In Extremis:

Exploring gender, faith, and identity in the experiences of young South Asian British Muslim women who have joined or considered joining violent or non-violent extremist Islamist organisations

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of gender, faith, and identity in the experiences of second- and third-generation South Asian British Muslim women who have joined or considered joining a violent or non-violent Islamist extremist organisation. It explores how growing up as a South Asian British Muslim woman in the UK has shaped the individual experiences of those who have joined or considered joining the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). Embedded in a feminist research framework, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted between 2017-2018 to centre the voices of the women in the academic research that focuses on their lives. Conceptually I draw on a Bourdieusan framework alongside a rich history of theoretical research on women who participate in conservative religious movements and political violence to examine the ways in which their agency and experiences are embedded in the different social fields and normative frameworks which they navigate between. Focusing on the multiple choices they make, I explore the ways their embodied capacity to critically engage is shaped by the different social contexts and norms they inhabit, experience, resist, subvert, and perform daily. Consequently, I advocate for the introduction of 'relationality' to the study of 'radicalisation' to understand the mutually constituted relationship that unites agents and structures to tackle the overwhelming nomothetic nature of 'radicalisation' research. The accounts of the women who participated in this research raise some very worrying questions about the way Muslim minorities are treated in the UK. With this in mind, the title of this thesis: "In Extremis" is intended as a subversive reference to what the word "extreme" conjures in social consciousness. By definition, it refers to being in an extremely difficult situation and is crafted to draw attention to the difficult situations and challenges faced by all women in this thesis.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

Where no established convention exists for rendering proper terms in English, this thesis follows the standards set by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) for transliteration of Arabic, Urdu, or Bengali words. A bar above a letter (-) is used to indicate a long vowel. The standard convention of a single opening quotation mark is used to denote the ‘ayn (‘). A single closing quotation mark is used to denote the hamza (’). Ta marbuta is transliterated as “a” or “eh”. Urdu or Bengali words are marked with an asterisk (*) to differentiate them from Arabic words.

There are exceptions to this. Most importantly, for ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir’ (حزب التحرير), I use the transliteration used by the group to refer to their own name in English. Under IJMES, the transliteration would be ‘Hizb al-Tahrir’.

I have intentionally represented my participants’ voices as accurately as possible. Throughout this thesis the reader will read verbatim quotations inflected with Arabic, Urdu, or Bengali, and Modern London English (MLE). Where appropriate, I have marked the text with “[sic]” as per academic standard, unless it disrupts the text and their testimony.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Maryam joined Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT),[1] a historically non-violent extremist Islamist organisation when she was only fifteen.[2] "For me, the Hizb is the only political option for Muslims. I believe in the *Khilafah*, and I believe that we have a duty to ensure that the *Khilafah* is restored".[3] Now aged thirty, Maryam is still a member and believes HT is not only "the only political option" for Muslims, but that being a member of the organisation is a liberating, 'feminist' choice that 'empowers' her in everyday life as a British Muslim woman. Nadia was sixteen years of age when she sold her iPad and a phone, she stole from her father to fund her journey to Syria to join the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[4] Summarising her reasons for joining ISIS in a single phrase, a question posed to all women interviewed as part of this research, Nadia; now nineteen stated that she was looking for "excitement, meaning, and a future".

Overwhelmingly, research that focuses on women affiliated with violent and non-violent extremist Islamist organisations and movements, often assumes them to be "pawns in a grand patriarchal plan".[5] It is commonly grounded in the question: "why would such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their own interests and agendas, especially at a historical moment(s) when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?" (Mahmood, 2005: 2). It assumes that there is something intrinsic or innate to all women that predisposes them to reject the ideology, values, and practices that Islamist organisations like HT and ISIS embody (ibid: 2).

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[1] All participants have been assigned pseudonyms in the interest of data protection and participant anonymity.

[2] I use 'Islamist' to describe groups that follow extremist strands of Islamic fundamentalism and seek to change the political status quo through violence.

[3] Operating in over forty-five countries worldwide, HT is widely banned in the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia (Hanif, 2012: 202). However, Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain (HTB) operates legally in the UK and many other countries in the West. A background to the organisation is detailed in Chapter Four.

[4] There is some debate over how to refer to the group, ISIS/ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant), IS (the Islamic State), or Daesh in academic work (see Bennett, 2015). This thesis uses "ISIS" which is consistent with how the participants involved in the research refer to the group they joined.

[5] I refer to women who have joined or considered joining ISIS as 'women affiliated with ISIS' or 'ISIS affiliated women', and accordingly, the women who have joined or considered joining HT as 'women affiliated with HT' or 'HT affiliated women'. This is in line with the recent literature focusing on women's roles in ISIS which argues the term considers the nuances of women's involvement in the organisation (see for example Vale, 2019; Davis, 2020). In the context of this thesis, it is also the closest way of succinctly describing the experiences of women at the centre of the research without flattening their differences.

The ‘hypervisibility’ of Western women affiliated with ISIS in both the group’s propaganda and the political and media discourse surrounding the group has led to similar questions, resulting in neo-colonialist narratives of their involvement, backgrounds, and identities as Muslim women.[6] Referring to a subject as ‘hypervisible’ means that they are an object of “irregular gaze or fascination” (Sjoberg, 2017: 298). “In some ways, hypervisibility is the opposite of invisibility—hypervisible subjects receive disproportionate high attention while invisible subjects receive disproportionately low attention. In other ways, hypervisibility has some of the same effect as invisibility—distorting the subject” (ibid: 298).

In the case of British women affiliated with ISIS, the media’s construction of their involvement with ISIS relies heavily on gendered and neo-Orientalist tropes that infantilise and homogenise their desires and experiences, portraying them as apolitical and without agency (Martini, 2018: 472). It depicts them as ‘normal’ Muslim schoolgirls who “fell under the spell of hypnotists” or the “enchantment of evil jihadist men” (Jackson, 2019: 7). These narratives are constructed to maintain “narrative fidelity” about what it means to be a woman in the West (Gentry, 2015: 179). “Narrative fidelity means that the story matches the values and beliefs of the audience. If it does, then the audience is more likely to believe the narrative” (ibid: 178). The construction of the dominant ‘jihadi bride’ narrative simultaneously position British women affiliated with ISIS as ‘good’ and ‘bad’; ‘innocent’ and ‘guilty’ (Martini, 2018), maintaining narrative fidelity of both ‘Western’ or ‘British values’ of gender equality and of neo-colonialist narratives of what it means to be a Muslim woman – submissive, controlled, oppressed, and ‘under the spell’ of ‘evil jihadist men’.

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[6] Like Martini (2018), I recognise the problematic use of the monolithic categories of the “West”, “Western values”, “Western societies” or “Western world”. The same logic applies to the labels “Islam”, “Muslims”, “Muslim women” and “Muslim men”. However, for the sake of brevity and argument, these terms are most appropriate to use within the context of this thesis.

In recent years, there has been significant proliferation of research focusing on Western women who are affiliated with ISIS.[7] This includes work by Loken and Zelenz (2017), Pearson & Winterbotham (2017), and Speckhard and Ellenberg (2020) who explore what drives women to join a violent organisation like ISIS; Chatterjee (2016) and Spencer (2016) who map the roles women play in the organisation; Khelghat-Doost (2017), Musial (2017), Windsor (2018), and Lahoud (2018) who focus on how ISIS' recruitment strategy targets women; Sjoberg (2017), Martini (2018), Jackson, (2019), and Shaban (2020) who analyse media coverage on women who have joined ISIS; and Vale & Cook (2018; 2019) who developed the first global dataset in its scope and detail of international citizens who became affiliated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Given the public interest in the issue, there has also been a rise in the number of novels,[8] non-academic books,[9] theatre,[10] comedy,[11] and TV series,[12] focusing on these women's lives and journeys.

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[7] I engage further with existing research focusing on Western women affiliated with ISIS in Chapter Three.

The growing body of research on women affiliated with ISIS has provided invaluable insights, but until recently, has been plagued by several shortcomings. Firstly, in attempt to respond to and analyse the issue in real-time, current research was initially dominated by policy analysis (see Hoyle et al., 2015; Saltman & Smith, 2015; Rafiq & Malik, 2015). Despite the explicit recognition of the heterogeneity of experiences and backgrounds of women travelling to join ISIS, like in the media, a reductionist narrative of 'jihadi brides' quickly became a focus of the academic discourse. The emphasis on 'jihadi brides' in this early research demonstrated 'the dangerous habit of 'analysis by anecdote' of which "one of the most damaging side effects is the possibility that such perspectives hold sway with policymakers and practitioners charged with dealing with the problem" (Milton and Dodwell, 2018: 17). This narrative oversimplified the motivations and roles of a significant demographic of the organisation's members: women (Milton and Dodwell, 2018: 17). Notably, the designation of the label of 'jihadi bride' "provided a priori and simplified interpretation of these militants' actions and aims – i.e., becoming a combatant's bride" or mothers of ISIS cubs (Martini, 2018: 464). This label was juxtaposed with the label predominantly used to refer to men: "foreign fighters," i.e., "men were assumed not to have any other reason but wanting to fight" (ibid: 464), whilst retaining men's agency.

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[8] For example: *Just Another Jihadi Jane* by Tabish Khair (2016) or *Homefire* by Kamila Shamsie (2017), which bears haunting similarities to Shamima Begum's UK citizenship case prior to its occurrence.

[9] Azadeh Moaveni's (2019) *Guest House for Young Widows: Among the Women of ISIS* is a piece of journalistic research based on a narrative account of thirteen young women from Tunisia, Germany, the UK, and the Middle East who joined ISIS.

[10] *Does My Bomb Look Big In This?* by London-born Nyla Levy was a two woman show about a suburban London teenager who runs away to join Islamic State, which ran at the Soho Theatre in London from 21 May to 8 June.

[11] For example: 'The Real Housewives of ISIS', a British comedy satirical sketch from the BBC TV series *Revolting* showed so-called 'jihadi-brides' taking selfies and showing off bomb vests. One woman is shown saying: "It's only three days until the beheading, and I've got no idea what I'm gonna [sic]wear" (BBC, 2017).

British Comedian Shazia Mirza UK Tour in 2016 'The Kardashian's Made Me Do it' took a similar tone.

[12] For example: Netflix's *The Caliphate* (2020), which focuses on women only, explores similar themes in the Swedish context (Netflix, 2020).

On the other hand, the framing of 'jihadi brides' attached a woman's decision to a man's agenda and resulted in any reference to women's agency only being understood within the frame of marriage and motherhood (ibid: 464). Sjoberg and Gentry (2007, 2015) have shown how women's violence is often explained through a narrative of motherhood (*Mothers,* Monsters, Whores), and Åhäll (2012, 2015) explains how the myth of motherhood "disciplines representations of female agency in political violence along essentialist ideas about gender, agency and violence" (2012: 115). As Brown (2016) argues, regardless of the roles women assume once they arrive in ISIS-controlled territories, "the jihadi bride concept is only one part of the story".

Where academic research has been generated, it generally lacks empirical data, neglecting the voices of those whose lives and experiences it focuses on, mostly relying on secondary sources, or social media analysis at best (see: Loken & Zelenz, 2017; Klaussen, 2015; Pearson, 2017; Vale and Cook, 2017; 2018). Of course, there are genuine methodological challenges driving this lack of empirical data, specifically surrounding accessing these women, but, as this thesis and other recent studies demonstrate (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020; Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017; 2020), it is not impossible.[13] I discuss this further in Chapter Three.

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[13] My concern with the (lack of) methodologies used in extremism/terrorism research is not unsubstantiated. In 1988, Schmid and Jongman identified several problems in research on terrorism. These included serious concerns with methods being used by researchers and with analysis undertaken once data was available. Silke (2000) reiterated these concerns in his article *The Devil You Know: Continuing Problems with Research on Terrorism* where he describes extremism research is in an unhealthy state: "It exists on a diet of fast-food research: quick, cheap, ready-to-hand and nutritionally dubious" (Silke, 2000: 12). At the time,

Current research neglects to engage with a large body of theoretical scholarship that focuses on women's engagement in religious or conservative movements, which problematises the reliance on the Western liberal notion of freedom as a prerequisite for meaningful agency (Mahmood, 2005). This body of research moved analyses on women in religious, social, and political movements from a reductive focus on causal or motivational factors to more sophisticated analyses explicating processes of agency and subject formation (Mahmood, 2004; Deeb, 2006; Bano, 2012, 2017; Avishai, 2008, Hoyt, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014; Inge, 2016; Jamal, 2009). Subsequently, existing research treads a fine line of negating the complex agency embedded in the experiences of Western women affiliated with ISIS. Even the language of 'push and pull' suggests that their engagement was driven by factors outside of their control. This does not discredit these, perhaps poorly named, 'push and pull' factors or the contribution of existing research. Still, it necessitates focusing on the individual experiences of these women, expounding how their agency and experiences are embedded in the different contexts which they exist within.

Moreover, existing research on Western women affiliated with ISIS also often neglects to engage with the rich history of research on women’s engagement in political violence, terrorism, and extremism, which interrogates how certain individuals are legitimised as ‘actors’ whilst others are not (see Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2008;

Silke argued that “considerable responsibility” lay in the hands of editors and boards of academic journals as well as the wider academic community to “encourage and help research which attempts to use more rigorous research methods” (ibid: 13). Schuurman (2019)’s review of research published between 2007–2016 identified that researchers have started to adopt a wider variety of data-gathering techniques, greatly diminishing the overreliance on literature reviews and media sources. However, as I discuss in Chapter Three, in the context of the proliferation of articles published on women joining ISIS in the last five years, I argue little progress has been made in rigor of methodology or editorial review.

2010; 2020; Auchter, 2012; Åhäll, 2012). Highlighting that the dichotomous framing of the question of 'agent and structure', like the ‘agent-victim’ binary, is gendered (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2015: 43; Auchter, 2012: 123), this research shifted analyses of women’s agency in violence from an outcome-based framework focusing only on women’s actions to focusing on how women make choices (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2020).

Like Loken and Zelenz (2017: 66), I believe the hypervisibility and sensationalism of Western women joining ISIS in political, academic, and policy discourse has led to researchers being hesitant to engage with these existing bodies of research to study the *muhajirat* (Western women who travel to join ISIS).[14] Firstly, this arises from ISIS' recruitment of Western women from "comparatively gender-equitable societies" like the UK, which has disrupted Western narratives of intervention, often necessitated on 'saving brown [Muslim] women from brown men' especially within the context of the War on Terror (see Spivak, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2002). The superiority of the West is grounded in a view that these women supposedly enjoy better status in Western societies (Martini, 2017: 461). This assumes that all women who have access to the West (and the opportunities this brings) would not want to betray this wealth of privilege (Gentry, 2020: 146). Secondly, it exposes the agendas and normative frameworks of academic and policy researchers studying Western women affiliated with ISIS, who often search for women’s agency in resistance or comb for evidence of participation in violence or terrorism, without paying attention to the multiple and complicated ways women's agency is embedded in their experiences engaging with extremist organisations like ISIS.

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[14] Throughout interviews, participants used the term *muhajirah* (singular) or *muhajirat* (plural) (a woman who undertakes *hijra*) to refer to themselves in references to their experiences with ISIS. This echoes findings from other research (Loken & Zelenz, 2017; Perešin, 2015), and reflects how ISIS refers to Western women in their propaganda. However, it must be noted that participants did not use the plural and singular consistently often to themselves as *muhajirat* when talking about the self. It must also be noted that *muhajirat* (female migrant) is a different term to *mujahidat* (female fighter) because the two are often used interchangeably when discussing women affiliated with ISIS in some academic research. The term *mujahidat* has changed over time (Qazi, 2011: 35), but there is an important distinction between ‘fighter’ in ‘migrant’ and blurring the line between the terms obscures the nuances in ISIS’ ideology on women and the heterogeneity of women affiliates within the group, which is discussed further in Chapter Three.

Furthermore, of specific interest to researchers, is the intersection of the Western and Muslim identities of these women. This is accentuated by the juxtaposition of their Western and Muslim identities in media and in ISIS propaganda, which reinforces the neo-orientalist narrative that there is something fundamentally irreconcilable about being Western (British) and Muslim that will inevitably lead to both internal and external conflict. This leads to a preoccupation in existing research of whether British Muslim women are caught between two cultures, rather than undertaking a more complicated theoretical project of "interrogat[ing] the lives of women whose choices "desire[s], affect[s], and will[s] have been shaped by non-liberal traditions" (Mahmood, 2001: 203), as well as the wider context of growing up within a 'liberal' context (the UK).

In the same way that media constructions of Western women affiliated with ISIS aim to preserve 'narrative fidelity' about what it means to be a woman in the West, the reluctance to engage with this existing and comprehensive theoretical framework to study the *muhajirat* is embedded in a highly gendered neo-orientalist normative project of maintaining the 'narrative fidelity' of what it means to a young British Muslim woman: caught between two 'cultures' or two 'identities' 'vulnerable' to the manipulation of the recruitment strategy of extremist groups like ISIS. In the case of women affiliated with ISIS, researchers focus on the ways women must have been deceived about what life under ISIS has to offer: marriage, children, and a unifying Muslim identity (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2016: 26). With specific emphasis on their youth, a picture is painted of an ignorant young woman ‘pushed and pulled’ between competing influences, incapable of independently choosing the traditional gendered ideology that ISIS espouses (ibid: 26). With little evidence of Western women affiliated with ISIS engaging in violence, researchers are also reluctant (or simply remiss) to engage with theoretical literature that explicates women’s agency in engaging with violent organisations. However, regardless of the deception or manipulation utilised by ISIS to recruit young women (and men) into their ranks, “nothing about the existence or content of that deception makes women’s decisions to join simple, streamlined, and attributable *only* to manipulation” (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2016: 26).

In comparison, the role of women in HT has received remarkably little attention compared to women affiliated with other extremist or radical groups. Academic research focusing on women’s engagement in extremism concentrates almost exclusively on violent groups and movements. “What happens before the bomb goes off” (Neumann, 2008: 4) has obsessed academics and policymakers for decades. However, it relegates ‘non-violent’ extremist Islamist groups like HT to the “periphery of academic enquiry” (Orofino, 2019: 267). As Orofino argues, “HT is emblematic of these vocal, non-violent groups and is one of the oldest and most active Islamist groups in the world, yet it is often considered less relevant compared to jihadi groups like Al-Qaeda or ISIS” (ibid: 267). The small body of existing scholarship on HTB mostly focuses on men (Hamid, 2007; Wali, 2011; 2013; 2016; Yilmaz, 2010; Hanif, 2014). In the last twenty years, there have only been three pieces of research which contribute to understanding the experiences of women directly affiliated with HTB in the UK (Wali, 2011; 2013; Sinclair, 2010; Orofino, 2018; 2019). This means there are significant gaps in understanding the experiences of women who participate in non-violent extremist organisations like HT.

This omission is critically gendered. Women who participate in a violent extremist organisation like ISIS or perpetrate acts of terrorism “runs counter to traditional images of women as pure, maternal, emotional, innocent, and peace-loving” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015: 2). By joining a violent extremist organisation, they expose the social construction and “destabilisation of gender itself, a destabilisation that is denaturalising and that calls into question the claims of normativity and originality by which gender and sexual oppression sometimes operate” (Butler 1993: 128). This has caught the attention of many researchers, resulting in the substantive proliferation of research focusing on Western women affiliated with ISIS in recent years. Contrastingly, from the outside, the women who join HT ‘disappointingly’ reinforce stereotypes of Muslim women. They are subservient, they dutifully cover, they do not promote nor is there any suggestion they will engage in violence. Subsequently, like wider research on HT, they are ignored; demoted to the side-lines of academic research.[15]

Consequently, this thesis explores how growing up as a South Asian British Muslim woman in the UK shaped the individual experiences of those who have joined or considered joining either a violent *or* non-violent extremist Islamist organisation. Instead of questioning why women, like Maryam and Nadia, joined or considered joining HT or ISIS, or were merely attracted to their ideology or deceived by the group, this thesis will recognise their experiences before they engaged with the organisation. It questions how young South Asian British Muslim women encounter, understand, and negotiate their gender, faith, and identity growing up and living in contemporary Britain. Furthermore, it compares their experiences with a wider group of South Asian British Muslim women who haven't joined or considered joining an extremist organisation but are actively seeking to address the challenges they face daily through creating spaces, opportunities, and networks for women like themselves. Drawing a comparison between these three groups of women is not intended as an attempt to map or predict who may or may not become radicalised. Rather, it aims to shed light on what led these women, with remarkably similar experiences and challenges, down very different paths.[16]

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[15] A surprising number of Extremism and Terrorism Studies researchers I have met over the duration of this doctorate hadn’t even heard of HT.

Research questions

1. What is the role and impact of gender, faith, and identity in the experiences of second-and third-generation South Asian British Muslim women who have joined or considered joining Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)?

2. How do second-and third-generation South Asian British Muslim women, more broadly, encounter, understand, and negotiate their gender, faith, and identities growing up and living in contemporary Britain?

Why HT and ISIS?

This research project began with a broad focus on young British Muslim women who had joined or considered joining ISIS. However, the focus of the inquiry expanded to look at HT for three reasons. Firstly, as discussed above, there is very little research focusing on

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[16] Like others (see for example Loken & Zelenz, 2017), I have concerns about the use of "control groups" of individuals who have not been affiliated with extremist organisations in research that focuses on extremism to map or sequence processes of radicalisation or even 'push' or 'pull' factors. However, this is not the aim of this study, nor did this research engage with a 'control group' of Muslim women. All the women engaged in this study had made or were actively deciding to change their circumstances.

British Muslim women who have been involved or participated with HT in any capacity. Secondly, although HT is a self-proclaimed non-violent organisation, operating legally and freely in the UK it shares with ISIS the common aim of the restoration of an Islamic caliphate. Both condemn the treatment of women in the West, and there is significant overlap in their *shari'a*-based ideologies regarding women, which offers an interesting comparison.

Thirdly, other Islamist groups like ISIS "promote themselves as righteous alternatives to the Western system" like HT do (Orofino, 2019: 5). Still, their violent methods dissuade many young Muslims from getting involved. HT is an alternative for young Muslims in countries like the UK who feel "the need to feel part of something important and revolutionary that aims to protect Muslims globally" (ibid: 5). This offers an interesting comparison with ISIS and enables a critical exploration of the differences between young British Muslim women who have joined a violent extremist organisation and a non-violent extremist organisation, and what both can tell us about the actual lived experiences of joining or considering joining an extremist organisation.

Finally, as qualified by the research conducted as part of this thesis, HT Britain (HTB) was most active and most visible in the UK during the late 1990s to mid-2000s and its women membership and target recruitment audience at the time was predominantly made up of university students (aged eighteen to thirty years). This means that these women, whether current or former HT members, are now in their late thirties to early forties, offering an interesting generational perspective to understanding their engagement with HT, compared to the young British Muslim women who joined or considered joining ISIS who were between the ages of fifteen to twenty-five years at the time (due to ethical reasons, only participants who were over eighteen years at the time of interview were included in this study).

A short history and a critical review of existing research on both HT and ISIS and their ideologies on women are discussed in the background chapters (Chapter Three and Chapter Four).

Epistemology & Methodology

This thesis pursued an ambitious methodology for understanding the experiences of young British Muslim women who had joined or considered joining an extremist Islamist organisation. As stated in the introduction, the ‘rise’ of ISIS has led to a proliferation of research focusing on the ‘radicalisation’ of young Muslim women without access to primary data. I was determined from the outset that this contribution would not be another piece of social science research concentrating on these women's lives without speaking directly with them. However, my focus on the importance of ‘experience’ in terrorism, extremism, and security studies research, particularly research that labels itself ‘feminist’, does not preclude or eclipse the importance of other research methods. The evidence of ‘experience’ alone cannot explain how “subjects are constituted as different in the first place” (Scott, 1991: 777). Making ‘experience’ visible means critically examining how categories of representations are constructed and how they operate (ibid: 778). Prioritising ‘experiences’ is not only about the inclusion of neglected voices, but about interrogating why those voices have been excluded or neglected in the first place. As such, methods used in existing research on women engaged in terrorism, extremism, or political violence, such as discourse analysis, social media analysis, or archival research, are equally as important. However, given the dearth of qualitative research which focuses on the experiences of women affiliated with ISIS or HT, it is imperative to address these gaps to avoid denying the agency and voices of these women entirely.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the methods I employed and my fieldwork in detail. However, as a way of positioning this research and introducing my approach, in this section, I discuss the feminist research framework which underpins this project. I also address my positionality as a white British non-Muslim woman researcher upfront.

Feminist Research Framework

Jean W. Scott (1991: 797) cautioned about reifying 'experience' or 'voice' in research: "it serves of a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is "unassailable"'. However, this assumes homogeneity in the experiences, backgrounds, opinions, and/or desires of the women or subjects at the heart of a research project that focuses on 'experience'. Furthermore, it ignores that the researcher is also an active participant in the research, with their own experiences, backgrounds, opinions, and/or desires.

Consequently, this project is underpinned by feminist standpoint epistemology ('standpoint feminism'). Standpoint feminist epistemology refers to an individual's unique world perspective. It sees societal knowledge as being located within an individual specific geographical and historical locations (Mann and Kelley, 1997: 392). In short, standpoint theory articulates that knowledge is situated and perspectival (Harding, 1986). Promoting that sociological research inquiry must be "rooted in the lived actuality of the social actors' reality (the life-world) (Collins, 1989; 190: 208-21), and that the lived experiences of social actors must form the basis of sociological method and concepts"

(Hekman, 1997: 347). Standpoint feminist epistemology is grounded in the claim that knowledge must begin in women's ‘everyday/every night world’ (Smith, 1991), and how women's lives are the "places from which to start off knowledge projects" (Harding, 1991, 61). These "standpoints" must be located and analysed within the broader relations of social and political structures. They are "historically shared, group-based experiences" (Hill Collins, 1997).

As a theory, standpoint feminism has received criticism for having difficulty in accounting for difference within the experiences of women. In other words, it treats women's experiences heterogeneously (Haraway, 1987; Hekman, 1997). As an epistemology, it is also detrimentally static. There is, in fact, no single "feminist standpoint" – instead, "they are multiple and depend on one's ethnicity, culture, sexuality, class, and myriad other factors" (Maruska, 2010: 12). To consider the difference and the heterogeneity of women's 'life-world' experiences, my project is also informed by Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' approach, which is in many ways an advancement of standpoint theory (Hekman, 1997: 350). In advocating 'situated knowledges', Haraway (1988: 583) argues for feminist objectivity that considers *specificity* and *difference* among individuals acknowledging that all knowledge is produced from a particular position. Kathy Ferguson (1993) also points out that far from being essentialist, feminist standpoints are shifting and myriad. Ferguson's term ‘mobile subjectivities’ highlights that there cannot be one "feminist standpoint" not even for an individual researcher as she travels through time and space, as the context changes (Maruska, 2010). This focus on *socially situated knowledges* or *multiple subjectivities* leads to greater attention to the concept of reflexivity and the role of the researcher in constructing and representing knowledge. Together, feminist standpoint epistemology and Haraway's situated knowledges approach as a research framework enables the critique of the notion of 'woman' as a unified object of theorising and as a unified subject of knowing (Lugones and Spelman, 1983).

Inherently, this research is embedded in a broader intersectional approach to understanding the interlocking historical, social, and religious structures and operations of power which constitute subjects. Put simply, intersectionality is meta-theorisation of power and domination" (Bilge, 2010: 23), which refers to how social divisions (race, class, gender, religion, and others) are mutually constituted, forming "the particular nuanced and contested meanings of particular social, economic, and political contexts in which some social divisions have more saliency and effect" (ibid: 94). Specifically, "[p]eople can be citizens of the same states, live in the same neighbourhood, and even work in similar occupations and yet their social positionings and access to different kinds of social capital – existential but also vital and economic – can vary hugely" (Yuval-Davis, 2015: 98). Situated gaze, situated knowledge, and situated imagination construct differently the ways we see the world (Stoeltzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002), and "[p]eople positioned in the same social locations … often develop different identifications, meanings, and normative attitudes and attachments to them" (Yuval-Davis, 2015: 96). Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is often used as a "buzz word" (Davis, 2008), or misappropriated or applied in social science research. In a recent tweet, Brittany M. Williams (2020) aptly refers to 'intersectionality' as a "research parsley" which is just thrown into a dish/piece of work without any understanding of what it means.[17] It is not my intention to extend a theory of intersectionality here, however, from its inception, this research project is intersectional in aims, methodology, and analysis, engaging with Nira Yuval-Davis' (2015: 93) concept of 'situated intersectionality' which "should be applied to all people and not just marginalised and racialised women, with whom the rise of intersectionality theory is historically linked".

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[17] Williams, B. 2020. 7 May. Available at: https://twitter.com/DrBritWilliams/status/1258493583658754050?s=20 [Accessed 2 Jan 2020].

The concepts of reflexivity and power (knowing and representing others) are pivotal in feminist research. Feminist researchers must recognise their social positioning and their roles in the production of data and knowledge (Harding, 1993), and speaking on behalf of those who are more than capable of speaking for themselves. The concern of exacerbating 'Otherness', exclusion, racism, and ethnocentrism through sociological research is central to this, and fundamentally, questioning whether feminists in dominant cultures can ever *know* subaltern cultures (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997; Mohanty et al., 1991; Spivak, 1988).

As an Oxford University researcher who is a white-British non-Muslim woman, this has been at the forefront of my mind during every stage of my research project. From the inception of this project, I have aimed to remedy the lack of voice(s) in 'radicalisation' research. I have grappled with the ethical dilemmas, as well as the larger epistemological issues involved in conducting research that seeks to understand or 'know' others – particularly as an outsider. I am very aware that give my positionality I represent a potential problem in the representation of these women's voices and experiences as the 'Other'. I have also contended the issues that arise when speaking for (representing) the intimate details of ‘others’ lived experiences, which have, at many times, overwhelmed me.[18]

Code (1995: 30) echoes my views and the views of many feminist researchers who are contending with power dilemmas around knowing, representing, and advocating for Others:

> "Only rarely can we presume to understand exactly how it is for someone else even of our own class, race, sexual orientation and social group. These issues become exacerbated when feminists claim to speak for others across the complexities of difference, with the consequences that the politics of speaking for, about, and on behalf of other women is one of the most contested areas in present-day feminist activism and research".

Moreover, the analysis and interpretation of others' narratives usually take place ‘back in the office’, in isolation from research participants, colleagues, and even assessors. In most research, both the analytic processes and the ‘raw’ narrative transcripts tend to remain hidden and invisible. Furthermore, when it comes to analysis, not all knowledge or information is treated equally due to the epistemic bias of the ‘knower’, the researcher. And often informants are unavoidably treated differently than others when testified to (testimonial injustice) (Fricker, 2007; also see: Hastrup et al., 1990). This results in some voices or experiences being afforded more credibility or legitimacy over others in ethnographic research.

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[18] Spivak (1988)’s seminal work highlights the problem of the ‘muted’ subaltern woman who inhabits the periphery of Western feminist research. ‘Subalternity’ refers to those socially, politically and geographically outside the dominant power structures. Spivak argues that the subaltern are perceived not to have agency to speak for themselves. Representations in ethnography are embedded in power relations and can produce neo-orientalist tendencies in the representation of the participants and their knowledge (ibid). Spivak outlines that resisting hegemonic forms of representation of the marginalised is difficult and many researchers end up reproducing the dominant forms of knowing they strive to dismantle. Spivak highlights that even if the researcher is writing with and for the subaltern, typically their work results in reproducing power structures, and speaking for the sublatern.

Importantly, my research was also conducted in a community that has been under intense, often-unwanted scrutiny by researchers, the media, and government alike over the past twenty years. Moreover, my whiteness ostensibly positioned me in being able to research without fear of scrutiny or security surveillance from the UK government or police apparatus. Throughout this thesis, I have aimed to write myself into both the methodological account of my research (Chapter Five), in terms of my motivations, my access, and my analysis, by taking a narrative and descriptive approach (Squire, Andrews, and Tamboukou, 2015).

Pursuing a narrative approach also aims to tackle the ethical challenge of speaking on behalf of others. Within the main empirical chapters of this thesis, there are profiles of each woman interviewed which are, in part, narrative in structure. I have included, where appropriate, lengthy quotations to ensure their voices, which are the most important parts of this research, are not lost or made invisible. "Narrative is generally understood as 'the stories people tell … how people make sense of their lives … [and] how they construct disparate facts and weave them together cognitively to make sense of reality" (Patterson & Moore, 1998: 315). Narratives help us make sense of ourselves as human-beings and play a critical role in the construction of political behaviour and giving an individual agency in telling their own story (ibid: 315-316). A fundamental aspect of a feminist research process is who interprets participants' words and how these words are interpreted. Consequently, whilst my concerns about speaking on behalf of the women in this thesis, or being a 'voice over' for their experiences, remain, considering how my voice and positionality has shaped this project as much as theirs and by including verbatim quotes throughout this thesis depicting the most important parts of these women's stories, the reader can engage with both my interpretation (the analysis and findings presented) and the women's stories in their own words and from their perspective. I discuss this further in Chapter Five.

Methods

This research took a qualitative approach, relying on the use of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The study began with general community observation in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. I spent three months ‘hanging out’ in local coffee shops, attending community, university, and mosque events, and speaking to local community members.

Although my fieldwork took me across London, and once to Sheffield and Birmingham, to conduct interviews, all participants interviewed in this project had a current or former connection to Tower Hamlets, which I discuss below. The research findings of this project must be understood as partly specific to those who have a connection to this London Borough.

In summary, this research is based on the testimonies of twelve British Muslim South Asian women, aged eighteen to twenty-five years who had joined or considered joining ISIS; eleven British Muslim South Asian women, aged eighteen to twenty-five who had joined or considered joining HTB; and thirty British Muslim South Asian women who had NOT engaged or considered engaging with extremist causes but were engaged in or had started their own community organisations, initiatives, or campaigns to support and empower other Muslim women in their communities.

My fieldwork and the methods employed in this thesis are discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.

Why Tower Hamlets?

All participants interviewed in this project had a current or former connection to Tower Hamlets. Spanning twenty London wards, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets has the largest percentage of Muslim residents of any local authority within the UK (thirty-eight per cent of the population compared to a national average of five per cent), most of whom are second- or third-generation immigrants (Office for National Statistics, Census 2011). In terms of population, Tower Hamlets has the fourth-largest Muslim population in England and Wales following Birmingham, Bradford, and Newham, whose Muslim populations are larger in number but represented a smaller proportion of residents (ibid). The Muslim population of Tower Hamlets increased from 71,000 in 2001 to 88,000 in 2011 (nineteen per cent increase) and has the highest percentage of young Muslims in London (sixty per cent of all children are Muslim). Tower Hamlets is home to forty-seven mosques and Islamic Centres (Shannahan, 2014). This includes London's biggest mosque and one of the oldest mosques in Britain, The East London Mosque.

Secondly, through the analysis of data collected by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), the only identifiable geographical 'hotspots' where women have travelled from to join ISIS are the communities within the boroughs of Tower Hamlets (specifically Bethnal Green) and Haringey (specifically Finsbury Park). At the time of beginning this research project, the ISD-ICSR Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) database was the largest existing database tracking FTF and women migrants joining ISIS.[19] Since 2014, the database had tracked and archived social media material on over a hundred self-identified women supporters and migrants to ISIS through social listening software on online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Kik, Tumblr, Ask.fm, and blog accounts (Saltman and Smith, 2015: 7). Women within this database were identified as coming from as many as fifteen countries across Europe, the USA, and Australia (ibid). Within the UK specifically, it was possible to map from the data the main geographical 'hot-spots' where a significant number of male FTF or migrants travelled from. These include areas such as Tower Hamlets, Bradford, Birmingham, and Leicester. However, the data on women did not mirror this pattern. For women, the data is widely scattered with women understood to be travelling alone or with friends from Glasgow, Birmingham, Bradford, and Leicester, and the only identified geographical 'hot-spot' where women travelled from was, at the time, known to be East London.

Thirdly, HT Britain (HTB) has historically been very active in Tower Hamlets including hosting its annual conference in Bethnal Green in 2009, 2013, 2014, and 2016. Most recently, during Ramadhan 2017, it hosted one of its three community *iftars* (the breaking of fast) in Whitechapel led by three of its most prominent UK leaders, Dr Abdul Wahid, Abu Yusuf, and Taji Mustafa. The focus on this community is particularly relevant, as, at the time of planning this research project, HTB was still centring much of its activity and organisation around hosting and/or speaking at university events across the UK to encourage young people and students to spread the organisation's ideology and engage in recruitment. Furthermore, it still held weekly study groups within Tower Hamlets (The Brick Lane Islamic Circle), which further advocated that the community was still an important focus for the organisation.

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[19] Since this doctoral research project began the ISCR has developed another dataset using a similar methodology led by researchers Gina Vale and Joana Cook (2018; 2019). This dataset, the first in its scope and detail, maps 41,490 international citizens from eighty countries who travelled to join IS in Iraq and Syria. In 2018, they estimated that 4,761 (thirteen percent) of these were recorded to be women (2018: 5). In their 2019 update, these numbers increased to 44,279–52,808 (total numbers), but specifically women to 6,797–6,902 (2019: 4-5). They estimate that 145-150 women from the UK have travelled to ISIS controlled territories (2018: 20-21; 2019: 17). I discuss Vale and Cook’s research further in Chapter Three.

Why British Muslim South Asian women?

I anticipated that there would be challenges in accessing the limited number of British Muslim women who had either joined or considered joining either ISIS or HT and I didn't want to exclude the voices of any women I encountered during my research, so I did not set parameters of ethnicity in my initial research design. However, as my research began in Tower Hamlets, I predicted that the ethnicity of my sample would mirror not only the ethnic majority of Tower Hamlet's Muslim population (eighty-six per cent South Asian) but also of the British Muslim population (sixty per cent South Asian) (Census, 2011).[20]

As it eventuated, out of all the women interviewed as part of this research, only five women I engaged with were not of South Asian descent (Nigerian, Somalian, and Iranian). Two of these women considered joining ISIS (Group 1a); one of these women joined HT (Group 1b), and two of these women were not/had not engaged with an extremist organisation (Group 2). At first, I included their testimonies in my analysis and the first drafts of my chapters. However, it was clear that there were important differences between the experiences of the South Asian British Muslim women in my thesis and their experiences as non-South Asian British Muslim women. This would have been a fascinating route to explore, alongside the importance of differences between the experiences of converts and extremist organisations. However, given the parameters of a doctorate in both time and word count, alongside additional limitations of access and size of the sample, this was not the research project to explore this route.

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[20] The ISD-ISCR database did not identify any patterns of ethnicity in their mapping of foreign fighters nor did Vale and Cook’s more recent data from 2018 and 2019.

As such, this is broadly a study on second-and-third-generation British Muslim South Asian women who have grown up and lived in London. It is not representative of a larger population of Muslim women in the UK. It does not suggest that the experiences this research highlights are shared by all second-and third-generation British Muslim South Asian women across the UK, or even in London. A small number of these women have joined or considered joining extremist organisations and, as such, it explores how growing up in London as a British Muslim South Asian women shaped their journeys and experiences before joining/considering joining these organisations.

What's wrong with 'radicalisation'?

For a long time, 'radicalisation' has been considered by academics and policymakers as a process that occurs 'before the bomb goes off' (Neumann, 2008). It is "typically seen to refer to a complex and dynamic process which results in individuals coming to embrace a *violent* ideology in support of a political and religious cause" (Silke and Brown, 2016; emphasis mine). On a very basic level, it is grounded in an attempt to understand and explain an individual's journey to participation in violent extremism. However, within academic and policy literature alike, it is widely employed to denote diverse and complex phenomena and often used with assumed causality to violent behaviour or as a precursory process to terrorism (Borum, 2011: 7). Within academic literature, the ubiquity of the use of the term 'radicalisation' suggests a consensus about its meaning. Still, no such consensus really exists (Sedgwick, 2010: 479), and the conceptual fuzziness of ‘radicalisation’ allows everyone to conceive it as they like (Crone, 2016: 588). In fact, many researchers using the terms ‘radical’ and ‘radicalisation’ make no attempt to define the terms. This is both theoretically and empirically problematic.

Throughout this thesis, I have chosen to avoid using the term ‘radicalisation’ where possible (beyond this introductory chapter). Instead of contributing my own definition or re-conceptualising what ‘radicalisation’ means within the context of the experiences of the women interviewed as part of this thesis, I have made the conscious decision to avoid it altogether. This is because I take the view that it is both unwarranted and ineffective. Whilst, it is not the aim of this thesis, nor is there space here, to pursue a deep dive into the history of the concept of ‘radicalisation’,[21] and all existing approaches and attempts to model, map, or predict different pathways to ‘radicalisation’; it is important to briefly discuss the ontological and political fuzziness of the concept of ‘radicalisation’, and the limitations of existing approaches to understanding ‘radicalisation’.

Defining ‘Radicalisation’

Etymologically, ‘radicalism’ as a concept has changed much of its meaning throughout history. The meaning of “radical” for many centuries was related to its late Latin origins of *radicalis* meaning ‘root’, and the earliest uses of radical are indeed all about literal roots, hinging on the meaning “of, relating to, or proceeding from a root” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Linguists know that a verb's radical form is its root form, and mathematicians know that the radical sign—√ or √‾—is used when finding the square root of a number or formula.

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[21] For an analytical overview and history of the concept of ‘radicalisation’ see Arun Kundnani (2012)’s *The Muslims are Coming* along with the work of Sedgwick (2010); McCauley and Moskalenko (2010); Richards (2011); Awan, Hoskins, and O’Loughlin (2012); Githens-Mazer (2012); Schmid (2013); and Silke and Brown (2016), to name a few examples.

The term ‘radical’ became widespread in politics within the 19th century. In the 18th century, it was often linked to the Enlightenment and revolutionary movements seen in France and America (Schmid, 2013: 6). Many political parties in the 19th century called themselves “radical” but were mainly radical based on advocating for republicanism rather than royalism (ibid: 7). At the time, ‘[r]adical stood for representing or supporting an extreme section of a party (Awan, Hoskins, and O’Loughlin, 2012: 3): at least in the second half of the 19th century, ‘radical’ was “almost as respectable as liberal” (Awan, Hoskins, and O’Loughlin, 2012: 131). In the UK, supporters of parliamentary reform were known as ‘radicals’, seeking to extend suffrage and organise new voters in transforming the Whig parliamentary faction into the Liberal Party (which, in 1918, became the Labour Party) (Merriam Webster, 2021).

The term ‘radicalisation’ is itself a derivative of ‘radical’ (Richards, 2011: 144). “The term ‘radical’ and hence the terms ‘radicalism’ and ‘radicalisation’ can have two types of meaning: one relative and one absolute” (Sedgwick, 2010: 480). The Oxford English Dictionary (2017) defines “radical” as “representing or supporting an extreme section as a party”. In this sense, it serves the purpose of indicating a relative position on a “continuum of organised opinion” (ibid: 481). Therefore, ‘radicalisation’ indicates positive movement on that continuum (ibid). The definition of ‘radical’ is also relational to ‘moderate’: we can only understand what is meant by supporting an “extreme section of a party [organisation or religion]” if we understand what moderate support or belief looks like. In this sense, ‘radicalisation’ is what velocity is to position. That is: ‘radicalisation’ is a [positive] change in the degree of extremism expressed by an individual or group” (Mandel, 2010: 111). Understood relatively, ‘radicalisation’ as a concept is unproblematic. However, issues arise in its operationalisation – questions, such as how is 'moderate' defined? And where is the line drawn between 'moderate' and 'radical'? And who draws it? Ultimately, "[t]o be radical is to be extreme relative to something that is defined or accepted as normative, traditional, or valued as the status quo' (Mandel, 2010: 105). Historically, however, organised hegemonic opinion changes and shifts the status quo. For example, the suffragettes of the 19th and 20th centuries were considered radical in their advocacy for universal suffrage. As such, the term 'radical' has no meaning on its own (Sedgwick, 2010; Neumann, 2013); its "content varies on depending on what is seen as mainstream in a given society at a given point" (Neumann, 2013: 876). However, in most cases, the line distinguishing between moderate and radical is "presumed to be self-evident," and consequently, the concept becomes absolute (Sedgwick, 2010: 481).

Analytically, Moskalenko and McCauley (2009) attempt to draw the line between moderate and radical by proposing a distinction between 'radicalism' and 'activism' through a binary of violent to non-violent action. Activism is defined as a "readiness to engage in legal and *non-violent* political action" and radicalism as a "readiness to engage in illegal and *violent* political action" (Sedgwick, 2010: 483; emphasis mine). Githens-Mazer (2009: 2) expands on their work and proposes radicalism can be both violent or non-violent and should be defined as: "collectively defined individual felt a *moral obligation* to participate in direct action (legal or illegal)" (emphasis mine). Accordingly, radicalism is determined not by activism but apathy. It is then pertinent to explore how, why, and in what context violent and non-violent radicalism, and consequently 'radicalisation', are conflated and become understood as threats to the status quo (Awan, Hoskins, and O'Loughlin, 2012: 9). In this regard, it is clear the concept of 'radicalisation' is also an "evaluative one" (Mandel, 2010: 105), with those that are labelled 'radical' posing a threat to a way of life or existing status quo – rather than the result of the threat of violence. This brings us to exploring the recent emergence and usage of 'radicalisation' developed.

As late as the early 2000s, there is scarce reference to 'radicalisation' found in the academic literature on terrorism and political violence (Richards, 2011: 144). Even as the threat of terrorism emerged seen the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the term 'radicalisation' was not used in the media or academic discourse at all (ibid). In fact, before 2001, 'radicalisation' was rarely referred to in the media; the greatest increase in frequency of use of 'radicalisation' was between 2005 and 2007 (Kundnani, 2012). This timing strongly suggests that the term's current popularity derives from the emergence of 'home-grown' terrorism threat in Western Europe, resulting from the London bombings in July 2005 (hereinafter: 7/7) (Sedgwick, 2010; Kundnani, 2012; Crone, 2016). Neumann (2008: 4) goes further and argues that the current use of the term in relation to extremism was catalysed by the political climate after 11th September 2001 (hereinafter: 9/11):

> "There is a long and well-established discourse about the 'root causes' of terrorism and political violence that can be traced back to the early 1970s. Following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, however, it suddenly became very difficult to talk about the 'roots of terrorism', which some commenters claimed was an effort to excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians… It was through the notion of radicalisation that a discussion … became possible again".

Since 2001, most Western European countries institutionalised the term ‘radicalisation’ by establishing ‘counter-radicalisation’ or ‘counter-extremism’ programs. Briefly, “[t]he concept of ‘radicalisation emerged as a vehicle for policymakers to explore the process by which [the Muslim] terrorist was made and to provide an analytical grounding for preventative strategies that went beyond the threat of violence of detention” (Kundnani, 2012: 4). Accordingly, the concept of ‘radicalisation’ inherited from birth several “built-in limiting assumptions” (ibid: 6), and became more and more deeply entangled, conceptually and politically, with Islamist violent extremism and terrorism. In fact, the adoption of the term ‘radicalisation’ shifted the discourse on extremism. Academic and policy researchers alike began to model the process by which an individual becomes a supporter or perpetrator of (Islamist) terrorism without addressing the wider context. Previous discourse has focused on the circumstances, the ideology, the group, and the individual. But the emergence of the concept of ‘radicalisation’ emphasises the individual, and to some extent, the ideology and the group, but significantly de-emphasises the wider circumstances (Sedgwick, 2010: 480). This is the context that modern ‘radicalisation studies’ emerged, accelerated by an increase in funding and career progression opportunities, and driven by the impetus to identify the ‘root causes’ of home-grown Islamist terrorism (Kundnani, 2012) (discussed further below).

There is also a conflicting definitional relationship between the concepts of ‘radicalisation’ and violence. The concept is almost always used with assumed support for, and causality to, violent behaviour. This critically confuses propensity to violence with radical ideas and conflates the question of what causes violence with how belief systems and ideologies come to be adopted (Kundnani, 2012: 21). Until recently, academic focus has been overwhelmingly and equally on violent ‘radicalisation’ (Neumann, 2008; Borum, 2011; Della Porta and LaFree, 2012). Defining ‘radicalisation’ with assumed causality to violence obscures the heterogeneity of individual experiences and the different violent and non-violent ideologies of different radical or extreme organisations. It implies those who adhere to radical ideologies, who pursue far-reaching changes in society, are prone to violent or terrorist behaviour. Or, at the very least, they will be more likely to resort to violent means to achieve their goals.

This approach has led to the development of ‘conveyor belt’ theories/approaches in understanding non-violent extremist organisations like Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), who are assumed to be allies to violent extremist organisations willing to perpetrate acts of terrorism in pursuance of their goals. Others, such as Schmid (2013), even argue that the term non-violent extremism is a contradiction, and they are all part of the same radical milieu supportive of the goals, if not the methods, of violent extremist organisations. Glees and Pope (2005) argue there is a conveyor belt process from Islamism to terrorism, advancing that their research unearths there is a parallel between the activities of HT and Islamic student societies at London university campuses and the recruitment of British Muslim students into terrorism. Bartlett et al. (2010: 51) refer to this as the “moral oxygen” some believe non-violent organisations give to violent methods just by existing. For example, Ahmed and Stuart (2009) argue the party provides ‘justification for the instigation of terrorism’ and paves the way for more violent groups to radicalise Muslims. Moreover, it contributes to a narrative that it is not only non-violent Islamist extremist organisations like HT who are positioned on a conveyor belt to terrorism but extends to Islam more broadly, positioning Islam and Muslims as the problem. As discussed below, this is reinforced in public discourse constructed by Western politicians. For example, current UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson repeatedly states that ‘Islam is the problem’. This was first employed during his tenure as London Mayor following the 7/7 bombings in 2005, with the added comment that thousands of Muslims were suffering from the ‘infection’ and the ‘Islamist virus’ (Kundnani, 2012).

Several scholars have sought to remedy this conceptual error within the academic literature of ‘radicalisation’ by exploring and conceptualising non-violent ‘radicalisation’ (Bartlett et al., 2010; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Bartlett and Miller, 2011). Bartlett et al. (2010: 10) reconceptualise ‘radicalisation’ by distinguishing between “radicalisation that does not lead to violence” (non-violent ‘radicalisation’) from violent ‘radicalisation’. In their own words, non-violent ‘radicalisation’ is: “the process by which individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the status quo but do not undertake, or directly aid or abet terrorist activity” (ibid). In contrast, violent ‘radicalisation’ can be defined as a process in which radical ideas are accompanied by the development of a willingness to directly support or engage in violent acts” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 798). However, these conceptualisations are rarely operationalised in academic studies or policy discourses on ‘radicalisation’, and as accounted above, support for radical ideas is more than often conflated with a willingness to engage in violent methods.

This also has critical gendered implications in understanding women’s participation in extremist movements. The proliferation of earlier research that focused on women’s participation in extremism was heavily influenced by a fascination with the personal motivations of these women and their ability to perpetrate or contribute to such violence (see: Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). However, this has led many who study woman’s participation in extremism to place far too much emphasis on women’s propensity for violence in their analysis and led to a blindness to the heterogeneity in women's experiences of engaging with violent and non-violent extremist organisations. It ignores that the experiences of many who join organisations, like ISIS, and whether due to opportunity or intention, do not take up violent roles or perpetrate acts of violence. Organisations, like ISIS and al-Qaeda, have strict gendered ideologies meaning there is unlikely to be an opportunity for women to take up violent roles, even if they desired to (see: Von Knopp, 2006, Qazi, 2011). In Jihadist discourse and ideology, women are primarily seen as auxiliaries of Jihad (Von Knopp, 2006). This is particularly important in organisations like ISIS or HT, who strive towards the restoration of a functioning Islamic caliphate: women are essential for the establishment of a viable, lasting Islamic state. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, women are needed for raising children, looking after financial and logistical matters, recruiting new members (specifically other women members), disseminating the group's ideology (Vale, 2019). As the testimonies of the women in this thesis demonstrate, many women join violent extremist organisations with no intention of participating in or perpetrating acts of violence. Of course, others do, but many don't have the opportunity to do so within the ideological structure of the organisation they are affiliated with. Failure to differentiate between violent and non-violent 'radicalisation' leaves little space to understand the diversity of women's roles and participation in extremist organisations – especially within organisations with highly gendered organisations like ISIS. Moreover, it leaves little space to understand the differences between non-violent 'radicalisation' into non-violent roles or and violent 'radicalisation' into non-violent roles across organisations.

It is also problematic to assume that radical ideas always predispose violent behaviour and not the other way around. Theoretically, 'radicalisation' is only a threat to the status quo when it leads to violence, and “this causation is exactly the presumption that we tend to take for granted” (Crone, 2016: 590). As Crone (2016) highlights, prior experience with violence can also be a precondition for participating in violent extremism. Crone conducted an analysis of individuals who perpetrated terror attacks in Europe between January 2012 and January 2015 and found that eighty percent of them had criminal backgrounds, and approximately sixty percent had been in prison. Recent research has explored the crime-‘radicalisation’ nexus further and identified many cases of individuals who have engaged with violent extremism; ideas rarely instigate violence but are more commonly used as ex-post rationalisation of violent acts (Crone, 2014; 2016). In these cases, ideology is only a motivating factor in the ‘radicalisation’ process. Instead, individuals are driven by violent countercultures. As a consequence, failing to distinguish between violent and non-violent ‘radicalisation’ eclipses the heterogeneity of experiences of those who have joined or considered joining extremist organisations.

In summary, ‘radicalisation’ understood relatively as a concept is unproblematic. It refers to movement on a continuum of thought between moderate and radical. However, it is dependent on social and historical context, and, in its modern usage, ‘radicalisation’ has emerged not as an analytical concept but as a Western security paradigm (Heath-Kelly, 2013: 395), which serve to address homegrown Islamist terrorism in the West (Kundnani, 2014: 156). Consequently, it becomes an absolute concept where the line between moderate and radical is perceived to be self-evident, and more critically, is often perceived to distinguish a binary between the West and Islam. Academic attempts to conceptualise ‘radicalisation’ overwhelmingly conflate ideology with deviant behaviour, in particular violent behaviour (Brown, 2020: 2). This is a challenge, as it leaves little conceptual space to explore the heterogeneity in individual’s experiences of joining extremist organisations. This is specifically problematic when seeking to understand the experiences of women who have joined or considered joining extremist organisations, given the diversity and heterogeneity of their experiences in engaging with the organisation and the different roles they assume. Moreover, in its modern emergence, it inexplicably intertwines Islam and Muslim identities and experiences with ‘radicalisation’ into violent extremism, specifically terrorism, securitising Muslims and positioning them as risks of future threats (Kundnani, 2012; Brown, 2020; Hussain and Bagguley 2012), as discussed in the following sections.

Finally, and fundamentally, the concept does nothing but puts distance between those who have been ‘radicalised’ and those who are looking to understand their experiences. In other words, the researcher and the researched. Not a single woman interviewed as part of my research used ‘radicalised’ or ‘radicalisation’ to describe or explain her experiences suggesting the language is ineffective in articulating lived experiences. Even applying the concept in its relative form: as a movement on a continuum from moderate to radical is ineffective because an individual's intellectual and behavioural development is continually changing. Moreover, it suggests that the experiences of individuals, behavioural or intellectual, can be undone or reversed, and those who have been ‘radicalised’ can be rehabilitated into society if they are ‘de-radicalised’.

'Radical' British Muslims: Setting the context

There is a tendency across academic, policy and media domains to refer to British Muslims as a homogeneous 'Muslim community' (Dwyer, 1997). The Muslim "community" in the UK is a vast, complex, multi-faceted and deeply variegated collectivity (Dwyer, 1997: 55; Rashid, 2016). The category of 'religion' is included in most recent national surveys in the UK; however, it was only introduced in the 2001 Census. The Muslim ‘community’ in the UK forms nearly five per cent of the population, with over forty-seven per cent born in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2012; MCB, 2015: 16), and, for seventy-three per cent, "their only national identity is British (or other UK identity only)" (MCB, 2015: 17). Heterogeneity is evident in terms of ethnic origins, socioeconomic status, age, education, religious denomination, and religious attachment (Dwyer, 1997; Modood et al., 1997).

Since 2001, there has been a sharp and voluminous rise of research focusing on British Muslims, with specific scrutiny on youth and women. This increase was driven by the tragic events of 11th September 2001 (hereinafter: 9/11), a series of four terrorist acts bringing down the Twin Towers in New York City, U.S. and catalysed further by the 7th July 2005 London bombings (hereinafter: 7/7). This is evidenced by the sheer number of academic articles and books, which open with the words: "Since 2001…". Pre-millennium, research on British Muslims predominantly focused on ethnicity, migration, and access to and experiences of the labour market (for example, see: Brah, 1996). Post 9/11 and 7/7, research shifted and then accelerated to concentrating on identity, belonging, alienation, and youth, and a failure of Muslims to integrate.

However, the 'problematic' Muslim identity and the narrative of the 'failure' of Muslims to 'integrate' had its origins in the Rushdie affair (1989) where riots broke out in response to Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses.* Rushdie's book included offensive "passages relating to [the] Prophet Muhammad, his wives, and the Qu'ran" (Modood, 2006: 214). The book resulted in Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issuing a *fatwa* [religious edict/order] advocating for the murder of Rushdie for committing blasphemy (see Allen, 2010, Modood, 2006; Githens-Mazer et al., 2010). The Rushdie affair was a vital catalyst in politicising the identity of British Muslims, arousing of global Muslim consciousness (Saeed, 2016: 28). The July 2001 riots in Bradford, Burnley, and Oldham and the attacks of 7/7 and 9/11 also "provoked and boosted reductive and stigmatising images" of Muslims (Rehana, 2015: 7).

The implications for Muslim young people's identity and transitions to adulthood are numerous (Franceschelli and O'Brien, 2015). Young Muslims living in Western countries have been increasingly perceived by the public and described by the media as "alienated, deviant, underachieving, and potential terrorists" (Dwyer et al., 2008: 117), and simultaneously 'militant, aggressive and potential fundamentalist' (Archer, 2001: 8).

In 2006, Tony Blair's government launched the ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’ program (known as 'Prevent') designed to target a wider population whose activities, behaviours and beliefs were not criminal, but, according to government officials, indicative of extremism.[22] As part of the initial ‘Prevent’ programme funding, £20 million was allocated to local authorities and community organisation to fund projects to combat extremist ideologies and a consultation process aimed at identifying communities most 'at risk' (Kundnani, 2014: 158).[23] However, all ninety-four local authority areas with more than 2000 resident Muslims (according to the 2001 census, the first to ask a question about religion) became involved in ‘Prevent’. "The government's assumption was that the best measure for the level of extremism was the size of the local Muslim population, which, as one government email put it, was 'rough and ready proxy for risk of radicalisation" (ibid: 159), despite, as Githens-Mazer (2012) explains, the statistical gap between the reality of the security threat and the perception of that threat is statistically negligible.

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[22] Prevent is also sometimes referred to broadly as CVE (countering violent extremism) (Brown, 2020: 42).
[23] The UK Government currently spends £40 million on CVE, which is part of its £2 billion counterterrorism budget (ibid: 42).

As of 2015, ‘Prevent’ also became a statutory duty in public institutions such as healthcare, universities, and schools, with frontline staff working with the public being responsible for “reporting suspicious behaviours that might indicate that an individual is susceptible to ‘extremist’ ideologies or is already under their influence”. (Fernandez, 2018: 168). This led to the entire British Muslim ‘community’ comprised of 2.7 million Muslims being securitised (Croft, 2012), and "resulted in a sensationalised narrative that implicated all Muslims as potential terrorists, hidden in plain sight" (Saeed, 2016: 2), or vulnerable of being radicalised into violent extremism. As Richards (2011: 151) summarises: "the characterisation of vulnerability matters because it lends itself to a broader spectrum of response concerned with potentially numerous 'vulnerable' individuals, and … traditionally non-security areas such as community integration and cohesion become securitised". Moreover, operationalising a counter-terrorism policy on the perceived vulnerability dependent on the religious affiliation of swathes of people, deflects a fundamental tenet of traditional terrorism studies – that terrorism involves the perpetration of rational and calculated acts of violence. Instead, it implies a diminished capacity for rational behaviour, and these people need help in being recuperated into mainstream society (Richards, 2011: 151). This has functioned to problematise and securitise Muslim communities in the UK and positioning all Muslims as vulnerable to becoming radicalised into violent extremism (Richards, 2011).[24] The Home Office claims there is no evidence that Muslim communities are being targeted (Home Office 2011a: 23). However, Muslims have a one in 500 chance of being referred to ‘Prevent’, which is forty times higher than any other demographic group (Versi 2017 in Gentry, 2020: 146).

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[24] The securitisation of British Muslims has been studied in previous research by Kundnani (2014), El-Shimi (2015), Health-Kelly (2013), Ryan (2009), Rashid (2016), Saeed (2016), and Brown (2008) amongst others.

The UK's ‘Prevent’ policy did not arise in isolation. As Kumar (2012: 9) observes, "the history of 'Islam and the West', as it is commonly termed, is not a story of religious conflict, but rather born of political rivalries and competing imperial agendas". Europe's Imperialist agendas during the Crusades are important points of intersection between the West and Islam, encounters that led to "exaggerated stereotypes and caricatures of a violent Islam" (Saeed, 2016: 5; see also: Esposito, 1999; Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008; Fekete, 2009; Allen, 2010; Kumar, 2012). Some scholars go as far as arguing European identity was formed through the deliberate exclusion of Muslims in its cultural and historical narratives (Asad, 2003; Casanova, 2012). Qureshi (2015) argues that ‘Prevent’ “follows the same colonialist logic as that of the British Raj after the Indian war of independence in 1857 where Muslim grievances and resistance were attributed to primitive religion, rather than an outcome of material conditions, where the only kind of Islam allowed was one ‘palatable’ to the British value system” (Qureshi, 2015: 183; Saeed, 2016: 5).

The modern discourse around the perceived 'failure' of Muslims to integrate and the production of British Muslims as a problematic Other has its origins in events like the Brixton riots (1981); the Rushdie Affair (1988); and the Northern riots (2001) (Heath-Kelly, 2013: 409). This positioned all Muslims as 'reactionary'. However, it was not until the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005 that British ‘multiculturalism’ became securitised (Elshimi, 2017). Multi-culturalism was identified as one of the causes of ‘radicalisation’ against British Muslims – the Muslim community was blamed for creating segregated communities, undermining a cohesive British identity (Mirza, Senthilkumaran and Ja'far, 2007). The integration agenda was geared to confuse concerns about immigration and the management of diversity with the threat of terrorism and concerns of 'radicalisation' (Sedgwick, 2010). The UK's 'Prevent' Policy anchors the problem of 'radicalisation' in the identity crisis of British Muslims through promoting a panacea of "British values" and reproduces Muslim populations as latent security threats (Heath-Kelly, 2013). This reinforces troubling dichotomies between moderate and radical Islam, or 'good and bad' Muslims (Maira, 2009; Brown and Saeed, 2014).

This has had explicit gendered implications on British Muslim women. Historically (and specifically in the British context), Muslim women have played a vital role in the production of difference between the West and the Rest (Hall 1992; Puwar and Raghuram 2003). The 'saving Muslim women' trope embedded in Western political and media discourses post 9/11 (Abu-Lughod, 2002) functioned to position Muslim women as a dominant, and most visible, signifier of difference between Muslim communities and wider society. British Muslim women's identities have been politicised, securitised, and radicalised by the media and the state in constructing the threat of Islamic extremism, directly and non-directly related to acts of violent extremism. Examining media representations of Muslims and Islam in Britain, Moore et al. (2008) found that there was increasing importance placed on the differences between Islam and British culture and values with Muslim women positioned as the signifier of difference. The Muslim woman stereotype represented in such narratives oscillates between the 'oppressed victim' and a 'symbol of violent radicalism' – the former remaining dominant (Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2011; Tyrer and Ahmed, 2006). On the one hand, Muslim women are “portrayed as victims in forced marriages, honour killings, and female circumcision” (Brown & Saeed, 2015: 1963; Asfhar et al., 2005; Brown, 2008; Puar, 2007; Werbner, 2007). On the other, they personify a security threat, with the headscarf itself representing a direct threat (it hides the person underneath) and an ideological threat – it physically interrupts the progressive (and 'gender-equal') landscape of Britain (Brown and Saeed, 2015: 1953). Consequently, British Muslim women are positioned, not only as a threat to the security of the societies that many of them have grown up within but also as a signifier of difference in public discourse to construct Islam as antithetical to Western culture (Brown & Saeed, 2015; Dwyer, 1999; Khan, 1998). Their very existence is manipulated to embody the Other, and characterises, what is perceived as, a repressive fundamentalist religion echoing neo-colonialist and orientalist representations of Muslim women (Mohanty, 2003).

With gender equality being perceived as a central marker of 'Britishness' (Pearson, 2015); often used as the litmus test for British values in Muslim communities within counter-extremism programmes (Huckerby, 2012: 6), the highly essentialised and over-generalised stereotype of the Muslim woman is portrayed as irreconcilable with being British. Through this narrow orientalist lens, tackling the inequality and discrimination and the empowerment of Muslim women was central to the remit of the ‘Prevent’; strategy launched by the UK government in 2006 (Brown, 2013: 45). They are forcibly embedded in the fight against extremism in their roles as mothers and gatekeepers to communities who can prevent the ‘radicalisation’ of their male relatives and other male members of the community. They are seen to be the ‘missing link’ or ‘stop-gap’ in counter-extremism projects (Brown, 2008: 472; Gentry, 2020: 150); catalysts who can 'civilise' and 'liberalise' British Islam and Muslim communities (Brown, 2008: 473).

Within CVE, Muslim mothers emerge in a binary mode: as ‘good mothers’ who help prevent their children’s’ ‘radicalisation’, or as ‘bad mothers’ who are directly or indirectly responsible for it (Brown, 2020: 119-120). Furthermore. given the perceived backwardness of Muslim communities, Muslim women are understood as having something to benefit from becoming more 'British' as they become liberated from the subservient and oppressed gendered roles deeply entrenched in their cultural practices (Pearson, 2015). In recent years, this framing has been renewed by the announcement of government policies aimed to promote the integration of Muslim women in the UK by providing free English classes to the hardest to reach communities (Saeed, 2016: 37). This assumes that speaking English will make Muslim women feel more 'British' and empower them to strive to a 'British' understanding of gender equality, and then allowing them to transfer their new 'Britishness' to their male relatives and counterparts in the community. Other programmes to empower Muslim women have included a role-modelling project designed to raise the aspirations of Muslim girls, and a campaign designed to increase the civic participation of Muslim women in British society (Rashid, 2016).[25]

Explaining ‘radicalisation’: A short review of existing conceptual research on ‘radicalisation’

Approaches to studying ‘radicalisation’ broadly fall into Political Science, Sociology, Criminology, Law, Political Theory, Policy Studies, Religious Studies, and Islamic Studies. Most researchers seek to identify a range of possible triggers, ‘push and pull factors', mechanisms, models, or pathways occurring at multiple, complicated levels of analysis (Moghaddam, 2005; Wiktorowicz, 2005; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Bartlett and Miller, 2010; Brown, 2011; Pattanaik, 2011; Taylor and Horgan, 2008; Christmann, 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Della Porta, 2018), but ultimately focus on the 'at-risk' or 'already-radical' individual (Brown, 2020: 2).

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[25] Naaz Rashid’s (2016) book *Veiled Threats: Representing the Muslim woman in Public Policy Discourses* provides an excellent analysis of the centrality of ‘empowering’ Muslim women to UK counterextremism policy paradigms and highlights the role of ‘empowering Muslim women’ initiatives as a justification for the UK’s ‘war on terror’ and the Prevent agenda. Katherine Brown’s (2020) *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization* also analyses the gendered differential in the impact of counter-radicalisation measures with a focus on Prevent; and Caron Gentry’s (2020) *Disordered violence: How gender, Race and Heteronormativity Structure Terrorism* analyses ‘Prevent tragedies’ and how Prevent functions through ‘logics of gender’.

Phase models seek to identify or predict different pathways to 'radicalisation'. Phase models "select observations [cases] of 'successful' radicalisation and start by reasoning backwards to describe the radicalisation process which these radicals have presumably gone through" (Neumann, 2013: 874). They differ in lengths, stages, and complexity, from Sageman (2004) and Precht's (2007) four-stage processes to more dynamic models like Moghaddam's (2005) 'Staircase to terrorism', and McCauley and Moskalenko (2008)'s 'Twelve mechanisms of 'radicalisation'. Phase models are often employed to analyse violent 'radicalisation'; thus, they cannot effectively explain non-violent 'radicalisation' without assuming it is an earlier stage of a 'radicalisation' trajectory.

Moghaddam's (2005) staircase model was one of the first phase models of 'radicalisation'. The step metaphor is utilised to reflect that the process is not automatic or inevitable; rather, individuals can stop at any point on the staircase. Instead, it maps how individuals move from discontent to feelings of frustration and anger in not being able to change their circumstances, to moral disengagement from standard social norms as they come to adopt the framework of the extremist group or cause to a willingness to carry out acts of violence. There are six steps in total, progressing from 'Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions' (Ground Floor) to 'Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Conditions' (First Floor) to 'Displacement of Aggression' (Second Floor) to

‘Moral Engagement’ (Third Floor) to ‘Solidification of Categorical Thinking & the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Group’ (Fourth Floor), and finally, ‘The Terrorist Act and Side-stepping Inhibitory Mechanisms’ (Fifth Floor). The ground floor is inhabited by those who perceive some form of injustice or experience some sort of ‘deprivation’ in their lives. Those who wish to do something about it move onto the First Floor. If individuals find no solutions to their problems, they move onto the Second Floor, displacing their frustration onto an enemy. On the Third Floor, individuals join a group, which facilitates a moral engagement with a ‘cause’ before moving onto the Fourth Floor, where they are recruited into a terrorist organisation. Finally, on the Fifth Floor, they are mobilised into perpetrating an act of terrorism.

There are significant issues with the linear nature of models like Moghaddam’s. Firstly, the model puts anybody with a grievance or has experienced injustice on a potential ‘staircase’ to terrorism. Moghaddam’s ‘Ground Floor’ consists of ‘hundreds of millions of people’ with perceived injustices and grievances. Specifically, given the hyper-securitisation of Muslim communities, models of ‘radicalisation’ like Moghaddam’s, suggest any Muslim individual with a perceived grievance or injustice is ‘at risk’ of ‘radicalisation’ or capable of progressing up the ‘staircase’ to terrorism. Moreover, Moghaddam suggests that if individuals feel they have a choice or control in their future or options within the society they live within to address their grievances or the injustices they experiences they won’t progress to the next floor. Many people who *feel* they have no control or ‘choice’ in their lives nor options to address their so-grievances or injustices do not do anything to address these particular issues but continue their everyday lives. Whilst Moghaddam’s model is designed to suggest there is no inevitable outcome to ‘radicalisation’, one can only ascend or descend a staircase or stay stationary - fixed in place on the ‘staircase to terrorism’. There is no conceptual space to allow for or consider the complex choices that shape an individual’s engagement with an extremist organisation or organisation. Consequently, not only do linear models like Moghaddam’s position all those with a perceived grievance or injustice on a potential ‘staircase’ to terrorism, but there is little conceptual space to understand the heterogeneity of individuals’ life experiences within the different contexts they are embedded within, nor the complexities of agency or choice.

McCauley and Moskalenko’s (2008) ‘Twelve mechanisms of radicalisation’ model takes a similar approach in mapping different pathways to ‘radicalisation’. They argue that ‘radicalisation’ can happen on three levels: individual, group, and mass. They delineate twelve mechanisms, which enable ‘radicalisation’ to happen. At the level of the individual, ‘radicalisation’ is caused by grievances, either experienced personally or by the group the individual identifies with. At the group and mass levels, ‘radicalisation’ is the result of competition and conflict with other groups (or states). McCauley and Moskalenko stress the reactive nature of ‘radicalisation’: it occurs in response to events and forces within the environment. Moreover, unlike other models and approaches (discussed below), they argue that ideology or religion is not a key causal factor in ‘radicalisation’. They argue that some individuals join a radical group for thrills and status, some for love, some for connection and comradeship, and in many cases, ideology only serves to rationalise the violence. Whilst McCauley and Moskalenko suggest there are multiple and diverse pathways leading individuals and groups to ‘radicalisation’ and terrorism, and the twelve mechanisms they identify are non-exhaustive, they simultaneously argue that ‘radicalisation’ happens in “response to the actions of others” (ibid, 2008: 426). McCauley and Moskalenko’s model stresses the reactive nature of ‘radicalisation’: of the twelve identified mechanisms, McCauley and Moskalenko note that only two are autonomous, while the remaining ten are reactive and context dependent. On the one hand, this highlights both the importance of environmental context in the experiences of those who join or consider joining extremist organisations and the multiple factors that shape the contexts individuals inhabit. However, on the other hand, it again leaves little conceptual space for understanding the relationship between agency and ‘environment context’. Moreover, their use and application and application of the concept of ‘mechanisms’ suggests that there are observable, scientific phenomena, which can be mapped and identified across cases of ‘radicalisation’.[26]

Root cause approaches focus on identifying root causes and causal factors in ‘radicalisation’. Root cause approaches also focus on the ways different factors intersect on the micro, meso, and macro levels to shape individuals’ experiences of ‘radicalisation’ (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009). Instead of trying to map a process to predict the different stages of ‘radicalisation’, greater attention is given to identifying different intersecting factors between vulnerabilities, motivations, grievances, on the one hand; and an enabling environment, exposure to ideologies, and recruitment on the other hand (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009: 24). For example, Wiktorowicz (2005) argues that groups position ‘grievances’ within an interpretative ‘frame’ and places importance on socialisation in creating ‘a network of shared meaning’ for those who share these grievances. Wiktorowicz describes that a ‘cognitive opening’ can be the cause of emotional distress, discrimination, political repression, identity confusion, or as a result of ‘consciousness raising’ or persuasion by others. He argues that those who experience a ‘cognitive opening' as a result of the above may then attempt to find religious answers to their discontent. Sageman (2008) also argues 'radicalisation' is a process where ideology becomes more extreme in response to a 'cognitive opening' or a group bonding process. He emphasises the importance of friendship and kinship in the process, rejecting both economic and political conditions as insignificant. Despite Sageman's argument that social bonds come before ideological commitment in the process, at the heart of his approach is an unexamined assumption that violence has its origins in religion or theology, specifically Islam. Whilst understanding how religion and ideology can be a *mobilising* factor in why an individual would join an extremist organisation is important, the tendency to view 'radicalisation' through the prism of religion or religious ideas results in a de-politicisation of 'radicalisation'; conceptualising it as a religious process, not a political one (Crone, 2016: 595). As such, hypostasising for ideology to 'radicalisation' has resulted in blindness to the heterogeneity of experience in the journeys of those who come to participate or support extremist movements. It ignores the experiences of those who join or consider joining extremist organisations that don't and can't take place in a vacuum.

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[26] Borrowing the concept from Psychology, McCauley and Moskalenko (2008: 415) define ‘mechanism’ in a ‘general sense’ “the means or manner in which something is accomplished”, including ‘physical stimulus’ and the ‘physiological and neural processes involved’.

Existing models and theories of 'radicalisation' are inherently simplistic and borderline nomothetic. Their focus is to uncover and explain 'radicalisation' in terms of the systematic regularities that different cases exhibit and run the risk of over-prediction and over-generalisation (Moon, 1977: 183). They prioritise finding root causes or causal mechanisms in how 'radicalisation' progresses to formulate observable 'laws' and 'norms' of how 'radicalisation' occurs (Hollis and Smith, 1990). Essentially, they fall into the trap of trying to explain 'radicalisation' to map and predict the probability of future action without first understanding the perspectives, experiences, and histories of those who have experienced ‘radicalisation’. Moreover, in the hands of police and state security apparatus, this type of scholarship becomes a prospectus for mass surveillance of specific populations and communities, seeking to identify ‘at risk’ individuals on ‘radicalising paths’ (Kundnani, 2012: 19), like discussed above.

Taylor and Horgan (2006) identify that process thinking about ‘radicalisation’ neglects that decision making, making a choice to join or consider joining an extremist organisation, does not take place at one single point in time, nor isolated from the contexts the individual inhabits (see also Horgan, 2005). Rather, focusing on a broader context of involvement and engagement helps identify the ‘powerful incentive of reward’ individuals are both offered and experience when they engage with and join extremist organisations. Taylor and Horgan argue that the ‘answer’ to why an individual becomes involved in extremism (compared to those who do not who share similar backgrounds and experiences) lies in the psychological and emotional context of the individual, which is driven by non-psychological forces of ‘opportunity’ and ‘context’. Taylor and Horgan (2006) do not predict a linear process of ‘radicalisation’, but they do map a complex diagram of interdependent and intersecting factors influencing an individual’s ‘trajectory’ into joining an extremist organisation. These factors act as ‘trajectory qualities to terrorism’. Taylor and Horgan describe that, although they clearly contribute to the choices of the individual to engage with the extremist organisation, these factors have little ‘predictive value’ and cannot be said to “cause” or result in choices of a particular set of actions (ibid: 592).

Instead of trying to ‘force simple answers’ to why individuals join extremist organisations, Taylor and Horgan’s work presents a more nuanced conceptual framework outlining the multiple intersecting factors, which can shape an individual's involvement in an extremist organisation. However, whilst some of the later work Taylor (2008) and Horgan and Taylor (2011) engages with the factors that shape individuals' choices to *disengage* from extremist organisations and the 'decisional context' of choice, there is little conceptual space given to agency within this model, nor the complex of the different choices individuals make. Without this consideration, the model presents the concept of an individual who is 'pushed' and 'pulled' between competing forces before being making the 'choice' to join the extremist organisation. Taylor and Horgan's (2006) work is also underpinned by a model of rational choice (ibid: 597), and their understanding of decision making is shaped by the psychology of criminology (ibid: 593). This understanding is based on individuals' cognitive behavioural decision making and returns to a process way of thinking (ibid). This has critical issues for understanding women's agency and choice in the context of political violence and extremism, as discussed earlier in this Introduction and further in Chapter Two. This is discussed further within Chapter Three with reference to the existing research on Western women affiliated with ISIS (see, for example, Saltman and Smith, 2015).

This is only a brief overview of some of the existing research on 'radicalisation'; however, this research also provides the backdrop for the ways that recent academic and policy researchers have attempted to understand why Western women have joined or considered joining extremist Islamist organisations, like ISIS (discussed further in Chapter Three). As the research presented in this thesis demonstrates that there is no single root or route to 'radicalisation'. This doesn't mean to suggest that existing research on 'radicalisation' is rendered useless, or these models or theories are incorrect in the factors they identify, or there cannot potentially be space for a serious consideration of agency within the existing ‘radicalisation’ framework. Contrarily, although the plethora of ‘radicalisation’ models and theories have limited predictive or explanatory power, they are instructive in highlighting the heterogeneity in the experiences of those who have joined or considered joining extremist organisations. In fact, whilst there are gaps in existing research in exploring the complex agency embedded in the experiences of those who engage with extremist organisations, many of the factors outlined in these approaches and models are similar to the experiences and testimonies shared by the women interviewed as part of this thesis. This necessitates further research focusing on the individual experiences of those who have engaged with extremist organisations, which moves away from mapping or predicting motivational, or driving factors and explores how their agency, choices, and experiences are embedded in the different contexts they inhabit.

Introducing relationality to the study of ‘radicalisation’

Clara Eroukhmanoff (2015: 257) argues that "to question the very idea of ‘radicalisation’”, we must “come to terms with the concept of *relationality”*, which sees practice as “ontologically relational". Drawing on a Bourdieusan framework, Eroukhmanoff suggests that analysing the field of practice relationally "renders the concept of ‘radicalisation’ unwarranted, but also reveals its problematic assumptions". I want to build on Eroukhmanoff's approach, which focuses on critiquing the possibility and legitimacy of ‘counter-radicalisation; as both a concept and practice where ‘radicalisation’ is a remote process that can be effectively ‘tackled’ (ibid: 259), to build a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of ‘radicalisation’.

Bourdieu (1998: vii) argues that the logic of practice primarily focuses on the *relations* of actions in the world. In other words, *practice* refers to the relations *between* agents and "its cornerstone is a two-way relationship between objective structures (those of social fields) and incorporated structures (those of habitus)" (Bourdieu, 1998: vii). The problem with the dominant and rationalist model of existing 'radicalisation' research is it centres on "disconnected view of practices" (Eroukhmanoff, 2015: 258), where actors are entirely autonomous making individual choices that lead to individually intended outcomes.

Central to this are two issues. Firstly, it creates distance between the observer (the researcher or more broadly the field of 'radicalisation', terrorism, or security research) and the observed (in this case the Muslim community) without examining the relationship between the two. Secondly, it denies the relationship between the subject (the 'radicalised') and the social world they exist within. As Eroukhmanoff (ibid: 258) describes existing 'radicalisation' research: "constitutes the social world as a spectacle (theatrical representation) where practices are seen as no more than actors performing roles and acting out on their motivations" (also see: Bourdieu [1980], 1992: 52). As described above, existing research on 'radicalisation' ignores that the social world and the subject are both products of past historical practices and interaction between people, 'doomed' to diminish the relationship between social agents to an ahistorical and dissociate logical formula (Bourdieu, 1977: 83; Eroukhmanoff, 2015). Put simply, many existing approaches to understanding experiences of 'radicalisation' fall down in viewing 'radicalisation' as a practice as a result of autonomous preferences and motivations, instead of being the product of relations between actors and structure.

It is helpful to draw on Bourdieu's notion of *field,* or space, as to move away from this objectivist nomothetic tendency in ‘radicalisation’ research and to build a more nuanced approach to the lived experiences of ‘radicalisation’. For Bourdieu (1998: 31):

> “The notion of *space* contains, in itself, the principle of a *relational* understanding of the social world. It affirms that every "reality" it designates resides in the mutual exteriority of its composite elements. Apparent, directly visible beings, whether individuals or groups, exist and subsist in and through *difference*; that is, they occupy *relative positions* in a space of relations which, although invisible and always difficult to show empirically, is the most real reality (…) and the real principle of the behaviour of individuals and groups”.

In the field, there are "no autonomous practices, no autonomous identity, and no autonomous agents, but only a relation between agents and a relation between practices" (Eroukhmanoff: 258). As such, practices (here, ‘radicalisation’) are the product of the encounter between habitus and field, or between dispositions and positions (which I discuss further in the following chapter).

Taking a relational approach to understanding experiences of ‘radicalisation’ means returning to the dialectic between the *opus operatum* and *opus operandi* of structure and habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), where neither habitus nor field has the capacity to solely determine social action (Wacquant in Adler-Nissen, 2013: 8). As Eroukhmanoff highlights, this is where a Bourdieusan framework is most informative: in understanding the mutually constituted relationship that unites agents and structures. Chapter Two elaborates this Bourdieusan approach further and develops the broader conceptual framework, which underpins this thesis.

Conceptually, I draw on further the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986; 1990) and Saba Mahmood to explore how an individual adopts certain values, beliefs, norms, and practices that are embedded in specific social fields and inform their different intersecting identities. Despite often positioned, by themselves and others, in opposition to each other in their theories of habitus, I argue that reconciling Bourdieu and Mahmood's work offers productive grounding for developing a framework that considers both agency and structure, and the nuances of human experience.

Rather than seeing Mahmood and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus in conflict with one another, I bring them together to understand habitus as a social, bodily, intellectual, and emotional "muscle-memory'. This means understanding habitus not only as unconscious mimesis, as in the eyes of Bourdieu, but also as pedagogic processes – skills that one develops or learns. In other words, their embodied capacity to negotiate their own identities, lives, and futures. Understanding habitus as "muscle-memory" encompasses how individuals develop "transposable dispositions of being and operating in the social world" (Sweetman, 2009: 493), and how they develop the intellectual and emotional propensity to critically engage (reflexivity) and act (agency) within that same social world. Accordingly, I propose a framework that understands agency is conditional upon the position an individual occupies in the social space (field), their dispositions (habitus), and the choices they can make (agency). This is achieved through critically engaging with the field (reflexivity) based on the knowledge that has been learned and taught (pedagogy), and their access to resources (capital), which shapes their embodied capacity to act. Through this lens, I argue that reflexivity can be recast as a type of capital that is taught, learnt, and developed through our pedagogical habitus.

To define agency, I build on Saba Mahmood's (2005: 7) seminal work in the *Politics of Piety*, conceptualising agency as a means of subjection formations and a "modality of action". Mahmood to destabilise and disassociate agency from a liberal conception of autonomy, and, instead, focuses on an individual's ability or propensity (embodied capacity) to critically engage and make choices within the different social contexts and norms they inhabit, experience, subvert, and perform (ibid: 22). Drawing upon wider feminist scholarship on the agency of women who participate in gender-traditional conservative religious movements (Avishai, 2008, Hoyt, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014) as well as theoretical discussions on women who engage in political violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2011; 2020; Auchter, 2012), I outline a conceptualisation of agency which focuses on the way women make choices, which reflects the reciprocal, relational, and simultaneous nature of the fluid interaction between habitus, subject, field, and practice. I argue that it is not necessary to see agency, identifying strategies of empowerment, subversion, or resistance: it suffices to note how women 'do' agency and make choices, how they inhabit, perform, observe, negotiate parts of their identity, values, and beliefs within different social fields.

In application, this means exploring how the women at the centre of this thesis adopted certain values, beliefs, norms (habitus), which shaped their different experiences, the choices they made, and the practices they engaged in within specific social fields. It means investigating the ways in which they are both constituted by and constituting of social structures, and how their experiences joining or considering joining violent and non-violent extremist organisations are contextualised and embedded within their personal histories and journeys.

I am cautious of falling into the trap that others have fallen into, which can be seen as in 'sprinkling a little bit of Bourdieu here and a little bit of Mahmood there in order to add conceptual weight to their work. Instead, I want to critically draw upon their work to understand the experiences of the young women in this thesis from a new perspective, and one that, until now, has not been explored in understanding the experiences of those who join or consider joining violent and non-violent extremist organisations. Moreover, by drawing on the work of Mahmood, Hoyt, and others, my research is grounded in a much wider body of literature on women who join traditional or conservative religious movements. Rather than solely within the research that focuses on 'radicalisation', my intention is an attempt to disable or at least shift the Western gaze embedded in the existing literature on women who join extremist Islamist organisations, and seek to understand their experiences from their perspectives and from within the intersecting normative frameworks in which they rely on to make sense of their own lives. This approach equips me with the conceptual and analytical tools to pay attention to heterogeneity and nuance in individual experiences and distance my research from the inherently nomothetic nature of ‘radicalisation’ studies more broadly.

Thesis structure

Chapter Two crafts the foundational conceptional framework of this thesis. The first part of this chapter focuses on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1980; 1984; 1986) work on *habitus* to explore how an individual adopts certain values, beliefs, norms, and practices embedded in specific social fields, and informs their different intersecting identities. I augment Bourdieu’s ideas on the importance of beliefs and belonging in habitus by drawing on the work of Nira Yuval-Davis (1997; 2006; 2011) work on belonging and the ‘politics of belonging’. I also draw on Bourdieu’s later work (2000; 2009) on *habitus clivé* and Waltorp’s work on composite habitus. I explore how young second-generation Muslim women embody several durable dispositions simultaneously as they move in and out of different overlapping social fields. The second part of this chapter focuses on Saba Mahmood's (2005) work on habitus, which draws on a longer and richer history of *habitus,* tracing it back to an older Aristotelian tradition. This means considering habitus as not only unconscious mimesis, like Bourdieu but also as pedagogic processes – skills that one develops or learns. The final section of this chapter builds further on Mahmood's (2005) seminal work in the *Politics of Piety* to conceptualise agency to destabilise and disassociate agency from a liberal conception of autonomy and draws upon wider feminist scholarship on the agency of women who participate in gender-traditional conservative religious movements (Avishai, 2008, Hoyt, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014) as well as theoretical discussions on women who engage in political violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2011; 2020; Auchter, 2012).

Chapter Three provides a historical and ideological background to ISIS with a specific focus on the ideological and functional role of women to the group. In doing so, it draws on secondary research and media sources, including analysis of ISIS propaganda publications, as well as academic and policy research. The second part of this chapter reviews relevant academic and policy research on Western women affiliated with ISIS, highlighting both its strengths and limitations, the gaps that exist and how this thesis seeks to address them.

Chapter Four provides a historical and ideological background to Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), with a specific focus on its ideology on women, drawing on both primary and secondary research. It also draws upon the testimonies of both men and women interviewed as part of this research to explore what it is like to be affiliated with HTB, specifically, a woman affiliated with HTB. It also serves as a review of current research on HT globally and

HTB. The final section of this chapter focuses specifically on the sparse but existing literature that focuses on women affiliates of HT Britain, highlighting both its strengths and limitations, the gaps that exist and how this thesis seeks to address them.

Chapter Five discusses my fieldwork process in detail and the methods employed in this project. Through providing a detailed account of my research, especially regarding reflexivity and positionality, and building relationships with community organisations, within this chapter I aim to provide a transparent account of the ethics, challenges, and limitations of conducting qualitative research with individuals who have engaged with extremist organisations.

Chapter Six focuses on a broader overview of the experiences of British South Asian Muslim women who have grown up and live in the UK, specifically in and around the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This chapter focuses on women who have *not* joined or considered joining an extremist organisation but who are proactively and positively seeking to change their circumstances and experiences. This draws a direct comparison with the women in the following chapters, who by joining or considering joining HT and ISIS, were also seeking to change theirs through vastly different ways and means. It explores how young second-generation Muslim women embody several durable dispositions simultaneously as they move in and out of different overlapping social fields. The first part of this chapter explores participants' experiences 'growing up Muslim' across the social fields of the family, the school, university, the workplace, the religious field, and the wider public field. The chapter highlights the similarities in the experiences and composite habituses of the women in this chapter (and wider thesis), unique to being a South Asian British Muslim woman growing up in London. It explores the ways that 'their sense of the game' (habitus) across multiple social fields has been routinely disrupted from an early age. The second part of the chapter engages with the wider conceptual framework recognising the ways women make choices and ‘do’ agency in critically engaging and negotiating the different social contexts and norms they experience and are embedded within. Exploring the ways, the women in this chapter simultaneously inhabit, perform, observe, and negotiate parts of their identity, values, and beliefs within different social fields, I trace the ways they are actively seeking or creating space for themselves and other Muslim women where they can learn about Islam and discuss their faith and identities.

Chapter Seven explores the experiences of eleven British Muslim women aged eighteen to thirty-five years old who have joined or considered joining HTB. Five women are still members, four have left, and two are engaged with the organisation, but not, or have not yet, become full members. The chapter begins by providing individual profiles of each woman, relying on their voice to tell their own stories of becoming involved with HTB and grounding the following analysis in their own narrative and real lives. The second part of this chapter explores participants’ experiences ‘growing up Muslim’ across the social fields of the family, the school, university, the workplace, the religious field, and the wider public field. I highlight that whilst there are close similarities to the experiences (and habituses) to the women in Chapter Six, the experiences of the women affiliated with HTB are characterised by a set of strongly perceived gendered contradictions of being Muslim, being a woman, and British, which shaped their experiences and understanding of their identity as a British Muslim woman. Moreover, from an early age, what distinguished these women from the other women in this thesis was an ideological drive to make the world a better place for Muslims. In searching for a way to make sense of their lives and the challenges they faced, structure their daily routines and purpose, interpret their different experiences and encounters, and act on this political drive, they encountered HTB. The final part of the chapter explores how HTB offered them both a cognitive, normative, and political framework they could engage with to both understand and embody their faith, critically engage with politics, shape their identities, and give purpose to their belonging, not only as Muslim women but as British Muslim women. HTB promised them the opportunity to belong to a bigger cause with other Muslim women like them in the UK (and globally) and equip them with the tools and resources to do something.

Chapter Eight explores the experiences of twelve young women aged eighteen to twenty-four years who joined or considered joining ISIS.

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The primary material originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA due to the sensitivity of the subject matter and the interests of further protecting the anonymity of the research participants to the utmost extent. The material is based on interviews conducted as part of the fieldwork in this study.

I highlight that, although there are distinct similarities in how the composite habituses of all women in this thesis have been structured and disrupted, for the young women affiliated with ISIS, these disruptions fundamentally destabilised their 'sense of the game' and their sense of belonging. I highlight that, unlike the women in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven who had an embodied capacity (shaped by their habitus and access to capital) to critically engage with the normative framework and social fields they were embedded within, the young women who became affiliated with ISIS ultimately lacked a propensity (and lack of capital) to reflectively critique or scrutinise the norms, rules, and discrimination which shaped their daily lives, and the experiences and challenges they faced. Instead, their response was to escape their present realities; to untether themselves and their identities from the milieus that defined them, and find meaning, definition, and belonging elsewhere. Whether or not they executed their plans to travel to Syria or simply flirted with the idea, I explore the choices they were making about their identities, their faith, and their futures when they felt they had little control over other aspects of their lives as British Muslim women.

Chapter Nine revisits the main arguments of the thesis, discussing both its contributions and limitations. In doing so, I contextualise the implications of this research for the current debates surrounding the repatriation and rehabilitation of British nationals affiliated with ISIS.

In Extremis?

The accounts of all the women interviewed as part of this thesis raise some very worrying questions about the way minorities, particularly Muslim minorities, are treated in the UK. With this in mind, the title of this thesis: ‘In Extremis’ is intended as a subversive reference to what the word "extreme" conjures in social consciousness. It refers to being in an extremely difficult situation and is designed to bring attention to the difficult situations and challenges faced by all women in this thesis. In other words, the challenges of growing up in the UK as a British Muslim woman, whether they joined an extremist organisation or not.

This thesis is inspired in many ways by the work and approach of the late Saba Mahmood (1961-2018). In the preface to the second edition of *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Mahmood (2005: xii) describes she was often ‘chided’ for not denouncing the mosque movement and the patriarchal values or views they espoused. Considering this she questions: “If academic knowledge production aims to be something more than an exercise in denunciation and judgement, it must surely think beyond its own naturalised conceptions in order to grasp what other notions of criticism, evaluation, and reasoned deliberation operate in the world. This in turn requires opening up [the] study of different forms of subjectivity and concomitant disciplines of ethical self-formation”.

With this in mind, I invite the reader to question their conceptions of agency, freedom, ‘empowerment’, and subject formation in understanding the experiences of the women in this thesis.

All women in this thesis are individuals. I am acutely aware that this thesis does not tell the comprehensive stories of women affiliated with ISIS nor Hizb ut-Tahrir, nor does it even begin to claim to do so. I also do not claim that I am the right person or only person or should and can share these stories. But it is, hopefully, a start.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptual framework

Chapter overview

As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, taking a ‘relational’ approach to studying ‘radicalisation’ means focusing on the mutually constituted and constituting relationship between agents and structure. This approach assumes there are "no autonomous practices, no autonomous identity, and no autonomous agents, but only a relation between agents and a relation between practices" (Eroukhmanoff, 2015: 258). It means exploring how experiences and pathways of those who have joined or considered joining an extremist organisation have been shaped by the individuals’ experiences and negotiation of their different overlapping identities in the different social contexts they occupy daily. Put differently; it necessitates addressing the duality of agency and structure, and how the experiences of the young women at the focus of this study cannot be understood without reference to the multiple contexts in which they inhabit and move between.

I draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986; 1990) and Saba Mahmood (2005), despite often positioned, by themselves and others, in opposition to each other in their theories of habitus. I argue that reconciling their work offers productive grounding for developing a framework, which considers both agency and structure, and the nuances of human experience. Bourdieu’s (1980; 1984; 1986) work on habitus explores how an individual adopts certain values, beliefs, norms, and practices embedded in specific social fields, and informs their different intersecting identities. Drawing on Bourdieu’s later work (2000; 1999) on *habitus clivé* or composite habitus (Waltorp, 2015) I explore how young second-generation Muslim women embody several durable dispositions simultaneously as they move in and out of different social fields.

Whilst Bourdieu provides a convincing framework for explaining how the social positions of individual subjects come to be embedded as dispositions, largely through unconscious processes (Mahmood, 2005: 138), his theory of 'habitus' is less instructive in explaining the conscious effort an individual makes to re-orientate their desires brought about by "the concordance of inward motives, outward actions, inclinations, and emotional states" (Mahmood, 2006: 54). Joining critics who argue that Bourdieu's theory of habitus is too deterministic and his conceptualisation of reflexivity (disruptions in the habitus) too limited, I argue there remains the question of how we develop the capacity to be reflexive, and critical, in negotiating our identities.

Therefore, I employ the work of Mahmood (2005) to explore how different values, beliefs, and choices are acquired and developed through coordination of outward behaviour (bodily acts, social demeanour) and inward dispositions (emotional states, thoughts, intentions). Mahmood draws on a longer and more traditional Aristotelian conceptualisation of the term of habitus to understand how the body, mind, and emotions are simultaneously trained to achieve competence at something (Mahmood, 2005), in other words, their 'embodied capacity'.

Rather than seeing Mahmood and Bourdieu's concepts in conflict with one another, I bring them together to understand habitus as a social, bodily, intellectual, and emotional 'muscle-memory'. This means understanding habitus not only as unconscious mimesis, as in the eyes of Bourdieu, but also as pedagogic processes – skills that one develops or learns, in other words, their embodied capacity or propensity to negotiate their own identities, lives, and futures. Understanding habitus as "muscle-memory" encompasses how individuals develop “transposable dispositions of being and operating in the social world” (Sweetman, 2009: 493), and how they develop the intellectual and emotional propensity to critically engage (reflexivity) and act (agency) within that same social world. This means developing a framework, which understands that agency is conditional upon the position an individual occupies in the social space (field), their dispositions (habitus), and the choices they can make (agency) based on the knowledge that has been learned and taught (pedagogy), their access to resources (capital). Through this lens, I argue that reflexivity can be recast as a type of capital that is taught, learnt, and developed through our pedagogical habitus.

I build on Saba Mahmood’s (2005: 7) seminal work in the *Politics of Piety* to conceptualise agency. Mahmood destabilises and disassociates agency from the liberal conception of autonomy and, instead, focuses on an individual’s ability or propensity (embodied capacity) to critically engage and act within the different social contexts and norms they inhabit, experience, and perform (ibid: 22). In the final part of this chapter, I outline a conceptualisation of agency which focuses on the way women make choices, which reflects the reciprocal, relational, and simultaneous nature of the fluid interaction between habitus, subject, field, and practice. I argue that it is not necessary to see agency, identifying strategies of empowerment, subversion, or resistance: it suffices to note how women ‘do’ agency and make choices, how they inhabit, perform, observe, negotiate parts of their identity, values, and beliefs within different social fields.

Pierre Bourdieu: Habitus, Practice, and Field

> "All in all, habitus can be understood as knowledge that has been learned by the body. It is a way of inhabiting a world, and part of what one is."
>
> (Bourdieu, 2000: 141)

Bourdieu developed his theory of habitus to explain how individual action is both "constructing and constructed by social structure" (Franceschelli, 2013: 17), which involved re-thinking the duality between agency and structure. Bourdieu (1977) developed the concept of the habitus to explore the ways in which the body is in the social world, and the social world is in the body. In this sense, the habitus is:

> "a socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world – a field – and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world."
>
> (Bourdieu, 1998a: 81)

In the Logic of Practice (1980; 1990), Bourdieu defines habitus as "a system of durable and transposable dispositions …which generate organised practices and representations…" (1990: 53-65). For Bourdieu, habitus explains how agents internalise and transform objective structures into durable dispositions, which reproduce elements of the objective structure (Lienard & Servais, 2000). Habitus can also be defined as "a concept that expresses on one hand, the way in which individuals' become themselves' – develop attitudes and dispositions – and on the other hand, the ways in which those individuals engage in practices" (Webb et al., 2002: p. xii-xiii). Bourdieu's concept (1990) of habitus also relates to the resource of knowledge. This knowledge is gained from a specific culture in which an individual lives in, informing their worldview and understanding. In Bourdieu's (1990: 53, emphasis mine) words:

> "The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, *transposable dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of operations necessary in order to obtain them".

These 'transposable dispositions' are 'predisposed ways' of 'being' in the social world (Sweetman, 2009: 493). These include ways of "moving, walking, and generally way of making and doing things, behaviours, and gestures" (Francescelli, 2013: 40), or "the manner and style by which actors carry themselves" (Jones, 2002: 74-75). Dispositions influence a person's expectations of social life. An individual's disposition is reflected in actions and behaviour unconsciously but imprinted in and through a person's socio-cultural behaviour and bodily *hexis:* durable ways of "standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking" (Bourdieu, 1990a: 70; Reay, 2004: 432). "[D]urably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu, 1978: 78), determines how a subject sees and experiences the world. Essentially, what they think and do, their aspirations, values, and practices. Intrinsically, habitus can be understood as "the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts … they are durable and transposable" (Webb et al., 2002: 36). According to Bourdieu, the habitus is ingrained at the unconscious level as subjects: "move through, and across different fields, they tend to incorporate into their habitus the values and imperatives of those fields" (Webb et al., 2002: 37).

Field and practice

The concept of 'field' is essential to Bourdieu's theory of habitus: "The field is the crucial mediating context wherein external factors are brought to bear upon individual practice and institutions" (Jenkins, 2002: 86). Bourdieu acknowledged that fields are 'fields of struggle', defined by the interests at stake, including areas such as culture, housing, education, employment, land, power, politics, social class, prestige (Jenkins, 2002: 84-85). The nature of social fields is relational and characterised by the struggle for different types of capital: "To think in terms of field is to think relationally (…) in analytic terms in a field may be defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 96-97).

> "The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of the field (or a hierarchy of intersecting fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge of cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value, in which it is worth investing one's energy."
>
> (Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989: 44).

Regarding 'practice', Bourdieu refers to any visible and objective social phenomenon (Jenkins, 2002: 69); practice is 'what people actually do in the social world' (ibid: 68-69). A leading premise in Bourdieu's theory of practice is this "circular relationship between internal subjective dispositions and external objective structures" (Francescelli, 2013: 40). Bourdieu describes the interaction between agency and structure through a middle level of 'objective practices'. The individual acts as a 'filter', which absorbs and internalises influences coming from the social world in the form of external objective practices (ibid: 40). The "internalisation of objective practices produces individual dispositions to act and behave in certain ways" (Francescelli, 2013: 40). These dispositions go back to reproduce and inform objective practices, and consequently, influence the social world. This characterises the nature of habitus. This means, habitus is informed by structure through socialisation but is then assumed by individuals to produce individual practices, which in turn shape objective structure (Francescelli, 2013: 40). For this reason, "habitus is the source of 'objective practices', but is itself a set of 'subjective; generative principles produced by the 'objective' patterns of social life' (Jenkins, 2002: 82).

The flexibility of practice is often compared to jazz musicians. During musical performances, "musicians stay within certain musical boundaries, which follow a particular jazz tradition and style, and are limited by the constraints of their instruments" (Power, 1999: 49). However, they can improvise almost endlessly in musical themes:

> "habitus is in cahoots with the fuzzy and the vague. As a generative spontaneity which asserts itself in the improvised confrontation with endlessly renewed situations, it follows a practical logic, that of the fuzzy, of the more-or-less, which defines the ordinary relation to the world".
>
> (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1992: 22-23).

Capital

With 'capital', Bourdieu extended Marx's theory of capital as "the product of an investment which can secure a return" (Moore, 2004: 446), beyond the economic sphere (Francescelli, 2013: 43). He argued social (relations with others), cultural (knowledge and education), and symbolic capital (prestige and social honour) are the inner workings of social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). Put simply; social fields are the social areas where different groups compete, like in a game, for different volumes of economic, social, cultural, and other forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: xxi). There are four main types of capital that Bourdieu identifies: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (Reay, 2004).

'Economic capital' is the most 'straightforward' type of capital (Reay, 2004), and understood in association with power (money and wealth). 'Cultural capital' exists in three forms: 1) in the embodied state, e.g., in the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; 2) in the form of cultural goods, e.g., pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.; 3) a form of objectification results in things like educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1983 in McCall, 1992: 843). 'Cultural capital' also includes the body of knowledge and competencies, values, beliefs, and resources that parents directly or indirectly transmit to their children (Hofstede, 2001). 'Social capital' accumulates from networks of relationships, like the family. 'Symbolic capital' is the form that other types of capital assume when they are uncategorised (Reay, 2004). Within the context of this study, another type of capital is essential: religious capital.

In the *Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field* (1991), Bourdieu describes religion as an autonomous social field, which involves the production, reproduction, and diffusion of religious goods (Bourdieu, 1991: 7). Just like other social fields, "religion implies struggle and class distinction based on the possession of religious capital as a symbolic resource in the hand of dominant groups" (Franceschelli, 2013: 43). He argues that religion has both a social and political function "by imposing and inculcating schemes of perception, thought, action objectively agreeing with political structures" (Bourdieu, 1991: 32).

The importance of family

Habitus is constituted not only by a person's individual history but also the collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of. However, "just as no two histories are identical, so no two habituses are identical" (Bourdieu, 1990: 46). Intergenerational transmission is the process in which cultural capital passes down from parents to their children. The transmission and acquisition of cultural capital are unconscious processes "reflected by the metaphor of the social world as a game: participants enter and adapt to the rules of the game already in place; these rules reflect and perpetuate social class inequalities" (Franceschelli, 2013: 46; also see: Silva, 2005). Bourdieu argued that cultural capital is imprinted and encoded in habitus from childhood through learning (Bourdieu, 1984).

In conceptualising the role of the family in his theory of habitus, Bourdieu wrote two articles *On the Family as a realized category* (1996) and *The family spirit* (1998). He outlines that family is both "an objective social category ("a structuring structure" and "a subjective mental category (a structured structure)" utilised by the individual to bring together representations and actions coming from the social world (Bourdieu, 1996: 21; Bourdieu, 1998). Family is an important field which provides the social context where the process of intergenerational transmission takes place – but it is not culturally neutral.

> "The habitus acquired in the family is at the basis of the structuring of school experiences…; the habitus transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences… and so on, from restructuring to restructuring"
>
> (Bourdieu, 1972, cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 134)

In other words, the habitus is an outcome of early childhood experience, and specifically from socialisation within the family, but it is also continually restructured with the outside world (Di Maggio, 1979; Reay, 2004). Consequently, habitus can either be replicated through encountering a field that reproduces its disposition, or it can be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations.

Belief and Belonging

'Belief' is a critical concept within Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field, which is particularly important for understanding the relevance of Bourdieu's work on identity. In the Logic of Practice (1990), Bourdieu describes the importance of beliefs as an "inherent part of belonging to a field" (Bourdieu, 1990: 67). He argues that beliefs are pre-intentional, acquired during childhood through learning. Having a sense of belonging goes beyond what might initially be thought of as feelings of 'being at home' or of seeing oneself as 'fitting in', whether to a community or place (Yuval-Davis, 2006). 'Belonging' is believing one belongs in a space (Christensen, 2009). Yuval-Davis' argues belonging is a dynamic process based on the interplay between individuals and subjective factors at three levels: social locations (constructed along different power axes of difference, for instance, gender, class and, ethnicity); individuals' identifications and attachments (for example, narratives about who you are/where you belong), and ethnic and political value systems, by which people judge their own and others' belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 199; Christensen, 2009). Accordingly, the 'politics of belonging' concerns "specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectives that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways" (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). A major part of scholarship on 'belonging' is the "the dirty work of boundary maintenance" (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 563).

The construction of who ‘belongs to’ the state triggers the construction of who does not “belong to” the state (Butler and Spivak, 2007). Judith Butler extends the notion of bipolarity from her theories on gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990, 1993), in her book, *Who Sings the Nation State?* (Butler and Spivak, 2007). Consequently, ‘belonging’ and ‘unbelonging’ are “inextricably linked” (Christensen, 2009: 26). In the same way as “if the state is what ‘binds’, it is also what can and does unbind (ibid: 26). “If the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes” (Butler and Spivak, 2007: 4–5). Through drawing on Yuval-Davis’ work on belonging alongside Bourdieu’s work on habitus, I first detach belonging from the notion of citizenship to explore how ‘belief’ in belonging is inherited, taught, learnt, embodied, and reiterated from an early age across multiple social fields, including the family. However, I return to the ‘politics of belonging’ and the construction of citizenship later in the thesis.

Habitus, agency, and reflexivity

> “The habitus, as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practice can be predicted … this is because the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances.”
>
> (Bourdieu, 1990: 77).

As others have argued in a similar vein, I agree that Bourdieu is too deterministic in the suggestion that individuals are fated to reproduce the conditions of their existence (Mellor & Schilling, 2010a), tethered to a destiny which is mostly determined by history. The latent determinism in Bourdieu’s work is ironic given his rationale for developing the concept of habitus: “an attempt to transcend dualisms for agency-structure, objective-subjective, and the micro-meso” (Reay, 2004: 432).

However, Bourdieu sees habitus as potentially generating a varied repertoire of possible actions, simultaneously enabling the individual to draw on transformative and constraining courses of action (Reay, 2004: 433). “Choice is at the heart of habitus” (Reay, 2004: 435), and is associated with the “art of inventing” (Bourdieu, 1990a: 55):

> “Habitus is a kind of transforming machine that leads us to ‘reproduce’ the social conditions of our own productions, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products.”
>
> (Bourdieu, 1990: 87).

Despite this tendency to behave in ways expected of ‘people like us’ (Reay, 2004), Bourdieu argues there are no determined rules that dictate behaviour. Rather “the habitus goes in hand in hand with vagueness and indeterminacy” (Bourdieu, 1990: 77; Reay, 2004: 433). Habitus is not one of the predictable regularities of different types of behaviour, but “that of vagueness, of the more-or-less, which defines one’s ordinary relation to the world” (Bourdieu, 1990b: 78).

Academic concerns of determinism in Bourdieu’s work are connected to the ways in which Bourdieu handles reflexivity. Within Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, Bourdieu does consider reflexivity; he is aware that people reflect on their practice, construct narratives, and strategise. However, he sees individuals as becoming reflexive *only* when disruptions occur in their habitus. For Bourdieu, reflexivity emerges under restrictive circumstances and does not involve reflection *of* the subject *on* the subject (Bottero, 2010). Rather, it entails the systematic exploration of the “unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 40). In other words, when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjuncture can generate transformation (Reay, 2004). For example, when they travel abroad or start a new degree programme. For Bourdieu, “reflexivity emerges from moments of ‘crisis’, from mismatches between habitus and field which reveal the taken-for-granted assumptions of the game” (Bourdieu, 1977: 169). As such, “consciousness and reflexivity are both the cause and the failure of the immediate adaptation to the situation” (Bourdieu, 1990b: 11). For Bourdieu, habitus avoids disruptions, crises, or challenges that might call it into question.

Bourdieu’s framing of reflexivity in dispositional terms does not account for other key aspects of subjectivity, such as the dissonances people sometimes experience in the performance of social roles, and the narratives they construct in processes of reflection of self and others (Bottero, 2010). Because of this, Bourdieu overstates the unconscious aspects of habitus, neglecting everyday reflexivity (our inner conversations) (Sayer, 2004; Archer, 2003; Reay, 2004). As Crossley (2000: 138) argues, habitus is not just unconscious and demands ‘dialogues with oneself’.

As Bohman (1998: 143) summarises, Bourdieu is:

> “…unable to adequately equip practical agents with reflective and critical abilities which would make it possible to describe how they might initiate … transformative processes, or to understand how they might succeed in enlisting the cooperation of other agents in transforming social identities and conditions”.

This is problematic as there is more reflexivity in everyday life than Bourdieu acknowledges. Perhaps the disruptions in habitus that Bourdieu portrays happen more frequently than he suggests (McNay, 1999; Bottero, 2010). But this still confines reflexivity to being a transforming force and ignores that reflexivity may also be bound up in habitual everyday action, which perpetuates existing norms and behaviours (Bottero, 2010: 9). For example, gender reflexivity (and agency) should not be understood only as a “liberal freedom to question and critically deconstruct the rules and norms which previously governed gender” (Adkins, 2004: 191), because it can also habitually reproduce and reinforce those norms. Bourdieu’s framework fundamentally limits the “life of the mind”, and underestimates how agents can stand back from their everyday milieu, critically reflect on their habitus, and seek to transform (Sayer, 2004: 23), or continue to act in accordance with it.

Various endeavours have been undertaken to reconcile everyday reflexivity with Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (for example, see Adams, 2006; Elder Vass, 2007; Mouzelis, 2007). I find Bottero (2010) who reframes Bourdieu’s ‘socialised subjectivity of habitus’ as ‘situated intersubjectivity’ the most convincing. Bottero states that “to operate within the ‘rules of the game’ is not just a question of acting on embedded instinct”, but it also depends on the “coordination and standardisation of practical actions” by interdependent social agents, who affect each other as they act (Bottero, 2010: 11). She utilises the work of Barnes (2000), to argue “agents must take account of, and act in accord with, the expectation of the people they encounter in given social situations” (Bottero, 2010: 11). Hence, ‘the sense of the game’ refers to an individual’s relations with others – an encounter between agents as well as an encounter between the habitus and the field.

Bottero reconciles everyday reflexivity with habitus by arguing that 'practice' is anchored intersubjectively. Bottero (2010: 14) proposes it "is experienced not just in terms of dispositions to act but also as a relation to the expectations and influence of concrete networks of others". Strictly speaking, engaging with collective practices can make an individual feel it is impossible to swim against the tide, leaving them feeling "ambivalent, resigned, or even cynical" to these practices (ibid). Bottero describes that we routinely participate in practices that are "both habitually reproduced and widely experienced as troubling" but given that these practices are collectively engaged with daily, they seem resistant to change. Therefore, one important question is how people perceive and construct the constraints they experience and how these constraints are challenged (ibid). Besides, individuals continually provide each other with a commentary on what they are doing, and in doing so, generate accountability to each other as a way of coordinating understandings and practice, but also sustaining a sense of how they are likely to act in the future (ibid). As such, "reflections [and commentaries] upon practice are also practices in themselves" (ibid: 15). By routinely sharing commentary on their joint practice, individuals locate and provide justifications for their shared ways of living and enable them to establish what is acceptable and what they can get away with.

Finally, much of Bourdieu's sociology is dependent on assumptions that people are inclined to associate with others much like themselves, for reasons of "structural proximity and because their embodied predispositions make them seek out the familiar and similar" (Bottero, 2010: 16). Consequently, he neglects both the degree of heterogeneity that may exist in each social context and the individuals that modify and reconstruct the dispositions as they move through different milieu and networks. The field is made up partly by other individuals, so the relation between habitus and field is: "also an encounter between agents, with more or less similar dispositions and characteristics" (ibid). In studying the ways an individual experiences and negotiates their identity, it is imperative to consider the intersubjective nature of practice and reframe reflexivity within Bourdieu's framework as "a reflection on, not a reflection of, dispositional practice, rather than the "recovery of tacit assumptions that already structure practice" (ibid: 17).

Composite Habitus, Split or Clivé Habitus

Returning to Bourdieu's discussion of disruptions in the habitus, the mismatches between habitus and field he describes (Bourdieu, 1977: 169), happen more frequently for some individuals than others. Lahire (2011) argues that there are many situations where individuals are 'transplanted from one field to another through social mobility or migration, and this leads to 'maladjusted' or 'out of place' individuals'. As discussed, Bourdieu argues that these habitus 'misfires' reveal the 'taken-for-granted assumptions of the game' (ibid), and the habitus adapts to consider the new circumstances or new field. However, what happens when the two fields have conflicting rules, logic, norms, and structures, which is often the case?

In Bourdieu's later work in Algeria, he started to consider the situations when habitus mismatches occur more frequently, where "dispositions are out of line with the field … habitus has its 'blips', critical moments when it misfires or is out of phase' (Bourdieu, 2000: 160-162). In *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) and *The Weight of the World* (1999), Bourdieu introduces the idea of the habitus becoming split or *clivé* (Waltorp, 2015: 53). He argues that for some people there is often a contradiction between the experiences and expectations of their families and broader society (Bourdieu, 1999: 383). "When the 'structuring of [the] habitus happens across partially overlapping fields, the tension between them can result in a split or fragmented habitus" (Waltorp, 2015: 53). Other scholars have supported this idea (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Reay et al., 2009; Ahmad, 2012). For example, Noble (2013: 354) employs the idea of an 'ethnicised habitus' to explain the feeling of being attached to part of wider society as well as the diasporic community.

Most usefully for this thesis, building on Bourdieu's idea's around 'split habitus', Waltorp's (2015; 2020) draws on her research with young Muslim women in Denmark to develop the concept of 'composite habitus'. Waltorp argues the young second-generation Muslim women embody several durable dispositions simultaneously as they move in and out of different social fields. However, "[t]his does *not* imply that any of the composite parts of the habitus can be easily disregarded or applied in a conscious or flexible manner… a composite habitus is not "roles" one can choose freely and consciously to shift between as convenient" (Waltorp, 2015: 53). Rather, it is the multiple predispositions that shape the identities, preferences, opinions, and choices structured and structuring across overlapping social fields. "The term composite habitus points the ways in which these young women, as most people in the modern, globalised world, are informed and formed by *multiple fields* and *multiple forces* during their life trajectory" (Waltorp, 2015: 51).

Consequently, instead of viewing habitus in a unitary or singular manner, I draw on Bourdieu's later work of 'split habitus' and Waltorp's (2015; 2020) concept of 'composite habitus' to explore the ways in which the way women in this thesis' 'sense of the game' and composite habitus developed across multiple social fields, exploring how this has been routinely disrupted from an early age. Waltorp argues that the concept of 'composite habitus' also affords the women in her study a range of strategies to challenge different norms and practices. Building on Waltorp, I also argue the concept better explains the routine reflexivity embedded in daily life described above and the intersubjective nature of social fields and practices (Bottero, 2010), which Bourdieu struggles to account for. Composite habitus also enables us to think further about how different fields are made up partly by encounters and interactions with other individuals, with their own composite habituses, with more or less similar overlapping dispositions and characteristics, and how these interactions and encounters may reinforce or disrupt an individual's 'sense of the game'.

Employing habitus as a conceptual framework

Employing Bourdieu's theory of habitus as a conceptual framework enables:

> "… a way of looking at data which renders the 'taken-for-granted' problematic. It suggests a whole range of questions … How well adapted is the individual to the context they find themselves in? How does personal history shape their responses to the contemporary setting? What subjective vocations do they bring to the present, and how are they manifested? Are structural effects visible within small scale interactions? What is the meaning of non-verbal behaviour as well as individuals' use of language?"
>
> (Reay, 1995: 369)

However, key questions remain in how we develop the capacities to *become* reflexive? Do we all have the same capacity to critically engage with the norms and practices that govern our daily lives? Even if we are born with an innate capacity or propensity to be critically reflexive, how do we learn how to do this? Bourdieu, and subsequently, others who build on Bourdieu's work, express how reflexivity emerges in the field, but it presents nothing on how an individual gains the skills or capacity to be reflexive. For this reason, I draw on Mahmood's conceptualisation of habitus as a pedagogic process.

Saba Mahmood: Habitus as pedagogic process

Mahmood's seminal work *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005) has significance for the conceptual framework of this thesis for two crucial reasons. Firstly, in her complex theory of agency grounded in the notions about embodiment, practice, and habitus, and, secondly, in her development of a pedagogical habitus which seeks to recognise the body as a site of learning, and the importance of education and training.

Mahmood offers important criticisms of Bourdieu's theory of habitus, arguing that Bourdieu appropriates Aristotle on practice, he leaves aside the pedagogical aspect of the Aristotelian notion of habitus as well as the context of ethics in which the concept of habitus was first formulated (Mahmood, 2005). For Mahmood, Bourdieu's treatment of habitus and agency is limited by his concern for the unconscious or mimetic ways of learning in which we follow social norms without reflecting or seeking to change them:

> "One result of Bourdieu's neglect of the manner and process by which a person comes to acquire habitus is that we a lose a sense of how specific conceptions of the self (there may be different ones that inhabit the space of a single culture) require different kinds of bodily capacities. In contrast, the Aristotelian notion of habitus forces us to problematise how specific kinds of bodily practice come to articulate different conceptions of the ethical subject, and how bodily form does not simply express the social structure but *also endows the self with particular capacities* through which the subject comes to enact the world."
>
> (Mahmood, 2005: 139; emphasis mine)

In her own words, Mahmood grounds her work in a "longer and richer history" of *habitus,* tracing it back to an "older Aristotelian tradition" where habitus is "understood to be an acquired excellence at either a moral or practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of a person" (2005: 136). Mahmood traces habitus to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1999), translating habitus as a "tradition of moral cultivation" and implying a "quality that is acquired through human industry, assiduous practice, and discipline" (2005: 136). For Aristotle, *virtue* takes root in one's character in the process of *learning through doing.* Habituation has, if it is to produce attentiveness or virtue, to be more than mindless repetition. Mahmood also draws on Foucault (1988: 18) to develop this approach into identity-transforming 'technologies of the self', and Mauss' (1973) emphasis on bodily pedagogy (the body is best understood as an ensemble of aptitudes). She argues that drawing on principles of virtue ethics that are associated with Foucault who "allows us to think of ethics of always local and particular, pertaining to a specific set of procedures, techniques, and discourses" and it is through such practices that a "subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness or truth" (Mahmood, 2005: 28):

> "[I]n order for a child to learn to pray, the parent must make her conscious of her gestures, glances, and thoughts. When the child undertakes the act hurriedly or forgets to perform it, her parents may present her with various kinds of explanations for why praying is important, what it signifies, and how it is different to the child's other activities. Such a pedagogical process *depends upon inducing self-reflection* in the child about her movements and thoughts and their relationship to an objective called God – all which *require some form of reflection about the nature of practice*. In other words, conscious deliberation is part and parcel of any pedagogical process, and a contemporary discussion about it cannot be understood simply as a shift from the unconscious enactment of tradition into a critical reflection upon tradition."
>
> (Mahmood, 2006: 54).

This older meaning of habitus refers to a specific pedagogical process, by which moral virtues are acquired through coordination of outward behaviour (bodily acts, social demeanour) with inward dispositions (emotional states, thoughts, intentions). Employed in this way, habitus refers to a conscious effort at reorienting desires, brought about by the concordance of inward motives, outward actions, inclination, and emotional states through the repeated practice of virtuous deeds. Essentially, "formation of the self does not require resistance to a structure of ideal; the self can achieve virtue by training itself to accord with a structure, toward an ideal" (Blankholm, 2019: 948). For Mahmood, "self-consciousness is a condition of proper self-habituation, or the proper attainment of virtue" (ibid: 949). Put simply, instead of returning to Bourdieu's metaphor of human habit is a fish in water; where it is not required to think 'water' or to negotiate its place therein, it is more helpful to draw on Turner's adaptation of this metaphor to learning to ride a bicycle:

> "[W]e cannot explain how to balance on a bicycle apart from doing it … while we have acquired a habit of riding, there are various styles we can adopt – aggressively, carelessly, nonchalantly and so on".
>
> (Turner, 2019: 296)

Strictly speaking, the modality of agency and the ability to be reflexive is dependent on the embodied capacities that different types of agency require (Mahmood, 2012: x). In Mahmood's ethnographic study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt, she demonstrates that the women she interviews are aware of the body as a site of learning and conscious of the *virtues* they have acquired through training. Mahmood draws on the work of Talal Asad (2003; 1997) to explore the embodied habitus of faith and argue that the anthropology of the body is the real conduit in a discussion of practice and ethics (Turner, 2019: 291). She contends that moral value arises from the ways in which bodies and subjectivities are grounded in communities and the material conditions of life

(Mahmood, 2005; Waggoner, 2005; Turner, 2019). “In short, the piety of Muslim women arises through the quest for virtue through habits and behaviours” (Turner, 2019: 292).

Unlike Bourdieu’s formulation on habitus, for Mahmood, it “does not serve as a conceptual bridge between the objective world of social structure and subjective consciousness”. Preferably, it is a “pedagogical technique” developed in the formation for the self. It is important to note that she is not suggesting there is freedom from habitus; instead, she is proposing the existence of hybridity within habitus through self-critique (Mahmood, 2006: 199). Academics, such as Turner (2019) and Rey (2018), have argued that Mahmood could have gone further in her criticisms of Bourdieu, considering the wider limitations of his contributions to sociology and anthropology of religion. However, instead of extending these criticisms, I believe there is both conceptual space and value in drawing on both perspectives.

This means considering habitus as not only unconscious mimesis, like Bourdieu but also as pedagogic processes – skills that one develops or learns. In other words, their embodied capacity or propensity to negotiate their own identities, lives, and futures. Understanding habitus as “muscle-memory” encompasses how individuals develop “transposable dispositions of being and operating in the social world” (Sweetman, 2009: 493), and how they develop the intellectual and emotional propensity to critically engage (reflexivity) and act within that same social world. Subsequently, I am advocating a framework that understands agency is conditional upon the position an individual occupies in the social space (field), their dispositions (habitus), and the choices they can make (agency). This is achieved through critically engaging with the field (reflexivity) based on the knowledge that has been learned and taught (pedagogy), which shapes their embodied capacity to act.

Essentially, combining Bourdieu's fish analogy with Turner's bicycle metaphor: when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is *like* a 'fish in water', however, first we must learn to swim 'like a fish in water'. Moreover, once we have learned to 'keep afloat', we must learn different styles ('strokes') of swimming to keep afloat in different types of water, tides, and depths, interacting with different types of fish (people); sometimes with access to an oxygen supply (capital), and sometimes without. We develop a 'muscle memory' of knowing how to swim and not drown, and in which we may not 'feel the weight of the water and take the world around us for granted'. But very quickly the tide can change, or a different fish (perhaps a shark) can enter our waters (social field) and throw everything into question. In these situations, our embodied or trained ability (embodied capacity) to swim or our access to oxygen can determine whether we survive or not. Or, more than often, the situation will further our swimming capabilities and enhance our access to capital. Our ability to assess the waters (reflexivity) and decide which stroke to use (act) is also shaped by the skills we have learnt and developed in training ourselves in "accord with a structure, toward an ideal" (Blankholm, 2019: 948), and being encouraged to reflect our actions and behaviour.

In other words, reflexivity can be recast as a type of capital, but it is a type of capital that cannot just be inherited or transmitted from parent to child. Instead, it is taught, learnt, and shaped by the pedagogic habitus - it is "pedagogical technique" developed in the formation for the self. This is not to argue that reflexivity is a rational or even conscious calculation of the amount of satisfaction an aspect or way of life brings. Rather, it is often an emotional reaction or response arising from feelings about how one fits in (or does not) with others and what they think, feel, and do (Holmes, 2010). In this sense, reflexivity is a critical part of habitus, especially when habitus is confronted by a social field that disrupts or challenges it. [27]

Conceptualising agency

Mahmood's understanding of habitus as a pedagogic process informs the development of her theory of agency, and in turn, informs my understanding of agency in the context of this thesis. In this final section, I build on Mahmood's work and wider feminist scholarship on the agency of women who participate in gender-traditional conservative religious movements (Avishai, 2008, Hoyt, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014; Burke, 2012) as well as theoretical discussions on women who engage in political violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2011; 2020; Auchter, 2012; Åhäll, 2012). I outline a conceptualisation of agency, which moves away from a binary framework of oppression-resistance, with women being either empowered or victimised, liberated or subordinated (Bauman, 2008, Bilge, 2010, Hoyt, 2007; Burke, 2012). Instead, I draw upon a conceptualisation of agency which focuses on the way women make choices, which reflects the reciprocal, relational, and simultaneous nature of the interaction between habitus, subject, field, and practice.

In many ways, "[a]gency is the currency by which political subjects are often recognised in Western, liberal thought - a currency which is gendered and racialised in a number of different ways" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015: 149; Auchter, 2012: 123). Many approaches to understanding women’s choices and actions initially (and blindly) assumed that women wanted (or should want) liberation and that women’s collective action grows out of their common oppression (Rinaldo, 2014: 826). Liberation is unquestionably assumed to be the “emulation of the powers and behaviour of the white, wealthy male (i.e., the rational, autonomous man)” (Brown, 2020: 13). If women are not visibly acting to promote their free will and free action, to liberate oneself from oppressive contexts, then they are often “perceived to have faulty agency” (Brown, 2020: 13), or to be ‘pawns in a grand patriarchal plan’ (Mahmood, 2005).

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[27] Stahl (2013) makes a similar argument in his ethnographic study of white working-class boys in a socially marginalised area of South London.

Research focusing on women’s participation in both political violence and gender conservative religious movements strives to dispel stereotypes that women are not just “victims of patriarchy” or the circumstances they find themselves in (Rinaldo, 2014: 826).[28] Locating agency in women’s experiences through a liberal framework of autonomy leads to the argument that women’s choices or actions represent resistance against social and gender norms or patriarchal discourses or they are instrumentalising such norms or discourses as a way to feel empowered or for non-religious ends (Auchter, 2012; Rinaldo, 2014; Hoyt, 2012). For example, Bartkowski and Read (2003) and Mir (2009) have argued that veiling allows women to feel empowered within cultures that sexualise women’s bodies (Burke, 2012: 8). Brenda Brasher (1998)’s research on evangelical women converts whose religious beliefs empower them to speak out against discrimination or abuse. Both resistance and empowerment approaches problematically assume that women must experience dissonance between the dominant culture and their gender-traditional religions (Burke, 2012: 8). As such, these women who do not experience this dissonance are excluded from being agents (ibid). Instrumental approaches centre on the non-religious outcomes of religious practices (Asfhar, 2008; Bartkowki and Read, 2003; Chong, 2008; Davidman, 1991; Franks, 2001; Gallagher, 2003; Orsi, 1996). By way of example, women who wear the veil as a means of accessing or moving through spaces they would otherwise be excluded from or find difficulty accessing or navigating (see Macleod, 1992). This also assumes that women want to liberate themselves from patriarchal culture or their faith, and religion or ideology is only a means to navigating or accessing liberation or emancipation. Again, it excludes women who choose to comply with gender-traditional religions or religious movements from being actors (Burke, 2012).

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[28] Grouping my analysis and the theoretical approaches to women’s agency in this way does not imply to conflate the experiences of women who participate in gender conservative religious movements and women who participate in political violence. However, there are similarities in the ways that researchers approach both groups of women and both bodies of literature hold theoretical insights for this thesis.

Research on women who engage in terrorism, extremism, and political violence has highlighted the dichotomous framing of the question of 'agent and structure', like the ‘agent-victim’ binary, is gendered (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2015: 43; Auchter, 2012: 123). Instead of analysing women’s choices and actions through an outcome-based framework and to resolve the “dilemma of only seeing women’s violence as complicit with patriarchy because it doesn’t fit ideal gender types” (Brown, 2020: 13), Sjoberg and Gentry (2007; 2011; 2015) proposed drawing on Nancy Hirschmann’s (2004) work on procedural agency to focus on agency in decision making rather than outcomes or actions. In other words, women’s agency can be understood through their own accounts of their experiences and through tracing the different choices they make and actions to understand how they arrived at a particular outcome (Brown, 2020: 13), rather than focusing on the outcome itself. Central to this approach is understanding, "[d]esires and preferences are always limited by contexts that determine the parameters of choice" (Hirschmann, 2004: ix) – which in the context of this thesis can be understood as the interaction between habitus and field. "Given this interdependence, actors can choose to use their limited autonomy to act against, around, or with others" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015: 46). Individuals do make choices which shape their actions, but these “choices are both heavily and differentially constrained" across people's positions in social and political life - based on gender, race, class, nationality, and other positions (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015: 138) Subsequently, "people do not make choices (to commit political violence or otherwise) independent of either the other people or social structures around them" (ibid: 138). This approach is both “content- and outcome-neutral” (Brown, 2020: 13). It shifts the focus from searching who has agency and who does not recognise the multiple ways women make choices in negotiating their daily lives and the challenges they encounter. Instead of focusing on women’s agency as outcome-driven, women’s experiences should be understood, contextualised, and historicised through their own accounts and by following a series of choices and actions to understand how they arrived at this particular outcome (joining an extremist organisation, for example) (Brown, 2020: 13). In other words, “the voices of women should be contextualised and historicised as the experiences and iterations of their subjectivities” (Auchter, 2012: 135).

Through addressing the conceptual challenges that women’s participation in Islamist movements poses to feminist theorists and gender analysts, Mahmood (2006: 31) argues for the uncoupling of the notion of agency from that of resistance, and develops an alternative approach to understanding women’s, specifically Muslim women’s lives. The *Politics of Piety* is in part ethnographic and in part theoretical. The women’s mosque movement Mahmood studies in Cairo was composed of women from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds who gather in mosques to “teach each other about Islamic scriptures, social practices, and forms of bodily comportment considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self" (Mahmood, 2006: 33). She describes, "movements such as this… certainly, conjure up a whole host of uneasy associations such as fundamentalism, the subjugation of women, social conservatism, reactionary atavism, cultural backwardness, and the rest" (ibid: 33). It is assumed there is something intrinsic or innate to all women that predisposes them to reject ideology, values, and practices that Islamist movements and organisations, like HT and ISIS, embody (ibid). Mahmood argues that this "sharply limits our ability to understand and interrogate the lives of women whose sense of self, aspirations, and projects have been shaped by non-liberal traditions" (Mahmood, 2006: 33).

Alternatively, Mahmood makes use of (but also departs from) post-structuralist theory of subject formation. She specifically utilises the work of Judith Butler and Michael Foucault, to explore agency as a modality of action "whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic norms" (Mahmood, 2006: 37). She argues that self-realisation must be separate from autonomous will: "agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (Mahmood, 2005: 15).

Mahmood states that her work is "manifestly informed" by Butler's (1993) insights on norms. Central to Butler's work are two arguments (inspired by Foucault): 1) power cannot be understood only through a model of domination that is possessed and deployed by individuals or agents over others, with intentionality and rationality in its execution. In its place, "power should be understood as the strategic relation of force that permeates life and produces new forms of desires, objects, relations and discourses" (Mahmood, 2006: 45; Foucault, 1980: 2) The subject does not precede power relations through individuate consciousness but is produced through these relations, which form the conditions of possibility (ibid: 2). Mahmood relies on these insights to argue that understanding power and subject formation in this way enables us to conceptualise agency “not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable” (Mahmood, 2006: 45). Butler calls into question what she calls an “emancipatory model of agency”, one that presumes all individuals are “endowed with a will, a freedom, and an intentionality” (Butler, 1993 in Mahmood, 2016: 46). Instead, Butler locates agency within structures of power, suggesting that there is no possibility of undoing social norms that are independent of doing norms and agency is located, within this ‘productive re-iterability’.

However, Mahmood departs from Butler’s dualistic framework where agency is only developed in contexts where norms are thrown into question (not unlike the disruptions in Bourdieu’s habitus), and norms are conceptualised through the “mode of doing and undoing, consolidation and subversion” (ibid), and proposes thinking about the many ways in which norms are “lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for and consummated” (ibid). As a substitute to this, Mahmood argues norms are not only social impositions [to do or undo], but they constitute the very substance of an individual’s “valorised interiority” (Mahmood, 2006: 48). She contends that subjectivity is produced in relation to normative frameworks (Mahmood, 2005), and agency must be understood as a capacity of action that is contextually contingent, located within structures of power, rather than outside of them (Rinaldo, 2014: 828).

Mahmood draws on Foucault's (1997a, 1997b, 1997c) studies of ethics as way of analysing Muslim women's subjectivities and practices. Foucault describes 'ethics' as the dimension of moral prescriptions relating to "the kind of relationship that you ought to have with yourself", and which "determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault, 1997b: 263). Furthermore, she argues:

> "… Foucault's work encourages us to think of agency: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions [embodied capacities]; (b) as ineluctably bound up with the historical and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed… the capacity for action is enabled and created by specific relations of subordination".
>
> (Mahmood, 2005: 29).

Mahmood establishes Foucault's 'paradox of subjectivation' through the example of a pianist who submits herself to the disciplinary practice, as well as the hierarchical structures of apprenticeship, so she can develop the ability (the agency) to play the piano with mastery (ibid: 29). "[H]er agency is predicated upon her ability to be taught, a condition classically referred to as "docility" (ibid).

> "… what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency – but one that can be understood from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment."
>
> (Mahmood, 2005: 15).

Docility is often associated with the abandonment of agency, but the term really implies "the malleability required of someone in order for her to be instructed in particular skill or knowledge – a meaning that carries less a sense of passivity than one of struggle, effort, exertion, and achievement" (ibid: 29). As such, an individual's acts in this respect are not directed towards 'emancipation' or 'resistance', but towards developing the skills and capacities necessary for undertaking specific kinds of moral action (Foucault, 1997; Mahmood, 2005). "For setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object" (Foucault, 1990: 29).

Mahmood (2005) develops a 'culturally situated moral agency' (Jacobsen, 2011), building upon Butler's understanding of 'becoming' as 'always under a cultural compulsion' (Butler, 1990: 12). This is rooted in the Foucauldian model of self-formation that requires an account of the 'scaffolding of practices' that provide 'the necessary conditions for both their subordination and agency' (Mahmood, 2005: 154).

Understanding agency as simultaneous and fluid

Mahmood's work contributes to expansive literature, which has explored the complexity of women's engagement in conservative or fundamentalist religious movements (Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Harding, 2000; Bracke, 2003; Deeb, 2006; Stadler, 2009; Bano, 2012; 2017; Inge, 2016). Notwithstanding its theoretical contributions, Mahmood's work on agency is in many ways, a *non-theory of agency*. She maintains keeping the meaning open and, quoting Talal Asad, allow it to emerge from "within semantic and institutional networks that define and making possible different ways of relating to people, things, and oneself" (Asad, 2003: 78, in Mahmood, 2005: 34). Besides, Mahmood makes it clear from the outset of her work, seen from the very first page of the first chapter in *Politics of Piety,* that her project is informed by a social, historical, and contextual aim of understanding agency through exploring situated and historicised structures and operators of power, which constitute and are constituted by but do not determine subjects. Regardless, Mahmood's work has inspired a wide range of research on women's agency, particularly the agency of women who join or conform to religious movements. A portion of this literature applies Mahmood's conceptualisation of agency to their analysis, adapting her ideas to different historical and social contexts. Whereas others extend Mahmood's concept further, building on her 'non-theory' of agency to further understand how individuals engage with the different normative and social structures that that shape their daily lives to make choices and exercise agency.

In developing my own conceptualisation of agency in, alongside Mahmood, I want to draw on the work of Amy Hoyt and her concept of 'simultaneous agency'. Amy Hoyt (2013)'s work is built on a critique, like Mahmood's, of the "secular-liberal hyper attention to resistance as agency" (Feller, 2016: 157). Hoyt develops the concept of simultaneous agency to explain why and how Mormon women both support and oppose the structure of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS). She contends they "used simultaneous agency to negotiate between their individual, marital, and ecclesiastical expectations and desires" (Hoyt, 2013: 204-205). For example, the women in her study face pressure from religious leaders to stay home with their children whenever possible, which often stigmatises women who want to pursue a career, and economic pressure to contribute to the household income. Hoyt explains Mormon women have developed a strategy to negotiate this and access greater individual agency through personal revelation. By applying phrases like "I prayed about it, and I feel good about it", Mormon women carve out space for personal interpretation of Mormon teachings and use this interpretation to justify other choices they make. Hoyt's concept of 'simultaneous agency' enables us to consider both agency within moral structures and agency to challenge multiple moral structures as well as the possibility of ‘messy’ combinations between different types of choices, and outcomes.

Rachel Rinaldo (2014: 825-829) makes a similar argument in the conceptualisation of ‘pious critical agency’, which she defines as the capacity to engage critically and publicly with religious texts. She argues it is possible for individuals to both engage critically with their religion and religious texts, whilst at the same time using their religion for ‘diverse ends’, which might be instrumental, expressive, or non-religious. Particularly in how they draw on both religious and secular resources to engage with the intersecting frameworks. Rinaldo’s approach considers women who take a critical stance on some aspects of their religion despite fervently adhering to religious doctrine in other respects (ibid).

This notion also relies on Orit Avishai’s (2008) concept of ‘doing religion’, which borrows Butler’s (1990) ‘doing gender’ logic to emphasise the “constructed nature of religiosity and the enactment of religiosity in the context of social norms and regulatory discourse” (Avishai, 2008: 413). Through studying the ways that “orthodox Jewish Israeli women observe, negotiate, and make sense of religious regulations of their marital sexuality”, Avishai argues ‘doing religion’ is a mode of conduct and being, a performance of identity, not only purposeful or strategic action (ibid). She extends Mahmood’s focus on docile conduct as a self-authoring project by underlining religious conduct does not occur in a normative or discursive vacuum. Avishai (2008:413) argues their religious practices are ends in themselves: “religion may be done in the pursuit of religious goals – in this case, the goal of becoming an authentic religious subject against an image of a secular Other.”

Developing these ideas further, I argue that agency is both simultaneous and fluid, and can arise in multiple intersecting ways as an individual engages with (and is constituted by) overlapping normative frameworks embedded in the many social fields they are simultaneously embedded within. This is especially important for the women in this thesis who are informed and formed by their composite habituses, structured across multiple fields and multiple forces during their life trajectory growing up as second-and third-generation South Asian Muslim women in the UK (Waltorp, 2015: 51). Conceptualising agency as both simultaneous and fluid enables an acknowledgement of the ways in which an individual is informed and formed by multiple intersecting normative frameworks and social fields, rather than conflicted by them. Consequently, it is not necessary to ‘see’ women’s agency by identifying empowerment, subversion, resistance, or rational strategising: it suffices to trace how women make choices or “do” agency. Specifically, how they inhabit, perform, observe, negotiate parts of their identity, values, and beliefs within different social fields.

Chapter summary

This chapter has crafted the foundational conceptual framework of this thesis by drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Mahmood. My work is informed by both Bourdieu and Mahmood in two ways. Firstly, and fundamentally, in understanding the duality of agency and structure. Secondly, in seeking to understand how the experiences of the young women at the focus of this study with reference to the multiple contexts in which they are embedded.

I have argued that this means understanding habitus not only as unconscious mimesis, as in the eyes of Bourdieu, but also as pedagogic processes – skills that one develops or learns. In other words, their embodied capacity or propensity to negotiate their own identities lives, and futures. Understanding habitus as 'muscle-memory' encompasses how individuals develop "transposable dispositions of being and operating in the social world" (Sweetman, 2009: 493), and how they develop the intellectual and emotional propensity to critically engage (reflexivity) and embodied capacity to act (agency) within that same social world. I have argued that agency is conditional upon the position an individual occupies in the social space (field), their dispositions (habitus), and the choices they can make (agency) based on the knowledge that has been learned and taught (pedagogy) and resources they have access to (capital). Through this lens, I argue that reflexivity can be recast as a type of capital that is taught, learnt, and developed through our pedagogical habitus.

Augmenting Bourdieu's idea's on the importance of beliefs and belonging in habitus by drawing on the work of Nira Yuval-Davis (1997; 2006; 2011) work on belonging and the 'politics of belonging'. I have outlined that 'belonging/unbelonging' is not only essential in subject formation in the sense of being of feeling home or seeing oneself as 'fitting in' within the social field, but in the ways in which social fields or boundaries and identities are constructed and maintained.

Conceptualising agency, I have drawn on the work of Mahmood (2005; 2006) and wider feminist scholarship on the agency of women who participate in gender-traditional conservative religious movements (Avishai, 2008, Hoyt, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014) as well as theoretical discussions on women who engage in political violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2011; 2020; Auchter, 2012) to destabilise and disassociate agency from a liberal conception of autonomy. Instead, I have outlined a theory of agency which focuses on an individual's ability or propensity (embodied capacity) to critically engage and make choices within the different social contexts and norms they inhabit, experience, subvert, and perform. Finally, I have drawn on the work of Rinaldo (2014), Hoyt, and Avishai (2008) to conceptualise agency as both simultaneous and fluid, to with the aim to understand the multiple intersecting ways an individual engages with (and is constituted by) multiple overlapping normative frameworks embedded in the many social fields they are embedded within.

CHAPTER THREE

The 'Caliphate':

The Ideological and Functional Role of Women in ISIS

Chapter overview

The so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), otherwise known as IS or Daesh, has been described as a "hybrid terrorist organisation and conventional army, a religious, millenarian group, an insurgency, and a pseudo-state, amongst others" (Vale and Cook, 2018: 7). Most notably, as demonstrated by Vale and Cook's (2018; 2019) original dataset, ISIS is probably the most diverse terror group in history with over 44,000 citizens from eighty countries who travelled to ISIS-controlled territories to join ISIS. A quarter were women and minors (Vale and Cook, 2019). It also contributed to the forced migration of over 4 million others, causing an unprecedented refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East (UNHCR, 2016).

This chapter aims to provide a historical background to ISIS and the ideological and functional roles of women within the organisation. In doing so, it also serves as a review of current academic and policy research drawing upon both primary and secondary sources and identifying contemporary themes within the existing research on Western women affiliated with ISIS. As outlined in the introductory chapter of this thesis, this research has provided invaluable insights, and despite methodological shortcomings, it has been instrumental in painting a picture of the ideological and functional roles of women within ISIS.[29]

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[29] The following chapter, which focuses on HT as an organisation, also draws on insights from interviews conducted with former and current HTB affiliates on their experiences whilst members of the organisation. However, due to the ethical approval granted for this study by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), it was not possible to have the same conversations with those who were affiliated with ISIS.

A brief history

Since 2011, the intense political turmoil in Syria and Iraq resulted in socio-political vacuums which enabled Salafi-jihadist groups, like ISIS, to thrive (Lister, 2014:1).[30] However, ISIS' roots date back significantly further than this recent conflict to at least 1999 when its founding father Ahmad Fadl al-Nazal al-Khalayeh (aka Abu Musad al-Zarqawi) was released from prison in Jordan after serving five years for terrorist charges (Lister: 5; Saltman & Smith, 2015: 28; Mohamedou, 2018). On release, Zarqawi moved to Afghanistan and established relations with Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda (AQ) (Gerges, 2016). Bin Laden reportedly funded a camp for Zarqawi in Herat to build a new jihadi group, Jund al-Sham, which was later, and more widely known Jam'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (JTWJ) (Lister: 6; Saltman & Smith: 28). JTWJ led attacks in Jordan before being forced underground until the US invasion in Iraq in 2003 (Lister: 6; Friedland, 2015: 7).

JTWJ re-emerged in Iraq in the Kurdish Province of Sulaymaniyah and rapidly transitioned itself into a significant player in the drive against US and coalition forces aiming to disrupt the process of government transition and provoke sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims (Lister: 7). During this period, Zarqawi's Salafi ideology shaped the organisations three primary targets, which were Jordan, Shia Muslims, and the international community (ibid: 7). Zarqawi strongly believed that JTWJ could capitalise on the socio-political turmoil and position itself as the sole defender of the Sunni community, laying the foundations of an Islamic State (Gerges, 2016). It should be noted that although JTWJ represented a growing jihadi umbrella faction, the relationship between Zarqawi and Bin Laden was more of a “marriage of convenience” than a collaboration (Saltman & Smith: 29). Bin Laden was reportedly suspicious of Zarqawi (Weaver, 2006), and the two fundamentally disagreed on issues that ranged from ideology to violence on a level of targeting and tactical matters (Gerges, 2016).

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[30] However, as Mohamedou (2018: 28) argues, ISIS did not 'arise' in a regional vacuum but in a deep, labyrinthine securitised global context where political violence evolved due to international affairs and security and not solely on the geopolitics of the regions in which the groups are active, or the conflicts playing out there.

The relationship between JTWJ and AQ became increasingly fraught between 2004-2006 when JTWJ increased the number of mass attacks against Shia citizens, something that Bin Laden and AQ fundamentally disagreed with (Lister: 8). However, in 2004, despite this tension, JTWJ made an official pledge of allegiance to AQ and changed their name to the AQ organisation in the Land of Two Rivers, otherwise known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) (Lister: 8; Saltman & Smith, 29). AQI continued to wage a campaign of terror and violence across Iraq inspired by Zarqawi’s specific jihadist agenda (ibid). Shortly before Zarqawi’s death in 2006, AQI formed a merger with five other jihadi groups across Iraq, which amalgamated in Majils Shura al-Mujahideen (MSM). MSM aimed to unite in the coordination of Iraq’s jihadi insurgency (Lister: 8). A US air-strike killed Zarqawi on 7th June 2006, and in less than five days, AQI appointed Ab Hamza al-Muhajir (Abu Ayyub al Masri) as the new leader of the group (ibid). Masri continued the trajectory Zarqawi envisioned for AQI, the critical aim remained the establishment of an Islamic State and inciting sectarian violence across Iraq (Saltman & Smith: 29). Later that year, it was announced that the AQI was now to be known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) formed from the MSM coalition (Lister: 9; Saltman & Smith: 29). This change of name represented not only the organisation’s commitment to its state-building vision but also a symbolic shift away from AQ (Saltman & Smith: 30).

With Abu Umar al Baghdadi (not to be confused with Abu Bakr Baghdadi) as the new leader of the organisation, ISI powered on. By late 2006, the organisation finally distinguished itself as self-sufficient and independent from AQ (Lister: 9). However, in early 2007, US-backed local tribal Sahwa councils started to combat ISI actively in the areas where they held territorial control (Mohamedou, 2018). This counterinsurgency proved relatively useful, and during this period, IS-led sectarian violence decreased significantly (ibid). During this period, it was reported that over ninety percent of ISI senior leadership had been killed or captured, including the death of al-Masri and al Baghdadi (ibid).

The US military withdrawal from June 2009 to August 2010 dramatically weakened the counterinsurgency efforts of the Sahwa councils (ibid: 10). ISI concentrated on restructuring by devolving back to a specific terrorist group and moving their headquarters to Mosul in Iraq where they could take advantage of local Arab-Kurdish tensions (ibid). In 2010, Abu Bakr Baghdadi entered the scene as the new figurehead, and the group started to escalate attacks across Iraq, particularly in Baghdad (Lister: 10; Saltman & Smith: 29; Friedland: 10). The professionalisation of the organisation and its ability to offer large salaries catalysed the expansion of ISI. In 2011, exploiting the heightened conflict in Syria, Baghdadi sent a contingent of ISI militants into Syria to fight the Assad regime under the name of Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) (Friedland: 10).

JN, led by Abu Muhammad al Jawlani, quickly expanded into a full insurgent force. By January 2013, they had made significant territorial gains, which included seizing more extensive military facilities (Lister: 13). JN had claimed to have no links to ISI or AQ up to this point. However, on 9th April 2013, Baghdadi made an official audio statement claiming that JN was part of ISI, and both organisations would be expanding into the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) (Saltman & Smith: 30; Gulmohamad, 2014: 2). However, this statement was publicly rejected by al Jawlani and Abu al Zawahiri, Bin Laden's successor, and in February 2014, Zawahiri announced that there was officially no affiliation between ISIS and AQ (Saltman & Smith: 30; Gulmohamad, 2014: 2).

Despite this, ISIS continued to grow in both power and size and were expanding its territorial control across Northern and Eastern Syria (Lister: 13), by first establishing a stronghold in Raqqa ousting all other rebel groups, and then seizing significant parts Fallujah and Ramadi in the province of Anbar (Friedland: 11).

The call to build a caliphate

On 29th June 2014, the first day of *Ramadan*, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi issued an audio recording announcing the official establishment of the caliphate, the Islamic State (ISIS), declaring himself as the Caliph (Lister: 13; Friedland: 11). Baghdadi made a special plea to "a wide range of professionals, from doctors to engineers, to join the state as well" (Milton and Dodwell, 2018: 16), with no gender specificity to the call. Between 2014-2019, over 44,000 men and women (900 from the UK) from eighty different countries travelled to ISIS-controlled territories, including up to 6,902 foreign women (150 from the UK) (Vale and Cook, 2019).[31]

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[31] The countries with the highest number of women who travelled (based on highest estimates) were Russia (1,000), Tunisia (700), France (382), China (350) and Morocco (293) highlighting the regional and ethnic diversity of affiliates. The countries with the 5 highest proportion of women: men affiliates were from Iran (76%), Croatia (57 – 71%), China (35%), Kazakhstan (25 – 30%), and Netherlands (27%) (Vale and Cook, 2018; 2019).

On 22nd September 2014, IS spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani announced a plea for an action calling for attacks worldwide on the citizens of the US, France, and other countries that were involved in the US coalition targeting the group. The call for action was met with a sharp increase in ISIS-claimed terrorist attacks internationally. This included attacks in the UK including the Westminster Bridge attack in March 2017, the Manchester Arena Attack in May 2017, and the London Bridge Attack in June 2017. At the time, those affiliated or inspired by the group had carried out over 4,300 attacks across at least 29 countries (Vale and Cook, 2018).

During its peak, ISIS "punctuated its violent territorial campaign with the systematic abuse of women and boasted about its activities in its online propaganda" (Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2020: 7). Using an antiquated interpretation of the Islamic distribution of the 'spoils of war', ISIS revived the practice of sexual slavery, war booty, and concubinage (Lahoud, 2018). "Women in the caliphate were fully commoditised and used to recruit, reward, retain male fighters, and ultimately reproduce" (ibid: 7). Central to this strategy was the systematic enslavement and rape of approximately 6,000 Yazidi women and girls (UNHCR, 2019).[32]

At the time of writing, the so-called Islamic State has now lost its final territory, but at its peak, in late 2014, it is believed the group controlled over 100,000 km² of land with 11 million residents (Vale and Cook, 2018). The final territorial collapse of the Islamic State's caliphate in Bāghūz in March 2019, led to Kurdish forces in Syria capturing thousands of remaining fighters and supporters, with many being placed in camps such as al-Hol in the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration for northeast Syria (Vale, 2019).

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[32] The Yazidi community from Sinjar in north-western Iraq were targeted by ISIS in August 2014. The men and boys (older than 12 years) who refused to adopt ISIS beliefs were killed and the women and girls were enslaved (UNHCR, 2019)

By 2019, up to 7,366 foreign citizens had returned to their home countries (20%) or were in repatriation processes to do so (Vale and Cook, 2019: 3). Yet, only 609 women (8 per cent of total returnees; 9 per cent of women) who had travelled to join the Islamic State had been registered as returnees in their home countries (Vale and Cook, 2019: 31). The remaining foreign ISIS affiliates are being held in crowded prisons and refugee camps, like al-Hol across the region (Davis, 2020: 2).

For the 11,000 women and children imprisoned in camps like al-Hol (Human Rights Watch, 2019), conditions are dire, with at least 240 children dying on route or upon arrival alone in 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). Human Rights Watch (2019) report that the conditions are much worse for foreign women who are segregated in their own part of the camp (the "Annexe") with no access to supplies or fresh food, money, and no way of contacting home or seeking legal help (Vale, 2019: 43). At the time of writing, the global COVID-19 pandemic has overshadowed the question of how to address the issue of returning foreign ISIS affiliates in camps and prison in the MENA region, who are at serious risk of being infected and spreading the virus (Davis, 2020: 3). What is more, ISIS has positioned the pandemic as propaganda, arguing it is "retribution for crusader nations" and cautioned its members in the Levant against travel to affected countries while urging those already in Europe to carry out attacks (Hincks, 2020).[33]

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[33] Recent articles in ISIS's weekly Arabic-language *Al Naba* magazine stress that Muslims can be afflicted by COVID-19, the magazine initially suggested the virus was divine punishment against communist China (Hincks, 2020)

A recent increase in both Arabic and English ISIS propaganda is a reminder that ISIS continues to pose a threat beyond Syria and Iraq, and whilst some of those living in camps like al-Hol show signs of disillusionment with ISIS' caliphate vision, others have sought to re-impose its ideology (Vale, 2019; Davis, 2020). Moreover, as discussed further below, ISIS' "post-territorial phase has brought greater autonomy and ideological authority to individual hard-line detainees", particularly women living in camps like al-Hol (Vale, 2019: 2).

Ideology

ISIS identifies with the Salafi-jihadism movement, a distinct ideological movement in Islam (Bunzel, 2015: 7). There is no clear definition of Salafi-jihadism, and many define the movement through its primary relevance to the ideology of al-Qaeda (AQ) (Witorowicz, 2005; Bunzel, 2015). However, this is problematic as it assumes homogeneity within the movement and neglects that, despite being characterised by their Salafi-jihadist ideologies, organisations such as AQ and ISIS have different interpretations of these ideologies which shape their goals and trajectories. Salafi jihadism is only one strand of Salafism. Jihadism derives from the Islamic term "jihad" (struggle or holy war) (Hegghammer, 2014: 246). Salafi-jihadi groups are perceived to be more extremist and intransigent than other groups (ibid: 253). They believe that violence can be used to establish Islamic states and confront their enemies (Witorowicz, 2005:76). The main objective of Salafi jihadism is the implementation of Islam's *shari'a* law in countries controlled only by Muslims (ibid). Calling for the restoration of a unitary Islamic State, the caliphate, ISIS follow the most extreme form of Salafi jihadism. Specifically, in its uncompromising position on Shi'a Muslims who it believes are all deserving of death (Bunzel, 2015: 9). If Salafi-jihadism was placed on a political spectrum, AQ would be on the left, and ISIS would be on the far-right (ibid: 9). This difference in ideology is paramount to understanding the historical development of ISIS and their relationship with AQ.

At first glance, ISIS ideology may appear indistinguishable from that of Hizb ut-Tahrir, discussed in the following chapter. Both view religion and politics as inexplicably bound together so all governance and political decisions must be based on *shari'a* law. However, aside from violence, both groups differ significantly on several issues, including those related to '*aqeeda* (creed) and *manhaj* (methodology). Regarding *manhaj* (methodology), ISIS ignores the right of process in choosing the *caliph* and having jurisdiction to establish an Islamic state without the invitation from or consensus of the population.

In terms of *'aqeeda* (creed), ISIS ideology holds that Islam must be cleansed from within and that Muslims who do not follow its interpretation of Islam should be declared apostates and killed. The proclamation of *takfir* (ex-communication) also extends to other Muslims who do not follow from ISIS' ideological concepts. A 40-point list issued by ISIS entitled "*aqidah wa manhaj al-Dawlah al-Islamiah fi al-Takfir"* (ISIS Creed and Methodology of Takfir) states that whoever embraces democracy and secularism, and all governments who do not rule by the *shari'a* law, are deemed *kuffār* or apostates, which legitimises their killing (Hassan, 2017).

Central to ISIS ideology and strategy is its focus on territoriality: '*baaqiya wa tatamaddad'* (remaining and expanding). Until its territorial decline, ISIS focused on expanding its influence by gaining territory and calling on Muslims to perform *hijra* (migration) to join the caliphate (Jakso et al, 2018). Throughout *Dabiq*, ISIS "draws on historical elements of the first caliphates to legitimise its efforts and solidify its claim as a divinely sanctioned to the glory of an idealised Islamic past which it seeks to re-establish in the present" (Fuhriman et al., 2020: 14). Despite weakened given the loss of its territorial stronghold in the region, 'remaining and expanding' is very much the core tenet of its ideology.

Another fundamental component of ISIS' ideology is its apocalyptic vision. According to this vision, "a new caliph and a new caliphate will be established, and a series of battles will ensue, culminating in a final", Armageddon-style battle in the caliphate, fighting under black banners, will defeat the armies of the Antichrist (Segrest, 2016: 352-353). ISIS propaganda, like *Dabiq*, references the apocalypse frequently. The title of *Dabiq* itself is central to the organisation's apocalyptic prophecies (McCants, 2015). *Dabiq*, which lies about ten km (six miles) from the border with Turkey, features in Islamic apocalyptic prophecies as the site of an end-of-times showdown between Muslims and their "Roman" enemies (Segrest, 2016; McCants, 2015). The Prophet Muhammad is believed to have proclaimed: "the last hour will not come" until Muslims vanquished the Romans at "Dabiq or al-Amaq" – both on the Syria-Turkey border region - on their way to conquer Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) (McCants, 2015: 161-179). However, even though there is clearly an apocalyptic basis to ISIS ideology which is central to their propaganda and recruitment of foreign affiliates, during their Caliphate-years, the apocalyptic ideology has not yet influenced strategy let alone tactics (Cook, 2017: 104).

Ideological and Functional Role of Women in ISIS

At the centre of ISIS' ideology is a set of strict gendered norms and expectations about the role and vision of women and womanhood. However, unlike HT who have an official constitution and multiple published documents highlighting the organisation's ideology and position on women, evidence published by ISIS is less reliable and more fragmented in its origins. For example, a manifesto titled: *Women in the Islamic State: A Manifesto and Case Study*,[34] was published in 2015 by the ISIS' all-female al-Khansaa policing Brigade. However, although considered to be a 'blueprint' for the role of women in the caliphate, it has not been declared to be an official ISIS document. Instead, it was produced internally by women in ISIS for the transmission of ideas to other women in the organisation (Chatterjee, 2016: 209).

Moreover, the manifesto was only published in Arabic by the organisation, unlike other ISIS' publications and propaganda, leading many to argue that the intended audience of this propaganda was other women in the region, rather than Western women (Winter, 2015; Chatterjee, 2016; Spencer, 2016).[35] Alongside the manifesto, an analysis of ISIS published propaganda, such as their *Dabiq* magazine accessed through The Clarion Project, video evidence produced by ISIS' campaign for its finishing school *al-Zawra* to promote the role of life as a woman in the caliphate (launched in 2014), images of billboards instructing women to wear the mandated *Sharīʿī* attire,[36] and media analysis helps piece together a picture of the role of women in the Islamic State.

Reproduce and populate the Caliphate

> "So, have you understood, my Muslim sisters, the enormity of the responsibility that you carry? ... you are preparing the lion cubs of the *Khilafah* [sic]?"
>
> (IS, Dabiq (10), 2015: 45)

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[34] Translated by the Quilliam Foundation.

[35] For example, *Dabiq* magazine published in English and *Rumiayah* magazine published in French.

[36] ISIS, "Speak to the believing women as they lower their eyes, guard their opening and do not show their adornments except what has appeared from them" [in Arabic], Raqqa Province, 2013.

> “O sister in religion, indeed, I see the *Ummah* of ours as a body made of many parts, but the part that works most towards and is most effective in raising a Muslim generation is the part of the nurturing mother.”
>
> (IS/Dabiq (10) 2015: 45)

Ideologically, ISIS is committed to the segregation of the sexes and the promotion of a rigid social order premised on control over women’s bodies (how they behave, interact and dress) (Lahoud, 2018). ISIS believes that the primary purpose of a woman is to reproduce and populate the caliphate. In *Women in the Islamic State: A Manifesto and Case Study*, it is stated that “the greatness of her position, the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood” (IS/al-Khansaa: 18). The importance of this role in building the caliphate is characterised by statements such as “may your sons be the bricks and mortar in the tower of majesty and minarets of the State of Islam” (ibid), and “the guardians of the faith and protectors of the land will merge from you” (ibid: 41). In building a state, women are essential to “bring up and educate, protect and care for the next generation to come” (IS/al-Khansaa: 18). ISIS repeatedly emphasises that women play a vital role in the indoctrination of children and custodians of the organisation’s future (Vale, 2019: 4). Apart from ‘mothering’ the next generation, a wife’s function is to maintain and take care of her husband. However, a considerable number of women recruits found themselves widowed shortly after marrying and married again to another fighter (Spencer, 2016). ISIS believes that marriage is an obligatory institution for women and to retain the “purity” of a woman she should be married between the age of nine and seventeen years of age (Spencer, 2016).

Work outside of the home

At the peak of ISIS’ governance over its controlled territories, aside from their significance in reproducing the state, women were vital in contributing roles as active participants in the functioning of the state (Bloom & Winter, 2015; Khelghat-Doost, 2017). In exceptional circumstances, certain women were permitted to work outside the home (Al-Khansaa, 2014). The manifesto for women authorises employment outside of the home. However, it was mandated that a woman's independent duties must not exceed more than three days a week or should not last late in the day, so that so was not away from the home for too long (ibid). Some women were permitted to work as doctors and teachers (Khelghat-Doost, 2017: 867), and it is reported that other women were also performing law enforcement (*hisba*), administrative, and welfare activities, including tax collectors (Khelghat-Doost, 2017; Gan et al, 2019). ISIS imposed a strict dress code demanding all women from puberty upwards wear two gowns to conceal their body shape, black hand gloves, and dark layers of two face veils year around (Spencer, 2016). At the peak of its governance, ISIS instituted a strict sex-segregation policy throughout its territory, which meant every woman had to be always accompanied by a *maḥram* (male guardian) (Vale, 2019).

On 2nd February 2014, ISIS announced the establishment of an all-women's police unit the al-Khansaa (Bhutia, 2015; Spencer, 2016). The al-Khansaa brigade is described as the all-women's morality police by IS (Bhutia, 2015; Eleftheriou-Smith, 2015; Hall, 2015; Moaveni, 2015). They consisted of a group of formally appointed women's members of the organisation to police and patrol IS territories to regulate the lives of other women citizens (Spencer, 2016). Responsibilities of the group included enforcing extreme gender segregation, and ensuring women are wearing the correct type of dress and behave appropriately in public using violence, such as conducting daily lashings and mutilating breastfeeding mothers in public using bear-clamps (ibid). They were also responsible for ensuring residents pay their taxes and fines. Testimonies from ISIS escapees who used to be former members of the brigade confirm these reports, sharing information about how much women are paid (between £70 and £100 per month), and the training completed (ibid). This represents how women are significant in ISIS' attempt to establish moral and ethical leadership in its territories, and the role of women in inculcating beliefs and behaviours in line with the organisation's ideology.

Another critical role played by women is the role of the recruiter. ISIS established a comprehensive social media platform which recruited more than 44,000 foreign militants (Vale and Cook, 2019). Studies indicate that ISIS predominantly relied on Western women affiliates to lead the social media campaign on sites including Twitter, Tumblr, Kik, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Ask.Fm (Saltman & Smith, 2015; Perešin, 2015; Khelghat-Doost, 2017). The propaganda objectives are relatively straightforward – simply motivate women from abroad to perform *hijra* to ISIS-controlled territory (Khelghat-Doost, 2017; Windsor, 2018). ISIS media accounts display images of women cooking, making Nutella pancakes, playing with children, doing homework, and posting photos of Syria's sunset (Saltman & Smith, 2015).

Windsor (2018: 514) focuses on the role of Scottish woman Aqsa Mahmood who travelled to join ISIS in Syria in 2014. Aqsa is believed to have played a pivotal role in the recruitment of other British young women during the early days of ISIS focus on the recruitment of Western women (Windsor, 2018; Klaussen, 2015). Through an analysis of social media posts from an account believed to be Aqsa's, Windsor (2018) identifies Aqsa and other British women as "local experts" on emigrating to Syria. Their blog posts detail a list of things that other young women should know before emigrating, the structure of living arrangements for single and married women, and outlines standards of behaviour for women in the caliphate (Windsor, 2018). Klaussen (2015: 16) calls this the "Umm Factor",[37] which refers to the role of a network of mostly Western women ISIS affiliates working as disseminators and recruiters of ISIS content and propaganda. Klaussen identified 30 accounts that contained "Umm" in the Twitter handle among the Western ISIS foreign fighter's followers who were being mobilised in tactical support roles as recruiters and proselytisers to an extent far surpassing their involvement in any previous Salafi-jihadist group (ibid: 16-17).

Women's engagement in violent combat

"The question of whether or not women can [and should] participate in combat operations has been hotly debated by jihadis for decades" (Winter, 2018: 4; also see: Lahoud, 2014; Makanda, 2019, emphasis mine), and ISIS has been no different. Throughout most of ISIS' 'caliphate years', ISIS repeatedly denied women affiliates requests to participate in *qitāl (fighting)* (Vale, 2019: 4). ISIS ideology permits women to fight if the enemy is attacking their country, and there are not enough men to protect it, but only once the imams have issued a *fatwa* for it (Bloom and Winter, 2015). "In other words, ISIS' position was that women were at best a rear-guard to combative jihad, not protagonists in it" (Winter, 2018: 8). In 2015, a document produced by a women-focused ISIS media agency started to circulate online, focusing on teaching women how to use weapons and maintain their fitness through jogging ("Keep adding distance every day in order not to be a burden on your Jihadi brothers"). This suggested that women were potentially being trained for fighting or battle.[38]

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[37] "Umm" is an honorific name, used to address women as the mother of certain persons—usually the oldest son (Klaussen, 2015: 17).

[38] Charlie Winter's translation: Author's translation, al-Zawra' Foundation, "Valuable Advice and Important Analysis on the Rules for Women's Participation in Jihad", August 2015; see Charlie Winter (@charliewinter), "2. In August, #IS|ers circulated this clarification on permissibility of women & fighting.

However, the most significant development in women's participation in ISIS was their recent involvement in violent combat during the territorial collapse (Vale, 2019; Winter, 2018). Faced with imminent defeat and territorial loss, ISIS was forced to concede on this most critical policy, and in October 2017 openly called for women to participate in jihad on messaging app Telegram (Winter and Margolin, 2017). The call to fight was framed through highly gendered, empowered terms with the first recruitment video depicting a woman combatant, a "chaste *mujāhid* woman journeying to her lord with the garments of purity and faith, seeking revenge for her religion and for the honour of her sisters" (Winter and Margolin, 2017). The shift in women's roles which was further reinforced by videos that emerged from Bāghūz, where women were seen fighting alongside men to defend ISIS' final territories (Vale, 2019: 5). This presented substantial evidence of women's battlefield and weapons training and communicated the physical and ideological threat that women ISIS affiliates could pose going forward (Vale, 2019: 5-6).

Life in the camps: women's continued activism

Although ISIS continues to release propaganda through its multiple online channels, the territorial collapse of ISIS in Bāghūz in March 2019 has marked an additional shift in women's roles with the potential to initiate their own forms of activism and leadership (Vale, 2019 Winter, 2018). Moreover, specific developments in camps like al-Hol provide key insights into both viability and likelihood of ISIS' resurgence in a post-territorial context, and the security threat foreign women affiliates may pose if they return to their home countries (Vale, 2019: 5).

Here's my translation.", Twitter, 19 November 2015, https://twitter.com/charliewinter/status/667326295706050560.

Footage from inside al-Hol suggests women are leading the continued ideological indoctrination of children (Vale, 2019: 6). In July 2019, a video emerged of children chanting around gathered a makeshift ISIS flag shouting "*bāqiyya*" [remaining], from ISIS' slogan "remaining and expanding" (Hall, 2019). As Vale (2019: 6) highlights, most of these children were too young to have attended ISIS schools or training camps, most of which closed in 2017. As such, women are still acting as effective emissaries in camps to instil ISIS ideology in children's minds.

Moreover, within the camps, women ISIS affiliates are continuing to implement ISIS ideology by policing others' dress and behaviours (Vale, 2019: 6). Through a continuation of ideals and regulations like those enforced by the al-Khansaa brigade, improper attire, behaviour, renouncing support for ISIS, or engaging with aid workers, lawyers, or journalists is met with punishment (Vale, 2019: 6). In al-Roj camp, an Iraqi woman was "barred from communicating with her neighbours after she removed her veil" (Loveluck and Mekhennet, 2019). It has been reported that women ISIS affiliates have also used knives, stones, lashings, and burned tents to impose their rule (Cunningham, 2019; Molana-Allen, 2019). At ISIS' territorial peak, the development of *hisba* units enabled ISIS to enact its strict gender ideology through women policing women. The resurgence of women ISIS affiliates' activism and policing demonstrates their implementation of the ISIS' ideology without the presence of men's leadership or direction.

The *Baghūziāt* (women liberated in ISIS' final stand) are reported to be the most militant and dedicated enforcers of ISIS' ideology (Moaveni, 2019; Vale, 2019). "With male IS' members detained elsewhere and contact almost entirely severed, a new post-territorial hierarchy is emerging", in which women seem to have greater autonomy to initiate their own forms of activism (Vale, 2019: 7). Women ISIS affiliates have also erected their own *shariʿa* courts modelled on ISIS judicial system, and mirroring ISIS ideology, in some cases, the pursuance of justice has even led to brutal killings (Loveluck and Mekhennet, 2019). Subsequently, whilst women are continuing to play an essential role in upholding and transmitting ISIS ideology to children in camps like al-Hol and al-Roj, it appears their actions and activism are starting to exceed the limits of women's roles and the strict gendered ideology they lived under in the 'caliphate' era (Vale, 2019: 7).

From inside the camps, women ISIS affiliates have also initiated their own online campaigns. In June 2019, a group of women who claimed to be detained in al-Hol, issued videos and letters in Arabic, German and English online. "Holding up cardboard signs reading "Free Prisoners. Your sisters in al-Hol", the women criticise life under the *kuffār* (infidels), noting shortages of water, food, and electricity, as well as poor sanitation and healthcare" (Vale, 2019: 8). In the video, they call on their "brothers" to help them who they claim have forgotten them. Although the creation and dissemination of the campaign demonstrates leadership and creativity of women ISIS affiliates from within the camps, their "victimhood framing" through the reminder of their dependence on their male counterparts reinforces their physical and ideological default to male leadership. Consequently, it is predicted that although from inside the camps women are keeping the ideological dream of the caliphate alive, any leadership or resurgence of the 'caliphate' will very likely remain dependent on the authority of ISIS men (Vale, 2019: 9).

Existing research on Western women affiliated with ISIS

Women have historically participated in and sometimes led extremist organisations, and there is a rich body of academic research focusing on women who join extremist organisations and participate and perpetrate acts of violent extremism. Yet, the migration of Western women to Syria to join ISIS perplexed academic researchers, policymakers, and government officials, as if women joining an extremist organisation was a 'phenomenon' that had never happened before. It is true, women have been a blind spot for government, academic and policy sectors in relation to the growing threat of global extremism (Saltman, 2019), but it has long been argued that "scholars and policymakers should not be surprised at women's political violence, nor should they assume that women's reasons for choosing political violence are less varied or less agential that men's" (see Sjoberg and Gentry, 2016: 24; also Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2011; 2018; Auchter, 2012). Overall, research on Western women affiliated with ISIS fails to engage with the long history of research on women who participate in violent extremism. In Chapter One, I highlighted this has not only led to several theoretical shortcomings, but a reinforcement of longstanding, distorted gendered narratives of women who participate in violent extremist organisations.

The problem with 'push' and 'pull' factors and policy-driven research

Existing research was initially dominated by policy analysis (Rafiq and Malik, 2015; Saltman & Smith, 2015), attempting to understand what would drive them to leave their homes in Western 'gender-equitable societies and join an organisation renowned for its barbarism and lack of respect for women's rights and equality (Saltman & Smith, 2015; Rafiq and Malik, 2015). "[S]eeking to stem the flow of female migrants" (Hoyle et al, 2015: 10), this early research relied on social listening tools to track 'self-identified' ‘female migrants’ to map ‘push and pull factors’ among the large “eco-system” of Western women who were *believed* to be residing in ISIS-controlled territory (Hoyle et al, 2015: 8). Despite the acknowledgement of the diversity of experiences and backgrounds of women traveling to joining ISIS in Syria (Saltman & Smith, 2015: 5), this research highlighted the dangers of ‘analysis by anecdote’ with the side effects being that such perspectives “hold sway with policymakers and practitioners charged with dealing with the problem” (Milton and Dodwell, 2018: 17).

Through analysing only handful of high-profile media cases and social media profiles (Saltman & Smith, 2015; Perešin, 2015; Perešin and Cervone, 2015; Saripi, 2015; Rafiq and Malik, 2015), early research focused narrowly on a combination of “multi-causal” ‘push and pull factors' driving women to engage with such organisations, treading a fine line of negating the complex agency embedded in their decisions (Saltman & Smith, 2015: 5). The ‘push factors’ they identify include feeling socially or culturally isolated or questioning their identities or “uncertainty of belonging within a Western culture; feeling that the Muslim community is violently persecuted; anger/sadness/frustration over perceived lack of action over response to this persecution” (Saltman & Smith, 2015: 5). Pull factors include idealistic goals of religious duty and building a caliphate; belonging and sisterhood; and romanticisation of the experience (ibid: 13). There are critical issues embedded in these findings.

Firstly, despite acknowledging that, “it is not possible to create a broad profile of females at risk of radicalisation based on age, location, ethnicity, family relations or religious background” (Saltman & Smith, 2015: 5), the framework and language of ‘push and pull factors’ echoes the nomothetic tendencies of early ‘radicalisation’ literature (see:

Moghaddam, 2005; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Taylor and Horgan, 2006), which attempted to map or predict those who might be at risk of being radicalised (see Chapter One). The language of 'push and pull' constructs women as empty vessels, puppets on a string, and negates the complex agency in their decisions, suggesting their engagement with ISIS was driven by factors outside of their control. Within this framing, joining ISIS is something that happened to them, not something they chose. The framing of 'push and pull' is deeply embedded in liberal Western conceptions of freedom, agency, and rights (Mahmood, 2005). The normative use of language such as "warped feminism" (Saltman & Smith, 2015) without theoretical engagement of agency, structure, empowerment debates, constructs women affiliated with ISIS as crazy, 'warped', and confused and without agency because they got Western feminism 'wrong'. Consequently, in haste to produce insights and establish themselves as leading experts, think-tank, or academics working on the issue, and guaranteed new sources of funding (public and private), much of this early policy research ends up reinforcing neo-orientalist tropes of the Muslim woman 'Other' and, consequently, 'jihadi bride' framing.

Secondly, inherent in much of the early research on the 'radicalisation' or motivations of Western women affiliated with ISIS is the attempt to over-explain and the over-application of its findings or key-insights without explicit acknowledgment of the critical limitations embedded in its methodologies. This does not necessarily discredit the findings of this early policy-based research, nor the so-called 'push and pull' factors it identifies – the research presented in this thesis supports some of these findings (discussed further in the Conclusion Chapter). However, at the early stage of conducting this research, with the lack of data embedded in their analysis, and the lack of acknowledgment of the limitations of their approach, really the ‘push and pull’ factors identified in these studies were merely just hypotheses.

Who needs ‘methods’ anyway?

Where academic research has been generated, it generally lacks empirical data, neglecting the voices of those whose lives and experiences it focuses on, mostly relying on secondary sources, or social media analysis at best. Subsequent academic research relied heavily on the early policy insights (see Hoyle et al, 2015; Saltman & Smith, 2015) as ‘evidence’ and used a similar framework for understanding why young women born in Western countries were travelling to join ISIS, re-hashing their findings by drawing on new media sources. This means several of the above implications reverberate throughout the literature. This later research uses secondary literature reviews as the primary method for analysis alongside profiles of young women drawn from high profile media cases to draw conclusions to support the “pull and push factors” hypotheses constructed in early policy research (Bakker and De Leede, 2015; Perešin, 2015; 2018; Perešin and Cervone, 2015; Bjorgum, 2016; de Leede, 2018; Windsor, 2018; Gan et al, 2018). Furthermore, as highlighted in Chapter One, much of this literature does not acknowledge or engage with theoretical insights of existing research on women who participate in violent extremism, nor considers the multiple and complicated nature of women’s agency. The only existing research that seriously considers the agency of women affiliated with ISIS is conducted by those leading this work for over a decade (see for example: Sjoberg & Gentry, 2016; Gentry, 2020; Sjoberg, 2017; Brown, 2020). New voices also include Pearson (2015; 2018), Pearson and Winterbotham (2018; 2020), and Loken and Zelenz (2017) whose work is discussed further below, but otherwise, in the words of Gentry (2020: 88), it is "quite surprising that the need to divide women from their agency continues in the recent work on women and Da'esh".

The dearth of qualitative and rigorous methodologies in extremism and terrorism research is not a new issue. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, scholars such as Schmid and Jongman (1988), Silke (2000), and more recently, Morrison (2020) have raised serious concerns with the quality of research being published in academic journals on extremism in terms of the methods being used. Of course, there are genuine methodological challenges driving this lack of empirical data, specifically surrounding accessing women have joined or considered joining extremist organisations, but, as this thesis demonstrates and other recent studies (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020; Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017; 2020), it is not entirely impossible. This is not to say that research that does rely on discourse analysis, social media analysis or social listening techniques is fundamentally flawed or limited at all. ISIS and its supporters use of a variety of media and social media has provided researchers with unprecedented access to vast amount of online data, and in the last five years, researchers like Klaussen (2015), Pearson (2016), Vale and Cook (2018; 2019) have developed sophisticated and robust online methodologies. For example, Vale and Cook's (2018; 2019) expansive dataset is the first to map the diverse 'trajectories' of ISIS foreign affiliates after the fall of the 'caliphate': those killed in Syria and Iraq; executed by ISIS; detained by regional authorities; involved in detainee exchanges; repatriated to home nations; in third-party countries; or whose status is simply unknown.[39] However, early research predominantly based its analysis on blurry screenshots of unverified ‘Tweets’ pulled from Twitter nor did it accept its limitations and generally attempted to over-explain its findings.[40]

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[39] Moonshot CVE, a start-up founded by Vidhya Ramalingam and Ross Frenett have also developed complex and bespoke online social listening tools and methodologies in their work on extremism.

Consequently, despite the proliferation of research focusing on Western women affiliated with ISIS in recent years, there still exists significant gaps, namely research that focuses on their own experiences and testimonies. Within the final section of this chapter, I highlight work of Loken and Zelenz (2017), Pearson and Winterbotham (2017; 2020), and Speckhard and Ellenberg (2020) whose work offers important theoretical and methodological contributions and is closest to my research in approach.[41]

Why do Western women join Daesh?

Loken & Zelenz (2017: 48) draw on an original dataset of social media activity from seventeen Western *muhajirat* accounts active between 2011–15, along ISIS propaganda (Dabiq). Despite using a similar methodology to previous research, Loken & Zelenz (2017) acknowledge not only the limitations of using social media datasets in the context of extremism research but they critically examine the narratives embedded in previous research and media framing. Loken & Zelenz (2017: 65) argue that Western women ISIS affiliates are motivated largely by same factors as men. “They are not ‘jihadi-brides’, running after men for excitement or reward. They are committed actors making decisions they view as fundamental to their faith” (ibid: 65).

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[40] I agree with Gentry’s (2020: 88-89) assessment that Terrorism Studies still has a gender problem, and it is evident that “the feminist scholars who have worked on women and terrorism for a decade are not included as ‘experts’ when these journals seek peer-reviewers” or editors.

[41] Also see recent work by Pearson, (2017), Khelgat-Doost (2017), Martini (2018), Jackson, (2019), Shaban (2020), Abbas and Kanhai, (2020), Lahoud (2018), and Nilsen (2020).

Through their analysis, they identify that women do "uniquely reference gendered violence in their home countries that may push them towards extremist communities" (ibid: 65). Many have experienced hate crimes, racism, and/or Islamophobia, and they feel directly violated by the laws, discourse, and opposition to Islam in their home countries (ibid: 66). Loken & Zelenz (2017: 47) argue, ultimately, the Western "*muhajirat* are primarily responding to a religious and political call to righteousness and view themselves as political agents for a group they believe represents their interests as Muslims and as women". Their analysis also debunks explanations that women are deceived by an "unrealistic portrayal of life" in ISIS-controlled territories, as they find the women in their study are straight-forward about the violence they experience and the realities of life under ISIS. Finally, they find that the significance of their ideological commitment to their journeys to join ISIS is illustrated through the capitalisation and prominence of the word '*Hijra'* in their social media posts: "This linguistic choice indicates that the *muhajirat* see themselves as emulating Mohammad – literally fleeing persecution and waging a violent jihad against non-believers".[42] Consequently, Loken & Zelenz conclude, Western women affiliated with ISIS are "reacting to their social, political, and religious worlds and responding in ways that they feel benefit their interests as women and as Muslims" (ibid: 64).

The 'Radical Milieu' Approach

Pearson and Winterbotham (2017) explore the role of gender in the 'radicalisation' of European women who join ISIS through conducting interviews and focus groups in the UK, Canada, France, Germany, and the Netherlands between 2015-2016. The authors conducted interviews with “family groups or individuals with direct radicalisation experience, individuals themselves, and professionals working with such individuals and their families” (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017: 62). They describe this as “the radical milieu” approach which seeks to take into consideration the importance of the context in which specific cases of ‘radicalisation’ take place (Winterbotham & Pearson, 2020). This methodology was adapted by RUSI as a solution to generate original context-specific data about violent extremism and ‘radicalisation’-processes without interviewing violent extremists (ibid: 2). Pearson & Winterbotham (2017; 2020) employ RUSI’s milieu approach to access individuals with direct experience of ‘radicalisation’ in the family, school, and community as well as exploring the context and shared grievances among people in areas where ‘radicalisation’ happened (Winterbotham & Pearson, 2020: 2).

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[42] In an online 'Facebook ethnography', Nilsen (2020) also finds women ISIS affiliates express their values and worldviews in discourses related to the following concepts: *hijra* (migration), *ghurba* (estrangement), jihad (holy war), *mujahida* (female holy warrior), *al-akhira* (the hereafter) and j*annah* (paradise).

In their study, Pearson and Winterbotham (2017: 63) find that issues of belonging and identity; the internet; youth; status; and the wrong interpretation of Islam are the most common factors in the experiences of women IS affiliates. More specifically, Muslim women in the community also identified perceived injustice as possible factor in the ‘radicalisation’ of young women. They described their experiences of public Islamophobia, linked to female dress and appearance. Most Muslim women participants chose to wear the *hijab*, and Islamic dress was important to them. “A lack of societal acceptance of clothing choices, including the *hijab, niqab* or traditional long black robes, was strongly associated with feelings of exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination” (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017: 64).

By drawing on interviews within the community, Pearson and Winterbotham engage in a more nuanced theoretical discussed of agency when discussing how community members felt about Muslim women who join extremist organisations like ISIS. They found that women were at times granted less agency and blame than men. While young women in the community emphasised the significance of young Muslim women deliberately seeking to challenge both traditional and Western-imposed gender norms, by seeking a new identity for themselves and looking for belonging and empowerment by joining ISIS. Pearson and Winterbotham's milieu approach enable them to suggest ways in which ISIS messaging might resonate within the community and attract other young women.[43]

Interviewing returnees, defectors, and prisoners

In a recent study, Speckhard and Ellenberg (2020: 83) conducted 220 in-depth interviews with men and affiliated with ISIS from thirty-five different countries representing forty-one different ethnicities. This included returnees, defectors, and prisoners. Thirty eighty were women from eighteen different countries, representing twenty-two different ethnicities (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020: 90); 76.3 percent were foreign members of ISIS; 0.6 percent of the sample were from the UK, whilst 13.2 percent were Iraqi, and 10.5 percent were Syrians. To date, this is the most comprehensive study of its kind focusing on ISIS affiliates. However, it must be noted that Anne Speckhard is a veteran research psychologist and has been conducting in-depth psychological interviews and field research for over twenty-five years. Among the authors' interviews with women, Speckhard and Ellenberg (2020: 83) find that the most cited motivations for travel included: "poverty, family conflict, and prior trauma, with Europeans citing family conflict most often and locals citing poverty most often". European women also cited experiences of discrimination that made life difficult at work or in their daily lives, for example being spat at in the streets (ibid: 97), and “a desire to bolster their Islamic identities which are often under attack by Islamophobic sectors of society, as well as the desire to help the greater Muslim community” (ibid: 124). Fundamentally, the results of this study demonstrate the strengths and contributions of qualitative interview-based research with those who have joined extremist organisations.

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[43] Although Pearson & Winterbotham (2017; 2020) & Loken & Zelenz (2017) advance research on Western women affiliated with ISIS in both methodology and in analysis, they still return to the language of "push and pull" which I find both simplistic, problematic, and unnecessary.

Chapter summary

This chapter has traced the history and ideology of ISIS, focusing specifically on the party’s ideology on women. The second part of this chapter has provided an analytical but non-exhaustive review of existing research focusing on Western women affiliated with ISIS. It highlighted that, where valuable insights have been made, there exist critical flaws in the existing theoretical and methodological contributions which were driven initially by policy research. The final section of this chapter focuses on three recent studies, relevant to this thesis, which have moved research on Western women affiliated with ISIS forward in terms of analysis and methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR

The ‘Liberation Party’:

The Ideological and Functional Role of Women in Hizb ut-Tahrir

Chapter overview

Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is a non-violent revolutionary Islamist party with the fundamental aim of the restoration and expansion of the caliphate in Muslim-majority countries and to unify Muslims worldwide under one political bloc, or global *umma* (Pankhurst, 2016). Hizb ut-Tahrir means ‘Liberation Party’ (Orofino, 2015: 401). “The focus on liberation, as highlighted by the name, stresses the core aim of the group, that is, to set Muslims free from their oppressors all over the world” (ibid: 401). Operating in over forty-five countries worldwide, HT is widely banned in the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia (Hanif, 2012: 202). However, Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain (HTB) operates legally in the UK and many other countries in the West.

This chapter aims to provide a historical background to HT and HTB and the ideological and functional role of women in their organisation. It employs a historical analysis from several academic historical accounts of the organisation, utilising primary sources and including an internal communique issued by HT’s global leadership for branches in the West, alongside interviews with both current and former women and men members, HT published books, pamphlets, leaflets, and media statements, online material, and secondary literature. Consequently, it also serves as a review of current research on HT globally and HT in Britain. The final section of this chapter focuses specifically on the sparse but existing literature that focuses on women affiliates of HT Britain, highlighting both its strengths and limitations, and the gaps that exist and how this thesis seeks to address them.

A brief history

HT was founded in Jerusalem in 1952 by the Islamist scholar and jurist Mohammed Taiqiuddin an-Nabhani (1909-1977) (Taji-Farouki, 1996). Nabhani applied to the Jordanian government for authorisation to establish the party. This was denied by the Jordanian government who were concerned the party intended to overthrow the monarchy and that HT ideology was incompatible with the Jordanian constitution (Pankhurst, 2016; Ahmed & Stuart, 2009).

Yet, by 1954 the party was publicly interacting with Jordanian society and building support for the movement and an-Nabhani and his deputies, Hamdan and al-Masri, managed to recruit members (Pankhurst, 2016: 54). The group were initially referred to as 'nabahaniyyun' (followers of an-Nabhani) before the group was known as Hizb ut-Tahrir (ibid: 54). At the time, the party planned to achieve power within thirteen-years – the time it took for the Prophet Muhammad to establish a state in Medina (Pankhurst, 2016). By 1962, HT decided the best way to achieve power was through influencing a coup (*nussra*). To do this, the party sought to gain interest and protection from the army. Numerous coups attempted by HT in 1968, 1969, and 1971 all failed.

Despite these early failures, in 1970 the party stated that it had secured popular support and all that was required to achieve their goals was the presence of a sufficient force capable of taking power. However, the activity of HT stagnated between the 1970s and 1980s (Ahmed & Stuart, 2009; Pankhurst, 2016).

An-Nabhani's death (20th June 1977) triggered the expansion of HT's activities. HT's new leader (*amir*), Abd al-Qadim Zallum, narrowed the target group for recruitment (Orofino, 2020), focusing more closely on campaigning in schools and universities (Taji-Farouki, 1996). HT started to target intellectuals who were able to communicate the group's ideology to a wider audience through public speeches and lectures, publications, and articles (Pankhurst, 2016; Orofino, 2020). HT also targeted religious leaders who could help the group recruit in mosques, along with politicians and economists (Taji-Farouki, 1996: 35). During Zallum's time as *amir*, HT also abandoned its focus on the Middle East in favour of an international approach, resulting in several branches across Europe, the US, and Asia, including Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain (HTB).

HT's relationship with political leaders and governments in the Middle East and North Africa has always been turbulent (Orofino, 2020). HT deem Muslim politicians who do not espouse HT ideology *kuffār* (unbelievers), apostates, and puppet rulers at the service of Western states (Taji-Farouki, 1996). Consequently, HT members have frequently been arrested and imprisoned in the Middle East, including several of the men interviewed as part of this thesis.

HT remains proscribed in almost all-Muslim majority countries, and members continued to be arrested and imprisoned. Lebanon, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates are the exception. HT's current *amir* Ata Abu Rishta has set up its Middle East headquarters in Lebanon, where the party was officially legalised in 2006 (Orofino, 2020).

Strategy in the West

HT has been active in the West for nearly fifty years, operating in countries such as Germany, UK, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, and the USA. It works by actively promoting widespread support for its Islamist revolution among Western Muslims (Ahmed & Stuart, 2009).

Committed to establishing an expansionist Islamist state in Muslim-majority countries, HT works in the West to target Muslim communities to create a monolithic bloc sympathetic to its brand of Islamism and to promote sole identification with HT's *umma* (Pankhurst, 2016). HT unequivocally states that the caliphate should never accept Western governments, and commands that Western Muslims oppose Western civilisation; disengage from mainstream political systems and identify solely with the *umma*:

> "The party will not work to establish the Khilafa in the West but Muslim countries. The members of the party in the West must not take part in anything related to governance in those countries, i.e., they should not take part in elections or participate in civil disobedience, etc."
>
> (Ahmed & Stuart, 2009: 63)

HT asserts that Muslims – both individually and as a collective – must develop what it calls an 'Islamic personality'. This ensures Islam is the 'only criteria' for 'concepts about life, practical, and actual' (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2000: 72-73). HT believes that Western Muslims must subvert their societies and institutions with a view of not 'Islamising' them, but instead developing a bloc that would aid a revolution (Ahmed and Stuart, 2009). Ultimately, HT works to "create a 'model Islamic' community within – interacting with, but not integrating into – wider Western societies" (Ahmed and Stuart, 2009). The creation of an "Islamic" identity is a political act, achieved by changing "non-Islamic thoughts" into "Islamic thoughts" and removing any alternative thoughts or lifestyles (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999: 25).

HT's strategy in the West is deeply rooted in their 'clash of the civilisations' ideology (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2002: 5): the belief that the West is inherently incompatible with Islam and firmly convinced that Western powers always conspire against Islam (Orofino, 2015: 403), which is discussed further below. In the West, HT frequently depicts Muslims as being threatened by Western institutions and private actions (Orofino, 2015: 404). HT claims that the West has contributed to the decline of Muslims in several ways, including pressuring the Ottoman caliphate to implement constitutional capitalistic reforms and the impacts of Western foreign policy on Muslim-majority countries (Orofino, 2015: 406).

Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain (HTB)

The first branch in a non-Muslim majority country was established in West Germany in the 1960s (Taji-Farouki, 1996: 170). The UK branch was established by Abdul Kareem Hassan and Fuad Hussain in 1986 (Hamid, 2016). HTB initially focused on recruiting a small group of students before expanding the message to the broader public, following the method of HT founder Taquiddin An-Nabhani (Pankhurst, 2016). HTB's group membership grew rapidly as the party were able to attract a significant number of new members in the UK during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Orofino, 2020). HTB's members were usually young South Asian Muslims between eighteen to thirty years (ibid), a demographic that has not changed (Orofino, 2020, corroborated by my research).

Initially, HTB was known to mostly operate through public-facing groups, these include youth groups and student and community organisations to distribute their ideology to

British Muslim communities. Young Muslims were actively encouraged by HTB to spread the ideology (Pankhurst, 2016; Ahmed and Stuart, 2009). The party mostly focused its efforts on university campuses, youth organisations, and mosques (Ahmed & Stuart, 2009). In some cases, HTB members active in targeting school children (ibid). For example, HTB members used to run the Islamic Shakhsiyah Foundation – a charity that managed two primary schools – and wrote the schools' curriculum based on HT's version of Islam (Ahmed and Stuart, 2009: 4).

Between late 1993 and early 1996, the party developed a public and increasingly hostile profile – with their activism being reported in the UK press. The party began targeting second-generation British Muslims on UK university campuses and mosques through leaflets and meetings, which were frequently reported as being anti-Semitic, anti-Hindu, and homophobic(Ahmed & Stuart, 2009). This led to the first government efforts to ban HTB in 1994.

In the aftermath of the 7/7 London attacks, then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair also pledged to investigate, and if necessary, ban the party. The party was further scrutinised by the public departure of its senior members.[44] However, the government failed in proscribing HTB, and the party used this situation to present itself and its ideology as a non-violent mainstream political alternative – which it continues to do so to this day. At the time of writing, HTB continues to operate legally in the UK. Since, across broader society in the UK, HTB has worked to present its ideology as a non-threatening 'Islamic' alternative to current political thinking, HTB presents itself as an 'Islamic' voice and engages with politicians, local authorities, and mainstream media (Ahmed & Stuart, 2009). In 2008, the party's Chairman, Abdul Wahid, even spoke at a debate funded by the government's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' programme ('Prevent').

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[44] Shiraz Maher, Rashad Ali, Dawud Masieh and Maajid Nawaz all left the organisation at this time. Maher is now an academic at Kings College, London where he is director of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, and the Ali, Masieh, and Nawaz former the counter-extremist thinktank Quillam Foundation to challenge HT and Islamist ideology.

Several former members interviewed as part of this thesis reported that the influence and engagement of HTB is dwindling in the UK. Whereas the organisation and its goals seem to be gaining more traction overseas, in countries such as Australia, Tunisia, and Central East, in the UK HTB has "gone very quiet". One former male member joked "It's literally gone all quiet on the Western front. I'd be surprised if there were more than 100 members these days. Maybe there's even less than fifty." Early in the project, one former member informed me that it wasn't surprising that I was finding it hard to access female members because he'd "be surprised if any still existed". When questioned about the state of current HTB membership and activity in the UK, current members including those who sit on the executive committee responded combatively with little specificity, describing that the primary role of HTB is to educate and critically engage Muslims in political issues, supporting the goal of the restoration of the caliphate in Muslim lands.

However, at the time of writing, HTB has updated its website with new 'perspectives', new campaigns. This includes a targeted 'Youth' campaign featuring a group of young boys, and a new "Join Us" membership form (Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, Online), which specifically references the 'Women's section'. The new website also has a "Question and Answer" page, and special section that focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic. This potentially suggests renewed activity in the UK.

Ideology

The *mabda'a* (ideology) of HT is deeply embedded within a very specific historical and political framework. It can be summarised by the following quoted from an-Nabhani, "the Western culture was a dagger drawn by the West in the face of Islamic State and by which it fatally stabbed her" (an-Nabhani, 1953: 4). An-Nabhani believed the disintegration of the Islamic State was aggravated by Western secular ideas and sought to construct a distorted narrative of confrontation with the West (an-Nabhani, 1953: 23). HT believes that "the West – as a system of political, social, economic, and religious values, and practices – is not compatible with Islam" (Orofino, 2015: 403): "The aim of Hizb ut-Tahrir is to resume the Islamic way of life and to convey the Islamic *da'wah* [message] to the world. This objective means bringing the Muslims back to living an Islamic way of life in *Dar-al-Islam* (Land of Islam)" (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2000: 12).

Consequently, HT's ideology is also rooted in revivalism which grew from an-Nabhani's discontent with a general state of decay in Muslim society (an-Nabhani, 2002), and deeply linked with the idea of the 'battle between Islam and the *kuffār* (nonbelievers) (Wali, 2013). Based on this concept, HT constructs a dualistic view of the world as divided between *Dar al-Islam* (Land of Islam) and *Dal al-Kufr* (Land of Unbelief) (Orofino, 2015: 403; Ahmed & Stuart, 2009: 3). According to HT, Western states have tried to subjugate Muslims in several ways first with violence than through "new colonial means" (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2002; Orofino, 2016: 406).

For HT, Islam is not only a religion but a holistic political ideology, within which sovereignty belongs to God, not humankind. Two contradictory state systems inspired An-Nabhani: (1) The Prophet Mohammad's Islamic State in Medina (632 CE); and (2) the modern nation-state system. Essentially, he drew on the fundamental principles of the nation-state and put an 'Islamic' spin on it (Wali, 2011: 94). An-Nabhani's vision of a caliphate is formed by modern conceptions of statehood incorporating, for example, a standing army, constitution, and governing body. HT's draft constitution implements *shari'a* law at state level.

However, HT's ideology only exists in theory and cannot be implemented until the establishment of the caliphate. According to Article 1 of the HT constitution:

> "The Islamic '*aqeeda* [doctrine] constitutes the foundation of the state. Therefore, nothing is permitted to exist in the state's structure, system, accountability, or any other aspect connected with the state that does not take the Islamic '*aqeeda* as its source. The Islamic '*aqeeda* is also the source of the state's constitution and laws. Consequently, nothing related to them is permitted to exist unless it emanates from the Islamic '*aqeeda*'".
>
> (An-Nabhani, 1998: 240)

Moreover, HT requires debate as a precursor to revolutionary change and support for the party's vision at the grassroots level. HT intents to infiltrate and find support from military factions to facilitate what it calls a "bloodless" coup, a concept unique to the group known as *nussra*:

> "But if the land was a land of *kuffār* and the rules of Islam were not put in implementation, then removing the ruler who governs over the Muslims would be through using the method of *nussrah*, i.e., seeking the help".
>
> (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999: 22)

Expansionism is also central to HT's ideology. If HT achieves the restoration of the caliphate, its relationship with other states would be dictated by its doctrine of *jihad* based on the *Dar al-Islam/Harb* ideology outlined above (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999). Muslim-majority countries would be united into one state as part of the global *umma*. If a Muslim-majority country does not accept HT's rule or refuses to cooperate with its state, then violence would be used (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999). Once HT's state has been established, non-Muslim-majority countries would be 'invited' to join 'Islam' (Ahmed & Stuart, 2009). Should non-Muslim-majority countries refuse HT's invitation, jihad would then be waged against them (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999).

HT's '*aqeeda* (doctrine) has not changed since 1952 (Orofino, 2019: 5). HT encourages its members to develop a bond with its ideology rather than a single charismatic leader so that membership remains constant over time (Orofino, 2020). The '*aqeeqa* helps to form an "indissoluble bond between the individual and the movement" (Orofino, 2019: 8). An-Nabhani believes that understanding and accepting HT doctrine is empowering for members and solidifies the bond between the individual and movement (An-Nabhani, 2001: 19–20). In other words, HT's *'aqeeda* (doctrine) is the linchpin of the framing process from which HT's collective action and recruitment frames originate (Orofino, 2019: 14).

Violent or non-violent?

HT does not advocate jihadist terrorism as a method for achieving the caliphate. This is because the party considers this would be counterproductive to its aims:

> "We consider that Islamic law forbids violence or armed struggle against the regime as a method to re-establish the Islamic state".
>
> (Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, online)

However, whilst HT asserts itself to be a non-violent party, it approves military coups (*nussra)* in Muslim-majority countries. Moreover, its ideology has facilitated and inspired jihadist terrorism, and it bears crucial similarities to the doctrines of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, including ISIS. In common with Islamist terrorism, HT believes Muslims have a “religious duty” to liberate perceived ‘occupied Islamic lands (Pankhurst, 2016).

Above all else, HT considers itself to be a political party (Wali, 2011: 95), whose ideology is skewed towards radical politics. The label of ‘radical’ is essential, since HT are not passive radicals (Dekmejian, 1995), they do not seek reform, nor do they participate in the political process of the states they live in (Wali, 2011).

The Ideological and Functional Role of Women in Hizb ut-Tahrir

> “…it should be clearly understood that whatever actions she is charged with and whatever responsibilities are placed on her, she should continue in her primary responsibility which is that of a mother and the upbringing of the children”.
>
> (An-Nabhani, 1990)

“Pregnancy, delivery, suckling and custody.”

HT’s ideological position on a woman’s purpose in society is to birth, rear, and support men for the caliphate (Dyer, 2016). HT assigns different roles to men and women, with women’s primary function and purpose in society being the wife and mother (ibid). Women are instructed to be submissive to their husbands. HT emphasises the importance of raising future generations to maintain society and the survival of the caliphate (Dyer, 2016). According to An-Nabhani (1990), the “primary responsibility” of women is “pregnancy, delivery, suckling and custody” of children above all other commitments, responsibilities, and activities. HT’s draft constitution also states that: “The primary role of women is that she is a mother and responsible over the household and she is an honour that must be protected” (An-Nabhani, 1999: Article 112).

As Dyer (2016) outlines, HT's numerous self-publications alongside an-Nabhani's early visions for the group provide a blueprint for women's *shari'a*-based roles and restrictions within a caliphate. HT's 'founding' documents detail the obligations of women to remain in the private sphere and the restrictions on their movements in the public sphere. These documents include the Hizb ut-Tahrir draft institution (2010) and Taqiuddin Al-Nabhani's work *The Social System in Islam,* which was first published in 1999.

Both documents "exhibit attempts to design a system that makes it possible for women to prioritise the role of mother while at the same time placing restrictions on those who attempt to deviate from or challenge its status quo" (Dyer, 2016). For example, the draft constitution outlines a woman receives the greater right of custody than her husband, referencing the Prophet Muhammad addressing a woman whose husband wanted to take her child from her: "[y]ou have more right to him as long as you do not remarry" (an-Nabhani, 1990: 90).

Nurturers and educators of the future generation

HTB argues that women have "a crucial and indispensable part in public life, whether that be politics, business or trading etc." (Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, online). The group's early narratives on women's primary roles are echoed within HT's more recent campaigns not only in the UK but also abroad (Dyer, 2016). HTB stated in its 2012 'Manifesto for Change' that, in an Islamic caliphate, "[w]omen are to be given every educational opportunity for self-development" (Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, 2012: 23). In a YouTube video, HT's central office proclaimed, the caliphate "will deliver a first-class education system for its women" and ensure "the educational rights and aspirations of women are met" to "encourage women into higher studies to become, for example, doctors, scientists, architects, or engineers" (The Women's Section of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2015). The group frames this narrative around the caliphate's obligation to "provide the best education and medical services possible to its citizens", and this makes "an abundance of women doctors, nurses, and teachers to fulfil these roles" a necessity (The Women's Section of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2015).

An honour that must be protected

HT states in its draft constitution that a woman "is an honour that must be protected" and is protected by rules restricting her movements and visible appearance, both in private and public spaces (Dyer, 2016). As described by several participants, women members have a strict dress code, including the *jilbab* (a loose dress) and *khimar* (headscarf), which some participants just referred to as the full *abaya.* "You were forced to cover up if you wanted to join, study and remain in the party, and the dress code was made mandatory by the HT *[a]mir*". Several former members reported that they would intimidate other sisters until they adhered to the HTB dress code. "…I remember that we were told to almost police the sisters in what they wore, especially the recruits. Oh yeah, for women, it was part of joining, and if they didn't comply even at first, we would tell them it was *haram*. They were failing" (ibid). The document also details the different roles women would be forbidden from taking in a caliphate: "women are not permitted to undertake anything at all from any of the actions of the ruling, whether the Khalifah, assistant, governor, Supreme judge, [a] judge in the *madhalim* court or *'amil* in the district" (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2010: 490-491).

The draft constitution states that “In origin men and women are segregated, and do not come together except for a need by Shar’ agrees to it and agrees to their assembly for it, such as trade and the pilgrimage”, meaning “that men are segregated from women, and so each of them lives in a different sphere of life than the other” (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2010: 479-480). HT believes that, when a girl or woman is of an age where she is ‘able to produce children’, she should be covered and separated from men in the public sphere (Dyer, 2016). The group’s draft constitution employs a *hadith* as evidence, which asserts the Prophet Muhammad told one of his female companions: “If a girl reaches puberty (indicated by starting menstrual cycle), it is not correct that any part of her be seen other than her face and her two hands up to the wrists” (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2010: 476, 493, 498).

Both HT and HTB claim its model for an Islamic society would empower and protect women. This is a position reiterated and believed by many participants in this study. It alleges that, in the caliphate, women would be free to pursue further education and employment.

‘Liberating’ women

Fundamentally, HT condemns the treatment of women in the West, arguing an ‘Islamic’ model is the only system that ‘liberates’ women (Dyer, 2016). When questioned, several HTB members interviewed as part of this thesis claimed that HT’s model for an ‘Islamic society’ would protect women from specific problems, such as sexual harassment, which they argue are promoted by Western societies. This ideology strongly resonated with current HTB members who argued that capitalism and Western feminism had led to the confusion of gender roles and the expectations of how Muslim women should or shouldn’t behave. Wali (2011: 168)’s research uncovered similar defences with his respondents arguing that they were "more liberated than western women because they had accepted to live within the moral boundaries established by God" and "their Islamic identity provided them a means to repel the dominant non-Islamic culture".

Recently, the Women's Media Section in the Central Media Office for HT has led a global campaign to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) for gender equality. The campaign *Beijing+25: Has the Mask of Gender Equality Fallen?* seeks to challenge Western narratives of gender equality. The campaign culminated in an online global women's conference on Saturday 4th April 2020 and the publication of a booklet with the same title as the campaign (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2020: online). The incredibly thorough analysis presented by the speakers from Palestine, Turkey, Indonesia, Tunisia, Australia, Lebanon, and Britain discusses HT's comprehensive blueprint of detailed principles, laws and systems as implemented by its political system, and an alternative vision to raise the status of women to secure their rights, elevate their standard of living, and achieve true progress within a state (ibid).[45]

During the conference, speakers condemned Western conceptions of gender equality arguing, over the last 25 years+ there has been no improvement for the "masses of ordinary women in the Muslim world nor worldwide [and] the scale of violence, poverty, insecurity, exploitation, injustice, and oppression that women face, as well as the state of education and healthcare within their lands, has worsened" (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2020). Their core argument is that "[f]eminism and gender equality are flawed and irrational because they ignore the undeniable truth of gender differences". The conference, its social media coverage on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and the publication of the booklet that followed demonstrate not only commitment and intellectual engagement of HT's women globally in the promotion of HT ideology as the only system that liberates and empowers women, but their current activity organising as the global Women's Media Section.[46]

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[45] The press release for the conference can be accessed here: http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.info/en/index.php/press-releases/cmo-women-s-section/19242.html. The full conference proceedings can be viewed online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AU5-7j_ufI

Inside HTB

HT's website(s) emphasises the different activities of the Women's branches globally, for example, the recent April 2020 Beijing+25 *Has the Mask of Gender Equality?* conference or the conference on "The Family: Challenges & Islamic Solutions" (2018) in Tunisia". Moreover, there are plenty of resources on the ideological role of women in the caliphate. However, it is hard to find information about what role women play practically or the specific structure and goals of the women's section. Even in historical accounts of HT, the role of women is mostly neglected (Taji-Farouki, 1996; Pankhurst, 2006).

Furthermore, women's involvement in HTB in the UK has always and continues to be clandestine-like. As described in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, it was a challenge to find women who had joined or considered joining HT. It was only possible through snowballing, specifically interviewing current and former men members who connected me with their wives and other women relatives.

Moreover, trying to understand the role women contributed to HTB in the past and present was remarkably difficult to decipher from my interviews with both the men and women participants. When communicating with those who are still currently engaged, my questions were often met with formulaic, idealistic rhetoric which echoed the organisation's ideology on women's roles, rather than offering an insight into the practical nature of their involvement. The responses from those who had left HT offered more detail. From this, I was able to build a picture of the practical engagement of women's roles in the organisation.

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[46] It is notable that they organised this online global conference during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The women's structure has its own *Mutamada* [national leader] and its own committee: "we carried the *da'wah* in the same way as the brothers". Historically, women were not governed according to the party structure, and the brothers organised the sister's committees, but as interest grew, so did demands for representation and autonomy. They were eventually in control of the women's *da'wah*. Through this decision, women members became a separate entity within HT, which allowed them to set up their own hierarchy, and the women and the men began to operate in different and separate spheres. Since becoming autonomous, the women's and men's sections rarely, if ever, meet and the *Mutamada* do not even hold each other's phone numbers. They communicate through a network of their wives or their own media offices.

There is a men's media representative and a women's media representative. They write press releases, newsletters, and articles on different activities of each section and provide analysis to various issues going on around the world from a HT perspective. The women's global media representative is Dr Nasreen Nawaz, who is one of HT's most visible members online. She actively participates and initiates debate, organises the global women's conferences and participates in academic research as an interviewee, discussed more below.

Several participants also reported that the brothers from their counterpart committees were not initially particularly supportive of women's sections or willing to make room for them in the organisation – particularly in University settings: "We just didn't see the point in them, they couldn't do anything the men could just do themselves" described a current HT affiliate, "Of course women are imperative to the Khilafah, but they can support the organisation without being members or organise meetings".

Most of men and women participants described the primary roles of women were to recruit other women and educate them about HT ideology and concepts: "Mostly, other than going to *halaqaat* and attending other meetings, we just tried to spread the message to others and recruit them. I used to give out leaflets too." This includes the role of *Mushrif* [supervisor or instructor] which is the same as their male counterparts, they organise and hold *halaqaat* often in their homes, to teach and guide the other Sisters.[47]

The *halaqaat* is also where women learn their religious obligations (according to HT's specific vision) and where 'Hizb' personalities are constructed through a continuous process of acculturation (Orofino, 2019: 105). Zainab, a former HT affiliate commented, "We'd learn about the ideology and stuff, but we'd also learn about how to behave and how to articulate ourselves in debates and arguments and stuff like even about politics".

Another important position is the role of the *Da'i* [recruiter], who actively engages in spaces where she will encounter other women, who she will often befriend and invite for tea or coffee, or more formally to an event where she will start the process of engaging the potential recruit on issues central to HT ideology. “I played the part of a really friendly and chatty girl. I mean I was that anyway, but I used to make myself visible in prayer rooms or at ISOC where I’d always chat to others, ask them to pray with me or ask if they wanted to get tea or go the canteen after. I’d suggest we swapped numbers and I’d text them and ask them to hang out again. Eventually, I’d invite them to meet another Sister or invite them to a *halaqa*” (Humaira).

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[47] *Mushrif* is the masculine for 'supervisor or instructor'. However, in all my interviews participants used the masculine rather than feminine *Mushrifa* to refer to themselves or their peers, which is consistent which Orofino's (2018; 2019) and Wali (2011; 2013)'s research.

When the male participants were questioned, they also claimed that their primary tasks were to recruit, educate, and disseminate the HT message, e.g., through organising protests. The difference is that women were only allowed to engage with other women and were not allowed to set HT agenda or establish their own campaigns. Several participants also described that there was an element of exclusivity to becoming involved, more so for the women than the men. A former male member reported: “The women were like a clique. They had to focus on recruiting other women like we did, but they were more exclusive. I remember thinking they made their recruits jump through so many hoops”. A former HT affiliate commented: “You had to prove you were committed before you got invited to the proper meetings. It took ages, you had to prove your loyalty. I never did. I was interested, but it seemed too cult-y [sic] at that point”.

Existing research on British women affiliated with HTB

Unlike ISIS, there is very little existing academic or policy research on HT. Where research does exist, it mostly focuses on the Middle East, Central Asia or South/east Asia (Karagiannis, 2005, 2006, 2010; Karagiannis & McCauley, 2006; Chaudet, 2006; Osman Nawab, 2010; Iqbal & Zulkifli, 2016; Høigilt, 2014). Historical accounts have offered invaluable contributions to understanding the origins, emergence, and ideology of the party. Suha Taji- Farouki's book *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate* (1996) and Reza Pankhurst (2016)'s *Hizb ut-Tahrir: The Untold Story of the Liberation Party* both provide a thorough analysis of the group and its central ideological tenets.

There is even less academic research that focuses specifically on HT in Britain. Existing research predominantly takes a comparative approach to exploring HTB's recruitment and impact of Muslims (Yilmaz, 2010; Sinclair, 2010; Hanif; 2014; Orofino, 2016; 2020; 2019). Yilmaz (2010) explores the success of HT's recruitment of young Muslims in Britain, Uzbekistan, Egypt, and Turkey, arguing that the group is most successful in countries like Britain where experiences of discrimination and racism push Muslims towards HT. Sinclair (2010)'s research, discussed further below, focuses on HT Denmark and Britain. Hanif (2014) explores the ways in which HT has been securitised under differing political contexts including the Arab Middle East, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, and the UK, dividing his analysis between *majaal* (Muslim countries) and *non-majaal* (non-Muslim countries). Finally, Sadek Hamid (2016) examines the appeal of HT to young Muslims in Britain. He identifies three elements to HT's success in Britain. Firstly, young British Muslims are attracted to HT's ideology because it offers them a complete identity and uses external circumstances to romanticise the past and promise a future. Secondly, the intellectual nature and strategy of HT are unique and offer young British Muslims structure and direction. Thirdly, HT serves as a family for young British Muslims.

In the last twenty years, there have only been three pieces of research which contribute to understanding the experiences of women directly affiliated with HTB in the UK (Wali, 2011; 2013; Sinclair, 2010; Orofino, 2018; 2019). Within the final section of this chapter, I discuss Wali, Sinclair, and Orofino's research on women in HTB and review the strengths and limitations of their methodologies and findings.[48]

Women in HT Britain "Unveiled"

Farhaan Wali's (2011; 2013) ethnographic study explores the 'radicalisation' and indoctrination of British Muslims into HTB. As part of his research, Wali (2011, 2013) conducted a focus group with seven women members of HTB to discuss their personal experiences of why they joined HT, their indoctrination, and their experiences within the organisation. However, it is essential to note that the single chapter he dedicates to "Female HT members" in both his thesis and book is based on the testimonies of only four of these women.

Wali discovered commonalities in the backgrounds of the women HT affiliates he interviewed in terms of age, education, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. Firstly, in terms of early family life and upbringing, there were several common features: there were stricter rules at home for girls than for boys, and sometimes this resulted in acts of rebellion. Secondly, as girls, the women underwent gendered socialisation in their inherited South Asian cultures as well as the majority culture outside of the house. Wali also identified that social class played an important role in the early experiences of the women in his study, especially as their families had all migrated to the UK in search of greater prosperity and stability but had parents who were educated professionals. The four women that Wali interviews all joined HTB at university where Wali identifies they

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[48] Outside of the research focusing on women affiliated with HTB, there is very little research focusing on HT globally. Murzakulova (2015)'s research explores the main reasons for women's participation in HT in Krygyzstan, where HT is currently proscribed. She conducted focus groups and interviews with 270 convicted women HT affiliates (ibid: 132). In a context like Krygyzstan, where the state sees HT as a "menace" (Murzakulova, 2015: 136), Murzakulova argues that women's participation in HT is based upon by rational choice. It solves problems of personal safety, improves their social role in the community, helps their financial problems, and enables them to seek social justice for Muslims (ibid: 136-137).

"gravitated towards relations with people that were similar to them, based on similar social experiences" (Wali, 2011: 189).

Wali argues that the women HTB affiliates in his research became socialised into culturally structured gender roles at an early age and joining HT enabled from to "actively break away from the cultural mores of their parents" (Wali, 2011: 166). For the women Wali's (2011) study, "HT was an important mechanism for making sense of the world", in this sense the women he interviews "were actively involved in determining their own fate" (ibid: 166). Wali concludes: "[their] choice was influenced by their deep desire to resist the traditional patriarchy of their home upbringing [and] from an outsider perspective, it would seem that the women replaced one form of subordination for another, as HT ideology is equally rooted in patriarchy… [but] the choice to join HT was an expression of self-agency, while the cultural values and norms of their parents were enforced upon them" (Wali, 2011: 166-167).

Wali's work offers a starting point in understanding the experiences of women who join or consider joining HTB. As later discussed in Chapter Seven, his findings are corroborated by this thesis. However, compared to the much, richer findings of his more comprehensive study with men members, Wali's focus group with seven women is very "add women and stir",[49] especially as his chapter on women is only based on the testimonies of four of these women. It is important to note that Wali's quantitative survey also surveyed ninety-one women members of HTB. However, his analysis does not disaggregate by gender nor discuss the different experiences of women compared to men.

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[49] Bunch (1987) coined the oft-used phrase, "You can't just add women and stir". Instead of simply tacking on a few paragraphs about women to male-dominated historical accounts, academics and policymakers must reshape their understanding of history, considering women's experiences, expertise, actions, and agency (also see Harding, 1995).

Interestingly, Wali's makes a strong argument for his background as a member of HTB for six years, and how this gave him unprecedented access to the party and its current members. He criticises Sadek Hamid's previous work (Hamid, 2007), along with other scholars (see Afshar et al., 2005 who use HT as a case study), for having no personal experiences of HT and for anonymising the responses of participants. In Wali's words (2011: 48): "The literature is overwhelmingly dominated by articles looking to explain the phenomenon of HT radicalisation from a distance. Subsequently, they do not offer any empirical data to corroborate theory as scholars struggle to penetrate HT, which greatly weakens their usefulness".

He discusses why he chose to use the focus groups with the women in his study, focusing on access and bypassing gender segregation. He also addresses the challenges he encountered in engaging with the women in his research, especially when discussing experiences of "indoctrination". However, he failures to acknowledge how his own gender and being a former member of HT, himself may have shaped or even skewed his findings. As an insider who has had similar experiences, Wali may be more likely to understand and represent participants' experiences than someone who has not joined HT as he claims. However, as Zempi (2016) highlights, being an insider does not guarantee that the 'insider researcher' understands participants' perspectives and experiences more than an 'outsider researcher', because their lives are as different as they are similar, which may outweigh their shared positions (Bridges, 2001). For example, although Wali shared the experiences of joining HT with the women in his study, he did not share experiences of gender or age. This is something I discuss further in Chapter Five. There is also an additional risk that the researcher might take for granted or overlook perspectives due to their shared positions (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1997). Consequently, the charges he wages against other academics who explore the experiences of those who join HT are somewhat disparaging, given that both his own methodology and conclusions are dependent on his own background.

HT women in Denmark and Britain

Kirstine Sinclair (2010)'s doctoral research explores notions of "home" and "belonging" among HT members in Denmark and Britain, questioning the differences between the two branches. Based on interviews with members and former members of the group both countries Sinclair's thesis explores how HT members "delineate their community positionalities within the de facto transnational, diasporic spatial setting that Muslims occupy in Europe" (Sinclair, 2010: 5). Sinclair acknowledges the challenges and limitations she faced in accessing members of HT Britain. Sinclair details an interaction with former HTB leader Anjem Choudary and a group of his students which appears to have led to her further unsuccessful access or interviews with HTB (Sinclair, 2010: 59). As such, her comparison of HTD and HTB only includes six interviews with members of HTB (compared to twelve interviews with HTD), and only two women HTB affiliates (no women affiliates were interviewed in Denmark). Sinclair concludes that her lack of access was characteristic of the changing context in Britain during the time of her fieldwork (2008-2009) (ibid: 60). Following 7/7, the party affected by increasingly strict anti-terror legislation, cutting back on public appearances.[50]

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[50] One point Sinclair misses is the role of Anjem Choudary's in HTB during this time. Choudary is renowned for his radical violent ideology that does not reflect HTB. He later led the proscribed violent organisation al-Muhajiroun with Omar Bakri Muhammad, and has been prosecuted for inviting others to support ISIS under the UK Terrorism Act 2000. Choudary's involvement in al-Muhajiroun is believed to have begun in 2002. Al-Muhajiroun disbanded in 2004 to avoid proscription but relaunched in 2009 under the name Islam4UK. Consequently, the organisation that Sinclair was trying to access through interviewing Choudary in 2008-2009 was unlikely to be HTB, and much more likely to be the formative Islam4UK.

At the time of the study, Sinclair found there was minimal contact between the two branches and the main differences came down to issues of ethnicity, country of origin, and local politics (ibid: 5-6). In Denmark, members were of Arab origin; in Britain - South Asian – mostly Pakistani and Bangladeshi. In Denmark, there was a strong focus on the Arab world, and especially issues related to Palestine and Israel. In Britain, the focus was mostly on Pakistan and Kashmir (ibid: 6). Sinclair found that although most of HT's members in Denmark and Britain were educated and engaged in society: they were employed, connected to their friends and families: they still felt homeless in their own countries, and their feelings towards HT's vision of the caliphate were not Utopian but arose from intense longing. However, this longing was not equivalent to being at home in Denmark or Britain. Instead, Sinclair argues that HT's characterisation as both a transnational and a national organisation provides members with a narrative that helps them make sense of themselves and their place in the world as Muslims (ibid: 162-164).

Sinclair does not focus specifically on the gendered differences in the experiences of her participants. Still, she does draw upon the experiences of the women she interviews throughout her thesis (Sinclair, 2010: 123). It is important to note that both Sinclair and Orofino only interviewed two women from HTB who were senior in the party. One of these women, Dr Nasreen Nawaz, is the Women's Media Representative, and is not affiliated with HTB but with the HT Central Media Office. Sinclair dedicates a chapter to discussing 'individual rationales' and discusses the clandestine nature and secrecy of the women' section of HTB which attracted potential recruits to them and the apparent importance of their mission (ibid: 161). She describes the experiences of her interviewee, who was initially rejected by the group, which made them seem more exciting and their group more unreachable and thus desirable (ibid: 161).

The Appeal of Hizb ut-Tahrir to Women in the West (Australia and UK)

In recent years, Elisa Orofino's (2016; 2018; 2019; 2020) research has provided invaluable insights to the study of HT globally, and more specifically, within the context of HT Britain and HT Australia where her research is focused. Based on analysis of HT's primary informative material and literature, along with the fieldwork conducted in the UK and Australia, she argues that "HT constructs its narrative against Western states on the need to rescue a 'suffering *ummah*' [Muslim community] all over the world" (ibid: 410). Elisa Orofino's doctoral research (2018) and subsequent book (2019) explore how "vocal" radical "social-movements" like HT manages to attract segments of Muslim communities in the UK and Australia.

Orofino didn't set out to explore the gendered experiences of women affiliates of HTB, but for access reasons, most of her interviews are only women. Orofino (2018: 26) describes the challenges she had in accessing HTB men members. She details that had to go through their wives, and if approved by the wives, then she could interview the husbands.[51] Subsequently, only four interviews out of sixteen are with men HT affiliates. Out of the fourteen interviews, Orofino conducts with women, only two are British HT affiliates.[52] As mentioned above, one of these women, although a British national, is Dr Nasreen Nawaz and is not affiliated with HTB but with the HT Central Media Office.

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[51] As discussed above, and further in Chapter Five, I find this fascinating, as within my own fieldwork, the opposite was true: it was much easier for me to access the men, and who negotiated access on my behalf through a network of their wives.

[52] Orofino (2019: 22) also analysed over 400 HT online textual posts (from the official websites of HT Australia, HT Britain, HT Central Media Office and from Facebook) and 83 visual posts from YouTube, Facebook and from HT official websites gathered between October 2015 and May 2017.

However, she also interviews, Ibtihal Bsis, a senior member of HTB. Consequently, like with Sinclair's study, the unbalanced sample and access to members in HTB make both studies less comparative as they are pitched by in title and methodology and more as single case studies with insights from another country.

Despite the small sample of women affiliated with HTB in her study, Orofino's research offers important insights. Firstly, she argues that HT "provides its members with an ideology that pushes them towards specific religious, social, and political views defined as 'radical'" (Orofino, 2018: 3). The intellectual framing of HT's ideology targets young Muslims who are "outraged about the perceived injustices motivating many terrorist groups, but who disapprove of using violence to achieve their aims" (ibid: 3). Secondly, Orofino finds that HT's presence in over 45 countries worldwide highlights its unique ability to adapt to specific local settings and political conditions (ibid: 4). Thirdly, "HT's appeal to members in the West is linked to its ability to stand as a durable, global and reliable actor increasingly resembling a transnational organisation" (Orofino: 268).

Most importantly, Orofino (2018: 270) uncovers that, globally, HT "relentlessly" seeks to inculcate the idea that Muslims are in danger and that the only way to protect them is through the restoration of the caliphate. Through using contemporary political and social grievances in the West, HT positions itself as an appealing alternative to young Muslims and spotlights Western models of governances as failures (ibid: 270). By demonstrating a clear rationale and method to recruits, HT is an appealing route and framework for young Muslims who want change (ibid: 270-272).

Chapter summary

This chapter has traced the history and ideology of HT and HTB, focusing specifically on the party's ideology on women. Drawing on the testimonies of women and men interviewed as part of this thesis, it also briefly discussed women's roles within HTB to provide a background on how the party operates in the UK. The second part of this chapter reviewed the existing, albeit sparse, academic research that focuses on women affiliated with HTB. It highlighted that, where valuable contributions have been made, critical gaps persist, necessitating specific research focus on women affiliated with HTB.

CHAPTER FIVE

"She's alright for a white girl": Fieldwork, Ethics, and Reflexivity

Chapter overview

Building on the feminist research framework outlined in the introduction to this thesis, in this chapter, I discuss my fieldwork process in detail. To the reader, this chapter might read differently to the usual methodology chapter in a doctoral thesis; it may even read differently to the chapters in the rest of my thesis. This is my intention. I have reiterated the importance of reflexivity and writing oneself into one's methods and analysis in feminist research. Taking the reader on a detailed journey through my fieldwork enables me to write myself into the project but also provides context and agency to the community studied. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, it is notoriously difficult to conduct qualitative research with individuals who have engaged with extremist organisations. Through providing a detailed account of my research, especially regarding positionality, and building relationships with community organisations, I aim to provide a transparent account of the challenges and limitations of conducting qualitative research with individuals who have engaged with extremist organisations.

The first section of this chapter discusses my fieldwork process and the methods I used. I then move onto discussing the specific ethics and risks of research into extremism. The third section discusses reflexivity and positionality, and the different ways trust and research relationships developed. The final section focuses on the challenges and limitations of this project.

A caveat on "the field."

Despite using the term 'fieldwork' to describe my research process, I want to make it clear, "the field is not a passive entity that is waiting to be read and discerned by the researcher" (Hussain, 2020). Being situated in the Department of International Development, the term 'fieldwork' to describe our research process is the norm, both academically and administratively. However, there is something uncomfortably *exoticising* and Othering about the term (Katz, 1994; Hussain, 2020),[53] which displaces not only knowledge production but the boundaries of where the field begins and ends. For me, the term always felt jarring; unlike my peers, who flew back to Oxford from their 'fields' to 'write-up', I never left my 'field'. I wrote up most of my thesis in the Tower Hamlets library whilst engaging with many of the community members I met in the early stages of my research. Like Hussain (2020), I believe "for those of us, for whom being in the field means to meet with communities, listen to their stories, walk-in their environments and be with them", the field never begins or ends but always remains with us, 'everywhere' (see Katz, 1994).

Fieldwork

Bolognani (2007: 290) argues "any piece of research involving Muslims becomes political". The 'climate of Islamophobia', especially following the 7/7 bombings, "created a general sense of mistrust towards people investigating issues concerning Muslims in Britain" (Bolognani, 2007: 281). Consequently, research engaging in Muslim communities brings additional challenges and potential discomfort centred in their fear of misrepresentation of their religion (Zempi, 2016). I anticipated, like Spalek (2005: 411), "due to the verbal and physical abuse suffered by Muslim communities in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the interviewees may have distrusted my interest in their lives". I expected initial access to potential participants would be challenging, given my non-Muslim identity. Although participants wanted to ascertain my motivations before agreeing to take part, I discovered being genuine and honest led to openness and trust between the participants and myself and helped to ease any suspicions. This was a brief background about me and growing up in Leicester, which most of the participants received positively as most of them had family there.

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[53] Given the parameters of this thesis, there is unfortunately no space to discuss this further. Other this has been discussed in detail by others. See for example: Gilbert, 1994; Staeheli & Lawson, 1993; Cuomo & Massaro, 2014.

Initial Community and Participant Observation

I began my fieldwork with a three-month community observational period, doing what Clifford (1998) describes as, 'deep hanging out' in local coffee shops, attending community, university, and mosque events, and speaking to local community members. This approach relied on snowball sampling to identify respondents, which assumes that a 'bond' or 'link' exists between the initial sample and others in the same target population, permitting recommendations to be made within the context of acquaintance (Berg, 1988). These initial observations and conversations helped me connect with women who had not joined an extremist organisation but were acting on their experiences and challenges positively and productively to empower and support other Muslim women like them.

At first, I spent a lot of time in Starbucks on Whitechapel Road (opposite the East London Mosque). After a meeting at the mosque, I decided to head in to write up my notes and discovered the coffee shop was packed with young Muslim women aged around sixteen-twenty years. The barista told me it was always like this after school as they all come to do their homework and hang out with their friends before attending an event at the mosque or heading home. I came back the next day at a similar time, and they were right.

Starbucks was again packed with excited young Muslim girls slurping *Frappuccinos*, gossiping, or discussing homework. I started to visit regularly, and as there were often no spaces, I would ask if I could share their table or borrow a chair. Initial conversation started because two girls approached me and told me I looked like a character from the British soap opera EastEnders. After showing me different photos and YouTube videos of this character and laughing with them, I told them what I was researching. To my surprise, they found this fascinating. I was expecting them to be more apprehensive about me as a white non-Muslim researcher. They were open in telling me about their lives and daily experiences before I'd even asked any specific questions. Most of these initial conversations are not included directly in this research, as many of the girls I conversed with were under eighteen years. However, their discussions were invaluable in shaping not only the direction of this project but also connecting me with their older sisters and cousins.

During this period, I engaged with many local shops and restaurant owners. Every day I would buy lunch from the same family-owned café on Whitechapel Road and converse with the owners and other customers about everything from local and national politics to veganism, gentrification, and climate change. This was instrumental in building an understanding of the different dynamics in the local community, from mosque politics to social and economic issues directly impacting them. During some of these conversations, we discussed the issue and impact of extremism on British Muslim communities, including HT and ISIS. As discussed below, this helped me connect with former HT members and form an understanding of how both HT and ISIS were perceived in the community. These conversations, which were mostly with men over the age of fifty, also connected me to their daughters, granddaughters, and nieces, some of whom later agreed to be interviewed, and others who invited me to events or gatherings tailored to Muslim women in the community.

I attended many events held at the mosque, in the community, at London universities, and several national conferences organised by Muslim women. During these events, I built a comprehensive understanding of the issues being experienced and discussed by Muslim women, which later helped me shape my interviews and analysis and connect with young women who later agreed to be interviewed. Although, at first, the women's representatives from mosques in the community seemed to welcome my presence and invited me to several events, they were less supportive in helping me organise interviews with younger women.

Accessing those engaged with HT – Internal networks of wives

Through this initial observation period, I was able to connect with former HTB members and those who had considered but had not joined HTB (Group 1a). This was through ongoing conversations I had with different members of the community. I discovered quickly it was common for older members of the community to know someone who had been a member or been engaged with HTB at some point in the last ten-fifteen years or had been engaged themselves. One community member remarked: "Of course I know the Hizb [sic]. Everyone knows the Hizb around here. You used to see them all the time, handing out leaflets, trying to get people to join at mosque". At first, I had many informal conversations over coffee or lunch with former members or those who considered joining - some who agreed to in-depth interviews, but others who helped me form an understanding of how HTB used to operate, the politics of the organisation, and how to access other former or current members. During this time, I discovered a network of former HTB members who provided support to each other and others who are trying to disengage from the organisation. I developed a relationship with the person who founded this network. This, at first, seemed to be based on his assessment of how well I understood Islam and HTB's history, a way of him testing my integrity and my commitment to my research. After we met in person, he agreed to connect me to the women in his network, which included his three sisters.

In contrast, it was much more challenging to connect with current HTB members. Since HTB operates legally in the UK, I decided to try and contact the organisation directly. I contacted the organisation's UK's senior leaders, including the Media Representatives for both the men's and women's sections. I first met with a senior member of the HTB men's section at his workplace in a pre-booked meeting room. When I arrived, he asked me if I was hungry and produced an avocado sandwich, which he had chosen for me as he had predicted I "was a millennial and millennials love avocado". We discussed HTB's history, their current activity, and my research – specifically whether he thought it would be possible for me to speak to current women HT affiliates. He told me with brutal honesty; he didn't know. Although he could help me organise interviews with men, the men's section of HTB and the women's section did not communicate directly. Instead, communication was only through a network of their wives. However, he promised to put me in touch with the women's section and asked his wife to contact me. I frequently met with this contact for coffee during my fieldwork, who had been a member of HTB since he was eighteen years.

Accessing those engaged with ISIS – Community organisation partnership

At first, it seemed I would connect with women who had joined or considered joining ISIS in the same way the women had with HTB. This was due to my initial conversations revealing several community members who knew of or had family members or friends, that had children who had engaged with the organisation. I connected with several of women interviewed as part of this thesis who 'considered' joining ISIS this way, however, in pursuing these leads, it transpired that others were either cautious or had been advised not to engage with researchers or journalists following legal advice. It was clear I would need a gatekeeper (Gilliat-Ray, 2005). I partnered with a local community organisation, which enabled my access and engagement with young women who had either joined or considered joining ISIS.[54] They acted as a gatekeeper and assisted in organising interviews with individuals and families who had experienced a family member joining or considering joining ISIS. However, it took time to find the right organisation, build trust, and negotiate access.

I spent two months meeting with practitioners from several national and community organisations working on countering extremism to discuss their work and programmes. I had the opportunity of partnering with them and observing their programmes and interventions with young people. At first, all organisations I met with were open to engaging with my research and allowing me to observe their programmes. Building relationships with several organisations would have enabled me to observe a variety of different programmes and facilitated access to slightly different communities and cases. However, I encountered several barriers to progressing with most organisations due to funding issues. I found there were holes in the promised reach or access several organisations claimed they had.

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[54] Due to reasons of anonymity and protection of the young women at the centre of my research, I will discuss the work and my engagement with this organisation without naming the organisation, to ensure my participants cannot be indirectly identified due to their affiliation with this organisation. This also means I am intentionally vague when discussing the different programmes and interventions led by this organisation, and the locations they take place.

This process helped me understand the different financial, social, and political challenges of leading counter-extremism programmes and interventions in the community. It helped me build a strong partnership with the organisation I ended up working with. At the beginning of my research process, I had first contacted this organisation and had received no response. However, I discovered one of their senior management team used to run a youth programme in London that I had been involved with when I was younger, which helped build trust and a partnership with the organisation.

I volunteered with the organisation for six months observing two of their ongoing programmes. These programmes engaged with young people across East London who had been identified as ‘at risk’ of being drawn into extremism. They had either shared extremist content or views online or at school, had a family member or friend who had travelled to join ISIS, or who had been referred to the programme by their family or teachers who were concerned about them. These programmes centred around supporting young people with communication and leadership skills giving them a platform to discuss their feelings and views. They provided them with practical tools to explore their identity and experiences creatively. They also included events with guest speakers from those formerly engaged with extremist organisations, police officers, and successful Muslim business or political leaders from across the UK. The organisation helped facilitate access and build relationships with young people who had joined or considered joining ISIS.

Interviews

Although this thesis does not focus specifically on the experiences of men, interviewing men was instrumental in gaining access to women. In the case of HT, the men wanted to tell their stories and share their experiences before connecting me with their wives, daughters, and other women relatives. These interviews also helped inform my understanding of the background to HT, their current activity, and their ideology on women. There are other men's voices represented in this thesis, and these include the voices of the family members of the young women who travelled to ISIS-controlled territories and were either killed or, at the time of the interview, still missing. In my analysis, I rely on these voices less than the voices of the women I interviewed directly. However, they add an interesting perspective to the analysis and corroborate some of the findings.

The primary data presented in this thesis is based on interviews with:

	Sample size
Group 1a – British Muslim South Asian women, aged 18-25 years who had joined or considered joining ISIS	12 interviews
Group 1b – British Muslim South Asian women, aged 18-25 years who had joined or considered joining Hizb ut-Tahrir	11 interviews
Group 2 – British Muslim South Asian women who had NOT engaged or considered engaging with extremist causes but were engaged in or had started their own community organisations, initiatives, or campaigns to support and empower other Muslim women in their communities	30 interviews

My interviews with all participants were loosely structured, taking an ethnographic approach, which is characterised by its "concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand” (Spradley, 1979: 5). All interviews were informal and took place in a location chosen by the participant, including local coffee shops, on campus at the participant’s university, meeting rooms at the participant’s workplace, at the youth centre run by my partner organisation, whilst walking in the park, or over Skype. In several cases, participants requested to conduct the interview outside of the local community so they wouldn’t be recognised – sometimes this meant travelling to an entirely different part of London, or a place they would unlikely be identified, such as the British Library.

I began all interviews by asking each participant to tell me the story of their life, their experiences growing up – in their family, at school, at university, and work. I allowed the participant to structure the interview, and I only probed questions to explore issues that were both salient to them and those relevant to my research questions. By allowing the participant to shape the conversation, they were able to construct the narrative and flow of the interview, telling their story in their words. At times, where I had to ask questions to guide them where they were uncertain or lost their way, I tried to make sure I only asked prompting questions: “What did that feel like?”, “What happened then?”, “How was that?”, “What did that mean to you?”. This helped mitigate my potentially interruptive role as interviewing researcher. I only intentionally (but gently) redirected the flow of interviews if I felt they were heading towards areas of conversation we were not ethically approved to discuss for the safety of both the participant and me.

Typically, each interview lasted one-two hours, sometimes longer. All interviews were both flexible and in-depth in structure, and the majority took place over two meetings. In the beginning, I asked each participant whether they felt comfortable being recorded or not. This question itself seemed to make most participants shift in their seat and feel uncomfortable, so I decided to rely on detailed interview notes instead, sometimes taken during the interview and then reviewed post-interview.

When I reviewed my interview notes I highlighted any quotes I felt encapsulated the themes and issues discussed by the participants, and post-interview I asked the participant to approve the wording and further consent to the quote being used in my thesis. This was to ensure accuracy and misquoting participants as I rely on detailed quotes from participants throughout the thesis. I also asked for feedback from all the participants about the interview process.

Analysis

My analytical process was iterative and took place alongside my fieldwork. I began the analysis by annotating my detailed research notes with a combination of initial themes and then analysis of broader narratives. Once I had identified key themes, I compared the different narratives across interviews and within each account. I was conscious that interview accounts are co-constructed, so "the actual findings from the data cannot (and should not) be easily separated out from the form of their production" (Skeggs, Thumim, and Wood 2008: 3).

Consequently, a narrative approach is central to my analysis and thesis to mitigate the ethical dilemmas of speaking on behalf of others. As Portelli (1991: 50) argues, oral accounts do not merely reveal "what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did". Stories, in individuals own words, also facilitate understanding of the intersection between self and society

(Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou, 2015). Narratives also help us make sense of ourselves as human-beings and play a critical role in the construction of political behaviour and giving an individual agency in telling their own story (Patterson & Moore: 1998, 315-316).

A fundamental aspect of a feminist research process is who interprets participants' words and how these words are interpreted. As Bhopal outlines (2001: 283): "It is the woman's understanding of her own experiences that is sought in the interview process, the researcher (whatever her background) is not structuring the interview so that the subject tells a story that conforms to the researcher's orientation". However, as described above, given the restrictions surrounding recording interviews, and the nature of having to rely on oral consent, I had to rely heavily on notetaking during the research process. This meant that although that post-interview I asked each participant to review and approach my 'transcript' notes and quotes of the interview, they were still notes that I had written, in essence 'translating' the participant's narrative. I was conscious of this from the beginning, and I strived to ensure my notes, especially quotes I wanted to use were exactly what they participant had said, down to an 'um' or an 'ah', or as is reflected throughout the thesis, the participants' use of Modern London English (MLE) (discussed further below). Whilst this is imperfect, relying on a human ear, rather than an audio recorder, under the circumstances, it was the best solution. Throughout this thesis, verbatim quotes are not only used to highlight key themes but also enable readers to assess the analysis against what had been said, in the participants own words.

There is also the risk that, when writing an academic piece of research, especially a thesis which often follows a formulaic structure, the research reconstructs a participant's narrative in a way that re-tells their story in a different way when grouping them or discussing them alongside other participants. In narrative research, it can be difficult to find a balance between representing participants' voices and presenting an analysis with the rigour required. In attempt to strike this balance, Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight open with the individual journeys of the women affiliated with ISIS and HT in narrative form, relying on their voice to tell their own stories. Whilst these 'profiles' were still written on the page by me, they represent the unique and individual experiences of each woman in the way they were shared with me.

Research Relationships and building trust: "This white girl can speak better Arabic than you, beti*."

> "Reflections on the inevitability of power differentials within the research have extended into discussions of the dangers of the illusion of equality in research relationships, the ethical dilemmas involved in conducted research with disadvantaged or marginalised women, as well as larger epistemological issues in involved in attempting to "know" others".
>
> (Doucet and Mauthner, 2007: 39)

The research relationships I developed were not as difficult as I anticipated, but they were not always easy. My positionality and experience directly impacted my access and my opportunity to build these relationships in the first place but also shaped the trust that developed with those I interacted with. My identity markers, my gender, perceived age, ethnicity, class, non-Muslim status always played a role in my interactions, but the degree to which they were significant varied depending on the individual or group. Being a white British non-Muslim woman researcher but having personal familiarity with South Asian Muslim culture and traditions provided me privileged insider knowledge and understanding (Britton, 2019). This proved invaluable in building relationships and trust.

I was uniquely positioned in forming connections and building rapport with all those engaged in my research due to my knowledge of a shared cultural and linguistic framework. Bucerius (2013) highlights being an outsider trusted with inside knowledge can be an excellent research asset (see also: Powdermaker's 1966 motif of stranger and friend).

As a non-Muslim young woman, some aspects of my identity can be linked to insider positions (e.g., being a young woman), and other elements can be linked to outsider positions. As such, I oscillated between being both an insider and an outsider during different interactions within my research. Within this section, I discuss the various ways my 'white-non-Muslimness', my gender, and my perceived youth intersected and impacted my research relationships and process.

Outsiderness

Feminist researchers studying marginalised and 'other' communities have emphasised the potential benefits of researchers who share 'similar' background or experiences with their participants (see: Lee, 2008; Zempi, 2016). It is assumed that researchers who are insiders are more likely to understand and better represent participants' experiences (Zempi, 2016). This is relevant in research with groups that have been underrepresented and socially or culturally marginalised like British Muslims (Zempi, 2016). However, as Zempi (2016: 2) highlights, "a degree of commonality does not guarantee that an insider researcher will understand participants' views and experiences any more than an outsider researcher", because their lives are as different as they are similar through other personal, social, and situational characteristics, which outweigh the shared positions (see Bridges, 2001; Zempi, 2016). There is an additional risk the researcher might take for granted or overlook perspectives due to their shared positions (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1997).

This perspective assumes the community in question is, to a degree, homogeneous, with more shared identity markers than not. As has been argued elsewhere in this thesis, in the case of British Muslims (and any community to an extent), this couldn't be further from the truth. As a collectivity, 'British Muslims' are "striated by a plurality of identities – such as race, ethnicity, age, language, class, education, sexual orientation, and degree of practising Islam, down to the individual level" (Zempi, 2016: 3). Despite categorised broadly as 'South Asian', the heritage of my participants was diverse, representing the plurality of the South Asian Muslim community in the UK, including those with dual heritage. For this reason, drawing a line between 'insider' and 'outsider' is misleading. Instead, it is more illuminating to think about "outsiderness" and "insiderness" as introduced by Nancy Naples (1996). Both iteratively whilst conducting my fieldwork, and retrospectively whilst analysing and writing up my findings, this enabled me to think about the ways that different aspects of my identity positioned my 'outsiderness' or 'insiderness' in my other interactions and relationships and influenced the trust between myself and my participants.

From the beginning of my project, my 'outsiderness' as a non-Muslim non-South Asian woman (Naples, 1996) seemed to work in my favour in my interactions with men, who perceived me as unthreatening and were willing to engage with me. In many ways, my 'whiteness' and my 'non-Muslim-ness' meant the men felt more comfortable speaking to me and engaging in conversation than if I was a South Asian and/or Muslim women. I observed this at multiple times during the initial stages of my fieldwork when the same men I would be joking and discussing anything from politics to reality TV with, would hardly speak two words to their South Asian Muslim women customers. There were many instances, especially in my early interactions, were my 'non-Muslim-ness' would become a topic of conversation. I would be quizzed about why I wasn't married yet and why I would want to live separately from my boyfriend when we could live together. These conversations were non-threatening, and I usually diffused them using cultural familiarity, e.g., how expensive and long South Asian weddings can be.

In terms of language, my interviews and interactions were conducted in English, which all my participants spoke natively or fluently. However, my basic competence of Arabic also shaped my interactions, particularly with the men I engaged with. They enjoyed that I could speak Arabic and would tell any passer-by I could speak better conversational Arabic then themselves, or I was teaching them to speak Arabic "like they speak in Jordan and Syria". This was not entirely true; I would mostly confirm the Levantine Arabic vocabulary they were sharing with me was correct or teach them how to say basic words like a car (*sayarra*). Noticeably, this was often used as a signifier of difference when I was introduced to their children or nieces/nephews: "This white girl can speak better Arabic than you, *beti**"[term of endearment]. This reminded me these men were consciously engaging with me as an outsider, but also my presence and their opinion of me was exceptionalised and dependent on my ethnicity.

In comparison, from the very beginning of my fieldwork, it was very difficult to build trust with older Muslim women, especially those connected with the mosque. I was sensitive to the fact that this community and group of women had experienced hyper-scrutiny and securitisation for many years, and I was cognisant of this in my interactions.

The men I engaged with were welcoming and invited me to community and mosque events, even on behalf of the women. However, the reception from the women was colder. Even after weeks of spending time with the younger women in the community and some of the men, it was very clear that they did not want to participate or discuss my research with me. I discuss this further below. Whilst they welcomed me to their events and talks, and invited me to share their food, they were very clear that they did not have any interest in talking personally about their experiences to an outsider, especially a researcher.

Age and appearance

Throughout my fieldwork, my perceived age was salient. It either contributed to the perception I was not a threat, or it shaped my ‘insiderness’. I have always been mistaken for being younger than I am, and this concerned me when starting my fieldwork in case people did not take me seriously. However, looking “young” turned out to be instrumental in building trust and rapport in all my research relationships. In my initial interactions with Muslim men in the community, it added to my non-threatening presence, and I would go as far to say, in many ways, endeared them to me. In no time at all, they were telling me to call them “uncle” and their wives (if present) “aunty”. This was unsurprising to me as I had experienced this from my friend’s families and my parent’s South Asian friends. Culturally, it is a mark of respect. However, it was a sign of trust being built within the context of my research. Other researchers have outlined how, when faced with a woman researcher, men use being overfamiliar by using terms like “love” and “sweetie” when addressing them as a way of maintaining authority in the interaction and reminding the researcher of her femininity and/or youth.

My age was also prominent in building trust with all the women I interacted with as they perceived I was a similar age to them. They often referred to this, such as “you know what it’s like being our age”, or “girls our age”, or it was perceived I was slightly younger than them (by the women affiliated with HT specifically). Along with our shared experiences of gender, this was instrumental in shaping our relationships. In some interactions, it was more salient than my ‘white non-Muslimness’ (discussed below) as we discussed the challenges of growing up and navigating life as young British women and negotiating the competing demands of being a young woman in contemporary Britain, or specifically London.

Across all interactions and research relationships, researchers’ appearances, actions, and adaptations are important markers of their identity (Zubair et al. 2012). Okely (2007: 71) states, researchers frequently have to learn to adjust their ‘bodily performances’ and actions – including the way they dress – to fit in with and be accepted by those they are researching (also see: Zempi, 2016). As a non-Muslim woman, I was highly conscious of dressing in a way that was both culturally and religiously appropriate. However, I was mindful to ensure I came across as a genuine ‘real’ person. Since sartorial choices are an important marker of an individual’s identity, I didn’t change anything specific about my wardrobe. Still, I did ensure I always wore long-sleeved blouses and trousers (past the knee). This was done to “assuage the tension by trying to minimise signs of my [white] femininity” like other female researchers (Bucerius, 2013: 16).

However, there were two instances where I adapted my sartorial choices on advice from my gatekeepers. Firstly, in my interactions with the women who were affiliated with HT, I was advised by my gatekeepers to wear all black. Again, nothing unusual to what I would usually wear, but given many of these women wore the full *abaya*, it was remarked that removing any visible markers of difference would be a useful starting point. Secondly, as described above, I was encouraged by my gatekeeper, to “dress young” in my participant observations and interactions with those who had considered joining or joined ISIS. He argued this would potentially make the young people I was working with more receptive to me. He specifically advised me to wear trainers and “ideally a new model” as “the kids love that”. In all my interactions with this group of young people, I made sure I dressed younger than I would usually, and I bought (with fashion advice from my 16-year-old brother) a new pair of trainers.

Gender and whiteness: “She’s alright for a white girl”.

In terms of the men, I engaged with who were members of extremist organisations, they appeared to perceive me in a non-threatening way. They were willing to talk openly with me as a woman, but also as a non-South Asian and/or Muslim woman. This was no more apparent than in my interactions with the men or were members or former members of HTB. As discussed above, they couldn’t put me in contact with women members directly as the men and women’s sections did not communicate directly. However, they were comfortable talking to me about being interviewed about their personal histories and, sometimes, their traumatic experiences. Unlike the interactions described above, I was surprised that even when talking about the ideology of the organisation and their role and experiences, these conversations flowed easily.

Schwedler (2006: 425) discusses this type of access in relation to her research with Islamist groups predominantly in Jordan and Yemen, where being a Western non-Muslim woman enabled her access. She refers to this as the “third gender” (ibid). I want to avoid this conceptualisation as I feel it treads a fine line of erasing the experiences of those who are non-binary or transgender, to explain the diversity of Western cis-women's experiences conducting research. However, conceptually it draws attention to the ways Western women enjoy the advantages of being less threatening and, consequently, interviewees are more likely to let their guard down (ibid: 421). I discussed this with my participants. One participant remarked: "It's just easier to talk to you because, there's less judgment because you're not Muslim or even brown. You're like coming in to ask me questions, but you're not comparing or judging, you know? And even if you did, I don't care because you're not another Muslim". Another remarked "I guess it's nice talking about my life and experiences with a woman, who I can talk to like this – other than my wife. And we wouldn't talk about this anyway".

However, where the intersection of my gender and ethnicity was an opportunity and enabled many of my relationships and trust with men, it constituted more of a challenge in my relationships with women. As Phoenix (1994: 55) argues, "the complexity and range of respondents' reasons for taking part in a study mean that the woman interviewer–woman interviewee situation does not always produce rapport through gender identification. Nor are the power positions between researcher and researched fixed dichotomies". As explored in later chapters, 'whiteness' as a signifier of difference between Muslims and non-Muslims was a common theme articulated by many of the young women in this project, when discussing their experiences at home, school, university/work, and broader society. From an early age, their identities had been positioned as the opposite to "whiteness" (often also used as a synonym to "Englishness") by their parents. As such, their initial reactions to me, both white and English, meant I was immediately perceived as someone very different from them, and someone not to be trusted. Again, I discussed this directly with those engaged in my study. One participant commented: “it’s just, like, if you were brown like me, I’d think that you know what it’s like, *innit* [sic]. But ‘cos you’re white, when I first met you, I thought, how is she ever gonna [sic] understand my life”. Another participant told me she didn’t know whether she should trust me at first, because “white people just wanna [sic] judge Muslims, ya know [sic]?”, but after talking to me told her friends: “she’s alright for a white girl” and helped me organise more interviews.

In many ways, I initially had to prove myself against the stereotype (and/or participants previous experiences) of white women and white researchers pursuing an unadulterated interest in researching the lives of Muslim women. I confronted this in two ways: 1) I discussed my motivations upfront in my research interactions. This enabled me to show my participants transparency in my intentions (even if it took them a while to trust me), but also opened the importance of the research up for conversation; 2) By doing this, I explicitly referenced my whiteness and my background, showing participants I recognised our difference at the same time as sharing my familiarity and lived understanding of their culture. In one interaction, the importance of this was demonstrated after laughing with a participant about growing up in a house where you’d open the freezer and think your mum had treated you to a big tub of ice-cream, only to be bitterly disappointed it was a tub full of dhal. The participant yelled to her friend “Oh my god, she gets it, man. *Relate* [sic]!”. I found it remarkable that something so mundane and simple connected us and was fundamental in building trust.

This understanding of my connectedness to the experiences of the participant through partial identification is labelled “conscious partiality” by Mies (1983: 123), which becomes a way to replace what she calls “spectator knowledge”. I was conscious of the risks of overplaying connections and understanding of South Asian cultures. I was concerned, that by sharing anecdotes and familiarity with the culture and experiences of my participants I was strategically distancing myself from my whiteness to build trust and rapport, in other words, drawing attention away from the power imbued in research relationships differentiated by ethnicity. However, “conscious partiality”, according to Mies (ibid: 123), creates a dialectical distance between the researcher and participant and “it enables the correction of distortions of perception on both sides and widens the consciousness of both, the researcher and the ‘researched’”. I did not deceive my participants; I only shared anecdotes or experiences I had experienced first-hand or related to myself or close family members.

By consciously discussing ethnicity and whiteness with my participants, I didn’t manipulate our connectedness to dissolve our difference. It was centred and connected to our conversations about their experiences growing up in the UK as South Asian British Muslim women. In other words, highlighting our shared backgrounds and/or my understanding of their culture and upbringings did not conjure the impression that we were the same so they could trust me. Instead, it ‘widened the consciousness’ and trust between both parties in discussing the issues at the centre of this research.

Whilst I was aware, given my non-Muslim identity, participants may have avoided discussing certain elements of their religious lives at home relating to their disagreements over Islam or some of the gendered practices of Islam. I also was cognisant that, as an outsider, participants would either feel they needed to represent a good image of life at home as a young Muslim woman or – the opposite - they would be overly critical, feeling they had to be hyper-critical of gendered practices of Islam, they might predict I disagree with. However, most participants openly discussed many of the arguments they had with their parents with me during fieldwork and some of the other issues of contention they experience within their families. With many participants, I routinely discussed Islam and the gendered aspects of Islam, sometimes even Islamic feminism. Despite this, I felt that, at times, it was harder to encourage a deeper conversation about some more religious aspects of Islam. Many participants described they had very little knowledge about Islam. This is discussed later in the later chapters of this thesis. However, at times, I reflected whether, for some of them, they didn't know how to have certain conversations with an 'outsider' and whether if I was also Muslim, it would have been easier to discuss certain topics. As discussed, the insider-outsider relationship is not binary nor static, and on the whole, I felt that this did not limit the research project.

'White-non-Muslim-ness' and (not) conducting research

It is imperative to discuss how my positionality informed my freedom and opportunity to research in the first place. Throughout my research, I became aware of how my whiteness granted me privileged access to navigate public spaces without anxiety and fear. Throughout my research, participants recalled encounters during their daily lives that made themselves and other Muslims feel routinely unsafe, and how, for some of them, this shaped their decisions to join or consider joining extremist organisations. In contrast, as a researcher I did not need to adopt strategies to minimise the risk of exposure to everyday racism or Islamophobia, nor did I become familiar with being marked as a 'body out of place in mundane multicultural encounters' (Britton, 2019 notes something similar in her own research). I became increasingly aware of how unsafe Muslim women felt in the UK as the research progressed, and how, despite the everyday risks of harassment as a woman, my whiteness constituted a blanket of safety when occupying and travelling through spaces that were increasingly threatening to those who were perceived as different.

My ‘whiteness’ ostensibly positioned me to research without fear of scrutiny or security surveillance from the UK government or police apparatus. From the outset, I was mindful of how my research may draw unwanted attention to my participants or the communities I was working within. I was able to propose, plan, and conduct the investigation without fear the research would draw unwanted attention to me as the researcher. As discussed throughout this research, the UK counter-extremism approaches and the security climate of the last twenty years has positioned British Muslim communities as areas of heightened security risk. Throughout my interviews, I was often reminded of this when my participants would qualify their statements or opinions with comments like: “I’m not an apologist but…”, or “you’re not Muslim, so you don’t have to be worried about looking like an apologist for doing this research or asking these questions”.

The ‘ambiguity of rapport’.

Building rapport and trust in any interaction is built on reciprocity. Some feminist researchers have argued that power differentials in research could be minimised by developing non-hierarchical and ‘friendly’ relationships with respondents (Oakley, 1981). However, the question is: how far does this apply to engaging with extremists or those who support extremist causes? Especially individuals who have articulated hatred for people like you and the country you (both) were born and grew up within. As an individual, I pride myself in my ability to build rapport with others. I have always found it easy, connecting and empathising with others. However, as a researcher, especially interacting with those who had joined and supported violent extremist causes, I found I had to continually and reflexively assess the nature of how I communicated. Developing rapport was essential in building trust. However, maintaining this rapport was a different matter, especially in demonstrating active listening through non-verbal cues/communication. Verbal and non-verbal cues communication are often an important way of showing you are actively listening to an individual. I am a very expressive person who often articulates their active listening and attention this way – for example, I find myself nodding in agreement when attending lectures or talks.

Within my research interactions, I found myself nodding, as if in agreement, and uttering "hmm" or "mmm" or other forms of verbal cues responding to the experiences or views participants were sharing. Reflecting on this, I believe this was accentuated by the Multicultural London English (MLE) dialect of many participants.[55] As evident in the quotes reflecting the voices of the women in my study, contractions such as "innit" or "you know" were used frequently and required feedback – often a "hmm" or a nod of the head. This was especially important with the women in this project, who felt they hadn't been genuinely listened to, heard, or understood – I reiteratively showed them I was open and trustworthy in hearing their stories. Sometimes they would say "do y'get me [sic]?" or "do y'get it? [sic]" and I would use the opportunity to probe further with a question or a facial expression to show I wanted them to expand but not to disrupt their flow. The same applied to humour and laughter, which I found the younger participants used to monitor my engagement and investment in their story and lives.

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[55] MLE is a dialect of London English which has emerged since the early 1980s in parts of London where there has been a relatively high level of immigration. See for example: Green, Jonathon. 2014. 'Multicultural London English - the new 'youthspeak'. In Coleman, Julie (ed.), *Global English Slang: Methodologies and Perspectives.* London: Routledge, pp. 62-71.

As others have noted, there is also a delicate balance required between using verbal and non-verbal cues, and challenging participants on the views they were expressing, or becoming complicit in giving such views 'airtime'. Anne Speckhard (2009) discussed this in her research with terrorists: whether the researcher has a moral obligation of challenging 'troublesome' views expressed by their participants. Fortunately, this was not an issue that arose for me. In the case of those who had affiliated with ISIS, I believe it was mitigated by the interactions being facilitated by a gatekeeper, who was a person they could discuss and be challenged on such views. I also believe they were oversaturated from talking about their development of such views, and their support to violent extremist ideologies, as part of their 'de-radicalisation' processes, that they found it refreshing to discuss their lives with me before these recent experiences.

"White saviourism" and 'walking away'

From the beginning of the project, I have been cognizant to how my research and my presence inadvertently exacerbated the inequalities between myself and my research subjects, particularly in the ways undertaking this doctorate will contribute to my career advancement. As Cotterill (1992: 604) describes, within most research projects, "the final shift of power between the researcher and the respondent is balanced in favour of the research, for it is she who eventually walks away". In her preface to *Feminist Dilemmas in Field Work,* Wolf (1996) summarises this dilemma well:

> "My research was an attempt to analyse and depict their lives, their situation, and the gruelling work of factory jobs ... I would go on to finish my dissertation, get a Ph.D., get a job based on a talk about this research, make enough money in one month to sustain an entire village for several, publish, and, I hoped, make a career… Despite my good intentions, I was making a situation for myself based on structures of poverty and gender inequality".

There have been times when I battled with whether to continue with the research at all, questioning whether by merely submitting the DPhil, I was reinforcing a neo-colonialist white saviourist gaze: the epitome of a white woman “saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1988). This is otherwise known as a white saviour complex, in which white people act to help people positioned as non-white in a way that validates our privilege, whilst failing to contribute to social justice and equality (Britton, 2019). I, like others, have troubled over the question: ‘Should [I] the white researcher stay at home?’ (Haw, 2006). However, I believe the answer to this question is a cautious no.

As discussed above, the insider-outsider is not a static binary, and identity is intersectional. I am a white non-Muslim researcher, with multiple degrees from top UK universities. However, I am the first person in my family to go to university. My parents left school without GCSEs or A-Levels. My ethnicity and my gender have been the most salient parts of my identity in conducting this research, but my personal history, specifically the social class of my background, is not insignificant. My intention for this research was to remedy the lack of qualitative research that focuses on the experiences of Muslim women who have engaged with extremist groups. I did not want to speak for them because I understood they were not only capable of making themselves heard and able to do so with more authenticity and conviction than me. However, simultaneously, I have attempted to make space for myself and them in an academic world where we would both not commonly be heard nor expected to be heard. I have taken a narrative approach, including their voices alongside my analysis as much possible, and I have considered the impact of my positionality as a researcher at every stage of this process.

As Haw (1996:329) argues, in addressing these concerns, it is important to open-up any piece of research so the perspective breaks away from the "ghettoisation" of the research process. This stance allows for the legitimacy of the researcher's 'voice' as well as the voice of the researched. Above all, it allows for a diversity of 'voices' in any research area, which differ in age, ethnic background, religious faith, physical ability, sexuality, and class, and critically reworking these perspectives so that theory and action can develop and spaces for exploration can be created. Ultimately, as Haw (1996: 329) articulates: "it is not about exploration aimed at colonisation. It is not a question of whether you travel and where you travel but how you go about it".

However, an aspect of feminist research that is often under-discussed, especially in the realm of terrorism and extremism studies, is 'walking away' from fieldwork or the particular methods, or research relationships that we choose *not* to pursue. During my fieldwork, there were several occasions when I decided to 'walk away'. In some instances, this was because I felt an interview would be too risky for myself or the participants in terms of location or who else knew about the interview or the connections to the research. I also walked away from two possible 'gatekeeper' relationships as I did not feel they truly represented the interests or safety of my potential participants nor understood the research aims guiding my project. In one of these instances, the person in question tried to put me through a 'test' to see how well I understood UK Terrorism Law and 'whose side I was really on'. I felt threatened, and I felt uncomfortable with how they were discussing the women they said they could connect me with, so I decided to 'walk away'.

As described above, it was very difficult for me to build relationships with older Muslim women within the community in Tower Hamlets, particularly within the mosque. I reflected and discussed on this experience iteratively with my other participants, many of whom attended the mosque and had mothers and aunties involved in the mosques I was engaging with. The consensus was that, although the community would always be welcoming, I would have to spend a long-time building trust within the older women in the mosque before they trusted a 'white person' like me to discuss the issues I wanted to discuss. Interestingly, Anabel Inge (2016) spent nearly two and a half years working with women across different mosques and religious groups in the Salafi mosque community in South London. In her book, *The Making of a Salafi Woman: The Paths to Conversion* (2016), she describes the lengths she went to build trust as an outsider in the community. Inge's (2016) research is an impressive ethnographic project but spending a long-time convincing individuals to trust you to pursue a line of research is not always appropriate – especially as an outsider in communities that have been under hyper-scrutiny in a highly securitised and politicised environment.

'Walking away' from research also involves consciously choosing not to pursue a research direction that may be inappropriate or unnecessary, causing more harm to the community or participant group in question. Although I had hoped to engage with the women who were involved in the mosque, specifically those who were active in the community, I decided that this was not an area of my research I would continue to pursue. As a feminist researcher, I believe it is important to continually reflect on whether you are the right person to be doing the research you are doing, and in this instance, given my positionality as a White Western non-Muslim researcher, I felt that it was inappropriate to pursue this line of research, especially it was not integral to the core research aims of the project.

Challenges and Limitations

There are several limitations to this project that have not been possible to overcome, but I do not believe distracts from its value and contribution.

Firstly, the thesis is based on a relatively small sample of women who joined or considered joining HTB or ISIS. As outlined, it was only possible to interview eleven women who joined or considered joining HTB and twelve women who joined or considered joining ISIS. However, I was aware from the beginning that I would be working with a small sample given access and the limited wider population of women who had joined or considered joining the two organisations. In total, including the women who had never engaged or participated in Islamist extremism, over sixty women were interviewed as part of this research. This was very much an 'opportunity' or 'convenience' sample, which is common "when dealing with groups or individuals that are difficult to access" but there is no real way for the research to know if they are "dealing with a biased sample that is noticeably different from the population of interest" (Silke, 2000: 8). For example, given that most women affiliated with ISIS involved in this study either changed their minds about joining, travelling, or had returned, they were unlikely to be the group's most hard-line supporters. A study, including interviews with those who had lived under ISIS-controlled territories for a longer period or were still actively supporting the organisation, would undoubtedly yield different results.

Secondly, the complexity of truth and memory are far from simple matters in qualitative research (Randall & Phoenix, 2008), even more so in research on extremism or terrorism (Silke, 2000). How do I know the women I interviewed were telling me the truth about their stories? Randall and Phoenix (2008: 130-137), who discuss at length the challenges of truth in narrative-based projects, point out that a person being interview can never know the whole truth about their life, due to perspective or memory so "regardless of the method we employ in doing research with 'human subjects', 'truth' will be a problem". Within research on extremism, there is the possibility that participants may deceive the researcher due to fear of being prosecuted. However, I made it clear from the outset I would not be asking any questions seeking to elicit any incriminating information, and this was not the purpose of my research enquiry. Moreover, as outlined in the introductory chapter of this thesis, this project is fundamentally grounded in a feminist research framework, shaped by feminist standpoint epistemology and Donna Haraway's (1988) situated knowledges approach. Together, this means acknowledging there is no single standpoint (truth) and acknowledging that all knowledge is always produced from a particular position, in a particular context, at a particular time.

In the Introduction of this thesis, I raised the issue of 'testimonial injustice': the concerns of affording more credibility to the experiences of some participants over others, and this poses limitations. Representation is not just about analysis or writing, but also how the researcher thinks about their research. Throughout my fieldwork and analysis, whether writing or not, I would often find my mind wandering, thinking about certain participants' experiences and stories over others, and what it meant for the thesis. Whilst, in many ways this is unavoidable, the most 'compelling' stories will captivate the researcher more, it is important to note that this is often influenced by epistemic bias, and sometimes prejudice (Fricker, 2007). Whilst I did not intentionally exclude any participants' stories from my thesis, nor did I consciously afford more legitimacy or credibility to any experiences over others in my analysis or write up, the issue of testimonial justice will always limit even the most well-intentioned feminist ethnography.

The way stories are told also changes over time. I have emphasised the specificity and uniqueness of this project being shaped by both the participants and the researcher, but the project is also shaped by the time during the fieldwork is conducted. Not only in terms of the political and social context – for example, the UK referendum to leave the European Union, 'Brexit', had taken place a year before I started my fieldwork, but the time in the participant's life the interviewer asks them to recount their experiences, and tell their story. Without the parameters a doctoral research project presents, it would have been interesting to conduct interviews with participants at multiple stages of their lives and journeys to explore how their experiences change and also how their narration of their experiences changed. With this in mind, this project and the women's whose voices and experiences are represented must be considered to be specific to the time in their lives they were asked to share them.[56]

Thirdly, this project has been undeniably shaped by my background, experiences, and connections. Another researcher would have undoubtedly conducted a very different project, with different challenges and limitations, and findings. I have strived to address this throughout by writing myself into the project. There are limitations to having only one researcher work on a research project that are somewhat unavoidable with undertaking a doctoral research project of this kind. Above, I have addressed the concerns challenges that arise with research being conducted 'in the back room' and how I iteratively and retrospectively discussed my analysis with my participants to ensure their voices were factually and respectively represented. However, it does not remove the bias and limitations inherent in a solo-qualitative research project.

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[56] The historical and cultural and specificity of a feminist research project is something Saba Mahmood (2005) discusses at length in *The Politics of Piety* considering the ways it shapes her role as a researcher, her fieldwork and participants experiences of the fieldwork, and the readers' interpretation of the research.

Where the field ends/begins: "What do you think about Shamima Begum?"

One of the most significant challenges I encountered during my fieldwork, my analysis, and writing up was the lack of escape I had from my research. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have brought attention to how the idea of the field is traditionally conceptualised as a bounded zone, set aside from the researcher's 'normal life'. However, whilst studying a contemporary research topic is important and exciting, it also means it is impossible to escape your work. On a social level – everybody has something to say about extremism, but also on a mass-information level – particularly when recent terrorist attacks occur, or when the media is dominated by events such as finding missing UK schoolgirl, Shamima Begum. With the constant media coverage, the persisting Twitter dialogue, and my friends, family, and colleagues continually sending me news articles or asking me questions; I found it impossible to escape my work. This led to a high level of stress and anxiety. I felt no matter where I turned; I could not distance myself from my research. It was everywhere. I felt concerned for the tone of the national conversation, media coverage, the extraordinary measures being implemented by the UK government, and the way these issues directly and volatilely impacted the young women, their families, and the communities I worked with.

During the time Shamima Begum's case was dominating headlines, I had to address the concerns of several concerned participants and their families who were worried their participation in my research would now put them at a greater risk of losing the right to live in the country they were born in. In these cases, I met up with the participant and sometimes their families and reviewed everything they had shared with me and the quotes I wanted to use in my thesis. This provided another opportunity to withdraw anything they no longer wanted to share or withdraw from the research entirely. Fortunately, this was not the case, and the participants I met with noted they found this process helpful and enjoyed reading parts of what I had written about their experiences. This was reassuring for both them and me, and in the end, no participants withdrew their data from my study.

During this time, it became challenging to proceed with writing my thesis. It took time for me to implement effective 'self-care' and ways of distancing myself from my research and writing. There is an essential distinction between 'self-care' in terms of the self-preservation I am describing from the global 'self-care' "market of spiritual, happiness, therapy, and wellness culture" à la Gwyneth Paltrow and 'Goop' (see Longman, 2020), viewed as complicit with "neo-liberal governmentality and consumerism". Instead, I am speaking about how to create boundaries between one's work and one's personal life. As a first step, I set myself clear boundaries of times I would access Twitter and read the news. I asked friends, family, and colleagues to think first before sending me articles or news stories I would have probably already seen. I requested they refrained from bringing my research up as a topic at dinner parties or asking me questions or my opinion on related issues in the news. This helped me create a separation between my research and work amongst my online and offline social life. It is this type of 'self-care' in research, especially in research of a sensitive nature, that I believe is imperative. In his recent review of analysing interviews with terrorists, Morrison (2020) makes a similar call to action.

This has never been more important than now. This thesis was finished during the COVID-19 pandemic. The boundaries and ‘self-care’ strategies I developed in the early stages of my writing to help me create distance between my work as an act of ‘self-preservation’ went out of the window. Globally, researchers are having to adopt ‘remote methodologies’, and often in the case of doctoral students, their bedrooms too. In this new world of research, boundaries between work and home are harder to maintain and strategies of ‘self-care’. For researchers with caring responsibilities, especially women, it becomes even more of a challenge.

Within this context, I want to advocate for the prioritisation of ‘self-care’ as a research principle for all researchers to create and maintain both boundaries and strategies between our work and home, but also as a way of supporting each other and paying attention to ourselves and our work. ‘Self-care’ is not just about individuality but developing communities and spaces of care. Tapping into a long history of the ways in Black and Queer activists use self-care practices for dealing with histories of violence and trauma, both for individual resilience and the sustainability of collective movements, researchers can and should create spaces and practices where we can decompress, ‘take a breath’ together, and hold each other accountable in the work we are producing. In other words, “re-assemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday, and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; [and] looking after each other” (Ahmed, 2014). We can sustain our feminist research, particularly in hyper-masculinised spaces of studying extremism, political violence, or terrorism, by “looking around us, paying attention to ourselves and each other, offering accountability for ourselves and each other” (Michaeli, 2017: 56).

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of my fieldwork process. From the outset I have strived to write myself into the description of my fieldwork, reflexively considering how my positionality and background shaped my motivations, the methods I employed, my access, my research relationships, and, ultimately, the final research product.

As Suzanne Day (2012: 80) points out: reflexivity is not a magical cure. She states: “One thing that is clear…is that qualitative methodology in its complex entirety, and the kinds of qualitative accounts we produce, may simultaneously benefit from, and be constrained by ones’ particular approach to reflexivity”. I have aimed to approach reflexivity as not only a process of conscious self-reflection on the part of the researcher, but also a deep understanding of the wider social context and power dynamics can potentially shape the research process. However, this is not an easy endeavour. If one genuinely considers the position from which they are engaging with, not only, a research issue but real people with real lives and histories, it takes true critical reflection of one’s motivations, values, and own history. It is an uncomfortable and difficult process, and it is not perfect nor complete, but it is necessary. It is an easy task to shy away from, but as a research principle it can lead to better practice, better ethics, and ultimately, more compelling findings (Ackerly and True, 2008: 699).

Through discussing my fieldwork process and the research relationships I developed with both my participants and gatekeepers, I have aimed to provide a transparent account of the benefits and opportunities as well as challenges and limitations of conducting qualitative research with individuals who have engaged with extremist organisations.

CHAPTER SIX

“Alhamdulillah! I am not a terrorist”:

Experiences of South Asian British Muslim Women growing up and living in London

“From a very young age, I’ve constantly thought about what people think of me. Do I look too Muslim? Do I not look Muslim enough? It’s a headache, really”.

Muna

“Sometimes I feel like a step outside the house, and I water myself down…. dilute my Muslimness to make myself more palatable, more acceptable to everyone else.”

Farah

Chapter overview

This chapter focuses on responses from thirty qualitative interviews with second-and third-generation British Muslim women aged eighteen to twenty-five years. All participants have a connection to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Twenty-five participants grew up in Tower Hamlets, whereas five grew up in Tooting in South London, but now reside in Tower Hamlets. This chapter focuses specifically on women who are proactively and positively seeking to change their circumstances and experiences. This draws a direct comparison with the women in the following chapters, who by joining or considering joining HT and ISIS, were also seeking to change theirs through vastly different ways and means. The aim is not to sequence, map, or model, or identify ‘push and pull factors’ or conditions that make one or two groups more likely to engage with a violent or non-violent extremist organisation other another group. Instead, this comparison aims to shed light on what led three unique groups of women, with remarkably similar experiences and challenges, down very different paths to self-author and control their own identities, lives, and futures.

Growing up Muslim

The family field

Family is one of the most vital social fields where habitus is generated. The family structures the cultural context of childhood and children's everyday life. Most of the participants (25) grew up in two-parent households, but five were raised in single-parent households under varying circumstances. All participants still lived with their parents and either their maternal or paternal grandparents. This is not unusual within the South Asian community (Basit, 1997). All participants stated they had good relationships with at least one of their parents, and they respected them immensely. For those who described complicated relationships with one of their parents, where both parents were around, it was their relationship with their mother they most struggled with: "My mum is very hard to get along with, she is very strict on what we, me and my sisters, can and can't do, she only really wants us to get married and live a life like hers, she's resistant to change" (Halima). This was supported by other participants who stated that their relationships with their mothers were often fractious growing up due to their stricter interpretation of Islam and/or stronger cultural expectations.

They also remarked that their mothers treated them and their brothers or male relatives differently. On the other hand, where fathers were present, nearly all of the participants described an easy relationship with their father, stating that it was their fathers who encouraged their independence, education, and independent interpretation of their faith: "It was always my dad who was on my team, my mum favoured my brothers, she waited on them hand and foot, and they could do whatever they wanted really, but my dad always pushed me to be independent, go to university, join the hockey team – my mum wasn't happy with that. She thought it was bad for a girl to play sports" (Zara). Another participant described a fond memory of going to work with her dad, a delivery driver, which used to 'make her mum crazy' as she thought it was entirely unacceptable for a girl to be out late (even with her father).

From a very young age, all participants were aware they were Muslim, through what it meant to be and behave like a 'good Muslim girl'. At the time, 'Muslim' was just a label, which described their family or how to behave rather than understanding what being Muslim meant in a religious sense. All participants attended *madrasa* growing up, where they learnt to read the Qur'an, but commented they did not understand the application of this to the way they lived their lives until they were much older. "It wasn't something I thought about when I was younger like I read the Qur'an and prayed and I understand why, but other than that it was just something I was told I was and impacted the way I should behave" (Nabeelah). Laila added, "It was very behaviour based. This is what Muslims do. This is how Muslims pray. This is how we read the Qur'an. And when I asked why. It was all: 'We do this because Allah has told us to. We do this for our relationship with Allah'". Several participants also started fasting for *Ramadan* at an early age. "Yeah, I started fasting quite young, like at first, just half a day, because my mum told me to, she said this is what you do to become a good Muslim. She said in *Ramadan* we think about what we have a lot of and [about] people who have less. We practice not just going to get stuff we want whenever we want".

Despite feeling they lacked religious content or critical knowledge of *Qu'ran* or *hadith,* by routinely sharing a commentary on their joint religious practice, through these early experiences of being shown how to 'be Muslim', participants parents' were locating and providing justifications for their shared ways of living and practising their faith (Bottero, 2010). This enabled participants to establish what is acceptable and what they can get away with within the 'rules of the game' within a shared discourse. It also encouraged them to discuss and reflect on the nature of their practice – why they were fasting or praying and why this made them a 'good Muslim'. In doing so, it started to shape their pedagogical habitus, by which moral virtues are acquired through coordination of outward behaviour (bodily acts, social demeanour) with inward dispositions (emotional states, thoughts, intentions) (Mahmood, 2005).

However, all participants felt that their early understanding of Islam was deeply entrenched in their parents' cultural values and expectations, not religion, and it was difficult to distinguish between religion and culture in their parent's expectations, values, and rules growing up. This was particularly true in their gendered expectations behaviour. Nasreen reported, "My mum would tell me the *Qu'ran* said I had to do certain things because I was a girl or because that's what good Muslim girls did. Like wear *shalwar kamiz** or learn how to cook something with my grandma". In the words of Khadija, "now I'm older I realise that my mum doesn't really know what Islam says about women. She's read the Qur'an and stuff, but really what she wants me to be is the ideal Bangladeshi girl, not the ideal Muslim girl". Iram reiterated this: "For my mum and dad, being Muslim is synonymous with being Pakistani, I don't think they know the difference".

The family field provides the social context where the process of intergenerational transmission of values, beliefs, culture, or resources (capital) takes place – but it is not culturally neutral, and the strategies adopted by parents to transfer capital vary according to "the contexts where people speak and in which people's lives are lived" (Brannen, 2006: 151). For the second-and third-generation South Asian Muslims, Franceschelli

(2017: 12) argues that religion is a vital component of the family habitus, which "functions as either the process that enhances the (intergenerational) passing on of resources, values and beliefs or the content of this transmission". For participants, the early transmission of values, beliefs, culture, or resources was entrenched in a culturally and gendered normative framework which was often both contradictory and confusing.

All participants felt pressure to uphold their reputation and familial honour within the community as a 'good Muslim family': "My mum is just obsessed about how what we say, do, or look like, impacts the way other families or people see us" (Fazia). Previous studies have highlighted the role women play both symbolically and materially in the maintenance and practice of cultural or ethnic values and the role of the community policing these values (Anthias & Yuval Davis, 1992; Dwyer, 2000; Silverestri, 2011). As Dwyer (2000: 477) notes, gendered expectations of young women as the guardians of cultural and religious integrity are particularly strong within diaspora communities – young women are expected to uphold a family's religious and cultural identity and reputation. "For us, as Muslim girls, the minute you step outside, you represent your family, not yourself. Boys do too, but it's more acceptable for boys to do what they want" (Zara). Sara reiterates this sentiment: "What you wear, how you speak, who you speak to, where you go, how well you can speak Urdu, people are judging you all the time, and then they make judgements of your family".

Participants also remarked their parents would always define what it meant to be a 'good Muslim girl' in opposition to 'Englishness' or 'English girls', which was always a point of both contention and confusion. For their parents, 'Englishness' carried with it lower moral standards, specifically regarding the behaviour of women. "Mum would go on and on about English girls being uncontrollable, staying out late, drinking, wearing short skirts, and she used this imaginary English girl in her head to try and tell me what a good Muslim girl should be" (Fazila). Most parents would also use 'Englishness' synonymously with 'whiteness'. "White girls this, white girls that… obviously I didn't want to walk around in short skirts or drink, but my English friends didn't either, so I didn't understand what made them different to me, other than having stricter parents" (Iram). Most participants stressed they found the binary of 'Muslim' and 'English', or 'Muslim' and 'white' employed by their parents as strange and forced. "I'd come home and put the TV on to start watching something like Friends, or Scrubs, and my mum would storm in shouting 'Oh my God we are not one of those English families, eating and slobbing [sic] in front of the television'. It was funny because when we went to bed, all she did was sit and eat in front of the TV" (Fazia). They were confused to why being 'a good Muslim girl' could only be defined in opposition to 'whiteness' or 'Englishness'. One participant described how she found this particularly confusing as one of her teachers was a white-English Muslim convert, which, according to what her parents had taught her, was a contradiction. This was compounded by the importance placed on the differences between Islam and British culture and values in hegemonic public and political discourse, with Muslim women positioned as the 'signifier of difference'.

Women, and their bodies, are often positioned as a national or cultural signifier of difference (Yuval-Davis, 1997); used to mark the imagined boundaries between groups or nations of people. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis and later in this chapter, the role of young British Muslim women as the signifier of difference between the majority population of the UK, and the Muslim community is not only generated from within the community. However, here, their experiences exhibit being positioned as a signifier of difference by their families heavily influences their understanding of who they are individually, who their peers are, and what it means to be a Muslim woman. Central to this were concerns of, and commitments to, upholding their reputation within the community as a ‘good Muslim family’: “My mum is just obsessed about how what we do, say, or look like, impacts the way other families or people see us. “Oh, my god, what will people think, what will people say” (Fazia).

As Dwyer (2000: 477) notes, gendered expectations of young women as the guardians of cultural and religious integrity are particularly strong within diaspora communities – young women are expected to uphold a family’s religious and cultural identity and reputation. In other words, diasporic identities are always configured through gender (Dwyer, 2000: 475). “For us, as Muslim girls, the minute you step outside your house you represent your family, not yourself. Boys do too, but it's more acceptable for boys to do what they want” (Nabeelah). Sara repeated this sentiment: “What you wear, how you speak, who you speak to, where you go, how well you can speak Urdu, people are judging you all the time, and then they make judgements or criticisms of your family, like ‘I saw so and so the other day, I can’t believe her Urdu is so bad, what a shame on her parents’”. Previous studies have highlighted the role that women play both symbolically and materially in the maintenance and practice of cultural or ethnic values and the role of the extended family or community policing these values (Anthias & Yuval Davis, 1992; Dwyer, 2000).

By continually reinforcing the differences between being Muslim and being English or ‘white’, these early familial experiences, directly and indirectly, functioned to position the women in this chapter as different to their non-Muslim peers and the majority population. The pressures of meeting parental expectations and upholding familial honour extenuated the usual stresses of growing up and being a teenager. As expressed by Muna: “Being a teenager is hard enough, you know, most of us have no idea who we are, what we believe, or want to be. But for Muslim girls, I think it’s much harder because often, like in my family, parents are quite strict, but also there is pressure to be like they want you to be, or rather what they don’t want you to be”. Similar sentiments were echoed by other participants who emphasised this created a pressure to be or appear more Muslim to meet their parent’s expectations. However, this was at the same time as feeling unsure of what being Muslim meant to them, disrupting their ‘sense of the game’ and how their composite habitus was developing.

However, despite these pressures and the contradictions between how their parents told them to behave and their own behaviour, this also made participants routinely think about what they were doing, and how they were doing it. Through teaching their daughters to engage in a range of strategies to negotiate how they are perceived outside of the home by the community, parents were teaching participants the ‘rules of the game’ through coordinating ‘doing’ with intention. As Mahmood argues (2005: 136), habituation has, if it is to produce attentiveness or virtue, to be more than mindless repetition, it “also endows the self with particular capacities through which the subject comes to enact the world” on their own. That is, from an early age, they learnt to reflect on themselves, their identities, values, and behaviour.

Additionally, through engaging in shared commentaries on joint practices individuals are either able to locate and provide justifications for their shared ways of living or the norms that govern their lives, which enable them to establish what is acceptable and they figure out what they can get away with in challenging these ways of living and/or norms (Bottero 2010: 14). Consequently, through engaging in shared commentaries with their parents on how they should behave, and those they bore witness to in the community, participants were also able to question the constraints they experience, and how these constraints may be challenged within their shared practices and ways of living – within the 'sense of the game'. In other words, they had access to reflexivity as capital.

The educational field: school and university

Due to the majority Muslim demographic in Tower Hamlets, many of the participants attended primary schools with a high percentage of children from South Asian or Bangladeshi backgrounds, or at least, a high number of other Muslim children: "I think the only white people in my school were the teachers" (Rukhsana). Those who attended primary schools outside of Tower Hamlets joined more diverse schools, but still with a Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic, and Refugee (BAMER) majority. They first felt their 'Muslimness' or difference at secondary school, when many attended more mixed schools, "with tons more white people [sic]" (Nasreen). At high school, most participants also commented they felt their teachers treated them differently and expected less of them academically. Several participants reported their teachers would never choose them to answer a question in class, and others described never being picked to read aloud (in English classes) or participate in science demonstrations. In Farah's words: "Sometimes it felt like my *hijab* made me invisible like the teachers didn't know how to interact with a *hijabi* student, so they just ignored me instead". Nabeelah commented: "It wasn't like I didn't know I was brown, obviously, but I didn't think about what that meant. It didn't mean anything until I went to high school".

Some participants initially found that other students either ignored them and their difference altogether, or there was an inquisitive fascination with their 'Muslimness' without malicious intent. "At first kids weren't mean they just asked questions about Muslim things they'd heard about" (Maryam). For several participants going to secondary school also coincided with their choice to wear the *hijab* for the first time, which is discussed in more detail below. "Other girls, white girls, just wanted to ask me questions mostly about my scarf without judgement, but then as things changed, things became different, like everyone's obsessed with Islam being oppressive, and then you get targeted for that instead". As Zara described, for most participants who started secondary school, it coincided with the 7/7 bombings in London, which changed everything. Most participants highlighted experiences of racism and Islamophobia throughout their schooling.[57] Whilst they observed they weren't targeted or attacked directly, they would witness conversations or slurs to describe all Muslims, especially post 9/11. "It's kind of hard to describe because it was just normal, you got used to it. Even at primary school, kids would play games pretending to be a Muslim with a bomb at the airport" (Mehwish).

However, post 7/7, participants started being targeted more directly. Several participants found other children no longer wanted to be friends with them, and other participants had their *hijab* pulled from their heads or were physically attacked in the playground. Others highlighted that even their friends would ask them insults cloaked in questions about

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[57] In the UK, there is no universal definition of Islamophobia (Zempi and Awan, 2016: 2). The Runnymede Trust (1997) provides the definition of "unfounded hostility towards Muslims which results in fear and dislike of Muslims". The All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) on British Muslims defines Islamophobia as: "a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness" (APPG, 2018). Significantly, there has been no attempt to adopt a definition of Islamophobia by Government despite recognising the significant impact the problem has on British Muslim communities (APPG on British Muslims, 2018). A conceptual discussion of 'Islamophobia' is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, drawing on Allen (2010), I understand Islamophobia as perpetuated through various 'modes of operation' that entail exclusionary practices that disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against Muslims and Islam.

Islam. In response, several participants reported that their parents advised them to do everything they could to just "blend in" and try not to talk about Islam at school (Sumaira). "I remember trying to explain to them how hard it is to fit in when everyone is like *that,* and you're like *this*" (Halima). However, most participants found it easy to discuss their experiences at school with their parent. "My mum was helpful she bought me and my sisters this book *Does my head look big in this?* about this girl who starts wearing a scarf, and it helped me think about why I wear my scarf more".

Whilst at school, participants also felt they received inadequate support and career advice from teachers. As Aisha states "When I told my teachers that I wanted to apply to study medicine, it was suggested that I should lower my expectations. Even the career advisor repeatedly reminded me that it was tough and asked how my parents would feel about all the late nights and sometimes placements away from home". Halima added: "When we were applying for UCAS there was a delay with my application because my teacher hadn't submitted my reference when I asked her why she said she didn't think I was going to university. I was the top student in her class. I got A* in everything, why would she think I wasn't going to university?" This supports existing research which has highlighted young British Asian Muslim women (Brah, 1993; Brah & Minhas, 1985; Basit, 1997; Scandone, 2018; Archer, 2002; Archer and Francis, 2007) are treated differently from other young women their age during secondary school due to stereotyped perceptions that they won't amount to much or will just become a housewife. Brah (1993) notes these low expectations and stereotyped perceptions are a "major obstacle" to young Asian women's aspirations and achieving success in both education and the labour market.

In contrast, participants acknowledged their parents had high expectations of them and stated their parents viewed education and careers as a necessity. All participants highlighted university was not a choice; it was expected that at the very least they would complete an undergraduate degree. Participants also had high aspirations for themselves regarding education: “Obviously, I went to University, who doesn’t these days?” Another participant added that there was “no alternative, university was a must”. In her research with British-born Bangladeshi women students, Scandone (2018: 518-519) conceptualises aspirations as an essential part of habitus, which is integral to collective constructions of “what people like us do” in diasporic communities. Despite this, several participants stated their mothers were sceptical of their post-university career choices. As Hiba remarked, “I studied engineering at uni [sic], and after my mum just assumed, I’d just come back home and do nothing. She wasn’t happy when I applied for all sorts of jobs across London, but what did she think I was going to do?” Hence, mothers were more determined to ensure their daughters were settled and married by a certain age and the pursuit of ambitious post-university careers was a potential threat to this. Several participants noticed their parents, specifically their mothers, regarded getting a degree as a way of advancing themselves to find a better husband and marrying into a more exclusive background. As Ahmad (2001: 143) details, “a daughter’s education can bring ‘prestigious capital’ rather than ‘economic capital to a family”. Particularly within South Asian families, education of daughters is an investment, symbolising their value both within, and outside of, the family (ibid). However, fundamentally, placing importance on education, regardless of the desired outcome, also bestowed belief in their daughters’ abilities and potential, which translated to self-belief, ambition, and access to capital.

Habitus works best in the field in which it is born (Waltorp, 2015). According to Bourdieu, as individuals move across social fields, their habitus, their ‘sense the game’ often adapt seamlessly. However, for some individuals like the women in this chapter, there are often contradictions between the experiences and expectations of their families and broader society. This causes disruptions and for the habitus to split (Waltorp, 2015; Bourdieu, 2000). As participants started school and then university, their ‘sense of the game’ was routinely disrupted. This destabilised their sense of who they were, their sense of belonging, and their grasp of the rules of the game as they were treated differently to their peers. The dissonance between parental expectations of academic achievement and the lack of support is an example of the overlapping structuring of participant’s complex habitus shaped by composite parts in which they are informed by multiple forces and take up positions within multiple fields.

Once starting university, participants discovered their parents increased the pressure to be “a good Muslim girl” and uphold the family’s reputation. Several participants noted their parents were suspicious of the drinking culture and the secularising influences of universities (Ahmad, 2001 notes similar findings). In response, there was more demand for them to attend religious events in the community and wear traditional, cultural dress. “My mum thought that wearing *shalwar kamiz** made me seem more Muslim. It was again all about how it looked to others” (Humaira). All participants attended London universities, which meant that they could live at home, but several lived in university accommodation. As Humaira reflected: “At first my parents were fine with this, but after a while, they couldn’t deal with the judgment of the community and family, and in my second year I just moved home”. Fazia’s parents’ solution was that she could live in ‘halls’ during the week, but she had to come home every weekend.

For most participants, questioning what ‘Muslim’ or being Muslim meant to them and developing an independent relationship with their faith was central to these pressures. “For a long time, “Muslim” was just something I performed to make my parents happy, or it was something I watered down at school to fit in – I sometimes say that sixth form was my “performing ‘whiteness’ time – where I tried to seem less Muslim” (Fazila). This was repeated by other participants who felt for a long time they had little personal connection to their faith or control over their identity. Understanding what ‘Muslim’ really meant to them was impacted by a perceived lack of space to develop a personal relationship with Islam. Crucially, they felt pre-occupied with negotiating the different demands or stereotypes of being Muslim and adapting or ‘translating’ their identities in the different spaces they occupied (Bhabha, 2012).

These experiences in education at both school and university resulted in the women in this chapter feeling conflicted and frustrated with the stereotypes forced upon them by their teachers and others. Balancing both the high expectations of their parents and their drive to do well alongside the stereotypes embedded in their education was described by participants as “stressful”. This increased the usual pressures of school, university, and exams. On the one hand, they felt that they had to go above and beyond to be the perfect daughter – the high-achieving, well-behaved Muslim girl. On the other, they had to contend with stereotypes that diminished their potential and threatened to limit their opportunities. In the words of Sara: “I found that I was trying to prove myself to non-Muslims that I wasn’t what they thought of Muslim women, but at the same time I was trying to make my parents proud and meet their expectations”. Muna reiterated this, stating that she is continually assessing: “Do I look too Muslim? Do I not look Muslim enough? It’s a headache really”.

The challenges of negotiating their parent’s expectations, their own goals and ambitions, and the stereotypes of Muslim women embedded in wider society led to increased pressure on participants, impacting their sense of self and disrupting their understanding for their ‘rules of the game’ across multiple social fields. However, again, what is evident from their narration is the deliberation that went into their actions – the ability to translate or negotiate different parts of composite habituses to adapt to various social fields. As Waltorp (2015: 53) argues a composite habitus is not just “roles” one can choose freely and consciously to shift between as convenient”, but it does provide the individual with strategies to negotiate the different norms and challenges they face in their daily lives (also see Franceschelli, 2017; 2015).

Moreover, universities like other social institutions have been highly securitised through the UK’s counter-extremism strategy ‘Prevent’ “for the sake of protecting ‘British values’” (Saeed, 2016: 2; Brown & Saeed, 2012). The dominant narrative on Muslims in Britain maintains educated Muslims are perceived to be a more significant threat, with Muslim women continuing to be categorised as submissive and oppressed, or at risk of ‘radicalisation’ (ibid: 26). The ‘Prevent’ duty imposes responsibilities on universities to identify radical and ‘at risk’ students, but this has almost exclusively focused on Muslim students (ibid: 65). Universities are tasked with preventing students from being ‘radicalised’ by denying space for radicalism and reducing exposure to existing radicals and radical ideas (Brown & Saeed, 2012: 4). Consequently, Muslim students find themselves learning in an environment where they are frequently under surveillance.

Supporting previous research, all women who attended or previously attended university highlighted similar concerns. All women referenced ‘Prevent’ multiple times during their interviews: “Everyone knows what ‘Prevent’ is. Of course, we do, it’s the way the government are trying to stop more Muslims from becoming terrorists… but they think everyone’s a terrorist which means we all suffer” (Muna). Several women felt ‘Prevent’ directly impacted their space to be Muslim, and explore Islam, especially at university. Nasreen stated: “I started university when I was starting to develop a relationship with my faith and learn more about Islam. I was part of ISOC [Islamic society], but it felt we had to limit being too Muslim to avoid suspicion”. One woman reported: “I was head Sister of ISOC for a while and the SU decided that we needed a non-Muslim observer on our meetings and events, to make sure we weren’t “too Muslim”, or in other words, we weren’t radicalising each other”. Other women described their apprehension in organising events that may be construed as ‘radical’. Halima stated: “At uni [sic], I organised weekly *iftars* during *Ramadan*, but I was anxious about it the whole time, in case they put a black mark against my name for ‘organising Muslim gatherings’”.

Alongside their experiences at university, all women feared the government spying on them for ‘being Muslim’, particularly in their WhatsApp conversations or in other places online. Women described being cautious about researching “Muslim things” online in case it flagged them up to “the government” as “becoming more Muslim”. Several women talked about discussing “religious stuff” with their friends via WhatsApp: “We can’t even have WhatsApp conversations without fear the government is listening or reading” (Huda). Ultimately, women felt they were treading a fine line between finding space to express their faith and develop a relationship with Islam and other Muslims, and not appearing too Muslim for fear of being accused of being ‘radical’.

The hyper counter-extremism and securitisation of Muslim students and communities in the UK has permeated the individual subjectivities of the young Muslim women in this chapter structuring their composite habituses and deeply destabilising their sense of belonging. In her research with Danish Muslim women in Copenhagen, Waltorp (2015, 2020) highlights the importance of social media in simultaneously 'mirroring, augmenting and aiding' the structuring of the women's habitus across multiple fields. In Waltrop's study, social media enables the young Muslim women to navigate (conflicting) expectations from relatives and friends and pursue otherwise incompatible strategies or explore multiple versions of the self (ibid: 50). However, for the British South Asian women in this chapter, the perception that the government was always 'spying' on them deeply ingrained a narrative of unbelonging, positioning Muslims in opposition to the majority population, but also meant that they felt there was limited space for them to explore who they were, what being Muslim meant to them, or even connect with others.

The workplace

When entering the workplace, several participants described they found it challenging to find a job at all, which is not unusual for many graduates in the UK employment market. However, they felt it was much harder for them as Muslim women. Zwysen & Longhi, (2016) found that BAME graduates are between five and fifteen per cent less likely to be employed than their white British peers six months after graduation. Khattab and Hussein (2017) found that Muslim women are up to seventy per cent less likely to be employed than white women of the same age and qualifications. Iram who is a graphic designer said: "All my work experience is in Muslim charities or small companies like a Muslim fashion shop, then when I came to apply for jobs in other companies, it was just impossible, even though my portfolio was massive, I couldn't get in anywhere". Others like Nabeelah shared Iram's experience, "You go into a job interview and immediately you can see them assessing you, wondering how someone so 'oppressed' could apply for a job like this. So many times, I've been asked if I'm married, I'm sure that's not allowed, is it?" Others shared they had even considered removing their scarves when applying for jobs, so their interviewers did not know they were Muslim (also see Ramji, 2007). However, in the words of Fazia: "There was no point really because you can tell I'm Muslim from my name". Several participants identified they could not distinguish the perceived discrimination in finding a job from the anxiety their parents had instilled in them about their experiences of racial discrimination in the job market. This influenced how several participants wrote their job applications. Khadija said, "I was proud of the stuff I did for the Islamic society at uni [sic], but my mum and dad told me not to put this on my job applications because it looked too Muslim, so I took it off".

Most participants also found the workplace culture challenging to navigate and often hostile to Muslims. Muslim women may experience far more complex challenges than Muslim men in the workplace (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). There was a small percentage of Muslim women in the companies they worked for, and participants reported they often felt they represented the token diversity quota. Three participants had even overheard colleagues iterate such sentiments, confirming their insecurities. For example, Hana recalled "I overheard one of the guys say, "she is quite good for the token Muslim". Several participants also described a lack of inclusivity in terms of prayer space, especially in terms of networking or socialising that would often take place in bars or pubs: "My welcome social was in a pub, I explained to my boss it was *haram* for me, but he said, 'Oh don't be a spoilsport come and have a water or coke! This was in my first week” (Halima). Another participant described a networking event with a client where she was forced to hold an alcoholic drink in her hand. If she didn’t comply, it would have appeared rude and “uptight”. Arifeen (2020) highlights the practice of ‘happy hours’ as a legitimate form that paradoxically results in feelings of exclusion and marginalisation for Muslim women who feel they have to participate in happy hours as a networking practice to progress in careers.

Finally, for some participants, the workplace culture normalised working late, and often at weekends, which caused ongoing conflict with their parents. As Uzma described: “If you don’t stay late, you look like you’re not committed or working hard enough, but travelling home late, often after 11 pm is unacceptable for my parents so they’d stay up waiting, or sometimes they’d drive and wait outside my office in the car until I’d finished”. Others noted how, as Muslim women, they felt unsafe when travelling home alone late at night, which would prevent them from working late or socialising with their work colleagues, and this hindered their progression at work (Brah, 1993).

Entering the workplace and moving into a new social field triggered further shifts or disruptions in the habituses of participants. When individuals enter a social field, ‘a game already in place’, they usually adapt to the rules of the game; whether these rules reflect and perpetuate social class inequalities (Franceschelli, 2013: 46). For this reason, Bourdieu argues that people are inclined to associate with others much like themselves, and “their embodied predispositions make them seek out the familiar and similar” (Bottero, 2010: 16). However, in the workplace, associations are often not always by choice, and the disruptions or shifts when entering the new social field meant participants’ ‘sense of the game’ quickly adapted to feeling like it was not a ‘game’ they should be a part of.

Moreover, as their narration demonstrates, entering the workplace, participants were impacted by the experiences and perceptions of their parents not only as Muslims but second- or third-generation children of migrants. Habitus is constituted not only by a person’s individual history but also the collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of. For most participants they were entering careers their parents or other family members had no experience of in the UK (Tariq & Syed, 2017), meaning there was little transmission or access capital or resources on how to operate within these new social fields.

The religious field

In developing a relationship with Islam and practising their faith, most participants reported there is limited physical space for them as women to be Muslim, regarding mosques and prayer rooms or other religious spaces. “Mosques are a crucial focal point for the realisation of Islamic identities at the community level, serving as a symbolic function, as well as operating as devotional sites” (Brown, 2008: 474). In the UK, where mosques do accommodate women, the access is restricted and smaller than the men’s space and often does not even include a prayer space. Instead, it includes religious teaching space, such as a girls’ *madrasa*. For most participants, their last regular attendance within a physical, religious space was when they attended *madrasa* when they were younger (whether in a mosque or someone’s home). “I think all mosques should admit women. I like the idea of a women’s only mosque that they are building in Bradford. We don’t want to pray with the men, we just, well I just, I want to feel like I am part of a community. My relationship with God is personal, but being a Muslim is sometimes hard, and it’s nice to have a community ” (Mehwish).

Moreover, most participants claim they do not feel comfortable in the spaces that do admit women due to the dominant male majority. One participant reported she felt safer walking home in the dark than in the mosque with so many men: “If I don’t have my brother with me, I just feel unsafe with all those men, I feel safer walking around the streets in London” (Nasreen). However, it is not just the dominant male presence that put the participants off attending the mosque. The judgement and policing from the older generations of women impacted their sense of belonging: “*Wallahi*[I swear to god], all those judge older women, constantly staring and spying on you, judging you and your family on how often you come to the mosque, how you pray, and what you’re wearing…” (Zafira).

For the participants who did regularly attend the mosque, they said they often struggled with the expectations of the community. They were expected to represent their families, and if, for example, they had moved away to university, the community would always bring this up, casting judgement and disapproval. Most participants stated if there were more young women who attended the mosque or involved in organising activities, then they would be more likely to get involved: “it's just loads of men, and, like [sic], when there are women or women do lead something, it’s just women like my mum and grandma’s age…. they believe different things to us… they see the world differently… I respect them and their struggles, innit [sic], but they don’t get what it's like to be young these days” (Amira). Khadija added: “I don’t go to the mosque because I don’t feel like there is a mosque progressive enough to help me understand lots of my daily challenges, or other things happening in the world”.

As Bhimji (2009: 365) describes, religious spaces, such as study circles, allow women to explore various identities, collectively understand and develop a relationship with Islam. Spaces like study circles are essential for shaping relationships and understanding faith, but also for providing support to each other. Without them, British Muslim women have limited space to be Muslim, explore what being Muslim means to them and develop a critical relationship with their faith. All participants highlighted access to mosques, or other religious spaces were important to them. In the words of Asma: "I would like to go to the mosque more because I think I would meet more young Muslim women like me who want to learn more about their religion". Naila said: "I want to feel like I am part of a community. My relationship with God is personal but being a Muslim is sometimes hard, and it is nice to have a community". This was echoed by most participants who stated they desired a wider sense of community and the access to religious knowledge that comes with attending a mosque and being part of a religious community. Participants also noted the limited availability of prayer spaces in schools, universities, and the workplace. All participants reported that due to a lack of prayer space, they must pray in toilets, hallways, corners of rooms, or not at all.

Instead, participants felt that their relationship is forcibly domesticated, like their mothers or grandmothers, and this limits their sense of a community wider than their families. As described below, many of the women have pushed back, demanding space for Sisters in ISOCs at university and creating their own communities through study groups, creative spaces, and networks. All participants felt that their relationship with faith and Islam remains a very personal journey in a private space. Without access to a community, they feel that they find it more difficult to challenge the religious knowledge imparted by their parents, whose understanding of their faith is steeped in cultural values and traditions.

Existing literature has highlighted that elsewhere in the UK, where female participation in mosques is higher, women have found that mosques increase their sense of community, understanding of their faith, and sense of identity (see for example Brown, 2008).

Consequently, their 'sense of the game' was that a British Muslim woman's relationship with her faith must be private in both nature and location. Despite early experiences of being shown how to pray and read the *Qu'ran* by their parents and at the *madrasa,* they felt there was limited space for them to practice their faith outside of the home, with limited access to a religious community, within which they could learn more about Islam and their faith and identities as British Muslim women. Just like other social fields, "religion implies struggle and class distinction based on the possession of religious capital as a symbolic resource in the hand of dominant groups" (Franceschelli, 2013: 43), but with limited ways to access religious spaces, participants felt there were little ways to access or gain religious knowledge (capital). As evidenced in their narration, participants felt that access to such religious knowledge or a community with other young Muslim women like them would equip them to make sense of the dissonance between the experiences in their everyday lives, what their parents told them about Islam, and their other opinions and views.

Wider social field

I define the wider social field as the broader realm in which the composite habituses of the young women in this chapter are structured. Across the wider social field, a lack of positive representation of Muslim women compounded by negative media discourse and daily experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia habitually destabilised any 'sense of the game' these women had developed.

Representation: Seeing Muslim Women

A recurrent theme across all interviews was the lack of visibly Muslim women or positive Muslim women role models in not only British public life, but also more broadly across the world. The importance of role models is three-fold. They are behaviour models – they show us how to perform a skill and achieve a goal (Kemper, 1968). They show us that a goal is attainable — they are representations of the possible, successful members of one's group, they say 'I can do this, so you can do it too' (Lockwood, 2006; McIntyre et al., 2010). Moreover, they make a goal desirable — they are inspirations; "someone to look up to and base your character, values, and aspirations on" (Gauntlett, 2002: 211).

All participants found it hard to name one visible Muslim woman who was a role model to them and felt that this directly impacted their sense of self, identity, and aspirations. Despite the complicated relationships with their mothers, most participants named their mothers as their primary role model. "Of course, she's my role model. She's amazing, her and my grandma, and the other women in the community, what they've done and fought against – you have to be inspired by them" (Hana). However, for most participants, this was not enough – their mothers and grandmothers were inspiring, but not in the ways they needed to be inspired. Farah: "My mum's inspiring in her strength and resilience, that's amazing, but she's never had a job, and she's never thought about the world being any bigger than our family and the community. But I want something more". Several participants also named historical and current Islamic female scholars as their role models. For example, the Prophet Muhammad's first wife Khadijah bin Khuwaylid, and Amina Wadud. These scholars, amongst others, inspired them in their faith and to learn more about their faith. However, as role models, they did not show young Muslim women how to perform a skill or achieve a goal. They are not physical representations of the possible or the achievable.

The handful of Muslim women who are visible in British public life, such as politicians like Naz Shah MP, Rupa Huq MP, Rushanara Ali MP, Nusrat Ghani MP, and Tulip Siqqiq MP, or TV show winners Nadia Hussein (The Great British Bake Off) and Saira Khan (The Apprentice), were not popular amongst participants. Several participants claimed that they do not represent them or Muslims in Britain more generally. They felt that most of these individuals 'perform whiteness' to the highest degree. One participant stated: "They're not role models to me because I don't want to be them. They don't show me success they show me that to be a successful Muslim in the UK you have to constantly water yourself down and make yourself palatable for the white people". Another participant felt the same: "People like my MP, Rushanara Ali, they compromise too much on Islam, it's like to be successful you have to side-line being Muslim and just use the tag, forgetting about your beliefs".

A similar sentiment was echoed in response to discussing social media influencers, such as Dina Tokio, the 'Tattooed Hijabi', and others. Most participants followed the work and lives of these women through social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, and agreed that it was good to see Muslim women occupying these spaces. Still, they felt that watching Muslim women like Dina Tokio talk about fashion for Muslim women, or make-up for darker skin wasn't enough. They wanted Muslim women in these online spaces to be engaging in more critical questions regarding some of the issues discussed in this chapter, or career advice, or how to navigate being a Muslim woman in the UK.

The high frequency of media attention compounds this lack of positive representation and inspiration on Muslim women by both the UK government and media. The way the media frames Muslim women was a common theme reflected in all interviews. Sara: “It’s so hard to positively identify or be Muslim confidently around London when we’re constantly being told that being Muslim is a bad thing, and we should be ashamed or scared”. Other participants quoted articles they’d read from as young as thirteen years old, focusing on words such as ‘humanising’, ‘demystifying’, and ‘empowering’. Uzma stated: “If we’re not being demonised, we’re being patronised. The media is constantly reporting something negative about Muslims, usually Muslim women”. Naila also added: “Politicians and the media are always discussing how to empower us because Muslim women are all oppressed apparently, but how about they stop picking apart everything we do?” All participants stated that they felt that negative media attention on Muslim women impacted the way that they engaged with others: “I feel like I constantly have to prove to people I’m not the timid, oppressed little Muslim girl they’ve read about in the news, or worse, the terrorist. I’m just a normal girl” (Humaira). In Seema’s words: “all I hear the media or the government talking about is humanising Muslim women, how can you humanise someone who is already human? It makes us feel like we are different from the rest of the population. We are just the same”. Farah added: “Muslim women are the only group of women who need demystifying… I’m a person, not a puzzle… why do people want to know what I am feeling or what I do anyway?”

Haw (2009: 367) describes this as the ‘mythic feedback loop’ to highlight the connection between “an internal ‘felt’ contradiction, then synthesised as ‘fact’ in the social world by action and practice, eventually taking on a wider symbolic function as it returns to shape the internal sense-making of other individuals”. In other words, the media's emphasis on signifying stories of ‘backward’ Muslim practices, such as veiling or terrorism impacts on the identity of the wider British Muslim community, which in turn affects Muslim women's sense of self (Mirza, 2013: 9), and structures their composite habituses.

Experiences of Islamophobia & Racism

Experiencing Islamophobia and racism heavily influenced all the participant’s experiences growing up and living in the UK. Whilst Islamophobia is usually understood in gender-neutral ways, evidence shows that there are gendered dimensions to its manifestations in the public-sphere (Chakraborti & Zempi, 2012: 269): Muslim women who veil are immediately more recognisable in the public sphere as Muslims, and consequently are more vulnerable to abuse (ibid; Allen, 2004). All participants recounted childhood experiences of Islamophobia targeted at their families, often directed at their mother and sisters. Hafsa recounted: “On the day of the 7/7 bombings, me and my sister waited for ages for the bus, but they all kept driving past. Another Muslim girl joined us and then a white couple. A bus then stopped and let the white couple on but shut the doors in our faces”. Several participants also recounted being spat on whilst on their way to school with their mothers and sisters and having their *hijabs* pulled off in the playground.

One participant reported that in the aftermath of the EU referendum in June 2016, dog faeces was thrown at her father on his way to work. Moreover, Mason-Bish and Zempi (2019) report that Muslim women are at an increased risk, particularly of street harassment in the recent political and economic climate in the UK. Numerous participants also described the nature of the abuse they experienced had changed following recent terrorist attacks in the UK, and the increasing media coverage of ISIS (also see Zempi, 2019). Rehana stated: “I can’t tell you the number of times people have looked me in the eye and called me a terrorist… *Alhamdulillah*, I am not a terrorist. I am just a normal Muslim woman”. Another participant reported that she was nearly pushed off a moving bus after the London Bridge attacks, and another time was tapped on the shoulder on the street and asked if she was on her way to join ISIS. She was on her way to the gym. “People look at me weird, you know, like what are you doing here? Like, I am just minding my own business. Other people can walk down the street with no one batting an eyelid. Still, a Muslim woman gets on a tube and *wallahi*; she’s like an attraction in a zoo [sic]” (Uzma). Several other participants described having their *hijabs* ripped off their heads or being sexually assaulted on the London Underground: “The man grabbed me by the back of my hijab, and then my breast, announcing to the whole carriage: ‘I’m just frisking her to make sure she doesn’t have a bomb’. He then ripped my *hijab* off before pushing me off the tube at the next station” (Nabeelah).

As demonstrated in previous research (see Allen, 2014; 2015a; 2015b), this discrimination was not limited to direct verbal and physical attacks. All participants recounted incidences of Islamophobic and racist micro-aggressions, particularly at school or when navigating public transport. Microaggressions are typically defined as subtle snubs, slights, and insults directed toward minorities, as well as to women and other historically stigmatised groups, which implicitly communicate or at least engender hostility (Lilienfeld, 2017; Sue et al., 2007). For example, nearly all participants reported being asked where they were from, “I’m from London, mate” (Kiran), and several reported being asked what was under their *hijab*. These experiences are embedded in the structural Islamophobia participants experienced in the school and workplace. Nasreen added: “At primary school, kids would play games pretending to be a Muslim with a bomb at the airport. Even now at work, people just ask ignorant questions about Islam, that you can tell aren't questions at all, but just cloaked in a question so they can justify saying it aloud" (Maryam). Muna reported that, after the Manchester Arena attack in May 2017, two colleagues asked her: "Why do all Muslims want to kill us?" Another participant highlighted how *Ramadan* brought additional challenges: "In my first year at work during *Ramadan*, I'd come in every day to find loads of cakes and treats on my desk, with my colleagues stating, "we're just trying to tempt you". Farah added while at university, when explaining why Muslims fast, she was asked by a lecturer: "So it's like repentance then, for all your terrorism and sins?"

There are very real emotional, psychological, and behavioural consequences for Muslim women as victims of gendered Islamophobia (Zempi, 2020: 97). For the participants in this chapter, their experiences resulted in them feeling unwelcome and unsafe, moving across the multiple social fields they occupied daily. Moreover, their "[e]very day experiences of both explicit and subtle manifestations of Islamophobic and misogynistic harassment produce, inter alia, feelings of inferiority, loss of confidence and self-esteem, depression, guilt, and self-blame" (Zempi, 2020: 97). This was compounded by repeatedly being presented with negative images of themselves, which functioned to routinely disrupt participants 'sense of the game', their composite habituses across multiple social fields. Recent research has also highlighted the reciprocal relationship between Islamophobia and media representations of British Muslims (Zempi, 2020; Allen, 2015), habitually disrupting their 'sense of the game' across their composite habituses and deeply ingraining a belief of unbelonging across multiple fields.

Composite Habituses of Unbelonging

For the women in this chapter, 'their sense of the game', across multiple social fields, has been routinely disrupted from an early age. In the family field, this was often through contradictions between the normative frameworks (rules and norms) taught/learnt/inherited by their parents in early childhood and from their parents' behaviour. There were also gendered inconsistencies between the rules and norms inherited by their parents on how to be 'a good Muslim woman', often taught through positioning being South Asian or 'Muslim' in opposition to 'whiteness'. In the school field, this was through the dissonance between parental expectations, the inherited and inherent value of education and 'doing well', their internal goals and ambitions, and their daily experiences as a young Muslim woman at school. At both university and in the workplace, their 'sense of the game' quickly adapted to sensing it was not a 'game' they should be a part of. Drinking culture embedded in the social fabric of UK universities and workplaces, compounded by experiences of systemic racism and Islamophobia and a responsibility to uphold the family's reputation whilst working or away at university made participants feel that these spaces were not meant for Muslim women to be in at all. In the religious field, amongst nearly all participants, their 'sense of the game' was that a British Muslim woman's relationship with her faith must be private in both nature and location. They felt there was limited space for them to practice their faith outside of the home, with limited access to a religious community, within which they could learn more about Islam and their faith and identities as British Muslim women. In the wider social field, a lack of positive representation of Muslim women compounded by negative media discourse and daily experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia habitually destabilised any 'sense of the game' these women had developed.

As Bourdieu explains, central to an individuals' habitus are beliefs: an "inherent part of belonging to a field" (Bourdieu, 1990: 67). Deeply embedded in the composite habituses of the women studied in this thesis is an ingrained 'belief' of *unbelonging*, which is taught, learnt, embodied, and reiterated from an early age across multiple social fields. This includes the family where 'being Muslim' was routinely positioned as antithetical to the white British majority population.

Central to understanding habitus is understanding the cyclical relationship between subjective dispositions and objective structures. The 'practices' of counter-extremism and securitisation of Muslim communities in the UK has deeply permeated the individual subjectivities of young South Asian Muslim women. This has reinforced their ingrained belief of *unbelonging*, problematising every aspect of their identities. I am not arguing there was any uncertainty or confusion about how 'British' they were or felt. For all the women in this chapter (and this thesis), on a personal level, there was no question about them being or feeling 'British'. In the words of Halima, "I'm as British as I am Muslim, why would I question whether I belonged in the place I was born". Instead, it was this exact narrative, which positions being Muslim in opposition to being British that destabilised their sense of belonging. Having a sense of belonging goes beyond what might initially be thought of as feelings of 'being at home' or of seeing oneself as 'fitting in', whether to a community or place (Yuval-Davis, 2006). They knew they *should* 'belong' and feel like they belong, but their complicated, contradictory, and securitised subjectivities, systematically and routinely reinforced by the media, politicians, their parents, and others, deeply ingrained a belief of *unbelonging.*

Despite the routine external reinforcement and representation that they didn’t belong or their identities as Muslims were antithetical to being British, the women in this chapter actively sought to find or create space for themselves and other Muslim women where they could learn about Islam and explore their faith and identities and develop and share strategies to negotiate their lives as Muslim women in the UK. Consequently, they were also actively, consciously, and unconsciously, generating a counter-narrative and engaging in commentaries of being “normal” Muslim women, critically questioning how Muslim women are depicted and treated in the UK and globally.

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the different ways they critically engage and negotiate the different social contexts and norms they experience and are embedded within. Despite the similarities between their experiences as Muslim women growing up in the UK with the other women in this thesis, they had a stronger propensity, embodied capacity - defined by their habitus and access to different types of capital - to engage with critically and question the normative frameworks and practices shaping their daily existences. Throughout the first half of the chapter, I have revealed how, from an early age, they had access and participated in shared critical commentaries on the practices they engaged with and shaped their daily lives as British Muslims, which influenced their embodied capacity and propensity to be critically conscious and reflexive across the different areas of their lives (Mahmood, 2005). Instead of escaping their existing realities or finding a different framework to make sense of their identities and faith, their critical consciousness led them to generate their own.

Negotiating "Muslim"

In Chapter Two, I outlined a conceptualisation of agency which understands that "agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (Mahmood, 2005: 15). I argued that agency must be understood as a modality of action that is contextually contingent, located within structures of power, rather than outside of them, shaped by the embodied capacities of the individual shaped by their composite habitus. Specifically, agency is both simultaneous and fluid and can arise in multiple ways as an individual engages with (and is constituted by) multiple, intersecting normative frameworks embedded in the multiple, intersecting social fields they are simultaneously embedded within. Understanding agency as simultaneous and fluid enables us to consider the possibility of 'messy' combinations between different types of choices and actions, and the different strategies women use to negotiate their daily lives and challenges.

Increasing visibility vs decreasing visibility

Experiences of direct physical and verbal Islamophobia impact the ways that British Muslim women occupy space, particularly as they move in and out of different social fields, thinking carefully about how they "manage" their Muslim identities as they move through different spaces (McDowell, 1995). Zafira reported: "I never travel alone. I always make sure I get the bus home with someone, or I ask my brother to come and meet me". Huda added: "Most Muslims I know will never stand near the yellow line on the tube…if they even go on the tube at all". As described above, other participants felt their opportunities at work were limited as they didn't feel they could work late like their peers due to feeling unsafe travelling home late, or the expectations of their parents (discussed further below). Several women also stated they had been discouraged from attending social events or meeting friends if they must travel too far on their own. “My parents aren’t keen on me being out late anyway, so now I don’t push it. I’m worried I’ll just run into the wrong people and end up in trouble” (Hana). As a strategy, they have sought to remove themselves from these situations to protect themselves or, in other words, decrease their visibility as Muslims in certain spaces.

In addition, several women described “diluting their Muslimness” outside of the home to maximise their safety or improve their opportunities. As described above, others shared they had even considered removing their scarves when applying for jobs, so their interviewers did not know they were Muslim. Many participants also reported changing their names on their job applications or social media to avoid appearing “too Muslim”. Maryam: “I used to always shorten my name on things… like a nickname, especially at school and on social media…”. Several participants described resigning to holding the alcoholic drink at work events to fit in or gain acceptance, and others described they removed their *hijabs* before job interviews, so their prospective employers did not think they were “too Muslim”.

At first glance, these examples appear to illustrate participants compromising on their beliefs, desires, and aspirations to navigate, negotiate, or accommodate the social fields and normative frameworks they are moving between. In other words, by “diluting” or making their gendered Muslim identities more ‘palatable’, they are conceding to the narrative that Muslim women disrupt or do not belong in the visual context of UK society. However, this interpretation ignores how the composite habituses of the women in this chapter (and thesis) are structured and informed by the intersecting multiple social fields and normative framework they encounter. As South Asian British Muslim women, their subjectivities and agencies are contextually contingent, located within normative structures of power, rather than outside of them. Individuals with split or composite habituses often have access to a wider range of strategies to challenge different norms and practices (Waltorp, 2015).

Consequently, removing, or diluting markers of their Muslim identity, such as their name or their *hijab*, illustrates how some of these participants are decreasing their visibility as Muslims to manage the way they are perceived and treated. It also demonstrates the ways they are drawing on their resources, their capital – what they know about how the ‘game’ works in these intersecting fields. By doing so, they are self-consciously crafting their religious and gender identities to negotiate opportunities, or to avoid drawing attention to themselves in these different spaces, and to ensure they can move safely throughout their daily lives.

An individual’s sartorial choices are central to identity management and performance – what we choose to wear to shapes the impressions of those we encounter (Butler, 1990). As Ryan (2011: 1054) argues, a large part of presenting the self is dressing the self. Clothing and style are an intentional way of signalling; they are a visible construction or a code that exists to be read (Hebdige, 1979). The sartorial choices of Muslim women, namely, their decisions to veil or not veil and the impact of the veil on the way they move throughout different spaces, has dominated the literature on Muslim women, not only in the UK but across the world (Bilge, 2010). Most women interviewed in this chapter covered their heads; twenty-five wore the *hijab*, and one wore the full *abaya*. All women were aware of the ways they performed their religious and gender identity through their clothing: “I wear the *hijab* for Allah and me, you know, but I also do it, so people know

I’m Muslim”. They were hyper-conscious of the ways it also signalled their Muslimness to other Muslims, including their parents, and non-Muslims in different spaces.

Several women shared they sought solutions to hide their *hijab* in public spaces to make their Muslimness invisible. They described wearing hats or hooded coats/jackets, which they pull over their heads when travelling through public spaces. However, if they cannot find alternative solutions to cover their heads or hide their *hijabs*, for example during summer, several women described their only solution was to remove their *hijabs* when travelling home late at night, or through spaces where they do not feel safe: “My *hijab* makes me feel closer to *Allah*, but my faith is inside it comes from within, not from without, and being targeted because of my *hijab* impacts my relationship with *Allah*, so removing it for thirty mins while I get home is not the worst thing in the world if it keeps me safe so I can continue to love and be close to God” (Huda). Mason-Bish and Zempi (2018) find that Muslim women also adapt the way they wear their scarves, including the colours they wear, to ensure they don’t stand out in certain spaces. This also supports Begum (2008)’s research which describes the identifies similar ways that the second generation British born Bangladeshi women preferred to express their visual ‘Muslimness’ as an embodied inner private belief when situated within and excluded from the physically unsafe ‘male-dominated’ Bangladeshi East London streets.

At the same time, women described how, in some situations and spaces, they wore their *hijab* with pride – wearing bright colours or experimenting with different styles – not being afraid of standing out. Tarlo (2010) describes that Muslim women’s appearances are often crafted, not “so much of inherited religious or cultural traditions as of the interplay between local circumstances and global forces”. Capturing this Sumaira describes that, although she removes her *hijab* to travel safely home at night, she wears it with pride at university: "I always wear a different colour or pattern. It's good for people to see *hijabi* in the lab or the gym". Huda described: "as a *hijabi*, you have to carefully assess and calculate every situation and decide whether it's a good idea for you to be yourself in the situation, or whether you should adapt – to protect yourself". Two women described they chose to wear the *hijab* in response to the challenges they have faced. One remarked: "Of course it was a religious decision too, but it was also an act of pride. People think it's a negative thing, or being Muslim is shameful or whatever, and I wanted a way to shout my Muslimness from the rooftops". Contrastingly, Zempi (2016) found that wearing the niqab provided participants with a sense of protection and anonymity in public, and participants described the wearing of the niqab as 'liberating' and 'empowering' in the sense that it allowed them to leave the house without worrying about being judged on their physical appearance. Several participants were also involved in Muslim women's groups that promote the visibility of *hijabi* Muslim women in public spaces and promote the work of *hijabi* Muslim women across a variety of different sectors.

Finding a balance between concealing their *hijab* as a marker of their Muslimness in some spaces and using their *hijab* to signal their Muslimness and their religious identity in others is another example of how the women in this chapter negotiate and respond to the discrimination they sometimes face daily through managing their identities. In the words of Rehana, "I'm not ashamed of wearing a *hijab* at all. But you just must be smart of how you come across; all women must do that everywhere we go, right, to stay safe? Men are not going to change anytime soon. For us Muslim girls, we have to go a step further because Islamophobes and racists are not going to change anytime soon either".

As Bilge (2010) argues, many social scientists have tended to ignore the religious reasons why Muslim women chose to wear the *hijab*. For the women in this chapter, the decision to cover (or not cover) was not only performative; it in itself was a strategy. Through the convergence of outward behaviour and inward desires, participants described that wearing the *hijab* made them feel more Muslim and reflexively learn about their faith whilst navigating the multiple different social fields they moved through. Rehana stated: "It's just part of me. It's like the connective tissue between God and me if that makes sense. Like when I feel lost or like the world is getting me down. I just feel connected to Allah through my scarf". Muna added: "For me wearing the *hijab* is about modesty, it's about protecting an inner part of yourself from the world". In Mirza's (2013) research, participants described their *hijab* being a 'second skin', which is as much about their inner spiritual life as well as a naturalised external way of being. As Mahmood (2005:155-156) argues in her examination of the women's mosque movement in Egypt, the four working women in her study were struggling in negotiating the secular work environment, including travelling to and from work, alongside the expectations of their families. Mahmood describes through the concept of *istiḥayā'* (making oneself shy) that the women in her study found ways to synchronise their aspiration for piety with the challenges they faced in their daily lives (ibid: 156-157). Through the repeated performance of wearing the *hijab,* a critical marker of piety and Muslim identity, the women in Mahmood's study, were training themselves to be pious (ibid: 158). For the women in this study, the repeated performance of wearing the *hijab* across the different social fields they moved between was not only a way of signalling their Muslim identity but a way of safeguarding their relationship with their faith in a context where "Muslim women's identities and lives feel up for grabs" (Uzma). In other words, the women in this chapter utilise their *hijab* as a way of 'doing religion' in pursuit of their religious goals across the multiple fields they move between. As a strategy, they use their *hijab* as a way of "becoming an authentic religious subject against an image of a secular Other" (Avishai, 2008: 418).

In addition to sartorial signalling, many of the women in this chapter punctuated the conversation with religious and non-religious Arabic words. Examples of non-religious words included: *shukran* [thank you], *khalas* [enough/that's all], *yalla* [come on], *habibi/habibiti* [baby/dear – term of affection]. Examples of Religious Arabic language included: *salaam alaikum* [peace be upon you], *alhamdulillah* [thank God], *wallahi* [I swear to God], *bismillah* [In the name of God], *mashallah* [God has willed], and *inshallah* [God willing]. As all South Asian backgrounds, their mother tongue is Urdu or Bengali, rather than Arabic. Interestingly, none of the women could speak Arabic, except for a few conversational or slang words. Several participants stated that using religious language is imperative to being Muslim, and they use religious Arabic language every day in prayer or when reading the Qur'an. However, the use of religious language in everyday life is different, for example, responding with *alhamdulillah* when someone sneezes, or, using *inshallah* as an excuse for lateness or absence from a social situation.

Several participants highlighted that they continually and consciously use religious and non-religious Arabic words in their everyday language to signal their Muslimness and religiosity to other Muslims and non-Muslims. Sumaira said: "I think I started using more Arabic words around the time I was at uni [sic] because everyone else did, and it was a way of showing them that you were Muslim too and you knew that you knew your stuff. I guess it was a way of fitting in". These linguistic, social markers make their Muslimness visible and present in their everyday interactions and signal their group association (see: Hall 1992). Mehwish said: “I’m Muslim and British, so I use Arabic, Urdu and English all the time. It’s just who I am”. Muna added: “I make an effort to use Arabic words all the time, especially in places where there are loads of white people. I think it’s important because some people hear Arabic and they immediately think of terrorism or whatever, but if they hear Arabic spoken by a normal Muslim girl like me ordering my Starbucks then it messes with their heads and disrupts their stereotypes – at least I hope so”. Several participants shared similar tactics at university to disrupt associations of ‘radical’ Muslims associated with the ‘Prevent’ duty. Laila described, “We’d intentionally use Arabic or Urdu (white people can’t tell the difference – sorry) loud in the corridors in the Politics department, and we’d push it. They could refer us all to ‘Prevent’ if they wanted to”.

Using Arabic, Urdu, and Bengali to signal their religious and cultural identities were simultaneously a strategy of resistance and a further way of ‘doing religion’: a form of crafting their Muslim identity against the image of a secular Other - whether that was their direct peers or collective society. Across multiple fields, using linguistic markers enabled participants to consciously communicate meaningful connections to their Muslim, South Asian, and British identities but also their right to be in certain spaces. It enabled them to navigate and feel they were pushing back against the normative frameworks and narratives they felt restricted them. The practical and emotive capacity of using Arabic alongside their mother tongue languages Urdu and Punjabi as well as the multiple meanings of the hijab are facets of identity that are important to many young South Asian Muslim women in negotiating the challenges they face daily (see Hoque, 2017).

Performing and narrating “normality.”

One of the central themes arising across all the interviews was the insistence of being a “normal Muslim woman”. It was employed when describing their experiences of being accused of terrorism, or the securitisation of Muslim communities and spaces through ‘Prevent’. However, most women also described performing normality to negotiate different challenges. For example, it was discussed in response to the dilution of their Muslimness in specific spaces or to improve their access to work opportunities. Zafira stated: “I try and be as normal as possible at work. I try and fit in, smile at everyone, and talk about all sorts of topics with my colleagues, so I seem normal to them, and they don’t just think I’m the uptight Muslim girl”. Warren (2019) highlighted that approachability and affability - making a concerted effort to smile and to open conversations are particularly acute after ‘Islamic’ terror attacks in Britain. Some women even expressed this normality as being synonymous with “whiteness”. Asma recounted: “I think school was a time I performed whiteness… tried to be like a normal so I would draw less attention to myself. If you act like them, normal, then you don’t seem too Muslim, and they don’t accuse you of terrorism or something worse”.

In a similar way that the *hijab* was used to mediate their religious identity, participants associated certain items of clothing with this performance of “whiteness” or “normality”. In Halima’s words: “When I started at my new job I went shopping and picked out clothes I thought a white girl would wear, so I didn’t look too Muslim, I just wanted to look normal. They weren’t skimpy or anything, but now I wear much baggier stuff and stuff that I think is modest for me”. Nabeelah reported she something similar at sixth form, “I used to beg my parents to let me wear skinny jeans like my white friends so I could be the Muslim girl who wore skinny jeans at least".[58] Ryan et al. (2011: 1054) note that Muslim women often have to manage their identities through a 'chameleon effect': "It is not simply a matter of wearing the hijab, but combining it with other signifiers such as jeans, which present a mix of meanings and values open to varied and sometimes contradictory interpretations".

The association of normality with 'whiteness' illustrates how their experiences of discrimination have resulted in positioning them as 'abnormal' for being Muslim, and how, to some extent, they have internalised this discrimination. It illustrates the multiple ways they inhabit the norms in the multiple social fields in which they are embedded and the ways their composite habituses have been structured through disruptions caused by experiences of discrimination and the securitisation of Muslim communities. However, it also shows how they self-consciously perform aspects of another identity, 'whiteness', to negotiate their daily lives across the multiple social fields they navigate through drawing on secular resources they associate with 'normality'.

'Normality' was also used by women to reinforce the binary of 'good Muslim' and 'bad Muslim', and used to distinguish them from the "abnormal" "bad" Muslims who commit acts of terrorism or violence. Ryan (2011) found that the women in her study resisted stigmatisation by asserting their moral integrity and laying claim to 'the normal'. The women explored in this chapter employed a similar strategy. For example, when discussing her experiences of 'Prevent' and the securitisation of spaces at university, Farah stated: "the government think they're going to learn something or stop terrorism or extremism by policing Muslims like us all the time, but we're just normal Muslims, we're the good ones, but they treat us like we're bad… we're all bad, we're literally just normal people". Such sentiment was reiterated by Humaira who described being accused of being a terrorist more times than she could count: "I'm just a good, normal, Muslim girl. I pray, I fast, and I don't break the law". By asserting themselves as "good, normal" Muslim women, they are consciously positioning themselves against the "abnormality" of Islamist extremist and negotiating the discrimination and stereotypes attributed to them. They also described finding ways to challenge these stereotypes by defining a "new normal" for Muslim women by developing and creating space for their self-consciously Muslim identities. Nasreen stated: "We're more religious than our parents' generation, but we are also live in a very complicated world. By adapting and showing that Muslim women aren't just one thing or oppressed, or terrorists or whatever people think, we can counter what they think by showing them and each other that everything people say to us is wrong, and we can define who we are and what we believe". Thus, increasing their visibility as Muslim women through the strategies discussed throughout this section, they are challenging the abnormality attributed to them and defining a "new normal" for themselves and others like them (Ryan, 2011).

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[58] Claire Dwyer's (1999) research found similar findings over twenty years ago in Bradford where girls reported that wear "English clothes" in fit in at school.

Creating space

The women in this chapter are proactively increasing their visibility by creating spaces for themselves and others, both online and offline, to explore their relationship with their faith, their religious identity, and to tackle the pressures and challenges in their everyday lives. These include self-led study groups for Muslim women like themselves, a mentoring network connecting Muslim women mentors and mentees across sectors, creative poetry circles, art collectives, and online platforms for Muslim women to explore their identities, opinions, and religious perspectives. One participant described: "I write a blog once a month for this platform, and I love reading the comments or having people contact me after to talk about it. It is creating this online community for people like me to reclaim some space and connect as Muslims". Another participant shared: "Being part of a mentoring network helped me understand what I could achieve, and how to make it possible without compromising my faith because I saw other Muslim women doing the same".

Online spaces are particularly important for a generation that spends most of their time on their phone (Warren, 2019). Waltorp's (2015; 2020) research highlights the importance of mobile phones and social media for Muslim women in Denmark in navigating similar challenges to the women in this chapter. Moreover, in recent years the internet has become a critical space for extremist groups in spreading their ideologies and recruiting new followers – many of the women in the following chapters of this thesis encountered HT and ISIS online. While Waltorp's focused on the ways the Danish Muslim women in her study were using their social media to navigate romantic relationships alongside parental expectations, the women in this study were using online space to counter the stereotypes and narratives of Muslim women in UK society and to provide support to other British women who were looking for answers about their faith. One participant set up an online blog, which has now grown into a global platform, featuring articles, for example, on where British Muslim women could buy modest clothing on the high street, how to navigate workplace pressures as Muslim woman, and experiences of depression and eating disorders as a Muslim woman. Critically, the platform also provides critical religious commentaries with articles from women on why they now pray more, experiences at the mosque, and reflections during *Ramadan*. Another participant has a podcast which discusses similar issues, including political issues and world politics, including how extremism impacts Muslim women. Reflecting on the platform, the founder said:

> "I was troubled by the singular narrative of Muslim women in the media. Muslim women were constantly being asked to explain themselves, why they wear *hijab*, why they aren't terrorists etc. And I wanted a place where Muslim women could just exist without agendas. I also think Muslims have spent so much time reacting to headlines about Muslims that we haven't been given the time to be able to just think and reflect on what we think and shape our own thoughts. I want the platform to play a role in helping to contribute to shaping thought and in turn, change the narrative surrounding Muslim women."

By creating and occupying these spaces, they are pushing back against the securitisation of Muslim spaces in the UK and negotiating and responding to their challenges through developing a community and resilience. Accordingly, they are creating a "new normal" for themselves and other Muslim women like them and supporting each other in navigating life as a British Muslim woman in contemporary Britain. Participants are constructing space for themselves and others by both listening to and negotiating dominant external discourses about Islam and Muslims and then using them to re-construct their shifting and contingent counter-narratives of what it is to be a 'Muslim woman' (Mirza, 2013). Through focusing on British Muslim women as producers rather than consumers of narratives, Warren (2019: 69) uses the term 'ruptural politics' to show how women are using creative and professional platforms to "disrupt and re-configure symbolic and material spaces, roles and identities imposed by conservative Islamic and Western-liberal thinking on Muslimness, womanhood and labour". For the participants in this chapter, whose composite habituses were routinely disrupted across multiple social fields from an early age, creating space and constructing counter-narratives is simultaneously a strategy of empowerment and resistance disrupting the narratives which destabilised their sense of belonging in the first place.

Offline, several participants have also created Muslim women networks in their place of work to support each other in the workplace. “We meet every two weeks, and we share different challenges that we face and help find solutions to tackle them. We also have a weekly *iftar* dinner during *Ramadan*”. Several participants also volunteer together and have set up an initiative bringing together Muslim women from a broad range of careers and different walks of life to network, mentor, and connect with young Muslim women. Their founder reflected: “It’s hard for Muslim women going into certain careers because there are less of us and we don’t have our parents or natural connections to help us know what to expect so we connect girls with older Muslim women who have experience in the workplace to help them”.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the experiences of thirty South Asian British Muslim women who have grown up and lived in London. It has argued that there are distinct similarities in the experiences and habituses of the women in this chapter unique to being a South Asian British Muslim woman who has grown up in London. Drawing on the concept of ‘composite habitus’, it has highlighted the ways that routine disruptions in the way the women in this chapter developed a ‘sense of the game’ across multiple social fields ingrained a sense of unbelonging. These included gendered inconsistencies between the rules and norms inherited from their parents on how to be 'a good Muslim woman', often taught through positioning South Asian or 'Muslim' in opposition to 'whiteness'; a perceived of lack of space (religious and non-religious) to be a Muslim woman in the UK, and direct, perceived, and inherited experiences of Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination across the different social fields they occupy.

I have argued that embedded in the habituses of the women in this chapter is individual habituses of all women in this chapter is an ingrained 'belief' of *unbelonging*, taught, learnt, embodied, and reiterated from an early age across multiple social fields, including the family where 'being Muslim' was routinely positioned as antithetical to the white demographic majority of the British population. Experiences of Islamophobia and the securitisation of Muslim communities and spaces through interactions with the ‘Prevent’ duty at school and university compounded this further.

I have explored how the different ways they developed strategies to find a balance between increasing their visibility as Muslim women within some spaces, at the same time as decreasing their visibility in others, simultaneously drawing on both religious and secular resources to engage with the intersecting multiple social fields and normative frameworks they navigate and are embedded within. This involved the management of their sartorial and linguistic choices, as well as proactively creating space for themselves and other Muslim women outside of the hostile or securitised spaces from which they feel excluded. It also includes mediation between performing “normality” to make themselves “palatable” to broader society and defining a new “normal” and creating space and counter-narratives for British Muslim women like themselves.

Tracing the different choices, the women in this chapter made in negotiating the challenges they face, rather than focusing on the outcomes of those choices, has revealed the multiple ‘messy combinations’ and complicated ways agency is embedded in their daily lives, habituses, and social fields they move between.

The pressures and challenges shared by the women in this chapter are similar, and in some cases, identical to challenges of the women interviewed in the rest of this thesis, the women who had joined or considered joining HTB and ISIS. However, compared to the women in the following chapters who joined or considered joining HTB or ISIS, instead of seeking to escape their existing realities or looking for an alternative framework to make sense of their identities and faith, the women in this chapter were uniquely shaped by their composite habituses and embodied capacities (and access to capital), which led them to generate their own opportunities and frameworks for themselves and women like them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“I felt this strong pull to make a difference in the world for Muslims, as a Muslim”: The British sisters of Hizb ut-Tahrir

“It felt so great, like a proper sisterhood. We felt powerful like we were going to change the world”.

Humaira

“You see, most people see a girl in a hijab and expect her to be all mousey and reserved, but I wasn’t, and I don’t think the other kids, or my teachers were ready for that. They couldn’t get their heads around it”.

Zainab

Chapter overview

This chapter explores the experiences of eleven British Muslim women aged twenty-three to thirty-five years who joined or considered joining Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain (HTB). It explores the ways they have experienced and negotiated their gender, faith, and identity growing up in the UK as a British Muslim woman, and how this shaped their journeys into Hizb ut-Tahrir. Five of these women are still members, four have left, and two engaged with the organisation and considered joining but did not become full members. Three of these women were or still are official HT *Da’i* [recruiters], and two were *Mushrif* [supervisor or instructor] within the party.

Journeys into the “Hizb”

This chapter begins by focusing on the profiles of participants who joined, considering joining, and left HTB. Before diving into a critical analysis, highlighting these women’s voices and individual journeys is important in grounding their experiences in their real lives. As these testimonies demonstrate, there are distinct similarities between those who joined the organisation recently and those who engaged with the organisation between ten to fifteen years ago. A critical difference between the two groups is the setting in which they encountered HT. Younger participants initially encountered HT through online forums, after researching questions they had about Islam or the political role of Muslims. Older participants encountered HTB in their daily lives at university, where they asked similar questions. Where necessary, details have been omitted, changed, or anonymised to further protect participants' identities.

Currently engaged with HTB

Fatima, thirty-five years old

From a small family in a Pakistani-Muslim community in South London, Fatima decided to move out of home when she went to university to study medicine, against her parent's preference. Once she arrived, she found it very difficult to adapt to university life. "There were no Muslims in my halls. I was put in a flat of international students, and they acted like they'd never seen a Muslim in their life, never mind a hijab. I just couldn't deal with their ignorance". She found it difficult to make friends, as welcome events were organised around "excessive alcohol consumption". "Eventually, I'd made two new friends, they were both keen to join the ISOC, and even though I wasn't, we went along together, to be honest, I was just happy to have some friends. At the event, there were these women, who looked a bit older, encouraging us to go to their talk the following day, which was about funding the NHS (National Health Service) which is what reeled me in. I'd never really heard anyone talk about these things with real evidence behind their opinions and linking it to Islam. It was inspiring". She became a regular attendee and soon started attending study circles organised by these women, who were da'i [recruiter] for the

Hizb.[59] Fatima began delivering talks to other students and attending protests. It wasn't until she finished her medical degree that she became a full member of the organisation. "It's a very long process, there's a lot to learn, and they need to know you can be trusted." Fatima is still a member of HTB, responsible for media and PR, albeit less active in her activism since having children and becoming a general practitioner.

Maryam, thirty years old

At fifteen years old, Maryam, who is of Bengali heritage, became one of the youngest recruits to Hizb ut-Tahrir and is still a member fifteen years later. Her father and brothers were instrumental in the organisation of HTB activities in her area. It was not expected that Maryam would become involved in the organisation, but she developed a growing interest in the debates her family was engaging with. "There were lots of meetings held at my house. I wasn't allowed in those meetings, but I'd always sit outside and eavesdrop, or I'd sneak leaflets out of my dad's briefcase". When questioning her brother about HT, he would shut down the conversation, stating it was "not for girls". Her dad promised that she could get involved when she was older. However, Maryam found out that there were women's groups via an older friend at the mosque. "I begged and begged him to let me go, but he refused. Instead, he offered to invite an Aunty to our house to teach me about the organisation, and more about Islam. At first, I was put off because I'd not long finished *madrasa*, and it just felt like extra school. But this Aunty was so engaging, and I learnt so much. After a while, she told me to invite some of my friends to our sessions which quickly became *halaqaat* [study circles]. It was so good. We were all around fifteen-eighteen at the time, and we started attending protests with my dad. Lots of the girls weren't allowed, and their parents didn't let them wear the full HT dress, but my dad was cool.” Maryam continued as an active member of HTB under the watchful eye of her dad until she went to university, where she became a student-*da’i* for the organisation. “It was my job to recruit and teach other girls. This wasn’t that easy because there was a large men’s group/section at the university and the Brothers were a bit off-putting, they weren’t very supportive of us. But I managed to recruit lots of Sisters during my time there. I also started leading *halaqaat* with the help of the Aunty who taught me. It was great.” Now, as a long-standing member of the organisation, Maryam describes how things have changed. “I am still an active member of Hizb, and I still believe and support everything the organisation stands for. But it’s different these days. We don’t meet up in person so often, and it's less social. I miss that. But I still work with my husband (who I met through the Hizb) to promote the message of the Hizb”. Maryam is now a stay-at-home mum who home-schools her two children in both general education and Islam, including the ideology and goals of HT.

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[59] A Da'i is someone who engages in da'wah, the act of inviting people to Islam for Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Amina, thirty-five years old

“I was such the activist as a teenager. I was anti-everything. I felt there was deep injustice in the world, and I always felt a strong duty to correct that injustice”. For Amina, these contradictions were in her home, her Pakistani community, her school, and in wider society. “I was fed up with the way my mum would push certain cultural things on me but not follow them herself. I was sick of the way politicians would talk about how multicultural Britain was, yet we have to listen to so much ignorance towards ethnic minorities, including what we would call now ‘islamophobia’, and I couldn’t get my head around being pushed by school and parents to get good grades and go to university but at the same time have to think about marrying a good Muslim man”. Amina came from what she described as a “mildly Muslim” family and had a growing interest in learning more about her faith. She began to attend more events at her local mosque and joined the ISOC (Islamic Society) as soon as she started university, where she studied Politics. By her second year, she was Head Sister of ISOC and President of the Women in Politics society. She was well-known across campus and ran event-series, including one titled "Muslim women in politics". "After one of these events, two women came up to me and started asking me whether I'd heard of Hizb ut-Tahrir. I had, but I'd never heard of any women who were involved. Anyway, they invited me to have tea with them. We talked about things we were passionate about and the kind of world we would like to live in". Before long Amina was meeting with these women regularly "putting the world to rights", and she was eventually invited to a *halaqa*. "At this point, I was fully immersed in everything HT. I read everything. I'd go to every event, talk, protest. I stepped down as Head Sister of ISOC because I didn't have time. I was bored with the ISOC anyway". By her third year of university, Amina was recruiting other students to join HT including her future sister-in-law. "When I graduated, I couldn't envisage working anywhere that wasn't for the Hizb, my parents were keen for me to get married, so I married my husband who was training to be a doctor. I spent my time working for the Hizb and researching more". Today, Amina is still active as a member and teacher in HT. She has travelled around the world, connecting with other women HT affiliates in countries such as Indonesia and Tunisia.

Khadijah, twenty-nine years old

Khadijah first encountered HT online around three years ago whilst working on her PhD in 2015. "I came across the Hizb on Twitter. I was looking for Muslim scholars or Twitter accounts that I could follow to learn more about my faith and to look for people who were speaking out against ISIS, but not in any way that was anti-Muslim women". She came across the Twitter accounts of senior HTB members tweeting about the damage ISIS was doing to Islam. "This was interesting to me, but what drew me in was their discussion and analysis of other issues like homelessness, and Brexit… oh and I read a fascinating piece on sexual consent and Islam". It was the first time Khadijah had heard any of these issues being discussed from a "Muslim angle". She asked her sister about the organisation, who said she had had friends at University who were members. "I remember her saying, I wouldn't get involved if I was you, Khadijah, they're a bit, you know [sic], intense. But I was already reading everything I could get my hands on, so I pushed her to put me in touch with her friends". Khadijah began having tea with one of her sisters' acquaintances from university twice a week, where they would discuss the history of HT and HTB and the role women played in the organisation. She was then invited to a small *halaqa*, which she still attends weekly. Khadijah is not yet a full member of HTB despite being actively involved with the organisation and is unsure she will become one: "For me, it's about the intellectual stimulation. I'm learning from these people, and I believe in the goals and the restoration of the Khilafah, but I'm not sure how well this organisation suits me. I feel inspired and empowered by the things I am learning, but I am twenty-nine and unmarried, and there are not many other young, unmarried women in the organisation these days. We'll see, but for now, I think it's good for me".

Sana, twenty-three years old

Sana became aware of HT in 2017 when a stranger approached her on Facebook after posting on a group about Muslim women's rights. "I started following and posting on these pages just before I started university. I grew up in a pretty white area of London… it's in Tower Hamlets, but it's like this little white pocket… and I was hoping when I got to uni [sic] they'd be more Muslim girls like me who were passionate about conquering injustices and feminism, but they weren't, or I didn't meet any anyway". Sana felt connected to these online communities. "Then one day, I got this message request from this weird name I didn't recognise, it was a link to a video about women in Hizb and what Hizb stood for and how the organisation promoted women's rights". Sana had never heard of HT before, and after some research, was intrigued. She agreed to speak with this person and was put in touch with a local group of women who met weekly. "It was great. I loved those Sisters. I finally felt I'd met people on my wavelength.". These informal groups gradually transformed into more traditional *halaqaat,* where they would discuss HT teachings and concepts. Like Khadijah, Sana is also not a full member but feels very passionately about becoming more deeply involved with HT one day. "I've got to finish my degree first, and then I'll probably do a masters, but I want to help revitalise the organisation, make it more youthful again… you see these women in Central Asia and Australia doing amazing things for the Hizb and I think that we can do that again in the UK someday – I want to be part of that".

Formerly engaged with HTB

Zainab, thirty-two years old

Zainab first came across HTB during *Ramadan* in her first year of university. "I just wanted to feel connected with Islam like I do at home with my family, so I went to the prayer room… and I met three sisters …we started to hang out". After *Ramadan*, Zainab continued to eat and pray with her new friends, talking about politics, Islam, and "how to be a good Muslim". In her second year, she moved into a house with these women and three older Sisters. "What I didn't realise is that I had moved into a Hizb house. My friends and those already living in the house were already members, and they hosted a *halaqaat* every week, and other sisters in the community would come too". She describes feeling safe and happy during this time. “As one of the younger members, I was instrumental in recruiting others like me. I used to do this at Freshers fairs at the start of term. I’d stand near the ISOC stand and hand out leaflets. I’d also run special events during *Ramadan* for Muslim women, and I’d tell them about Hizb ideas and invite them to our house for tea. I was very successful, and I did this for my whole time at university”. However, cracks started to form when she graduated and wanted to move home to her family. The older Sisters tried to force her to stay, and when she finally left, edged her out of the group. “They deleted me from the WhatsApp group and the Facebook group, and they changed the day of the *halaqa* and wouldn’t answer the door when I turned up at the house”. Zainab tried to find another HT women’s committee near her parents, but she never found a good fit and ultimately became disillusioned. “I then met my husband and started to learn that there was more to Islam and life than HT. My husband also opened my eyes to how extreme HT are, and I decided to turn my back on the organisation”. Now a pharmacist in East London, Zainab has three children and spends her free time volunteering in the mosque.

Hareem, thirty-one years old

Hareem encountered HTB at her university’s Fresher’s Fair. At first, Hareem wasn’t interested in the Sisters who were handing out leaflets about Palestine: “They were just pushy”, but whilst speaking to them, she met another Muslim girl who was also finding her first few weeks at university challenging. The two girls quickly became friends due to their shared interests in politics. Hareem started attending talks hosted by HTB with her new friend and connected with others who had a similar mindset. “I’d never really heard Asians or Muslim women, definitely not Pakistanis talking so passionately about Islam and I felt enlightened”. She started attending *halaqaat* twice a week hosted by her friend's mum and sisters. "I didn't know much about HTB at that point. It wasn't for a while that they started talking to us about the organisation." Hareem describes feeling a little taken aback that she hadn't heard anything about HTB until this point, but she was still interested. She started to attend more events and protests and was even part of a small group who tried to "take over" the Sisters section of the university ISOC to recruit more young women members. However, at this point, Hareem started to feel an unwanted pressure from her new friends to wear the HT "uniform". "They also wanted me to take this oath of sorts, and I found that extremely concerning". She began to push back and argue with Sisters over *hadith* or clothing. One day she walked out of a *halaqa* halfway through and never returned. "The Sisters started spreading rumours about me, but I didn't care, you know. It was a cool experience, and I learnt a lot, but they became too much like a cult which is a shame because that wasn't for me".

Ayesha, thirty-four years old

Ayesha also encountered HT at her university Freshers Fair. "There were sisters there handing out leaflets about homelessness, and conflicts around the world. They were advertising events, to learn about how we could help these things as Muslims". Ayesha was keen to attend and dragged her younger sister, Humaira (see below) along with her. "I wouldn't say that either of us were very religious back then, but we were culturally Muslim, and both covered so I think we were both interested in learning about Islam from people other than our parents and Imam". Ayesha spent her first year at university attending these events and developing an intellectual interest in her faith. She also started using the prayer room with other Sisters she had met. During *Ramadan*, she was invited to a house for *iftar* [breaking of fast] where a group of Sisters lived. "During these *iftar*s, we would discuss things on a more personal level than at events. We started talking about how to reconcile certain issues we had with our upbringings and parents and how we can live our lives as good Muslim women. I learnt a lot about Islam through these meetings".

After *Ramadan*, Ayesha was invited to join a *halaqa* where she was introduced to HT ideology and concepts, and she soon became a member. Ayesha eventually became a *Mushrif* leading *halaqaat* with the help of her sister. After completing her MSc, Ayesha became an Engineer. However, she struggled with the practicalities of the HT uniform in the workplace, and there was little advice or understanding from her fellow Sisters. Working full-time, she found she had less time to commit to HTB, and her fellow Sisters became hostile and unkind. As a result, Ayesha became less active in the organisation and pulled away from the Sisters who had once been like her family. "I had to leave. It had become a toxic environment for me. I still believe in the Hizb, but I don't believe that the organisation is run well in the UK, especially the women's sections and I think that it lets the organisation and its mission down."

Humaira, thirty-one years old

"I followed my sister's footsteps in everything. She applied to study engineering at uni, so I did too. She became a member of the Hizb, so I did too. I wasn't engaged for a long time; I just went with Ayesha because she wanted me to". However, as she saw Ayesha becoming more engaged with her faith and learning more about HT, she admired how empowered and confident she had become. "It was great. We'd have a family dinner, and Ayesha would be challenging my dad on *hadith* and different teachings. Telling him he was wrong, and that he didn't understand Islam". This admiration led Humaira to ask her sister more questions about HT and eventually being invited to the *halaqa* that her sister attended. "I loved it. I learnt so much. And eventually, when my sister became the

Mushrif, I started to help recruit others too. It felt so great, like a proper sisterhood. We felt powerful, like we were going to change the world". However, as soon as Ayesha left the organisation, Humaira felt that she too was being pushed out. "It became very clear that the other Sisters didn't like me because of Ayesha, and this made me angry with Ayesha and them. Instead of attending *halaqaat,* I just threw myself into my work and never looked back really".

Considered joining HTB

Sumaiya, twenty-four years old

Sumaiya came across HTB online. "I've always been pretty religious. I've been brought up that way, but around the time of the London Bridge terrorist attack, I started researching more about my faith. I'm of a generation that has grown up with nothing but negativity towards Muslims and constantly being associated with terrorism. I wanted to know more about where the views of those who could commit such acts of violence were coming from". Sumaiya described reading online threads, posts, and watching videos on different issues being discussed from an "Islamic" perspective. This included a video made by the HTB Women's Section on the role of women in the Caliphate. "I was intrigued to hear a perspective that was strong and not watered down but wasn't promoting violence I found a girl in Australia who was a member of Hizb and doing a PhD and started messaging her with questions". Soon, Sumaiya was engaged in conversations with members of HT from across the world, including women from Australia, Tunisia, and Kazakhstan. Most importantly, she started talking to a British woman who claimed to be a *Mushrif* and a long-standing member of the organisation. "She invited me for coffee down on the Whitechapel Road. I was anxious, but I decided to go and see what she was about. It was quite an insightful conversation, but I felt a little confused as online I felt the movement was more political, and that was what I was looking for. Whereas in person, it seemed more about religion and she was talking in lots of religious terms and language, which I felt weird about". Despite her uncertainty, Sumaiya met with the *Mushrif* two more times before she felt that this wasn't a journey for her. "She kept talking in hypotheticals. She also couldn't answer questions I had about the organisation and the other members in the UK. And the insistence on regulating women's clothing was a no-deal for me. I wear the *hijab*, but it's my choice, and I felt that she was telling me there was no choice about it".

Aafiya, twenty-six years old

Aafiya encountered HT through a close family friend after losing her father. "I've never been very religious or political. Like I've always cared more about socialising and stuff, even at uni. But when my dad died, I felt this need … like this pull into my faith, I wanted to learn more about Islam". She turned to a family friend of a similar age for advice. This friend took Aafiya under her wing; they'd meet for coffee and talk about their faith, death, what it meant to live after loss, and how to make a positive impact on the world. "I was so impressed by her… she seemed to have it together. Know her faith and her mind. I was inspired, and I wanted to know more, so she started sending me articles, podcasts, YouTube videos, one day she brought another friend along to our catchups". The new friend started talking about solutions and actions, and eventually, she introduced Aafiya to HT. "It turned out that my family friend had been a member all along and was kind of grooming me before she brought in an Aunty to seal the deal – make me want to become a member. I'm not going to lie though I didn't think that at first. At first, I was intrigued, and I listened and asked questions, and it seemed like an opportunity I might get involved with". However, for Aafiya, there were contradictions in the information she was given and the answers to the many questions she had. She decided to take some space from her friend to think. “I wanted some time to think about what I’d learnt and HT and figure out what was best for me. But they text me ten times a day! They turned up at my house, waited for me after work. When I didn’t respond, they tried to contact me through my mum”. In the end, this was too much for Aafiya, and she decided that she wanted nothing to do with the organisation. “I wasn’t going to be bullied into joining something I was unsure about. I did consider it. It seemed appealing, but the approach was bullish, and it put me off”.

The contradictory nature of growing up Muslim

Family Field

All participants described having traditional upbringings, which were embedded in their parent’s South Asian cultural heritage and the communities they grew up in. For most of the women, their early childhoods were characterised by a pattern of perceived contradictions: overbearing and inconsistent cultural expectations and values, and incongruous role models and representations of being a British Muslim woman.

These contradictions were driven by the strong prescription, but the weak implementation of gendered values and behaviours in family and community life. From an early age, all participants understood that there were very different roles, behaviours expectations for men and women, reinforced by the different ways their brothers and other male relatives were treated in comparison to them: “My brothers were given more freedom, they could go out late and stay at friends, but I had curfews” (Hareem). Amina reported: “My brothers were allowed to take driving lessons, but I wasn’t. My parents said I was allowed to learn when I got married”. The implementation of these gendered values and expectations was not always consistent despite regular reminding of the right way to behave or what was appropriate for a Muslim woman to do on almost daily. Most participants described that, daily, their parents weren't strict, and they didn't feel that they had a lack of freedom based on being a girl. In Ayesha's words: "They were strict but not strict at the same time… [they] tried to bring us up traditionally, but I could pretty much do what I like. My mum wanted me to be traditional and cook, look after my brothers, and get married… but she wasn't strict about it, she just tried to sneak it in when she could". Moreover, most participants stated that they had always accepted and agreed that there should be different rules for girls and boys due to safety and modesty. "I didn't feel restricted growing up, they never stopped me from doing anything, in fact, they usually encouraged it. Of course, there were limits for us girls, but there should be, there's no need to run around with boys or be out late at night" (Sumaiya). Furthermore, several participants identified that their parent's prescription of gendered behaviour and values were used to uphold the family's reputation within the wider community, but it didn't matter so much at home: "I could really do whatever I wanted at home, and my parents didn't really insist on anything, but when I left the house it was all do this, don't do that". (Amina). Most participants felt that their parents cared much more about the community and extended family perceiving them as "good Muslim girls" rather than them adhering to the prescribed values, roles, and behaviours. "It felt a lot of the time that my parents were all about keeping up appearances within the wider the family and others in the community too. It was weird. Like why they cared so much about what other people thought, or why did they want them to think we were good Muslims if we weren't" (Fatima).

Through this monitored gendered behaviour, all participants were aware that they were Muslim, and what it meant to be and behave like a ‘good Muslim girl’. As discussed below, despite several participants attending *madrasa* as children, the majority did not, and being ‘Muslim’ was culturally inherited from their parents: “I only knew I was Muslim as a kid because my parents told me so. That was it really, it didn’t mean anything else” (Fatima). Furthermore, all participants reported that their parents were not very religious, and their understanding of their religion was deeply embedded in their culture. In the words of Amina: “They understood what being Pakistani meant, but they didn’t really know what being Muslim meant”. Several participants found their parents used “Pakistani” and “Bengali” interchangeably with “Muslim”, especially when establishing different rules and expected behaviours. “I’m not sure they really knew the difference” reported Khadijah, “It’s like they thought the two were interdependent. I think they still do”. Their parents’ conflation of and confusion between culture and religion were often exposed when they were questioned about why a certain behaviour was necessary to be a good Muslim, or why it was imperative to wear a certain item of clothing. Other participants reported perplexity in their parents' use of religion as a reason to regulate their behaviour or clothing, but their lack of religiosity in their own day to day life. “It was constantly… be a good Muslim… this is the Muslim way… etc.… but I never saw my mother pray… and my father rarely, if ever, went to the mosque” (Amina). For many women, their parents’ conflation of culture and religion led to a theme of repeated contradictions in their early lives.

The presence of these contradictions led to participants feeling their parents had weak and hypocritical ideals and didn’t understand Islam at all and led to ongoing conflict between them. Fatima recalled: “It just drove me mad; I’d constantly question them why whatever they were trying to make me do have anything to do with being a Muslim? And it would always end in a big debate where I'd get no real answers except x + y = being Muslim". Ayesha added: "We'd have these huge fights over why certain behaviour would mean being a 'good Muslim', but they'd just end with me being sent to my room and my dad telling my mum I'd grow out of it or something". Though these conflict with their parents, individuals were searching for justifications for their shared ways of living or their norms that govern their lives. Although they did not find the answers, they wanted from their parents, through engaging in this shared commentary with them they were able to figure out how they could challenge the norms they didn't agree with (Bottero, 2010: 14). In other words, they had access to reflexivity as capital, and through this conflict, they developed the embodied capacity to reflect on themselves, their identities, values, and behaviour.

Despite these contradictions and conflict, all participants described relatively positive and stable relationships with their parents growing up. For most participants, conflict arose when their parents, in particular, their mothers, did not always set the same example following the same gendered values and behaviours they prescribed for their daughters. For most participants, both parents had always worked. "My parents both worked my whole life. My mum is a pharmacist, and my dad was a hospital porter" (Aafiya). Interestingly, the mothers of most participants were very career-driven and encouraged their daughters to pursue ambitious career paths too. This is particularly notable in comparison to the mothers of the women in other parts of this thesis. "Both my parents were very supportive of us in being successful in our careers. There was no alternative though really, we had to become doctors like them, or we would let down the family" (Fatima). Many participants discussed this at length, citing that their mothers were inspirational in terms of their career paths. But not in terms of their parenting or in being a "good Muslim". Khadijah says: "My mum was particularly successful in her career. She's a Professor of Medicine now. She's very well esteemed, and she's always inspired and encouraged me in my career, but she's not a good Muslim, and I think she sacrificed understanding and committing to her faith for her career. She also sacrificed teaching us about Islam and how to live our lives as good Muslims". In talking about their mothers, and their parents more generally, "hypocrite", "hypocritical", or "hypocrisy" were words frequently used. "I just felt my mum was a hypocrite" (Amina). "It was just hypocrisy, you know, my mum would say that I should not stay out too late, help prepare food for my brothers and father, and she said I should cover my head, but she didn't do the same. She was never home in time to cook for any of us, she often stayed out late working, or I know that she used to go to the pub with her colleagues, and she didn't cover her head at work either because she said it was inconvenient" (Zainab).

This perceived hypocrisy led to a growing distrust in the values, beliefs, and the cultural understanding of Islam that they had inherited from their parents. Moreover, nearly all participants were highly critical of their mothers for neglecting their religious education and prioritising their careers, despite pursuing similar career paths (doctors, dentists, accountants, pharmacists, and engineers). As a result, many participants described actively pushing away from parents' cultural values and expectations, resulting in a desire and craving to learn more about Islam and what it really meant to be a Muslim woman. From an early age, these contradictions contributed to a lack of clarity, and an inability to decipher the difference between their culture and religion led to participants feeling that they had little 'sense of the game' even in the family field.

For nearly all participants, the family field was also characterised by a high level of lively political and social debate. Participants described that their parents would "always be discussing the news" or arguing about "something to do with politics". In Sumaiya's words: "My mum and dad were kind of on the opposite ends of the political spectrum, so they were always debating whatever was in the news and how impacted the Muslim community". Sana added: "Sometimes my grandma would get involved too and that was quite funny because she is really Tory and my dad is super left like he loves Jeremy Corbyn so you can imagine these debates." For Maryam, this also included her dad's involvement in HTB, which was pivotal in her own engagement with the organisation. As Mahmood (2005) describes reflexivity is a pedagogical technique which is learnt through "doing". Witnessing and engaging in these debates with their parents and grandparents developed the embodied capacities to engage with not only their wider world but their place in it.

The educational field: school and university

All participants considered themselves very academically driven from an early age, motivated by their own enjoyment of learning and their families' imperative for them to succeed. "It was very important for us to do well at school. My parents were very committed to our education. We all had after school tuition nearly every night, and my parents pushed us to do other things that would help us get into university, and in our careers. Before I'd even started my A levels, I'd done work experience in three different GP surgeries" (Fatima). All participants engaged in extracurricular activities, including sports, drama clubs, and debating societies. "I did everything. I played Hockey on Monday and Thursday. Drama on Wednesday. Debating club on Tuesday. Oh, and at lunchtimes, I did extra French and Spanish classes" (Amina). Two participants were head girls during their time at secondary school, and, as discussed below, several others were involved in political activities outside of their school environment, which included the UK Youth Parliament and British Youth Council. Like the women in Chapter Six and Chapter Eight, participants described that their parents also had high academic expectations for them. However, the women in this chapter placed greater emphasis on their own aspirations and achievements, rather than feeling pressure from their parents or like they have a lack of control in their career choices.

All participants attended schools with high numbers of South Asian Muslim students, and they had lots of friends and good relationships with their teachers. “In some ways, primary school was a bit of a false reality for me. There were lots of other Muslims, and other Muslim girls and I didn’t have to really deal with being different” (Fatima). However, this changed when they began sixth-form college, and suddenly they became a minority amongst their peers and found themselves navigating a very different environment: “From being popular at high school, I found I had hardly any friends in Sixth Form. My old friends had all gone to different colleges, or they were doing different subjects, so we never saw each other” (Humaira). “It felt like people just saw that I was Muslim and avoided me with a barge pole. Even the other Asians” (Amina). Hareem described: “Other students would actively try and not sit next to us you know [sic], in assembly and stuff or even in class, or they’d ask us stupid stuff like where we were from”. Numerous participants even reported similar micro-aggressions from their teachers. At the time, they wondered whether it was because of their decision to wear the *hijab*, which made them feel uncomfortable. However, Hareem and Aafiya who did not wear the *hijab* still described similar experiences and thought it might be due to their opinionated, outspokenness that people didn’t expect from a South Asian girl: “I don’t think people were used to having a mouthy Pakistani girl in their class and they didn't know how to take me" (Hareem). Zainab added: "You see, most people see a girl in a *hijab* and expect her to be all mousey and reserved, but I wasn't, and I don't think the other kids, or my teachers were ready for that. They couldn't get their heads around it".

Inside and outside of the classroom, nearly all participants also described either first-hand experiences of Islamophobia or witnessing incidences happen to their close friends, which routinely disrupted their daily experiences at school. Sana reported: "This thing happened in my school where this group of white girls when around putting chewing gum in the hair and/or *hijab* of all the Muslim girls. It was horrible. And if they couldn't get to our heads, they'd stick it on our bags". Sumaiya also shared: "Me and my friends were in science once, and these girls were trying to shove their phones up inside our hijabs to take photos to see what it was like underneath. It was mental [sic]". Sumaiya describes that she grabbed several of the girls' phones and "smashed them on the desks". Several participants described responding directly to the discrimination and abuse they experienced, either verbally challenging the perpetrator on their views or physically fighting back. As discussed further below, this was not limited to the school field. Ayesha reported: "You just have to stick up for yourself. Like I know what their saying is wrong, and they should too. But it was pretty tiring because I was the only one really who used to speak back".

Being treated differently to their peers and the daily experiences of Islamophobia, disrupted the ways in which participants' habituses adapted to the school field. It destabilised their sense of who they were, their sense of belonging, and their grasp of the rules of the game. It demonstrates how participants' composite habituses were structured along the contradictions and disruptions between the experiences and expectations of their families and those they encountered in the school field.

Alongside addressing the discrimination, they faced ‘head-on’, several participants also adopted strategies to gain acceptance amongst their white peers and teachers because of feeling left out or treated differently in the classroom, and as a strategy to limit the Islamophobia and discrimination, they faced. As argued in Chapter Six, those with composite habituses often have access to multiple strategies to challenge different norms and practices they encounter (Waltorp, 2015). For the women in this chapter, these strategies included imitating the fashion style of their female peers, wearing more make-up, speaking out less in class, and even flirting with non-Muslim boys. In many ways, these strategies mirrored the strategies of ‘performing normality’ that the women in the previous chapter employed to navigate the different social fields they moved between (also see Ryan et al., 2011). The women in this chapter increasingly and consciously concealed their Muslim identities, which allowed them to fit and belong with their peer group and appease their teachers’ expectations more. “There was definitely a huge shift in me as a person when I went to sixth-form, I didn’t change my beliefs or anything, but I learnt how to adapt myself to make sure I fitted in” (Fatima). Several participants described that their experiences at school left them confused and lost in knowing who they were, and where they belonged as a British Muslim woman. Their adaptation and concealing their Muslim identities to fit in made them feel guilty without understanding why: “I felt guilty for trying to fit in with the others by seeming less Muslim, but equally I didn’t really know why as I realised that the Muslim part of my identity came without a lot of substance” (Khadijah). For most participants, their experiences at school contributed to a feeling that they lacked a real, consistent identity and feeling like they constantly had to fight to defend themselves.

University

The transition to university was a challenging process for most participants, who all moved into student accommodation. Firstly, moving away from home as a South Asian Muslim girl was a difficult decision. “It’s not that usual for a Muslim girl to move into student accommodation for university. Most parents don’t allow it. I fought hard with mine about it, but ultimately I got my own way”. Amina described that her parents seemed to be less worried about her welfare living away from home, and more about what the wider family and community would think. “When I said I wanted to move into halls, my mum's first response was ‘what will people think?’ She was mostly worried that having a daughter move out before marriage would bring shame on us”. Fatima added: “I have an Aunty who never shut up about me living away. She acted as I’d gone and got pregnant or something. She’d say “Aw, *beti** [term of endearment], it’s such a shame”. I was studying Medicine at a great uni, how was that a shame?” Many felt pressured to prove to their parents that it was worth it by enforcing very strict study schedules on themselves and isolating themselves from their peers. “I spent a lot of time in the library, or just studying in my room. I was motivated anyway, but I didn’t want to give my parents any reason to think that me living away from home was a bad idea, so I just kept my head down” (Zainab).

This was compounded by adapting to a university culture which, at the time, seemed solely catered around “excessive alcohol consumption”. Ayesha: “When I started university there was literally no events during fresher’s week that didn’t involve alcohol.

Even the halls welcome event, there was wine, and people were just getting really drunk. I felt really uncomfortable”. Fatima describes that it was even hard to bond with her flatmates: “All they wanted to do was go out to the SU [Students’ Union] and drink. I tried to get involved, but lots of them were out in the day (or sleeping after a night out), and I wasn’t going to sit around and watch them pre-drink before they went out again”. Other participants echoed similar sentiments stating that they felt they didn’t belong within this ‘*haram*’ environment, and they felt very lonely, specifically during their first term at university: “I just felt like I didn’t fit in” (Amina). Additionally, several participants reported they felt that it wasn’t only the environment that did not cater to Muslim students, but also the people who were unfriendly and cold towards them. “I was put in a block with loads of international students, mostly from Germany and France, and they seemed to put a lot of distance between them and me. Like they were cautious of me being Muslim” (Fatima). Zainab recalls a similar experience with her white-British flatmates: “It was weird. It was like they’d [flatmates] never seen a Muslim before, or maybe it was more living close to a Muslim, like in the next room. I wouldn’t have minded if they’d asked me questions you know, but they didn’t. They didn’t include me in plans, or sometimes if I walked into the kitchen and they were talking, they’d just stop. It was horrible”. Consequently, for most participants, it was difficult to make friends or establish relationships with their non-Muslim peers. Moreover, they found it difficult to identify other Muslims, especially Muslim women, living in their halls or away from home who shared their experiences. “As I said its quite unusual for a Muslim girl to move away for uni and it took me three months, near the end of the first term, before I saw another *hijabi*, then I found out there were actually only three *hijabi* girls living in halls on campus” (Zainab). Participants described that unlike at school when they adapted their appearances to fit in and make friends, they really didn't want to do that this time, as they were trying to become a better Muslim and learn more about their faith.

The challenges of adapting to their university cultures and negotiating both their parents' expectations and judgements from their wider family, disrupted any 'sense of the game' the women in this chapter could develop in the university field. Their 'sense of the game' very quickly adapted to feeling like this was a 'game' they shouldn't be part of as it felt there was limited space for Muslim women at university. This destabilised their sense of belonging, making them question in which spaces they could exist as Muslim women in the UK.

Outside of their experiences amongst their other peers, the young women in the chapter (Khadijah, Sana, Aafiya, and Maryam) all referenced the impact of 'Prevent' in the university setting. However, where participants in the previous chapter had felt under acute surveillance, the women in this chapter described that 'Prevent' and the overall securitisation of Muslim spaces within their universities made them feel that, at times, university was not a field that Muslim students could freely be part of. Khadijah explained: "In my undergrad [sic] ISOC used to be able to organise loads of debates and talks for different Islamic speakers including Hizb speakers, I think. We were like [sic] freely allowed to invite anyone, but in my PhD so like six years on, we weren't allowed to invite anyone. Like not even the local Imam unless he was mates with the Principal or something". Participants also spoke of the narratives constructed around 'Prevent' which impacted the way they navigated through the university field. Participants referenced that their universities often presented themselves as 'anti-Prevent' and constructed 'Prevent' as this "great-secularising force" (Maryam) that they were keeping at bay at the doors at the university. Sana: “It was made out that the government has this dodgy policy but ‘we’ve got your back’ but watch out and don’t become or say anything too Muslim anyway just in case”. In many ways, the narrative was constructed as ‘we have a duty to protect you from the Duty’. Aafiya added:

> “I was doing this presentation with this boy in my international relations class on Iran and nuclear weapons, and we were quite critical of Israel and the US. But before the presentation, the Prof [sic] came to us and said it was in our best interest not to do the presentations because while what we were saying was defendable, we didn’t want to draw attention to ourselves as Muslims because of ‘Prevent’ because the views were very strong. It was weird. Also, funny really because nothing about what we said really aligns with HT ideology and ISIS wouldn’t agree either, so I’m not sure who she thought we’d been radicalised by”.

Alongside the challenges of adapting to university, the narrative of ‘Prevent’ constructed by their universities made them feel like they always had to watch over their shoulders. Unlike the women in Chapter Six, it wasn’t so much a feeling of surveillance, but a feeling that they could step out of line with their ‘Muslimness’ at any moment and “Prevent’ would get us[them]”. This disrupted the ways in which their composite habituses adapted to the university setting and deeply embedded a sense that they didn’t belong in this field.

Religious field

Most participants described a growing interest in their faith at the same time as starting sixth-form college and preparing for university. For some, this was partly a response to the confusion and contradictions in their family, school, and the wider community, but others described that their interest grew more organically. However, for most participants, their journey into HTB began with a search to learn more about Islam or return to becoming more committed to their faith.

Two-thirds of participants felt that they did not have "proper" knowledge of Islam growing up, and due to their parents' conflation of culture and religion, they felt that they had limited understanding of what it meant to be Muslim. As described above, several participants attended *madrasa* as a child, but they felt that this was less about their religious education and more about keeping up appearances in the community. "All *madrasa* taught me was how to read the *Qu'ran*. I liked it, but again, I didn't really understand the application of Islam to how I should live my life and how to guide myself through the world as a Muslim" (Maryam). "*Madrasa* was more of an obligation than education. I didn't really listen either. The Aunties were strict, and my mum and dad were very clear that we should just sit there and listen and not ask questions". (Zainab). One-third of participants did have, in their words, religious upbringings, but reported that there were gaps in their understanding and practising their faith: "I did pray with my parents growing up, and we did observe *Ramadan* every year" (Hareem). Fatima says: "I definitely grew up practising my faith, but I didn't really embody it and that was the problem". Only one participant, Maryam, who joined HTB at the young age of fifteen, said that she felt that her religious education was satisfactory, and she has always known what it was to be a Muslim and practice her faith.

When I encouraged participants to unpack what they meant by a lack of 'understanding' of their faith, it transpired that what they were looking for was a more dialogic, reflexive relationship with their faith, rather than relying on the "unthinking, traditional" Islam of their parent's generation. Instead of relying on the textbook, authenticated religious knowledge of Islam they inherited from their parents and/or learnt at *madrasa*, most participants felt the overwhelming need to ask questions. These were questions about Islam, about being a Muslim, and about how to respond to different issues in their everyday life. “It was incredibly difficult to understand anything about my faith from the perspective of my parents. Many participants felt a need to turn to their faith for clarity and community – they wanted answers, but they also wanted people to identify and discuss these answers with.

Interestingly despite their parents actively encouraged them to critically engage with the world around them in terms of politics and social affairs, they did not encourage them to do them same in terms of religion or their own personal faith. However, capital is imprinted and encoded in habitus from childhood through learning. As I have argued, through developing their embodied capacity to critically engage not only with the world around them but with the normative frameworks and social fields, they were embedded within. Although they didn’t have access to much religious capital, the women in this chapter had access to reflexivity as capital, which led them independently to explore Islam, constantly and critically questioning their parents and those around them. As Bourdieu explains, habitus is constituted not only by a person’s individual history but also the collective history of family, and the intergenerational transmission is not a conscious process. For most first-generation British Muslims like the parents of the women in this chapter, it has been argued that “Islam was an aspect of their ethnic [cultural] identities, and faith adherence was more to do with participating in communal life and less about personal religiosity” (Hamid: 2016: 8). Therefore, it is likely that the lack of religious capital transmitted from parent to child was also inherited intergenerationally from their own parents.

In response, several participants described that they became more active in their mosque community whilst still at school. However, they experienced similar obstacles to the women discussed in Chapter Six a lack of space for Sisters to pray, a hostile atmosphere from Brothers and Aunties (elders) in the mosque, and an overall lack of progression or inclusivity. Looking for a community elsewhere, Amina describes: “I looked for groups of other young Muslim women my age who wanted to talk about their faith. Like study circles, but I couldn’t find any. Not that I could go to anyway”. Fatima asked her Muslim friends at school if they would like to start their own study circle, “None of them were that interested really. They weren’t that bothered. Most of them had quite religious parents, and I think they were bored of it or fed up”. Instead, several participants persisted in questioning their parents and other family members, as well as re-reading the *Qu’ran*, and any other texts they could get their hands on. “I knew I was Muslim, and I always felt Muslim, but I still wanted to know more and learn more” (Sana).

For Sana, Sumaiya, and Khadijah, who joined or considered joining the organisation more recently, they turned their efforts online. As described in their journeys above, they started researching more about Islam and women’s role in Islam. Sumaiya: “I started reading much more about different interpretations of *hadith.* I also read some stuff on Islamic Feminism and following different bloggers and YouTubers, but they talked a lot about social issues as a Muslim but not religious”. It was also within this online space that they first encountered HT. “I’d just spend hours watching YouTube videos about the history of women in Islam. I became so fascinated by it. I was also confused because women seemed to play such an active role in Islam politically in the past, but it seemed like they didn’t anymore. Except for the women, I heard who were joining terrorist organisations like ISIS. Then I discovered Hizb ut-Tahrir” (Sana). HT’s online resources are easily located, especially their videos and articles on women, and women’s role in restoring the

Caliphate. These resources offered these women an intellectual, critical way to engage with their faith, in a space they felt was unbounded by expectations and biases.

For the others, it was starting university that pushed them to search for the questions they were looking for, which ultimately led them to HTB. Amina: "I kind of reinvented myself when I started uni [sic], both socially and religiously. I think everyone does to an extent, but for me, it was also because I felt that I needed to be a better Muslim and it was a good opportunity to do so, also because I missed my mum and dad, and my faith connected me to them". Several participants reiterated this, describing that being away from home and out of their comfort zone around lots of non-Muslims pushed them to connect more with their faith and seek out other Muslims. For some, the first step was joining ISOC: "I'd already decided to join the Islamic Society (ISOC) before I started uni [sic], but it was a really helpful experience for me. I finally had other Muslims to talk to that wanted to talk about Islam. Not all of them. Some of them were less serious and just there for the social side". For others, it was starting to attend the prayer room more frequently and praying with other Muslim women. "It felt good to talk about things and ask each other questions about things. We'd talk about all sorts, things in the *Qu'ran*, yeah, but also things to do with what was going on in the news, and how we could understand these through Islam" (Ayesha). Many also began attending events where they'd hear speakers, often HTB members, debate different issues pertinent to Muslims in the UK and globally. As discussed further below, it was through these interactions that they started to develop a dialogic; reflexive; and critical relationship with their faith and with other Muslims and started to find answers to some of their questions.

Wider social field

Experiences of Islamophobia

All participants recounted early experiences of Islamophobia and racism, especially when navigating the wider community. “People weren’t racist at school, you know. Sometimes some idiot would ask me if I was bald, or had hair under my scarf or something, but people weren’t racist or Islamophobic” (Ayesha). “The worst I got at school was people used to joke you smelt like curry if you were brown like me. But really that was just stupid”. (Humaira). However, their experiences were very different outside of school, and they were exposed to racist slurs and other behaviours daily. “Old white people were the worst, getting on the bus home from school, the number of comments I used to get… there was one man who was always on the same bus as me who repeatedly called me a ‘letterbox’. One day I had enough, and I asked him if he had anything he needed to post” (Zainab).

Other participants reported similar experiences of Islamophobia and racism on the bus journeys home from school. Sana describes “On multiple occasions, I’ve had people physically move away from me, and probably more than a dozen times I had other kids yell at me “omg she’s got a bomb”, or something like that. I wanted the ground to swallow up it was so embarrassing”. Numerous participants also described experiences of physical abuse: people barging into them in the street muttering racist slurs, being shoved on the tube, one participant, described that someone once tried to drive a car directly into her, and several others described having their *hijabs* ripped from their heads.

Alongside being on the receiving end of racism and Islamophobia, nearly all participants reported witnessing other Muslim women, including their mothers, experience such abuse. In response, most participants described that, unlike at school where they had adapted their behaviours or appearance to fit in with others, they didn't change or feel the need to change anything about themselves in response to this direct abuse. Instead, it just made them angry and frustrated with living in the UK as a British Muslim woman: "Like, on one hand, the UK claims to be a welcoming, inclusive and multi-cultural place, but its citizens are far from it and its very clear who they think who has a right to be here and who shouldn't", Amina describes. "I remember feeling lost. I wasn't that religious, but I felt connected to being Muslim and that I needed to protect that".

What distinguishes these experiences of Islamophobia and racism from the women in Chapter Six is verbal resistance to the attacks and discrimination they encountered. Like at school, their immediate reaction was to respond to the way they were being treated, correcting the misconceptions about Islam, 'shout back', or asking passers-by for help. Hareem described:

> "Don't get me wrong it was always horrible, but I just found the best thing to do was to just address there and then otherwise you're just adding to their stereotypes of us and it's dangerous [sic]. Once these guys on the tube were trying to grab our shopping bags to see had bombs inside, so we started on them [sic] back and got these older women to help us too. Because what if they'd followed us and something worse had happened. It was always exhausting though afterwards I'd just go home and cry in a heap. It's so exhausting".

However, this was not always possible. There is little an individual can do to resist physical acts of violence such as being shoved or a tube or having a car driven into them. Furthermore, the verbal resistance to the discrimination they experienced didn't mitigate the impact of the ways these experiences habitually disrupted participants' 'sense of the game' across multiple social fields. As described in Chapter Six, there are very real emotional, psychological, and behavioural consequences for Muslim women as victims of Islamophobia (Zempi, 2020: 97), and these experiences functioned to routinely destabilise participants’ sense of safety and security in the place that was supposed to be their home. Early age experiences of Islamophobia and discrimination, amplified by narratives of counter-extremism and the securitisation of Muslim spaces, made the women in this chapter feel there was no place for them as Muslim women in the social fields they moved between. This deeply ingrained a sense of unbelonging in their composite habituses, which continually disrupted their ‘sense of the game’ daily. As Bourdieu highlights belief as an “inherent part of belonging to a field” (Bourdieu, 1990: 67) acquired in childhood. For the women in this chapter, there was no question about their own belief in their ‘right’ to belong in the fields they moved between, in the school, university, or even wider British society. However, belonging is also about ‘being at home’ and ‘fitting in’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006), and at a time when they were looking to explore their relationship with Islam, their identities as Muslim women were habitually disrupted, making them question in which spaces they could exist as Muslim women.

Making a difference and changing the world

A stark similarity in the testimonies of all participants was a deep commitment to social and political justice, and a drive to find their place in making a difference in the world. “From an early age, I used to say I wanted to change the world. I don’t think I knew what that really meant when I was younger… I just knew I wanted to make a difference” (Fatima). Most participants shared similar anecdotes from their youth. “I was really impacted by certain things happening in the world. Poverty across the world really bothered me. I just knew I needed to do something” (Ayesha). They described being very inquisitive and outspoken on issues they felt needed changing, and they’d ask their parents on ways they could help others. Several participants described strong-arming their parents into regularly financially supporting several charities that helped the poor, the environment, and even a donkey sanctuary. Aafiya said “I used to organise a termly showcase at school to raise money for charity. We’d organise different musical acts and charge for tickets, and we’d also organise a raffle and then donate everything to our chosen charity”. Amina said “I started reading about social justice too when I was in sixth form [sic]. I asked my sociology teacher, and she told me to read Peter Singer, do you know Peter Singer? Well, I was interested in his work, and I felt an even deeper commitment to making a difference”. Before attending university, two participants took part in the UK Government funded International Citizen Scheme (ICS) and volunteered in Kenya and India, respectively. Another described that before she went to university, she volunteered to tutor older members of the community to learn English. Two participants were UK Youth Parliament representatives, Members of Youth Parliament (MYP) when they were younger, and one was a member of the British Youth Council. For several participants, their commitment to social justice was the reason they chose to study medicine at university. “Growing up in my community, you see so much disparity in wealth and access to different services. Also, as an Asian community there was a lot of diabetes; you saw it everywhere. This really motivated me to be a doctor” (Fatima).

Similarly, most participants described being very politically engaged from an early age. They all read newspapers and following the news on TV and Radio. “I always knew what was going on in the world, more than other kids my age I would say” (Khadijah). Two-thirds of participants reported their parents were interested or engaged in politics, particularly UK politics and this shaped their engagement. “My parents were very politically engaged, and we listened to Radio 4 every morning, so I was always exposed to what was going on in politics” (Maryam). This deep commitment to social and political justice was inherited from their parents, a form of symbolic capital, which enabled them to engage with the world around them. Engaging in these conversations with their parents from an early age also encouraged to reflect not only on their own identities as Muslims, but how certain social and political issues impacted Muslims in the wider world. In other words, their embodied capacity to engage with the world around them.

The perception that there was little opportunity and space to engage or pursue their goals to "make the world a better place" further destabilised their sense of belonging. Participants found that as Muslim women, it was hard to know what to believe, who to support, and who supports them within these spaces. Participants cited examples of the ways that British Muslim women are represented in the media, specifically surrounding the persistent debate around the *hijab*. They also discussed the ways the government and the media were constantly trying to problematise their existence. "Everyone has always got something to say about Muslim women, for some reason the government thinks we are oppressed and don't have a voice (some people even think we don't speak English), and for some reason they always seem to think there is a problem with our very existence" (Zainab). Discussing her experiences as a MYP for UKYP, one participant remarked: "It's funny because I got involved with UKYP because I wanted to be involved in decision making in this country one day, and UKYP seemed like a really great initiative. At first, it was great, but then I realised that I was constantly approached with stereotypes and bias just because I was Muslim, and people didn't really want to hear from me, they want to speak for me". Similarly, another participant stated she had negative experiences trying to get involved with local youth political movements or organisation where there was little accommodation for Muslims, never mind Muslim women. "There'd always be residential meetings which obviously I wasn't allowed to attend, or they'd be no prayer space. Or ultimately, we didn't really discuss or address anything that impacted the lives of Muslims in the UK. No one wanted to talk about that".

Amina commented: "I thought about joining the Labour party like my dad, but I found it really difficult to reconcile what I thought was good for the country, and what was good for Muslims in the UK and worldwide". Several other participants echoed similar sentiments and talked about issues of foreign policy in Muslim countries, and counterterrorism in the UK. One participant summarised it as: "Let's face it, there's never really been a role for Muslim women in British politics. I know there are Muslim women MPs now, but you don't exactly see them wearing *hijab* or *niqab,* and you don't hear them speak out much, they just tow the party line".

***Halaqaat*, '*aqeeda*, and making a difference**

Joining HTB offered these women both the tools and opportunity to be part of a political project that claimed to have Muslims' best interests front and centre. It provided them with a cognitive framework and a solution to understand many issues facing Muslims across the world, and it offered them the opportunity to be part of something. Orofino (2015; 2020) describes that HT uses 'moral shock' framing (Wiktorowicz, 2005:95 In Orofino, 2015) to encourage individuals to ask questions about a specific topic about the way Muslims are treated, and the solutions that HT present (Orofino, 2015: 404). The women in this chapter were engaged in this 'moral shock' narrative through their encounters with *Da'i* at freshers' fayres, events, or through engaging with HT content online. Deeply embedded in their composite habituses was a desire for purpose and opportunity to make a change for Muslims across the world but they felt they did not have space, opportunity, or support to make that change. Once they were engaged with HTB, they were offered an opportunity to participate in important party organising activity such as leafletting campaigns, and attending and organising protests, seminars, and conferences, which made them feel like they were an important part of the collective. Engaging with HT ideology, e.g., accepting HT's idea of the caliphate as the best system to protect Muslims around the world (Orofino, 2015: 405) also gave them structure and purpose.

Nearly all participants encountered HTB at a time when they were looking to learn more about Islam and their own relationship with their faith. Through their engagement with HTB started to develop a dialogic, reflexive, and critical relationship with their faith and with other Muslims and started to find answers to some of the questions they had about being Muslim. Whilst much of this happened through informal interactions with other HTB affiliates they encountered at events and protests, the *halaqaat* was central to this journey. The *halaqaat* is designed to train HT students to think in a very critical way about their faith and their role in the world as Muslims, and this was exactly what the women in this chapter were looking for. For HT members, the *halaqaat* is a continuous learning process, and it requires the utmost commitment – one participant was travelling fifty miles to attend her weekly *halaqa.* Throughout the process, the students learnt their religious obligations and Islam through HT ideology. Consequently, HTB offered them a critical framework to engage with their faith and their identities as Muslim women.

HTB also offered the women in this chapter a place for friendship and support – a space to belong and feel safe. Once engaged with HTB, many participants moved into HT houses where they lived with other sisters, or at the very least they had other Muslim women to sit with at lunch or pray with during *Ramadan* at university. As Yuval-Davis

(2006: 199) argues, belonging is about feeling safe and fitting in, but it is also about narratives about who you are and where you belong. HT's 'aqeeda [doctrine] is imperative to the ways in which HT constructs narratives of belonging (Orofino, 2018). HT "relentlessly" seeks to inculcate the idea that Muslims are in danger and that the only way to protect them is through the restoration of the caliphate (Orofino, 2018: 270). For British Muslims, pivotal to this narrative of belonging is being part of a collective, which is working together towards this goal. Central to HT's *'aqeeda* is "bringing the Muslims back to living an Islamic way of life" (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2000: 12). For the women in this chapter, who did not have any desire to leave their homes in the UK nor feel any disconnection to the 'British' component to their identity, this helped them imagine a space for themselves to belong through the lens of HT ideology. Moreover, HT pushes its members to develop a strong bond with the group's *'aqeeda*, rather than to a single leader, so that affiliations remain stable over time (Orofino, 2018). Orofino's (2018; 2019) research focuses on how HT manages to maintain the long-term commitment of Western affiliates in Britain and Australia. She finds that, whilst leaders change, HT's *'aqeeda* has never changed and has functioned as a stable basis for long-lasting membership and commitment. The women in this chapter spoke of a strong connection to not only their 'sisters' but to the 'Hizb' even those who had left the organisation.

Personal motivations are often hugely over-explained as reasons for women's participation in extremist organisations, as they are used to negate women's support for the ideology of the organisation they are joining (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007; 2015). However, through focusing on the wider experiences of the women in this chapter, their choices to join HTB were informed and formed by the multiple and complicated ways their habituses were structured across the overlapping social fields and normative frameworks they were embedded within. In other ways, it reveals how their decisions to join HTB were 'messy' combinations of choice and agency in navigating the challenges they faced and finding an answer to the questions they had.

Crafting a religious identity against a secular Other

Through tracing the different choices women in their journeys into joining HTB also reveals the ways in which engaging with HTB gave them access to resources and tools to intentionally craft a new identity for themselves as British Muslim women, which aligned with both the ideology being taught to them by HT but their own preferences, tastes, and desires. An individual's acts and choices in this respect are not directed towards 'emancipation' or 'resistance', but towards developing the skills and capacities necessary for undertaking kinds of choices and actions (Mahmood, 2005). As discussed throughout this chapter, participants struggled with finding space to explore their identities as Muslim women at school, university, and in the wider public field. Many participants even described experimenting with 'watering' down their 'Muslimness' and performing 'whiteness' to fit in or avoid drawing attention to themselves.

HT insists that members – both individually and as a collective – must develop what it calls an 'Islamic personality'. The creation of an "Islamic" identity is a political act, achieved by changing "non-Islamic thoughts" into "Islamic thoughts" and removing any alternative thoughts or lifestyles (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 1999: 25). Throughout their interactions with HTB, the women in this chapter developed the skills to make sense of their religious identities and actively "do religion" in response to the challenges they faced (Avishai, 2018). For example, through adopting full HT dress, they were able to mark their identities as not only Muslim women but as conservative Muslim women both consciously and visibly. Several participants remarked that the full *jilbab* and *abaya* made them feel safer in public and prouder to be Muslim. It helped them 'rise above' the daily experiences of Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination they faced. In doing so, they were able to intentionally craft self-conscious religious identities against the majority secular Other as a means of navigating their everyday lives as British Muslim women.

Central to this was their engagement with HT's ideology and the debates and conversations they had with other HT women affiliates about gender equality. Through these interactions and the engagement with HT's ideology, they were able to critique the treatment of women in the West and beyond but also understand the contradictions and the discrimination they experienced and transform their own identities both intentionally and politically. A significant part of this was their views on the role of motherhood, specifically, 'Muslim' motherhood, and how this shaped their identities as 'mothers' or future 'mothers'. Before engaging with HTB respondents spoke of wanting their own mothers to be more Muslim and teach them more about Islam. They were also hyper-critical of their own mother's behaviour and choices, and they wanted to make different choices concerning their careers and bringing up children for themselves. As outlined in Chapter Four, 'motherhood' is central to HT's ideology on women, but HT also offers women a space to engage with Islam, be vocal about political issues, and a framework for navigating the challenges they face. For the women in this chapter who were mothers, they reported that joining HTB had offered them not only a framework for learning about Islam themselves, but how to bring up Muslim children. It also offered them space for community and to discuss the challenges of bringing up Muslim children in the West or being a working Muslim mother with other Muslim women like them.

Chapter summary

For the women who joined or considered joining HTB, their early experiences (and habituses) were strongly characterised by a set of deeply felt gendered contradictions, specifically in the strong prescription, but weak implementation of gendered values and behaviours in family. In many ways, their embodied capacity to critically engage with the social fields, practices, and normative frameworks, which shaped their lives and identities was, in many ways, no different to the women who hadn't joined or considered joining an extremist organisation. However, where they differed was feeling empowered, equipped, and supported to act, which impacted their propensity to be critically reflexive in certain social fields. Many participants also struggled with finding space to explore their identities as Muslim women at school, university, and in the wider public field.

For many, their engagement with HTB coincided with wanting to learn more about Islam and developing a social understanding of their role in the world as a Muslim woman. For those who already described themselves as religious, joining HTB was part of their "religious transformation" or "awakening" – becoming more connected with their faith. Others, who had described being less religious previously, felt their journey into HTB was concomitant with or, in some cases, constituted their religious education. Many participants who had originated from culturally religious backgrounds, where the only source of religious knowledge was gleaned from reading the *Qu'ran* or passed down from their parents, described they did not really understand their faith or what it meant to be Muslim until they encountered HT. Most participants felt the overwhelming need to ask questions: questions about Islam, about being a Muslim, and about how to respond to different issues in their everyday life. However, they did not have access to the religious knowledge or community to find answers to these questions, and as a result, felt disempowered. Engaging with HTB offered them a dialogic, reflexive, and critical way to learn about their faith that their parents and community did not offer them. Engaging with HTB gave them to tools to craft a self-conscious religious identity against the secular Other they felt threatened by, enabling them to develop strategies to navigate their daily life as a Muslim woman.

Most participants described feeling passionate about making a difference in the world but lacking the tools and opportunity to do something about it, especially as a Muslim. Several participants were politically engaged from a young age – two members were involved with the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) as teenagers, and another was involved with the British Youth Council (BYC). However, as a Muslim woman, they found that it was hard to know what to believe, who to support, who supports you. HTB promised them the opportunity to belong to a bigger cause with other Muslim women like them in both the UK and the world and equip them with the tools and resources to do so.

Alongside negotiating the gendered contradictions present in their family and wider social environment, nearly all participants experienced loneliness and isolation amongst their peer groups. For many, this was concurrent with starting university, where they struggled to fit in with their peers within the wider university culture. Moreover, all participants encountered racism and Islamophobia from a very early age, which impacted the ways they interacted or desired to interact with their non-South Asian Muslim peers. In many ways, social isolation can be understood to be the catalyst in driving these women towards HTB. For many, they came across HTB in a search, not only for an understanding of their faith but in a moment where they needed friendship, support, and peer interaction.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“I just felt like I was taking control”: The British *Muhajirat* of ISIS

“I was drawn in by the passion and commitment to something with meaning. I hadn’t seen that elsewhere, and it excited me.”

Nadia

“I remember I was ashamed; really ashamed of being Muslim.”

Dina

Chapter overview

This chapter is based on interviews with twelve young women aged eighteen to twenty-four years who joined or considered joining ISIS (women affiliated with ISIS).

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Family life and upbringings

Family Field

Nearly all participants spoke positively about their upbringings and their relationships with both parents, characterising them as "ok, but not close", describing there was an apparent line drawn between the role of parent and child. Their parents were strict, commanding authority and respect. This is for all except Rana and Sabeen who felt that their parents had little time for them. In Rana's words, "it was like they sometimes just forgot to parent me and left my Nani [Grandmother] to do it", and Leila whose father was estranged, and mother was often out working two jobs or busy with her mosque community. This left Leila to care for her brothers. Interestingly, nearly all participants also described close relationships with their siblings, regardless of their position in the family, e.g., youngest, middle, or eldest child. This was echoed from a parental perspective by Chandi's father: "All my children always got on very well. They were very close and protective of each other". This reported familial closeness is interesting, given that by joining or considering travelling to ISIS-controlled territories effectively meant leaving their families behind, with no certainty of seeing them again in the future.

Most participants also described their parents as strict and "very protective” or described their parenting as "heavy-handed". This meant that they didn't have a lot of freedom growing up, and, for some, to the present day. Iman stated: "My parents are very protective. We're not allowed to go out late, and they have to know exactly where we are at all times". Sabeen reiterated this saying: "I wasn't allowed out on my own until very recently. My parents want to know where I am at all times". This lack of freedom was a common theme amongst nearly all participants, except for Ayana. Ayana reported that her parents were much more laid back than her friends' parents and allowed her on occasions to stay out until 10 pm. "I don't know why really because they were strict in other ways especially regarding school, maybe it's because I was more like a son than a daughter… also until my brothers went to uni [sic] we did everything together which meant that I was allowed to stay out later because I was with them, and then things just didn't change". Zakiyah observed she had a bit more freedom than her peers, and if she was home by dinner, she could spend time at her friend's houses after school. However, the experiences of other participants were very different. Several reported that they had never been round to a friend's house for dinner, they had never been allowed to attend a party, and, over half had never been allowed on a school trip, even just for a day during school hours. Iman said: "I wasn't really allowed to go anywhere without my parents, my sisters or me. We didn't push back against it because it was just how it was, but yeah, we weren't even allowed to go to Drayton Manor [theme park] with our teachers".

The family acts the cultural context of childhood and structures everyday life for and by its members. As a field, it generates the intergenerational transmission of different kinds of capital from parent to children, but as a ‘practice’ it sets the frames of the possible actions for the child. By their protectiveness, participants’ parents were instilling a sense that as young Muslim women, they were different to others they interacted with, and the rules were different for them.

When they did leave the house under the supervision of their family, their appearance and behaviour were monitored by their parents. In the words of Yasmin: "I wasn't allowed to choose my clothes or what I wore ever actually. My mum always made sure I was dressed appropriately and that my *hijab* was on right, and then when I got married my mother-in-law did the same". Dina reiterated this: "It was made very clear that when we were outside the house, we represented the family and that we had to make sure we looked like honourable, good Muslim girls". This duty to uphold the family's reputation as a 'good Muslim family' was also reported by those who had more freedom. Ayana, Zakiyah, and Nadia all reported instances of where their mothers would force them to wear cultural dress, usually *Shalwar Kameez**, to a family gathering or to a non-uniform day at school to make sure people knew they were a "good Muslim family" who were bringing their daughters up right. This is consistent with other women's testimonies featured in previous chapters, and existing literature which focuses on the concept of honour in South Asian families, and the role of women's bodies and lives are closely monitored to symbolise and uphold the honour or reputation of their families (Dwyer, 2000: 477).

Several participants described constantly refusing to wear “cultural stuff” (Zakiyah’s words) to family or community events as “small acts of rebellion” (Nadia’s words), but in comparison to the women in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, they didn’t question or analyse the wider significance of having to ‘uphold the family’s reputation’. As Mahmood argues (2005: 136), habituation has, if it is to produce attentiveness or virtue, to be more than mindless repetition, it “also endows the self with particular capacities through which the subject comes to enact the world” on their own. Through making the child “her conscious of her gestures, glances, and thoughts” (Mahmood, 2006: 54), parents contribute to training the child to become reflexive – developing an embodied capacity to critically engage in the world. However, the parents of the women in this chapter did not encourage them to think or talk about why they were doing what they were doing – even in terms of why they wanted them to dress or behave a certain way.

Bottero (2010: 14) describes that we routinely participate in practices that are “both habitually reproduced and widely experienced as troubling” but given that these practices are collectively engaged with daily, they seem resistant to change. By routinely sharing commentary on their joint practice, individuals locate and provide justifications for their shared ways of living and enable them to establish what is acceptable and what they can get away with. However, without engaging in any time of critical with their parents on why they were doing what they were doing, they did not have the same access to reflexivity as the capital as the women in the previous chapters had.

Lack of Space & Privacy

A uniting theme amongst nearly all the participants was the lack of space to figure out and define who they were, or what they liked or disliked, and what they wanted from their future. Moreover, it was commonly associated or rationalised in reference to their gender. Tahani describes: "Well, because I was a girl because we were girls, me and my sisters, there is like specific ways you have to behave, like extra rules that boys don't have. A lot of the time it's just unspoken like you're not allowed to do something because you're a girl, or I'd have to stop my homework early to help my mum prepare dinner when my brothers were just left to focus". Ayana adds: "Growing up my brothers got away with so much. They could go out whenever they wanted, could eat dinner when they wanted. My parents didn't even put much pressure on them to pray. Me and my brothers loved playing pranks, and I'd always get in trouble because I wasn't behaving properly for a girl, but my brothers never did".

As discussed, acceptance of this lack of space and privacy as this is "just how it is" was common amongst most participants. They stated they agreed that girls should have less freedom and should support their parents with more domestic chores than their brothers. Zakiyah says: "I used to push back against little things like not wanting to do my homework, or eat okra or *jeera* [cumin], but ultimately I just did what they told me to do because I knew they knew best, they still do". Even, Ayana, who, compared to others, was more rebellious and independent, and staying out late, drinking alcohol, and sometimes taking drugs, described that, at the end of the day, they knew it was temporary behaviour, and she would ultimately settle down and follow her parent's rules, whether that be getting married to a "nice Muslim boy", going to university, or pursuing the career path her parents wanted them to follow. Zakiyah added: "I think that girls do need protecting more than boys and that they shouldn't have too much independence, and I would go further and say this mostly applies to Muslim girls because our duties and priorities should be different".

Moreover, like the experiences to the women in the previous chapters, this was often positioned in opposition to whiteness, or Englishness, which was always described as undesirable. "Back then, my parents made me think there's like Muslim girls, or Asian girls, and white girls, and Muslim girls should do this, and white girls do that, but Muslim girls don't behave that way because we are Muslim, and that's why we're different. The stuff they used to say like white girls get accidentally pregnant as teenagers or do drugs and stuff and wear certain stuff, and this was unappealing to me. I didn't even question them" (Dina). "What they said was consistent with how I saw Muslim women around me, like my friends, and their mums, so I just thought that they were right and followed what they said" (Tahani).

In the family field, the early transmission of values, beliefs, culture, or resources was entrenched in a highly gendered normative framework. Whilst there are similarities between the habituses of all women in this thesis what distinguishes the early experiences of the women in this chapter is the strictness and protectiveness of their parents which was embedded in gendered and cultural norms, and the lack of critical reflection and critique on their childhoods. There is less presence of contradiction, whilst the experiences are the same, the perception is different. The women in this chapter didn’t doubt the gendered rules and behaviour their parents dictated – they felt and commented on the gendered differences, but they didn’t feel any injustice - ‘just how it is’ for us was a common theme.

Educational Field - School

The perception of a lack of control was emphasised further in the acceptance of nearly all participants in their descriptions of their parents as clearly dictating, or strongly influencing their education choices and their future career choices. Iman stated:

> "… when it came it choosing my GCSEs and A-Levels, my dad just chose them for me and said that I had to do these subjects if I was going to apply to be an optician, he like decided it for me. I think one day he even said to me and my sister, one of you should be an optician, and one of you can be a dentist. So, we just listened and did what he wanted. I didn't even consider the possibility of doing anything else. I just thought he knew best".

This was a common sentiment reflected throughout conversations with my participants. Their parents had already defined a set path for them in terms of their futures, what career they were to pursue, and when they would get married, and, for some, who they would marry. Rana describes: "yeah there was no compromise, it was decided from day one I'd stay on and do A-Levels, and I'd have to do science ones so I could be a doctor like my mum and dad. In their eyes, there was no other option, and nothing was open for discussion, so I just did it". Those who had brothers added that there was more freedom for their brothers in their life choices, which included discussion on what they wanted to study and do in the future. Ayana said: "My brother wanted to do engineering, not medicine as my parents wanted and he just said so, and they let him. I didn't know what I wanted to do so I never said anything and just did what they told me to". Those participants whose parents were less forceful in how they believed their daughters' lives and careers should pan out, described that, despite having some choice in what they studied, or the career they pursued, they had no idea what they should do. For example, Nadia described: "I just had no idea. I was like mediocre at everything. I liked Drama and English, but because those things don't have set career paths, I never discussed them with my mum or dad, I just didn't know, so even though I did have a choice, it felt like I didn't". Accordingly, most participants had resigned themselves to or accepted the path scripted out for them. Sabeen said: "Like I didn't feel like I had a choice in the matter. I didn't mind really. Like my parents knew better and would choose something that was best for me". Tahani adds: "I felt that I had no control over my future, I didn't overthink it at the time, but reflecting, I never made my own decisions at all. I just did whatever I was told to". From a parental perspective, Iqra's mother added: "Iqra wanted to go and do drama, but this is not an appropriate or good career for a Muslim girl. How many Muslim girls do you see in Hollywood films, hey [sic]? Not in good ones. We just wanted the best for her, so we did push her into choosing the right GCSEs that would make sure she had as many options as possible. She's very smart so she had to play her cards right to make sure she went the right way".

Alongside accepting their parents’ gendered norms, values and rules, several participants described that they never questioned the path chosen for them, because they didn't know what they wanted to do, or had ever really thought about it. "My parents made it clear from early on what I should do and how I should behave, so I didn't know what the alternative was, I wasn't aware what other things I could do" (Yasmin). Without the opportunity, or the encouragement to think about their futures, nearly all participants lacked the embodied capacity to critically evaluate their desires, strengths, or goals.

As in Iqra's case, her mother described that she wanted to study drama, but her parents told her that this was not a good career option, and pushed her into choosing a different path, thus, possibly discrediting her preferences and trust in her judgement. Similarly, by never perceiving the decision as their own, instead of one that would be made for them, as in the case of Rana, Ayana, or Iman, there was little space for these women to even reflect on what they wanted; their choices were constrained and limited, if not, non-existent, which meant in making decisions surrounding their own future, their agency was limited. Without being engaged in a conversation about their own choices, the women in this chapter were prevented from reflecting on what they wanted to study and what they wanted for their futures. They were also denied the opportunity to say or were ignored when they did say that they “weren’t good at science” or “found maths too hard”. Again, their embodied capacity or propensity to negotiate their own identities lives, and futures were under-developed by the ways, in which their habituses had been structured across multiple social fields.

At school, the women in this chapter felt they were constantly walking a tightrope of hypervisibility/invisibility. In the classroom, like the women in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, the women in this chapter described a disconnect between the expectations of their parents and the support and teaching they received from their teachers. Where the women in the previous chapters felt that this was driven by stereotyped perceptions of Muslim women, the women in this chapter, when it came it learning, just felt that they were invisible: Nadia: “It’s really normal for Asian parents to be pushy innit [sic], and but teachers don’t really care. There was [sic] like thirty maybe thirty-five people in my class. They don’t pay attention to the Muslim girl. Unless you make them. Lol [sic].” Leila added: “Teachers don’t really care. They just come and teach the kids they wanna [sic] teach. Like you can sit there and do what you want, and if you don’t make too much noise, they don’t notice cos [sic] you’re invisible to them”. Several participants relayed how this was an obstacle when they were applying to university. “My parents didn’t go to university, and they were really supportive, but they didn’t really know how to help me write my UCAS statement. Your teacher is supposed to help you, but in class, they just spend the time answering the questions of the white kids and the boys, and we were just left to help each other”. “[T]he habitus transformed by the action of the school” (Bourdieu, 1972, cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 134). For some individuals, the habitus quickly adapts, but for others, like the women in this chapter, it continually “misfires” (Bourdieu, 2000: 160) when there are contradictions between the experiences and expectations of their families and a different field, like the school. The disruptions between their parent’s expectations and the teaching and support they received from their teachers resulted in apathy and disengagement for this group of women as they felt simultaneously invisible and ‘out of place’ in the school field.

Even when they were targeted by other students both inside and outside of the classroom in acts of Islamophobia or racism, they felt that the focus was on the *other* student as the perpetrator and not on them as the victim. Sabeen shared: “Once this boy wrote “Muslim P*ki Terrorist” and coloured in a bomb on the back of my school shirt and then as I got up to leave science class his friend ripped off my scarf. And he got suspended right, but no one asked me I was ok. And when he came back to school, he just came back to the same science class. They didn't even make him say sorry". Dina shared a similar experience:

> "In maths, me and my friends used to sit at the front because it was better to see the board and focus, but there was this group that use kick our chairs and yank on the back of my *hijab.* Once they kicked my friend's chair so hard, she fell off and cut her head. The teacher shouted, and then that group got moved to sit at the front of the class, and we had to sit at the back where we couldn't really hear properly, and Miss[the teacher] never saw our hands when we wanted to answer a question".

Within these experiences of Islamophobia and racism, there is a tension between the hypervisibility of their gendered identities and appearances as Muslim women amongst their peers and invisibility of the erasure of their experiences of victims of this discrimination and bullying by those responsible for their safeguarding. These experiences routinely disrupted their 'sense of the game', destabilising their sense of who they were as young Muslim women, their sense of belonging, and their grasp of the rules of the game in the school field as they were treated differently to their peers. From the security and protection of the family field to the insecurity of school field, it demonstrates how the composite habituses of the women in this chapter are formed and informed by multiple overlapping forces by multiple forces and how they take up positions within multiple fields.

In Chapter One, I argued that the hyper counter-extremism and securitisation of Muslim students and communities in the UK has permeated the individual subjectivities of young Muslim women in structuring their composite habituses and deeply destabilising their sense of belonging. At school, nearly all women in this chapter felt that although their learning and needs were invisible, their Muslimness was 'hypervisible'. Nadia: "So, like

[sic], maybe it’s hard to explain, but they didn’t see me, but they saw this *signals to *hijab**. Like when you walk down the corridor, and you see the headteacher, she doesn’t see another student she just sees a walking *hijab,* and she’s like ‘better watch out for that one’”. Being watched, or under surveillance, was a common theme amongst many of the younger participants. Zakiyah reported: “Yeah man [sic], you can’t do anything Muslim at school. Like no way. It’s even risky wearing a scarf. That’s why I didn’t. Because 1. My mum told me that you’re more likely gonna [sic] get attacked that way; 2. The teachers just think you’re just some oppressed little Muslim girl or you’re gonna [sic] become a terrorist”.

Whereas participants in previous chapters directly referenced ‘Prevent’ and knowledge of ‘Prevent’ and or UK counter-extremism policy, the women in this chapter spoke more indirectly of the ways in which the ‘Prevent’ duty impacted their experiences at school. Only two participants referenced ‘Prevent’ in name. Several participants spoke of letters being sent on how to their parents about “warning signs of radicalisation”. Rana reported: “The school sent this letter to my dad, and said like, if your kid seems like they are becoming more Muslim you should be worried. It was pretty silly”. Iman added: “We all got this letter that invited parents to go to a meeting at the school about “radicalisation” and my dad went to the meeting, and at the meeting they said that you should be worried if your kid is doing this, this, and this and, that the school has a responsibility to report Muslim kids to the police”. Others (from different schools) reported being made to attend a workshop where they had to learn about ‘British values’ with only other Muslim children.[60]

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[60] Since 2015, as part of the Prevent Duty all schools must teach ‘British values’ to the children in their care.

Several participants reported that this made them feel that they could not be themselves at school, that there was no space for them to be Muslim. It made them feel they had no control over their identities as Muslim women. They constantly felt they were either being watched by their teachers in case their 'Muslimness' "spread like a virus" (Tahani). In response, several participants also reported that their parents told them not to talk about Islam at school as to not draw attention themselves. Heath-Kelly (2017: 297) describes how the deployment of the 'Prevent' Duty through national networks of education and healthcare provision has constructed imaginaries of 'pre-crime' spaces, "imagining all bodies are potentially vulnerable to infection by 'radicalisers' and thus warrant surveillance". Goldberg et al. (2016: 2-3) describe 'pre-crime' spaces' as "physical spaces and times where professionals 'operate' or act within the aims of the 'Prevent' programme". The construction of the school as 'pre-crime' space mirrors "epidemiologies of threats to population health such as cholera" (ibid: 302). The construction of the school as a 'pre-criminal' space maps possible 'symptoms' of 'radicalisation' on to Muslim women's bodies, which are closely monitored in case they become more Muslim or at risk of 'contagion'. In other words, it 'radicalises' the very nature of their identities regardless of their consideration of engaging with an extremist organisation.[61]

The perceived lack of choice and control in their lives and futures was impacted by the nature of their upbringings and the choices about their futures being made for them by their parents but reinforced by the lack of choice and control over their identities as Muslim women at school. The tensions between their invisibility as learners and their hypervisibility as securitised and discriminated against Muslim bodies routinely disrupted their 'sense of the game'. It prevented them from 'being Muslim' and exploring what that meant to them. As Bottero (2010) argues, central to reflexively is engaging in commentaries with others about the practices we engage in to negotiate our challenges and constraints but to also assess what we can get away with in changing. Within the perceived opportunity to do this at all, the young women in this study had a less developed embodied capacity to critically engage with the world around them. As Nadia describe: "I felt like I'd been muted as a Muslim. Like I not made into a mute. I'm not being discriminatory. I mean I feel like someone pressed the mute button and put me in black and white or sepia. D'ya get me? [sic]?"

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[61] Shereen Fernandez (2018) extends the concept of the 'pre crime' space to discuss the impact of the Prevent Duty of the private sphere of the Muslim home.

Understanding of Islam and the wider world

Growing up, most participants felt that religion was generally not a significant influence in their lives, and many described the lack of an existing personal relationship with their faith prior to their engagement with ISIS. However, until this point, being Muslim for the majority was just something they were told they were from an early age, nothing more than a label, a 'premodifier to their identity'. Importantly, the Islam they knew was prescriptive and embedded within a cultural framework inherited from their parents. Their understanding of what it means to be a 'real Muslim' was fundamentally a set of behaviours and values prescribed by their parents and lacked any theological underpinning. Growing up, most participants were not encouraged to ask questions about Islam or seek answers to challenges in their lives by turning to Islam. As described above, they were also not encouraged to talk about Islam at school or outside their home or community, which they describe as a means of protection. Instead, they were encouraged to dogmatically follow religion they had learnt with little reflection, critical engagement, or application to their real lives and everyday realities.

Religious Field

Growing up, most participants attended *madrasa*, where they learnt how to read the Qu'ran and a basic understanding of their faith. "Like, we went to *madrasa* when we were little, but I didn't really listen, no one does really, and it was just boring" (Zakiyah). Nadia adds: "I went to *madrasa* with my sisters and cousins, but it was quite formal, and we just would read through the *Qu'ran* without any discussion on what it said. I only liked going really because I got to see my cousins". Most participants stated that aside from attending *madrasa,* everything else they knew about Islam and their faith was what their parents told them. "We weren't encouraged to ask questions, just listen to what the Aunties said at *madrasa* and what mum and dad told us at home" (Dina).

Moreover, most participants identified that growing up religion was just 'what mum and dad told them'. There was little knowledge or understanding of what the *Qu'ran* said, or discussion of *hadith*, or any theological debate. Over half of the participants stated that they had no idea what *hadith* was and had never considered Islam outside the words of the *Qu'ran*. "I learnt it of course. Like I knew what it was, and what Islam was about but only from like reciting the *Qu'ran*" (Yasmin).

Like the experiences of the women in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, their parents' understanding of their faith was often grounded in social and cultural understandings of Islam – how to behave, who to spend time with, and what was acceptable to wear. "The *hijab* thing is a perfect example because my mum used to say ah you need to wear a *hijab* to be "good Muslim girl" [impersonating mother], and I'd try it in a different style, and she would be like no, this is the proper way, the Bengali way. So really, I kind of just was like whatever, surely it doesn't matter if I cover my head with a Tesco's bag" (Zakiyah). Tahani also reported that her mother used Islam to justify specific rules or behaviours: "It was always, be a good Muslim girl, do this, that. Or a good Muslim girl should XYZ… I didn't question it at the time, but I didn't understand why it made me more religious, or it means I was a good Muslim girl by not doing certain things".

This also related to the performance of religion. Sabeen notes: "I prayed every day from a young age with my mother, granny, and aunties, but I never really thought of anything when I was doing it, at first I just copied them, and I just used to zone out actually". Ayana also adds: "We did *Ramadan,* but the only praying I'd do was to get my period because I was hungry and couldn't be bothered". Several other participants echoed similar thoughts and highlighted that, despite the performing religious practices and rituals alongside their parents, particularly around specific times religious importance like *Ramadan*, they didn't think about the reasons behind these things.

Consequently, most participants lacked a personal and dialectical relationship with their faith, limiting the development of their embodied capacity to critically engage not only with Islam but the wider world. Their understanding of Islam was spoon-fed by their parents, and they were not encouraged to ask questions, or critically and independently engage with their faith. "Yeah, it wasn't a conversation, just this is what it is, and this is what we do" (Nadia). Dina reiterated: "Islam existed in its little pocket, my life growing up. I didn't use my religion in my daily life, and I rarely thought about how to interpret what I did through Islam. This is just how I was brought up. Like I believed in God and prayed but didn't think more about it the rest of the time".

Several participants described that they started to develop more of an interest in Islam before their decision or consideration of joining ISIS. For those who did have questions or a growing curiosity about their faith, they found that they had little access to anyone to talk to about it. Conversations about faith were not typical or expected in their families, and they had little access to a religious community who they could approach to ask questions. Ayana said: "I knew my parents knew why they believed in Islam, but they never really encouraged us to talk about it, and I never used to go to the mosque so when I wanted to learn more about Islam, I just started my own research online". Nadia also added: "My dad was encouraging of me becoming more connected to my faith, but he didn't really try to talk to me about it, he did tell me to go to the mosque a bit more which I did, but I didn't really fit in, I didn't like it — there weren't many young people, and the older aunties were a bit scary and intimidating".

In some cases, like Ayana's, parents did suggest their daughters start attending the mosque more frequently and turn to the religious community for guidance through their challenges. However, Nadia, like Ayana and others, found that when she did start attending the mosque, the community wasn't what she was hoping. In her words: "My dad suggested I go with him to the mosque and some of the women's section stuff as well, but I really didn't like it. It was mostly old people, and they were quite patronising, and it was boring really, not engaging at all". Ayana describes that after her sexual assault, she tried to go to the mosque more, and start conversations with other women, asking them questions about part of her faith she wanted to learn about. However, she found, rather than being supported, she was judged for her lack of knowledge, and there wasn't really a community for her there. Again, this is consistent with the testimonies of other Muslim women in this thesis. Chapter Six discussed the role of space and community in the development of a relationship with faith and religious identity formation outside the home.

For many participants, this led them to search for answers about Islam online. Several participants described, like many other women in this thesis, that they started listening to podcasts, watching YouTube videos, and reading blogs about being a Muslim woman written by other Muslim women. However, unlike the other women in this thesis, they also found themselves in critically different online spaces where they encountered different conversations and different people – in some cases, the people who were responsible for recruited them to ISIS or at the very least introduced them to ISIS propaganda. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse their journeys through these spaces. However, several recent studies have explored the way. Western women ISIS affiliates interact in online spaces to (see Nilsen, 2020; Pearson, 2017).

Experiences in the wider social field

Islamophobia and racism

For many, these feelings of isolation and disconnection were compounded by their lifelong experiences of Islamophobia and racism, resulting in a distancing of themselves from the wider community and society more broadly. Whilst many of these experiences echo the experiences of women in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, there is a clear distinction in the severity of some of the experiences recounted by the women in this chapter, specifically. However, in some cases, it is difficult to know whether the severity of the Islamophobia or discrimination they experience was worse than the women in the previous chapter, or whether their perception and its impact on them was more severe. Fundamentally, their experiences of Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination caused routinely disrupted their ‘sense of the game’ and deeply ingrained a sense of unbelonging in their everyday lives.

For all participants, their understanding of- and relationship with Islam and being Muslim in the UK was heavily influenced by their experiences of Islamophobia and racism. "Everyone knows it's not a good thing to be a Muslim in the UK. People hate us" (Dina). Sabeen recounts: "When I was about eight years old, me and my mum were spat on and called bloody terrorist P**is on the Tube". Most participants reported verbal attacks like this one, which often conflated their perceived ethnicity and religion into one discriminatory slur. Nearly all participants reported having been called a "terrorist" multiple times from a very early age. Ayana: "I think I was about 4 when me and my brother first got called terrorists. We were on the tube on the way back from school, and this guy started yelling at my brother and calling us mini terrorists, and other racist stuff". Another participant said that she'd been called a "Muslim terrorist" countless times. Nearly all participants also recounted experiences of physical attacks:

> "You become a bit numb to it after a while, but someone has tried to pull my *hijab* off probably every year since I started wearing it which was ten years, I guess. Sometimes this was in the playground at school or after school by racist *chavs* [sic], but still other kids, a few other times it was on the bus or tube and once in the street, and this was by adults. Like, who walks up to a young kid and decides they're going to assault her by ripping an item of her clothing off. Imagine that a middle-aged bloke walked up to a young white girl and ripped off her top in public. There would be outrage".
>
> (Nadia)

Zakiyah shared that she and her friends were chased home from school by a group of 'white girls' threatening to throw acid on them: "They started yelling stuff at us and running at us shouting that they were going to throw acid on our 'ugly monkey Muslim faces'. I've never run so fast in my life. One of them did throw a bit, and it got on my friend's *hijab,* but luckily it turned out it was just water, but it was so scary". Chandi's father added: "Once my daughters were walking to school together and were spat on by some drunk men in their forties. Chandi's sister wouldn't go to school for a week and wouldn't stop crying, and Chandi just kept washing and asked her mum to keep washing her clothes. I think it made her feel dirty". Rana and Sabeen also shared a similar experience: "We were walking home once with Rana's Nani [Grandmother], and some people tried to push her into the road called her "an old P*ki bitch", she fell over and then when one of them grabbed my scarf, and the other one spat in Rana's face".

All participants also recounted incidences of Islamophobic and racist micro-aggressions, particularly at school or when navigating public transport. Sabeen described: "It was quite common that people would refuse to sit next to me at school, and the other Muslim girls too". Yasmin added to this: "You probably don't realise this, but when a Muslim girl is on public transport in a *hijab*, people move away like you're diseased… it happens all the time. People stare at you, look over your shoulder at your phone, or move away". Other participants reported occurrences of people repeatedly asking where they were from: "people love to ask Muslims where they're from. I'm always like London, mate [sic]", or, assuming their ethnicity: "sometimes people just assume you're from India, and it's like I'm Bengali, yeah, but it don't [sic] matter man I'm from England". Ayana said: "People always used to make a point how different I was for an Asian or Muslim girl", and Zakiyah added: "The number of times I've heard… you're so pretty even with your head covered". These daily microaggressions experienced by all participants functioned to distance them from the place they thought was their home.

Therefore, Islamophobia permeated every area of their life, at school, in the community, and at home where their parents would often discuss their experiences of discrimination or discrimination experienced by other Muslims they knew. "I highly doubt there's a non-white person out there who's never experienced hate or been attacked because of their race or religion, and I'm not saying it didn't affect me – it did – but my parents talked about this all the time, how discriminated Muslims are, and unaccepting society is of us" (Tahani). Tahani also describes that her father was also very politically engaged and "used to go on rants" about the British government, and the way Muslims are treated. Others reiterated similar experiences stating that the Islamophobia they experienced was genuine and affected them and the way they engaged with others, but their parents' negative descriptions and warnings of life in the UK as a Muslim amplified their perceptions of discrimination. "I'm not saying the things they said weren't true, but, looking back, it felt like they were fear-mongering in their warnings. When I couldn't get a job after uni [sic], my parents were insistent in was because I was Muslim, and Muslims are discriminated against, and it's much harder for Muslims to get jobs, and it just made me feel worse because I couldn't change that about myself" (Dina). Iqra's mother describes this from a parent's perspective: "I was very worried about them [her children] going out in the world. Yes, life is hard for Muslims, and people can be so cruel, and I wanted my children to know that that, so they were prepared. One day Iqra came running home crying with paint all over her that some boys had thrown on her near the estate, calling her a 'Muslim whore' and told her to go back to her own country. I was so sad to see my daughter that way, so I did try and protect them and make sure they were aware that life is difficult as a Muslim in the UK".

Shame and unbelonging

Importantly, for nearly all participants, these experiences of Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination resulted in feelings of shame and embarrassment towards themselves and being Muslim. In the words of Leila, "I was embarrassed about being Muslim for a long time. Like it's embarrassing because people say things wherever you go, and you start to believe them, and it just makes you feel ashamed". Nadia says: "I used to wish every day that I wasn't me, I wasn't Muslim, I didn't wear a *hijab*". Yasmin said: "I didn't want to stand out. But as Muslim girls, we always stand out. I begged my mum to let me remove my scarf. They were girls at school who wore it but didn't seem to get bothered by people, so I wanted to take mine off, so people didn't know I was Muslim". For Ayana, Iman, Dina, and Yasmin, this shame was also embedded in their personal experiences of sexual assault, rejection, and divorce. In Ayana's words: "I was so deeply ashamed. I thought it was my fault for engaging in *haram* stuff like drinking and smoking weed. I thought that it was karma for that, and I was ashamed of myself for getting myself to that point". Reflecting on her divorce, Yasmin added: "I was embarrassed about getting a divorce like other people finding out, but mostly I was ashamed and disappointed in myself that it didn't work out like I wasn't a good enough wife for him, and I failed at my duty".

Shame can have long-term emotional effects that impede an individual's propensity to build a healthy relationship with themselves that allows them to properly filter and respond to potentially harmful messages and behaviours (Frost, 2011). Stigma and shame are a process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity" (Goffman, 1963: 3).

As Goffman describes, one type of stigma is racial or religious discrimination. Such stigmatisation threatens the labelled individuals' moral standing' (Yang et al., 2014: 1533), and challenges their moral presentation of self (Ryan, 2011: 1048). "The stigmatised may feel marginalised, hated, undermined, and even threatened" (ibid). In other words, it questions their understanding of who they are and how they present who they are to others. It disrupts their sense of belonging in a social field and their ability to feel safe. Ultimately, stigma undermines the 'normal' identity of the individual and labels him/ her 'abnormal' (Goffman, 1963). When someone acts or says in a way that suggests "something is wrong with you", the message that is recorded rather than disputed and leads to feelings of shame (ibid). The individual begins to believe that something is wrong with them, and if they do not have the propensity to self-reflect or critically engage with who they are, and what they believe – they often look outside for someone or something to tell them what is right. In this case, they don't trust themselves or their beliefs, they are led to believe they are unreliable, so they turn elsewhere for answers.

Shame and trauma are often over-explained as a causal factor in why women join terrorist organisations, especially regarding sexual or domestic violence (see Bloom, 2011; 2007). Trauma is often used to diminish women’s decisions for engaging in extremism, characterising them as dispossessed driven by emotion and irrational (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007: 188). The personal trauma experienced by Ayana and Yasmin, although deeply troubling, is somewhat unsurprising given the sample size of women in this thesis (total = seventy-three). In focusing on the shame that the women in this chapter felt, I am not suggesting there was something unique or perverted about the specific psychologies that drove them to join or considering joining ISIS (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007: 188), nor was there anything irrational in their decision. Rather, I am highlighting the damaging impact their experiences had on their identities and relationship with their faith, and the ways it critically impacted their sense of belonging.

Having a sense of belonging goes beyond what might initially be thought of as feelings of ‘being at home’ or of seeing oneself as ‘fitting in’, whether to a community or place (Yuval-Davis, 2006). ‘Belonging’ is believing one belongs in a space. Belonging is also about “emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’, and about feeling ‘safe’” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). Between the strict cultural expectations of their parents and the hypervisibility of Muslim women’s bodies in the school and the community through both experiences of Islamophobia and the securitisation of public spaces through ‘Prevent’, the women in this chapter felt they had little choice and control over their daily lives and movements as Muslim women. As argued in Chapter One, the ‘practices’ of counter-extremism and Islamophobia have deeply permeated the individual subjectivities of young South Asian Muslim women. As a result, the women in this chapter had little opportunity and space to explore their own identities, tastes, beliefs, and aspirations. Fundamentally, it made them feel unsafe in every social field they existed within. It critically destabilised their emotional attachment to the place that was supposed to be their home, and it made them feel ashamed of a major part of their identities. However, despite being routinely told their identities as Muslims were antithetical to being British, or they should ‘go back to where they came from’, it wasn’t the ‘British’ element of the identity they question, it was the ‘Muslim’. As with the women in the other chapters in this thesis, there was no question about them being or feeling ‘British’, they knew they *should* ‘belong’ and feel like they belong, but the routine disruptions in their habitus deeply ingrained a belief of *unbelonging.*

Pivotal to the responses of the women in Chapter Six in navigating this discrimination, those who had not joined an extremist organisation, was their claim to 'normality'; their command and ownership of their identities, and their active responses and strategies in the face of this discrimination to reclaim or define their own space in wider society. For the women in this chapter, their very similar accounts of discrimination resulted in feelings of shame and embarrassment, impacting their sense of self and emotional connection to the people and places in their daily lives.

Escape and *hijra*

‘Belonging’ also draws attention to a dimension that encapsulates not just ‘be-ing’, but also the yearning of ‘longing’ (Probyn, 1996), and “perceptions of belonging can become reference points of a sense of self and a sense of (dis)connection to people and places” (Christou, 2011: 250). As a response to the challenges they were facing, participants spoke of wanting to escape and running away. In the words of Yasmin: “I’d just had enough of it. I just wanted to get out”. Tahani added: “I just wanted to live somewhere where I could wake up and think this is a good place to be a Muslim, Muslims are respected here”. Participants spoke of wanting to find somewhere they could feel safe and welcome.

Given the centrality of the concept of *hijra* to ISIS recruitment propaganda targeted at Western women (Perešin & Cervone, 2015: 495; Lahoud, 2018), the importance of ‘escaping’ in the testimonies of the women affiliated with ISIS in this study is interesting. Traditionally, *hijra* refers to the Prophet Muhammad’s migration (622 CE) from Mecca to Medina to escape persecution. “In the mainstream Islamic discourse, *[h]ijra* constitutes moving from *Dar al-Harb* to *Dar al-Islam*. *Dar al-Harb*, which literally means —house of war, refers to lands where Islamic law is not implemented or where Muslims do not enjoy the freedom to practice their religion" (Uberman and Shay, 2016: 16). ISIS co-opted the concept to attract and mobilise foreign nationals, like the women in this chapter, to join their ranks and travel to ISIS-controlled territories in Iraq and Syria. As recruitment strategy, ISIS appropriated *hijra* as an 'undeniable Islamic obligation' as a means of gaining personal significance, purpose, belonging, living under Islamic ideals, enjoying prosperity, and being protected (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020: 99). *Hijra* can also be conceptualised as the physical movement away from a problematic place to a better one, for the sake of *Allah* (Masud, 1990: 29). *Muhajirat,* the term used to describe Western women who join ISIS by both the group and the women in this study, also has the original *Qu'ranic* meaning of "one who avoids or abandons bad things" (Perešin & Cervone, 2015: 495), and this is central in their testimonies.[62]

In their narratives of their decisions to undertake *hijra,* participants spoke of ecclesiastical considerations as well as practical. Echoing the language of religious obligation embedded in ISIS' recruitment propaganda, participants said they felt they had a duty to undertake *hijra* but not because they had a duty to join ISIS, but they had a duty to make the world a better place or find a better place in the world for themselves as Muslims. In this sense, they saw themselves emulating the Prophet Muhammad in making *hijra* in moving away from the place where they felt they had no freedom to practice their religion or freely be Muslim – literally fleeing persecution and away from non-believers (Loken and Zelenz 2017: 47).

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[62] This finding corroborates Speckhard and Ellenberg's (2020)'s recent interviews with women affiliated ISIS from Belgian and Ireland.

More saliently, participants spoke of their plans to make *hijra* as a way to remove themselves and dissociate themselves their 'bad experiences' from their current contexts. One participant stated: "I just couldn't wait to get away from the place that had made me a feel like bad Muslim, and ashamed of who I was. I could not wait to become someone else who had nothing to do with all these *kūffar* people". The opportunity of making *hijra* gave them an escape route and an active step to dissociate from their present reality and transform their identities. It signified a transition from a place that made them not only unsafe but also deeply ashamed for who they were, to the political and geographical utopia where they could feel they belonged and feel 'proud to be Muslim'. In the words of Ayana: "I wanted just to become a new person, I didn't think about where I was going, well I did, but I was thinking mostly on making *hijra* becoming a better Muslim and becoming someone who does things, and not just thinks about them". This theme of "becoming a better Muslim" was a common theme amongst participant testimonies, with a focus on transforming themselves and their identities. Another common theme was feeling in control and making choices for themselves. Yasmin: "I had never felt more in control than when I booked my flight and followed the instructions of the Sister. I was taking control of my life, and I felt good". Nadia echoed this: "I just felt like I was taking control, like I finally held the reigns on my life, and becoming a good Muslim". Dina describes that the decision felt like a "breath of fresh air":

> "Being a Muslim woman in the UK is suffocating. Not for the reasons white people think. White people think it's because our parents are controlling or because we are oppressed. Yeah, my parents are strict, but I think they should be with girls. But no, as a Muslim woman you can't breathe because when you step outside your house or just try and go to school even [sic], people move away from you as if you're a virus or worse they spit on your or worse they spit on your mum. Wouldn't you have had enough too?"

Through making *hijra* participants saw the opportunity to fundamentally transform who they were; however, it also signified a way in which they were seeking control at a time when they felt little choice over their identities as Muslim women. For some participants just considering the decision to undertake *hijra* transformed their lives and encouraged them to think about the ways in which their lives could be different. For others who were prevented from making their journeys, they found alternative ways to transform their identities and what being ‘Muslim’ meant to them through opportunities their parents or youth workers helped them find like the leadership programme I observed during my fieldwork.

Simultaneous agency

The decision to undertake *hijra* was informed by series of practical and ideological choices: the consideration to leave home and their families, the consideration of how to get there, the consideration where they were going, the consideration of what life would be like there, and the consideration of what their futures would hold. As described in Chapter Two, tracing the choices that women make reveals that the choices they make are “both heavily and differentially constrained" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2015: 138), across the different social fields and normative frameworks they are embedded within, and the information they have access to. Through the different ways they engaged with ISIS propaganda, the women in this chapter were presented with a framework by ISIS recruiters or other women considering making *hijra* (or sometimes their brothers), which proposed a new way to see the world, Islam, and their identities as Muslim women.

In engaging with this new framework, the women in this chapter were drawing on both religious and secular resources, enacting agency through engaging with both a narrative of Western gender empowerment and ISIS’ strict gender ideology presented to them on what it means to be a Muslim woman. Like the women in Chapter Seven, the women in this chapter were informed by the intersecting normative frameworks they were embedded within. In the narratives of their engagement with ISIS, participants spoke of feeling ‘empowered’ and “liberated” in their decisions to travel to Syria, language which is cloaked in a Western framework of gender empowerment and emancipation. At the same time, they were drawing upon both cultural and religious resources, which were shaped by their composite habituses, to engage with ISIS’s strictly gendered and violent ideology which predicated their subjugation. Lahoud (2018: 6) highlights that this tension is embedded in ISIS propaganda itself, which is designed to project a “sense of empowerment for women, without needing to deliver it in practice”. Lahoud argues that through its propaganda, ISIS appeared to give women a ‘voice’, but on close examination, the content focused on ISIS’ empowerment, not women’s empowerment.

Central to the framework and utopia that ISIS offered the women in this chapter was the role of becoming a wife and mother. As highlighted in Chapter Three, ISIS believes that the primary purpose of a woman is to reproduce and populate the caliphate: “the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood” (IS/al-Khanssaa: 18). Women’s symbolic roles as mothers are also fundamental to ISIS’ identity and goals as a state (see Yuval-Davis 1997; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Parashar, 2015). However, women’s primacy as wife and mother has been over-determined as a motivator in the journeys of Western women affiliated with ISIS. Moreover, as argued in Chapter One, it has been used to diminish their capacity for agency or used to eroticise and gender their choices and bodies through arguing they are lusting after jihadi men on a foreign battlefield (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007: 40-41).

Throughout my interactions with the women in this chapter, I did not question them directly about the role becoming a wife or mother played in their experiences of engaging with ISIS, rather, I let it arise organically. For several participants I interacted with as first as a group, it first came up under the umbrella of sex. Women's sexual activity is often used as a narrative to rationalise their involvement in violent organisations – either because of their "insatiable need for sex, men's control or ownership over their bodies, or their inability to have sex with men" (ibid: 40). However, the young women were discussing how "gross" they thought sex was after reading an article on 'Bustle.com'. I asked them why they thought it was "gross". The responses varied from "it's scary and weird" to "it seems like it would hurt" to "why would you want to do it unless you were going to have a baby". This led us to discuss the consideration of becoming a wife or mother in their decision to join ISIS. Other participants addressed the issue directly. Sometimes they addressed either the 'jihadi brides' narrative themselves or the importance (lack of) of becoming a wife or mother in their decision.

Nearly all women interviewed reported that, before they engaged with ISIS, they had not thought of having children or did not want children. Zakiyah said: "Well, I knew I'd probably *theoretically* have children in the distant, distant future innit [sic] because its normal in my culture. Like that's what you do. I hadn't thought about if I wanted that". Dina said: "I actually really didn't even want children. I found them really annoying and I just was like I cannot be dealing with that". Leila, Sabeen and Rana echoed similar sentiments. However, with ISIS presented that becoming a mother was an obligation and central to the role they would play in the caliphate, their perspective changed. Nadia reported: "It wasn't that I suddenly wanted a baby overnight. I still don't want a baby, omg [sic]. It's just that the idea of being in control of something and being part of something with a purpose like that. It was just so empowering”. Leila added: “When the sister I was talking to about *hijra* told me, you will come here, and you will marry a *muhajid* and have a baby – I had to really think – is this what I want? Can I do this?” Several other participants spoke of how the consideration of motherhood was through the lens they engaged with ISIS’ ideology. Ayana reported “Talking about having a baby with the sister made me understand my duty and what I believed, and it compelled me to leave”. Several participants connected their deliberation over becoming a wife or mother to escaping and being in control. In the words of: “I knew that if I went to Syria, I’d have to become someone’s wife and I might have to have a baby. I wasn’t sure about this at first. But I wanted to be part of something. I wanted to get out. I just wanted to be in control of my own life”.

Consequently, becoming a mother or constituted another choice in their decision to join the organisation. However, rather than being driven by a “maternal imperative” (Gentry, 2009: 239) or desire to find a husband, it was a consideration of whether this was a role and a new identity they could and wanted to take on, and whether this was a part of ISIS ideology they agreed with. In this sense, becoming a wife and mother was also a planned means of escape and an opportunity to change their life and identity, rather than a motivation or so-called ‘pull factor’. This echoes public health research in the UK focusing on planned teenage pregnancies specifically in a UK context, which finds that young women and men both see parenthood as an opportunity, within their own control, to gain independence and a new identity (see Cater and Coleman, 2006). The young women in Cater and Coleman’s research felt a strong need to change their lives, which normally related to escaping negative situations or insecurities. Becoming a mother was seen as providing this new identity and purpose and transforming themselves entirely (ibid).

Åhäll (2012: 105) argues that motherhood is everywhere in representations of women's agency in political violence and focuses on the ways in which agency is enabled through the *Myth of Motherhood.* Understanding motherhood as a 'myth' refers to the social and cultural constructions of motherhood and its representations. This is present in ISIS' *shari'a*-based ideology and recruitment propaganda targeted at Western women: "preparing the lion cubs of the *Khilafah*" (IS, Dabiq (10), 2015e: 45). Through these depictions ISIS craft a narrative of 'motherhood' and the importance of their roles, and thus women's agency is enabled through the imaginary or the myth of motherhood. Building on Åhäll (2012) whose work focuses mostly on discourse analysis, I argue that for the women in this chapter, although becoming a mother was not driving an imperative in their reason to leave, motherhood was a fundamental way in which motherhood was how their agency and choices were enacted through their own deliberation and enabled through the framework ISIS offered them.

As argued elsewhere in this thesis, narratives of women's participation in extremism and political violence as 'mothers' or 'brides' usually deny or distort women's agency (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007; 2015), however through tracing the different choices that women make and their narratives of making those choices, we can explicate multiple and complex ways they are informed and formed by the world around them and how this shapes the decisions and journeys they take.

Chapter summary

The experiences shared by the women in this chapter present a very complex picture of the journeys of those who have joined or considered joining ISIS. Many of the themes discussed in this chapter are present across all testimonies of the women in this thesis. In the previous chapters, the lack of religious space and the impact of securitisation narratives limited how the women could connect and build a relationship with Islam or feel like they belonged in their different social milieus. However, in the face of these challenges, their response was to create new spaces for themselves and others like them, whilst criticising the existence of the norms and discrimination that made them feel unsafe or unwelcome in existing spaces. For the women in this chapter, the response was less critical and less proactive. Instead of seeking ways they could create spaces or narrative for themselves in the UK, they believed that 'this was just the way it is here' and sought to escape instead.

Most commonly, both the women who joined and considered joining ISIS spoke of a desire to escape their present realities; an urge to untether themselves and their identities from the milieus that defined them, and find meaning, definition, and belonging elsewhere. For nearly all participants, this embodied a strong impulse to dissociate themselves from their current realities; extricate themselves from a society where they have never felt belonging and often felt stigmatised and ashamed of being a Muslim woman. This itch to escape was deeply embedded in their family habituses and a perceived lack of choice over their identities and a way they live their lives. It was rooted in an inability or failure to cope, resist, or subvert their present realities, and is intrinsically intertwined with a deeply ingrained sense of unbelonging.

Their capacity to be critically reflexive and engage with the normative frameworks shaping their lives was certainly less developed and less embodied than those who joined HT, but this was not only shaped by their family habituses. Across all social fields, from a young age, the women in this chapter were not encouraged nor had space to consciously deliberate their actions, the practices they engaged within, and the normative frameworks that shaped their daily existences. In other words, they did not inherit or have access to reflexivity as capital in the same ways as other women in this thesis did.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion – In Extremis

Chapter overview

In the opening paragraphs of this thesis, I highlighted that the hypervisibility of Western women affiliated with ISIS (Sjoberg, 2017), in both the political and media discourse and the ISIS' propaganda has led to gendered and neo-Orientalist tropes that infantilise and homogenise their desires and experiences, portraying them as apolitical and without agency (Martini, 2018). I argued that these narratives are constructed to simultaneously maintain "narrative fidelity" about what it means to be a woman in the West (Gentry, 2015), *and* what it means to be a Muslim woman.

I argued that this hypervisibility has led to a significant proliferation of research focusing on Western women affiliated with ISIS, some of which has offered invaluable insights into how women are recruited and the roles that women play in the organisation. However, overall, critically, this research lacks rigorous methodologies and overlooks the multiple and complicated ways women's agency is embedded in their experiences engaging with extremist organisations like ISIS. In doing so, it neglects to engage with the rich history of research on women's engagement in political violence, terrorism, and extremism that came before it (see Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007; 2011; 2015; Brown, 2008; 2010; 2020; Auchter, 2012; Åhäll, 2012), as well as a large body of theoretical scholarship that focuses on women's engagement in religious or conservative movements, which problematises the reliance on the Western liberal notion of freedom as a prerequisite for 'meaningful agency' (see Mahmood, 2005).

Consequently, this thesis set out to explore the role and impact of gender, faith, and identity in the experiences of second-and-third generation South Asian British Muslim women who had joined or considered joining ISIS or Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT). The comparison between women affiliated with ISIS and HT enabled a critical exploration of the differences between young British Muslim women who have joined a violent extremist organisation and a non-violent extremist organisation, and what both can tell us about the actual lived experiences of 'radicalisation'. Embedded in a feminist research framework that promotes that women's experiences are the "places from which to start off knowledge projects" on women's lives (Harding, 1991: 61), this research offers a unique and vital qualitative contribution to the existing literature on both organisations.

Focusing on a third group of Muslim women who were actively seeking to address the challenges they face daily through creating spaces, opportunities, and networks for women like themselves, it also sought to explore how second-and third-generation South Asian British Muslim women, more generally, encounter, understand and negotiate their gender, faith, and identity growing up and living in contemporary Britain.

In this final chapter, I will review the research and arguments presented in this thesis. I will then discuss the contributions that this thesis makes to the current research landscape, as well as its limitations and implications for future research. In the final months of writing this thesis, Shamima Begum, a British schoolgirl who travelled to join ISIS in February 2015, is currently appealing the UK Home Office's decision to revoke her UK citizenship and her right to a fair trial in the UK at The Supreme Court (November 2020). It is not my aim nor expertise to discuss the legality of the revocation of Shamima's citizenship. However, I will discuss Shamima Begum's case and the direct implications of the UK Government's decision to rescind her UK citizenship on both the repatriation and rehabilitation of other British women affiliated with ISIS and more broadly the lives and experiences of British Muslim women across the UK.

Growing up as a South Asian British Muslim Women in the UK

Employing Bourdieu’s theory of habitus (1986; 1990), this thesis sought to explore the way in which the women in this study became themselves’, developed their attitudes, and engaged different practices across different social fields. Habitus comprises socially ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions. In many ways, habitus can be understood as an unspoken ‘sense of the game’, a way of being that is structured (and structuring) across different social fields. However, for some individuals, like the women in this study, there are contradictions between the experiences and expectations of their families and broader society (Bourdieu, 1999: 383), which cause disruptions in the structuring of the habitus. In these cases, individuals develop ‘composite habituses’ which explains the ways they are informed and formed by *multiple fields* and *multiple forces* and *multiple agents* during their life trajectory” (Waltorp, 2015: 51).

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted there are distinct similarities in the experiences (and composite habituses) of all three groups of women, unique to being a South Asian British Muslim woman. Growing up their experiences were strongly characterised by the intergenerational transmission of cultural vs religious understandings of Islam; gendered inconsistencies between the rules and norms inherited from their parents on how to be 'a good Muslim woman', often taught through positioning South Asian or 'Muslim' in opposition to 'whiteness'; a perceived of lack of space (religious and non-religious) to be a Muslim woman in the UK, and direct, perceived and inherited experiences of

Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination across the different social fields they occupy. For the women in this thesis, their sense of the game across multiple social fields has been routinely disrupted from an early age. In the family field, this was often through contradictions between the normative frameworks (rules and norms) that were taught, learnt, and inherited from their parents in early childhood. In the school field, this was through the dissonance between their parents' expectations, the inherited value of education and 'doing well', and their daily experiences as a young Muslim woman at school. At university, their 'sense of the game' quickly adapted to sensing it was not a 'game' they should be part of. Amongst nearly all participants, in the religious field, their 'sense of the game' was that a British Muslim woman's relationship with her faith must be private in both nature and location. They felt that there was limited space for them to practice their faith outside of the home and limited access to a religious community, within which they could learn more about Islam and their faith and identities as British Muslim women. In the wider social field, including the workplace, their experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia habitually destabilised any 'sense of the game' these women had developed.

What distinguishes their experiences from one another is how they perceived, critically engaged with, and responded to the challenges and constraints they experienced. Their responses and the choices they made in navigating the challenges they faced are shaped by their composite habituses, their embodied capacities to critically engage with the normative framework and social fields they are embedded within and their access to social, religious, cultural, and symbolic capital. Above all, despite the similarities in their experiences, tracing the very different choices each woman in this thesis made in navigating the challenges they faced reveals the complicated, messy, and often mundane nature of agency embedded in the complicated choices, actions, and lives of women.

Creating space and constructing counter-narratives

For the women in this thesis who had not experienced joining an extremist organisation, despite the routine external reinforcement that they didn't belong or their identities as Muslims were antithetical to being British, they responded by actively seeking or creating space for themselves and other Muslim women where they could learn about Islam and explore their faith and identities as Muslim women. In doing so, they were actively generating, both consciously and unconsciously, a counter-narrative and engaging in commentaries of being 'normal' Muslim women, critically questioning how Muslim women are depicted and treated in the UK and globally. Daily, they found ways to reflexively and critically engage with the normative frameworks and social fields they are embedded within. Despite the similarities between their experiences as Muslim women growing up in the UK with the women in this thesis who had joined or considered joining an extremist organisation, their embodied capacities (defined by their habitus and access to different types of capital) enabled them to critically engage and question the normative frameworks and practices shaping their daily existences. From an early age, they had access and participated in shared critical commentaries on the practices they engaged with and shaped their daily lives as British Muslims, which influenced their embodied capacity to be critically conscious and reflexive across various aspects of their lives.

Through tracing the different choices, the women in this chapter made in negotiating the challenges they faced; I explored the different ways they draw on both secular and religious resources to develop strategies to engage with the intersecting multiple social fields and normative frameworks they navigate and are embedded within. Exploring the strategies these women used to find a balance between increasing their visibility as Muslim women within some spaces, whilst simultaneously decreasing their visibility in others, revealed the multiple 'messy combinations' and complicated ways agency is embedded in their daily lives, habituses, and social fields they move between. These strategies also included mediation between performing 'normality' to make themselves 'palatable' to broader society and defining a new 'normal' and creating space and counter-narratives for British Muslim women like themselves outside of the hostile or securitised spaces from which they feel excluded.

The British Sisters of Hizb ut-Tahrir

For the women who joined or considered joining HTB, their early experiences (and habituses) were strongly characterised by a set of deeply felt gendered contradictions, specifically in the strong prescription, but weak implementation of gendered values and behaviours in family and community life. They had also developed an embodied capacity to critically engage within the social fields, practices, and the normative frameworks that shaped their daily lives. However, their experiences of seeking space for themselves as British Muslim women to develop a religious identity, an independent relationship with their faith, and finding different ways to feel they belonged, were less successful. They were looking for a way to make sense of their lives, structure their daily routines, and interpret their different experiences and encounters. What is more, what distinguished these women from the other women in this thesis was an early political drive to make the world a better place for Muslims. From an early age, they developed a political consciousness inherited from their parents. Many of the women interviewed described feeling angry and disillusioned but that they lacked the tools and opportunity to do something about it, especially as a Muslim. Several participants were politically engaged from a young age – two members were involved with the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) as teenagers, and another was involved with the British Youth Council (BYC). However, they found that, as a Muslim woman, it was hard to know what to believe, who to support, and who supported them.

Their engagement with HTB coincided with wanting to learn more about Islam and developing a social and political understanding of their role in the world as a Muslim woman. For those who already described themselves as religious, joining HTB was part of their "religious transformation" or "awakening" – becoming more connected with their faith. Others, who had described being less religious previously, felt their journey into HTB was concomitant with or, in some cases, constituted their religious education. Many participants who had originated from culturally religious backgrounds, where the only source of religious knowledge was gleaned from reading the *Qu'ran* or passed down from their parents, described they did not really understand their faith or what it meant to be Muslim until they encountered HTB. Engaging with HTB offered them a dialogic, reflexive, and critical way to learn about their faith that their parents and community could not offer them.

Central to HT's *'aqeeda*[doctrine] is "bringing the Muslims back to living an Islamic way of life" (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2000: 12). For the women in this chapter, who did not have any desire to leave their homes in the UK nor feel any disconnection to the 'British' component to their identity, this helped them imagine a space for themselves to belong through the lens of HT ideology. In doing so, they were able to intentionally craft self-conscious religious identities against the majority secular Other as a means of navigating their everyday lives as British Muslim women and make sense of their religious identities and actively 'do religion' in response to the challenges they faced. HT also offers them space to engage with Islam, be vocal about political issues, and a framework for navigating the challenges they face.

Ultimately, HTB offered them both a cognitive, normative, and political framework they could engage with to both understand and embody their faith, critically engage with politics, shape their identities, and give purpose to their belonging, not only as Muslim women but as British Muslim women. HTB promised them the opportunity to belong to a bigger cause with other Muslims like them in the UK (and globally) and equip them with the tools and resources to *do something*.

The British *Muhajirat* of the ISIS

Contrastingly, the women who joined or considered joining ISIS were driven by a fundamental desire to escape their present realities. This urge to escape was embedded in a perceived lack of choice over their identities and the way they live their lives, shaped by their experiences in the home, the school, and the community. It was driven by a deeply ingrained sense of unbelonging, and feelings of shame and stigmatisation of growing up as a Muslim woman in the UK. For all women in this thesis, experiences of Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination routinely made them feel unsafe and unwelcome disrupting their daily lives and sense of belonging (discussed further below). For the women affiliated with ISIS, their very similar accounts of discrimination resulted in feelings of shame and embarrassment, impacting their sense of self and connection to the people and places in their daily lives. Their capacity to be critically reflexive was less developed and less embodied than the other women in this thesis. Growing up, they were not actively encouraged to deliberate their own choices, actions, and the practices and normative frameworks that shaped their daily lives consciously or reflexively. Many were also actively discouraged to ask questions or critically engage with religion or politics at both home and at school for fear of seeming too 'Muslim' and being reported to 'Prevent' (the irony and reciprocity of this is discussed below). This lack of critical engagement led to their feelings of boredom, frustration, and isolation, and, critically, their feelings of shame and embarrassment in response to the discrimination they experienced daily. They felt they did not have control in the way they lived their lives or the way they were treated or perceived by others. As I reiterated in Chapter Eight, this was an absence of seeing an alternative to their current lives *in situ* and a resignation that this was just how life was in the UK for Muslim women.

I argued that through making *hijra,* they were not only seeking to escape the everyday Islamophobia, racism, and discrimination they experienced, but also transform their identities as Muslim women. *Hijra* can also be conceptualised as the physical movement away from a problematic place to a better one, for the sake of *Allah* (Masud, 1990: 29). It signified a transition from a place that made them not only unsafe but also deeply ashamed for who they were, to the political and geographical utopia where they could feel they belonged and feel 'proud to be Muslim'. In this sense, like HTB, ISIS also offered these young women a framework that helped them redefine their identities, purposes, and futures as Muslim women, but it was a highly prescriptive framework that necessitated uprooting their lives and families in the UK.

Consequently, whether they executed their plans to travel to Syria or simply flirted with the idea, they were making a choice for themselves at a time when they felt they had little control over other aspects of their lives as British Muslim women. Their experiences engaging with ISIS were shaped by a series of choices they were making about their identities, their faith, and their futures. These choices were shaped by their composite habituses but also the different normative frameworks they are informed and formed by. I have argued that, in their decision to join ISIS, the women in this chapter were drawing on both religious and secular resources in making these choices, enacting agency through engaging with both a narrative of Western gender empowerment and ISIS' strict gender ideology on what it means to be a Muslim woman.

Central to these choices was an engagement with how becoming a wife or mother, a so-called 'jihadi-bride', would benefit them and whether this was something they really wanted alongside their ideological motivations to join the organisation. As Chapter Eight details, the young women affiliated with ISIS were not driven by lust or desire or the goal to become a mother, nor were they deceived about the realities of life under ISIS. Instead, they were responding to the different challenges and constraints they experienced and making a choice about their future. Consequently, in many ways, becoming a wife and mother was also a planned means of escape and an opportunity to change their life and identity, rather than a motivation or so-called 'pull factor'. I have argued that this echoes public health research in the UK focusing on planned teenage pregnancies specifically in a UK context, which finds that young women and men both see parenthood as an opportunity, within their own control, to transform their lives and to gain independence and a new identity (see Cater and Coleman, 2006).

As discussed in Chapter Eight, nearly all women interviewed said that they hadn't even thought of having children or did not even want children before ISIS told them it was their duty, and this was how they could be part of 'something bigger'. However, although, maternalism is not claimed by women themselves as significant in their journeys – they weren't driven by a "maternal imperative" (Gentry, 2009: 239) – it was fundamental to the choices they made in that it was central to ISIS' ideology. Whilst I have argued that narratives of women's participation in extremism and political violence as 'mothers' usually deny or distort women's agency (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007; 2015), motherhood is also fundamental to how women's agency in extremism is both enacted and enabled (Åhäll, 2012). In the context of the women affiliated with ISIS, considering becoming a wife or mother constituted another choice in their decision to join the organisation. However, rather than being driven by a maternal imperative or desire to find a husband, it was a consideration of whether this was a role and a new identity they could and wanted to take on, and whether this was a part of ISIS ideology they agreed with.

Åhäll (2012: 105) argues that "motherhood is 'everywhere' in representations of female agency in political violence and that it is, therefore, useful to think of motherhood as a *myth*". Understanding motherhood as a 'myth' does not necessarily involve actual mothers or pregnant women but refers to the social and cultural constructions of motherhood and its representations, which women are naturally associated with (Åhäll, 2012: 109). Within the case of British women joining ISIS, this couldn't hold truer. Motherhood is a fundamental tenet of ISIS' *shari'a*-based ideology on women, central also to its recruitment of Western women. Women's symbolic roles as mothers are also fundamental to ISIS' identity and goals as a state (see Yuval-Davis 1997; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Pettman, 2005; Parashar, 2015). As argued in Chapter One, motherhood also structures dominant narratives of Western women affiliated with ISIS in both media representation and existing academic literature, which ultimately denies them agency. However, as the findings presented in this research suggest, the significance of becoming a ‘jihadi bride’ has been over-explained and used to flatten the experiences of women who participate in extremist organisations like ISIS.

Finally, the ‘overprotectiveness’ of Muslim parenting, specifically ‘mothering’, is a dominant frame in UK CVE (Brown, 2020: 124). Within such narratives, Muslim mothers are blamed or held responsible for their children’s ‘radicalisation’ through being strict or over-controlling, smothering their every move (ibid: 124). Muslim mothers are accused of failing to understand the “lived realities of their children” and failing to “protect children from the ills of Western society” (ibid: 125). It is beyond the scope and aims of this thesis to discuss these narratives in detail here, and Katherine Brown’s (2020) research published at the time of writing this conclusion, does an excellent job of just that. However, the experiences of the women affiliated with ISIS here present a much more complex story than these narratives suggest. There is no doubt that the nature of their parenting shaped their experiences, but their parents were not ignorant to the challenges their children were facing inside and outside the home, at school, and in wider society. Nor were the women trying to escape the ‘overprotectiveness’ of their parents or seek more ‘freedom’. Moreover, there are strong similarities between all women in this thesis, regardless of their engagement with an extremist organisation, suggesting that similar upbringings are not unique to those who engage in extremism but just young women who grow up in South Asian British Muslim households in the UK.

In Extremis?

Deeply embedded in the individual habituses of all women in this thesis is an ingrained 'belief' of *unbelonging*, taught, learnt, embodied, and reiterated from an early age across multiple social fields, including the family where 'being Muslim' was routinely positioned as antithetical to the white demographic majority of the British population. *Belonging* is believing one belongs in a space. However, in making this argument, I am not suggesting that there was any uncertainty or confusion about how 'British' they were or felt or their parents felt. For all the women in this thesis, on a personal level, there was no question about being or feeling 'British', as opposed to what the media and some academic research has suggested. Rather, it was this exact narrative that positions being Muslim in opposition to being British that destabilised their sense of belonging. Put simply, they knew they *should* 'belong' and feel like they belong, but their complicated, contradictory, and securitised subjectivities, systematically and routinely reinforced by the media, politicians, their parents, and others, deeply ingrained a belief of *unbelonging*. Belonging is also about "emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home', and about feeling 'safe'" (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). For the women in this thesis, from an early age experiences of Islamophobia and/or racism severely impacted their ability to feel safe 'at home' in the country where they were born and grew up within. It deeply permeated their sense of security in their own homes. This was compounded by the feeling there was little space for them to be 'Muslim' or explore what being Muslim meant to them without feeling threatened or discriminated against, under surveillance, or due to a lack of support or religious community. Like Bourdieu, I have argued that there is a cyclical relationship between subjective dispositions and objective structures, and the 'practices' of counter-extremism and securitisation of Muslim communities in the UK have deeply permeated the individual subjectivities of young South Asian Muslim women. This has reinforced the ingrained belief of *unbelonging*, problematising every aspect of their identities, and making Britain feel like an 'extreme' place to be and grow up as a British Muslim woman.

For the women affiliated with ISIS, this was critical. The women in Chapter Six, those who hadn’t joined an extremist organisation, responded by creating new spaces for themselves and other Muslim women like them to belong and participate or construct counter-narratives about who they are and what being Muslim meant to them. The women affiliated with HTB responded by searching for a framework to make sense of their lives, faiths, political interests, and aspirations as British Muslim women living in the UK. However, the women affiliated with ISIS spoke of a desire to escape their present realities; an urge to untether themselves from the milieus that defined them, and seek meaning, definition, and belonging elsewhere. For nearly all participants, this embodied a strong impulse to dissociate themselves from their current realities; extricate themselves from a society where they were told they didn’t belong and felt stigmatised and ashamed of being a Muslim woman. However, their decisions to undertake *hijra* symbolised a migration away from the ‘bad things’ in their life, not their ‘British’ identities, nor how ‘British’ they felt.

This suggests there is a cyclical relationship between the impact of counter-extremism, Islamophobia, and the experiences of those who join or consider joining extremist organisations. With a focus on the impact of ‘Prevent’ on Muslim communities, this has been argued elsewhere by others (see for example Esposito and Iner, 2019; Health-Kelly, 2013). It highlights the importance of considering the wider experiences of those who engage with extremist organisations, and how agents are both constituted and constituting of both structure and practice. The securitisation and politicisation of British Muslim communities have functioned to 'radicalise' the basic identities of British Muslim women, and this highly securitised climate has made the UK a very 'extreme' place to grow up in as a British Muslim woman.

However, as Yuval-Davis (2007: 563) ‘belonging’ is not only a ‘feeling’ or an emotional attachment. Rather it is a dynamic process based on the interplay between individuals and subjective factors at three levels: social structures, individuals’ narratives and emotional attachments, and ethnic and political value systems, by which people judge their own and others’ belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 199). Accordingly, the ‘politics of belonging’ concerns the “construction of who ‘belongs to’ the state and who does not “belong to” the state (Butler and Spivak, 2007).

The repatriation and rehabilitation of Western women affiliated with ISIS have raised serious questions about who has a right to belong to a state and who does not. In the UK, the public debate has centred around the Shamima Begum case. In an interview with *The Times* war correspondent Anthony Lloyd, Shamima reported she did not regret her decision to join ISIS; and she was unphased by the violence she’d witnessed. She wanted to come home for the sake of her baby’s health. The response from Sajid Javid MP, the British home secretary, was to revoke her citizenship under 40(2) of the British Nationality Act 1981 and leave her and her new-born baby in al-Roj refugee camp in Syria, where the baby later died. While UK law prevents making a person stateless, Javid claimed he could legally remove citizenship as it was possible to strip Shamima of her UK nationality as he claimed she is eligible for citizenship elsewhere. Shamima was born in the UK, but her mother is from Bangladesh. However, Shamima has never been to Bangladesh. The UK government is claiming that, under Bangladeshi law, a UK national like Shamima, if born to a Bangladeshi parent, is automatically a Bangladeshi citizen. Technically, that means Shamima has dual nationality. However, Bangladeshi nationality and citizenship lapse when a person reaches the age of twenty-one, unless they seek to retain it. Shamima turned twenty-one in August 2020. Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said Shamima is not a Bangladeshi citizen and there is "no question" of her being allowed into the country. Shamima first took legal action against the UK Home Office at the High Court and the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) in February (2019) when the SIAC ruled the decision to revoke Shamima's British citizenship did not render her stateless and was therefore lawful, as she was "a citizen of Bangladesh by descent" at the time of the decision (Shamima Begum vs. Secretary of State for the Home Department, 2019). In July 2020, SIAC ruled that, from Syria, Shamima could not fairly and effectively appeal her case, and the conditions she was living under in the refugee camp in al-Roj were in violation of her rights under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which protects the right to freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment. The Court of Appeal ordered that Shamima must be allowed to return to the United Kingdom to exercise her right to appeal against the decision to remove her nationality. At the time of writing, Shamima's case is being heard at the UK Supreme Court. [63]

In rushing to expel her from the only country she has ever known and setting her citizenship up for debate, and her female body as a potential security threat to Britain, Shamima is automatically positioned as not *of* Britain. Brown (2020: 192) argues that Shamima Begum epitomises Razack's (2008) concept of 'casting out'. Throughout the War on Terror, special categories have been created which isolate groups of people from the rule of law (Brown, 2020; Razack, 2008). Razack (2008) "links this to the continuing legacy of colonialism, racism, and gender oppression, such that a climate of fear limits the fundamental rights of those who been identified as threats and are, therefore ‘cast out’” of the protections of the rule of law (Brown, 2020: 192). The research presented in this thesis shows, Shamima Begum, and other second and third-generation South Asian British Muslim women like her, were never ‘cast in’ into what it means to be ‘British’ through the narrative of the state, the British mass media, and the British public. In Chapter One, I highlighted how through UK counter-extremism policies like ‘Prevent’, ‘Britishness’, rather than being a celebratory term, is rhetoric for identifying what ‘type’ of person ‘lacks’ the ‘values’ of a ‘true British citizen’, a notion predominantly aimed at minority communities (Kundnani, 2007). Yuval-Davis also reminds us that “the dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 563) is often conducted on gendered and racialised bodies. From having their *hijabs pulled* off at primary school or by “fully grown men” in public to being asked ‘where are you *really* from?’ or being moved away from on the tube like they are a “virus”, to being taught ‘British values’ in school workshops led only for the Muslim students, the women in this study, women just like Shamima, have been routinely and systematically reminded they don’t belong from a very young age, that they are not ‘of Britain’. I am stretching Razack’s (2008)’s concept somewhat as it refers to being ‘cast out’ of the protections of the rule of law under new climates of threat. However, my argument is that, with or without a British passport or citizenship, with or without joining an extremist organisation, British Muslim women like Shamima Begum are not ‘cast in’ to the public or state narrative or what it means to be ‘British’ or to be ‘of Britain’. In the words of Butler (2007) “[i]f the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes” (Butler and Spivak, 2007: 4–5).

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[63] Since Sajid Javid deprived Shamima of her citizenship in February 2019, the Home Office has rescinded the citizenship of two further British women aged twenty-eight and thirty years both with parents from Bangladesh.

Shamima's case draws attention to several further issues relating to the research presented in this thesis. Firstly, central to the debate around Shamima's citizenship is her culpability in her decision to travel to Syria and join ISIS and whether, if rehabilitated, she would pose a critical threat to UK society. These discussions centre around her age at the time she left the UK, and the roles she performed in supporting and sustaining ISIS when in Syria. Advocating for her defence, her solicitor claims she was a child who was 'groomed' and 'radicalised' and should be allowed to return to be the UK so she can face a fair trial and be reprimanded and rehabilitated. However, in Shamima's interview, she did not appear as a sympathetic character, she did not express remorse or guilt, and she still expressed commitment to ISIS' ideology and vision as a caliphate. Early 'jihadi bride' narratives of British women affiliated with ISIS like Shamima as "under the spell of hypnotists" or the "enchantment of evil jihadist men" juxtaposed with narratives embedded in the justification of removing Shamima's citizenship: "a time-ticking bomb", a threat to British society if she were to come 'home' (Brazell, 2020) and Shamima's own account of her involvement. The binary positioning of her as either a 'victim' or 'villain' leaves no space for us to understand her as living a flawed and complex life, making flawed and complex choices. The maternal narrative embedded in Shamima's interview —her motherly instincts required her to return to her life in the West—also cast her as a failed mother because all her children died in her care (Brown, 2020). Her inability and refusal to be depicted as the perfect victim, who was deceived, traumatised, but also remorseful for the choices she did make, has prevented recognition of her trauma and the complexity of her wider experiences before and during her engagement with ISIS. It also demonstrates the "contingent nature" of 'anti-radicalisation' or rehabilitation efforts on "saving and controlling Muslim lives", (Brown, 2020: 194), and 'who sings the nation-state' (Butler and Spivak, 2007).

The high-profile nature of Shamima's case has highlighted the need for further qualitative research on the experiences of British women affiliated with organisations like ISIS before, during, and after their involvement. Through focusing on the ways women's lives and experiences are formed and informed by overlapping normative frameworks and social fields, this thesis has demonstrated the complex and 'messy combinations' of agency in the experiences of British women affiliated with ISIS, like Shamima. However, research, like presented in this thesis, only scratches the surface on building a comprehensive understanding of these women's experiences and highlights the need for further research.

Finally, Shamima's case and the UK Government's decision to rescind her UK citizenship has direct implications on the lives of British Muslim women across the UK. The suggestion that a second- or third-generation British citizen can have their nationality removed if one or more of their parents originate from another country is deeply troubling regardless of the crimes Shamima may or may not have committed under UK terrorism law. It suggests that their Britishness and citizenship is conditional and fragile, in ways that others don't have to consider. The perceived insecurity of removing Shamima's citizenship generates feelings of anxiety and vulnerability amongst British Muslim women who already feel at risk and under increased scrutiny from the UK government and its security apparatus. Johnson and Fernandez (2019) write, "[s]tripping Shamima Begum of citizenship teaches us, yet again, that even when People of Colour are born and bred in Britain, they are still seen as aliens within the nation". Furthermore, even more, troubling is the media framing and social media discourses that have dominated the public consciousness surrounding Shamima's case. The acerbic and violent Islamophobia embedded in such discourses and framing functions only to further isolate British Muslim women from UK society as examined in this thesis.

Final reflections

From the outset of this thesis, I highlighted critical gaps in the existing research on Western women affiliated with ISIS and HT and broader research on 'radicalisation'. I also distanced my thesis from the traditional 'radicalisation' framework, highlighting the contributions and the shortfalls of existing approaches to understanding 'radicalisation' and the neo-orientalism embedded in the current academic and policy research landscape.

Both conceptually and methodologically, this thesis has sought to address some of these shortfalls. By developing a conceptual framework that takes into account the multiple and complicated ways that individuals' agency is embedded in the different contexts they inhabit, it has been possible to explore the ways that individuals' experiences and choices in engaging with extremist organisations are informed *multiple fields* and *multiple forces* and *multiple agents* during their life, not just at one point in time. By avoiding mapping a process or identifying a list of common factors to unite the women in my thesis, I have been able to consider the complex and multiple choices in their decisions and experiences engaging with ISIS or HT. By taking a qualitative and narrative approach, I have also aimed to position the voices of the so-called 'radicalised' individual in the research that focuses on their lives and experiences.

As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, existing research on 'radicalisation' ignores that the social world and the subject are both products of past historical practices and interaction between people, and 'radicalisation' 'acting out on their motivations'.

Through taking a ‘relational’ approach to ‘radicalisation’, drawing on both Bourdieu and Mahmood’s work on habitus, has enabled me to explore experiences and pathways of those who have joined or considered joining an extremist organisation have been shaped by the individuals’ experiences and negotiation of their different overlapping identities in the different social contexts they inhabit and move between.

Where this differs from existing approaches, for example, McCauley and Moskalenko’s (2008) or Taylor and Horgan (2006), is that it extrapolates the complicated, iterative nature between agent and structure. Furthermore, many of the experiences discussed by the women interviewed as part of this thesis could be compared or mapped onto a list of ‘push and pull’ factors. For example, disruptions in the ‘sense of the game’ across multiple social fields for the women in this thesis could be considered a ‘push’ factor. However, as argued throughout this thesis, understanding disruptions in ‘sense of the game’ means exploring the many different ways individuals structure and are structured by the social fields they inhabit and move between. This is where a conceptual framework that considers habitus differs from former approaches. A conceptual framework that considers habitus helps explores how an individual adopts and engages with certain values, beliefs, norms, and practices embedded in specific and multiple, often conflicting social fields. Doing so enables the consideration of the deeply embedded nature of the subject formation and the complicated, relational nature of agency and choice.

Whilst, in many ways, this thesis offers a unique contribution to the field, it draws upon (and is inspired by) nearly two decades of feminist scholarship on women’s violence and participation in extremist organisations (see Chapter Two), which is often ignored by others working in the field. Future research seeking to understand the experiences of those who engage with and disengage from extremist organisations should engage with this scholarship to seriously consider agency and choice. With this in mind, through reconceptualising the complicated and gendered nature of agency in the experiences of those who engage with extremist organisations. This thesis hopes to simultaneously disrupt existing research on ‘radicalisation’ and reground the research that focuses on women’s participation in extremist organisations in the rich history of research that came before it (see, for example, Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; 2011; Brown, 2011 among others).

Finally, I have argued for the importance of participant voice and qualitative methods in extremism research (alongside other methods). At the same time, I have highlighted the risks, challenges, and limitations of conducting qualitative, ethnographic research in Muslim communities that have been and continue to be under hyper-scrutiny and securitisation, and at the centre of research and government policies that, on a very basic level, do not protect their interests. Whilst I advocate for more qualitative and in-depth research in the area of extremism studies, future research should consider whether the methods or fieldwork proposed are appropriate or necessary, the communities or people it is seeking to engage are essential to the project, and whether the researcher proposing the method is the right person to conduct that particular research. By providing a detailed account of my fieldwork and in-depth considerations of my positionality as a researcher, I have highlighted the tensions, flaws, and gaps within my research project. Even the most well-intentioned feminist research has its limitations and risks for both the participant and the researcher. In consideration, I have also made a case for critical self-reflexivity in feminist research and even extremism research that doesn’t label itself ‘feminist’. This thesis is a starting point as a qualitative, feminist ethnographic research inquiry focusing on the experiences of British South Asian Muslim women who have joined or considered joining an extremist Islamist organisation. It hopes to inform and guide future researchers seeking to conduct similar qualitative, feminist research in extremism studies.

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