevalence of thought about Muslim marriage, for this cohort, many complimented their Islamic marriages with a Civil Registry Office marriage as well. They felt this made their marriage more legitimate in the eyes of British society and ensured a level of commonly accepted legal protection. As Bano (2007) confirms, many Muslim marriages in Britain now follow this model for recognition under English law and as an insurance of claims to state-sanctioned marital rights, in the event of marriage dissolution. This was not the case with the parental generation, who only had a "common-law" marriage as a form of legal reference, if anything at all, and hence were unprotected in cases of divorce.

The attainment of the Muhammedan Way within the Murabitun has propagated the example of a leader of men having four wives - without the promise of unilateral support, let alone, permission from previous wives. The practice has been established as custom within the community since its inception, and while it is not practiced prolifically, it is still a significant social model, which has constructed participants emotional associations within community and Islam. Polygyny[24] involves the marriage of a man to multiple women, which include marriages formalised in Islamic religious ceremonies (Charsley and Liversage, 2013). In terms of recorded occurrence of polygyny in the UK, details from a Shariah council cite polygyny in the top ten reasons for divorce.[25] Polygynous marriages are prohibited under British law, with bigamy a criminal act. As a result, those in polygynous marriages lack access to the legal system upon the breakdown of marriage. While polygyny is still an unusual choice for British Muslim communities, its effects have an impact on their families. The Quran states that a Muslim man may marry up to four wives simultaneously (Hinchcliffe, 1970), yet Islamic legal scholars dictate its impossibility on the condition that the husband must be able to provide emotional, physical and financial support to his wives

[24] The more common term "polygamy" refers to the general practice of multiple marriages occurring simultaneously. The term "polygyny" is a more accurate term because it refers to the type of polygamy dealt with here, in which a man marries more than one woman simultaneously (as opposed to "polyandry," in which a woman marries more than one man simultaneously). For a detailed analysis of the development of law on polygyny in Muslim-majority countries, see Chapter 7 in Lynn Welchman, Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States: A Comparative Overview of Textual Development and Advocacy. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

[25] Perminder Khatkar, "The British Muslim Men Who Love 'Both Their Wives,'" *BBC News*, September 26, 2011, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-15032947.

simultaneously[26]. The premise made it almost unattainable, except in the case of the Prophet Muhammad and therefore not religiously sanctioned. Furthermore, restrictions have been constructed on polygyny due to issues of man's comportment rather than legal restrictions, with some Muslim majority countries codifying such restrictions (Soliman, 2017). It was professed, more than once in this study, that women who felt disempowered and demoted by their *haram* or *kafirun* behaviours through stepping outside of community boundaries, chose to become multiple wives, particularly around the ages of 18-23, as it contained gendered expectations, and more interestingly, gave them the rehabilitated status they desired.

6.3.1 A tale of polygyny

We meet over a flickering internet Zoom signal during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Bushra is 33 and studying for a Master's in international relations, and sits comfortably surrounded by books and writing pads. Bushra was born in Norwich, to an African-Caribbean American Mother and white British father, who converted with SAQ in 1970, his neighbour at the time. Bushra describes her father as a child of the 1960s, a miner who was searching for an epiphany and thus primed for meeting the Shaykh. Her parents divorced when her father wished to take a second wife. Insightful and reflexive, a common characteristic of these young women who engage a critical mind to question the sum of the parts in order to understand the whole, she says that what predominantly informed her experience of growing up, a "mixed-race child" as she describes herself, moving frequently, and whose parents experimented with religious identity, meant having fluid identity markers, "I think that it all had an impact on me and so my relationship to my Islam has been equally fluid in that way".

For Bushra the nature of parental transmission and community ideology was narrow, strict and unforgiving and translated into a rhetoric that positioned her faith in direct correlation to her sense of self, "My Islam, my Muslimness determined the value of my character and the justification of my being on this planet, which I think, you know, can only create quite a complex and perhaps combative relationship". She explicates how the best outcome for women of her generation was to be a wife and mother and to support unremittingly, the community project. Attracting comments in her late teens that the solution to her problematic behaviour would be to get married — yet containing her 'self' within such a rigidly defined space, deeply affected her relationship

[26] Many of these scholars read Surah an-Nisa, "You will never be able to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire to do so" (4:129) in conjunction with the verse "If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three, or four. If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one" (4:3).

with Islam. As a result, Bushra pushed against confinement, immersing herself in life outside Islam, with the *kafirun*, describing herself as “a cat out of a bottle”. Frustrated by the incongruity of presenting the ideal Muslim woman, and the psychological trauma of suppressing, “natural urges to understand my own boundaries, to create my own system of morality” she stepped away from community. Feeling she had to first experience what it was she was rejecting before choosing it.

Despite this consternation, she came to sense a real lack of depth and warmth in her life which, she recognised as the practice of Islam. Realising she could not do it alone, she decided to reintegrate back into the community, in search of an ecstatic, surrendering practice, “I know myself better. I know better how to not be overrun or abused or any of those things, and so when I went back, I really loved the experience. I remember going to my first lady’s *dhikr* and just like crying and crying, because it just felt so like, oh, in my heart, you know, I just love that kind of medicine”. She then married, as a fourth wife, to a prominent member of the community, and the reaction was not what she expected. Established loyalties and hierarchies among the families did not welcome her as she had hoped. The first three wives were from within, what is characteristically described as, the “core families” or first hour converts. Comparatively, they are Caucasian and range in ages from 48 - 68, Bushra is the youngest. She explains how although she was not naive in imagining a woman wanting her husband to marry again, her husband had reassured her and in fact presented it as a way to reinvigorate “their” dynamic. While she was prepared for challenges amongst the wives she had not conceived the community backlash that followed, who she had considered as kin. In an uncharacteristic turn she bemoaned her hedonistic turn as reason for her punishment, “I kind of felt like I also deserved to be punished in some way. So that idea of being badly treated was almost like, righting the balance of all of the the joy and the fun and the love that I had experienced”.

Bushra’s marriage was tempestuous, divorced and married three times, she felt caught in a “madness” of conforming and conflicting roles, realising that ultimately, she was not a “Murabitun wife” and never would be. The result was excommunication by the Shaykh, receiving a phone call that timidly informed her that the doors of the community would be shut to her. She was devastated and disorientated, with no acknowledgement of the pain and trauma she had experienced. This lack of support directly affected Bushra’s relationship with her faith, “I haven't had the most nourishing or loving experience with the community, which for me was, is, obviously very intimately linked with my relationship with Islam.” She had never known Islam outside the community and hence found solace and sisterhood with other women from the community who had similar experiences. She describes her love of doing *dhikr*, being moved deeply by

gatherings, but that community interactions make her uncomfortable, feeling censored and subject to self-doubt.

On her reintegration into community, she observed that many of the women were miserable, regretful and full of rancour. This she believes is due in part to the shutdown of the "shadow self" or rather the emulation of mastering the *nafs* to be of pure heart only, that rejects all difficult emotions. The act of self-sacrifice over a prolonged period leads to a cognitive break with yourself, she explains, that manifests in scary and unhealthy ways. It is not about glorifying these feelings, but to be aware of their contribution towards what it is to be human. She believes this is due to how the parent generation surrendered to marriage and family despite precarious employment, poverty, and male privilege, leaving them with little to show for their hard work in later life. While the political philosophy of the Shaykh's[27] writings chimed with her ideals and values about the world, the political system and democracy, as a woman in the community, left her yearning to learn and debate these political philosophies rather than be positioned as replicating the performative functions of being a Muslim woman, baking in the kitchen and doing childcare.

Bushra is still married as a fourth wife, and her unwillingness to accommodate the good Muslim woman trope has enabled a relaxing of expectations, particularly with her husband, who "drinks the Kool-Aid straight". To constantly present the perfect Sufi is unrealistic, and exhausting, so she encourages the need to tackle these conversations and create a "human sized movement". There are many times she has been asked by younger women about becoming a multiple wife and takes the time to "have the conversation that I wished somebody would've had with me". Bushra believes that women in polygynous marriages need to be kinder and more honest with each other, to allay fears of "husband stealing" and to live in harmony, "there's so much more that we could share if insecurities were kind of checked … that to me is the great tragedy". She recounts *iftars* during Ramadan where all women of the household would gather, be it in an awkward and traumatising way, competing over cake-making or social compliance. She is resentful towards those that did not share the reality of what she was walking into. She can only be honest with those women she advises — about polygyny or becoming an adult woman — without judgement, or that one size fits all.

[27] Such as reading The Engines of the Broken World by Ian Dallas (2013a) and The time of the Bedouin - on the Politics of Power, by Ian Dallas (2013b).

Bushra chose to reformulate her position in her marriage, “You know, having autonomy in polygyny is almost like the ultimate currency”. What she describes as the “extreme unnatural situation” of polygyny acts as a type of collective punishment that serves to offset the pain of sharing a husband. Her own situation has brought about a cathartic process of finding peace by determining the marriage logistics - she decides when he can visit, has her own apartment and financial independence. Yet being completely at the mercy of a husband with the additional pressure of polygyny results in continuous shockwaves, especially when the husband does not defend the new wife to keep peace in the whole family dynamic. “It shook me out of that kind of rosy eyed, perfect, deep love. I don't think I'll ever be back there again, but it did also teach me that in a way I have to compartmentalise.” She does not idolise polygyny and when asked about it by curious parties, she explains she is under no illusion that the other women in the marriage want you there, despite a man’s promise that it will be harmonious and supportive, “they will cut you if they can.” Being in a polygynous marriage means giving up on the idea that your husband is your companion in everything you share together in life — instead her needs are supplemented by others. “I love having the comfort and stability of being in a relationship and the freedom of, you know, acting like I'm single.” This she believes has been liberating for both her and her husband, rather than being “the prisoner and the guard in jail, you know?”

Bushra worries that she is only presenting the seemingly negative aspects of her life, yet feels it is incumbent upon her generation to interrogate their parents’ experience to both heal generational trauma and be their own “authentic” selves, that reflect their contemporary Muslim lives. This she believes will liberate and encourage real relationships based on people’s humanity, which in turn will elucidate a more genuine connection with Allah. Love is a central guiding force, in spite of its absence in her life, “you pass something on because you love it and because it's something that you want to share, because you want them to experience that love as well”. She decries instances of mental illness, sexual orientation or trauma within Muslim communities that are rejected for not complying with the ideology, yet questions on how you marry concepts, such as homosexuality, with the decree that it is forbidden, remains difficult - “at what point are we then reinterpreting the boundaries of what it means to be Muslim.” Despite the challenges she has faced, Bushra seeks out connections of love and beauty wherever she can. While she identifies with Islam on the grounds of religion, it is not her primary identity marker, “I'm not trying to be a saint. I'm not trying to be some kind of like spiritual guru, you're not going to find me in the middle of the night on my prayer mat, because it's just not who I am. It's not how I do things, but I don't think that makes me less of a person, or not Muslim in any kind of way.” Rather, she is reformulating and practicing a faith that frames Allah as generous, loving, compassionate and merciful, “I look around me every day and I see beauty, I attribute it to him, I see a wealth of experience and opportunity and all of these incredible things, my love of art and of music, my love of people, and I connect all of

that to him". Bushra accepts that all life's experiences' including the "darker urges" are part of a "dynamic that has as its foundation, love." Ultimately, "I guess it's a relationship with oneself, where now at a more mature age I can say that I have a deep love and appreciation for myself that I think I would not have been able to nurture had I stayed fully in the system that had a kind of predefined role".

The institution of marriage and the expectation to acquiesce to its maintenance is a standard that the second-generation have fulfilled as a matter of social construction and pious duty. Yet, as these narratives suppose, these women feel "let-down" by both their community and by its men, bewildered by the presumption that they would be protected by the convention. Polygyny in particular disturbs group dynamics, despite its being accepted practice and its association with gender-traditional practices. Instances where participants experienced rejection or ex-communication by the community over issues of marriage, and divorce, were clearly significant life-changing events, which impacted their relationship with their faith and embodied belonging. Marriage optimised hierarchy, class and the pious self, yet the segue to the "fine life" did not materialise nor empower many of the women who lived by its mandate. Indeed, retaliation predominately came from women in the community towards those they deemed as overstepping their place, while little was directed toward the husbands themselves, who often downplayed any negative response. It is generally accepted that the couple figure out the marriage by themselves, through prayer and absolution. A lack of "safe" space or open discussion about the challenging aspects of marriage, polygynous or otherwise, set women up for resentment and difficulty, exaggerating its benefits and blessings. When marriages broke down, women were often left unprotected and "completely on their own", without financial support, and in many cases the choice of the men to marry multiple times was not questioned nor contained, resulting in a failed promise of community and belonging (Ahmed and Fortier, 2003). Most of the young women agreed that intermediaries and more knowledge about the challenges in marriage within a community would be beneficial.

The association of the ideal Muslim marriage and the lived realities of today's British Muslims forces married couples into an automated module, which some felt reflected a Westernised and Christianised practice parallel with consumerism, resulting in isolation from family and community. The expectation of women, and men, to carry the weight of family success, community compliance as well as their own career and needs, fundamentally alters the parameters of marriage. Indeed, the number of divorces does not correlate with the emphasis given to its importance nor the image presented by the community. Divorces occur at a high rate, at both young ages and as a result of husband's entering into polygynous marriages later in life,

particularly if not agreed to by the first wife, often leaving women powerless and with the sense that religion has sanctioned this behaviour. While Muslim divorce is not uncommon and neither is there an expectation under Islamic jurisprudence to stay in a bad marriage, the impact of divorce on young women has for many been one of shame and failure. The lack of what they describe as, "the practice of having boyfriends and breaking up", etc., which would help them ascertain "red flags", meant not having the experience necessary to determine their own marriage choices in contrast to male members of the community, whose looser virtue was often overlooked. Participants whose marriages failed were left with its emotional burden at a young age, to the extent that they were considered "flighty" or loose. Or their self-depreciation in the face of community disquiet transmutes as a trauma they expect to bear as a result of choosing a "hedonistic" lifestyle. This typically results in any repercussion being seen as somehow deserved, as a way of righting non-Islamic behaviour, with the not behaving as a good Muslim woman ought becoming a trauma of the self.

Cheruvallil-Contractor (2012) argues that Muslim women fail to experience the Islamic ideal of emancipation, access to education, economic activity or property rights, as a result of cultural values within communities and women's *unawareness* of what is assured them in the Quran and *Sunnah*. However, there is a mismatch between these promised ideals and the Western Imperialist notion of women's domesticity, piety and virtue. Many of the first-hour generation did not condone *tafsir* and *itjihad* or the reinterpretation of theological texts and jurisprudence on the premise that equity already exists in the Quran. However, participants were intrigued about feminist movements in Islam and the fight for women's rights in marriage and the family. They wanted to know more of my research and were confused as to why this knowledge had not been shared with them by their parents, particularly regarding marriage rites. Many did not believe it was possible to have an "Islamic" feminism. However, European Muslim women today are far more aware and forward about their marriage contract and dowry. During attendance at a Muslim women's retreat[28] I was taken aback at how many women had specifically outlined the contents of their marriage contract, emphasising the right to work, receiving monetary value for their housework and their protection in case of divorce. This custom of marriage being a "business-like" arrangement that includes a contract stipulating marital boundaries and dower has only become relevant with the second-generation within the past ten years. The parental generation were more "relaxed" according to their narratives, or indifferent, to the rights of women in marriage during the 1970s - 1990s, many attested to not having had a written contract and others

[28] Ladies of Light Mercy of the Womb Retreat. (February 2020). Organised through the Rabbani Project. Not affiliated with the Murabitun.

to not even being present at their own contractual signing. The consequence of this has often left women under-resourced in regard to their rights, entering into polygynous marriages without their consent or suddenly divorced by their husbands. These experiences have deeply affected the next generation, many of whom have witnessed this in their own families and in the community.

6.4 The Christianisation of Islam

The choice to encapsulate traditional gendered feminine ideals was much criticised by feminists for some decades, reminiscent it was argued of Colonial rule, an aspect of the Murabitun ideology which has shaped its formation from the outset. What it captures is how gender performativity and expectations of feminine behaviour is endemic to how women perform their belonging to this community, whether to demonstrate a sacrificial nature *a priori,* or to embolden a moral way of life. These ideals were emulated by a network of women leaders, mothers, and aunties to the young women of the community as to how to be a good Muslim woman. Indeed, performances enacted and embodied in a "place" can constitute behaviour in individuals which cannot be disassociated from the collective project (Fortier, 1999). Convert fervour believed this to be the correct and Islamic way of bringing up the next generation, to both distinguish them from the secular society and establish service and obedience, producing bodies that are "formed and continually reinforced via inducible practices within culturally defined spaces, which are themselves in turn continually constituted out of these same practices" (Martin, 1997:92). The influence of the West on religious belief, community cohesion and women's changing roles, bodies, behaviours and presence in the public sphere has been a challenge to the establishment of British Islam. In the domain of increased mixing in public, questions around sexuality and the boundaries between femininity and masculinity become thematically incongruent. On a religious practice and transmission level, these aspects of women's lived realities have been carefully managed in order to maintain the binary distinction between appropriate moral conduct and the superficial imitation of the West.

In Mossière's (2016) study of converts in France, she remarks on how converts embody modest dress and veiling as a way to distinguish themselves from the Western secular women so that by embodying the role of mother-in-the-making they are "propelling notions of femininity and sexuality outwards, like a sort of stain, to the benefit of material 'purification' and 'internal moralisation'" (547). Converts' self-obsessive concern with appearance, hyper-sexualisation and the ambition of achieving an egalitarian status with men is regarded as shameful and obscene and something that diminishes a women's value to society and negatively impacts her role as guardian of the home, as wife and mother. The oft quoted observation by the Prophet Muhammad that

“paradise lies at the feet of the mothers” is both a vanguard of thought and an example of how Islam gave women rights before the West, particularly among converts. As such the idea that married Muslim women are “serious” about being pious and virtuous as opposed to Western liberal women who are not, becomes part of a constructed femininity to distinguish Muslim women. Indeed, what Brenner (1996) describes as the “discipline of veiling” addresses the way some convert women adopt strategies of dress performance in response to scrutiny by Muslim peers, despite feeling empowered by their Islamic covering. It is not uncommon for long-term convert women to comment on the length of skirt, the way of tying a veil, visible body shape, or neckline, to younger or new converts - a constant reminder that being Muslim means adhering to a set of codes and duties. Consequently, some choose not to wear the veil to avoid such pious discernment with those that unveil feeling a sense of relief, further demonstrating how women are both symbols and bearers of moral ethics, who are expected to monitor their public behaviour and accept its being monitored (Mossière, 2016).

While Muslim religious styles are often seen as transgressing the secular separation between public and private spheres, much of Western public discourse draws on the idea that Muslims are exceptions to socio-cultural adoption of and adaption to norms, making them a unique category (unlike other ethnic and religious minorities) (Fadil, 2006). However, the women of this study have articulated in multiple ways how, in spite of their Muslim upbringing, the secular world has filtered through and been formatted in an “Islamic” way. The phenomena they describe is how two different cultures that promise different parameters of individual and communal boundaries intertwine through them. These women grew up observing and being part of mainstream education, friends, work, and cultural influences that impacted their formative and generational understanding of themselves. Their awareness of feminism, women’s rights in legal marriage, and women’s rights in Islamic theology, comes from the perspective of a British Muslim woman who has incorporated secularity from a different perspective to that of their parents’ generation who chose to reject it. Their experiences draw parallel influences between Muslim and secular ideologies, as Bushra elucidates, the brain looks for patterns and consistencies and so creates bridges. If secularity, which according to Beaman (2012) has been heavily influenced by Christian traditions and beliefs, perpetuates the construction of feminisation and segregation in society, the ascribing of a domestic (private) versus social (public) division is similarly the creation of a unique British Islam, with its particular indoctrination of Western ideas and philosophy, such as its anti-imperialist stance. Has it in fact perpetuated a “Christianisation” or Euro-Christian ethos (El-Guindi, 1999) regarding gendered practice and public/private performativity? The degree that the concept of guilt and shame has been “weaponised” within this creation, which although aiming to stand apart from its Christian roots, has become entangled in a conservative religious narrative that places “sins” within a Western Islamic doctrine. It is through this prism that the construction

of gender, space and sexuality has been distorted, creating polarity rather than an integration of dualities, which Islamic principles insist upon.

6.4.1 Caught between two worlds

Leila is in her early 40s, the eldest of a large white working-class family and is divorced. Her mother converted when she was less than a year old, so for the purpose of this study she is included, but the passive act of conversion has its own story. She describes the environment among the young women as they turned 18 and 19 years of age whereby marriage and good feminine comportment was the focus of their development. While most married young, Leila was considered a renegade because she questioned its institutional veracity. At their age she believed young women should be exploring, learning and testing the boundaries between sexes, official marriage came later and should only be called so after three years or with children. “I think it’s almost cultural appropriation, bringing a culture into something and then taking some of the more negative misogynistic, stigmatised things and melding them together over something so intimate. I just think it's a recipe for disaster… It doesn’t make people happy, it’s stressful.” An inevitable part of being a young Muslim woman in Norwich from a relatively small community was the likelihood of meeting someone - a prospective husband. Leila had a non-Muslim boyfriend, and despite a heated relationship believed his conversion would be a seamless part of their commitment through marriage. Despite his “cold feet” the conversion occurred, but their marriage continued as it had begun, and after a difficult and complicated relationship, they eventually divorced. Leila is candid in her story, “when I got married Islamically, really, it wasn't worth the paper it was written on because there was a lot of infidelity in the marriage which is “not allowed” - being married didn't protect me from the things that it was meant to protect me from ideologically.” She believes that with more relationship experience she would have recognised the red flags - her husband was unfaithful, in and out of the relationship, ghosted her, put her down, but she just believed he was a difficult personality and was easily distracted by other people.

Leila expounds that the concept of no sex before marriage affects many young women who marry young and then get divorced. So, that by the age of 19 or 21 they are carrying the social weight of a failed marriage, a heavy burden to carry so early on in life with little experience or confidence of an alternative. She believes that in Western terms, marriages do not fail, rather it was as if they were girlfriend and boyfriend and they broke up, but when women have had three or four marriages by the time they are 21 that signals something is socially broken. “The idea that at the age of 17 you will be in love and married forever and then six months later you don’t feel the same, is because you’re a teenager with hormones and mistakes to make and not because you’re

bad at relationships." This translated into a feeling of disenfranchisement and being a second-class citizen, particularly in relation to her sexuality, and the imperative to fulfil the husband's needs whether inclined to do so or not. The message from the community, and elite women, was if they did not serve their husbands, or refused them sex, they would be contradicting Divine law. "That was literally…it wasn't just spoken by people, it was reiterated as an idea to the point of, if you don't, if you refuse your partner sex, you're making yourself a space in hell, that is, you know, that is the line. I don't think I believed it, but that's where it gets weird, because I did believe it. I just thought, Oh, you know that's what [men] need. It's just the way it is. Maybe I don't believe it … because now I can't believe that was something that I ascribed to". Leila persuaded herself that she only had to marry a man who wouldn't force her to have sex and that she would enjoy it so it would not be a problem.

Leila is aware of the damage this indoctrination has had on her and other young women, "I've been thinking about it recently, how some friends who weren't that into sex, who had difficulties being physically intimate and how deeply and utterly traumatising that was for them". Ultimately, she came to the realisation that she could not trust in those institutions, "and again, like the thing of polygyny you had to put up with it, and if you went against it, again, you'd probably go to hell for denying the husband sexually if he wanted to have sex with someone else!" While the lack of experience was one thing, it was a combination of low self-esteem and seeing herself as someone who's only role was to serve and support others - but the very vocal and established ideas about sex in marriage remained, "you know, being there for your man and, being his safe space and his sanctuary, all of those things I found difficult, and I kind of parked them under the umbrella of "I don't really have any rights". As though in a process of retribution she exclaims, "I want to clear myself of any hidden need or trauma and so I've been sitting with just the idea of self-compassion and gratitude for me and some sad little stories have come up. I realise they're actually quite, quite horrible and you know, some of them I can't talk about because they're just too horrible".

These experiences are embroiled in community and belonging. For Leila being part of the "pack" meant fitting into a designated role, and that if she did not, she would cease to exist. As a result, she struggled to feel comfortable in community or group situations, where she did not feel safe or nurtured. While she does not attribute this directly to Islam, it was part and parcel of that way of living, so there is an attachment to it in some form, although her relationship with Allah, she clarifies, is very different. She no longer feels the same burdens, but its resonance comes through her work as she expands her therapy practice in Chinese Medicine to treat sexual trauma, for both women, and men - whom she believes have also been discriminated against in the same domain - thereby levering her own trauma into her strength.

The revelations from these young women is at times stark, the sense of being at the “bottom of the pack”, negotiating socially acceptable and unquestioned practices from peers, some family members, and the community structure, that a women’s needs simply came second - implying that it was not important for her sexual needs to be fulfilled, but rather that her *ibadah*, was to fulfil the sexual needs of her husband. Douglas (2002) argues that particular notions of sexual “pollutions” can become “analogies for expressing a general view of the social order” (4). It can thus be determined that acquiescing to the internal pressure of religious discourse has transposed submission in sacred terms, and that when marital, and sexual, dynamics are not equitable or reciprocal, agency and choice become constrained. This raises important questions about the impact of religious discourses on Muslim women’s subjectivity and self-formation - “In this hierarchical and dualistic religious anthropology, God is singularly the accomplice of a man’s sexual desire without any consideration of his wife’s consent, desire, or circumstances” (Hoel and Shaikh, 2013:82). Bodily symbolism, particularly the rhetoric of sexual morality, is therefore a powerful framework for maintaining or defending notions of ethnic, religious and national cohesion. As a result, some of these women have removed themselves from the community - a process of unbelonging that can be psychologically painful and damaging. Some who experienced excommunication for challenging community doctrine attest to this experience of shock or rupture. Despite communities relying on and being sustained by women, this type of fracturing reveals the way kinship ties, and affection, can be withdrawn, in spite of history and memory (Stasch, 2009). Indeed, it reveals the impact a community and its members can assert on the sanctity of the family and marriage, sometimes with the implementation of harm and violence (Chowdhury and Winder, 2022).

The contention that abusive marriages - being left destitute from divorce, not considered worthy of love, respect or protection - was enabled by a set of intransigent behaviours established by the community’s leadership, religiously condoned and allowed to go unchecked, had a formative effect on these women. For some the fear of repercussion, excommunication and rejection was extremely damaging and has needed repair in later life. Experiences deemed “traumatic” have made some women feel uncomfortable when in place, describing it as allergic and a dynamic too triggering to be in. There is a level of vulnerability endured through these experiences that can be considered as a form of violence (Chakraborty, 2009). Indeed, as Butler (2004b) reflects, this is a feature of social relations - people are at risk because they have been *made* vulnerable to subjugation. Despite Islamic prescriptions regarding marriage being subtle and malleable and simultaneously informed by ideals of gender equality, the articulations of these women’s examples do not reflect this. In this formulation of British Islam, the concepts of equality in marriage and the household have not been translated or forethought in the ideology, let alone in practice. The

socio-political ideology of a charismatic British Shaykh, the rejection of secularity and liberalism as being a distraction from the *deen,* played a leading role in the Murabitun's developmental policy for being Muslim. Such gender-biased religious traditions that determine a woman's sexual compliance are powerful in shaping her gendered subjectivity. It is here that Lloyd (2007) suggests that the performativity which produces a gendered subject is also the site where a critical agency becomes possible. It is the instability of performativity that opens up possibilities for destabilising or subverting the dominant regulatory order.

6.5 The conditions for creativity

A consequence of the consternation between transmission, community and ideology, has seen a development of both a combative and/or "overwhelming experience" (Tantam, 2024), which in turn impacts participants relationship with their faith. Their emotive reaction, robust or diminutive, has coloured the transmission of the feminine embodiment of pious submission, which perhaps convert parents hoped for, but not one which reflects the gender justice promised in the Quran. This combative relationship not only sets up gender disparities, but drives the individual toward more tactical, "fluid" or *bricologic*, lived-religion practices in order to play out power imbalances (Woodhead, 2013). Ortner (2006) describes how two elements; dominance and resistance and agency of intentions and aspirations become intertwined, whereby women develop creative and resilient approaches *through* challenges. As a result, a resilient subject (Aranda *et al*., 2012) emerges as both constrained and agent - described as having an "unfinished" resilience that can account for the creative possibility beginning to take shape. In an effort to reclaim ethical value, participants articulate the need for depth and warmth in their relationship with their faith, one that is imbued with love. These women find spiritual fulfilment in ritual practice and prayer. They construct ideas of beauty and divinity through their experiences of the *wird*, *dhikr*, fasting Ramadan or simply being in nature, in the search for an ecstatic, surrendering practice, that is fulfilling and inclusive. It is through word, meaning and context and the implementation of spiritual desires, that they prioritise a love of knowledge. It is the lack of what they deemed to be the true intention of Allah, the teaching of love and encouragement for all spiritual aspects of faith, that meant many grew up with the opposite, leaving them with a feeling of self-loathing, inadequacy, deficiency and a sense of being judged. There was love of Allah, love for the Shaykh and love for the community, yet familial love was not valued in the same way. While the Muslim experience and framework informed their spirituality and morality, their own journey with faith has focused on the cultivation of love which both contextualises and reinforces Islam as a "way of life" - confounding the application of good *adab* with what it means to have self-respect.

As with women in Hoel and Shaikh's (2013) study who conceive sex as *ibadah,* to allow for a more loving and nurturing God, the choice to draw on more egalitarian religious imaginaries to challenge androcentric discourses is an interesting addition to the agency and resistance narrative - to believe in a merciful and compassionate God is also a way to fragment the normative construct of male privilege in gendered religious and patriarchal traditions. Kawash (2011) states that "Religion as an institution has done much to uphold the most damaging forms of patriarchy" (994) and women's disaffection with institutional religion is a considerable effect. However, this is not a clear-cut rejection. While some European women are leaving established religions, they are "numerically more dominant, especially the newer forms of alternative spiritualities" (Aune *et al*., 2008: 15). The first-hour generation negotiated individual agency, gender equality and civic rights and duties in their initial religious socialisation which assumed communitarian, asymmetrical gender relations and a nondemocratic adoption of social and political education. The second-generation continue this negotiation but in the context of finding a balance between religion and the social roles and visibility that modernity has brought with it, despite patriarchy continuing to be the dominant feature in institutional religion. In the face of unmerciful conditions, women deploy resourceful ways to persevere. As a result of their socio-political, temporal and historical context, participants are drawing on both their secular and Islamic feminist interpretations of women's rights to critique Islamic and Christian values of marriage, divorce and sexuality.

Within the emulation of Sufi models of self, where the *nafs* are overcome and all challenges are considered a "test" by Allah, these women emphasise the need for understanding the complexity and challenge that the journeying self necessitates. Rather than simply consider needs and desires as ego-derived and unworthy in the construction of a religious self, this empirical data shows how internal contradictions, ambiguities and incoherences inform and diversify the discourse and practice of ordinary Muslims (Osella and Soares, 2010). These women were frustrated by the disparity of presenting the ideal Muslim woman and the psychological trauma of what happens when you suppress "natural urges to understand your own boundaries, to create your own systems of morality". The concept of subjectivity as a description of normative ideals, such as Butler's (1990) *Girling the Girl*, reflects the multitude of practices through which gender identity is performed. Indeed, it is within these norms that a subject's agency to resist or subvert them is located, to compulsively repeat and adapt variations of those same citations. As Foucault's (1978) *assujetissement* iterates*,* the subject as produced by a subjection to (disciplinary) power which results in a process that constitutes a becoming. While Nassbaum (1999) argues that Butler presents a "parody without politics", too focused on the discursive performance and not on institutional change, Butler does expose the illusion of "natural" binary gender categories, albeit through a Euro-centric lens. If this can be "recuperated" (McShane, 2021) as a decolonial "boarder-thinking" (Mignolo, 2011) tool when read alongside Black and

Indigenous feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; Lugones, 2007), it is capable of revealing and unsettling imperialist definitions of gender and used to highlight the extent to which Euro-Christian beliefs have permeated gender traditional practices.

Indeed, in the process of Anthropology's decolonising of trauma, we are encouraged to look beyond Western depictions of traumatic experiences and to "listen deeply" (Tantam, 2024) to other culturally specific ways of knowing, healing and coping. While Turner's (1974) exploration of transformative crises is useful to extrapolate the potential of the threshold position it does not fully capture the depth and embodiment of existential struggle. Incorporating decolonial feminist literature alongside Islamic Feminist and Sufi epistemological pedagogies emphasises the more ambivalent aspects of agency, as well as the importance of "retethering" (Lester, 2013) that rebuilds social bonds, which is a crucial part of the evolving, circular and transformative nature of healing - the "unmaking and remaking" of what makes up the journeying self - particularly for second-generation convert Muslims who straddle both worlds and as a result advance limiting definitions of religiosity. Those who experienced the *kafirun* life or stepped outside expected Islamic behaviour, recounted how they needed to know *fully* what it was they were rejecting to know what it was they were choosing. The absurdity of others' judgements or opinions on their life choices in face of the hypocrisy they observed, seems to have catapulted their desire for freedom of choice and to create something of their own making. Indeed, it is through the tension between constraint and resistance that relations of power open up "a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions" (Foucault, 1982:220). Overcoming experiences of extreme personal and public reckoning and adversity has induced a resurgence of assertiveness and a questioning of the parameters they were set to value themselves with. The loss of control (separation) gives way to the uncertainty of vulnerability (liminal), which through relational repair, performance and recognition, participants undergo an iterative process of *becoming otherwise*. As they have expressed, without experiencing difficulty, heartbreak or hardship, being a Muslim can become a romanticised, exoticised experience. Instead, what emerges is that this process of deconstructing and decolonising benefits their understanding of their own spiritual journey, informed through embodied experiences and the ethics of change.

6.6 Conclusion

To incorporate alternative perspectives and lived experience into what Bushra describes as "the social experiment of British Islam, and the expectation to represent it" is, I believe, a necessary evolution of the phenomenon. The Murabitun established the specificities of a gendered script along lines of private-feminine and public-masculine spheres, which delegated women, and men,

to particular activities such as motherhood and being a good wife. While traditional notions of femininity appeal to converts in their quest for more family-orientated and traditional values, these scripts can also "serve to facilitate the subordination of women" (Sumerau and Cragun, 2014). This chapter has revealed that this juxtaposition plays out in participants lives who negotiate the traditional lifestyle alongside their secular lives to claim an equal space in the home or outside it. What we see is how this unique Western Sufi adoption of Islam has inadvertently, or not, transposed a Christianisation of Islam, creating polarity rather than an integration of domains, implementing admonishments rather than endorsements. The result has been a breakdown of trust in the community and Islamic practice, which for some women led to a combative relationship with their faith, while for others was about reformulating womanhood and the expectation to serve unremittingly. As such these women are finding ways of refashioning the concept of a "good Muslim woman" considering how it impacts the self, their family, and their future. By normalising these conversations, the second-generation wish to reformulate the fear induced sense of being an "outlier" or going to the fire (hell). It is not about absolution but rather a concern with the fact that establishing a pedestal of perfection, that nobody transgresses, establishes negative relationships with the self, which may cause damage and trauma.

While the ethics in Islam have been considered incompatible alongside contemporary secularised societies and particularly disadvantageous to women (Mossière, 2016), there are many Muslim women who have sought to frame a feminist and egalitarian interpretation of Islamic theology, producing and reshaping subjectivities through envisioning a universalistic Islam, one disassociated with ethnic cultural and traditional interpretations. In doing so, alternative religious and social representations of Muslim identities have been produced, that incorporate secular context, culture and a "modern" agency, which is having a cumulative effect on the way women challenge patriarchal narratives and move instead towards ways of believing that are more spiritual, less formal and which position women as central in religious life and transmission (Cheruvallil-Contractor and Rye, 2016). The ritual practice of Islam from a young age, the format of an alternative education and the value of the cultural and ideological backdrop of the community, participants have acknowledged - gave them insight and empowered their sense of connection with the Divine. To conclude, in regard to secularisation theories, "women's modes of belief are neither secular nor sacral, but both" (Aune *et al.*, 2008:15). This process of challenge and resist is part of the process of creative endeavour which leads to new ways to believe and practise and, more significantly, new ways for their children to believe. As such, these women are slowly but significantly transforming the religious landscape and reclaiming it for themselves.

Chapter 7: New ways of being and belonging

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I arrive in the searing heat of the afternoon after a long drive from the coast. The Pilling Park Community Centre in Thorpe, where the Eid-al-fitra celebrations are taking place, is nestled into a sprawling 1950s housing estate. As I pull into the carpark I notice the surrounding houses covered in the St.George cross, the World Cup notwithstanding, this makes my hair stand on end. I am greeted at the gated entrance by the Imam, Abdal Hakim and a close family friend who diligently offers to carry the heavy crockery boxes, tug-of-war rope and the hessian sacks I have brought as my contribution to the celebration. The front of the low yellow-bricked building was deemed to be the “men’s” section, where the BBQ was already alight and a flurry of bodies flittered about busily setting out tables and arranging the day’s accoutrements. Walking down the wide corridor entrance, I greet faces I do not recognise, but who smile and bid me “Eid Mubarak”. My focus is to find the kitchen. As I enter, the women are busily preparing food and drink, and the cacophony of where the salads are to go, what time the performances are starting and where the cake and tea area is going to be rings in my ears. I place the crockery down and without much jostling or interference, I pull up my sleeves and get stuck in. I like being in that place, in the fulcrum of the organisation and activity and I happily find myself a role to fulfil. Clearing a space by the portal for the cups and saucers to the sound of disco music emanating from a performing magician feels somewhat out of place. Yet, much more obtuse is the appearance of a Pakistani man beside me who begins blowing up balloons as big as they can go and then popping them, to the delight of the children and the annoyance of the women in the kitchen. Whilst arranging for the salads to arrive at their designated place, I help an elder prepare fruit. I ask her if she enjoys doing this, as she really doesn't need to be in the kitchen helping; she responds with a huge smile, saying how much she loves it, loves having a role in the festivities. It seems we both do. I go out to the front to greet some friends, it is filling up now, smoke from the BBQ fills the area and people are queuing in a very orderly fashion for their food. This years Eid celebrations include a large variety of people, Malaysian, Pakistani, West Indian and non-Muslims, it feels open and inclusive, something older is dissolving and something new is being born. I watch the crowd around me, men sit under a large oak chatting and playing with some of the children, some women congregate near the entrance smiling and laughing, while others are battling it out in the Archery competition, hair flying loose from their turban scarves. I seek out my contributor whom I have arranged to speak with today, the first of the first-hour’s, who with an ethereal elegance beckons me over to the shade. We greet each other and she gestures smiling toward my cohort, the second-generation, whom she believes have actually achieved real community. At my questioning, she explains the difference between a requisite community of disparate people and those who have grown together, forming unconditional friendships that transcend differences.

There is a sadness in her words, a recognition of failure, or perhaps this was their purpose, in this creation of "British Muslims", to ultimately achieve a "*fitri* being", the natural primal state of man, and woman, in harmony with nature and the time and place they are situated.

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7.1 Introduction

"My destination is no longer a place, rather a new way of seeing." Marcel Proust

The narrative around the question of compatibility between Western and Muslim values reduces identification to predefined categories, such as "Muslim", "Sufi", "British" or "convert". This withdraws people's ability to confer or create viable alternatives underpinning belonging and reifies normative identities. British Muslims feel the burden of bridging such dichotomous classifications and have gone some way to disparage the negative representation of Islam (Hassan and Younis, 2017). As such, they enact "righteous" publicly accepted behaviour to prove their compatibility with the nation - not a characteristic to be found in Muslim countries (Bowen, 2007). Sammut and Sartawi's (2012) study on British Muslims found that those determined to practice Islam in an orthodox manner were more vulnerable to threats to their Islamic identity, impacting their adherence to practise their beliefs under pressure to integrate. As such, these second-generation converts have to negotiate and redefine their everyday religiosity and practice in order to accommodate and comprehend their liminal positionality. Yet despite this, many Muslims consider their identification as Muslim, even if loose, as vital to their sense of belonging. As Zainab explains, "There is no such thing as practising one hundred percent perfectly. It does not exist; we are not created to be perfect. We do our best and that's all Allah expects. There is always more to be done, but I know that Allah appreciates all the things I do, I know he loves me, and I know I'm becoming better".

There are many studies of minority Muslims who take a more active and visible role and live out their religiosity in public spaces, See Soper and Fetzer (2009); Mandaville (2007); Roy (2004). However, these studies have engaged with the momentum of a "revivalist Islam" or what has been coined the "new Islam" - a recent contemporary phenomenon that emphasises the centrality of Islam as a public and sometimes political identity (Jeldtoft, 2011; Peek, 2005). These studies present a specific expression of Muslim identity and life, namely minority and diasporic populations, which largely exclude the lived experiences of converts or their post-convert families. This risks essentialising Islam as a principal identity marker, and/or making all Muslims "all about Islam" (Abu-Lughod 1989; Jeldtoft 2009). If assignable categories which attempt to define, such

as; religion, gender and national identity are considered conclusive, their meanings and constructions go through multiple transformations in response to shifting environments and self-formation. The challenges posed by secular society, minority status and public and political Islamophobia bring an awareness to British Muslims of the need to engage in a reinterpretation and adoption of new organisational forms and practices. The emergence of new spiritualities challenges classical methods for studying religious behaviour, by focusing on spiritual discourses and narratives, such as a lived practice (Ammerman, 2014), revealing the dynamics between contemporary regimes of spirituality and the thriving cultures of well-being under a Neo-liberal paradigm. Despite its critics, Neo-liberalism has become the major contemporary global order. In John Locke's classical liberalism, for example, the individual is prioritised as the emissary of fundamental rights and values - liberty, autonomy and equality as well as the deregulation of economic activity, privatisation and limits to welfare support (Mossière, 2022). However, its potential threat to individual liberty, social justice and market dominance is seen by many (Rawls, 2001, Whyte, 2019), with neoliberalising processes like market forces impacting religious life, shaping religious spaces as well as ritual and liturgy, adapting to individuality through modernising teaching and worship (Martikainen, 2006).

Despite religious values continuing to influence societies as part of an ethical, post-secular evolution (Habermas, 2008), the popularity of mindfulness and yoga are examples of how spiritual activities have merged with commodification and branding (Jain, 2015), with the use of semantic terms such as "religious entrepreneurs". In this way, neoliberalism impacts religious experiences by shifting responsibility for learning and improving oneself onto the individual - now "tasked with developing their "human capital" through education, experience and emotional competence, they are also urged to produce their own happiness and to customise religious resources, often based on the kind of well-being such resources might foster" (Mossière, 2022:3), away from collective and communal structures of support. The neoliberalised individual thus exemplifies how ethics and change are shaped by spiritual rather than religious narratives. While this coincides with secularisation and the religious shift from the public to the private realm, Mossière (2022) argues it reflects the inevitable evolution which exists in all faiths, whereby the mystical transcends the mainstream with renewed attention towards reflexivity and self-realisation. Spirituality is defined here according to Simmel's (1997 [1911]) concept of the subject whose religiosity is contingent on the affective, cognitive or physiological aspects that shape their lived realities, "a dynamic part of a life freed from the concern for transcendence" (Mossière, 2022:4). In this way, spirituality is a unique human experience that appears as an expression of the individual's vitality, it is an active subjectivity, in relationship to others, things and the world, and improves all aspects of a subject's life. Ultimately, it enables the self to connect in creative ways in contradiction to modern fragmented conditions (Hervieu-Léger and Willaime, 2001).

For participants the privileged site for these developments has become the workplace; combining spirituality, well-being and neoliberal constraints. “New” leaders need to be sought in these contexts, opening up “new” discourses and approaches to Muslim values, citizenship and belonging. The mode of “representation” is an important discussion point for both a wider Western-European audience but also a vital one for Muslims themselves (Fadil, 2006). The inclusion of work motives and identities in this chapter highlights the impact and relevance of spirituality and individuality on participants career choices and their representation on social media. Work presents as an act of meaningful communication with the wider world - a way to put values into action and find meaning in a contribution or service to others. These values are expressed as ideal images of what these women constitute as true worth, power and meaning as practitioners. The image of individual success has gained cultural currency which has negated the idea of shared purpose and mutual responsibility. While religion acts as a foundation, women’s integration of new spiritualities transcends normative ideals and what we see in this chapter is how in practice they present actions which seek not only self-care and fulfilment but social connection and harmony as a way to find the good and hope in life. This is the concluding part of the journeying self whereby the second-generational become fully responsible and autonomous subjects in their own right - a process launched from its nascent beginnings, traversing trauma and grief, through the challenges of gender submission and resistance, to engaging the ethical imagination (Moore, 2011) to draw attention to the way they wish to see and be seen in the world. Such attempts at becoming a “good” or “better” is context for the ethical formation of “knowing oneself”, both a creative and value laden endeavour.

This chapter presents the ways participants intersect their Muslim identity with other identities (Baumann, 1999) and that their liminal positionality can give insight into and be uniquely positioned to understand the question of what a British Muslim is. New spiritualities are expressed through an amalgamation of Eastern mysticism, mindfulness, yoga, Shiatsu, and an exploration of the Divine feminine and “ecological Islam”. These concepts and practices have been integrated into their lived religion and used as avenues of income, knowledge sharing and professional development. These career choices encapsulate both spiritual choices and practices which come to terms with historical traumas. Firstly, I examine how women reconfigure their Muslim identity and inherited culture in order to gain ownership of their convictions - since epistemologically the second-generation are in a process of decolonising their *deen*. Then I analyse the use and impact of social media and self-formation. Incorporating their work and their use of new media reveals the importance of convictions, defined through power, to show how their Islamic faith is adapted to be more inclusive. Finally, I look at the ways women are amalgamating various spiritual philosophies within their practice of Islam. It delves into their experiences with the Divine feminine

as a means of healing and being the good in the world. While lived religious or spiritual practices are less visible and identifiable compared to more formalised versions, they are a relevant form of social action and considerably under-researched in the context of British Muslims. Focusing on the micro (politics) that do not necessarily constitute orthodox "Islamic" practices but are integrated in people's daily lives, can show how Muslims (like everyone else) are making sense of the world (Soares and Osella, 2010), particularly for those Muslims who identify as secular or are highly critical of what they consider as an orthodox turn within the community. As Liberatore (2013) argues, within this general terrain of the problematisation of culture (of the parents), a set of intersecting domains offers a series of problems and challenges for politics and for self-formation. As Cadge and Konieczny (2014) argue, despite "religion hiding in plain sight" (9), individuals creatively and practically incorporate a "bricolage of meanings" available to them and present them in the workplace. For this cohort their Muslim values are quite compatible with their secular values, and their choices of work are significant in this regard to enable constructing identities that co-constitute the secular and the sacred.

7.2 The liminal space

There is a fundamental question in the scholarship on Islam in Europe about how multiple generations of Muslims relate to the Islam of their parents (Fadil, 2015). The consensus has been that with growing secularisation and religious decline Muslims too would follow the pattern of their non-Muslim peers. In response, there have been numerous studies that reveal that in fact Islam has persisted in importance amongst second- and third-generation Muslims, particularly from migrant and minority populations. However, this identification is overwhelmingly stressed as a need to differentiate from their parents' traditional, ethnic or cultural Islam in the quest for an "authentic" or "real" Islam (Liberatore, 2017; Fadil, 2015) - a process that has been related to the popularity of the Islamic revivalist movement among diasporic generations (Roy, 2004), and described as largely an engagement with exegetical texts and theological arguments by individual Muslims. While these studies were useful in dispensing with earlier modernist accounts that pathologised Islam and set up binary oppositions, they leaned toward an over-investment of ethical self-cultivation regarding Islamic norms, constituting a reductionist account at the expense of political, economic and other structures that mediate Muslim life. A focus on piety lacks complexity as "ethical self-cultivation is never a totalising project, nor are its outcomes easily predictable" (Fadil, 2015).

British Islam is relatively young and therefore has plasticity. It is still evolving. This is particularly seen in examples of diasporic young Muslims who are adapting and moulding their cultural

heritage and their Islam in exciting and creative ways through poetry and art (Janmohamed, 2016, Fadil, 2006), reclaiming their culture (Liberatore, 2016). These generations are developing something new within the container of being British or European. In the rupture from their previous lives on account of their conversion, convert parents disassociated from their cultural heritage just as their children have struggled to reconnect with it. Coined by one participant as a "cultural appropriation", it was the adoption of a different culture to the one you were born into, without any consideration on the impact of that disassociation. In this context culture can be referred to as a mode of subjectification (Foucault, 1985) based on an uncritical acceptance of inherited practices, referring to a submission to parents, kin or community. This is a point that needs to be underlined - culture was translated as a submission to an inherited Islam, the Islam of the parents. Yet for the second-generation, there is a substantial distinction between the cultural attitude of their parents and their own commitment to a transcendent Islam. They describe the burden of an Islam tainted by obligation rather than personal choice, lacking a freedom that their parents had, leaving them with a sense of hypocrisy and malaise. Despite their attempts to live Islam differently the parental insistence on particular ritual practices and isolation from other conceptions of Islam, created a gradual distancing from what were seen as orthodox interpretations and in some instances estrangement from the community.

I am meeting Habiba over the less than dulcet tones of a Zoom call from Spain where she now lives, with her three children and (second) husband. Habiba is an author, poet, musician, a scholar of Sufi liturgy and creative writing facilitator, conducting workshops and meetings both online and in person, such as women's Sufi retreats. Her creative repertoire speaks of an inquisitive mind, a thirst for knowledge and the importance of having a connection with the communities that surround her, locally and globally. She was born in Norwich when the community were establishing Darqawi - the project to create a Muslim centre of commerce and learning deep in the Norfolk countryside in the mid 1970s. She grew up in a rural village, which felt isolated especially with the aftershocks of her parents leaving Darqawi and eschewing the community's transition into the Murabitun. Their withdrawal established her own family unit as a sanctuary. The "only Muslims in her village", Habiba became adept at putting on a façade, a shell to present to the outside world, an "acceptable" persona. This was necessary to avoid the inevitable questions which would follow her identification, events she had no relationship to, such as wars and terrorist attacks. As a child she too was not prepared for the expectation of being the voice of Islam, it was challenging and hostile, constantly feeling othered, which she found to be alienating, and inhibitive to close friendships.

While she would not conceal the fact that she was Muslim, she would not advertise it, so it was not the primary focus on which to be judged, "It felt like the word Muslim has so many

connotations, mostly negative for people in the West, and that's a very heavy burden to take on". Being treated like a freak, a rarity, or exotic, became commonplace, so she would be selective as to whom she would share it. Compared with young Muslims today, who are more visible and numerous, her generation were few, "There were only a handful of people you could really relate to, who understood your experience", now she believes "it is a cultural movement!". In comparison, Habiba feels that minority Muslims in the UK have a clear and proud cultural identity, such as "Pakistani Glaswegians for example, who are part of a certain body that advocates a strong sense of belonging". For her, being a white child to convert parents has meant not actually having a culture to speak of, or belong to, which has formed a "low-level trauma" due to its alienation, "not to be compared with overt racism that minorities experience". She felt like an island, "All my life, I wanted to build bridges and make archipelagos, to reach other people, to imagine a kind of … like a network". In Habiba's book, based on 20 years' experience as a British Muslim, particularly with a view on race and convert whiteness, she explains how being white impacted the way she interpreted her Islam. She believes this gave her the licence to interpret Islam differently because of how her own parents' journey had evolved; being part of the counter-cultural movement of intellectuals, artists, etc., it gave them a freedom to choose without being constrained by cultural expectations compared to minority Muslims. Habiba wishes she too had been given the chance to choose, to explore her own spirituality and break from her inherited tradition, which became tainted by her parents' experimentation, "I think really if Islam is about truth, then it has to be about a person's whole truth and they have to come to it with their full self, it can't just be a forced thing, you can't force it on someone because then it's inauthentic. It's not true. Ultimately it must be one's choice, otherwise it is a dictatorship".

In essence, this connects to an idea that white British people have homogenised their own colonisation which has fragmented their indigenous Britishness, as Habiba exclaims, "unlike the Scottish, Irish or Welsh who have a better idea of their relationship with the land and what that entails…we lack our folk tradition, and those marginal places that do celebrate it are sneered at and scorned…The closest you might get is a farmer's market in London and you get this kind of nice rustic, almost a pastiche of a bucolic harmony and bliss with homemade cheeses and maybe buy a basket or something, it's very lovely but it's almost a caricature of something that has been really quite forcefully destroyed, and we haven't really reckoned with that". In Zahra's experience however, as a Black Muslim woman, the community in Norwich, created a "white" way of being Muslim and declared it the only path, from how to wear your scarf to how to dress, it recreated patterns of elitism that detracted from Islam as it should be. At its core, she explains, "white Englishness is based on colonialism and imperialism where the same inherent patterns of behaviour are repeated … just in different clothing". This construction, she believes, perpetuated a hierarchy and entitlement that used punitive measures that were scary, negative and

unwelcoming, especially for a child. It is her contention that when the Black Muslims arrived in Norwich from London, “they brought the joy, they brought an actual community that looks out for one another through trials and tribulations and at the heart, Allah and the *deen*”.

This study reveals how this cohort of second-generation convert Muslims are undergoing a decolonisation of the *deen*, critiquing their inherited culture and the essentialisation of constructed identities as a means to reclaim a sense of self and a belonging to place (Ingold, 2008), which is rooted to the land they are from. For Habiba developing a “new” Islam which is sensitive to these “pollutants” feels like a recuperation of an “authentic, pre-modern, pre-industrial revolution nostalgia”. Although, she condemns how, globally Muslims express a desire for the Ottoman empire which in essence is still imperial and elicits a return to patriarchal gender roles. Therefore, for some participants, Islam specifically feels like a decolonisation from imperialist or patriarchal dominance, that it is a return to something more “natural” and aligned with who they are now. Curiously, this mirrors the revivalist narrative of contemporary Muslims, but without Islam functioning as the primary identity marker. As Habiba exclaims, “Even if you take up a practice, such as Qigong or yoga, which itself comes with an identity, you still want to feel that you are you, that you are where you’re from without putting on a façade or playing a role. Without a strong sense of identity, and place, which has been so lost and destroyed, we’re all over the place, desperately trying to grab onto roots and creating clumsy connections”.

Besides demonstrating the ethnographic complexity of these interrogations, this case-study enables an understanding of how this active reclaiming of religion relies on a distinct way of being a Muslim and the actions taken as a Muslim, correlating directly with the background of a Muslims’ interpretation and use of Islam as a cultural marker. Conversion in the West is described as a “double frame” - the religious, cultural and social frame that converts turn from, but stay related to, [or religion] as the newly chosen world view but one which they cannot completely identify with - a [form of] “Syncretism” (Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999). The circumstances therefore in which conversion takes place is a primary indicator. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the ideological background of the Murabitun has been fundamental in forming, presenting and interpreting the development of this identity - how the parents’ Islam is reflexively understood through largely liberal and progressive terms. The culture from which participants were raised was based on the countercultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, with the expectation to actively pursue a life outside of mainstream society, to be homeschooled, to raise renaissance women and prolific educationalists, to be entrepreneurs and non-dependent on state support. Indeed, the ideological stance of combining the spiritual and political, described as tempo-politics (Rogozen-Soltar, 2019) has been absorbed and reformulated in the next generation.

The fact that a lot of the parental generation were university students, artists, travellers, and intellectuals, involved a cognitive freedom to explore spirituality and esotericism. However, this unique situation laid the grounds for the proliferation of potentially different paths. The desire to explore and experience themselves in different ways, rather than copying their "parents' Islam" is a central tenet of participants search for their own spiritualities. While on one hand being a second-generation convert comes with a privilege since there is less cultural baggage and therefore fewer demands on young people to make certain sacrifices and life choices, on the other hand, the lack of a majority Islamic culture, meant the first thing they learned about being Muslim was practice-based, in action and intention, through *zakat*, the *salat*, and Ramadan, rather than through theological rule-based traditions. The creation of community is predicated on remembrances of belonging which surface and support its duration, with "generations … called upon as images of duration and continuity" (Fortier, 1999:45). Genealogy and ancestry therefore play an important role in determining the type of Islam that is practiced and emulated and for these women it has entrusted them with an outward looking view of Islamic practice. This not only demonstrates how the revivalist movement is an inauthentic way of declaring a "pure" Islam because, as a discursive tradition (Asad, 1986), determining what is *real* Islam is in constant negotiation. As such, tradition or ancestry can play a part in the authorising discourse of secular and liberal accounts of the self, resulting in a more complicated relationship with tradition.

7.3 Social media: presentation not representation

Recent anthropological scholarship on Islam in Europe draws attention to how the growing objectification, fragmentation and pluralisation of dominant and authorising discourses and institutions is leading to religion becoming increasingly individualised, resulting in individuals engaging in debates, reassessing interpretations and integrating and adapting to more European structures (Cesari, 2003; Fadil, 2006; Mandaville, 2001, 2003). Others argue that individualisation is indeed a dimension of agency which can be measured and observed. Roy (2004) argues that Globalisation/Westernisation, loss of authority, and systems of social and legal coercion have resulted in seeking knowledge falling to individuals - seldom a part of critical, liberal or secular discourses, and leading to a privatisation of religiosity that stresses the individual and inner self, with a shift from the focus on norms, to ethics and values. Yet the influence of individuation on these transformations is also part of a story that combines the pursuit of the personal to a religious direction (Cesari, 2004; Peter, 2006). While modern society promotes the ethic of individual self-fulfilment over relationships of kinship, ethics and morality, communities have not conveniently disappeared, and perceiving religious identity through the lens of individualism exacerbates the idea that it is in tension with the rest of society (Mason, 2004).

A central aspect to the individualisation of religion is experimentation and can present as a contemporary spirituality in the form of, spiritual packages, personal preferences and drawing on multiple styles and traditions (Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000; Houtman and Aupers, 2010). As a result of increased usage of the "information society" (Knoblauch, 2008), privatised religion shifts towards more visible, and public manifestations, through media production. The digital medium has provided a rich resource and opportunity for young Muslims to communicate to a wider society, in particular creating personalised and individualised connections with knowledge (Gilliat-Ray, 2012). Consequently, Muslims today have a far greater awareness of diversity of how Muslims and communities practice and find meaning. As Zainab, a younger participant fervently exclaims in relation to the community, "We are not open minded … people look at us and think 'you're so open minded', but when you start travelling you realise we're not…..Don't think that we are Muslims and follow the Shaykh and that's the only way, because it's not, I feel bad really, emphasising this, because I feel grateful, but I think we need to take the blinkers off and see the wider picture". While belonging to a community has endowed these participants with a strong foundation, the conflicts inherent in their positionality has meant that they are searching elsewhere for their sense of self and belonging.

In her study of young Danish Muslim women's social media usage, Waltorp (2015) posits that women use social media as a means of augmenting available spaces for identity experimentation. This manifests both offline and online in various fields, a practice Waltorp describes as "composite habitus" (2015:50) - the bodily comportments that reveal an astute awareness, both necessary and constructed, in order to navigate distinct social environments accessible through smartphone use. This analytical concept is useful to apply to participants who access and present themselves on Instagram posts as a performance of microcelebrity and digitally mediated Islam (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018). It reveals an awareness of the historical agency of technologies and a nuanced analysis of the variations of their use, which has implications for both gender politics - as dominant gender norms are reproduced, and through dynamic communication, where normative feminine practices are contested and in flux. However, despite this rare promise of a space where Muslim women may be free from expectations and advocate what Habermas (1989) suggests as the power of their intellect, we should be weary of defining digital media as fundamentally emancipatory. However, for these young women, being a Muslim who presents on social media, links with the idea of a social contract, drawing the political sphere into and within the prime duties of being a Muslim. In these narratives, an active member of society is synonymous with being a good Muslim, the end goal of which translates as "knowing oneself". This clearly challenges the assertion of liberal-secular notions over citizenship and its relation to religion.

As a writer and artist, Habiba uses social media, particularly Instagram, to promote her work, as “a very useful shop front”. If people see a video of her singing, they may like and follow, ask to collaborate or buy her music. It is a marketing tool that allows her to network, “It is a way of presenting your work and creating opportunities for yourself”. It was during Covid lockdowns that Habiba intentionally began to build a community online, to share more about herself in a “time where everybody is online a lot and probably feeling a bit depressed and isolated”. She would share her adventures of growing vegetables, brewing kombucha and making soap, offering something of value, both aesthetically pleasing and interesting for herself and by extension to “alleviate others’ gloom”. While she admits it “was superficial” it was also a part of a social activism movement, an alternative educational tool. She believes that it offered the chance to share complex ideas and to work in ways that people can digest, something that has in turn helped open doors for her. It is a place she can express herself with a sense of purpose, as “a useful sort of keyboard warrior … in a ‘let’s change the world one post at a time’ sort of manner”. Habiba is selective with her social media, she hates Twitter/X due to its overwhelming bombardment of soundbites and opinions, which are ugly and poisonous, putting her energy instead into platforms such as Substack which has little censorship. “To make a video of yourself speaking kind of raises the impact of what it is that you are doing… speaking to camera is obviously better for the algorithm, but it also feels much more of a declaration, you know, face to camera, feels like you have more *skin in the game* in a way. To do that kind of thing takes bravery, to record something passionate, especially if it's critical”. Ultimately, she feels it can present a more genuine version of who she is. With “trolls”, or people who attack her perspective, particularly around the issue of the Divine feminine in Islam, she suggests simply ignoring them, although she herself did take down posts after a personal attack. Despite the inevitable negative comments, it is a space for presenting your manifesto, stating what you believe in and accepting any backlash that follows. “In a way it builds resilience, as a woman, as a Muslim, it is unusual - but it does come with a loss of privacy”. While she could not imagine having a corporate job or working for someone else, it is her unique perspective that has brought her work and opportunities to collaborate. “I think one of the boons of social media is that if you take that perspective, that stance, that stubbornness of … ‘I am not going to back down or just peddle somebody else's message, I have to speak my own, my truth in the end’ … initially it seems scary because you think, oh, I'm never going to get work … nobody’s ever going to hire me. But in the end, it becomes a benefit because people start trusting you more”.

There is a sense these women have a greater access to power in moulding new ways of consuming and generating new publics through the production, circulation and consumption of images by women and for women in the large. Habiba, like others is responding to the myth of

social media's epochal transformative power. Through cell phones and social media, women are presenting themselves, designing pathways of self-production and encouraging dialogue across distant sites. This trajectory is seen as an important part of "speaking one's truth" which through modes of work has been beneficial, as others recognise the potential for change through them. The reference to the Islamic framework is both a means to resist and challenge existing stereotypes of Muslims and Islam but also how an active discourse on Islamic identity reflects a certain vision on the Muslim subject and its relation to the political sphere - it is recognition through a new re-presentation. Calhoun (1994) explains how identity movements feature a central causal effect of resistance to imposed identities and the search for recognition and legitimacy. The effects of a dominant discourse and existing representation towards Muslim identities are not abstract, they influence the identity formation of the subject and the relationship towards outsiders (Fadil, 2006). It is important then to question and challenge these dominant representations (Jordan and Weedon, 2000). Calhoun (1994) further links identity politics to the question of recognition, whereby identity is not only constructed though self-recognition, but through recognition by the other. Therefore "the relationship with the 'constitutive other' (Hall, 1996) remains central in the process of acquiring an autonomous and legitimate Self" (Fadil, 2006:22).

7.3.2 Cultural competence

The idea of "exposure" that comes with social media and perception by the other is automatically coloured by the intersections of being Black, Muslim, and a woman. It has the potential to induce shame rather than simply "embarrassment" which is a more traumatic experience and hence brings with it the burden to do justice to each one of those identities. Those of African Caribbean heritage are more likely to be associated with Christianity, than with Islam. Black Muslim women are considered the most subjugated of Muslim women Britain, as they experience prejudice from both wider British society and amongst other Muslims of colour are considered the bottom rung (Suleiman, 2013). Exemplified by the study conducted on Islamophobia amongst the middle-class in Britain, who despite their outward denial of prejudice would quickly admonish a woman who converted to Islam (Jones and Unsworth, 2022), there is a sense that without a space to occupy, women of colour have to continually carve out their own definition and for this, again social media offers ownership. The idea of cultural competence - the ability to recognise biases, respecting others' beliefs, etc., and adapting our modes of communication - is therefore important for Black Muslim women, who already challenge identifications, perceptions and representations by being educated and successful. However, social media also takes this out of their control - as they cannot simply present themselves or manipulate an outcome and are far more likely to experience

being cancelled or criticised if they make the smallest mistake. They are directly open to personal reproof, eliminating their “softness” or “humanity”. Zahra describes this as a consequence of a lack of cultural competence, and for whomever experiences it, the shame can be traumatic.

Zahra’s story makes up a central part of this thesis and her experiences are enmeshed with multiple layers of expectation, culture, prejudice, and racism. Zahra was homeschooled within the community and went on to study midwifery at university and to work for the NHS. However, after the birth of her first child, which had complications, she suffered post-natal depression but did not turn to conventional medicine nor take anti-depressants - as she puts it, she turned to her inner self, and to Allah. Her family had not used conventional medicine nor visited the doctor, she explains, until she was 13, rather fixing illness with tonics, bitters and natural therapies. When she became ill with anxiety her overriding approach was to deal with it herself, “I just thought about it, I had my intrusive thoughts and I know people get medicated for them, but I made lots of *duas*.” She is very candid in her description of the “psychosis” she suffered, visions of falling down the stairs with her child as an example. Yet she interprets the experience as one that was in fact preparing her to become a mother and of having a child to care for. This mental endurance equips Zahra with the belief that she can handle whatever life throws at her, yet in the same breath admits her vulnerability, and the need to negotiate and compromise with others. This reflexivity is a trait she believes a lot of the second-generation have embraced. When faced with challenges she will always ask herself why she responds in that certain way. “What is it telling you about yourself and how can you validate it rather than feel shame for it? You need to know why that's happened within you, because trauma is an internal response to an external event, yet it's so deeply personal that we can't say … you aren’t traumatised”. Through her birth experience she learned to question these inequalities, while “on the one hand, being able to name who wronged you can feel empowering, on the other hand, knowing that people wronged you can really feel quite delicate, vulnerable and fragile, because you're exposed to these people”. The consequence of not feeling safe in her medical profession, meant that she could not continue working for a system that was complicit in harm.

Already active on social media and open with her audience about her experiences, she began to receive hundreds of birth stories through her Instagram page, giving people tips and tricks on how to help navigate their own experiences. She decided to provide a listening service, charging an hourly rate, and soon had a waiting list of clients. This demand has not abated, and she has no shame in admitting her skill and ability to build trust. While it may not be to everyone’s taste, she believes rapport online is reciprocal. She developed a debriefing model to use with pregnancy, birth and postpartum experiences, including a three-stage process; “reflecting, reinforming and reframing”, alongside a clinical debrief. Zahra has honed these skills through reflection,

observation and listening, which she laments were not encouraged within Midwifery through systemic failings. She believes that as a Muslim, reflection means slowing down, a process modern society has discouraged. Mainstream therapy has developed a tone of narcissism - reflective of the culture - and one of self-importance, so that “Hurt people hurt people.. I'm like, what do you mean? Are we normalising hurt people hurting other people? Are we never going to say your hurt is not okay … but what you do with it is. We need to figure out what to do with your hurt so that you don't hurt others”. Validating pain does not mean accepting bad behaviour, otherwise you cannot change the response in the future.

Carving a space through her unique business has been a revelation as well as a challenge, both as a Black Muslim woman and by confronting the statistics of Black maternal health, racism and trauma. An interesting consequence has been to see how Muslim women battle with a sense of ingratitude, that in questioning their experiences they do not trust Allah’s decree. However, as Zahra explains that is the purpose of Allah being there, as an entity to turn to, rather than internalising or personalising blame. Rather than considering questioning Allah as a weak or selfish act, she explains, “I feel really privileged to be in a position to help, particularly Muslim women and Black and Asian women, to navigate this”. While she agrees that if she were white it would have been an easier and quicker business to build, her being in the public eye has brought with it a particular exposure because she does not come from a clearly defined Muslim cultural heritage, which can be a lonely burden to carry. Representation through social media is based on perception, and most who engage do so by choice. When editing is involved, it depends on the cultural competence of the presenter, which impacts how others perceive you and the story they choose to present. Her experiences of this have made her feel somewhat embarrassed - despite “real confidence in character, integrity and authenticity” gained, she is still human and wishes not to be misunderstood, exclaiming, “don't like me because you know me, don't dislike me because of your perception of me”.

Thanks to her supportive online community however she has reclaimed social media as a safe space to raise awareness and to “unconditionally” share with others. Although she realises this is unboundaried, it is a part of her “brand”, which considers the bigger picture, so that “you get what you give”. Zahra believes that as a global society we are wounded, our nervous systems are exhausted, seeing the good in the world and being generous is what is needed, “that one minute voice note could be the difference between going to the Garden and going to the Fire. You don't know what your bigger picture is”. The community she has built up online has been insightful, “it's a complete parasocial thing because the person they know I am, is in their heads. They don't know me because they've not spent time with me, but they think they do”. Zahra has over 75,000 followers online and uses her platform to support diverse causes of oppression as well as discuss

taboo subjects in Islam such as, sexuality, marital issues and normalising divorce. While Zahra thrives on affirmation, she is self-effacing, “I don't believe it really. I'm deeply insecure about these things”, yet her platform endows her with a sense of responsibility which she believes is part of her duty as a Muslim and an essential part of her own relationship with Allah. Indeed, it is part of her aim to “do different” and resolve inherited patterning, which she sees as repeating itself without “proper reflection and consideration”. As a result of increased information sharing and the language of healing, trauma and well-being she feels her generation are seeking to resolve the mistakes of their history.

Working within trauma and healing reveals the importance of taking ownership of lived experience, particularly when intersectional challenges distort women’s lives. As Zahra’s narrative unveils, Muslim women are challenged by concepts of subservience as a self-deprecatory rather than submission to God. The connection between religiosity and mental health, reflects the embodied self-sacrificing belief adopted by many Muslim and convert women (see Chapter 6). These include the element of self-discipline and presentation to the world of “perfection”, beautiful and manicured, which Zahra believes was particularly exacerbated by being a Black woman lest they be considered rough, maltreated or trouble. This perpetuates inequalities based on race and gender, and the fear of critiquing institutions, authorities or established traditions which leads to a containment of “trauma” rather than resolution. Submission to Allah enables these women the release of emotional burdens and the taking on of responsibility, and rather than suppressing shame or anger it is necessary to debrief and heal.

Representation of British Muslims on social media is increasing and participants are presenting themselves and their work as a way to empower trans-local connections and discussions of taboo subjects. The digital sphere can offer anonymity or help to create a persona that can lead to more emphasis on discourse, dialogue and rational debate (Habermas, 1989). For these young women the platform has provided a form of community building and education - the sharing of resources, viewpoints and news stories that might otherwise go unreported. This may be necessary due to the nature of their “movement” or activism, which is ultimately intertwined with the real offline context. In Castellian terms, they possess “net-work-making power” (Castells, 2010:773), that is, “power wielded by actors and networks of actors with the capacity to set up and programme a network” (Meng, 2012: 470). However, by virtue of their socio-economic position and capacity to consume, Muslim women also possess “networking power” (Castells, 2010:773), “the power that actors in global net-works exert over those excluded from the network” (Meng, 2012:470). This net-working power enables participants to present their identity in distinct ways, for Zahra it is categorised within the domain of motherhood, birth and family, for Habiba it is through the arts, the environment and Sufism. Such efforts work to link women’s

empowerment exclusively to their identities as “game changers”, consumers of well-being and healing which validate their ethical formation of values and morality.

The digital uptake and commoditisation of global Islam has prompted a proliferation of activities outside the Mosque and some scholars argue that this re-spatialising of knowledge sharing impacts both genders, causing a contest among male religious authorities and increasing the power of women in shaping religious narratives (Hirji, 2021). However, scholars who express optimism about the virtual world being less of a barrier to identity forming, are quick to temper this with a note of caution (Maher and Hoon, 2008). Research suggests that populations that are vulnerable to harassment in real life, such as women and people of colour, are also vulnerable online (Duggan, 2017; Golbeck, 2018). Therefore, for Muslim women or those whose identity is Othered, cyberspace is not a neutral or safe space. It carries some of the same entanglements, contradictions, and injustices as the so-called real world, which Hirji (2021) argues denies any promise the Internet can offer, as it is “a space that was already colonised and under surveillance . . . a mechanism of control” (Ali, 2020). Contemporary media constructions can reinforce essentialised dichotomies which deem women as either “unworthy, undeserving victims [of culture] or more worthy, heroic survivors, if they embrace Western liberation and culture” (Jiwani, 2010:68). This reflects the complex ways power often shapes representations of Islam and greater attention is needed to make visible the ways Muslim women are contributing to broaden and diversify the relationship between religious faith and social action, creating a society which they wish to both sustain and transform.

7.4 Syncretism

There are five pillars in Islam; the affirmation of the *shahada*, performing the *salat*, paying *zakat*, fasting the month of Ramadan and performing the Hajj once in your lifetime, if you are able. Islam provides a normative framework, a method of disciplining the subject through both formative and elementary forms of religious practice. For converts, abiding by these directives is fundamental to embodying the Islamic ethical self - a clear set of goals and an orientation for one’s life. Roy (2004) argues that a consequence of the deterritorialisation of Islam in Europe, is that “correct” ritual practice, such as praying five times a day, fasting and reading the Quran, has become a moral imperative on how to be a good Muslim. This ideation of the “morally virtuous” comes in response to a lack of visible or established Muslim societal structures in diasporic or minority communities. However, the second-generation converts inhabit multiple places of belonging and bridge supposed cultures in conflict. As we have seen in previous chapters, for participants these visible markers are already in a state of flux, such as the secular/religious paradigm which is

inculcated in multiple references of ethics and values due to their positionality. So that “like various forms of religiosity, secularity too includes a range of ethical, social, physical, and sexual dispositions, hence the need to apprehend the secular via its sensorial, aesthetic, and embodied dispositions and not only its political ones” (Fadil and Fernando, 2015:64).

In Britain then, Islam becomes a lifestyle choice, one whose ritual meaning can be adapted and transformed. As discussed above, this inherent flexibility enables these women to *choose* to be both pious and autonomous women within the larger socio-religious context that allows for nuance, paradox and change, which includes a move away from orthopraxy towards greater secularism. While many of the women of this study still practice in an orthodox manner, one of the themes to emerge from the analysis is the way participants are adapting or growing their spirituality in non-Islamic and more pragmatic and inclusive ways. Jedaloft’s (2011) concept of lived Islam posits that for many Muslims, Islam is simply being a Muslim, and belonging or self-identifying as part of a Muslim community. While the definitions of lived Islam are relativity broad, in this explanation, certain interpretations of Islamic practice are not a prerogative, rather a value system based on morals and ethics lived through everyday activities - emphasising such things as treating others well and doing good in the world, particularly through the domain of work.

In the wider context of anthropological theorisation of values (Robbins, 2022) and the study of morality and ethics (Lambek, 2022), values are referred to as “those things defined as good within a society or social group” (Robbins, 2013:100) so that culturally constructed conceptions of what is ultimately “desirable in human life” (Graeber, 2001:1) are central to social theory. Since they are found everywhere, values can be considered a universal, and in any focus on “diverse values” or on “value conflict”, it denotes “a word that allows [them] to consider all sorts of cultures and the most diverse estimations of the good without imposing on them our own - thus we can speak of our values and their values, while we could not speak of our good and their good” (Dumont, 1982:210 in Robbins *et al.*, 2022). An ethical life, a moral life is, therefore, really about taking in the reality of what other people feel or how other people see things from their point of view. For participants their journey of self-formation has been about discovering who they are on their own, following a faith that *feels* right to them, that they have chosen, something that authentically reflects who they are and the culture they invest in.

Latifa is 37 years of age, white, and from a large family who have been a part of the community since the mid 1970s. A dynamic and illuminating young woman, she has participated on this research journey since its inception. Growing up, she only knew the community. It was her primary experience and connection to being a Muslim. The community were family - Aunties guiding her education and training on everything from service and cooking to recitation of Quran

and *dhikr*. These memories had a big impact on her, particularly with Muslims who were not British or white, but whose culture and traditions in fact gave her a frame of reference. She understands that being a Muslim in Norwich meant you knew there was something different about you, so having the community and Mosque in common was important. Knowing that she belonged to a big group provided a strong thread throughout her life - navigating school, having friends as kin meant trust and openness. For good or bad, that was her reality.

Latifa is a practitioner of Shiatsu, Qui gong and breathwork, she believes the environment of the community and learning about the service of others was a driving force behind her becoming a therapist. Propelled by events she witnessed unfold, such as the conflict in Bosnia, and her mother's chronic illness, meant she was motivated by the need to "make everything ok". She also cared for her younger siblings, "It's quite a heavy burden to carry … I think, without realising you feel that weight". As a result of suffering painful periods, she received some Craniosacral Therapy treatments - a common practice of the first-hour parents to pursue alternative therapies for health concerns - and in this way a curiosity and love of pathways to healing began. "Allah has given us all these different ways, you know, from therapy to the pharmacy kitchen, ways you can grow, cook and eat to heal, it just feels much more accessible and natural and easy".

At 18 and recently married, she began to pursue her career, partly moulded by the community ethos to have a job that would fit around being a hands-on mum and partly because she wanted to be independent and own her own business. It also coincided with her parent's divorce, an event she saw reflecting the Chinese Medical philosophy of the elements in that "everything is related, nothing just happens on its own". It allowed her to relate and process the strong emotions of that time, with the connection between physical, emotional, spiritual and mental apertures resonating with her deeply. Lightbulb moments occurred around how she manifested certain relationships, helping her to accept others' choices. She learned that imbalances in the body reflect imbalances in the mind and thus her filter on the world changed. The realisation that if she did not alter everything in her life it would stay the same and that her unhappiness would result in disease, "basically you must change everything in your life because if you're in the same situation, the same things will happen to you". Within a year, her marriage too had ended.

Latifa's career has remained a constant through life's challenges, "I realise that for me, this healing … being in this field of work, is basically connecting people to creation, to themselves". She describes the "journey to know myself" results in better supporting others on their journey to know themselves and feel connected to source. "It just feels like the more I read, the more I study, the different paths I try or discover, are useful for me on my journey: everything affirms the truth, that my parents taught me growing up, that I have one creator, but I really want everything to be

connected, just everything". Through her studies, travels, and working with others, she uses clips on YouTube and Instagram as a resource, seeing how "acts of manifestation and attaining happiness" are gaining popularity. She makes connections between scientific studies which map brain waves to exhibit the power of connection and her understanding of the Quran. She feels she is "constantly rediscovering and reconnecting to source, in a world that is full of distractions and the illusion of control - all of these tools offer ways to remember Allah and yourself."

These experiences have reaffirmed Latifa's faith, and in particular have altered her relationship to wealth, which she connects to the theory of abundance. Watching a YouTube video about a Japanese billionaire who "always just said thank you" whether spending or earning money is an example of how a "gratitude" mentality harmonises your relationship with, and increases, your wealth. This she explains is all in the Quran - "whatever you are grateful for, expands … so that our relationship to Allah is our expectation of him". The carrying around of sadness or difficulty would make her feel like she was fighting, and allowing things to ease has transformed her life. She is happier and more relaxed than ever before. As she talks, she explains how her learning and training have been motivated by the traumas of childhood but that nevertheless, how knowledge is imparted and received is crucial. During training in Qigong ten years ago, she was faced with processing psychological layers, and recognising a tendency in herself to perform for the teachers, she again questioned her values. Such experiences have helped her confirm concepts she was taught growing up and understand those on her own spiritual journey. "Ultimately life teaches you about yourself."

Latifa is responding to somatic changes in her journey of self-formation. If she feels compelled to sit and recite Quran, then that is the kindest thing she can do for herself, there is no pressure to be "a Muslim, to pray or to fast" - "it doesn't relate to being accepted or valued … I feel there's something in it for me, you know, it's not because I must do it. It just feels like there's so much sweetness in it". She is prioritising her needs and desires, "all those things that we were taught when we were younger, to recite Quran, to do the *wird*, to connect with source, to Allah. I feel like I actually really get it, I finally understand now where there are places for it in my life, having that quiet time in the morning or connecting every day or just doing a little bit of Quran and the power of those words". To achieve this, Latifa needed to step back from the community, both for work and to reflect and grow after a numbing in membership and devotion - "going through the motions". Through her experiences she is reflexive about the power of choice, for herself and other women like her, who are "breaking away from the old habits and bonds" and creating new ways of being in the world. She focuses on feeling at home in herself, integrating "life lessons" and trying new things, "whichever way you approach it it's the same search, when you're connecting, what do you think you're connecting to?"

In Latifa's understanding, Eastern medicine and philosophy have created bridges that connect with her Muslim faith. Quranic teachings about Allah's resonance in every cell are easily manifested in the Taoist teachings of the four elements and their manifold meanings. Comprehending these philosophies as embodied knowledge has helped clarify emotions and challenges from childhood and relationships with parents and community. As such these alternative modes of knowledge practice give participants a language with which to express their trauma and inconsistencies of growing up as British Muslims. It has given these young women insights into their mental and physical health which they have harnessed in their choices of career and of doing good in the world. They see women's spiritual empowerment as a radical act in itself. The process of change described by Foucault (1982) analyses power relations, which "underlines everything which makes individuals truly individual" on the one hand, while on the other, "attacks everything which separates the individual, break his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way" (212). For participants there has been a tussle of power on the one hand in their formative culture, described above, and on the other in their representation in wider society. Indeed, like their parents, these young women have adopted a reasoned, but also an emotional, engagement with spiritual practice, that combines Islamic pedagogies of self-discipline (Mahmood, 2001, 2005) but is not the only process through which they fashion their spiritual self. Other practices have enabled the cultivation of inner emotions, intentions and dispositions and allowed them to connect with Islam in ways that their culture and constraints did not.

Professional career choices reflect an ideology of self-reliance and continuous learning that was instilled through their Sufi upbringing, in spite of challenges they faced and have attempted to rectify. The importance of spiritual over religious practice tends to be prioritised as a way to find value and meaning in their work. Atlas (2008) describes how the concept of self-fulfilment is absorbed by neoliberal adjustments of productivity so that well-being becomes part of personal development that follows the ethical and moral sense of fulfilment and self-care. This means responsibility and autonomy is assigned to the individual to fulfil their potential as liberal subjects through education and work success and health and moral obligations. However, as Purser (2019) argues, a spiritual practice of self-reflexivity (Foucault, 2000) can translate as a "biopower" asserted over a subject's body as part of an internal conditioning process, so that in the illusion of coping with stress-induced environments they are inadvertently reinforcing the neoliberal status quo. It is a heavy burden to place on individuals which can result in "the fatigue of being oneself" whereby stress and anxiety are portrayed as an issue of the self not society. Yet, the tension in discovering meanings and shaping new ones allows for a sense of empowerment in subjects whose agency both reproduces existing hierarchies even as they create new forms of

relationships (Mahoney and Yngvesson, 1992:63). The adaption of alternative philosophies, which are considered seamless as they merge similar sets of belief, is seen as complimentary. As such, participants are fomenting their ethical self through disciplines that allow for more compassion, understanding and healing, which these young women desire. In Winnicott's (1982) words, “in any cultural field *it is not possible to be* original except on a basis of tradition ... The interplay between originality and the acceptance of tradition as the basis for inventiveness [is] one example ... as the interplay between separateness and union” (99). This interplay is reflective of their curated identities, interests and ways of being in the world which, in fact, exhibits a continuation of the change they were brought up with.

7.4.1 Ecological Islam and the Divine Feminine

This chapter demonstrates how everyday practices such as Qigong are seen by many as completely harmonious with Islam - a conduit that restores connection, with others, with nature, living things and nurtures an internal harmony. This is aligned with ways to counter a critical, judgemental and negative internal voice. The *deen* and Qigong both teach *tasawuf* - the purification of the *nafs* - explained by when one part of your soul feels whole and harmonised it affects other parts of your life. It helps these participants express and feel strong in their faith. This could be described as a form of bricolage (Beck, 2010) which highlights how individuals explore and make internal choices about what suits their religious and secular worldview (Altglas, 2014a). It is a strategy for living in a modern world but one which empowers individuals to take responsibility for their own faith and choices. This knowledge also unearths cultural and patriarchal practices which position women as self-sacrificing (Rao, 2015) for the fulfilment of others and to their own detriment. For some participants, practicing Qigong brought awareness and healing to the issue of self-care and wellbeing in a way that the Islam they knew had not managed to do. It has become part of a lived religion “tool set” so that consistent integration of new spiritualities creates embodied changes particularly in the face of destabilising global challenges, as Laftifa explains, “It’s the same as the *deen*…if you do something every day a profound shift occurs”. The regimen of the subject (Mahmood, 2001, 2005) is not an exception, nor reserved for those who practice extreme piety, but can be considered natural and present in all aspects of society and religious life.

For Habiba spiritual nourishment comes in many forms, and she will take it where she can, be it Taoism, Sufism or quantum physics, “They’re all just tapping into the same thing from different perspectives, like a circle you can come at it from different sides. You have to walk around it to see that there are all these other angles as well, but we're sort of all drawn to this same thing, to

the light". Being born a Muslim meant she did not explore different spiritualities like her parents did before settling upon Islam. For her, maintaining the *salat* meant she never broke the chain and while she finds divinity through different avenues, she always comes back to the centre. "There's been years when I just felt like I wished I had come to this completely of my own volition. I want this to have been my path and not just my parents' path that I've inherited". Habiba's work has been a way for her to address the challenges of her unique upbringing and the vastness of the label of being a British Muslim. On this search she has met and prayed with Sufis from other *tariqas*, such as the Threshold Society. Kabir and Camille Helminski co-write books on Sufism and Islamic feminism - although she would classify them more as "radical, out there converts" - it triggered her interest. However, through meeting Dr Sofia Rehman in her book club, Habiba came to learn about the community of authors who focus on the female experience and issues of gender in Islam particularly through theology and activism. It was through these interactions she first became aware of the concepts of Islamic feminism and the concepts of *itjihad* and *tafsir*. "I think it's very interesting, particularly in the Instagram activism scene, I think there's definitely a growing interest, although it's typically women who are interested in it. I think the sea-change will happen when men take an interest in it, and when men start giving it legitimacy, taking on the discourse and deciding, 'Oh yeah, we can actually trust what women are saying about their experience'". At a Habibiyaa *dhikr* she attended held by Haroun Sugich, a British Syrian, Karim Langham gave a talk about his personal reflection on spirituality and Ibn Arabi's discourse on women, and how women are the gateway to Allah, explaining that men cannot know Allah unless they are tuned into women. For Habiba this was revelatory, and refreshing, being in a multicultural group of devotees openly discussing women's value in Islam, thus normalising it. She believes changes are afoot, in contrast to 10 or 20 years ago, and it is a pleasant surprise.

At a festival to celebrate the divine feminine, organised by Ray of God, an open and multi-faith event, Habiba did a reading, a *qasida* from the *Diwan* written by Shaykh Muhammed Ibn Al Habib, a traditional Sufi Saint and the Shaykh of SAQ, about the story of Layla and Majnun by Nizami Ganjavi. She describes how it blew her mind, "I was like, oh my God, he's talking about a goddess, but he's not talking about *A* goddess. He's talking about the feminine gateway to God and people are singing this, men are singing this, traditional people singing this and it is not alien to them". Layla is considered the name for the divine feminine in Islamic tradition, yet it has been relegated to Sufi poetry rather than given serious scholarly integrity. Habiba questions why these traditions have not been considered nor adopted by wider Sufi or traditional Muslim communities and are sidelined for more radical, alternative, and non-classical *tariqas*. She believes that conservative and patriarchal powers have ultimately repressed Sufism and with it any debate about the concepts of the feminine in Islam. She links how the behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad and stories of events such as, "every time the daughter of the Rasul came to him, if

he was in a meeting, he would stand up, hug and kiss her, sit her beside him, it was such thing of honour" are promoted. Indeed, in the context of history when femicide was a cultural practice, raising the standard was about respecting and honouring women in society. However, as Habiba explains, reading Sufi masters and saints who flip the gender construct and proclaim the "Divine feminine" as synonymous with Allah presents an opportunity to delve into such theological concepts. Habiba was intrigued to research and write about gender and Islam, particularly women in Sufi spaces, but her reluctance to continue was twofold. Firstly, it is a well-represented genre of research and secondly, her experience of the complexity and contention with which the concept of the divine feminine was received.

The term divine feminine is considered controversial due to a lack of knowledge and correct way of referring to Allah - not wanting to feminise God, and particularly through its connotation with feminism, even for those that profess to approve its importance and proclaim its illuminations. The concept is simply another aspect of Allah, one that reflects feminine attributes, such as compassion and mercy - yet the concern is that any work on the divine feminine aspect may take away from Islam's theological roots. Throughout my research it was described as something "other" or even dangerous and therefore not acceptable within Islamic theology. What I discovered however was that women are able to integrate their understanding of the divine feminine through their practices as a form of connection based on their feelings and beliefs. An example is the word *rahim,* meaning mercy, which is the same word for womb, and one of the ninety-nine names of *Allah, ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* (compassionate). This connection with the womb, menstruation, birth and trauma, becomes a way for women to channel their devotion through their own embodied aspects. As another participant, Halima explained, it is a conversation, "It's a very deep way of connecting to our lives through the mercy of Allah, because that's something that Allah has given us … be it a physical womb or an energetic or spiritual womb, we have that womb. It's a means for us to directly connect to Allah and by doing so it starts to undo the layers of disconnection and trauma".

The concept of the divine feminine is considered unconventional despite its popularity amongst British Muslim women who participated in this research, both in the Murabitun and from other *tariqas*. Women's spiritual equality has social and ritual implications, which for Wadud (2006), Barlas (2002) and Shaikh (2013), requires female mosque leadership as a priority in order to claim religious equality. I believe it equates to leadership in educational and professional roles, as well as women's own spiritual autonomy. Heavily gendered public and media debates continue to pervade the view of Muslim women as oppressed and backward. Women who wear the hijab, above all, are identified and labeled as "a hallmark of the incompatibility of Islam with European values as well as of the unwillingness of Muslims to assimilate and become truly part of European

nation-states" (Moors and Salih, 2009:376), pointedly typified by comments by the British Foreign Secretary at the time likening women in burkas to letterboxes and bank robbers (Elgot, 2018). However, scholars of feminist anthropology such as Abu-Lughod (1998, 1986) and Kandiyoti (1991), argue that Muslim women are not passive proxies, nor torchbearers of social diffidence, icons of modernity, or privileged bearers of cultural authenticity, but rather they have a distinct place as political actors, activists or simply as ordinary women (Ryan, 2011), through which the complex process of agency and subjectivity is articulated. While there is potential for women to tell stories about women such as Khadija and Ayesha, the Prophet Muhammad's wives and leaders in their own right, in some Muslim communities' women can become mouthpieces for men who advocate for a political Islam and the establishment of patriarchal norms (Badran, 2009). Therefore, the inclusion of the divine feminine is a part of women with leadership roles engaging community narratives that are more inclusive and supportive of change (Duderija and Rane, 2019).

Habiba now runs exclusive retreats for Muslim women on Islam and spirituality, taking from Sufism, which for her has been "a beautiful, healing and fulfilling process" and further motivated her field of interest. She focuses on the history of *Al Andalus* (Andalucia), the women who represented that era and the roles they played in its successes - in the sciences, literature and arts, such as a poet slave girl becoming a queen. This she interweaves with spiritual ecology and her second book, called *Mora* meaning both a mulberry and a female *Moor* (North African Muslim) is due for publication, focusing on the plant history of Al Andalus and how it reflects the telling of its history, particularly in terms of the colonisation of Islam. "The Islam we see today is not a true reflection of Islam proper, its perspective on the world and its interconnection with nature … if you really study the sources, they talk about the natural world as being sentient. And you don't get that in a modern, Western viewpoint, which is completely secular and materialistic. It is embedded into Islam, and we've kind of forgotten it and covered it over because we want to be acceptable to a form of Western, principally white status quo". The natural mysticism of Islam has been overshadowed, particularly in relation to women in this field. Several of Ibn Arabi's teachers were women mystics, making a causational link between being a woman and ecological wisdom and our need to reconnect with the land.

Jackson (1983) articulates an "anthropology of the body" incorporating both cognitive and linguistic models of meaning as well as the physical aspects of being - to create a basic ontological structure of being-in-the-world. The body is not an instrument of the mind nor society, but something that can proffer an analytical capacity to deepen understanding. The question of embodiment and the land stems from the wider woman-nature connection debate, which builds on the reproductive ability of both, so that women are symbolically naturalised and nature is symbolically feminised (Carol Adams in Warren, 2000). American ecofeminist Warren (2000, 1996)

enumerates multiple historical, empirical, socioeconomic and linguistic connections - such as the language of rape and butchery - which have effectively perpetuated the oppression of both women and nature. Jabeen (2020) specifically links this concern with post/colonial South Asian societies and an empirical analysis reflecting women's lived experience of such treatment - how women become associated with the natural world, which is both colonised and extracted. Thereafter women are associated with negativity, pollution, corruption and fear and must be dominated (Federici, 2017). Indeed, this configures with the idea that Islam itself in the West has been colonised too, but that Muslims are not willing to accept this current status. These women argue that the injustices over gender, race and environment cannot begin to heal until a practice of mercy is incorporated, and one which can only be expressed through the portal of nature. Collective forms of worship, *dhikr* and rooting to the earth through devotional practices, breathwork and prayer become ways of connecting with this aspect of their lives. By turning inward and addressing their own internal disruptions enables the finding of balance which in turn allows for an outward shift and adaptability to life's experiences. As Rabiyya expresses it, "I'm not saying that you have to hide yourself in a cave and just do *dhikr*, what I'm saying is that for long-term sustainable change, I feel like that's where it needs to start".

Al-Ghazālī informs us of a central locus of control which tempers our reaction to things which occur internally and externally. Muslims believe that Allah brings you both happiness and bitterness in order to teach you something about yourself and to attain a soul that is at peace with itself. The study of care and ethics advances the importance of finding the good, and that diverse ideas and imaginings of the possible also incorporate the inherent tensions and challenges which emerge as a result, entrusting us to combine our explorations of both the shadow and the good (Robbins, 2013), to enrich ontological meaning through their symbiosis and universal qualities. As such, participants see this is an invitation to have agency in their faith, whether practicing piously or not at all. As Leila recounts, growing up she was told stories of human's greatest attribute - the potential to be caliph or representative of Allah on earth, a *Khalifah*. It also denotes the highest value or perfection in life that one may reach. This prescience "does not allocate men as the agents and women the agentettes, it is all of us". The *haram* (sacred space or sanctuary) is not just a protected space or territory, but how divinity expresses itself through the concept of the heart being one's own sacred space, the womb as one's own creative space and so on, which reinforces the belief that divinity loves the feminine. For these women, tending the heart and acknowledging the feminine is considered being in tune with the "whole self". It is a querying and a challenging of the insistence on the irreducibility of the self, which includes religious identity or activity to be an imperfect indicator because it is not the whole story of what it means to be Muslim. Knowledge of the Divine feminine means these women can respond when faced with misogynistic attitudes, religious or secular. As with Probyn's "sociology of the skin", whereby

individuals possess a heightened sensitivity to sensibilities and other modes of being and desires for becoming, the key is to look at how an individual's capacity for selfhood and agency emerges from embodied engagements with others and the places they inhabit, even if ambivalent, uncertain, part dominance or exclusion, as well as positive and productive. As one participant explained, "I really feel that as a Muslim we have absolute trust in everything because it's in Allah's hands, so there must be something, even though it seems so awful where we're going through right now - those are the conditions for seeing the good".

7.5 Conclusion

Erikson (1954) long ago clarified that identity theory highlights the framework within which convictions and values become consolidated as understandings of the self, which structures relationships with others, and provides a sense of continuity and connection, or rather belonging, to a place, and an ideology or worldview, that transcends the flux and fragmentation of life. Re-articulating Islam through values and emotions reveals how orthodox practice and theological knowledge is considered less important than what it means to live as a Muslim. Participants described their Muslimness as being inseparable from their Britishness, which is contrary to many studies of new strains of Islam, which highlight the importance of the global Ummah and endorse a separation between culture, tradition and ethnicity. Living Islam in this way challenges both the academic concept of religion (Asad, 2003) and the more orthodox definition of what is considered to be a "proper" Muslim. However, while this strategy has enabled these women to negotiate their belonging in relation to the largely critical majority discourse on Islam by electing a more subjective and private religious practice, ironically they have become more visible in the public sphere. This comes in response to a general increased visibility of Muslims on social media, women in particular, who are using the space to reconfigure their identities, create new community connections that recognise and legitimise their amalgamated ideas of Islam and spirituality, despite structural biases and dangers of exposure. These women are challenging their inherited culture, that of the parents and community, in order to make conscious convictions of their own. They are finding empowerment through the reconceptualisation of the divine feminine and finding solace and activism in ecological justice through their faith in God. Career choices therefore become a mode through which to know themselves better, to interrogate its complexity and as a result, how it becomes a way to connect to the Divine.

The ideology in which they were educated, now better understood for its failings as much as its advantages continues to influence their choices and indeed provides a foundation of belonging from which they can embark on their own journey. Routing it through the natural world gives the

discussion a container in which to deal with issues such as gender in a less contentious way. Eisenstein calls it "*The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*" (2013), and what we are seeing in these women's narratives is their complete faith that there is good in the world and they have a part to play in perpetuating it. It is an articulate and reflexive exploration of their positionality and their ethical self. There is agreement that we come into the world with a natural sense of truth, justice and goodness and if we want to see that happen in the world, then we have to go through difficult, painful processes, which is reflected throughout human history. It is a form of "doing archeology on the *deen"*, in their practice, and through their work, and in this way integrating the lessons of their understanding of Islam, the example of the Prophet Muhammad who embodied the truth that everything on earth is part of Allah and therefore needs to be nurtured as a commonly shared resource. Yet while they believe that Islam provides a functioning structure to achieve equilibrium, they do not credit Islam alone for this knowledge, it is in all the major traditions and practices of indigenous people. Colonialism and capitalism have forced divisions amongst peoples and their relationship with their belonging. The teaching of the ecological wisdom of Islam has the potential then to enlighten Muslims to take responsibility for their role as caretakers of the planet and to work with others, non-religious, and of different faiths, for ecological justice. What lies behind these attitudes is the clear notion that for them Islam must be heuristic if it is to be embodied. It must fit with everyday life, not the other way around, and that people, places and personal connections are equally important.

8 Conclusions

This thesis has mapped the experiences of second-generation convert Muslim women who live in-between, or on the periphery of, two worlds as being both British and Muslim, and yet not *really* "Muslim" nor consistently "British" in the way that identity is understood and categorised in both popular public opinion, orthodox religion and academia. I have described this lived reality as the *dihliz,* the liminal space or threshold - which is experienced as positionality - both physical and metaphysical, from which they engage in a processual review, interrogation and negotiation of hierarchies of division inbuilt into ideology, be it religious or secular. Indeed, this reflexive stance which unearths the complexity of their lives and incorporates internal contradictions, ambiguities and incoherences with which they narrate their lived experience is akin to what Leila Aboulela describes as "decolonising the imagination". It questions whose viewpoint the story of our lives comes from, in order to distinguish between harmful legacies, cherished tradition, and an expression of creativity. It is a searching for how to free our imagination to discover new ways of thinking and knowing. I have named this process The journeying self, an embodied and subjective journey that seeks to broaden dialogue and possibility for social and ethical change. A process that sees these women examine their lives, from community belonging and the construction of power, across the domains of marriage and gender justice through to a re-claiming of faith, practice and representation.

Ethnographic enquiry reveals a how this processual journey of ethics and change is a result of both constraint *and* creativity. While the liminal can be delimited to a narrow technical distinction of the middle stage in ritual passage, it has a wider potential to capture the essential elements incorporated in imprecise and unsettled transitoriness (Horvath, 2013). Experiences of discomfort, tend to make you step back away from that which inflicts it, it causes you to move, shift and gather the world in a specific way, where the background or past is freshly in front of you and brought back to life. Inhabiting the liminal positionality provides a different viewing point and disorientates how life has been arranged. It begins with a feeling of discomfort but it is not always negative, instead it can give rise to feelings and experiences of pleasure and excitement about a new world opening up. What we have learned from participants is that "If you know yourself you know your lord, if you know your lord, you know yourself, and you innately have a sense of where you are". The liminal can frame the moments when the relationship between structure and agency is unclear or unresolved, because within liminality such distinctions cease to make sense even when a process of structuration and meaning-formation is taking form. Indeed this "interstructural" position elaborated by the "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1967) stage, highlights the ambiguity of the outlier, and the process, which involves a "death" or triggering event, or element of letting go, alongside obedience and crucially, a deep introspection and reflection of an

individual's world so they may return renewed and empowered, perhaps having claimed a new identity position.

This mirrors Foucault's (1985) modes of subjectification, and description of ethics as being the moral prescriptions related to "the kind of relationship that you ought to have with yourself", one that, "determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (*ibid*, 1997:263). Yet the liminal also exists within perplexing contradictions, it combines both a potentially unlimited freedom from structure which can peak in transforming moments of sublimity, yet also exists within situations where all forms of hierarchy, authority and norms dissolve, so that potentially nothing matters, and crucially "…without any new system yet contrived to replace that which has disappeared" (Durkheim, 2002:43). This for me is the most exciting part because it is here that the journey comes full-circle. While, without reintegration at the post-liminal stage, when the individual is recognised and welcomed back into the social order with their new role, it is argued there is a danger that liminality is a "crisis without conclusion" (Thomassen, 2009). However, this is conceptually paradoxical, as a cycle or journey does not have a conclusion, rather it is the "continuity of change", where experiences of trauma, agency and creativity interweave and produce an unfinished resilience. It is through the de-contextualisation of a performance, that is, through "the rehearsal of the conventional formulae in non-conventional ways", that sites emerge for re-signification, ones that thereby "assume meanings and functions for which [they were] never intended" (Butler, 1997:147). Whether it be through resistance, submission or subjection, the power to act, and indeed choose, reveals the role of agency in the invention of new meanings of self. These second-generation convert Muslim women are engaging with and reconfiguring beliefs and practices through multiple discourses, which are integral in the journey of ethical self-formation and which enable productive and diverse discussions within Muslim communities about what the Muslim tradition entails.

Life-stories, which have been permeated by "how to become a self-made person, how to live self-sufficiently, and how to achieve self-reliance" (Yoo, 2018:1) stem from experiences of predominantly dominant, white, Western tailored creations of autonomous, rational, unitary stable beings based on Western gendered concepts of the self. Women's stories are different. Nuanced, flawed, fluid, marginalised voices, and those on the boundaries of dominant culture offer a different perspective - a more sincere, vulnerable truth-telling about ourselves and our lives. While these selves are also discursively constructed, they refrain from promoting claims of authority over personal experience or marking self-sufficiency or self-reliance as the beacon of achievement. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), the Nigerian novelist, speaks about the dangers of the single story which may be true, but which, nevertheless, one-sided, creates an incomplete picture. Storytellers, and the contents of the stories they tell, are often determined by relations of

power and authority in society. More often than not, that authority decides who the storyteller is, who the story is about, what story is told and how it is told. As a Muslim researcher studying Muslims from this community, it is incumbent on me to bring attention to the multiple and contextualised expressions of identification and belonging in order to tell the other side of the story. Such a positionality has entrusted me with multiple speaking positions and the ability to approach questions of identity formation through honest and vulnerable summations and through the voices and experiences of my participants. The process of knowledge construction, such as that of the journeying self, deserves equal attention to the production of ideas as the resultant perspective can challenge established disciplines and offer new vantage points — mimetic and yet morphing the objective/subjective viewpoints. Furthermore, by confronting "self-bewilderment" my own subjectivity is altered, which has been a cathartic process, if only to open up the space to reflect on my own negotiations of belonging. However, in the ethical realm there is always variability and by interrogating "home" I have mapped the history, place and performance of my own belonging and carved out a space within its history in my own terms.

The journeying self must coincide with a foundational place, "home". This case-study concerns the Murabitun, the worldwide movement of Western converts to Islam under the leadership of Western-born Shaykh Abdal Qadir, an exception in Sufi movements due to its explicit aims to create a pure, spiritual, and political, "British Islam". The choice of a handful of British converts to establish a Sufi community in the depths of Norfolk, encapsulated a desire for a new way of living, which they actively, and politically, was put into practice particularly through their children. What was revealed through this research is how this project contained within it an inheritance of whiteness, replicating aristocratic hierarchies and allocations of power and elitism - as well as Western Protestant Christian language and beliefs, accounting for ideas of sin, punishment, judgement and comparison to others. It was embodied in community structure and reproduced across performative practices, education of the young and traditional gender ideals of marriage and family dynamics. By "whiteness", I refer to Ahmed's (2007) definition of it as a corporal schema, not as a reference to skin colour or associative force, but rather as a form of cultural capital, reproduced through likeness, and with a powerful and synthesised culture and history. In Chapter 5 we saw how ritualised patterns and collective remembrances of the past, and present forms of belonging, can be considered an "ossified tradition" (Fortier, 1999:51), yet forming part of community life. This "anthropology of the body" (Jackson, 1983), became the cognitive, linguistic and physical ontological structure of being-in-the-world, useful to understand the analytical dimensions of performance and obligation to a place (Ingold, 2012). This community has been a touch stone, a place to know and be known, a way to be closer to the *deen*. If you are raised to believe Allah is omnipresent, a universal source of love and justice, that your community is family and security and that your behaviour and comportment is paramount, you will manifest a different

kind of relationship to self and self-others throughout your life. The values with which we are raised, the feelings of rights and wrongs, are not innate but grow up in us from the influences to which we are subjected (Martineau, 1838 in Abend, 2010: 23). Our sense of good is shaped, learned and embodied by social habits that occur through acts of care, and the interplay between the individual and the social collective in its pursuance. Indeed, my own interactions and participation during fieldwork revealed the extent to which concurring threads of memory, community and practice, were encapsulated so deeply within my own body.

However, the analysis addressed generational change (Cole, 2004) and how, despite first-hour converts' active and conscious choice to rupture from their socio-cultural and political past, their children - without a similar conviction of change - similarly deconstruct inherited discourses to "decolonise" them - meaning the process of understanding as to how deeply culture and community had become ingrained in their lives; their ideas of work, marriage, and childrearing. As a Facebook group revealed, they were caught between wanting to know everything about their religion, heritage and belonging, and then to be as far removed and free of it as possible. Any hegemonic discourse has the capacity to temper our sense of belonging, through the intentional power to connect us and the ways it produces a resistance to, or redefines our identity towards it. This conflict was exhibited through punitive measures, contending with exclusion, judgement and powerlessness from those in authority and had a deep impact on young women's developing sense of self. Liminality considers the importance of ceremony masters, mirrored in the Sufi practice of *murid/murshid,* leaders who pass through transformational passages and emerge skilled and humble. However, if left unchecked, this can lead to self-proclaimed masters of charisma who claim to "know the truth" yet who "in reality establish their own position by perpetuating liminality and by emptying the liminal moment of real creativity, turning it into a scene of mimetic rivalry" (Thomassen, 2009:21). The dissolution of this practice by this cohort has meant a change to traditional Sufi *tariqas*, led by an acute need for a more compassionate and intimate connection with a Shaykh. The expectation to be an exceptional convert Muslim placed a heavy burden on young developing minds, who learned from a young age to gauge their audience before engaging in conversation about their culture, and indeed their name - reflecting how the choice made by parents to relinquish their pre-convert life, is not always an inevitable, nor enviable choice for their children.

Examining women's embodied and performative enactments of belonging, Chapter 7 argued for more nuanced ways of theorising subjectivity-making. Belonging is gendered, and women's notions of self are informed by gendered understandings of the God-believer relationship. The Murabitun espoused gender-traditional behaviours across public-private spheres, essentialising the reproduction of the "good Muslim woman" through community practice, marriage and

sexuality, intersected by social, economic and racial inequalities. This was further complicated by the inculcation of a Euro-Christian ethos, which acquired interpretations of “sin”, “segregation” and “subjugation” within this British Islam and was used to maintain women’s appropriate moral conduct, distorting ideas of piety and virginity. In order to distinguish themselves from secular society, the community implemented feminine and masculine boundaries as a way to manage women’s roles, bodies and behaviours, creating duality and contributing to confusion and conflict rather than dismantling inequality. Participants were caught between these polarities and as a consequence sought to re-interpret womanhood and pious “service”, while for some, traumatic experiences led to a breakdown of trust, profoundly impacting life events. By “troubling” (Shaikh, 2013) the politics of our belonging or interpretations of religion, where freedom and constraint interact in complex ways and where agency and submission fuse in an individual’s lived experience, uncovers how women are reworking formations of the self. The self is never individual, it adapts, consciously and unconsciously in relation to others, often underestimating the power which is transmitted through these affective ties. Those we love, the energy we invest, and the communities partaken in, are all functions of power. It is within these relationships however, that a creative subjectivity is reformulated - dismantling limiting ideas of assignable difference and gender injustice in order to challenge generational expectations.

As a result, we discovered how this second-generation responded to their mothers before them, by actively incorporating, rather than simply rejecting, a secular re-scripting of Muslim women’s agency. The promotion of self-worth over self-sacrificing femininity is considered a value laden and progressive choice by participants and a crucial component of family harmony. This stage in the journeying self, is articulated through agency, both active and passive (Ortner, 2006), in the form of obligation and choosing to resist and reject it when desired. Foucault’s (1978) *assujetissement* interprets these acts of becoming as creative resistance discovered through challenges, without which, participants agreed, being a Muslim woman in Britain becomes an exoticised or romanticised experience. Through narratives and collective memory work, women are examining constructed and normative ideas, to “determine ideals by our daily actions and decisions not only for ourselves, but largely for each other” (Addams, 2002:112). While the universal aspects of Islam remain intrinsic to social life, despite moral variation, the power of choice is revealed as a core element in the process of ethics and change. Faith and spirituality are not irreducible, they are socially and historically reproduced, placing critical emphasis on the social and emotional experiences rather than a grand narrative. Participants’ knowledge of Sufism has enriched their curiosity for Divine connections and revealed a desire for an all-loving and universal Allah that rejects harmful interpretations, demonstrating how the process of decolonising dominant and normative traditions repositions women as central to their spiritual aspirations. Indeed, the interweaving of the “sacred” and “secular” and consideration of the legacy they leave

their own children enriches our understanding of British Muslim women, reflective perhaps too of what is happening in society as a whole.

The act of remaking and inventing new meanings, be they of community, belonging or religious or spiritual practice was an incredibly rewarding knowledge transfer enclosed in this study. These women were interested in an Islam that connects to art, nature, the land, and to others, in diverse and inclusive ways, pursuant of alternative practices of the Divine that were inherently interconnected with Allah as Light - the source of life. Sufism demands people change themselves, to reflect and unravel their own hearts as a way to avoid ossification. It also demands that you do not become embroiled in ideology, which has been a challenge for those converting to a new life entirely. However, the moral life has not become side-lined in modern life, and religion can provide important "metanarratives" (Bellah, 2011) through which modern subjects anchor the diverse contours of their lives. Indeed, the liminal positionality manifests experiences of doubt, rupture and failure as a drive to know oneself, inclusive of the belief that Allah brings both happiness and bitterness in order to teach you about yourself. As al-Ghazālī's *tazkiyat al-nafs* elucidates, being human is both body and soul, matter and spirit and finding the balance between them is what makes us human. It is a recognition of patterns, sequences, rituals, where the sacred is emphasised as integral to everyday life and action, where "the universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has repercussions on human life, with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity" (van Gennep, 1960:3). It is a cyclical process, engaging a person's ethical imagination that focuses on the symbiosis of the good and the shadow, disclosing new dimensions and fresh insights into a phenomenon that remains viable and negotiable whatever the cultural context. This study has shown the importance of everyday faith, and that by connecting to Divine elements in varied ways, participants feel authentic and whole. Perhaps as Durkheim argued, an enhanced sense of selfhood is a necessary outcome of the social complexity in modern societies, and that by interrogating it, can generate and make space for new and varied ways of being human, enabling an individual to choose their own way of being (Edwardes, 2019).

The reference and use of the Islamic framework implies an Islamic ethical, moral and political subject, yet building an identity through various practices, considering active citizenship through work a religious duty, or connecting to divinity through ecological justice, reveals how Islam encompasses more holistic interpretations. It challenges the dominant definition of religion as a discourse that focusses on avoiding transgressing prescribed limits and instead reveals its capacity to adapt in creative and syncretic ways through everyday life. Ultimately the participants' characterisation of Allah is generous, loving, and compassionate, and by maintaining its core healing capacity they are decolonising imperial and patriarchal interpretations that have stripped

this quality. As Hajja Rabea acknowledges, the pressure Muslim children undergo to achieve the "good Muslim" standard expected by parents and communities, can constrain young people and result in them "losing life-force, joy and spontaneity", stating, "you can make *tawbah* for broken rules, but you cannot make *tawbah* for broken psyches". Repentance comes in many forms and what this case-study has shown is that while participants make the best of their inheritance, they are compelled to investigate what Islam means for them, re-imagining, re-configuring and re-vitalising it, resulting in a "different colouring of Islam that is "full of love". The world into which we are born does not exist in some absolute sense, but is rather just one model of reality, the consequence of a particular set of adaptive choices made by generations before. Different modes of being and belonging are not failed attempts at integration, they are unique forms of imagination, and the voices and experiences of those attempting alternative ways of confronting the challenges of today are part of the repertoire of human capacity. The journeying self requires analysing the complexity of life, incorporating the internal contradictions, ambiguities and incoherencies that inform the lives of ordinary Muslims. It is a way for the next generation to be active in their own making— becoming accountable for the processes which produce them rather than remaining continuously reproduced by them. As Premawardhana (2018) writes in *Faith in Flux*, the idea that rupture is theorised as merely a breaking from the past is limited, since the possibility of transcending one's formative context, taking on the new, presents a way of radicalising it so that change is intrinsic to tradition.

In Asad's (2003) *Formation of the Secular* he asks us to question the way secularity has traditionally been defined, and to revise our own analytical conception of the world. To define the secular sphere as a place where human freedom and individual rights prevail - in contradistinction to the religious sphere - is authoritarian and dominating and separates their coexistence, with both "turning out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought" (*ibid*: 200). In other words, the concept of religion, or religionisation (Ahmed, 2007), like race, is not only opposed to the secular but also produced by it. Indeed, categorisations have endowed the ideology of whiteness, built largely on discourses of white, Christian, liberal Protestants and affecting all structures in English-speaking societies, to become the sea which has swallowed up all other variations. Therefore, how we think about religion, the language we use to express religious ideals and construct institutional life-worlds reinforces the guard-rails which keep hierarchy in place, divisions based on fear and difference, and a wielding of power over those less privileged across diverse categories of race, gender, sexuality, class and age. These terms serve the power interests of those that construct this edifice, not as a cause, but as a continuum. Therefore it is essential to unpack normative assumptions, *a prioris* and dichotomies inherent in ideologies, epistemologies, and knowledge systems. In the case of "the Muslim woman", the act of demolishing stereotypes and markers which oversimplify their complex and diverse realities, is a

particularly crucial endeavour. For Muslim women living in Western societies, distinctions between feminism(s) and subversive or resistant agency, are muted along with multiple suppositions, which negate the broader processes of self-fashioning and remodelling of ones affects and interiority. Yet as Islamic feminists argue, women are being subdued and controlled due to their innate "power" and "strength", so that all "sexual institutions (polygamy, [legal] repudiation, sexual segregation) can be perceived as a strategy for constraining her power" (Moghadam, 1993:7), despite what is promised in the Quran. The task therefore is sustaining a robust and productive practice of reflection and debate which responds to the internal challenges of gender injustice and strengthens the vibrant and productive internal dialogues about the nature of Muslim tradition, while simultaneously resisting globalising forms of Islamophobia.

This thesis has offered the opportunity to hear the narratives of second-generation convert Muslim women as they journey through the stages of self-formation and embrace change, so that instincts, desires, emotions, memory and experience imbricate to capture the whole self. These narratives traverse dichotomies and open discussions on the complexities of living with Islam in Britain, the way challenges, conflicts and doubts are appropriated, articulated and defied or defended in the everyday by those who live it, to reveal a more intricate tapestry of Islam. Through the process of doing "archaeology on the *deen*" participants are in fact continuing the very process of "change" that their convert parents began in their own journey with faith. Although the scope of the study is limited it has the potential to provide insight into this phenomenon and its wider implications. Further studies could include male experiences, which would be of real interest. However, restricting the discourse to women allowed elements of Islam, not normally approached, to be subject to anthropological and feminist scrutiny, as well as raising the normally taboo subject of the divine feminine. While the common view is that Islam is hostile to critique, I would confirm Ahmad's (2017), proposal that critique is an inherent practice in Islam, whereby Sufism in particular can be the agent for merging both '*aql* and *qalb*, and, if considered anthropologically, is an everyday activity in the lives of ordinary people and effective in enacting its ethical aims. This can enable space for new theoretical considerations of agency and change, such as citizenship, women's equality and culture, modernity and secularism. It demonstrates how particular actors in specific social contexts construct ethical lives, highlighting the active and "chosen" aspects of the moral self that have become characteristic of modern society. This perspective constitutes an interesting and illuminating avenue for developing the anthropology of Islam, gender and ethical formation and the ways Muslim women are slowly but significantly transforming the religious landscape and reclaiming it for themselves.

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