

**Exploring the lived experiences of mixed ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam
through one parent**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the lived experiences of Islam among mixed ethnic women living in a Northeast town in England. I consider the ways in which Islam is lived in a multifaceted environment, and how these experiences influence the ways that these women negotiate and create a sense of belonging, self and identity. Central to this thesis are 15 women's stories of lived religion that capture the significance of intersections of mixed ethnicity, gender and space. I use creative participant-led approaches, informed by qualitative research methods, utilising interviews, photo elicitation and walking interviews. I explore the different scales of conflict which participants experience at the intersections of their gender, ethnicity and religion, ranging between subjective, pragmatic and wider structural conflict they face. I consider how participants navigate such conflict, positioning themselves as active agents of their lives and skillfully exercising strategies in a bid to attain social harmony. This opens up sociological dialogue about the diversity which exists in Islam and everyday expressions of Islam which have been sidelined for institutional depictions. I consider the ways my participants understand and explain their adult relationships with Islam as enduring, despite ongoing conflict and struggle. I emphasise processes of distancing they engage in, and their alignment with cultural aspects of Islam. In doing so, this research makes three key contributions. First, in focusing on the experiences of mixed ethnic women in Middlesbrough, I emphasise the significance of intersections of mixed ethnicity and gender within studies of lived religion. Second, my use of mobile participant led methods highlights the importance of considering the contextual specificities which influence people's identities. Lastly, I bring diversity to the study of Muslim identities in the U.K. and offer detailed accounts of the experiences of mixed ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam through one parent.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

1. Introduction

This thesis explores the lived experiences of mixed ethnic women living in Middlesbrough in the Northeast of England, who have a kin connection to Islam through 1 parent. Drawing on lived experiences, I consider the ways that mixed ethnicity, faith, gender and urban space intersect with one another, to create a diverse range of relationships and experiences of Islam. Within this thesis, I identify how my participants negotiate and create a sense of self and identity. This research develops existing research on lived intersections of religion, ethnicity, gender and space, but also serves to move these discussions forward by focusing specifically on the lived experiences of women from mixed ethnic backgrounds, adding a dimension which is significantly under researched. In doing so, I demonstrate that my participants both express and evidence the need for increased understanding of the diversity and fluidity which exists in Islam, both within Muslim communities and more widely across media and political discourse. More specifically, I illustrate that everyday expressions and some of the more ambivalent relationships people have with Islam have historically been sidelined, particularly those experienced by mixed ethnic people. In doing so, I argue that the fluid, relational and contextually defined nature of lived religion is intrinsic to understanding the lived experiences of Islam among mixed ethnic women.

The introductory chapter will begin by contextualising this research within existing public

and academic discourse. I introduce my position as researcher, discussing both my thesis and my own development through the research process. I then outline the conceptual framework that my research follows, followed by the research questions and aims that this thesis addresses. Lastly, I outline the direction that this thesis will take, offering a summary of what each chapter will include and its purpose within the overall thesis.

1.1 Contextualising the research and the researcher

The relationship between ethnicity, faith and gender has a historically rich and complex journey. They have been explored as individual and interwoven categories, with both areas of research generating dynamic and multifaceted narratives of people's lives. These narratives form the basis of vital sociological research, both theoretically and empirically. From the outset, considering the lives of mixed ethnic women in Islamic households uncovers a range of intersections at play. That said, historically religious identity has often been conceptualised in simplistic, binary terms namely: religious or atheist, practicing or non-practicing, acceptance or rejection and belonging or exclusion. Past research and public discourse have also focused predominantly on the experiences of pious Muslims and how British Muslims manage cultural 'British' expectations with religious expectations (DeHanas 2016; Liberatore 2017). This research begins to address and open up broader and more expansive understandings of faith membership and practice, by foregrounding the participants' lived experiences and at times, seemingly ambivalent relationships with faith.

This thesis is interested in intersectional identities more broadly, for example the experiences of young British Muslims, generational differences between Muslims and more recently, the intersections of gender, religion and sexuality (Vertigans 2010; Manning and Roy 2010). Crenshaw (2016) explains that intersectionality is not solely about identity and should be understood in terms of how structures make certain identities the consequence of and the vehicle for vulnerability. Reimer-Kirkham and Sharma (2011) and Singh (2015) have also addressed that religion has been left of intersectional theorising, something which this thesis addresses. Contemporary public controversy has included protests against Muslim women wearing the burqa, the threat of terrorism and political reference to the failure of Muslims to integrate to British society (Vertigans 2010; Jeldtoft 2013). At the heart of these narratives is the idea of a 'clash' between Islam and contemporary (western) social and cultural life

(Manning and Roy 2010). Historically, academic research has also reflected this narrative of conflict, with faith and ‘modern’ social life routinely positioned as seemingly incompatible (Manning and Roy 2010).

Since the 9/11 terror attacks, Muslims in Britain have also undoubtedly been living in a state of hyper visibility. Arguably, no other minority group has been subjected to the extent of public hostility and scrutiny (Jeldtoft 2013). Muslims have predominantly been presented as a group who exist in antithesis to liberal democracy, gender equality and the broader concept of freedom (Jeldtoft 2013; Malik 2014). Similarly, the media have disproportionality framed Muslims and Islam negatively, focusing on scare stories to perpetuate societal fears about immigration, crime and terrorism (Malik 2014). Politicians and commentators have also expressed considerable concern about the growing cultural threat Muslim minorities pose to secular and liberal traditions of Europe (Caldwell 2009). Importantly, this type of stigmatising rhetoric fails to present a true reality into how the majority of young British Muslims think or live their lives. It fails to engage with the broader social, economic and cultural factors that contextualise their lives and presents them as a homogeneous group with no voice, agency or differences (Ahmed 2019; Jeldoft 2013). Whilst some research has attempted to present the normality’s of everyday Muslim life, much of the literature produced post 9/11 has focused on a range of narrow topics, including: social cohesion, identity, multiculturalism and public policy (Gillat-Ray 2013). Studies which have focused on Muslim women have also often continued to fixate on the appearances of Muslim women rather than everyday issues such as health, education, access to employment (Catto and Woodhead 2011). These issues are often discussed using a ‘problem centered approach’ which perpetuates the pernicious idea of a ‘clash of civilisation’. These imaginaries of Muslims and Islam have considerable effects on everyday Muslim life. This thesis offers an alternative perspective by presenting the everyday lived experiences of Islam whilst engaging with some of the less well-known features of British Muslim life. Whilst acutely aware of the impact social imaginaries can have on people's lives, I adopt an ‘everyday lived Islam’ approach in an attempt to move beyond the hyper-visibility of faith identities associated with Islam. As aforementioned, I seek to reflect how the women interpret and practice Islam in their daily lives rather than in relation to institutions and scripture (Nielson 2013).

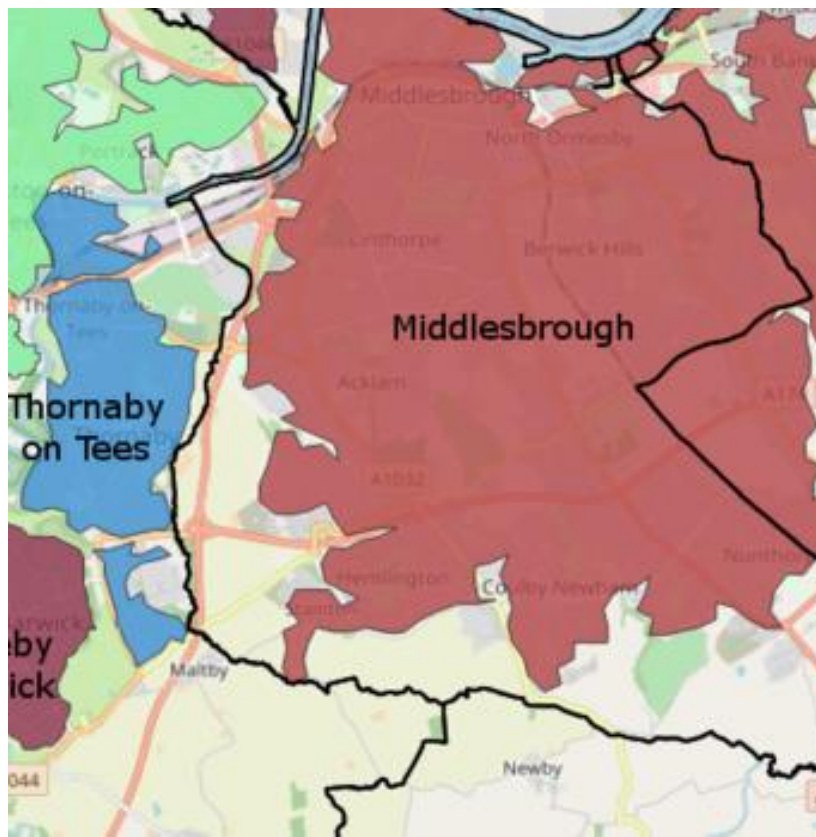
The last twenty years has seen an increasing interest in uncovering the lived realities of

hidden populations whose voices have previously been unheard (Crenshaw 1991, 1989). This is perhaps a reflection of a society in which globalisation and factors such as conflict-driven migration have led to greater religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity in many societies which in turn, has contributed to identities becoming increasingly diverse and multifaceted (Hvenegård-Lassen et al. 2020). Importantly, this has shone a light on intersectional identities. Such research has attempted to shed necessary light on how people navigate faith in a multitude of complex ways and addressed how this can be a difficult and challenging process (Crenshaw 1991; Mirza 2013; Hvenegård-Lassen et al. 2020). Uncovering the narratives of previously unheard voices remains as crucial as ever in terms of developing the field of lived religion. While the lived experiences of Islam among mixed-ethnic people are significantly neglected in academic research, scholars have explored how people manage conflicting identities within Islam, including the following areas: conversion to Islam (Van Nieuwkerk and Kieuwkerk 2006; Allievi 2008) and LGBTQ+ people's experiences of managing religious identities (Rodriguez & Ouellette 2000; Anderton et al. 2011; Anderson and Koc 2020; Jackson-Taylor 2021). These areas of research also hold particular relevance to this thesis as they shed light on the multifaceted relationships people have with faith where there are heightened conflicting expectations. Importantly, these studies have also drawn on concepts of fear, shame and guilt which permeate lived experience of religion. More generally, there are few social scientific studies that directly explore emotional dimensions of risk. That said, Lupton (1998; 2013) argues that emotion and risk are inevitably and routinely configured via social and cultural processes and through interaction with material objects, people, space and place. She goes on to argue that emotions and risk judgements and understanding are fluid, shared and collective, rather than located within the individual. Central to this study is the belief that historical depictions of religion exclude the more ambivalent positionings many people have with religion and sideline the emotions evoked from experiences of lived religion. Thus, I align myself with lived religion scholars who move away from historical focus on institutional practice and belief and foreground the ways that people 'do' religion in their everyday lives (Orsi 1999; McGuire 2008; Stirling et al., 2014; Ammerman 2016). The next section moves on to contextualise the research in terms of the social and cultural environment it is situated in.

1.1.1 Contextualising the research

As a town, Middlesbrough (see: map 1) presents a particularly interesting site for this

research as it comprises its own rich social, economic and cultural context. Middlesbrough is situated in the Northeast of England (see: map 2) which, as a region, has its own complex socio-economic and political history. The rise of far right politics, majority vote for Brexit and heightened concern around immigration has dominated the political landscape of Middlesbrough in recent years which in turn, has also exacerbated essentialist understandings about Islam and ethnicity, including Islam as a monolithic religion (Modood 2008; Allen 2010; Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Kumar 2012; Meer and Werbner 2005; Telford and Wistow 2019; Abbas 2020).



Map 1: Middlesbrough and surrounding areas



Map 2: Northeast Region within England

All of the women who took part in this research lived in Middlesbrough and the surrounding areas visible in Map 1 and so the stories heard are shaped in and in relation to aspects of this space. The ONS (2021) recorded that among the 316 local authorities in England (excluding the Isles of Scilly), Middlesbrough was ranked 1st for most income-deprived, with 25.1% of Middlesbrough's population being income-deprived in 2019. Within the town, 49 out of 86 of its neighborhoods are among the 20% most income-deprived in England, and only 4% are comparatively least income-deprived. These disparities paint a bleak image of some of the inequalities Middlesbrough faces as a town and illustrate how income inequality is disproportionately high in comparison to national figures. In terms of ethnic and religious diversity, Middlesbrough was recorded as “the most ethnically diverse local authority area in the Tees Valley, with a British Minority Ethnic population of 11.7% identified at Census 2021, an increase of 86% since 2001”. It was also recorded as having the “highest percentage of mixed ethnic population in the north east” at 1.71%, and the “highest Muslim population in the north east” at 7.05% (Middlesbrough Council 2022 website, based on Census 2011 data). Interestingly, 6.16% of the population did not state their religion, however, this was lower than England's national measure of 7.18%.

This thesis is interested in how Middlesbrough's social, political and economic landscape shapes my participants' experiences of and relationships with Islam. The economic history of Middlesbrough offers insight into how prominent issues facing the town came about, including: navigating Brexit, Islamophobia, high levels of immigration, the rise of working class Tories, high levels of unemployment and industrialisation. The 20th century saw the wider Teesside area become a prominent base for mining, steelmaking, ship building and heavy engineering, with the town benefitting from the strategically positioned River Tees providing an easy and accessible entrance to the North Sea (Benyon et al. 1994; Telford and Wistow 2019). As a result, the town profited from the high levels of global transportation of its products (Benyon et al. 1994). However, the 1980s 'neoliberal restoration' marked the shift towards a globalised free-market economy, whereby a great number of innovative new companies moved their production centers to developing countries, this ensured lower production costs and maximised profits (Badiou 2008). Consequently, Teesside shifted from an economy that was previously centered on production to predominantly leisure and retail services. This was further demonstrated by the loss of 100,000 manufacturing jobs and the increase of 92,000 jobs in leisure and retail services, which occurred between 1971 and 2008 (Shildrick 2010). Such employment was often poorly paid, non-unionised and denied workers' rights and basic entitlements and as a result, there was a major shift in the social, economic and cultural outlook of Teesside's workers (Telford and Wistow 2019). Simultaneously, the welfare state was cut back after the global financial crisis of 2008; austerity measures principally targeted the public sector and as a result, severe cuts were made to local authority budgets resulting in the closure of many public services.

Telford and Wistow's (2019) research illustrates how welfare reforms which began in 2010 have hit the poorest towns like Middlesbrough the hardest. The lack of genuine industrial economic policy in Middlesbrough (and the Northeast more broadly), has affected what was once a strong political commitment to democratic socialism in the area (Beatty & Forthergill 2016), hence, The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) who self-identify as an anti-immigrant and anti-establishment party enjoyed increased support in Teesside between 2014 and 2016. During the Brexit campaign, Nigel Farage (UKIP's former leader) constructed a campaign between the 'Peoples' Army' (Shipman 2017) challenging mainstream commentators, politicians and the capitalist class who mainly backed Remain (Mulvey & Davidson 2018). UKIP's principal objective - to leave the EU - was welcomed in the

previously industrialised areas of Teesside, where feelings of frustration were rife. As a result, all of Middlesbrough's local authorities elected to leave the EU in 2016 (with a total result of 65% leave) (Warren 2018). More broadly, research has found that the UK's vote to leave the European Union in 2016 was fueled by anti-immigration sentiment more so than the influence of other demographic and economic factors (Goodwin & Milazzo 2017; Warren 2018). Anti-immigration sentiment in the UK has arguably created an increase in hate crimes against migrants, rising Islamophobia and more generally a 'hostile political environment' for migrants particularly in the period prior to and following the referendum (Laverick and Joyce 2019). This has been further exacerbated by the Home Offices' emphasis on its goals to decrease net migration, limit transition to citizenship, and remove migrants without documentation. The aspects of the Brexit social climate have also undoubtedly led to concerns over the degree to which Brexit will increase discrimination for minorities living in the UK. This thesis is interested in how women living in Middlesbrough experience Islam and mixed ethnicity, in this socio-political climate. The discrimination prevalent in Teesside has made researching and writing about these women's lives and experiences a process which required a great deal of sensitivity. At the heart of this thesis is undoubtedly the voices of the women, however, it is also necessary to shed light on how this research oscillated between the telling of the women's stories and my role as reflexive researcher. Consequently, the next section of this chapter moves on to position myself as researcher, within this research.

1.1.2 Contextualising the researcher

This is a thesis about the lived experiences of the women who shared their stories with me. But it is important to acknowledge that I also share, in some part, my own story. Whilst it is sometimes considered as a weakness in relation to discussing how researchers have operationalised reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Lynch 2000; Webster 2008; Strhan 2015), my own narrative was key in enabling me to maneuver between 'being' and 'doing' reflexivity - forming a symbiotic relationship. It was imperative that I balanced my own story within the wider picture of the participants' stories and my reflexive actions. I feel that it is necessary that I share in part my own story here, as my research was inspired by my own experiences of growing up as a mixed ethnic woman with a Muslim father and has therefore been embedded in shaping my interest, motivation and passion towards this topic from the outset.

I was initially drawn to researching identity from a sociological perspective due to my own personal identity challenges. My siblings and I grew up with a Pakistani Muslim father and Indian-English mother who was previously non-religious and converted to Islam upon marriage. Despite my mother converting to Islam to respect my father's wishes and respective Islamic obligations, she mainly deferred to my father in our religious upbringing, leaving my father to make final decisions when my siblings and I were concerned, especially those concerning religion, ethnicity and culture. As such, we were raised as practicing Muslims, participating in learning the Quran, attending the mosque on special occasions and following Islamic dietary requirements (such as abstaining from alcohol and pork). Life was quite different when my mother took us to visit her family in Leicester which was a much more 'liberal' and relaxed environment. There was no strong presence of religion or cultural expectations, in fact, we (my siblings and I) often spoke about 'how English' we felt around her family- yet our lives were still heavily shaped by Islamic expectations.

I stood at the intersection of numerous conflicting cultural, religious and gendered expectations. Throughout my childhood and adolescence these expectations caused me internal conflict with myself and external conflict with those around me. My teenage years were characterised by conflict within the family home, centered around the narrative of me wanting 'more freedom' in how I lived my life and the unfairness I felt in comparison to my peers. Adolescence has long been associated as a period of life characterised by shifts in identity, developing individual beliefs, hence the phrase 'coming of age' (Coleman 1980; Lesko 2012). Indeed, this was true for me. I found myself drifting further and further from Islam while my mother became increasingly despaired at how to manage the conflict this caused within the home and the turbulence it created between relationships, firstly between my parents and I and between my parents. Having reached a climax during my late teens - my mental health suffering and my relationship with my family heavily impacted - it became increasingly clear that I did not affiliate with the 'practicing Muslim' label I had been born into. This was a shared experience among my siblings and something we still support each other with as young adults. My mother has also experienced her own journey of growth, self-acceptance and engaged in much reflection of her role as 'mediator'. Despite reaching a level of ontological security with my family in relation to how I live my life, feelings of guilt and anxiety have permeated this journey. Guilt towards my father - who is seemingly on his own with his Islamic faith - has led my siblings, my mother and I too often question our own

choices and relentlessly debate the extent of subtlety we *should* exercise in order to respect his faith. The art of subtlety and compromise has undoubtedly been instrumental in learning how to exist in the environments I find myself in, whilst also allowing me relative control and freedom over my life choices. My own experiences have led me to recognise the importance of research that would explore how, and to what extent, other young women from mixed ethnic backgrounds experience and navigate tensions of faith, ethnicity, and culture.

1.1.3 Lived experience as conceptual framework

Lived experience is at the core of the theoretical and methodological framework which permeates this thesis. The sharing of stories and narratives about people's lived experiences are traditionally rooted in interpretivist traditions (Schwandt 2003). Stories of peoplehood comprise the narratives told about specific identities and these narratives are instrumental in generating understanding about society and its inhabitants (Smith 2003). Not only do they encourage individuals to make sense of themselves and form their own identities and sense of self, but also they enable people to understand the social world around them (Smith 2003). The use of personal narratives and stories in social research is often centered around an epistemological framework which views life as socially constructed and created through people engaging with their social world and in relation to those around them (Schwandt 2003; Young and Collin 2004). Frameworks which take an interpretivist and constructionist approach often utilise participant led modes of communication (including stories and images). Participant-led methods lend themselves well to uncovering how individuals make sense of and construct their own identities and sense of self (Stevenson and Holloway 2016). At the heart of this thesis are the stories of everyday religion. I take a dynamic lived religion approach to explore the women's relationship, exploring how their experiences of Islam are shaped by the discourses and narratives around them and the social interaction that they have with their communities. I utilise a constructionist approach into understanding how identities are formed and experienced in everyday life. Positioning this research within such a framework views identity as a socially constructed entity, shaped not only by people's personal experiences and backgrounds, but also, by the ways that those around them inform their own narratives and identities (Soja 1996; Creswell 2015; Liberatore 2017). Leading with people's lived experiences has enabled me to shed light on how my participants make sense of their own identities within a wide range of cultural narratives and how people's actions and identities are shaped by and shape narratives in society.

My research is positioned within and borrows insights from two understandings of social life and knowledge: social constructionism and classic interpretivism. The epistemological and ontological assumptions which I set out from the foundational base upon which my own thinking and understanding about the social world and its phenomena rest. My research is grounded on the belief that reality and knowledge, to an extent, cannot be revealed to us except through that which is revealed from our individual and subjective experience. These assumptions also inform my understanding of social research both in general and in the development of my research methodology in this thesis. As a mixed ethnic female who was raised in an Islamic household, this research works at a level which connects my own biography with my participants. As a result, my own epistemological and ontological positions about the social world and specifically identity work have largely been shaped by two factors. Firstly, my readings in the area of epistemology and ontology have shaped my understanding of the social world and the philosophical arguments which relate to this research and my own upbringing. The second factor which has shaped the theoretical framework in this research is my shared identity with participants in this study. My belief is that whilst people are shaped by and relate to discourses around them, the social world is also constructed by individual agents who make sense of things and act in accordance with these understandings. Therefore, whilst I believe that various types of knowledge exist which also require exploring, as a constructionist and interpretivist sociologist, I adopt the position that these knowledges are understood in relation to human perceptions and beliefs, as well as humans also having the ability to challenge and shape these perceptions and beliefs. According to Cohen et al. (2007) “the social world can be understood only from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated” (p.19), suggesting that all knowledge and social experience is by nature highly subjective due to human endeavors to understand and interpret the social world around them.

The ontological approach this research takes in relation to the nature of the social world and existence is constructionism. Its origins are typically associated with the postmodern era in qualitative social research (Seidman 2015). The constructionist paradigm incorporates aspects of both post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms, it also can be conceptualised as having a critical realist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology. Constructionism and social constructionism are often used interchangeably. However, constructivism relates more to the idea that individuals mentally construct their experience of the world through cognitive

processes (Schwandt 2003), whereas social constructionism has an increased focus on the social rather than an individual focus and the cognitive processes that accompany knowledge (Young & Colin 2004). Most notably, social constructionists believe that it is not solely the researcher's interpretation, but rather, social phenomena equally affect researchers' interpretations (Schwandt 2003). Therefore, whilst other realities and knowledge do exist, these cannot be claimed as true objective realities. Consequently, I take the position that social worlds can only be understood through exploring human beliefs and perceptions and that meaning making is shaped by society and its social inhabitants.

Turning to the nature of knowledge and specifically how it is acquired, the epistemological stance this research takes is an interpretivist view. In opposition to the positivist paradigm, interpretivism can be conceptualised as having a relativist ontology with a subjectivist epistemology. This view emphasises a close relationship between the researcher and their social world, therefore, the two are not totally independent from one another and instead, influence one another. The birth of social constructionism can in part be traced back to an interpretivist approach to thinking (Schwandt 2003). Similar to constructionists, interpretivists generally focus on the process by which meanings are sustained, created and negotiated (Schwandt 2003). They also share a similar goal of understanding the lived experience of social worlds from the perspective of individuals who live in that particular social world. Both approaches were born in an attempt to challenge positivism and scientism more broadly and have thus been influenced by the postmodernist movement. That said, whilst they may share common philosophical roots, social constructionism is also distinct from interpretivism (Young & Collin 2004). While interpretivists also value human experience as subjective, they strive to develop an objective science to study and describe it (Schwandt 2003). This highlights a clear distinction and tension between the two approaches with interpretivism typically adopting an objective interpretation of social phenomenon, consequently, a logical empiricist methodology is often applied to human inquiry by interpretivists. An interpretivist view suggests that the social world can be understood through our interpretations and perceptions, rather than simply direct observation. Hence, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue that interpretivist research “is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (p. 22). For interpretivists, “knowledge is relative to particular circumstances—historical, temporal, cultural, subjective—and exists in multiple forms as representations of reality (interpretations by individuals)” (p.22). This research will consequently focus on narrating and recognising

the meaning of the participants' experience of social life.

As Harding (2004) argues, ethnic minority groups are better equipped than dominant groups to speak about social structures due to their own experience of oppression and division. Thus, this research assumed from the outset that the mixed-ethnic female participants were experts of their lives, hence why the methods (interviews, photo elicitation and walking interviews) used in this research were chosen on the premise of privileging the participants' voices. The following chapter expands in greater detail on the various ways sociological approaches have informed theoretical discussions in relation to my focus on mixed ethnic women and Islam. I draw on recent developments in the sociology of religion, particularly in the development of lived religion. This is an important approach through which social research can facilitate necessary depth into understanding the diversity of religious experiences in the U.K and importantly how these experiences move beyond historical emphasis on institutional religion. Finally, my research sits firmly in the new field directly considering mixed ethnicity, gender and Islam, which draws on and contributes to debates in the following areas: lived religion; secularisation debates; inclusion and exclusion; visibility in urban spaces; and binaries surrounding religion.

1.2 Research aims and questions

The title of this thesis: '*Exploring the lived experiences of mixed ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam through 1 parent*', summarises the broader focus of this thesis. Departing from existing studies on Muslim identities, this thesis aims to present a sociological investigation of the formation of mixed ethnic experiences of Islam. I consider the influence of mixed ethnicity in shaping everyday experiences of Islam, particularly within family and societal practices and influence. This thesis intends to achieve three specific aims:

- I aim to achieve an in-depth understanding of mixed ethnic experiences of Islam in Middlesbrough by exploring the significance and meanings attached to Islam from the perspective of mixed ethnic women.

- I seek to identify the ways in which lived experiences of Islam and mixed ethnicity are generated and expressed as identities.
- I emphasise the importance of considering racial and religious sincerity among my participants and expand on existing knowledge about the roles of agency and structural constraints in shaping people's ethnic and religious identifications. Here I also consider how multiple axes of differences - mixed ethnicity and gender in particular - lead to disparate experiences and interpretations of Islam.
- I highlight the potential of 'mixed ethnic experiences of Islam' to contest existing ethnic and urban narratives and to defy homogenised understandings of Islamic identity.
- Finally, the overarching aim of this thesis is to present a theoretically informed and empirically grounded account of the lived experiences of mixed ethnic women who have a kin connection to Islam through 1 parent.

Specifically, the thesis sets out to address three main questions:

1. How do mixed-ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam (through 1 parent) engage with and relate to ideas of Muslim identity?

This first question directly addresses the wider ambitions of this research in an attempt to draw out the diverse, complex and multifaceted lived experiences of faith. Previous attempts to consider these relationships within sociology are relatively new, however, the last 25 years has seen growing attempts to explore the lived experiences of faith and a premise on uncovering previously 'unheard' stories. Where sociological research has explored intersectional experiences of Islam, the focus has been on gender and faith, with mixed-ethnic people's voices remaining unheard. It would be reductive to assume that people (regardless of their diverse backgrounds) experience and practice Islam in the same way. That said, representations of Muslims in popular media and political discourse have historically homogenised Muslims. Interestingly, this is a pattern which exists both in relation to Islam

and other faiths, with religion often discussed in binary terms: practicing vs non practicing, inclusion vs exclusion, pious vs deviant and hell vs heaven. Scholars of lived religion have uncovered how religious participation and identity transcends simply being (or not being) a member of a religious group. By asking the participants to speak about their everyday experiences I was able to center and foreground the subtleties and nuances which shaped their relationship with Islam. One participant captured this eloquently, saying that *'I drift in and out of Islam, it depends who I'm with and where I am'*. Significantly, this aided me in uncovering how Islam might exist in experiential terms, more as a continuum, rather than in binary terms. Adopting this understanding, helps move discussions about lived religion forwards and shed light on a rich and vital area of intersectional empirical research.

2. How do mixed-ethnic young women experience Islam in their transition from childhood to adulthood?

The second research question concerns my theoretical focus on the self and identity as a fluid, shifting and socially constituted entity. Recognising age as a significant factor in people's life experiences, I question how the participants' experiences of, and relationships with, Islam manifest in moving from childhood to adulthood. Of specific interest is the women's experiences of adolescence, as this has long been recognised in coming of age literature as a particularly challenging 'transitional' period. By foregrounding the women's transitions from youth to adulthood - I enquire into key issues like autonomy and independence, relations with the male sex, gendered expectations - as these are well-established areas of tension between Islamic and Western cultures and within studies exploring coming of age. This question also speaks directly to the methodological decisions I have made regarding how best to collect data which uncovers the lived experience of faith. My choice of method - interviews, photo elicitation and walking interviews - is informed by my intention of encouraging participants to reflect creatively on their whole life trajectory (including the spatial aspects of their identities) and equip the women with a voice to narrate their journeys.

3. How do mixed ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam (through 1 parent) interact with and relate to Middlesbrough's histories, spaces and communities?

The final research question focuses specifically on how respondents interacted with and related to Middlesbrough's histories, spaces and communities. Located in the working class town of Middlesbrough, one of the most deprived areas in England, the use of walking interviews were particularly appropriate for encouraging participants to share their stories about how social, political and physical features of a landscape shaped their lives.

Middlesbrough is recognised as an urban town which consists of close knit communities, growing ethnic diversity and increasing hostility towards minority groups. This represents an interesting site to explore how identities buffer against one another and shape people's experiences of Islam. Walking interviews are emerging as a distinct qualitative research method for exploring the connection between self and place (Evans and Jones, 2011). They are recognised as a particularly novel method for connecting words with location making them a powerful tool for exploring spatial dimensions of social life and religious identity. My use of walking interviews speaks directly to this question. They enable me to explore how popular attitudes, perceptions and narratives which circulate Middlesbrough shape the women's relationships with Islam and relationally, their town.

1.3 Thesis outline

Chapter 2 of this thesis explores the key theoretical and empirical research which this research is grounded in. The literature selected is in line with the 3 key areas of identity (religion, ethnic and spatial) that I am interested in, as indicated by my research questions above. I begin by considering identity in terms of religion, engaging critically with concepts of lived religion, religious socialisation in the U.K. and British Muslim lives. I then engage with developing notions of 'new ethnicities' and 'hybrid' ethnicities, before moving on to consider scholarly contributions made in the field of space and place identity. Here I make specific reference to literature which supports the belief that place, and identity are co-produced by one another.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and process. The process of recruiting participants is outlined and the development of the data collection methods: interviews, photo elicitation and walking interviews. I then consider where the research is situated whilst also discussing my narrative approach in the data collection process and during analysis. Lastly, I consider my positionality as a researcher and reflect on my experience of the research process.

Chapter 4 is the first of the three analytical chapters presented in this thesis. I present the forms of fragmentation and conflict which permeate my participants lives predominantly

within the home setting, and emphasise adolescence as particularly difficult for my participants. I differentiate between the different scales of struggle experienced, including wider social struggles, pragmatic issues and internal subjective struggles which permeate my participants' lives. Engaging empirically with my data, this chapter establishes the context in which my participants' complex and multifaceted relationships with Islam stem.

Chapter 5 focuses specifically on the strategies, tools and tactics that my participants implement in their lives as they navigate the myriad of expectations they face. Importantly, I draw out the spatial distinctions that are associated with the temporal aspects of their lives, focusing predominantly on my participants' engagement with the wider community. While Chapter 4 focuses on the difficult conflict my participants face (particularly in their earlier years) this chapter presents the intelligent, sensitive and at times, humorous ways that my participants attempted to attain a sense of ontological stability and social harmony with those around them. I present the significance of gender and sexual expectations in their lives as women, and the powerful role of gatekeeping by Muslim family and community. Here I illustrate my participants as active agents who, despite facing real power struggles, negotiated and manipulated these codes to attain racial sincerity. I also highlight the significance of my participants' mother's experiences and status in relation to Islam as their parallel existence is notably significant for understanding the formation of my participants.

Chapter 6 'drifting in and out' is the last of the three analytical chapters and sits most closely with established research in the field of lived religion. Here I consider how my participants manage their identities beyond Middlesbrough. I identify that my participants drifted in and out of Islam (to various degrees) over the course of their lives. Here I consider religion as situationally and contextually defined, identifying kinship and geographical positioning of religious influence as significant. In doing so, I also consider religion as enduring in my participants' lives drawing on the subtle and often overlooked depictions of religion in their lives.

Finally, Chapter 7 offers a conclusion. Here I outline how this thesis has directly examined the three core research questions which were stated earlier in this chapter, before moving on to providing a concise summary of each chapter presented in this thesis. I then outline three significant contributions which this thesis makes to sociological research and finally close by highlighting the aspects of my research which illustrate the potential for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Mixed ethnic women provide an increasingly diverse and rich context in which to explore how Islam exists in everyday life. This thesis problematises the notion that people's relationships and experiences of religion are linear and binary and in doing so, aims to explore the diverse ways in which Islam is lived among mixed ethnic women. As a mixed

ethnic woman who has grown up with a Muslim father, I am aware of the fluid, multifaceted and at times, ambivalent relationship people have with faith, particularly in a mixed ethnic household. ‘Official’ definitions of Islam, much like institutional definitions of religion more broadly, often felt unrelatable. Thus, this thesis is situated within a ‘lived religion’ approach, which lends itself well to capturing the ambivalent relationships that many people have with religion. The thesis aims to tell the story of how Islam manifests everyday life and specifically how this intersects with mixed ethnicity, gender and the spatial aspects of an urban town, situated in the Northeast of England. The literature discussed in this chapter has been selected for its contextual contribution towards telling these stories. I begin by exploring approaches to lived religion, outlining what this approach involves and why it is useful to this thesis. I also discuss its value to intersectional research before contextualising the turn to lived religion within a wider body of sociological research interested in lived experience. Following this, I outline research on young people's religious socialisation in the UK, with reference to religious socialisation in Muslim families and communities. I then provide context into the social and gendered organisation of Muslim families in the UK given its pertinence to my participants. Following this, I discuss approaches to studying urban identities before finally outlining theoretical contributions to the sociology of race and ethnicity. Close attention is paid to Hall's (1991) ‘new ethnicities’ due to its relevance to my participants rich and complex backgrounds (in terms of ethnicity, religion and space) as well as the ‘lived’ approach this thesis takes.

2.2. Lived Religion

The sociology of religion has seen a significant shift in the way it understands people's relationships with and experiences of religion (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011). At the turn of the 20th century, religion was also typically viewed as in decline and losing importance (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011; Davie 2013). Emerging in the mid-1990s the lived religion approach was born in part out of critiques of secularisation models. Critiques typically shifted from a focus on secularity to casting a necessary light on new, diverse questions on the role of religion in everyday life. Rather than exploring religion through institutional forms of belief, including attendance and membership to ‘official’ religious spheres, the lived religion approach encouraged a new way of understanding religion through the everyday practices, habits and patterns of social life that are experienced by ordinary people (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011). Through interdisciplinary conversations and exchanges between historians,

sociologists and scholars in religious studies, scholars united under a shared ambition to move beyond the seemingly narrow (and largely Western) understandings of religion as primarily revolving around institutional affiliation, religious attendance, and propositional beliefs. Key scholars from a number of disciplines have emphasised that people do not live religion through religious institutions as it has been formally suggested, but rather, people enact and relate to religion in the contexts of their everyday lives (Hall 1999; McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011; Ammerman 2013).

McGuire (2008) has been instrumental in outlining the concept of lived religion and has argued that it has enabled scholars of religion to move beyond the assumption that there is an inherent incompatibility between religion and modernity whilst also encouraging a new appreciation for the multiplicity and ‘messiness’ of everyday religion. She adds that standalone definitions of ‘religion’ have been insufficient in accounting for the ways religion is experienced and practised. Thus, as an approach, the contexts that religion has been explored in have also diversified substantially over the years with scholars now exploring religion in environments which were previously considered informal, secular and public (Ammerman 2006; McGuire 2008). Scholars have also been able to gain deeper understanding of some of the more harmful aspects of religion (such as exclusion, violence and terrorism) which were previously lost in narratives reinforcing religion as in decline (Allievi 1998; Peek 2005; Van Nieuwkerk and Kieuwkerk 2006; Chaudhry and Miller 2008; Stirling et al., 2014). It has also shone a necessary light on the everyday sphere of people’s lives and highlighted the diverse, complex and ever evolving combinations of beliefs, values, commitments, practices, relationships and experiences that exist among ordinary people (Ammerman 2006; McGuire 2008). Building on this line of thought, this thesis takes a holistic approach to understanding young mixed ethnic women’s relationships with Islam. Therefore, the term ‘religion’ is not used to convey a single set of beliefs as defined by Islamic institutions, but rather, it is used to capture to the multiplicity of daily life (in relation to Islam, space, gender and ethnicity and other aspects of identity), where religious concepts and ideas are experienced by the women and expressed in everyday life, including through bodily practices, performances and rituals.

A key element of the lived religion approach - which is relevant for this thesis - is its focus on how religion is practiced in everyday life (Orsi 1999; McGuire 2008). As aforementioned,

religion practised by individuals is often starkly different to societal depictions stemming from institutional understandings. McGuire (2008) captures this in her positioning of 'lived religion' as the distinction between people's actual beliefs, practices and experiences of religion from the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices.

Ammerman (2016) argues that the focus on the study of religion among sociologists should fundamentally be about what people 'do' in their everyday lives, rather than official doctrine and dogma which she argues should be left to theologians to explore. However, she also recognises that exploring the everyday practices should not be entirely divorced from institutions and organisations, as practice is often tied to institutions, texts, rituals and beliefs. Consequently, she argues that lived religion research would benefit greatly from considering the "domains of sacred life where things are being produced, encountered and shared", including the embodied practices (2016:10). For example, Ammerman (2020) argues that understanding religion as a lived 'practice' is useful for understanding how religion exists in relation to bodies, spaces and practices, including what people eat, the spaces people inhabit, how they dress, birth and death rituals and traditions. Importantly, given that lived religion can be explored in diverse settings, it also has the potential to explore practices which people do not recognise as religious. This is important for highlighting the encounters which people do not directly recognise as religious (due to institutional depictions of religion) but are influenced by religion in less direct ways (Ammerman 2016; Wuthnow 2020). Popular cultural narratives have tended to portray Muslims as a historically homogenised uniform group with aspects of their identities typically sidelined in order to reinforce Islam as the dominant aspect of their identity (Jeldoft 2013). By foregrounding my participants' everyday practices I aim to capture how Islam intersects with other structuring categories (such as place, gender and ethnicity), whilst actively challenging essentialist narratives associated with Islam.

Scholars have also emphasised emotion and embodiment as important aspects of religious practice (Ammerman 2005; McGuire 2008; Wuthnow 2020). Wuthnow (2020) argues that religious practices are embodied and as such, materially constituted in the physical movement and appearance of the human body. He refers to facial expressions, grooming and dress as core performances and appearances which make up religious embodiment. Similarly, McGuire (2008) argues that religion is closely linked to the material body through social practices relating to health, gender, sexuality and leisure. McGuire (2008) refers to "popular religion", to capture how people practice religion through the material expression of

“clothing, pictures and posters, jewelry, coffee mugs and bumper stickers” (p.78). Not only does this support that religion can manifest in instances where there is no obvious connection to religious organisations but it also emphasises that everyday movements are embodied as religious through the process of people assigning meaning to them. It connects domestic spaces with the secular - highlighting how material bodies are always grounded in the spaces that they maneuver, whilst conveying a message about the religious identity of the individual. The relevance of practice when exploring lived religion illustrates how religious participation and identity often transcends binary understandings around faith membership (such as simply being or not being a member of a religious group) - despite popular narratives suggesting the contrary (Becking et al. 2017). Through capturing the everyday encounters of Islam as experienced by the respondents, this thesis aims to explore how Islam exists in experiential terms, rather than through institutional understandings of religion. Thus, this thesis builds on this line of argument, adopting the stance that religion often manifests through practice. Importantly, I recognise that everyday religion is often orientated towards things which a person or group recognises as religious and that the nature of this assessment critically depends on the context in which it is made. Therefore, I foreground the everyday contexts in which these practices are embodied which enables me to consider how these practices are spatially defined.

Exploring everyday religion also speaks to the significance of place, which is recognised by lived religion scholars as an important aspect of religion (Park 1994; Raivo 1997a; Pacione 1999; Kong 2001). As this thesis is interested in the lived experiences of Islam among women from a Northeast town in England, an important element of exploring this is understanding the urban context in which these experiences of Islam are constructed and enacted. The importance of place is also supported in the broader study of lived experiences and identity, where place is widely recognised as a core component of how people make sense of social life and their identities (Sibley 1995; Manzo 2003; Bamford 2014). Sociologists and geographers have argued self-identity is developed through people's everyday experiences of physical and social spaces (Soja 1996; Manzo 2003; Bamford 2014). Soja (1996) argues that the lived world occurs in a socio-spatial dialectic, whereby social processes and space shape one another. Ammerman (2005) supports this and argues that religious practices must be understood in relation to their specific context and that people belonging to a specific cultural context learn that certain cues and interactions are understood as religious and vice versa. She adds that the religious ecology of the culture and the legal

systems that define how and what religion can be done and not be done, is critical to understanding lived religious practices. Building on this, Wuthnow (2020) argues that religious practices are influenced by the discrete physical and temporal spaces in which they occur, meaning that “cues, spaces, affordances and power dynamics” (p.45) shape the practices which occur in social situations. Offering a different argument, Day (2011) argues that cities have historically been defined by faith traditions and as a result, religion can also be influential in shaping its context both materially and socially, this highlights a mutually exclusive relationship at play between space and religion in everyday life.

Orsi (1999) offers one of the first examples of lived religion scholarship which drew out the significance of place in relation to how people practice religion. His research explored how various religious traditions manifest in the urban landscapes of American cities where there is mass urbanisation and pluralism as a result of diaspora nationalism. Despite “urban religion” having historically long been seen as somewhat of an oxymoron and depicted as in decline, Orsi argues that religion thrives in urban western cities as urban landscapes have the potential to pave the way for religious expression whilst the material landscape can actively facilitate religious expressions. Orsi highlights how city dwellers live through their social and material environment which in turn, creates a distinct relationship between religion and space that is characterised by fluidity and constant change due to the ever evolving architecture, geography and social issues of the city. This enabled Orsi to uncover how people engage with place within their everyday routines and that place could manifest at times as contradictory and complex. Since Orsi’s (1999) work, the interaction of everyday religion and urban space has become an emerging focus of inquiry into how cities work. I add to the study of urban lived religion by exploring how Islam is lived in smaller cities and towns, like the North East town that the women in this thesis are from. Most previous studies - including DeHanas (2016) and Beekers (2020) - have focused on how Islam is lived across Europe or in super diverse urban contexts, rather than smaller urban towns or cities which this thesis is interested in.

The geographer Lily Kong (2001) has been instrumental in prompting scholars across various disciplines to discuss the role of spatial environment in peoples lived experiences of religion, striving to overcome disciplinary boundaries between the study of geography and religion. Kong (2001) argues that in order to offer worthwhile insight, research in urban religion must

unite the poetics and the politics of religion, specifically the ‘global, national, regional, local and, indeed, that of the body’ rather than simply the sacred (2001:226). This has since been supported by Becking et al. (2017) who argues that, in an increasingly globalised age, it is not enough to view religious, national and ethnic identities as distinct entities. Instead, these identities form a ‘syncretistic bricolage’ of layers which shape an identity (Becking et al. 2017). Interestingly, Hertz’s (1913) work has recently been taken up by scholars working on religion and place emphasising that religious sites can be interpreted in a variety of ways rather than as a single uniform site. Hertz’s work also captured the importance of understanding the meaning of a holy place in terms of the social practices of the particular communities visiting it and the identities produced through this, rather than of the place itself. This captures much of urban religious research which has developed in recent years, whereby the importance of considering the multiplicity of political meanings people invest in religious places, including those which relate to: gender, class and ethnic politics, secular and sacred meanings, has been emphasised. Building on these arguments, this thesis recognises the influence of context in shaping people's experiences of religion whilst also recognising the material body as grounded, placed and contextually defined. I approach the women’s backgrounds as multifaceted and made up of various representations that are prone to reproducing and transforming across time and space. By exploring the backdrops to the women's social lives, I consider how the physical spaces which the women move in (and in relation to) are considered significant through the social meanings they and others ascribe to them.

Exploring everyday religion within its context also deepens appreciation of the ways in which religion can shift over time. Whilst exploring the women’s journeys with Islam from childhood to adulthood, this thesis takes the theoretical stance that the self and identity are fluid, shifting and socially constituted entities (McGuire 2008). Age and context are widely recognised as key factors in shaping people's experiences of and practices relating to religion (Orsi 1999; Wuthnow 2020). is further supported by ‘coming of age’ literature which has historically recognised the period of adolescence as a challenging ‘transitional’ period in people's lives characterised by concerns around increased independence, role change and decision making for the future (Coleman 1980; Lesko 2012). Therefore, this thesis pays close attention to women's transitional journeys from youth to adulthood, and how their experiences of Islam evolve during this journey. Studies exploring the lives of young British Muslim women have also identified adolescence as a period of tension, turmoil and growth

(Basit 1995 & 1997), making it an interesting time frame within which to explore lived religion. Consequently, this thesis takes an approach which views adolescence as a period of conflicting stresses and tension, however not because of internal emotional instability but rather, due to conflicting external pressures that the women experience. Adopting a lived religion approach is particularly useful for exploring women's experiences of 'coming of age'. It enables me to enquire into significant issues like autonomy and independence, relations with the opposite sex, gendered expectations which are well-established areas of tension during adolescence and between Islamic and Western cultures (Basit 1995 & 1997).

Notably, these issues relate not only to adolescence, but also the women's gendered identities. Lived religion has also proven especially salient in exploring the experiences of women, a group who have previously marginalised themselves in the study of religion, including women, children and migrants (Ammerman 2016). As aforementioned, the study of religion historically focused on the 'proper' religion of elite male specialists. The women in this thesis are marginalised minorities in terms of ethnicity, religion and gender. Thus, lived religion is an effective approach for considering the women in this thesis. As an approach it has proven effective for transcending hegemonic definitions of what religion is and makes the women's experiences and practices visible (Jeldtoft 2011; Ekstrom et al. 2019). These studies have afforded women the same right to define their relationships with religion as religious authorities which are predominantly masculine domains (Jeldtoft 2011; Zubair and Zubair 2017; Ekstrom et al. 2019). Jeldtoft (2011) argues that applying a lived religion approach to Islam is particularly valuable for exploring female experiences of Islam, as it can uncover how everyday religion can challenge the dominant focus on institutional (masculine) Islam. However, I am also acutely aware that a lived religion approach cannot erase the power dynamics associated with marginalised voices such as the women in this study. However, this thesis has the potential to bring the perspective of a group of marginalised women to light, in relation to how they negotiate and live Islam in an urban town as mixed ethnic women.

Despite the lived religion approach becoming a more popular approach among scholars of religion there are relatively few attempts of it being applied to Islam, and within the studies that have been conducted, there has been little focus on lived experiences of Islam outside large metropolitan centres (Dessing et al. 2013; Jeldtoft 2011,2013; Zubair and Zubair 2017; Hoque 2019). The predominant focus among lived religion scholars has been on New Age

Religions and Christianity, particularly in the context of Europe and North America (Nielsen 2013). As aforementioned, scholars exploring Islam in 'lived' terms have largely focused on how Islam is lived in super diverse urban contexts across Europe (Dessing et al. 2013; Jeldtoft 2011,2013). Contributing to this literature, this thesis explores how Islam is lived in smaller cities and towns, and so focuses on a town in the Northeast of England. That said, much can still be learnt from the works mentioned above, particularly in relation to how Islam is practised in everyday life and away from institutions, and how this intersects with gender and other forms of identity. Dessing et al's. (2013) collection of essays arguably brought the non-institutional dimensions of Islam in Europe crystalised sociological attention in non-institutional dimensions of Islam. Adopting Michel de Certeau, Roland Barthes and Henri Lefebvre theoretical stance on everyday life, the scholars in Dessing et al's collection focus on the individual and everyday ways which Muslims live Islam across Europe. Like this thesis, Dessing et al. (2016) does not disregard the importance of Islam as a tradition but rather, takes interest in the ways which Islam is lived which popular narratives and imaginaries on Islam have not captured. They attempt to make sense of the everyday realities of life negotiated by 'ordinary' Muslims in a variety of locations and situations across Europe, including how Islam shapes people's interactions with public spaces like schools and shopping centres. By drawing on a variety of spaces, Dessing et al. (2016) are able to illustrate the diversity of applications of 'normative' Islam among people in their everyday life and importantly, how this contrasts with some of the popular religious imaginaries in these spaces.

Thus, this thesis emphasises the importance of self-defining and drawing on the contextual specificities which shape the women's relationships with Islam. Jeldtoft (2013) argues that research exploring the lived experiences of Islam is fundamental if the sociology of religion is to move beyond essentialist narratives suggesting Muslims are 'all about Islam'. She adds that illustrating the various ways that young Muslims have identities and concerns which transcend being Muslims and intersect with other socio-political issues. Muslims in Europe have undoubtedly been highly publicised and politicised in recent years, something which the participants in Jeldtoft's (2013) study were highly resistant of. The participants engaged with individualism, privatisation and even eclectic religious behavior in a bid to adapt and reformulate their engagement with Islam and challenge negative cultural narratives and discourses (Jeldtoft 2013). This thesis builds on these findings by exploring how Islam is lived among mixed ethnic women in a space where negative and essentialist discourses about

Muslim identities are rife. This undoubtedly opens up questions about what it means to be Muslim to individuals, and how people's relationships with religion is subject to how people make sense of the world around them. Thus, to gain an understanding of how mixed ethnic women experience Islam, it is important to, as Wilcox (2012) argues, not demarcate what does and does not count as religion for my participants. The next chapter covers this in more depth, outlining the strategic measures which I undertook during my recruitment process so as to not deter women with more ambivalent relationships with Islam. By activity challenging popular narratives, the more hidden experiences shaped by intersections which the women encounter can be uncovered.

In the same way that research exploring people's experiences of lived religion has emphasised the multiplicity of identity and social life, research exploring how faith is passed between social groups suggests that this is an equally multifaceted process which takes place in everyday life (Scourfield et al. 2013). There is considerable research which has emphasised the role that the institutions people are attached to and the broader socio-political climate they move in shapes young people's everyday experiences of religion and religious socialisation (Scourfield et al. 2012; Bengtson et al. 2013; Spilman et al. 2013; Dollahite et al. 2019). The concept 'religious transmission' is most often explored in social research quantitatively analysing intergenerational patterns of religion and membership with institutional forms of religion (Boyatzis et al. 2006; Bengston et al. 2018). Scourfield et al. (2013) argues that the term transmission is passive in the sense that it does not capture the dynamic process of inter- and intra-generational negotiation of belief and reinforces historical tendency to discuss religious identity in relation to affiliation with religious institutions (2013: 20). Transmission implies that religion is passed between people in a neat and orderly fashion. This thesis is interested in the messiness which occurs in everyday life and challenging existing religious binaries and institutional depictions of religion which 'transmission' does not capture.

The term religious socialisation can be seen as an especially useful concept for exploring lived religion, not only does it enable the influence of social structures to be explored but it also lends itself well to exploring the dynamism of peoples negotiation with religion, including in more informal spaces. Further, Guhin et al. (2021) argues that while the concept of socialisation has been critiqued for its lack of attention to power and agency, it remains a

key mechanism of social reproduction. He identifies that even among scholars who have moved away from the term have still explored the idea of social reproduction in their work. Despite this, while alternative theories (like social reproduction) achieve much of what socialisation intended to do, key elements of socialisation are lost, including: historicity, transferability, and a sensitivity to unequal power relations. Scholars embracing the term socialisation have thus emphasised the historicity and overarching power of social structures pertinent to identity formation. That said, the term socialisation has gained some critique in social studies of childhood for its implication that there is an assumed and unquestioned division between children and adults (Oswell 2013; Strhan 2019). This criticism has also sparked fears that children are passive victims of religious indoctrination of children, as well as opposite fears among religious people about children being influenced by wider cultural values that are at odds with religious teachings (Scourfield et al. 2013; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019). Taking these critiques into account, alongside ‘socialisation’, the concept ‘religious nurture’ is also relevant to this thesis in the sense that it equips voice and agency in young people. The idea of ‘religious nurture’ has predominantly been used to explore how adults ‘nurture’ children into faith. This thesis builds on this, exploring how contextual characteristics (such as places, narratives and discourses) nurture everyday religion. Scourfield et al. (2013) argues that this approach emphasises the micro-level social processes at play the most, making it particularly useful for exploring everyday religion.

Whilst religious socialisation (in all its forms) is not always successful, research has shown that certain factors increase the likelihood of successful parent-child transmission, including: parental religiousness, parental religious homogeneity, consistency between parental beliefs and behaviors, and close relationships between parent and child (Myers 1996; Bader & Desmond 2006). Bader and Desmond (2006) study found that when both parents are consistent in their religious views and evolve from the same religious denomination, they can more effectively transmit religious behavior and attitudes to their offspring. They also found that when parents send mixed messages to their children, for example, when their behaviors contrast their attitudes about religion, there is less chance religion will be transmitted to their offspring. Myers (1996:863) also similarly found that children were more religious when parents reported that both were “about the same” level of religiosity, which Myer’s coined as ‘belief homogeneity’, arguing that belief homogeneity enables parents to maximise religious transmission to avoid children accepting mixed messages about the role of religion in everyday life. The stories heard in this thesis are unique to previous studies exploring

religious socialisation in the sense that they capture how religion manifests in households where parents are not from the same religious or ethnic denomination.

That said, while the discussed conceptual variations of religious socialisation brings value to the study of lived religion, I also recognise some of its criticisms raised by scholars and make practical steps to overcome them. Many of the criticisms raised concern children's agency. This thesis is designed and embedded with an ethos that actively affords the women agency which counteracts some of the criticisms raised. The methodology discussed in the next chapter overcomes some of the concerns raised about socialisation implying passivity as the methods enable the women to express their experiences in their own words, images and geographical references. Not only are these three modes of communication which are intrinsically participant led, but they also actively invite participants to independently reflect on what they perceive as important articulations for telling their stories about their relationship with Islam. This thesis stresses the importance of exploring the contextual specificities of the mixed ethnic women's relationships with Islam, it is imperative that it explores the socialisation and religious nurturing at play in the women's lives. Therefore, I embrace Scourfield et al.'s (2013) argument that variations of these socialisation concepts should be used in tandem in order to offer a full (macro and micro) depiction of social life. The next section goes on to consider relevant intersectional approaches to the study of lived religion.

2.2.1 Intersectional approaches to lived religion

Intersectionality was arguably born out of identity politics failing to consider the distinctions and complexities of experiences *within* groups. Identity politics emerged from the need to recognise marginalised groups rights, equalities and experiences. Crenshaw (1991) pioneered intersectional approaches arguing that despite identity politics equipping some minorities a voice it “frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (1991: 1242). Crenshaw's (1991) thoughts were inspired by her consideration of black women's marginalisation in the US legal system, where she identified that despite racism and sexism often intersecting in their lives, feminist and race theories seldom considered these in relation to each other. Crenshaw (1989, 2016) explains that intersectionality is not solely about identity and should be understood in terms of how structures make certain identities the consequence of and the vehicle for vulnerability. In relation to this thesis' focus on religion,

Reimer-Kirkham and Sharma (2011), Singh (2016), Sharma and Llewellyn (2016) and Yukich and Edgell (2020) have addressed religion being left out of intersectional theorising. My own personal experiences as a mixed-ethnic woman who has a connection to Islam has illustrated to me that religion is heavily shaped by the contextual specifics of the spaces I have moved in and the social encounters I have experienced. Intersectionality allows me to explore mixed ethnic women's experiences of Islam and consider the dynamic and often interlocking aspects of their identity, whilst also identifying specific social encounters, periods of life, or social spaces which make certain aspects of their identities feel more significant at times.

Whilst the use of intersectional approaches have considerably grown since the 1990s - both in academia and politics - has led to it being used in a variety of ways, it has also been the target of extensive critique (Davis 2008). Most prominent is the concern as to whether it is a conceptual framework, a theory or a 'standpoint epistemology'. Thus, many of these critiques have centered around intersectionality being too vague and ambiguous to be applied theoretically to social life, making it no more than a useful for framing the multiplicity of social life (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Singh 2005; Zack 2005; Sung 2006; Hancock 2007; Brah 2008; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016; Jackson-Taylor 2021). Moreover, as intersectionality has grown, concerns have surfaced about an 'endless constellation' of intersecting factors being explored, which can inadvertently return scholars back to exploring the people's individual experiences of social life (Anthias 2013; Jackson-Taylor 2021). Despite the fact I am mindful of these critiques, I also recognise that intersectionality is constantly in refinement and agree with scholars arguing that it is a useful paradigm for exploring identity (Davis 2008; Jackson-Taylor 2021). As outlined by Hill Collins and Bilge (2016), it is useful for considering how religion is encountered in the context of everyday life and for encouraging scholars to recognise plural dimensions of social life which shape the self. In line with this thesis, this is particularly important when identifying the role which cultural narratives and social imaginaries play in shaping the women's experiences of Islam. Therefore, whilst I do not set out to 'employ' intersectionality as such, my own approach is shaped by research exploring gender and religion which has usefully drawn on intersectionality theory and is a field where a focus on intersectionality is growing.

Among some of the key scholars who have led to this growth are Yukich and Edgell (2020) and Sharma and Llewellyn (2016). They have emphasised that religion should be viewed as a

raced phenomenon, and it is impossible to consider lived religion in isolation of the race, ethnicity and culture. Yukich and Edgell's (2020) edited volume challenges the idea that religion exists as a uniform set of beliefs and instead, argues that religion (and non-religion) should be viewed as providing people with 'cultural repertoires' (which include beliefs, identities, discourses and practices) that people draw on and act upon in different ways according to the spaces and people they encounter. These repertoires are developed and embedded in specific social and institutional contexts and can relate to religion, race, space, gender and so on. Garner and Parvez (2020) build on the concept of cultural repertoires and illustrate how black Muslim women in the USA and France experience distinct forms of religious prejudice due to how the USA and France conceptualise religion and race in nuanced ways. Whilst the United States' Muslim population comprises an increasingly racially diverse group with varied class backgrounds, this context has led to the racialisation of black Muslims. Garner and Parvez (2020) identified the tendency among non-black Muslims to promote racial stereotypes about Black Muslims and dismiss the legitimacy of a connection between Islam and blackness. In France, a different form of racism can be seen at play where anti-Arab/Muslim/immigrant racism overlaps with class stigma towards poorer groups. Garner and Parvez (2020) found that this was further exacerbated by the concentration of French Muslims originally from North Africa. The unique ways in which the women were racialised in Garner and Parvez's (2020) research illustrates how space and location has the potential to dramatically shape people's experiences of religion, as well as other aspects of identity like race, class and gender. While the women in the USA experienced secularism's focus on protecting religious freedom, it was virtually impossible to target their visibly religious bodies. Instead, their efforts to challenge racial hierarchy were targeted at non-black Muslim women which illustrates the prevalence of racial discrimination within already discriminated religions and ethnic minority groups. The women in France experienced legalised hostility towards their bodies through the militant interpretation of secularism. Their resistance was typically exercised towards the state, in an attempt to confront the policing of their bodies. This speaks to the wider tendency for religious groups to be homogenised and racialised. Exploring the intersectionality of race, gender, and religion yields key insights but also provides an essential corrective in a context where historical homogenisation of Muslims has occurred. The ethnic diversity among the respondents in this thesis is particularly diverse and rich due to my participants' mixed ethnic backgrounds, meaning that the way that they experience the intersection of race, ethnicity and religion comprise different and distinctive expressions. Therefore, I argue that

intersectionality is useful for considering the intersection of religion, gender, social location and mixed ethnicity.

2.2.2 *The broader study of everyday life*

The turn to lived religion can be contextualised by a wider body of sociological research which is increasingly interested in the everyday, mundane practices of social life. The focus on everyday life emerged in 1960 in the works of Lefebvre, de Certeau and Barthes (Dessing et al. 2013). Despite having varied approaches to studying the everyday, all were united on their belief that the everyday had the potential to transform awareness, enable people to see new things and was performative. Their work was largely shaped by a growing dissatisfaction with positivism and critical sociology - approaches which were seen as overly deterministic in their conceptualisation of the individual in society and as consequently failing to capture the complexity of everyday social life (Garfinkel 1967; Douglas 1970). The study of everyday life experienced a revival in interest at the start of the 21st century with Highmore's (2002) and Sheringham's (2008) collections of work igniting a rediscovery of Cartesian and Lefebvrian thought. Highmore (2002) and Sheringham (2008) studied individuals in their everyday context enabling them to uncover the more mundane and everyday micro relations and encounters which occurred in everyday life. The influence of psychoanalytic approaches to studying space and identity (e.g. psychosocial approaches) encouraged new questions to be asked about how identities are situated in everyday social life, as well as how this shaped people's relationships with the outside world and themselves. This feeds into the everyday encounters explored in this research, by foregrounding the women's everyday interactions in and around the spaces they move I capture the frequently incoherent and fragmented nature of people's relationships with everyday religion.

Simmel (1950) was among the very first sociologists to explore how social life is shaped through every day and mundane forms of culture and interaction, here he developed the notion of the fragmented self in his work (Simmel and Levine 1971; Frisby and Featherstone 1997). His work highlighted the self and society existing in mutually constitutive relationships, arguing that the two cannot be explored separately. Rather than depicting society as a concrete substance, Simmel (1950: 9–10) argued that society exists as an event and is something that individuals *do*. Like Highmore (2002) and Sheringham (2008) later

captured in their work, Simmel also argued that sociologists should take interest in conspicuous forms of interaction and relationship - as well as the larger social formations. Since Simmel (1950) academics across sociology and anthropology have explored how these shifts demonstrate the intrinsically social and political nature of identity (Worchel 1998; Barth 1969; Cohen 1986; Lawler 2015). Sociologists have focused on exploring tensions between the individual and the constraints of social structure, bringing necessary attention to the way that identities are shaped by discourses of power and drawing attention to ideas of exclusion and belonging (Phillips 2009; Lawler 2014). Anthropologists have explored the cultural expression of identity including the meanings attached to different identities and the ways that people maintain group boundary demarcation lines (Barth 1969; Cohen 1986). The way in which identities have been identified as socially produced, socially embedded and explored in relation to people's everyday lives is central to telling the respondents stories in this thesis. This thesis follows the premise that identity is multifaceted and ever-changing and that it is through interpreting their stories that their lived experience of Islam and other aspects of social life and identity can be understood. The next section discusses some of the research which has been drawn on these concepts to explore the experiences of British Muslims. I also outline the demographic trends which characterise Muslim families living in the UK, enabling me to situate my participants' and their Muslim family within a broader Muslim social landscape.

2.3 British Muslim lives

This surge of interest in young British Muslims in the last decade can be contextualised by an increasing moral panic about extremism and integration which has resulted in young British Muslims facing significant scrutiny in public and political discourse (Archer 2001, 2002; Basit 2009; Haque & Bell 2001; Modood et al. 2010; Jeldtoft 2013). Academic research has typically been concerned with exploring specific aspects of identity such as: the negotiation and construction of gendered and cultural identities in Islam (Dwyer 1999, 2000, 2008; Nyhagen 2004; Liberatore 2017) and educational aspirations of young British Muslims (Basit 1997; Archer 2001). In many ways these depictions have often provided static descriptions of identity among young British Muslims, concentrating on what these identities are like and the typical issues faced by young people. Less attention has been paid to the 'ordinary' lived realities of Muslims. The purpose of this section is to provide relevant context into British Muslim life, focusing on the significant role which family and the wider

community play in socialising young people as well as the importance of Islamic gendered expectations in Muslim women's lives - with specific reference to the process of conversion.

2.3.1 *Kin, family and culture*

The Home Office Citizenship Survey (2013) has found that Muslim households within England and Wales have the highest levels of faith retention across generations, in contrast with Christianity, which the survey found as having declined the most over generations. Arweck and Nesbitt (2009) argue the high levels of retention can be explained by the social organisation and processes of socialisation which take place in Muslim households. There is significant evidence that young British Muslims are more likely to be involved in outside-of-school religious organisations, supplementary Islamic education such as the formal learning of the Quran and are less likely to have friends round to their houses, which collectively reinforce the importance of Islam and family in their everyday lives (Martin 2005; Arweck and Nesbitt 2009; Scourfield et al. 2013). This is also supported by wider studies of religious socialisation which have found that generational replications of faith are the result of parents proactively encouraging young people to faith in their everyday life (Voas 2003; Smith and Denton 2005; Savage et al. 2010; Day 2011; Scourfield et al. 2012; Bengtson et al. 2013; Spilman et al. 2013; Dollahite et al. 2019) and consistency between both parent's religious attitudes and behaviors (Myers 1996; Bader & Desmond 2006). Sibling ties (particularly among sisters) have also been identified as having an important influence on the shaping of how religion is enacted, supported or abandoned in families (Sharma 2016). Focusing on the context of Christianity, Sharma (2016) argues that siblings have the opportunity to '*rehearse, perform, challenge, and question religious identities*' which influence how religion is experienced in the family. Other studies have also highlighted the role which specific religiosity measures play, including the value assigned to religion (Myers 1996), the frequency and value of prayer in everyday life (Francis and Brown 1991) and the beliefs and opinions in relation to the existence of God (Willits and Crider 1989). This is particularly relevant when exploring the lived experiences of Islam among a group whose parents are potentially not united in their faith, given their ethnic differences.

The importance of family was also supported by the 2011 census which recorded that in terms of household composition, the composition of Muslim households comprised the largest family size, averaging at 3.8 family members compared to 2.3 in Jewish, Christian and Buddhist households. Interestingly this conflicts with broader trends, whereby the composition of UK households has largely remained the same since the industrialisation era (during which the family composition largely shifted from extended to nuclear) (Coontz 1992). Equally, Muslim households are also recorded as significantly more likely to be made up of families consisting of married couples and the least likely to include lone parent families and cohabiting couples, compared to Jewish, Christian and Buddhist families (Dobbs et al. 2006). Divorce and separation have also been outlined as less common within Muslim households with only 20% of Muslim families comprising lone parent households (due to divorce), compared with 38% of Christian families and 47% of Jewish families (Dobbs et al. 2006). Culture and ethnicity have thus been highlighted as intrinsically entwined with family in the process of religious socialisation, particularly in Muslim family life (Dhami and Sheikh 2000; Becher 2003; Arweck and Nesbitt 2009). Research has shown a number of socio-cultural factors to be at play which has played a role in maintaining the extended family and low divorce rate in Muslim communities. For example, Dobbs et al. (2006) found that young Muslims were more likely to live within their parents' household for a longer period typically until they married and a cultural expectation whereby the eldest son in a Muslim family remained in the parental home with their wife after marriage (Dobbs et al. 2006). This illustrates the stark contrast of family sizes between Muslim households and typical British households. This also relates to wider research exploring religious socialisation.

Other scholars have exercised caution when making assumptions about high retention rates and argued that young people often self-identify as a particular religion in a bid to align themselves with kin and culture (Scoufield et al. 2013; Day 2011). However, several of these studies have focused on religions that have not been racialised to the extent which Islam has in the UK. Day's (2011) research exploring the lived experiences of Christianity among young people in a Yorkshire town in England captured the importance of culture and kin in religious socialisation. Day (2011) found young people self-identifying as 'Christian' in order to align with their family lineage, despite not having Christian 'orthodox' beliefs. Grandparents were identified as key in promoting cultural and ethnic expectations, and their geographical positioning was also important (Becher, 2003, 2005, 2008; Arweck and Nesbitt

2009; Day 2011). Arweck and Nesbitt's (2009) study finds that young people's relationship with religion can become fractured when the distance from the family home, the proximity of their (or their parents) place of worship, or the distance from their home to the home of grandparents and extended family is excessive. This thesis builds on these insights, some of the respondents have Muslim families who live at a great distance from their town (within and outside the UK). I explore their role in influencing the respondents' lived experiences of Islam and importantly, how these relationships are managed. The walking interviews, as explored in the following chapter, lend themselves well to this line of enquiry. Walking alongside the women in their local area enabled me to explore how the spaces and people they encounter in their everyday lives shapes their relationship with Islam.

The importance of kin and lineage may explain why there is a considerable body of research which supports the idea that religious socialisation in Muslim families in the UK is heavily tied up in notions of ethnicity, race and culture (Ali 1992; Jacobson 1997). Jacobson (1997) explores the interrelationship between religious and ethnic identities maintained by young British Pakistanis. Their research highlights the tendency for older-generations of Muslims to mis-identify tradition and culture as 'religious'. This often manifested in discussions of caste, dowries, dress, arranged marriage, marriage ceremonies and unequal treatment of men and women. This is also supported by findings from the Youth on Religion (YOR) survey, which identified a consensus among the respondents that there were advantages to forming friendships with those from similar religious backgrounds. Cultural aspects of religion, such as the clothing and food associated with Islam, were identified as creating a shared bond between those with the same religious background. This supports wider findings which have recognised the 'myriad of influences' at play in children's religious socialisation (Nesbitt 2004; Rymarz and Graham 2005; Singler 2013; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019). That said, despite the practical advantages highlighted by the Youth on Religion Survey and group solidarity having acted as a supporting measure during the settlement of first generation Muslims in the UK (Anwar 1985), inter-generational conflict has been identified as the main dimension of conflict within Muslim family life in contemporary Britain (Stopes-Roe and Cochran 1990; Hennink et al. 1999; Lewis, 2007; Mondal 2008). Lewis's (2007) study based on 18-30 year olds found a 'cultural bipolarism' at play, in which Britishness and Islam were positioned as two polarised and incompatible categories. As well as difficulty around aligning with one of two categories, some young people even expressed a desire to avoid them altogether. Not only does this support wider findings about the transition from youth to adulthood being a

period of 'turmoil and rebellion' due to a change in expected social roles (Basit 1997a, 1997b, 2009), but more specifically it highlights tension as typically occurring between second and older generations of Muslim families (Anwar 1985; Modood et al. 2010; Berthoud 1997; Becher 2008). This illustrates the added tension which religious expectations and generational differences can bring to an already turbulent transition from youth to adulthood. Older generations have been identified as promoting entwined interpretations of Islam and culture which young people experience as narrow and confining (Stopes-Roe and Cochran 1990; Jolly 1995; Hennink et al. 1999). Interestingly, Dollahite et al.'s (2019) argues that excessive firmness and lack of flexibility may reduce young people's receptiveness to their parent's emphasis on faith, particularly across their lifetime.

Aside from kin and culture, a number of researchers have also argued that young people's relationships with faith are shaped by a myriad of influences they are exposed to in modern day society (Nesbitt 2004; Rymarz and Graham 2005; Singler 2013; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019). The Youth on Religion (YOR) survey found that 37% of Muslims and 22% of Christians argued that religion was an important factor to consider when making friends, whilst only 12% of those with no religion saw it as an important factor. Muslims made up the highest percentage of young people who saw faith as an important factor when making friends, offering some explanation for high intergenerational retention rates in Islam (Home Office Citizenship Survey 2013). Madge et al. (2014) provides arguably the most detailed and multifaceted account of the role of religion for young people growing up in contemporary, multicultural urban contexts. Madge et al. (2014) identifies the role which peers play in shaping young people's religion, arguing that regardless of the faith that young people are born into, young people regard religion as a matter of personal choice. Madge et al. (2014) argues that this is due to increasing numbers of young people growing up in multi faith environments in Britain. This is an interesting argument given that this thesis explores people's relationships with religion in a mixed ethnic environment. Madge et al. (2014) found that at times friends exerted pressure on each other which influenced their religious attitudes and practices - sometimes intentionally but more often not. Madge et al. (2014) found that some of their participants reminded each other about the importance of adhering to religious expectations (e.g., eating Halal meat, dressing modestly and praying five times a day) and that this was a component of their friendship. For those who kept mixed friendship groups, they often faced choices between 'temptation' and their religion, often these individuals utilised their own agency when dealing with competing pressures and

used moral justification to rationalise their choices. Thus, the religious beliefs of friends can also play an important role in young people's lives, particularly in terms of reinforcing group religious membership and personal religious identity. This thesis is unique in the sense that it is exploring religious socialisation in a context where the young women mixed ethnic and have a kin connection to Islam via one parent. Therefore, there may not be a united religious stance among parents of the respondents. This undoubtedly poses a more complex process of socialisation whereby the women are exposed to a myriad of influences - which transcend Islamic expectations.

Equally, studies have explored how young people negotiate their religious values and beliefs within the framework of individual agency and liberal individualism (Madge et al. 2014; Woodhead 2017; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019; Hoque 2019). This is important to recognise given that the academic focus on the gendered (and broader) experiences of British Muslims has largely been on pious Muslims (Allievi 1998; Dwyer 2000; Neuwkerek and Nieuwerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012; Liberatore 2017). As such, a number of anthropologists have argued that the study of Islam in recent years has reinforced an assertion of Muslims (particularly women) as a consistently moral and disciplined group (Schielke 2009; DeHanas 2016; Liberatore 2017; Beekers 2020). It is also worth noting that the respondents in this thesis are growing up in a broader religious landscape in which 'non-religion' has replaced Christianity as the cultural default, the 'new normal' with less stigma than ever attached to it (Woodhead 2017; Katz et al. 2021). There is wide agreement among lived religion scholars that people in late modern society have an increased sense of individual autonomy and a desire to fashion their lives in independence of institutions (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011; Davie 2013). Similarly, Madge et al. 's (2014) study explores how schools in multi-faith act as 'microcosms' of diverse communities. Some of the respondents in the study identified the diversity they experienced as 'vital preparation for university' thus speaking to the wider influence liberal individualism plays in contemporary society and this thesis' focus on how religion plays on in mixed ethnic sites. Schielke's (2009) study supports similar findings, drawing on the experiences of a group of young Muslims from a village in Northern Egypt during the month of Ramadan. Despite the men acknowledging Islam as a clear set of commandments with little space for negotiation, they also identified other areas of life such as romantic love and sexuality (which had the potential to contradict Islamic expectations) as important to them. Schielke's study (2009) challenges the association of Islam with the idea of perfectionism and argues that - like most of humankind - Muslims cannot be pious and at

times have the potential to lose focus and discipline. This insight is particularly useful for this thesis which takes a lived religion approach and is underpinned by the belief that everyday religion is fluid and at times, ambiguous. Thus, everyday life can be seen as characterised by the coexistence of values, including morality, discipline, community, romantic love and consumerism - as well as religious expectations.

2.3.2 Gendered organisation

Whilst it is worth noting that in practice Islam undoubtedly varies among individuals, alongside the importance of kin and culture, gender expectations have also been identified as central to the social organisation of Muslim families and communities (Allievi 1998; Dwyer 2000; Neuwkerek and Nieukerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012). Dwyer (2000) argues that immediate and extended families, and the wider community, emphasise 'appropriate masculinities and femininities' through various methods of monitoring and surveillance to ensure that young women dress modestly and limit contact with men. This speaks to Butler's (1993) thoughts on gendered identity as performative and 'learnt' in everyday social life. Through various modes of surveillance and monitoring, the family and community encourage (the extent encouragement can vary substantially) young women's adherence to Islamic gender expectations. Sharma and Lewellyn (2016) have argued that social structures of power, institutions and bodies can also play a significant role in generating inequalities which exist in religion. Young Muslim women are often considered 'guardians' of cultural and religious honor, meaning that their individual reputation and that of their families is of critical importance if they wish to partake in events and traditions considered important in Muslim communities (such as, finding a suitable marital partner) (Dwyer 2000; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012). This illustrates the societal importance and value assigning to adhering to gendered expectations in Muslim communities. Lupton's thoughts on risk society and the emotional self are relevant here. There are few social scientific studies that directly explore emotional dimensions of risk, however, Lupton (1998; 2013) argues that emotion and risk are inevitably and routinely configured via social and cultural processes and through interaction with material objects, people, space and place. She goes on to argue that emotions and risk judgements and understanding are fluid, shared and collective, rather than located within the individual. This is particularly illustrative in the gendered organisation of Islam and the negative consequences associated with Muslim women (or those perceived as Muslim women) transgressing gender expectations.

One highly gendered component of Muslim life relates to the institution of marriage and specifically, the requirement for women to convert to Islam (Van Nieuwkerk and Kieuwkerk 2006; Allievi 1998). Despite the mixed ethnic experience of Islam (or any other religion) receiving little attention, conversion is an area of religious research which I have identified as particularly relevant to the women in this thesis for a number of reasons. Allievi (1998) and Van Nieuwkerk and Kieuwkerk (2006) offer insight into how Islam is lived in a mixed ethnic family - albeit, from the mother's perspective rather than the female child's. Expectations for women to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim man are guided by the belief that there should be a unified marital relationship and eventual upbringing of family is established (Van Nieuwkerk and Kieuwkerk 2006). They argue that marital conversion often involves major shifts in behavior and identity in order to 'fit in' and satisfy their Muslim family and the wider community. The study of marital conversion in Islam has arguably most vividly captured the extent to which religion in a mixed ethnic setting (or even a broader atheist landscape) can involve managing conflicting messages, gendered policing from family and community and struggles of attaining privacy and authenticity (Van Nieuwkerk and Kieuwkerk 2006; Allievi 1998). Allievi (1998) interestingly disrupts binary understandings of Islam and religion by distinguishing between "verbal converts" and "total converts". Verbal converts were defined as those who verbally pronounce their new affiliation with Islam but are not active practitioners while "total converts" were those who publicly declare and visually display their connection with Islam. In capturing the ambivalent relationships some of the 'verbal converts' have, Allievi's (2008) moves away from the historical tendency to promote pious and institutional understandings of Islam.. The women often engaged in modes of self-governance and discipline of their bodies in a bid to preserve their families' reputations. The sexual expectations at play here speaks to Foucault and Sheridans' (1977) thoughts on modern day governance in relation to the panopticon prison model. This is supported by many of the women moving in and out of faith across their lifetime to distance themselves from societal pressure (Nieuwkerk 2018). Managing societal pressure through distancing techniques also speaks to the significance of space and place. The next section considers relevant literature which explores the role which space and place play in shaping religious identities.

2.4 Urban place and identities

Studies in the field of urban place experienced an active exploration across disciplines after 2000 (Peng et al. 2020). The last 40 years in particular, have extensively reviewed and elaborated different meanings of place identity (Peng et al. 2020). Most prevalent were studies exploring the influence of place identity on people's attitudes and behaviors whilst least studies exploring the effects of physical environment change on place identity were neglected. As such, place identity is now broadly recognised as a versatile concept through which many psychological theories of human-environment relations are understood (Haartsen et al. 2000; Zimmerbauer et al. 2012; Gieseeking et al. 2014). Sociologists also began to recognise people's experiences of physical and social spaces as shaping a core component of self-identity (Sibley 1995; Manzo 2003; Phillips 2009; Bamford 2014), including their sense of belonging in terms of race, gender and ethnicity which are central thesis' interests.

Proshansky (1978) is widely recognised as initially introducing place identity, defining it as “those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a *specific environment*” (Proshansky 1978, p. 155). Another explanation of place identity often drawn on is Paasi's (1986, 1991, 2002c, 2003, 2009a,b) collection of articles. Paasi distinguished between two aspects of place identity, namely, place identity of a place and people's place identity. Place identity refers to features of culture, nature and people that are drawn on in discourses (including in science, politics, governance and cultural activism) in order to distinguish a specific place from others. Definitions of place identity from early leading scholars, such as Proshansky and Paasi, have significantly influenced the formation of the wide range of meanings of place identity (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; Peterson 1988; Saleh 1998; Twigger-Ross et al. 2003; Huigen and Meijering 2005; Hauge 2007; Groote and Haartsen 2008; White et al. 2008).

Considerable attention has been applied to the conceptual foundation of place identity (either the place identity of a specific place, or people's place identity). However, less research has considered the versatile meanings of place identity or recognised how people's identification with place is often located in the identities they ascribe to a place (Rijnks and Strijker 2013). Debates focusing on the analytical interactions between place, people and place identity have significantly complicated the meaning of place identities among scholars. Additionally, scholars have widely debated the unclear distinctions between place identity and other

environment psychology concepts (such as sense of place, rootedness, place attachment, place dependence and satisfaction (Lewicka 2011; Xu et al. 2015). Additionally, attention has focused on belonging in 'global cities' such as London, Manchester, New York and Los Angeles (Sassen 1991; Buck et al. 2002; Savage et al. 2010). Whilst these cities provide increasingly global sites to explore global mobility as well as its regional and national role, the dominant focus of a few 'global cities' risks losing sight of smaller cities and towns which are also of urban significance in terms of exploring lived religion. In order to synthesise the extensively studied place identities and their meanings, this section reviews how researchers have conceived and deconstructed place identity. I outline the importance of urban imaginaries; the everyday phenomenological level of place; gendered aspects of place; and lastly the geographical relevance of 'belonging' - four areas of place identity which are pertinent to this thesis.

2.4.1 Urban imaginaries

The study of urban imaginaries is an important aspect of urban place and identity research (Lindner and Meissner 2015; Wacquant 2007). Urban imaginaries refer to how spaces and places are imagined and represented (Lindner and Meissner 2015; Wacquant 2007). Lindner and Meissner's (2015) work on urban imaginaries explores the role which urban imaginaries play in shaping the future of urban societies, communities, and built environments. Their work acknowledges how the urban planning which took place over the course of the 20th century led to the development and popularisation of the imaginary. During this period urban theorists such as Michel de Certeau highlighted the disparities between the goals of urban planners and those of everyday residents of urban spaces. De Certeau's approach, and later Lefebvre's (1991) research, focused on the disparities between urban planners who focused heavily on visual aspects of the city. They argued that this top-down perspective underplayed the perspectives, everyday experiences and scents of everyday street life (including the sounds and smells) and in this way, urban imaginaries have the power of defining which shared memories are considered in future spatial planning.

This thesis is interested in the contextual specificities which shape everyday Islam, including how the cultural narratives and discourses associated with their towns and identities shape these experiences. During my contextualisation of Middlesbrough in chapter one, I illustrated some of the ways in which the town is imagined and represented popular discourses and narratives. These include connotations of the town as: (post)industrial, declining, left behind,

working class, backward, white, racist, Islamophobic, ex-Labour turned Tory and anti-immigrant supporters of Brexit (Telford and Wistow 2019). Urban imaginaries are particularly important because the women in this thesis exist in and in relation to imaginaries associated with the town in focus. I explore how the women encounter this dominant imaginary, and how it relates their everyday experiences of Islam as mixed ethnic women. Telford and Wistow's (2019) research is particularly relevant as it captures some of the social imaginaries prevalent in the North East town that the women in this thesis live in. Nayak (2022) interestingly explores the notion of shame attached to these imaginaries. Telford and Wistow (2019) illustrate how welfare reforms which began in 2010 have hit the poorest towns like Middlesbrough the hardest and fueled hostility towards minority groups. This is supported by the town's increased support for The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) (who self-identify as an anti-immigrant party) between 2014 and 2016 (see: Rosenbaum 2017). As noted in the previous chapter, electoral evidence saw 65% vote leave in Middlesbrough (Warren 2018). Even more significantly, Teesside contains a local authority – Brambles Farm and Thorntree – which collected the proportionally highest leave vote in Britain (Rosenbaum 2017). Connotations and urban imaginaries associated with Middlesbrough speaks to Wacquant's (2007) coining of 'territorial stigma'. Wacquant (2007) acknowledges 'territorial stigma' as the stigmatisation, othering and negative representation of geographical communities and places. Place stigma or 'territorial stigma' centres on the damaging impact social imaginaries can have on a place's reputation. Wacquant (2007) argues that this stigma can also intersect with other aspects of identity including, with class, racial and ethnic discrimination. Exploring the territorial stigmatisation of a place offers insight into the popular discourses and narratives which justify the stigmatisation, marginalisation and at times even spatial containment of groups in society. Thus, social imaginaries encompass cultural processes which foster unequal relationships between and within communities. More broadly, anti-immigration sentiment prevalent in the town has also been reinforced by the Home Office in their repeated emphasis on decreasing net migration, limiting transition to citizenship, and removing migrants without documentation. This also speaks to Tyler and Slater's (2018) broader sociological study of stigma which highlights the centrality of stigma in neoliberal projects of government and Nayak's (2022) particularly relevant recent study on stigma associated with Middlesbrough. These aspects of the post-Brexit social climate have undoubtedly led to concerns about the discrimination minorities living in the Middlesbrough experience now (as well in the future). The material and symbolic construction of places are meaningful in terms of how people and individuals are

viewed, the conditions through which they become viewable and how inhabitants of spaces relate to people outside of spaces and their communities and are viewed. This thesis builds on these approaches by exploring how the women relate to the social imaginaries of the spaces they encounter. As the women's social backgrounds are influenced by a range of intersecting aspects, they do not fit neatly into existing categories and social imaginaries. As mixed ethnic women with ambivalent relationships with Islam they challenge social imaginaries depicting Muslims and ethnic minorities in stark opposition to the West. I build on these findings to explore how the women view themselves in terms of the social imaginaries of their town.

2.4.2 The everyday phenomenology of space

Considering place at a phenomenological level lends itself well to exploring issues of embodiment and difference in the production of space (Soja 1996; Liberatore 2017). Urban sociologists have argued that exploring the phenomenology of a space facilitates new questions to be asked about the production of difference in spaces as well as minority embodiment (Soja 1996; Liberatore 2017) - two questions which are central to this thesis. The lived world is recognised as occurring in a socio-spatial dialectic, whereby social processes and spatiality are mutually constituted (Soja 1996; Creswell 2015). Social constructionist, Creswell (2015) offers one school of thought, arguing that places are made up of underlying social processes. Creswell conceptualises place as a fluid entity which can be drawn on to understand the world, he highlights it as an ideologically charged reference point which not only forms human existence, but is also formed by it. He develops Tuan's (2018) definition of space, which Tuan argues is something abstract and made up of volumes and transcends society's popular understanding of place as merely representing the physical boundaries of countries and land. Creswell argues that place has more to do with constructing the minds of humans. In an attempt to illustrate how places are socially constructed with meaning, Creswell defines place and space in relation to one other to highlight their distinctions. Thus, physical spaces gain meaning through the social meaning people ascribe to them and in the ways which those meanings inform social practice.

The social meaning people ascribe to space is particularly illustrated in Day's (2011) study, which explores the lived experiences of Christianity among a group of individuals from a Yorkshire town. Day argues that the respondents' embodiment of space shaped their beliefs and religious identities. When exploring what identifying as 'Christian' meant to her

participants, Day found that self-identification to Christianity was bound up with spatial aspects of the town, including its history and nationalist sentiments. Those who appeared different (often due to religion, ethnicity or nationality) were othered through various measures of distancing. For example, the term ‘our’ was often used by participants as an inclusive term to exclude non-English people in the town. The use of micro-aggressions identified those who were ‘out of place’ and considered a threat to the existing ‘pure’ culture. Such rhetoric demonstrated how the participants saw their views about membership to groups as not only status but also, unproblematic. It also illustrates how lived religion is shaped by the social organisation of spaces and vice versa. This line of thought has a long connection with rhetoric around claiming and ownership of territory.

The methodology discussed in the next chapter discusses how the photo elicitation and walking interviews I undertook lent themselves particularly well to exploring layered aspects of identity. By walking alongside the women in their hometowns I was able to capture how these layers of experience and identity shape their lived experiences of Islam. Exploring the respondents' backdrops to social life was important for capturing how spaces can influence the social practices born out of them. Rather than studying Muslims as a fixed group, this research insists upon the interactional constitution of social units across space and consequently takes into account the various intersections that constitute one’s identity.

2.4.3 Belonging

Belonging is also recognised among scholars as an important aspect of spatial identity (Sibley 1995; Manzo 2003; Phillips 2009; Hopkins and Gale 2009; Savage et al. 2010; Bamford 2014). Belonging is recognised by scholars as an inherently geographical concept as it connects people to places (Sibley 1995; Manzo 2003; Bamford 2014). Savage et al. (2010) argues that belonging should be considered as a socially constructed embedded process in which people reflexively judge their suitability to a given space. There are a number of researchers who argue that spaces have the potential to evoke a powerful embodied experience that forms feelings of belonging and attachment (Sibley 1995; Manzo 2003; Bamford 2014). Foregrounding space lends itself particularly well to studying the social processes associated with belonging, something which this thesis is interested in. According to Creswell (2015) people’s feelings of attachment and belonging can also be conceptualised in relation to mobility. Creswell (2015) draws on phenomenological geographer Seamon’s (1993) discussion on how place and mobility are intrinsically connected in the way that peoples embodied space creates a sense of belonging. In the same way that Seamon points

out, bodily mobility (rather than rootedness and authenticity) is “the key component to the understanding of place” (p.63).

Of particular relevance to this thesis is research which has explored how minority groups attain a sense of belonging in social spaces where they are not the majority (Hopkins and Gale 2019; Singh 2014; Jakobsh 2015; Liberatore 2017). These studies have often emphasised the role which visible and material differences play in shaping social relations. Visual materiality can serve to isolate and shield group members from outsiders whilst simultaneously visibly defining their boundaries (Purewal and Kalra 2010). For example, visible identifiers such as the hijab and turban have been identified as enabling majority members to bond and affirm in-group loyalty, while those who do not belong to the group are pushed further towards the margins (Dusaj 2012; Jakobsh 2015). Jakobsh (2015) explores Sikh women’s experiences of and reasoning behind wearing the turban in the U.K. Whilst there are no statistics measuring how many women wear the turban, it is undoubtedly a small number making them a particularly visible group in diaspora context. Jakobsh’s (2015) study highlighted that female use of the turban was often born out of historical exclusion of women from Sikhism and failure to recognise women as ‘bearers’ of Sikh tradition. The male use of the turban has historically been perceived as the ultimate symbol of masculinity and ‘Sikh look’ (Dusaj 2012). In this way, material identifies are a means to both distance and discard unwelcome entities and/or a means to establish new ones. The women in Jakobsh’s (2015) study were able to position themselves as creators of new Sikh material culture that moved beyond historical emphasis on masculine symbols. This thesis focuses on the material and visual dimensions (including the ambiguities of these) which shape experiences of belonging in a town where hostility towards minorities is rife in part due to its own economic struggle.

Scholars have also explored how people attain a sense of belonging in an increasingly globalised world. Savage et al. (2010) explains this through the concept of ‘elective belonging’. They argue that ‘elective belonging’ captures the tension which can occur between migrants and locals where ‘born and bred’ locals view those who have migrated to an area and chosen to settle as suspicious. They argue that consequently, the classic sociological distinction between insiders and outsiders is fast becoming redundant and instead, the idea of ‘feeling at a home’ in a particular space is less about being born and raised somewhere, but instead a matter of ‘elective belonging’ (p. 53). In other words,

people's sense of belonging reflects their comfortableness in living among people whom they identify as similar to themselves, in other words '*One's residence is a crucial, possibly the crucial, identifier of who you are*' (p. 207). This enables individuals to tell stories of how their arrival and eventual settlement to a space fits authentically with their sense of self. Hopkins' (2008) research illustrates elective belonging at play. He highlights how South Asian Muslim men in Scotland regard South Asian neighborhoods as buffer zones, which offer a demarcating protective line between those who are perceived as 'racially' different. In relation to race, respondents overwhelmingly foregrounded their experiences of racial difference around a white/nonwhite dualism. For example, the growing numbers of nonwhite Muslim populations in Scotland created a cosmopolitan environment which fostered a new 'Little Pakistan' where people could attain a sense of belonging. Despite there also being some ethnic hierarchies which existed in 'Pakistani Muslim spaces' these differences were regarded less significant than white/nonwhite differences, this fostered a sense of solidarity among the communities through difference. This relates to 'selective belonging', defined by Watt's (2009) as the spatially selective narratives of belonging which are limited to a specific space within a wider area. Watt's (2009) argues that this allows spaces to be invested in a positive place image that the wider locality does not share. In these instances people can align with some aspects of a place whilst simultaneously not aligning with other aspects.

This also speaks to Gupta and Ferguson (1992) emphases on the interconnectedness of space. They criticise classical anthropological tendencies to downplay the mobility which occurs in countries. They argued that there is a taken for granted assumption that countries (and even continents) have their own specific culture which radically simplifies the distinctions and rich diversity which exists, something which Liberatore's (2017) research also highlights. This has led to spaces being depicted as less fluid than they actually are, in turn generating static and typologizing portrayals of religious groups in society. This is particularly important for this thesis which builds on these findings to explore the everyday experiences of Islam among a group of women who move across different spaces. I build on this, exploring how the women attain a sense of belonging in their hometown where there are significant negative social imaginaries in circulation both within the town and across the UK. By foregrounding the women's experiences of religion across the life course (including key milestones like moving away or starting a new job), I consider how their encounters with new shape their sense of belonging with their hometown, including if it results in disaffiliation with aspects of

the town. Sharma and Guest's (2013) and Scott-Baumann et al. (2020) studies are relevant here, their research illustrates how young people's experiences of moving away to university can result in a sense of disaffiliation and reshaping of relationships with their home town and faith communities. They consider the transitional nature of attending university and how this can destabilise existing identities. Sharma and Guest (2013) explore how the religious beliefs and practices of self-identifying 'Christian' students foster a sense of familiarity and offer cultural resources that encourage the flourishing of social relationships with like-minded students, while Scott-Baumann et al. (2020) focus on the ways in which Muslim identities are produced, experienced, perceived, appropriated, and objectified on campus. Sharma and Guest (2013) also found that university-based Christian gatherings and groups acted as less stable resources and at times, were symbolic of heightened social differences amongst Christian students from different social backgrounds. This resulted in some students beginning to question, modify or give up their religious identities entirely.

Additionally space is recognised as constructed in a way which perpetuates inclusion and exclusion (Massey 1994; Rogaly 2020). Historically, spatial boundaries and geographies have been used as tools of oppression. They have ensured that oppressive forms of cultural and political domination targeted towards specific groups could take place. Research exploring inclusion and exclusion have explored the effects of people transcending the spaces they occupy (Puwar 2004). Puwar's (2004) research focuses on the disruptions which occur when 'different' bodies (female ethnic minority groups, in particular) are considered as 'invading' spaces. Puwar (2004) challenges subtexts of masculinity and whiteness arguing that 'certain types of bodies [...] are tacitly designated as being the "natural" occupants of such spaces with others marked out as trespassers' (p.8). Puwar draws on the political workplace to highlight some of the processes through which 'space invaders' are understood as 'bodies out of place'. This is also supported by Cresswell's (2015) thoughts on 'knowing your place'. Further, Rogaly's study of Peterborough (2020) identifies a prevalence of racialisation at play in the UK which is instrumental in perpetuating spatial exclusion. Rogaly (2020) is among few urban researchers who explore smaller urban spaces outside of London. His work is situated in the East of England and has contributed to existing debates on diversity in England which have predominantly focused on London as a distinctively multicultural space, whilst other towns or smaller cities have been depicted as homogeneous. Following on from Massey (1994), Rogaly argues that space is 'porous, extroverted and always connected to other places elsewhere' (p.5) and often made up of economic and social

systems which serve to racialise and divide communities through differentiating between 'locals' and 'migrants'. Building on these arguments, this thesis explores the respondents' encounters with the spaces they move in (and the feelings they attach to these spaces). This is important for uncovering the role which urban imaginaries and cultural narratives have in shaping the respondent's sense of belonging as well as how this shapes their broader experiences of Islam.

2.4.4 Gender and place

Research exploring the gendered organisation of space is another area of urban identity research which is relevant to this thesis. Urban researchers have identified how space has the capacity to embody gender relations, making these relations central to how women encounter space (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1996; Soja 1996). The mid to late 1970s saw feminist geographers highlight the historical neglect of women in human geography research (Massey 1994). McDowell (1999) argued that modern western cities were historically characterised by a gender separation of 'productive' public spaces (typically occupied by men) and 'reproductive' private spaces like the home (seen as the 'proper' place for women). Thus, gender relations at the turn of the 20th century were increasingly scripted and the ideology of separate spheres for men and women was taken for granted. In this sense, urban spaces can be seen as the centres of unequal power relations, oppressive socio-political structures and exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Massey 1996). Massey (1996) presents an important development within feminist geography, drawing attention to the unequal power relationships shaping the spaces and places women inhabit. She argues that social spaces always involve 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings', in the sense that space (and the people who inhabit these spaces) have multiple intersecting identities (Massey 1994:2).

On the whole, research discussing the relationship between space, gender and identity has typically neglected religious spaces and those that have illustrate that the focus has predominantly been on the semiotic and social meanings with religious spaces primarily being perceived as sites of worship. However, Bhimji (2009) explores some of the ways which religious spheres shape British Muslim women's identities and agency. Their research is based on 25 British born South Asian Muslim women from two major cities in northern England. Bhimji (2009) captures how the women feminised male dominated spaces such as

the mosque and the ways that the women interacted with male religious leaders in the religious sphere. This speaks to some of the aforementioned literature discussing how religious institutions are typically the domain of men. Bhimji (2009) uncovers some of the lived experiences of the women which transcend this assumption in their engagement with study circles conducted in the English language, reading a range of Islamic materials and travelling abroad and learning the Arabic language. These everyday social practices illustrated how their experiences of Islam were shaped by the spheres they moved in and their desire to align themselves with their political, cosmopolitan and feminine endeavors. That said, even though Bhimji's (2009) study found that despite the women making their presence astutely known in the mosques and other Islamic spaces, the mosques continued to be dominated by traditional male religious leaders. This suggests that the women were not fully able to contest the ideologies of the authoritarian men in the mosques (in this case the imams). Importantly, Bhimji's (2009) observations are based on a group of affluent Muslim women with cosmopolitan backgrounds and are therefore not representative of how Islam is practised universally across Britain. Women from segregated low income neighborhoods with less formal education typically do not have access to the same networks and resources. This relates to research exploring the value of anonymity which urban cities can afford social groups prone to discrimination and 'social gaze' (Sennett 2002; Tonkiss 2003). Bhimji's (2009) study is just one study which supports the influence which cosmopolitan, global influence and transnationalism can have on ethnic minorities and Muslims living in the U.K (Vertovec 2001; Gardner and Grillo 2002; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Byng 2017). It also supports some of the issues which can arise in smaller communities where there is less cosmopolitan and global influence and Islam is heavily structured around institutional forms of religion.

Other studies have also illustrated how Muslim social orders are produced through gendered dichotomies of space, whereby public space is associated with masculinised visibility, empowerment and presence, and private spaces are feminised through their association with invisibility, absence and seclusion (Mohammed 2012). Mohammed (2012) explores the urban space narratives of British Pakistani Muslim located in Birmingham in the U.K. The respondents experienced space as constructed and ordered to control encounters between unrelated men and women, as this posed a significant risk to family honor (izzat), women's heterosexual purity and ultimately their value in the marriage market. Thus, the women

created their own mental mappings of spaces which they identified as safe, as opposed to places they deemed to be risky and classified by social, racial and gendered difference. Whilst much can be learnt from Mohammed (2012) and Bhimji's (2009) identification of how place, 'race', gender, and religion intersect to shape the ideological, material, and effective modalities of a space, both scholars have focused on multicultural cities. This thesis builds on these findings by exploring lived experiences of Islam among a group of mixed-ethnic women in a post-industrial town in the Northeast of England. Contrasting the super diverse cities that have typically been explored, I present the unique social imaginaries and gendered social organisations which shape their encounters with space and lived religion.

The gendered organisation of spaces Muslim women move in speaks to broader research exploring how women have been historically neglected in spatial policy making (Bondi and Rose 2003; Kern 2021). Kern's (2021) research argues that social inequalities are built into cities, homes and neighborhoods which disadvantage women. Despite there being little discussion of alternative visions for future cities, Kern identifies interlocking inequalities and systems of oppression within cities, which women experience in the form of physical, social, economic and symbolic barriers. Bondi and Rose's (2003) construction of gendered spaces also offers insight into how space and time is experienced in gendered terms. Their reference to how women negotiate boundaries between cultures and classes and private and public spaces is relevant to this thesis. Their work draws on the affective experiences of urban space and the making of urban public places, arguing that within nation states, women are differentiated by class, race, ethnicity and nationality. As such, their movement across cultural boundaries highlights the gendered and racialized characters of citizenships and institutions. Despite limited progress, minority groups (including women, disabled people, gender and sexual minorities and ethnic minorities) are still increasingly marginalised and excluded in spaces, decision making and spatial planning (Bondi and Rose 2003; Kern 2021). Furthermore, whilst there has been considerable research highlighting the relationship between gender and religion, religion and cities and gender and cities, there has been far less research exploring how gender, cities and religion intersect, or specific focus on smaller urban spaces like towns. The literature discussed however has offered crucial insight into the relationships and interactions between everyday religion, women and cities. This thesis therefore advances the study of urban lived religion by exploring how Islam is lived in smaller cities and towns. I now move on onto the final section of this literature review, which considers academic approaches to exploring racial and ethnic identities.

2.5 From race to ‘new ethnicities’

This section reflects on the various approaches which have been applied to studying race and ethnic identity. As this thesis is interested in mixed ethnic and Muslim identity, it is important that I begin by contextualising my thesis in relation to sociological approaches to ethnicity and race, particularly those relating to the racialisation of Muslim identity and other new forms of cultural racism. Over the past three decades there has been an explosion of material within sociology and related social science and humanities disciplines exploring a range of theories concerning race, ethnicity, racism and racialisation (Solomos and Collins 2010). The most notable feature of contemporary research has undoubtedly explored the role played by questions of culture and forms of cultural identity (Benet-Martínez 2002). Race and ethnicity are now broadly recognised among sociologists as socially constructed and defined, which this thesis supports. The idea of ‘new ethnicities’ developed in the late 1990s by Hall (1991) is particularly relevant to the respondents’ rich and multifaceted ethnic backgrounds. Hall (1991) argued that from the 1980s there was a noticeable shift in how race was framed in socio-political debates. He identified the development of new forms of racial and ethnic identity which also intersected with questions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity - defined as ‘new ethnicities’. Hall (1991) went on to strongly influence scholarly and activist debates about race and identity in British society. As this thesis is interested in the lived experiences of Islam among mixed-ethnic women living in a North East town in the UK, an important element of exploring this is the rich ethnic backgrounds of the women and more importantly, how this shapes their experiences of lived religion. This section provides an overview of the key debates in this field. I address some of the definitional issues in relation to key notions and concepts and differentiate between racialised difference, racism and racialisation. Here I outline their unique lineages whilst also highlighting their inter-relationship. I then discuss the connection between race and contemporary Western Islamophobia before lastly, exploring how Hall’s (1992) thoughts on ‘new ethnicities’ are particularly useful for the respondents I am exploring.

2.5.1 Defining Race and Ethnicity

Accounts of ethnic identity have largely been drawn from ideas created and developed by sociologists in the UK and the USA. Originally, British sociology was drawn to theorists

who sought to define race by mixing science with revisionist theology (see: Knox 1850; Gobineau 1853). Theorists from this period drew on facial features and measurements as indications of stature, beauty and intelligence. Biological understandings of race have routinely been related to prejudice and “essentialist” understandings of innate properties (such as physical differences) which are based on group membership (Grusky 2019). Whilst this significantly contrasts with contemporary perspectives on race, racial science was the prominent stance which later gave rise to racial engineering in the eugenics movement, selective ‘breeding’ of some humans and ‘out-breeding’ of others (Grusky 2019). Racial science complimented 19th-century social Darwinism and what Herbert Spencer termed ‘the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life’. Much of this discourse also informed and provided intellectual justification for exploitation by European powers and colonisation of Africa.

In comparison to other areas of sociological inquiry the study of race and ethnicity were relatively understudied fields. It is only from the start of the 20th century where growth can be seen in the study of race and ethnicity (Meer and Nayak 2015). The late 1800s and early to mid-1900s saw the sociology of race and ethnicity increase, with scholars seeking to understand the development and rise of modern capitalism and its connections to globalisation, colonialism, slavery and growing social and economic inequalities across Europe (Brunsma et al. 2015). Thus, while many critics have argued that Marx and Engels (1848) and Weber (1904) were class reductionists and “race light”, both recognised race to be a central part of how society was structured to privilege whiteness. While this is not to say that Marx directly contributed to discussions on race, he did contribute to early understandings of race by recognising slavery as a product of capitalism. Equally, Martineau (1838), W. E. B. DuBois (1899) and Washington (1901) were among a few others at the time, who wrote about racial and gender differences, arguing for a need to understand how these social categories operated on a structural and institutional level. Although other scholars such as Oliver Cromwell Cox and Bob Blauner also sought to understand race and racism structurally, it was not until the late 1900s that the field of sociology of race and ethnicity engaged in deeper understandings of race and racism as structural, institutional and systemic (Brunsma et al. 2015). Scholars began to tackle questions of immigration and assimilation in an attempt to better understand how some ethnic minorities merged with dominant groups, as well as how and why new ethnic identities developed (Winant 2000). Through the mid-1900s, other notable sociology of race and ethnicity scholars (including: Ida Wells, Franklin

Frazier, Oliver Cromwell Cox and St. Claire Drake) wrote on everyday race relation issues in an attempt to understand the social “lived” realities of being a minority in a society where prejudice towards minorities was deemed socially, economically, even politically acceptable (Brunsma et al. 2015). Thus, Winant (2000) argued in his annual review on race theory, that “the sociological study of race has been shaped by large-scale political processes” (p. 170). It was the mid 1900s that saw significant attempts from scholars move beyond previous mis(conceptions) of race as biologically constructed, race and race relations were reframed as group positions (Blumer 1958). Blumer (1958) was key in paving the way for race scholars to view racial prejudice in terms of group prejudice, rather than a set of personal feelings. This formed the foundation of both empirical and theoretical understandings of race and racism up until the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Prior to the urban ecology of ethnic migration which was advanced by the Chicago school in the early 20th century, British race relations approaches were preoccupied with the implications of post-war migration. The 1960s saw scholars consumed with concerns around the weakening social and political cohesion from poor social and cultural integration, interestingly these concerns can be seen as having resurfaced in contemporary anti-Islamic rhetoric. While British scholars grappled with questions around multi-racial coexistence and prejudice, Black power and civil rights were simultaneously tackling the US political agenda and more systematic concerns, including, access to housing, education and jobs. John Rex and Robert Moore were key in the 1970s in formulating a sociology of ‘race relations’ in their portrayal of the structural forces which generate racial disadvantages (Rex et al. 1970). As structure challenged agency, British racism was conceptualised as an apparatus of racialised social distribution. Studies adopting these frameworks provided important evidence of systematic racism through detailing examples of differential access to social resources. Whilst evidence of racial disadvantage is far less popular in contemporary racial studies it is still drawn on to illustrate the significance of race today. The peak of the 1960s and 1970s saw the dominance of structuralist race theory, in which social structure was the main concern. Marxists and Weberians primarily debated whether race was an inferior form of inequality to class, if racism was an unconscious ideology from race (Miles and Torres 1996), and the connections between the Black struggle in Britain and anti-colonial struggles in developing countries (Sivanandan 1982). Structuralist race theory lost support as scholars in Britain, the US and elsewhere began to focus in the 1980s on the concept of ‘blackness’.

The breaking down of 'blackness' was largely driven by African American feminists and their British supporters who strived to illustrate the different experiences of prejudice (predominantly the gendered experiences of being black) (Carby 1982; Parmer 1982). Particularly relevant to this thesis, feminists opened up a space which considered various experiences organised by identities. The focus on 'identities' was echoed in Britain too with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) illustrating racial differences which had historically been occurred by binaries of blackness and whiteness, and oppressions and privilege. Here, Hall's (1992) ground-breaking 'New Ethnicities' was deployed. Hall (1992) argued that the essentialist black subject no longer existed and that there were new migrant identities which should be considered in conceptualisation of race. Predominantly, British scholars drew on identities expressed in popular culture to understand new ethnic identities. This was later refined in the US where Conyers (1999) and Davis (1999) among others shed light on the diversity of voices and experiences in relation to slavery, something which had previously been essentialised by an assumption of unitary experience. Whilst scholarly work on identity importantly broke down uniform definitions of race moving beyond earlier depictions of standardised black identities facing oppression, much like structuralism these approaches focused heavily on representation and discourse rather than actually mobilising political support and designing targets for social reform. Thus, racism became a secondary issue to understanding racial identities.

In terms of defining racism, Garner (2010) has defined racism as encompassing three core elements: a set of ideas (based on culture and physical appearance); a historical power relationship (whereby over time groups are racialised reinforcing an assumption of innate hierarchy); forms of discrimination (which can range across a spectrum from denial of access to resources to genocide). Gilroy (1987) has also been pivotal in arguing that scholarly work on race has lost its connection with the political struggle against racism, which led to him declaring the end of race. Gilroy argued that it was an empty ideological and political construct which inadvertently sustained racism. Gilroy (1993) has inspired a generation of race scholars to explore the lived dimensions of race through his work on black subjectivity (see: Twine 2006; Vera and Feagin 2004). These works have elaborated on the social texture that shapes race relations. Parallel to Gilroy's theoretical developments were two other alternative theories. The CCCS saw Solomos and Back (1995) develop a theoretical analysis of the everyday processes through which race and ethnicity are developed, through exploring the lives of black activists in the British Midlands. Identifying connections between political

mobilisation and racial formation, they argues that while Hall (1991) and Modood (1997, 2002) were correct in their challenging of essentialist depictions of identity, “black” had been abandoned in the politics of identity but remained an important 'organising category' in contemporary political life' - particularly in national, and local British politics. Solomos and Hill-Collins (2010) have since argued that this work illustrates the importance of not losing sight of racist forces, their effects and the political implications of attempts to challenge them. Solomos and Hill-Collins (2010) highlighted two key elements in the analysis of racism. Firstly, that it is essential that racism is identified in precise terms, rather than merely alluding to it and that it is also vital to identify the appropriate action required to eliminate it. They add that race has been over theorised and remains disconnected from social and political engagement and that while discussion of identities is necessary, race politics are necessary in facilitating change. The surge and popularity of the black lives matter movement in Britain (and across the world) is one example of the change political activism can encourage. Bulmer and Solomos argue that race must be considered an object of political action as well as sociological investigation. Solomos and Hill-Collins (2010) have since supported this arguing that it is key to developing a more theoretically informed understanding of and political engagement with race.

By situating the concept of racialisation within the sociology of race, it is apparent how racialised difference is constructed through a process of racialisation, often denoting racism. Here, sociological approaches relating to the racialisation of Muslim identity are particularly relevant for the identities explored in this thesis. Bulmer and Solomos (1998) argue that ‘race’ and ethnicity are systematic representations of difference whereby the oppressed view and experience themselves as the ‘other’. Thus, racialised difference plays an important role in sustaining racial logic. Racialisation as a theoretical framework evolved primarily from the sociological study of race and ethnicity and describes the racial rationality that outlines group boundaries. Omi and Winant (1986) put forward their theory of racial formation between the 1960s and 1990s, moving away from explaining race as a product of social relations and a dimension of power, they focused on how race is defined and what meanings were attached to it and how it is used to reproduce racism. Their theory conceptualised racialisation as a framework that created and reproduced racial meanings defining racialisation as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (1986, 111). The construction of ‘natural traits’ as collectively attributed were central to producing racialised depictions, for example Scott (1992) argued that it is racism

which brings race into being. As conceptualised by Hall (1997) this was a significant process of symbolic power, whereby certain groups were classified on the basis of the specific meanings racism attributed to racial differences. Murji and Solomos (2005) add that it is “the processes by which racial meanings are attached to particular issues – often treated as social problems – and with the manner in which race appears to be the, or often the, key factor in the way they are defined and understood” (2005, 3). Thus racialised differences manifest from the power of racism in signifying racial differences. As such, scholars have argued that racialisation should be used in favor of race due to race now being recognised as a scientifically invalid term. However, others have criticised definitions of racialisation, arguing that it is limiting for studying newer forms of racism such as Islamophobia. The main focus of studies exploring processes of racialisation is to understand how meanings are attached to experiences, in this way it cannot be understood in static form and should be recognised as constantly evolving and subject to change. This is particularly important for this thesis which considers expressions of mixed ethnicity that at times are characterised by fluidity and richness. Gonzalez-Sobrinho and Goss (2019) argue that despite previous work in the field of racialisation the concept has been applied to every type of racial process with little specificity. This has limited understanding of the mechanisms by which racialisation functions. However, more recently, scholars have generated insightful findings into why racialisation occurs in specific groups, including British Muslims (Solomos and Hill-Collins 2010) In light of this discussion, the process of racialisation can undoubtedly be seen as intrinsically intertwined with the working of racism. People become aware of the stigmatising effect of racialised differences within a racist context. Racism exists in various forms, one type being the hierarchy of assumed biological inequalities whereby inferiority is based on phenotypic traits (skin tone, hair texture etc.). ‘Natural’ race categories have been institutionalised and produced in official forms and data which reflects the power to assign meaning based on physical differences (Omi and Winant, 1986). A more recent form of racism is that which is based on cultural differences, whereby views are shaped by a perception that races are made up of uniform cultures that are fixed. Small (1994) argues that culturalism is “closely tied into the end of the British Empire and a lingering ambivalence and prevarication over what to do with the colonies and the commonwealths” (p. 91) and rests on the stance that ‘it is natural for people to want to live amongst their own kind’ (ibid). Cultural discourses have become instrumental in sustaining assumed differences and the racialisation process, which exacerbates distrust between members of different groups and construes to the belief of fixed cultures (Gilroy 1987).

The relationship between ethnicity and race is one that is complex, resulting in the two often being used interchangeably (Grusky 2019). Ethnicity can be traced back to the 20th century, first appearing in Warner and Lunt's (1941) work. The term was coined with the intention of replacing older terms such as 'race' and 'nation' due to their biological reference. While race remains an important category for historical analysis, the 1960s saw 'ethnicity' typically used to define minority groups, groups of distinct culture and origins which co-existed with larger minority groups (Lachenicht 2011). As such, today ethnicity is broadly recognised as a group that is characterised by a distinct sense of difference due to its culture and origin. Today most scholars agree that the difference between "race" and "ethnicity" is not the distinction between the "cultural" and the "natural/physical," as "racial" distinctions are recognised as culturally made. In this sense, the terms cannot substitute one another but rather as coined by Hall and W. E. B. Dubois (1994) they play "hide-and-seek" with one another. Berreman (1981) adds that whilst ethnicity is linked in a dichotic relationship with race, it is dissimilar in the way that racial stratification is associated with birth-ascribed status, importantly, these are typically based on physical and cultural characteristics as defined by outside groups. Ethnicity is similarly ascribed at birth, but the key difference is that the ethnic group are more likely to self-define their cultural characteristics. As a result, racial categorisations (as defined by the outsider) are often embedded with inaccuracies and stereotypes, while ethnic classification is generally seen as a more accurate depiction as it is defined by the group itself. In more recent history, ethnicity has frequently been linked to the dichotomy of "us" and "them". The "Us," (the white/western), are viewed in 'majority' non-ethnic terms, whereas, "Them," (new immigrants or minorities) are viewed as ethnic minorities (Lachenicht 2011). Thus, like racial differences, ethnic classifications have also fallen victim to being defined and used by outside groups to stereotype an ethnic community with ethnicity oversimplified as a static cultural process, however this stereotyping is less prevalent than racial stereotyping. Thinking on ethnicity can be seen as deeply shaped by and shaping geopolitics. Ethnicity has been appropriated for a variety of purposes, from political mobilisation that uses the necessity of ethnic homogeneity as the basis for excluding populations of different racial backgrounds, to the conflation of ethnicity with religion and the reduction of complex geo-strategic and historic conflicts to 'ethnic strife' (Lachenicht 2011). Hence, I now move to consider how these ideas about racism and ethnic prejudice are deeply entwined with global and local Islamophobia, which provide an important context for understanding the experiences of my participants.

In relation to this thesis, many scholars have argued that racism is deeply entwined with the prevalence of Islamophobia in Britain (The Runnymede Trust 1997; Vervotec 2002; Modood 2002; Muir and Laura 2004; Cummins 2004; Modood 2008; Allen 2010; Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Kumar 2012; Meer and Werbner 2005; Abbas 2020). The British Runnymede Trust commissioned a report in 1997 and is often credited as the first notable piece of work which explored Islamophobia directly¹. The report highlighted the increased risk that visibly identifiable Muslims experience against racist violence. Similarly, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia report, 'Perceptions of Discrimination and Islamophobia', found that European Muslims were more likely to experience hostility (including negative stereotyping and social exclusion) and violent incidents as a result of the visibly signifiers of their religious identity (Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Meer and Modood 2008). While many scholars define Islamophobia as negative emotions projected towards Islam and Muslims based on fear and hatred, the Runnymede Trust have been influential in their comprehensive depiction of Islamophobia as an ideological framework. The framework positions the West as 'us', in stark contrast to Muslims as 'Other', problematising Muslims as a whole. Allen (2010) challenges this, arguing that Islamophobia does not need to rest on an imagined 'Other', but rather it is formed from a range of accurate and stereotypical perceptions, exaggerations and misrepresentations. Thus, he argues that the 'phobia' in Islamophobia stems from the perception of threat. Allen (2010) has also argued that a significant problem with research exploring the concept is that Muslim identity has typically been combined with ethnic, racial and national identity. This opens up an inquiry into whether discrimination as experienced by Muslims is on the basis of their adherence to Islam or rather, racism that Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds happen to experience. As Pratt and Woodlock (2016) argue, the subtle distinction may well be lost on perpetrators themselves, as illustrated by many ethnic groups experiencing Islamophobia despite being misidentified in terms of religion or nationality in the post 9-11 backlash. Due to the term 'Islamophobia', lacking precision, Sayyid and Vakil's (2011) groundbreaking collection of essays examine the concept of Islamophobia by focusing on the term itself. Within Sayyid and Vakil's (2010) volume, Tyrer (2010) interestingly argues that Islamophobia should therefore be understood as a political form of racism. For example, they argue that in an instance where a Sikh

¹ Research exploring prejudice against Muslims has a longer history, and was considered by Edward Said (1978) in his study of Orientalism

person experiences Islamophobia, they experience racism (a result of their brown skin) and Islamophobia (through mistaken identity of the absent Muslim). Additionally, critics who have argued that Islamophobia cannot be perceived as racism due to religion being a choice, fail to acknowledge that meanings associated with race, racial difference and religion are also socially constructed with elements of choice and ascription. In this way, the concept of racialisation is inherently linked to Islamophobia in contemporary society (Garner and Selod 2014). As critical scholars of 'race' and racisms, Sayyid and Vakil (2011: 276) aptly summarise: 'Religion is "raced", and Muslims are racialised.', which concisely summarises the interplay of religion and race that feed into my participants' experiences.

The events of 9/11, violence in the Middle East, the rise of the so-called Islamic state have invited identity to be framed in new ways, as emergent patterns of sociopolitical organisation and encouraged anti-Islamic sentiment (Adlparvar and Tadros 2016). Additionally, large-scale displacement of refugees across West Asia, the Middle East and into Europe have also brought increasing numbers of different ethnicities, religions and nationalities into close proximity (Adlparvar and Tadros 2016). Parallel to this, right-wing political parties in Europe and North America have illustrated attempts to organise societies based on imagined common histories and demonise ethnic minority groups (Adlparvar and Tadros 2016). Whilst Islamophobia and racism are not in themselves the central focus of this thesis, their relation to race, and how this shapes my participants' experiences, is relevant here. This is particularly relevant to this thesis' interest in the spatial aspects (e.g. the socio-economic and political climate discussed previously) which shape the women's lived experiences of Islam and mixed ethnicity. Islamophobia in Britain has been considerably documented since the events of the Rushdie Affair (Adlparvar and Tadros 2016). In particular, there has been an emphasis on the lack of assimilation among Muslim groups whose ethno-religious characteristics are presented as incompatible with integration fueling emphasis on the 'Muslim problem' (Weller 2009). Abbas (2020) has argued that critical analysis of today's Brexit discourse suggests that Islamophobia is deeply rooted in racism and that as a result, racism is as rife as ever in Britain. Abbas argued that Islamophobia in the United Kingdom has not emerged as an inquiry regarding European integration. Instead, it marks a withdrawal into ethnic nationalism that is characterised by structural and cultural racism based on anti-immigrant and anti-minority rhetoric. He argues that this is an exclusionary tactic of biopolitics which promotes hyper-ethnic nationalism to challenge 'Muslimness' or 'Islamification' of society. Abbas (2020) suggests that the development of an ethnic

Englishness reverting to a historically selective category is particularly relevant in local areas which have experienced community fragmentation or increasing effects neoliberal globalisation and local area community fragmentation. Those who have challenged the idea of Islamophobia as racism have argued that Islam is not a race. This illustrates a historical misunderstanding of racism: Islamophobia reflects the wider historical, institutional and cultural processes that have deep tentacles in the workings of society as a whole. Since the 1990s a new perspective has emerged identifying that very few people have a fixed and stable ethnicity. The next section moves on to explore how this thought stemmed from recognition that every person comes from somewhere and has different aspects they can draw on - these are new ethnicities.

2.5.2 New Ethnicities

The 1990s was particularly important in developing notions of 'new ethnicities', 'hybrid' and creolised identities (Mercer 1988; Hall 1991; Hoque 2019). Importantly, these challenged previous definitions of ethnicity and are especially relevant to this thesis. This thesis foregrounds new ethnicities and hybrid identities. The women in this thesis exist between boundary markers which speaks closely to Hall's thoughts on new ethnicities. Hall's (1988) groundbreaking essay on 'new ethnicities' marked a significant shift in how ethnicity was defined and understood. Hall described a shift between two phases of black cultural politics, whereby a struggle over the relations of representation shifted to a new politics of representation itself. This, he argued, marked 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' and a new recognition that the 'black subject cannot be represented without reference to the divisions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity' (p.27). More generally, this involved 're-theorising the concept of difference' in order to develop a more diverse and non-coercive concept of ethnicity. Not only does this work pursue Hall's (1996) arguments on 'new ethnicities' but they also acknowledge the 'diversity of black experiences and subject-positions' as well as going further to argue that 'we are all...ethnically located' (p.27). This was particularly important for challenging the usually 'naturalised' category of 'Whiteness'. Hall (1991) insists on considering understandings of 'blackness'; being 'black' as a politically and culturally constructed category, which essentialist depictions cannot define. Thus, Hall argues in new ethnicities that there must be an abandonment of homogenised racial, ethnic or cultural categories.

Hall's (1991) conceptualisation of 'new ethnicities' lends itself particularly well to the women in this thesis and demographics associated with their backgrounds. It marks a significant shift from how ethnicity was previously conceptualised - as outlined above - as all-encompassing and that people lived within its confines. In contemporary England, growing numbers of mixed-ethnic marriages and mixed-ethnic children have made historic conceptions of 'fixed ethnicities' less relevant. Unlike previous conceptions of fixed ethnic identity, new ethnicities comprise different strands of family history which is especially important and relevant to this research. Furthermore, as this thesis is interested in lived religious experiences (rather than institutional pious religion), Hall's (1991) thoughts on 'new ethnicities' also lends itself particularly well to exploring everyday religion. Importantly, it recognises the contextual specificities (including the effects of contemporary globalised multiculturalism) which shape people's experiences of everyday religion. This is a particularly useful approach for exploring the mixed-ethnic aspect of the women's relationships with Islam.

The UK's 'mixed race' population has shown considerable growth in the last 10-15 years (Office for National Statistics 2002), which (as aforementioned) can be put down to two major factors: the increase in mixed-ethnic marital unions and the rising acceptability in society to identify as 'mixed-race' on official documents (Song 2017). This is corroborated by the 2021 census which saw 2 million people (2% of the population) self-identify as mixed or multiple ethnicity, in comparison to 677, 111 people in the 2001 census, thus demonstrating a major increase (Office for National Statistics 2011). The growing number of inter-ethnic relationships demonstrates further insight into the trends and patterns of an increasingly ethnically diverse British population, as well as the need to explore how ethnic identities are continually evolving over time (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Hall's later work with Du Gay (1996) also identified that identity (including new ethnic identities) exist around a process of becoming, unbecoming and re-becoming, which not only captures identity as a fluid entity but it also demonstrates identity as a liminal and dynamic process. Hall and Du Gay (1996) offer a dynamic apparatus to explore identity which is particularly useful for opening up binaries that are often associated with cultural identities, such as mixed-ethnic and Muslim identities. They draw on a range of thoughts, including Freudian psychology and Foucauldian historical studies, and argue that a 'discursive explosion' has occurred in which various components including, psychological, religious and gendered are drawn on to explore identity.

The 1990s has also been highlighted as a particularly important period in terms of developing scholarship on mixed race identities due to the development of notions like 'new ethnicities', 'hybrid' and creolised identities, which is particularly relevant to this study. Not only is there considerable diversity between the participants in the sense that they represent a wide range of ethnicities but also, they all have varied relationships with faith and other social identities. 'New ethnicities' is characteristic of a 'second wave of literature' (which emerged 1990 onwards) and sought to overturn the pathological notions of mixed race that had long been associated with academic discussions that emanated from the Age of Pathology. For example, during the post-1945 period, mixed race was generally regarded as Black (Gill & Jackson 1983). This wave of literature unified in their endeavors to challenge previous notions of 'mixedness' that were established in the Age of Pathology and that built their definitions of 'mixed ethnicity' in terms of identity, rather than marginality (see: Root 1992; Zack 1995; Hall and Du Guy 1996; Song 2003; Twine 2004). Sociologists writing during this period were distinctive for their operationalisation of 'actor-centered' methodologies (such as, qualitative interviews), which prioritised the individual experiences and biographies of participants. This has enabled scholars to move towards establishing 'mixed race' as a socially and legally legitimate category of ethnic identity which has allowed for mixed identity to be explored as a dynamic concept (Ifekwunigwe 2004: 137). That said, due to the complexity of mixed-ethnic identity, there is also considerable debate among academics regarding how mixed-ethnic studies can gain their legitimacy (Caballero 2013). Caballero (2013) states that mixed-ethnic studies can only gain legitimacy once equal recognition of components that make up people's ethnic identity is attained; this would involve mixed-ethnic individuals not having to compromise aspects of their racial or ethnic identity in order to be granted membership to a particular ethnic group. In 1993 Maria Root wrote a ground-breaking Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage which can be aptly summarised by: "I have the right to have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people." Root (1996) also captures the multifaceted structure of identity eloquently, summarising mixed ethnic identity and experience as "having both feet in both groups". This relates to Hall's critique towards essentialist arguments, which he argues fail to capture how individuals belong to more than one group. Hall and Du Gay historicise the entire idea of deconstruction and emphasise how anti-essentialist critiques have enabled deconstruction and post modernism to advance the question of ethnic and cultural identity. Whilst some scholars argue that deconstruction can result in liquidation, Hall and Du Gay argue that this approach

importantly opens identity up to various new semantic possibilities and enables new meanings to be triggered.

Whilst there is little research currently exploring how mixed ethnicity shapes lived experiences of Islam, Hall (1991) and Root's (1996) thoughts on new ethnicities are aptly captured in a body of relevant research exploring the experiences of parenting in mixed ethnic families. Song's (2017) study explores multiracial parents' narratives of racial 'dilution' and cultural loss through their parenting practices. Based on 63 multiracial participants in the U.K, Song (2017) explores how the emotions attached to dilution varied among parents, whilst some expressed sadness others recognised it as an 'inevitable' loss. For example, some parents made conscious efforts to connect their children to their minority heritages and others were more philosophical about generational change. Among the more optimistic attitudes were parents who believed that their ancestral lineage (however small the percentage) continued to matter, these parents engaged in a variety of strategies to 'keep the story alive' in terms of everyday socialisation and cultural, symbolic and occasional expressions. Song's (2017) later research explored how parents attempted to raise and socialise their mixed-ethnic children in British society, capturing how many parents attempted to capture the hybridity of cultural and ethnic traditions within their parenting practices. Song's research found that parents who married into an inter-ethnic union predominantly opted to raise their offspring by embracing one or more of their ethnic origins, thus exposing their children to a broad range of ethnic and racial identifications and influences. This was supported by some parents identifying their children with double barrel surnames. Like Hall (1991) and Root (1996), Song (2012, 2017) challenges fixed definitions of race and captures the multiplicity and fluidity of mixed-ethnic identities that is also relevant to this study. As cited in Hall's (1992) defense of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, Hall draws attention to the potentialities that emerge in what he titles an 'oscillation between Tradition and Translation'. In celebrating the products of translation and mixture, Hall's (1992) defense of Rushdie's work relates to many of the multiracial parents in Song's (2017) study who talked of their children as in transition in the way that they drew on various cultural and ethnic traditions. The growing cosmopolitan outlook displayed by many multiracial parents arguably illustrates a 'dilution' of diversity reflected in Hall's (1992) thoughts on 'new ethnicities' (Song 2012, 2017). Understanding lived religion among mixed ethnic people is an important step towards better understanding and theorising new ethnicities in the U.K. As illustrated, mixed ethnicity presents a particularly interesting site as they are

rich, complex and at times contesting sites. Equally, lived religion research has also confirmed that everyday religion can be ambivalent, fluid and contextually defined. This thesis builds on these findings exploring how mixed ethnic women navigate these complexities and narratives in their experiences and relationships with Islam.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have mapped out the relevant conceptual and empirical scholarly work in which this thesis is grounded. The literature discussed has been selected for its contextual value for telling the story of how mixed ethnic women in this thesis 'live' Islam. I have outlined the value in moving beyond theories of secularisation, outlining what a lived religion approach involves and how it is useful to this thesis's intersectional and broader aims. I then moved on to discuss theories of religious socialisation, before making specific reference to the popular social organisation of British Muslim family settings in the U.K. Lastly, I draw on literature to discuss the relevance of space and place in shaping experiences of lived religion, recognising the importance of contextual specificities in shaping everyday religion. The growing interest in urban religion has potential for enriching understanding of how Islam is experienced and expressed among mixed ethnic women living in towns. This leads on to the final section which explores the value and pertinence of recognising 'new ethnicities' in a global age of cosmopolitanism, and how Hall's (1991) thoughts on 'new ethnicities' lends itself particularly well to exploring mixed-ethnic sites (as illustrated by Song 2012, 2017) and everyday expressions of Islam among mixed ethnic women. This thesis will thus develop an approach that draws together insights from lived religion, new ethnicities and spatial approaches in order to examine how Islam is lived among mixed ethnic women living in a post industrial town in the North East of England. I consider how my participants relate to institutional understandings of Islam, identify where religion is located in their lives and how Islam is woven into their lives. I unpick assumptions associated with Muslim identity in the UK and consider how my participants' relationships with Islam shape their relations with family, community and themselves. Addressing these questions requires an approach which captures how my participants express Islam across the different spaces they move in in varied ways. Therefore, in the following chapter, I explore how the methodological choices and research design I follow supports this conceptual framework.

3. Methodology

Having presented the main theoretical perspectives that are at the center of this thesis, the focus will now turn to the practical steps and ethical and theoretical considerations involved in carrying out the data collection. The previous chapter outlined the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of this research and so this chapter outlines the methods deemed most appropriate for meeting these underpinnings. This chapter is thus dedicated to offering a comprehensive explanation of the research process itself. I begin by introducing the participants and the local authority they reside in. I then present the research design, including the process of recruiting participants, and the development of the data collection methods: interviews, photo elicitation and walking interviews. I then discuss how and where the research is situated, whilst also considering my narrative approach in the data collection and analysis process. Lastly, I reflect on my position as researcher and reflexively consider my experience of the research process.

3.1 My participants

3.1.1 Identities

The participants in this study all identified as mixed-ethnicity or mixed-race individuals and as having 1 Muslim parent². Fifteen participants were recruited to the study and all were of British nationality and had lived in the UK their whole lives. As discussed in chapter 1 there is an increased need to explore the diversity which exists in Islam and specifically how the intersection of mixed ethnicity shapes people's lived experience of Islam and faith more broadly. Therefore, this thesis focuses directly on the lived experiences of women of mixed ethnicity and with a kin connection to Islam through having 1 Muslim parent. Given that this thesis cuts across many aspects of identity, I took careful consideration when designing the recruitment strategies I would implement. I recruited my participants by posting my recruitment advertisement poster³ in a range of settings including: religious establishments and more neutral settings such as shops, social media and educational institutions. It was particularly challenging defining (in clear and logical terminology) the specific group of women which I was interested in and I was particularly conscious that I did not want to inadvertently exclude potential participants and that my wording captured the attention of the

² See appendix 1 for a short profile of each participant

³ See appendix 2 for recruitment poster

demographic of interest and in turn, maximised the diversity of the sample ⁴. The wording chosen for the demographic was: ‘mixed ethnic women aged 18-25 with some kin connection to Islam’. It was anticipated that there may be some confusion over what this meant so I also included the following further guidance:

- *you have 1 parent who was raised Muslim*
- *one of your parents was not raised as Muslim*
- *your parents have different ethnic backgrounds making you mixed ethnic*
- *you or your parents do not need to be PRACTISING Muslims*
- *you simply need to have/had some connection to Islam in the course of your life*

My choice of wording supported my research commitments to facilitating and encouraging people to self-identify. I was actively committed to not prescribing the women with labels that could misidentify them and more importantly, not capture the various aspects and layers to their identity. Therefore, the phrasing: ‘some connection to Islam’ was left up to participants' interpretation. I also highlighted that neither the participants or their parents needed to be practicing Muslims, instead they would recognise Islam as having some role in their current or previous expressions of identity. This guidance was informed by my anticipation that many people would assume they were not eligible due to not practicing or engaging with doctrine or scripture. Chapter 1 has highlighted that research exploring people's relationships with religion has long been tied up in institutional definitions and religious membership being conceptualised in binary terms (practicing vs non-practicing or religious vs atheist) (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011). In order to gain an understanding of the diversity which exists in Islam among mixed ethnic women, it was crucial that I did not put forward any predetermined ideas of what did or did not ‘count’ as ‘Muslim’. This also supported my thesis’ commitment to shedding light on the diversity which exists in Islam and presenting the women’s lived experiences of Islam. Similarly, Jackson-Taylor (2021) and Paige and Shipley (2021) adopt fluid definitions of what religion looks like in everyday life and reject static definitions that are embedded in assumptions and preconceived ideas and stereotypes. Therefore, when terms like ‘Islam’ and ‘religion’ are used through this thesis, they must be recognised as fluid and that the women’s own descriptions of their lived

⁴ See appendix 2 & 3 for recruitment poster and information sheet

realities of Islam are at the forefront of the analysis.

Interestingly, despite the considerable refinement I undertook in developing (what I deemed) a precise and clear call for the participants I was interested in, I still received a mass of interest and enthusiasm from people which did not fit this research's interest. I received a vast number of messages from people saying that they or someone they knew would love to talk about their Muslim identity. Some of these people were disappointed when I had to turn them away as they did not fit the specific identity characteristics I was interested in. In most instances people expressed that they had a connection to Islam, but they were either not from Middlesbrough or they were not of mixed-ethnicity. It was necessary that participants identified with these characteristics too in order to capture the contextual specificities that I was interested in. The mass of interest I received prompted me to engage in some self-reflection, both in terms of my research and my own identity and positionality. Not only did it instill confidence in me that exploring lived experiences of Islam was of academic and societal value but it also suggested that people had a desire to widen understanding of how Islam manifests in their lives. The diversity of people which expressed an interest also encouraged me to consider new alternative avenues of lived Islam that I could explore in future research. Young people across the country were passionate to share their experiences of Islam, suggesting the broader public interest in this research area. In terms of my own identity, it also shone a necessary light on the amount of people who had a shared experience and commitment to voicing their journeys with Islam. That said, it would be sociologically obtuse to pretend that the mass of interest did not raise some concern in me. It also suggested that people may not have had an opportunity in the past to reflect on or discuss their religious identities before and that their experiences may be characterised by struggle. Identity struggles can undoubtedly be isolating and daunting however, after much deliberation about what this meant in terms of inclusivity, exclusion and my own identity I reached a conclusion that the mass of interest was an optimistic sign that people wanted to voice their identities and contribute to social change. When considering wider research on minorities, the historical marginalisation and homogenisation of Muslims in popular discourse (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Puwar 2004), and growing hostility towards ethnic minorities in Middlesbrough (Mulvey & Davidson 2018; Telford and Wistow, 2019) may offer some explanation for the high numbers of people who expressed an interest. Despite conversations with potential participants illustrating the disappointment they felt for not

being eligible, they also highlighted a culture of collective solidarity and desire for social change. Many expressed enthusiasm and even excitement at the prospect of something they could relate to. My choice of methods (particular photo interviews and walking interviews) also gained specific attraction, many participants eagerly asked what photographs they could bring to the interview and when they could begin. It was evident that my choice of creative methods was regarded by many potential participants as an exciting way that they could tell their story - importantly through their own words and images. These conversations, and the recruitment process more broadly, was undoubtedly a heart-warming and motivating experience. Prior to beginning my data collection it equipped me with a firm belief that my research would at the very least, give a group of rich and inspiring women a necessary platform to discuss their relationship with Islam.

3.1.2 Sampling, recruitment and limitations

Participants were recruited via non-probable, purposive sampling; participants were selected for their characteristics and experiences in line with the research aims: identify as a woman, be of mixed ethnic background, have one Muslim born parent and a resident of Middlesbrough. Three forms of contact were utilised to obtain a sample of participants: my personal social media networks, mosques and advertising in public spaces. I made contact through email in which I included my study's information sheet ⁵. All recruitment was carried out within Middlesbrough given that the research aimed to explore the role Middlesbrough played in shaping the mixed ethnic women relationship with Islam. Therefore, my recruitment poster was only physically posted in spaces within Middlesbrough. Whilst this research did not aim to be representative of an entire demographic within the town, it took steps to ensure that the diversity of the sample was maximised according to gender, age, neighborhood and other key characteristics, by recruiting through diverse related networks and organisations in the city as well as public advertisement. This supports Barbour's (2001) argument that recruiting through diverse networks enhances the diversity of a sample and in doing so, the quality and rigor of the research is enhanced. This was especially important given that this thesis aims to shed light on the diverse lived experiences of Islam. For this reason, I recruited from religious establishments and more neutral settings such as shops, social media and educational institutions. It was anticipated that the women recruited through

⁵ See appendix 2 for information sheet

this avenue may have a stronger connection with Islam than the more neutral settings. Whilst this thesis is interested in the everyday lived experiences of Islam (rather than institutional faith) that is not to say that I was solely interested in the ambivalent relationships people have with Islam, I also wanted to attract women who were more certain with their relationship with Islam and more closely aligned with the mosque. Recruiting at the mosque would perhaps uncover mixed ethnic women's lived experiences of institutional Islam and how this compared with institutional understandings of Islam.

The religious settings where I advertised for participants were also carefully selected in a bid to further enhance the diversity of the sample and for their congruence with the research focus on spatial and ethnic aspects of identity. I contacted 2 local mosques situated within Middlesbrough: The Abu Bakr Mosque and Cultural Centre⁶, and The Jamia Masjid Al-Madina⁷ and both mosques kindly agreed to share my contact details with its members. The Abu Bakr Mosque and Cultural Centre is an established and well known organisation located in the urban area of central Middlesbrough. It was registered as a charity in 1990 by the Muslim Federation Cleveland and has since attracted an approximate 132770 visitors since its opening. It is an established and well known organisation located in the urban area of central Middlesbrough. The Abu Bakr Mosque is a particularly interesting site to advertise for participants to take part in this research as the mosque has historically attracted a wide range of ethnic and native communities, some of which include, Middle Eastern, Pakistani, Turkish and African Muslims. In comparison, Jamia Masjid Al-Madina (equally as popular as Abu Bakr and located just 1.2 miles away), is predominantly made up of Pakistani Muslim's. It is interesting to see how the urban landscape of where these mosques are situated affects the ethnicity of Muslims they attract. Jamia Masjid Al-Madina is situated in a community that is made up of predominantly Pakistani families, whereas Abu Bakr Mosque is located on the main road which heads towards the main shopping center and is surrounded by a vast number of ethnic minority communities, such of which include Arabic, Pakistani, Kurdish and African. It is interesting to see how the urban landscape of where these mosques are situated affects the ethnicity of Muslims they attract. Jamia Masjid Al-Madina is situated in a community that is made up of predominantly Pakistani families, whereas Abu Bakr

⁶ The Abu Bakr Mosque is located in central Middlesbrough and attracts an ethnically diverse population of Muslims <http://www.abubakr.org.uk/>

⁷ The Jamia Masjid Al-Madina Mosque is located in central Middlesbrough and predominantly attracts Pakistani Muslims. <https://www.jamiamasjidmiddlesbrough.org.uk/>

Mosque is located on the main road which heads towards the main shopping center and is surrounded by a vast number of ethnic minority communities, including: Arabic, Pakistani, Kurdish and African communities. This could explain why Abu Bakr Mosque has attracted an ethnically diverse group of Muslims who pray at the mosque. In attracting and accepting Muslims from all ethnic backgrounds, Abu Bakr Mosque is made up of an ethnically and culturally rich group of Muslims. Additionally, Abu Bakr Mosque operates as more than a place of worship, it also caters for the Middlesbrough community more broadly by hosting social events, training, education and youth activities that are accessible by all, this has had a positive effect on encouraging communication between all ethnic groups. Recruiting at a mosque which facilitates activities (rather than solely religious practice) lends itself particularly well to this thesis' focus on the everyday experiences of religion rather than institutional religion.

Finally, recruitment via my social media accounts involved sharing my research publicly on my personal social media platform; Instagram and Facebook⁸. A number of my colleagues and friends shared my post which proved effective for bringing publicity to my research. Many of my participants became involved in the study through finding the advert for my research on social media sites. Social media recruitment proved to be the most fruitful source of recruitment and the majority of participants were recruited via this avenue. This is supported by Ellard-Gray et al. (2015) who argue that internet based methods have proven particularly effective for recruiting hidden communities due to social networking sites providing spaces for communities to unite. Additionally, The Teesside University Asian Society also included my advert on their research recruitment page. This was particularly useful as the research aimed to recruit women between the ages of 18-25, an age group who are often engaged in higher education or may have friends who fit the participant specification. More broadly, age 18-25 being a particularly interesting stage of the life course as it is widely recognised as a period of rapid change, as noted in the previous chapter. For example, young people often experience increased autonomy and freedom from starting new jobs or education or managing new relationships which can increase tension and uncertainty in everyday life. Due to these key milestones, it was anticipated that this period would be a particularly interesting life stage to explore the participants' experiences of living Islam

⁸ See appendix 2 for post shared on social media

including how other aspects of their identities shaped these experiences.

There were some limitations when considering the sample obtained. In total 15 women were recruited. Given the size of this project it was not possible to obtain a sample completely representative of this population. As aforementioned, this thesis was specifically interested in mixed ethnic women's relationships with faith due to this being a substantial gap in UK research. As such, it was important that the recruitment was strategically targeted in order to reflect the diversity which exists in Islam. Fortunately, the sample I gathered consisted of women from a wide range of mixed ethnic backgrounds, including: Pakistani, Indian, Arabic, Persian, Italian, English, Dutch and Algerian (see: table 1) .

Pseudonym	Background	Age
Emma	Pakistani father who is practicing Islam, and an Indian mother before marriage was previously nonreligious but converted to Islam. Emma positions her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural.	21
Hana	Hana is Emma's older sister; she is 25 years old. Like Emma, she grew up with a Pakistani father who is practicing Islam, and an Indian mother who now loosely engages with Islam loosely to support Emma's father at important times (such as at Eid). Hana was raised as a practicing Muslim but now positioned her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural.	25
Lily	Lily's father is Persian and her mother English. Her mother did not convert and Lily's relationship with Islam was mostly when she visited her father's family abroad as her father was also non-practicing. However, cultural expectations associated with Iran and Islam influenced his parenting style.	25

Zoe	Zoe grew up with an Algerian Muslim father and an Italian mother. Her father is practicing Muslim, and her mother did not convert to Islam but engages with it within the family home. Despite being raised as practicing Muslim, Zoe now positions herself as non-practicing Muslim.	24
Aneela	Aneela is of Scottish, Indian and African ethnicity. Her father is Scottish and her mother Indian African. Aneela's connection to Islam was through her mother. Her father did not convert to Islam and Aneela's exposure to Islam was largely through her mother's upbringing and extended family - where Islamic and cultural expectations were prevalent.	20
Lucy	Lucy's mother is English and her father Iranian. She grew up in a non-practicing household however, the cultural expectations associated with Iran and Islam influenced his parenting style and her mother supported her father.	23
Zara	Zara's father is Algerian Muslim, and her mother is English. Her mother converted to Islam upon marriage and engages with Islam within the family home.	25
Alisha	Alisha is Zara's younger sister and was similarly raised as practicing Islam but did not practice anymore. She aligns herself with spiritualism and rejects institutional religions.	21
Henna	Henna's father is Dutch and her mother Pakistani Muslim. Her father did not convert to Islam and her mother engages with Islam. Henna's parents divorced when she was 15. Henna is not practicing Islam but engages with Islam when with Muslim family.	24

Kim	Kim's father is a Pakistani Muslim, and her mother is English. Kim's mother did not formally convert and Emma positions her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural.	23
Maria	Maria's mother is English and her father non-practicing Muslim. Maria positions her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural and through family.	19
Sameela	Sameela's father is Indian Muslim and her mother English. Sameela identifies as Muslim but is not practicing Islam in everyday life	18
Jenny	Jenny's mother is Norwegian and her father Pakistani Muslim. Jenny is not practicing Islam but engages with Islam culturally and when with Muslim family.	20
Liz	Liz's mother is French and her father Pakistani Muslim. She was raised as a practicing Muslim but has distanced herself from Islam now.	22
Amber	Amber is Liz's younger sister, like Liz her father is Pakistani Muslim. She was raised as a practicing Muslim and has similarly distanced herself from Islam now.	18

Table 1: Background information of recruits

The diversity of their mixed ethnic backgrounds was more diverse than I anticipated and the ways that this shaped their relationship with Islam even more so⁹. Several of the participants engaged in varied forms of faith, some followed the 'morals' they deemed important, some followed the rules they associated with Islam and others rejected Islam entirely. Obtaining a sample which reflected a wide spectrum of relationships with Islam was vital when considering the 'lived reality' of religion. In terms of spatial identity my participants also

⁹ See appendix 1 for a profile of each participant

varied considerably. The women lived in a range of areas within Middlesbrough and its surrounding areas which naturally meant that they varied in social background. As such, the spatial aspects of their identities and lives provided interesting dimensions to their lived experiences of Islam.

3.2 Methods and Data collection

This section introduces the methods I used during the data collection. I outline the three stages of interviewing that were carried out: semi structured interviews, photo elicitation interviews and finally, walking interviews, before exploring how they complement and support my interest in lived religion. The majority of interviews were conducted face to face and in public spaces such as cafes or libraries. All the interviews took place within a two year period and were audio recorded and transcribed by me. In total fifteen participants were interviewed three times and two participants also took part in the initial pilot study interview. Three participants who initially expressed an interest did not attend the interviews due to university commitments but expressed that they would have otherwise taken part and to bare them in mind for future research. In total forty-five interviews were carried out and each lasted between sixty to ninety minutes. The methods introduced here importantly support my commitment to considering my role and influence in the production of data. Photo elicitation interviews and walking interviews were deliberately selected for their ability to equip participants with control of their narratives. Carrying out repeat interviews also allowed me to tell the women's rich and complex stories in a way that structurally layered their experiences over time. By returning to the same participants, I was also able to address points raised in earlier interviews in more depth and via a different mode of communication from participants (for example, photos or maps). It also offered an opportunity to re-visit initial stories and correct misunderstandings or researcher assumptions, which is useful for increasing the validity and reliability of the data collected.

3.2.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected for their alignment with my research questions. All 15 interviews were fortunately carried out face to face prior to Covid-19 restrictions being implemented. Interviews are widely considered an ideal method for exploring complex and

multifaceted phenomena (Edwards and Holland 2013). What was of particular interest to this research is what Creswell (2017) refers to as ‘hidden information’, that is often concealed and pushed out of sight. As discussed in the previous chapter, narratives surrounding Islam and British Muslim life have often portrayed Muslims as a uniform group of individuals and have downplayed the diversity which exists within Islam. When exercised effectively, interviews have the potential to uncover in-depth opinions, thoughts and feelings as well as nonverbal responses, like hesitations and avoidance of eye contact. They allow researchers to bring this information into view and ultimately have the potential to gather rich detail and description about groups of people. This is also supported by Edwards and Holland (2013) who argues that interviews are an effective way of interpreting social phenomena from the “perspectives of those involved” (p.16). This makes interviews particularly suited to this thesis’s focus on exploring the lived experiences of religion among the participants. In order to elicit an understanding of the socio-cultural spaces that have been discussed in the previous chapters, it was essential to become a part of participants’ understanding of their lived experiences and meanings associated with it. Uncovering intimate details from participants during interviews sheds light on the intricacies about how they interpret, exist and react to the social world around them as well as how they relate to and engage with popular narratives circulating.

Despite engaging in a process of self-reflection and refinement throughout my fieldwork, the pilot study offered me a specific opportunity to conduct a trial run and make revisions and adjustments to the study. As recommended by Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002), the pilot study was conducted with two participants who closely resembled the targeted study population (mixed ethnic and/or Muslim) and was executed using the same administration procedures (same style interview, desired length of interview and interviewer). As well as uncovering logistical issues (such as my ability to deliver the interview schedule, record the interviews, the time required to record responses) I was also keen to uncover any issues identified by the participants. Therefore, after the pilot study, participants were also invited to fill in an online self-administered survey, where they were able to voice any issues they encountered during the pilot interview and offer any recommendations. Issues were then discussed in detail in order to mutually identify a solution going forwards. The pilot study led to some questions being re-worded due to them being identified as comparatively unclear and vague, and therefore generating limited responses from participants. For example, the question ‘*where do you feel most comfortable?*’ participants typically answered in limited

depth e.g. 'home' or 'with friends' with little expansion. This question was thus refined to 'where do you feel most comfortable? (Offer specific places, situations and people / Why?/ Has this changed over time?/ Do you think this may change?)', which invited participants to divulge more detail.

Whilst I had some experience of research 'in the field', I felt it important to have a loose set of thematic questions prepared in advance of conducting the interviews¹⁰. This helped guide me through the interview confidently which allowed me to focus on establishing rapport with my participants. I encouraged participants to lead in telling their stories, particularly in the early stages of the interview, however, the topic guide was a valuable source in bringing participants back in focus when necessary. It was important that I found the balance of allowing participants to use their own agency to develop their own narrative whilst also adhering to my research aims. I chose not to use entirely unstructured interviews as they are considered problematic even when carried out by the most experienced interviewers. Semi structured interviews enabled participants to have a voice in the study whilst also enabling me as researcher to collect a body of qualitative data that could be analysed effectively.

3.2.2 Photo-elicitation interviews

Interviews have also been used effectively alongside photographs in research concerning lived experience and multifaceted identity. Structurally layering photographs with participants' dialogue about the images has been identified as having the potential to offer rich oral and visual insight into people's lives (Pink 2003; Rose 2006; Thomas 2009; Collier and Collier 2009; Dunlop and Richter 2010). That said, visual methods are a relatively new and novel approach to qualitative research having derived from traditional ethnography methods in sociology and anthropology in the 19th century (Pink 2003; Rose 2006; Thomas 2009; Dunlop and Richter 2010). Some academics have argued that it is from pictures, that the construction of the self is best illustrated (Pink 2003). Visual methods have been identified as a particularly effective method for enabling a greater inclusion of young people especially those from more marginalised groups, as well as for studying urban aspects of identity (Harper 2003; Dunlop and Richter 2010). Photos and images have been identified as useful tools for overcoming cultural and language barriers and misunderstandings (Harper 2003), which is useful in terms of this thesis' interest in different expressions of culture and

¹⁰ See appendix 5 for interview schedule

ethnicity.

Following this line of thought, the photo interviews involved participants selecting ten photographs that they would use as prompts during the interview. The photographs were not data themselves, instead the interview transcript which was generated alongside the photograph would form the data which would be later analysed¹¹. The activity involved participants collecting five photographs they felt they aligned with and five photographs which they felt did not resemble their lives. I gave limited guidance to the women as I was conscious not to project my own ideas onto them. I simply equipped them with two subheadings that their selected photographs should fall under: “This is me” and “This is not me”. When introducing my participants to what the activity would involve I was met with an eager attitude from my participants. The approaches that my participants took in collecting photographs were varied in approach. Some of the participants exceeded ten images while others annotated and organised their photographs into categories (food, language, clothes etc.). The photographs were shared with me in advance of the interview and the themes which their photographs captured shaped the topic guides that I developed. Many of the women apologised at the start of the interview for bringing more than the specified amount of photos, and suggested that it was too difficult to choose just five images for each of the categories and that they had enjoyed digging through their childhood photo albums. Not only did this demonstrate that they had taken much deliberation and effort in the task, but it also suggested that the women had enjoyed the activity and that it was cathartic. Despite me initially stating that ten images was the limit, I encouraged the women to draw on all the photos they had brought to the interview and refrained from posing any limitations on them. Not only was I happy that the method had clearly been effective in creatively engaging my participants, but I was also passionate to remain committed to giving the women a voice and not limiting them in their self-expression.

Given that this research was framed within an interpretivist framework (Jackson and Mazzei, 2009), the fieldwork was underpinned and designed in accordance with the belief that participants should be free to illustrate their own notions of self through various modes of communication. Photographs have proven to be effective tools for equipping participants with the agency required to self-describe themselves and their everyday worlds (Bowes,

¹¹ See appendix 5 for interview 2 schedule which was developed alongside participant

1996). This speaks closely to this thesis's focus on mixed ethnic lived experiences of Islam within Middlesbrough. The women were able to draw on photographs which illustrated their everyday lives, many of which collected photographs of their hometown, social events they attended, family members and how they expressed themselves through clothing. The freedom which the camera gives to participants distinguishes itself most clearly from traditional paper and pencil forms of data collection (Beekers 2021). Photo production and ownership enhanced participation and control over what the women chose to share with me. For example I found that most participants could demonstrate the cultural expectations they experienced through images, and that the interview flowed and was largely unaided by me. Photographs have the potential to bridge the gap between popular misunderstandings of groups and the diversity and nuance of everyday lived experiences. I encouraged participants to reflect on their previous interview and further clarify details of their experiences. The second interview was a useful element of retrospective analysis, which enabled me to engage in further depth with the research process and the data created, thus furthering the validity and reliability of the data collected. It also equipped participants with an opportunity to engage in creative self-reflection, which could open up new lines of inquiry and grounds for further research.

A significant consideration I had to make was how the photos would be used in the research. Despite the photographs being extremely poignant and powerful emblems of the women's lives, as anticipated, they often risked compromising the women's identities as they included places and faces which could expose the women's families and friends. As a result, I chose only to include photographs which did not include any identifying information about the women and followed the style of photo elicitation by using the photographs aids for the participants during the interviews rather than as data. Despite this feeling like a missed opportunity to visually illustrate their lives, the anonymity and risks associated with taking part in research were deemed more important. Moreover, following the transcription I was satisfied that the interview transcripts were effective in unpacking the rich narratives associated with each of the participants' photographs.

I initially planned to carry out the photo interviews face to face, however, the COVID-19 pandemic meant that The University of York, Economic and Social Research Council and British Sociological Association implemented a temporary ban on face to face fieldwork. In

order to overcome this obstacle, I conducted the photo interviews online via video using Teams. Despite this not being what I had originally set out to do, I was keen to maintain the relationships I had formed with the participants, as well as the continuity of my fieldwork. Technology proved to be a valuable asset as participants were easily able to share their images with me via email and draw on them in a video interview. I recognise the privileged position my participants and I were in during the pandemic in terms of being able to easily adapt my research and adapt to online platforms. Many scholars have explored the effects of COVID-19 on people's research (Paula 2020; Hlongwa 2020; Hendriksen et al. 2021), the temporary ban on fieldwork posed a crisis for many researchers who were forced to change, delay and quit their research endeavors entirely. Paula (2020) argued that the lockdowns which were implemented to contain the spread of COVID-19 would unduly impact PhD students' and early-career researchers' careers due to the vulnerability of their income, and the time-constrained nature of research programs. These were concerns I also had to grapple with. For example, I was acutely aware that as I had planned to conduct these interviews in private spaces (away from my participants' families) and that carrying out on-line interviews could pose privacy concerns as my participants were at home. I recall that my participants mostly engaged in the on-line interviews from their bedrooms with their doors closed. This ensured that our conversations were private and that other family members could not overhear. Some of my participants were alone at home throughout the day as their parents were key workers and this offered them additional privacy and flexibility for them during the interview. Therefore, despite initial panic and concern about how I would remain committed to my participant-led and creative approach, the pandemic actually posed an enhanced opportunity for my research which I made a conscious effort to embrace.

Fortunately, my digital access and competence meant that I was in a position to carry on with my fieldwork and make only minor adaptations. During catch-up conversations with participants, I identified that lockdown could actually be a good opportunity to carry out interviews. During the national summer lockdown in 2020, nearly all the women were either working from home, studying from home or not engaged in any work as they were on holiday from university or on furlough. None of the participants were key workers and many expressed that they were feeling unoccupied, bored and lonely. Upon inviting them to the second interview I was met with a great eagerness from participants who were keen to be engaged in something that involved doing something different and speaking to someone

outside their immediate contact group. Even among those who were working from home, conducting the interviews online was seen as a more practical and manageable way that they could engage in my research. Thus, for me, lockdown inadvertently assisted me in my fieldwork as the women appeared more reliable and available due to the newfound time they had on their hands. The next section now moves on to consider the third and final mode of data collection which furthered my commitment to enabling the women to produce their own stories. The final interview involved physically ‘walking alongside’ the women in their hometowns to get an even deeper insight into their worlds.

3.2.3 Walking Interviews

A third method suited to exploring identity and lived experiences are walking interviews (Evans and Jones 2011; O’Neill 2015; O’Neil et al. 2015; O’Neil 2017; O’Neill and Roberts 2019). Walking interviews are particularly well suited to exploring people’s relationship with environment, as well as their journey across time (O’Neill and Roberts 2019). Social researchers have found that ‘walking alongside’ participants is a particularly powerful method for observing, experiencing and making sense of people’s everyday realities and practices (Emmel and Clark 2009). Despite the long tradition of walking in the practice of arts (Heddon 2007; Fulton 2010) and the more recent increase in ethnographic and anthropological research (Ingold 2007; Edensor 2010; Pink 2008; Pink et al. 2010), biographical sociology has comparatively seen relatively little contribution. That said, more recently, walking interviews have begun to emerge as a distinct qualitative research method useful for exploring the connection between self and place (Evans and Jones 2011; O’Neill 2015; O’Neil et al. 2015; O’Neil 2017; O’Neill and Roberts 2019). This lends itself well to this thesis’ interest in spatial aspects of lived religion. O’Neill and Roberts (2019) argue that the way people experience and interconnect their various senses (including visual) informs their interpretation of the everyday world and identity formation. They add that the ‘visual’ must be conceptualised in relation to other senses too, thus, I use walking interviews in addition to traditional interviews and photo elicitation interviews which prioritises other senses (including: voice and emotion) (Pink 2008; O’Neill 2017; O’Neill and Roberts 2019).

Walking interviews can be beneficial to both researcher and participant in a number of ways. They have the potential to capture people’s thoughts, relationships and memories of a space

(O'Neill and Roberts 2019) by unlocking participants' memories that are associated with a particular space. This allows researchers to encounter the 'surprise' element of space, which Massey (2013) poignantly refers to as the 'hidden, concealed, unobserved or forgotten aspects of the urban landscape'. As this thesis is interested in mixed ethnic expressions of Islam - an area of lived religion which is significantly lacking - the ability of walking interviews to capture the 'unobserved or forgotten' aspects of urban identities is particularly complimentary. Walking or 'passing' through a particular scene may also encourage participants to remember or rework the emotions attached to a memory (O'Neill and Roberts 2019). This can encourage the formation and reformation of the self as sensual, expressive and embodied which are significant for understanding the self and identity (O'Neill and Roberts 2019).

There are various ways researchers carry out walking interviews, however, my format involved participants walking on foot alongside me during an interview following a previously agreed route which participants had designed. Thus, the creation process was mostly participant led and flexible. I was keen to give my participants the freedom and time to design their route, so I asked them to design their route prior to the interview over an agreed period of time rather than during it. This allowed them to design the route at their own pace and in as much depth and detail as they chose to. The only input I had in designing the route was overseeing that the route met the safety guidance (e.g. avoidance of concealed areas and particularly dangerous roads). This was collaboratively agreed between researcher and participant, the route was shared with me prior to the interview and I asked participants to make minor adjustments if I deemed it to be of risk. That said, I anticipated that the idea of mapping out a route that told their story may be overwhelming for participants. In order to aid the initial steps of the creation process, I provided participants with examples, templates and ideas of the kind of approach they could take.

Participants were asked to design a route within the parameters of Middlesbrough and to share it via email with me prior to the walking interview to ensure that the route was deemed safe (for both participant and researcher)¹². To protect the safety of the researcher, participants were advised to avoid areas which were potentially unsafe (such as fields and woodland areas). In past research endeavors, many researchers have adopted a fixed route

¹² See appendix 6 for example of walking route

approach to avoid safety concerns. Fixed routes are also valuable in terms of generating comparable information quickly about significant spaces within a set route. Much consideration went into the decision making behind how much freedom I would give my participants in the design process. I concluded that assigning a set route would have removed the empowering element that was at the core of this study. Giving the women a voice was a key component of this research. Furthermore, the participants' relationship with space would undoubtedly vary massively given that they were a socially and ethnically diverse group. Prescribing them with a route would have limited their capacity to express their identities. Once the routes were designed they were used to allow researchers to walk alongside the participants in their hometown. This facilitated an engagement with how participants interacted with and related to their town's histories, spaces and communities (Butler, 2007).

The routes that participants designed varied considerably, some referenced specific buildings and organisations and made notes about their relationship with them, while others reflected more broadly on their relationship with the town, making reference to different communities and social groups within Middlesbrough. The participants' routes were used in conjunction with the interview guide which was useful in terms of allowing me to open the interview in a variety of ways. This meant that within my transcription I was able to include detail from the maps, including names of streets, places and institutions that were encountered on the walks. Interestingly, the transcripts also identified how participants felt during the process of designing their route. Many of the participants reflected on how the process of designing the route had been a cathartic opportunity to look back on their lives and consider their relationship with specific places and communities. It also enabled them to reflect on how aspects of their lives had changed over time or stayed the same. The fieldwork I carried out illustrated stages of the life course as significant variables which shaped my participants' relationships with Islam, the findings are thus discussed with reference to key life stages: childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Others commented on how the creation process of the route and the walking interview itself reminded them of other areas of life where they had engaged in autobiographical video recording. For example, one woman commented that the activity had reminded them of their experience of blogging when they were travelling Asia, during which she had detailed her experience of specific places and spaces of interest. Many of the women reflected on how the process had been therapeutic and had allowed them to reflect on key places, spaces, events, people and symbols in their hometown.

One challenge when carrying out walking interviews was considering how the data could be implemented into the research. I was conscious that the women's routes could compromise their identity given their specific mention of schools, organisations and communities within Middlesbrough, a town known for its tight knit communities and shared ethos that '*everyone knew everyone*'. I was also aware that discussing their lives and experiences of religion had the potential to produce sensitive discussions that may also compromise their identities. Therefore, I chose not to include the mapped routes as data themselves, but instead, represented them as data (in part) through the transcripts themselves. This was a difficult decision particularly as the routes that my participants had designed made rich and fascinating visual and textual data. However, I respected my participants' confidentiality above anything and was confident after transcription that the transcripts effectively translated the women's routes with a necessary distance that would protect them.

3.3 Situating the Research

3.3.1 Analysing and interpreting the lived realities

The process of analysis began during the first interview, in which I made brief fieldwork notes. Following its completion, I immediately embarked on making more detailed notes on my initial thoughts regarding the interview. These thoughts consisted of reflections about how I felt the interview went, was it successful and how it could be improved. This helped me develop as a researcher throughout the fieldwork. I also recorded any recurring themes, common ideas and my own interpretations of observations I made. Evidently my own annotations were also a core component during data collection and analysis. Observations made by researchers undoubtedly constitute a useful tool in qualitative interviewing (Flick 2009). I reflected on my field notes at the start of each transcription. Whilst the data was read interpretively to ensure that there was an appreciation of how individual participants made sense of their social environment (Unruh 1980), the observations made were also recognised as 'contestable', given that they were open to interpretation. In this sense, it is difficult to distinguish between analysis and transcription, both inform each other, and so analytical observations are only ever what Clifford et al. (1986) calls 'partial truths'. That said, it should not be assumed that interpretations produce a lack of rigor, instead, processes of reflection and reflexivity enable the researcher and participants position and participation to be

constantly scrutinised and reflected on, enabling 'take for granted' assumptions to be problematised. To ensure accuracy and control over the data production I completed the transcription process myself. I also revisited the field notes repeatedly to re-immense myself into the narratives and maximise my familiarity with the data.

Initially, the scale of data which the interviews produced was overwhelming and guidance from previous research endeavors (particularly those using walking interviews) was limited and vague on how to specifically analyse said material. I felt that in order to overcome what seemed somewhat chaotic was to instill order over the data and make it more organised so that it was accessible and legible. In doing so, I would be able to decipher what was significant to the research. Using thematic analysis, the text derived from interviews was organised into thematic codes on a spreadsheet. All coding was completed by hand, this was the method I felt most confident for ensuring that I had complete control over the data and remained immersed in the data (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Saldana 2015; Alu 2019). By working closely with the data, I also felt confident to return to the transcripts throughout the analysis process to gain richer detail, this is something that may have been too overwhelming and detached to have done if I had used coding software like NVivo. The process of coding enabled me to identify links between the data and these links are what formed themes and eventual findings chapters in this thesis (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Saldana 2015; Alu 2019). I was able to identify many codes including: parents, grandparents, generational differences, mosque, spirituality, being 'good', morals, school, clothing, boyfriends, alcohol. I then organised and condensed my codes into overarching themes. For example, some of the codes including, '*morals*', '*being good*', '*mosque*', '*Quran*' were compressed into the theme: '*Engaging with religion in different ways*'. This process of transcription was completed prior to embarking on the next stage of data collection, this was useful for allowing me to embed the codes and themes into the design of following interview guides. This was essential for building on the participants' narrative in richer ways as we progressed through the research.

One analytical tool that was helpful to my analysis process was that put forward by Ritchie et al. (2003). This method was designed in order to allow qualitative data to be explored in a systematic approach, whereby data is first organised, then summarised and lastly, interpreted within a thematic framework. Using the fundamentals put forward by Ritchie et al. (2003), this research opted for framework analysis as it is competent with providing structure to

otherwise detailed and at times overwhelming qualitative data (for example, interview transcripts). It also facilitates an element of systemic analysis which allows the research process to not only be, to a degree, replicable but also explicit. That said, despite the structure framework analysis affords, the process of abstraction also allowed me to be creative with the data which particularly suited my choice of creative methods: photo interviews and walking interviews.

Framework analysis involves the researcher undertaking four main steps (Ritchie et al. (2003)). The first step involves identifying initial themes. Similar to many analytical approaches, the first stage of analysis I initially spent some time familiarising myself with the data. This involved thoroughly reading and re-reading the transcripts in relation to the aims and objectives of the research in order to identify any recurring themes. Once the themes were identified a conceptual framework could be developed. Following this the themes were further refined which enabled the themes to be organised in a hierarchical structure of main themes and sub-themes. The second stage involves labelling the data. Here I applied the conceptual framework to the data (interview transcripts) in order to systematically index the data. This contrasts from coding which aims to capture dimensions that have already been precisely defined. Indexing simply aims to illustrate a theme mentioned within a section of the data. What was most important is that I continually refined the conceptual framework during the indexing process. The third step put forward by Ritchie et al. (2003) involves sorting the data by theme. The data was logically organised into categories of 'similar' content in order to allow the data to be collated. I opted to sort the data manually, however, other researchers prefer to use computer programs (such as NVivo). The final stage involves summarising the data. This involves making the data more manageable through synthesising and summarising. I was meticulous in ensuring that all language used by the participants was unchanged in order to preserve the key phrases or terms within the analysis. Furthermore, all data was treated as important, despite the meaning of some data appearing, at first, unclear, it often became clearer at later stages of interpretation. Ritchie et al's. (2003) guide was a useful tool for analysing qualitative data, particularly data which is multifaceted and complex. There were a number of overlapping, relational links between the data which it was important to capture. Following these steps allowed for the analysis to draw links between the micro creation of social relations to the wider socio-cultural structures. Importantly, I did not seek to obtain facts, rather to represent the site in its truest form, this stems from the belief that all representations are shaped by interpretation. By engaging in these practices, a fuller

understanding of how the participants engaged in identity work could be conveyed (Latimer and Schillmeier 2009).

There are a number of strengths associated with thematic analysis. It is a method proficient with “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Clarke and Braun 2017, p.79). Not only is thematic analysis able to describe and organise the data in rich detail, but it also has the potential to identify and interpret unique aspects and dimensions of the research topic (Boyatzis 1998). Thematic analysis also lends itself well to exploring under-researched or new areas as it is a method proficient in providing a rich description of a whole data set. It also distinguishes itself from approaches (such as discourse analysis and grounded theory) as it does not rely on pre-existing theoretical frameworks (Boyatzis 1998). Therefore, I argue that this mode of analysis is particularly suited to exploring under-researched groups in society such as my participants.

3.4 Situating the Researcher

3.4.1 Reflexivity

Over time, reflexivity has become considered a crucial component to research. It is a particularly important process which aids in challenging some of the critiques associated with qualitative research, particularly that which explores the lived experiences. This research prioritises the subjective lived experiences of the participants, therefore, in order for the data to be considered holistically, adopting a reflexive methodological approach throughout analysis was necessary. Within qualitative research it is impossible to entirely exclude the researcher from the data collection, analysis and reporting of findings. Researchers are intrinsically involved in the research process by being both reflective and reflexive, a subtle distinction put forward by Finlay (2002). Reflection relates to the process of looking back on the process and considering how, as a researcher, what you would do differently (Finlay 2002). Reflexivity, on the other hand, relates to the process of questioning the researcher's own position in the research, where and how they are located in it, and how this may influence the findings (Finlay 2002). I implemented strategies which could overcome inequalities, assumptions, my own bias's and behavior. Etherington (2004) makes a valuable recommendation stemming from their own experience of reflexivity in their research. They put forward the following questions as useful for considering the positionality of the

researcher:

- How has my personal history led to my interest in this topic?
- What are my presuppositions about knowledge in this field?
- How am I positioned in relation to this knowledge?
- How does my gender/social class/ethnicity/culture influence my positioning in relation to this topic/my informants?

These questions shaped my process of reflection and reflexivity throughout the research. They were questions that I considered during the design process of my research, when I was collecting the data and when I engaged in analysis and during the writing of my thesis. In this sense, the questions ran parallel to my endeavors forming a holistic and organic relationship between the questions and myself. Whilst my thesis has already demonstrated an attempt to address these questions, the next section offers a more focused discussion about how I adopted a reflexive approach in my research, focusing specifically on questions of power, positionality, discussion and interview setting.

Adopting a reflexive approach is something which I have implemented from the start of this research. This is a skill which is often developed well into researchers' academic careers. It was important that I was wholly committed to questioning my own positionality in the research. As outlined in the introduction, it is my own identity (as a mixed ethnic woman with a Muslim father) which led me to this research. As a self-identifying mixed-race non-practicing Muslim, I was interested in how other women synthesised religious, gendered and cultural expectations on their identity - which at times, starkly contrasted one another. It is not uncommon for sociological and anthropological researchers to be drawn to topics which relate to their own experiences, knowledge or lives (Orsi 2005; Yip 2008). Researching an issue close to the researcher inevitably raises concerns about power and positionality, whilst also having significant benefits for research. Being 'an insider' had a number of advantages in the research process. Firstly, it proved beneficial for understanding cultural and religious terminology and ideas that outsiders would not ever completely understand or appreciate. Moreover, my personal experiences and knowledge proved beneficial in fostering a shared common identity with the participants which enabled me to adopt an empathetic approach and encourage participants to speak honestly. That said, being 'an insider' should not be over

relied on. I was careful to not make assumptions or lapse into homogenising aspects of my participants' identities. It was crucial that I executed the right balance of empathising with the participants while also remaining distant enough to analyse their individual experiences. Whilst I had a common identity with the participants, their lived experiences are individual to mine. Therefore, their stories are treated as unique, powerful and heartwarming. The women in this study took solace in opening up about their lives, many of whom had never discussed the complexity of their identities and were keen to shed light on their lives.

3.5 Ethics

The project received ethical clearance from the University of York's Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee in August 2019, before I began fieldwork (ELMPS 2019). The ethical principles and guidance outlined by the British Sociological Association informed the ethical approach I took during this process. During this process, all materials which related to this project were approached, this included: an information sheet, the process I would follow to gain consent and the consent form¹³. Preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of participants was the key focus in this process. Given that this research had the potential to uncover personal and arguably controversial material, close attention was paid to data security. Throughout the research all information associated with the participants was digitally stored under encryption, this included audio recordings, maps, images, transcripts and contact information. No interviews were printed out as it was not deemed necessary, and all participants were given pseudonyms from the outset of the fieldwork. This meant any data stored on them was saved under their pseudonym rather than their real name. I was clear in reassuring them that I would remove any identifying features from the transcripts (such as references to places and names of people). Participants were also made aware of contact numbers¹⁴ they could contact should they have any concerns. No issues were raised by participants across the fieldwork.

The safety of participants and researchers is often neglected in methodological literature (Bashir, 2017). I took a number of relevant safety precautions during the fieldwork. There

¹³ See appendix 4

¹⁴ See appendix 3 'information sheet' for contact details provided to participants if issues arise

were some specific practical and ethical considerations relating to walking interviews which I had to be mindful of prior to and during the walking interview. A number of researchers who have used walking interviews in their fieldwork have outlined some of the obstacles they have encountered as well as how to avoid them (Emmel and Clark 2010; Butler and Derrett 2014; Chang 2017). I took considerable guidance from previous attempts to carry out walking interviews and implemented this throughout my walking interviews. One factor raised was that weather can have significant ramifications on walking interviews (Carpiano 2009). Despite weather conditions being beyond researchers control, it was important that I, as the researcher, was prepared to make alternative plans. I was prepared to carry out the interview on a bus ride or to rearrange it entirely for another day. I also assessed with the participant both of our physical capabilities for the walking interview and made any adjustments that were deemed necessary, for example stopping at a cafe during the walk for a break.

As discussed above, prior to the walking interviews I also requested participants share their route with me so that I could assess the safety of the route. Participants were advised that interviews would be carried out in daylight and that their routes should avoid overly enclosed areas: fields, woodland areas for their own safety as well as mine. Requesting the routes in advance of the interviews gave me an opportunity to assess whether it was safe. It also meant that I could discuss the route with my partner before the interview and the time that I estimated that the interview would start and finish. To ensure that my whereabouts was known at all times, I also used the APPLE feature on my iPhone which enabled me to 'share my location' through GPS, this ensured that my partner was aware of my location at all times during the walking interview. My partner was the best person to share this information with as I live with him and the APPLE 'share your location' is a feature we regularly use in day to day life. Prior to the walking interview, I also discussed with participants whether they were happy to be seen walking alongside me and a plan for if we did bump into someone they knew. Some of the participants did not have any concerns here but others wished to simply introduce me as a family friend. What was key in terms of preparation for the walking interview was that the participant and I made a plan prior to the walk in order to avoid any confusion occurring during the walking interview which could disrupt the interview and cause unnecessary stress for the participant.

My experience 'in the field' proved to be a valuable asset during the process of obtaining ethical clearance and carrying out fieldwork. Having carried out fieldwork with a Department for Education project exploring the lives of young people in care¹⁵, I had exposure to the difficult and complex lives some young people lead. This gave me valuable knowledge for how to manage potentially sensitive and difficult conversations and how to manage my own emotions before, during and after the interview. My previous experience equipped me with the skills necessary to navigate difficult conversations, particularly when participants appeared apprehensive to divulge more information or required prompting. It was anticipated at the start of the research that the participants may raise topics that had the potential to be distressing, past research has demonstrated that belonging to groups which vary considerably in cultural norms and expectations can have significant impact on mental health (Abbas and Reeves 2020). For ethical reasons, I chose not to ask direct questions about people's mental health and instead allowed participants to lead in telling their stories. Where appropriate, I ensured that I communicated that there was support available. Additionally, the information sheets that participants were provided with prior to the fieldwork enclosed details of relevant support networks (including: MIND¹⁶) and more specific support groups aimed to support ethnic minority communities and women more generally. Prior to carrying out the fieldwork I also ensured that participants were aware that they could pause or withdraw entirely from the research and that there would be no repercussions. Throughout the study I also reminded participants that they could take breaks at any point. Some of my participants spoke openly about the support they had received both in the past and at present for their mental health and how talking about their identity in this research had been a healing and cathartic process. The women were confident and remarkably resilient who had at least some experience of difficulties managing their (often conflicting) identities. There was a shared consensus among the women in my study that they were pleased that academic research was shedding light on their identities, something which all, at some point, had struggled to reconcile with. Upon coding and analysis it did become clear that I had collected some depth of material regarding

¹⁵ Publications from my work carried out with young people in care:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/931985/House_Project_Final_evaluation_report.pdf &
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/931987/Staying_Close_Break.pdf

¹⁶ Mind charity contact details provided to participants:
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/#:~:text=Infoline%3A%200300%20123%203393>

the emotional welfare of the women and that this had scope for further enquiry. I could have explored this further in future interviews, however, my commitment to not cause harm to my participants was my main priority. Therefore, despite it feeling at times like a ‘wasted opportunity’ I remained committed to prioritising the wellbeing of participants and took solace in knowing it was something I could explore in future projects.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined my research process and in doing so, drew together my methodological steps with my theoretical approach. My participants have been introduced and I have discussed the importance of ‘giving a voice’ to an underrepresented and misunderstood group. I have highlighted the benefits of using interviews alongside photo elicitation and walking interviews. I have also reflexively considered my own positionality in the research. The methods discussed in this chapter have been selected for the ways in which they complement the research aims. That is not to say that they are the only methods which should be used, in fact, the variety of creative methods which could have been used leaves scope for further research. The next chapter presents the first of three analytical chapters.

4. Scales of Conflict

4.1 Introduction

The first analytical chapter of this thesis centres on stories of conflict predominantly within the home. Collectively, the three findings' chapters draw out the spatial distinctions that are associated with the temporal aspects of my participants' lives focusing predominantly on the home (chapter 4), the Middlesbrough community (chapter 5) and beyond (chapter 6) . It would be disingenuous to ignore the fact that all my participants in this thesis and most likely, for many women who live at the intersection of religion, mixed ethnicity and gender, experience various forms of struggle, conflict and confusion. A significant volume of research has explored pious British Muslim identities in the UK context, while relatively little research has explored people's ambivalent relationships with Muslim faith and identity, such as in the context of mixed ethnic families and how this affects family and home life. Research in similar fields have contributed to an understanding of managing other (seemingly) incompatible identities including: British Muslim identities, LGBTQ religious identities and White Muslim converts (Allievi 1998; Amer 2020). On the whole, religious membership is widely discussed in binary terms (Muslim/not Muslim), despite the women in this study illustrating that they straddled the influence of Islam and influences outside of

Islam simultaneously which provides an interesting frame to consider multiple and complex identities. The women in this thesis present a unique situation whereby these conflicting expectations permeate their immediate households and families, making them arguably more intense and inescapable. The stories of struggle which are heard in this chapter are predominantly extracted from the women's childhood and adolescence - a period of life which nearly all of them identified as notably difficult. There was a running theme in all of the women's stories about involvement from extended family and the wider community being a source of conflict and frustration in the immediate family home. The women experienced their freedom and lifestyle choices as inherently policed by religious and cultural expectations, and expressed frustration that their identities were frequently misunderstood identities. More broadly, this speaks to research which has identified 'coming of age' as a particularly influential period which shapes people's experiences of religion (Orsi 1999; Wuthnow 2020). In addition, 'coming of age' literature has historically recognised adolescence as a challenging 'transitional' period in people's lives, characterised by concerns around increased independence, role change and decision making for the future (Coleman 1980; Lesko 2012).

The stories heard relate to how the women navigated conflicting challenges typically associated with intersectional identities of gender, religion, race and ethnicity, in relation to identities conferred upon them by living in a stigmatised urban setting in the Northeast of England. I consider the forms of fragmentations and conflict which permeate my participants' lives. I differentiate between the different scales of struggle experienced, including wider social struggles, pragmatic issues and internal subjective struggles which permeate my participants' lives. All of the women came forward with stories about feeling 'on the border' of the various spaces and groups they encountered. Most of the women described their mother's and father's sides of the family as two, separate and polarised groups with little to no contact or cultural similarity between the two. Moreover, their narratives were inherently characterised by broader socio-political patterns of exclusion, including undercurrents of Islamophobia and microaggressions in Middlesbrough which shaped their experiences of: social life; family and peers; wider politics, culture and media. These stories of struggle speak to scholarly recognition of urban space (Massey 1994; Rogaly 2020) and institutional religion (Jeldtoft 2011; Zubair and Zubair 2017; Ekstrom et al. 2019) as inherently bound up with power imbalances. Both urban and lived religion scholars have argued that spaces are

constructed in a way which perpetuates the exclusion of women and minority identities (Jeldoft 2011). Hence, while the women's stories of 'struggle' and 'conflict' varied, they were all characterised by a sense of frustration that they did not fit naturally into Middlesbrough's socio-political landscape. This landscape was characterised by ethnic and religious groups predominantly 'sticking together' and conservative cultural interpretations of Islam taking precedence among the Muslim community. Furthermore, the intersection of rising of far right politics, Brexit and concerns regarding immigration which have dominated the socio-political landscape of Middlesbrough in recent years have also exacerbated essentialist understandings about Islam and ethnicity, including Islam as a monolithic religion (Modood 2008; Allen 2010; Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Kumar 2012; Meer and Werbner 2005; Telford and Wistow 2019; Abbas 2020).

I begin this chapter by exploring the complex ways that my participants experience or have experienced struggle, including their experiences of inclusion and exclusion and managing conflicting expectations. This contributes to the study of 'belonging' and 'exclusion' (Manzo 2003; Ammerman 2005; Bamford 2014; Singh 2014). Drawing on the contextual specificities which shaped their lives, I explore how the women lived Islam in a context of two 'culturally unconnected' sides of family. I also draw on the socio-political climate of their town and how broader understandings of minority identities shaped the women's struggle. By drawing attention to a group of women whose lived experiences of Islam operate increasingly at the margins of aspects of daily life, I conclude this chapter by drawing attention to the women's difficulties navigating feelings of fear, shame and guilt, which arose from their exclusion and mis-identification. I discuss how this was limiting and even detrimental to mixed ethnic women, and some of the parallels this has with scholarly work exploring the rejection and internal conflict experienced by LGBTQ+ people growing up in faith households (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; Anderton et al. 2011; Anderson and Koc 2020; Jackson-Taylor 2021) and the emotional self (Lupton 1998). Importantly, this contributes to a necessary shift from institutional depictions of faith membership and acknowledges the women's everyday struggles of navigating these discourses and narratives.

4.2 Locating struggle

Nearly all of the women described their families and backgrounds (specifically their mixed-ethnic and Islamic backgrounds) in stark opposition throughout their childhood and adolescent years. While each of them discussed how they learnt to navigate conflicting expectations and how this shaped their lived experiences of Islam (which will be discussed further in the next chapters), adolescence was identified as a particularly difficult stage of the life course characterised by increased conflict within the home and struggle with the wider society due to their relationships with Islam. Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to telling the women's stories of conflict. I consider the different fragments of conflict that my participants experience, including structural, subjective and pragmatic issues in their everyday lives. Considerable conflict described by the women was situated in broader religious and social narratives of Islam and imposed on the women and in turn, shaped their encounters with family, community and wider social life. I also draw attention to external conflict such as in relation to the structured components of contemporary British life and how these structures and expectations manifested in the online world, something which all the women discussed and demonstrated visually as internally difficult to manage. I end this section by discussing the subjective conflict this caused for my participants, in relation to fear, shame and guilt.

4.2.1 Polarised families

The first site of conflict I located in my participants' lives was family. There was an overriding consensus among the women that cultural, ethnic and religious differences kept the participants' mother and father's sides of the family socially, culturally and physically apart, and as such their family was made up of two very separate and different worlds. Aneela is 20 years old, she is of Scottish, Indian and African ethnicity and unlike the majority of participants her connection to Islam was through her mother¹⁷. Her father did not convert to Islam and Aneela's exposure to Islam was largely through her mother's upbringing and extended family - where Islamic and cultural expectations were prevalent. When asked to describe her family, Aneela described her mother and fathers family as 'complete opposites':

“So there's a big drinking culture on my dad's side, he's Scottish, a lot of them are alcoholics. My dad had a pretty bad experience growing up. He won't really

¹⁷ See appendix 1 for short profile on Aneela

touch alcohol, his brothers and sisters were alcoholics, a lot of their children were alcoholics. A lot of their partners were also alcoholics, one of them used to have a bottle of whiskey for breakfast. Obviously the other side will not have a drop of alcohol, very conservative, very halal. Swearing as well, you wouldn't hear any swearing on my mum's side and smart, educated, proper. I wouldn't say education was a big thing on my dad's side.”

(Aneela)

Here Aneela situates her broader family as two polar opposites, drawing on very binary descriptions. She immediately discusses her family's relationship with alcohol to illustrate the distinctions between her mother and father's side of the family. This suggests that alcohol is something she perceives as a clear indicator of the cultural differences between them. Alcohol consumption is undoubtedly an obvious symbolic difference between popular Western culture (especially among young adults) and basic tenets of Islam (see: Dwyer 1999, 2000, 2008; Nyhagen 2004; Liberatore 2017).

Emma is also 21, she grew up with a Pakistani father who is practicing Islam, and an Indian mother who Emma described as ‘basically English’¹⁸. Her mother converted to Islam due to her father requesting it of her when they married, however, she did not practice Islam in day to day life:

“My mum’s mum is totally chilled about everything, basically English, very liberal, like she’s fine about all the grandkids having boyfriends or girlfriends etc. and like one of my cousins is lesbian and she’s fine about that and welcoming of everyone. Even though she’s Indian she has integrated, for example, she worked in a factory when she came to England and has made English friends and learnt the language. When she was alive her and my granddad would mix with English couples too sometimes. I think this is the key difference between my mum and dad's side... My grandma on my dad's side cannot speak a word of English, she rarely leaves the house as she lives with my aunties family as one big extended family. She doesn’t need to do anything as my auntie does everything for her. Can you see the big cultural difference here in terms of integration? This has a big impact on our relationship with

¹⁸ See appendix 1 for short profile on Emma

my dad's side. With my dad's family we would not even mention relationships, boys etc., my grandma would want us to marry Muslims. To be honest the language barrier is a big enough barrier but then there's all the cultural and religious stuff thrown onto that too”

(Emma)

Interestingly, both Aneela and Emma drew on visible markers of religion to illustrate the distinctions between their mother and father’s family, including: dietary practices, clothing and views. Muslim and not-Muslim were situated as two unique categories, with entirely different lifestyles and outlooks.

Emma went on to illustrate the physical separation of her mother and father’s side of the family, which was typical of all but one of the women’s families:

“While we (me and my siblings) are close to both sides of the family, there wasn’t contact between both sides though for all our childhood. My mum’s mum and dad’s mum both met for the first time not that long ago and even my dad only met my mum’s family a few years ago. Their parents weren’t happy about their marriage ‘cos of the Pakistani and Indian clash. My mum's dad was unhappy for years, it was only when she had her first kid that he agreed to let her back in their home and it was only when we were in secondary and he thought he was going to die that he agreed to let my dad come round, then they all met and it was fine. They really got along, they are so similar they love politics and history”.

(Emma)

Emma’s reference to her grandfather's thoughts on approaching death are extremely powerful here. It highlights how entrenched cultural, religious and even global conflict was in her family. It was only when her grandfather was approaching the end of his life he changed his outlook and wanted to meet her father. Emma speaks about things being ‘fine’ now. This is interesting, Emma does not mean this experience was without difficulty, there had after all been decades of physical separation and hostility, but rather, she captures how quickly things felt amicable and resolved once her grandfather had reconciled that her father was Muslim and above all not so dissimilar to himself. In referring to ‘*the Pakistani and Indian clash*’,

Emma acknowledges wider narratives of conflict here, including historical religious conflict stemming from 1947 between India and Pakistan. The aftermath of the Partition in 1947 saw the creation of a separate Islamic state of Pakistan for Muslims, during this time there was large scale sectarian strife and bloodshed throughout the nation. Emma's example of conflict between her family is unique here, it encompasses global politics stemming back from the 20th century and captures the wide tendency for older generations to not shift in their beliefs and ways of life. Emma's story is undoubtedly testament to the inaccuracy of dominant narratives surrounding Islam and that the telling of this story is vital to challenge historical homogenisation of Muslims and Islamophobia (Gupta and Furguson 1992; Puwar 2004; Jeldoft 2013). Popular narratives have relied heavily on depictions of Muslims as a homogenised and uniform group, reinforcing Islam as the dominant aspect of their identity. Emma's powerful story captures the important role other important aspects of identity can play and equally challenges popular understandings of so called 'incompatible' identities.

4.2.2 *Community exclusion*

Another site of conflict described by my participants relates to the structural issues they faced with the wider Muslim community. When hearing about how growing up and living in Middlesbrough shaped the women's lives, it was quickly apparent that there was a deep sense of frustration that the Islamic culture and attitudes popular among Middlesbrough's Muslim and broader ethnic community did not accommodate their mixed-ethnic identities. Parallel to this, was also a deep sense of unease that they were 'visible' among the Muslim community. The women's frustrations about the local Middlesbrough community varied in nature and strength but can broadly be categorised into two overriding issues. The first concerned the racial stereotyping and micro aggressions they experienced, and the second ties more closely with their religious stance being assumed (e.g. that they were or at least, *should* be practicing Muslims).

Lily's experience of racism captures some of the detrimental ways people navigate unclear identities. Lily is 25 years old, and her father is Persian, and her mother is English¹⁹. Lily's experiences of Islam mostly manifested when she visited her father's family abroad as her father was non practicing. However, cultural expectations associated with Iran and Islam

¹⁹ See short profile for Lily in appendix 1

influenced his parenting style. Unlike Emma (who was brown skinned), she described her visual appearance as “*a bit unclear*”. Lily described herself as having white skin but dark features, which made her ethnicity often ambiguous to others. She recalled two encounters of racism which stood out in her life:

“A racist experience which really stands out to me happened on Halloween a few years ago. I was queuing up outside a nightclub in Middlesbrough town center, and this boy behind me in the queue was like ‘what's your name?’ and I said ‘Lily’ and he said ‘what's your surname’ and I said ‘Hasan’ and he said ‘URGHH’ and he was like borking you know like mimicking being sick while he said it...and I was like ‘what?’ and I said ‘fuck off you racist bastard’. When I was inside I asked someone inside who he was, he was definitely being racist I didn't even know him. That's the most recent thing where I was like what the hell. I was so angry I said to my friend that I was with to just turn around and ignore him but it really affected my night obviously and I was conscious of it all evening”.

(Lily)

“So yeah I was in year 7 I had only been at secondary school for a few months and I was on a computer in a lesson called ‘opening mind’ and my teacher came up to me and said ‘are you Jewish? And I said ‘no, why?’ and she said ‘oh just cos of your nose’... Yeah, how bad is that. At the time I wouldn't have known what a Jewish nose is, I told my mum and as soon as she found out she marched into the school to speak to the head of house. She was called Miss Jackson, she was only in the school for a year and a half... SO BAD.”

(Lily)

Both of these incidents illustrate racist attempts to understand ethnic identities which are more ambiguous and broader patterns of colorism which are innately embedded in society. Colorism can be defined as the allocation of privilege and disadvantage based on the lightness or darkness of a person's skin (Hunter 2007). This supports the idea that people are heavily reliant and comfortable using visual markers to identify different ethnic and religious

groups. Most notably, this illustrates the structuring effects of whiteness in society and how 'passing' as white can afford racial and ethnic privilege (Ginsberg 1996; Ahmed 1999; Hunter 2007). It also emphasises the strategies people undertake in order to understand less obvious identities. Lily felt that her surname made her identifiably Muslim which prompted the boy to express disgust. Reflecting back to secondary school, Lily also spoke about the time she was asked if she was Jewish due to her nose. Lily remembered feeling extremely embarrassed when she asked her mother what this meant, she was noticeably shocked when she reflected on this and sought comfort in the hope that this would not happen today due to better awareness of antisemitism and hostility towards Jewish people. Lily identified this as a racial microaggression, she spoke about how, at the time, it had been highly embarrassing, but now, as an adult it spoke volumes about hostility towards ethnic minorities, including both Muslims and Jewish people in Middlesbrough.

Aneela also drew on a number of images to discuss her experiences of racism and microaggressions across secondary school. One image stood out (see: image 5), it was Aneela with her classmates in secondary school. I let Aneela discuss this image for some time as it was clear that it had recalled a number of memories that were both useful for Aneela to vent her frustrations and for my understandings of their experiences of racism:



Image 5: Aneela school party

“I remember being called the N word and Zulu warrior, not in a horrible way, a jokey way. It is weird now looking back and thinking it was a joke at the time because in reality it is actually really bad...Also, it was a big thing in secondary, the idea that Muslims are terrorists. Obviously this was around the London bombing times where there was a big fear of terrorist attacks. So that was something that was often mentioned too. I would really try and disassociate myself with Muslims, I would say I am not Muslim and even join in with the terrorist jokes... In terms of changing my physical appearance, I would whitewash my skin with white foundation, wear white eyeliner to make my eyes less dark, and straighten my hair to the point it burnt off, this was to appear more English”

(Aneela)

Whilst she justified this comment as a joke at the time, this did prompt Aneela to engage in significant attempts in secondary school to fit into the dominant white standard of beauty that was popular at the time she was at school. Aneela spoke about how she would ‘*whitewash*’ her skin in school with the wrong shade of foundation, in order to appear paler. She also spoke about routinely straightening her hair to the point it was heat damaged, and the relief that it has grown back now. This relates to Daribi’s (2020) work on the complexity of hair as a symbol of cultural identity. Dabiri writes about the time consuming process of chemically straightening hair she, and many other women with Afro hair grow up subscribing to. Like Aneela, Dabiri grew up in a mixed Black and White family and describes a difficult relationship with her hair as a child. Later, Aneela spoke about how her relationship with her hair has since evolved and she wears her curls more often now at university. This, like Dabiri’s decision, was a political decision to re-establish a connection with her body and ethnicity.

This also speaks to an important body of research which explores the significant role which interfaith dialogue plays in generating power relations and fostering belonging (or lack of) (Sanderson and Thomas 2014 and Orton 2016). Collins (1986) argues that identities can be situated within a ‘matrix of domination’, as identity negotiation often occurs within the intersections of social hierarchies. Orton’s (2016) pays particular attention to these power hierarchies, arguing that the relationship between identity and interfaith dialogue demonstrates that various elements of identity (including relationships and conditions) can aid interfaith dialogue in relation to inclusion and exclusion. Orton (2016) shows the importance of communication across faith and secular individuals and groups within civil societies, paying particular attention to the relationship between identity and interfaith dialogue. He argues that various elements of identity (including, geography and conditions) can aid interfaith dialogue in relation to inclusion and exclusion. Sanderson and Thomas’s (2014) intersectional research also illustrates how interfaith dialogue can generate power relations which lead to inclusion and exclusion. Their research explores the ways that young Muslims and white non-Muslims from Oldham and Rochdale self-identify through a process of ‘othering’. For example, the negative views that both groups of participants had of their counterparts or ‘out-groups’ was pivotal to how they themselves self-identified. Aneela’s attempts to visually fit into western beauty standards also relates to Cresswell’s (2015) thoughts on ‘knowing your place’. Cresswell (2015) argues that the notion of knowing where

an individual should be situated in a specific environment results from judgement when people are viewed as transgressing their social spaces and entering another social group's space. Thus, individuals are viewed as being “out - of - place” which illustrates some of the motivations behind Aneela’s attempts to fit in.

Interestingly, Lily and Aneela were the only participants in my research who recalled particularly overt experiences of racism. This was interesting as, unlike most of the other women, Lily and Aneela admitted that they have occasionally passed as white. Aneela offered an interesting observation relating to this. She recalled that people often made racial slurs in her presence because in her words:

“It is mad because I will hear derogatory comments or racial slurs and the people who say these things will assume I am fully English because of my skin, or worse that I will not mind. That is a very uncomfortable position to be in to be honest. There have been times where I have even been with my dad who visually is more obviously an ethnic minority and I have just hoped that he couldn’t hear what was being said...”

(Aneela)

While white skin is undoubtedly associated with racial and ethnic privilege, the women here did not experience this as such. Their white skin tone combined with different features (such as afro hair, darker eyes and Muslim names) actually created a more ambiguous identity which invited unwanted attention and probing, rather than privilege. Figueroa’s (2013) work focuses on appearance and racialised perceptions of skin colour in relation to mixed ethnicity in Mexico. She considers what beauty does in people's lives through discussing the contrasts between *being* and *feeling* acceptable, pretty or ugly and displacement produced from being to feeling. She argues that beauty matters as it highlights the pervasiveness of racism in everyday life. Visual markers such as skin colour and people’s birth names played a significant role in how the women in this study perceived themselves, and were perceived by others, in a range of social settings. This relates also to Hall (1991), Root (1996) and Song (2012, 2017) whose contributions to new ethnicities literature also considers the prevalence of more ambiguous ethnic identities in the U.K. Song identified the increase of parents attempting to capture the hybridity of cultural and ethnic traditions within their parenting practices through opting double barrel surnames for their children. Interestingly, the

significance of the racialisation of names was also illustrated in Lily's experience of racism and Islamophobia. This speaks to wider literature on processes of racialisation in the U.K (Omi and Winant 1986). Omi and Winant's (1986) focus on the ways that race is defined to reproduce racism is particularly illustrative in the hostility Lily faced when she told someone her surname.

As well as visually distancing themselves from their mixed ethnicity, several of the women verbally distanced themselves from Islam in a bid to fit in with peers. Lily expressed remorse and guilt that she would at times 'join in on jokes' which aligned Islam with terrorism or verbally state their stance against Islam so that they did not 'look like terrorists'. Lily felt immense guilt that she engaged in this behavior as a child. I reassured Lily not to worry and that it was not her fault. We quickly moved on as I could tell she was not comfortable, but it was clear that Lily and Aneela were embarrassed about their previous attempts to align themselves with such narratives. Both of the women had undoubtedly experienced the negative effects of the post-9/11 sociopolitical climate, where heightened fears around terrorism increased hostility towards Muslims (Telford and Wistow 2019). Both of them were now grown women who were passionate about equality and were active allies in challenging xenophobia, homophobia and Islamophobia. These distancing techniques demonstrate that there was a conscious understanding among the women, as children, that institutional Islamophobia and racism influenced their lives. More importantly, it also demonstrated that they were aware that they could manipulate and overcome these systems by adapting their visual appearance, in an attempt to be accepted. This illustrates how emotion and risk are configured through social and cultural processes and through interaction with material objects, people, space and place. It also relates to the ways that emotions and risk judgements are fluid, shared and collective, rather than located within the individual (Lupton 1989). This also relates to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of shame in which he draws on shame to illustrate how social structures are embodied in everyday practice. As Bourdieu (1987) accounts:

'The analysis of objective structures – those of different fields – is inseparable from the analysis of the genesis at the heart of biological individuals of mental structures which are in one instance the product of the incorporation of social structures themselves: social space and the groups which are distributed across it, are the

product of historical struggles (in which agents are engaged by function of their position in social space and the mental structures through which they comprehend this space)' (1987:24).

Bourdieu (1987) argued that individuals are agents formed through and by mental structures: the ideas and representations relating to different structural identifiers, e.g. class and gender, etc. Agents incorporate these representations or structures as they move in social spaces. These mental representations shape how people move and which spaces they can move in. Bourdieu's description captures the 'out of placeness' people feel when their bodies defy the norms and expectations of a situation.

Some of the other women targeted their frustrations about being stereotyped and misunderstood at the Muslim community. Both Amber and Emma spoke about their difficulties navigating this. Amber is 23, she grew up with a Pakistani Muslim mother and an English father, her relationship with Islam is only via mixing with her mother's extended family. Amber and Emma, collectively, were the only women who had a Pakistani parent. Their frustrations about being racially stereotyped in the Muslim community centered towards a lack of understanding among the Pakistani community about mixed ethnic people. Amber quote poignantly captures this:

"It's funny, the extent to which people stereotype. Obviously it happens all over the U.K. but I think in towns and smaller areas there is a tendency for narrow minded people to form very stereotypical perceptions of what Muslims and people in general to be honest, They see that you're brown and assumes you're a full-fledged Muslim even though actually, half my family is white and I don't identify as practicing Muslim and neither does my mum! it's hilarious they think my skin can tell the full story, our family is so complicated skin colour is 1% of it all"

(Amber)

I asked Amber what she meant when she referred to a 'full-fledged Muslim', she described this as someone who is practicing Islam, typically their full household is made up of practicing Muslims, and they are fully engaged with Islam in day to day life through things like prayer, diet and clothing choices. The contrast she makes is interestingly not between

Muslim and non-Muslim but actually between Muslim and white, illustrating clear processes of racialisation. Amber spoke about her relationship with Islam being more complex, due to her mixed ethnic background. Emma firmly believed that it was her skin colour which made her identifiably 'Muslim'. Like Aneela and Emma's descriptions of their families, Amber's frustrations similarly illustrated that visible markers of religious identity played a significant role in how others viewed her and in turn, understood her religious and ethnic identity. Historically, people have drawn on visual markers to describe minority groups, especially Muslims who are heavily racialised in popular narratives (Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Garner and Selod 2014; Pratt and Woodlock 2016; Garner and Parvez 2020). In the above extract from Amber, it is also evident that societal reliance on visual markers can result in the misrecognition of a person. Amer's (2020) study is particularly illustrative of some of the frustrations which can arise from reliance on visual markers. Amer (2020) explores experiences of religious misidentification and 'Whiteness' among White Muslim converts in the U.K. The study found that White Muslim converts experienced misidentification through others assuming that they were not Muslim due to their white skin colour. They also faced skepticism from the Muslim community about their loyalty and dedication to Islam due to their white convert status. Like Amber, the converts in Amer's research were mis-identified and overlooked in a context which heavily racialises Muslims as 'brown'. Put simply, being brown was seen as authentically Muslim (and thus prescribed a higher status in Amer's study), whereas being white was not (and consequently deemed lower in status). This hierarchical understanding of race in Islam is evident in Amber's experience and she captures how it worked in detriment for her. It also illustrated how identity, for Amber, was relational with comparisons being made between her mixed ethnicity and the Muslims who expressed a clearer racial identity. This has a number of parallels with Garner and Parvez's (2020) study which, as discussed in chapter two, explored how being black fits into the racial hierarchy at play in Muslim communities. Garner and Parvez (2020) identified the tendency among non-black Muslims to promote racial stereotypes about Black Muslims and dismiss the legitimacy of a connection between Islam and blackness. Like many of my participants who experienced racialisation, Garner and Parvez (2020) illustrates the prevalence of racial discrimination within already discriminated religions and ethnic minority groups. In this sense, Muslim 'legitimacy' is often viewed in relation to what is seen as authentically Muslim in terms of race.

During the walking interviews, it became clear how understandings of acceptable racial identities were fueled by Middlesbrough's landscape. During each interview, I was able to see a very clear social and geographical organisation of ethnic minority groups. Jenny offered insight into this during her walking interview. Jenny is 20 years old. Her mother is Norwegian and her father Pakistani Muslim²⁰. We walked down the main road which led into Middlesbrough town center, she pointed out the places different ethnic groups would go and the clothing they would wear, for example she identified the side streets where different ethnic groups were concentrated. Their visibility was exacerbated by Middlesbrough being small in size, and there was a strong (and often unwelcome) sense among several of the women that 'everyone knew everyone' and that as a result, there was 'nowhere to hide'. Emma's walking interview was particularly poignant in depicting how living in a close-knit town exacerbated some of the issues they faced concerning their visibility as a group. She designed her route strategically, capturing her struggles navigating spaces and her relational experience of moving out of central Middlesbrough to the outskirts of the town. As we walked round the town center she laughed about memories from her teenage years. She described instances where she would hide if she saw 'the aunties':

“As a teenager I would always be ducking and diving to hide from the aunties in town. It was a major anxiety going to town. I still don't understand why they were and still are! so bothered... I am not lying when I say this I think they literally see themselves as messengers of God as though they have been directly appointed to do God's work. Thing is, it's not in a caring way, it's to spread gossip and it's to make their daughters and themselves look better than me - in the eyes of god but mostly I think, the community. It's very much like Victorian day where everyone's in competition for a marital partner and family, community scandal, tarnishing the family name, all that kind of thing, it's very similar!”

(Jenny)

When I asked Jenny why she felt the need to be “constantly on guard”, she spoke about her wanting to avoid being the subject of scrutiny in the Muslim community and her fear it would come back to her family. Importantly, Jenny was not referring to her biological aunties, albeit she only had one in Middlesbrough - something which she expressed relief about, but rather

²⁰ See short profile for Jenny in appendix 1

aunties referred to the older female generation in the Pakistani Muslim community. Whilst auntie is commonly used as a term of respect across BAME communities, the term has become symbolic of the broader cultural gatekeeping at play, whereby older generations guide (to varying degrees and through various measures) younger generations behavior in the public realm. Jenny captures this in her reference to ‘messengers of God’, describing the auntie's day to day policing to ensure people behaved within the parameters of what they deemed acceptable for Muslim women. For Jenny, this meant actively erasing any suggestions that she was anything but Muslim, despite straddling multiple identities, however illustrates a strong sense of agency in her attempt to humorously deceive the aunties.

Studies have shown that individuals with seemingly incompatible identities are sometimes viewed by fellow in-group members as threatening the stability of their specific group boundaries (Hopkins 2011; Amer 2020; Jackson-Taylor 2021). Some of the women also recognised that community pressure also instigated conflict within the home with parents . Emma spoke about how her dad ‘just wanted to please his family’ and ‘mum just wants to keep dad happy’ which caused significant stress in and beyond the household. This supports Hennink et al. 's (1999) and Azam’s (2006) findings about Islamic restrictions being shaped by parental pressure to behave in line with Islamic expectations in order to preserve the family’s reputation. Thus, while community has been identified to be a source of enablement and support for some individuals and groups, for the women the Muslim community was experienced as deeply constraining. Researchers have found that despite family and community affording group solidarity in religious communities, the same solidarity can also act as a potential site for intergenerational tension, particularly when considering the historical context of ethnic-minority Muslims migrating to the U.K. (Anwar 1985; Berthoud 1997; Becher 2008; Modood et al. 2010).

For Emma and many of the other women, transgressing perceived ‘norms’ in the Muslim community meant being highly visible, vulnerable and subject to social sanctioning. The urban and religious imaginaries at play here were clear. Perceptions of identity incompatibility were influenced by stereotypes and assumptions in spaces where people have ideas about what ‘fits’ and does not 'fit' the urban landscape, something which many scholars have identified (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994; Soja 1996; Puwar 2004; Rogaly 2020). Additionally, research has captured the negative effects which can arise from a person's

identity not being recognised by others, particularly those identities which unite seemingly ‘incompatible’ or conflicting groups. For example, British Muslims (Archer 2001; Shah et al. 2010) or gay Christians (Jackson-Taylor 2021). Thus, how the women thought people perceived their identities was just as important as how they actually perceived them. Howarth (2002) adds that it is also important who these others are, and their power to make their representations dominant in society. In the above extract, Amber also talks about Middlesbrough’s Muslim community (and Middlesborough more generally) lacking knowledge about mixed ethnic people. This enabled the dominant Muslim community control and influence of mixed ethnic women which was hard to avoid and resist. Their appearance and behavior was heavily shaped by community expectations (exerted through gossiping and regular reminders) and so my participants were conscious to avoid social sanctioning and conflict with their family and the local community. This speaks to broader understanding of heavily stereotyped groups (Gupta and Furguson 1992; Puwar 2004; Lachenicht 2011; Jeldoft 2013). When identities and their associated stereotypes are highly visible (as illustrated by the over saturation of political and cultural narratives on Muslims) this can shape the lens through which these identities are viewed (The Runnymede Trust 1997; Vervotec 2002; Modood 2002; Muir and Laura 2004; Cummins 2004; Modood 2008; Allen 2010; Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Kumar 2012; Meer and Werbner 2005; Abbas 2020). In addition, it can distort the extent to which identities are visible within already minority groups. This has significant ramifications for people who have more unusual identity pairings (e.g. Muslim and mixed ethnic; Muslim and English; Muslim and white). The women in this study are positioned as minorities within an already minority group. Being mixed ethnic and connected to Islam was deemed unpopular and there was an overriding expectation in Middlesbrough that being Muslim meant being unequivocally *only* Muslim.

4.2.3 Managing online identities

One of the more pragmatic conflicts that my participants faced was in the online world. The surveillance that characterised many of the women's stories of struggle were found to also permeate their online worlds, something which has been identified in literature exploring exclusion of minorities in online spaces (Awan 2014; Al-Rawi 2022). Central to these stories was a deep frustration among the women about their visibility on social media sites (like Instagram and Facebook) and that they were tired of trying to attain a level of privacy in light of the on-going surveillance they face. More broadly, visibility is a significant theme through

this chapter and this section foreground the strategies my participants used to feel less conspicuous online. This was particularly illustrative in the second phase of interviews with the women, during which they were asked to bring images which they identified as illustrative of their identities and lives and could be used as talking points during the interviews. All the women who took part in the photo interviews brought at least one picture that related to social media. Interestingly a number of women presented me with extensive lists of the accounts they had blocked from viewing their account. I considered these images as particularly poignant depictions of their online struggles. They immediately alluded to the extent some of my participants went to in a bid to secure online privacy, what was potentially at stake if their privacy was compromised and lastly, their desire to present their authentic selves online despite existing in a space permeated with conflicting expectations.

Among all my participants, Liz presented me with the most extensive list of family members she had blocked over the years. Liz's father is French and her mother Pakistani Muslim. She was raised as a practicing Muslim but has distanced herself from Islam now. Her list was particularly memorable as every account user had the same surname. Liz described the list as members of her mother's family, hence why they all shared surnames and that most of them lived in Zimbabwe. She laughed nervously and I sensed that she either felt guilty or embarrassed, or both:

“The main reason I've blocked all these people is because I don't want them to see images of me drinking alcohol, wearing revealing clothing or with boys. I don't want the family to talk to for it to reflect badly on my mum, even if we haven't been raised properly Muslim we are still seen as traitors. Even though they are miles away it would get back to my mum and it would be embarrassing. I do feel bad obviously, but this is the nature of it”

(Liz)

I was intrigued as to what 'properly Muslim' meant. I asked Liz to elaborate and she referred to socially conservative understandings of Islam such as girls staying predominantly in the house, not socialising much and the expectation that they would have an arranged marriage. Using the word 'traitor' was also a strong use of words to illustrate Liz's social positioning in

relation to the Muslim community and lack of understanding in society about the different aspects and influences which shaped positioning with Islam and ethnicity. Liz's use of the phrasing 'the nature of it' also stood out to me as an interesting choice of words. Whilst it did not explicitly give anything away, the use of 'it' suggested that - whilst it was too complicated to explain - there was a deeply ingrained system in place that was widely acknowledged, accepted and adhered to. I followed this up with Liz to gain some clarification, I was also interested to hear her opinions on what she was referring to:

"y'know being mixed and having Muslim family and the fact there's this gossipy mentality where they feel the need to report back, it's shit for me but it'll probably never change and now everyone (even old people) have social media, it's even worse. Obviously, my family isn't going to disown me. They aren't like that, but they would say that I can't go out or be stricter with me" .

(Liz)

Liz's frustrations illustrate that there are significant costs at stake if she were to disclose her social activities, relationships or choice of clothing to everyone online. Aneela was aware of what being revealed or 'exposed' online to Muslim families (both in the U.K. and transnationally) meant, both in terms of conflict with her parents and limitations on her freedom. This suggests that even though living in a city or at least at some distance from family can afford some anonymity (Sennett 2002 ; Tonkiss 2003), networks in the Muslim community are tight-knit and gossip can spread fast even when people attempt to take precautions. The captures how religious imaginaries transcend online as well as offline spaces. There was a shared consensus among the women that living in an age of social media created a transnational bridge between their immediate lives and family abroad. Importantly, this meant that their online identities were shaped not only by and in relation to their local Muslim community, but also, the international presence of Muslim families online. This speaks to wider research exploring the effects of increasing transnationalism and its impacts on children of migrants (Vertovec 2001; Gardner and Grillo 2002; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Byng 2017). Particularly pertinent are questions about how transnationalism forms expressions of religious, gendered and national identity. The effects of transnationalism means that identity is influenced and shaped by social relationships which transcend national borders. As defined by Levitt and Schiller (2004), transnationalism means ' . . . identities and cultural production reflect their multiple locations' (p.1006). This also relates to place

attachment, and captures the amalgamation of conditions which shape the construction, negotiation and reproduction of social identities (Vertovec 2001, p. 573). Typically, transnationalism has been discussed in a positive light affording transnational migrants to be socially embedded in multiple locations, sites, and modes of communication. It has also allowed them to participate in organisations which assist settlement and ties to countries of origin (Lacroix 2014). The women demonstrated a consciousness that familial, cultural, and religious ties to their parents' countries of origin influenced their use of social media and more broadly, their identities (Gardner and Grillo 2002). This sentiment was also acknowledged aptly by Emma who said:

“Social media has to be the biggest issue I have had. It’s very difficult to hide on Instagram. It's all images and videos. I have to be extremely careful especially when I was younger and lived at home. I’d use privacy settings and blocking function to try manage this”

(Emma)

Zoe is 24 years old and grew up with an Algerian Muslim father and an Italian mother²¹. She told me about the strategies and tactics she utilised when managing her identity on social media. The remedy sought by Zoe is perhaps illustrative of the significant role social media has on people’s lives (Awan 2014; Al-Rawi 2022). From hearing about the difficulties of women in my studies and difficulties navigating social media, it was clear why one would give up entirely trying to. While all the women used different levels of privacy settings, Sameela was the only participant who, in addition to privacy settings, managed two separate Instagram accounts. I asked Zoe why she felt that this was necessary:

“I’ve tried the whole blocking people but something always gets shared. Plus, I feel bad. It’s embarrassing seeing these people in person and I’ve blocked them all. Sometimes they ask for my social media in person! and it's obvious that I am lying if I say I don’t have social media because who doesn’t have it in this day and age!. Keeping things separate is the best. I can keep everyone happy. I have one for Muslims and one for everyone else/ I just have trusted family and friends on the

²¹ See appendix 1 for short profile on Zoe

account that I post anything on then the other one is Muslim friendly content for Muslim family mainly”

(Sameela)

As Sameela described ‘keeping things separate’, helped her overcome the contradicting expectations of her mixed-ethnic, Muslim and British identity. One account was made up of ‘Muslim friendly content’ which she elaborated as meaning ‘no alcohol, no boys, no partying’ and the other was a more unfiltered representation of her, for only ‘trusted family and friends’. The struggles described by the women when using online social media platforms were underpinned by a deep frustration that they - or at least how they wanted to be - did not fit naturally into the landscape they existed in. A lack of recognition or actual denial of a person's identity can be considerably detrimental to one's sense of self (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, the next section explores the impact this had on the women’s sense of self and general wellbeing.

4.2.4. Internal conflict

The pragmatic conflicts that my participants discussed as significant when navigating their identities online relates to some of the more internal and subjective conflicts (like shame and guilt) that my participants faced. The stories heard in this chapter are undoubtedly characterised by difficulty. Fear, shame and guilt are unfortunately common emotions among people who have experienced distancing, exclusion and rejection in families and religious and urban communities (Bondi and Rose 2003; Kern 2021; Jackson-Taylor 2021). As aforementioned, Lupton (1998; 2013) argues that emotion and risk are routinely configured through social and cultural processes and through interaction with material objects, people, space and place. She also argues that emotions and risk judgments and understanding are fluid, shared and collective, rather than located within the individual. The previous section illustrated how several of the participants experienced exclusion across a range of social spaces, including among extended family and across the wider community - both online and offline. Cultural narratives and discourses were key in shaping what was ‘normative’ in the spaces they moved in which not only shaped their everyday experiences of Islam but also their social relationships, wellbeing and broader attitudes towards religion. As a result of these ‘normative’ expectations, fear, shame and guilt were emotions which were felt by all of the women at some point in their lives. Emma recalled her experiences of guilt,

predominantly in her late adolescent years. Emma spoke about how she kept her boyfriend a secret for two years due to her father objecting to her being in a relationship:

“I hated lying about what I was doing, I spent most of college feeling anxious. It was so embarrassing, my boyfriend's family treated me like my family while my family wouldn't even acknowledge my boyfriend's name”.

(Emma)

Maria similarly drew on an image of her boyfriend in the photo elicitation interviews and described the distressing memories which surround her experience of university graduation:

“At the end of uni it was awful my dad didn't come to my graduation cos my boyfriend was going, I had to come clean about Jake who I'd been with for years in secret, cos he wanted to come too. Obviously, the day was full of anxiety rather than celebration. In the end my dad didn't come. That was huge for me”

(Maria)

Maria's graduation was a key moment for her. She spoke about how hard she had worked and what a big milestone it was for her but that it had been overshadowed by anxiety and dread. She spoke about how she felt her two worlds simply could not be reconciled, and that she recognised, from the outset, that some form of loss was inevitable - her boyfriend's presence or her dad's. During each stage of fieldwork, several of the women reflected on critical choices they had to make at some point in their lives, and identified moments where they were pushed to make a choice between adhering to external religious expectations or pave their own new path. Social identity theorists have long argued that humans are psychologically driven to form complementary social identities (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Greenway et al. 2015). Certain combinations of identities have been socially constructed as more compatible towards one another, whereas other combinations are deemed more oppositional (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002).

The presence of fear, guilt and shame in the women's lives is not so dissimilar to findings put forward by academics who have explored LGBTQ+ communities' relationship with sexual and religious identities. As discussed in Chapter two, a number of scholars have explored the challenging experiences of rejection and internal conflict faced by LGBTQ+ people growing

up in faith households (Rodriguez & Ouellette 2000; Anderton et al. 2011; Anderson and Koc 2020; Jackson-Taylor 2021) and the sociocultural aspects of risk, fear, shame and guilt (Lupton 1998; 2013). Anderson and Koc's (2020) study identified higher levels of religious guilt, gay guilt and gay shame among gay men and thus put forward the recommendation that it was beneficial for gay men to seek group membership in more than one community so that their social connectivity and welfare was not solely reliant on religious communities. Similarly Jackson-Taylor (2021) explores the lived experiences of faith among LGBTQ women, and like the women in this thesis, reflected on their childhood fears that they would "go to hell" if they did not follow religious expectations. The rules and cultural expectations promoted by the Muslim community played a big role in shaping women's self-understanding.

Stories of fear, shame and guilt often involved the women reflecting back on their younger selves worrying about the consequences of not following Islam the right way or disappointing loved ones. An overriding fear among several of the participants as children was a fear of going to hell. Alisha²² talks about a pervading fear and guilt which characterised her childhood:

"I felt a lot of guilt as a kid, but I particularly remember feeling really bad about eating sweets like Haribo's. I remember the first time I had gelatin in daycare they gave me marshmallows and I was like Oh My God. I'm gonna die!!!! They made it seem like it was soooo bad. I have gelatin sweets all the time not, I don't actually eat pork, but I love sweets and they practically all have gelatin so..."

(Alisha)

I laughed with Alisha about her experience as I was familiar with some of the similar rhetoric surrounding pigs and pork which I had experienced as a child from my family. Kim also reflected on similar fears from primary school:

"My mum didn't wear a headscarf, so I thought we were both going to hell for that. We were always told there's 2 angels, one on each shoulder one writes the bad stuff

²² See appendix 1 for short profile on Alisha

you do and one writes the good stuff. and then when you die they decide if you go to heaven and hell, so this was always in my mind good vs bad. Dad used to talk about heaven as this dreamy paradise - I'd imagine the scene from Charlie and the chocolate factory where the kids arrive and go mad for all the chocolate. Then hell I'd imagine as drowning in fire and devils and pain. I've come to the conclusion that if heaven and hell is real, everyone's going to hell cos no one's perfect enough in terms of Islam, so I'd rather be with everyone. Plus if God can't be nice if that's what he does to everyone, I don't think he would do that if he's supposed to be accepting and forgiving **laughs**”

(Kim)

These were powerful examples and while Alisha and Kim were able to laugh whilst telling me (mainly because they had distanced themselves entirely from rigid interpretations of heaven and hell) it was nevertheless emotional to hear about some of the vivid fears the women had as children. Kim seeks comfort in believing God is a forgiving and accepting character in her life and that this conflicts with popular depictions of hell in Islam. Few scholars of religion have explored experiences of anxiety, fear and shame in relation to religion (Jackson-Taylor 2021). Most findings are based on psychological studies exploring the psychological effects of belief in hell (Templer & Dotson 1970; Abdel-Khalek 2004; Doctor et al. 2008; Cranney et al. 2013; Cranney 2018). That said, the previously mentioned study by Jackson-Taylor (2021) offers some insight into the gendered dimensions of fear, anxiety and shame relating to religion. Jackson-Taylor (2021) uncovers how LGBTQ women exposed to homophobic religious rhetoric experience feelings of shame and guilt and have negative social perceptions of themselves. While my study has a different focus, religious narratives about the correct way of being are relevant here. The conservative Islamic narratives my participants were surrounded by had a significant impact on the emotional and physical wellbeing. Several of my participants expressed concerns about ‘going to hell’ and illustrated how it was a common, and highly legitimate belief in Muslim communities (particularly among children and young adults) and that fear was the rational response. Kim reflects on her interpretation of her identity and social positioning and how this situated her as “going to hell”. It is incomprehensible that Kim believed certain things she and her family did made them predisposed to going to hell.

The strength of conservative narratives of Islam in her town are core to how Kim understood herself and those around her as a child. Kim also spoke about how as she grew older, her fear of hell reduced. She became impartial towards hell and less scared about what hell was. She questioned whether it existed and was comforted in the fact that if it did, everyone would potentially be there because she now firmly believed, '*nobody could possibly live up to Islamic expectations*' (Kim). This sense of realisation was processual and took many years to reach.

Emma also reflects on a similar process of realisation and positions it relationally to her mother's experiences:

“My mum converted to Islam when she married my dad. Despite how much she changed her identity, her religion, her clothing, even her name, her entire way of life, it was never enough. She was and still is always judged, much like me probably! As my mum got older and had her own struggles - she went through a lot - she has given up trying to please family and the Muslim community. Seeing her never fully being accepted has made me realise I will never live up to Muslim expectations, so I have stopped”.

(Emma)

Emma speaks about her mother's experience of conversion to Islam and highlighted some of the big changes her mother made. Conversion (and the gender and sexual expectations associated with it) will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter²³ However, what is important here is Emma's struggles were relational to her mother's struggles. Emma expressed echoes of sadness, frustration and even anger that despite her mum making huge sacrifices and changes to her identity, it was ultimately - as Emma said: 'never enough'. This was a central realisation for Emma and played a role in her eventual distancing from Islam. Emma captures the value that mentally accepting that she could 'never live up to Muslim expectations' brings to ontological security, however, while this sentiment was also captured by Zoe, her ontological conflict was still ongoing, much into her adult years due to her father's shifting attitude. When I first interviewed Zoe 3 years ago, I recall being impressed

²³ In the next chapter I discuss the importance of recognising my participants' mothers' ambivalence and at times, questioned status when considering my participants' relationships with religion.

(perhaps even slightly jealous) that her family were managing to balance the English and Muslim aspects of their family, celebrating Christmas and Eid, appreciation and contact between both sides of the family and no instances of conflict. I was surprised as none of my other participants had described this happy utopia and I certainly could not relate to it. Recently, Zoe got back in touch with me to ask if we could speak as there were issues she felt were important for my research. Zoe was 21 now, she told me that her father had recently become 'more religious', her sister was having an arranged marriage, her sisters had started wearing the headscarf, and even her English mother had begun to show increasing alignment with Islam:

"I'm sorry to bother you, I know you have a lot on but I felt you would be able to offer some support here because of your research. Recently my dad has gotten really religious. I've had a boyfriend for a few years and my mum and sister are putting pressure on me to break up with him or encourage him to convert before telling my dad. They just don't want conflict with my dad as he has a short temper but it's so unfair why is she making it worse.... I don't want either of those things, I am heartbroken. I have broken up with him out of pressure but I don't agree with it, he's a good person, surely that's what's important!?. He said he would make small changes but obviously he doesn't want to convert. I don't even follow Islam, why would he!? It's so sad, I am on anti-depressants I am really depressed I think I am going to have to cut myself off from my family because I want to be with him. That's why I am at a uni in Manchester to get away from them, I feel so depressed when I go home all they talk about is religion, even my mum has started sending me videos about Islam and conversion to put pressure on...I'm doing a hard degree at uni and I don't have the energy for all this its affecting my degree but I rely on my parents financially, in another year I'll be working. It's just sad because all I've ever done is throw myself into uni so that they could be proud but it's clear now all they care about is that"

(Zoe)

Zoe's interview caught me by surprise, the total conversation ended up lasting sporadically over two days as I was concerned that Zoe was experiencing a great sense of discord and felt the need to check in with her. Zoe's experience of ontological conflict illustrates that moving away does not eradicate the cultural and religious pressure she faced. Her mother sent her

regular texts messages and videos to encourage Zoe to change her mind and while Zoe recognised that her mother and sister were also facing the same pressure, Zoe felt angry, abandoned and let down by the females in her life that she felt were allowing the cycle to continue and not supporting her decisions. This is reflective of the deeply patriarchal structure that Zoe, her mother and sisters existed in and the displacement this caused for Zoe. It also uncovered that Zoe felt her parents' love was conditional, despite her doing a medicine degree and other aspects of her life being previously celebrated she felt they were now meaningless because she felt her value solely depended on marrying a Muslim. It would be obtuse of me to ignore the concern this raised for me as the researcher. Zoe is the only one of my participants who I forwarded the contact details for a charity that offers advice and support to BAME people experiencing cultural and religious pressure (see image 1):²⁴.

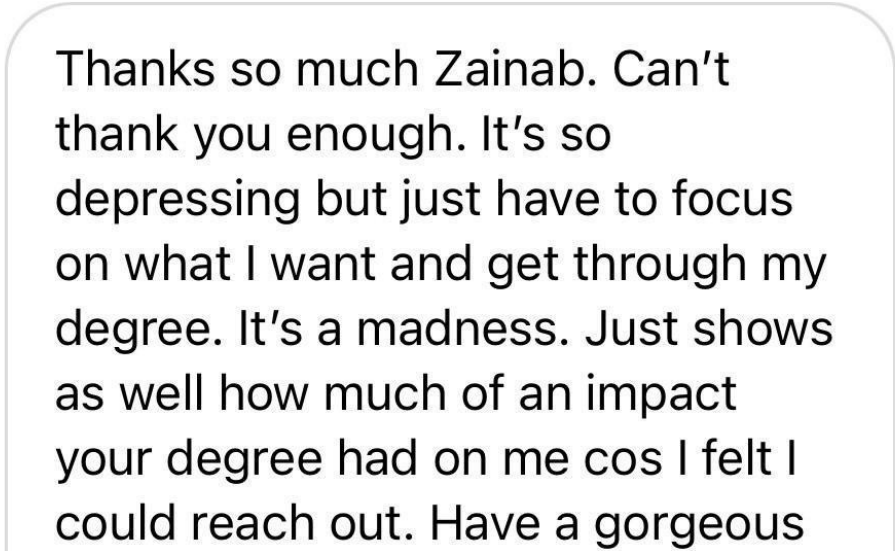
This is a charity that help with BAME issues I've heard good stuff about them. I know you might not think your issues are dramatic enough cos it's not outright abuse but they are causing you mental distress and I've thought about turning to them in the past, they help people facing pressure from cultural and religious traditions

<https://www.haloproject.org.uk/help-for-victims-W21page-77>

Image 1: My recommendation of Halo Project Charity to Zoe

²⁴ The Halo Project Charity is an award-winning specialist by and for black and minority communities based in Middlesbrough. They provide emergency and non-emergency support to over 1,500 clients in the UK and abroad and they are committed to “providing cultural and emotional support to clients.”, particularly those facing forced Marriage, Honor-Based Violence and/or Female Genital Mutilation

I still check in with Zoe and she has offered me a follow up of her situation. Zoe now feels empowered that she can distance herself from her family and has since resolved issues with her boyfriend. She has decided she will focus on university and revisit the issue when she is financially independent from her parents. Zoe has thanked me and expressed the benefit that our conversations and my research more broadly will have on people in similar positions (see image: 2):



Thanks so much Zainab. Can't thank you enough. It's so depressing but just have to focus on what I want and get through my degree. It's a madness. Just shows as well how much of an impact your degree had on me cos I felt I could reach out. Have a gorgeous

Image 2: Follow up conversation with Zoe

Zoe's story about internal conflict supports that conflict and pressure concerning religion was enduring in her life (Jackson-Taylor 2021). Zoe's father had made a significant U-turn - in terms of his own positioning with Islam - and this had huge ramifications for Zoe and her family. A relatively peaceful upbringing had been turned upside down and Zoe was expected to follow suit. I asked Zoe if I could capture this in my research as it was undoubtedly a sensitive and emotional story and I was conscious about being respectful, however, Zoe was deeply passionate that I shared it:

“I want you to capture what's gone on in its rawest form to be honest if it can help just 1 person. I knew I could come to you but some people have no one. You've helped me feel happy again. Out of all my friends and family I couldn't tell them because they just didn't think my relationship would or could work but you encouraged me to put

my happiness before everything else and I don't feel like a bad person anymore for doing just that"

(Zoe)

While Zoe had decided to distance herself from her family for the time being and felt a sense of security and stability, it was an issue that she knew she would have to revisit in the future and that it was not over. This form of conflict was emotionally Labour intensive for Zoe and I have reminded her that should she need support in the future, the charity I recommended will be there to offer their professional services and that she can reach out to me for more informal support.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter aims to achieve two things: it centres stories based on conflict, and differentiates between the different scales of conflict in my participants' lives. In this chapter, I have explored the myriad of ways that mixed ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam navigate conflicting challenges associated with intersection of gender, religion, race and urban space within the home. To the best of my knowledge, there is very little sociological research which has explored mixed ethnic peoples experiences of Islam. I contribute here to existing literature on lived Islam and work on religion and gender through adding much needed discussions on mixed ethnic experiences of heavily racialised religions like Islam in the U.K, foregrounding stories about the unique struggle and ambiguity this brings. The stories in this chapter have been difficult and heartfelt windows into the difficulties people facing managing conflicting identities and expectations face. Adolescence has undoubtedly been identified in this chapter as a particularly difficult stage of the life course for all of my participants. Most of the stories in this chapter stemmed from this period which saw increased conflict within the home and struggle with the wider society. By foregrounding the women's transitions from youth to adulthood - I enquired into key issues like autonomy and independence, relations with the opposite sex, gendered expectations - as these are well-established areas of tension between Islamic and Western cultures and within gender studies exploring adolescence. However, for some, Zoe in particular, conflict had endured into her adult life and was something that she knew she would have to revisit in the future. In highlighting age as a significant factor in my participants experiences of Islam, I draw

attention to the ways mixed-ethnic young women experience Islam in their transition from childhood to adulthood - a core focus of my research questions²⁵.

In chapter 1 I also outlined that I was interested in how mixed ethnic women engage with and relate to ideas of Muslim identity and in turn, how this shapes the ways that they interact with and relate to Middlesbrough's histories, spaces and communities²⁶. This chapter has captured the ways that my participants struggled to fit into popular representations of Muslims and the different ways that conflict and struggle arose, due to how embedded these narratives are in their town. In differentiating between the scales of struggle experienced by my participants, I discuss some of the wider social struggles such as Islamophobia and racial and ethnic microaggressions in Middlesbrough faced by participants as well as the more pragmatic issues such as how to manage their identities on social media. I also consider some of the more subjective and internal struggles such as 'feeling on the border' in the different spaces and groups they encountered and experiences of shame and guilt which arose from their exclusion and mis-identification. While the women's stories of 'struggle' and 'conflict' varied and illustrate experiences of fragmentation and conflict, they were similar in the sense that were characterised by a sense of frustration among my participants that they did not fit 'naturally' into Middlesbrough's landscape. That said, despite the relentless conflict and struggle described by my participants' lives, they also convey stories of resilience, strength and the humorous agency they exercised when attempting to deceive gatekeepers. I feel privileged to have been able to share these stories as in chapter 1 I set out to uncover previously 'unheard' stories. The next chapter moves on to foreground the strategies and tactics my participants exercised as active agents of their lives during their journeys of navigating conflict in the wider community and 'learning the *right* way of existing' in relation to the Middlesbrough community.

²⁵ See Chapter 1 (page 21 and 22) for more detail on thesis' research questions and aims

²⁶ See Chapter 1 (page 21 and 22) for more detail on thesis' research questions and aims

5. Learning the right way

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I focused on stories characterised by conflict, struggle and hardship within the home, paying specific attention to how these were experienced as difficult. These stories were also underpinned by strategies and tools that my participants reflexively engaged in as they endeavored to learn the ‘right’ way of existing in relation to the Middlesbrough community. Thus, chapter 5 focuses predominantly on how identities were managed beyond the home and in relation to the Middlesbrough community. These stories focus on how my participants attempted to attain various degrees of what Giddens’s (1991) defines as ‘ontological security’ in the spaces encountered. All of my participants spoke about how they became increasingly skilled at managing expectations and avoiding conflict in the spaces they moved in. I explore how the women reconciled two very separate and ‘culturally unconnected’ sides of family, whilst also claiming aspects from each. These stories are important as they offer insight into my participants' significant attempts to fit into the range of social spaces they encountered whilst also capturing them as a group of intelligent and active agents in their lives. My participants varied considerably in their specific attempts to manage expectations. Therefore, in this chapter, I draw on their words and images to explore how they skillfully navigated the conflicts around them in unique and individualised ways whilst also considering how this fitted into the broader landscape.

The notion of ‘learning the right way’ is not simple. At its very least, it is a statement characterised by subjectivity. That said, it was a notion that was routinely used by all of the participants who conveyed a very particular set of norms and customs attached to their Muslim family and the wider community. All of my participants spoke about their journeys from childhood to adulthood as shaped by an on-going process of learning the social norms, expectations and ‘ways of being’ in the unique cultural, ethnic and institutional environments they found themselves in. The significant body work discussed by my participants as I will

explore in this chapter can be linked back to Goffman's (1990) work on impression management, which he argues is a core component of social interaction and also influences how people are treated by others. Similarly, the stories in this chapter contribute to the large body of research on self-presentation which focuses on Muslim women's relationship with modesty and the significant role gender expectations around clothing and physical appearance play in their life (Allievi 1998; Butler 2001; Tarlo 2009; Lewis 2013; Madge et al. 2014). Through imagery, words and spatial references my participants conveyed their journeys through which they navigated gatekeeping and learnt the specific expectations associated with the spaces they moved in. Motivations for learning how to navigate the 'correct' expectations were typically shaped by a strong desire to 'keep the peace' between women and their families, as well as fit into the wider landscape, such as at educational institutions and the workplace. Keeping the peace in this context meant finding the balance between adhering to religious, gendered and cultural expectations (to avoid social stigma, shame and conflict), but also, of simultaneous importance to my participants, was their ability to exercise choice and agency to engage in the social and personal lives that my participants desired to live. This was where my participants utilised forms of deception to balance conflicting desires, which not only captures their agency but also, the 'game like' (and at times humorous) scenarios that my participants described navigating.

As discussed in the previous chapter, adolescence was experienced as a particularly turbulent period. My participants recalled numerous episodes of internal and external conflict that they experienced in everyday life. This chapter focuses specifically on their attempts to reconcile these conflicts. The specific role which parents, peers, extended family and the local Middlesbrough community played were often highlighted in conversations with the women. I begin by discussing the gender expectations which permeated my participants' lives, making particular reference to modesty, expectations about relationships with the opposite gender and how this influenced their sense of agency and freedom. I also consider the significance of my participants' mother's experiences and status in relation to Islam, I argue that in order to understand the formation of my participant identities, it is essential to understand my participants' mothers' parallel existence. Here I also draw attention to the significant role which mothers played in mediating the women's relationships with the wider family and their close involvement in guiding the women's journeys of learning how to exist. I end the chapter by drawing on some of the women's reflections from their earlier years in relation to how they managed their identities in school. This provides an important lens through which

to consider how my participants have evolved from children to young adults (in terms of their political views and their own sense of self), while also considering the impact that the shifting socio-political landscape in their town has had on their journeys.

5.2 Gender expectations in Muslim spaces

All of my participants described gender expectations as central to their everyday encounters with Islam, these expectations stemmed from cultural traditions associated with their ethnic and religious background. This resonates with the substantial body of research exploring the significance of female gender expectations in Islam (Allievi 1998; Neuwkerek and Nieuwerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012). While the ways in which my participants discussed and visually illustrated the prevalence of gender and sexuality expectations varied considerably, collectively their stories demonstrated an obvious set of expectations at play in all their lives. My participants positioned these expectations as deeply ingrained, omnipresent and largely unquestioned among the Muslim community in their town. The local Muslim community in their town was experienced by my participants as playing a significant gatekeeping role, whereby they instilled and reinforced gender expectations for women. The town's close-knit community and members of my participants' wider family (namely grandmothers and aunts) were also frequently referred to as playing a substantial role in promoting and instilling these expectations. This supports findings about the significant role grandmothers play in shaping young people's religious experiences (Becher, 2003, 2005, 2008; Arweck and Nesbitt 2009; Day 2011). Gatekeeping permeated my participants' lives across a range of social domains and activities, including their encounters with men and how they presented themselves in terms of modesty expectations.

Nearly all of my participants spoke at some point during my fieldwork about their experiences of gender expectations. Modesty is widely recognised as playing a key role in the social and gendered organisation of women in Islam (Allievi 1998; Neuwkerek and Nieuwerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012). Some academic studies have attempted to challenge these essentialist depictions and shed light on the diversity which exists in Islam (Tarlo 2009; Mossière 2011). However, popular media and political discourse has typically depicted women's modesty in extreme forms, with significant reference to the veil being symbolic of the subordination of Muslim women. This has played a significant role in shaping popular understandings of modesty in Islam. The stories in this chapter challenge these

understandings by shining a necessary light on the ways that my participants were active agents in the way that they challenged and negotiated gender expectations. This often produced what I perceived to be a more subtle form of expectations of modesty which was undoubtedly illustrative of their mixed ethnic background and at times, ambivalent relationship with Islam. Nearly all the stories I listened to traced back to early adolescence and were underpinned by a conscious awareness of how gender expectations did not feel natural. Emma's story was particularly powerful. She described attending a local primary school where there was a strong presence of a Pakistani community. She recalled how the Pakistani mums would rally around the school gates at the start and end of the school day chatting with one another. One of these women was her auntie who collected Emma and her siblings and cousins:

“They would always be gossiping about silly things like the latest scandals about other parents and kids - very Bridgeton style! The thing I remember is when one of them told my auntie that I shouldn't be wearing a dress for school now that I was older, I was 10”

(Emma)

Emma often pined for her mum to collect her from school but she taught at a local secondary school so was not available during school pick-ups. During Emma's photo elicitation interview she elaborated on this particular encounter, showing me a picture of her school dress that she had been referring to (see image 3):

Image 3: Gingham school dress



“Even in primary school my auntie said to my mum I shouldn’t wear my gingham summer dress because it shows my legs and potentially pants when I am sat down or doing cartwheels, it really bothers me looking back because I was a child, it upsets me

that I couldn't just be a child and free, who cares if people saw my pants if I did cartwheels, I was a child. Talk about sexualising young children... I am so against this. They couldn't even let me wear a summer dress when I was a child. Luckily, mum compromised, and I agreed to wear shorts under it.”

(Emma)

Emma's extract sheds light on her everyday experience of gender expectations and the specific challenges that she negotiated with. Emma also highlights the double standards at play in Muslim communities, whereby women experience significant pressure to engage in body work. Emma also expressed frustration that her brother dressed freely and did not have gender specific restrictions imposed on him at such a young age or even as an adult:

“What was even worse is my brother had none of these issues, he wore shorts and even took his top off if he was hot, he still does that now and he's 22...My sister has been a great use though, she majorly rebelled as a teenager so she's made my life easier because she challenged everything. That's why my parents are more relaxed with me. Plus she knows how it feels, so she always covers for me, knows where I am if I'm drinking or with a boyfriend which is good - you know, for safety reasons. I'm lucky I can tell her she always knows where I am and what I am doing. We had a good system when I was in college and started drinking, going out etc... We spoke about one particular incident the other day. Actually it's quite sad but turned out to be funny looking back. In Year 7 people at school kept having birthday parties at function rooms in pubs but my dad wouldn't let me go cos it was in a pubs or bars and I missed loads but one day my sister and her friend took me and they went to the cinema. We pretended that we all went to the cinema then my mum picked us all up from the cinema. I remember she had to buy the present for me to take cos I was only 11 and she was 17 at the time...We felt a great sense of accomplishment and I remember feeling like I'd had the best night of my life!!!”

(Emma)

Emma shows the strength of the relationship between her and her older sister, and how this

relationship has been crucial to her own experiences growing up and navigating the conflicting demands and desires she experienced, both in relation to school and home. The strength of sibling ties is emphasised by Sharma (2016) who considers how sibling ties are important to sociological knowledge on religion within families. Sharma focuses on exploring how sister relationships affect religious commitments and identities, and her study emphasises the role which siblings play in shaping the way religion is enacted, supported or abandoned in families. As Sharma argues, religiosity among siblings often goes unnoticed, yet we see here how Emma's relationship with her brother and sister was critical and relational to how she encountered Islam. Her brother's experiences were symbolic of the gendered inequality embedded within particular expressions of Islam which Emma expressed frustration towards. Emma's elder sister acted as a buffer between gender expectations within the Muslim home and community and other social desires that Emma had, such as attending school birthday parties. Emma's sister's problematic experience of the same gender expectations that Emma speaks about also supports Sharma's (2015) argument that siblings have the opportunity to 'rehearse, perform, challenge, and question religious identities' (p.62). Without Emma's elder sister passing on her own experiences of learning the right way, Emma may have had an equally turbulent childhood.

Active negotiation was typically conveyed through my participants' use of discretion and secrecy. This was bound up with a desire to avoid social sanctioning. Emma spoke about changing into her skirt once she arrived at school which captured many of the women's stories of secrecy where they felt it was simply too difficult to reconcile their personal choice and religious or cultural expectations. There are a number of parallels here with research exploring how British gay men manage religious and sexual identity, particularly those studies exploring the challenges raised from belonging to the gay and Muslim community. Against a backdrop of homosexual censorship in Islam, Yip's (2004) study explores how gay Muslim men construct a safe space to manage their identities. Yip explored how the men negotiated their social relations within a framework of socio-cultural religious factors, including the strict religious censure of sexual relationships prior to marriage, marriage being seen as a cultural and religious obligation, an expectation of respect for parents, and emphasis on maintaining family honor. Many of my participants also referred to this framework as limiting and restrictive in their lives. Some of the men in Yip's study adopted strategies such as discretion, secrecy and silence in order to balance socio-religious obligations. These

strategies were similarly at the core of how my participants managed the various (often conflicting) influences in their lives. Typically, elders (namely, grandmothers) were at the center of reinforcing this framework fueled by the motivation of maintaining their family's honor.

My participants described gender expectations as unavoidable as control was exerted through gossip, scandal and the fear that this could influence family reputation (Shaw 2001). Despite Emma possessing little ability to speak Arabic or Urdu, she recognised from a young age that adhering to gender and sexuality expectations was of great importance to her grandma through regularly hearing the word "sharam". Both Emma and Hana²⁷ reflected on the role which elders played in reinforcing gender expectations:

"My dad's mum would always say 'sharam' which means do you have any shame... always to us girls, not the boys"

(Emma)

"They take it upon themselves to remind you how you should be, it's intense"

(Hana)

"If someone saw me with a boy or wearing a short top they would pass it on to my grandma then I would get told off. Basically if you talk to boys, wear revealing clothes you're seen as a 'slag', I don't like that word, but they view you as that derogatory word"

(Hana)

Through an analysis of the temporal and spatial organisation of the women's lives, it was possible to identify how their relationship with Islam was heavily shaped by their environment. My participants discussed how the various environments they found themselves

²⁷ See appendix 1 for short profile on Hana

in shifted what was expected of them, from immediate family to extended family and living away from Middlesbrough. It was clear that Middlesbrough's tight-knit community played a key role in assimilating the women to adopt the correct ways of 'doing Islam', particularly in relation to gender and cultural expectations. However, this process was not linear, it was messy and complex and the women often challenged or adapted expectations to fit with their lives. For most of the women, living in Middlesbrough - a tight-knit working-class town, meant that they were constantly engaging in identity work in order to adhere to various cultural, religious and gendered expectations and avoid falling victim to social sanctions. The elderly demographic were also identified as gatekeepers who policed women's adherence (or lack of) to Islamic gender expectations. The passing of time - from childhood to adulthood - was a good illustration of how physical space shaped the women's ever changing relationship with Islam.

The women in this study identified the significant role that the social organisation of Middlesbrough played on the pressure they experienced from their Muslim family and wider community to act inline within Islamic expectations. Public space was particularly important for the women in this study as the tight-knit organisation of Middlesbrough's Muslim community meant that 'everyone knew everyone'. This made it difficult for the women to attain privacy. As such, the women often experienced policing of their identities which manifested as powerful 'looks of disgust' or 'eye rolls' rather than dialogue. The Muslim community played a key role here as gatekeepers. A number of studies have highlighted the role that the Muslim community plays in stopping young people deviating from Islam and policing young women's bodies (Mujahid 2005; Brown 2008; Sharma 2008, 2011; Gaddini 2022). Mujahid (2005) found that young women are guided by the local community so that they do not turn away from 'rightly guided path' so that they preserve their 'deen' (faith) and consequently benefit community cohesion. In conjunction with the tight knit organisation of Middlesbrough's Muslim community, the women in the study also identified that the elderly Muslim population was the predominant demographic that exerted pressure over the Muslim community to behave in line with conservative Islamic expectations, particularly on women.

Religious authority is often conceptualised as an institutional structure with particular emphasis on hierarchical power structures and official systems, for example transnationally (like the Vatican) or state-wide (Yildirim 2019). The women's experiences of power in

Middlesbrough's community suggests that power can also operate on a micro-level within the community. Campbell (2007) argues that within religions where there are low levels of institutionalisation (such as Islam), religious authority is more diffuse. As such, religious authority in Islam is often associated with preachers, imams and intellectuals. What was notable in this study is that members of Middlesbrough's Muslim community (particularly elders) acted as 'guardians' or gatekeepers over the women, nudging them to remain within the parameters of Islam. Some of the women expressed frustration about what they perceived as a lack of understanding about their identities among the elderly Muslim relatives, a lack of understanding often manifested in the form of criticism about the women's lifestyle choices, such as not conforming to Islamic modesty. There was a consensus among the women that the Muslim community as a whole (but particularly the older members) did not appreciate or account for their ethnically and culturally diverse identities and that in most cases, their mixed ethnicity was entirely overlooked. Adhering to the Islamic gender expectations was something that the women found 'restrictive' and 'fake' (Amber), thus clashing with what the women deemed 'authentic' to their own individual identities. However, individuality, for the women, clashed with a strong desire to also avoid 'being the topic of local gossip and judgement' (Liz). As such, the women in this study often expressed frustration towards the popular definitions of what a 'good Muslim woman' was which circulated Middlesbrough. Interestingly, the notion of 'good girl' has been written about in relation to Christian and secular women (Sharma 2011; Tolman 2002) and Higginbotham (1994), Skeggs (1997) and Wilkins (2008) have explored the idea of respectability in relation to women. Skeggs (1997) argues that respectability contains judgements of class, race, gender and sexuality which are used as a means of 'othering' deviant codes of behavior. This relates to ideas about what a 'good Muslim' woman looked like were in the eyes of my participants narrow in nature and left little room for how different demographics interacted with Islam, for example how age or ethnic background influenced people's relationship with Islam.

Extended family, peer groups and the wider community were identified as playing a significant role in shaping my participants' religious identities (Bhopal 1998; Hennink et al. 1999). Hennink et al. (1999) argues that young people experience significant pressure from their wider family and Muslim community to behave according to Islamic expectations. Bhopal (1998:78) argues that this is aimed at preserving two important values, maintaining "izaat" (family honor) and secondly, avoiding "sharam" (bringing shame upon oneself). He

adds that this is particularly relevant for Muslim women who are viewed as “carriers of culture” and risk jeopardising their families reputation and social standing if they challenge Islamic expectations. Therefore, Hennink et al. (1999) argues that even in immediate families, where parents have liberal views, surveillance and judgement from the wider community and extended family can play a significant role in shaping parenting practices. These findings suggest that family, community and culture collectively play a significant role in socialising younger generations of Muslims and teaching them how to conduct themselves in society. Interestingly, this appears to be at odds with an established stance in family-studies - that close family relationships and high family functioning results in intergenerational transmission of religion (Bengtson et al. 2013; Spilman et al. 2013). Therefore, despite the discussed research suggesting that family emphasise the importance of preserving *izaat* and avoiding *sharam*, the social and organisational structure in typical Muslim families and communities presents a more holistic process of religious socialisation where multiple people and bodies are involved.

Scholars have long argued that Muslim women engage in significant gender work (Allievi 1998; Dwyer 2000; Neuwkerek and Nieuwerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012). However, where this study departs from previous findings, is in the way that modesty manifests in their lives. Past studies on Islamic modesty have predominantly focused on how the veil or traditional ethnic clothing (such as the Pakistani *shalwaar kameez*) manifests in Muslim women’s lives and how Muslim women exercise agency in their clothing choices (Tarlo 2009; Siraj 2011). Moreover, whilst certain forms and styles of dress have historically been deemed appropriate for Muslim women (Allievi 1998; Neuwkerek and Nieuwerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012; Ahmed 2019), less attention has been paid to clothing which is considered inappropriate. In the extracts below Zoe and Emma capture how they attempted to ‘keep the peace’ by modifying modesty expectations to fit more naturally into their lives:

“So even though I didn’t have to wear a headscarf I was constantly reminded if my trousers were too tight or my top was too short or low cut. So, people probably wouldn’t realise I have had to dress in line with modesty expectations, but it is still really annoying for me and limiting in terms of fashion, especially when it’s hot weather”

(Zoe)

“Normally I would just make sure I adjust clothes slightly so that I can keep the peace, like a longer top or a cardigan to cover my arms. When I was in school it was worse as I didn’t have any freedom or control so I would change clothes in secret, like I would just wear trousers walking into school but when I got to school I would take them off and put my skirt on”.

(Emma)

Zoe and Emma’s stories of ‘keeping the peace’ also move away from general theorisations of gender and Islam and capture the everyday, mundane specifics through which my participants enact gendered, Islamic identities. While they undoubtedly engaged with ideas of modesty, Emma and Zoe’s stories challenge essentialist depictions which overemphasise the veil as a symbol of Muslim women’s oppression and are typically linked to dialogues about the terror threat on public safety and women's rights (Macdonald 2006). My participants engaged in varied and subtle forms of modesty which demonstrates Islamic modesty as contextually nuanced and complex (Tarlo 2009; Mossière 2011; Lewis 2013). They actively negotiated modesty expectations in subtle and contextually defined ways which not only transcends the historical focus on Muslim women as passive but also illustrates the diversity which exists in Islam when considering mixed ethnic women’s experiences. What was interesting is that my participants predominantly discussed what modesty meant for them in remarkably similar ways. They often drew on pictures of subtle depictions of modesty to illustrate how clothing expectations manifested in their lives. Past research on Muslim women and identity has predominantly focused on how the veil manifests itself in different forms, however, the veil was not spoken about or illustrated through pictures as having a significant presence in these women's lives. This suggested that mixed ethnic women's experiences of modesty are quite different to those from non-mixed backgrounds.

My participants referred to more subtle forms of modesty, and spoke about how they learnt to modify the expectations which were exerted on them by their immediate family by opting for ‘slightly longer tops’ or ‘looser trousers’. Some of my participants located their experience of

modesty on a scale in which, for example, Emma positioned themselves 'somewhere in between what English girls wear and full on Muslims'. By saying 'full on Muslim clothing', Emma was disassociating herself from Muslims and English people and instead, positioning herself halfway between clothing associated with Islam and Western society. When asked what they meant by 'English clothes' and 'Islamic clothes', many of the women described the clothing as two very separate and polarised categories of clothing. Photographs that the women discussed in the photo elicitation interviews demonstrated that English clothes related to 'typically western' designs found on popular high streets stores in England - featuring sleeveless tops, skirts and shorts. The women stressed that these items did not prioritise modesty in their design, which contrasted with the photographs they drew on to demonstrate what modesty looked like in their lives. Photographs relating to Islamic gender expectations of modesty visually demonstrated that covering skin was a key priority. Zara and Lily drew on photographs of themselves abroad in Muslim countries visiting family when discussing what Islamic modesty looked like in their lives. The photographs evoked distressing past experiences and memories about feeling as though they

Image 4: Zara in Algeria





Image 5: Lily in Iran

had no control as children and teenagers. All of them voiced frustration that ‘covering up’ was a priority around Muslim families, particularly when visiting Muslim families in traditional Muslim countries such as Algeria and Pakistan. Zara is 25 years old, her mother is Italian and her father Algerian. She was raised a practicing Muslim but did not practice anymore. She drew on an image of her visiting family in Algeria (see image 4) which unlocked memories of the discomfort she had experienced at the time. Zara did not have traditional Algerian clothes and so opted for a coat to cover her arms and meet the modesty expectations surrounding her and, in her words, “pretending to play the game”. She spoke about the uncomfortableness of being too hot, standing out and feeling ‘like the odd one out’.

There is a wealth of research which explores how ‘in-between’ identities experience contradictory expectations. Whilst there has been little previous research attention to how mixed ethnic individuals experience Islam, research on Muslim converts offers some findings that are relevant to the women’s experience of modesty in this research (Gudson-Jensen’s, 2008; Nieuwkerk’s, 2018). Gudson-Jensen’s (2008) study is particularly relevant as they explore how Danish converts experience contradictory experiences as both ‘Danish’ and ‘Muslim’ and how conversion is a process that unfolds over time through learnt behavior. Like my participants, the women in Gudson-Jensen’s (2008) study demonstrated great skill at navigating two very unique worlds - ‘Muslim’ and ‘not Muslim’ and adapting seemingly polar expectations so they fit more authentically into their lives. Popular discourse has long put forward the belief that Islamic beliefs and Western values are incompatible (Murji and Solomos 2015). Adopting this kind of binary way of thinking fails to identify the complexity and diversity which exists within people's identities. Mixed ethnic identities are a clear example of how two seemingly different identities can unite to form new increasingly rich and diverse religious identities. For example, it was clear that mixed ethnicity played a role in shaping the women's experiences of Islamic modesty. The women spoke about how they engaged in more subtle forms of modesty and that this was a result of them experiencing a ‘more liberal’ and ‘diluted’ version of typical Islamic gender expectations in comparison to non-mixed ethnic Muslims. Lucy, is a 25 year old from a mixed ethnic family consisting of an English mother and Iranian father. She spoke about how she and her parents often negotiated what was acceptable modest clothing in order to meet the ‘bare minimum’ of gender expectations and that reminders often manifested ‘little reminders’ to ‘cover up’ or ‘tone-down’ their clothing. That said, despite tolerance shown by the women’s immediate families, pressure to conform to modesty expectations was also expressed by the wider Muslim community and extended family in Middlesbrough in more stringent ways.

The sexual expectations that my participants described learning can be explained by Bhopal (1998:78). Bhopal (1998) argues that Muslim women in particular are viewed as valued “carriers of culture” who risk jeopardising their families reputation and social standing if they challenge Islamic expectations. This highlights the importance of preserving family honor and avoiding bringing shame upon oneself in the Muslim community. There is significant literature exploring the so-called shame-honor cultures (defined as the need to guard female

sexuality) prevalent in Asian cultures and Muslim communities (Werbner 2005). Women have been identified as significantly policed for their adherence (or lack of) to so called gender expectations in Islam (Bhopal 1998:78). Scholars have identified honor and shame cultures as typically located and able to thrive in tight knit communities (Werbner 2005; Shaw 2001). Werbner (2005) argues that in Pakistan, honor and shame is labelled as a “village thing” and the urban middle-classes imagine villages as dangerous places where honor killings typically occur. Equally, Shaw (2001) argues that in Britain, similar incidents of violence and murder against women predominantly occur within close-knit neighborhoods where Muslims live in concentrated clusters. While scholars have mostly explored super diverse cities, I found that the ‘close knit’ social organisation of Middlesbrough fueled how shame and honor culture permeated the Muslim community - similar to Shaw’s (2001) discussion on villages.

Grandmothers were also discussed by nearly all of my participants as playing a significant role in instilling expectations and shaping my participants' journeys of learning how to exist. Interestingly, this was apparent regardless of the geographical location of grandmothers. Some of my participants had regular contact with their grandmothers as they lived locally and others rarely communicated due to them living abroad in their country of origin, however they too could recall the reminders they had experienced of their grandmothers instilling values when they visited or via telephone. Hana spoke about how her grandma in particular would often remind her parents how she should dress and behave who would relay messages to her. She also said that the local community would pass judgements onto her grandma about her, for example if she had been seen in town ‘with a boy’ or wearing ‘inappropriate clothing’ which would typically lead to arguments within the family. Lily showed me a picture of her when she visited her grandma in Iran and her grandma insisted on blessing her with incense and prayer before she went travelling (see image 8):



Image 8: Lily being blessed by grandmother

Unsurprisingly, there is widespread agreement in literature that immediate and extended families play a key role in shaping their children's religious identities and sense of self (Voas 2003; Smith and Denton 2005; Savage et al. 20; Day 2011; Scourfield et al. 2012; Bengtson et al. 2013; Spilman et al. 2013; Song 2017; Dollahite et al. 2019). Within Islamic society, family operates as a cornerstone, playing an integral role in the running and organisation of family and social life (Dwyer; 2000; Dhami and Sheikh, 2000). In particular, this includes older family members playing a close role in raising young people and shaping their values and beliefs (Dwyer; 2000; Dhami and Sheikh 2000). This also supports wider findings on the distinctive role grandmas play in religious socialisation (Copen and Silverstein 2007; Mulder 2012; Vrublevskaia et al. 2019). Copen and Silverstein's (2007) analysis draws on data from the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG) to examine the extent to which grandmothers influence the religious beliefs of adolescent and young adult grandchildren. Their study found that religious similarity between grandmothers and granddaughters was particularly strong as well as demonstrating that there was a significant degree of religious similarity across three generations in the family. Grandmothers were also considered active contributors to the religious orientation of contemporary young adults, similar to my participants' identification of grandmothers playing an active role in their lives. That said, my findings also nuances aspects of Copen and Silverstein (2007) argument by providing nuanced insight into the lived complexities of these grandparent-grandchild relationships in mixed ethnic families. My findings illustrated that while grandmothers passed on teachings and reminded my participants about how to behave or present themselves in society, this did not guarantee replication of religious orientation. While all of my participants spoke about how grandmothers encouraged modesty, and that they adapted their clothing when visiting their grandparents so that it was both 'appropriate' within Islamic expectations and appeased grandmothers, it was equally if not more important that adaptations were within the parameters of what they felt comfortable wearing.

Therefore, while grandmothers certainly play a significant role in the shaping of young people's religious experiences, my findings demonstrate that socialisation from grandparents (in terms of guidance and encouragement) does not always guarantee the genuine 'passing on' of religion. Mellor and Shilling (2010) argue that it is important to consider instances where embodied religious norms in particular religious cultures are not passed on and the reasons for this. As research has suggested, young people often engage with religion to align

with kinship or as some of my participants spoke about, their desire to please family members (Day 2011). Strhan (2015) draws on Mellor and Shilling's (2010) approach when considering the tensions in relation to the formation of religious subjects. Mellor and Shilling (2010) consider how the teachings of Christianity invite Christians to be strangers in society and encourage Christians to change their modes of behavior and shape themselves through specific practices in line with the norms of their faith and how this is positioned in relation to the dominant norms of the urban spaces they move. Strhan (2015) considers how concepts of body pedagogics, inter-relationality, and subjectivity enable an understanding of conservative evangelicalism which views the self and social world as interlinked and relational. My participants likewise illustrate how they are also formed relationally and through particular embodied practices as subjects with different embodied sensibilities in relation to modesty and dress through their friendships in school, media etc.

Zoe and Lucy spoke about gender expectations also permeating other aspects of their lives, including attitudes towards appropriate conversation topics and relationships with males. Zoe and Lucy described that this was deeply ingrained in them and thus undoubtedly a product of early socialisation and continual reinforcement.

"I've always just known certain things I can tell my dad and certain things I just can't, like I can tell my dad Helen wants to come over, but Tom can't"

(Zoe)

"We wouldn't even mention relationships etc. in front of my dad's family. I have to be careful what my friends and I say in front of my dad, we avoid talking about boys, alcohol, that kind of thing, even though I am 25 now it's always been like that..."

(Lucy)

The previous chapter conveyed how the participants' experiences of conflict were typically contextualised by the social organisation of Middlesbrough's tight knit Muslim and South

Asian community. My participants routinely found themselves navigating this gatekeeping that observed the women's behavior and their overall adherence to Islamic expectations. The censoring of conversation, behavior and physical appearances can be traced back to Goffman (1990) who popularised the idea of managing identity and behavioral perception in different spaces. Goffman argued that impression management is a core component of social interaction and also influences how people are treated by others. Particularly relevant to my participants is the large body of self-presentation research which focuses on Muslim women's relationship with modesty and the significant role gender expectations around clothing and physical appearance play in their life (see: Allievi 1998; Butler 2001; Tarlo 2009; Lewis 2013; Liberatore 2017). The mothers of my participants were also notably integral to this process of learning that my participants spoke about. The majority of my participants' mothers were connected to Islam through marrying Muslim men (my participants' fathers), and it was their father through whom they had a kin connection to Islam. This highlighted a number of interesting parallels between my participants and their mothers' experiences of learning the correct expectations in the Muslim spaces they moved in, which the next section discusses in detail.

5.3 Role of mother as peacemaker

Nearly all of my participants spoke about their mothers as playing a significant role in their lives, during adolescence - a period which, as already discussed, was particularly turbulent. This meant that mothers were often increasingly involved in guiding their daughters' (my participants) journeys of learning how to exist. Mothers were discussed by my participants in various capacities: sometimes mothers were active in reminding them the 'correct' ways of behaving and presenting themselves in Muslim spaces, while other times they were considered instrumental in mediating relations within and beyond the family home. Like grandmothers, the distinctiveness of mothers as agents of religious socialisation (compared with fathers) has been cited in research exploring religious socialisation (Acock and Bengtson 1978; Bengtson et al. 2013). Bengtson et al.'s (2013) study found that mothers were often called upon to mediate relations between fathers and children, and during this process mothers reinforce and extend their influence in the religious orientation of their offspring. This is supported by my participants whose relationships and experiences of Islam were undoubtedly influenced by their mothers' personal relationships and positionings with Islam. However my findings suggest that as nearly all of my participants' mothers were not

born and raised Muslims, this influenced my participants' ambivalent relationships with Islam. What was particularly clear from discussions about mothers was that my participants' mothers' experiences and status in relation to Islam (as uncertain and ambivalent) was very significant for understanding the formation of my participants' own relationships with Islam and identity.

It is worth noting that the ways in which my participants spoke about their mothers relationships with Islam varied considerably. The majority of my participants had Muslim-born fathers and their mothers had either converted to Islam upon marriage or chosen not to but still engaged with it in varying degrees²⁸. Only two of my participants had Muslim-born mothers. My participants' stories illustrate how the positionings of their mothers towards Islam influenced their parenting. Emma, Zoe and Maria presented particularly interesting relationships with their mothers. All three of their mothers had converted to Islam upon marriage. Conversion for their mothers was underpinned by an assumption among extended family and the wider community that they would ensure that their offspring would engage with Islam too. Emma, Zoe and Maria discussed how this did not actually play out as easily as intended. It was clear that in this setting, mothers often acted as a buffer between my participants' leanings towards western culture and their fathers' more traditional and - in my participants' eyes - restrictive Islamic view. Emma, Zoe and Maria described their mothers at the forefront of stressful dealings throughout their adolescent years:

“My mum often challenged my dad when he told me to change into something more modest, she'd tell him to ‘get with the times’. But equally mum's car boot was always full of cardigans for me though, here's a picture like to put on if we went to my dad's family's house- y'know to cover my bum... It's only looking back now I realise my mum was learning too, I can't imagine how stressful it was for her and the pressure”

(Emma)

²⁸ See appendix 1 for a short profile on participants which includes mothers positioning with Islam.



Image 9: Cardigans in the car boot of Emma's mums car Emma's

“thankfully mum was enough to rival it out”

(Zoe)

“I remember my mum always telling me to block my dad's family on social media so they couldn't see how we dressed. She would turn a blind eye”

(Maria)

In the same way that my participants described their continual journeys of learning how to exist in Muslim spaces, mothers who converted were also presented as learning alongside

them. This was something which Emma spoke about at length. She reflected on how she had been angry with her mum for most of her childhood and adolescent years for supporting her father in parenting her. As an adult she has reflected back on this and spoken with her mother which has altered her view:

“My mum converted when she married my dad, she's recently told me that she cried a lot when she moved up here, apparently my dad's extended family would mock her Punjabi or ask her why she wasn't wearing a salwar kameez every Saturday when we went round. I feel bad for her looking back. I didn't realise that she was essentially going through the same pressure and judgement that I felt. She said she converted because she loved my dad and it was the only way they could get married and move forward, she didn't think too deeply about how this would affect raising children, she said she didn't consider that her family would also influence us, and we may not want to follow Islam”

(Emma)

What was significant to me is that understanding my participants' mothers' experiences of Islam and their questioned and ambivalent status in the local community was critical to understanding the formation of my participants' religious identities and how they learnt to present themselves in the spaces they moved in. The two were intertwined and experienced relationally. There are many parallels here which present a unique cyclical gendered socialisation at play between mother and daughter. While there is little research exploring lived experiences of Islam among mixed ethnic females, there are a number of parallels with my findings and studies exploring female conversion to Islam (Allievi 1998; Van Neuwkerk and Nieukerk 2006; Ozyurek 2015) . Studies on conversion are particularly relevant to my research as they shed important light on ambivalent relationships that people can have with religion and highlight the distinctive role of parents in equally complex environments. Much like some of my participants' mothers, Allievi's (1998) study on the experiences of female Muslim converts found that the women in her study faced significant pressure from both community and extended family to behave and dress in certain ways in order to be accepted as a 'proper Muslim'. My participants similarly discussed how their mothers also had to learn the 'right' ways of doing gender (in relation to clothing and child rearing) in Islam and that

this often involved major identity and behavioral shifts. Their status as ‘true Muslims’ was heavily questioned by the local community, illustrating parallels with my participants’ experiences of learning how to exist. Allievi (1998) also opened up ideas around what it means to be Muslim, which are particularly useful for understanding my participants’ ambivalent relationships with Islam. Allievi emphasises the diversity which exists within Islam by distinguishing between different types of Muslim converts. Firstly, “verbal converts” are considered as people who verbally pronounce their new affiliation with Islam but are not active practices (this form of conversion typically occurs during marital unions). Secondly, “total converts”, are those who independently publicly declare and visually display their connection with Islam. Emma, Zoe and Maria's descriptions of their mothers illustrate the complex and ambivalent relationships that convert mothers have with Islam and equally, how this manifests for my participants as they also balance different, and at times conflicting, aspects of identity.

5.4 Fitting into the wider landscape of racialised narratives

The stories told so far in this chapter have predominantly centered on how my participants navigate spaces they perceive as ‘Muslim spaces’, in other words, spaces where they encounter an increased concentration of Muslim family and community. During my contextualisation of Middlesbrough in Chapter One, and Chapter Two’s discussion about some of the ways urban spaces are imagined and represented in popular discourses and narratives, I discussed how imaginaries associated with the town can play a significant role in how people make sense of space and aspects of identity. As aforementioned previously described, some of the connotations of Middlesbrough relate to it being perceived as a space which is, (post)industrial, declining, left behind, working class, backward, white, racist, Islamophobic, ex-Labour turned Tory and anti-immigrant supporters of Brexit (Telford and Wistow 2019; Nayak 2022). Urban imaginaries are particularly important in this section because the stories exist directly in and in relation to imaginaries associated with the town. Thus, this section focuses on drawing out the contextual specificities of Middlesbrough’s wider landscape, including the socio-political context and urban imaginaries which shape my participants' stories. I discuss how some of the popular narratives and rhetoric’s in the town have shaped different aspects of identity and their perception of Middlesbrough and spaces outside of it.

My participants have grown up against the backdrop of increased Islamophobia and this was something which all of my participants recalled as significant in shaping their lived experiences of Islam as well as how they learnt to present themselves in public spaces. As described in Chapter Two, a number of scholars have argued that contemporary racism is deeply entwined with the prevalence of Islamophobia in Britain (The Runnymede Trust 1997; Vervotec 2002; Modood 2002; Muir and Laura 2004; Cummins 2004; Modood 2008; Allen 2010; Sayyid and Vakil 2011; Kumar 2012; Meer and Werbner 2005; Abbas 2020). As aforementioned, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia report found that there was an increased chance that European Muslims would face hostility (including negative stereotyping and social exclusion) and violent incidents if they visibly displayed associations with Islam, such as clothing (Home Office 2020). This could explain some of the distancing techniques that my participants described as having engaged in at some point in their lives. Importantly, my participants demonstrated the significance that narratives associated with Islam and minority backgrounds had on their own social positioning and behavior, but equally, they demonstrate how narratives evolve, shift and can be challenged - particularly over time.

Aneela's reflections from her time at secondary school were particularly powerful windows into how narratives can significantly shape how people perceive themselves in and relation to urban spaces and how they learn to exist in these spaces. Aneela grew up with a Black African mother and White Irish father²⁹, and she spoke about the significance of this ethnic combination against a backdrop of increased hostility towards Muslims and historical racism towards Black people. While I did not ask participants questions about mental health (such as clinical diagnosis) for ethical reasons, I anticipated that my participants might share their experiences of mental health difficulties based on my own experiences and academic understandings of lived experiences among minority groups. This was particularly clear in Aneela's story in which she freely disclosed some of her experiences of mental health in relation to her ethnic and religious identity. Aneela described her ongoing journey of internal conflict and feeling 'caught between' two worlds: being white or being other. Thus, racialised narratives played a significant role in how my participants made sense of themselves in relation to dominant narratives. They were consciously aware of what would decrease potential prejudice and increase acceptance and fitting in. Aneela traced this feeling back to

²⁹ See appendix 1 for short profile on Aneela

primary school, she showed me a picture of her and some school friends at a birthday party, while Lucy's spoke about how she presented herself on documents:

“This is a picture of me at a girls birthday party, there was a photographer there to do a photoshoot, I remember feeling out of place and hating the whole experience, I have another picture of my at school on photo day and I remember the same feeling, I'm the only brown girl in each of the pictures. It's very different from my sister's experience because she is a lot paler than me. I have a huge identity crisis. Growing up I was surrounded by white people. People tell me what I am, to be honest, I would try to simplify my background so people could understand it. I am so ingrained in this culture; it makes me question the validity of my African identity. When the terror attacks happened in 2011 it was a big thing, people at school would be like: Muslims are terrorists”

(Aneela)

“I am conscious when I apply for jobs because there's so many studies that show how having a foreign name reduces your chances of getting interviews. So, I am always aware of this. I always make sure I put my British middle name on applications. It's awful though”

(Lucy)

“There wasn't like a moment I realised, but I think you know when people start being a bit racist, it's more when you see other people like my dad's colour experiencing racism then I feel more conscious of it. I haven't had much racism, but I remember in school someone said you have a proper Muslim name, but you don't look Muslim. It isn't proper racist, but it was said in a derogatory way, it was like ‘oh, your name...’. It's always little comments. One thing happened last year, where I live it's not the nicest area, it was like on [name of road], me and my dad were queuing for cash at the cash machine, some man behind us was like smashed and high he stunk and everything he was dancing around, he was like dancing around singing a stupid racist

song about, sorry I don't wanna say it 'pakis'... my dad didn't even hear which I was glad about it.”

(Lucy)

Aneela and Lucy both describe engaging in significant attempts to distance herself from what (she perceived) others would consider ‘Muslim’ or ‘other’. Both grew up with one white English parent. Lucy’s accounts relate to more recently, she recalls the micro-aggressions she has experienced as a result of her ethnic name and consciously includes her English name on applications in hope to decrease potential stigma. Lucy was acutely aware of the privilege that this granted her in terms of attaining a job interview. This illustrates how the term ‘whitewashing’ can transcend beauty practices. Aneela’s story centres around her experiences during her time at secondary school (around 6 years ago), her experience of racism and stigma is undoubtedly reflective of the increase in religious and race based hate crimes following terror incidents such as 9/11 terror attacks and Manchester arena attacks. She recalls the physical and practical attempts she took to disassociate herself with Islam and ethnic differences. Looking back, she is able to identify the impact that the socio-political context at the time had on her perception of fitting in.

Both Lucy and Aneela’s stories support that Islamophobia is a deeply racialised concept and is something that many ethnic minorities and Muslims have to learn how to grapple with. Acts of terrorism, negative stereotypes and moral panics fuel Islamophobic and racialised ascriptions of Muslimness in the U.K. and wider Western contexts (Peek 2005; Chaudhry and Miller 2008; Moulin 2015; Moulin-Stožek and Schirr 2017). Studies have found that these challenges impact self-identification including how people declare their identity and religion (Moulin-Stožek and Schirr 2017). After 9/11 there has been increased anti-Islamic and anti-Arab sentiment that has been generalised to all those who “appear” Muslim (Ahluwalia and Pellettiere 2010). There are a number of parallels here between research exploring Sikh men’s experiences of misidentification, discrimination and managing identity in Western post 9/11 context (Sian 2013; O’Donnell et al. 2018; Ahluwalia and Pellettiere 2010; Ahluwalia 2011). Ahluwalia and Pellettiere’s (2010) study found that due to Sikhism not being a mainstream religion in the USA Sikh men had to routinely define their identity for others. Experiences of misidentification, discrimination and oppression were routine experiences among participants with misidentification far more frequent than correct

identification. Men were targeted because of their appearance (e.g. skin colour, long beards and turbans) and experienced verbal and physical attacks based on ignorance and stigma. Like Aneela's story, studies capture popular understandings of darker skin colour as somehow illustrative of being Muslim. The racialisation of Muslims remains prevalent in society despite skin colour and religion being irrelevant of one another³⁰. The dis-identification captured in Lucy and Aneela's stories offers insight into the multi-faceted aspects of experiencing Muslimness as an ethnic minority and how people negotiate this. For Lucy, consciously including her English middle name was an attempt to overcome her perceived susceptibility to prejudice.

There is an abundance of research exploring the connections between colorism and the practice of whitewashing in media marketing communications (Walker 1983; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Herring et al. 2004; Mitchell 2020). This definition captures the sentiment behind Lucy and Aneela's reflections. It also illustrates their understanding of skin colour as illustrative of a minority identity or 'other' whereby a collective position in mainstream Western culture is established and a clear juxtaposition of "us" and "them" is apparent (Moulin-Stožek and Schirr 2017). Studies have found that colorism can also operate within races (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Herring et al. 2004). This is illustrated in Aneela's comparison between her and her sister's skin colour. In Aneela's words her sister was visibly 'paler' and could pass as English or 'not Muslim'. There is a long history of Black women with lighter skin tones being treated more favorably and as more attractive than women with darker skin tones (Hill 2002; Herring et al. 2004). This feeds into narratives of benefits afforded by white privilege and the social advantages of having a more ambiguous racial appearance. Mixed race literature has explored the role which physical appearance plays in mixed ethnic people's lives and the relentless questioning they experience in their everyday lives (Farjardo Anstine 2011; Huang Kinsley 1994). Within this literature there is a body of research exploring the reaction to ambiguous mixed race people's appearances and how this operates within rigid racialized frameworks (Gilbert 2005; Song 2003; Williams 1996). Questions such as "what are you?" illustrates how people of mixed ethnicity are expected to explain their "existence" in relation to others (Bradshaw 1992; Nakashima 1992; Root 1998).

³⁰ The racialisation of Muslims in the U.K. is discussed in detail in chapter 2

While my participants, at times, described Middlesbrough as some of the connotations referred to by Telford and Wistow (2019)³¹ (left behind, working class, backward, white, racist, Islamophobic, ex-Labour turned Tory and anti-immigrant supporters of Brexit), they also identified an emerging improvement in cultural understanding towards ethnic minorities which coexisted alongside some of the more hostile urban imaginaries . This influenced their own social positioning and offered an opportunity for my participants to reflect on some of the strategies they had utilised in their past, in an attempt to learn the ‘right’ way and keep the peace. Most recently, the revival of the Black Lives Matter movement had highlighted the importance of educating oneself on the racial and ethnic diversity in the U.K. and placed the onus on non-ethnic minority people to unlearn preconceived notions. That said, it is important to recognise that the spaces that my participants identified as shifting and evolving were typically outside of Middlesbrough. Here I heard stories about how the socio-political context was shifting in some spaces and rewriting narratives about minority groups ³². During my walking interview with Aneela, she showed me her college. We travelled by bus to reach her college and I timed that it was a 30 minute ride. Aneela told me that she and Emma both attended this college, and this is where they met. Their motivation behind attending the college was based on its association of being a ‘steppingstone’ to university and offering students increased independence. Some of the benefits Emma and Aneela recalled were: meeting new people, not having to wear a uniform, calling teachers by their first name and having free periods. As we walked across the high street that the college was situated on, Aneela became visibly happier. Aneela’s voice was underpinned by nostalgia:

“going to college and uni there was a big shift, people celebrated diversity and wokeness, me and Emma were the cool ones for being different, our group is so diverse, there is us who are mixed race, Alec who is half black and gay and the girls who are lesbian and bi-sexual!, we are a right mixed bag! It’s similar to Manchester where I go to uni”

(Aneela)

³¹ Chapter 2 explores Telford and Wistow’s (2019) work on urban narratives associated with Middlesbrough in more detail.

³² The socio-economic context relating to Middlesbrough is discussed in detail in chapter 1 where I contextualise this research.

This shift is undoubtedly illustrative of a new culture emerging alongside the more negative urban imaginaries previously mentioned, whereby society celebrates difference. Aneela has experienced a society which heavily stigmatised difference as well as a more recent culture of being ‘different’ and ‘woke’ as something that is considered ‘cool’. Much like material things, value assigned to social groups (or in this case, social difference) can vary considerably in different contexts and time-frames and among different groups (Beer 2009). Importantly however, Aneela went to college in the outskirts of Middlesbrough - a college which was detached from a sixth form and as such, attracted people from in and around Middlesbrough. She went to a university in Manchester. In this sense, my participants were aware of the damaging impact dominant narratives in Middlesbrough had on their lives and sought to overcome this. Decisions to move away for university or travel a substantial distance for college was underpinned by an acute awareness that Middlesbrough was ‘behind’ in terms of understanding and celebrating minority identities. My participants spoke about how they could ‘be themselves’ in spaces which celebrated difference, meaning that the rigorous identity work discussed earlier in this chapter decreased significantly. There is an increasing societal temptation to view ‘wokeness’ as ‘cool’ (Whiteout 2018). Wokeness is typically associated with a left-wing progressive agenda including in relation to social, environmental, gender and racial justice. The narrative of being woke and doing good has become increasingly part of today's popular culture. However, it was apparent that this narrative was more visible in certain spaces, including cities and educational institutions which attracted a more diverse network of people.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have contributed to much needed discussions that emphasise the agency which women exercise in their everyday experiences of Islam. I have foregrounded the strategies and tools that my participants reflexively engaged in as they attempt to learn the ‘right’ way of existing in the spaces they move in. I have considered how my participants learn to act in ways that enable them to move between the expectations of often conflicting social worlds, without causing conflict. While ‘*learning the right way*’ is contextually subjective, all of my participants expressed this idea and conveyed the specific set of norms and expectations that they learnt to manage. Despite these seemingly impossible

expectations, my participants shared their attempts to overcome them as active agents of their identities and lives. They shared a number of humorous strategies and tactics exercised - often with the support of mothers - to convince the Muslim community that they were conforming to traditions and expectations in order to 'keep the peace'. Keeping the peace was something that was at the very heart of the stories heard in this chapter. This meant not disrupting the equilibrium, the expectations among the Muslim community which if disrupted could tarnish reputation and prompt conflict within the family. Despite my participants being strong and women with clear mindsets about how they wanted to live their lives, they equally valued being respectful and living a life which was peaceful and fostered good relationships with family. This was a theme which was developed through also discussing my participants' mothers' experiences and status in relation to Islam as this was significant for understanding the formation of my participants' relationships with Islam.

First, I considered the role which gender expectations played in my participants' lives. I identified these expectations as deeply ingrained and unquestioned, and stemming from the traditions associated with their ethnic and religious background. I also uncovered the important role which family and community played in gatekeeping my participants' lives and instilling these expectations. Second, I further developed this theme in exploring the role which wider cultural narratives play in shaping how my participants experience Islam. I foreground the contextual specificities of Middlesbrough's wider landscape, including the socio-political context and urban imaginaries and how they have shaped different aspects of my participants' identities and their perception of Middlesbrough and their existence within and in relation to it. This provides a notable departure from my focus on Muslim spaces and considers the role which wider narratives also play in shaping urban religious and ethnic identities.

These findings contribute to two important areas of research discussed previously in chapter two. Firstly, the role which modesty expectations play in my participants' lives offers a new perspective on the significance of female gender expectations in Islam (Allievi 1998; Neuwkerek and Nieuwerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Tarlo 2009; Mossière 2011; Burke 2012), by focusing on mixed ethnic women. More broadly, popular media and political discourse has typically depicted women's modesty in extreme forms, with significant reference to the veil being symbolic of the subordination of Muslim women which does not represent my

participants. The stories heard in this chapter encompass, what I perceive, to be a more subtle form of expectations of modesty (in comparison to that depicted by previous scholars exploring women in Islam), and that this is undoubtedly illustrative of them growing up in a household where parents are of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Equally, despite my participants identifying gender expectations as unavoidable as control was exerted through gossip, scandal and fear tactics, my participants challenged and negotiated this control through their use of discretion and secrecy.

The second area of research this chapter has contributed to is that interested in intergenerational exchanges relating to religion. By focusing on mixed ethnic women's lived experiences of Islam, I have shed light on the ways intergenerational exchanges take place in households where parents are of different ethnicity. Like previous studies exploring religious socialisation, my findings support that mothers play a distinctive role as agents of religious socialisation (Acock and Bengtson 1978; Bengtson et al. 2013). However, where this research departs past studies is in its focus on households where parents are of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Nearly all my participants' mothers were not born into Islam but rather, converted upon marriage or loosely engaged with Islam in family life. My participants' relationships and experiences of Islam were heavily influenced by their mothers' personal relationships and positionings with Islam. What was particularly clear when discussing religious exchanges that took place within my participants' households, was that my participants' mothers' experiences and status in relation to Islam (as uncertain and ambiguous) was significant for understanding the formation of my participants' own relationships with Islam and identity. This leads onto the next chapter which marks the final analysis chapter in this thesis. Here, I explore the ambiguous and fluid and flexible relationships that my participants have with Islam as adults as they encounter spaces beyond their homes and community

6. “drifting in and out of Islam”

6.1 Introduction

As illustrated in Chapter Four, conflict was experienced by my participants as contextually embedded and typically situated in the early adolescence period within the home. Chapter Five focused on the ways that the women learnt how to exist beyond the home and in the Middlesbrough community, the process of learning was equally discussed as relationally embedded and temporarily mediated. This chapter is the final of my three analytic chapters and considers my participants' experiences of lived religion as contextual and situationally defined beyond the Middlesbrough community and the family home, casting a light on their relationships in the wider world. The stories in this chapter predominantly center on my participants' relationships with Islam in the present (as young adults), whereas the previous two chapters focused on stories from early and late adolescence within the home and Middlesbrough community. Here I consider the role of navigating ethnically diverse spaces in shaping fluid and flexible relationships with Islam which can be considered ambiguous in comparison to more popular understanding of institutional religion. As discussed in Chapter Two, a significant body work in the field of 'lived religion' has explored the ways in which people often challenge traditional religious teachings in their everyday practices in order to deepen understanding of people's relationships with and experiences of religion in everyday life and thereby make space for groups whose existence challenges scripture and ideas attached to religious institutions (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011). Born out of critiques of secularisation models, the turn to 'lived religion' from the start of the 21st century cast a necessary light on new and diverse questions on the role of religion in everyday life. As described in Chapter Two, rather than exploring religion through institutional forms of belief (such as, attendance and membership to 'official' religious spheres), the lived religion approach encouraged a new way of understanding ordinary people's relationships with religion through everyday practices, habits and patterns of social life (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011).

My participants have engaged in some of these processes to help make sense of their mixed ethnic positioning in Islam. This chapter foregrounds my participants' lived engagements with particular aspects of Muslim religious practice and how they reflected on the meanings

of these for them, and the ways in which these meanings and practices are embedded in how my participants form a sense of self and authenticity in their lives. I illustrate how my participants disrupt religious and gender structures to make space for their own identities whilst also exercising caution in terms of respecting tradition and culture. The stories narrated in this chapter illustrate how religion is negotiated and renegotiated in ways that are relational, contextual and at times, messy. I foreground the individualised and personalised ways that my participants engage with Islam and how these stories feed into debates around moving beyond religious and ethnic binaries associated with identity. In this chapter I consider how my participants' relationships with Islam are contextually and situationally defined through kinship and space. I draw attention to two overriding influences. Firstly, the geographical proximity between my participants and their Muslim family and the influence this has on their relationships with Islam, and secondly, the influence which moving out of town (for work or study) had on these relations and lived experiences. I also consider my participants positioning with Islam as internalised and enduring. I draw attention to the ongoing presence that Islamic morals and values have in their lives before finally considering the permanence of Islamic dietary expectations in their everyday lives. I conclude this chapter by highlighting that my participants both express and evidence the need for increased understanding of the diversity and fluidity which exists in Islam both among Muslim communities and more widely across media and political discourse.

6.2 Locating religion: families and spaces

The first section of this chapter explores how my participants position their fluid relationships with Islam as contextual, relational and situationally defined through kinship and space. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, my participants moved between a range of social spaces, in which the ethnic, cultural and religious norms differed considerably. In what follows, I consider how geographical proximity to Muslim families influences my participants' relationships with Islam, as well as how moving out of the town shapes these relations and lived experiences. Considering these relational and spatial dynamics is crucial to understanding why my participants had ambivalent relationships with Islam and highlights the necessity for an increased understanding of the diversity and fluidity which exists in Islam more broadly.

6.2.1 Kinship

I begin by exploring how my participants' experiences of Islam can be considered as substantially located in kinship. The strength of family ties and exposure to Islam were strongly connected to the geographical positioning of Muslim family, which played a considerable role in shaping how regularly - and to what degree - my participants experienced Islam in their everyday life. Some of my participants had very little connection with extended Muslim families which in turn shaped their relationship with Islam. For those who had Muslim families living in the same town, their contact was much greater, meaning that Islam had a more dominant presence in their life. However, despite these distinctions, a clear similarity was that religion was rarely discussed in terms of individual and personal faith commitment and kinship was the dominant factor which shaped participants' relationships with Islam, in terms of how and how often it manifested in their everyday lives.

As discussed previously in Chapter Five, kinship has been identified by a number of scholars as playing a significant role in shaping how young people identify (Becher 2003, 2005, 2008; Scoufield et al. 2003; Martin 2005; Arweck and Nesbitt 2009; Day 2011). These existing studies have even warned caution about assuming high retention in terms of religious identity means young people have strong religious beliefs, as studies have shown that young people often self-identity as a religion in order to align themselves with kin and national culture (Arweck and Nesbitt 2009; Day 2011). Arweck and Nesbitt (2009) have identified that the likelihood of young people's relationship with religion fracturing when the distance from the family home, the proximity of their (or their parents) place of worship, or there is a significant distance from their home to the home of grandparents and extended family. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, these studies have typically explored religions that have not been racialised to the same extent as Islam is in the UK. The previous chapters have indicated how factors such as name, hair, and skin colour can all contribute to individuals being 'read' by others as Muslim, which then shape their sense of identity, even if this is experienced with some ambivalence. In what follows, I explore the distinctive role that family plays in shaping my participants' engagements with forms of religious practice.

Emma captures the importance of kin and tradition when considering young people's relationships and experiences of Islam:

“I learned to read the Quran with my grandma after school, it was something that was expected of all us cousins, so I just did it like everyone else. I never read it now I finished it and this was seen as a big achievement a major milestone so for me it was a ticky box and something I could receive praise through”

(Emma)

It is clear here that seeking to please grandparents was a significant motivation for engaging in Islamic rituals and practices for my participants when they were children. Day’s (2011) study found that young people demonstrated a desire to articulate faith through important relationships with kin. This supports the idea that young people locate religion in the social relationships they deem legitimate (Smith and Denton, 2005; Clydesdale, 2007; Day, 2011), rather than solely through a framework of individual agency and individualism (Madge et al., 2014). Out of all of my participants Emma and her sister Hana described having the most contact with their Muslim grandmother as they both visited their grandmother daily after school. As discussed in Chapter Five grandmothers and aunties played a significant role in regulating gender expectations. Very few of my participants’ (including Lily and Laila) had infrequent contact with their Muslim family and this was due to the geographical distance of their grandparents living abroad. Emma and Hana’s grandmother on the other hand lived locally in their town and they were the only two of my participants who had finished reading the Quran. This resonates with research indicating that grandmothers can play a significant role in shaping young people’s religious experiences (Becher, 2003, 2005, 2008; Arweck and Nesbitt 2009; Day 2011).

A number of my participants also located their current relationships and exposure to Islam through family social events, including special occasions such as Eid or weddings. Lily did not have much contact to her Iranian Muslim family as they lived in Iran, and as such her experiences of Iranian culture and Islamic events were infrequent and unique:

‘I enjoy the social aspect of Islam because we meet with family, get dressed up, even though Eid and weddings are “religious events” they feel more like family cultural things where there’s less focus on pressure and more on having fun and socialising”

(Lily)

Lily speaks about ‘embracing’ such occasions and that these occasions encouraged respect and belonging. This suggests the way that my participants engaged with Islam (either through the reading of scripture or more cultural socialising) differed substantially depending on where in the life course they were, where their Muslim family was situated, and how much involvement their Muslim family had in their daily lives. That said, there was a clear pattern which suggested that as my participant got older they were able to exercise more agency in relation to family involvement and expectations. Even Hana who had also learnt the Quran as a child felt herself drifting from this tradition as she got older. It was clear that while family pressure played a considerable role in how my participants experienced Islam, agency was also present among my participants:

“There came a time where I just wasn’t interested anymore in impressing my family by finishing the Quran. It was late secondary school. I remember as we got older me and my older cousins would be really disruptive because we just wanted to watch TV after school, we would deliberately make funny faces or walk funny to make each other laugh. Sometimes I would pretend I was on my period so I didn’t have to participate. It was the reading and praying aspect that I just couldn’t relate to. It is a different language too, so I literally didn’t have a clue what I was saying”

(Hana)

I asked Hana why she would pretend to be on her period at prayer time and she told me that this was because some of her favorite TV programs would be on after school, and she did not want to miss them. The strength of family for Hana is obvious; however, Hana’s actions identify ways in which she utilised agency to subvert the familial power structures in which she was placed. This relates to de Certeau’s(1988) work on the tactics people employ in order to reclaim their own autonomy from external forces. A number of scholars have considered the relevance of de Certeau’s description of tactics in relation to the study of

childhood (Oswell 2013). Michel de Certeau's (1988) work on the tactics people employ in order to reclaim their own autonomy from external forces is particularly relevant to considering how lived experiences of religion can be shaped by age and childhood. A number of scholars have considered the relevance of Certeau's description of tactics in relation to childhood (Oswell 2013). Oswell (2013) argues that one way of considering children's agency is through de Certeau's (1984) thoughts on 'tactics' and 'strategies'. While strategies are the actions of institutions, tactics are the actions taken by those who do not have such power and attempt to challenge the broader system of authority which they exist in. Oswell (2013) argues that 'it makes little sense to frame children's agency in terms of a simple binary, having or not having agency, capacity or power' (2013, 269). This is captured in Shillitoe and Strhan's (2020) study exploring how non-religious children how they negotiate religion and their non-religious identities in collective worship and prayer in primary school settings is particularly relevant here. They identify the tactics developed by non-religious children during acts of collective worship which illustrate how children's experiences of prayer are highly individualised and subjective. The children in their study tactically reconfigure such attempts for collective prayer in order to resist or create their own meanings. For example, some children would go to great lengths to hide contraband (such as toys and playing cards) up their sleeves in order to take them into collective prayer as they found it 'boring'. This was a clear depiction of children's agency and how objects and the strategies were developed in relation to the networks around them and has parallels with Hana's reflections on her tactics employed during her childhood.

To summarise, my participants' engaged with religious practices in a variety of ways, in relation to their family. It was clear that they enjoyed and found value in particular family events or celebrations, but they moved away from practices that they found 'boring' when they got in the way of how they wanted to be spending their time. The next section moves on to explore a key milestone experienced by a number of my participants (moving away from their town) and how this affected their relationships with family and in turn, lived experiences of Islam.

6.2.2 Moving away from Middlesbrough

As described above, religion was predominantly located in kinship for my participants. This meant that 'moving away' (which was experienced for a period of time by most of my participants) significantly shaped their relationships with Islam. Some of my participants

experienced living away from Middlesbrough when they reached early adulthood; this was for a range of reasons including moving for work, education or family relocations. These moves typically involved moving to a city, where they were able to experience the cosmopolitan environment that city life had to offer. Among those who moved away for university, Emma, Lucy and Hana went to Russell group universities and Lily and Aneela went to post-92 metropolitan universities. Interestingly, Emma also experienced her family actually relocate from central Middlesbrough when she was 18 to the outskirts of Middlesbrough which had its own unique influences on Emma's lived experiences of Islam. The socio-diversity and left-wing politics which dominated many of the participants' experiences of the city was a stark contrast to Middlesbrough socio-political landscape and enabled many of the women to embark on a journey of self-acceptance and self-discovery. Many of my participants spoke about how moving away enabled them to - from a geographical and mental distance - appreciate and even embrace aspects of their religious identity that they had previously (in Middlesbrough) felt pressure to embrace. Allowing some of them to reach what they described as a level of authenticity and sincerity in terms of 'what felt right' in their relationship with Islam. Chapters Four and Five captured the struggle and identity work of 'learning' that my participants experienced, whereas this section focuses on my participants' relationships with Islam as young women and in a social space outside of their hometown, Middlesbrough. Stories about moving away in this section offer an interesting opportunity to comparatively explore how different spaces were encountered and importantly, how distance from the close knit community in Middlesbrough afforded my participants the freedom to engage with an Islam that felt sincere to their racial and religious identities.

Lucy speaks about her experience of moving to Newcastle for university from one of the most deprived postcodes in Middlesbrough:

"I like that it is small, and everyone knows each other but that's also my disadvantage... people gossip, and people are so closed minded. Living in a city is really good. Middlesbrough was voted the worst place to live after all. It opened my mind a bit, meeting people who aren't from Middlesbrough. Even though being just down the road in Newcastle it's very different because it's a student city, there's more variety of people and views and culture. You need to get out of there."

(Lucy)

Lucy's story supports urban sociological research arguing that city life can afford minority identities a cosmopolitan space to live, in terms of religious and ethnic identity (Sennett 2002; Tonkiss 2003). It also offers an interesting lens to compare how Islam manifests in different spaces and in turn, how this shapes relationships and experiences of religion. Nearly all of my participants agreed that the Islam followed in their town was 'behind the times' (Lucy), 'stuck in the past' (Emma) and 'very cultural and traditional' (Zoe). As discussed in Chapter Two, there are growing numbers of young people aligning themselves with a new intellectual Islam particularly in affluent spaces where Muslim women experience the effects of cosmopolitanism (Bhimji 2009). However, this is not representative of how Islam is practised universally across Britain and this is particularly clear in the ways that my participants experienced Islam in their hometown. While my participants were passionate that they did not align with the heavy focus on culture and tradition in Middlesbrough's Muslim community, these attitudes were prevalent in the spaces they moved in and were therefore significant in how the women experienced Islam in their daily lives. Equally, for nearly all of my participants (including Lily) the local Muslim communities emphasis on culture and tradition was a strong motivation for moving away:

'I deliberately moved away, I could not imagine staying in Middlesbrough forever, it is so backward, it's increasing in right wing, far right support and they are not liberal at all. If you don't stay in your box you're screwed. Moving to a city has been essential for me to develop as a person, it is so left wing, it's predominantly students. We always go on marches, and everyone is into politics! There's very little focus on religion to be honest'

(Lily)

It is interesting how 'tradition' impacts life in Middlesbrough in various simultaneous forms, for example: working class tradition, right wing traditions and Muslim traditions which seemingly inevitably clash. I asked Lily what she meant by 'stay in your box' and she demonstrated an awareness of what she felt was necessary to 'be counted' as Muslim in Middlesbrough, in terms of appearance and behavior. Segregated low income neighborhoods (like the Northeast town explored in this research) are characteristic of less formal education and typically do not have access to the same networks and resources. In these communities, research has found that the lack of cosmopolitan influence has resulted in everyday Islam

often becoming a case of following more institutional and cultural forms of religion, such as donning on visible symbolic and performance of basic tenets (Mahmood 2001; DeHanas 2016; Liberatore 2017; Beekers 2020). Therefore, the struggle apparent for the women here was that while young people have been identified as negotiating their religious values and beliefs within the framework of individual agency and liberal individualism (Madge et al. 2014; Woodhead 2017; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019), the lack of influence liberal individualism has had in post-industrial towns more broadly produces stark comparisons to urban experiences for those identified as Muslim. This is important to recognise given that the dominant academic focus on the gendered (and broader) experiences of British Muslims has been on Muslims living in super diverse urban cities (Mahmood 2001; DeHanas 2016; Liberatore 2017), and there has been little attention to the experiences of Muslims moving between different towns and cities within Britain.

Cities have been recognised by scholars as encouraging positive incentives for accepting social difference (Young 1999). Of course, while cities are by no means free of racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice, Sennett (2002) argues that the disorderliness of cities provides people with experiences of navigating differences which are necessary for achieving 'full adulthood'. This can enable differences between social groups to flourish in urban cities and the celebration and excitement of difference. This could imply that people living in cities typically have the socio-cultural resources necessary for developing intercultural skills, including a willingness to communicate and engage with the unfamiliar. Tonkiss's (2003) thoughts here are particularly useful; she explores some of the tensions between anonymity and community in cities. She adopts aspects of analyses of urban indifference and blasé attitude - characteristic of Sennett's (2002) analysis - and defines relations between city-dwellers as a "minimal ethical relation" (p.298-300). Tonkiss (2003) considers urban indifference as a kind of social relation which facilitates "certain protections" and "certain freedoms" that are thus made possible. He adds that urban indifference involves a comfort that "no one is looking, nobody is listening." (p.298-300), which affords anonymity. Tonkiss (2003) stresses that this can be especially valuable for members of social groups (such as women or ethnic minorities) which tend to be the object of the social gaze in towns and more rural environments. Several participants struggled with Middlesbrough's close-knit community and their experiences contrasted what Tonkiss defined as a sense of urban anonymity.

Another important story for considering religion as located in kinship and contextual is Emma's story. During her late teens, Emma's parents moved from an area close to the center of the town to the outskirts of Middlesbrough and most notably some distance away from her father's Muslim family who previously had exercised great religious and cultural influence in her life, particularly during her childhood. During Emma's walking interview we hopped on a short bus ride to her new home. The journey with Emma drew my attention to the starkly shifting landscape. As we left central Middlesbrough, the congestion apparent in the center of Middlesbrough subsided and the landscape became greener, quieter and secluded. This shifting spatial positioning provided an interesting viewpoint to consider how Islam and more specifically, the Muslims community, manifested in the smaller area in the outskirts of the town, in comparison to more central and built up areas of Middlesbrough. As aforementioned, it also captures the coexistence of different 'traditions' in the town:

“Before we lived closer to town so you'd see more Asian people and more people in general. Now we live in a village. Can you see, it's all old white people round here you don't see anyone. I liked the fact that before it was easy to get to town and see my friends, now we are a bit cut off, the bus is like once a day. But it's good for privacy actually. Like now I can go out with shorts on, and I used to be scared someone would tell my auntie, or that she would see me. Also, in terms of like if you were out with a boy you would be worried again, here you can go on a walk and it's fine. I think it makes a big difference where you are brought up. People in London aren't going to have that paranoia of being seen. I'm still paranoid when I go into town, I would hide if I saw someone, and I would always be looking around like I was on guard. I don't feel it as much at Teesside retail park because Asians don't really go there as much. It's cut off and it's not in town ...However, I know I shouldn't feel bad... when you go away with friends etc. you can be totally yourself here. Dad's more chilled when we go away as well which suggests he is only bothered here because of his family”

(Emma)

Moving away from central Middlesbrough to a village situated on the outskirts offered Emma an opportunity to compare some of her past experiences with her new positioning in a more rural area in wider Middlesbrough. She had gained distance and privacy which was beneficial in her life and perhaps, she implied, also her father's. This supports many findings which indicate the tensions between somewhat static and socially conservative understandings of small town communities, and the perceived cosmopolitanism of larger urban cultures (Sennett 2002; Tonkiss 2003). While this tension is not specific to religious identity, the question of religion is tied up with broader spatial tensions. Middlesbrough operates as a distinctive space and Emma's extract suggests that moving towards the outskirts of congested space with tight knit ethnic and religious communities can afford a level of anonymity that creates a greater sense of freedom in relation to religious norms of behavior. This is worth noting, as spatial analysis often compares spaces along the following binaries: cities vs towns or rural vs urban. Emma did not live in a rural area, albeit it was still Middlesbrough and actually only 10 minutes from the town center, however her new area was what she labelled 'on the outskirts' of the town. There is little discussion in urban research or studies of urban religion about people's experiences living on the outskirts of towns made up of close-knit communities. While studies have captured the anonymity and freedoms which cities can afford (Sennett 2002; Tonkiss 2003), Emma experiences a similar sense of freedom in a rural (mostly white) village rather than a city. This suggests that village locations can paradoxically support a greater sense of freedom and anonymity than towns, if the said town is inhabited by close-knit communities who restrict that sense of freedom.

Hearing about Lucy and Emma's experiences of moving away from Middlesbrough illustrates how space is experienced as relational (Massey 1994). It was clear that their experience of moving had influenced their preference of living away from central Middlesbrough and their opinions and associations of the town. This illustrates the role which broader social imaginaries associated with a place has in shaping people's perceptions of it and their positioning and associations within it and the relationships people have with a religion that is for them predominantly located in kinship. This sense of space as relational relates to Wacquant's (2007) coining of 'territorial stigma' which recognises the stigmatisation, othering and negative representations of geographical communities and places, as they are constructed in opposition to other kinds of places, including here, both villages and larger metropolitan cities. Lucy and Emma illustrated elements of territorial

stigma due Middlesbrough's poor reputation, in terms of liberalism and equality and its association, usually via the media sources as a Brexit voting, possibly xenophobic 'traditional' white working class town. As Wacquant (2007) argues, territorial stigma can intersect with racial and ethnic discrimination, which was clear in Emma and Lucy's stories. Their stories offer insight into popular discourses and narratives about Muslims in Middlesbrough which in turn, prompts their marginalisation as mixed ethnic women. Wacquant also argues that this can lead to the spatial containment of marginalised groups. While this is somewhat true (I observed in the walking interviews that ethnic groups were typically situated in specific areas), Emma and Lucy's stories about moving illustrate that some people can break the pattern of 'spatial containment' and move away and dissociate themselves from processes of spatial organisation entirely. Whilst the women do not fit neatly into existing categories and social imaginaries in Middlesbrough, they were able to pave new ones. Their more liberal engagements with Islam than the expectations of the tight-knit family community - illustrated, for example, by Emma's clothing choices and going out with boys - fitted more naturally into spaces which afforded some distance from the spaces that the Muslim community were predominantly located in. Importantly, this allowed them to challenge social imaginaries depicting Muslims and ethnic minorities in stark opposition to the West as well as showing their sense of distance from the institutional understandings of Islam popular in their town and drew on aspects of different spaces. Despite moving away, providing my participants with the critical distance required to experience spaces and spatial narratives outside of their town, Islam was nevertheless enduring in their lives. While the freedoms of city life were discussed in the foreground of how my participants described their experiences of moving away from Middlesbrough, Islam was nevertheless always present and enduring, albeit differently located. The next section explores how religion was enduring in my participants' lives.

6.3 Religion as enduring

Despite my participants distancing themselves from aspects of Islam, religion was undoubtedly enduring in their lives. Religion was positioned by my participants as internalised and permanent. I turn to a number of stories here which illustrate the importance of the social, contextual and temporal specificities when considering religious identity and how this manifests despite struggle and conflict. These stories also capture the importance of more ambivalent relationships with Islam which popular depictions of faith would consider

‘disengagement’ rather than illustrations of the diversity which exists in Islam. At the forefront of these stories is what my participants identified as aspects of Islam that ‘felt right’ in their lives and equally which aspects did not, drawing attention to the importance of sincerity, authenticity and respect among my participants as they reached adulthood and led independent lives. I begin by exploring the illustrative pictures that my participants showed me when discussing the changing pace of Islamic expectations in their food practices. These images powerfully capture the importance of considering experiences of lived religion such as food practices which are typically taken for granted social practices. I end by discussing how my participants positioned morals and values associated with their Muslim background as remaining important into their adulthood. My participants placed considerable value in ‘being a good person’ and providing social value to the world they live in. While they distanced themselves from organised and institutional understandings of religion, theological understandings of Islam were pertinent to how they led their life.

6.3.1. Food practices

Food offered an interesting lens into both the distancing from and the simultaneous permanence of religion in my participants' lives. One of the subtle ways that Islamic teachings presented themselves in later life for the women was through their diet. Despite all the women having been raised as children to eat halal meat and abstain from pork and alcohol they all decided at some point in their adolescence to start drinking alcohol and eating non-halal food. Decisions why the women chose to eat non-halal meat varied considerably and were aided by the images of food that the women discussed during the second interviews. Some of the women expressed a sense that the dietary requirements associated with Islam were an ‘inconvenience’ as most popular British supermarkets did not sell Halal meat. Laila spoke about how halal meat was even less accessible when she moved away to university due to moving out of the family home where it was readily available. Some stopped eating halal meat in secondary school in an attempt to feel more like their friends.

“I would feel embarrassed at lunchtime in front of other children in my class because dinner ladies would check if I was Muslim because it isn't nice being different to

other kids”.

(Emma)

Sisters Zara and Alisha spoke about their mother bringing non-halal meat into the house ‘in secret’ when their Muslim father was away. Laila whose mother was English mother and Iranian father also experienced concealing what she and her mum ate from her father. Some of the women also spoke openly about how they did not feel guilty for choosing to eat non-halal meat as they believed that the very idea of categorising meat as halal or not-halal did not make sense to them:

“I don’t care about chicken being halal or not halal, chicken is chicken, it’s stupid and impractical”

(Zara)

Conversations with the women about pork abstinence contrasted greatly from the relaxed attitudes expressed in relation to consuming non-halal meat and alcohol. All but one of the women continued to abstain from pork during their adolescence and adulthood. The women spoke about the negative social and cultural connotations of pigs in Islam which they had grown up around, for example the idea that pigs were a ‘dirty animal’. It was clear from speaking to the women that they also felt it was unlikely that this would change in later life. Alisha drew on an image of sweets (see: image 7) and it reminded her of her first experience of accidentally eating pork gelatin in nursery:

“I remember thinking OH MY GAWD. I’m gonna die, it isn't halal!!!!”

(Alisha)



Image 7: Pick and Mix

The image was useful in prompting Alisha to open up about the discomfort she felt as a child when consuming animal gelatin, this also links closely to my discussions on fear of hell and guilt in chapter 4. Images of food that they shared with me offered my participants a means to reflect in the interviews on more subtle aspects of their religious identities such as their consumption patterns. Most of the women believed that eating pork would be seen by their Muslim family as the ultimate sin, Emma spoke about how it would be seen as the ‘final betrayal’ of their Islamic upbringing and the ‘very worst thing’ they could do. Moreover, the women expressed that abstinence from pork was something they ‘grew up with’ and as it was deeply ingrained in them throughout childhood they could not imagine changing this behavior as adults. Similarly the participants in Nieuwkerk’s (2018) study who had left or distanced themselves from Islam found that the habits, social norms, practices and values, such as abstinence from pork, were deeply ingrained and as a result, lingered on in later life. Eating pork was identified as a boundary that few were prepared to cross. Like most of the participants in Nieuwkerk’s (2018) study eating pork was the final step to leaving Islam and something which they struggled with - they refer to being repulsed when first trying pork and even experiencing a burning sensation in their throat. The women in this study similarly saw pork abstinence as deeply ingrained in them. Emma showed me an image of her meal at

Nando's with her sister. This opened up discussion about how Emma found it relatively easy to abstain from pork in comparison to alcohol or non-halal chicken:

“Loads of people are vegan now anyway, so I don't stand out' and 'pork isn't a popular meat anyway, not like chicken, beef etc.”

(Emma)

Emma had assessed abstinence from pork as a feasible and practical way in which they could respect her father's wishes, whilst simultaneously fitting neatly into the cultural food trends in England. This allowed her to engage relatively privately with Islam without it being a significantly public spectacle. Conversations around pork abstinence with the women suggested that the women engaged in a process of individualised negotiation with Islam to do what felt comfortable and authentic for them. Abstaining from pork was something which many of the women did in an attempt to show some level of affiliation and commitment to Islam. Recent studies on the lived experience of faith have found that children on the whole tend to be similar to their parents with their religious practices despite considerable 'switching, matching and mixing' elements of faith taking place over the trajectory of their lives (Denton 2009; Putnam and Campbell 2010). The notion of mixing and matching elements of religion resonates heavily with the young women in this study who can be seen as embracing some aspects of Islam, such as abstaining from pork, while simultaneously rejecting other aspects and consuming non-halal meat and alcohol. The interviews with the women highlighted the process of self-negotiation they engaged in to decide which elements to embrace, adapt or outright reject. For example, whilst abstaining from pork presented itself as a form of ongoing affiliation with Islam, it was not seen as a strenuous commitment for any of the women.

6.3.2 Morals and values

Hana's story allowed me to consider the permanence of religious morals, values and ethical teachings from her upbringing. Hana was raised as a practicing Muslim; she had gradually disconnected with Islam during her adolescent years when she felt that it was too restrictive over her lifestyle choices. However, what is clear is that having reached adulthood, Islam (specifically the value placed on being a good person in Islam) - had not 'gone' but instead endured:

“I would never get involved with formal prayers or Quran reading now but I still say a little prayer in my head if something bad happens like if an ambulance drives past or if someone's ill or I have an exam. I drift in and out of it really. The prayer is only a sentence, a bit like our father.... it's the same prayer that my dad taught us during our childhood, so I'd say this “bismillah irrahman nirraheem, please make the person whose hurt be ok” that's all I say...my dad said it was essential before embarking on anything in life or in time of need, so I kind of still have that mindset drilled into me. Even if I can't sleep I'll do a prayer in the hope that God might help - if he's real you know on the off chance he can help. It's funny because no one knows I do this, it's just something I do. I feel like other Muslims think there's nothing Muslim going on in my head because you know I have a boyfriend I drink etc.”

(Hana)

This suggested that despite Hana - who had been raised as ‘practicing Muslim’ - having drifted from this label, aspects of the religious teachings she had learnt during her upbringing remained engrained. Interestingly, compartmentalisation is common across LGBTQ people's experiences of managing religious tensions, and space, place and context have been identified as core mediators of this (Jackson-Taylor 2021). While Hana had drifted substantially away from religious practices and engaged in activities deemed by many in her community as ‘un-Islamic’, her narrative above illustrates that even though her relationship with Islam is one she drifts into and out of, as she describes it, aspects of religion were nevertheless enduring and remained important to her particularly at times of struggle.

I turn now to Alisha and her sister Zara's stories. Both grew up with an Italian mother and Algerian Muslim father. Zara was a probation officer. I asked Zara what aspects of Islam she resonated with, and she showed me a picture of her on her first day at work:

“I try not to think about the rules because if I think about them I feel bad cos I don't do them. I like to think about the job I do - looking after prisoners. I do my best by them not be cruel etc., I live by the principles of Islam rather than the specific rules... because otherwise I know I'm not fulfilling them. I think the principles are more

important to be honest, cos you can pray 5 times a day and be an awful person”

(Zara)

Here Zara largely focused on the morality of ‘doing good’. For Zara, looking after a vulnerable group in society offered societal value and thus allowed her to engage with the principles of Islam. This process of self-negotiation was essential for Zara to engage in a degree of self-acceptance. Alisha (Zara’s sister) was a 21 year old Art student, stated that her lack of trust in organised religion:

“For me organised religion was born out of too many white men with ulterior motives who occupied religious spaces. I do not resonate with it. I prefer to think about things spirituality like karma and good energy”

(Alisha)

Alisha’s distancing from organised religion relates to arguments put forward by lived religion scholars about experiences of the patriarchal aspects of traditional institutional religions such as Islam and Christianity (Jeldtoft 2011; Ekstrom et al. 2019). Alisha and Zara’s mother was born and raised Italian Catholic while her father Algerian Muslim, which suggests that her broad comment about religion comes from moving away from religious traditions of both her father and her mother. Both Alisha and Zara argue that their morals and decisions to be a ‘good person’ were shaped by endeavors to be humane, rather than solely to adhere to Islamic expectations. Ammerman (2016) argues that the focus on the study of religion among sociologists should fundamentally be about what people ‘do’ in their everyday lives, rather than matters of official doctrine and dogma which she argues should be left to theologians to explore. However Ammerman (2016) also recognises that exploring everyday practices should not be entirely divorced from institutions and organisations, as practice is often tied to institutions, texts, rituals and beliefs which is evidenced by my participants locating particular ideas about morals and values in relation to Islam. In addition, a number of academics have put forward the argument that young people negotiate their religious values and beliefs within a framework of liberal individualism and individual agency (Madge et al. 2014; Woodhead 2017; Strhan and Shillitoe 2019). This is reflected in

the sense of personal agency demonstrated by the women in this study who, despite the sense of religious expectations related to kinship and community, nevertheless as they grew up came to see their faith as a matter of their own individual choice, and as something they could negotiate so that particular principles of Islam could fit 'authentically' into their lives.

These kinds of experiences highlight the need for increased understanding of the diversity and fluidity which exists in Islam, including the unique and sometimes more ambivalent ways that people engage with Islamic teachings. The importance of the values and morals associated with Islam was also illustrated by Emma:

“I mean every time I come home I reconnect with Islam through visiting my Muslim family or attending a social occasion, and while I don’t agree with a lot of the rules I do respect the faith and it's the binding thread between me and my dad and his side of the family, so I do feel connected in many ways to it, the morals and values but also, in terms of cultural and family identity. I drift further away from it when I’m at uni. My dad knows that I’m obviously not praying anymore but he knows I do some things as and when, like if it's a holy time of year or if I am with family, this feels right and at a safe distance. Doing any more than I would feel fake and suffocating”

(Emma)

Emma showed me an image of the Quran in her university bedroom hidden in a cupboard (see: image 6).

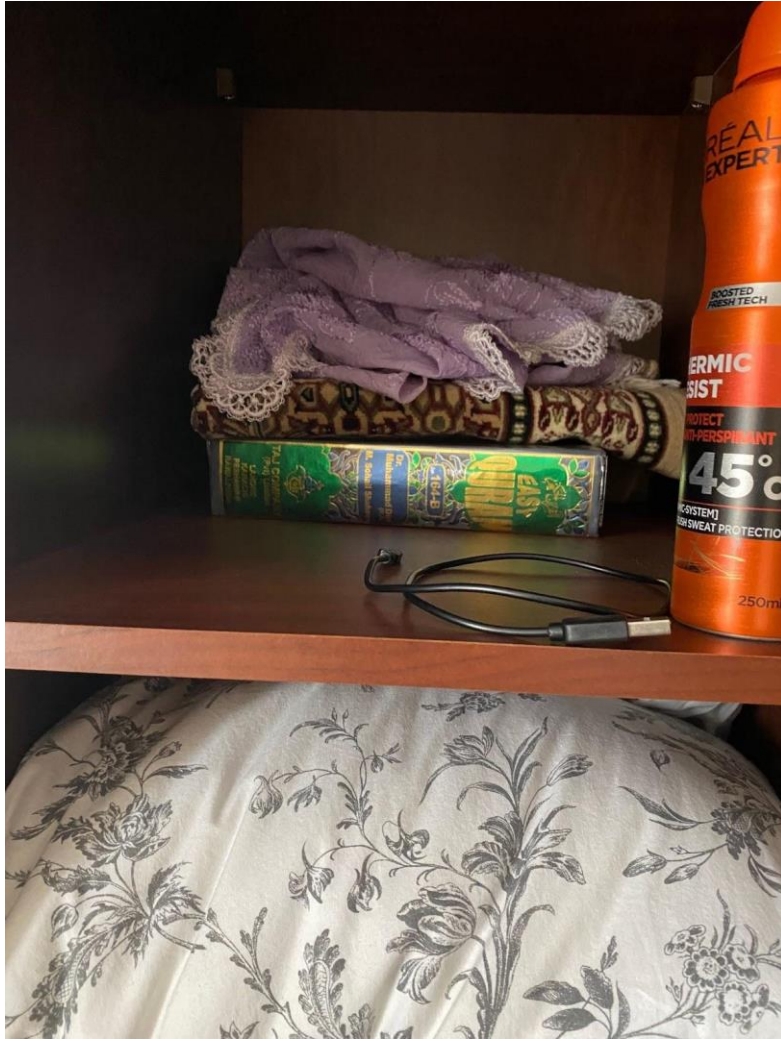


Image 6: Quran in bedroom

This opened up discussion about how Islam manifested in her life when at university:

“My dad wanted me and my sister to take a Quran or a prayer mat to university, he said even if we don’t touch it just have it there. I’ve never touched it”

(Emma)

Displaying physical religious objects in her university bedroom was something Emma saw as a ‘big public statement to everyone at university’ and she expressed a sense of worry that it would be ‘the first thing people notice’. For Emma, visual and public markers like displaying

the Quran in her bedroom conflicted and did not align with her sense of her own identity, however she decided to grant her father's request to 'make him happy'. This relates to Sharma and Guest's (2013) findings on Christian students at university. Like many of the Christian students in their research, the transitional nature of attending university destabilised Emma's previous religious identity. Emma was conscious of what other students would think of her and how displaying a religious text would influence her reputation. Emma was keen to fit in which led her to modify her religious identity. This relates to the previous chapter on keeping the peace, as Emma had to balance her father's emotions and what sat comfortably in terms of her own identity at university. Emma finishes by positioning herself in a relationship with Islam which she deems as safe and healthy for her own sense of self. She identifies the aspects of Islam and spaces she feels comfortable engaging with and is able to recognise what does not feel right. The next section explores another aspect of how religion was enduring for my participants (food practices). Equally, I highlight the importance of doing what 'felt right' for my participants in terms of authenticity and respect.

6.4 Conclusion

This final analysis chapter contributes to a much-needed area of research with the field of everyday lived experiences of religion, mixed ethnicity and gender. While the stories narrated in the previous two chapters have predominantly focused on my participants' adolescent experiences, this chapter largely foregrounds the more recent encounters and relationships that my participants have with particular aspects of Muslim culture and practice as adults and importantly beyond Middlesbrough and into the wider world. I cast a necessary light on the often ambivalent relationships people have with religion in multifaceted and diverse spaces in ways that trouble popular depictions of 'religion' and 'Islam' that are refracted through the lens of institutional religion and associated religious practices and beliefs.

First I consider the role that context plays in shaping my participants' experiences of Islam, paying particular attention to kinship and geographical positioning. I emphasise faith as relational, contextual and situationally defined, making it a fluid entity in my participants' lives. Their relationships with religion were often tied up with kinship, a finding which echoes wider studies in the field of religion, family and socialisation (Voas 2003; Smith and Denton 2005; Savage et al. 2010; Day 2011; Scourfield et al. 2012; Bengtson et al. 2013;

Spilman et al. 2013; Dollahite et al. 2019). Equally, this chapter has contributed to this literature through exploring how key milestones such as moving away - whether to a larger cosmopolitan city or to a smaller village - significantly shaped aspects of my participants' identities and attitudes.

This leads on to another aspect of this theme, which sees religion as an enduring presence of my participants. Despite having infrequent relationships with particular elements of Islamic culture, as described in the previous chapters, I identified aspects of religion as continually present in my participants' lives to various and shifting degrees. Here I emphasise the need for increased understanding about the diverse ways that religion manifests in people's lives in more subtle forms such as through morals, values and food practices. These are aspects of religion which scholarly and societal depictions of Islam often overlook. Popular understandings of religion exclude the more ambivalent relationships with religion, particularly Islam which is understood and portrayed in narrowly stereotypical terms. My participants offer insight into the complex, contextually defined and enduring relationships they have with Islam as mixed ethnic women which I have the pleasure of casting a light on.

7. Conclusion

This thesis sought to examine the lived experiences of Islam among mixed ethnic women in a Northeast town in England. I have used participant led methodological approaches to explore the fluid and multifaceted relationships that my participants have with particular aspects of Muslim identity and practice, and how these relationships intersect with mixed ethnicity, gender and urban place. Central to this thesis are stories of conflict, agency and authenticity across the home, community and wider world beyond Middlesbrough, which my use of creative and participant led methods have uncovered, supported and celebrated.

This research is built on three core research questions which have been directly examined throughout this thesis. First I asked, *how do mixed-ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam engage with and relate to ideas of Muslim identity?* The pertinence of this question is evident throughout my analysis chapters. I have demonstrated how my participants' experiences of Islam are complex, multifaceted and at times, ambivalent. In chapter 4, I foregrounded stories of conflict and struggle, identifying the different fragments of conflict in

my participants' lives. I argue that adolescence was a period in my participants' life courses which was heightened by conflict within the home. First I considered the intersectional significance of mixed ethnicity and Islam to their experiences of conflict, marking a significant shift from the historical academic focus on pious British Muslim identities in the UK context (DeHanas 2016; Liberatore 2017). I argued that narratives of conflict among mixed ethnic women are entwined with issues of gender and racial hierarchy in Muslim communities and wider social struggles. Further to this, I discussed the difficulty of managing pragmatic issues, including the online surveillance they faced (Awan 2014; Al-Rawi 2022). This leads on to the final theme explored in this chapter, the internal and subjective struggles my participants faced, relating to shame, guilt and fear. I explored the ways this detrimentally impacted my participants' sense of self and identity, wellbeing, and their understanding of their identities. In acknowledging the different forms of conflict my participants faced when navigating the discussed discourses and narratives they encountered, this chapter emphasises the need for a shift from institutional depictions of faith membership and the importance of centering women's lives experiences of religion in sociological approaches.

Within these stories my participants have challenged popular understandings of Muslim identity both in and beyond Middlesbrough as well as wider media and political discourse. My participants have been told they are 'bad Muslims', 'going to hell' and judged and misunderstood in the spaces they have moved in. However, they have skillfully navigated these narratives, engaging in re-framing of binary narratives, skillful compromise and deception, and relentless determination to attain a sense of ontological security and acceptance. In particular, Chapter 6 foregrounded the alternative and multifaceted stories of mixed ethnicity, gender and religion. This chapter centres my participants' relationships with Islam as a form of lived religion that is contextual, enduring and situationally defined. Here I emphasised their distancing from traditional religious spaces and institutional understandings of Islam, and how they shaped the ongoing presence of particular aspects of Muslim practice and spirituality - such as prayers, food practices, and values - in their lives. I foreground their relationships with Islam through their everyday practices, habits and patterns of social life (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011). I emphasise that my participants have fluid and flexible relationships with Islam which may appear ambivalent and messy, however my participants were thoughtful and reflective women who valued relationships which felt sincere to their identities. The centering of lived stories of conflict and struggle are paramount to this research, as they address how mixed ethnic women relationships with Islam manifest in

society. This provides a more nuanced portrait that challenges the wider homogenisation and stereotyping of Islam as a religion across the world and lack of understanding about the diverse relationships people have with religion. I have demonstrated how my participants manage the different forms of conflicts they encounter across the spaces they move in, illustrating how conflict and agency work simultaneously, as a lived experience. In doing so, I have captured the dynamic nature of lived religion and lived experiences and the multifaceted ways that they are navigated, managed and in turn, influence identity.

My second research question served directly to address this thesis's theoretical focus on the self and identity as a fluid, shifting and socially constituted entity, asking *how mixed-ethnic young women experience Islam in their transition from childhood to adulthood?*. As outlined in chapter 2, exploring everyday religion within its contexts can offer insight into the ways in which forms of religion can shift over time. Chapter 3 also outlined how my methodological choices lent themselves well to encouraging memory recall and changing experiences over time. My use of photographs and walking interviews encouraged my participants to creatively reflect on their life trajectory and consider how this has shaped and influenced their current identities. I have presented a clear narrative arc in terms of life trajectory through the analytic chapters, which - particularly moving from Chapter 5 to Chapter 6 - evoked a sense of how when growing up they learnt 'the right way' in terms of what was expected of them by others in spaces beyond the home including in the community and wider world, shaped by religion, race, ethnicity, and kinship relations, and how they learnt to navigate the tensions arising from this. I centered stories of learning, navigation and management, exploring the ways that my participants implemented strategies, tools and tactics to maneuver the myriad of expectations they encountered. This chapter centered on reinterpreting conflict and foregrounded the women as active agents of their lives, in which they engaged in various modes of humorous deception, compromise, distancing and avoidance in their attempts to attain social harmony in terms of 'keeping the peace' with their families. I argue that gender expectations have a prominent and unavoidable influence in their lives, which they are constantly learning how to manage and balance with other aspects of their identities and narratives in the spaces they move in. The second theme I considered is the significance of my participants' mother's experiences and status in relation to Islam. I argue that in order to understand the formation of my participants' identities, it is essential to

understand my participants' mothers' parallel existence. This chapter emphasises the importance of considering women as active agents of their religious lives and highlights the value which participant-led, visual and creative methods can bring to centering untold perspectives. Following this, Chapter 6 focuses on how the women moved into adulthood and the wider world and how they were better able to weave aspects of religious practice and identity in their 'authentic' sense of self that 'feels right' to them. Through this theoretical focus, I have demonstrated the enduring and evolving presence of religion in their lives.

The importance of considering contextual specifics of identity is also illustrated in my final research question, in which I ask, '*How do mixed ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam interact with and relate to Middlesbrough's histories, spaces and communities?*'. As outlined in Chapter 3, 'walking alongside' has enabled me to demonstrate identities as made and lived through space. My participants were encouraged to creatively map out a walking route through which they could offer insight into the influence that social, political and physical features of Middlesbrough had on their sense of self and identity. In particular, Chapter 6 emphasised the importance of capturing lived experiences of religion through stories, imagery and spatial references, and argues that participant led methods are effective modes of capturing lived experiences of religion as enduring, despite appearing ambiguous. Using walking interviews has allowed me to consider lived religion as socially and contextually rooted, shining a necessary light on the contextual specificities of everyday life. Foregrounding contextual specialties is essential for understanding the role which popular attitudes, perceptions and narratives in a space have on shaping identities and perceptions of social groups and spaces. This is vital to my argument that the fluid, relational and contextually defined nature of lived religion is intrinsic to understanding the lived experiences of Islam among mixed ethnic women.

7.1 Contributions

In addressing its aims and research questions, this thesis makes three significant contributions to sociological research in this field. First, I have illustrated the significance of engaging with intersections of mixed ethnicity and gender within considerations of Islam. Second, my use of creative and participant led methods, particularly walking methods, brings a contextually

focused urban perspective to the field which moves beyond the focus in much of the sociological literature on Muslim experience in Europe on larger cities by drawing out how these women's lives are shaped and experienced in a smaller city. Lastly, I bring diversity to the study of Muslim identities in the U.K. and offer detailed and illustrative accounts of the experiences of mixed ethnic women with a kin connection to Islam. The next paragraph moves on to consider these three contributions in more depth.

My decision to research the Islamic experiences of mixed ethnic women is significant to broader academic research on gender and Islam and supports the need for increased understanding of young people's experiences of religion as nuanced, lived and socially important. There are significant gaps in sociological research on this issue. There is very little previous sociological research on experiences of Islam among mixed ethnic women. My research therefore aims to open up these discussions and draw attention not only to the complex and multifaceted nature of these experiences, but also how these identities fit into the wider urban landscape. Bringing a mixed ethnic lens to the study of Muslim lives is essential in terms of casting necessary empirical and conceptual light on how people who are identified as Muslim - by themselves and others - may not fit neatly into simplistic popular stereotypes about what it means to be Muslim and may themselves regard many aspects of Muslim faith and practice with ambivalence. Consequently, this research is positioned within a lived religion approach which moves beyond institutional understandings of religion and identifies religion through everyday practices, habits and patterns of social life (McGuire 2008; Orsi 2011). In addition, the lived religion approach has enabled this thesis to consider engagements with religion outside the spaces of formal institutions by focusing on how women move across and within a wide variety of spaces outside of official religious institutions.

It is the intersectional consideration of Islam, mixed ethnicity and gender which is most significant here. McGuire (2008) has been instrumental in outlining the concept of lived religion, encouraging a new appreciation for the multiplicity and 'messiness' of everyday religion. However, there have been relatively few attempts by sociologists to apply it to Islam (Dessing et al. 2013; Jeldtoft 2011,2013; Zubair and Zubair 2017), and those which have explored how Islam manifests in 'lived' terms, have largely focused on how Islam is lived in super diverse urban contexts across Europe (Dessing et al. 2013; Jeldtoft 2011,2013). While these are seminal works on lived religion and lived Islam, they have not engaged with mixed ethnicity, however, they have offered insight into the messy and multifaceted conditions that lived religion can manifest in. My research directly contributes to this. I have

emphasised in this research that experiences of Islam are not homogenous, and that this is especially important to recognise when considering mixed ethnic women. A considerable amount of existing research in this field focuses on pious experiences of Islam (Allievi 1998; Dwyer 2000; Neuwkerek and Nieukerk 2006; Bhopal 2008; Burke 2012; Liberatore 2017). My research contributes to the need for increased understanding on the ambivalent, fluid and flexible relationships mixed ethnic women have with different aspects of the Muslim culture and practices of their family members. In foregrounding the voices of mixed ethnic women, I have demonstrated the diverse, nuanced and fluid relationships my participants have with Islam. I have identified how they navigate and manage conflicting narratives in an attempt to support their identities as mixed ethnic women with a connection to Islam.

My second contribution relates to the first. In order to cast a necessary light on the spatial and relational dimensions which shape how Islam is formed and enacted among mixed ethnic women I have utilised mobile and visual participant led methodological framework. My use of a mobile participant led methodology is embedded in sociological approaches to urban religious identities.

I make direct contributions to the field of urban religion by focusing on the spatial aspects of my participants' stories. While the significance of the place has been widely recognised by lived religion scholars as an important aspect of religion, this has predominantly been explored in support of diverse contexts or in relation to New Age religions and Christianity (Park 1994; Raivo 1997a; Pacione 1999; Kong 2001). My focus on spatial aspects of religious identity offers a new perspective into the ways in which Islam is lived in post-industrial towns in the UK. Located in the working class town of Middlesbrough, one of the most deprived areas in England, my use of walking interviews were particularly complementary for encouraging participants to share their stories about how social, political and physical features of a landscape shaped their lives. My participants' stories about exclusion and conflict were inherently characterised by broader socio-political patterns of exclusion, including undercurrents of Islamophobia and micro-aggressions in Middlesbrough. It was evident that there was a deep sense of frustration that the Islamic culture and attitudes popular among Middlesbrough's Muslim and broader ethnic community did not accommodate their mixed-ethnic identities. Parallel to this, was also a deep sense of unease that my participants were 'visible' among the Muslim community. This advances previous scholarly recognition of super-diverse urban space (Massey 1994; Rogaly 2020) and institutional religion (Jeldtoft 2011; Zubair and Zubair 2017; Ekstrom et al. 2019) as inherently bound up with power imbalances and instead casts a new light on how power

relations manifest in smaller urban spaces. My use of mobile methods has enabled me to center the spatial aspects of lived Islam among mixed ethnic women, and visually illustrate stories which have not been understood in this way before.

In focusing on my participants' relationships with space and context, I have emphasised the ways in which everyday practices, habits and patterns of religion and social life are located, embedded and influenced by an array of circulating socio-religious and urban narratives. I acknowledge the role which urban and cultural narratives play in shaping religious identities and perceptions of social groups and consider how the ways Islamic identities are formed and enacted within an array of widely circulating understandings. I consider the role which the ways that Middlesbrough is imagined and represented in popular discourses and narratives as: (post)industrial, declining, left behind, working class, backward, white, racist, Islamophobic, ex-Labour turned Tory and anti-immigrant supporters of Brexit (Telford and Wistow 2019; Nayak 2022), is encountered by mixed ethnic women. My participant led mobile approach casts a necessary light on religious identities as socially and contextually defined, embodied and ever evolving across space and time as my participant moves across different spaces. I illustrate how my participants encounter Middlesbrough's dominant imaginary, and that it relates their everyday experiences of Islam as mixed ethnic women in and in relation to their town.

Lastly, I bring diversity to the study of Muslim identities in the U.K. and offer detailed and illustrative accounts of the fluid, flexible and multifaceted relationships that people have with Islam. Chapter 6 makes direct contributions to the study of young women's relationships Islam. By centering the ambivalent and flexible relationships that my participants have with religion I address under explored identities and experiences which have predominantly focused on pious Muslims. Lived religion scholars have emphasised young people's religion as often located in kin (Day 2011) and as enduring (Jackson 2021). I agree with this, and my participants demonstrated their relationships with Islam as inherently rooted in kin and in the same way that mixed ethnic families were multifaceted and complex, so were my participants' enactments of Islam which saw them 'drift in and out' of Islam. Equally, I illustrated that despite my participants presenting somewhat ambiguous relationships with Islam (in comparison to institutional explorations), religion was nevertheless enduring in their lives.

7.2 Future research

Having reflected on my findings, there are some areas which illustrate potential for future research which would further contribute to the increased need for attention to under explored areas of socio-religious research.

The first is a more direct sociological examination of mothers who have converted to Islam upon marriage. As previously illustrated, my research has opened up an understanding of how these women's mothers' experiences of embracing of Islam upon marriage shaped their own experiences and positioning. While there are studies that have explored previously non-Muslim women's experiences of formal conversion upon marriage to Muslim men (see: Allievi 1998; Neuwkerk and Nieukerk 2006) less attention has been paid to some of the more ambivalent positioning's mothers have with Islam when newly embracing Islam into their lives. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to some of the theological and social challenges these often ambivalent positionings evoke for mothers in their everyday lives. As suggested by my participants, mothers' experiences at this intersection are also deeply complex, multifaceted and ambivalent and require focused attention. Not only would this shed further light on the diversity which exists in women's relationships with Islam but also, it would contribute to research on the unique role mothers play in raising and influencing their children's relationships with religion (Acock and Bengtson 1978; Bengtson et al. 2013). In relation to a more direct examination of mothers who have converted to Islam is also the potential of research focusing specifically on how mixed ethnic mothers seek to pass on (or not) aspects of religious practice and identity when they have their own children. This would advance Song's (2017) study of how mixed ethnic parents are raising their children (in relation to passing on ideas of race and ethnicity), by focusing on mixed ethnic mothers specifically.

The second area of future research would be an examination of the male perspective of Islam in mixed ethnic lives. While conducting the research, I was acutely aware that mixed ethnic men's experiences also remain under researched. As with women, I have yet to find any previous research on this perspective. Having heard my participants discuss some of their brothers' experiences (and having heard and seen my brothers' experiences firsthand) I am aware that this intersection has its own unique gendered aspects which requires direct and focused attention. Research has found that men face their own difficulties due to heterosexual

masculine ideals (such as pride, strength and honor) which are highly perpetuated and engrained in Muslim and South Asian communities (Dwyer et al. 2008). Exploring this intersection could shed light on the ways different masculinities are negotiated or resisted in the context of their mixed ethnic families, communities and the wider society.

The third is a more direct examination of the conflict associated with mixed ethnic women's experiences of Islam. As discussed in chapter four, my research opens up sociological conversations about this phenomenon. Fear, shame and guilt were enduring conflicts that my participants faced. As this research was a sociological enquiry, I have not been able to give these individual experiences the direct focus they require. While shame based culture has been explored (Bhopal 1998; Hennink et al. 1999; Dwyer 2000), this has predominantly been explored among British Muslims and South Asian groups, rather than mixed ethnic women. I argue that an interdisciplinary focus across sociology and psychology could offer fruitful contributions across a range of academic and public policy areas including mental health, social care, education and social policy. My research could be highly beneficial in opening up conversations about some of the unique struggles ethnically diverse individuals face when managing their religious identities, particularly in relation to institutional religion. Despite British society often being perceived as becoming more 'woke', liberal, and accepting of people's differences, Muslim communities (especially those in smaller urban towns) remain deeply organised around religious and cultural tradition (including shame culture) which my participants experienced at times as deeply constraining. Opening up understanding about experiences of internal conflict faced by this group could more generally assist in developing a far more nuanced picture of the difficulties associated with lived experiences of Islam across the UK which could be beneficial for increasing empathy and understanding within the Muslim community, and broader perceptions of Islam in the U.K.

7.3 Final reflections

The introduction to this thesis explained that this research was inspired by my own experiences as a mixed ethnic woman growing up in a Muslim family. It therefore makes sense to close this thesis by revisiting my own position as researcher and reflecting on my journey over the last three years. It would be disingenuous to suggest that I had not reflected on how I might have answered some of my own questions during fieldwork. During my fieldwork I asked participants what aspects of Islam sit most comfortably with them. Some

drew on theological aspects, while others aligned themselves with cultural connections. They spoke about family, language and even food. But one of my participants asked me ‘well it’s about being a good person isn’t it, like what you do every day, how you treat people...surely nothing else matters?’. I was moved by this. Not only did this emotively capture my research’s theoretical interest in everyday depictions of religion and the advantage of moving beyond institutional understandings of religion, but also, it captured the enduring presence religion can have in people’s lives despite seeming ambiguous and even ‘weird’ to outsiders. This captures the fundamental elements underpinning the study of everyday social life including, the meaning people assign to things, who people are and the things they do. Like my participants, my relationship with Islam has been difficult and turbulent, however, through self-discovery and hearing my participants stories I have been encouraged to seek solace in aspects of Islam which I feel comfortable with and while this may seem at its very least ‘unusual’, this supports sociological recognition that striving for authenticity and staying true to oneself is an important psychological mechanism (Grazian 2020).

During the last three years I have, at times, experienced academic and intellectual difficulties. Engaging in a PhD during Covid-19 has, at times, been immensely lonely, isolating and daunting, however as I come to the closure of my thesis, I feel immense pride and satisfaction that I have been able to deliver a story that has been close to my heart throughout my life. Having listened thoughtfully to my participants I have been able to seek comfort in shared experiences which has enabled me to reflect back on my own difficulties and confusion I experienced as a young woman. The overriding feeling I had as a child was that I did not fit naturally into any of the spaces I moved in. My participants have taught me a lot about what it means to be a mixed ethnic woman with a kin connection to Islam (through 1 parent) in the Northeast of England and affirmed that some of the difficulties I have experienced are not uncommon. However, it also illustrated that our experiences are not homogenous and that they are constantly evolving and complex. I felt a deep sense of affinity and community with them and I am proud to shed light on an overlooked group of women who challenge much of what society believes about Islam and Muslims. Having studied “our” identity I am able to feel at peace with my own identity and the context and culture which made my upbringing so difficult. I am proud of my participation in the agency they showed, the resilience and determination to pave their own futures. Their bravery has cemented the sociologist in me that strives for society to move towards a more understanding

place that celebrates difference rather than merely accepts it, and exercises understanding when faced with difference. The telling of everyday religion is an inescapable part of understanding religion. It has been, and will remain, an enormous privilege and pleasure to have been able to hear and tell these stories.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Profiles

- Emma is 21 years old and lives between Manchester (where she attends university) and Middlesbrough. She grew up with a Pakistani father who is practicing Islam, and an Indian mother before marriage was previously nonreligious but converted to Islam due to her father requesting it of her when they married. While her mother did practice for some years, she now does not practice Islam in day to day life and instead embraces it loosely to support Emma's father at important times (such as at Eid). Despite being raised as practicing Muslim, Emma positioned her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural, she engaged with it as and when it 'felt right' such as at weddings and Eid.
- Hana is Emma's older sister; she is 25 years old. She lives in Middlesbrough but has experienced living in York for university. Like Emma, she grew up with a Pakistani father who is practicing Islam, and an Indian mother who now embraces Islam loosely to support Emma's father at important times (such as at Eid). Like Emma, Hana was raised as practicing Muslim but now positioned her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural and she engaged with it as and when it 'felt right' to do so, such as at weddings and Eid.
- Lily is 25 years old. She lives in Middlesbrough but has also lived in Liverpool where she attended university. Her father is Persian and her mother English. Her mother did not convert and Lily's relationship with Islam was mostly when she visited her father's family abroad as her father was also non-practicing. However, cultural expectations associated with Iran and Islam influenced his parenting style.
- Zoe is 24 years old and now lives in Manchester but previously lived in Middlesbrough for 19 years. She grew up with an Algerian Muslim father and an Italian mother. Her father is practicing Muslim, and her mother did not convert to Islam but engaged with it within the family home. Despite being raised as practicing Muslim, Zoe now positions herself as non-practicing Muslim.
- Aneela is 20 years old. She lives between Manchester (where she attends university) and Middlesbrough. She is of Scottish, Indian and African ethnicity. Aneela's

connection to Islam was through her mother. Her father did not convert to Islam and Aneela's exposure to Islam was largely through her mother's upbringing and extended family - where Islamic and cultural expectations were prevalent.

- Lucy, a 23-year-old living in Middlesbrough. She moved away for 3 years to Newcastle for work and university. Lucy's mother is English and her father Iranian. She grew up in a non-practicing household however, the cultural expectations associated with Iran and Islam influenced his parenting style and her mother supported her father.
- Zara is 25 years old; her mother is Italian and her father Algerian. She was raised practicing Islam but did not practice anymore. She has lived in Middlesbrough her entire life and works as a probation officer.
- Alisha is a 21 year old Art student from Middlesbrough. She is Zara's younger sister and was similarly raised as practicing Islam but did not practice anymore. She aligns herself with spiritualism rather than institutional religions.
- Henna is 24 years old. Her father is Dutch and her mother Pakistani Muslim. Her father did not convert to Islam and her mother embraces Islam. Henna's parents divorced when she was 15. Henna is not practicing Islam but embraces Islam when with Muslim family.
- Kim is 23 years old. Kim's father is a Pakistani Muslim, and her mother is English. Kim's mother did not formally convert, and Emma positions her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural.
- Louisa is 19 years old. Louisa's father is an English and her mother non-practicing Muslim. Louisa positions her alignment with Islam as mostly cultural and through family.

- Sameela is 18 years old. Sameela's father is English and her mother Indian Muslim. Sameela identifies as Muslim but is not practicing Islam in everyday life.
- Jenny is 20 years old. Jenny's mother is Norwegian and her father Pakistani Muslim. Jenny is not practicing Islam but embraces Islam culturally and when with Muslim family.

Appendix 2: Advertisement

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS!

DO YOU IDENTIFY AS FEMALE?

ARE YOU OF MIXED ETHNICITY?

DO YOU OR YOUR PARENTS HAVE SOME
RELATION TO ISLAM?



ZAINAB MAQBOOL
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Information sheet

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My name is Zainab Maqbool, I am a PhD Sociology student at The University of York. I would like to invite you to take part in the following research project. Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let us know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

This is an exciting opportunity where you will contribute as participants for research being collected on your unique identity (which has never been explored in academic research before!). Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to get in touch if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Research project title:

An exploration of the lived experiences of Islam in young mixed-ethnic people's transition from youth to adulthood and the impact on their hopes, aspirations and life choices.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research project aims to understand how individuals from a British, Mixed-race background that have some connection or link to Islam, construct their identity. This could be in relation to gender, religion, culture and sexuality but ultimately you choose what to discuss

during the interviews. There is a lot of research on how British Muslims negotiate their identities in relation to Western values as well as how mixed race people negotiate theirs, however, there is nothing which focuses specifically on the unique experiences of mixed-race individuals that have some Islamic background or influence on their lives (the combination of religion and mixed-ethnic background). Mixed-race individuals experience two, often very different cultures and my research is interested in how Islam plays out in this context.

Some of the specific issues that will be covered in interviews include autonomy, gendered expectations, educational choices, clothing and alcohol consumption - as these are well-established areas of tension between Islamic and Western cultures. The research will thus inform wider social science debates including those concerning: the role of faith and intersectionality; mixed-ethnic identity formation; secularisation; the family and life course; and the so-called crises facing British Muslim youth.

The key research questions are:

- What are the lived experiences of Islam in the transition from youth to adulthood for mixed-ethnic young people in a deprived, post-industrial town in the North-East of England?
- How do these lived experiences affect their aspirations, hopes and life choices?
- To what extent does Islam exist in experiential terms more as a continuum rather than a binary for these young people?
- How are the ways that participants perform identity on social media received within Muslim families, wider communities and the surrounding town?

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have identified yourself as mixed ethnic with a kin connection to Islam.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, please sign the attached form. If you change your mind at any point during the study, you will be able to withdraw your participation without having to provide a reason.

What are you expected to do?

I will be collecting data 3 times over the course of this academic year (approx. September 2020-October 2021). You can choose how much of this research you wish to take part in. For example, you could take part in 1, 2 or 3 interviews. I fully understand that you may wish to drop out of the research to your own commitments and lives, so you can choose closer to the time if you wish to take part in the 2nd and 3rd phase of research. Other than the interviews there will be no further commitments associated with participating.

Phase 1 - The first interview will be aimed at simply getting to know you, I will ask about your life experiences in relation to the following themes: relationships, gender expectations, family and community, clothing and leisure activities. We will agree on a place where this interview can be carried out.

Phase 2 - The second interview aims to delve further than the first, you will be invited to bring 10 photographs that have meaning to you. These could be old or new photographs. The images could be of your physical and social environments or pictures of places that have meaning to you. The images you choose are entirely up to you, however, they must not include people's faces (in order to protect their anonymity). During the interview, you will be encouraged to discuss these images. We will agree on a place where this interview can be carried out.

Phase 3 - The final interview will consist of an audio-walk, this is essentially a 'walking interview' (you may have seen these being carried out on BBC News!). We will both agree on a route in Middlesbrough and will stop for a coffee on route!. Walking with you in your hometown will allow me as a researcher to see how you interact with and relate to your town's histories, spaces and societies. The idea of walking in your hometown is that it can prompt you about memories or situations that may have occurred in your life and that could be relevant to this research (for example, significant places).

Some general themes that I will probably cover in all the interviews are:

- i. culture, religion, gender and nationality
- ii. family backgrounds and migration histories
- iii. social activities
- iiii. attitudes toward Islamic and Western expectations (e.g., marriage, alcohol, modesty and relationships).

However, it is important to remember that the interview is not constrained to these areas and if you wish to discuss anything else which relates to your identity then I am more than happy to do so. If there is anything you do not want to discuss please let me know beforehand, that said, I won't actually raise a specific topic without you bringing it up first.

What are the benefits for taking part in this study?

There are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project as data will not be used by any member of the project team for commercial purposes.

However, the results from the interviews will contribute to a new research area being conducted about your identity.

Are there any risks involved in participating in this research?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced in everyday life. You will all be given code names so that the research will be anonymous.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any complaints about the project in the first instance you can contact me (the researcher) or my supervisor. If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the University of York's Registrar and Secretary to take your complaint further.

Will taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. During the interview your responses will be recorded, the voice

recordings will be stored on my laptop which is protected by a password, as is the file which the recordings are saved in. I will write out the interviews immediately after the interviews have taken place and will then delete the voice recording. To ensure that the data is secure from interception, the written out interviews will be stored on an encrypted and password protected device that only I have access to.

Any information you disclose to me will be treated confidentiality and shared on a need-to-know basis only. This project is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default; therefore, I will collect the minimum amount of data that is necessary for the project. In addition, I will anonymise or use pseudonyms within the data wherever possible.

Anonymity will be offered to you in the form of a pseudonym. I will also ensure that when I discuss the results in my project I remove any combinations of details which may identify you, for example the town you live in or any other personal details. Your real name also won't be recorded in the interview as any personally identifiable information from voice recordings will be removed.

Obviously, confidentiality cannot be entirely guaranteed during the walking interviews (3rd stage of research) as they are held in public places, and you could potentially be seen by people you know. Therefore, it is up to you whether you take part in this stage of the research as you would need to be happy with being seen walking alongside me. If you do take part in the walking interviews, I will discuss with you prior to the walk what the plan is if you bump into people you know during the walk. For example, you may wish to simply introduce me as a family friend. In other words, you can shape phase 3 of the research.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved by The University of York's Research Ethics Committee who monitor the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the university.

Your rights to complain

If you are unhappy with the way I handle your personal data you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. For information on reporting a concern to the Information Commissioner's Office, see www.ico.org.uk/concerns.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Zainab

Appendix 4: Consent Form

Consent Form

Contact details:

Zainab Maqbool

Mobile: 07415488675

Email: zainab.maqbool@york.ac.uk

My tutor/supervisor Professor Joanna Latimer is directing the project and can be contacted at:

Department of Sociology, Wentworth College, University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD

Tel: 01904 32 4735 Email: joanna.latimer@york.ac.uk

Chair of (ELMPS) Ethics committee: Tony Royle

Email address: tony.royle@york.ac.uk

Contact Number: (01904) 325061

Please turn to the phase of research that you are taking part in and answer the question.

Phase 1: Pilot phase

Please read and answer every question.

TO COMPLETE (please circle yes or no)

Do you understand what the project is about and what taking part involves?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project at any time without giving a reason?

YES NO

Do you understand that the information you share will be used in my PhD?

YES NO

Do you understand that your name will not be identified and that the information you share will not be given to anyone else?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project without giving a reason up to 3 months after the interview has taken place?

YES NO

Do you consent to the interview being recorded?

YES NO

Name of participant:

Signature of participant:

Name of researcher:

Signature of researcher:

Date of interview:

Phase 2: Interview 'Building Rapport'

Please read and answer every question.

TO COMPLETE (*CIRCLE YES OR NO*)

Do you understand what the project is about and what taking part involves?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project at any time

without giving a reason?

YES NO

Do you understand that the information you share will be used in my PhD?

YES NO

Do you understand that your name will not be identified and that the information you share will not be given

to anyone else?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project without giving a reason up to 3 months after the interview has taken place?

YES NO

Do you consent to the interview being recorded?

YES NO

Name of participant:

Signature of participant:

Name of researcher:

Signature of researcher:

Date of interview:

Phase 3: Photo elicitation interviews

Please read and answer every question.

TO COMPLETE (please circle yes/no)

Do you understand what the project is about and what taking part involves?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project at any time without giving a reason?

YES NO

Do you understand that the information you share will be used in my PhD?

YES NO

Do you understand that your name will not be identified and that the information you share will not be given to anyone else?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project without giving a reason up to 3 months after the interview has taken place?

YES NO

Do you consent to the interview being recorded?

YES NO

Name of participant:

Signature of participant:

Name of researcher:

Signature of researcher:

Date of interview:

Phase 4: Walking interview

Please read and answer every question.

TO COMPLETE (please circle yes or no)

Do you understand what the project is about and what taking part involves?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project at any time without giving a reason?

YES NO

Do you understand that the information you share will be used in my PhD?

YES NO

Do you understand that your name will not be identified and that the information you share will not be given to anyone else?

YES NO

Do you understand that you do not have to take part and that if you do, you can leave the project without giving a reason up to 3 months after the interview has taken place?

YES NO

Do you consent to the interview being recorded?

YES NO

Please fill your details in below:

Name of participant:

Signature of participant:

Name of researcher:

Signature of researcher:

Date of interview:

Appendix 5: Interview guides

Interview 1

Opening

Greetings and thank you for taking part

Confirm they have read and understood info pack – any questions

Collect signed consent form and confirm Ok to proceed

Reminder about recording. I'll be taking notes, but they're just little details for me.

Remember that we can take a break any time.

Family

Z - Please could you describe to me your immediate and extended family

Z - Did that make it easier, like he didn't have a religion?

Z - Are there any family events you've done together then?

Z- so what do you mean by that? Like what things are different, is it like their lifestyle... how they look? (prompt: so what do you think your parents have taken from their families and put into your life? / what about your mum, values wise?)

Z - So would you say in your family certain members have more authority, like what you're allowed to do?

Z - Do you challenge their authority then?

Z - Anyway, let's have a little break so you can have your cup of tea and then we will move onto questions about ethnicity.

Ethnic background

Z - So I'd just like to get an insight into your ethnic background, so I am going to ask some questions which relate to your ethnic and cultural background. Firstly, could you describe to me your ethnic background.

Z - Would you say you affiliate more with one side than the other?

Z - So do you feel English then would you say?

Z - When do you think you realised you were mixed? Did your parents talk about it?

Z - Do you behave in different ways when you are with different members of your family?

Z - So, Has being mixed ever caused problems for you?

Z - Do you think we live in a society which fully understands the diversity which exists among mixed ethnic people?

Z- Do you think the BLM movement is helping?

The Role of Faith

Z - Do you affiliate yourself with a particular faith?

Z - How do you connect with Islam (values, morals etc)?

Z - Has this changed over time?

Z - Do you envisage that it will change in the future?

Z - How do you feel about Islamic expectations for women? (manageable/restrictive)

Z - Do you think it is different for boys in the U.K.?

Z- Do you think Islam embraces diversity?

Relationship with spaces and places

Z - Talk about what it was like to grow up in Middlesbrough?

Z - Do you feel you change how you conduct yourself in different areas of the town?

Z - Do you think Middlesbrough has a good understanding about multicultural identities like yours? (are there instances where you have been surprised at people's views?, does this compare differently with other places you have been?)

Z - So do you ever challenge people?

Z - Would you say different areas within Middlesbrough have different views? (i.e. discriminatory views, views towards mixed ethnic people, views towards Muslims?)

Z - Do you prefer/Do you anticipate moving away from university/work (why?, does it offer privacy etc?, do you feel freer?)

Z - If you could choose somewhere different to have grown up would you? (Where and why?)

Closing

Thank you for your time.

Check they are ok, do they have any questions, access to support material and contact info etc.

Arrangements for 2nd meeting, will be in touch

Please get in touch in the meantime if you have questions

Interview 2

Opening

What have you been up to, how have things been?

Check in with any significant life events they mentioned last time (uni, holidays, relationships, family etc.).

How did you feel after taking part? How did it feel to tell your story? Anything that stuck with you afterwards?

Discuss images

Describe images which relate

Describe images which do not relate

Make notes on images

Clarifications

Check any alterations in terminology/names/details to protect confidentiality (notes on

transcript)

Is there anything they felt they missed, or thought about afterwards, that they'd like to include or discuss?

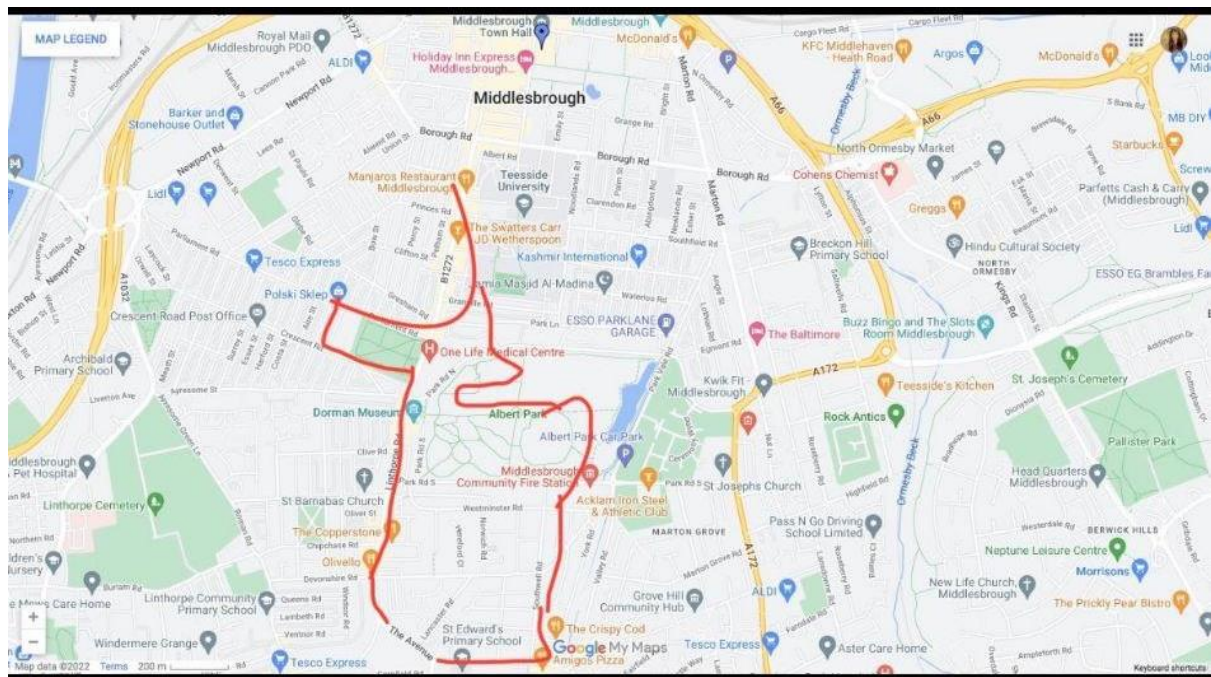
Considering Themes

There are some parts of your story that I'd like to revisit, if that's ok with you?

Outline 2 or 3 themes and check they are comfortable (questions will be specific to that participant – noted by me beforehand).

Appendix 6: Walking interview route

Included below is an example of the route one of my participants and I followed during their walking interview.



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