Navigating Coded Spaces: An Exploration of the Experiences of

Black Muslim Women in Britain

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**Abstract:**

This thesis explores the lived experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain through a conceptual framework of space. Black Muslim women have intersectional identities that are multiply marginalised in the British context. As such, the research investigates how they experience the racialised, gendered, and religiously-coded dynamics of spaces within Britain. To do so, the thesis draws on data collected from interviews and digital media. In-depth interviews were conducted with six participants and thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006). The data from the interviews was supplemented with data collected from episodes of five podcasts and one YouTube series produced by Black Muslim women in Britain about their lived experiences.

The findings are organised into three analysis chapters. Chapter Four builds on Nirmal Puwar's (2004) theory of 'space invaders', which examines the constraints placed on 'othered' bodies by somatic norms of whiteness and masculinity within the nation-state. In chapter four, I explore Black Muslim women's experiences of marginalisation in spaces coded with somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness, including educational spaces, the workplace, and everyday social and leisure spaces. In Chapter Five, I explore Black Muslim women's experiences in spaces in which the somatic norm is a marginalised social category with which they identify, for example spaces 'reserved' for or primarily occupied by Muslims or Black people. I bring Puwar's theory of 'space invaders' into conversation with Avtar Brah's (1996) conceptualisation of power as multiaxial to demonstrate how because of their intersectional identities, Black Muslim women can experience 'othering' not only within hegemonic, but also within subaltern spaces in Britain. The final analysis chapter, Chapter Six, considers the lack of spaces in Britain where Black Muslim women are not 'space invaders', and explores their experiences in the new physical and digital spaces that they have created, such as Black Muslim societies at university, podcasts, and digital platforms. Through these chapters, this thesis develops new knowledges of the multiaxial performative multiple marginalisation of Black Muslim women in Britain.

# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements**

*In Memory of Dr. Azeezat Johnson*

I would like to offer my thanks first and foremost to the six women who participated in this project, shared their stories with me, and made this thesis possible. My favourite part of this whole process was the hours I spent with you. Thank you also to the hosts and guests of *The Black Muslim Girl, The m Word, Turbans Ain't Hijab, Being a Muslim Black Girl,* and *Clued up* podcasts, and the *Black and Muslim in Britain* team.

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**Author's Declaration**

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

# Chapter 1: Introduction

> *Credit*
> *by Hodan Yusuf*
>
> *Give the people*
> *who inspire you*
>
> *Credit.*
>
> *Give the people*
> *whose lives*
> *and words*
>
> *Feed your mind*
> *and soul,*
>
> *Credit.*
>
> *It won't take away from you in any way*
> *To say I heard this via so and so:*
> *Or sister X said this.*
>
> *At the very least*
> *it's manners*
>
> *at the most,*
> *integrity*

I begin this thesis with a poem that has hung above my desk for the last couple years of this journey, written by the multi-talented Black Muslim poet Hodan Yusuf. A great deal of the credit for this thesis goes to my dear friend, Raeni, who took time to share her experiences as a Black Muslim woman in Britain with me when we were studying together for our

Master's degree.[1] Her stories opened my eyes to the multiple marginalisation that Black Muslim women face in the UK – a layering of racism, sexism, and Islamophobia. As a white, American woman, I do not need to search far to find representation of women like me, whether I am looking in academic scholarship or in popular media. This is decidedly not the case for Black Muslim women in Britain, for whom there is an overwhelming lack of representation. This thesis is my attempt to shift the scales, in however limited a way, towards a scholarship that includes and values the experiences of Black Muslim women.

My interest in reflecting on the intersections of, at first only, gender and religion, and in particular women in Islam, began when I was fourteen. When I was a secondary school student, one of my teachers recommended Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1991) and lent me her copy to read. Prior to reading this book, I already had an awareness of gendered experiences of religion in the form of Christianity from my own personal experience. Before secondary school, I attended a Classical Christian school for Grammar and Dialectic, which taught that women were not permitted to hold leadership positions in the church.[2] These views did not align with the views I was taught at home by my feminist mother, nor with the views of the church I attended where we had a female pastor. In my final year of Dialectic, I participated in a school debate where I argued that the Bible can be interpreted to allow women's leadership in the church. This was not well-received by the school's faculty, and I therefore chose to move schools when I was fourteen to attend a boarding school, which was Christian, but followed a standard secular curriculum.

Prior to reading Mernissi's book, I had almost no knowledge about Islam. I must have seen some mention on television, as this was 2005, during the so-called 'War on Terror', when news outlets regularly discussed Islamic terrorism and the 'plight' of Muslim women in Afghanistan. As a child and teenager, though, my parents limited our access to television and the internet, and I don't have any recollection of knowing about Islam. After reading

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[1] Since she also participated in this project, 'Raeni' is a pseudonym, as are all names used for participants in this thesis.

[2] I grew up and attended school in the United States. From ages 6-13, I attended a Classical Christian school, which has a different structure and emphasis to most traditional schools and uses a *trivium* approach. Students progress from Grammar, with an emphasis on the foundations of learning, to Dialectic (around age 11), with an emphasis on logic and formulating arguments, to Rhetoric (around age 14), with an emphasis on the application of language for persuasion.

Mernissi's book, I began voraciously reading any books I could find on women in Islam. One of the books I particularly recall reading was Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (2006), which portrays Islam as oppressive and misogynistic. Indeed, within many of the books I read there was an overall theme that Muslim women were oppressed and in need of saving. This cultural trend was so prominent that Lila Abu-Lughod addresses it in her 2013 book, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*. Abu-Lughod is critical of texts such as Ali's which she asserts instigate 'sentiments of horror and pity about women elsewhere, mixed with patronizing admiration for some activists abroad' (Abu-Lughod 2013, p. 68). In my own experience of reading Ali's and other texts, I certainly felt the horror and pity Abu-Lughod described.[3]

In 2006, former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto visited my school as part of the school's leadership in residence programme. Prior to her visit, I had been asked by a teacher who knew I had a special interest in women and Islam to create informational bulletin boards and prepare a presentation for the other students in anticipation of Bhutto's visit. During Bhutto's visit, I was asked by the rector to introduce her at a public lecture she gave and was permitted to have a private audience with her to discuss my interests. I often refer to this moment as life-changing and refer back to it when people ask how I became interested in Muslim women's issues. Over the course of our conversation, in which she reflected on the differences between the education I was receiving and the education available to girls in Pakistan, I was overwhelmed with emotions and a desire to help. I remember asking Bhutto what I could do to help, to which she replied that I should continue my education, read and learn, and in doing so find my purpose. Bhutto was assassinated 12 days after I turned seventeen and I made a promise to myself that day that I would follow her advice and continue to read and learn and in doing so, find a way to help.

When I reflect upon that time in my life now, I recognise that my desire to help the Muslim women and girls in Pakistan, and the Middle East more broadly, was imbedded in a 'white saviour complex', as well as rooted in a belief that Muslim women, as Abu-Lughod so aptly

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[3] Examples of the other books I recall reading in secondary school and university are: Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003), Nujood Ali's *I am Nujood, Age 10 and Divorced: A Memoir* (2009), and Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (2009). It is worth noting that many of these texts do not explicitly blame Islam for ….in the same manner that Ali's *The Caged Virgin* does.

phrases it, needed saving.[4] As I continued my studies, both my research interests and world view developed. I no longer believe that Muslim women need my help, nor do I believe that there is anything inherently misogynistic within Islam. After I completed my undergraduate degree, I shifted my focus and spent several years working in childcare and primary education. I maintained an intense curiosity and interest in gendered experiences of religion, and particularly in the experiences of Muslim women and eventually returned to higher education in 2017 to complete a Master's degree in Women's Studies, where I met Raeni. When I heard her stories about being triply-marginalised and underrepresented on account of being a Black Muslim women in Britain, I was curious to learn more. I did not know much about Black Muslim women, especially in the British context, prior to meeting Raeni, but I knew I wanted to learn. This thesis is the result of that search for knowledge.

## 1.2 Theoretical Lens of Space

This thesis explores the experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain through the theoretical lens of space. In doing so, it moves away from an overall trend found in much of the existing scholarship on Muslim women in Britain, where, as I will discuss in my critical context chapter, the focus is on the veil and clothing. This predominant focus on the veil in some ways reflects wider social discourses which reduce Muslim women to a homogenised category of 'veiled women'. As Black Muslim scholar Azeezat Johnson explains in a post on her personal blog, 'Muslim women are shoved into a single category as the hypervisible hijabi/niqabi, but any discussions about our experiences beyond this are either ignored or vehemently denied' (Johnson 2017).

When I began this project in the autumn of 2018, there was very little existing scholarship concerning specifically *Black* Muslim women in Britain. In the early stages of research, as I was developing the project's aims and research questions, I explored beyond the more traditional scholarship, looking also at popular media sources. I began reading blog posts written by Black British Muslim women. I also started listening to podcasts, like *Being a Muslim Black Girl* (2018), watching YouTube series, such as *Black and Muslim in Britain* (2017), and following Black British Muslim female influencers on Instagram. From these sources, as well as my conversations with Raeni, I began to see how complex Black Muslim

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[4] 'White saviour complex' refers to the 'idea that it is the role of the White outsider to "lift" the poor and oppressed in developing countries' (Straubhaar 2015, p. 384).

women's marginalisation was both in wider British society and in the British Muslim community.

In one of my conversations with Raeni, we discussed what it meant to be British and she brought up Paul Gilroy's book, *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987). She told me that even though she was born and raised in England, she didn't always necessarily consider herself 'British' and that particularly after she converted to Islam, her Britishness was questioned by others. She explained that even without taking religion into account, identifying as British as a Black person was complicated because of the racist policies and history of the nation. Over time, Raeni and I had more conversations about what it really means to be British, what British values are, and how being born here doesn't equate to a sense of national belonging.

While I was mulling over these ideas about belonging, race, religion, and national identity, I read Nirmal Puwar's *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (2004).  Puwar 'interrogates the pernicious, subtle but nonetheless widely held view that certain bodies are naturally entitled to certain spaces, while others are not' (Puwar 2004). Her book addresses what happens when women and minority ethnics assume positions in institutions such as Parliament, that have been historically 'reserved' for male and/or white bodies. I considered how the theoretical concepts she discusses could relate to nearly all spaces, not just institutional spaces in the British nation-state. After all, when Raeni was talking about a lack of national belonging as it relates to race and religion, she wasn't referring to institutional spaces, but rather to everyday spaces.

I considered how when we enter a space, we enter with certain expectations about who we might find there and are surprised when we encounter people which are dissonant to our expectations. These expectations can span a whole spectrum of social categorisations, from race and religion, to class and others. For example, if going for afternoon tea at the Savoy, you would probably be surprised to find a rough-sleeper carrying with him a tent and backpack, but are unlikely to be surprised if you encountered a middle-aged woman carrying with her a Fortnum & Mason shopping bag. This is because we hold in our minds an expectation of the class of patrons at The Savoy, and a woman who shops at Fortnum & Mason matches those expectation, while a rough-sleeper does not. Within almost every space, we can likely conjure a mental image of who we would expect and who we would not

expect to find there. In her analysis, Puwar refers to the norms of whiteness and masculinity in British institutional spaces and argues that bodies that do not match the norms of a space are 'space invaders'.

The term space invader and the theoretical concepts Puwar discusses resonated with the experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain that I had encountered up to this point, and I was interested in how the term could be applied outside of institutional spaces and to social categorisations in addition to gender and race. Consequently, I framed my research aims and questions around a theoretical lens of space and the coding of space as it relates to everyday experiences and the intersectionality of Black Muslim women's identity.

The research addresses the following two research questions:

- How, if at all, do Black Muslim women experience spaces in Britain as racialised, gendered, and/or religiously-coded?

- How, if at all, is the marginalisation of Black Muslim women in Britain related to the coded dynamics of space?

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore how Black Muslim women experience the coded spaces of contemporary Britain. The findings are based on the thematic analysis of data collected from six interviews conducted with Black Muslim women living in Britain and content from the episodes of five podcasts and one YouTube series created and hosted by Black Muslim women discussing their lived experiences.

**1.3 Cultural 'Moment' for Black Muslims in Britain**

I am writing this thesis during what might be regarded as a particular cultural 'moment' for Black Muslims in Britain. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the representation of Black British Muslims in mainstream media. I began this research in the autumn of 2018 and am finishing in 2024. Throughout the course of this project, I have observed a steady increase in the number of Google hits when searching 'Black Muslim woman in Britain'. In fact, I wish I had had the foresight to screenshot the number of

relevant hits produced when I began this project compared to when I am submitting, as the increase has been substantial.

When I began this project in 2018, there was very little representation of Black Muslims in mainstream media, and almost no positive representation. The 2016 BBC Two reality program *Muslims Like Us* featured Black Muslim men, though no women. The program was noted by some Black British Muslims as accurately portraying the anti-Black racism that is pervasive in British Muslim communities and critiqued by others for its negative portrayal of Black Muslims and its perpetuation of negative stereotypes, such as Black Muslims as 'misinformed convert[s]' (Gani 2016). Since 2019 however, there has been a slight increase in the representation of Black Muslim women in mainstream media. The following television programs and films feature hijabi Black Muslim women and notably do so without perpetuating negative racial stereotypes in the process: the film *Rocks* (2019), Channel 4's show *We Are Lady Parts* (2021), and BBC Three's show *PRU* (2021).

Beyond representation on television and in film, there has been a noticeable increase in the visibility of Black Muslim women in other forms of popular media. Many Black Muslim women in Britain are using media platforms to share their experiences and talk about the unique issues they face. One popular method is through blog posts and articles posted online. Amaliah, a platform 'dedicated to amplifying the voices of Muslim women…through articles, videos, award-winning podcasts, social channels, events and brand partnerships' frequently publishes articles on their website (Amaliah 2024). In one article titled 'Let's Talk: Anti-Blackness in the Muslim Ummah', the author, 'a London-based Gambian blogger' who goes by The Culture Critic, writes that she is 'desensitised' to the marginalisation she faces as Black, Muslim, and a woman, but when it came to 'matters of the *deen*' she had different expectations (The Culture Critic 2017). She writes about how difficult it is to find 'a sense of religious community' as a Black Muslim because of 'how strong the anti-Blackness was in the ummah' (The Culture Critic 2017). In a blog post titled '#Thoughts on Black Muslim History' on the Islamic History Project website, Nafisah also discusses how 'in the UK Black Muslims are not widely accepted into the communities of predominately British Asians' (Kara, N. 2018). Oher articles posted on Amaliah also address anti-Blackness, focussing specifically on the context of UK university Islamic societies (ISOC) (Abdulaahi 2019; Osei-Bonsu 2021; Rimi 2019).

In 2019, one organisation, Black Muslim Forum, partnered with Amaliah and conducted 'a survey on the extent of anti-blackness and colourism in the UK Muslim community' (Black Muslim Forum 2019). The survey found that 63.4% of self-identified Black Muslims 'felt that overall they did not belong to the UK Muslim community' and 48.98% reported having experienced 'anti-black discrimination or colourism within a UK mosque or religious setting' (Black Muslim Forum 2020). Following this report, the Muslim Census conducted a study into anti-Blackness amongst young Muslims within the UK in 2020, focussing instead on the perspectives of non-Black Muslims. In their findings, 98% of those surveyed 'believe that racism exists within the UK Muslim community' and 82% 'have witnessed anti-black racism from their own friends and family' (Muslim Census 2020). Examples of this racism included the use of anti-Black slurs, comments that Black Muslims aren't 'real Muslims', and the refusal to pray if a Black *Imam* was leading (Muslim Census 2020).

In addition to issues of anti-blackness, Black Muslim women have also written blog posts about cultural erasure and feelings of invisibility due to a lack of representation. There is a widespread assumption within the ummah that many Black Muslims are converts (The Culture Critic 2017). One issue that contributes to this misconception is the lack of representation of Black Muslims. The Amaliah team interviewed Rhianna Beau, a UK based blogger, in 2017. In the interview, Beau discusses how as a Black British Muslim with Jamaican heritage, her Caribbean 'culture can sometimes be viewed as "unislamic"' even though, 'technically, there is no "culture" within Islam' (The Amaliah Team 2017). In an article posted in *Stylist*, Bashirat Oladele also reflects on the lack of representation of Black Muslim women. Oladele writes that as a child she 'loved seeing women who looked like me on the screen', but that 'so often the narrative of Black womanhood in Britain excludes Black Muslim women' (Oladele 2019).

Black Muslim women are also sharing their stories on podcasts. Since they were first introduced to iTunes in 2005, podcasts went from a relatively unknown form of media to a mainstream form. A 2020 article in *The Guardian* claims that 12.5% of the UK population (around 7.1 million people) listen to podcasts weekly, up 58% from 2018 (Sawyer 2020). In the spring of 2019, in my first year of the PhD, I started listening to *Being a Muslim Black Girl*. The podcast is described on Apple Podcasts as: 'A Muslim, Black sister who thinks it's finally time we come together and touch on topics and dilemmas in depth that are not often spoken about, whilst also trying to grow in her *deen* and build her *Ākhirah*' (Apple

Podcasts). This was one of the only podcasts I could find that featured Black Muslim women in Britain at that time, though several featured Black Muslim women in the United States or South Asian Muslim women in Britain. Over the next several years, however, many new podcasts came out that were produced by and hosted by Black Muslim women, such as *Not Your Average Podcast* (from 2018), *TBMG Podcast* (from 2019), *The m Word* (from 2019), *Turbans Ain't Hijab* (from 2020), *Clued Up* (from 2021), and *Brit-ish Muslim Girl Diaries* (from 2021). Content from five of these podcasts is analysed in this thesis, as I will discuss further in the Methodology Chapter.

This increase in media representation of, and content creation by, Black Muslims is part of a larger cultural 'moment' which began around 2015 in which Black Muslims in Britain are making their voices heard more strongly. Everyday Muslim Heritage and Archive Initiative (EMHAI)[5] recognised a 'real need to explore ways to continue a more focussed approach in bringing about the inclusion of Black Muslim heritage in national archives and discourse' and in 2015 started the project 'An Exploration of Black Muslims in British History and Heritage' (Ahmed 2022, p. 14). In October 2016, The Black and Muslim in Britain Project was initiated 'with the intention of addressing the lack of faith representation during Black History Month in the UK' (Black and Muslim in Britain 2017). The Project released two seasons of a series on YouTube titled 'Black and Muslim in Britain' in 2016 and 2017 respectively. In October 2018, Mustafa Briggs began presenting 'Beyond Bilal: Black History in Islam' at universities around the UK. Briggs' presentation 'aims to explore and uncover the deep rooted relationship between Islam and Black History: from Black Prophets and prominent figures in the Qur'an to the unknown black Sahaba and scholars of the early generations' (Briggs 2022). In February 2019, the Muslim Council of Britain held a 'Proudly Muslim and Black' symposium at SOAS. That same year in October, the Muslim Council of Britain held an event at the House of Parliament, hosted by MP Naz Shah, titled 'Being Black, British and Muslim today' (Muslim Council of Britain 2019).

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[5] According to the founder/director, Sadiya Ahmed, 'Everyday Muslim Heritage and Archive Initiative (EMHAI) was established in 2013 to create an archive to document and preserve the UK's lived Muslim experiences. The organisation was established to address the noticeable absence of the historical and contemporary Muslim narrative from the archives, museums and history books in Britain.' (Ahmed 2022, p .14)

In October 2020, during Black History Month, Na'ima Robert published an article in *The Guardian* in which she acknowledged some of these projects and initiatives. Her article was titled 'Black Muslims are almost invisible in Britain, but now we're carving out a space'. In the article, she also noted the 'creation of various platforms for Black Muslims on specialist channels and online' (Robert 2020). The biggest contributing factor to the changes in how Black Muslims were being treated in the UK, according to Robert, was the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests which 'led to important community conversations about anti-Blackness, on a scale not seen before' (Robert 2020).

The murder of Black man George Floyd in May 2020 in the United States came just one year after the death of Shukri Abdi in June 2019 in England. Abdi, a twelve-year old Somali refugee who lived in Northwest England, drowned while out with schoolmates. The Justice4Shukri campaign pushed for a full investigation into the incident and her death, as Abdi had been experiencing bullying at school, though ultimately the coroner determined the drowning to be an accident (Taylor 2020). The response to the two deaths in the UK was strikingly different. British citizens of all races reacted in shock, horror and protest to the death of George Floyd compared to relative silence over the death of Shukri Abdi. Following Floyd's murder, there were large protests during which statues were vandalised and destroyed. In Bristol, a statue of Edward Colston, a slave trader was thrown into the city harbour. This particular incident was reported by one journalist as a 'moment that altered how our public spaces engage with history' (Mohdin 2023).

Around the same time as the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, there was a call to remove statues and change the names of buildings at some universities as part of a separate campaign to 'decolonise the curriculum'. In 2020, Oxford University's Oriel College's Governing Body voted to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes, a colonialist. Though later, in 2021, they decided instead to 'contextualise' the statue with informational signs rather than remove it (Oriel College 2023). Also in 2020, the University College of London 'denamed' several buildings and spaces on campus which had been named after Francis Galton and Karl Pearson, prominent eugenicists (UCL 2020).

## 1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis is an examination of the lived experiences of Black Muslim women within the multiply-coded spaces of contemporary Great Britain. It explores the complex socio-cultural situatedness of Black Muslim women in Britain and considers how they navigate different spaces as multiply marginalised individuals. The thesis brings theoretical frameworks from multiple disciplines into conversation with one another, using these tools to better understand the experiences and multiple marginalisation of Black Muslim women in Britain.

Chapter Two, the Critical Context, serves to further situate and contextualise my research. It is structured into two sections. In the first section, I discuss the relevant literature. Although as a group Black Muslim women have been historically excluded from mass media representations of British Muslims and indeed from representations within the media more broadly, as noted, in the last decade there has been a marked increase in the representation of Black Muslims in British popular media. Despite a relative increase in media representation, there remains a relative dearth of academic scholarship concerning Black Muslim women in Britain. As there is little scholarship on Black Muslim women in Britain, I focus primarily on the research within which mine is situated more broadly, including scholarship on British Muslims, Muslim women in Britain, and Black Muslims in Britain. In this first section of this Critical Context chapter, I discuss some of the studies in these fields which my research builds on. I also discuss the gaps in the literature that my research aims to fill. The second section of the Critical Context chapter is the theoretical framework. In this section, I review the three key concepts that I will employ as theoretical tools in my own analysis: space invaders and somatic norms, situatedness and the multi-axial performance of power, and intersectionality.

Chapter Three is the Methodology chapter, where I review my methodological process and reflect on the tensions of conducting feminist and anti-racist research. The chapter covers each stage of my research. I begin with my research philosophy, explaining how my research was influenced by my epistemological and ontological standpoint. I move on to describe my research design and chosen method of interviews. I then reflect on the challenges I faced in recruiting participants as a researcher who was conducting fieldwork during a global pandemic. I explain my revised research design, in which I extended my data collection to

include podcast data and discuss what that process looked like for me. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how I completed my data analysis using inductive thematic analysis.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are the analysis chapters in which I present and makes sense of my research findings. Chapter Four builds on Nirmal Puwar's (2004) theory of 'space invaders', which examines the constraints placed on 'othered' bodies by somatic norms of whiteness and masculinity within the nation-state. In this chapter, I explore Black Muslim women's experiences in spaces coded with somatic norms of what I term hegemonic Britishness, including educational spaces, spaces of work, and everyday social and leisure social spaces.

In Chapter Five, I explore Black Muslim women's experiences in spaces in which the somatic norm is a marginalised social category with which they identify, for example spaces 'reserved' for or primarily occupied by Muslims or Black people. I bring Puwar's theory of 'space invaders' into conversation with Avtar Brah's (1996) conceptualisation of power as multiaxial to demonstrate how because of their intersectional identities, Black Muslim women can experience 'othering' not only within hegemonic, but also within subaltern spaces in Britain.

The final analysis chapter, Chapter Six, considers the lack of spaces in Britain where Black Muslim women are not 'space invaders', and explores their experiences in the new physical and digital spaces that they have created, such as Black Muslim societies at university, podcasts, and digital platforms. Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter of the thesis, in which I summarise the findings of the thesis.

## Chapter 2: Critical Context

### 2.1 Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a steady increase in the representation of Black British Muslims in popular media, as discussed in the opening chapter. This is significant since Black British Muslims have historically been poorly represented both in policy and public discourse (Muslim Council of Britain 2022, p. 7). Despite this increase in representation within mass media, there remains a relative dearth of academic scholarship concerning Black Muslims in Britain, and particularly Black Muslim women.

Over the past forty years, there has been a great deal of academic literature published on women and Islam, much of which has focussed on debates on the veil. As anthropologist Emma Tarlo remarks, 'Library shelves literally groan under the weight of volumes with "veil" in their titles which offer a plethora of interpretations of life within, beyond and behind the veil' (Tarlo 2010, p. 2). In the 1980s and 1990s, this scholarship largely concentrated on the role of the *hijab* in the Middle East, Turkey, and Egypt (Franks 2000, p. 917). Following the 'scarf affair' in France and the ban of the *niqab* and *burqa* across many European countries in the 2000s there was an increase in literature concerning the veil in Europe.[6] There is a large volume of scholarship concerned with Muslim women in Britain. A great deal of this scholarship also focusses on the veil or Muslim clothing more generally (see, for instance: Afshar 2008; Ameli and Merali 2006; Dwyer 1999, 2008; Franks 2000; Tarlo 2007, 2013).

The scholarship on Muslim women in Britain sits within an even larger body of work on British Muslims. There is evidence to suggest that there have been Muslims living in Britain since at least the seventeenth century (Peach 2006, p. 632). The 'arrival of Islam in the UK' is generally considered, however, to be a 'recent phenomenon' since the number of Muslims living in Britain increased significantly following World War II (Joly 1987). Most of the scholarship on British Muslims focusses on the late twentieth century and into contemporary

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[6] The 'scarf affair' (*L'affaire du foulard* ) refers to the debate around the hijab in France, and generally refers to three particular moments: 1989 when three girls were expelled from school for refusing to take off their hijabs; 1994 when a ministerial circular asked for 'ostentatious religious symbols' to be banned in schools; and 2003 when the Stasi commission was formed, whose findings later led to a legal ban on religious symbols in French schools in 2004 (Scott 2010).

times. Some of the dominant themes in the literature are issues around citizenship and national identity (see, for instance: Haw 2009; Meer et al. 2010; Uberoi et al 2011) and debates around multiculturalism and community cohesion (see, for instance: Brighton 2007; Dwyer and Uberoi 2013; Modood 2005; Modood and Ahmad 2007; Phillips 2006).

Most of the scholarship on Muslims in Britain focusses only on South Asian Muslims. There is a small body of literature which addresses white Muslims in Britain (see, for instance Franks 2000; McDonald 2005). There is also a small body of literature concerning Black Muslims in Britain (see, for instance: Akande 2019, Curtis 2014; Reddie 2009). When it comes to literature on Black Muslim women however, most of the scholarship has come out of the United States and focusses on an US context (see, for instance: Byng 1998, Karim 2006; Khan 2011; McArthur and Muhammad 2017; McGuire et al. 2016; Muhammad 2015).

My research on Black Muslim women's experiences in Britain is situated within this larger body of research on Muslim women, British Muslims, and Black Muslims. In this chapter I will discuss the literature which my research builds on, also identifying gaps in that literature that the research aims to fill. Following this, I move on to set out the key theories which make up my theoretical framework.

## 2.2 Scholarship on Black/British/Muslim/Women

There is a vast amount of scholarship on British Muslims and Muslim women in Britain, and even more on Muslim women across the West. While my work is situated more broadly within these fields, I have limited my discussion in this section to a small subset of the scholarship that is most closely related to my own research. Given my research focusses on how the intersections of Black Muslim women's identities impact how they experience spaces in Britain, one of the areas of research it is closely related to is scholarship on British Muslim identity.

While a great deal of this scholarship investigates constructions of British Muslim identity from the perspective of Muslims, scholars have also explored how British Muslim identity is constructed by the non-Muslim majority, specifically how 'Muslim' as a concept has been racialised and 'othered' in the British context. In *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity*

*and Muslims in Britain* (2005), Tariq Modood argues that Muslims have been constructed as 'Other' within Britain. He explains how racial exclusion in Britain is further complicated for British Muslims as it is compacted with cultural racism and Islamophobia (Modood 2005). Myfawny Franks also addresses such constructions of 'otherness' and the complex intersection between racism and religious discrimination in her work on white British Muslim women. She describes some of the racism faced by white British Muslim women, for instance being called 'P*ki* and assumptions they faced that they were converts (Franks 2000, pp. 922-925). She discusses how these constructions of 'otherness' and racial and religious discrimination were limited to women who wore the hijab. These works, both from the early 2000s, demonstrate how Muslim identity in Britain has historically been racialised and constructed as 'other' to British norms. Franks' work, in particular, also addresses how these constructions can be gendered, as Muslim women's religious identity is more visible than Muslim men's. In my own analysis, I further investigate the effects of racialised and gendered constructions of Islamic identity within Britain.

As noted above, a focus on the hijab, veiling, or Islamic clothing in general, is central to most work that addresses gendered constructions of identity for British Muslims. One exception to this is Louise Archer's work on constructions of race, religion and masculinity for young British Muslim men (Archer 2001). Archer conducted group discussions with 24 South Asian male pupils, aged 14-15 (Archer 2001, p. 84). She concluded that 'the young men used black, Asian and Muslim masculine identities in quite different ways: as a shared site of solidarity against racism, a resistance to whiteness, and an assertion of masculine power' (Archer 2001, p. 98). Archer's work demonstrates how identities are constructed within specific socio-cultural contexts and in response to power relations within those contexts. For example, the use of political Black identity – a concept I will discuss later in this section – as a shared site of solidarity was a direct response to the racism these boys experienced. With the exception of Archer, however, gendered constructions of British Muslim identity focus primarily on women and on how the veil is used to visibly perform Muslim identity and/or challenge perceptions that Islam and Britain are incompatible, or that Muslim women lack agency. Archer's work highlights ways to discuss constructions of identity through a lens other than veiling.

Haleh Afshar, Rob Aitken, and Myfawny Franks (2005) drew on interview data from their previous research projects with white and South Asian Muslim women to write, 'Feminisms,

Islamophobia and Identities'. In the article, they assert that British Muslim women 'are creating a feminist political identity, which embraces the transnationality of *umma*' (Afshar et al. 2005, p. 278). Their lived experiences as Muslim and British, they note further, 'make it possible for them to have hyphenated identities which are experienced as an enrichment rather than a lack' (Afshar et al. 2005, p. 278). Their choice to wear the veil is not intended to separate themselves from British national identity, they argue, and in fact some wear the veil as a way to mark their identity within the British *umma*,[7] even if the cultures of their parents and grandparents did not embrace the *hijab*; for example, in some parts of 'the subcontinent often they wore "traditional" sari or *shalwar kameez*, but not the *hijab*' (Afshar et al. 2004, p.277-278). This work provides important insight into how British Muslim women in the later 1990s and early 2000s constructed 'hyphenated identities' and 'feminist political' identities. There is scope still to further explore how British Muslim women's identities are constructed and expressed outside of veiling, as well as to consider how the next generation of British Muslim women construct their own identities.

Other scholars who write about the function of the veil in the gendered construction of British Muslim identity include Nick Hopkins and Ronni Michelle Greenwood (2013). Drawing upon interviews with 22 South Asian and white British Muslims, they argue that Muslim women in Britain who wear a veil want 'to visibly declare their Muslim identities' and in fact wear *hijab* in 'an attempt to control one's categorisation by others such that it accorded more closely with one's self-categorisation' (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013, p. 438, p. 445). Their research provides valuable insight on the performative nature of identity. Their study, like most, however focussed only on the perspectives of South Asian Muslim women. As I was conducting research for my master's dissertation, one of my participants, a Black Muslim woman, shared that her turban was sometimes seen as a protective hair styling for Black women rather than as *hijab*. An analysis of her experience would provide interesting perspective to assertions that women wear the veil to attempt to control other's categorisation of them and whether or not these attempts are successful.

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[7] *Umma* (also stylised *Ummah*) is the Muslim community. 'Muslims living in the diaspora – particularly in the West – are of varied and diverse ethnic origins. What links them together, however, is a shared sense of identity within their religion, an idea most clearly located within the concept of the ummah' (Mandaville 2003, p.135).

While the above examples are just a sampling of the literature which explores gendered constructions of identity in Britain, they nevertheless provide an accurate overview of the themes in the scholarship. Findings indicate that gendered constructions of Muslim identity in Britain are a response to British Muslims' lived experiences. They suggest that wearing a veil allows Muslim women to position themselves within a global or national *umma* despite ethnic differences and that the veil can function to visibly assert a woman's self-categorisation as Muslim, and potentially their identification of a hyphenated identity as British Muslim. The findings highlight further that because of the (hyper) visibility of the veil, women have a heightened risk of encountering Islamophobia or racism. Based on these existing works, there is scope to further explore how Muslim women construct their identity in Britain as political, cultural and social climates inevitably change. There is also scope to explore these constructions of identity through a lens other than veiling. Additionally, the experiences of Black Muslim women have tended to be excluded from analyses of British Muslim constructions of (gendered) identity and consequently, this is a substantial gap in the literature that remains to be filled.

As well as being closely situated within the scholarship on British Muslim identity, my work sits within the relatively small body of work that specifically addresses the experiences of Black Muslims in Britain. Amongst the work that purports to address specifically 'Black Muslims', however, there is some in which the term 'Black Muslim' does not actually refer to Afro-Caribbean Muslims, but rather to politically Black Muslims. Political Blackness is a concept that reached its peak during the 1980s and 1990s, where the term Black is used 'to describe people of African, Caribbean and South Asian origins in Britain' (Modood 1994, pp. 859-60). While political Blackness highlights that race is a social construct, it is problematic in that it 'falsely equates racial discrimination with colour-discrimination' (Modood 1994, p. 859). Though it is no longer widely used, its impact is still evident, even within scholarship published in the 2000s and 2010s. For example, Basia Spalek's (2004) 'Critical Reflection on Researching Black Muslim Women's Lives Post-September 11th', addresses Spalek's experiences interviewing Black Muslim women, but her participants were all Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim women, and did not include any Afro-Caribbean Muslim women. Similarly, Pete Harris, Chris Haywood and Mairtin Mac an Ghaill's (2017) article, 'Higher Education, de-centred subjectivities and the emergence of a pedagogical self among Black and Muslim students' included only the experiences of Pakistani and Bangladeshi young men and women, despite using 'black' in the title.

There is some scholarship on Black Muslims in Britain that does address the experiences of Afro-Caribbean Muslims, for example, Richard Reddie's (2009) book, *Black Muslims in Britain*. Reddie's book focusses primarily on Black British Muslim converts and explores why a growing number of young Black people are converting to Islam. The text provides insightful cultural and historical context on the question of why Islam appeals to contemporary Black Britons.

At the 2019 conference 'Proudly Muslim and Black: Exploring Black Muslims' History and Heritage', Habeeb Akande gave a talk, which has since been published online, entitled, 'Finding the Way Forward: The Black Muslim Third Space'. In it, he discusses how Black British Muslim communities have 'witnessed the growth of new religious and social institutions, known as the Third Space' (Akande 2019). According to Akande,

> The 'Third Space' refers to an institution that seeks to fill the gaps where the mosque, school or traditional religious institutions are not meeting a faith community's particular needs. An institution is defined as an organisation founded for religious, educational, professional, or social purport. Organisations can also be digital on social media platforms or online. (Akande 2019)

He explains how for Black Muslims in Britain, the need for such spaces stems from the Islamophobia in Black communities and anti-Blackness in Muslim communities (Akande 2019). He concludes the talk by providing examples of existing spaces, which are primarily online. Neither Akande nor other scholars have developed this concept of the Black British Muslim Third Space. There is scope to further explore the concept of Third Spaces for Black Muslims in Britain, the issues Akande addresses such as Islamophobia in Black communities and anti-Blackness in Muslim communities, and how gender functions within these Third Space(s).

As well as the previously mentioned research on Black British Muslims, some research specifically concerning Black Muslim women in Britain has also started to emerge recently. In her doctoral thesis, '*You're Othered here and you're Othered there': Centring the clothing practices of Black Muslim Women in Britain*, Azeezat Johnson (2017c) explores how Black Muslim women in Britain perform their 'beings' through clothing practices and how they 'become Black Muslim women in relation to a multitude of objects, bodies, gazes and spaces' (p.iii). Johnson also published an article using the findings of her thesis

research, titled 'Getting Comfortable to feel at home: Clothing Practices of Black Muslim Women in Britain' (2017b). In 2021, Sheymaa Ali Nurein and Humera Iqbal published an article titled 'Identifying a space for young Black Muslim women in contemporary Britain', which explores 'the lived experiences of intragroup discrimination, identity and belonging in 11 young Black Muslim women in in the United Kingdom' (p. 433). In 2022, Amina Al Rasheed published a chapter in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Race and Gender*, titled 'The Politics of Race, Identity and Difference in the UK: Qualifying the Black Muslim African Woman', arguing that,

> Any critical feminist approach that aims to explore Black Muslim women's construction, and their racialized, gendered identities, would pay particular attention to African Muslim women and their relationship to and use of the discourses of hegemonic and dominant mainstream Islam in the UK, and their negotiations between Muslim, Black and African identities. (Al Rasheed 2022, p. 83)

These publications address the complex nature of Black Muslim women's identities and experiences in the British context. But as is evident, the amount of scholarship is very limited. Some of the themes in the scholarship on Black British Muslims overlap with the themes addressed in scholarship on South Asian British Muslims, such as issues around identity and discrimination. Unlike the scholarship on South Asian British Muslims however, even within such a limited library, there is an overwhelming focus on space in the scholarship on Black British Muslims. Akande reflects on the need for and creation of third spaces, Johnson frames her thesis through a lens of space, and Nurein and Iqbal discuss spatial concepts such as belonging. My research is also similarly structured around space and exploring Black Muslim women's experiences in Britain through a lens of space. In the following section, I discuss the theories which make up my theoretical framework.

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

### 2.3.1 Space Invaders and Somatic Norms

There is a vast body of literature that seeks to understand 'the complexity of society and social relations by mapping and exploring spatial patterns' (Valentine 2001, p.2). Within this scholarship is work on how socially constructed conceptualisations such as gender and race

relate to the construction of spaces and places. In this research on Black Muslim women's experiences in British spaces, I draw upon theoretical concepts from this body of scholarship. I use the notions of 'space invaders' and 'somatic norms' (Puwar 2004) to understand how Black Muslim women's experiences of social marginalisation relate to the construction of the spaces they occupy.

The term 'space invader' was first used in such contexts by Doreen Massey in her seminal work, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994). In this text, Massey asserts that spaces and places are gendered. She opens with a reflection on her childhood journeys into town and the fields she passed along the way: 'All of it – all these acres of Manchester – was divided up into football pitches and rugby pitches…I remember it striking me very clearly that all this huge stretch of the Mersey flood plain had been entirely given over to boys' (Massey 1994, p. 185). She goes on to reflect how she 'did not go to those playing fields – they seemed barred, another world (though today, with more nerve and some consciousness of being a space-invader, I do stand on football terraces – and love it)' (Massey 1994, p. 185). Massey had an awareness that certain spaces were designed for certain gendered bodies, and as a girl she felt unwelcome, even 'barred', from boys' spaces. Even as an adult, when she did enter and found that she loved being in football stadiums, her presence in those spaces was accompanied by a sense of being a 'space-invader'.

Massey then elaborates on other spaces, which were 'designed to, or had the effect of, firmly letting [her] know [her] conventional subordination' (Massey 1994, p.185). She describes being in an

> Art Gallery (capital A capital G) … full of paintings, a high proportion of which were of naked women…this was a 'space' that clearly let me know something, and something ignominious, about what High Culture thought was my place in Society. The effect on me of being in that space/place was quite different from the effect it had on my male friends. (Massey 1994, p.186)

In this instance, the exhibition was not designed to exclude certain gendered bodies; rather it was designed to, or at least had the effect of, communicating social meanings of gender. Although Massey limits her discussion to the *gendering* of space, her intentional capitalisation of Art Gallery and comment on 'High Culture' allude to how the space and social meanings were also classed. Massey concludes that spaces 'are gendered in a myriad

of different ways' and the 'gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live' (Massey 1994, p. 186 emphasis in the original). Massey used her own lived experiences as a woman to produce social knowledge on the different ways spaces can be gendered (and potentially classed). Her work leaves scope to further explore the gendering of spaces, as well as how spaces can be coded by other social categorisations.

Nirmal Puwar does just this when she adopts and develops the term 'space invaders' in *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (2004). She recognises how Massey vividly captures 'the sheer maleness of particular public spaces and women's experience of increasingly occupying them while still being conscious of being "space invaders" even while they enjoy these places' (Puwar 2004, p. 7). She goes on to note how 'the sheer whiteness of spaces' could also be added to the discussion (Puwar 2004, p. 7-8). Puwar uses the concept of 'somatic norms' in the development of her argument about how spaces are gendered and racialised.

Puwar's focus is on 'what happens when bodies not expected to occupy certain places do so' and she states that 'the arrival of women and racialised minorities in spaces from which they have been historically or conceptually excluded is an illuminating and intriguing paradox' (Puwar 2004, p.1). Puwar theorises how spaces are coded to exclude women and racialised minorities. She builds on arguments such as those of Moira Gatens (1996) and Charles Mills (1997). In *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality,* Gatens asserts that when subjecthood is purported to be genderless, one sex is understood to be the norm, and that males have come to represent the universal body. Charles Mills makes a similar argument about race in *The Racial Contract* (1997) as he discusses the political theory of social contract, in which he asserts the 'body vanishes, becomes theoretically unimportant, just as the physical space inhabited by that body is ostensibly unimportant' (Mills 1997, p. 53). Mills argues that it is only possible to pretend 'the body does not matter because a particular body (the white male body) is being presupposed as the somatic norm' (Mills 1997, p. 53).

While Mills uses the term somatic norm in his discussion of the racial norms in political theory, the concept of a 'somatic norm' was first developed by anthropologist Harry Hoetink in his 1967 text *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations. A Contribution to the Sociology of Segmented Societies* as a determinant of race relations. As conceptualised by

Hoetink, the 'somatic norm image' refers to the physical bodily characteristics that are accepted by a group to be the ideal.

In building her theory on space invaders, Puwar uses the term somatic norm to refer to both gendered, racialised, as well as classed norms. She elaborates, 'By using the term somatic norm I am referring to the corporeal imagination of power as naturalised in the body of white, male, upper/middle-class bodies' (Puwar 2001, p. 652). Puwar develops her argument primarily around gender and race, asserting that the somatic norm of British institutional spaces is whiteness and maleness. In particular, she explores what happens women and racialised minorities (i.e. individuals outside the somatic norm) enter these institutional spaces. She argues that they do so as 'space invaders' and concludes that the encounter 'causes disruption, necessitates negotiation and invites complicity' (Puwar 2004, p. 1).

My analysis of Black Muslim women's experiences in British spaces uses both the concepts of 'space invader' and 'somatic norms' as developed by Puwar. But it is also situated within and draws upon additional scholarship about the gendering and racialisation of space. One of the scholars that has explored the racialisation of British spaces is David Sibley (1998). Sibley argues that geographical spaces in Britain are clearly racialised with suburban and rural areas reserved for whites and inner cities racialised as for non-whites and racial minorities (Sibley 1998, pp. 124-6). Deborah Phillips (2006) also discusses the racialisation of British city spaces in her challenge of discourses on British Muslim self-segregation. She notes how 'many British Muslim residents of Bradford clearly perceived the city spaces to be racialised, with certain areas labelled as out of bounds to particular ethnic groups' (Phillips 2006, p. 33). She challenges discourses according to which British Muslims are choosing to self-segregate in certain inner-city areas, arguing that 'the racialisation of space not only involves white withdrawal (flight) and abandonment of inner-city ethnic spaces, but the active production and reproduction of racialised segregation through institutional racism and racist harassment (Phillips 2006, p. 29). Both Sibley's and Phillips' work exemplifies how geographical spaces can reflect and reproduce societal racism in Britain, with Phillips work also highlighting the complex interplay between racism and religious discrimination.

### 2.3.2 Intersectionality

Throughout my analysis I apply an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is a useful tool to address the experiences of Black Muslim women, as their social categorisations of

Blackness, Muslimness, and womanhood are not mutually exclusive and therefore an analysis of their experiences must acknowledge how these categorisations operate together. Other scholars who have conducted research on Black Muslim women have also argued for the necessity to explore these categories together. In their work, McArthur and Muhammad assert that 'the intersectionality of these three groups – Black, woman, and Muslim – should be explored to reimagine the complexity of Black girlhood and better understand how youth navigate multiple identities' (2017, p. 62). Johnson (2017c) acknowledges how using intersectionality 'enables an understanding of these social factors as construed in relation to one another, and exposes the wider relations that situate (and separate) race, religion, and gender' (Johnson 2017c, p. 4).  As Al Rasheed observes

> Intersectionality affirms the multifaceted nature of Islam and challenges the justification based on essentialized differences of race, class and religion. [Sudanese African Muslim women] do not live single-issue lives but struggle as Muslims and wage their resistance against racism and sexism as Africans' (Al Rasheed 2022, p. 72).

Intersectionality signifies 'the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts' (Brah and Phoenix 2014, p. 76). 'The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands' (Brah and Phoenix 2014, p.76). The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, but the concept is 'fruitfully situated in a trajectory of Black feminist thought that begins in the nineteenth century' (Carastathis 2016, p.15). 'Intersectional analyses operated in black thought, activism and organizing between the 1830s and 1930s' (Goswami et al. 2014, p. 9). Black feminists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries considered race and gender 'not only as separate categories impacting identity and oppression, but also as systems of oppression that work together [and] mutually reinforce each other' (Gines 2014, pp. 24-25).

In 1989, Crenshaw develops this Black feminist critique of the 'tendency to treat race and sex as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis' and coins the term 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw 1989, p. 139). In her essay, Crenshaw builds her argument

through examining a series of legal cases in which Black women were unfairly judged because antidiscrimination law only recognised and protected race and sex as individual classes, rather than acknowledging how race and sex can operate together to produce new forms of discrimination. She argues that the 'continued insistence that Black women's demands and needs be filtered through categorical analyses that completely obscure their experiences guarantees that their needs will seldom be addressed' (Crenshaw 1989, pp. 149-150). She emphasises furthermore the necessity to understand that discrimination does not always occur because of a single axis of identity, using an analogy of a four-way intersection: 'Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them' (Crenshaw 1989, p. 149).

While the concept of intersectionality was developed as a tool to engage with experiences of discrimination for Black women, intersectionality has since been used as a theoretical framework by feminist scholars across disciplines to engage with experiences of varying social categorisations. It is now generally considered 'essential to feminist theory' (Davis 2008, p. 68); and has been deemed 'the most important contribution that women's studies has made so far' (McCall 2005, p. 1771).

As a theoretical tool, intersectionality has been widely used, but also at times misappropriated and depoliticised. The concept originated in response to the exclusion of Black women from discourses around sexism and racism, but it has been 'detached from its political aims to redress Black women's invisibility in law and social-movement discourses' and 'harnessed to inverted representational objectives, namely, to signify mainstream feminism's arrival at a postracial moment' (Carastathis 2016, p. 4). I am intentional in my own use of intersectionality to honour and promote the political aims with which it was developed. Black Muslim women have historically been excluded from discourses around Black Muslim and Muslim women's experiences because the intersections of their identity go beyond the 'normal' intersections considered. I aim to include their experiences within these discourses, while acknowledging how systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and Islamophobia do not operate separately and are complexly mutually produced and reinforced.

Black women were historically excluded from discourses on racism and sexism because their experiences of oppression were multi-axial rather than due to a single axis of race or gender. Intersectionality provided us with a tool with which to understand their multi-axial experiences of oppression and solve 'the quandary "All the women are white and all the blacks are men"' (Falcón and Nash 2015, p. 2). Its use, however, is not without risks. At times, the use of intersectionality risks participating 'in the very power relations that it examines' (Collins 2015, p. 3). Intersectionality is often used as a tool to focus on the '*specific difference* of women of color', and 'in this usage, intersectionality always produces an Other, and that Other is always a Woman of Color', and most specifically almost always an African American woman (Puar 2012, p. 52). Puar hypothesises that this might 'be driven by anxieties about maintaining the "integrity" of a discrete black feminist genealogy' (Puar 2012, p. 52). Nevertheless, it is possible to honour the political aims with which intersectionality was developed by exposing power structures without reinforcing them.

Another risk of using intersectionality as a theoretical tool that scholars have addressed stems from the term itself. Because the term 'trades on the idea of an intersection, one can read the theory to mean that personhood (or identity) can be separated into discrete social parts'; 'the notion that two things "intersect" brings readily to mind a Venn diagram within which each thing exists both inside and outside the intersection' (Carbado and Gulati 2013, p. 532). Though such a risk can occur, I avoid it by positioning my work explicitly within a Black feminist framework of intersectionality, which uses intersectionality as a tool to challenge the idea that social categories, such as race and gender, function as distinct processes. Black Muslim women have intersectional identities, which, like Carbado and Gulati argue, are not separable like a Venn diagram. This research however, while it does touch on ideas around identity in later chapters, uses intersectionality primarily as a tool to focus on how the processes of social categories of Black Muslim women's identity operate to shape their experiences of power and oppression.

In using intersectionality as a tool in this way, the processes of social categorisations of identity can be and are viewed like a Venn diagram or the flow of a motorway intersection. Crenshaw developed the analogy of the intersection because it demonstrated that sometimes discrimination can be because of race or gender, but sometimes it is because of both. I explore Black Muslim women's experiences in specific 'spatial and temporal moments', paying attention to 'what identities are being "done", and when and by whom, evaluating

how particular identities are weighted or given importance by individuals at particular moments' (Valentine 2007, p. 15). Black Muslim women cannot separate the intersections of their identity, however the processes of racialisation, gendering, and religious coding can and do operate separately as well as concurrently in experiences of oppression and privilege.

### 2.3.3 Situatedness and the Multi-Axial Performance of Power

As well as using an intersectional approach in my analysis, I employ Avtar Brah's conceptualisation of the multi-axial performance of power and the importance of considering situatedness. By understanding power as operating multi-axially, it is possible to understand how marginalisation can occur both within and by minority groups. Brah's conceptualisations of these concepts are explained in her 1996 book, *Cartographies of Diaspora*.

Brah problematises notions of minority and majority. She argues that while the dichotomy between minority and majority can be 'mobilised in order to signal unequal power relations', it is not always a useful notion as 'the numerical referent of this dichotomy encourages literal reading, reducing the problem of power relations to one of numbers' (Brah 1996, pp. 183-184). Instead, Brah understands power as operating multi-axially rather than along a single axis of minority-majority. Understanding power in this way 'highlights the ways in which a group constituted as a "minority" along one dimension of differentiation may be constructed as a "majority" along another' (Brah 1996, p.186).

Brah also emphasises that '"situatedness" is central to how different groups come to be relationally positioned in a given context' (p. 179), asking: 'how and in what ways is a group inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality, or other axes of differentiation in the country to which it migrates?' (Brah 1996, p. 179). Understanding how a group is situated, she notes further, 'enables us to begin to deconstruct the regimes of power which operate to differentiate one group from another; to represent them as similar or different' (Brah 1996, p.179-180).

Brah's conceptualisation of power as multi-axial and the importance of situatedness are useful tools when examining the experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain. Black Muslim women are *situated* at the intersections of multiple axes of power relations. With

regard to their race, gender, and religion, they are generally situated in a marginalised position. Exploring how these power relations are constructed, and understanding that they perform multi-axially, is crucial to understanding Black Muslim women's experiences of marginalisation in Britain.

**2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reviewed some of the existing scholarship on British Muslims, Muslim women, and Black Muslims in Britain, identifying gaps in the literature that can be filled by my own research. I also discussed the theories of space invaders and somatic norms, intersectionality, and the multi-axial performance of power and situatedness which comprise my theoretical framework. I use these tools in later analysis chapters as I explore Black Muslim women's experiences in Britain. In the next chapter, I address the methodology I used to conduct this research.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

> 'You're telling stories about Muslims and Black people. Is it your best place as a white woman to do that?' (Project participant)[8]

One of the participants asked me this question in a conversation we had about the project prior to her interview. I was in my second year when I did my fieldwork and by this point, I had been asked many times why I was interested in doing this research as a white woman, who is neither Muslim nor British. The phrasing of the participant's question, however, was not about *why* I wanted to do this research as a white woman; rather it was about whether it was *appropriate* for me to do it. Among other things, her phrasing 'telling stories about' prompted me to consider how the project was being perceived.

This project is consciously feminist and antiracist, rooted in an epistemology that values experiential knowledge and views storytelling as a tool to give voice to those who are often silenced (Delgado 1989; Solorzano and Yasso 2001; McNamara 2009). I value storytelling as a tool, but in my role of researcher, I do not want to tell stories about, or speak *for*, Black Muslim women. My aim with the research is to amplify the voices of Black Muslim women and allow their stories to become the focus of meaning. My positionality as a white woman (among other social identities) has inevitably shaped every stage of the research, from design to analysis, and the answer to whether it is my 'best place' as a white woman to do this research is complex. In this chapter, I discuss my methodology, reflecting too on the tensions of doing feminist and antiracist research. While I am not able to give a definitive answer to the participant's question, I am able to explain why I chose to do this research and how I did it in a manner that I felt was ethical and followed feminist and antiracist research practices.

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[8] I have not included the participant's pseudonym in this instance because she asked me this question before signing the consent form. Because it was before she gave consent, I was not recording at the time. I wrote down her question in my own notes right away as the phrasing of her question, specifically 'telling stories about', was different to other similar questions I had been asked.

I begin this chapter by discussing my antiracist and feminist research philosophy and the epistemological and ontological perspective from which I have conducted this research. I describe how I developed my research design, including my research questions and chosen methods. While I initially planned to use interviews as my only method, I was ultimately only able to recruit six participants. I reflect on the challenges I faced while recruiting participants and how I had to reconsider my methodology to ensure that I had enough data to analyse. As I explain, I chose to supplement the interview data with data from podcasts. The use of podcasts for academic research is relatively new and I discuss what this process looked like in my case. I end the chapter with a discussion of how I analysed the data collected using an inductive approach of thematic analysis.

## 3.2 Research Philosophy

As someone who identifies as both feminist and antiracist, it was important to me to follow methods and research practices that aligned with my values. There is of course not just one way to conduct feminist and antiracist research. In fact, 'feminist research approaches are diverse in their emphasis and method' (Kiguwa 2019, p. 220). This is unsurprising since feminism itself is 'not a unified project. All feminists are concerned with understanding why inequality between women and men exists, [but] feminists do not all agree on where to find the causes of male domination nor how to combat this' (Letherby 2003, p. 4). Feminist researchers not only disagree about the cause of and solution for gender inequality; they also disagree about how best to conduct research investigating this issue both methodologically and philosophically. Nevertheless, a core feature which scholars have identified to be present in 'all feminist-oriented research' is 'the focus on and objective to critically engage women's lived social realities with a view of changing them for the better' (Kiguwa 2019, p. 200). In this way, feminist research, like feminism, is rooted in both theory and practice. Feminist researchers are committed to conducting research that not only produces knowledge but can also improve lives. Thus, although there may be diversity in methods and paradigmatic approaches, all 'feminist researchers start with the political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women's lives through social and individual change' (Letherby 2003, p. 4).

The marrying of theory with practice, and a commitment to knowledge not just for knowledge's sake, but to create positive change, is also a core characteristic of antiracist

research which, like feminist research, believes 'in the power of ideas to change society' (Sefa Dei 2005, p. 2). In his work on antiracist research methodologies, George Sefa Dei argues that an essential question for antiracist researchers is: 'How does this experience speak to me in terms of theorizing experiences and pursuing political action for change' (Sefa Dei 2005, p. 2). This question clearly articulates a goal shared by both antiracist and feminist researchers: the simultaneous creation of knowledge and political change.

As I discussed in the introductory chapter, one of my motivations for conducting this research was an intellectual curiosity in the gendered experiences of religion. Although I was interested in learning more about Black British Muslim women's experiences, my motivation to conduct this research within an institute of higher education stemmed from a desire for the research to have meaning outside of furthering my own understanding and knowledge. I wanted the knowledge produced to contribute towards actual systemic change. Consequently, one of the most upsetting aspects of conducting this research has been realising how complicit higher education is in upholding and perpetuating systems of inequality, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Four when I examine Black Muslim women's experiences within British educational spaces.

I was also motivated to conduct this research within an institute of higher education because of the relative dearth of scholarly literature available on Black British Muslim women's experiences. When Raeni told me about her experiences of being triply marginalised as a Black Muslim woman in Britain, I was of course angry and frustrated that she had to endure these experiences. When I found out how little scholarship there was that addressed Black Muslim women's experiences of marginalisation, however, I was indignant. While completing my Master's degree, I began to recognise the epistemological value of emotions in conducting feminist research. As Sara Ahmed writes, '[e]motions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds' (Ahmed 2004, p.12). I chose to lean into my emotions and gain inspiration from the anger I felt and use it as a political motivator.

Throughout the research process, I have also come to recognise how to use my heightened empathy, which I have learned is part of my neurodivergence, as part of a feminist research practice. Feminist scholar Sonia Kruks argues that the ability to 'feel with' other women 'may be pivotal for the development of relationships of respectful recognition among women; relations that can bridge difference among women in ways that neither involve

objectification of others nor over-identification with them' (Kruks 2001, p.171). This aligns with Audre Lorde's famous words, 'And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to us' (Lorde 1984, p. 43). Something does not need to directly affect us for it to be pertinent to us. To quote Lorde once again, 'I am not free while any woman is unfree, even if her shackles are different to my own.' I acknowledge the value of my empathy and ability to 'feel-with' other women. That being said, I also hold with me Kruks' caution that there is a 'fine line' between 'solidarity and charity' (Kruks 2001, p. 171). As I pursue this research, I am conscious of my positionality and the need to constantly think reflexively about how this positionality affects my research and whether my practices are ethically feminist and antiracist.

Reflexivity is recognised as a core feature of both feminist and antiracist research practice (Haraway 1991; Kendi 2019). Jennifer Mason defines reflexivity as 'thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see' (Mason 2002, p. 5). She suggests that it is important as researchers to recognise how our thoughts, as well as our actions and decisions, shape our research. As individuals, we all operate 'under a set of assumptions about the way the world works, or the way [we] believe the world should work' (DeCarlo 2018). As researchers, we also operate under a set of assumptions, which is evident through our paradigmatic approach.

Each paradigmatic approach has its own goals or objectives for research, as well as unique ontological and epistemological perspectives. Most feminist scholars use an interpretive or critical paradigmatic approach (Kiguwa 2019, p. 228), both of which reject the notion of objectivity and 'capital t Truth', instead recognising that truth is subjective. This contrasts with a positivist approach, 'in which researchers aim to abandon their biases and values in a quest for objective, empirical, and knowable truth' (DeCarlo 2018).

My work is conducted from a critical paradigm, which 'not only studies power imbalances but also seeks to change them' (DeCarlo 2018). Ontologically, scholars operating within a critical paradigm adopt a perspective of historical realism. Reality is viewed as something which is 'shaped by congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors, and then crystallized (reified) into a series of structures that are now

(inappropriately) taken as "real", that is natural and immutable' (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p. 110). Operating within a critical paradigm, then, means acknowledging that power structures are real, but that this reality is dynamic. Power structures are socially constructed within specific historical contexts and can change over time.

Epistemologically, scholars operating within a critical paradigm 'have emphasised the need to interrogate subjective accounts and interpretations of experience', which aligns with the feminist principle of making the personal political (Kiguwa 2019, p. 231). I concur with this viewpoint which values subjective accounts and interpretations of experiences as valid sources of knowledge. Accordingly, I have approached my research using standpoint theory which recognises 'lived experience as a criterion of meaning' (Hill Collins 2000, p. 257). Standpoint theory originated as a feminist critique to challenge ideas around the production of knowledge, since, prior to the 1970s, 'never was what counts as general social knowledge generated by asking questions from the perspective of women's lives' (Harding 1991, p. 106). Standpoint theory was 'proposed not just as an explanatory theory, but also prescriptively, as a method or theory of method (methodology) to guide future feminist research' (Harding 2004, p. 1). In contrast to the androcentric ideologies of the Enlightenment which encouraged scholars to seek objective knowledge, standpoint theorists accept that knowledge itself is socially situated and argue that the social and political disadvantages of oppressed groups can in fact be an epistemic advantage (Harding 2004, pp. 7-8). Afterall, oppressed groups 'have more direct access to accurate knowledge about the conditions of their subordination' (Griffin 1996, p. 180), even if historically this knowledge has not been substantiated by dominant institutions of knowledge production (Hills Collins 1991).

As noted above, one of my aims for this project is to amplify the voices of Black Muslim women, in however limited a way, and to centre their experiences in the production of knowledge, as historically their experiences have been excluded. I recognise that their experiences of socio-cultural marginalisation give them an epistemic advantage and knowledge about social inequality which I do not have as a white Christian who has not directly experienced those oppressions. I seek to draw upon their experiences as sources of knowledge (Campbell and Waco 2000).

Standpoint theorists acknowledge that the production of knowledge is socially situated. Research, after all, 'is a process which occurs through the medium of a person' (Stanley and Wise 1993, p. 175). As Donna Haraway argues, 'knowledge from the view of the unmarked is irrational' (1988, p. 587). In order to combat a false perception of objectivity, feminist scholars often write the situated nature of the knowledge they produce into their work. Haraway asserts that 'positioning is the key practice in grounding knowledge' (Haraway 1988, p. 587). Similarly, Liz Stanley and Sue Wise argue that 'the researcher is always and inevitably present *in* the research. This exists whether openly stated or not; and feminist research ought to make this an open practice' (Stanley and Wise 1993, p. 175).

I agree with scholars such as Haraway and Stanley and Wise who argue that as researchers we are situated within our research as much as the subject matter. I also concur with a feminist ontology that sees the 'self' as 'relationally and interactionally composed, its construction being historically, culturally and contextually specific and subtly changing' (Stanley and Wise 1993, p.195). The self, much like power structures, are *real*, but they are not immutable. My previous experiences have all shaped my current way of thinking, and have affected how I designed this project, carried out the research, and conducted the analysis. This is why, for instance, I have included some of my own experiences in the opening chapter. As I reflected in that chapter though, the 'self' writing this thesis is not the same as the 'self' who discovered feminism and Islam for the first time at age 14. Indeed, my views have changed even throughout the course of this research. Throughout the rest of this chapter, as I review my methodological process, I seek to also openly outline my own role in the research process and the knowledge produced.

### 3.4 Research Design

This research seeks to explore the lived experiences of Black Muslim women, paying particular attention to how they experience the dynamics of spaces within Britain. The research addresses the following research questions:

- How, if at all, do Black Muslim women experience spaces in Britain as racialised, gendered, and/or religiously-coded?

- How, if at all, is the marginalisation of Black Muslim women in Britain related to the coded dynamics of space?

To answer these questions, I used a qualitative approach, which was appropriate given the project's feminist focus on experiences. As Mary Maynard explains, 'a focus on experience has been seen as a way to challenge women's previous silence about their own condition' (1994, p. 14). She argues further that 'feminism must begin with experience since it is only from such a vantage point that it is possible to see the extent to which women's worlds are organized in ways which differ from those of men' (Maynard 1994, p. 14). I contend that the same argument can be applied to other social categorisations relevant for this research, such as race and religion.

In choosing a method, I was keen to choose one which would encourage storytelling. My inspiration to conduct this research after all came from listening to Raeni's stories about her own experiences. Storytelling as a research tool has been used by both feminist and anti-racist scholars who seek to provide 'voice to those who are often silenced' (Woodiwiss et al. 2017; Vasquez Heilig et al. 2020, p. 6). Stories and narratives are also a useful tool as they provide context to experiences of oppression and systemic racism (Ladson-Billings 2010, p. 11).

I chose to use semi-structured interviews, not least because I was already familiar with the method as I had used it while conducting research for my Master's dissertation. Interviews have been used by many feminist researchers who aim to develop knowledge collaboratively with their participants (DeVault and Gross 2012, p. 212). Semi-structured interviews, in particular, have been cited as the '*principal means* by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives' (Reinharz 1992, p. 18, emphasis in original). In his text on interviewing as a research method, Elliot Mishler (1986) warns that some styles of interviews can constrain storytelling, as respondents might limit their answers to short responses. From my own experience, however, I found that the ability to ask follow-up questions, as permitted within a semi-structured (as opposed to closed) interview structure, and developing a rapport with the participant countered this risk.

Once I decided on my method, I developed an interview guide, which is similar to an interview schedule, but more informal in style. Whereas an interview schedule generally requires 'uniformity in the wording and sequencing of questions', an interview guide is more flexible and 'consists of a list of topics and questions that can be asked in different ways for different participants' (Lindlof and Taylor 2011, pp. 199-200). A more flexible approach is useful when the participants' experiences vary, as it allows the interviewer to 'shuffle the topics and questions to find the best fit for an individual' (Lindlof and Taylor 2011, p. 200). I developed the questions to be open-ended with a goal of eliciting either stories or discussions, rather than short direct responses. Some of the questions I included were: Have you encountered situations in which people ask you about or make assumptions about your race? How was it growing up Black and Muslim? In what spaces do you feel comfortable or like you fit in? Where do you feel uncomfortable? What does it mean to be a Black Muslim woman in the UK? This last question I based off a question I had seen asked in the YouTube series *Black and Muslim in Britain*. I chose to include this particular question because in the series it had elicited interesting responses from the participants, addressing issues such as erasure from conversations, representation, intersectionality, and community.

The next step was to determine my target sample size. As a qualitative research project focussed on experiences, I was not looking for a representative sample, considering instead individual 'cases' as points of entry into larger social processes. I set a goal of between 12-15 participants and decided to use purposive sampling, which relies on the researcher to determine when an appropriate target has been reached for the aim of the project (Etikan et al. 2016).

As a student at the University of York, this research was conducted in compliance with the ethical research standards of the University. I gained ethical approval from the Economics, Law, Management, Politics, and Sociology Ethics Committee (ELMPS) in January 2020. I then began recruiting and interviewing participants in February 2020.

## 3.5 Recruiting

As I began the recruitment process, I was aware of and concerned about the small pool of potential participants.[9] My first step in recruiting was to create a call for participants (see Appendix 1), which I began distributing in February 2020. When distributing my call for participants I was aware that York, where I am located, has a very small Muslim population and so I would be unlikely to recruit many, if any, participants here. I shared the call for participants with the University of York Islamic Society. I was not aware if there were any Black Muslims in the society, but I knew that the demographic of universities does not always match city demographics and is more likely to be diverse. I also distributed the call for participants online through my personal social media pages and asked friends to share it on theirs. When distributing physical flyers, I focussed on areas where I anticipated a larger demographic of Muslims. According to a report on the geographical distributions of Muslims, 76% of Muslims live within four regions of Britain: London, West Midlands, the North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber (Ali 2015, p. 25). Within these regions, Muslims are densely populated within London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Bradford (Ali 2015, p. 26). In February 2020, I travelled to London to attend the British Islam Conference held there. I distributed flyers at the conference and also asked a friend to post it at her university in London, where she told me she had seen quite a few Black Muslim students.

In my process of recruiting, I anticipated challenges, not only due to the small number of potential participants, but also due to my positionality as what could be perceived as an 'outsider researcher'. The concept of insider-outsider research is well-developed and scholars have argued about the benefits and drawbacks of both positions. As a white, non-Muslim American, I do not share the same racial, religious, or national identities as the participants and thus could be considered an 'outsider'. Patricia and Peter Adler argue that being an insider gives the researcher a sense of legitimacy and allows them to gain acceptance by their participants more quickly (Adler and Adler 1987). Although the terms insider researcher and outsider researcher are frequently used, I agree with Sonya Dwyer and Jennifer Buckle, who assert that referring to the relative position of a researcher in relation

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[9] As mentioned in the previous chapter, according to the most recent census in 2021 there are around 3.87 million Muslims in England and Wales (6.5% of the overall population). 10.8% of Muslims are Black (417,960). The exact statistics are not available, but if we account for gender (49% of Muslims in the last census were women) and age (35% of Muslims in the last census were 17 or younger), there are approximately 133,000 Black Muslim female adults living across England and Wales, which is 0.22% of the population, or 1 in every 448 people.

to the group they are researching in such a 'dualistic manner is overly simplistic' (Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p. 60). Identities and social categorisations are complex and it is unlikely that any researcher would share all social categories with their participants.

While it is impossible for a researcher to know without asking how a participant feels about the similarities and differences between the researcher and themselves, I was aware in developing this project that my specific positionality as a non-Muslim, white US-American might impact some women's decision of whether or not to participate. Given the relative privilege of several of my social categories, I felt that it was important to be transparent in the recruiting process. In the information sheet that I distributed to all potential participants (see Appendix 2) I included a section in which I described some of my social categories, including my age, race, gender, nationality. In the information sheet I also invited potential participants to ask any questions they had about my positionality or my viewpoints.

One of the challenges I faced during recruitment related to social identification, but unexpectedly not my own. When I wrote the call for participants and information sheet, my criteria for participants was only that they were a Black Muslim woman over the age of 18 and living in the UK.  While I am aware that the term 'woman' can be contentious, my own personal view, and thus the view I took into my research, contends that any person who self-identifies as a woman, whether she is cisgender or transgender, is a woman and would be eligible to participate. Similarly, any woman who self-identifies as Muslim, whether she is practicing or not, was welcome to participate. When it came to self-identifying as Black though, I encountered an issue I did not expect.

Shortly after I distributed the calls for participants in London and online, I received emails from several South Asian women who expressed interest in participating. At first, I was unsure of how to respond. The first email enquiry I received was from a woman who identified herself as 'a British Pakistani female Muslim' and said she had heard about my thesis and would really like to be a part of it. I was curious if she hadn't read the call for participants carefully and saw only 'Muslim women' or if she identified as Black. She had provided her location in the email saying she was available for an interview, so I replied and offered her an in-person or Skype interview based on her availability. In the end though, she didn't reply to my response. After replying to her email and not receiving a response I had

time to reflect and think carefully about how to reply to the other emails I had received from South Asian women, as well as any future emails I might receive.

I designed the project with the experiences of Afro-Caribbean Black Muslim women in mind. I was only vaguely aware at the time that the meaning of 'Black' in Britain has been contested. As discussed in the previous Critical Context chapter, '"Black" as a political signifier has at times been used to identify those who experience structural and institutional discrimination because of their skin colour; namely people of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian origin' (Maylor 2009, p. 369). This political definition of Blackness 'prevailed between the 1960s and 1980s in Britain' and 'was used positively by coalitions of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian organizations in their struggles against racial discrimination' (Maylor 2009, p. 370). Others have argued against using 'Black' in this way, asserting that 'political blackness creates a non-strategic essentialism that is based on connecting people into a political project on the basis of not being white'; instead defining Blackness as 'rooted in a connection to the African Diaspora' (Andrews 2016, p. 2061). Once I was aware of this historical usage of 'Black', I responded to the emails I had received with a polite clarification that this project was focussing exclusively on the experiences of Black women with African or Afro-Caribbean heritage.

Another unexpected challenge I faced during recruiting was the global outbreak of Covid-19 in the Spring of 2020. As noted above, I began recruiting participants in February 2020 and in March 2020 the United Kingdom went into a lockdown during which residents were largely not able to leave their homes. While there were some exceptions for essential work, this did not apply to universities and all students had to stay at home. Even before the pandemic hit, I had advertised on my call for participants that I was willing to conduct interviews in person or via Skype. Since I was aware that many of the participants would likely be located in London, Birmingham, or elsewhere around Britain I did not want to miss the opportunity to interview a participant if I was unable to travel to them and also wanted to provide accessible options for participants who might be uncomfortable meeting me in a public space or inviting me into their home without knowing me. The choice to include the option of online interviews meant that even once we had entered a lockdown, I was still able to conduct interviews with participants who were comfortable using online systems.

In addition to Skype, I offered potential participants the option to use alternative video calling services such as FaceTime, Zoom, or WhatsApp. I also offered the option to conduct the interview by phone. Phone interviews have been critiqued by some researchers as 'being impersonal and a poor substitute for the sensuous interaction of face-to face meetings' as 'visual cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and body posture are missing' (Lindlof and Taylor p. 189). In their research comparing the two means, however, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) found that interviews conducted by telephone and face-to-face modes yielded comparable results (p. 116).

In the first month of recruiting, before the pandemic started, I recruited two participants. However, once the lockdown started, I did not have any more contact from potential participants who had come across my call for participants and had exhausted my social media platforms for distribution. At this point I relied upon snowball sampling in order to recruit further participants. Snowball sampling is a method according to which the researcher asks participants to invite their friends or members of their community to participate in research. The method is often used to find participants 'when they are few in number or where some degree of trust is required to initiate contact' (Atkinson and Flint 2001, p. 2). In my case, although the number of Black Muslim women in Britain is few relative to the general population, it is not so few; nor is the community one which would generally require 'a degree of trust to initiate contact'. I therefore relied on snowball sampling because I was not finding success in online recruiting and was not able to leave the house to recruit in person.

While snowball sampling as a technique is helpful in finding participants, it does come with drawbacks. Because four of the participants were recruited through snowballing, the demographics of the participants are limited: all of the participants are from Bristol or London and are either of university age or in their mid-30s. While, as noted above, I was not seeking a representative sample and so this circumstance was not prohibitive to the analysis, the project does lack the perspective of older participants or participants from countries in the United Kingdom other than England. A chart with further details about each participant can be found below. In the chart I have included the participants' pseudonym, their age at the time of the interview, as well as some additional biographical details. These details were shared during the interview and are included here to provide relevant context to the narratives shared in the following analysis chapters. During each interview, I asked the

participant if they had a preferred pseudonym, though most did not. Sagal chose her own pseudonym, and I chose the pseudonyms for the other five participants. I intentionally chose names that reflected each participant's cultural heritage.

### 3.4.1 Table of Participants

| Participant Pseudonym | Age | Brief Biography |
|---|---|---|
| Raeni | 30s | Raeni was born and raised in Bristol, England. She has lived predominately between Bristol and London, but as a performing artist has travelled extensively around the UK and abroad. She describes her parents as 'Jamaican migrants who moved to Bristol in the 1960s'. Her parents are practicing Christians and Raeni converted to Islam as an adult. |
| Folasade | 18-20 | Folasade was born and raised in Nigeria. She moved to York, England without her family when she was 16 to study A-levels. She is currently an undergraduate student at a Russell Group university. Folasade was raised Muslim. |
| Faduma | 20s | Faduma was born and raised in Sweden until she and her family moved to England when she around '6 or 7 years old'. She still has family in Sweden and visits '5-6 times a year'. She describes herself as 'proudly European'. Her parents met in Sweden, where they had both emigrated in the 1980s. Her mom is from Tanzania, 'ethnically Somali, but linguistically Swahili'. Her dad is from Somaliland. Faduma is currently a postgraduate student at a Russell Group university. She was raised Muslim. |
| Magan | 30s | Magan was born and raised in Somalia until she and her family moved to England when she was in primary school. Her parents are both Somali. She currently lives and works in London. She has also lived and worked in Saudi Arabia. |

| | | She has worked in both corporate jobs and as a teacher. Magan was raised Muslim. |
|---|---|---|
| Iyawa | 30s | Iyawa was born and raised in England to Nigerian parents. She is a midwife currently living in London. She attended a British university in France for her undergraduate degree and has also worked in France. She was formerly a semi-professional football player. Iyawa was raised Muslim. |
| Sagal | 20s | Sagal was born and raised in England to Somali parents. She is a postgraduate student at a Russell Group university. Sagal was raised Muslim. |

## 3.6 Interviews

I conducted my first interview in February 2020 with Raeni. Unlike the other participants, whom I did not know until they expressed interest in participating in the project, Raeni and I have been friends for years. As I mentioned in the Introduction chapter, Raeni and I first met when we were studying together for our Master's degrees and the project was inspired by the experiences she shared with me. Consequently, she knew more about the project and its development than other participants who only received the call for participants and information sheet.

For our interview, we met in-person and I followed the interview guide that I had prepared during my research design process. The interview guide was intentionally flexible in terms of the ordering of questions and the ability to add in follow-up questions. Because of my existing relationship and comfort with Raeni, our history of studying together at a postgraduate level, and her knowledge about the project, throughout the interview we not only discussed her answers to the interview questions, but also the merit of the questions themselves. For example, there was one question on the guide about what it means to be Black and Muslim in Britain that my supervisor had suggested taking off. We discussed the merits of the question and whether it should be left off or kept in. Raeni stated that she felt it was 'a really good question, because it gives you the space to explore', and then proceeded to elaborate on what it means for her to be a Black Muslim woman in the UK and being 'left out of the conversation'. Although I asked Raeni the questions from the interview guide, the overall dynamic of the interaction was much more conversational. I felt that this dynamic of

a conversational style led even more naturally to storytelling. After we had finished, I left and reflected on how it might be possible to replicate this dynamic with participants with whom I didn't already have an existing relationship.

One of the key components of good feminist research practice is to create rapport between the participant and researcher. One means by which feminist researchers have achieved this is through a willingness to share personal details with participants. Ann Oakley (1981) argues that an open dialogue between the participant and researcher – a two-way conversation – and a willingness for the researcher to share honest answers about herself is a way to challenge false notions of objectivity. The willingness to have a two-way conversation with participants has also been noted to be particularly important for white researchers interviewing Black participants. According to Rosalind Edwards (1990), white researchers were able to create a better rapport with Black participants when they were explicitly honest about their racial differences. Feminist researchers have also suggested that researchers openly share with participants 'the concerns that animate the research, so the conversation can unfold as a collaborative moment of making knowledge' (Devault and Gross 2012, p.215). I certainly found this to be the case in my interview with Raeni; However, as I have noted, Raeni and I already had an existing friendship and shared academic history.

Oakley (2016) writes that elements of interviews between women can 'transition to friendship' because of a sisterhood and shared subordination (p. 196). While the participants and I are all women, and this might have had some effect on the interview encounter, my goal as a researcher was to develop a rapport with the participants and create a dynamic similar to having a conversation with a friend, rather than actually transitioning the relationship to a friendship. I was aware that the participants agreed to an interview to share their experiences, not to make friends. I aimed to recreate the dynamic of the interview style I had with Raeni for three main reasons. First, I hoped that it would create a sense of comfort within the interview space, which can sometimes feel formal. Second, I hoped that it would create a space in which participants felt comfortable to also ask me questions. Third, I hoped it would encourage storytelling and a narrative response style.

As I was researching ways to create a conversational flow during interviews, I came across the term 'conversation with a purpose', which resonated with me, as it is exactly what my

interview with Raeni had felt like. As far as I have been able to glean, the term was first used by sociologist Robert Burgess in 1984. He argues that all unstructured (also called open) interviews are a type of conversation with a purpose, because they allow for a flexible and fluid interaction with follow-up questions stemming organically (Burgess 1984). Unlike for semi-structured interviews, for open interviews none of the questions are predetermined. An open style of interviewing was used by social researchers throughout the 1800s and early 1900s to make the interviewees more comfortable (Burgess 1984, p.102).

I continued to research 'conversation with a purpose' to see if it was an established method or simply a descriptor for open, or unstructured, interviews. I found the term used again in an online research methods comic written by Helen Kara, designed to be used as a teaching tool, evidenced by the discussion questions at the back. (Kara, H. 2018). The comic depicts a student's first experience conducting an interview and 'focuses on the often messy/imperfect real-life situations students/researchers may find themselves in' (The Graphic Social Science Research Network 2018). In the comic, the teacher describes interviews as 'essentially a conversation, a conversation with a purpose, to glean information, to find stuff out' (Kara, H. 2018). She explains that an interview is a conversation with a purpose, so they need to build rapport, but that it is a 'professional encounter' not to be mistaken for friendship (Kara, H. 2018). In the discussion questions that follow the comic, the reader is asked questions such as if the boy should have admitted that he was nervous to the woman he was interviewing, if he should have shown his feelings during the interview, and if he should have visited the woman a second time outside of a professional context (Kara, H. 2018).

From the limited scholarship I could find on 'conversations with a purpose' it did not appear to be an established method, but rather just a description of how an open interview style can benefit both the interviewer and interviewees. Kara's comic depicts how a combination of informal conversation with discussion about the interview topic can put the interviewer at ease. On the other hand, Burgess describes how a conversational style can help interviewees feel more comfortable. Burgess' observations in particular aligned with my goals. So, although 'conversations with a purpose' is not an established method, I decided to adopt the term. I changed to an unstructured interview style in subsequent interviews. Rather than calling them open or unstructured interviews though, I used the term 'conversation with a purpose', as I felt that this terminology more clearly articulated my objective.

In addition to the benefit of ideally creating a more comfortable environment for the participants, I liked the informality that the term 'conversation' evokes. As I explained earlier, the two-way nature of a conversation also matches feminist interview practices. Feminists have 'argued for the significance of a genuine, rather than an instrumental rapport between' researcher and participant, in order to 'encourage a non-exploitative relationship, where the person being studied is not treated simply as a source of data' (Maynard 1994, p.15-16).

Switching to a completely unstructured interview style also resolved another issue I had been struggling with. Even though I had designed the interview guide questions to be open-ended, I was aware that many of the questions focussed on specific intersections, such as race and religion, or race, religion and gender. While this would not preclude the participant from discussing other intersections in their answers, it did potentially guide their answers to focus more on those intersections. As Maynard warns, 'research practices which utilize either pre-coded or pre-closed categories are often of limited use when trying to understand women's lives, because they are based on assumptions that the researcher is already sufficiently familiar with the phenomenon being investigated to be able to specify, in advance, the full range of experiences being studied' (Maynard 1994, p.11). Conducting interviews without pre-set questions would not only allow the participant more freedom in choosing what they wanted to discuss, and in the process potentially opening up avenues for discussion of topics that I would not even know to ask about as a white non-Muslim woman; it would also allow them to locate their own subject position within and between their discursive identity categories (Hillsburg 2013).

As I mentioned above, open, or unstructured, interviews do not have a predetermined set of questions and 'rely upon the spontaneous generation of questions' (Savin-Baden and Major 2013, p. 359). Prior to each interview I provided the participants with a consent form to sign (See Appendix 3) and the information sheet. The information sheet advised the participants about the overall aims and research questions. Providing this information helped to clearly define the goal of the conversation. The information sheet advised that participants would 'participate in semi-structured interviews to discuss how you experience different spaces. These can be anywhere, including the home, school, workplace, mosque, as well as spaces such as shopping malls, grocery stores, and public parks'. While the information sheet specified semi-structured interviews, I explained to each participant after Raeni, either

verbally or by email, that I would instead be using a method called 'conversation with a purpose' where we had a discussion about their experiences as a Black Muslim woman in Britain. I explained that it was less formal than a typical interview, so I would ask follow-up questions, but I wouldn't be prompting specific topics of discussion and they could discuss anything they wanted prompted by the information sheet. I also invited them to ask me questions as well, either about the research or about myself. I invited the participants to treat the encounter as they would any other conversation with friends. For example, during one interview we took a tea break, which prompted a pleasant chat about how we like our tea. While the conversation was not related to the research aims or questions, it augmented the rapport we had thus far developed.

A potential drawback for researchers conducting open interviews is that 'the data yielded may vary greatly from interview to interview' (Reinharz 1992, p. 19). While this can present a challenge for the researcher in the analysis stage, it can also be an advantage because it provides 'a valuable reflection of reality' (Reinharz 1992, p. 19). As expected, the topics discussed by each participant varied, with some focussing more on their experiences at school or university, and others focussing more on their upbringing, social interactions, and experiences in mosques and other religious spaces. I had expected that some participants might ask for an idea or prompt of where to start, or be curious about what kinds of spaces other participants before them had discussed, but this wasn't the case. After an initial bit of small talk about Covid and isolation or a chat about how I became interested in this topic of research, each participant jumped right in with sharing a wide variety of experiences. Phrases such as 'Oh, and I wanted to tell you about this [experience]' and 'Oh and I haven't discussed this [space] yet', were commonplace and reflected the type of conversation that I had with all of the participants. None of the participants exhibited hesitation or uncertainty about what to discuss. There were a few instances in which a participant wanted to share an experience they had had but wanted certain details to be left out to ensure anonymity. In these cases, I assured the participant that I would only include the information they consented to have included and asked which details I should omit. I was able to exclude these details at the point of transcription, as I completed all of the transcription for the interviews myself without the use of transcription software.

Between February 2020 and July 2020 I conducted six interviews. With the exception of my first interview with Raeni, the other five interviews were all conducted via video chat

(Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp) or by phone due to Covid restrictions. Though the call for participants had advised that interviews would last around one hour, all of the interviews exceeded this time. The shortest interview lasted just over an hour and the longest lasted three hours.

Following these six interviews, I struggled to find more participants. I was concerned that I would not have enough data, so I spoke with my supervisor and discussed the possibility of alternative data collection methods. As I already mentioned earlier in the thesis, during my preliminary research process for the project in 2018-2019, I had started listening to a podcast called *Being a Muslim Black Girl* in which the host spoke about her experiences and shared stories about life as a Black Muslim woman in Britain. Between that time and summer 2020, more similar podcasts had been produced and/or were ongoing. I decided to incorporate data from these podcasts, as it would allow me to maintain my focus on lived experiences. An additional benefit of gathering data from podcasts, rather than through another method, is that I would not need to go through the ethics committee again in order to use the data because the podcasts were all publicly available online.

### 3.7 Podcasts

Once I had confirmed that using data from publicly available podcasts would not require any additional ethics approval and was an acceptable method, I began identifying which podcasts had content that would be suitable to use for my project. While the interviews had been conducted for research purposes, and the participants had been aware of my research aims and questions, the podcasts of course were produced for other purposes.

When searching for suitable podcasts, I looked first for podcasts produced by and featuring Black Muslim women in the UK. Once I found an appropriate podcast, I would then listen to a couple episodes to get a sense of the format and types of topics discussed. I was looking specifically for podcasts in which the hosts spoke about their experiences as Black Muslim women in Britain. I was not expecting the bulk of the content to focus on their experiences, as the interviews had, which is why I listened to multiple episodes before deciding whether or not the podcast was a good fit.

As a listener of *Being a Muslim Black Girl*, I knew that episodes of that podcast included content that was relevant to my research questions, and so this was the first to be added to my list. I had also listened to some episodes of *Turbans Ain't Hijab*, which had been recommended to me by Raeni, as it was being produced by one of her friends, and I found it to be relevant. The format of both podcasts was similar, with each episode addressing one primary subject. *Being a Muslim Black Girl* had one host, while *Turbans Ain't Hijab* had two hosts, and both sometimes featured guests. Both podcasts were also explicit in their focus on the hosts' identity as Black Muslim women.

I identified the rest of the podcasts I used by scrolling through Apple Podcasts and Spotify. I used the search feature on both of these platforms, using key terms such as 'Black Muslim', 'Muslim woman', and 'Muslimah'. I then read the shows' description and episode summaries to determine if the hosts were Black Muslim women. As I was searching for podcasts, I occasionally came across podcasts that had multiple hosts, of which only one was a Black Muslim woman, with the other host(s) generally being South Asian. Ultimately, I decided not to include these podcasts because I found it difficult to distinguish which host was speaking, and I did not want to incorrectly attribute an experience discussed as something that happened to a Black Muslim woman if I could not be absolutely certain about the identity of the speaker. To make the process easier for myself, I ultimately opted to only include podcasts where all of the hosts identified as Black Muslim women.

In the table below, I provide a list of the podcasts I used content from, as well as some additional relevant information about each podcast. I include the dates of the first and last episode, the description of the podcast as published on Apple Podcasts or Spotify, and how many episodes the podcast has. The chart also includes one YouTube series, which, as I will discuss later in this section, I also used content from for this thesis.

**3.7.1 Table of Podcasts**

| Podcast | Start date | Description | Episodes |
|---|---|---|---|
| *TBMG (The Black Muslim Girl)* | August 2019 – February 2021 | 'A fun and honest podcast bringing you all the big and small talk from the perspective of a Black Muslim Woman with love and laughter but most importantly wisdom' (Apple Podcasts) | 25 |
| *The m Word* | August 2019 – December 2020 | 'The M Word Podcast follows the journey of friends Ikram, Najma and Zahur as they navigate life as young, black, Muslim women in their early 20's living in London. Each bringing to the discussion their unique experiences and perspectives, this talented and funny trio has biweekly episodes where they discuss music, relationships and spirituality alongside their daily war on the pests of this Dunya.' (Spotify) | 29 |
| *Turbans Ain't Hijab* | February 2020 – December 2020 | 'A dynamic duo speaking on their experiences as Black British Muslimahs' (Apple Podcasts) | 7 |
| *Being a Muslim Black Girl* | October 2018 – June 2021 | 'A Muslim, Black sister who thinks it's finally time we come together and touch on topics and dilemmas in depth that are not often spoken about, whilst also trying to grow in her deen and build her Ākhirah. Sharing my personal experiences/journey. Bridging the gap on topics/dilemmas that no one really | 30 |

| | | touches on. Topics on Islam.' (Apple Podcasts) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Clued Up* | February 2021 – April 2022 | 'The "Clued Up Podcast" is your new favourite popular culture and music podcast from a group of friends, 4 East African black women, from London who came together through a love of music. Join the girls each week as they share their perspective on the hottest topics on your timeline, the music on your playlists, the 411 on the industry and the conversation in your group chats' (Apple Podcasts) | 48 |
| YouTube series | | | |
| *Black and Muslim in Britain* | October 2017 – October 2019 | 'A series exploring stories and dialogue around being Black and Muslim in Britain.' (YouTube) | 12 |

The format for each of the five podcasts is quite similar. Each podcast features individual Black Muslim women or friend groups, and occasionally guest(s), discussing topics such as their daily experiences and their views on specific issues, world events, and/or pop culture. In many ways, the discussion style on the podcasts is reminiscent of the conversations I had with the participants; that is, each episode has a theme, the style of discussion is often relaxed, and the hosts do not always stay completely on topic.

One of the challenges in using podcast data for this thesis is that the podcasts were not produced specifically for research purposes. As such, the content covers a wide array of subject matter, much of which is not relevant to the research questions for this thesis. Nevertheless, stories and insights about life as Black Muslim women in Britain are dotted

throughout the series and there are even some episodes where this is the main topic of discussion. For example, one episode of *The Black Muslim Girl Podcast* is titled 'Navigating space as a Black Muslim Woman'. *Being a Muslim Black Girl* also has an episode that centres on the experiences of Black Muslim women in British spaces, specifically universities, titled 'Black & Muslim in University'.

As mentioned earlier, I also used content from and included in the preceding chart one YouTube series, *Black and Muslim in Britain*. This YouTube series was produced as part of The Black and Muslim in Britain Project, which was 'initiated in October 2016 with the intention of addressing the lack of faith representation during Black History Month in the UK' (Black and Muslim in Britain 2017). The series consists of two seasons, each featuring five episodes, and two specials. Each season of the series features a cast of Black Muslim men and women in Britain, with some cast members appearing in both seasons. Each episode addresses a titular question or topic, and the series is filmed in a question-and-answer format, with each cast member answering the episode's question. Some of the questions/topics explored in the series include: 'What is the strangest thing you've experienced about being Black and Muslim' (Season 1, episode 2); 'What does it mean to be Black and Muslim in Britain' (Season 1, episode 5); and 'But Bilal (RAH) was Black' (Season 2, episode 1). As with the podcasts, although the purpose of the series was not to explore Black Muslim women's experiences in Britain, some of the content was nevertheless relevant to my research questions. Although the series features Black Muslim men and women, I included only the female cast members' answers in the data analysed for this thesis. I mentioned before that I opted not to include podcasts with hosts who were not Black Muslim women because I found it difficult at times to distinguish which host was speaking. This was not an issue for this series, however, because it includes video, unlike the podcasts which were only audio.

As with the interviews, once I identified a podcast or series, I began the process of transcribing the episodes. I initially started transcribing the episodes myself, as I had done with the interviews. When I was granted ethical approval to conduct this research, as part of the process I stated that I would keep participants' data secure and anonymise participants' names (see also Consent Form in Appendix 3). Part of this process included transcribing the interviews myself and leaving out certain details from the point of transcription. Since the podcasts and series are publicly available however, I was not required to gain approval from

the university ethics committee to use the podcast content as data. I also did not need to anonymise the names of those speaking. Even though I did not need to anonymise any data, I still chose to transcribe the episodes myself so that I could ensure it was accurate. As the number of podcasts and episodes increased, however, I realised that it would not be realistic to continue to do the transcription myself. I decided to transcribe many of the episodes using an online transcription software program called Otter. Otter is a paid service, but since it is AI operated it was more affordable for me than using a transcription service that relied on humans. The downside to using the software programme was a decrease in accuracy compared to doing the transcription myself. Because I could not be certain of the accuracy, for all quotes that I have used in the subsequent analysis chapters, I returned to the episode and listened again and edited the transcription to ensure it was accurate.

## 3.8 Analysis

In accordance with my aim of amplifying the voices of Black Muslim women, I decided to use thematic analysis rooted in grounded theory. Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). Analysis which is rooted in grounded theory 'does not distinguish between themes and terms that are more central and those that are more peripheral to the research topic' (Rubin and Rubin 2011, p. 204). I chose to use a grounded theory approach because, as a non-Muslim, non-Black, non-British woman, I wanted to remain open to the likely possibility that the data would address issues beyond what I imagined when writing my research questions.

I followed Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's process for thematic analysis. The process consists of six phases, which are followed as a '*recursive* process, where movement is back and forth as needed, throughout the phases', rather than step-by-step (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 86, emphasis in the original). The six phases are: 'familiarizing yourself with your data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 87).

The first step of familiarising myself with the data was the most challenging because of my desire to use a grounded theory approach. This approach would involve identifying themes from the data set as a whole and not according to how closely the themes relate to the

research topic. The data set I had accumulated was much larger than I had initially expected when I planned between 12-15 interviews. From the six interviews, I had around twelve hours of data, which I knew from conversations with my supervisor might not be enough. The data from the podcasts and YouTube series was around 200 hours. The sheer amount of data was overwhelming, but I also struggled with how appropriate it would be to use a grounded theory approach with this particular data set.

As I mentioned previously, the interview data was collected with the participants' knowledge of the project's aims and research questions and so the twelve hours was spent in conversation with those aims in mind. The podcast data, on the other hand, was produced for a different purpose. I chose to include data from the podcasts and YouTube series because it was readily available and would allow me to maintain my focus on the lived experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain. While some of the content in the podcasts and series focussed on Black Muslim women's lived experiences, a great deal of it focussed on discussions about pop culture. In the end, I decided to treat the data from the interviews as one data set and the data from the podcasts and YouTube series as a second data set.

As part of my research process, I had already begun looking for 'patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data during the data collection' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 86). Some of the themes I noticed while I was still in the data collection process were: norms and expectations for Black Muslim women in the UK versus abroad; instances of racism, Islamophobia, and sexism; levels of comfort and safety in different spaces; and the intersectionality of identity. I used a data driven approach where 'the themes will depend on the data' as opposed to theory driven coding, where the data is approached 'with specific questions in mind that you wish to code around' (Braun and Clark 2006, p. 89). Accordingly, I did not identify the themes I would address in the thesis until I had the entire data set.

The first data set I analysed was the data from the interviews. I re-read all of the interview transcripts, making notes as I went along of themes and generating initial codes. One of the challenges faced by researchers who use open interviews is the 'wide variance of data', which 'can be challenging to analyse' (Reinharz 1992, p. 19). Although the participants covered a wide range of subjects, I noticed that most of the experiences they shared revolved around themes of marginalisation and othering. The participants focussed on *how* they were marginalised or othered and *where* these instances of marginalisation or othering occurred.

Within the data, I identified two spaces that were discussed by every single one of the participants: educational spaces (school and university) and Islamic spaces (such as mosques, Islamic society, Muslim conferences and events). I also identified several spaces that were discussed by multiple participants: sports spaces, home, work, friendship groups, and cafes. While most of the experiences the participants shared were of being othered or marginalised, they weren't all. Some shared positive experiences and described once again *where* these experiences occurred.

Once I had identified these themes in the interview dataset, I turned to the dataset from the podcasts and YouTube series. While I had no difficulty in reading all the transcripts of the interviews multiple times, I was completely overwhelmed by the volume of the podcast and series dataset. I had already listened to the majority of the podcast episodes, but unfortunately I had not made any notes of the themes discussed, let alone cross referenced those themes with the other episodes. The first step of my process in familiarising myself with the dataset was to relisten to or rewatch a couple episodes of each podcast/series while making note of the themes.

In listening to the podcasts a second time, I became aware how much of the content did not relate to Muslim women's experiences. I wanted to use a grounded theory approach, but also wanted to maintain my focus on lived experiences. I decided to stop analysing the podcast dataset and use only the themes I had identified in the interview dataset for the thesis. I already knew that some of the themes from the interview dataset were present in the podcast dataset, like experiences in educational spaces and at work. Once I had a list of themes from the interview dataset, it was much easier to read the transcripts of the podcast episodes and find relevant data to include in the thesis analysis.

In the subsequent three chapters, I present the analysis of Black Muslim women's experiences as identified from the data acquired in the interviews and supplemented with the data acquired from podcasts and YouTube series.

## Chapter 4: Navigating Hegemonic British Spaces

### 4.1 Introduction

During my conversations with the participants, many of the discussions shared a common theme of feeling different, being 'othered' or experiencing marginalisation as Black Muslim women in Britain. Many of the participants clearly articulated *where* these experiences occurred. For example, Faduma shared that she had experienced several incidents of aggressive behaviour on the bus route between her home and university. She explained, 'It's a very white bus route going up to the University, going through these upper middle-class areas. And you go into the bus and here I am, I look very different'. Though she did not go on to elaborate on class, despite mentioning it in the quotation, she continued to speak about the visibility of her Blackness and Muslim identity, commenting how her experiences of 'othering' had changed drastically once she began wearing her scarf full-time in her late teens. She explained that she had experienced incidents of racism and othering as a child due to her race, but that once she started wearing the scarf, she encountered more Islamophobia. She described incidents such as people trying to pull her headscarf off or 'ranting' at her and saying she was 'a disgusting person because [she's] Muslim'.

In this chapter and the next, I explore the participants' and podcasters' experiences, paying particular attention to the coded norms of the spaces in which the experiences occurred. I explore the common themes of difference, othering, and marginalisation, drawing on Nirmal Puwar's concept of 'space invaders' as a tool to understand the relative situatedness of Black Muslim women in Britain and the somatic norms against which they are measured to be 'other'. As discussed in the Critical Context chapter of this thesis, in *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*, Puwar draws on cases from Westminster and Whitehall, the art world, and academia to demonstrate how spaces within the British nation-state are coded with somatic norms of whiteness and masculinity (Puwar 2004). She argues that it is against these racial and gendered norms that women and racialised minorities are measured. When they take up positions in spaces coded with these norms of whiteness and masculinity, they do so as 'space invaders'. Their situatedness as space invaders is tenuous. They are both insiders and outsiders; permitted to take up these positions, but also marked as 'out of place' (Puwar 2004, p. 8).

As I demonstrate in this chapter, Black Muslim women experience many spaces in Britain as space invaders due to the dominant somatic norms of the space(s). Regardless of whether they were born or moved here, they are seen as 'out of place' and 'different' to the norms of the nation. In this chapter and the next, I explore how Black Muslim women navigate and negotiate the dominant power relations and structural constraints of spaces in Britain. In this chapter, I focus exclusively on spaces coded with what I term norms of 'hegemonic Britishness'.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, I define the norms of hegemonic Britishness. In sections two through four, I explore Black Muslim women's experiences within spaces coded with these norms. In section two, I consider educational spaces, including primary and secondary schools and institutions of Higher Education. In section three, I discuss the workplace. Finally, in section four, I address everyday social and leisure spaces, for example cafes, buses, hotels. Since I did not prompt participants to discuss any specific space, due to the open structure of the interviews, some sections include narratives from all of the participants, while others only include some. As discussed in the Methodology Chapter, I identified the themes for the thesis using thematic analysis of the participants' interviews and then supplemented this data with content from the podcasts and YouTube series. Accordingly, certain sections include more data from the podcasts, while others include less.

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the participants and podcasters were aware that the constraints and marginalisation they faced was due to their 'othering' as a Black Muslim woman. At times, the participant clearly articulated the norms of the space they were discussing, as Faduma did above when she identified the racial and classed norms of the bus route. In instances where they did not articulate these norms themselves, I did. The classification of the spaces discussed in this chapter as being coded with norms of 'hegemonic Britishness' is my own.

## 4.2 Hegemonic Britishness

In this section, I define somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness which I argue permeate the social and institutional spaces discussed throughout the rest of this chapter. I focus primarily on defining the somatic norms of race, religion, and class. There is scope to address the

somatic norms of other social categories present in hegemonic Britishness, for instance sexuality, age, and (dis)ability, however I have limited my discussion to the categories which came up most frequently within my analysis.

As discussed in chapter two, the somatic norm generally refers to the physical embodiment of the theoretical 'universal'. As Charles Mills explains in *The Racial Contract*, within the 'political theory of social contract', the 'body vanishes, becomes theoretically unimportant, just as the physical space inhabited by that body is ostensibly unimportant' (Mills 1997, p.53). He points out, though, that it is only possible to pretend 'the body does not matter because a particular body (the white male body) is being presupposed as the somatic norm' (Mills 1997. p.53). As Puwar employs the term, however, somatic norm does not just represent the 'universal'. It is also one of the ways that systemic inequality is perpetuated. Through the designation of a somatic norm, certain bodies, namely those that match the somatic norm, are deemed to inherently belong within a space. As such, Puwar defines the somatic norms as the 'corporeal imagination of power as naturalised in the body' (Puwar 2001, p.652).

Black Muslim women in Britain are situated in a position of 'otherness' – different to and excluded from the hegemonic somatic norms of Britain. In terms of race, a report by The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain in 2000 found that 'Britishness, as much as Englishness, has systemic, largely unspoken, racial connotations. Whiteness nowhere features as an explicit condition of being British, but it is widely understood that Englishness, and therefore by extension Britishness, is racially coded' (Parekh 2000, p. 38). Though this report was written in 2000, not much has changed over the last twenty years and Britishness is still racially coded as white. 'Research with and by people of colour consistently finds British national identity to be racialised, but also classed, so as to exclude Jews, Irish, and other "off-white" migrants from the nation, alongside darker skinned Others', as Clarke points out (2021). The effect of this is that 'Britain's white middle-classes continue to enjoy a relatively privileged sense of national belonging, routinely represented as the norm against which others are defined' (Clarke 2021).

Black people in Britain are positioned against a norm of whiteness, while also subject to racism rooted in a history of colonialism. In their book *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, the Brixton Black Women's Group asserts that '[t]he mainstay of British

culture has been the assertion of its superiority over others, its total negation of non-European cultures in general and Black people's cultures in particular' (Bryan et al. 1985, p. 191). They further argue that the spread of 'white man's religion, literature, music and art' throughout the world disseminated with it a 'message that European culture and whiteness itself represented "civilisation", while African culture and blackness represented the primitive and barbaric' (Bryan et al., p. 191). Ideas of white superiority were further bolstered by the eugenics movement, purportedly rooted in science, which was popular in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century. Racism was inherent within the movement and encouraged the reproduction of those with desirable qualities (i.e. whiteness), while 'any hint of black heritage was considered a kind of contamination' (Eddo-Lodge 2017, p. 21).

Just as British identity is racialised and classed, with the white middle-class represented as the norm, Britishness is also connoted with religious norms against which Islam, like other religions, is positioned as 'other'. There is a long history of Muslim settlement in Britain, but 'the period after 1945 is distinctive in terms of the scale of Muslim migration to Britain', commonly perceived as the time in which Islam arrived in the UK (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p. 1). Writing about the post-World War II era in which Muslims began 'making a place for Islam in Britain', Daniele Joly writes in 1987 that, 'nothing had prepared the British Society to give a home to a strong nucleus of Muslims forming communities in some of its major cities. Britain is primarily a Christian Protestant society; this is enshrined in the composition of its institutions' (Joly 1987, p. 1). She continues, 'As in most countries which possessed an empire, Britain does not have a tradition of religious or cultural tolerance of non-Christian outsiders' (Joly 1987, p. 1).

The relative positioning of Muslims as 'Other' in Britain stems not only from their difference in religious practices from the norm, but also from broader public discourses which 'persistently reinforce the notion that 'Islam' and 'the West' are mutually exclusive' (Hopkins 2009, p. 27). These discourses became particularly widespread following the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 (hereafter 9/11) in the United States and overlapped with an increase in Islamophobia both in the United States and elsewhere. In a US-based study on the raced representations of the 'Muslim Other', Ali reflects upon three constructions of 'otherness' ascribed to Muslim bodies in a post-9/11 society: (1) Muslims as 'pre-modern', that is unable 'to use rational logic, participate in liberal democratic society, or engage in dialog to express disagreement (as opposed to social or political violence)' (Ali

2014, p. 1251); (2); Muslims as a threat, 'not only who must be saved from himself/herself, but, more importantly, he/she is a threat to Western life and security' (Ali 2014, p. 1253); and finally, (3) gendered understandings of Muslims wherein the 'Muslim male is presented as domineering and the Muslim female is depicted as submissive' (Ali 2014, p. 1255). These constructions of Muslim otherness have also been ascribed to Muslim bodies in the United Kingdom.

Following 9/11, and even more so after the London Bombings in July 2005 (hereafter 7/7), there was a 'significant shift in the coverage of British Muslims' in the media, and a new focus on Islamic terrorism (Poole 2011, p. 54). Poole describes a strategy used by the press following 7/7, which unlike the foreign terrorists of 9/11 was carried out by British citizens, as follows.

> A process of Othering takes place by individualizing the perpetrator (and so
> divorcing him from the wider Muslim community and appeasing any
> accusations of racism) and criminalizing him (seen partly in the predominance of
> mug shots) but then linking him to radicals outside the UK who have
> 'brainwashed' the individual…thus the link is made to Islamic ideology, given
> as the driving force, but it is also Othered by being located outside the UK.
> (Poole 2011, p. 56).

Although this process of Othering employed by the press works in some ways to protect the British Muslim community from constructions of 'Muslims as a threat', through its attempts to situate terrorists outside of the Muslim community and also outside of the UK, it also locates Islam as outside the UK, perpetuating a binary of 'the West' and the 'Muslim Rest' and Muslims as 'Other's within Britain.

Claire Dwyer writes that '[t]he politicisation of British Muslims is often traced to the protests following the publishing of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988,' though she argues that 'it was around issues of education, such as the "Honeyford Affair" that Muslim identities were first mobilised politically in the United Kingdom' (Dwyer 1999, p. 55). The term 'British Muslim' was used, though the debates concerned only ethnically South Asian groups. The racialisation of Islam is also evident in more contemporary debates on the segregation of British Asian communities and British white communities. As Hopkins notes, 'The racialisation of religion has now resulted in ethnic segregation being viewed through a

religious lens and so policy concerns now focus on residential clustering of Muslims rather than particular ethnic groups' (Hopkins 2009, p. 32). The use of the term 'British Muslim' has been debated, with some arguing that 'British Muslim identification is a contested category which attempts to subsume the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-denominational features of the community' (Samad 1998, p. 67).

The second half of the 20th century marked a shift towards multiculturalism more broadly in Britain. As Richard Ashcroft and Mark Bevir note, following the Second World War '[t]he population has changed from one that was overwhelmingly white, ethnically British and Christian, to one constituted by creeds, cultures and communities drawn from all over the globe' (Ashcroft and Bevir 2018, p. 1). The beginning of the 21st century marked another cultural shift, this time in the religious practices of those living in Britain. There has been a substantial decrease in residents identifying as Christian, countered by an increase in residents identifying with no religion.[10] The 2021 census marked the first time in history that 'less than half of the population described themselves as "Christian"' (Roskams 2022). This trend towards non-religion, however, is 'not straightforwardly secular' and those not identifying with any religion 'reject religious labels – but they reject secular ones as well' (Woodhead 2017, p. 249). Britain is no longer a 'Christian' nation, nor is it strictly secular – 'it exists somewhere in-between – between Christian, multi-faith and "none"' (Woodhead 2017, p. 260). Nevertheless, many of the institutional structures of Great Britain remain entrenched in its Christian history. The monarch continues to serve as both the head of the State and the head of the Church. The educational system is also 'a clear case of entrenched Christian institutionalisation,' and 'in state-funded schools, the law on religion remains virtually untouched since 1944, and still requires a daily act of worship of a predominately Christian kind, and religious education throughout the entire school career' (Woodhead 2017, p. 260). Christianity also 'remains firmly institutionalised in the ancient and most prestigious universities in Britain, in the judiciary, and in Parliament' (Woodhead 2017, p. 260).

Although the number of Muslims living in Britain is small compared to Christians and those with no religion, the numbers are not insignificant and are growing. According to the most recent census in 2021, there are around 3.9 million Muslims living in England and Wales,

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[10] The percentage of residents in England and Wales who identify as Christian has decreased from 71.7% of the overall population in 2001 to 46.2% of the population in 2021 (Roskams 2022). Conversely, the percentage of residents who answered 'No religion' has increased from 14.8% in 2001 to 37.2% in 2021 (Roskams 2022).

making up 6.5% of the overall population, and making 'Muslim' the third most chosen response to the religion question following 'Christian' and 'No Religion' (Roskams 2022). This figure shows that the number of Muslims is increasing, as Muslims made up only 4.8% of the population in 2011, and just 2.7% in 2001 (Peach 2006, p. 631; Muslim Council of Britain 2015, p. 16). Despite their growing numbers though, Muslims still fall outside what can be considered the 'normative' religious practices of Britain.

**4.3 Educational Spaces**

Having explained how Black Muslim women's racial and religious identities fall outside somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness, I now move on to discuss the experiences of Black Muslim women within spaces coded with these norms. I begin by focussing on educational spaces in Britain, exploring experiences within higher education, primary and secondary schools. As I have mentioned previously, during our conversations I did not prompt participants to speak about any specific space. Consequently, the cumulative data covered a broad range of spaces and there were very few spaces discussed by all of the participants. One of the few spaces that was discussed by all was university. At the time of our conversation, three of the participants were current undergraduate or master's students at universities in England. The other three participants were working professionals who had completed undergraduate degrees as well as further qualifications from UK universities.

In discussing their experiences at university, several of the participants mentioned being one of the only, or one of very few, Black and/or Muslim students. Iyawa attended the University of London Institute in Paris, where in her first year she said she 'was the only Black student there, and the only Muslim student'. She described it as 'very small institute' where the students were 'mostly white'. Iyawa described the institute as having limited course options, remarking 'there was only one thing to study and that was like French literature'. Like Iyawa, Magan also studied the arts at university with mostly white students. When she shared this, she also jokingly described how her East African family reacted to her degree choice.

> I went to Goldsmiths, which is probably the whitest school in London because it's like an arts university. My parents writ me the fuck off. They were like, this bitch. She is doing a degree that ain't nobody ever fucking heard about.

While Iwaya mentioned the whiteness of the university student body and the curriculum offerings tangentially, Magan's comments appear to directly attribute the whiteness of the student body to the curriculum offerings. Indeed, quantitative reports indicate a correlation between race and course choice at British universities. Black students are statistically less likely to study subjects such as history, languages, or the creative arts (Kwakye and Ogunbiya 2019, p. 61). This may be why Iwaya was the only Black student on her French literature course. Statistics also show that Black African students in particular, as opposed to Black Caribbean or other Black students, are most likely 'to take subjects associated with higher lifetime earnings such as business studies, computing and law' (Department of Education 2022, p. 9). Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbiya (2019) address this trend in their book, *Taking Up Space,* and posit that the disproportion of Black students in specific fields is likely due to the obstacles that Black people face in the job market. They explain that it is deemed a safer choice by many Black students to choose a degree in a subject that is more marketable than one in the humanities or arts that does not come with an obvious career path (Kwakye and Ogunbiya 2019, p. 61).

In addition to commenting on the limited course offerings, Iyawa also spoke about the geographical demographics of the other students who attended the University of London Institute in Paris. She noted, 'the other people who went to this university were mostly white people who were not even from London. They were from the outskirts, from little villages in England'. While she did not explicitly attribute the overall whiteness of her program to the geographical origins of the students, her comments nevertheless show an awareness of the overall racialisation of British geographical spaces.

Both qualitative and quantitative reports indicate that geographical spaces within Britain are racialised, with cities, such as London, coded for ethnic minorities and villages for the white middle-class (Sibley 1998; Tyler 2003). According to the most recent census in 2021, London is the most ethnically diverse region in Britain, with 46.2% of residents identifying with Asian, Black, mixed or 'other' ethnic groups (Office for National Statistics 2022). On the other hand, 96.8% of residents in rural areas identified with white ethnic group (Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs 2023). Patterns of residential segregation observed today, as well as the racial coding of city and country, can be tied to the post-war era. During that time, there was an increase in migration from Commonwealth countries in response to the labour shortage, which coincided with a housing shortage,

meaning that Black workers who emigrated at that time were often forced into poor quality housing in the inner cities (Valentine 2001, p. 209). It was also during that time that the rural became depicted as 'a "white safe haven" away from post-war "racial degeneration"' within political and popular discourses' (Tyler 2003, pp. 392-93). And so consequently, city and country became coded in racial terms (Sibley 1998).

Even though London is the most ethnically diverse region in Britain, the neighbourhoods are highly segregated. One podcaster described her university in Richmond, London, a predominately white (80.5%) area (Office for National Statistics 2023) as 'basically *Get Out* – the setting, the feel. For every fifteen people you walk by, you probably see one half-Black person. Not even fully…half' (*The Black Muslim Girl*).[11]

While Iyawa and Magan commented on the overall whiteness of the student bodies, Sagal commented on the overall whiteness of the teaching staff at her university. Sagal is a current student at a Russell Group university, which she describes as 'very white, as in the teachers and the lecturers'.[12] I spoke with Sagal in 2020 and data from around this time indicates that across all UK universities there is a prevalence of white teaching staff and dearth of teaching staff of colour. In 2017-18, only 16% of academic staff across all UK universities were Black or minority ethnic (Universities UK 2019, p. 15). Black staff represented the lowest proportion of any ethnic group, accounting for only 1.8% of academic staff in the UK (Advance HE 2018). Amongst full professors, the gap was even greater. 90% of professors were white, while only 0.6% of professors were Black (Universities UK 2019, p. 15). In the years since, these figures have not changed significantly. In 2021-22, 88% of professors were white and less than 1% were Black (HESA 2023). Research on the attainment gap between Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and white students has found that the disproportionate representation of BAME teaching staff has negatively impacted students of colour and contributed to their feelings of not belonging (Rana et al. 2022).

Faduma discussed at length her own feelings of not belonging at her Russell Group university.

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[11] *Get Out* is a 2017 horror-thriller film in which 'a young African-American visits his white girlfriend's parents for the weekend' (IMDB).
[12] I have excluded the name of the university for all current students, however, I have specified whether the university is part of the Russell Group per the request of one of the participants.

> For me there's always a feeling like I go into these spaces never really feeling like an equal. Even though we both got the same grades to be here, even though we did the exact same things to get here – took the same tests, got the same A/A*s – there's still that feeling of I'm entering the space and I'm still not an equal. (Faduma)

Her comments about entering the space with the same credentials, but nevertheless feeling inferior highlight her own awareness that the space is not neutral. Grades and qualifications allow for entry, but certain bodies are perceived as belonging, while other bodies – like her own – can enter, but not on the same terms. In the findings of a qualitative research project on students' engagement in UK higher education, Stuart et al. noted that 'minority ethnic students articulated less belief in their entitlement and rights at university than the middle-class White students' (2011, p. 506). They found that white middle-class students 'belonged' in the way that Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992) refer to as *habitus* (Stuart et al. 2011, p. 506).

> When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like 'a fish in the water'. It does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 127)

In an episode of *The Black Muslim Girl* podcast, the hosts discuss the exclusivity of Oxbridge and the lack of Black students at Russell Group universities in general. During this conversation, two of the podcasters had the following exchange:

> 'Oxford, Cambridge – they weren't made for Black people.'
>> 'They weren't even made for women.'
> 'They weren't actually made for us. They were made for *them*. So now, where we're coming and we're like, "No we need spaces", for them it's like, "This is our tradition." (*The Black Muslim Girl*)

In this conversation, the podcasters clearly articulate that Black women do not benefit from the same sense of belonging or *habitus* that white men have in universities like Oxford or Cambridge. The universities were made for white men and regardless of changes in

admission criteria, whiteness and masculinity are embedded in the traditions of the universities and continue to be the norm.

In *Space Invaders*, Puwar (2004) also discusses the concept of *habitus*. She describes what happens when there is a 'habitus mismatch', for instance when a racialised minority with an elite background holds a position in a predominately white environment (p.127). Due to their background, they 'will have a habitus that is much more in keeping with the demands of the field', however the racialised minority 'may "feel the weight" of the whiteness, even if the whiteness is invisible to others, and, in this respect, will have occasions where they feel like "fish out of water"' (Puwar 2004, p.127). Faduma's feelings that she isn't entering the space as an equal may be due to a habitus mismatch. She has the A/A*s to gain a spot at the university, but because the space wasn't made for her, when she takes up space in it, she feels the weight.

In addition to reflecting on not feeling equal when entering spaces at her university, Faduma also spoke about how others didn't seem to expect her there either.

> You know it's interesting because it's not just students. Sometimes you have some academics that take a double take when you walk into their lecture theatre because they're not really expecting to see you. And that's not necessarily coming from a place of hostility. It's just I may be shaking up that status quo, especially in a place like [this] which is just very, very, very, very white. (Faduma)

The double take that Faduma describes is an example of what happens when the norms of a space are disrupted. There is a 'socio-spatial impact' when othered bodies take up positions not reserved for them (Puwar 2004, p. 32). The presence of bodies which are dissonant to the norm are 'noticed as matter out of place' (Puwar 2004, p. 43). Faduma is noticed in a way that other white, and/or non-Muslim students are not. While Faduma states that the lecturer's 'double take' is not necessarily antagonistic, nevertheless these subtle actions might contribute towards Faduma's feelings that she isn't entering the space as an equal.

During our conversation Faduma described some of the stereotypes of Blackness that she encountered while studying at university. She explained, 'Academically people don't expect you to be very intelligent because of course of that stereotype of being Black and what that

contains intellectually and the whole history of like eugenics' (Faduma). The history of eugenics which Faduma referenced has its very history within the institution of British higher education. National eugenics was formed at the University of London 'in the service of the British Empire' (Joseph-Salisbury 2018, p. 46). While eugenics has been widely dispelled, the racial hierarchy it contributed to constructing endures today. This is evidenced in the inequal treatment of racial minorities across institutes of higher education. A 2016 report by the Social Mobility Commission, indicated that minority ethnic student's lower attainment in higher education could be due to 'discriminatory teaching, assessment, or subtle exclusionary attitudes' (Shaw et al. 2016, p. 43).

Sagal also discussed the racial bias she has encountered as a student at a Russell Group university. She relayed that she has heard academics make racist comments such as, 'Oh, this country in Africa was better off by being colonised'. She also reflected on the response of academic staff in her department when she asked why there were no events during Black history month. She reports that the director of the centre replied, 'some people don't believe that there should be a Black history month at all. Every month should be Black history month.' As Sagal noted however: 'The reason there is, is because we're completely erased throughout the whole year. It should be every month, but I haven't seen any events outside of the month'. Sagal went on to explain why she was surprised there were no events: 'Do you not think it would be important in a field that's so dominated by white researchers researching global south to use this opportunity to amplify the voices of Black scholars in the global south?'

The research for this thesis was conducted in spring and summer of 2020 and the experiences Sagal described had occurred during the 2019-2020 academic year. Her experiences highlight some of the issues that initiatives in the 2010s to decolonise British higher education sought to address, such as lingering colonial attitudes and the overwhelming whiteness of scholarship. An example of these initiatives is *Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford*, which began in 2015 and describes itself as a movement 'determined to decolonise the institutional structures and physical space in Oxford and beyond' (Peters 2018, p. 265). In their aims, they address 'Oxford's colonial legacy on three levels': 'colonial iconography (in the form of statues, plaques and paintings)', 'the Euro-centric curriculum' and 'the underrepresentation and lack of welfare provision for BME academic staff and students' (Peters 2018, pp. 265-66).

In our conversation, Sagal also spoke about how her university responded to the Black Lives Matter protests that followed the death of George Floyd in May 2020. Sagal told me that her university had released a statement following the Black Lives Matter protests, but that in her view, 'it's not because they actually genuinely have a commitment to anti-racism. It's performative'. She described how the content of the statement, which had been sent out to students by email, focussed on mental health figures, but didn't address the 'horrible things' students of colour studying at the university had experienced. She went on to say that in her experience, 'Russell Group – they're less willing to engage with these discussions (of racism). Even to admit students of colour.'. Indeed, research published in 2015 found that relative to white applicants with the same grades and A-level subjects, minority ethnic students received lower offer rates from Russell Group universities (Boliver 2015). A few years later in 2018, the BBC reported that Russell Group universities 'have on average much smaller proportions of Black students than other universities – less than 4% compared with the UK average of 8%' (BBC News 2018).

While the relative proportion of ethnic minority students at Russell Group universities is low, one of the participants pointed out that 'the research that takes place in those universities are [sic.] done on marginalised communities'.[13] She described a recent experience she had where an academic staff member requested to use her research data, as well as that of another minority ethnic student for an equality, diversity and inclusion event:

> I accidentally got CCed into an email and it was me and another girl who were mentioned. The other girl was doing research about Black Caribbean students, how Black Caribbean teachers or support staff can help with that. The title [of the email] was 'Students researching EDI issues'. The way the other student was described is 'not academically brilliant, but she has great data'. She didn't say anything bad about me, but the way she spoke about that student is completely unacceptable. This is how they think of us? While her academic skills were denigrated, her data was praised. And you know, I don't mind sharing my research, I'm not going to be sharing my

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[13] The participant consented to have this content included, but she asked that the information not be attributed to her, even with the use of a pseudonym.

research to dominant groups to talk about racism so they get to say, oh yeah we've ticked it off then and they are going to go back to their day jobs you know.

The participant was horrified by the language of the email, but when she raised the issue, she received a long reply which focussed on how 'in a research-intensive university we share our research' and did not address the derogatory language used. The participant acknowledged that she did not have an issue sharing her research, but rather her concern was that her research was being used as a type of virtue signalling following Floyd's death and the increase in awareness for the Black Lives Matter movement.

The same participant noted how 'dominant groups get to absolve themselves of the responsibility of educating themselves on race and racism by pushing it onto people of colour'. The participant's comment was similar to one made by Black Muslim scholar Azeezat Johnson at an event in 2017 put on by the Inclusive Mosque Initiative: 'I see a problem with the expectation that myself or other Black Muslims would or should be willing to have these repetitive conversations about anti-Black racism. It puts Black Muslims in the position of having to explain our oppression to our oppressors' (Johnson 2017a).

As participants explained to me, they encountered stereotypes of Blackness alongside and sometimes layered with stereotypes of Muslim women at British universities. Faduma told me, 'I think that's why people are taken aback when I, for example, occupy a space like in [this] University because they think that Muslim women are oppressed and they're intellectually inferior.' In this remark, Faduma refers to two stereotypes: Muslim women as an oppressed group and Muslim women as intellectually inferior. At another point in our conversation, Faduma also commented on the perception of religion within British higher education, indicating that the perception of intellectual inferiority is perhaps tied to religion as whole, rather than being gendered:

> I think also being in such an academic university. There's this kind of consensus in British academia that atheism is some kind of intellectual achievement. So when you are an academic and you are also religious, they just can't, they feel very uncomfortable with it. They can't settle the two identities.

Although research on participation and attainment gaps tends to focus on gender and ethnicity, there is some data available on differences in participation and experiences of students by religion and belief (McMaster 2020). According to research by Advance HE, there is a 'relative under-attainment of Muslim students', with a '14.3 percentage point attainment gap between Muslim students and those with no religion or belief' (McMaster 2020).

Faduma's impression that atheism is seen to be intellectually valued within what she terms 'academic universities' and of a perceived disconnect between religion and academia relates to how the academic space is coded in terms of religion. British universities are widely perceived to be secular spaces, though just as the religious coding of the British nation-state is complex and has changed over time, as discussed in the previous section, so too has the religious coding of British higher education.

British higher education was initially reserved for Christians. Some of the earliest universities in Britain, such as Oxford and Cambridge, educated only elite Christian men when they were founded (Stevenson and Aune 2016). They did not admit non-Anglican students until the University Test Act in 1871 was passed. The first secular university in England, University College of London, which admitted students regardless of their religious affiliation, was not founded until 1826. (UCL 2020). What we could term the secularisation of British higher education occurred in the 20th century with the construction of the 'red-brick' and 'plateglass' universities, which were founded as secular organisations (Stevenson and Aune 2016). Nevertheless, British higher education is not entirely secular. Oxford and Cambridge remain Anglican institutions, and the secular universities founded in the 20th century still offer religious courses. The makeup of the student bodies within British universities is also religiously diverse. In 2017-2018, 50.2% of students reported having a religion or belief (McMaster 2020).

While she was talking about encountering stereotypes of Black people and Muslims as less intelligent, Faduma explained,

> In an academic space, you feel 'less than' and not deserving. And then because you feel like that, you just feel invisible. Because you don't talk to anyone because you're like, I don't know how they're gonna see me, and then no one talks to you

and then people just assume that you don't have much to say or that you're not really that clever and you got here just by fluke.

Faduma articulates how knowing that these stereotypes exist within the academic space has a tangible, and even self-fulfilling, effect on her social interactions. The perception of Blackness and Muslimness as inferior to the norm result in feelings of invisibility, even at the same time as her Blackness and Muslimness make her hypervisible in her difference to the norm. In both experiences of hyper- and invisibility, Faduma's Black Muslim body is 'marked' as different and as a result she experiences constraints that white, non-Muslim students do not.

Iyawa also spoke about the effect that stereotypes of Muslimness had on her experiences at university, discussing her social interactions with other students. Though raised Muslim, Iyawa did not wear hijab until her third year of university, at which point she became visibly Muslim. She describes the student population at the University of London Institute in Paris as mostly white and from rural England, explaining,

Many of them it was their first time actually leaving England, and for a lot of the boys it was their kind of coming out, coming out of the closet. When they came to Paris they were able to really come out and just be with themselves. So when I started I was Muslim but it never really affected them. But when I started wearing my hijab a lot of them, who I had talked to the previous two years, they stopped talking to me and they distanced themselves completely because for them religion – and especially being Muslim and it was visible – I was automatically supposed to be homophobic. So, to me, I was like, why are you – hold on, we were friends, we used to hang out.

Iyawa's comment about coming out of the closet refers of course to the sexuality of her fellow classmates. Her experience highlights both how the visibility of Muslim women's religion is tied to the hijab, and the stereotyping of Muslims, regardless of gender, as homophobic. The hijab is seen as the physical representation of Islam. Previous research on Muslim women in Western societies has highlighted how some Muslim women intentionally use hijab as a tool to visibly assert their religious identity in societies where Islam is not the norm (Hopkins and Greenwood 2013). While Iyawa did not talk to me specifically about her

75

reasons for wearing the hijab, her narrative highlights how wearing the hijab made her religious identity visible in a way that it previously was not. As a result of this visibility, Iwaya experienced social exclusion from gay students who assumed she was homophobic because she was Muslim. Jasbir K. Puar examines the stereotype of Islam as an inherently homophobic religion in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007). Puar argues that the 'singularity of the Muslim or gay binary has been amplified, in the United States as well as globally, since September 11, 2001' (Puar 2007, p. 15). The discourses which bolstered a binary between Islam and the West have also constructed homosexuality and Muslims to be mutually exclusive and Muslims axiomatically homophobic.

The role that hijab plays in the visibility of Muslim identity was also evident in participants' narratives of their primary and secondary school experiences. In discussions about primary school, participants focussed primarily on being different and marginalised due to their race, which was more apparent than their religion. Issues regarding Muslim identity came up in some accounts of experiences in secondary school, but only by participants who wore hijab, and so were visibly Muslim, in school.

In analysing participants' experiences in primary and secondary schools, some of the same themes emerged that were evident in discussions of institutions of higher education. Two of the participants, Sagal and Folasade, described attending schools with primarily white students where they were one of few Black and/or Muslim students. Folasade grew up in Nigeria and moved to England when she was sixteen. She describes attending 'A-level school' in York, where she said she was 'the only Black Muslim, and there was I think about three other Black people.' She described the effect this had on her self-perception as follows:

> I'll never forget the first time I moved to school. When I was new to the UK, I didn't realise what my identity was because I came from a society where everyone around me is the same. All my friends are the same, all my family is the same. There's not that struggle of thinking I'm different and what if I don't fit in. I moved here for my A-levels and that was the first time that I properly saw myself as 'Other'. I saw myself as a Black Muslim woman.

Folasade's account highlights how her conceptions of belonging and fitting in, as well as her sense of identity, were dependent on the norms of the space she was in. She explains that she didn't realise her identity until it was different to those around her. Once she found herself in a space where she was different, she saw herself as 'Other'. Her phrasing 'I saw myself as Other' highlights the complexity of othering as an act that is not only done *to* somebody, but also as a process which can also occur *within*.

Like Folasade, Sagal also attended a 'white-majority' secondary school. She described how her Blackness was used by her school

> as a resource. I went to a white majority school and the person who was asked to be on the prospectus was me. On the website, it was me. So, it's like you're literally using me as a diversity tool when actually the majority of people here are white. You're not gonna let Black people in, you're just gonna use the ones that you have to make yourself look good.

Sagal's experiences highlights how representation does not always increase a sense of belonging and can at times just be performative.

While discussing her experiences at school, Sagal also reflected on how normalised whiteness is, even when it isn't British whiteness:

> Especially in schools I feel like we have to change the pronunciation of our name to make it easier for teachers. But if it's like a Russian name, they can say that. It's just African names they always have difficulties with. (Sagal)

She went on to describe racist encounters she had had with teachers at school, for example when they made comments to such as, 'Why didn't your parents give you an easy name?'. Sagal, of course, is a pseudonym, but it is worth mentioning that the participant's given name is also pronounced phonetically. Regardless of the ease of pronunciation, Sagal makes a valid point that certain names, like Tchaikovsky, are normalised within Western educational systems while non-white names are othered. Instead of asking how to pronounce her name, Sagal said that 'what a lot of teachers have done, and they do it at university as well, they just don't mention my name'. The strategy of calling certain children by their

given name and not others, however, only perpetuates the notion that names of African heritage are 'different', and even 'less than'.

The 'othering' of Black students in British schools is not limited to how they are addressed, or not addressed. The national curriculum is largely Eurocentric and even within that excludes Black histories. When Blackness is discussed, it is generally in the context of issues such as slavery or the colonisation of African nations. The exclusion of Black history has received recent pushback, with initiatives such as The Black Curriculum, which was founded in 2019 with a goal 'to address the lack of Black British history in the national curriculum' (The Black Curriculum 2022). In an essay published in *Cut From the Same Cloth: Muslim Women on Life in Britain*, Asha Mohamed reflects on issues of race and education, asking,

> What happens when the only history you learn about yourself is one of degradation, humiliation and dehumanisation? What happens when the only history you learn about Europeans is one of power, status and enlightenment? Do you feel equal? What does a child learning this in a British school subconsciously internalise? (Mohamed 2021, p. 29).

Mohamed argues that 'it really is all about education [t]o change how a people are perceived' (2021, p. 37). She asserts that one of the effects of the present curriculum is that 'it breeds thoughtlessness and an internalised supremacy on behalf of those of European descent' (Mohamed 2021, p. 34).

In their accounts of experiences at primary and secondary school, the participants described how they encountered racism and marginalisation as students. While she didn't necessarily recognise it as racism at the time, Sagal reflected on her school lessons about slavery:

> When I was in primary school they would talk about slavery and the teachers always asked me if I knew the answer. And, you know, my ancestors weren't slaves just because I'm Black. Even if they were, it's not my responsibility to teach.

One of the participants, Magan, previously worked as a teacher in a UK secondary school and, as such, was able to provide a unique perspective:

It was the same bullshit when I became a teacher. I was a teacher in an inner-city school in London. So you have all these Black and brown faces in front of you and that hasn't changed. When kids go to school and they're told they're not good enough. I found myself as the head of the department fighting for certain children.

Magan's comment 'it was the same bullshit' refers to her own experiences in London schools, where despite the diversity of the student body, students of colour, and particularly Black students, were made to feel like they weren't as capable as white students. Multiple scholars have investigated issues of attainment differences with reference to race in schools. In one study, Gillborn et al. found that teachers generally had lower academic expectations for Black Caribbean children, even if those children had performed well in classes (Gillborn et al. 2012). A great deal of studies have focussed on Black boys, but overall findings indicate that issues such as lower academic expectations affect both Black boys and girls.

Sagal reflected on how Somali students in particular were treated differently at her school. Sagal was born and raised in England to Somali parents, as noted above, and the city she grew up in has a relatively large Somali population. As she explained,

A lot of us as students, English is our first language, but teachers just assume that we speak English as a second language. So, they give students extra English classes, but just for Somali students. That's discrimination. Even though the students there can't even speak Somali – which is fair enough because it's not the country they were born in – yet are treated as the 'other'. And if you constantly treat a group of people as the 'other' yet your aim is to try to integrate them, it's counterproductive.

Sagal's reference to the attempt to integrate Somali students likely refers to a number of legal and non-legal initiatives, many of which were implemented in the late nineties and noughties with the goal to integrate British Muslims in British society (Aziz 2018).

With the exception of Sagal however, participants did not mention being treated differently as Muslim students at primary school. When it came to secondary school, though, both Folasade and Sagal discussed the impact their Muslim identity had on their school experiences. Folasade moved to England from Nigeria when she was around 16 to study A-

levels. She did not specify what type of school she went to, but stated that it was located in York, England. York is not a racially diverse area. According to the 2011 census, only 0.6% of the population in York is Black. The city has one mosque, but there is not a large Muslim population. In her school, Folasade describes being the only Black Muslim and being one of only three Black students. She explains that she encountered a lot of questions about her identity, likely because it was the first time some of the students had met a Black Muslim. She told me,

> At some point, when I got really fed up, I had the loveliest politics teacher. He was like, 'Ok, you should give a presentation or give a talk or something'. And so we did that. I remember the title of the presentation was 'Black Muslim Woman and My Identity'. I explained to them this was one identity. It's not about being different, three different identities. This is one. And the struggles of all three of them come together as one. For me, the hijab has never been a thing of struggle or a thing of oppression and has never been a symbol of oppression to me, because Islamically that isn't what it should be. But some cultures have made it sadly into that. One of the staff members asked me, 'Oh, but how come you can actively say that it's not a symbol of oppression when you don't even like showing your hair'? and I was like, I'm sure I sat through this and explained it to you. It was more so shocking. It was just like, it was a bit scary as well, because I was like, for you as, this was a staff member, you're leaving an impact on other people. You're not only affecting yourself. You have kids who you could impact the way they think. They could impact the way their friends think. It would be a chain.

Folasade chose to give a presentation on her identity in part because of the questions she had received from other students. In her account however, Folasade drew attention to the shock she experienced due to a question posed by one of the members of staff. The staff member's question demonstrated their personal bias and opinion of veiling. As I've discussed previously, the issue of the veil in Europe became part of the wider discourse following the scarf affair in France, which started in 1989. Many European countries have since implemented laws restricting Muslim women from wearing certain styles of veils, such as *niqab* and *burqa*. The UK does not have any such laws in place, but discussions around veiling are still part of public discourse. In 2018, Boris Johnson, who would later become the Prime Minister, made Islamophobic remarks in an article he wrote for *The Telegraph* just one

month after resigning as Foreign Secretary, saying that Muslim women who wear face veils look like 'letter boxes' and 'bank robbers' (Johnson 2018). In 2019, *The Independent* reported that in the week following this publication, there was a 375% increase in Islamophobic attacks (Dearden 2019) The article also reported that in the three weeks following Johnson's publication, '42 per cent of offline Islamophobic incidents reported 'directly referenced Boris Johnson and/or the language used in his column' (Dearden 2019).

Debates on the veil in Europe centre broadly on two arguments: first, that it is a religious symbol and, as such, does not have a place in secular society; and second, that the veil is a symbol of oppression. This second argument was clearly shared by the staff member at Folasade's school. Folasade's reaction to the comment was less about the individual's opinion that it was a symbol of oppression, though as she remarked she had just tried to explain that it wasn't. Rather, she was more concerned with the teacher's impact on other students, as a person in a relative position of power.

Sagal also expressed concern about the impact teachers have on their students and the ability teachers have to spread misinformation or bias about Islam. Reflecting on her own experiences in secondary school, she explained:

> The way Islam is talked about in schools, there's a huge lack of knowledge from RE teachers. They simply don't know a lot of it. Unfortunately, when you talk about Islam in secondary school, or sixth form, what comes up is then Islam as terrorism, which is unfortunate, but that does come up. Teachers aren't equipped with the correct knowledge to differentiate, unfortunately. And so, it perpetuates this lack of knowledge. My RE teacher was a Catholic, and yet, he had obviously lots of knowledge on Christianity, and Judaism. But when it came to Islam, he was saying a lot of things that were incorrect. I would have to constantly say, 'No, that isn't correct'. But then I didn't mind doing that. But the thing is, I was worried was that all the years that I wasn't there he was just continuing to say all these things, you know. And he was very experienced, he was doing it for 14 years.

In her reflections, Sagal brings up several points. She shared how, in her experience, the teachers had limited knowledge when it came to Islam. She spoke specifically about her RE

teacher, since this is the class wherein Islam is most likely to come up. RE, or religious education, 'is compulsory for all pupils in local authority-maintained schools aged 5 to 16 years unless they are withdrawn from these lessons by their parents' (Long and Danechi 2019, p. 6). The syllabi for RE are determined by the local education authority (LEA), and 'must reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Britain are mainly Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions' (Long and Danechi 2019, p. 7). While the topic of Islam may arise in other classes, RE is the only subject in the British curriculum in which the tenets of Islam are explicitly taught. Sagal expressed concern over this in light of her experiences of having a teacher with limited or incorrect knowledge, since the topic would not be addressed elsewhere. She also brought up how stereotypes of Islam as 'terrorism' came up in secondary school, though she did not specify if it was the teacher or fellow students who mobilised them. As discussed previously, one of the dominant negative tropes about Islam that is widespread in Western cultures following 9/11 and 7/7 is that of Islam as a religion of terrorists. Sagal's narrative expresses how widespread these tropes are present even in schools.

## 4.4 The Workplace

Unlike educational spaces, the workplace was a topic discussed by only a few of the participants. This is unsurprising, since three of the six participants were full-time students at the time I spoke to them. While only a number of participants spoke about work, issues around the workplace were discussed in several podcast episodes. The types of jobs discussed cover a wide-range of professions.

When analysing accounts of experiences in the workplace, one of the themes that emerged was stereotyping. Stereotypes about Blackness and Islam, and in particular Black women and Muslim women are culturally widespread. Many of these stereotypes emerged in the United States and spread to Britain, though some emerged here. Indeed, I already discussed some of these stereotypes and their origins in the previous section when I discussed assumptions about Black students' academic ability and the eugenics movement. Scholars have examined the role of stereotypes in the workplace. In a recent study conducted in the United States, Daphna Motro et al. found that the stereotype of the 'angry Black woman' was one of the factors which negatively impacted Black women's employment (Motro et al. 2022, p. 142).

On one episode of *TBMG* podcast, one of the hosts shared the following story:

> Even when I first started, the woman that I took over her [sic.], she was like to me, 'Oh yeah, when you're dealing with people make sure you're really nice and really quiet, because they're all very fragile. Don't be rude to them.' But I was just like, if I haven't been rude to you, if I haven't shown you that side, why are you telling me all of this? She was like, 'Oh yeah, make sure you're always wearing clean uniform and make sure you smell fresh.'

The host describes not one, but multiple stereotypes within the span of just a few sentences. She explains how the woman started by telling her to be 'nice' and 'quiet', where being 'rude' and 'loud' are two of the stereotypes long attributed to Black people. In a 1994 study of Black stereotyping in university populations, one of the top five stereotypes of Black people was 'loud', with 'rude' falling in the top ten (Wood and Chesser 1994, p. 21). The woman also told her to be 'clean' and 'smell *fresh*'. The stereotype of Black people smelling dates back to at least the eighteenth century. In an article on race and smell, William Tullett refers to debates around the smell of Black people, in which some argued that 'all negros do not possess a strong smell' while others asserted that 'all Africans have a bestial or fetid smell' (Tullett 2016, p. 314).

Another story shared on the same episode of *TBMG* podcast alluded to negative stereotypes about Blackness that one of the hosts encountered at work:

> So, what's happened is, sometimes the money is up, sometimes it's down. If it's anything less than £1, it's fine. If it's more than £1, then you need to redo everything and check. So I've told this girl that's training me, oh look there's 20p missing. She didn't know what the manager told me. She comes to me, 'Are you sure you didn't misread it?' So I said, 'No, I did it in front of you.' She goes, 'Oh, are you sure you haven't put any money in your pockets?' (The Black Muslim Girl Podcast)

While sharing this story, the host reflects on how it was immediately assumed that she was responsible for the missing money, and how the issue escalated even though it was only 20p. I've previously discussed the stereotype that Black people are intellectually inferior, and while that might have been implied in this situation, one stereotype that was certainly

invoked by implying that the host might have stolen the money is that of Black people as thieves. Stealing is a crime with 'significant and persistent racial disparities' (O'Flaherty and Sethi 2008, p. 511). Particularly in the United States, Black people are 'considerably more likely to be robbery victims, arrestees and prisoners' (O'Flaherty and Sethi 2008, p. 511). With thievery, there is also a classed element and in the UK race and class are interlinked. In the UK, rates of poverty are higher among Black and minority ethnic people compared to white people. In 2020, 46% of people 'living in families where the household head was Black/African/Caribbean/Black British were in poverty' (Institute of Race Relations 2020).

Another stereotype with origins related to elements of class, is the stereotype of Black people as 'the help'. This stereotype is more often found in the United States, but can as be found in Britain as the following conversation between two hosts on an episode of *TMBG* podcast demonstrates:

> 'You've written the brief for the meeting. You've booked the date, you've booked the room. You're about to talk and discuss a certain strategy that's going on. The people - obviously they're external people you're collaborating with, other people that are not in the office so they don't know who you are - the moment you walk in, "Can I get a tea? Can I get a coffee? Two milk, two sugars." The fact that they are automatically assumed that –'

> 'You're the help'.

> 'But what you're holding in your hand, I wrote that. The meeting is happening because of me.' (The Black Muslim Girl Podcast)

Workplace stereotypes of 'the help' are both racialised and gendered. While the host sharing the story in this case doesn't specify whether the people who asked her for tea and coffee were male or female, the assumption that she was an assistant rather than present for the meeting could have been due to either her race, gender, or both.

One of the participants, Raeni, also reflected on how people often make assumptions about her work due to gendered and racialised norms. Raeni is, among other things, a performing artist and poet. She is part of a hip-hop collective that performs hip-hop, reggae, and spoken word. She shared with me that when she tells people she is an 'artist', they often immediately

assume she is a singer. In Raeni's words, 'You're just a black singer because you have these norms'. In the same study cited earlier on Black stereotyping in university populations, 'musical' was cited as one of the top five stereotypes of Black people in studies conducted in 1932, 1951, 1967, and 1971 (Wood and Chesser 1994, p. 20). Blackness has long been associated with certain types of music, one of which is hip-hop. Historically, women and girls have been underrepresented in hip-hop spaces (Payne 2024, p. 253). As a hip-hop artist Raeni challenges stereotypes of hip-hop as a masculine style of music.

Raeni also challenges religious stereotypes as a Muslim artist and has faced difficulties at times as an artist because of her religious identity. She explained,

> I remember once we were going to perform somewhere, it was a hip hop show, someone wanted us to perform in this particular café and they were like, 'Yeah yeah, Come perform! We've booked the night'. And the owner of the actual venue was Muslim, Moroccan, and he was like 'Yeah yeah yeah'. When he found out that we were Muslim though, he was like, 'Yeah no, they can't perform'. Just cause the idea of Muslim women's voices not being heard and again 'What do you mean Muslim women are performing hip hop', and all of these various different things related to what Muslims can and can't do and being associated with particular forms of music. Cause you can do belly dancing in Saudi as much as Saudi puts itself up as 'We're Islam', like you know you've got belly dancers and in every sort of tradition there's some form of dancing or entertainment having to do with women, but when it comes to Black women that's not acceptable.

Raeni's narrative highlights several of the challenges she comes up against as a Black Muslim woman and hip-hop performing artist. In the story she shared, she indicates that the owner of the venue was fine with the idea of Black women performing hip-hop and only changed his mind once he found out they were Muslim. Music, as a whole, within Muslim culture is a contested topic. Some Muslims consider music to be *haram* and forbid both performing and listening to music. It is unclear if the owner of the venue forbade Raeni's group from performing because of religious convictions or due to the other issues that Raeni brings up. As she alludes to, there are cultural differences in beliefs around whether Muslim women should be seen and heard; there are also cultural differences in what types of

performance are appropriate for Muslim women to perform; and of course there is anti-black racism prevalent in many cultures.

A further theme that came up with reference to experiences in the workplace was representation and exploitation. One of the hosts on *TBMG* spoke about her experience as a niqabi woman in the workplace:

> One of my old workplaces someone came to film. Obviously, I'm the only Muslim in the office and I wear niqab. Come and see how he was trying to shove me in front of the camera. He even whispered to me, 'Go go, go go, you know so they see the diversity'. I said to him I'm not comfortable being filmed. He was like 'Just go!' (aggressively) I was like, ok. In that moment I was thinking I should've just said no. The woman who was filming picked up on it – and she was Muslim funnily enough.

This story recalls Sagal's account of attending a white-majority school and always being chosen to be on the prospectus. Here once again, the reality of the demographics differed to the image of 'diversity' the company tried to promote. This scenario highlights an additional issue of coercion. Given her gender, race and religion, it is worth questioning how the same scenario would have played out if she was white, a man, and/or not Muslim.

The issue of diversity in the workplace also came up again in a story that one of the *TBMG* hosts shared about her time working in retail:

> You know Kiko? I used to be the supervisor in Oxford Circus. There was a couple Muslim sisters, other sisters that worked there as well. But then I noticed there was a bit of division - the white people, the black people, and obviously the management innit. But obviously because I'm the only black person in management, a lot of black girls naturally came to me. I remember during Ramadan, so obviously the girls are putting on their head scarves - because we didn't use to cover them times - so we're putting on our headscarves, we're going off to pray, that's when you start noticing; going off to pray is a bit of an inconvenience for the managers. 'Why can't you do it during your break time?' and stuff like that. Do you not know that we have designated times to pray? These lot barbecuing their lungs seven times a day – 'Just

86

gonna go out have a quick fag' – But I just noticed it was a bit of funny behaviour when Ramadan came around.

In her commentary on the dynamics of the workplace, the host seems to imply that the store was relatively diverse and acknowledges how there was 'a bit of division' between different racial groups. Some scholars who have studied segregation in workplaces attribute the cause to discriminatory employers (Bursell and Jansson 2018). This is interesting in the context of the rest of the host's narrative, where she comments on how Muslim members of staff were treated differently by the management with regard to their breaks. She implies that staff were permitted to take multiple breaks throughout the day to smoke, but the same flexibility did not apply to Muslim staff members who wanted to pray during Ramadan. While this is only one example, in the context of one type of workplace, it is indicative of wider social norms that permeate British culture and consequently British workplaces.

My participants Iyawa also discussed how her job impacts aspects of her Islamic practice, like prayer. Iyawa, a midwife, spoke quite matter-of-factly about the nature of her job and how it can sometimes affect prayer times. For instance, she can't leave to pray while one of her patients is in labour. She explained though that, 'Obviously, if my patients are stable and I can [get] someone to cover me or I haven't got a patient, I'm still gonna go and pray. I'm still going to fast in Ramadan'.

## 4.5 Everyday Social and Leisure Spaces

As well as discussing their experiences in educational spaces and in the workplace, participants also spoke about their experiences as Black Muslim women in other everyday spaces. These were primarily public spaces, such as on buses, in hotels, and in cafés and restaurants. These also included social and leisure spaces both in public and private, such as sports spaces and common living spaces in shared accommodation. In this section, I examine the participants' experiences in these public, social and leisure spaces. I demonstrate that the constraints participants faced and/or their experiences of marginalisation within these spaces were due to being 'other' to the dominant norms of hegemonic Britishness.

During our conversations, two of the participants, Faduma and Iyawa, discussed their experiences playing sports. Both women participated in sports or were on sports teams in

which they were the only Black Muslim woman. Analysing Faduma's and Iyawa's experiences in sporting spaces was particularly interesting, as their reports on how their experiences were impacted by their identity as Black Muslim women were in many ways contradictory. Iyawa stated that her race and religion were 'never really an issue' when playing sports, while Faduma reported facing difficulties in sporting spaces because of her identity and the associations people make with being Black and/or Muslim.

While she was telling me about one of her previous jobs, Iyawa mentioned that she used to be a semi-professional football player. I asked her a follow up question, enquiring if she was *hijabi* at the time she was playing football. I specifically asked whether she was *hijabi* because I was curious if she had been affected by FIFA's ban on headwear, which was in place from 2007 to 2014 and impacted many female Muslim players who wore *hijab* (Olow 2019).[14] Iyawa shared that she grew up playing football and played 'semi-professionally for about five years' when she was a teenager. She did not begin wearing *hijab* until university and so she was not affected by any bans that may or may not have been in place at that time. Iyawa told me that when she was playing football, she 'was uncovered and it was never really an issue to be honest'. Although she was not wearing *hijab* at that time and was not in that sense visibly Muslim, Iyawa stated that her 'close friends within the team knew that [she] was Muslim'. She went on to elaborate,

> But the only thing that would change would be when it was Ramadan and they would know I wouldn't take the water. I wouldn't eat oranges during half time. But I was still playing when I was fasting. That's probably the only time when my religion came up.

Iyawa also spoke about being a Black player. Iyawa shared that she 'was the only Black person on the team,' but stated that 'that as well wouldn't have been an issue'. She posited that race and religion weren't an issue because of the nature of team sports. She explained, 'I think the one thing about sports, it unifies us. Because we were all there to win a game. We were one team.'

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[14] In 2007, an 11-year-old girl, Asmahan Mansour, was not permitted to participate in a soccer (football) tournament in Quebec, Canada after her *hijab* was declared a health risk (Lakhani 2008). The decision was upheld by FIFA (Fédération internationale de football association). FIFA subsequently banned all headwear, a controversial decision which affected *hijabi* Muslim female players at all levels, including for example the disqualification of the Iranian team from the 2010 Youth Olympics and the disqualification of the Iranian national women's team from the 2012 Olympics. The ban was in place until 2014 FIFA recodified *hijabs* and classed them as 'modern protective equipment' (Hamzeh 2017, p. 14).

While Iyawa asserted that her race and religion did not cause her any issues while playing sports, Faduma expressed the opposite. During our conversation, she commented that, one of 'the main problem areas that [she's] dealing with at the moment is sporting spaces'. Faduma is a badminton player and plays at her university. She shared, 'I struggle going to badminton because even though I really love playing the sport, I feel uncomfortable there because people are always looking and staring'. Faduma is also a cyclist. She expressed encountering similar struggles with cycling. She told me, 'So, I cycle a lot and even in cycling spaces I feel like maybe I should not be here. That's not because of me, it's just because of how people react to me.'

Faduma implied that the reason people stared at her and reacted to her was because she is a *hijabi* Black woman. She alluded to the somatic norms of cycling and badminton and how Black Muslim women fall outside of these norms. When speaking about cycling, she commented that, 'Cycling is a very specific sort of sport that not everyone does. It's not that common to be a Black Muslim woman wearing a headscarf on a bike'. She later made a similar comment about badminton, stating that it 'is also a very white, middle-class sport'.

As a *hijabi* Black Muslim woman, Faduma indeed does not look like the stereotypical cyclist or badminton player. A research project on ethnic differences in sports participation in England, which compared participation in ten sports amongst eight ethnic groups, found that cycling is a 'predominately white and Irish activity', whilst badminton 'is most favoured by Chinese men' (Higgins and Dale 2013, p. 226). A report published by Transport for London in 2011 also commented on racial trends in cycling participation, stating that London cyclists are 'typically white, under 40, male, with medium to high household income' (Transport for London 2011, p. 1). The report included data from Sporting Equals detailing weekly cycling participation in England. This data highlights lower rates of cycling among women and minority ethnic groups compared to men and white people. According to the report, only 1% of Black and minority ethnic women reported cycling weekly, compared to 2% of white women, 4% of Black and minority ethnic men, and 7% of white men (Transport for London 2011, p. 2). As well as higher rates of male and white participation, people with higher income levels are more likely to cycle and play badminton than people from lower income groups. Badminton has always been considered a sport 'for the middle classes' (Jones 1992, p. 23). Cycling, however, is considered 'one of the most equitable forms of transport,' and it

is therefore surprising that even among recreational cyclists there are relatively low numbers of cyclists from lower income groups (Transport for London 2011, p. 2).

Faduma specifically mentioned how uncommon it is to be a cyclist wearing a headscarf. She described how being a visible Muslim woman not only drew attention to her in cycling and in badminton, but also has negative impact on her ability to participate in badminton.

> When it comes to playing, no one really wants to play with you, be on the other side of the net, because they just automatically associate Muslim women's identity as being oppressed and somewhat weak and that translates into sport thinking you can't do this, or you're not strong enough to have that level on stamina to play on my team kind of thing.

Faduma's narrative exemplifies how stereotypes can show up in sporting spaces and the potential negative impact of those stereotypes. She specifically refers to the stereotype of Muslim women being oppressed and weak. Since athletes are conventionally depicted as strong, Muslim women, when associated with the trait of weakness, are placed outside the norms of sports.

In her work on Muslim sportswomen, Nida Ahmad notes that Muslim sportswomen 'are often considered "out of place" in high-performance sports settings' (Ahmad 2019, p. 182). The reasons for this are multifaceted. Muslim women as a group have lower than average participation rates in sports and physical activity in both Muslim-majority and Western countries (Kahan 2015). Scholars have purported a number of reasons for these low participation rates. Some cite the difficulty in participating in certain sports while maintaining modesty, while others argue that religion is not the reason for these low participation rates, but rather is coincidental to other demographic barriers (Hamzeh and Oliver 2012; Hussain and Cunningham 2023). Muslim women who do participate in sport are rarely portrayed in the mainstream media, except during the Olympics, and even then, discussion of Muslim female athletes often focusses on their *hijab* (Testa and Amara 2016, Samie and Sehlikoglu 2015)

Faduma reflected on other spaces she felt out of place at a *hijabi* Black Muslim woman:

> There are many times where I've left university and gone into a coffee shop and I'm like okay maybe I shouldn't be here. Because it's just full of like, white women are mums and have their prams, in their yoga pants. And then you have the older retired

[people] just having a cup of tea and I would think it's quite a relaxing scenery. Everyone just minding their business. I would go and have a cup of tea, and then I just felt really uncomfortable because of the stares. I don't know, it's a sense of people. You can see the way people look at you. I think you can kind of see what they think. Some of them are thinking, 'Do you live here? How do *you* live here?' and some of them are thinking 'Should I be scared?' So, I just avoid making people uncomfortable because it makes me feel uncomfortable.

In this account, Faduma once again describes the constraints she experiences as someone outside of the norms of the space. While she describes the scenery as 'relaxing', she herself feels uncomfortable. She implies that people are staring at her because of her Black Muslim identity, referring to stereotypes of danger associated with Muslims and Black people, and assumptions about what neighbourhood she lives in.

Folasade also talked about experiencing people staring at her in a café full of predominately white people. 'There was once I was in Betty's and someone was staring at me and I was just like, can you stop staring at me, please? They just make you uncomfortable. And you're just like, Can you just stop?'. Similarly to Faduma, Folasade also described how she felt uncomfortable as a result. In her narrative, she talks about wanting them to stop, but it wasn't clear if she actually verbalised this request or if she was just sharing her thoughts when relaying the story.

In both narratives, Faduma and Folasade specified that they were not the typical customer of the café spaces they were in. Faduma described the other customers as white mums in yoga pants and retired people, indicating norms of whiteness, middle to older age, and potentially also a certain class level. She was there as a Black Muslim university student. Folasade did not describe the customers of Betty's explicitly, because we had a shared understanding of the norms of the space. Betty's is a café with locations in North Yorkshire. The location Folasade was referring to in her narrative is in York and many of the customers at this site are older, white, and middle-upper class. At the time of her visit, Folasade was in secondary school and is of course Black and visibly Muslim as had already begun wearing *hijab* by that time.

When Faduma was sharing her experience in the coffee shop, she described the staring as a 'micro-aggression'. She compared this example to other instances of 'threatening' aggression she has experienced.

So, I've had a few people try to pull my headscarf off and try to do things that were very in your face threatening aggressive. And then I've had people throw things out of their cars, just cowardly things. I've been spat at before. That was by just like a random person that wanted to rant about me and how disgusting I am as a person because I'm Muslim.

While Faduma mentioned these instances of aggressive attacks, I noticed that the majority of her narratives, as well as the majority of other participants' narratives, focused on instances of micro-aggressions. While aggressive acts such as spitting or pulling off a woman's headscarf require intent, micro-aggressions can be intentional or unintentional, but still have harmful effects. As evidenced by Faduma's experiences in sporting spaces and in the coffee shop, the micro-aggressions described by participants often highlighted the negative stereotypes associated with Black and Muslim people in Britain. Participants indicated people make assumptions about them because of these stereotypes, such as Faduma's strength and endurance in sport as a Muslim woman.

Raeni also spoke about stereotyping. She explained how much of the racism she has encountered isn't 'racism you can write policies about', but rather subtle differences in how she is treated and assumptions that are made about her because of her identity. She and I met for our interview at a hotel in London and she told me about her check in at the hotel as an example.

When I came into the hotel – first of all, I know they didn't think I was a customer, you know what I mean? I came in here, It's like,

'How can I help you?'

I'm like, 'Oh I've got a room booked'

'Oh, do you?' [with a surprised tone]

'Yes, I do' [With a more assertive tone than used previously]

What do you mean do you? Yes, I do. You wanna take my name? You get what I mean. [They] took my name, finally found me. Have you ever been in a place and people don't think you have the money to pay for something? So it was that sort of look. Like

'Oh yeah, so it's going to be £390. Is that okay?'

'Here's my card'

'Oh okay [surprised tone]. I'll just get the pen.'

So why didn't you have a pen before?

Raeni used this story as an example of the types of assumptions people make about her – in this instance because she is Black. It is unlikely that her Muslim identity was a factor in this encounter, since she told me that during this encounter she was wearing a hoodie with the hood up, so her *hijab* was covered. She emphasised the receptionist's tone and actions in the interaction, asserting that first they did not think she was a customer, and then thought she wouldn't be able to afford it. She did not directly state so, but by sharing what she was wearing at the time, Raeni implies that her attire may have also been a factor in how she was treated. Research out of the United States has indicated that Black men in hoodies are perceived as more of a threat than white men in similar attire (Alinor and Tinkler 2021, James 2021). While the research focusses primarily on the perception of Black men in hoodies as threatening, Vashonte James argues that 'the combination of wearing a hoodie, being Black, and being male triggers specific stereotypes based on preexisting information regarding certain groups of people' (James 2021, p. 23). It is likely the receptionist's treatment of Raeni – both in assuming she wasn't a customer and in assuming she couldn't afford the room – was due to combination of Raeni being Black and wearing a hoodie, rather than just one of these factors.

Raeni commented that she is used to people making assumptions about her – 'all the time people make assumptions about where I'm from'. – and being underestimated according to these assumptions: 'I've been told, "You know you speak quite well". Like well for *what*?'. While it was not clear contextually what the remarks about where Raeni is from was referring to, the remarks on her speech came from a white person and appeared to be in reference to how well Raeni spoke for a Black person. This interaction highlights the racial stereotypes of speech. People associate certain dialects, accents or speech patterns with certain races. Research shows that 'social category information' is 'obtained from a person's speech' (Kurinec and Weaver 2021). Language, social categorisation and stereotypes are interconnected in a manner so that Black people are not only expected to use specific stereotypical speech, such as Black British English or African American Vernacular English, but also so that those that do are then more likely to be associated with other stereotypes of Blackness (Kurinec and Weaver 2021).

Faduma shared one of the methods she uses to avoid the consequences of negative stereotyping. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Faduma identified the bus route between her home and university as one of the spaces she has encountered aggressive

behaviour. She articulated that the bus route is 'very white', travelling through 'upper/middle-class areas', and commented that she looks 'very different' to the other people who typically ride this bus. She explained how she now wears her university student ID when taking this bus route.

> I'm wearing my [student] ID badge. I just feel safer when I wear my ID badge on the bus because I'm kind of letting them know I'm a student. I kind of feel protected in a way. Whereas if I wasn't [wearing it], they would just have ideas like "what are you doing here?" kind of thing. It's bad when it comes from a place of kind of needing to explain yourself for safety purposes. When they see my ID badge, like okay she's a student let me just mind my business kind of thing.

In this example, Faduma is using her ID badge as a tool to assert her belonging in a space where she otherwise might be perceived as an outsider and her presence questioned. She is showing that even though she does not look like the other passengers on the bus, she still belongs there.

In her narrative, Faduma intentionally uses her ID badge as a tool to prevent discrimination before it happens. Raeni also shared a story about how the visibility of her work ID badge changed the dynamics of how she was treated, though in Raeni's case she didn't use the badge intentionally. This incident also occurred in the hotel where she and I met for our interview. After checking in and going to her room, Raeni noticed a blood stain on the bedsheets, which she reported to reception. She described how when someone came to her room to check, 'he was just blasé as day'. She noted how during the interaction, he noticed her BBC work badge among her belongings and immediately his demeanour changed and was more polite.

Folasade spoke quite a bit about the challenges she faced when she first moved to the UK. One of the stories she told was about the difficulties of living in shared accommodation with other students.

> I would always ask, when you are having guys over just tell me because I live here. So it's a bit uncomfortable when I want to come down, make a cup of tea or visit a kitchen full of guys and I'm not properly dressed. On so many occasions they were just like whatever, like we're not going to tell you. So it'd be a situation where I'd have to stand by the staircase, wait for somebody to walk up, and then I'd ask, is there, are guys downstairs? Can I go downstairs? It was like in my own living space I was

being restricted. It was like a house arrest kind of thing where you can go to certain rooms, but you can't go to the rest because they just didn't care.

Folasade's comment about being 'properly dressed' likely refers to modesty standards, for example wearing *hijab*, that many Muslim women adhere to when they are interacting with men outside their immediate family that aren't required when interacting with other women. She describes how because her housemates were not willing to tell her when men were in the house common spaces, she felt restricted, even colloquially comparing the situation to 'house arrest'. While she doesn't elaborate on why her housemates would not tell her, Folasade has stated that she was the only Black Muslim living there and so it would logically follow that the social norms of the household were based on British norms.

Iyawa also alluded to the differences between British cultural norms and Muslim cultural norms in our conversation. She spoke about the 'coping mechanisms' she uses when socialising with non-Muslims to mitigate these differences and still enjoy herself. Examples of these included eating vegetarian dishes at restaurants where there were no halal options or drinking coke instead of alcohol.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the experiences shared by participants and podcasters in three spaces coded with racial, gendered, classed, and/or religious norms of hegemonic Britishness. I argue that these experiences demonstrate that Black Muslim women experience spaces within which these somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness pervade as 'space invaders'. Accordingly, they are not seen to 'naturally' belong within these spaces and experience constraints which those who match the somatic norm do not.

In the section on educational spaces, I explored experiences in both primary and secondary schools and higher education. I demonstrated that Black Muslim women fall outside the somatic norms of certain universities in the UK, particularly Russell Group universities, which are racialised, gendered, classed, and religiously-coded with norms of whiteness, masculinity, upper-middle class, and Christianity/Atheism. I explored what happens when Black Muslim women attend these universities and found their experiences consistent with Puwar's definition of 'space invaders'. Participants described constraints such as lacking a sense of belonging and encountering stereotypes and bias. I found racial and religious

somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness were also evident in primary and secondary schools. When Black Muslim girls attend schools with these norms they are situated as 'other' and treated differently to white, Christian and/or Atheist students.

In the section on the workplace, I explored experiences shared by Black Muslim women from a range of professions. A dominant theme that emerged across these narratives was an awareness that Muslim identity, and the practices associated with Islam, such as prayer, are outside of the norm of many British workplaces. It was also evident that the workplace is one of the spaces in which largely negative racialised and religious stereotypes emerge.

In the final section, which examined experiences in everyday social and leisure spaces, I explored Black Muslim women's experiences in spaces such as cafes, on the bus, at hotels, and in sports. The constraints participants described encountering within these spaces were once again directly related to their positioning as 'other' to the somatic norms of the space. In particular, they described experiencing micro-aggressions, as well as physical attacks, due to their racial and religious identities.

In the next chapter, I move on to discuss Black Muslim women's experiences in British spaces where the somatic norms are not hegemonic Britishness.

# Chapter 5: 'Space Invaders' in Subaltern Spaces

## 5.1 Introduction

As I discussed in the previous chapter, many of the discussions with participants centred around themes of feeling different, being 'othered' or experiencing marginalisation as Black Muslim women in Britain. The previous chapter focussed on experiences that occurred in spaces coded with somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness. In this chapter, I focus on experiences that occurred in spaces in Britain with subaltern somatic norms.

In *Space Invaders*, Puwar focussed on spaces in the British nation-state with norms of whiteness and masculinity (2004). In the previous chapter, I additionally considered the religious and classed norms of hegemonic Britishness. I found that Black Muslim women experience hegemonically British spaces as 'space invaders' due to the racial, religious, gendered and classed somatic norms, just as Puwar found that women and ethnic minorities experience spaces in the British nation-state as 'space invaders' due to the racial and gendered somatic norms. In my analysis of the participants' experiences, I found that the constraints and marginalisation they experienced did not only occur in spaces with somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness. The same themes emerged in spaces where the somatic norms included marginalised social categories they belonged to, for example spaces 'reserved' for or primarily occupied by Muslims or Black people.

In this chapter, I continue to engage with Puwar's theory of 'space invaders' and bring it into conversation with Avtar Brah's conceptualisation of power as multiaxial. Puwar describes 'space invaders' as 'not being the somatic norm' (Puwar 2004, p. 8). She uses the term somatic norm to refer to the 'corporeal imagination of power as naturalised in the body of white, male, upper/middle-class bodies' (Puwar 2001, p. 652). In *Space Invaders*, Puwar focusses on the social and political power that race and gender hold in the British nation-state. Just as her theory of space invaders can, and has been, applied to social categories in addition to race and gender, I argue that if considered alongside Brah's conceptualisation of power as multiaxial, the 'space invader' theory can also be used to explain marginalisation and 'othering' that occurs within subaltern spaces in Britain.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Brah (1996) problematises a notion of power that relies solely on a single axis of minority-majority. She argues instead that power operates multi-axially. Understanding power as multi-axial 'highlights the ways in which a group constituted as a "minority" along one dimension of differentiation may be constructed as a "majority" along another' (Brah 1996, p.186). She expounds that 'where several diasporas intersect, it becomes necessary to examine how these groups are similarly or differently constructed *vis-à-vis* one another', recognising that 'such relational positioning will, in part, be constructed with reference to the main dominant group' (Brah 1996, p. 186).

In *Space Invaders*, Puwar's application of power in relation to the somatic norm is constructed along a single axis. Her argument does not focus on only one social category. She does address intersectionality, acknowledging that when 'taking gender and race together, we have a complicated and enmeshed layering of "othering", whereby different bodies are "othered" according to one criterion or another in relation to the centrifugal invisible somatic norm' (Puwar 2004, p.143). The multiple social categories she discusses, however, are still all on one majority-minority axis – the axis of the hegemonic British-state. Puwar argues that white, male, upper/middle-class bodies represent the majority in the British nation-state, while 'other' bodies represent the minority and therefore experience institutional spaces in Britain as 'space invaders'. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, additional social categories, such as religion, can be applied to this theory, which in turn can be used to analyse the experiences of Black Muslim women in spaces where the somatic norms align with hegemonic Britishness. In this application, white, male, upper/middle-class, Christian/Atheist bodies represent the majority, and Black Muslim women's bodies are 'other' and experience spaces with a somatic norm of the majority as 'space invaders'.

Applying the theory in this way, however, does not explain why Black Muslim women encounter 'othering' and marginalisation in British spaces where the norm is not hegemonic Britishness. Why do they also experience spaces with Islamic and/or Black somatic norms as 'space invaders'? In order to understand this, we must consider power multiaxially. Black Muslim women are not only marginalised and 'other' to the majority on the hegemonic power axis in Britain, but also along subaltern axes. In this chapter I examine the somatic norms within some of the subaltern spaces Black Muslim women spend time in.

The chapter is structured as follows: I begin by examining Black Muslim women's experiences in Islamic spaces in Britain. I demonstrate that within these spaces Black Muslim women are 'othered' to the racial, ethnic, and gendered somatic norms of British Muslims. Consequently, as 'space invaders' they experience constraints and marginalisation. I then move on to explore the complexity of Black Muslim relations in Britain and how the relational positioning of different Black Muslim groups is constructed in reference to hegemonic British norms and British Muslim norms.

## 5.2 Islamic Spaces

During the conversations with participants, all six of the participants spoke about their experiences within Islamic spaces in Britain. For the purposes of this thesis, I define Islamic spaces as spaces in which the religious somatic norm is Islam. Examples of the spaces discussed include the mosque, Islamic conferences or events, and ISOC (University Islamic Society). The participants' narratives highlight the constraints and marginalisation they have experienced within Islamic spaces in Britain, which I argue were the result of being different to the racial, ethnic, and gendered somatic norms of British Muslims.

The mosque can be considered the quintessential Islamic space. Line Nyhagen argues that 'in Western contexts', mosques are, 'important spaces for Muslim women to learn about Islam, pray, socialize, engage in community activities (e.g. fund-raising), and gain a sense of community and belonging' (Nyhagen 2019, p. 326); however, they are only wholly accessible to Muslim men. Iyawa described a situation in which she was rejected from praying in a mosque because there was 'no space' for her as a woman.

> I have been rejected from going [to pray]. I was literally in central London, and I wanted to pray, because you know by the time I got home I knew it was going to be late and I would have accumulated my prayers.[15] I was in central London, there's a mosque right there. The gate was closed, so I started ringing the bell, cause I saw

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[15] Muslims pray 5 times a day during designated times (*Fajr*/sunrise, *Dhuhr*/noon, *Asr*/afternoon, *Maghrib*/sunset, *Isha*/night). *Qudha Salat* refers to the practice of making up missed prayers. Prayers may be missed due to work, or other obligations and prayed at a later time.

people in there, and the man literally came out and he said, 'No, there's no space for woman.' I said, 'Okay, I'll pray behind you. It's not a problem'. He was like, 'Oh, no, no, no, no. It's not possible.'

Her experience highlights how the design of some mosques in Britain constrains Muslim women's participation. When Iyawa was told there was no space for women, she initially understood this to mean that there was no separate women's prayer space which is why she offered to pray behind the men – a request which was also denied. Iyawa offered to pray behind the men because in some mosques without separate gendered prayer spaces, women and men are segregated in such a manner that men pray at the front, with children in the middle, and women at the back, out of the men's line of sight.

The construction of Islamic spaces in Britain, including the segregation of men and women within mosques and how this segregation is achieved, whether through separate prayer rooms or within the same room, is culturally rather than religiously determined. Iyawa, who is British-Nigerian, told me,

> Honestly in West Africa we don't have none of this nonsense about segregating. That's all to do with an imported type of Islam that has literally come from the *Wahhabis*[16] in Saudi Arabia.

She went on to explain that

> The segregation is something that has come out, you know generations after the Prophet's death. And it's something that is still quite prevalent in certain communities. The Bengali community, the Bangladeshi community, it's quite prevalent and it's quite acceptable. Even Pakistan, it's quite acceptable. Women don't have to come to the mosque, so therefore we're not going to build a space for women.

Iyawa spoke about specific ethnic groups where gender segregation is the norm. She notes how there are also different expectations for women within these communities in terms of

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[16] Wahhabism is 'the reformist theology first expounded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in Nejd in the 1740s' (Allen 2005, p.87).

mosque attendance. She correlates the cultural expectations for women's participation at the mosque with whether or not mosques have space for women.

A report by Muslims in Britain[17] supports Iyawa's assertions that there is a correlation between the availability of space for women within British mosques and cultural traditions of female participation. The 2017 report broke down UK mosques by ethnicity and reported what percentage of mosques managed by each ethnicity provided women's facilities. For example, only 35% of Gujerati and 43% of Bangladeshi mosques had women's facilities, while 79% of Pakistani mosques and 100% of Nigerian and West African mosques had them (Naqshbandi 2017, p. 6).

The same report stated that 28% of mosques in the UK provided no facilities for women and of the 72% of mosques that did, the facilities for women were not equivalent to the men's facilities

> The facilities available may for example only be available for Jumu'ah, or alternatively may be given over to men at Jumu'ah. They may or may not include women's toilets or ablutions, space may be inadequate or out of communication with the main musallah, or may be inaccessible to those with limited mobility (Naqshbandi 2017, p. 5).

In the report, there was a note with these statistics explaining that 'women's presence in the masjid is normal in most Arab and Middle-Eastern countries and elsewhere except for the subcontinent of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, where it is exceptional' (Naqshbandi 2017, p. 6). The report acknowledges that 'for some doctrines [limited facilities for women] is not an issue, e.g. women adhering to narrower versions of Deobandi practice may have no more desire to attend a *masjid*[18] than to grow a beard' (Naqshbandi 2017, p. 5). So, although not being able to access prayer space in the mosque was a constraint for Iyawa, it would not necessarily be viewed as a constraint by women who practice a different doctrine of Islam.

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[17] 'Muslimsinbritain.org is the definitive directory of mosques and Muslim places of worship in the UK. Established in 2005 and continually updated' (Muslims in Britain). As of April 2023, the website provides an up-to-date directory of the 2144 masjids/mosques in the UK. Muslims in Britain previously published biennial reports of UK mosque statistics, including 'women's facilities', however the last report published was in 2017 (Muslims in Britain).

[18] *Masjid* is an Arabic term meaning 'place of prostration' often used interchangeably with the term mosque.

In my conversation with Faduma, she described how mosques are often divided ethnically: 'In the mosques in the UK as well, in Bristol, they're also divided. So, you have Asian mosques, you have Arab mosques, you have Somali mosques.' The complex social and cultural dynamics of how Islamic spaces are constructed in Britain could explain this divide. Understanding the cultural difference in practice, such as whether women are expected to attend and in what capacity – in a separate room or in the same room as men – and how the mosques themselves are physically built around these expectations is a possible explanation for why ethnically divided mosques are more common in some areas. Though, in areas with smaller Muslim populations, it is not as common to find multiple ethnically divided mosques, likely due to a lower demand.

Iyawa described how she encountered gender segregation not only in mosques, but also culturally within certain Muslim families, which made navigating friendships difficult at times.

> Even going to their houses. 'You can't you know because my brother's home.' Like what do you think I'm gonna do with your brother? Or why can't your brother just go to his room? Or why can't we just sit in the living room? What is my presence gonna do to your brother exactly? Like drive him crazy? It would really play on my mind. I just thought, you know what, I need to find a bloody Nigerian community. Or even just people who are West African or something. Because it was just like weird. But in the end, it was just a case where I just learned to accept that this is, as much as it seemed like a curse, it's the beauty of Islam as well. Such a big community of Muslims from different backgrounds. It also made me understand the way certain Asian and Arab Muslims behave. Because this is their norm. And obviously we could be friends in spaces that didn't involve me going to their houses or them coming to my house or being around other male people, which was completely fine. And so, I basically learned how to navigate that way. And that just really helped. (Iyawa)

Iyawa's narrative is reminiscent of Folasade's experience in shared student accommodation. Both Iyawa and Folasade described how they had to change their behaviour and defer to the norms of the majority. For Folasade living in a predominately British space, she described how these norms restricted her access to parts of the house when she wasn't 'dressed appropriately'. For Iyawa, she described how she either needed to find friends with the same cultural background and beliefs as her, or change the locations in which she socialised with certain friends so as to maintain gender segregation.

Though Iyawa explains how she was eventually able to 'navigate' her friendships with Muslims from different backgrounds and comply with their norms, but she later stated that gender segregation remains a 'dealbreaker' for her when it comes to attending Islamic events.

> Segregation was probably always the dealbreaker. It's like, why do I have to be segregated? The Imam is talking and I can't see him because we have to be in another room. And the video quality is so rubbish. It's so poor that I can barely hear it. Why am I attending this event? And that was so frustrating for me. But to the other Arab sisters that were there, it was just so normal.

In these comments, Iyawa highlights once again how gender separation constrains her participation. She specifically refers to the audio-visual equipment. In her later comments, she implied to me that this is an issue across many spaces and was not a reference to one single event. Her observations align with the research cited earlier on the *masjid* facilities for women, which noted that spaces provided for women 'may be inadequate or out of communication with the main *musallah*' (Naqshbandi 2017, p. 5).

While she was talking about Islamic events, Iyawa commented that 'in Britain, when you say you're Muslim it's almost synonymous with Southeast Asia'. Azeezat Johnson made similar claims, stating that there is 'an erasure that occurs through the way racialisation and religious identity are constructed as meeting (or not). When the label of "British Muslims" is employed, it is implicitly attached to Muslims with some form of South Asian heritage ties' (Johnson 2017, p. 2). The majority of the Muslim population living in Britain today came in the 20th century from British colonies or as refugees, and indeed South Asians contemporarily comprise the largest ethnic group of Muslims in Britain. That being said, Black Muslims have actually been 'part of the British landscape long before South Asian migrants' (Khan 2018). Muslims have been in Britain since before the beginning of the eighteenth century, though they were only a small presence (Peach 2006, p. 632).

Iyawa expressed her frustration with the conflation of South Asian ethnicity with Islam in Britain and spoke about one of the more subtle ways it shows up – in event catering.

> And then at events I would attend I used to always be mindful when they said food would be served. I would always ask, 'What food is it?' Because Nigeria is very far from Southeast Asia and the kind of food is very different as well. So, these events

would always be predominately Southeast Asian and the food would always be some sort of curry. You know, Islam is very diverse. We can make anything halal. Why does it have to be Southern Indian curry? I'm like, gah!

As Iyawa notes in her comments, Islam is very diverse. In fact, in England and Wales there are 'significant numbers of Muslims from every ethnicity category recorded in the census' (Ali 2015, p.24). A report on the shifting ethnic diversity of British Muslims notes that 'the proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims is falling and the proportion of Muslims in the 'Black African, Black other' and 'Asian other' is rising' (Ali 2015, p.24). As of 2021, 10.8% of Muslims are Black, 14% are 'Other (including Arab)', 6% are white, and 4% are mixed race. Though as stated before, South Asians do make up the majority of Muslims in Britain. Around two-thirds of Muslims in Britain are Asian (primarily Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian), with the largest single ethnic group being Pakistani. Around 4 in every 10 Muslims in Britain are Pakistani (Ali 2015, p.24).

While Black Muslims make up 10.8% of the British Muslim population, multiple participants commented on the relative lack of Black representation, particularly at British Islamic events. Sagal remarked,

> But when you go to these Islamic events, we constantly have to tell people – they are people of colour – but they're not seeming to understand. You can just have whole events or whole societies and there's no black representation there.

Iyawa made similar observations, commenting:

> I used to be looking at these events and I thought, 'That looks amazing!' And I look at the names then I'm like, you know what, I'm going to pass and probably go somewhere else, maybe meet up with some friends or watch something on TV. I used to get excited, and then I'm so disappointed. It's literally just Little India or Little Pakistan.

The lack of Black representation is not only limited to speakers at events. Magan also expressed frustration at the lack of Black representation on national Islamic boards and committees.

> Because if you look at the board like the Islamic Board of the UK, I don't even know what the fuck the board is called. But if you look at those ni**ers they're all Asian men. They're all like elderly Pakistani brothers. And you know, South Asian brothers.

It's hardly any Black…Of course, we're going to be misrepresented because we don't have anybody representing or talking on our behalf on those committees. And that's the committee when it comes to the government and government policies towards Muslims.

While Magan's comment focusses on the lack of Black representation and the ethnic norms of the board, she also alludes to the norms of age and gender. She comments that the members of the board are all 'elderly Pakistani/South Asian brothers'. She comments on the negative impact this has for those not represented on the board, given that the board is directly responsible for communication with the government and influence governmental policies.

Several participants expressed their frustration with wide-held assumptions that Black Muslims are all converts. Magan, who is Somali, explained,

Well there's an assumption that Black Muslims are all reverts or converts. And this is the thing that used to make me cackle because I'm literally like the cis. I'm like ni**er we were Muslim in the time of the Prophet.

In this instance, Magan was referring to assumptions made by non-Black Muslims in Britain; however, she described encountering similar assumptions when she was teaching in Saudi Arabia. She implied that it is not only within the British Muslim communities that Black Muslims are assumed to be converts, but also within the wider South Asian and Arab *umma*. She jokingly remarked about how surprising she found these assumptions in Saudia Arabia given that both her first and surname are incredibly common Arabic Islamic names.

They're like, 'so when did you become Muslim?' I'm like, my name is [redacted]. And I'm like, I can understand Asians not understanding my name, but you mother fuckers are Arab.

In my conversation with Iyawa, she spoke about what it was like moving back to the UK after living and working in France. She began wearing *hijab* while living in France, so she explained that moving back in her twenties was her first experience being perceived as a Black *Muslim* woman. It was then that she first noticed the widespread assumptions that she was a convert because she is Black. She explained, 'Even in my place of work from colleagues, and also patients I look after. They're always kind of intrigued. "Oh, so you're Muslim! Ok. Were you born Muslim?"' She intimated that she wouldn't have to deal with these questions if she was 'maybe Arab or Pakistani' because 'if you are Pakistani or Arab

you're not a convert, you are just naturally Muslim'. As she explained though, as Nigerian 'it was incorporated in my culture. I'm no different to a Pakistani Muslim or an Indian Muslim, or Iraqi Muslim...this is part of my culture.'

Iyawa described how other Muslims in the UK would also assume that she was a convert.

> The kind of ignorant questions that they would ask me, 'Oh so, did you convert?' or 'When did you convert?' It made me not want to go to certain mosques that were predominately Asian or Arab. It made me want to distance myself from a lot of these Muslims who had this really – it's a racist view of Black Muslims. Almost like we are not real Muslims. You know, we converted. We don't even know Islam.

She suggested that it was more surprising to encounter these assumptions from other Muslims than it was to encounter them from non-Muslims: 'It was like, you don't even know the history of your own religion, that you're following.' She talked about the 'shock horror on their faces when [she] would try to school them about the history of Islam', and more specifically the history of Islam in West Africa.

In an interview for an article in *Al Jazeera*, Mustafa Briggs, the founder of the 'Beyond Bilal: Black History in Islam' lecture series, explained that,

> Islam is part and parcel of African history and it has been for over a thousand years. In today's society, Prophet Ibrahim's wife Hajar, would have been considered black. The rites and pilgrimages we have in Islam in terms of Hajj (pilgrimage) were built by the participation and the efforts of a black African woman. Before Islam was accepted in Saudi Arabia or any Arab societies, Islam was first established in Africa (Khan 2018).

The history of Islam in Africa and the significance of Black Muslims is largely overlooked in most accounts of Islamic history. In his book *Beyond Bilal*, based on his popular lecture series, Briggs (2022) writes, 'When we think of Black History in Islam, the figures that usually come to mind are people like Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, and Mansa Musa. Black History in Islam does not start with these individuals; but starts where Islam begins, in the Qur'an itself' (Briggs 2022, p.17). For example, the first official *muezzin*[19] in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, was Bilal ibn Rabah, an African freed from slavery by Abu Bakr, one

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[19] The *muezzin* is the official who proclaims the call to prayer five times per day.

of the Prophet's companions, who later became the governor of Syria (Reddie 2009, p.26-27).

Briggs explains that the reason he titled his lecture series, and subsequent book, *Beyond Bilal*, is 'because Bilal is often tokenized when we discuss race and Blackness in Islam and the Muslim community' (Briggs 2022, p. 33). He asserts that, 'Any claims of racism or discrimination amongst Muslims, especially by Black people expressing their lived experiences within the Muslim community, are usually waved away with an unhelpful appeal to Bilal's position in Early Islam' (Briggs 2022, p.33).

The first episode of series two of the *Black and Muslim in Britain* YouTube series focusses on this very issue and is titled, 'But Bilal(RAH) was Black'.[20] The episode description explains that the episode title is 'a common comment non-Black Muslims make to deny that Muslims cannot [sic.] be racist' (Black and Muslim in Britain 2018). In the episode, one participant Asma remarks, 'I've heard this so many times. It's like everyone's biggest argument to why Muslims cannot be racist'. Nimz and Funmi comment on who and how references to Bilal are used. Nimz states, 'You know who says this? It's people that are trying to rebuke anything you've said on your experience as a Black Muslimah or Muslim'. Nimz use of both Muslimah and Muslim highlights how Bilal is used as a rebuke to both men and women, implying that the focus is on Bilal's race rather than his gender in these arguments. Funmi explains how the reference might be used:

> So, for example, it would be like, "Oh, there's a lot of racism in Islam". Then, your non-Black friend or non-Black leader in the *masjid* would say, "Oh no sisters, don't worry about that. We don't talk about those things. You know Bilal, peace be upon him and blessing be upon him, he was a Black man". And then they stop there.

Funmi's explanation demonstrates how references to Bilal's race are used as a method of shutting down conversations about race and racism in the *umma*. She goes on to explain some of the issues Black Muslims are currently dealing with and how using Bilal to consistently shut down conversations about racism is not only irrelevant, but also prevents progress.

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[20] 'RAH', also commonly abbreviated 'RA', stands for *Radhi Allahu 'anhu* meaning 'may Allah be pleased with him'. It is often used after the name of male companions of the Prophet.

Beyond Bilal, there are millions of Black Muslims today.[21] So, let's talk about what's happening right now. Currently, a lot of Black Muslims don't feel welcomed into the community. Currently now, a lot of Black Muslims find it very difficult to integrate into the community, whether they were born Muslim or not born Muslim, and that's not being addressed. So hopefully, *Alhamdulillah*, through this movement we can address it, but the statement to come back with by saying, "But Bilal was Black" is like saying, "Oh, you're racist" and then someone saying, "Oh, but you know, my dog's carer is Black".

The year after this episode aired, in 2019, Black Muslim Forum partnered with Amaliah to conduct 'a survey on the extent of anti-blackness and colourism in the UK Muslim community' (Black Muslim Forum 2019) and the results of the survey were consistent with the claims Funmi made during that episode. The survey found that 63.4% of self-identified Black Muslims 'felt that overall they did not belong to the UK Muslim community' (Black Muslim Forum 2020).

Similarly to Funmi, Rakaya also talked about on how comments about Bilal's race are irrelevant to the contemporary issues faced by Black Muslims in Britain. She remarked,

> At the Prophet time, yeah, I can see why they use it, but sometimes it's just not relevant to the situation at hand. They'll be like 'Oh we're pushing you to the back' or something, but 'Bilal was Black' so we can't be racist.

Rakaya's comment about Black Muslims being pushed to the back recalled a story Raeni told about an experience she had in a mosque in London.

> There's one particular mosque [in London]. I remember going there. I opened the door, went in, and as I went to go in the room they was [sic.] like, 'The Jamaicans pray upstairs.' But Jamaican was just a synonym for Black. Cause how do you know where I'm from? So, as well, just to understand, being a Jamaican Muslim, no one is seeing you as a Jamaican Muslim who was born Muslim. People are seeing you as a convert to Islam. So, then the assumption is that there are aspects – you don't really know your religion.

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[21] It is not clear if Funmi meant that there are 'millions of Black Muslims today' in Britain or if she meant globally. Her subsequent comments refer to the British Muslim community, in which, for reference, there are approximately 417,960 Black Muslims according to the most recent census.

This story from Raeni about being rejected from the main prayer room recalls Iyawa's story about not being permitted to enter another London mosque because she is a woman. However, while gender segregation is relatively common in Muslim mosques, racial segregation is not. Gender segregation is implemented in accordance with cultural tradition and varying interpretations of the Qu'ran. On the other hand, the racial segregation that Raeni experienced does not have any cultural or religious basis and is an example of anti-Black racism. The 2019 survey conducted by Black Muslim Forum on anti-Blackness in the UK Muslim community also investigated incidents of anti-racism in mosques and madrassahs. The survey reported that '48.98% of participants faced anti-Black discrimination or colourism within a UK mosque or religious setting' (Black Muslim Forum 2020). Examples of this discrimination included, 'being stared at in the mosque and made to feel self-conscious', 'derogatory comments within religious settings stereotyping Black people or insinuations that they were not Muslim', and 'receiving patronising praise over basic actions such as making *wudhu*' because they were assumed to be converts. (Black Muslim Forum 2020).

In her narrative, Raeni reflected on how the term 'Jamaican' was used instead of 'Black'. While Raeni is indeed Jamaican, she commented that the man speaking to her would have had no way of knowing that and she interpreted his use of 'Jamaican' to imply convert. Furthermore, she thought that it was being used to insinuate that she didn't know how to practice her religion properly. While she was aware that the term 'Jamaican' was being used derogatorily in that instance, and she implied it had been used similarly on other occasions, she expressed to me that it didn't affect how proud she was to be a *Jamaican* Black Muslim woman:

> But for me, it is that Jamaican-ness that has gotten me so far. I think coming from a Jamaican background for me and [redacted mutual Jamaican Black Muslim female friend] it was very much, 'Wait a minute! We survived the middle passage. We are from a country of matriarchs and that form of matriarchy comes with ups and downs. We're from a country of matriarchs. We didn't get here, I'm not here in this country and now converting to Islam to be quiet.' And so that's what makes it a gift and a curse even though I wouldn't change it for the world.

Similarly to how Raeni described being Jamaican as both 'a gift and a curse', Iyawa reflected on how being a Black Muslim woman can work both for and against her. In the

story shared earlier, Iyawa spoke about how she was not let into a mosque to pray because there was no women's space. She followed that account with the following anecdote, in which she describes facing a similar scenario of a mosque not having a women's space, but going in anyway.

> But there have been times where I've gone into mosques and it's quite uncomfortable doing that prayer, but I did it anyway. I went in. There was no section for the women, I walked in the men's section. They were watching me like as if I was the Messiah or something. They were just so shocked. And I just went to pray in the back. I was like, I'm not disrespecting you, you don't have to look at me. I mean, look at me, I'm a Muslim woman, I've come to the mosque, I'm gonna pray. And then at the end of the prayer one of the brothers came to me and said, 'We don't have a section for the women.' I said, 'I know, that's why I came to pray at the back. But you know you need to actually think about creating a section for the women.' And I think I was able to do that because I was a Black Muslim. So, in some respects being a Black Muslim woman does work in my favour. In other respects, it does work against me because people have ignorant views.

Iyawa attributes the fact that she was able to go into the men's section and pray to being a Black Muslim woman. It is possible that she meant that as a Black Muslim woman she herself did not have any qualms about praying in the same space as men; but I think that rather, she was implying that the men did not stop her until after the prayer because of their 'ignorant views'. If they assumed she was a convert, they may have only approached her after because they assumed she just didn't know that she was supposed to be looking for a women's section.

**5.3 Black Muslim Spaces**

Having discussed the somatic norms of South Asian ethnicity and masculinity in British Muslim spaces and the constraints that Black Muslim women face because of these norms, I now move on to discuss how Black Muslim women can experience marginalisation within the Black Muslim community in Britain due to ethnic somatic norms. In this discussion, I explore how different Black ethnic groups are constructed as 'majority' or 'minority' within the Black Muslim community in Britain. Brah argues that 'where several diasporas intersect, it becomes necessary to examine how these groups are similarly or differently constructed

*vis-à-vis* one another', recognising that 'such relational positioning will, in part, be constructed with reference to the main dominant group' (Brah 1996, p. 186). Having established the somatic norms of two dominant groups in this context - hegemonic Britain and British Muslims – in the previous chapter and section, I now examine how those norms affect the relative positioning of Black ethnic groups in the Black British Muslim community.

I have previously established that the Muslim population in Britain is racially and ethnically diverse. Black Muslims make up approximately 10.8% of the Muslim population in Britain. Due to different cultural understandings of race, however, this number may not be entirely accurate. Rima Berns-McGown conducted interviews with Somali men, women and children in the 1990s in London and Toronto. She found that ethnic Somalis 'are black but do not identify themselves with sub-Saharan Africans or their Caribbean or North American descendants' (Berns-McGown 1999, p.5). In another study from 2006 on Somali community organisations in London, Hopkins similarly noted that 'respondents felt that Somalis were mistakenly and negatively aligned with other Africans and with African Caribbeans, whilst as ethnic Somalis without exception they aligned themselves more closely with Arab populations' (Hopkins 2006, p.368). Given these findings, it is possible then that when responding to the census, Somali residents in Britain may not select 'Black African, Black other'. It is possible that some of the 14% of 'Other (including Arab)' Muslims are Somali and that the number Black Muslims in Britain, including Somalis, exceeds 10.8%.

In an episode of *Black and Muslim in Britain*, one of the participants, Sariaya, commented on the ethnic diversity of Black Muslims in Britain: 'To be part of the Black [Muslim] community is such a melting pot of culture. You know, it's like you've got our Caribbean brothers and sisters and our Somali brothers and sisters, our Sierra Leonean, Nigerian, Eritrean, you name it.' Of the participants that I interviewed directly for this research, three were ethnically Somali, two Nigerian, and one Jamaican. It was interesting to hear, even among only these six, the varying perspectives of how they perceived different ethnic groups to experience different privileges.

Faduma is one of the Somali participants. She expressed that as Somali she enjoys certain privileges in the wider British Muslim community. For example, she explained that it is less likely for people to assume she is a convert.

So, I speak from a place of privilege as well, because I am of Somali origin and 99.9% of Somalis are Muslim and because we are in the horn of Africa geographically speaking we have had a lot of Middle Eastern influence in our cultures and biologically as well. So, I'm kind of, I'm the acceptable Black Muslim, cause I have the curly hair. I'm quite fair skinned. So, it's like, 'Oh, you're just one of us' kind of thing. They see us like darker Arabs as opposed to Black African women. So, there's that aspect of actually benefitting from, of having that privilege. For example, my experiences are very, very different to my West African Black Muslim friends that are stereotypically, whatever that means, more African in their features.

Faduma highlights how her lighter skin, and curly – as opposed to more afro-textured – hair affect how she is perceived by non-Black Muslims. She discussed how these features can give her privileges in certain Muslim communities, commenting for example how she 'find[s] [herself] very much accepted in Arab communities'.

Sagal, who is also Somali, discussed how Somalis are seen as distinctly East Asian, meaning that they are not fully accepted as Arab or Black. She hypothesised why this is, stating, 'I think you know like for Somalis it's because our Blackness is questioned. But no other person has that.' She described an event she had recently attended at her university ISOC about the history of Black Muslims but noted that Somalis were left out of the discussion.

So for example the University of [redacted] Islamic society, for Black History Month, they asked a speaker to come in and he does talks about Black Muslim history. And then throughout the whole thing, he didn't actually mention East Africa at all… I just completely understand that they just see us as distinct as East Africans. Especially when you're talking about Islam, and Africa and Black. Like, you know, that instance, Islam came to East Africa, before it came to a lot of Arabia and the rest of Asia, they came to literally past Somali and Ethiopia, Abyssinia at the time. And he didn't talk about any of that, which is so strange…So I asked him a question at the event. I said, 'Okay, so I think it's amazing that you talked about West Africa, North Africa, Central. You haven't mentioned Somalis. And if you're talking about Black Muslims, I don't understand how you can't mention Somalis.' And then this was his response. 'Well I'm not Somali, so I don't know about that history.' He's of West African origin. So, it's like this idea that they still 'other' us. They don't see us the same. So, he's happy to you know [talk about other parts of Africa and she mentioned the US and Brazil]

Which I understand his point is he doesn't know about East Africa, but you can learn you know. If you're doing something about Black Muslims, you can't not discuss Somalis.

She commented that it is not only Black Muslims who view Somalis as a 'distinct' group, but also other Black British communities. She remarked,

So, if you are a Black Muslim who isn't Somali, I've noticed that the Black community will support you. But there's just something about, they don't see us as Black. They just see us as distinct. It makes us an 'other' within an 'other'…You know, East Africans. I think obviously, now they accept Somalis are Black but when I was a kid [they didn't]'.

Sagal's comments provide a new perspective to the research I shared earlier about Somali's self-perception of race. That research was conducted in the 1990s and 2006 respectively, and Sagal's comments imply that there has been a cultural shift in the perception of Somalis as Black since she was a child, which would have been in the 2000s. This shift in external perceptions of Somalis as Black may also align with a shift in Somali's self-perception. While I could not find statistical data on the matter, anecdotally, three of the participants I interviewed were Somali and all identified as Black. A significant number of the podcasters and participants on *Black and Muslim in Britain* were also Somali and self-identified as Black.

Sagal's comment about being "an 'other' within an 'other'" speaks to the complex manners in which Black Muslim women experience multiple marginalisation. Black Muslim women are not only multiply marginalised in that they are marginalised in relation to multiple hegemonic norms (i.e. race, gender, religion); they are also multiply marginalised in relation to subaltern norms. Sagal's comment that Somalis are 'other' within an 'other' is made in reference to an already layered racial subaltern norm.

Sagal commented that she noticed Black communities were more likely to support Black Muslims who were not Somali. She referred to the death of Shukri Abdi and the protests that took place a year after her death, around the same time as the Black Lives Matter protests following George Floyd's death. She commented that while 'like 10,000' people attended the Black Lives Matter protest in her city, only '200' attended the protest for Shukri Abdi and they were 'just Somalis'. She stressed how 'we say Black lives matter, but you can't be

selective of which Black lives'. She went on to say, 'That goes for our Black community as well. We have a lot of Jamaicans and other Black people [in this city]. They just didn't come. And that is rooted I think in Islamophobia'.

One of the episodes of *Being Black and Muslim in Britain* centred around the question, 'What does it mean to be a Black Muslim?'. One of the participants, Halimat answered,

> To me, it's to be erased from many conversations and discussions around identity. And so, if there's a group of Black people talking about Black representation, Black Muslims are left out of the conversation. If it's a conversation around Muslim representation, Black Muslims are left out of the conversation. So, I feel that to be Black and Muslim in Britain is to be left out of a conversation in one way or another.

In my conversation with Raeni, she referred to the series and Halimat's answer in the series. She used Halimat's answer as a jumping-off point and went on to discuss the complexities of race, ethnicity and conversion in British Muslim communities.

> Being Black Muslim means to be left out in the case of being Muslim. Because in Britain, Islam is associated with being South Asian, to an extent Arab. Now starting to be Somali community, East African. So, it means being left out of that conversation. It means being left out of conversations of Blackness because even though there are Black Muslims it's like there is this idea that if you are Muslim that you're not really into your roots because it is seen as South Asian. It means even in particular, in some Black Muslim spaces being left out depending on where you're from. Because if you're from Somalia that's an authentic form of Black [sic.]. If you were born Muslim and you're like from West Africa, from Nigeria, you have an awareness of yourselves and who you are, but then you have this convert who wants to come. So, there's other layers as well, there's other things that complicate it further.

Raeni's comments summarise several of the issues addressed thus far in this chapter. She begins by acknowledging the conflation of ethnicity with religion in Britain, and how the term 'British Muslim' is in many situations synonymous with South Asian. She addresses how Black Muslims are consequently left out of conversations about British Muslims because of their race. She moves on to address how when 'Muslim' is used synonymously with 'South Asian', Black Muslims can be left out of conversations about Blackness. She then moves on to discuss the complications of ethnicity and conversion. She asserts that certain ethnicities are seen as more 'authentic' than others. While she says 'Black', I believe she meant to say Muslim when referring to Somalians. She implies that Black Muslims who

are not born Muslim do not have the same sense of awareness of who they are as Muslims. If we take this into account alongside Raeni's other narratives, we can infer that when she says 'depending on where you're from' you can be left out of Black Muslim spaces, that she is referring to Jamaicans. As she has previously asserted, Jamaicans are perceived to be converts. They are not seen as 'authentically' Muslim like Somali and those who actually are converts do not enjoy the same sense of self as those born Muslim.

Elsewhere in our conversation, Raeni reflected on the history of Jamaicans in England and how 'Jamaican' has been used as a slur not only by Muslims, but also by other immigrant groups.

> [Being] of Jamaican descent. I think in this society because of everything that happened with the Windrush, this that and the other, but then going back to criminality. Say for example you have a lot of people who enter the country as refugees or enter the country seeking asylum and people may say they're taking our country and there's stereotypes of them taking over the country of taking jobs, but there's not really stereotypes of criminality, even though people are trying to make that into a crime. Whereas with Jamaicans specifically and Caribbean people but predominately Jamaicans because people just think that being Jamaican means you're from all over the Caribbean but anyway, like being Jamaican specifically there was an element of criminality. So like you are someone who's coming to freeload or take a job and you come with this innate criminality about you right. So say for example when the riots happened –it must've been about 2012/2013 when the riots happened all around the country – and it was like oh these young white boys are trying to act like Jamaicans or using Jamaican slang. But that comes from somewhere. That comes from Yardie drug dealers, Jamaican criminals that comes from, so when you look back to what I was saying about Operation delivery it's because you demonize Jamaicans so much so that in the consciousness of the people Jamaicans equal criminality which is why I would say for many migrants entering the country what not to be was a Jamaican, 'oh no we're not like those Jamaicans'. So even Nigerians when they entered the country initially, things have changed, not all of them and not all Jamaicans are like this, there was this game being played so a lot of West Africans when they came to the country, now it's more economical, but it

was more for education, like 'oh no we're not like those Jamus, we're not like those Jamaicans, we're different'.

Brah emphasises the importance of understanding 'how, and in what ways a group [is] inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality, or other axes of differentiation in the country to which it migrates?' (Brah 1996, p. 179). She asserts that understanding how a group is situated 'enables us to begin to deconstruct the regimes of power which operate to differentiate one group from another; to represent them as similar or different' (Brah 1996, p.179-180). The context that Raeni provides on the relative situatedness of Jamaicans within Britain, both by dominant (British) groups and marginalised (other immigrant) groups could provide insight into possible reasons why Jamaicans are marginalised within British Muslim communities. Afterall, as Brah argues, 'relational positioning' is 'in part constructed with reference to the main dominant group'.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how the constraints and marginalisation Black Muslim women face in Britain do not only occur in spaces coded with hegemonic somatic norms, but also occur within spaces coded with subaltern somatic norms. Although Puwar limited her application of 'space invader' theory to spaces with hegemonic somatic norms, I argue that 'space invader' theory can also be applied to spaces coded with subaltern somatic norms. Furthermore, I argue that engaging with Puwar's theory of 'space invaders' alongside Brah's conceptualisation of power as multiaxial allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complex multiple marginalisation of Black Muslim women in Britain.

I examined experiences that occurred within Islamic spaces in Britain. These spaces included the mosque, Islamic events, and ISOC (University Islamic Society). Participants' narratives focussed on their experiences of marginalisation within these spaces and the constraints they faced, for example being unable to access certain spaces and encountering stereotypes and bias. In my analysis, I found that the marginalisation and constraints described could be explained by the participants' relative positioning as 'space invaders' to the somatic norms of the space. In Britain, Islamic spaces are not only coded with religious somatic norms, but also racial, ethnic and gendered norms. As Black Muslim women the participants matched the religious somatic norm of the spaces they described, but they

encountered constraints when they did not match the racial, ethnic and/or gendered norms of the space. For instance, one participant described how she had been turned away from a mosque because there was no space for women to pray. While this constrained her ability to complete her daily prayers, she remarked that this would not have been a constraint for Pakistani or Bangladeshi Muslim women, as those communities do not expect women to go to the mosque.

Participants described how South Asian somatic norms permeate a number of Islamic spaces in Britain, resulting in the marginalisation of Black Muslims. As one participant, Iyawa, remarked, 'in Britain, when you say you're Muslim it's almost synonymous with Southeast Asia'. Participants described how panels at Islamic events often did not reflect the diversity of British Muslims and were particularly lacking in Black representation, with one participant describing many events as 'Little India' or 'Little Pakistan'. Another participant noted the lack of Black, as well as female and youth, representation on national boards and committees, commenting that the members of the board were all elderly, South Asian and male.

While discussing the marginalisation they faced as Black Muslim women within British Islamic spaces, participants also reflected on the marginalisation they faced within the Black British Muslim community. These discussions highlight the complex layering involved in Black Muslim women's marginalisation. For example, one Somali participant commented that Somalis are 'an "other" within an "other"' and not fully accepted as either Arab or Black and thus marginalised in both the wider British Muslim community and also within the Black British Muslim community. One of the other participants, who is Jamaican, also commented on how Jamaican Muslims are marginalised by other Muslims due to their ethnicity, explaining that Jamaicans are often assumed to be converts, unlike Somalis, for instance, who are seen to be 'authentic Muslims'.

By examining their experiences through a lens that recognises power as multiaxial, we have a more nuanced understanding of how Black Muslim women are multiply marginalised. They are 'space invaders' in spaces coded with hegemonic somatic norms, multiply marginalised in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. They are also 'space invaders' in Islamic spaces in Britain, marginalised in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Additionally, even within the Black Muslim community, the somatic norms against which Black Muslim women are measured vary and can result in marginalisation. For example, due to colourism affecting who is considered 'Black'. The multiple marginalisation of Black Muslim women in Britain is complex and multiaxial, occurring both within and across different hegemonic and subaltern axes.

In this chapter and the previous chapter, I focussed on spaces in which Black Muslim are not the somatic norm and the constraints and marginalisation they faced as 'space invaders'. In the next chapter, I explore whether there are spaces in the UK in which Black Muslim women are not 'space invaders'.

# Chapter 6: Finding Spaces of Belonging

## 6.1 Introduction

> It's interesting being a Black Muslim woman in the UK. Because you fit in; you fit in all three of them, but all of a sudden, you're being told there's no space for you. Like you have this variety to pick from, but at the same time, you're left with nothing…Finding a place where you're accepted for all three identities, and you don't feel like you're kind of being disregarded for one is the hardest part of being in the UK. It's like there's no one group of people that will accept you and that you will fit in fully. If you want to fit in, you can disregard one of your identities and completely fit in, but if you want to keep, it's like you're hurting yourself to let others free. And it's like why can't I just be me? It's so hard. It's so exhausting. (Folasade)

Folasade described the difficulty of finding space within the UK as a Black Muslim woman. She explained how her intersecting identities allow her to fit into multiple groups, but that within those groups she isn't fully accepted and doesn't feel like she fits in. She describes this as simultaneously having a variety of choices while being left with nothing. In order to fit into groups of Black people, Muslims, or women, Folasade feels like she has to 'disregard one of [her] identities' and 'hurt [her]self to let others free'. As a woman with intersecting identities which are different to the majority of the group, she can fit in if she defers to the somatic norm of the group, but this requires ignoring certain intersections of her identity – a process she describes as painful, difficult, and 'so exhausting'.

The previous chapters discussed Black Muslim women's experiences in everyday spaces in Britain. Chapter Four explored spaces with somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness, while Chapter Five explored spaces with subaltern somatic norms. In all of the spaces discussed, Black Muslim women were positioned as 'other' to the somatic norms of the space and experienced constraints and marginalisation. In this chapter, I turn to explore whether there are spaces in Britain in which Black Muslim women are the somatic norm. I explore the spaces in which Black Muslim women described experiencing feelings of comfort and belonging and examine how, if at all, these feelings relate to their relative situatedness to the somatic norms of the space.

To explore these questions, I turned first to the conversations with my participants and then to the podcasts and began by analysing the instances in which they described feeling safe and/or comfortable within spaces. From these conversations there was a consensus expressing a dearth of such existing spaces. Many attributed the lack of such spaces to their intersecting identity, specifically the intersections of marginalised identities within the UK. As Folasade expressed above, even though there are spaces where she feels like she fits in, at the same time these groups don't make space for her fully as a Black Muslim woman. Raira Rafiq described being a Black Muslim woman as 'someone who can call home many places, but equally not sit comfortably anywhere' (Rafiq 2019, pp. 204-205). So, if such spaces where Black Muslim women can be accepted fully as their complete identity and feel comfortable and belong are not readily available, where can Black Muslim women go and experience this sense of somatic belonging? In response to a lack of such spaces, some participants described creating their own. Folasade spoke about how she and her friends decided to create a Black Muslim society at her university.

> And so, one night my friends and I were sat in my room, and I was telling them how I just want safe space for me. I just want where a Black Muslim woman, particularly, could feel safe without feeling all the struggles of being Black and the struggles of being Muslim. And I was dealing without being political, with just being me. And we decided that we were going to create a Black Muslim society.

Folasade and her friends created a space at university where she could feel safe as a Black Muslim woman and where that identity didn't have to be political. Other participants also described the desire for a space in which they could be political with their Muslim identity. Raeni asked, 'Where is that space where going through all of these questions about what it means to be Muslim, all of this which isn't like spiritual? It isn't looking at Islam as a spiritual identity. It's looking at Islam politically.' She goes on to say, 'So thinking about these spaces, where can people go when they need to talk about these political things which are affecting their lives. And then it was like, okay, we need a third space.'

The term that Raeni used – 'third space' – is a recognised term within the British Muslim discourse, stemming from usage in the United States Muslim community. Within this discourse, Raeni explained to me that the home is considered the first space, and the mosque is considered the second space. The third space then is 'an institution that seeks to fulfil the

particular needs of a faith community which are not being met by mosques, schools or traditional religious institutions' (Akande 2019).

This particular understanding of third spaces as religious institutions came into the Muslim discourse in the noughties, and Bazzano and Hermansen posit that the usage came from '"third space" in postcolonial and postmodern critical theory' which 'has been explicitly applied in studies of American Muslim youth cultures' (Bazzano and Hermansen 2020, p. xxviii). These American Muslim youth cultures are often a key demographic of institutional third spaces in the United States. In postcolonial and postmodern theory, the concept of 'third space' is attributed to Homi Bhabha. He developed the theory in his 1994 text, *The Location of Culture*. Rather than an institution, Bhabha speaks about the third space as a metaphorical cultural space, 'where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences' (Bhabha 1994, p. 312).

In this chapter, I draw upon theorisations of third space both as an institutional space as well as a cultural space in discussing the experiences of Black Muslim women in the UK. I argue that the safe, comfortable spaces sought by Black Muslim women and the spaces which they have created to fulfil that need can be conceptualised as third spaces. Within this discussion, I consider physical spaces, as well as online spaces. I begin the chapter with a section providing a more in-depth discussion of how third spaces are conceptualised and function in the United States and how this conceptualisation has been translated to the British context, particularly within Black Muslim communities in Britain. I then move on to discuss the need for safe, comfortable spaces for Black Muslim women in Britain as expressed by the participants and podcasters. Following on from this, I discuss the spaces Black Muslim women have created to fulfil this need. This section is divided into two sub-sections, one discussing physical spaces (i.e. physical places or in-person meetings) and another discussing online spaces (i.e. social media, online platforms, or podcasts).

## 6.2 Muslim Third Spaces in the United States and Britain

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, several new Muslim institutions were founded in the United States with a goal of meeting the needs of the community outside of a traditional mosque setting. They host events and provide space for prayers, among other things, but they are not traditional mosques, nor are they trying to replace the traditional mosque or Islamic school. They are known as third spaces.

One of the most well-known, and possibly the first, third space in the United States is called the Ta'leef Collective, located in Fremont, California with an additional campus in Chicago. It was founded by Usama Canon, beginning in 2002 as the outreach program of Zaytuna Institute in 2002, and formally becoming its own organisation, the Ta'leef Collective, in 2005. Its mission is to 'provide the space, content, and companionship necessary for a healthy understanding and realization of Islam' (Taleef Collective 2022).

The Ta'leef Collective was the first third space I heard about, however not because of its longstanding history. Just prior to starting my fieldwork, one of the participants for the project, Raeni, and I attended the British Islam Conference together in London in February 2020. There were attendees from across the UK, as well as from the United States and the topic of the Ta'leef Collective came up in several personal conversations with attendees, as well as at one of the conference's roundtable discussions. The founder, Usama Canon, was removed from his position in the Autumn of 2019 after the organisation's board of directors received allegations against Canon of 'professional misconduct, including verbal abuse and abuse of authority' (Khan 2019). As the conversations I engaged with that weekend revealed, this was a massive blow to third spaces across the United States and brought the concept into the mainstream media, albeit in a negative light. It was also a source of additional negative media towards Muslims in the United States.

After these conversations, I searched third spaces to find out more – about Ta'leef Collective and others. Raeni and I also discussed the concept briefly in our recorded conversation for this project. She was the only participant to discuss third spaces in the context of US third spaces, but as I will go on to explain, the concept is not restricted to the US context and

other participants discussed third spaces in the British context, some explicitly using the term and others through describing spaces that I am arguing constitute third spaces.

Since the Ta'leef Collective formed in 2005, many other third spaces were founded across the United States. Each of these spaces share similar missions and the formal term 'third space' emerged to describe them. According to Tannaz Haddadi, the co-founder of a third space in DC, the New Wave Muslim Initiative,

> A third space must be understood as an institution that is not trying to replace the traditional mosque; rather it seeks to fill the gaps where the traditional mosque is unable to meet a community's particular needs. Third Spaces place a greater focus on meeting a community's social and spiritual needs. A Third Space, broadly speaking, seeks to provide participants with a safe space "for people to come as they are," in terms of their religious understanding and leanings. (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2016, p.3)

This definition was shared in a report released by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. The report, released in 2016, was a case study of a third space in the DC area called 'MakeSpace' in an effort to gain insight into inclusivity practices at third spaces that could be applied across American Muslim institutions. The study of MakeSpace is useful to understand in practical terms how third spaces meet community's social and spiritual needs outside of a traditional mosque setting.

MakeSpace doesn't own a physical location, but rather, it hosts events at various rented locations. The purpose of MakeSpace is to serve as an inclusive hub for the Metropolitan area Muslim community, 'with a strong focus on youth and young professionals' (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2016, p. 4). The space places a particular focus on youth and young professionals, as these are demographics that are often left out of leadership or decision-making positions at traditional mosques, and consequently their needs are not always met (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2016, p. 4). Imam Zia who founded MakeSpace with his wife, cites that his inspiration to start the new institution came from his own experience in mosques where one ethnic group generally controlled everything, women were not able to access the main prayer space, and youth were left out of decision-making positions. These practices were not inclusive, and for 'Imam Zia the ideas of inclusivity are intrinsic to a mosque that truly follows the Islamic tradition' (Institute for

Social Policy and Understanding 2016, pp. 4-5). Because MakeSpace is not a traditional mosque, Zia faced difficulty finding support for his project and his initial team 'consisted of mostly high school and college students who had no previous experience running an organization but agreed with Imam Zia's vision' (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2016, p. 5). According to the report, the current organisational structure of MakeSpace is 'similar to that of many mosques' (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2016, p. 8). It doesn't state why, but likely this is due to the team's lack of organisational experience and Imam Zia's experience coming from traditional mosques. Nevertheless, the organisation is adamant that it is not a mosque. So then, from this analysis we can conclude that a third space is not determined by the function or organisation of an institution, but rather from its intent. While in many ways MakeSpace operates in a similar manner to many mosques, it intends to meet the needs of its community in ways that other mosques in the area do not, for example by allowing women to participate fully and intentionally giving leadership positions to generally underrepresented groups, such as youth and women.

In doing so, MakeSpace has created a space in which members of the community describe feeling comfortable, in ways they don't always feel in more traditional Muslim spaces. One woman who is on the MakeSpace youth committee shared,

> I don't have to worry about how good of a Muslim I am. With a lot of the mosques…I have to always be constantly watching myself, whereas at MakeSpace, I feel more welcomed and I'm able to practice Islam how I want to. No one's telling me you can't do this, this is how you pray, this how you don't pray' (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2016, p. 7).

From this explanation, we can see that MakeSpace is not only serving physical needs of the community, such as providing prayer spaces or events open to all, but also addressing the community's emotional needs. This member described feeling scrutinised at other mosques, whereas at MakeSpace she is comfortable to practice how she wants and feels welcome to do so.

The founder of MakeSpace cited his dissatisfaction with local traditional mosques as his inspiration for founding the new institution, and while it functions as and has been called a third space by others it is unclear whether Zia was familiar with the concept or with other

third spaces when he started MakeSpace. Other third spaces on the other hand have been explicit in their intent to create third spaces in name and function. One such space is Muslim Space in Austin, Texas.

Muslim Space was found in 2017 by a group of women in Austin Texas, at least one of whom was familiar with MakeSpace in DC. Muslim Space is cited as an organisation 'that fosters an open, inclusive, multicultural, and pluralistic space for self-identifying Muslims and the larger Austin community' (Bodman 2022, p. 584). In a report about Muslim Space, Bodman, a non-Muslim member of the community, wrote that the 'concept of "Third Space" was integral in the early discussion among the founders' and states that 'several leaders [of the organisation] describe it as a Third Space: not home, not a mosque, but what one might call a para-mosque organization' (Bodman 2022, p. 584). This term 'para-mosque organization' emphasises the organisation's role as one that functions alongside the mosque rather than as a replacement for it. Though it is not intended as a replacement for the mosque, studies of existing third spaces have shown that some members of third spaces attend only third spaces and are not also members of or attend events at other mosques (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2016, p. 23). Though since these spaces provide religious services, areas for prayer, and religious leaders there is argument that they could function as a replacement for traditional mosques rather than as a para-mosque.

Similar to the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding report on MakeSpace, Bodman's report on Muslim Space emphasises the organisation's commitment to inclusivity practices. Similar to MakeSpace, Muslim Space operates in many ways like a traditional mosque, with Friday *juma'a* services and events during Ramadan, such as nightly Quran readings and *tarawih* prayers (Bodman 2022, p. 587). Also similar to MakeSpace however, the organisation views itself as an institution separate to the mosque, in great part due to its inclusivity practices which emphasises female leadership and allows Muslims of all races and sects, and even non-Muslims, to join (Bodman 2022).

While the reports on MakeSpace and Muslim Space both provide examples of established institutions, a blog article by Rafia Khader reflecting on her experiences at third spaces pushes us to consider outside established organisations. Khader writes that when she was in her twenties she lived in Hyde Park, Chicago. At that time, she was on the board of the Muslim Students Association, and it was as part of that group that she had her first

experience of non-segregated worship. The students met in a tiny chapel without any barrier between men and women, and she said it was the first time she was able to see the imam as he delivered the *khutbah*. She described a shift she felt and 'something in [her] soul stirred' (Khader 2020). She later goes on to say that except for those two years in Hyde Park and until she began working at a third space, the Mohammed Webb Foundation, she 'never before had entered a Muslim space and felt that all of me was welcome' (Khader 2020). In the third space, Webb said she 'didn't have to bracket any part of my life and experiences as a Muslim woman raised in North America…[at Webb], odd enough, we were all welcome' (Khader 2020). For Khader community and the feeling of being welcomed fully is the key to third spaces. Although she works for an institutional third space, she states 'I would add that a third space is not limited to an institution. In many ways, the Muslim community I found in Hyde Park was a third space, operating sometimes, I felt, on the margins of the university campus' (Khader 2020). Though it was not a formal third space, like Mohammed Webb Foundation, MakeSpace, Muslim Space or Ta'leef Collective, it served the same purpose for Khader – it met a need not met by her local mosque, providing her with a Muslim community in which she was welcome, accepted, and able to practice Islam without restrictions as a woman.

In a presentation at the Proudly Muslim and Black conference at SOAS University of London in 2019, Habeeb Akande presented a paper on the growth of third spaces in Black British Muslim communities. In his presentation, Akande used the definition given by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. He defines third spaces as religious and social institutions that 'seek to fulfil the particular needs of a faith community which are not being met by mosques, schools or traditional religious institutions' (Akande 2019). However, unlike the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, which examined only institutional spaces, Akande also included virtual spaces in his report and discussed why such online spaces are important, particularly for young people. Now living through a pandemic where all social interactions have been periodically forbidden, we have another new understanding of the importance of online spaces across all generations.

Akande defined third spaces as religious and social institutions, which 'place a greater focus on meeting the social, cultural and spiritual needs of its participants' providing safe spaces for 'black/mixed-race Muslims to come as they are, free of religious, racial and cultural discrimination' (Akande 2019). For the Black British Muslim community there have

historically been a lack of spaces in which Black British Muslims can participate without being discriminated on the basis of religion, race, and/or culture since even within Black or Muslim spaces 'there is Islamophobia in Black communities and anti-Blackness in Muslim communities'– a topic which has already been discussed in this thesis (Akande 2019). So then the creation of third spaces which are welcoming to Black Muslims is necessary. Akande states that 'a third space does not have to be exclusive to Black Muslims. It can be created by non-Black people but the focus is Black Muslim issues' (Akande 2019). These spaces provide a safe space 'free from the Asian/Arab gaze' where Black Muslims 'are free to navigate in spaces where there are no microaggressions, performative acts of 'colour-blindness' and back-handed compliments from non-black Muslims' (Akande 2019).

Akande provided several examples of existing Black British Muslim third spaces, such as events which discussed issues from marriage/relationships to housing and interviews with converts and reverts, online web series, which 'feature personal narratives of influential Black British Muslims speaking about race, representation and their experience in the UK', blogs as spaces where Black Muslims could 'bring awareness and create solutions to combat racism, colourism and anti-Blackness in the Muslim community', and websites that inform and 'empower Muslims through history' (Akande 2019). Additionally, while he doesn't name examples specifically, he notes that there are many communities on social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook (Akande 2019). These examples of third spaces go beyond his initial definition which still defines a third space as an institution, however I do not critique these inclusions as inaccurate, but rather I suggest that we reconceptualise how we view third spaces and define it to be not just a religious and social institution. I agree with Akande that these online spaces function as third spaces for Black Muslims in Britain. They are not institutions as such, but they meet a need of the community, not met in the first or second spaces of home or mosque. They meet religious and social needs.

In the rest of this chapter, I develop an argument for what constitutes third space for Black Muslim women in Britain. I look at why Black Muslim women in Britain need third spaces and then discuss examples of existing third spaces.

**6.3 Safe and Comfortable Spaces**

We have distinct social spaces through which we move in our daily lives and each space serves a purpose. Theorists have conceptualised the division of spaces in society in different disciplines. Feminist theorists often use the concepts of private vs. public spheres, with women often relegated to the private sphere of home and family while men are associated with the public sphere. Philippe Ariès, a French historian of family and childhood, discussed how communities function through a 'division of space into areas assigned to work and areas assigned to living' (Ariès 1977, p. 229). These two spheres are similar to the division of space as conceptualised within feminist theory, however Ariès goes on to discuss a third division of space. He describes how cities, which have developed as centres with public meeting places open to all classes of society, provide 'a lively meeting place outside [of] families and jobs' (Ariès 1977, p. 231). This additional space serves a function of society that can't be met by the home and family – socialisation and the space to express ones' individuality (Ariès 1977). So rather than conceptualising social space as merely private, including the home, and public, including work, Ariès work considers how a third space also serves a social function. Ray Oldenburg, an American urban sociologist, also argues for the need for third places in communities. In his book, *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg argues that third places are necessary for civil society to ensure that citizens can feel a sense of place outside the home and work. He states that these spaces 'represent fundamental institutions of mediation between the individual and the larger society' and are 'an essential element of the good life' (Oldenburg 1999). He developed a detailed theory of third places, compiling a list of eight criteria a place must meet to be considered a third place, among them being a place that is easily accessible, open to all, have regulars, and be a space where the main focus of activity is conversation (Oldenburg 1999). He goes on to provide examples of third places, such as local cafés and coffeeshops.

In Oldenburg's theory, third places are social spaces that serve a function of community not met by home or work. Third spaces in Muslim communities as discussed earlier in this chapter serve similar, though more specific purposes. As social spaces outside the home and traditional mosque, they serve a function of community not met through the home or traditional religious spaces, like the mosque or school. In an article on Muslim Third Spaces in the US, Karoluk reflects on the term third space and how the term came to be used to

describe these Muslim institutions such as Ta'leef Collective. He reflects that in 'everyday usage third spaces can be seen as:

> One space in the domestic sphere (the family and the home); a second space is the sphere of civic engagement (including school, work and other forms of public participation); and a "Third Space" where individual, sometimes professional, and sometimes transgressive acts are played out: where people let their "real" selves show. (Karoluk 2014)

This description of third space as a space in which people can let their "real" selves show echoes Ariès theory which called for a space outside of home and work where one can express their individuality. These theories reflect a social characteristic in which we not only have different spaces through which we move, but how different parts of our selves show in these different spaces. We are not just comfortable or uncomfortable in some spaces and not in others, but we show and don't show different parts of ourselves within these spaces depending in part on our comfort level, as well as our role within those spaces, amongst other considerations. How we behave and what parts of ourselves we embrace and let show at home, at work/school/the mosque, and in social situations differs. Each of these spaces serves its own function, but it is also necessary for us, as Oldenburg puts 'to live the good life', to have access to all three different spaces.

Oldenburg posits as one of the necessary characteristics of a third place that it is a space that is 'home-like in terms of Seamon's (1979) five defining traits: rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth' (Oldenburg 1999). These feelings of being at ease, or being comfortable, and possession, like it is *their* space are essential for third spaces. In conversations with participants, a common theme emerged in which every participant described how their identity as Black Muslim women in Britain meant that they had limited spaces in which they felt safe and comfortable and could be their full, real selves. Iyawa described the negative impact on her mental health she experienced when she ignored certain aspects of her identity in order to fit into certain spaces.

> Certain stages of my life I feel like I have run away from my identity whether that's me being Black or being a female or being Muslim, but all these parts are integral to me. I can't escape who I am…it had got to the point where it did in a way crush me

and made me feel bad about myself, made me question my own identity and made me question the spaces I should actually be in.

Sagal made a similar statement about how she perceived an expectation within certain spaces to drop part of her identity: 'They want us to separate it. They want you to be Black here, Muslim here, and woman here. You go to these places and they're like "we're just focussing on this at the minute" Like no, they intersect.' Sagal spoke about the expectation to isolate intersections of her identity as an external expectation, whereas Iyawa spoke about running away from parts of her identity implying this was a choice she made, in order to fit in. In both instances, it speaks to a lack within the spaces they felt accepted as their complete selves as Black Muslim women. Iyawa describes how this process crushed her, made her feel badly about herself and made her question whether she should even be in those spaces.

Faduma also spoke of her identity as a Black Muslim woman in spaces in Britain, saying 'dealing with this identity is emotionally taxing in this kind of environment that I'm in. This is one thing that me and my friends talk about a lot. You just literally feel invisible just in spaces'. We moved on in the conversation to speak specifically about academic spaces, however the comment about invisibility was about more than just academic spaces. Faduma was speaking broadly about British culture. The effects of not having space in which to be fully themselves as Black Muslim women causes an emotional toll. Iyawa felt crushed. Faduma on the other hand describes feeling angry, exhausted, and withdrawn:

> I think there's a journey everyone goes through that comes from a marginalised group. In the beginning I was very angry, and I started to become withdrawn. I just stopped talking about politics, my identity.

Faduma eventually describes choosing to take up space anyway and recognising that it was others who made her feel that way, but how this was also isolating:

> It was just like, I exist. Get over it. Which is great I have adopted that in a lot of spaces in my life, but I think I realised that that just isolates me even more. I've lived in the West my whole life, it's all I've ever known. And taking up space because I feel like this is all I've even know even though I feel different. Why do I feel different? I feel different because of the way people are making me feel, not because it's necessarily these spaces.

While multiple participants expressed sentiments similar to Faduma's about taking up space even though she feels different, they also expressed their desire for 'safe' spaces where they weren't different. When she was talking about the Black Muslim society she and her friends created, Folasade asserted that, 'Everyone should be able to have a safe space. Have multiple safe spaces'. She went on to say, 'I want people to have that safe space. Let them know that if they need a place to breathe that they can have a space to breathe'. This necessity for space to breathe implies a suffocation in spaces that aren't safe or don't make room for you.

Sagal also talked about the need for safe spaces for Black Muslim women.

> It's so needed. That's why we talk about these safe spaces that it's just Black Muslims because the reason is we're going through a lot, but then to have to explain it to another person is really difficult. We need a space where we don't have to, you know, everybody understands each other. And we don't have to constantly fight for our rights. Especially, especially with the women as well, because obviously we still face sexism and all these other issues that even when we talk about with Black Muslim men they can't understand it. So especially with women and girls…we have to be a support system for each other.

Sagal talked about spaces that were just Black Muslims because she seeks a space where she wouldn't need to explain the intersections of her identity, where those intersections were already understood and taken into consideration without someone fighting for the intersections to be considered. While she initially said Black Muslims, she later clarified that for women it's even more necessary. Her repetition of the word especially could have just been a natural part of the conversation, but the tone of voice in which she spoke it implied that it was an intentional repetition used to emphasise that these spaces are particularly important for Black Muslim women and that right now those spaces, 'a support system', exist with each other.

The need for safe and comfortable spaces, spaces where Black Muslim women didn't have to explain or defend their intersectional identities, was clear and Sagal described creating take space with other Black Muslim (women). Others echoed this description of safety

which is found amongst others with the same identities. In an episode of *The M Word*, the hosts mused,

> 'Literally nowhere in society, there's nowhere that is safe space for Black women'
>
> 'Unless it's with Black women'

They went on to discuss how it is even more nuanced than that. It isn't always as simple as just being with other Black women, particularly while traveling: 'Even in countries where the majority are dark skinned people. Even there you face self-hate. Like how are you hating on me and we're the same fucking colour?' As their discussion of colourism reflects, even being in a space with others who share multiple intersections of identity is not a guarantee that the space will feel safe and comfortable; though the conversations imply that these spaces with others who share identities tend to be more comfortable than spaces in which the somatic norm is quite different.

Participants discussed feeling more comfortable and at ease among other Black Muslim women in general. Feeling comfortable and safe is one aspect of third spaces, however third spaces also fulfil community needs outside the first and second spaces. In this discussion, I am blending the theories of religious and non-religious theorisations of third spaces and consider the first space to be home and the family, and second space to be spaces of civic and/or religious engagement, such as the traditional mosque, work, and school. Third spaces are social spaces, which fulfil the needs of a community – in this case Black Muslim women in Britain – that are not met through the first or second spaces.

Conversations with participants revealed a theme in which as Black Muslim women they were seeking safe spaces that fulfilled social and sometimes religious needs that weren't met through their families, work, school, or the mosque. It is difficult to find these spaces, which fully accept Black Muslim women and all intersections of their identity. So, many Black Muslim women described creating these spaces themselves. The following section describes some of the spaces participants have created along with a discussion of why I consider these spaces to be specifically 'third spaces'.

**6.4 Third Spaces for Black Muslim Women**

**6.4.1 Physical Spaces**

Raeni is a musician and talked about a space she and her group were involved in creating:

> So one of the things that [we were] involved in was setting up this space called
> [redacted] which was a space where performers could come, but there would always
> be, it was a Muslim led space, it meant that, like we never said oh it was segregated or
> what have you but we would just put a split, when we laid out chairs, we'd put a split
> right and you would find that some people would rather sit. The men who felt
> uncomfortable would sit on one side, women who felt uncomfortable would sit on the
> other side and you'd see like people sitting in the middle so that was a safe space.
> There was a bar outside but there wasn't any alcohol sort of allowed in the room, but
> we had this break where people could go out and buy drinks. We would sell food we
> would give part of the donations, what we made on the door to the people so they
> made their money without us having to buy alcohol from them.

Raeni emphasised that this was a Muslim led space, and how they designed the space to
accommodate to the cultural norms of different Muslim backgrounds. She described the
layout of the space, which was not segregated in the way that many Muslim spaces, such as
mosques, are with separate male and female sections, however it accommodated for both
those who preferred segregated seating as well as those who were comfortable to sit in
mixed-gender seating. It was, as the participant described, a safe space for all. Additionally,
the performance space did not allow for alcohol. Alcohol is *haram* in Muslim culture,
though some Muslims still choose to drink. The majority of music venues and other public
performance venues are spaces in which the consumption of alcohol is regarded as standard.
Similar to the seating arrangement where Muslims whose culture dictates gender separation
could sit apart, while Muslims who were comfortable in mixed seating could sit together,
having the bar outside while not allowing the alcohol in the actual performance room
accommodated for attendees who choose to drink and attendees who choose to abstain from
alcohol. As a rented space, they also ensured that the owners of the property still could make
money by offsetting the loss in alcohol sales with food sales and part of the performance
donations.

Raeni designed the space to be a safe space in which she could perform as a Black Muslim
female artist. Since music is considered *haram* in many Muslim cultures, finding safe spaces

to perform can be challenging. Providing spaces where Muslims, including Muslim women could perform music was also one of the features of at least one Third Space in the US.

> We had a Family Choir, of which I was briefly a member. Who's ever heard of a Muslim Choir? I even performed solo in front of a mixed-gender audience, something that simply would not happen in your average mosque. The topic of music in Islam is controversial; women *singing* in front of men even more so. All these programs were different and new to me. But as the Webbies saw it, why did we have to bifurcate our Islam from our Americanness? At Webb, I didn't have to bracket any part of my life and experiences as a Muslim woman raised in North America who just so happens to also love singing. (Khader 2020)

Khader describes how music itself is controversial, but that gender also made finding space in which she could sing even more difficult. However, at Mohammd Webb foundation, a third space where she was a member, they didn't feel the need to 'bifurcate Islam from Americanness' (Khader 2020). Many religious traditions, such as the consideration of music as *haram* are often cultural and as American Muslims, members such as Khader occupy a cultural third space which combines American culture with Islamic culture. Spaces such as Webb allowed her to embrace her hobbies like singing within a Muslim space.

Raeni discussed how being a Muslim woman made it challenging at times to find performance spaces, and even more so as a Black Muslim woman.

> Yeah, I remember once we were going to perform somewhere, it was a hip hop show, someone wanted us to perform in this particular café and they were like, 'Yeah yeah, come perform we've booked the night.' And the owner of the actual venue was Muslim – Moroccan – and he was like 'Yeah yeah yeah yeah'. When he found out that we were Muslim, he was like, 'Yeah no they can't perform.' Just cause the idea of Muslim women's voices not being heard and again what do you mean Muslim women are performing hip hop and all of these various different things related to what Muslims can and can't do and being associated with particular forms of music. Cause you can do belly dancing in Saudi as much as Saudi puts itself up as "We're Islam" which they're not by the way, like you know you've got belly dancers and in every sort of tradition there's some form of dancing or entertainment having to do with women, but when it comes to Black women that's not acceptable.

The owner of the venue was Muslim and Raeni described how he was fine with them performing, until he found out that they were Muslim. She attributes this to not only their gender, but also race and the type of music they were performing, which she describes as outside the realm of 'acceptable' Muslim female performance.

By creating their own space, Rebel Music, the participant was able to perform in a space that accepted her as a Black Muslim woman. She was allowed to perform and the space itself was designed to accommodate for the needs of its performers and audience. Public performance, such as music and spoken word poetry, are generally performed outside of the home and workplace/religious institutions. Performance venues are part of the social third space, however existing venues do not always accommodate for Black Muslim female performers. This lack of existing venues led the participant and others to create their own space. A safe Muslim-led space to perform and enjoy performances.

Another space two of the participants were involved in creating was a Black Muslim Society at their university. Faduma explained that while there is an Islamic society at her university, she's 'also a minority there'. She elaborated, 'There's so many layers of being isolated in a space like that, so that's quite hard sometimes'. She explained how a small group of Black Muslims from the Islamic society came together and decided to create their own Black Muslim society.

> It's interesting that we're having this discussion today because last week this small group of Black Muslims in [redacted University] met and we were actually discussing because we have an Islamic society and for many years they found it difficult to diversify the society or try to make it accessible to black Muslims as well. And last week we had a meeting because, a few girls were tired of them not making a space for us, so why don't we just have a Black Muslim society? Because there's so many Black Muslims on campus. A lot of them are not visible and they just, they've never even heard of ISOC, which is the Islamic society, because it's just not accessible. They've had years to try to make ISOC accessible to Black Muslims. Muslims have been occupying these academic spaces for a very, very long time, so if they wanted to set that premise of making it accessible to Black Muslims, they would've done it a long time ago. I think there's a mixture of their not knowing how to and maybe just not caring so I think we had a really good discussion and they felt

very strongly about wanting their own space and I'm like, yeah, totally supportive of it now having heard their experiences and just having them come together. I thought, wow I actually enjoyed it and thought, yeah, I can get used to this.

Faduma's comments about Islamic society not being inclusive was mirrored in comments made by one of the hosts of *The Black Muslim Girl* podcast. The host was talking about ISOC (Islamic Society) and said,

The thing is I've talked to a lot of black Muslim sisters at different universities, and it's the same thing across the country. Like it's just not as inclusive, and it's a shame because I would have loved to have that space as a Muslim woman while I was at Uni. I found my space as a Black woman [in Black SOC], and I'm so happy and I'm so grateful for that. But as a Muslim woman, it was lacking.

Another participant that was involved in setting up the Black Muslim society, Folasade, described the night they decided to set it up in my conversation with her. She elaborated on some of the experiences that other members shared which prompted them to want their own space.

And the first meetup we had, literally everyone's conversation was the same. It was just,

'Oh, yeah, I just don't feel comfortable in spaces because I feel like somebody is looking at me a certain way or somebody is asking a certain question that clearly is coming from a condescending place'

And there was a guy who was telling us a story [about] a guy who would always call him 'Bilal'. Bilal is one of the *Sahabah*s from the time of the prophet. And it was like he'd always tell him,

'My name is not Bilal. My name is ---'.

And he'd be like,

'Yeah, Bilal, you're Black, you're Bilal.'

And it's just like, why do we have to feel like, we can't be part of society because of things that we can't change, because of things that we genuinely love. And that's why people don't accept their Blackness. That's why people try to run away from their Blackness or from their religion or from their sex because it's a huge mental struggle.

### 6.4.2 Online Spaces

One of hosts of *Being a Muslim Black Girl* spoke about how social media creates opportunities to meet and relate to people. She described how on social media, she could find other people she related too, even if they didn't necessarily share the same intersections of identity with her. 'I found people who are Muslim and not Somali. [I found] other races. They also went through similar things, or they relate to me. And I'm like, where have you guys been?'

Raeni also spoke about the potential to create community through social media.

> I would say Instagram is my personal space and is my – I'm not always that active on it. I could be more active. – but I would say Instagram is definitely a space I find really exciting because I'm able to, I see other Black Muslims. There is definitely a community. I think it's so interesting because in the same way that you have "Black Twitter", you have "Black Instagram". The same way that you have "Muslim Twitter" "Muslim Instagram", there's "Black Muslim Twitter" "Black Muslim Instagram" and you can see these places forming and it's nice…and not everyone is supportive of everyone, but everyone is supportive of someone. And so for me, witnessing that, that's just beautiful.

As is evidenced by the content of podcasts in this thesis, podcasts are one of the digital spaces through which Black Muslim women are able to share their experiences. The founder of *The Black Muslim Girl* podcast, Khadeejah, explained in an interview why she started the platform:

> It stemmed from feeling like an outcast within both spaces... Growing up, representation of black Muslim women wasn't a thing at all. TBMG is for the little black Muslim girls all around the world and it's for the Black Muslim women that need a space to call home (Hassan 2021)

On an episode of her podcast, Khadeejah elaborated more on why she started the podcast:

> For me it was just I know I'm not the only Khadeejah in the UK. I know I'm not the only Black Muslim girl in the UK. I know I'm not the only one who's been asked 'Oh are you Muslim?' despite the fact I have a hijab on. I know I'm not the only one who's been asked 'Oh when did you convert to Islam?' All of these bizarre questions.

Because I know I'm not the only one, there are safe space for everyone who looks like me and feels what I feel and even more.

One of the participants, Magan, also has her own podcast, and in my interview with her, she commented:

I feel like there's a lot more to come from Black Muslim women or Black Muslim British women, because I feel that just now we're tapping into our creative sides. We're coming out. We have the facilities or the finance behind this kind of producing the things that we want to do. To kind of tell our stories. So, like even with me, the reason why I did the podcast was to kind of be like, well, if not me, then who else? So, and I feel like this is a wave that's happening with a lot of people.

While podcasts are exclusively online, digital spaces, some have expanded into platforms that host in-person events as well. In an interview streamed live via Instagram, the founder of *The Black Muslim Girl* podcast spoke with the Black Muslim Women's Healing (BMWH) Collective about expanding her podcast into a larger platform:

[It was] 2018 [when] I realised that you know this could actually be something bigger. There isn't [sic.] really any spaces for Black Muslim women like myself and young Black Muslim women like me…within 23 days we planned the first event…which was offload offline and it was a nice safe space for Black Muslim women to come and discuss how their year has been, the promises they want to make to themselves for the next year, connecting with Allah, we touched on mental health

One of the guests on *The Black Muslim Girl* podcasts spoke about finding a safe space in TBMG, and alluded to one of the features of the safe space being the she was with people who look like her:

But after having been in the UK now for 15 years, I still look around and feel like, I'm the odd one out, wherever I'm in, like, apart from you know, where we've found these safe spaces like TBMG, and other areas where I've been able to connect with people who look like me, in the working life still, I can't really identify with people most of the time.

Both Khadeejah and Magan spoke about the difficulties they have faced in creating safe spaces and communities for Black Muslim women. Khadeejah ruminated on the reactions from non-Black Muslim communities:

> So then basically, with that in mind, what do you say when Black Muslims create spaces for themselves, because it seems as though the moment we create a safe space for ourselves, after considering everything we go through, that's when other communities have a problem. So it's like you're getting slapped, you're getting problems from the non-Muslim community already, which is pretty obvious and what you see in the media. And then now you're in the Muslim community where you know, you're Muslim first, but these communities are still discriminating against against because they see your race. And these are the same people that will say, "everyone, one Ummah, blah, blah, blah." They're the same people that will spcifically highlight that you're Black and therefore you don't belong in the community. So how do you now deal with people that say, "Oh, why have you got like a Blackout Eid? Why have you got Blackout this and that?"

Magan talked about her podcast's Instagram page. She explained why it was difficult to get people to interact with interactive features on the page, such as questions in stories. She alluded to the fear of being judged by other Muslims. In her comments, she also refers to her podcast as a third space and the goal and aim for it to be a safe and welcoming space for Black Muslim women.

> And it's just kind of indicative of like, where the Muslims are at the moment, because like, even with it, without saying, 'Don't worry, it's gonna be anonymous', and all the rest of it. You still don't want other Muslims to know what you think and how you think because you feel like you're going to be ostracised. So we're just out here. Like, this is the safe space guys, this is the safe space guys. Like we don't give a fuck about, you know, like any of this stuff that was holding. And still people are not saying anything. So it's like that third space is very revolutionary. Because even with other like-minded people, it's like, you almost have to suss something out completely. until you feel safe, because I don't know, maybe experience in life has taught you that, you know, not everyone has your best interests at heart. Or that people don't know how to keep a secret, you know? So yeah, that's the aim. And that's the goal. And really, it's not about me, it's about us. It's about all of us. It's about having the chance to be candid and feel like you're welcomed. A lot of people talking about, like, 'I don't really feel

welcomed in this space', you know, but then when you're given the space, you don't even know what to do. Because you haven't experienced a space like that.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the lack of spaces in Britain in which Black Muslim women are the somatic norm. I described how Black Muslim women are creating new spaces where they can experience safety and comfort and examined some of the physical and online spaces created by the participants and podcasters. I assert that the spaces described meet the criteria of third spaces.

I began the chapter with an overview of Muslim third spaces in both the United States and United Kingdom. Muslim third spaces are defined as 'institution that seeks to fulfil the particular needs of a faith community which are not being met by mosques, schools or traditional religious institutions' (Akande 2019). I then moved on to examine particular needs that participants in this project expressed.

In our conversations, several participants expressed their desire for a space in which they could belong and be fully accepted as Black Muslim women. They described how the intersectionality of their identity made fitting into certain spaces both easy and difficult. While they were accepted in many different communities – for example the Black community or the Muslim community – participants commented on how they didn't necessarily feel comfortable or accepted fully within those spaces. One participant explained how she felt she was being asked to separate the different aspects of her identity and focus on one part (i.e. race or religion) rather than the whole when in certain spaces.

Participants commented on the lack of existing spaces in Britain that met their needs. Some then described how the lack of such spaces prompted them to create spaces themselves. In the final subsection of the chapter, I discussed the safe spaces participants created, which included a performing arts space and a university society. In addition to physical spaces, some of the participants described finding and creating safe spaces online. This sentiment of finding safe space online was also reiterated by several of the podcasters.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

I began this research project with an aim to further my own knowledge about the lived experience of Black Muslim women in Britain and understanding of their multiple marginalisation. When I began my research there was very little academic scholarship that specifically addressed Black British Muslim women's experiences. So, in addition to reading the wider literature around Black/British/Muslim/Women, I relied on conversations with Raeni, as well as popular and social media to develop my project. Through this process, I decided on a theoretical lens of space and developed the following research questions:

- How, if at all, do Black Muslim women experience spaces in Britain as racialised, gendered, and/or religiously-coded?
- How, if at all, is the marginalisation of Black Muslim women in Britain related to the coded dynamics of space?

To answer these questions, I used a qualitative research approach and conducted open interviews with six Black Muslim women located in Bristol and London. When my data collection was disrupted by Covid-19, I decided to supplement the data I had gathered from my conversations with the six participants with content from publicly available podcasts produced by and about Black Muslim women. I presented the findings of my research across three analysis chapters.

In the first analysis chapter, Chapter Four, I examined the experiences shared by participants and podcasters in spaces coded with somatic norms of hegemonic Britishness. For the purposes of this thesis, I defined the norms of hegemonic Britishness as whiteness, masculinity, the middle-class, and Christianity/Atheism. I then examined Black Muslim women's experiences in spaces coded with these racial, gendered, classed, and/or religious norms, including educational spaces, the workplace, and everyday social and leisure spaces. I found that the experiences that participants and podcasters shared which occurred within these spaces shared common themes. Black Muslim women described feeling like outsiders, not experiencing a sense of belonging, encountering bias and negative stereotyping, and some encountering physical and microaggressions. In my analysis, I found that the constraints and marginalisation the participants and podcasters experienced could be explained using Puwar's theory of 'space invaders'.

In the second analysis chapter, Chapter Five, I turned to look at experiences that occurred within spaces in Britain that had subaltern somatic norms. I specifically focussed on experiences that occurred within Islamic spaces in Britain, as this represented a space wherein the somatic norm was a marginalised social category shared by the participants. I found that Islamic spaces in Britain were coded with several somatic norms, including racial, ethnic and gendered norms. In Britain, the term Muslim has become colloquially synonymous with South Asian. In addition to dominating representations of British Muslims, South Asian practices, for example gender segregation, are also commonplace throughout many Islamic spaces. I found common themes throughout the experiences the participants and podcasters shared that occurred in Islamic spaces, including exclusion, lack of and misrepresentation, bias and negative stereotyping, and a feeling that they didn't belong. Once again, these constraints and the marginalisation of Black Muslim women in these spaces could be explained using Puwar's theory of 'space invaders'. Although, Black Muslim women matched the religious somatic norm in these Islamic spaces, they did not match the racial, ethnic and/or gendered norms of the spaces.

In the final analysis chapter, Chapter Six, I reviewed participants' comments regarding their desire for safe and comfortable spaces for Black Muslim women in Britain and the relative lack of existing such spaces. Their comments indicated that there are relatively few places where Black Muslim women are not 'space invaders'. In our conversations, several participants described creating safe and comfortable space when the space they needed didn't exist – for example, creating a Black Muslim society at university when their needs were not being met by ISOC, and creating a performing arts space where Black Muslim women could perform without constraints. I discussed these spaces, as well as highlighting online spaces, including the podcasts. I found that the spaces described fit the description for 'third spaces', as they met the social, cultural and spiritual needs that were not currently being met by primary and secondary spaces, such as home or the mosque.

Through these analysis chapters, I explored the experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain through three distinct spaces. Analysing their experiences through a framework that considers the somatic norms within different spaces, the multiaxiality of power, and intersectionality, allowed us to understand the multiple marginalisation of Black Muslim women in a new light. British spaces are coded with numerous somatic norms, both

hegemonic and subaltern. Due to their intersectionality, Black Muslim women are often positioned as 'space invaders' to these somatic norms. They are 'other' to the racial, gendered, ethnic, and religious norms of Great Britain. Even within the British Muslim community, they are 'other' to the racial, ethnic and gendered norms; and within the Black British community they are 'other' to the religious norms. Their multiple marginalisation is not limited to multiple marginalised categories within one axis of space (i.e. hegemonic spaces), but also across multiple axes of space (i.e. subaltern spaces, such as British Muslim, or Black British spaces). Even with the Black Muslim community, there are complexities and power dynamics between ethnicities, particularly with regard to racial and religious identification.

While this thesis focussed primarily on intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion, while briefly touching on class, there is scope to explore beyond these categorisations. The participants and podcasters for this project were all in their 20s and 30s and located in cities. Additionally, the only participants who disclosed their sexuality were heterosexual. Further studies might include participants with a wider age gap, address how marginalisation in spaces varies by location in rural vs. urban areas, or consider the complex layering of additionally marginalised communities such as the LGBTQ community. There is also scope to investigate in depth the 'third spaces' Black Muslim women are creating, as I only touched on this briefly within this thesis.

As I discussed in the opening chapters of this thesis, I was motivated to conduct this research after discovering how little scholarship existed on the experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain. I was interested in learning more as part of my own search for knowledge, but I was also angry that Black Muslim women's voices had been undervalued and excluded for so long. This thesis marks my small contribution to this still significant gap in scholarship on the lived experiences of Black Muslim women. In particular, the thesis contributes to knowledge about how Black Muslim women are multiply marginalised within and across different types of spaces.

**Appendix 2: Information Sheet**

**Negotiating Spaces: An Anti-Racist and Feminist Exploration of the Experiences of Black Muslim Women in the UK**

<u>Information for Participants</u>

My name is Sarah Anne Barrow and I am a PhD researcher at the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York. I'm exploring how spaces are experienced differently by different people. These can be large spaces or places, such as England, or small spaces, such as a specific room in your home, and anywhere in between. I want to explore these ideas specifically from the perspective of Black Muslim women living in Britain, and how they experience spaces that are racialized, gendered, and/or religiously coded, and how existing in these spaces can challenge not just whose bodies are allowed, but also whose bodies belong in different spaces.

A little bit more about me: I am a 29 year-old, American and I have a BA and MA in Women's Studies. I am white and a Christian. I'm sharing this now because I think that my positionality as a white person, a non-Muslim, and a non-Brit uniquely influence how and why I am conducting this research. I also recognise that it may influence your decision to participate in my project, so, I'd like to share with you why I am choosing to focus specifically on the experiences of Black Muslim women in Britain. I completed my MA in 2018 at the University of York and my dissertation was entitled: "More Than Mere Fabric: How a Scarf Becomes a Veil" and explored the experiences of 15 Muslim women living in the UK and how they ascribe meaning to their veils and the process of veiling. During one of the interviews for this project, one of my close friend's shared with me some of the unique experiences she has living as a Black Muslim woman in Britain. I found that while a lot of research focussed on the veil, there was only some that focussed on other aspects of Muslim identity in Britain, and very little about what it is like to be Black, Muslim, and a woman living in Britain. So, I decided to fill that gap. I am continuously questioning what it means to be a white person conducting this research in the racist and sexist institution of higher

education in Britain and am happy to share my ever developing thoughts on this matter with any potential participants. At this point in time, I firmly believe that as someone who benefits from white privilege that it is my obligation to be anti-racist and so I am using the place that I have as a PhD student to do this and to challenge who academic research is about and for.

## What is this research about?

This research aims to explore how individuals experience spaces in which they are not the somatic norm, specifically exploring the experiences of Black Muslim women living in Britain. It further aims to explore how occupying space can challenge who is allowed and welcome in that space.

The key research questions are:

- How do Black, Muslim women in the United Kingdom experience racialised, gendered, and religious spaces?

- How does Blackness, anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia affect the ways Black, Muslim women experience spaces from which they previously would have been excluded based on their race, religion, or gender?

## What is involved for participants?

I am asking participants to participate in semi- structured interviews to discuss how you experience different spaces. These can be anywhere, including the home, school, workplace, mosque, as well as spaces such as shopping malls, grocery stores, and public parks. We will discuss who is allowed and/versus who is welcome in these spaces. We will also discuss how the contemporary climate of racism and Islamophobia in the UK affects access to and comfort in specific spaces.

I can meet participants in any location of your choice, whether this is a coffee shop, library, your home, workplace, or mosque.

## What will happen to the information I provide?

As a PhD researcher, I abide by the University policies of good and ethical research practice. This project has been approved by the University's ethics committee.

Interviews will be recorded, so that I have an accurate record of what you say. These recordings will not be retained beyond the project and will be deleted from portable devices at the earliest opportunity. During the duration of the project, recordings will be stored in secure, password-protected University servers and storage devices (i.e. external hard drives) to which only I have access. These recordings will be kept separately from any documents that can identify you. I will transcribe each recording personally. The complete transcripts will not be published at any time.

All data will be kept anonymous and all identifying factors will be excluded from published data.

## Are there any risks to taking part?

There are no anticipated risks to participating in this project. Due to the topic, sensitive issues are likely to arise during the course of the interview, for instance racism, sexism, or Islamophobia. What we discuss will be entirely up to you, the participant. I am happy to stop the interview at any time. You are also welcome to contact me up to six months after the interview to ask me to exclude anything you have said from the final thesis.

## Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions or would like to know more about this research project, feel free to contact me:

- Sarah Anne Barrow

Sab612@york.ac.uk

Additionally, my supervisors are:

- Dr. Evangeline Tsao Evangeline.tsao@york.ac.uk
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The head of my department, the Centre for Women's Studies, is:

- Dr. Victoria Robinson vicki.robinson@york.ac.uk.

The chair of the Economics, Law, Management, Politics, and Sociology Ethics committee is:

- Tony Royle Tony.royle@york.ac.uk

**Appendix 3: Consent Form**

**Negotiating Spaces: An Anti-Racist and Feminist Exploration of the Experiences of Black Muslim Women in the UK**

**Researcher: Sarah Anne Barrow**

This form is for you to state whether or not you agree to take part in this study. Please read and answer each question. If there is any part of the form that you do not understand or if you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher. Contact information for the researcher, her supervisors, and the head of the department can be found on the information sheet provided.

**Please tick yes or no for each statement**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I have read and understood the information sheet provided. | Yes | No |
| I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study. | Yes | No |
| I understand that all information that I provide will be held in confidence by the researcher. | Yes | No |
| I understand that all recordings, transcripts, and notes will be stored anonymously. | Yes | No |
| I understand that my consent form will be kept separate from all recordings, transcripts, and notes. | Yes | No |
| I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any point before the cut-off date provided by the researcher in the information sheet. | Yes | No |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I understand that if I choose to withdraw any answers I provide (from now until six months after this date), I can exercise my right to have that information excluded from the project. | Yes | No |
| I understand that I will not be paid for my contribution to this project. | Yes | No |
| Do you agree to take part in this study and for your interview to be audio recorded?* | Yes | No |
| *If you do not agree for the interview to be recorded, unfortunately you will not be able to participate in this research project | | |

All data is held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Full name: _____     Researcher: Sarah Anne Barrow

Signature: _____     Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____          Date: _____

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