

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**'Keeping the lamp burning': a study of a mosque
congregation in London**

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of the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor
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ABSTRACT

This research explores the different forms of religious practice within a mosque in north London. It was built by one migrant group, the Guyanese, but the congregation includes those from different Muslim communities now living in the vicinity. These different communities have brought with them their own religious traditions.

The ritual of Friday prayer brings this diverse group together as a congregation but the mosque is also a space for the communal life of the Guyanese and those who share their way of being Muslim, while globalised currents of thinking are apparent in the work of a Guyanese preacher who teaches an explicitly text based Islam in classes and lectures. My research examines the different ways in which Islam is present within these three domains and the relationship between them within the context of the mosque.

The research contributes to the idea of 'mundane Islam' and 'everyday religion' through an exploration of the implicit, unsystematic way of being Muslim lived by the Guyanese and the everyday relational concerns and ethical commitments it carries. Though the classes offered the very different view of Islam to which the teacher was committed, one purified of cultural traditions, the women who attended them brought the complexity and ambiguity of the mundane back into the process of religious transmission.

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I undertook this research during the last phase of my career as a child and adolescent psychotherapist in the NHS when, for various reasons, I became particularly interested in the moral nature of the social context of my work. I would like to thank the friends and colleagues who encouraged me in my decision to return to social anthropology, the discipline in which I did my first degree.

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CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

My fieldwork was undertaken in a local mosque in an inner-city borough of north London between 2009 and 2011. The mosque was established over many years by one migrant group, the Guyanese; the congregation now includes the different communities of Muslims that have settled in the vicinity more recently. The Guyanese have a double migration history. They are the descendants of an Indian diaspora that included Hindus, Muslims and Christians who migrated to the Caribbean and British Guiana (now Guyana) a century or more ago. Along with Afro-Guyanese, some Indo-Guyanese later settled in the UK. The Guyanese at the mosque¹ refer to this complex history as contributing to their sense of how they live their lives in London and as underlying the difference they feel to exist between themselves and other Muslim groups in the UK. This dissertation explores their experience as it was reflected in the life of the mosque they built.

I explore the mosque of my fieldwork (hereafter just 'the mosque') not as a site of institutional authority separable from ordinary religious lives (Woodhead 2013) or with the implication that other areas of life were unimportant for the congregation but as a complex context in which not only religious ritual but the processes of everyday living took place. I describe the religious and communal life of the mosque as I encountered it in ritual, in social events, and in the efforts of some within the congregation to develop greater scriptural knowledge of Islam amidst traditional forms of practice. It was a site of overlapping religious and social domains that included the ritual and the un-ritualised, the communal and the individual. Within this overlap, the nature of Islam was understood by those involved in different ways. I examine this complexity through the relationship between two conceptualisations of Islam within anthropology. The emergence of Islam as an object of knowledge and debate (Eickelman 1992; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996) and the search for religious 'authentication' (Deeb 2006) and piety (Mahmood 2005) have been understood as responses to mass education and the values of modernity and rationality that have disembedded religion from everyday life. More recent studies have been concerned with the religious and moral understandings of 'ordinary' Muslims as grounded in the processes of everyday life (for example, Rasanayagan 2011, 2013). The tension between these two approaches – the values located in authoritative views of

¹ Unless the context makes it necessary to specify that I am referring to Muslim Indo-Guyanese, I will generally refer to this group at the mosque simply as Guyanese.

correct knowledge and practice and those carried in the ordinary experience of people who are Muslim is not only a theoretical issue for anthropology (Marsden and Retsikas 2013) but also an issue for those I got to know. The material I present concerns not only explicit religious challenges by those who saw themselves as more knowledgeable or more pious, but the slippage whereby the ordinary and the everyday reasserted themselves. As a research site, the mosque offered a local view – not just a local instance of a globalised religion, but a window on the ambiguities and contradictions of everyday encounters through which experience emerges and within which it is managed. My fieldwork took place within a context of Muslim migration to Europe, the globalised flow of religious ideas and the climate created by the 7/7 bombings in London and its aftermath, but these large-scale processes only occasionally appeared explicitly as elements in the day-to-day concerns of those I got to know through congregational rituals, communal activities, and religious classes.

The mosque was, in Roy's (2004; 2007) terms, the reconstitution of a post-migration community in new physical site of belonging; it is the processes through which that sense of belonging was constituted that I am interested in. The mosque attracted other Muslims from different ethnic groups and for many, the differences in religious traditions and levels of commitment within the congregation were something to be accepted and accommodated, while for others they were errors that needed to be challenged. Nor was the mosque insulated from the virtual currents of a de-territorialised Islam and the new individualised forms of religiosity which Roy describes as an alternative form of post-migration Muslim belonging in Europe and America. As a physical space, the mosque encompassed within it the communal Muslim life among the Guyanese conducted in English, the presence of other ethnically-based, Muslim traditions and those who sought a more systematic theological ground for their religious practice. Though it was not accomplished without difficulty, the containing of these differences was the outcome of an explicit endeavour by some, but also expressed a wider moral vision whereby a diaspora population, the Guyanese, drawing on past experiences of a religiously and ethnically diverse society, Guyana, built a mosque for their community as a place in which they could live in their own way as Muslims and in which they could manage encounters with others whose religious traditions differed from their own.

Some of those I got to know were explicitly concerned with religious knowledge and practice that may be understood, at least in part, through the lens of new,

individualised forms of religiosity and the acquisition of objectified knowledge. Yet for many, being a Muslim was something carried mainly in day-to-day attachments to others within the community while their commitments to the larger frame of the divine and the eternal remained, for the most part, implicit and unspoken. While those who attended a weekly religious class had a perspective from which to consider and discuss Islam as separate from its lived practice, only a few among those I met in other contexts within the mosque seemed to feel they could or needed to voice their position on religious matters. Yet this does not mean that their private religious experience was unimportant to them, and certainly all my interlocutors were giving time of their lives to the mosque and the Muslim religious rituals that took place within it, while many were engaged with the practical functions which maintained both the fabric of the building and the life of the community.

If many were not primarily concerned with Islam as a matter of knowledge and debate, neither were they unreflectively immersed in an inherited way of life. I came to see those I got to know as making and inhabiting a moral space in which different degrees of self-awareness, freedom and creativity were exercised according to the demands of the occasion. This capacity drew on the resources of communal life within the mosque in which being Guyanese was interwoven with being Muslim and in which 'sociality is itself a moral source' (Rasanayagam 2011: 14). In common with recent work within the anthropology of Islam, my research focuses on the lives of 'ordinary' Muslims as a moral endeavour undertaken within the vicissitudes of daily life and in the face of other views of Islam expressed in sermons and classes and the challenging background presence of the wider discourses of globalised Islam (Marsden 2005; Rasanayagam 2011; Dahlgren and Schielke 2013; Simon 2014).

The mosque as the outcome of a history

The mosque stands at the corner of a residential road just off a busy high street in an inner London borough. From the outside, with its dome and minaret, it is clearly a mosque but it is an internally complicated physical space that retains the history of the building and of the group of Guyanese Muslims who came to London from the late 1950s onwards, in the second stage of a double migration. The grandparents and great grandparents of some of those I got to know had originally travelled from the Indian sub-continent to Guyana in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as indentured workers, though no one seemed to know many details of their family history and little material

evidence seemed to have survived². This was the last chapter in a long history of Indian migration to what was then British Guiana that began after the abolition of slavery in 1834, driven by the need for labour in the sugar plantations but also by economic and political conditions in India, and continued until 1916.

Reflecting the demography of those areas of the sub-continent from which they were drawn, this Indian diaspora population was mainly Hindu but also included Muslims (approximately sixteen per cent) and Christians (one per cent), the latter rising to ten per cent in the 1960s through religious conversion (Jaywardena 1966). Though Islam had first entered the country in the sixteenth century with African slaves, it was wiped out through repression and Christian missionary activity and only re-established with the arrival of this Indian workforce (de Kruijf 2007). Today Guyana is a multi-ethnic society of indigenous South American people and those of African and Indian descent; Muslims make up fifteen per cent of the total population of 850,000 (Chickrie 2007). As well as the gradual loss of local Indian languages and their replacement by English, the religious traditions of both Hindus and Muslims were subject to a number of transformative pressures. Chickrie (1999) suggests that women's involvement in the workforce militated against *purdah* and gender segregation. He argues that, because migration took place before the out-break of inter-religious tensions in the sub-continent and all were subject to the same conditions of indenture, the Indo-Guyanese could come together as a community, stressing their Indian past and their common interests *vis-à-vis* Guyana's other ethnic groups. This led to intermarriage and fictive kinship ties between Hindus and Muslims of Indian descent (de Kruijf 2007) and shared public participation in syncretic forms of religious rituals expressive of their common situation of economic and political restrictions (Khan 1997; 2004; Mohapatra 2006). Based on a study in the 1950s, Jayawardena (1963: 23) writes that 'Hinduism and Islam are regarded as alternative ways of being Indian. A close study of their customs reveals a considerable degree of convergence and syncretism has developed'. Under the Colonial government, education was left to plantation owners and European evangelists and only Christian holidays were officially recognised, so that Christian creole culture became influential in the lives of all, including Muslims (de Kruijf 2007).

The literature on migration from the Indian sub-continent to the Caribbean and Mauritius argues that a new form of life was generated through active processes that

² One person had only the luggage label from the trunk of a great-uncle who had migrated to Guyana.

were both material and imaginative (Jayawardena 1963, 1980; Vertovec 1994; Khan 2004; Mohapatra 2006; Halstead 2008; Eisenlohr 2006). Though this literature mainly concerns the larger Hindu Indian population, it is relevant to the Muslim Guyanese, not only because they shared the experience of migration and indenture, but also because it focuses on the processes by which a new sense of Indo-Guyanese belonging was generated.

The complexity and dynamic potential of diaspora encounters is vividly represented in eye-witness descriptions of the public celebration of Muharram in British Guiana and Trinidad during the nineteenth century. A festival of Shi'a Islam, it was immensely popular with Hindu and Sunni Muslims in which members of the Christian creole and Afro-Caribbean population also participated (Mohapatra 2006). Khan describes being Muslim in Trinidad as based in the following of customs, the freedom to participate sincerely in the ceremonies of other religious traditions, such as Catholic rituals to the Virgin Mary, as well as in the emergence of forms of superstition that were recognised by those involved as both real but different in kind from the three main religious traditions (Khan 2004). By the early decades of the twentieth century, Hindu missionary activity in British Guiana, Suriname, and Trinidad sought to bring the homogeneity of an 'official' Brahminised form of Hinduism to bear on folk traditions and to limit the mixing of Hindu and Muslim forms of religious activity, creating a sharper boundary between their adherents (Vertovec 1994; Khan 2004). Despite this, later studies suggest that inter-faith marriage, generalised social reciprocity and participation in syncretic, religiously based community events continued to be a feature of Guyanese life (Rauf 1974; Williams 1991). The fact that all had suffered the experience of indentured labour has been described as giving rise to an attitude of egalitarian inclusiveness among Indians that was extended to Afro-Caribbean neighbours on the estates. This was described in Trinidad as the valuing of a capacity to 'live good with people' (Khan 1997) and in British Guiana as the acceptance of others as being 'people like us' while recognising difference, a social disposition called *mati* (Jayawardena 1968; Robinson 2006; Halstead 2008).³

Over time, however this inclusiveness, born of having been, perhaps quite literally, in the same boat, gave way in the face of three currents of change. First, an indentured workforce tied to plantations began to live as free labourers within village communities, or as part of a more diverse workforce in urban settlements (Mohapatra 2006; Halstead

³ However, Williams' account of the tensions surrounding a Hindu-Muslim-Christian wedding she observed in the 1970s suggests a more complicated picture.

2008). Secondly, at the end of the 1950s, in the run-up to independence, inter-ethnic tensions between Afro-and Indo-Guyanese fostered and exploited for political purposes especially in urban centres, led to racialised identities, challenging and replacing the social inclusiveness of *mati* (Halstead 2008). At this time, there was a split in the main multi-ethnic political party in Guyana, the Peoples' Progressive Party of Guyana (PPP) which both groups had previously supported⁴. The violence continued for several decades, contributing to the large Indo-Guyanese diaspora in the UK, Canada and the US, while these globalised connections fed the economic disparities that further undermined social stability. Thirdly, from the 1970s the social and religious accommodations between Indo-Guyanese Muslims, Hindus and Christians came under attack by Muslim preachers from West Africa and Saudi Arabia who emphasised the importance of the 'correct' form of Islam. Khan (2004) describes the paradox that, as both Hindu and Muslim religious traditions became more global, so the focus of both became more centripetal, narrowing the religious perspective of the Indian population that had formerly participated in local forms of creolised culture and shared religiosity. Moreover, this wave of Muslim proselytising activity led to multiple religious factions within the Indian Muslim community, each taking a different stance towards the tension between 'purified' Islam and cultural traditions respectively (Chickrie 2007; de Kruijf 2007). Though the generation of Guyanese who eventually built the mosque in London would have left for the UK by then, these same currents of religious contestation and globalised movements within Islam were felt within the mosque. Yet so too was the legacy of a multi-ethnic and multi-faith Guyana. Carried in imagination into a second migration, it found expression in the building of a mosque and the forms of communal life and relational commitments this fostered.

Building the future out of the past

Before moving on to the second migration, I will use two vignettes to suggest the complexity of individual responses to this diaspora experience and the active process by which this past was carried into the present. Mr Rahman was the president of the mosque

⁴ The PPP was originally a multi-ethnic party formed in 1950 out of a merger between the British Guiana Labour Party led by Forbes Burnham and the Political Affairs Committee led by Cheddi Jagan, but concerns in the US and UK about the communist sympathies of PPP contributed to a split, with the Indo-Guyanese continuing to support the PPP under Jagan and the Afro-Guyanese population voting in the first post-independence government under Forbes Burnham and the Peoples National Congress.

at the time of my fieldwork; Azzim was a visiting preacher, a generation-and-a-half younger than Mr Rahman, who also taught a class for women and gave occasional lectures. These two Guyanese men gave very different, albeit retrospective, accounts of their responses to their, apparently, rather similar religious upbringings in rural Guyana, responses that sustained the different forms in which they lived out their religious commitments in London. In the complex context of British Guiana in the 1930s and 1970s respectively, neither of these men had grown up within a well-established system of religious education, though both reported attending classes where the memorisation of religious texts took place without explanation (Eickelman 1978). For English speakers like them, the barrier to understanding was particularly hard to overcome. Moreover, Azzim referred to the low level of general education available in rural areas. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the transformation in Islamic understanding during this period, from the handing on of something to be absorbed through imitation to something that could be grasped and understood objectively, (Eickelman 1992) had some impact and fed into the capacity to think and act independently that both Mr Rahman and Azzim were later to display. However, at this point, I want to draw attention to their retrospective accounts of their very different response to the religious world in which they found themselves when they were young as reflecting contrasting stances towards Islam and the nature of the link between the human and divine (Keane 2013).

When I first met him, Mr Rahman was an energetic man in his late seventies. By then, he had been involved in the Guyanese Muslim community in north London for over forty years. He had not originally meant to settle in the UK, nor had religion figured in his plans. As a child in rural Guyana, he said that he was taught to read Arabic by rote – ‘but we understood nothing so we always questioned why we were doing things we don’t understand’. The result, as he put it, was that ‘I didn’t used to be so serious about religion and when I married I only had knowledge of the formalities’. He said that his father had tried to learn Arabic and that he used to write to ‘somewhere in Egypt and to the Woking mosque in the UK for literature. When the first English Quran came over, we started to have a picture of more understanding . . . but we still had this backward . . . we were backward people.’⁵ He conveyed a sense of having felt on the outer periphery of the

⁵ This was a recurring reference in reports on the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, particularly from the perspective of a second migration of Hindu-Guyanese to the US (Halstead 2006)

Muslim world and that religious knowledge and understanding was somewhere else⁶. Looking back from a later perspective formed by his having studied Islam in London in the 1970s, and the experience of having led the Guyanese in the building of a mosque, he could reflect on the deficiencies in his own early education.

I could see the flaws in what we had been told when we were young . . . but you can't blame them [the parental and grandparental generation] for that because they were following custom as well. In my estimation, it was like this – they had the lamp and they just kept the light going by pouring a bit of oil but another generation comes up and we must move on a bit more from that . . . but it's not easy because you always have a fight with other people . . . even up to today. Different cultures have a different understanding of things. Some culture becomes part of religion. You can't take it out because we are living, practising for hundreds of years, thousands of years, maybe . . .

From the standpoint of his adult experience of attending religious classes in London, Mr Rahman was aware of the shortcomings of a religious education that lacked access to expert knowledge and was transmitted by the rote memorising of a text without understanding. Yet whatever he may have felt at the time, in later life he had found a perspective from which its moral value as a human experience and as social resource could be appreciated. His later religious education at the Central London mosque had not, in that sense, created an idea of religious understanding as based solely on the knowledge of a text. He presented the situation in terms of a valuing of the commitments of past generations and wisdom accrued piecemeal through age and experience.⁷ Mr Rahman spoke as if he took Muslim cultural traditions, not as the encroachment of human imperfection on the original divine revelation, but as the valued and valuable consequence of generations of human living as Muslims. 'Keeping the lamp burning' was, then, not just the best that could be managed by a community on the edge of the Muslim world. Rather, he presented it as a vital sign of something alive within the tradition of Guyanese Islam that continued to animate and motivate him and that he saw as something of value to be handed on into the future, as it had been handed down to him. This perspective on the complex relationship between a religious text and a lived tradition

⁶ I use this designation because that was how Mr Rahman seemed to have experienced the matter, but as Kresse (2013) points out, this does not mean that engaged forms of religious thinking do not take place at a distance from Arab or Muslim majority countries.

⁷ This reflects the encounter between Islamic learning and indigenous forms of knowledge on the East African coast (Parkin 2007).

created it as a moral object through the recognition and appreciation of its human provenance and its association with the lives and efforts of earlier generations of Muslims. Such an object suggests that active linking of thought and feeling within the imagination that constitutes a 'mindful life' (Marsden 2005: 263). For Mr Rahman, this object, the lamp kept alight by others, could be known and spoken of, but it was also a live and enlivening moral presence that linked his life to those of earlier generations and sustained the effort to build the mosque with all its attendant challenges.

Azzim, probably in his forties at the time of my fieldwork, was also born in rural Guyana, a generation or two later than Mr Rahman. He often talked about his own deficient schooling and his long struggle to gain a religious education. He had to teach himself Arabic from whatever books happened to be available before he could go on to read the Quran. In the process of this self-study, he became aware of the low level of religious knowledge and practice among the other English-speaking Guyanese Muslims around him. He once described how he lost his job in a sugar factory because of his insistence on taking time for religious practice. He then sought help in finding another job from a local sheikh who gave him something with writing on it that he was to bury in a ditch. He said he did not feel comfortable about doing it, as he did not think that such a practice was in the Quran, but he did it nonetheless. Nothing happened. When he spoke to the sheikh about this, he was told it had not worked because he had not believed in it; Azzim agreed that this was true. He decided instead that he would get another job when Allah willed it. The object of the story, as I heard Azzim tell it in a class, was, on the one hand, the pointlessness of such a practice as a remedy for his unemployed state, for which the sheikh was willing to take money and, on the other, the grave religious error it represented. Over time Azzim came to see the sheikh's way of thinking and acting as embedded within a proliferation of Muslim practices that were culturally transmitted misunderstandings and altered the original message of Islam – God's word as revealed to the Prophet, to which humankind could have nothing to add. In contrast to Mr Rahman, Azzim responded to the inadequacy of his religious upbringing by actively seeking a direct knowledge of the text for himself while still a young man in Guyana. Through his own observations, and perhaps the emergence around that time of a more self-conscious climate of religious proselytising in Guyana, Azzim became committed to a new perspective on Islam: a textual revelation that could be grasped intellectually as well as embodied through imitation of the form of practice of the Prophet, rather than through handing on the taken-for-granted Muslim nature of traditional ways of living. In contrast

to Mr Rahman's valuing of the accretions of human efforts in the past, Azzim orientates himself to a divine object located outside human culture. For him, God is accessible only through direct knowledge of the Quran. There is no legitimate place for either a relationship with the divinity based on the model of human intimacy, or the absorbing of Islam as an inherited way of life, and neither can the revelation of the Quran be possessed through memorisation without understanding.⁸

Azzim was consistent in his criticism of cultural additions to Islam, and elaborations of forms of worship. However, though he often spoke scornfully of the tendency in Guyana for the richest person in the village, rather than the most knowledgeable or the most pious, to take the role of religious leader, he also used his experiences of growing up on what he felt to be the edge of the Islamic world as the basis for understanding those ordinary Muslims he encountered in the UK, whom he saw as similarly stuck in error and misconception, reserving his criticism for the sheikhs and teachers who he thought misled them. He described the difficulties of being a reforming teacher and of learning early on, and from bitter experience, that telling others, especially those older than him, that they were wrong, was not productive. This very engagement with his own experience of learning and teaching drew him back into the complexities of human living, complicating too straightforward a framing of his position as the 'purification' of cultural elaborations. Trying to transform the religious awareness of others by developing in them what he called 'a thinking mind' was a long task and it was this, conceived as a religious duty (*da'wa*), that he was committed to when I met him. Yet this very experience of learning and teaching others drew him back into the complexities of human living.

Though the foundations of the religious views of these two men, as they represented them, were quite different, and their positions can be linked in the present to larger theological contestations within Islam, the lived reality was more nuanced and more fluid. I came to see the distinction between Mr Rahman and Azzim as complicated by the nature of what they had in common: a shared Guyanese past, an ongoing involvement with the Guyanese community in UK and a willingness to actively engage with non-Muslim British society. Both men had sustained their relationship to the object of their commitments over a long period and, for both, this had involved engaging with others and with the demands of material reality – whether to build and maintain a

⁸ This would run counter to an interpretation of rote learning as the embodiment of the divine revelation (Boyle 2006)

mosque or to establish classes as part of a larger proselytising endeavour. Their religious commitments, as they were lived out in concrete situations, brought to the fore the complexity, struggles, contradictions and failures that are the inevitable reality of any life – the difference between how we behave and think and what, according to our norms and doctrines, should be the case (Laidlaw 2013: 215). Such complexities are the outcome of an engagement with others. For Mr Rahman and Azzim, the congregation and the class were full of contradictions that had to be struggled with if a measure of communal solidarity or religious understanding were to be achieved. However, while Mr Rahman's perspective was explicitly informed by the recognition of these complications and built out of them, Azzim's stated view remained, for the most part, the ideal of scriptural revelation.

A second diaspora: engaging with new realities in Britain

Mr Rahman was the main source of this account of the history of the mosque. He first travelled to the UK in 1959 to do a course in tailoring and dry cleaning but, as he related it, had no thought of staying until political unrest in Guyana led his parents to tell him he should not return at which point he sent for his family to join him. Other older Guyanese had also arrived in the 1960s. Mr Rahman described himself at that time 'as practising [Islam] but not very involved'. He prayed solely with other Guyanese 'in private homes and basements' in a way that that was reminiscent of the description by Muslim architect Gulzar Haidar of 'prayer in makeshift settings' when he first reached London (Haidar 1996). Though Haidar refers to the relief of performing a familiar religious practice in the company of other Muslims, the vulnerability of such informal gatherings of religiously unsophisticated individuals from the periphery of the Muslim world was apparent in a story Mr Rahman told of being caught up in a new religious movement in the early 1970s. Some of the leaders of the North London Islamic Group, which he referred to as 'Guyanese-oriented', heard about a sheikh in Manchester and became convinced that this man was 'a prophet or something'. Mr Rahman was part of a group who spent some years involved with this sheikh before becoming disillusioned and returning to London, but many stayed on, only abandoning the Manchester project much later. During these years, those in London had formed a new group, the United Islamic Association (UIA), but Mr Rahman had also met an older Pakistani Muslim who encouraged him to undertake a course of study at the Central Mosque, at that time not in Regent's Park. A leadership challenge was mounted within the UIA by one of the late returners from Manchester

through what Mr Rahman felt were rigged elections and the signing up of large numbers of new members. He described this challenge as motivated more by personal ambition than theological differences, though he said that there were accusations at the time about people belonging to different sects and added, laughing, that 'this (dispute) was when we first realised we were Sunni'. This new perception, which seemed to have emerged from both this conflict and his religious training, also coincided with the religious disputes between cultural and textual forms of Islam that was underway in Guyana, though Mr Rahman made no reference to them (de Kruijf 2007). As a result of the dispute among the Muslim Guyanese in London, those who would eventually go on to build the mosque left the UIA to pursue their own path. Mr. Rahman's account of these various organisations echoes Vertovec's description of the formal and informal associations that helped to sustain social networks and meet religious needs among the Hindu Indo-Guyanese community in London, who like their Muslim counterparts, were spread across the capital rather than being gathered in one or two neighbourhoods (Vertovec 2000: 118). The life of the Guyanese at this time seemed to involve the forming of organisations and disputes about who ran them.

The absence in Mr Rahman's account of references to the theological aspects of the split in the UIA, as from his story of the group in Manchester, is striking.⁹ While theological disputes among Muslims in Guyana that led to a proliferation of groups (Chickrie 2007; de Kruijf 2007) no doubt contributed to the various rifts within the Muslim Guyanese community in London, they were not discussed. The splits in London were presented to me as driven by personalities, rather than theological or political differences. Recent pressures at the mosque, which I describe below, are more clearly recognised as linked to globalised theological movements within Islam but, again, I did not hear them discussed as reflecting the situation in Guyana. As, during my fieldwork, I received various confidences about more personal stresses and strains, I see this reluctance to discuss community difficulties with me, beyond a certain point, as linked to a wish to preserve the idea of Guyana as sustaining their Muslim community in London. If this imagined 'Guyana' was an idealised space where differences were tolerated and the capacity to do so was valued, there was also, within the immediate past, a robust willingness to dispute, form into factions and stand one's ground, allowing splits to take their course. One of the main themes of this dissertation is an image of Guyana remembered and embodied in

⁹ From the timing, it is possible that the group in Manchester may have been Deobandi. In the early 1970s a sheikh arrived in Bury in Greater Manchester and founded a Deobandi College.

personal and collective experiences and the way it fed into the re-imagining of a new communal home for this group of Muslim Indo-Guyanese in London. The other, interwoven with it, is the religious framing of the life of this community and the different ways this was taken up by individuals.

After the split with the UIA, the new grouping, led by Mr Rahman, began informal prayer gatherings in private houses. This developed by stages, through the acquisition of a house and then, in the mid-1980s, a local hall that had been used first for light industry and then as a synagogue. For fifteen years, this anonymous-looking building was both a prayer hall and a place for social events until the new mosque with a decoratively tiled and carpeted prayer space for men and a similarly decorated balcony area for women was built on the adjacent site in 2000. This new-build had been paid off by 2005, but by the end of my fieldwork in 2011 the congregation had outgrown this space and another three-storey structure was about to be built on the site of the old hall. The oversight of the building works, and the setting up and managing of the Charitable Trust that runs the mosque bespeaks a considerable level of organisational and financial ability, not only among the immediate group of Trustees but also within the wider Guyanese community whose financial contributions in the form of interest free loans, gifts and legacies have supported the venture in addition to contributions from the wider congregation. Though I have not sought information about this aspect of the Guyanese community, among the Trustees were an accountant and someone else who had been a successful local businessman while among others I got to know, there were a number who worked in professional and semi-professional capacities in the NHS and in education, and in administrative positions in local government.¹⁰ The economic success of some within the larger Guyanese community in London was undoubtedly an important factor in relation to the building of the mosque but it may also be seen as linked to local circumstances that supported the growth of different ethnic community groups within this area of London, as in other urban centres in the UK, facilitated by the idea of 'multi-culturalism' (Vertovec 2002: 21)¹¹. Just as different migrant communities in Europe, and the diverse groups within those communities, encounter the different history and traditions of European societies, this congregation is situated in a particular and changing social context. If the decentralised system of local government in Britain created opportunities for pragmatic local accommodations through a discourse of as multi-culturalism (Bowen 2007), an

¹⁰ I am leaving this deliberately vague for reasons of confidentiality.

¹¹ In 2003 an Afro-Guyanese, Trevor Phillips, was appointed to be head of the Commission for Racial Equality.

unwritten constitution, an established church and a legal system that recognises discrimination on the grounds of race but not religion has created other obstacles (Hellyer 2009). The majority of Britain's 1.6 million Muslims are of South Asian heritage. Though originally from also from South Asia, the Guyanese felt marginal to these much larger Muslim communities, the diversity of beliefs and practices within them (Vertovec 2002), and their continuing links with religious centres in the subcontinent (Werbner 2002). At the same time, as English speakers from a former British colony, they had a degree of familiarity with the host society while their lack of ties to Muslim religious leadership elsewhere left them free to make their own way (once they had severed ties with the group in Manchester). This has echoes of the situation described by Mandel (2008) with respect to the Turkish Alevi community in Germany. Though marginalised in their home society, they found themselves freer and more successful in adapting to new circumstances than their Sunni compatriots. In seeking to explore this Muslim community of Guyanese, I focus on the mosque they built and the nature of the religious life within it but this is for practical reasons. I am not arguing that the mosque could not be understood as embedded within a large context.

Muslim Guyanese have always been a minority within a minority and their absolute numbers are small. From the 1991 census Vertovec (2000) estimated the total Guyanese-born population in the UK, as 20,400 and within this the Indo-Guyanese as 5,400. Assuming the ratio of Hindus to Muslims reflected that in Guyana, the Muslim Guyanese would have numbered about 1,000 at that time though Vertovec makes no reference to the fact that a generation had passed since the first migrants came to the UK and the British-born descendants of the Indo-Guyanese would not be included in this number. At the time of my fieldwork, the register of members of the mosque, probably mainly Guyanese, who paid a nominal sum to be on the mailing list, stood at 500. This would number households rather than individuals. Yet despite this small number, the mosque is financially and theologically independent of the direct influence of the transnational religious groups based in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that are involved in the financing of many UK mosques. Unlike the Pakistani Muslims of whom Werbner (1996, 2002) writes, they cannot call on the resources of a large pre-migration 'home' community and it appears that the Guyanese feel that this has been helpful to them in developing their own mosque in a new context. Mr Rahman described how, in the early days, he had written to other Muslim organisations for loans. Only a Saudi Arabian organisation replied, offering money but an agent they sent made it clear that they would want control over what

happened within the mosque. The offer was refused and those seeking to build the mosque sought to safeguard its independence by funding the venture themselves, first through a loan from a Guyanese businessman in South London with contributions from the Guyanese congregation and small-scale fund raising used to pay off what they could from the loan each month. The commitment to having a place of worship was one of the elements that distinguished this group from the one they left, whose members did not want, or perhaps were not able to move away from the use of private homes. Money continues to be raised through large and small interest-free loans from the Guyanese community, bequests, fundraising events and a collection from the congregation on Fridays. At the time of writing the new extension is complete and fundraising to pay it off is underway. Though this involved constant effort – Mr Rahman’s favourite phrase on such occasions was ‘put the money in the box before you go in the box [coffin]’ – it also reflects the economic success of some Guyanese in the UK and their willingness to put some of their wealth at the disposal of the mosque and their community. Beyond this, the Guyanese Trustees also made interest-free loans to other mosques in need of funds and the mosque actively supported Palestinian charities as well as responding to emergency causes.

Quite apart from the need to raise money, the attempts to find a building for use as a mosque, and later to extend it, involved engaging in protracted struggles with other sections of the local community. Some religious groups were only willing to sell their redundant buildings for non-religious use, while other ethnic communities, some Muslim (Mr Rahman cited a Bengali group) were also competing for space in the same locality. This, in turn, brought the Guyanese into contact with local politics. Mr Rahman described losing a property they wanted near the old mosque to a Greek Women’s organisation because, he said, the mayor at that time (the early 1980s) was Greek. He said that he had threatened to complain to the council about this. Whether he did or not, it is indicative of an engagement with local ethno-politics (Baumann 1996). When a building adjacent to the mosque, and owned by the council, came up for sale, Mr Rahman described how the Community Relations officer he had brought to the site asked, ‘What do you want me to do?’ Mr Rahman told him, ‘Sell us this land,’ and it seemed that a deal was done whereby the land alone, rather than the unwanted building was sold. He said triumphantly ‘and that was the last thing that happened before the closing of the Community Relations Council!’.

On a day-to-day basis, the confidence and comfort with difference that had once been embodied in the social valuing of *mati* relationships was a continuing resource in the mosque's relations with other ethnic and religious groups in the surrounding community. The Afro-Guyanese diaspora have been prominent in the part of London in which the mosque is situated and individuals from that much larger section of the Guyanese community have been active in local Labour party politics. The borough came to be associated in the 1970s and 80s with a discourse of multi-culturalism. Some Guyanese would use this idiom to joke to me that 'we were multi-cultural before you were'. This was indicative not so much of a reified discourse of ethnic identity (Baumann 1996,1997) as an ironic familiarity with the pragmatic way of conceiving of relationships to other ethnic and religious groups within the local community that Baumann calls 'demotic discursive praxis'. This practical mode of ordinary day-to-day living with others facilitated a new sense of belonging in a new context.

More recent migrant groups from Muslim countries and the global currents of renewal within Islam have brought fresh challenges, this time more obviously and unavoidably theological. Mr Rahman referred, in passing, to a period in which the serious and well publicised difficulties in nearby mosques had spilled over into their congregation. However, neither he nor others were willing to speak in any detail about the impact of the disputes at Finsbury Park mosque in the neighbouring borough during the 1990s, when Abu Hamza al Masri was the imam, or the influence locally of Omar Bakri Mohammad, the founder of *Hizb ut-tahrir*. This group still leafleted outside the gates during the period of my fieldwork. They did so alongside others offering classes, publicising marches, or championing Muslim victims of injustice at home and abroad. The mosque also had its own internal religious difficulties. When the first generation of Guyanese imams, who were felt to have had insufficient religious training, were replaced by two Saudi-trained Guyanese in the 1990s, it became clear that though they were Guyanese, they had a very different idea of Islam and were not willing to undertake the kinds of rituals and prayers for family members that the community had become accustomed to. Eventually these two imams were removed and replaced first by one part-time Bangladeshi imam, and then by a second who had trained in the UK. However, though I made efforts to talk to the senior imam, only the younger imam, Bilal, was willing to talk and let me observe his children's classes. This may have reflected the senior imam's greater work and family commitments but it may also have been that he was less comfortable with my presence. Because of the size of the congregation, there are two

Friday prayers, so a rota of visiting preachers took turns to give the sermon and lead the prayers. Both the vice-president and the mosque secretary, who is the daughter of Mr Rahman, made it clear that they needed to maintain vigilance towards the many visiting preachers and lecturers who spoke at the mosque and referred to the constant risk posed by the fact that, if ever one of the official imams did not arrive to take prayers, there were always men waiting their chance to take over.

When the congregation moved from meeting in a private house to the mosque as a public space, the implication was that it was open to all Muslims.¹² This was a source of considerable anxiety among the Guyanese at the time and for this reason, while the mosque is open to all for worship, the terms of the Charity under which the mosque operates specifically limits the Board of Trustees and voting membership of the mosque society to the Guyanese and those married to Guyanese. However, my focus is not on the high-profile disputes of the past or the risks they may still pose, but on the more routine form in which different ways of practicing and speaking about Islam challenged one another within the mosque at the time of my fieldwork. While the Guyanese continued to run the mosque, there was also a group that included both Mauritians and others who migrated to the UK directly from South Asian countries who regularly attended the additional rituals, lectures and social occasions at the mosque and who seemed to share a similar view of being Muslim to that of the Guyanese. For purposes of simplicity I will sometimes use an expression of Mr Rahman's and refer to this larger, more complex, grouping as 'Guyanese oriented'. This group contrasted with those within the congregation who may also have come from the same sub-continental societies but whose pattern of attendance at the mosque is more like those who have migrated recently from Uganda, Somalia, North Africa and Eastern Europe. These groups attend Friday prayers and major festivals but are not generally present at the more peripheral ritual and social events, though some may attend the adult religious classes and lectures that take place at the mosque.

The life of the mosque; the life within the mosque

I have organised my material around three different domains within the mosque and the different forms of religious and social life that predominated within them. Chapters 2 and 3 give contrasting accounts of a Muslim community created through the practice of

¹² The Trustees would say that it is open to all members of the public.

collective prayer and the idea of unity that formed the subject of many of the sermons. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the communal life of the Guyanese and the religious and social values carried within it. Chapters 6 and 7 concern the objectified form of Islam based on scriptural knowledge that was the focus of Azzim's teaching and the responses to it of those who attended his classes and lectures. Running across this division into domains and chapters were the complex processes whereby a group of Guyanese Muslims re-constituted a communal life in London, the emotional and imaginative resources that sustained both the building of the mosque and the day-to day-management of uncertainty and challenge, and Islam as a current within the flow of ordinary life rather than set apart as rational knowledge. Even in classes and lectures, where this perspective found a space of its own, it was subject to the pull of worldly concerns and commitments.

Living Guyana in London

The world in which the Guyanese-born within the congregation had grown up was present not only in verbal accounts of that world as it was remembered but as it was lived in forms of sociality and modes of speech. As Vertovec writes of Hindu Guyanese in Britain, 'Indo-Caribbean social and cultural styles seem, at least outwardly much more 'Western' than those of first generation immigrants from India' (Vertovec 2000: 116). A style of open, lively sociality was an element that characterised the atmosphere in non-ritual areas of the mosque and animated the hospitality that was offered as part of almost all mosque events other than Friday prayers. This quality of 'conviviality' (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014) was not only a source of enjoyment for those who participated in bringing Guyana to life in London, but it was felt to have facilitated the creation of a mixed congregation and friendly relations with non-Muslims. The group at the mosque who were closest to the Guyanese were the Mauritians for whom a similar pattern of indentured migration had taken place from the Indian sub-continent (Eisenlohr 2006). The relationship between these groups in London was characterised by a sense of common experience and a certain rivalry, as indicated in a joke told by the Guyanese to the effect that those who ended up in Mauritius were those who could not wait for Guyana and got off the boat early. Despite the different social and political circumstances of Guyana and Mauritius in the present, it seems, both in the literature and from observation at the mosque, that these two groups had a similar conception of ethnic and religious pluralism as a 'common good' (Eisenlohr 2011). But a way of being together in gender, ethnic and religiously mixed gatherings that expressed the moral world of the Guyanese was not so well received by all. Those who joined the congregation through later migrations brought traditions and expectations

founded in more ethnically and religiously homogeneous societies. While individuals from other ethnic groups might choose to join more marginal events at the mosque, it was only in the public performance of the core collective rituals of Islam that the range of ethnic and religious difference within the congregation were gathered together.

Being Guyanese Muslims was one of several different traditional, 'non-orthodox' ways of being Muslim that were present in the mosque alongside those who sought a more systematic and conscious understanding of their religion. Much of the time, the implications of these differences within the congregation did not become the subject of explicit comment and in a sense, this *de facto* accommodation of difference reproduced the ethnic and religious diversity of Guyana. At another level, this inclusiveness was made possible by the shared collective ritual of Friday prayer in which all could join. This ritual produced not only a visual image of a united congregation (Bowen 1989) but, through a direct experience bodily of attunement to others, an embodied unity among an otherwise diverse congregation (Rappaport 1999). Beyond this, the range of ethnic and religious difference within the mosque created for some that potential for encounters with other perspectives that may, as Parkin (2007) suggests, give rise to reflective thought about the thinking of others. But this was not the only possible outcome. The response to the diversity of Islam within the mosque was itself diverse. Some members of the congregation sought to impose physical boundaries on gender mixing; for others, the range of Muslim traditions stirred anxieties about their practice and a wish to learn more; while for yet others, it created the idea of theological error and the need for the certainty of 'one right way'. For their part, the Guyanese rarely if ever spoke about religion as something separate from their participation in Friday prayers or attendance at other mosque events. As children, they had not learnt to recite or read the Quran with understanding; as adults, many did not seem to feel it was necessary to engage more actively with the text in order to live a good Muslim life. For them, Islam offered a religiously inflected framework through which to experience life as a moral undertaking alongside others.

Diaspora imagination

Diaspora experience and the emergence of post-migration communities have been construed in terms of processes that are both material and imaginative (Jaywardena 1980, Roy 2004; Werbner 2002; Mohapatra 2006; Eisenlohr 2006, 2015). For an understanding of the nature and generativity of imagination, anthropology has drawn on literary theory for accounts of the relational qualities of the mind and the compression of locations and

moments in external space-time into the simultaneity of the imagination (Bakhtin 1981 and Benjamin 1968). As Eisenlohr puts it, 'I treat diaspora not as a simple consequence of migration from A to B, but as a form of identification in which some continued relationship or allegiance to a necessarily imagined, and sometimes even invented, homeland is made relevant for such processes of identification . . . diasporas are not created by the mere fact of displacement' (Eisenlohr 2006: 8). He sees evidence of these imaginative processes among Mauritian Hindus in the special status accorded to classical Hindi and the visual recreation of the sacred geography of pilgrimage that together sustain a continuing relationship with the ancestors in the present. For the Guyanese at the mosque this imaginal dimension was carried in the embodied states created in collective ritual and communal sociality, in a style of expressive language, and in a view of their place as Muslims within a wider non-Muslim society. The life of the mosque can be construed as the flow of identifications with earlier generations of Guyanese Muslims that create both pattern and continuity *and* sustain the potential for transformation – the paradox of a 'changing same' (Shukla 2001 citing Jones 1968). There is also the implication that something serious is stake within the imaginative dimension of experience and that this is in play, and therefore potentially at risk, in all situations. Jayawardena (1980) argues that when a home is lost in external physical reality, as India was lost to the Guyanese, its values are transferred to the domain of imagination. The challenges and uncertainties that had to be lived through at the mosque drew on these imaginative resources in processes that Mattingly calls 'moral work' (2012; 167). This is imagination not as fancy and fantasy, but as central to the way our species invests the material world with relational and ethical meaning within what Marchand (2010), in a study of apprenticeship learning, calls 'the indissoluble relation between minds, bodies and environment'.

A moral world grounded in ordinary lives

Recent studies of everyday lives within Muslim communities have shifted the focus from Islam as an object of scriptural and authoritative knowledge to its presence within the moral understandings of ordinary people, raising issues as to how to conceptualise the nature of this presence. The very fluidity of ordinary sociality poses questions as to the forms in which the moral is present within 'the unbounded flow of life experience' (Marsden and Retsikas 2013) and in what registers of experiences ethical concerns emerge (Panadian and Ali 2010). Simon (2014) writes of the gap between the cultural demands and religious ideals of the Muslim community in West Sumatra that he studied and the diversity of individual moral responses among those he interviewed.

Ethnographies of piety and religious renewal have understood the moral in terms of conscious processes of self-fashioning but this new focus suggests the need to engage with 'nonvolitional currents of affective and psychic force not amenable to wilful control' (Panadian and Ali 2010: 6).

Hirschkind's (2006) work suggests bodily states as the point of articulation between the individual and the social and though he considers bodily affective states in relation to the cultivation of piety, the medium of this self-fashioning is grounded in universal bodily capacities – the 'affective and visceral registers of human existence' (Hirschkind 2006: 31). I will build on the implications of this point, and the link it suggests with a psycho-developmental literature on pre-reflective bodily intersubjectivity. I will argue that the everyday lives of 'ordinary' Muslims in which the moral is present within 'the ambivalence of everyday experience, its incoherence, and failure to live up to the ideal' (Rasanayagam 2013: 114) can be better understood by keeping in mind the fluidity and emergent qualities of human functioning from infancy onwards, rather than looking at it only from the perspective of a mature adult. This allows one to consider the relationships between the registers of experience without prioritising the cognitive. The research of Trevarthen (1979, 1998) and Hobson (1998, 2002) offers a model of development based not in the discrete, innate capacities of the infant but in the unfolding and shaping of those capacities in the vicissitudes of relational experience through which the mind's link between the body and the social environment first emerges. From this perspective, the infant and carer are in an active, mutually attuning, open-ended relationship from the start of life and development takes place in and through an intimate social world which the infant participates in, comes to feel at home in and internalises. This posits the individual as both carrying *and* creating the social, as the continuous and avoidable registering of the intersubjective qualities of ordinary human interactions, and the moral as an emergent imaginal dimension within these states of relatedness in development and throughout life. This perspective speaks to the issue raised by Simon (2014) that the moral subjectivity of ordinary Muslims, in the accounts of they gave of their struggles to live and express their personal experience through the opportunities and conflicts embedded within their culture, could not be understood as an adherence to social norms or the acceptance of Islam as an ideal social order. Rather, moral capacity draws, in unpredictable ways, on a shared background of intersubjective experience within a community within which (bodily) affective, conceptual and deliberative registers of experience are mutually constituting (Eisenlohr 2006: 263).

Such a view is consonant with the moral nature of everyday life as characterised by a fluid accommodation of different relational states, aspirations and failures as much as achievements – aspirations as entailing on-going responsibilities and failures that may, at different times, be faced and repaired, evaded or misrepresented. As Dahlgren and Schielke (2013) suggest, it is through improvised encounters with contradictions and ambiguities rather than through normative formulas and prescriptions that ‘a more or less good Muslim life’ is led. I think many Guyanese would have agreed with this view. By contrast, the approach that Azzim, the visiting imam, espoused was of the divine revelation as a rationally knowable object, outside the fluid and uncertain domain of the human. The centrifugal power of shared rituals held together these two opposing conceptions of a religious life within the same mosque, the different ethnic groups and theological strands within Islam,¹³ the pious and minimally practicing alike, as no doubt they do everywhere (Henkel 2005). Hence, I start with religious ritual.

Chapters 2 and 3 - Friday prayers

Outside Ramadan, it was only at Friday prayer that the diverse congregation at this mosque came together *as* a congregation. In my account of the collective performance of ritual prayer and the sermon that preceded it, I draw attention to the contrast between these two elements of collective religious practice and that between the ritual of Friday prayers and the mundane background against which it takes place and out of which it draws the congregation together. Collective prayer is conducted in Arabic at the mosque, as it is across the globe, in a ritualised form that Rappaport (1999) argues establishes a religious reality that does not depend on the inner state of individual participants. Yet this is not to say that individuals may not have widely different ‘intentions and understandings of what is going on’ (Rasanayadam 2013:104) or that the performance of collective prayer at the mosque was not a potentially complicated and, at times, contested matter in terms of its correct form and the material and organisational practicalities it entailed. However, Rappaport is drawing attention both to the nature of the religious as a felt reality and the processes by which it is shared. He gives two accounts of ritual in two different registers of experience – firstly, that located in the illocutory power of public ritual speech to instantiate a state of affairs and secondly, that based in the bodily impact of ritual’s formal, given and, from the perspective of the participant, unchanging structure. While

¹³ Although it seemed that the majority at the mosque was Sunni there were references that implied the presence of some Shi’a Muslims within the congregation.

prayer was in Arabic, the sermon was given in English, the language of the mosque, so that the relationship of different sections of the congregation and the rota of preachers from different parts of the Muslim world to both languages was complicated, complicating in turn any argument based on the existence of a shared language community. However, in Rappaport's second register, the musicality of the words of prayer and the accompanying bodily movements are an expressive, aesthetic element in a familiar collective performance that is open to all. It is with respect to this aspect that Rappaport turns to the work of Turner (1969) and d'Aquili et al (1979) to suggest the bodily impact of ritual. This points to aspects of ritual that are not symbolic or propositional and suggests a perspective on the pragmatic and the performative that is grounded in the co-ordinated patterns of bodily movements among the congregation. Through an alignment of neurophysiological response, a transformation in the states of being within a group takes place such that, as Rappaport puts it, the distinctions between persons that pertain in ordinary time dissolve, discursive logic is over-ridden by primary process thinking and strong emotional states predominate. This, he argues, is both a social phenomenon that transforms a collection of individuals into something like 'a single organism' and a quality of individual experience in which 'developmentally earlier [forms of] functioning' come to the fore, creating a mode of being that is 'more participatory and less de-centred than conceptual thought' (Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili 1990: 277 cited by Rappaport 1999: 227). Chapter 2 describes the collective ritual of Friday prayer as attuning the bodily experience of a disparate group of individuals to one another, creating a direct, if transient sense of being gathered into an ideal moral entity, the community of believers. However, Hirschkind's (2006) work suggests that such a perspective is also relevant, though in a less obvious way, to an understanding of other activities in the different domains of the mosque which generate a moral world and a sense of communal belonging within it. I will therefore make space here to lay the foundations for my argument.

Though Hirschkind's (2006) ethnography of religious practice in Cairo concerns a loosely connected group of young men going about their daily life rather than engaged in ritual, the somato-affective impact of listening to taped sermons as a religious practice are described in those registers of experience of which Rappaport writes with respect to the impact of ritual. While Rappaport places the bodily dimension of ritual in a neurophysiological and developmental context, Hirschkind builds his account of the potential of sermon audition to create ethically meaningful affective states out of, on the

one hand, an Islamic psycho-physiology of preaching and, on the other, a view of the bodily-affective processes of social life based on the work of two social theorists, Jousse ([1925] 1990) and Massumi (2002)¹⁴. Hirschkind's work is predicated on what he sees as universal human capacities for bodily communication while Massumi links these bodily registers of feeling and the body's capacity for pre-verbal, pre-reflective communication to a psycho-developmental perspective in the work of Daniel Stern (1985)¹⁵ whose account relates to research on early mother-infant relationships ('primary intersubjectivity') in the work of Trevarthen and Hobson cited earlier. The work of all three offers a model of the emergence of a shared cultural world and the entry into language ('secondary intersubjectivity') arising from the early bodily relatedness of primary intersubjectivity (Hobson 2002) and of the dynamics of bodily communication as present in everyday life across the lifespan (Stern 2012).

Hirschkind (2006) describes a form of Muslim religiosity among young men in Cairo that takes place outside the mosque and beyond the relative formality of the piety classes that are the site of Mahmood's work (2005). Though the goal of the subjects of both ethnographies is to embody states of piety as unconscious dispositions, Mahmood presents her informants as consciously focused on the accomplishment of an actively pursued disciplinary project; in Hirschkind's work there is a sense that ethical coherence may also emerge through a less consciously self-driven process. Hirschkind's interlocutors sought to cultivate pious states but, rather than only attending to the verbal content of the sermons and their direct implications for practice, they made them into the continuous, often unattended, background soundscape of their lives: the radio in the taxi, the tape-recorder playing away while friends conversed. The impact of the sermons is described as being transmitted directly to the hearer through the musical dynamics of the delivery, prompting bodily, affective, and imaginative responses. A recurrent theme, both in the sermons and in the way the young men expressed the nature of their impact, was that of 'opening the heart', which Hirschkind renders as 'states of emotional receptivity and response' (Hirschkind 2006: 75). This was sometimes spoken of by individuals in terms of a directly calming effect but also as the taking in of that capacity for 'moral discrimination' that is necessary for proper conduct. The experience of 'opening of the heart' to affective currents of sound is, as Hirschkind puts it, one in which the 'body

¹⁴ I will recast this as bodily-affective. However, it is also worth noting that Damasio (1999) whose work Massumi references prefers to use the term 'emotion' for non-conscious visceral states, reserving 'affect' for the conscious or potentially conscious experience of feeling states.

¹⁵ In footnotes (Massumi 2002: 262 and 287).

registers its involvement with its sensory surroundings' (ibid: 77) and becomes able to discern, and attend to, an ethically appropriate focus. This is a very different language from that which Mahmood uses to render her informants' experiences. When Mahmood (2005:32) writes that 'the women are summoned [in the classes] to recognise themselves in terms of the virtues and codes of these traditions, and they come to measure themselves against the ideals furnished by these traditions' and argues that in doing so the women are exercising ethical freedom, she is speaking of an individual's conscious effort to re-make herself. Hirschkind's descriptions, on the other hand, evoke not the boundedness of an individual consciousness, or the body as the ground for conscious self-fashioning, but something like the ongoing, naturally occurring life of an organism within the currents flowing through the surrounding environment.¹⁶ The young men use this permeability to shape a sensibility to a religious world but it is implicit in Hirschkind's argument that human beings are *naturally* attuned to one another and imaginatively responsive to the musical qualities of their sound world, the relational states carried within it and its potential to bring feelings of relatedness to life within, and between, individuals.

The sermons at Friday prayers that are the subject of Chapter 3 were in marked contrast to collective prayer at the mosque. Though delivered in a ritual context, the sermons were themselves non-ritualised events. They were given by a rota of imams from different parts of the Muslim world, varied greatly, and offered neither a coherent theological position nor a perspective on that difference. A concern with the state of the *umma* was a recurrent theme but, unlike the creation of unity through the attunement of bodily experience in collective prayer, this image of Muslim unity had to be created through language. Yet the imams could not draw on a common tradition of Islamic preaching, or a shared knowledge of Arabic. Instead many addressed an external experience that the congregation had in common – that of living within a non-Muslim majority society. These sermons expressed a concern with the lack of a proper religious context within which to live a Muslim life and the obvious absence of continuity between the form of life within the mosque and that of the society beyond. A minority of the

¹⁶ This view of the body in its environment (Marchand2010) echoes the work of William James to whom anthropologists such as Crapanzano (2004) and social theorists like Massumi (2002) have turned in recent years to capture the fleeting, emergent nature of experience as complex states of feeling that resist conceptual articulation. This is akin to Faubion's (2011: 96) description of the indeterminacy of ethical evaluation in 'the experiential aura and atmosphere that surround ethical value'.

sermons were focused, not on the community of Muslims, or on issues related to public practice, but on an individual's internal religious state, directing the listener towards their private, rather than public and communal obligations. However, sermons of both kinds were the construction of an individual imam rather than a performance structured within a canonical tradition (Rappaport 1999). The relevance of Hirschkind's work to the sermons at this mosque lies in the implications of the *absence*, and perhaps for some the *loss* of that degree of homogeneity in the soundscape and the continuity of a shared life-world present within a Muslim society, modernity and secularisation notwithstanding. This is not to deny the complexity and fragmentation created by the different, and competing commitments that even the pious in Muslim countries find themselves subject to (Schielke 2010; Ghannam 2011; Shively 2014, Fadil 2013). It is rather to call attention to the discontinuity between the soundscape that permeated the mosque during the ritual of collective prayer in Arabic on the one hand, and on the other that which prevailed in those activities conducted in English: the sermons, other non-ritual activities within the mosque, and in the world beyond.

Chapters 4 and 5 – The life of the mosque

Chapter 4 describes the improvised processes of everyday interactions that predominate in the marginal spaces within the mosque. Here sociality was lived through ideas and images expressed in language, as styles of comportment and as intersubjective atmospheres and a community was constituted that could be, for those who participated, a source of moral value (Rasanayagam 2011).

The mosque offered space for a variety of communal events that took place in areas of the building other than those reserved for prayer and I describe three examples in detail. A meal was offered to the congregation to break the fast during Ramadan. Though it was part of the religious rituals of that month, it also gave expression to a gender-mixed style of sociability among the Guyanese, and a form of conviviality that drew in individuals from other groups within the congregation and beyond. The mosque shop was a space in which individuals could gather to exchange news, and voice private, and sometimes contentious, thoughts. Life-cycle events and informal prayer gatherings for those who are sick or who had died were improvised, communal events, outside the main rituals of Islam. These different forms of sociability enacted aspects of Guyanese communal life and their success as a migrant group in building their own mosque but they also brought into focus differences within the mosque, the passage of time and the anxieties associated

with both external challenges and internal threats to a sense of hope, confidence and continuity. People came together within these different spaces and events in a form of communal life in which something of value was at stake. Moral significance was invested in familiar ways of doing things and in embodied styles of interacting but social encounters also created the need to improvise new perspectives and ways of thinking and managing. Despite the obvious difference between ordinary sociality and ritual prayer, such activities similarly gather and attune participants to one another, generating and sustaining a particular kind of ethical sensibility, but these processes happen in the midst of things, rather than as an explicit goal in themselves.

Chapter 5 explores the imaginative content of encounters and conversations with individuals as offering a window into the values and commitments carried implicitly within everyday life and from which ethical capacity emerges. Within this dimension, the idea of Guyana, and the multi-faith form of life that existed there during the early lives of those who built the mosque, was a source of moral significance in the present. Relational commitments, embedded in ordinary forms of sociality, were spoken of as resources in difficult circumstances. Through evoking such scenes, a larger space was created in which what was at stake in the present could be placed, understood and defended and hopes for the future sustained in the face of anxiety.

Chapters 6 and 7 – Islam as knowledge

Chapter 6 describes the religious thinking of Azzim, the Guyanese imam referred to earlier. He had come to an understanding of Islam as based on an intellectual engagement with the knowledge of God's revelation contained within the Quran rather than as it was lived within his own or other cultural traditions. He was committed to the work of passing on this religious awareness, a central element of which was the transcendent, non-material nature of the divine. In his view, currents of thought and practice that obscured or challenged the absolute separateness of the Creator and the created were widespread among Muslims. Re-establishing this gap was therefore essential. It is a gap between the divine and the human that other religious traditions have sought to bridge (Keane 2013). His weekly class drew in a group of women seeking to know more about their religion. He also gave lectures to a wider audience within the mosque and occasionally preached on Fridays. While Azzim's stance can be seen in part as reflecting the rise of Salafist thinking within European Islam (Roy 2007; Mandaville 2007; de Koning 2013), his views as expressed in the class were anomalous from this standpoint, particularly with respect to

gender relations. Though he took a rational approach to religious knowledge and saw Islam and science as synonymous, Azzim's commitment to teaching involved him in messy human encounters with others and the need to address not only what was correct theologically but, at least sometimes, what was likely to be effective and helpful to others. The resources that Azzim drew on at these points and the language he used were rooted in his own experience of life. There was, moreover, a gap between Azzim's religious views and the way they were received by those who attended the classes that I describe in Chapter 7. The women in the class were, in their different ways, committed to becoming better Muslims but this was not a straightforward matter. As others have suggested, the emergence of new forms of religiosity need to be seen over time and in the context of competing life demands and the experience of ambivalence and failure (Schielke 2009), in terms of different ways of engaging with the contradictory domains of a complex society (Fadil 2013; Shively 2014) and individual modes of adaptation to life in Europe that may include, not only Muslim practice, but also non-practice and the adoption of other forms of spirituality (Jeldtoft 2011; Fadil 2011).

The situation in the class reflected both the inevitable ambiguities and tensions of life and aspects of Roy's 'crisis of transmission' in European Islam (Roy 2004: 168) in which the wish for the immediacy of a felt religious experience challenges the slow process of acquiring knowledge and private teachers and internet sites create a market in ideas that challenges the institutional basis of religious authority. Azzim was just such a freelance teacher, though his teaching did not centre on the cultivation of felt religious experience. In the classes, Azzim's thinking on Islam as grounded in the textual knowledge of God's revelation came into contact both with the women's confused and confusing concerns, gleaned from various sources of religious ideas, and with the ambivalence and doubt caused by their conflicting commitments to the traditions of their family and other areas of their lives in a non-Muslim majority society. From the perspective of embodied emotional registers of experience in the earlier chapters, Azzim can be understood as seeking to create a space for Islam that was protected from the vicissitudes and uncertainty of these human registers, a religious perspective that placed Islam beyond the vagaries of the human, while, at the same time, the lived experience of being a teacher re-created this vulnerability through the pull others exerted as embodied intersubjective states.

The mosque is a material structure, a site of religious practice, ordinary sociability and aspirations to greater religious knowledge. Yet these domains are also overlapping and interwoven. Attention to the religious and the social as currents of everyday life brings to the fore ‘the complexity, fluidity and ambiguity of human experience’ (Pelkmans 2013: 12), a concern with the states of hope and doubt that are carried in this medium, and religious and social practices as offering ‘cultural technologies of hope’ (Graw 2012: 25). Though a solid material structure, years of struggle had gone into making of the mosque as a Muslim space (Metcalf 1996). To maintain its existence required a continuing physical and moral effort.

The mosque as my fieldwork site

I came to this research towards the end of a career as a consultant child and adolescent psychotherapist when I was working in the paediatric department of a district general hospital. I am conscious that the preoccupations of my working life will have shaped the way I approached my research and I will therefore say something about my background. Though it is always essential in clinical practice to keep in mind a perspective that is wider than the immediate encounter between oneself and the individual child or family, I wanted to understand better the processes by which human beings create and inhabit shared moral worlds, not as phenomena within clinical work but as a question of anthropology. As I had done my first degree in social anthropology at Manchester University, I decided in 2002 to do a part-time MSc in medical anthropology. I had intended to do a dissertation related to my clinical work but NHS ethical procedures made this impossible in the timescale required. When, at the last moment, I had a chance introduction to the secretary of a mosque not far from my work, I decided to use the opportunity this offered for an observational study of a girls’ after-school class that took place within the mosque but independently of it. As a result of this experience, I became interested in religious practice as a way to explore the processes through which a shared moral world is created and sustained – religion is both something very different from ordinary social life and also central to an understanding of an important aspect of it. While clinical work can be framed in terms of ‘the referral problem’, the needs of a family, or the demands of a wider social system, it is also possible to see the task as a collaborative attempt to understand the experience of a family or young person and, through that effort itself, for a new perspective to emerge from which to see and live the situation afresh. Seen in this light, the task of clinical work is to open a space for reflection between

the givens of our biology and the expectations and demands of a social world. This is both the space of psychoanalytic clinical practice and the space of the ethnographer (Keane 2014).

Like anthropology, psychoanalysis encompasses radically different ways of theorising its subject matter. The psychoanalytic tradition that informs my thinking may be rather different from that which many anthropologists have in mind, in that it is primarily clinical rather than academic and, though focused on the experience of the clinical encounter, it is also realist in its commitments (Bell 2009). This tradition – variously designated Post-Kleinian or British Object-Relations – theorises the mind, both in development and throughout life, as an emergent property of the body’s responses to the environment (Isaacs 1952 [1948]), shaped through the iterative experience of human relationships and their internal counterpart (Steiner 1998). Bodily-affective processes are understood as sustaining both externally oriented cognitive functions and the potential of the mind to experience itself as a moral space of complex relationships and multiple perspectives (Britton 1998) that in turn generates a sensibility to the non-material emotional and moral qualities of the social world (Caper 1999). As to the relationship between anthropology and psychoanalysis, Lambek (2002) characterises his focus on spirit possession as being on processes that are neither entirely within, nor entirely external, to the individual; though the task of the clinician is different from that of the anthropologist, psychoanalytic work takes place within just such an ambiguous space.¹⁷

My chance introduction to the mosque offered an opportunity to observe the way a moral world was lived out, disputed, and handed on within a Muslim community, a sustained gathering in which something serious was at stake. The ‘ethical turn’ within recent anthropology created a space to think about what it means to live well within a moral community, to act ethically in relation to others or to make judgments with respect to the values of a tradition (Lambek 2000; Mattingly 2012). While it was my clinical work that prompted my interest in undertaking this research in the first place, and psychoanalytic object relations theory has, inevitably, informed my reading of anthropology, it has been through Hirschkind’s account of the somato-affective basis of ethical sensibility among pious Muslims, Zigon’s (2007) grounding of the moral in

¹⁷ One of the psychoanalytic ideas that has received some attention within anthropology is that of ‘transitional space’ (Winnicott 1965). This idea suggests that there is a developmental need for an experience of ambiguity between the creativity of the child and that which is given in the environment (for a use of this concept within anthropology see Hollans 2008).

unconscious intersubjectivity, the relational states carried within 'everyday religion' (Schielke and Debevec 2012) the moral dimension of daily life (Rasanayagam 2011; Dahlgren and Shielke 2013) and finally Simon's (2014) close attention to the experience of his interlocutors that I have sought to understand my fieldwork. Drawing on my background, I argue that these ideas are enhanced by being grounded in intersubjective development and the sedimentation of embodied patterns of feeling and thinking carried through time.

Following my initial period of fieldwork with the girls' after-school class, I kept in contact with the mosque secretary and approached her again for the Trustees' permission to undertake research on the adult congregation. Because I was doing my PhD part-time, I built my visits round a series of regular events so that I could plan my time in relation to my work but also because it is in the nature of a congregation that much of the time the mosque was largely empty or closed. During the two years of my fieldwork, I regularly attended Friday prayers and the rituals of Ramadan, a group for women that met once a month for religious self-education; a weekly gender-mixed study group that one of the rota of visiting preachers was starting at his home, a weekly women's class that another visiting preacher held at the mosque and a women's keep fit group taken by a non-Muslim Guyanese. In addition, there were more peripheral rituals, occasional lectures and some opportunities to meet those I had got to know outside the mosque. Though there were limitations in committing my time to regular attendance at the same event, rather than taking what opportunities might present themselves by following individuals, this structure fitted better with my work commitments, and allowed me to compare small changes against the background of repeated events, and to retain my focus on the mosque as a site of overlapping activities rather than institutional structure. It was also consonant with an observational approach to the study of infants and young children growing up in their families with which I was familiar from my professional background (Miller et al 1989). I explained the nature of my research to each new group, and to any new person who enquired, but the fact that I became a familiar and predictable presence created a different kind of understanding. I participated when I could – helping to serve meals, cleaning the mosque for Ramadan and learning classical Arabic – and observed when participation was impossible, as in prayer. Some individuals were more comfortable than others with my presence, or more willing to speak to me, and they figure more prominently in the chapters that follow. Some conversations took on the character of unstructured interviews and a few were taped but for the most part they arose in the

ordinary course of being with my interlocutors in events that had a structure of their own in which I confined myself to observation rather than intervening with questions. This is not to argue that a more active enquiring stance would not have been productive in a different way but I wanted to observe what happened when people got used to my presence and conducted themselves in ways that might more closely approach what would ordinarily occur.

I was very grateful to the Trustees and those I met subsequently for allowing me to be present. Following the war in Iraq and the 7/7 bombings in London, there was a constant media interest in Islam generally in terms of terrorism and reports of Islamophobia. My consciousness of this contributed to my wish to observe rather than actively ask questions. The fact that I am approaching retirement and that I worked with children in a local hospital no doubt helped me to present my research as something that was not too contentious and threatening, though my age has also meant that my material is skewed towards the views of older members of the community. From time to time, I would suddenly be pounced on by the president of the mosque and asked to say a few words at a meeting and although I felt welcomed I came to realise later that some of the Trustees had occasionally needed to field anxieties about me on my behalf. While many of the Guyanese may have felt there was scope for a benign interest in their community, and were used to relationships with non-Muslims within the borough, for some it was puzzling that I was interested in ordinary everyday Islam that rather than the 'correct' version. Although I dressed in a way that was not dissimilar to Guyanese women of my age, I am sure I did not look Muslim, but there was only one occasion when I was openly challenged and this was because I was not joining others in prayer. A Ugandan woman I knew explained who I was and managed to diffuse the situation, but the woman was obviously not pleased. This was at a time when *Hizb ut-tahrir* leaflets were being distributed outside the mosque and, on leaving, I noticed the woman in conversation with one of the men who were leafleting.

Over and above these tensions with respect to Islam, there is a special difficulty in relation to observing religious practice due to the expectations of conversion that it arouses (Clarke 2013). I was aware that those who allowed me to be present may have been doing so out of a sense of religious obligation. This was most obviously the case in the classes but in that setting there were opportunities for others, especially Azzim, to comment on the ambiguity of my studying Islam for an intention other than conversion.

Perhaps more salient to my theme is the fact that some people were able to accept my position as an observer of the moral commitment of others and could allow or even welcome that interest. This relates to issues of self-awareness and the nature of a moral sensibility in that it seemed that they could identify with my wish to understand this aspect of human experience. However, some people were more reserved in my presence or avoided talking to me at any length. One person explained this quite simply as related to a fear of gossip but others may have felt reluctant to be drawn into a relationship that might have felt to them to require, even indirectly, the 'giving an account of oneself' (Keane 2014). I have changed the names of everyone who appears in the text and occasionally amalgamated some encounters where this did not affect the understanding of the material. However, I am very aware that some people's identity cannot be disguised from those who know the mosque but they are the individuals who most explicitly gave their consent to my study.

And finally, the questions that Azzim taxed me with in his classes, as to the use I would make of the experience if I did not use my knowledge to become Muslim, were legitimate. I can only say that, within the limits of my capacity, I have used the experience in that I have been changed by it and for this I am grateful to all those I got to know at the mosque.

CHAPTER 2 – Praying together

This chapter describes the collective prayer on Fridays that brings together, for a short time, an ethnically diverse group of Muslims living in London. It is a ritual that can contain differences in religious knowledge, piety and commitment. I approach this event not as manifesting the unchanging unity of Islam but as a moment of communality created out of the flow of the mundane. If prayer provides a shared focus, albeit of a fragile and transient nature, the physical structure of the mosque offers the congregation a solid and more enduring moral space that can be turned to in life's vicissitudes. I take the bodily impact of ritual as the starting point for my analysis of the way the moral was experienced as present within the life of the mosque as a whole, but ritual is itself vulnerable to the complex human concerns within which it is situated. I thus examine both the immediate bodily impact of collective prayer and the need to extend and renew the subjective states it creates in the light of the developmental framework I have outlined above.

The mosque was open every day, and people came and went in small numbers for prayer, classes, and other events throughout the week. It was around midday on Friday that the central ritual of the Muslim world was performed here, at the same time as in mosques across the globe. This process of gathering, from which the Arabic name of the prayer derives,¹⁸ starts outside as people move towards the mosque in increasing concentrations from the surrounding streets, emerging from houses, buses and parked cars, a process that is mirrored in the dispersal afterwards. Some imams rendered this experience through a visual image of angels simultaneously gathering over the mosque. While there is a hadith that records the Prophet speaking of angels standing at the gates of every mosque on Fridays to write down the names of those who attend, this image of gathering angels evoked a different idea to that of record-keeping and judgement passed on individuals – a congregation formed in voluntary response to angelic activity – though sermons frequently made reference to God's judgement. There is a contrast between the idea of a congregation gathered in by a conscious fear of judgement and one drawn in by angels, where both human and angelic activity take place as a natural response to God rather than through the exercise of human judgement. The imam's image of gathering angels directs our attention, as no doubt he intended, to the public and collective nature

¹⁸ The consonants j-m-' form the root from which words that involve gathering and assembling are derived.

of Friday prayer and to the individual's dependence on the prayerful dispositions of others rather than any individual act of choice and agency. The mirroring of the material and spiritual domains suggests a form of contact across this divide, which is imperceptible by human senses and beyond human control (Keane 2013). Yet, on closer inspection, this gathering is not unproblematic. The congregation was marked by distinctions and differences that held the potential for conflict. That such gathering for collective prayer takes place each week is nonetheless indicative of something shared that is of continuing significance for this group of people. It is to this transcendent moral reality that the imam's words give visual form.

Rappaport (1999) argues that it is through the nature of ritual itself that such diversity is brought together and, indeed, transformed, albeit temporarily, into a kind of unity. For any individual, a ritual can appear as given and unchanging, an individual event within a larger enduring canon; its performance includes all who attend, regardless of private states of conflict, ambivalence or doubt. All who join the prayer lines at the mosque are therefore acknowledging Islam publicly, affirming its account of divine reality and in doing so, realising that ordering of the world that the Quran proclaims. However, beyond this argument based on the nature of speech acts, Rappaport also suggests that the aligning of individual worshippers to one another initiates another kind of unity that he designates 'more intimate and binding' (ibid: 118). By attuning the bodily states of those present to one another, the ethical potential within the embodied experience of human inter-subjectivity is brought to the fore. This offers an external account of the phenomenology of the angelic gathering. If the imam's story of the angels is an image of these processes taking place outside human awareness, creating something like the moral background of human intersubjective being-in-the-world (Zigon 2007), then facing and managing the reality of disruptions and differences within the congregation – something that occurs outside prayer itself – may be said to draw upon imaginative resources from such a background (Rasanayagam 2011). Zigon (2015) designates this as engaging ethical capacities, although the relationship he envisages between these modes is unclear. I am suggesting both a continuity between the nature of the moral and the ethical, as Faubion (2011) argues, and the moral as a quality of communal experience (Rasanayagam 2011; Dahlgren and Schielke 2013). The mosque is a physical structure: its potential to serve as a moral world is maintained in a live state through the use the congregation makes of it.

Differences with respect to gender, dress and ethnicity

Friday prayer is open to all, and women as well as men from all the local migrant communities attended the mosque in large numbers.). Unlike in many UK mosques, the provision for women was comparable to that for men and, for the most part, women seemed to feel welcome (Shanahan 2014). There is a separate balcony area for women, adjoining toilet and ablution facilities and an additional space beyond the balcony that are all integrated into the architecture and decorative styles of the building. Women stewarded the balcony and took part in the cleaning and maintenance of the building. However, the crush on Fridays often meant that men took over space on one side of the balcony, separating it off with moveable screens. This competition for space continued at the end of prayers, as the women were often forced to wait with small children and buggies near the main double doors, while the men surged out. Leaving together would not have been acceptable to some of the men and, in this situation, that view took precedence. Aware of the difficulty this created for the women, who sometimes complained about it, the Guyanese male stewards would every so often hold the men back for a short while, asking them to 'allow the sisters to pass'.

If women were included at the level of material provision, their presence was not uncontested by some sections of the congregation and, as Shannahan (2014) suggests, space was a marker for some deeper feelings about gender relations. There are accounts of men and women attending prayer together, though physically separated, in early Islam (Makris, 2007) but many within the congregation have come from societies in which women pray only within the home. Many mosques established by Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in the UK have minimal, or no accommodation for women. While the Guyanese accept the requirement of segregated prayer, there is gender mixing in all other areas of the mosque, which is one of the distinctive aspects of their way of living their lives as Muslims.

However, the congregation contained other indicators of ethnic and religious difference, the most visible of which were the great variety of forms and degrees of Muslim dress among both men and women¹⁹. Some wore ordinary Western clothes with long sleeves, longer length skirts and headscarves for the women; others dressed in the traditional styles of the Somali and other African communities; and a few were in explicitly

¹⁹ This variety is in contrast to that within the more homogeneous Muslim communities in the northern cities of the UK (Werbner 2002).

'Islamic' dress. Though this self-consciously Islamic group included men of all ages, clad in long white garments and white crochet caps, among women it was mainly the young who wore either a black, or carefully colour co-ordinated *jilbaab*, and an elaborately wound *hijab*. Some created scarf ensembles with long biased-cut skirts in subtle colours, combining the Islamic with a highly personalised style – 'a new form of Muslim personal art' (Tarlo, 2010: 1). Only a very few wore the complete black covering garment, the *niqab*.²⁰ All will pray side by side with other women, but the differences of dress that marked out this latter group do not always go unremarked. One Guyanese woman, apparently assuming I was wondering why another woman was dressed in this way and wishing to reassure me, said 'probably it was the way they dressed in her country'. If prayer gathers everyone into a common ritual, dress marks out difference. Her suggestion that this was a cultural form rather than a religious choice may have been her understanding, or may have been a tactful way to explain the situation to me. It calls attention to the interpretive adjustments through which differences and perturbations in the fabric of social life need to be continuously managed (Zigon 2015: 214). However, among those I met who wore the *niqab*, it was always a conscious personal religious choice rather than part of the traditions into which they had been born. Some women unfastened their face covering while on the balcony but others remained completely covered. A woman standing near the door to the balcony asked of another, in an irritated tone of voice, why she was covered since there were only women here; the woman pointed silently to a closed-circuit TV camera in the corner (there was a monitor in the shop covering different areas of the mosque). The questioner shrugged and the moment passed but it briefly brought to the surface an unbridgeable gap created by the overt signs of individualised religiosity in contrast with the overwhelmingly communal nature of the religious commitments of the Guyanese. Whatever the actual motivation of this woman, her form of dress is a marker for the political and religious challenges of groups like *Hizb ut-Tahrir* that, by implication, pass judgement on other Muslims through the stereotyping of dress as indicative of piety. It may therefore stir in others the deep discomfort and unease that Tarlo (2005) describes at finding herself in the midst of such discourse at a religious meeting. The potential for more substantial disputes that might be stirred by this form of dress were avoided through the self-selected attendance at other events in the mosque, and the availability of other mosques, though the sense of contestation was

²⁰ This is the black face veil, sometimes with a gap for the eyes, worn with a long black dress (*jilbaab*) and black gloves covering the hands.

present in many of the leaflets distributed outside. Women wearing the *nikab* or more formal Islamic dress did not attend the events at the mosque where there was gender mixing. Hence, it was mainly on Fridays and during the prayers and recitations of Ramadan that such encounters occurred.

As I walked in the same direction as those gathering for Friday prayers, I became conscious of an ambiguity around the point at which I became part of this flow of people. This was reflected in my uncertainty as to when to put on my scarf and thus leave my own identity as a non-Muslim before joining the gathering congregation. The moral complexity of this situation for the researcher has been a matter of concern among anthropologists working in Muslim countries (Lukens-Bull 2007; Clarke 2013; and Marsden 2013). As many of my visits involved prayer, the female secretary of the mosque had made it clear that I should wear a headscarf. Apart from that, provided I wore trousers and took a long-sleeved top and scarf with me, I managed with items from my ordinary wardrobe and, if asked, always described myself as non-Muslim. During my fieldwork, I became increasingly aware of the sartorial dilemmas of those Muslim women who dress for the mosque in a style they do not generally adopt – one Mauritian woman described wearing a ‘part-time hijab’ – a problem that men who wore ordinary Western clothing did not encounter. Leila, the mosque secretary gave a witty account of how once, realising she had arrived at the mosque straight from work in an outfit that was too short to pass muster, she had to shimmy her skirt down over her hips so that it would cover her legs. The diversity in life-style and practice within the congregation was thus even greater than the range of mosque attire would suggest.

On Fridays, I would enter through the door used mainly, but not exclusively, by women.²¹ Having taken off my shoes and left them in the rack reserved for women, I went upstairs to the women’s balcony above the male prayer hall. Whether due to an oversight by the architect, or the emergence of stricter sensibilities since the drawing up of the plans, ‘hospital’ screens were placed round two of the three sides of the balcony so that if men looked up, they could not see the women praying. On one side of the balcony, facing the direction of prayer, the railing does allow women at the front to look down at the imam, while otherwise remaining concealed. As if to answer a question I had not voiced as to why this segregation was maintained when gender mixing was generally the

²¹ Though one can get to the women’s balcony by both the main doors and both are used by women at other times, on Fridays a gender division is adopted in terms of entering, though not for exiting the mosque.

norm elsewhere in the mosque, one Guyanese woman explained the need for this gender separation in terms of the physical nature of Muslim prayer. In all the domestic circumstances in which I observed prayer where both men and women were present, the men prostrated in front of the women, as if this is a less disturbing and arousing experience for a woman than the other way around; or perhaps, as Mahmood explains, it is rather that the responsibility for maintaining order in the domain of sexual relations falls to women (2005: 110). My view of Friday prayer was from the women's balcony though in other settings I mixed freely with men and women, or at least among those who themselves socialised in this way. In order not to call attention to the fact that I did not join in prayer, I generally sat on the row of chairs arranged along the back wall for the use of older women who could no longer make the prostrations. This allowed me to observe prayer while avoiding the ambiguity of participating and the difficult situation that Morgan Clarke (2013) describes.

The balcony as a space for women

When I arrived on the women's balcony, an elderly Pakistani woman I knew was sitting at the back fingering her beads and whispering prayers to herself. She nods at me in recognition. (When I get up to go after the first prayer ended, she remains seated, again in private prayer but looks up to say, 'See you next week'). The women's area is almost empty, about ten women (and just two or three small children). They were mostly sitting alone but three young women are sitting in a group, chatting. These little groups with their belongings spread out around them have the appearance of a picnic. One woman is standing in solitary prayer. I notice that an older woman I know slightly is talking quietly to another further along the back row. A few more women arrive. One of the women who acts as steward brings some mosque calendars and puts them on the chair beside me telling me to sell them for £2 if anyone asks. A very elderly woman struggles in with sticks and an air of vulnerability. She needs help from the steward to find a seat. A woman of about forty in an East African/Somali style dress comes in with some shopping bags. Putting them down she shakes her arms before starting to pray in an apparently calm, relaxed manner. It reminds me of the shaking out a tablecloth. The woman is someone I know from the Sunday Sisters' Circle to be coming in her lunch hour. I am aware that despite an appearance of relaxed tranquillity she will be rushing back to work as soon as prayer ends. Her measured movements have a calming impact on me and brings to my mind an occasion when the teacher of a class I attended explained the proper way to pray

was by giving to each bodily movement its proper time, relaxing into each posture before moving on.

This local gathering in of individuals to form a congregation in preparation for acting together in prayer, takes place at a specific and predictable, though slowly shifting point in time. Tied to the local time of sunrise and sunset, it appears to move through the fixity and uniformity of secular time, reflecting Rappaport's distinction between mundane and liturgical time. The times of prayer move steadily each day following the changing time of sunrise and sunset in the different seasons and so should be knowable if one is praying each day. Calendars were also sold as part of fundraising. Yet many people I came across did not know when prayer was due, indicating that many were not observing the obligations of prayer, at least in any systematic way. The Central London Mosque in Regent's Park sets the exact timing for Muslims in the UK. This became apparent when there was a delay in the printing of the special Ramadan calendars because the mosque secretary was waiting for the timings from Regent's Park. By contrast, the sighting of the new moon at the start and end of Ramadan is determined in Saudi Arabia. While it was a subject of theological debate in the class I attended as to whether this should be determined by a local sighting, during a discussion in the kitchen while preparing the meal to break the fast, the likely timing of the end of Ramadan as between a Friday and a Saturday was thought, with marked irony, to be a matter that would be settled in Saudi Arabia in accordance with their own social convenience. The liturgical timing of daily prayers and of the beginning and end of Ramadan links this local, but diverse, congregation to Islam as a global religion but at the same time creates a new context of difference and the awareness of hierarchy and power as located elsewhere. It was then something of a shock to hear of another domain in the announcement of clocks going forward or back in line with the switch to and from British Summer Time.

With the call to prayer, those who were scattered around the balcony in comfortable informality started to transform themselves into a congregation, forming lines with a shared orientation towards Mecca. In contrast to this smoothly choreographed familiar formation, those who arrived at the last minute, during the sermon, or even after the start of prayer caused a disruption, both physically, in requiring others to move, and in bringing the concerns of the street into the midst of a ritualised process. Whatever may be said about the nature of ritual itself and its distinctiveness from the mundane, these scenes were a reminder that it takes place within an everyday human

context and is not immune to intrusions (Hunet 2012). However, when the scene on the balcony was not dominated by large numbers jostling to fit in, or by the conversations of those who had not yet settled themselves, there were times when the space, and the gathering taking place there, had a profound aesthetic impact. Thus, on a Friday in winter:

It is dark on the balcony until the space is lit by the large chandelier hanging down from the dome into the men's area so that the light seems to rise up through the double-height space and disperse through the gloom of the balcony. The visual impact leads me to listen more closely to the call to prayer and the way the sound seems to fill the space as the light had done. Today it strikes me as a measured and satisfying sound, not insistent or harsh. Perhaps because of the emptiness of the balcony I was more aware than usual of the musicality of the sound – the lengthening of the first word of the phrase and a sustaining the note at the end. The overall effect was of the light and the sound creating a focus that pulled together a random scattering of individuals into a group, creating a state of readiness and expectation for what will follow.

This aesthetic experience of focus and coherence, due in no small measure to the design and furnishing of the building, was in marked contrast to the scene of women praying in other local mosques I visited.²² One North African woman I met sitting on the balcony while I was waiting for a class to start said that she was enjoying the beauty of the space provided for women in this mosque, and observed how different it was from one she usually attended nearer her home. However, this aesthetic impression needs to be considered against the more complicated background of everyday life from which the congregation emerged and to which it would return (Osella and Soares, 2010). Even within the ritual itself, the unpredictable physical demands of accommodating a large, disparate congregation were considerable, while mundane, un-ritualised, reality crowded in as soon as prayer ended.

The ritual of collective prayer

Two modes of congregational activity, the sermon and collective prayer, together make up the core ritual of collective prayer. For the purposes of my argument, I will consider prayer in this chapter, and the sermon in Chapter 3, which is not the order in which these

²² Other mosques I visited with those I had got to know in the Saturday class were all housed in poorly maintained residential or industrial buildings (as was the original hall of this mosque) that can offer little in the way of material beauty and where the provision for women was poor, with access to the imam and the men's prayer hall only via loudspeaker.

elements of the ritual occur. In comparison with the lengthy rituals of transition through the life stages or of healing that have shaped anthropological thinking, the core act of worship in Islam is strikingly plain – a brief but ‘dramatic gesture of submission’ (Henkel 2005). It is an act composed of repeated cycles of simple bodily movements – standing, bowing from the waist with the hands on the knees, prostrating with the forehead and nose on the ground and sitting back with the heels under the body – accompanied by brief recitations in Arabic – the phrase ‘God is greatest’ (the *takbir*), the short opening *sura* of the Quran (*al fatihah*) and other short verses and supplications. The ritualised nature of the five obligatory (*fard*) daily prayers, whether performed collectively or individually, distinguishes them both from the freedom that is accorded to private supernumerary prayer, which may be undertaken in one’s mother tongue and composed in whatever way meets the needs of the moment, and from other activities at the mosque which owe their form to particular cultural traditions or to ad hoc initiatives – for example the celebration of the Prophet’s Birthday, or an event to pray for a sick person. These activities, the subject of later chapters, were not a unifying point across the congregation but rather refracted the differences within it; yet for the Guyanese, and those who Mr Rahman referred to as ‘Guyanese oriented’, they gave form to their communal life and collective commitments.

Within Islam, the form of ritual worship is understood as that which was established by the practice (*sunna*) of the Prophet, and the main elements of Friday prayer are held in common by Muslims. However, accounts of the Prophet’s practice and teaching (the *sunna* and the *hadith*) are accorded varying degrees of authenticity, interpreted in different ways by different schools (*mathab*) and have been elaborated over time in the practice of the different traditions derived from them, allowing a degree of legitimated difference. In the class I describe in Chapter 7, there was little awareness of these interpretive traditions, and the different forms of practice that were reported often prompted references to the Prophet having said there would be seventy-two forms of Islam only one of which was correct. Though the Guyanese did not seem to see their practice in this light, awareness of a widespread concern with error gave a sharp edge of anxiety to some disagreements about practice at the mosque. In the two imam-led study groups I attended, the ongoing emergence of new forms of religious practice locally were ascribed to the activity of particular sheiks. One of these imams, Azzim, opposed all innovations of practice as a grave error, while the other, a Bangladeshi preacher, thought a ‘one-off’ event such meeting for a meal on the Prophet’s birthday or to read some

chapters (*suras*) of the Quran on the anniversary of a death was permissible. For him, it was in seeking to repeat such events, in specifying how many, or which, *suras* were to be recited and in formalising a way in which they should be performed, that such events became ritual innovation (*bid'a*).²³ Since the form of worship has been fixed by the Quran and the Sunnah, such innovation constitutes idolatry (*shirk*) through the explicit, or implicit, denial of the unity, integrity and completeness of the Divine revelation to the Prophet. Many of the disagreements at the mosque were between different cultural traditions and innovations rather than disputes about theological interpretations of Islamic practice. The myriad, and often hidden forms of *shirk* were an issue that particularly concerned Azzim, who took the Saturday women's group. He felt that resisting the slide towards ritualisation required constant vigilance.

In the sermons and the classes, there was an emphasis on the correct forms of practice without which, some insisted, prayer would not be accepted by God. When one woman in the class asked about praying in her own language, Azzim made it clear that whatever obligatory prayer was due had to be performed first, in Arabic, and that only then could one pray in a non-ritualised vernacular form. Thus, even when undertaken in private, ritualised prayer brings the individual into conformity with the obligations laid on all. Transformative power is invested in the correct form of words such that the pronouncement of the statement of witness (*shahada*) to the oneness of God and to Mohammed as God's messenger creates the individual as a Muslim. From a third person view, this is brought about through the public acknowledgement of a conventional order and the concrete properties of formulaic ritual language. Though Azzim was strict in his insistence on the correct language of prayer, he would not have seen agency as invested in the words as such. Seeking to bring about an outcome by writing the words of an *ayah* on an amulet was, for him, the fetishising of a material object and therefore *shirk* and it seems clear that locating efficacy and power in speech acts as such would also constitute *shirk*. For Azzim only God had such power and to speak God's words aloud, as the Prophet did, is to acknowledge that divine locus of power, and no other.

I was rather shocked to witness the taking of the *shahada* by people who would not have been able to recite it as a whole or even to do so phrase by phrase, and instead repeated the words after the imam, syllable by syllable. On one occasion, a middle-aged

²³ The second group was of mixed gender and met in the imam's home, but those who attended changed until they had no connection with the mosque and consisted of young professionals drawn from across London.

woman in a black *jilbaab* and *hijab*, whom none of us had seen before, came into the Saturday class with a young Portuguese man who, she said, wanted to make the *shahada*. Though he spoke virtually no English and no Arabic, Azzim helped him to do so and the pair left immediately afterwards. No questions were asked as to who they were and why they had come at this point. Azzim told the young man that he would now have to learn about the religion but it was the stumbled, broken phrases, requiring many corrections and repetitions that had transformed him into a Muslim. In saying the words, he entered into the obligations they entailed, whether or not he fulfilled them. As Henkel (2005) puts it, the 'limited and sharply defined commitment' of the *shahada* is easy to fulfil in speech, while an 'unreserved commitment to the divine rules laid out in the Quran and the *sunna* of the Prophet, as variously interpreted by Muslim scholars and ideally as encompassing and shaping the entirety of the believer's existence' is scarcely achievable by an individual and its form and requirements are 'hardly possible for a large community to agree. From this perspective, the *shahada*, incorporated and repeated in numerous prayers, may be said to transform a range of internal states, including shifting feelings of ambivalence and doubt, as well as unfulfillable aspirations of piety, into something binary that either is, or is not, the case. If his intention was to become Muslim and he said the words correctly, the young man who came to the class was previously not, but now is Muslim, regardless of his lack of understanding of the words he spoke. Yet this transformation is detached from the living of a life in the light of its implications. It reflects a perspective on Islam as a divine revelation, an object that is whole and complete, in contrast to a concern with what it is in human terms to see oneself as being, among other things, Muslim.

Prayer (*salat*) takes only a few minutes and can be performed anywhere, provided the ground is clean or covered and that the required ablutions (*woodoo*) have been completed so that one is in a state of ritual purity. Though congregational prayer is often visually impressive because of the size of the gathering, it is essentially the same in form as other prayers during the week, whether conducted alone or with others.²⁴ Henkel (2005) suggests, in relation to urban life in Turkey, that the simplicity and brevity of this universal Muslim ritual constitutes a 'highly mobile body technique' that can be slotted in as 'a sequence of practice into everyday life'. While this may be so in principle, not all Henkel's informants are in fact trying, or managing, to adopt this regular practice and, as I will describe in a later chapter, even those sufficiently committed to attend classes

²⁴ The number of cycles varies between two and four according to the prayer. Congregational prayer has only two cycles.

encountered difficulty in fulfilling these obligations within the complexity of their lives. Yet in some of the homes I visited, prayer did indeed take place amid the trappings of everyday life. It required that the usual schedule of activities be put to one side but, once commenced, it seemed that the demands of the ritual could create a protected and focused space around the worshipping individual – a mother prayed as her young children continued to bounce around on a bed beside her, or a gender-mixed discussion group around a dining table temporarily transformed itself into segregated prayer lines in the sitting room area with men taking up a position in front of women. This adaptability of the location of prayer to ordinary life led Azzim to refer frequently in the class to the demands of Islam as ‘easy’ but this ignored the many requirements and interpretations of ritual obligations that preoccupied and troubled his students. Beyond this, many of those I met did not attempt to fulfil these obligations in any systematic way and did not seem to regard them as essential to maintaining some level of religious practice.²⁵

Praying together as an embodied experience of unity

The Friday prayer that replaces the daily noon prayer is performed in unison. Religious distinctions suggested by the visible differences of dress and ethnicity, and the variations in ritual performance associated with different Muslim traditions (such as the raising of the index finger during prayer, or differences between men and women in the placing of the hands on the body) that were the subject of discussions in the class I attended, were submerged within the larger pattern of coordinated movement. So were differences in commitment to religious practice. Conforming to the ritual of prayer, and particularly its performance alongside others, creates a *de facto*, if temporary, harmony among those present. Even on days other than Friday, when there might be only a few women present on the balcony and, seen through the windows, only a handful of men downstairs, when the call to prayer sounded those who were there would form a line, ensuring that any children joined them. The two midday prayers on Friday, during Ramadan and the two major festivals,²⁶ saw the largest numbers and the greatest diversity. At such times, the imam repeatedly called on those present to ‘straighten your lines and close the gaps’, to make ‘space for others and close the gaps in our hearts’, and ‘pray this prayer as if it were

²⁵ There is of course a difficulty in enquiring about this but sometimes it became obvious that individuals were not regularly managing to perform the five daily prayers and it seemed that they did not regard this as an obligatory element in their religious life.

²⁶ *Eid al fitr* (at the end of Ramadan) or *Eid al adhar* (the festival that celebrates Ibrahim’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael)

your last'. This addressed the need to establish a concrete order among those present that would reflect the acceptance of a single shared religious reality (Bowen 1989) and invoke a perspective that reached beyond the human lifespan. In communal prayer, the individual worshipper is made dependent on the actions of others and creates this sense of mutual dependence as a religiously inflected ethical resource.

While the performance of ritual may create a high degree of co-ordination among the participants, this is in the face of the reality of individual differences and currents of change. Henkel (2005) suggests, with respect to the complexity of religious views and degrees of commitment within Turkish society, that the universal form of Muslim prayer 'transcends local particularities' and special religious projects and counters the centrifugal effects of the many diverse currents, both religious and secular, within modern Turkey. The north London congregation I observed was also a complex grouping whose existence over time, and integrity as a congregation, was formed and re-formed by this gathering for prayer each Friday – though of course the same people might not be present. Indeed, the passage of time and the absence of those who had died since last Friday, or last Eid, was a matter to which the congregation's attention was frequently drawn. The centripetal force of prayer, and the gathering in of what might otherwise be an increasingly disparate and dispersed group, as new migrant communities arrived and earlier generations become more involved in the society around them, was reflected concretely in the demand that worshippers, who had been scattered around the prayer space in self-chosen arrangements, should form into lines, whether there few or many individuals present. This generally takes place automatically in response to the call to prayer but sometimes individuals required direction – 'Sister, you can't pray alone' – and I came to understand during my fieldwork that not everyone on the women's balcony was equally used to collective prayer. Two women I met, one from Somalia and one from Sri Lanka, who had arrived in the UK as adults told me that they had never prayed in a mosque before coming to London. Most women in the Muslim world do not attend the mosque for prayer and when they do so in the UK, often occupy marginalised spaces.

As prayer started, the women formed into more compact lines than those adopted for the sermon to accommodate those who had continued to arrive, though this was no easy matter if too many had crammed onto the balcony. While room might be found for those already there, the stewards might start to insist that others must stay in the corridor area beyond and pray there. In prayer, this large and disparate gathering of women began

to perform the sequences of movements side by side, with sufficient familiarity for their actions to approximate unison. Though an intensely private moment, a woman praying alone is an intimate and humanly affecting sight; as a non-participant, I responded differently to the view across the backs of the women prostrated in worship. In accord with Rappaport's characterisation of ritual as creating a unified whole that is 'more characteristic of the internal dynamics of single organisms than of social groups' (Rappaport 1999: 224), it is an impressive and thought-provoking sight but the watching outsider is not part of this organism. From the outside, one can only observe the external surface, except at those moments when that surface is broken by perturbations: exchanges with stewards about late arrivals who need chairs, disputes with those who have positioned themselves so that they block the doorways or impede the prostrations of those behind them, and the presence of young children.

Some women were accompanied by children. Women had the responsibility during worship for young children of both genders. After the age of about seven, boys accompanied their fathers or entered the male prayer hall alone. The nine-year-old son of one of my informants, whom I had formerly only seen fooling about at home, was transformed in identification with an adult Muslim male as he detached himself from his mother and sister and set off ahead of us in his white robe and lace cap to pray with the men, while we went to the women's balcony.²⁷ In accordance with the widely held view that women's attendance at the mosque is not obligatory or even, in the opinion of some men, desirable, if women with children chose to attend they had to find ways to divide their attention between their prayers and their children, ways which lie outside the tight prescriptions of prayer. Some sat back against the walls with their infants in their laps, attending directly to them, and did not appear outwardly to be praying; others left their babies propped on coats and bags and prayed at some distance from them. One mother managed to sooth a fretful six-month-old by laying the infant beside her while she prostrated herself, repeatedly sweeping him into her arms as she stood up and then replacing the child gently on the floor as she returned to her knees. This was a striking example of how an infant might, almost from the beginning, have an experience of the sounds and movements of something they will later understand as prayer. For the most part those babies who were awake seemed calmly watchful of what was for them, no

²⁷ There is some elasticity in this requirement in that at least one older boy of about ten with developmental problems was often brought by his mother to the wide area that ran like a corridor around the outside the women's balcony from where she attempted to pray, not always successfully.

doubt, a familiar, or a becoming familiar, scene and an experience of the withdrawal of their mother's attention in prayer that they could generally tolerate without protest. Only rarely were the children oblivious to the atmosphere, which seemed to act on their state in a soothing manner allowing their mothers to divide their attention, and pray. Women whose babies became upset during prayer would generally take them out into the corridor area which was always a rather chaotic place, with an atmosphere quite different from that on the balcony. Some people might try and pray there but others treated the space as a place where you could talk, walk around and eat (despite the many notices to the contrary) so that the harmony of prayer on the balcony was absent and children of all ages tended to become more fractious and hard to control. Though toddlers and two- or three-year-olds moved about unhindered between the lines of women, or explored the balcony, peeping through the screens that created the temporary overspill area for the men, their behaviour also seemed modulated by what was taking place around them. Some would imitate the adults' prayer movements, sometimes observing and correcting each other. At other times, they were distracted from their 'prayers' when they became absorbed in the pattern on the carpet or in whispering to each other as they 'prostrated' side by side. On one occasion, the sound of a child 'singing' along in imitation of the imam could be heard clearly. For the most part, the children seemed attuned to their surroundings, 'at home' within the atmosphere on the balcony. In contrast to Stafford's (2007) recollections of the enforced immobility of the Christian services of his childhood, Muslim prayer offers the possibility of actively joining in through imitating the movements of prayer, something a young child could do passably well.

Young children and infants seemed absorbent of the non-verbal qualities of the atmosphere, the rhythmic activities and enveloping sounds that filled the space, and could in consequence tolerate the withdrawal of their mother's attention in prayer, as distinct from the chaotic situation that prevailed in the area beyond. Such an exposure to religious activity as a familiar world would, in the ordinary course of things, precede any formal religious teaching of school-aged children or the conscious seeking of piety in adulthood. This has implications for an understanding of later objectified forms of religious experience. The distinction between those brought up from infancy within Muslim families who are in some sense practicing and those whose families were not, or where an individual only converted (reverted) to Islam in adulthood²⁸, can be linked to that

²⁸ As I will explain in a later chapter, since the created condition of all is Muslim, converts are said to 'revert'.

between the embodied, pre-reflective, pre-linguistic basis of internalisation of, and identification with, the religious practice of others that precedes conscious thought and a conscious conception of religious practice based on participation in a language community.²⁹ Nor is participation in the embodied and affective atmosphere of a religious world, such as may be thought to be available in some form to the infants on the prayer balcony, an isolated event but one sustained by multiple experiences of human mindedness. During prayer, infants can inhabit a space created by the visual proximity of their mother's physical presence, as well as their bodily sense of being held together by the 'sedimentation'³⁰ of past inter-subjectively created experiences of safety and care. Indeed, it is through contact with the human rather than the specifically Muslim qualities of this context that infants are able to respond to an experience of ritual as a space within which they, and their relationship to mother, are contained by, and within, the pattern of familiar sounds and movements that they will eventually understand as prayer. Thus, even for the infants on the prayer balcony the experience is more complicated and multi-faceted than can be covered by an account of Muslim prayer. While both present and past experiences of being with others in multiple ways, including 'others at prayer', are dimensions of the adult experience of collective worship, for infants and adults alike the experience of prayer is predicated on a larger experience of bodily intersubjectivity. This is what I understand Rasanayagam to be implying when he describes the moral world of Uzbekistan Muslims in Pakhtabad, the ground for mutual intelligibility and moral reasoning, as extending beyond religious understandings into other dimensions of communal being (2011: 246). Neither the pedagogic process of religious formation nor the pious disciplines of self-fashioning start *de novo* with an adult project, nor can they be entirely confined within such a project. Ethical capacity, whether located in relation to religious practice or not, has its roots in the developmental processes of infancy and childhood and the intersubjective nature of human being within a social world that this sets in train. Indeed, even for those who convert as adults, a long developmental history of being with others is already part of the sediment of their life, a life that continues to unfold in relation to others in ordinary, day-to-day events. Yet it is just this worldly background from which those in the piety movement seek to separate themselves³¹ and

²⁹ As the philosopher Searle (2010) argues, a conceptual account of language use presupposes the existence of such pre-linguistic intentional processes.

³⁰ A term from Jousse ([1925]1990) used by Hirschkind to refer to the internal accumulation of experience.

³¹ Kresse (2013) argues that the term 'worldly' rather than *Islam mondaine* better describes this human context.

it is in just these qualities of worldly communal life that sociality constitutes itself as a moral resource, as I describe in later chapters.

The bodily experience of prayer as something that could be lost

Some of those I met through classes and study groups spoke of the somatic impact of individual prayer such that they felt that they could anticipate when prayer time was approaching as a bodily need to pray. Those who pray regularly speak of its calming and cleansing effect on the individual (Simon, 2009) glossed as a sense of internal coherence (Hirschkind 2006) and attunement to others (Rappaport 1999). However, there is an implication that all these processes are subject to a sense of depletion and that a framework within which they can be renewed and sustained is needed if they are not, as Simon's informants describe, to be lost in a way that is felt to be unrecoverable³². Implicit in Hirschkind's account of the young men seeking to extend their contact with the sounds of preaching through tape recordings is their anxiety that the bodily impact of religious practice can be lost and requires renewal. He also offers a theoretical account of this process that I will seek to build on.

Hirschkind makes three specific points about the impact of the coming together of music and meaning in a religious language within the body of the listener that maps on to developmental and neuroscientific perspectives on related phenomena. First, he describes the Quran in terms of the fusion of intellectual and aesthetic dimensions that 'give the text its unity' (Hirschkind 2006: 154); the Quran is presented as an object that unites these two domains of experience. Secondly, he refers to an assumption of the universal accessibility of divine speech such that a preacher can trust that the word of God, in the original language of revelation, will be taken in by all, and its multiple meanings understood according to the capacities of the listener to respond to those meanings. Thirdly, he describes an Islamic understanding of the power of the divine word to 'inshrine human souls' as 'a key element in a pre-rational ordering of the self upon which more rational practices depend' (ibid: 152). From an Islamic perspective, such processes are the result of, and evidence for, divine power. For the young men, it is the heightened awareness of these bodily states that creates their sense of the reality of religious

³² As Faubion puts it 'the care and maintenance of the *polis*, of the Greek city state . . . was for Aristotle the teleological culmination of the development of civilized human life and within which alone human life could be fully worth living' (Faubion 2011: 20) – though only, of course, for wealthy free adult males. It is the state of this collective object, the *umma*, which the sermons address.

experience, which they seek to extend by keeping the tape running in the background. From a social science perspective, the bodily-affective registers of religious practice and their ethical outcome are the products of a religious discourse and the soundscape of a time and place. However, each of these points can also be understood as reflecting psycho-developmental and neurological processes. The account of the impact on the individual of an object capable of uniting the intellectual and affective domains of experience into a complex integrated religious response is suggestive of the need of our species to integrate the direct sensory, affective qualities of experience with a rational, abstracting, categorising response to these raw impressions. This has been described by neuroscientists but with particular relevance by McGilchrist (2010), who argues that this integration is inherently problematic because there is an intrinsic paradox at the heart of the human need for the unity of these perspectives, in that rational thought is experienced as intrinsically self-sufficient and separable from the open-endedness of sensual and emotional response. This paradox is reflected in the split between the rational and the sensual registers of experience within Post-Enlightenment European thought (Connolly 2006) and echoed in psycho-developmental accounts of the direct impact on the infant of the minded bodily presence of the parent in orienting, focusing and integrating the infant's bodily states and attention. Daniel Stern (1985) writes of the ongoing, mutually shaping bodily-affective states of being that are communicated between of the mother and infant as *integrating* different sensory modalities and states into a dynamic form of experience he terms 'vitality affects'. Nevertheless, these states of bodily focus and coherence for the infant are not permanent achievements. They are repeatedly lost and need to be re-established. If 'vitality affects' captures our adult capacity to sense and respond directly to the contours and dynamics of the state of life in those around us, what comes with it is the vulnerability produced by a sense of dependence on, and responsibility for, the state of a shared world that this engenders. Just as parental attentiveness helps to return the distressed, dysregulated infant to a state of integration and alertness to the world, the impact of prayer may be understood as gathering up an individual or a congregation in a way that temporarily re-creates a sense of focus and order. This is not to attribute qualities of permanence or wholeness to a moral world or to the impact of Muslim prayer but rather to call attention to its fragility and transience.

The core ritual of Friday prayer is regularly and predictably performed in accordance with a liturgical calendar and therefore available for all to participate in. The

continuing presence of Islam at the mosque, the immediate practical responsibility for which is borne by the Trustees, contributes to a sense of the continuity of God's order amidst the unpredictability and dislocations of life – an intermediate space between the 'messiness of the human world and the perfection of Islam' (Simon 2009: 258). Whether an individual has maintained their own religious practice or not, by praying alongside others, the ebb and flow of personal states of piety and practice are replaced, for a while, by something more tangible and certain, a visible gathering of Muslims, that holds together across the gaps in individual commitment and the inevitable cycles of doubt and hope (Pelkmans 2013). In the light of Stern's idea of the communication of 'vitality affect' one might also see such experience as not only visibly reassuring but inwardly resonant and sustaining. As one friend, who did not pray regularly put it to me, when she decided to abandon what she was doing at home and accompany me to the mosque for prayer: 'I'll just go and make my peace with God'. Though she was not regular in her religious practice, she was someone whom I knew to pray at the mosque in private and who would ask the mosque Trustees for prayers for herself and her family in times of difficulty. Of a quarrel with a local *halal* butcher about being given less meat than she had paid for, she said she had let the issue drop, adding that 'I may not always pray but I am not going to have a fight with someone on a Friday. So I came back here and made *woodoo* (ablution) and went to the mosque.' This suggests that both collective ritual and the mosque, as a place within which to access the Muslim liturgy, may be thought of as functioning not only through the properties of speech acts to establish a conventional order to which individuals publicly subscribe, but also as a receptacle for an awareness of the vicissitudes and failures of religious and social commitment – a containing space within which fragmentary and problematic religious experience can attain a degree of form and coherence, and failures can be felt to be made good. For my friend, this was accompanied by a degree of self-awareness, although saying you are going to 'make your peace with God' surely passes over into something the nature of which is beyond conscious verbal representation. There was a sense in her way of speaking that this was something available and awaiting her, an object that she felt she could turn back to after a rupture. Some individuals may stay on to pray in private after the end of collective prayer and amidst the bustle of people leaving. Whatever the motivation, this is a matter of individual choosing and, perhaps, of need. A woman with whom I had had a conversation in the kitchen earlier in the day about the death of her teenage son in Guyana some years previously, stayed behind to pray. When she eventually got up she said to me, 'When I

talk about my son it makes my flesh creep’, implying that her additional moments of prayer were in the hope of finding some way to still her state of disquietude, of seeking to move from distress towards something not so much hopeful as less despairing. I suggest that the familiarity of religious practice and the physical accessibility of the mosque create an emotional and ethical space that an individual can inhabit, however transiently, in a way that is felt to make good one’s own shortcomings by gathering in the unpredictable nature of everyday life and re-establishing the sense of divine order and one’s place within it.

While there were times when the affective qualities of prayer and recitation in the language of the Quran pervaded the mosque – as in the call to prayer, the sounds of prayer itself, or the background hum of children in a *hafiz* class struggling to recite from memory, on most occasions it was the sounds and idioms of English that had to carry alike religious ideas, practical injunctions to worshippers, and the exchanges of social conversation. For the Guyanese, English is their mother tongue and the language in which their daily lives were conducted and in which they felt at home; for them Arabic was a barrier to a direct experience of Islam. However, for everyone in the congregation of this English-speaking mosque in London, the qualities of a seamless ethical soundscape are to some extent unavailable. While there is an aesthetic created by the architecture of the mosque, the sound of the call to prayer, and the familiar movements and repetitions of prayer itself, it is not always like this. In school holidays it is noisier, during Ramadan it is crowded, and at festivals the mood is more that of a social celebration. Soares and Orsella (2009 [2010]) have been critical of ethnographies that ‘over-privilege the coherence and disciplinary power of Islam’ (ibid p12). I was aware of just such a temptation to attend to the beauty of quiet moments on the prayer balcony at the expense of the more fraught and chaotic or even just the mundane and the practical; it is in this direction, the range of experience outside of prayer and within other parts of the mosque, that I will move in subsequent chapters. Even in a Muslim society, ritual comes to an end and the mundane world begins again. The women in Mahmood’s classes met this by seeking to reshape their lives in accordance with strict interpretations of practice (Mahmood 2005: 116) while young men found it necessary to use the portability of taped sermons to create a continuous religious sound background for their lives (Hirschkind, 2006). Others must live through and with this gap in a different way. Though the Guyanese felt themselves part of the fabric of the local community beyond the mosque, it was this rupture in the Muslim

world of the congregation that the sermons sought to address and to which I will now turn.

CHAPTER 3 – Creating unity through words – preaching at the mosque

The special linguistic and bodily-affective qualities of ritual are highlighted by the sharp contrast between the two elements of Friday prayer – congregational prayer in Arabic and the sermons in English that precede it. During prayer, a religious world is realised through the canonical nature of its movements and language (Rappaport 1999); in sermons, a religious reality is spoken of in a non-ritualised language. Of necessity, sermons are subject to the variations and vagaries of an individual preacher’s capacity and preoccupations, from which ritual is largely protected.³³ In sermons, the imam must choose his own words and speak for himself. Though the senior of the two imams attached to the mosque often preached on Fridays, he was on a rota that included visiting preachers, each bringing their own concerns and ways of speaking. Among the diversity of preachers there was no consistent theological perspective or attempt to address the religious differences within the congregation; nor was there a common, unifying rhetorical tradition of preaching. There could be no assumption of the immediate, divinely ordained accessibility of the language of the Quran, of which Hirschkind writes, since sermons at the mosque were delivered largely, if not entirely, in English to a congregation with different first languages who were now living within a non-Muslim society.

In such circumstances, sermons talk *about* religious matters as an object of conscious understanding (Eickelman 1992). Preachers may exhort a congregation to attend to their religious duties in a complex non-Muslim context; they may urge Muslim commonality – the *umma* – in the face of the heterogeneity of a migrant congregation (Cenker 2015); and they can suggest the need for reflectiveness; but they cannot instantiate these things. At the risk of over-emphasising the distinction between prayer and preaching, since both take place within a common ritual framework, this chapter describes the objectified perspective on Islam that was presented to the congregation in sermons. Yet, there is inevitably another less conscious dimension – that of the emotional qualities embodied in the presence of the preacher and in his manner of delivery. This

³³ Excluding individual mistakes or disputes over the proper form of the ritual.

was generally in tune with the verbal content of the sermon and may have been consciously designed to be so; sometimes, however, as I will describe below, a strong expression of emotion in the litany that followed the sermon seemed intended to balance out the milder content of the latter.

Most of the sermons I heard were, in different ways, about living a Muslim life in the present and about the problems of living as Muslims in a non-Muslim majority country, a material and moral experience held in common by the worshippers. Concerns such as the religious state of the congregation and with the Muslim *umma*, the forces that threatened it, and what was required to defend it varied widely between sermons. There was a contrast between those preachers who sought clearer distinctions and stronger boundaries between Islam and the non-Muslim world, and those who saw being Muslim in terms of living alongside non-Muslim others, with widely shared, or sharable religious values: that is, between an exclusive and inclusive religious stance (Lambek 2013: 2). In contrast to the more inclusive preoccupations of the official mosque imams and of the Guyanese which I describe in the chapters that follow, most of the sermons preached by visiting imams fell into the former category, in which the threat posed to the individual and to the *umma* came from the failure to protect from the world beyond a proper Muslim context for practice. In the second half of this chapter I give a series of examples of these concerns and the way the anxieties associated with them were framed. However, this chapter begins and ends with preaching that reflects the thinking of the Guyanese, in order to contrast its particular qualities with those of the sermons of most visiting preachers who might be said to be, in different ways, preoccupied with the drawing of a boundary and with the certainties that such a concrete, bounded object gave.

Just before one sermon, there was an intervention by the younger of the two official imams. Bilal had been appointed by the Guyanese, who saw him to be in sympathy with their way of thinking and, having been born and brought up in the UK, particularly suitable to act as the public face of the mosque at youth and community events. He only rarely preached at the mosque as he generally took Friday prayers at a local mental health unit, but his way of speaking and conducting himself gave expression to the sensibilities of the Guyanese. The brief intervention by Bilal that I describe was striking on the one hand for its acceptance of human reality as he found it, and on the other his firmness in relation to his own position of knowledge and experience. It also calls attention to the difference in a congregation at prayer and during a sermon.

In ritual prayer, one participates through the collective performance of prescribed actions accompanied by the recitation of formalised speech; being present at a sermon imposes no such requirements, except the convention that, unlike in a lecture, one does not ask questions, but neither does one have to listen. This ambiguity was particularly marked during a crowded and noisy gathering for the festival of *Eid al adhar*,³⁴ when large numbers attended the mosque, bringing together the knowledgeable, the devout, and the minimally practising. As the imam who would be giving the sermon and leading the prayer, Bilal quietly explained to the congregation how the ritual on that day would differ in some ways from the more usual form of congregational prayer on Fridays. It was clear that he assumed that some of those present would not be familiar with this difference and that he would need to make this announcement if the ritual was not to be disrupted. On the women's balcony, most were dressed in conspicuously new and highly colourful clothes. The young were intent on greeting each other with elaborate hugs and kisses, while the older women were exchanging *Eid* cards. The imam went on to ask that people be quiet and listen to the sermon, rather than thinking about the food they would be eating later, as this was an opportunity for them to learn something. Again, there was a tacit acknowledgment that many in the congregation would not be inclined to pay much attention. However, some of the women clearly did want to listen to the sermon as, later, a group of young women in pious black dress, sitting in the front surrounded by those in colourful new *Eid* attire, held up a hurriedly scrawled notice to those behind them, reading: 'Sisters, please be quiet – we can't hear!'.

Eid al adhar is a religious occasion that marks an event in the pre-history of the Abrahamic tradition through prayer and donations given so that the meat of slaughtered animals may be distributed to the poor³⁵ – but it is also a communal celebration of food and family in the present. Four prayer times, rather than the usual two on Fridays, are laid on to accommodate the level of demand, and the imam's remarks indicated that its status as a joyful family celebration might overwhelm its religious significance: some might attend the mosque only for events such as this and therefore require some explicit guidance. Rather than exhorting all to greater piety, Bilal addressed this problem in a low-key, practical way that accepted the reality of the situation. This approach was well

³⁴ This festival celebrates Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael and the substitution, through divine intervention, of a goat for the child.

³⁵ This has become problematic for those in the UK and many people give to charities which dispense financial donations as food to the poor in Muslim countries, although at least one of my interlocutors expressed concern about how this system operated in reality.

attuned to a style of thinking and acting among many of the Guyanese and Mauritians, who were present in large numbers at this event, but it would have been alien to others in the congregation. It was also at odds with the style of many, if not most of the sermons preached on Fridays, though they vary considerably one from another.

Local preachers; local sermons

Many of those leading prayer and preaching at the mosque on Fridays were 'freelance': part of the decentralisation of religious knowledge and authority within globalised Islam. While there was no obvious sense of crisis during the time of my fieldwork, there were indications that the Trustees of the mosque perceived an undercurrent of potential challenge and a need to be vigilant³⁶. Given that the preachers were drawn from many different parts of the Muslim world, some educated abroad and others in the UK, this created a great diversity of subject matter and modes of delivery.³⁷ Though the visiting preachers at the mosque sometimes made it clear that they could be consulted for advice and seemed to preach around a circuit of mosques, and may thus be said to have careers in this field, at least from the perspective of this mosque congregation their sermons were tied to the context in which they were given. In this way, they differed from the recorded sermons that exist as commodities in a marketplace.³⁸ Those preachers for whom English was not their first language, and those whose religious concerns and manner of delivery required it, interspersed the English sections with long quotations in Arabic, making the sermons fragmented and difficult for me, and presumably other non-Arabic speakers, to follow. These preachers generally delivered sermons in a more emotional style than the ordinary, conversational tone of the English-speaking imams.³⁹ Thus, while some sermons were delivered in idiomatic North London English, with casual references to familiar landmarks in that world and to the everyday concerns of Muslims living within it (for example, 'Ramadan should not be about spending the whole day buying food in Shopping

³⁶ Though the Trustees exercise a degree of oversight it is unclear how complete or consistent that could be.

³⁷ Among those I came to recognise, there were preachers who were originally from Egypt, North Africa, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Guyana.

³⁸ By the end of my fieldwork, I got the impression that one of the preachers, Azzim, might be taping some of his sermons and certainly he would deliver the same or a similar sermon/lecture on different occasions as if he was working on a theme over time; another of the 'visiting' imams has appeared in religious broadcasts though there is no indication that this gives him special status, or was even widely known within the mosque. This imam held a gender-mixed discussion group in his house that I attended for about a year.

³⁹ While I knew only one of the imams to have been educated entirely in the UK, others, such as the Guyanese imam who works in the NHS, or a Bangladeshi imam who is active in local politics and the media, were very much at home using north London idioms.

City'); other preachers, from a variety of Muslim countries, sometimes adopted a perspective that was not at all local and a time-frame that was not that of the present – evincing a preoccupation with the early Muslims, ‘an indifference to the pastness of the past in favour of its exemplary value in the present’ (Hirschkind 2006: 162), and a concern with the concrete details of the events that take place after death and at the Last Day. Even for those who presented religious concerns as the moral struggles of individuals to live today in accordance with divine revelation, might present these in relation both to the events of a founding period and the end of time (Deeb 2009).

For all the preachers, however, the current situation of Muslims across the world was a recurrent theme and if the sermons of the ‘local’ imams were less obviously emotional, both groups of preachers made use of the short supplicatory prayer (*du’a*) that follows the sermon to give expression to marked states of feeling, with the apparent aim of stirring the listener to a heightened response. There were moments when the imam’s voice would break, or where the series of supplications would rise in a crescendo of shouting, the more striking because it might have followed a low-key sermon. Thus, a restrained sermon, by a ‘local’ imam on the theme of not despairing of God’s mercy was followed by a supplicatory litany first for the sick, and then the dead (‘spare them the pains of the grave, *yer Allah*’), and then for a woman who, it had been announced, had taken the *shahada* that day. After this the imam became more and more impassioned, asking first for Palestine and then for Iraq to be spared *fitna* (chaos)⁴⁰ – ‘*yer Allah – yer Allah*’ – and to be delivered from the occupation – ‘*yer Allah – yer Allah*’ – so that, by the end, he was shouting and sobbing. However, in contrast to the work of Mahmood and Hirschkind, who found that individuals actively sought out strong emotional qualities in sermons, in this context it was problematic to some listeners. There were indications that some of those I knew well found these expressions of emotion excessive, one woman saying, ‘Well, perhaps it (the *du’a*) sounds better in Arabic than in English’, and another referring to one of the imams, who speeds up as the supplications reach a climax, as ‘doing his express train again’. Though delivered in English, or perhaps precisely because of this, there was something unfamiliar and jarring in the mode in which the supplicatory prayer was often delivered.

There is an inevitable contrast between ritual and sermons, between the eternal as manifest in the received canonical structures of ritual and the humanly made, variable,

⁴⁰ Some words are said in Arabic if they have a religious meaning is assumed to be familiar.

messages of the sermon. By comparison with prayer and recitation, or preaching constructed directly out of quotations of the word of God, sermons in English are naked, improvised, human things, undertaken with more or less skill. Ritual prayer offers the unity of a predictable form; sermons expose individual differences – differences in the stance adopted towards the issues they put before the congregation and in the capacity of the preacher to consider them. Matters of theological disagreement were not commented on within the sermons themselves, yet the differences between the sermons implied marked disagreements and even within a sermon, there were sometimes indications of ambivalence and uncertainty about the tone to be struck.

The preacher whose emotional *du'a* followed a low-key sermon about not despairing of God's mercy had spoken in an ordinary tone of voice. Though he set his homily within a religious perspective on time that gave a central place to death and the need to live in the light of the reality of the eschaton, he did so not by summoning up concrete scenes of the hereafter, but beginning with the remark that we were half-way through Ramadan and there were those who were here with us last year who were no longer with us; we have no guarantee that we ourselves will be here next year at this time. The abundance of God's mercy was contrasted with our difficulty in recognising when we have taken a wrong road and 'need to correct and reconnect our lives'. This difficulty, he argued, is because we do not want to change: we prefer escape and delusion, such as through alcohol, but sin only increases the error and the addiction to sin grows until 'your heart feels nothing'. He ended by saying: 'So, brothers and sisters, this is the time to come back and correct ourselves, whether this is to do with our relationship with Allah or with other human beings, whether with Muslim or non-Muslim, we should ask Allah for his forgiveness.'

The sermon contained many references to 'our' sins and what 'we' should do. It was a style of preaching influenced by a background of engagement with local circumstances. I thought it constituted the sort of sermon that might be the implied target of other preachers who were mockingly critical of what they saw as the government's agenda to promote a 'British' form of Islam. This might account for the fact that this imam used a very different emotional palette for the supplicatory prayer that followed his sermon, as if such a mild, internally directed sermon, in which the faults were our own and in which relationships with non-Muslims were also placed before God, required to be

balanced by an angry litany and a shift in focus to one where external occupiers were threatening the otherwise unproblematic nature of the divine order in Muslim countries.

Unlike the young men in Cairo listening to cassette sermons, who exercised choice in their tape selection, the London congregation had to hear whichever preacher happened to be acting as imam on that day. However, many of the women, and perhaps the men also⁴¹, did not actually sit through the whole sermon. They would arrive late, right up to the start of prayer (and sometimes during it)⁴², as if the sermon was optional and unimportant; they too may, in a sense, have been exercising choice. A Sri Lankan woman who had just started to attend the Saturday classes expressed an oblique criticism of one of the more political sermons and went on to ask me if I knew when Azzim, who taught the class, preached. I offered her my best guess based on what seemed to be the rota pattern and she said she would try to come then. Azzim's sermons were the most abstract. Indeed, alone among the preachers, he took an explicit semiotic stance but, as his preaching stood out from the rest in this regard, I will discuss his approach in the chapter that deals with his religious position in the classes. My focus in this chapter is on the sermons themselves and how they presented the issues facing the congregation, rather than on how they were received. There is an inevitable bias towards those where I could understand what was being said, given that some accents were more difficult to follow than others, and to those where I felt I could grasp the meaning of the sermon. There were some that I found impossible to follow and which I am not able to comment on but, in principle, they constitute an interesting phenomenon in themselves. The themes I have selected were those that recurred most frequently. They spoke to the absence of a proper Muslim context. Roy suggests a distinction between those groups who 'try to inscribe forms of Muslim communalism in the framework of the host countries', accepting as the Guyanese have done the task of rebuilding a concrete community in a new situation, and those who 'endeavour to express their community as an ideal transnational and non-territorial entity' (2004: 202). Some of the preachers were less preoccupied by the instantiating of an ideal than the sense of loss and threat created by migration to non-Muslim societies.

While recitation has its own musical beauty, and prayer its choreography of bodily movements, sermons, mainly if not entirely in English, must generate the experience of a

⁴¹ The men's prayer hall could only be seen from the very front of the women's balcony and I rarely occupied a space there as it was more difficult to then remain seated while others prayed.

⁴² There is the possibility to stay on to complete the cycles of prayer that one has missed.

divine and eternal unity without direct access to the transformative power of the language of the Quran that Hirschkind describes. Here the issue is how one might understand sermonising in a context where the interweaving of linguistic and sensory levels of meaning is at best limited, where there is no common tradition to draw on, and where no explicit reference is made to theological differences. Those preaching at the mosque who used extended Arabic quotations were, perhaps, relying on the affective impact of the 'music' of Quranic quotations but without verbal understanding; those who sought an emotive visual account of the grave and the Last Day had to express themselves in English. Rather than offering an account of the rewards and punishments of the hereafter, the preachers often described some problematic situation, for the individual or the community, local or global, that required addressing. These sermons emerged out of an engagement with the world the congregation inhabited in the present. The collective experience of living within a non-Muslim society and the struggle of the individual to lead a religious life in such circumstances created a new context of 'intelligibility' (Rasanayagam 2011; 2013). While these sermons have distinct emotional tones, the summoning up of pre-reflective registers of feeling is not the dominant mode in which they communicate. Instead, there is a shift towards sermonising in more cognitive registers – towards a conscious awareness of a situation – and an emotional tone linked to encouragement to the external action necessary to rectify it.

Preaching to a diverse post-migration congregation drew attention to the gap between those sermons where there seemed to be a fit between the English idioms used, the emotional tone sought and the content (as in the 'do not despair of God's mercy' sermon), and those where there seemed more of a struggle between the theme, the capacity of the preacher to deliver what he intended and the complex context beyond the mosque with which the congregation were engaged in different ways and to different degrees. Key scenes in the Prophet's life, the hardships and abuse endured by the Prophet and his Companions and the piety of the early *umma* were used to describe the transformative effect of divine revelation, but the moral significance of these scenes was difficult to evoke without resorting to inflating ordinary language. For example, the preacher emphasised the extreme humiliations the Prophet and the Companions endured, the mortal wounds that were sustained by those who yet continued to fight and the unsurpassed moral standards of the early Muslims that meant a woman loaded with jewellery could safely ride in public without risk of attack. However, that the problem is inherent in a sermon as a human creation was apparent in the fact that those who

identified with their lives in London also had to manage a different, but related, predicament. The use of deliberately homely images of family life would be extended into personal anecdotes that revealed more about the speaker than about that which he might hold in common with the congregation. Attempts to locate the sermon in the present, through allusions to the demands of the modern working environment in which, for example, 'performance-related pay' provided a metaphor for religious reward and reflection, strained the idea that the sermons referred to experiences that the congregation would share.

Creating Muslim moral space

In the sermons delivered by visiting imams that I describe below, the concern was with threats to the physical safety, unity and moral well-being of the world-wide community of Muslims, both as actual individuals living in perilous circumstances and as an imagined entity, the *umma*, of which the congregation was a material manifestation. The preacher sought to evoke a sense of collective responsibility. In these sermons, the moral and physical state of both the individual and the *umma* were often presented as the outcome of external events and social interactions with the world that required a sense of collective Muslim responsibility and action.

In collective prayer, the imagined community of Muslims is made visible and placed in accord with God's order through the correct performance of ritual but, when prayer ends, the state of *umma* is thrown back on complicated improvised responses to the all-too-observable realities of life. These realities can be seen to press in closely around the rituals of Ramadan when families gather on the women's balcony late into the night. The area outside the balcony starts to resemble a campsite as children are managed and given food and drink, despite the many notices to the contrary. On one occasion during Ramadan, the 'night of power', when the recitations continue through the night, several men came upstairs at about 11 o'clock, insisting vociferously on contacting their wives, who were somewhere on the balcony. Eventually, the female stewards managed to convince them that there was no way to get a message to these women in the darkness and in such a crowd. I was at this point sitting outside with a Guyanese woman I knew well. Adolescent girls of East African descent thronged the stairs, swathed in black and looking extremely pious but, in reality, all were talking loudly, either to each other or on their phones. My companion made several attempts to persuade them to be quiet so that those who were forced, by the crush, to sit outside on the balcony could still hear the

recitations that everyone had come for, but the girls took no notice. The Guyanese woman was extremely cross and remarked critically on how they were being brought up. This jarred with my initially stereotyped response to their attire (Tarlo 2005).

Sermons can speak of, and to, such situations of dispute and failure but while ritual can restore, at least transiently, the integrity of the *umma* as a moral object through the correct performance of the liturgical canon, sermons for the most part can only present a congregation with its religious shortcomings, proclaim their consequences in this life and hereafter, and exhort their repair. I say, 'for the most part', because sermons do draw on other registers. As well as pointing to this or that external situation or insisting on the obligations of correct practice, a preacher will also embody an attitude to what he is saying – he will himself be an example of how a situation can, or should, be lived, that may or may not consistent with the manifest content of the sermon. In the four sermons I describe below, the threat to the object of concern, the *umma*, is seen through different lenses: the threats posed by the presence of a non-Muslim world; by the lack of an appropriate and necessary context for a Muslim life, not only in Western societies but also in Muslim majority countries at the present time; by the internal differences within the *umma* that undermine its coherence and integrity; and by the erosion of religious commitment among adult Muslims, as a result of living in non-Muslim societies. Such threats bespeak a radical disruption in, or loss of a way of being-in-the-world with others rather than the momentary 'moral breakdown' in an ongoing order of which Zigon (2007) writes – a world lost, not through transient, reparable intersubjective failures, but through migration and large scale political changes.

Most sermons implied, or specified, the need for human action in the world, but some presented the remedy as having a divine source. In one such sermon, the safety and unity of the *umma* was seen as created by God's promise of the rewards of practice, among which was the provision of a protective barrier around Muslims against the threats posed by others. The sermon consisted of large sections in Arabic with only brief remarks made in English. The imam said that Ramadan was a month of blessings, a month given by Allah for this purpose. He spoke of the tally of blessings which would be received for reciting the Quran when standing, when sitting, or when performed at a specified time and then related how one of the first Muslims wanted to recite the Quran, not for one month, but for a thousand. As no one would live long enough to accomplish this, Allah told the Prophet that if you recited the Quran on the 'night of power', it would count the

same as a thousand months of recitation. The imam finished by saying that the recitations of Ramadan created a barrier around Muslims that shielded them from the unbeliever, *jinn* and *shaitan*.⁴³ The Guyanese and ‘Guyanese oriented’ valued engagement with their complex relationships with non-Muslims in and of itself, and some preachers indicated that Muslims should accept the reality of living alongside others, invoking a narrative of the early Muslim community as having done so. However, in this sermon it is living within a pluralist society that poses the threat to Muslims gaining paradise and against which the *umma* needs protection. While the solution – an impermeable barrier – invokes the transcendent power of God, rather than human action, it is presented by the preacher as if it were a material barrier or at least as created through a countable number of recitations.

Another sermon started with a doubt about the capacity of the individual to be transformed inwardly by reciting the divine words but then shifted to the need for Muslim practice to take place in an external context that also reflects God’s revelation – the preacher first located the impediment to establishing the sovereignty of God within the individual, then identified the absence of divine sovereignty in the external world. The imam spoke of how all constitutions in Muslim countries refer to sovereignty but then asked, rhetorically, how many Islamic constitutions reflect the values of Islam? He said, interjecting that he hoped this did not offend brothers from Algeria, that articles in the Algerian constitution state that ‘the people are the source of power’ and ‘we confer our power on our delegates’. He went on dismissively: ‘It’s all by the people, for the people and so on. These constitutions are all just cut and paste. but this is a direction that is contrary to Muslim *aqeeda* (belief).’ He then said that in Bangladesh ‘people’ were also sovereign, and that this was ‘directing the generations away from the *deen* of Allah⁴⁴’. Although there was a reference in the Pakistan constitution to the sovereignty of Allah, in practice, the situation was worse than in other countries. He reached a climax saying, ‘We are engulfed by this reality’. The imam acknowledged that sometimes people said he was too political but that ‘without a certain reality, we can’t practice Islam. We recite [the Quran] but what does it mean if the reality we live in is engulfed by a social and political world order that is contrary to Islam? It is not enough to be an individual Muslim.’ The preacher insisted that there was a collective need to establish the divine order in the

⁴³ The *jinn* are a parallel creation, made out of fire rather than clay; like humankind, the *jinn* have free will. *Shaitan* (satan) is a *jinn* who refused to bow before Adam, rather than a fallen angel as in Christian cosmology.

⁴⁴ *Deen* means religion but also a way of life consistent with it.

world. It was not clear whether this was because, without such a context, religious practice was difficult to fulfil or because, more radically, it was 'not enough to be an individual Muslim' since the state of the Muslim *umma* was critical to God's order. While the former would imply a human need for a shared way of being in the world and the practical and moral implications of its absence, when the preacher questioned the meaningfulness of reciting the Quran in a material context that was contrary to Islam, he implies a semiotic stance that prioritises the material and the public over the private and immaterial realm of meaning.

Among congregations such as the one in which I did my fieldwork, the very diversity of Islamic traditions and divergent forms of living as a Muslim within the UK presents a threat, since individuals may come to see things differently in the light of their very different experiences. In the sermon I describe below, the preacher tried to rouse the congregation to a collective sense of being Muslim which did not distinguish between them as to level of piety or type of practice. His rhetoric sought to manage internal difference, and the doubts this might engender about the integrity of Islam, by creating a space that would enclose all Muslims, so that the threat posed by difference and doubt was kept external to the *umma*.

The preacher alternated between ordinary speech and angry, passionate shouting. He was condemning Muslims who criticise other Muslims for following this or that practise and this or that sheik. In particular, he was castigating those who were critical of Muslim women who wore the hijab and niqab. 'It's not just a piece of cloth, it's bigger than that, it's a symbol. Like the minarets in Switzerland . . . there are only four but people in Europe want to say, "We thought you would have changed your values by now and become like us"'. He added, mockingly, 'democracy, freedom, do what you like when you like . . . but second- and third-generation Muslims are coming back to their deen [religious way of life], humdulallah [thanks be to God].' He said the Arabic word hijab meant 'drape' but then went on to say that some scholars say it should cover the face. He said that personally, he didn't think that, but everyone should defend this view because it's an Islamic opinion. 'No sister wears it except because she believes it is part of the deen'. So we shouldn't attack it; they attack it because Islam is becoming more and more powerful.'

I had attended this Friday prayer with a woman from the Saturday class and her children. Later, at home, she described the sermon to her brother-in-law, voicing just the mixed feelings and concern with how the situation might look to non-Muslims in

Switzerland, and how they might feel, that this preacher had represented as evincing a lack of solidarity. Though my presence may have heightened her awareness of multiple competing perceptions of the situation, it was an opinion consistent with views she has expressed at other times. This touches on a broader issue about the impact of the observer, whether as an impediment to authenticity or as a prompt to an awareness of other positions that may not normally be present. As I will describe later, some of those I met worked alongside non-Muslims and, as a result, became drawn into a process that produced an increased awareness of, and concern about, the perspective of others, while there were those who felt it their religious duty to resist, to reach back to more traditional ways of being, or to erect a self-imposed barrier to keep out such perceptions, much as God was seen as providing a divine barrier in the first example.

The continuing, integrity and wellbeing of the *umma* required, above all, that a Muslim form of life was preserved and handed on intact to the next generation. All migrants may be concerned for the safety of traditions from a lost homeland, though here there is, in addition, the fear of divine punishment. One sermon began with the imam thanking Allah for ‘guiding us, protecting us and bringing us together again’, conveying a strong sense of the congregation being brought back together safely after another week. He went on to talk about the dangers that militated against this prayerful continuity and said that he was going to talk about something that affects all of us – the raising of children.

‘They are in danger in this society. Imagine a one-year-old left in the middle of the jungle by its father. We would say this man is mad. We all know this. We are bombarded with the ideas of this society. In the streets, there are adverts of naked women; in school they are not safe. I heard about a French class where the boys were told to practice chatting up the girls. In the playground they say to each other, [here he imitated a sarcastic tone] “Do you listen to your father? Really?”’ He talked of Muslim children in danger from ideas that are not from ‘our *deen*’ (our Muslim tradition). *‘These people say “You’re young . . . don’t worry . . . be an individual . . . it’s your business. . . fun is the most important thing, don’t listen to your parents or read the Quran. . . live life as you want’. He went on to place the responsibility for ‘saving ourselves and our families from the *naar* [the fire of hell]’ with Muslim parents but then acknowledged that ‘there are some things we do that don’t help. What is it we want? What is our goal for our children? To be practising Muslims who love their *deen* . . . not just as a burden but an understanding of Islam so that even*

when we are gone they will continue to practice. . . and whose job is this? The parents. . . yet sometimes we forget this. When we are choosing a school we find a private school which costs a lot of money and we think about the exam results but we ignore the fact that there are few Muslims there and that it is difficult for them to pray. We say, "Oh, they can pray later". I'm not saying they shouldn't be lawyers and doctors, but that won't help on Yawn al Qiyama [the Last Day when all rise from their graves]. We have the wrong objective for them. Islam must come first and other things after.'

He emphasised that the people who have the job of raising the young are the parents 'and the answer isn't just to send the child to the madrasa. It's not for the imam to build a child. What is he learning at home? We have to spend time with our children. We live in a society where people have to earn money and this can become a 24/7 preoccupation outside the home.' He said that as adults we are affected by society and come to think that loving a child means a Nintendo Wii and a new bike. . . 'but the young child raised in the deen . . . it's a gift'. He spoke with increasing urgency of the need for adults as parents 'to push ourselves to practice the more because we live in this jungle. Otherwise the ideas of this society will take root and we will lose them'.

The external world, the non-Muslim world, is presented as a jungle but it is a jungle that Muslims are drawn into, not only by the necessity to participate through work and school, but by the desire for what is available in that world. The dimension of time is crucial in relation to the ethical – the sustaining of a commitment over time, here the passing on of a heritage from one generation to another. A process is being described by which adults lose their sense of what is important to them as Muslims and, as a result, what had been a gift to them from their parents becomes unavailable to pass on to their children. The preacher presents this as a shared, public predicament brought about by the nature of UK society; in the more intimate atmosphere of the classes, an account of such failures would be given in terms of the individual's loss of trust in God and the turning instead to different objects that was implicit within this process.⁴⁵

The never-ending nature of this struggle was the subject of a minority of sermons that sought to give a more internal account of failure. One attributed the difficulty in

⁴⁵ The inescapable nature of such pressures is described by de Koning (2013) in relation to the differences between and within groups of Dutch Salafists where the practical difficulties of living out the ideal are only ameliorated by the intimacies of friendship groups. He suggests that it is in the effort to achieve moral perfection, not as an accomplished state, that these individuals live as Salafists.

remaining steadfast (*istaaq*) to human nature, a nature that the Prophet was said to have described as constantly moving, like water boiling in a pot. The preacher said that the word for humanity (*insaahn*) was linked to the word meaning 'to forget'. 'We say we worship one God but at the back of our minds we rely on other things . . . Being straightforward means there is no one but Allah.' He ended the sermon by relating *istaaq* to the state of the community: 'We stand and pray in the same building side by side but the moment we leave the building we are disunited. Yet *istaaq* means continuing to be united and steadfast'. This sermon used an idea of our common human nature, rather than the dangers of an external moral jungle created by others, to understand both individual failure and the shared failure to realise the communal dimension of Islam, the *umma*, in the world beyond the mosque. It gave an image to the instability of human being through which the processes of failure could be recognised and a language in which it could be thought about as an intrinsic aspect of the human.

Prayer, sermons and the mundane

Though participating in the ritual of collective prayer may be said to engender a sense of unity through the mutual attuning of bodily states and to instantiate a religious reality through the public recitation of verbal commitments to it, once ritual ends the experience it has generated is subject to the unpredictability and improvised nature of everyday life. Announcements are made at the end which might be said to extend the experience of being part of a community, but some of the congregation would have already started to leave. Those who had died in the last week and those who were sick were named, details given and prayers sought for them; coming events at the mosque were announced; and people reminded to give towards the upkeep of the mosque. In this way the congregation, past, present and future, was evoked but as a vulnerable, only partially united, human community rather than ideal and essentialised object, the *umma*. The uncertainties of the wider world were present not only in announcements of special collections in support of a religious school opening in a neighbouring borough, or the vans of medical aid going from the mosque to Palestine but also in collections for the victims of natural disasters, whether Muslim or not, or in information about local health-screening campaigns.⁴⁶ The insistent, chaotic aspect of the mundane enters the mosque even as these announcements are being made – people jostle to pass into the non-ritual spaces in which

⁴⁶ From time to time an NHS van could be seen parked inside the mosque grounds offering blood-pressure testing, information on diabetes and cancer screening services.

social activities take place or to leave the building, while at the gates they come into contact with those who are leafleting for religious lectures, language classes, *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and on occasion, the Socialist Workers Party.

While prayer may create a community through ritual, and the sermons can only invoke the unity of the *umma* and for the most part are unable to say anything which matches the impact of prayer and recitation, mundane social transactions press in on a space that must be routinely physically managed. Kresse (2013) suggests the adjective 'worldly' as more accurately portraying the characteristics he intends than mundane Islam and this is the situation here. I would argue that it is in part the painful awareness of this contrast – between a religious reality instantiated in ritual and the complex worldliness of what lies beyond – that leads some to wish to ritualise larger areas of life than those which other Muslims see as limited to the forms of worship practiced by the Prophet. This extension can come to mean that there is no area of life that Islam does not regulate precisely and to which one must therefore live in conformity. This enlargement of the scope of religious obligation, the ritualisation of everyday life, evokes the link made by Roy (2007) between the loss of a concrete community through migration or through the pluralisation of society and the emergence of self-disciplining, individualised forms of religiosity.

Another response to this situation that I will now describe has been to bring the relational and the everyday into the mosque in the form of semi-ritual and social gatherings. Outside of the prayer hall and the balcony, there are areas of the mosque, marginal to the main rituals, where some within the congregation gather, converse and socialise in a way that also expresses, for them, though not for others, a shared moral world in a way that blurs the distinction between the mosque and the world beyond.

CHAPTER 4 - Beyond Friday prayer – the life of the community

This chapter describes events that, although taking place within the mosque, contain within them the unscripted, improvised qualities that characterise the ‘welter of everyday social life’ from which objectified forms of religious consciousness have become differentiated (Marsden and Retsikas 2013). It looks beyond Friday prayers in the men’s hall and on the women’s balcony in the recently built section of the mosque to the kitchen, the shop and the old hall – spaces in which different kinds of religious, life-cycle and fundraising events take place along with ordinary sociality. Here the centripetal pull of the sounds and movements of congregational prayer and the verbal exhortations to a united *umma* in the sermons were replaced by unplanned, gender-mixed activities. The sharing of meals, informal religious rituals and gathering together to exchange news or to voice contentious thoughts, all expressed aspects of the life of the community – its self-confidence as much as an anxious awareness of its marginality to larger Muslim groups.

If the women in the piety movement were seeking to bring daily life within the ritual prescriptions of Islam (Mahmood 2005), the Guyanese brought the relational concerns of ordinary life into the mosque and sometimes into a religious ritual. Some of those I got to know in these spaces did not fulfil the formal obligations of five daily prayers or perform *haji*, but they did attend the mosque on Fridays, though not necessarily regularly; they joined with others during Ramadan and for festivals and, on occasion, came to the mosque for private prayer. This situation might be variously described as a failure of religious obligations, as the reality of religious practice within the worldly context of ordinary Muslims (Kresse 2013), or as the fulfilment of a different view of Islam and the realisation of the imagined world from which it springs. Through their communal life within spaces marginal to the main rituals of the prayer hall, the Guyanese actively generated experiences of belonging in which being Guyanese and being Muslim were interwoven. The Guyanese construe this complexity as a positive moral presence; I will also argue, as Rasanayagam (2013) does, that it is in participation with others in life projects such as the mosque, and in weathering the vicissitudes of social relationships over time that the grounds of moral experience are laid. This leaves open the nature of the different kinds of moral and religious commitment that individuals may bring.

The mosque was a focus for the social and family relationships of the Guyanese and expressed a commitment to their view of the world, with its roots in Indian migration –

first to Guyana and then to the UK – a world now held largely within the imagination. Mauritians, who share a similar migration history, families of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent, and individuals from a variety of other countries have been drawn to join them. The diversity of this group, referred to by Mr Rahman as ‘Guyanese-oriented’, as well as that of the wider congregation, recreated something of the diversity of Guyana. If their history placed the Guyanese on the margins of the Muslim world, they spoke of it as having offered them, directly and indirectly, experiences from which they derived strength, energy and direction. In a similar vein, Kresse (2013) describes a Muslim community in a complex marginal location on the Kenyan coast that he calls a ‘double periphery’, on the margins of both the Muslim *umma* and the Kenyan state. Yet some within the community experienced the social diversity of their urban neighbourhoods as ‘creating mutual exposure to the way others live – Muslims [and] non-Muslims’. Through ‘having the wider world in mind’ they could develop ‘open-minded and cosmopolitan attitudes and behaviour’ (2013: 96). This, as Kresse points out, is not something inherently linked to Islam but rather a capacity that ‘grows out of the conditions of experience that shape people’s lives individually and socially’ (2013: 97).

Though Schielke and Debevec describe the ‘essentially unsystematic nature of religion as lived practice’ (2012: 3), in this chapter I will draw attention to a certain coherence and patterning in the forms of life that took place outside of formal prayer. This coherence, embodied in known ways of doing things and of being together, generated familiar affective atmospheres and an experience of inhabiting a shared Guyanese inflected world. Eisenlohr (2006) describes the privileging of classical Hindi and the recreation of the sacred geography of pilgrimage as bringing Indo-Mauritians into a live relationship with the ancestors in the present; the manner in which the Guyanese occupied the non-ritual spaces of the mosque not only re-created the complexity and creativity of Indo-Guyanese culture but sustained it as a continuing source of vitality and values and an imaginative object of responsibility and concern.

The generative nature of imagination is understood by anthropology in different ways. Eisenlohr links this quality in the way a diaspora community brought the past and a former abode into the living of life in the here and now to literary, critical and theological understandings of the relational nature of the mind and transformative power of imagination (Bakhtin 1981; Benjamin 1968). Bloch (2013) characterises human imagination in terms of the discrete cognitive capacities he calls ‘time travel’ and ‘mind

reading'. The developmental and neuroscience literature to which I have referred in earlier chapters also offers perspectives on the potentially open-ended generativity of imagination as an implicit current, flowing continuously within everyday life. I suggest that this illuminates the idea of ordinary sociality as the ground of moral experience, and the mutual intelligibility that people find in living together within a shared tradition despite their many differences (Rasanayagam 2013;2011).

In the work of the developmental psychologist Daniel Stern (1985; 2012), the body's capacity to express the flow of feeling states within and between people is present not only in infancy but throughout life as the dynamic contours of 'vitality affects' – the musical reference deliberately directing our attention away from the cognitive and linguistic. We are social animals with the kind of bodies we have in the material environment we inhabit and our imaginings are shaped by the experiences this affords. However, when our species escaped from the form of mammalian consciousness that the neuroscientist Gerald Edelman (1994) calls 'the tyranny of the remembered present', into self-consciousness, the open-ended connectivity of the brain made possible the open-endedness and creativity of imagination. For the neuroscientist, Damasio, the body's visceral response to its external and internal environment, and the brain's continuous evaluation and imaging of that response with respect to survival, is the foundation of our species' later evolving capacity for an imaginative and moral response to the world (Damasio 1999: 230)⁴⁷. From this perspective, our ongoing, non-conscious monitoring and evaluating of our bodily state in relation to others becomes the basis for ethical awareness within our species. While imagination emerges into consciousness as images, narratives and thoughts, informing the capacity for judgement and the taking of responsibility, it is a continuous presence that accompanies the activities of ordinary life lived alongside others.

It is ordinary events that I describe in this chapter – the *iftah* meal in Ramadan, the use the Guyanese and Mauricians made of the shop as a space of their own, and an improvised prayer event that expressed the passage of time amongst the group who had built the mosque. These events were, for the most part, a matter of living and doing rather than talking and the processes that sustained those present were carried in the activities themselves. In chapter 5, I will explore the challenges they faced and the way some of my

⁴⁷ I use the term affective because it has greater currency within anthropology but the neuroscientist Damasio (1999) distinguishes the non-conscious *emotional* registers from the conscious *affective* states.

informants sometimes voiced their thoughts and described their experiences, but the focus of this chapter is on a way of being together in the activity of the moment, the familiar feeling states this generated, and the values that it carried and communicated in the flow of things for those who participated.

Breaking the fast together

The mosque has a long tradition of cooking and serving, on Saturday and Sunday evenings, the meal (*iftah*) that breaks the fast during Ramadan. It brings together a large section of the congregation for a ritual in which the emphasis is on the practical task of food preparation and distribution, and relationships of collaboration and sharing. It draws on the resources that the congregation have accumulated over time – a physical place in which to serve and eat the meal, the practical and social skills to organise it – creating a shared experience based on fasting in Ramadan, and a ritual framework within which the food is offered and accepted.

The moment at which fasting ends coincides with sunset and the timing of the fourth prayer of the day. After the *iftah* meal, the fifth and last of the five daily prayers takes place, followed by a prayer cycle specific to Ramadan, with Quranic recitations going on into the early hours of the morning.⁴⁸ Although it is set within a ritual framework, *iftah* is also an occasion that meets the practical need for food and drink after fasting within the dynamics of a social event. It brings together both a dispersed network of individuals who know each well and those from the wider congregation who choose to break their fast at the mosque rather than at home, but do not necessarily participate in the more social aspects of the event. Because of the overlapping ties of family and friendship, some non-Muslim Guyanese and Mauritian friends may also be present at these meals, thus reinforcing the social function. In contrast to the exacting timetable and choreography of Muslim prayer that surrounds it, the meal itself is an un-ritualised, even chaotic event to which many come in family groups. Some people come for the meal and then stay on to chat in the hall while waiting to go through for the whole evening of religious ritual and recitation, while others, particularly those with young children, leave after the meal. Still

⁴⁸ The length of time available for the *iftah* meal itself and for related sociability varies with the time of year – in summer the lateness of sunset reduces the time interval between the two prayers to the point where there is barely time to serve and clear up. On such occasions, announcements were made to encourage the congregation to speed up their meal and one year it was decided that no pudding would be served on this account.

others, such as the more religiously dressed women in *nikab*, do not attend the meal, arriving only for the later prayers, while a number of men attend *iftah* alone, without their families, wearing long white religious dress and lace caps, re-asserting the religious dimension amid the sociability.

Though communal eating forms an element of most religious and social events at the mosque, *iftah* attracts by far the largest and most diverse grouping since it is part of the mainstream rituals of Ramadan, which the congregation attend in large numbers. The provision of the meal has a long history. Before the move to the hall-mosque in the mid-1980s, when the congregation was smaller and entirely Guyanese, food was cooked at home and brought to whichever building was then serving as the mosque. Now the gathering for *iftah* can attract up to five hundred men, women and children, requiring more centrally organised catering and a large commitment of time, effort and money. Sometimes individuals still bring small dishes to the kitchen to supplement the mass catering; this seemed incongruous but might have been a hangover from earlier times. Calls for extra donations are made just before and during Ramadan to cover all the additional expenses during this period of intensified religious practice, such as the expense of hiring *hafiz*, men who can recite the Quran from memory and who come from outside the UK especially for the occasion. It was clear from these announcements that many use the mosque without involving themselves in the practicalities of its maintenance or provision of events. This disparity between the outlay of effort made by those individuals who make the *iftah* meal possible and those who come to eat it is sometimes commented on, for example when men come to the hatch and ask for 'take home' parcels for their families. At the same time, those who gather in different combinations to prepare the meal are all Guyanese or have close ties with them; the activity contributes to establishing and maintaining their own conception of the mosque. Unlike congregational prayer, where, by turning up, anyone can take their place in the line of worshippers, confident of what to expect, it would not necessarily be so straight forward to move from being a member of the wider congregation to becoming more involved in the organisation of events such as *iftah*. Yet *iftah* is also an event that the congregation as a whole value and have come to expect. One year it was decided that a meal would be served on Saturday nights only, as the burden on those who produced it was too great, but there were so many complaints that the two weekend meals were reinstated the following year. The hall started to fill up with individuals and families from about forty-five minutes before the fast ended. Elderly women 'reserved' chairs around

the walls for one another and sat together to chat. Young families 'camped' out with bags of possessions. As sunset and *maghrib* prayer approached, large pots of tea were brewed and trays of fizzy drinks poured in readiness for the moment when the hours of abstinence would end.

The kitchen as a social space

Though the catering arrangements have changed, the kitchen has remained a space occupied by the Guyanese and those individuals from other south Asian communities who most closely identify with them. The mosque has a large catering-style kitchen adjoining the old hall with low gas burners near the floor that can accommodate the huge cooking pots which require two men to lift. Perhaps for this reason, the actual cooking was always the province of the men, although the women sometimes joked that this gave them a rightful and well-earned break from their usual domestic role. When the food was being cooked on the premises, the event began a couple of hours before with the preparation and cooking of curried meat and vegetables, dahl, rice and salad; tinned fruit and ice cream were served for pudding. The men attended to the vats of food in a spirit of cheerful camaraderie reminiscent of a barbeque, while the women stood around the large central work surface preparing bowls of salad for the meal and little paper napkin parcels, containing one or two dates and a small fried 'dumpling', which were distributed, together with a drink, at the point when fasting ceased.

While all the marginal spaces of the mosque were gender-mixed, the kitchen and the shop were the spaces most fully given over to the expression of the Guyanese conception of gender relations. During the preparation and serving of the meal, the kitchen was full of informal, sometimes slightly risqué banter with none of the restraint of Muslim etiquette that was discussed in the classes. Warm greetings and embraces were exchanged between people, men and women, young and old, as they arrive to help or just 'look in'. Those adults who were not free to help, because they had children in tow, brought them in to greet relatives and be admired by them, before going out into the hall. Older teenagers, and unencumbered young adults, gathered just outside the kitchen and chatted, waiting to perform their task of distributing the food. Thus, the kitchen was at the centre of a noisy, multi-generational gathering – great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, young adults, teenagers, and children – and, though the ties between them of kin, marriage and friendship varied, everyone knew everyone else. Members of older generations were addressed by younger people as 'auntie' or 'uncle' and young men and

women who had known each other since childhood exchanged affectionate greetings and kisses. The Islamic forms of address, 'brother' and 'sister', and the formality between the genders associated with these, were absent. The older of the two mosque imams, coming over to collect his plate of food, might sit down to eat it with the young women involved in the serving of drinks. When I first went to these meals, a middle-aged Bangladeshi woman, whom I will call Zahara, had charge of the drinks. During the first year, she was assisted in laying out and piling up tray upon tray of plastic cups filled with cola and lemonade by a teenage girl of Pakistani descent, whose mother regularly helped in the kitchen, and later by two very young Guyanese sisters. Young people who arrived as part of family groups and stayed to help did so as an adjunct to their own social relationships. Later, many would gather in and around the shop, joking and teasing one another, while others spilled out to the area outside to chat. Parents seemed to accept that for the young adult members of their families, Ramadan at the mosque would need to be fitted into ordinary life and that, once the meal was over, some would leave to continue celebrations elsewhere.

A shared history ran through the face-to-face immediacy of the relationships in the kitchen. One elderly woman remarked to me, as if caught by surprise at the thought, 'We came here together when we were young in the Sixties, and now we are old'. While this is a statement of fact, it also suggested the opening up of a space for reflection on what the years had amounted to and the value to be placed on them. The meals themselves were 'sponsored' by different individuals and families, whether through financial contribution, the involvement of family members in its preparation or arranging outside catering. In this way, the accumulation of relational ties was present within the activity itself – an element in the functioning of communal life as a moral resource. Some Ramadan meals were a regular annual undertaking by certain families; others were provided by families where there had been a death during the preceding year, as part of their understanding of the religious rituals of Islam as well as public remembrance of the dead person. For the Guyanese imam and teacher of the Saturday class, Azzim, as a religious ritual, rather than a human event of remembrance, such an action misrepresented the relations between the living and the dead in Islam. However, while the senior mosque imam attended *iftah* alone, perhaps in his official capacity, Azzim often came with his family, as a member of the general congregation. So, despite his very different theological views that I will describe in chapter 6, one was left to assume that Azzim continued to value the Guyanese community and to regard himself as part of it.

One might characterise an event such as *iftah* as being a mixture of the religious and the social in which the latter was marked off by the physical separation between the hall and the kitchen. But such a distinction would cut across the nature of 'everyday religion' as embedded in ordinary living and open to what was carried in currents of sociality (Orsi, 2012). Bacchiddu (2012) describes the everyday, vernacularized religious practices among Catholic islanders off the coast of Chile that depart markedly from the demands of orthodox Catholicism, yet from the perspective of the islanders carry and express their values of social reciprocity. While the mosque kitchen offered a separate space in which a familiar and celebratory atmosphere could be generated, this atmosphere also carried the relational, moral and religious concerns of the group. The Guyanese, and others in the kitchen and the shop, were not preoccupied with issues of knowledge and correct practice, as were those who attended classes, but they maintained an idea of being Muslim in which gender mixing and joking, the wearing of ordinary high-street clothing and a willingness to see themselves as living alongside non-Muslims were elements of moral significance. I suggest that this should be seen not as disengagement from Islam but as the engaged enactment of aspects of a moral world in which being Guyanese and being Muslim were interwoven in unpredictable ways. Islam was sometimes invoked, but lightly, as when a man enquired teasingly of a woman struggling to open a large tin of fruit salad, as to whether she had said *bismillah* (in the name of Allah) before attempting this task. While there are many short prayers and religious forms of greeting that can be said in the flow of daily life with the intention of bringing God into the midst of things, I rarely heard them used by the Guyanese. This remark was at least partly ironic, and was accepted, and answered, in the same joking spirit. Yet those who joke also pray.

Praying in the midst of things

Although a relaxed attitude predominated in and around the kitchen during the preparation of the meal, there was a point at which the religious nature of the occasion suddenly reasserted itself. The distribution of the snack parcels took place just before the call to prayer sounded among those gathered in the hall and the area leading to the kitchen. Many seemed not to hear it at first, while others paused to adjust themselves in expectation of what was to come. People switched from a lively, disorganised engagement with those around them to individual attention to prayer. A young Guyanese woman who had been sitting chatting with others near the kitchen now sat with her hands

open in a supplicatory gesture and, despite the distracting movements of the two-year-old on her lap, she seemed able to focus herself on this moment of prayer. On one occasion, the Bengali imam announced over the loud speaker that the meal had been donated by a family who wanted to remain anonymous, but that they had asked for prayers for themselves and for some sick members of the family. There was then a short recitation in Arabic before the imam continued by asking in English, in a familiar formula, that those present should 'open their hands and their hearts'. Though these bodily images, like those used by the young men in Hirschkind's study, created a heightened awareness of individual internal states, other perspectives were also invoked. The imam asked God's blessings for success in this world and the next, then referred to 'the delicacy people are waiting to eat in Allah's time' and ended by asking blessings for 'all the people of the world'. This prayer suggested that the everyday world, in which people hoped for success and the sensual pleasure of eating could, and should be brought together in an imagined, divine space-time that included all human kind as in need of blessing. This inclusion of non-Muslims, by the Bangladeshi mosque imam, not only acknowledged the presence of some non-Muslim Guyanese within the gathering but also reflected an important relational and religious value for these Guyanese Muslims.

After the 'snack' had been eaten, lines were formed in the hall for prayer, though with none of the aesthetic qualities of the later prayer on the women's balcony where, in winter, the chandelier is the only form of lighting. Rather, there was a haphazard, un-stewarded move towards forming lines that were far from straight, under the full glare of the lights in the hall. Children milled about and, such was the informality at this point, spilling over from the social activity that preceded it, that sometimes people I knew well from the kitchen tried to pull me into the line to pray with them, a thing they never thought to do upstairs. Doubtless, this arose from the sense of good feeling and communality in the kitchen that I could share in while helping to prepare, serve and finally eat the meal. I do not know what would have happened if I had agreed to join them in prayer, but in demurring I was conscious of having felt uncomfortable when a Christian woman, visiting the mosque for an interfaith event, prostrated in prayer during the tour of the women's balcony. That awkward moment served to underscore the impenetrable barrier created by the *shahada*. Unlike on the balcony, in the hall I could remain standing on the margins of the prayer lines where there were other women who were not praying, presumably because they were menstruating, or were non-Muslim family members or friends. This prayer was short and few people stayed on to pray in private, as they did on

the balcony. The hall was immediately needed as an eating area, with individuals and families seated on the floor along the lines of cloth laid to protect the carpets – the men with some of the boys in one area of the hall and the women with the younger children in the other – separated, but visible to one another, during the first Ramadan of my fieldwork.

Large, round trays piled with paper plates of food would then start to leave the kitchen, returning empty in an endless chain, until the word came back that no more food was needed. Although both men and women were standing round together to receive the trays, the serving was undertaken separately by gender. A hectic level of activity took place and then came to a sudden halt as the meal ended. Plates and leftovers were gathered into black plastic bags by helpers, the cloths were folded up and the carpet hoovered by a man who often made a joke about hoovering up the women. Children and toddlers ran about. The congregation dispersed, leaving little knots of people talking together. There was a hiatus after all the activity, particularly if, because of liturgical timing, there was a lengthy gap before people needed go into the new section of the mosque for the next prayer.

Whatever the success of the event at a practical level, there were tensions, between the different domains of meaning that the event held in play – the meal as an element in the rituals of Ramadan, its status within the life of the community, and the fact that it was an event which the Guyanese could shape to meet their own sense of how things should be in the face of those who took a different view. Some of the Guyanese had resisted the transition from using private accommodation for collective prayer to the building of a mosque, open to all, precisely because they feared the loss of their way of doing things and the values this carried for them. Others had felt that it was an important element in those values that they should open their community to different Muslim groups. If the *iftah* meal was an act in which the community consumed together what the community had provided, it was complicated by the reality of different views within the congregation about the way the meal should be conducted that marked out different conceptions of about how to be Muslim. I will describe some of these differences in Chapter 5.

Apart from Friday prayer, the *iftah* meal attracted the biggest gathering in the mosque; yet unlike prayer it was, to a large extent, shaped by human concerns. The social atmosphere established in the kitchen flowed through the whole event. The timing and

reason for the meal lie within a framework of Muslim worship, but much else about the occasion was shaped by the styles of gender and generational relationships among the Guyanese. Relations between men and women were characterised by the sort of joshing that expressed both sexual vitality and the tensions of gendered demarcations and disputes. It was a sort of game that all joined in. When those in the kitchen heard a remark passed on from a male member of the congregation, not Guyanese, which seemed to challenge the religious appropriateness of woman's dress, a woman replied in an elaborate joke, 'Oh a *he* who is upset by what he sees ... if that *he* doesn't like it then that *he* doesn't have to look ... does he?' This is not to say that such a reply would have been given had the remark been made face to face, or that what was at stake in the presence of women within the mosque was not taken seriously, as I will describe in Chapter 5. The *iftah* meal was not simply a reproduction of earlier such meals not only because, as Schore (2008) suggests in his account of an annual religious summer camp, there is a constant updating of memory when occasions are repeated over time, but also because the provision of the communal meal brought to life, in the present, the moral commitments that have endured over time and have built a post-migration community, the mosque and relationships of family and friendship. The preparation and serving of the meal made visible and real the moral world of the Guyanese. MacIntyre (1981) suggests that ethical value lies in the capacity to actively collaborate *with* others in a form of practice that has been inherited *from* others. Yet the nature of this relationship to being Guyanese Muslims is not uniform, fixed or inevitable and the young people who helped to serve in the kitchen, but gathered later in the shop were, inevitably, in a different relationship to this inheritance than were their parents and grandparents.

The shop – a place to speak one's mind

The shop, like the kitchen, was in the old building, near the entrance to the hall. It was open on weekday evenings when children's classes were held, Fridays during the period when the two congregational prayers took place, and during festivals and other events. The small space was crammed with religious literature – books pamphlets and DVDs – devotional objects of various kinds, and articles of religious clothing, alongside sweets and soft drinks. Safina, a Guyanese woman in her fifties, who stewarded the women's balcony and, with her large bunch of keys, generally acted as the concierge of the mosque, was chiefly responsible for the shop, but there was a rota of women to mind the shop when it was open. Men also served there but less frequently. Although it was cut off from the

main prayer area, there was a closed-circuit monitor and sound system on the wall above the counter showing views of different parts of the mosque. On Fridays, one could hear the sermon through it but no one in the shop paid any attention, although the women serving often prayed there rather than closing up and going to the balcony.

The shop served the congregation as whole but, in the absence of either the harmonies of ritualised prayer or the mediation of practical activities, such as the *iftah* meal, difficulties and differences with respect to religious matters emerged in different ways. On one occasion, the secretary of the mosque, Leila, came in and examined the sweets on display as someone had complained to her that they were not all halal. She was sure they were, but felt the need to check. She described this as but one of a series of similar challenges. One year, the pictures in the calendar had been challenged as, inadvertently, they had shown an image of a cross, formed by the glazing bars of a window. Finding a substitute picture was not so easy because, as Leila pointed out crossly, all sorts of things could be construed as a cross if you wanted to see it that way. The calendar was a recurrent point of discord. This year they had prepared a series of old views of the mosque because they wanted to mobilise financial support for a large new extension that would start as my fieldwork ended, but human figures would have to be removed from the photographs before they could be used. There was also an ongoing, unresolved dispute about contested festivals⁴⁹ and whether they should be listed in the calendar. Leila complained that they would put them in one year and the next year they would take them out: 'You can't please everyone'. She felt that one should try to accommodate others and avoid unnecessary provocation while at the same time seeking to protect those elements that were felt as essential by the Guyanese.

A subtler problem attached to occasions when individuals needed to speak in their own words of religious things, without the protection of ritual forms. Arriving at a time when I thought the preparations for an event would be starting, I found no sign of activity in the 'old hall' although I could see some men sitting or praying individually in the male prayer hall. In the shop, Safina was helping an African woman dressed in black to choose a Quran. It turned out to be a curious exchange. The woman, whom I took to be a convert, or at any event not from an Arabic-speaking country, kept saying she wanted a green Quran. Safina duly searched and produced a green Quran with a translation by Yusuf Ali,

⁴⁹ The birthday of the prophet and the fast on the tenth day of Muharram were marked at the mosque but not considered by all to be part of orthodox Islam.

which was rejected. The woman then said that it should start 'alif lam meem'.⁵⁰ Safina told her they all started like that. Eventually it seemed that the woman wanted a transliterated Quran (in which the Arabic is rendered phonetically in Latin script) and Safina went off in search of other volumes among the stock kept upstairs in what is referred to as 'the library'⁵¹. This conversation had taken place in an atmosphere of some awkwardness. I was conscious that, though surrounded by religious objects that implied a shared world, one might still lack a common language. Sometimes there was a real language difference, but more usually it was the absence of a shared mode of communicating about religious things that exposed difference or a lack of knowledge. This dilemma seemed part of the motivation for those who joined the classes. Seeking knowledge together as a group was also a search for a common language within which to safely voice and share religious experience without fear of rebuff or embarrassment.

The shop is open to all, but for the Guyanese and the Mauritians, it functioned as a space for informal conversation among older men and women and, during social events at the mosque, it was also a retreat for the young who, by taking over the job of serving customers, also took over the space as a gathering place for their friends. The bantering, theatrical style of speaking that filled the kitchen also flourished in the shop, so that the conversation had the quality of a display of being 'at home', though often with an ironic twist. At one fundraising dinner, the meal was provided by a member of the congregation who owned a restaurant. When I asked the young Guyanese woman I was sitting with about the food, she looked down at her plate and said with a flourish, 'Looks Guyanese,' then, bending closer, went on, 'Mmm, smells Guyanese'. She paused and then added dramatically, 'But wait! What's this? I think I see a carrot!'⁵² – indicating that it was not, after all, *absolutely* Guyanese. Despite the confident mode of comportment displayed by the Guyanese, there was often an edge to their performance. It created a lingering sense that 'home' might not, after all, be something one was so securely and physically in occupation of, since it was now an imagined place. The play on a suspicion that ingredients had been added to the food that were not Guyanese, was a familiar way of managing,

⁵⁰ Three letters of the Arabic alphabet with which the Quran starts

⁵¹ The room is named after the man who befriended Mr Rahman in the 1970s and helped him to educate himself in Islam

⁵² When I came to write up, I realised was uncertain as to whether it was carrot or some other vegetable that she named.

within the idiom of a joke, tensions about change, new situations and particularly contact with other Muslim traditions.

Much of the conversation in the shop among the older generation revolved around news of fellow Guyanese and Mauritians – particularly who was sick and who had visited them – not only in London but ‘back home’. On one occasion, the talk was about a road accident in Guyana in which two adults and a baby had been killed. The identities of those concerned were known to everyone. Migration has created a dispersed network of relationships between the Guyana that the older generation had grown up in, ties of marriage and friendship in the UK, and the countries, such as the USA and Canada, to which other family members had emigrated. A conversation in the shop between a group of Guyanese about gardening in London, and what could and could not be grown here, was interrupted by a joyful cry of, ‘Oh look, foreigners!’ as they spotted the arrival of friends from Canada who were calling in for Friday prayer and to make contact. There were recurrent and poignant references to loss, and to the complex situations of belonging and not-belonging, created by migration. The jokes, like that about foreigners, seemed to be a riff on their years of commitment to life in the UK and what it all amounted to. Were they now British, and at home here, or would they one day go back to Guyana where some were sending money for the repair or upkeep of what had been their childhood homes? Or was it, as Mr Rahman put it, that, though they would not return there, when they said ‘home’ they still meant Guyana? Though often disguised as a joke, feelings of vulnerability were sometimes expressed more directly. Rosemary⁵³ took advantage of a time when we were alone together in the shop to tell me that she and her husband had bought a plot in a local cemetery. If they died abroad, they wanted their bodies to be returned to the UK for burial. She said that having made her life here in London, where her children had been born, the idea of being buried in a strange place made her feel anxious and it seemed that this anxiety overwhelmed any concern about what other Muslims would think of such considerations. On a long coach journey – a mosque day-trip to Weston-super-Mare – Rosemary had told me the story of her arrival in London, her shock at the bleakness of the country and the single room her husband had found for them to start their married life. Her husband has since been successful

⁵³ Some older Guyanese had both Muslim and European names. This was linked to the tradition of having ‘calling names’ that were used in school in Guyana although how they were selected could be quite individual. Clearly this bespeaks expectations at that time that the Indo-Guyanese would adopt a European Christian style but this was never remarked on. The younger members of the community seemed mostly to have adopted Muslim names

financially and, during a walk along the sands, Rosemary confided that they can now afford to take holidays at resorts that offer activities which others would consider un-Islamic. A number of women seemed to see me as a person to whom they could safely tell such things without fear that I would criticise them or gossip to others. In this way, from time to time, I came to hear passing references to family complications and the existence of marginal activities, such as the use of an amulet to ward off magic said to have been deployed by someone else. Though it would have been interesting to do so, it was difficult to follow up on these hints without appearing to be focusing on practices about which people felt anxious and defensive.

Aside from these more personal confidences, the shop was a location in which critical opinions, theological differences and doubts occasionally surfaced. Though anyone could enter, it was sufficiently separate to feel one was in a different kind of space and, realistically, one could check who was likely to hear, and so pick one's moment to speak. At a time when the shop was displaying various posters for *hajj* groups being organised locally, a conversation started about the cost of making the pilgrimage. The Algerian caretaker, who is closely associated with the Guyanese, said he felt the trips were too expensive and poor value for the money spent. Several men described the poor accommodation and the difficulties they encountered; it was clear that they felt some Muslims were making a lot of money out of other Muslims. No one present seemed inclined to disagree. Though conversation is certainly more guarded when unknown customers are present, even among those who know each other well, there is always the possibility of discovering that, in making something explicit, you have opened yourself up to an unexpected response. When Raza and Safina were on their own, sorting out stock just after Christmas, there was a discussion between them about Christmas dinner, which it seemed they both had cooked, but when Raza made a reference to decorating her house, Safina said sharply that she didn't do that. Raza did not seem put out but it drew my attention to the differences that may underlie an appearance of consensus. For Safina there was a line between what was and was not acceptable in adopting the practices of other faiths and, to her mind, Raza had crossed the line. It was Raza who had explained to me that people would feel reluctant to talk about religion, due to a fear of gossip. However, I was surprised by Safina's response, as in other ways she and Raza seemed to have a similarly relaxed attitude: for example, both enjoyed dancing at the gender-mixed parties I attended away from the mosque. When Safina had danced at a birthday party,

her confidence and restrained grace made one aware that this was a woman who had danced all her life.

The most serious theological disagreement I heard voiced in the shop followed some jokes about heaven and hell among a small group of men standing around in the entrance, some Guyanese and others whom I did not recognise. Someone told a joke about a man who wanted to go to hell so that he could light his cigarettes, and another added that he wanted to just get into heaven and no more, so that he could remain at the entrance and smoke. Normally this would have been an entirely light-hearted conversation, but on this occasion, someone broke with convention. A man I did not recognise suddenly said, in a serious voice, 'We are not like the Christians who believe that when you die you go immediately to heaven or hell. Muslims believe in *barzakh*'. *Barzakh* is an intermediate period in the grave and he implied that you were confined to this marginal state if you did not know the answers to the questions asked by the Angel of Death. From a corner of the shop, a Guyanese woman said quietly, 'We don't know if that's true,' to which the man replied, tartly: 'We don't know if Allah exists'. Nobody seemed to want to take this further and the group disbanded. As with the disagreement between Raza and Safina, the general disinclination to make religious thinking explicit beyond a certain point preserved appearances and protected people from the possible consequences. On this occasion, for reasons that were unclear, the woman challenged the speaker in a radical way rather than from within an Islamic framework itself – certainly the view the man was expressing about the events after death were not those I had heard expressed by Azzim in the Saturday class. Such radical questioning of what we can ever know was unusual. The conversation seemed to have taken place among a group of equals where no one felt in a position to manage the challenge. The example below shows how edgy the joking can become and how much is really on the line. Yousef, a Bangladeshi man in his forties and an occasional preacher at the mosque, seemed to join in the relaxed, even transgressive, joking that was underway when he arrived in the shop. He had been quite involved with the Guyanese in the past but now appeared to hold theological views that were very different from theirs.

A Guyanese woman in her fifties was behind the shop, brandishing a large pair of scissors, when Yousef came in, apparently just to exchange greetings. Though his manner was jocular and familiar, he looked conservatively religious and had an impressive beard and white turban. His appearance had apparently undergone a change in recent years

that others remarked on. The woman behind the counter joked about cutting off his beard. Yousef laughed and elaborated on the joke, making it more explicitly sexual by linking her threat to him with her relationship with her husband. Everyone laughed. It was coming up to *hajj* and material was circulating about a pilgrimage that Yousef was leading. He made another joke about taking the Guyanese as a separate party on their own, the implication being that they would be too noisy and disruptive otherwise. This was said as if it was a quality he appreciated in them but, as the conversation continued, it became clearer that there was a critical edge to his remarks. He made some passing comment about the fact that one of the women present wore make-up. However, everyone continued to joke and the exchange concluded with good humour. As a young single man, he had been very close to Mr Rahman and his family. This familiarity was apparent in the joking exchanges in the shop but there was an undercurrent to the exchange. I was reminded that Mrs Rahman had told me that since the days when Yousef was 'part of the family', he had become more conservatively religious, developing a career as a preacher and teacher in various mosques in neighbouring boroughs. She was particularly critical of his avoidance of any physical contact with her, when everyone else was hugging her at a family party: 'And yet I was like a mother to him, cooking for him, doing his washing, helping him marry when his family were against the match.' On this basis, to her mind, he should treat her as though she were within the permitted degree of relationship for such intimacies (though this is a distinction the Guyanese do not themselves mark). Such gender sensibilities were not in evidence in the scissor joke and I was left to wonder what was really going on. Was Yousef joining in the joke or was he using his position as a religiously attired Muslim man to pass judgement on the laxity of Guyanese Islam?

The Guyanese knew that other Muslims thought and acted in different ways from themselves and that some people regarded that diversity negatively, in the light of the warning of the Prophet that there would be seventy-two ways of being Muslim, of which all but one were in error. I never heard this concern with error voiced by the Guyanese, but it made some who attended the classes I describe in Chapter 7 anxious about their practice, and prompted them to wonder how they could ever be sure where they stood. Others, however, felt quite certain. A young French woman, who I thought was a convert, stopped me after Friday prayers to say that she understood I was studying Islam and that it was most important that I studied only the one correct form of Islam; she then handed me a leaflet. Early in my fieldwork, I met a Ugandan woman at a group. I was surprised to learn that she had only just started to wear the *hijab* and that, until recently, she had been

working in advertising and film. I had occasional contact with her during my fieldwork. After her marriage and an extended visit to Yemen, she became increasingly firm in her religious views and adopted the *niqab*. When I saw her for the last time, she told me, 'You have to remember, Judy, there is only one right way.'

For the Guyanese, it is not only that, in the eyes of others, they are not following that one right way, but that they themselves do not see difference as contrary to Islam. As Rasanayagam puts it of the different religious understandings among those present at a ritual meal, this is indicative of something 'more positive and productive than a passive tolerance of difference' (2013: 104). Since building a mosque entailed opening the doors to all who chose to worship there, the mosque itself was an expression of their ethical position in this regard, but it also made them vulnerable.

Sustaining a moral community

The disagreements about the nature of ritual in Islam recurred in many different forms. To some people, it seems entirely natural that God should be invoked in times of need, not only privately in the repetition of a verse of the Quran deemed appropriate to the situation, but also in public. Events such as the one I describe below would cross the line on which Azzim insisted, whereby ritual is limited to the forms of practice of the Prophet: everything else was deemed an 'innovation' that interfered with the form of worship revealed by God.⁵⁴ This was at the heart of the dispute between the Guyanese and two earlier, Saudi-educated, Guyanese imams. The two Bangladeshi imams at the mosque during my fieldwork were willing to accommodate the sensibilities of the Guyanese in these matters, participating and leading rituals for mixed gatherings in the hall, which included prayer and brought the concerns of everyday life into contact with the comfort of divine blessings; how they themselves understood the situation was not something I ever heard them comment on.

I arrived one Sunday afternoon for a meeting of the 'sisters' circle' and was surprised to see a very large gathering in the hall. Someone explained that it was a meeting to offer prayers for a Guyanese 'auntie' who was very sick. A lot of older men were sitting along one wall, with older women in a group at right angles to them. Though this constituted a degree of segregation, there were also a lot of younger women in bright clothes, short-

⁵⁴ Some practices, including rituals that are held at a specific time after a death or annually on a specific day, such as the birthday of the prophet, or the extra fast on the tenth day of the month of *muharram*, would for some fulfil the criteria for a religious innovation.

sleeved dresses and without head covering and men sitting among them. I learned that they were non-Muslim members of the family of the sick woman. One of the mosque's Trustees, Harry, sat down next to the imam who then started to speak, saying that the sister had asked for this gathering. When he had visited her, she had asked about the times when prayer is always accepted by Allah and he began to enumerate the different circumstances when this was so, one of them being prayers for the sick.

Then an elderly woman arrived accompanied by two younger women, perhaps her daughter and grand-daughter. They carried a stool and a rug and settled her between the imam and Harry, who held her hand quietly throughout the rest of the meeting. The imam acknowledged the woman, saying that we were going to pray for her recovery. Her daughter thanked everyone. I noticed Mr Rahman hovering in the background looking much older or rather looking his age, in a way he usually does not. The imam said, 'When a group sits together and remembers Allah, the angels will circle around and praise those people to the angels in the sky. If we open our hearts and pray sincerely, Allah is remembering us as we remember him'. On several occasions during the meeting, the woman groaned as she sat with her head bowed holding Harry's hand. Then the imam asked if others wanted to speak and one older man began, 'Every good thing we do is an act of worship . . . like being here today to encourage our dear sister ... it is ibada [worship]'. Another man chanted some verses of the Quran, it seemed to me as if welcoming the opportunity to show his good voice. Then Mr Rahman said a few words in his usual jocular style but with a note of sadness. He said he had played cricket with this sister in the old days to raise money for the mosque. 'You don't believe me, but how fast she could run.' He then couldn't resist saying something about the new calendars that were on sale. The imam was about to start the prayer, when Mr Rahman said that some who were present were not Muslim but they should just pray in their own language because 'prayer doesn't have a language'. The imam said people should 'open their hands and open their hearts', the gesture for supplicatory prayer, and began, first briefly in Arabic then in English, 'Allah accept what we are offering here today.' As his prayer finished, the call to the (regular) afternoon prayer sounded and the crowd moved into the mosque, reassembling afterwards for a communal meal provided by the sick woman's family.

This occasion had drawn in a very mixed group of people both Muslim Guyanese, Mauritians and others. Some people who had married into Hindu and Christian families were accompanied by their relatives. There were also some British non-Muslim widows

of Guyanese and Mauritian men. Some were friends – I was introduced to a Hindu Guyanese woman who was the friend and former work colleague of a Mauritian member of the congregation: ‘We were nurses together’. This range was reflected in their dress, creating a complicated hybrid event but, as Leila, the mosque secretary, once commented to me, ‘Not all Guyanese are Muslim and not all Muslim Guyanese are practising.’ In its inclusive reach, the event was part of the social life of a community but in its ritual frame and intention – to seek God’s blessings – it was an expression of a religiously imagined domain. From the perspective of the Guyanese, it was a natural expression, within a Muslim tradition, of the moral concerns that attach to living one’s life alongside others. The group had come together for mutual support as much as for the support of the woman who was its focus – an improvised event that calls on collective memories to create a feeling of solidarity in the face of time passing. Those who may not have thought they were going to spend the rest of their lives in the UK, find that they are. Here mutual support and shared moral resources were given form through the image of Allah and the angels, the seeking of God’s blessing by the imam, and the trust that is invoked by his assertion of the certainty and dependability of God’s response. Yet at the same time it remained a very *ad hoc*, even a mundanely human occasion, in which those present were also invited to draw emotional strength from the practical communal achievements of the last fifty years, instantiated in the meeting itself. Yet despite the social account that could be given, it was a religious event, one that carried the everyday relational concerns of the group. The prayers were improvised and in English, in a manner that explicitly sought to encompass the diverse group that was present. Mr Rahman’s sentiment – that prayer has no language – comes out of his own religious feelings, as does the view expressed that all such gatherings are a form of worship.⁵⁵

Grounding everyday religion in the continuity of imagination

The women involved in Muslim renewal were seeking to draw the everyday world into conformity with their conception of Islam through ‘a recuperation of a set of traditional practices they saw as grounded in an exemplary past and in classical notions of Islamic piety’ (Mahmood 2005: 116) and to bring personal states of piety into closer harmony with public rituals of authentication (Deeb 2006: 222). That these ideals may prove unachievable is hard for those involved to acknowledge within this objectified framework.

⁵⁵ Azzim would certainly disagree with the first of these views. As to the latter, for him it would depend on whether the speaker meant that that worship resided in the ritual aspect of the event.

Yet any religious tradition depends ultimately on what ordinary people do, rather than on what authoritative interpretation holds should be the case. Schielke and Debevec suggest that not only ritual, but the ordinary practices of daily life naturally carry the meanings of a religious tradition. Expressed in ways of doing and feeling, these shared meanings may be neither deliberately sought nor random, but rather part of the imaginative patterns of a tradition. Within this approach to 'everyday religion' Orsi (2012: 156) argues that religious meanings are felt as real by virtue of the material reality of the everyday practices through which they are expressed and through the way that the affective states associated with them enact human relationships, with those present, absent or dead. Thus, the sorts of events and encounters described in this chapter are the medium through which being Muslim Guyanese attains a felt reality for those who participate in them.

From this perspective, the *iftah* meal is a material process, a work of social imagination, and a form of everyday religion. The physical preparation of the meal, the impact of familiar forms of sociability in the kitchen and the exchange of news and opinions in the shop enacts a shared imaginary – an idea of being Guyanese Muslim that is held in common, though not necessarily completely, by those present. While the layered details that constituted the preparation and serving of the meal on any one occasion varied, the background qualities of the experience allowed the event to be recognised among the Guyanese as alive with a particular intersubjective significance, that it did not have for others who bring different ways of seeing and feeling with them to the mosque. The event for the sick woman was a more self-conscious celebration of shared memories and of commitments fulfilled, but it was also the revitalisation of a shared religious and social imaginary through the accomplishment of a successful gathering, through its framing as a prayerful request for blessings and a collective recognition of vulnerability and loss, of time passing and of change that was coming. In the ordinary flow of things, perhaps without the confidence invoked by the imam's idea that such prayers are always answered, this reality was sometimes too difficult to face. I was aware that, during my fieldwork, a situation was developing in the kitchen in which the continued presence of some elderly women, who had been central to the establishment of the mosque, was making it difficult for younger women to ever be more than just helpers. For this change to happen a new phase had to be imagined and a space had to be made for it. By the time I left there were indications that this was underway.

CHAPTER 5 – Everyday religion, ethical sensibility and reflective capacity

The ritual and social activities of the Guyanese and those most closely associated with them were described in the last chapter through events that fell outside the main congregational rituals of Islam and spilled over into ordinary sociability. These events were both unscripted everyday encounters *and* patterned by an expressive communicative style that carried the relational values they shared. Keane writes, ‘we come to be who we are within, and by virtue of, relationships with others... their ways of inhabiting our imaginations and our emotions’ (Keane 2010: 66). In this chapter, I explore that presence of social relatedness within the imagination as it was acknowledged, challenged and defended in external encounters and as it surfaced as moral commitments in conversation and narrative. Through listening to sermons, young men sought to develop this imaginative life as a distinctively Muslim ethical sensibility within themselves, but it is a life that already exists in the mind. The bodily sedimentation of past relationships and identifications formed through contact with older generations in maturation generate ways of acknowledging and responding to others and to aspects of the moral world, whether such experiences are the focus of conscious attention and practices of ‘self-care’ or not.

Though the Guyanese I got to know may have attended religious classes as children and learned to recite some passages of the Quran by heart, this was not the soil in which they primarily rooted their sense of what they felt it was to be Muslim. For the older generation, and those who had migrated to the UK in adulthood, that soil was, I have argued, the form of life in which they grew up in Guyana: a life which carried the experience of earlier generations of Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, through the emergence of a new community alongside Christian Afro-Guyanese within a British colony. Within this world, Islam and other faith traditions came to be experienced as elements in a dynamic lived relationship and invested with qualities akin to those the Mauritians see as forming socially integrative ‘authentic religion’ Eisenlohr (2011). Jayawardena (1980) suggests the complicated process by which the past shapes what follows, describing the dynamic nature of this handing on of a way of life through a comparison of the diverging transformational paths of two Indian populations from a similar geographical area that migrated in the nineteenth century to Fiji and Guyana

respectively. He argues that while Indo-Fijians maintained an actual link to India, the Hindi language and private styles of Hindu and Muslim religiosity, this was not so for the Indo-Guyanese. For them, India became largely a place within the imagination, knowledge of both the spoken and written forms of the Hindi language disappeared, and a more public form of religiosity emerged among both Hindus and Muslims. Yet paradoxically, as Jayawardena puts it, for the Guyanese 'India' and 'Indian-ness' became invested 'with more useable meanings. By this I mean that, if a cultural entity exists mainly in the imagination, then it is the more susceptible to interpretations prompted by the need to shore up an ideal in times of anxiety and crisis, personal or public' (1980: 432). It is this Guyana – transformed through imagination into an object invested with shared values that can offer sustenance in the face of anxiety – which has been carried forward into the later experience of the Guyanese in London as a resource to meet the challenges of a new situation.

If the meaning for my interlocutors of being Muslim and being Guyanese, or 'Guyanese oriented', was something mainly to be lived collectively, rather than spoken of, elements of this world were nonetheless acknowledged and owned. A sermon drew such a moment of recognition from a Mauritian woman I knew slightly. The imam had spoken about how our good and bad deeds are written down by the angels and how on the Last Day some of the merit from our good deeds would be given to those we have oppressed. He then talked of the behaviour of the Companions of the Prophet who, when they visited new cities, where they did not speak the language, were nonetheless able to impress others through 'the beauty of their characters'. The imam's tone was mild and encouraging, concerned with cultivating what many would recognise as moral qualities. As we left after prayers, the Mauritian woman said approvingly that the sermon had been 'short and clear', adding 'not like those who get into strange new things'. She did not elaborate further but I assumed that by 'strange new things' she was referring to those sermons that dealt insistently with an exacting view of the demands of correct practice as the only conditions under which God accepted worship. In its mildness, one might be tempted to think that the sermon's main quality was that it was uncontentious; it represents a prioritizing of moral qualities of character that can be communicated and recognised directly by others, without language, over the kind of religious claims that require the specificity of language and may be grasped with certainty as knowledge or reproduced as orthodox practice. In this sermon, the nature of the judgement that comes after death was imagined in terms of relationships to others in this life, while a 'good

character' was described in terms of the emotional-aesthetic response it evokes and the moral states it generates in others. These qualities resonated with this Mauritian woman.

Such relational states, the modalities through which they are communicated, and their ethical implications have received considerable attention within anthropology in recent years, creating links to developmental psychology and neuroscience (Bloch 2012, 2013). Our variable, and not necessarily conscious awareness of the mutually affecting presence of others underlies not only the capacity to make conscious inferences as to the intentions of others but also the potential to experience in a more immediate sense a responsibility for the 'state of things' within a social world. The ethical is then a sensibility that emerges from our capacity to be aware of our dependence on a shared imagined world and its vulnerability to the vicissitudes of our commitment and that of others. The capacity to live in, sustain and hand on such an intersubjective domain constitutes 'the ethical as a mode of being in the world' (Lambek 2010: 10). The contours of such an imagined world may, however, become sharper under situations of challenge: Faubion (2011: 96) draws attention to the indeterminate nature of ethical experience as 'atmospheric, ineffable and beyond articulation'. As such, it is radically at odds with the possibility of knowledge and certainty in depictions of Islam as fixed in a text or objectified in the new material forms in which religious knowledge is disseminated (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Marsden and Retsikas 2013)). Indeed, in recent work, the ethical as an aspect of Aristotle's conception of 'human flourishing' has been framed as intrinsically related to the capacity to live within the complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity of human mind-created reality and the anxiety this stirs (Lambek 2000, 2010). This implies that, as well as being the product of a social world, the ethical has properties that sustain such a world in being, both as a material space of social interactions and as an imagined domain.

For the Guyanese at the mosque, being Muslim was interwoven with being Guyanese. Judgements on religious matters were made and action taken 'according to the time and occasion' as Schielke (2010: 27) puts it, rather than by recourse to authoritative religious opinion. For such judgments to be more than random or contingent reactions to events, implies a sensibility to the presence of moral qualities within the mundane, though not necessarily always as an object of conscious thought. With respect to everyday religion, Orsi (2012: 156) suggests that an engagement with the religious entities and idioms of everyday religion carry the moral values of ongoing relationships with persons within a moral world, including those only present within the imagination,

for example, the forebears who kept the lamp burning. This chapter describes encounters in which aspects of the moral world of the Guyanese and what was felt to be at stake within it emerged more explicitly. This emergence might be occasioned by moments that Zigon (2007) calls ‘moral breakdown’, and which require a conscious ‘ethical’ response to repair the fabric of background moral assumptions, or by the need to give an account of where one stands to someone else (Keane 2014). However, I also suggest that some of the examples I give point to the implicit presence of an ongoing reflective potential that is of a piece with the rest of an individual’s way of being in the everyday world, rather than something only called into existence by particular demands.

Facing uncertainty, challenge and failure

The contrast between the *iftah* meal and Friday prayer was apparent in the improvised liveliness of the former but also in the anticipatory uncertainty that surrounded it – who would arrive and how it would go? – and the social judgements passed afterwards as to its success, especially where the meal had been provided by a family. While religious rituals may also go unattended, and many daily prayers during the week attract only a handful of people, they are protected by their canonical status from the anxiety of failure, in a way that social events are not. There is risk inherent in un-ritualised events that must depend on the immediate capacity of a group to respond to the needs and expectations that are in play – in this case to manage a situation in such a way that a Guyanese Muslim space is properly created. Beyond this again are the risks inherent in a diverse group with different expectations. Though the sermons spoke of the absence of a religiously appropriate social context and the failure of individuals to maintain their practice, they rarely referred to the differences of view within the congregation itself as to what those practices, and that social context, should be. On only one occasion did I hear an imam make a clear reference to the contestation between traditions when he spoke of an additional fast, outside of Ramadan, that would soon be undertaken by some groups. He indicated that not everyone recognised or agreed with this practice.⁵⁶ However, differences that were obscured at Friday prayers, or were managed by people self-selecting with respect to attendance at particular events, came to the fore in the direct and visible contact of the mixed gathering that *iftah* attracts. Such contact resulted not only in overt challenges, but also in the uneasy awareness of the existence of other

⁵⁶ Some within the congregation mark the tenth day of the first month of the Muslim calendar (*muharram*) by fasting. This is perhaps a legacy of Shi’a Muslims within the population that migrated to Guyana.

religious possibilities and a sense of responsibility for one's own choices and commitments. Such occasions drew attention to the emotional and ethical resources available.

Dress was a marker for different stances towards Islam within the congregation and changes in dress over time may therefore be indicative of changes in religious practice and perhaps in ways of thinking, whether because of external pressures or personal choice. Among the Guyanese there was a range of dress styles but, on the whole, among older women a modest version of Western dress plus a scarf gathered in a knot under the chin (rather than wound round the head and neck) predominated. Guyanese men wore ordinary casual clothes. The dress of Guyanese men and women contrasted with the more formal Islamic clothing worn by others in the congregation gathering in the hall for *iftah* and still more so among those who only arrived later for the evening rituals. More elaborate South Asian styles of dress were worn by the younger women milling around the kitchen area. Carefully colour-toned outfits, whether long dress- like versions of a *jibab* or *salwar kamees* were worn with long scarves of a floating fabric that was lightly draped on the head. Such scarves would not meet the standards of a *hijab* for some, as they did not cover the hair.

During the period of my fieldwork, I became aware that some Guyanese, who had been wearing ordinary 'modest high-street clothes', seemed to have started to adopt a version of South Asian dress, or had started to wear the generic style of Islamic dress on sale in the shop when attending the mosque, though they did not dress in this way outside the mosque. Some of those who previously looked colourfully dressed, but definitely Muslim, started to wear black to the mosque. If this current of change was experienced by some as a response to external pressure and responded to with a degree of irony and self-consciousness, the debates about what Islam demands raised doubts and concerns for others and changes in clothing may have been the outcome of subtle personal accommodations to new ways of perceiving religious obligations. I was used to seeing Jasmin wearing short tunic dresses over trousers and a colourful, casually tied scarf, with some, if not most, of her long hair showing, so I was surprised when she appeared in the kitchen one day in Ramadan dressed in black with a black scarf wound around her head. When I remarked on the change, she pulled a wry smile. However, the hijab kept slipping and she repeatedly tried to re-fix it with a clasp. Another Guyanese woman, who was wearing more colourful clothing and a casually tied scarf, offered some advice as to how

to wind the material. Jasmin expressed her exasperation and eventually removed both the black scarf and the black under-cap which was supposed to completely hide her hair. She re-gathered her long hair into a pony-tail and started again to try and get it right. It was difficult to read what was going on in this adoption of a more Islamic style of head covering since Jasmin was, apparently, quite comfortable, within the mixed company of kitchen, to remove the whole lot and adjust her hair before retying it. On this occasion, her changed style of dress may be associated with the emotional impact of the additional religious rituals of Ramadan, but I saw her again later in more Western clothing, so it was not a permanent change. By contrast, the Bangladeshi woman who helped with the drinks remarked casually to me that someone, unspecified, had told her that the style in which she tied her hair up – in a kind of bandana which leaves her neck, and sometimes her ears visible – was not Islamic. She shrugged, making it clear that she was not minded to alter her way of dressing. Such a remark would not have come from the Guyanese or others helping in the kitchen but it was indicative of the range of views present within this Muslim congregation, as within the wider local Muslim community, and the willingness of some people to correct others. Since clothing is taken by some as a direct indication of piety and theological allegiance (Tarlo 2005) there is a constant need to stand one's ground, to accommodate externally or give serious consideration to the perspective of others.

While the range of views and practice within the mosque allowed some space for me as a non-Muslim to observe, from that perspective called research, there was always the possibility of some people feeling I should not be there and, though I dressed in a similar way to many other women of my age at the mosque, I am sure I did not look Muslim. Among the Guyanese, only Rosemary⁵⁷ ever seemed troubled by this. She would sometimes comment, for no apparent reason, that I was 'looking more Muslim today'. On an occasion when she and I were opening the shop and hanging out the Islamic dresses, she wondered if I would buy one. I said I thought I would feel odd in it, meaning that I felt I would look as if I was pretending to be Muslim. Later she tucked my scarf down into the top of my shirt, which to my mind already had a high neck. This was done light-heartedly and, like other Guyanese, she herself did not wear a *hijab* outside of the mosque, but her concern with my religious appearance was perhaps indicative of her sensitivity to how other Muslims may perceive her and her friendly contact with me.

⁵⁷ This was a 'calling name' and she was sometimes called by her Muslim name.

As with dress, the production of the *iftah* meal made visible to others a Guyanese way of being Muslim and therefore laid them open to criticism. Here too there was an impression of a change underway. When I came to the mosque in 2009, there was no curtain dividing the hall into male and female areas during the meal and when prayer was called, the men went into the main prayer area of the new mosque, leaving the hall space for the women to pray in. During my second year I noticed the curtains were sometimes drawn across the hall from the start, offering some men segregation not only for prayer but, if left in that position, also for eating, while other men and boys still ate in a glassed-in area at the side of the hall, physically separate but visible to the women. While this drawing of the curtain may have arisen initially through the pressure of numbers that meant that some men were obliged to stay and pray in the hall, the fact that it was not always drawn back afterwards was due to the encroaching demands of a stricter style of religiosity. Early on in my fieldwork, the lack of segregation for eating in the hall had been remarked on by a young Ugandan woman whom I had met at another Muslim gathering and it was clear from her tone that, because of the mixed seating she would not be coming again for *iftah* at this mosque. When I saw her and her sister some months later at Friday prayer, their clothing had changed from carefully colour-toned Islamic dress to black *nikabs*. These concerns with gender-segregation in the hall brought the currents of the Muslim revival up against the very different way of being Muslim that was visible in the marginal areas of the mosque where a Guyanese style predominated. Leila, the mosque secretary, often worried about the impact of these contradictory demands. While individuals can grant themselves latitude to think about religious issues in their own way and may voice them as and to whom they choose, as happened sometimes in the shop, those involved in running the mosque were faced with public challenges that were presented as grounded in the correct interpretation of Islam. A form of religious practice may be the means through which 'worlds are simultaneously constituted, conceived and lived' (Lambek 2013: 8) but this also entails the resources and willingness to defend the description under which such an ethical world is imagined into being and the values it contains.

One evening during iftah, Leila beckoned me into the entrance area by the shop which was not exactly private but out of the main hall. She talked quietly, checking occasionally that no one else was likely to hear. She asked if I had noticed the argument she had just had but I had not. She told me that she had to deal with the demand by an Algerian man from the congregation for complete segregation during the meal – that the

curtain drawn during maghrib prayer should remain drawn. Leila was shaking and clearly very upset. She said that he had threatened that if this didn't happen he would lead a walk-out, with others, from the mosque. She had apparently insisted that the curtains remain drawn back for the meal, explaining to me that if they gave in over this it would be another demand next time. Looking up I could see that Mr Rahman and Harry were in fact drawing back the curtains. The Algerian caretaker of the mosque, who is warmly supportive of the Guyanese, came and asked Leila if she was alright. She said she was but continued talking to me about her outrage when, on top of what had happened, the man had then come and offered her a date from the snack that breaks the fast. When she refused his 'gift', he had challenged her accusingly, saying that one should not show anger during Ramadan. Clearly upset, she went on to explain to me that if he, and those who thought like he did, had their way, she would not be in the mosque at all: none of the women would be. They would all be at home. At that point, her daughter and daughter-in-law passed by us on the way to the shop. They are two very beautiful young women, colourfully dressed in the most casual degree of Muslim attire. Their thin sparkly scarves were sliding off the back of their heads, showing their long dark hair hanging loose. There was nothing unusual about this. However, Leila broke off talking to me to tell them both to pull their scarves up and I heard her speak to them again later in the shop, even more urgently, saying that they really must be more careful as they would cause trouble. Without pause or comment, they both made some half-hearted gesture towards pulling their scarves back into place and carried on talking to their friends. Though Leila seemed clear about the need to defend the presence of women at the mosque, she is undecided about how and where to draw the line. I noticed that when the time came for the second prayer (after iftah), and the curtain was being drawn across again for that purpose, Leila was carefully tucking down the edges of the curtain that masks the praying males from the women who might be leaving through the shop exit, as if to make clear that she understood and accepted the need for the curtain at this point.

Though couched in religious terms, some of these challenges were deemed by others, such as the teacher Azzim, to be about traditional, cultural misunderstandings of Islam rather than rooted in the Quran. Yet all these disputes raised questions about the grounds for a particular conception and who had the power and authority to pronounce on it in a global situation in which traditional institutional structures of religious knowledge have already lost their authority. The Trustees had survived the high profile political disputes of the past and this had led to the awareness of the need to be vigilant.

While they felt they had a right to run the mosque according to their conception of Islam, they did not necessarily feel able to conduct a public theological argument, nor would they have claimed their legitimacy in that way. Rather, they saw a Muslim life as embedded within broader social and practical concerns and the acceptance of the effects of culture and history.⁵⁸ As president of the mosque, Mr Rahman's public pronouncements often demonstrated a style of thinking that was shaped by his practical engagement with Islam, through the material project of mosque building and by his absorption of contemporary secular thinking in this area. This was certainly provocative to some people and Mr Rahman has had to defend himself both in the past and during the time of my field work against others' assumptions of greater religious orthodoxy. For example, there was a long running dispute in which Mr Rahman and the other Trustees were challenged and threatened over their insistence on shutting the doors when the mosque was full on Fridays. Though I could not see what was happening among the men on the ground floor, there were times when the women's balcony was so full that people had great difficulty in finding a space to pray while late arrivals continued to push in, resisting any restraint from those, like Raza and Safina who were trying to steward the balcony. At its worst, during Ramadan, the doorways and the stairs became blocked, and doubtless the same situation was reproduced in the corridors and exits downstairs, so it was not just a matter of the Trustees conforming to empty bureaucratic requirements but a genuine 'duty of care' with its ethical implications of work and responsibility⁵⁹. However, the closing of the mosque doors on health and safety grounds created an ongoing confrontation since, in the view of some of the men in the congregation, their right to pray took priority over all other considerations. On at least one occasion, some men barged Mr Rahman: he was knocked to the ground and the police were called. In subsequent weeks, Mr Rahman spoke at the end of prayers about the situation, complaining vigorously that these people were not proper Muslims.

This issue was a reminder of the presence of very different views within the congregation, very different basic assumptions about the world and the religious significance accorded to the distinction between the material and the immaterial (Keane, 2007), the same event under entirely different ethical descriptions, and of how high

⁵⁸ This is not to say that they adopted a universal acceptance of the cultural traditions of others, if only because some traditions directly challenged their way of conducting themselves.

⁵⁹ Lambek (2010: 50-53) cites Hannah Arendt on the ethical nature of human labour as that which 'brings something new into the world' for which one assumes responsibility and for the task of 'cleaning up after oneself and others' (ibid: 16).

feelings about this could run. Talking of health and safety was to admit the legitimacy of material considerations external to the religious domain, bringing into sharp focus that, for some, the mosque was not an ordinary physical structure subject to material limitations of capacity and safety. However, in saying that those who were challenging him were not proper Muslims, Mr Rahman gave the dispute a religious frame. He did not spell out his conception of what it was to be a 'proper Muslim' in these circumstances though the implications were that it included living in the world alongside others and acknowledging the need for the practical arrangements that this necessitated. As the account was reported at Friday prayers the two perspectives were, and remained, incommensurable. As with the dispute about gender segregation during the eating of the *iftah* meal, practical efforts were made to accommodate the various parties, and an area of the women's balcony was sometimes screened off as an extra area for use by the men. The underlying dispute was, however, unresolvable because what was at stake was a way of thinking among the Guyanese that was often shown to be radically at odds, not just with those identified with global Muslim Renewal, but also with those from other ethnically based traditions of Islam, and the complicated impact of the former on the latter. The theological differences that underlay the dispute were not made explicit because there was no shared space within which such different views could encounter each other as religious perspectives rather than as the physical presence of individuals claiming the right to pray and demanding admittance. Moreover, religious thinking and ethical reasoning among the Guyanese was dispersed through a way of being in ordinary social life rather than brought into focus through the lens of abstract theological ideas.

Thinking in the present; drawing on the past

One of the characteristics that distinguished the Guyanese, and the wider group that associated with them, was an idea of being a Muslim as something you did alongside others in the world, accepting the need to accommodate your thinking to the experiences this brought rather than trying to structure your experiences so that they aligned with religious interpretations and obligations. However, this stance was rarely spelled out. The only person who seemed comfortable to speak about this attitude was Harry, the vice-president, an active member of the congregation who was always called on to open meetings with a short prayer, which he did with great seriousness and a presence that was at odds with his usual sociable, jocular manner. When I asked him about these prayers

he said, 'Well, we start and end the day with prayer and so, too, every event', conveying the intimacy and simplicity of what is shared and transformed in this way.

In addition to bringing the everyday within a religious framework, Harry regarded practical thinking as a religious virtue. On an occasion when I was standing with him in the shop, an announcement came over the sound system that a *janaaza* (funeral) would be taking place after congregational prayer and that people parking in the road beside the mosque must keep the gates clear as the hearse would need to park. Harry then said the man who was being buried had been at the mosque for prayer only last Friday but had been taken ill on Saturday. He thought the man had had a heart attack and died that same night. He seemed to want to emphasise the suddenness and completeness of the change from life to death. I took the opportunity to ask about the delay in the burial, as I had understood that in Islam the dead needed to be buried immediately. Harry said that that was in the old days, when there was no refrigeration; also, people are living all over the world now: 'It takes time to get here, maybe twenty-four hours from the US and Canada, but maybe two or three days from Guyana.' He said actually a young man had recently challenged Mr Rahman about this delay in burials, saying that it was contrary to Islam. In reply, Mr Rahman had asked the young man what he would do if his mother was on holiday in Mauritius and his father died here – what would he do? Would he wait for his mother? The young man conceded that he would wait. 'So, there you are. That's your answer'. Harry repeated, 'It's the sixth pillar, the hidden pillar of Islam: common sense', and laughed. I thought he offered this joke as a way to avoid seeming to have set up this position provocatively, in contradiction to the views of others – it was only everyday common sense he was talking about, not theology.

Yet, what Harry styled as 'common sense' was not just practical improvisation or doing what was convenient, but an orientation to the concerns and values of human relatedness. Moreover, this way of thinking requires to be lived out through a way of comporting oneself if such an idea is to be carried off convincingly in the face of other ways of being Muslim. Though Harry's perspective was likely to be a social resource in non-Muslim settings in the UK,⁶⁰ it was at odds with much that was made explicit both within the adult classes and among the more traditional sections of the congregation who

⁶⁰ Like other aspects of Guyanese life, this may be connected to the absorption of the thinking of aspects of the colonial power in British Guiana.

sought to continue to live within, or to recreate more religiously (and culturally) homogeneous experiences.

During a conversation in the mosque office, Harry told me that he had been challenged by some Algerians within the congregation about attending a Christian funeral. 'As you know we have a lot of friends.... not only Muslim... and not only friends but family members⁶¹. In their belief [those with whom he was in dispute] if a non-Muslim passed away you can go to the home and pay your respects but you can't go to the burial ground or to the church... it's haram, forbidden. But I have been to several churches and cremations and so on, and I cannot see for the love of God what I would be doing wrong... This is a dear friend who has passed away... Probably they [the Algerian challengers] don't have non-Muslim friends of the family so maybe it's straightforward for them but for us it's different... Apart from that, I grew up with people of different faiths, in fact for me with neighbours of different faiths... it's helped me tremendously in my life.'

Harry was arguing that his appreciation of the perspective of others was not just an aid in managing external encounters but an internal resource in carrying the emotional burdens of life. For this, as he made clear, he was drawing on an experience of Guyana such that the moral resources of the present lie in a relationship to a past and to forebears from whom ethical understanding had been handed on, infusing the practice of both everyday life and religion with the valuing of relational commitments. However, in contrast, authoritative theological positions as the repository of a tradition can seem to challenge the values carried in this dimension. I was asked on one occasion why I was doing my research at this mosque rather than in others where, the Guyanese woman talking to me implied, Islam would be regarded as more correctly practiced. I explained that I was interested in how she and others actually lived as Muslims rather than with what some other people might consider the correct way of doing so. This was met with the remark that, when she was growing up in Guyana, she had thought there was only one kind of Islam, that which had been handed on by her parents, but now she understood that this was not so. She realised now that there were different groups like *shi'a* and others whose names she was not sure of. She bemoaned the fact that there were groups who thought you should be killing people – 'this isn't Islam' – but did not mention theological differences closer to home, those within the mosque. Her rejoinder to my

⁶¹ He is here tacitly acknowledging the level of intermarriage between faith groups.

expression of interest in her way of being Muslim seemed to be that once it was possible to be Muslim without self-consciousness as one's parents had been, but no longer.

Amina, the wife of the president of the mosque, was aware of other views, the questions they posed and the gap that was opening between their Guyanese traditions and new ways of being Muslim. Some of the resulting changes were presented as a matter of real regret and as forced on them, while others were seen as offering something of value that could be integrated with the practice they had inherited. Amina said that in the early days in London they had organised social events for local elderly that involved tea and singing old (English) songs, but this had been dropped due to pressure from other Muslims which she felt had been wrong.⁶² However, talking about a recent death, she explained that when they first arrived in the UK, the Guyanese had held long gatherings as they used to in Guyana. She referred to such gatherings as 'like a wake', in which individuals would recite whatever verses they knew from the Quran. Now they understood that this was seen by other Muslims as 'a cultural thing' and this had resulted in generally shorter events led by an imam who recited something appropriate to the occasion. Though she did not contest this reference to their former practice as 'a cultural thing', and seemed to feel the present arrangement was better, this did not apparently transform their past practice into idolatry. Amina seemed to share with other Guyanese contentment with the Islam she grew up and a feeling that her experience was sufficient to sustain an independent way of thinking about religious matters.

Though Guyana was no longer the external social context of her life, it was very present within Amina's conversation both as it was reported through news and visits and as it once was. This latter may be thought of not only as memories of an actual past but of a past constantly re-imagined into life in the present. That Amina could look back on her childhood and on her parents' way of being Muslim as something that provided a familiar point of orientation and meaning adds an internal dimension to the idea of a sustaining external social context of the ethical of which Keane (2014) writes. An aspect of this accumulation and transformation of experience over time was contained in a remark by Amina that 'as you get older you mix a bit more religiously'. It implied an ongoing process in the present but one that, for her, reached back to the religiously mixed society in Guyana. Whether and how accurate a portrayal of the past it might be is less

⁶² I learned later from someone else that the singing of religious songs, *qasida*, that had been widespread in Guyana had also been given up in the UK.

important in this context than the way Guyana, as a multi-faith society, was invoked as an ethical object by the Guyanese. Though there were some references to the political unrest between Indo- and Afro- Guyanese in the years before and after independence, what had survived in the accounts I heard among those who grew up in the years before the Progressive Peoples Party split along ethnic lines was the experience of inter-faith contact. Amina described the fact that Hindu, Muslim and Christian Guyanese children went to school together from where they went to church and sang hymns. She said they did not have to go but she had wanted to. There was a catechist who taught religion and Hindi so, she said laughing, she had done that too. The children celebrated Eid, Diwali and Christmas. She talked of having a Christmas stocking, little presents and a tree: not a proper tree, just a plant brought in from the garden and decorated, even though her father considered himself a religious person. She acknowledged that some people were now very hostile to this practice, but it was quite usual in Guyana for Muslims and Hindus to celebrate Christmas. When they moved to the UK, she was content that her children went to a church school and continued these practices since she regarded them as a way of learning about others. One of her sons is married to a Guyanese Christian and I heard references to attending Midnight Mass with his family at Christmas. The implication of this 'mixing' was pointed up in relation to one of her grandsons who had married into a Hindu family from the subcontinent, rather than from Guyana. She explained that the difference was that in India they do not celebrate other people's religious festivals in the same way, and her grandson's wife seemed to know nothing about 'these things' concerning the religion of others. For her, as for other Guyanese, Guyana was closely associated with this acquaintance with other ways of doing things, particularly religious things.

Amina had grown up deep in the countryside in Guyana – 'it was really a fantastic place... lots of outdoor life'. She described running around with her cousins, fishing in the channels and walking along the sea-wall in the moonlight. 'Really very good games... our children can never get those games we had... Even when I went back [as an adult] I would want to get my fishing rod!' She talked of how creative girls had been in Guyana, always cooking and making things. In her youth, young people were always busy at something, learning how to use knives and machetes. She enthusiastically described a technique for peeling a coconut that involved a crowbar and a machete: 'You stick the crowbar in the ground and stick the nut on it and use a machete to take the husk off. Then you use a paddle [she went and fished out an old one to show me from the back of a cupboard] to

shred the coconut while you chat to your friends'. She was quite clear, however, about the lack of educational opportunities and the greater limitations placed on a girl then. She felt she had done well in school and would have liked to continue her education beyond the age of thirteen, but was instead sent to learn to sew professionally – a skill which eventually helped to support the family when they moved to London. She also spoke of a child who died shortly after birth; no one ever discussed what had happened with her or even her husband. Her father had dealt with everything: 'That was how things were in those days – you were very dependent on your parents'. They had arranged her marriage although she knew her future husband: 'My children can't believe it, but he visited our house for eight months before we married without my ever speaking to him'. She laughed as she described a trip to the cinema with the whole family, in which she sat at one end of the row and he at the other.

Amina's account of her childhood might be dismissed as the idealised memories of a woman looking back over decades, but the picture she gave allowed space for more painful episodes and mixed feelings. Moreover, preserving impressions of past freedom and enjoyment is part of what one could understand by the sustaining quality of a social context, while the experience of surviving deep disappointments and losses may be thought of as contributing to an awareness of both dependence on, and the fragility of what was invested in an idea of Guyana and the Guyanese community.

Over various conversations that touched on Amina's reminiscences of Guyana and accounts of current experiences, the Guyana of her imagination, the freedom she had enjoyed there and the disappointment she still felt at the loss of her education were a continuing presence. The qualities of past experience that have shaped a way of being in the world are not likely to be fully open to self-reflection but may be present as bodily states and patterns of feeling and responding that have emerged from the sedimentation of past social relatedness; hence, an undisciplined, unself-conscious, but relational imagination can be seen as providing the internal social context that sustains an ethical way of being. Amina's talk of the Guyana of her girlhood and its continuing presence in her mind can be understood as imaginative resources that she drew on during a very difficult early life in London; the bringing up of six children and two who 'passed'; and the years of struggle to establish the mosque. This resource is still available to her in old age. Her openness to my presence and acceptance of my research and her willingness to talk about religious matters were indicative of this. The presence of such moral resources may

be obscured in the day-to-day business of living, until called upon through challenges or a crisis in the background intersubjective fabric (Zigon 2007). However, I would argue that there is an underlying continuity within the imaginative and embodied resources of the individual on which explicit interventions draw (Faubion 2011).

Within Amina's conversation were accounts of moments when she had had to manage verbally the challenges of others – a 'giving of an account of oneself' which Keane (2014) regards as key to an understanding of what it is to exercise one's ethical capacities. Though in public Amina generally kept her opinions to herself, she had her own views and when she chose to voice them she was critical of those with stridently orthodox opinions who felt they should be telling others what to do. She referred to them as 'fanatics' but these turned out not to be the distant fanatics of the media. She said that her brother, now dead, had been like this, and would tell her, 'You can't walk bare-headed or in front of a man, a woman shouldn't allow her voice to be heard, you can't sing . . .' He had left the mosque for another group, but had fallen out with them also. Over time, he had mellowed a bit so that he gave them less trouble, but Amina said sadly that as his sister, 'I couldn't go and give him a hug and kiss, as that was against religion as far as he was concerned'. She described encounters with a Muslim man in a weekly health group she attended that seemed to echo this situation. He repeatedly told her to cover her hair and to dress differently. In the end, she decided to tell him, 'No, I can't do what you want. I'll do what I want. When I go to the mosque I cover but otherwise not.' Then he began to say that she should not be going to the mosque to which Amina said she replied, 'Your lot have women under your control so they don't know anything about the mosque, but our people are not like that. We know how to mix with men without fancying them and things like that.' She said that he was annoyed but she had just walked off and did not speak to him the following week. While she might feel she had dealt with the challenge this man posed to her view of things, her relationship with her dead brother continued to sadden her, a reminder of the price paid for commitments and failures on both sides and the complicated and subtle nature of responsibility within the domain of the ethical. It is not only, as Lambek writes, 'that a person is or isn't responsible for all the consequences of her utterances and actions, or could have foreseen them all' (Lambek 2010: 53). Responsibility as he describes it is rather for the nature of one's ongoing relationship to such consequences. It is a matter of recognising, and continuing to keep in mind and live with, and in the light of, the consequences of actions on the one hand, and forgiving and accepting forgiveness on the other.

Amina felt able to take issue with aspects of Islamic teaching. For example, she expressed strong disagreement with the view that menstruating women are unable to pray because they are unclean, insisting instead that the reason for the injunction against praying at this time should be understood as being for the comfort of the woman who was menstruating. This was of a piece with her view of God as not wanting us to suffer. During my visits, members of the congregation would phone Amina for advice. For example, there was a call about a woman who was seventeen weeks pregnant and had been told that there was something seriously the matter with the foetus. A termination was being considered. Amina spoke sympathetically to the caller, saying she did not think God would want a woman to carry a baby for nine months only for the baby to die. The person on the other end of the line asked about sharia law. She said they could phone the imam about that, but she thought that 'God is very understanding and didn't mean us to make more unhappiness for ourselves . . . we must do what we think is best.' While leaving space open for the possibility that the family might want to seek the opinion of an imam, she apparently felt confident that 'doing what we think is best' was appropriate in the circumstances, as if our human capacity to think was itself reflective of God's understanding of us and that we were therefore meant to exercise our judgement. Here one could say that the capacity for judgement is a function of the qualities of relationships present within the imagination, including that to God. The resources carried in such relationships can be brought to bear in approaching a new situation. Thus, doing what we think best is related to having internalised and identified with a relationship to an object (an idea of an 'Other') that gives us the freedom to act and is experienced as forgiving and enabling us to forgive and to accept forgiveness.

As well as these practical concerns, Amina also had abstract questions about theological issues. During a recent visit to Mecca, outside the main *hajj* season⁶³, she had had difficulty performing the requisite number of circuits of the *kabah* on foot and had paid someone to push her round in a wheel chair. Other members of her group could return frequently to repeat this ritual of seven circuits but she could not. Instead she started to query why one was supposed to go around seven times: why *seven*? Amina felt no one could answer to her satisfaction. She asked Yousef, the Bangladeshi religious teacher described in Chapter 4, what happens if you cannot walk and cannot afford to be

⁶³ This was her first pilgrimage. She is in her mid-seventies and had waited for a younger Guyanese woman to organise the trip. As far as I could ascertain, Mr Rahman has also not undertaken *hajj*.

pushed. He answered that you would be forgiven, but Amina complained that that was not what she wanted to know. Indeed, it only complicated matters further as far as she was concerned. One of the guides on the tour had indicated that 'it was alright as long as you tried' but she remained dissatisfied with these answers though she could not say exactly why. I understood her to be troubled by the arbitrary nature of the number, and the idea that the sick and elderly needed to be forgiven for not meeting the requirement to physically walk the circuit was at odds with her way of thinking, and with the way she envisaged God. In a sense, this question may have stood in for a host of unvoiced concerns. Certainly, she had an expectation of being able to question and understand within the framework of her own thought and experience rather than by taking on a new framework, a theological system and its forms of reasoning, as happened in the classes. Though she had enjoyed the *omr* pilgrimage to Mecca and was very grateful to the Guyanese woman who had organised it and had asked for blessings for her, it did not seem to have been transformative in the sense of marking a sharp caesura in her life. Amina was critical about some aspects of what she had experienced that seemed inconsistent with the religious nature of the occasion, such as the crowds of people pushing – 'They don't care a lot about anyone else – only themselves' – and was somewhat puzzled by others, such as the empty villages they passed on a coach journey to the coast. When I pressed her, she said, 'I have seen it now and I'm glad about that but it didn't change anything for me. I don't think it changes anything. Well, maybe there is the praying five times a day but I don't live a bad life or do wrong things'.

For many Guyanese, as with Amina, the experience of living as a Muslim was a matter of trusting in one's own judgments. One could argue that the freedom to form and trust such judgements is based on the awareness that one's own viewpoint, and the ideas formed from that perspective are just that – ideas, not facts. This de-centring of perception⁶⁴ that allows an object of thought to be perceived differently by others opens, as Keane (2014) points out, a dimension of human existence in which human beings, though constrained by both biology and culture, are nonetheless potentially free to think, to make judgments as well as to take (or evade) responsibility for them and to forgive and be forgiven⁶⁵. This is a domain that the philosopher John Mc Dowell (1994) calls 'the space of reasons' (rather than of causes) – a space in which through the experience of living

⁶⁴ For which Keane (2014) uses Foucault's term 'self-distantiation' (Foucault (1997: 117).

⁶⁵ A freedom that Laidlaw (2002) reminds us includes the range of choices not only those with which we agree.

alongside minded others we come to feel at home. Keane locates the emergence of this capacity in the 'affordances' of particular social encounters that create the conditions for the awareness of other minds. I have argued that if this capacity is seen as beginning not in the complex cognitive and social awareness of 'secondary intersubjectivity' that Keane cites (2016: 29), but as an emergent property of primarily bodily form intersubjectivity at the start of life, one is closer an account of the largely unreflective flow of intersubjectivity of everyday life and the elusive potential of individual moral subjectivity carried within it (Simon 2014). Thus, the sedimentation of past, initially bodily-affective experience of others forms a continuously evolving background preparedness within the imagination for the ordinary ethical demands of daily life. However, the conversations I describe in this chapter were all, to some extent, reflections that took place outside the main flow of the everyday world and though the challenge to health and safety and the drawing of the curtain took place took place in real time, reflections on these and other events involved the ('affordant') presence of someone, myself, whom my interlocutors knew to be trying to think about their lives. To that extent the material I report is not as it might be in the hurly-burly of life but offers a window into the self-reflective capacities of some of those I got to know at the mosque.

Loss and the re-imagining of a community

Many of Amina's relatives have settled in Canada, USA and the UK. Though she had made trips back to Guyana, she did not plan to return, since the people she would have wanted to see were no longer alive. She still travelled to see her family in North America, but Mr Rahman had announced that he would not be renewing his passport. Guyana was often referred to as 'home' and many of those I got to know may have once thought that they would go back eventually; it was clear now that this was not going to happen. Though new ties had been made, what had been gained through migration to the UK was accompanied by an awareness of the loss of what had been given up. This pervasive sense of loss was given a particular form in Amina's account of her husband's loss of his mother when he was very young. On several occasions, her conversation came around to the poignant fact that he had no photograph of his mother and was very troubled by the fact that he had no memory of what she looked like. At the celebration of his eightieth birthday, among a display of pictures of the family, the community, the cricket matches and the mosque down the years was one in which Mr Rahman's father was shown standing, as if in a wedding picture, next to a woman whose face had been blurred. The picture was the

creation of one of his sons; it was labelled 'Mr Rahman's parents'. At this event various local dignitaries from the borough, local churches and voluntary organisations, and from the Peoples' Progressive Party of Guyana in the UK (PPP) spoke about the achievements of Mr Rahman's life, but when Harry got up he started by talking of how Mr Rahman had lost his mother at a young age. I later learnt that Harry had also lost his mother in early childhood. One can see this as not only of private significance. It also encapsulated the importance of the experience of loss in which, as migrants, all shared to some degree and which gave meaning to their picture of Mr Rahman's capacity to galvanise the Guyanese Muslim community to build a new home for themselves, a mosque in London, that was being celebrated. While loss creates a gap in the fabric of the external social context that Keane (2014) argues is a necessary support to the individual's ethical capacities, it may also stimulate the capacity to imagine into being a new context and a new focus of ethical thought, though first the loss must be recognised.⁶⁶ Lambek (2010: 59) makes a link between the loss of a world, albeit through failure to maintain the integrity of individual or collective practice rather than concretely through migration, and the need to mourn that loss as the ground of ethical capacity. This would coincide with a psychoanalytic understanding in which it is in accepting the external reality of loss that the internal work of imagination takes place and a mind-created object can emerge to carry forward what was valued in what has been lost.⁶⁷

The rupture of migration is something shared with many, if not most, within the congregation but a new post-migration life is not just imposed or waiting to be taken up. In an important sense, it must be imagined into being and this draws on a quality of human imagination – hope – as much as on the practical capacity to build a community as a material reality. In his reflection on an interview conducted in the nineteenth^h century with the last chief of the Crow people about the destruction of their world, the philosopher Jonathan Lear (2008) writes of what he calls 'radical hope'. For the most part, we live within an already existing, though slowly changing, form of life in which mourning losses is a constant accompaniment. By focusing on a catastrophic loss, Lear calls

⁶⁶ Within work of the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion it is both the presence and (bearable) absence of the Other in the primary relationship that are required for the development of mind (Bion 1962); the sustaining of an ongoing capacity to recognise what is lost and to mourn that loss is what is seen to free the continuing imaginative capacities of the mind throughout life (Klein 1940)

⁶⁷ Since Freud's (1917) paper 'Mourning and melancholia'. The experience of loss mourning has had a critical place in psychoanalytic understanding of ordinary development and in the emergence of psychic difficulties.

attention to the human capacity to imagine into being something which had not previously existed, yet it is a capacity required to some degree in the face of all loss. Crapanzano (2004: 99) refers to a Christian theological conception of hope as ‘an infused virtue’ that suggests that the fulfilment of a sense of an anticipated future state depends on some agency other than the self. The Crow chief located the origin of his vision in a dream and a felt dependence on the presence of an ancestral spirit. Among those who helped to build the mosque as a new focus for the Guyanese, it was a relationship with an actual and historic Guyana and with the earlier generations who migrated and lived there, ‘keeping the lamp burning’, that continued to inhabit the imagination of their descendants, so that a place lost as an everyday reality could become an idea that would provide support in new circumstances.⁶⁸

Mr Rahman’s account, in Chapter 1, of the history of the Guyanese Muslim community’s project to build, by stages, their own mosque, described a rupture within the community in London in the early nineteen-eighties. One of the differences between the groups concerned the need to have a home. ‘We always wanted a building. I don’t know why they didn’t want one, but I said no, we need something to identify with – a room or a house or whatever it is.’ At the time of the split, the group that Mr Rahman led lost all the existing material resources: ‘We had to start from scratch... so that’s what we did and everyone pitched in.’ When he was asked to lead the rump of the society, he said he had agreed because he felt he had ‘a vision to get somewhere, to establish ourselves’. He told the Guyanese that he was going to move ahead on this path and those who wanted to come should join him; those who did not were free to leave. In telling me this Mr Rahman emphasised his own single-mindedness, saying, ‘If anybody slip, my hand will be stretched backwards [he demonstrated several times the action of reaching behind him], so grab it, because I not going to turn back to pick up nobody. If they don’t want to come along, they don’t have to take my hand, you see.’ Sometimes this undertaking was presented as a collective aim in the UIA; at other times, it was more clearly felt to be his vision. ‘I know I may not finish it before I get to the door (of paradise) but God will know that I tried my damndest’. Yet the project required the community to commit to it and would only have been possible, and would only have made sense, to the extent that they did come together around it. The physical struggle to fund and build the mosque as a material structure for the Muslim Guyanese in London required both an act of ethical

⁶⁸ The relationships within this imaginative domain are with what psychoanalysis calls ‘internal objects’ – not only the internalisation of external relationships but imaginative creations.

imagination, 'an expanded sense of what can be' (Rumsey 2010: 118), and the ongoing moral work to sustain this focus for the community (Mattingly 2012).

Despite his later religious training in London, Mr Rahman's response to the limitations and inadequacies of religious knowledge and practice in the Guyanese Islam of his youth was as a source of value as well as an object of continuing moral responsibility – the responsibility to go beyond simply keeping the lamp burning. What the Guyanese seemed to feel they had inherited was a form of practice and a style of reasoning in which what was humanly good within the mundane sphere has been brought together with a religious tradition in a form of Muslim sensibility that maintained a porous boundary between the Muslim and non-Muslim spheres. If, among themselves, the Guyanese could seem confident in their own way of doing things this was now increasingly challenged both theologically, by movements that seek to purify religious thinking, and by Muslims from other, more homogenous, cultural traditions who have settled in North London. However, there is another kind of interface with the large and diverse Muslim population in London – that with groups who also find themselves marginalised minorities within the larger Muslim community in London. The mosque offered its facilities to the local Turkish community for funerals: sometimes they brought their own imam and sometimes the mosque imam took the ceremony. On those occasions, men and women arrived together in ordinary Western dress. When a two-year-old Kurdish child died at home, the mother had wanted someone to come and recite the Quran over the body but she had been told by an imam at the East London mosque that such prayers were unnecessary.⁶⁹ The woman became very upset, saying that she herself would recite the prayers if no one would come from a mosque to do so. In the end, Mr Rahman heard about the situation, visited the home and said the prayers. This seems to indicate the emergence of another sort of Muslim formation that is based neither in a textual view of orthodoxy nor in the continuity of pre-migration cultural traditions but in a response to the diversity of actual Muslim communities in London in new circumstances with new unmet needs.

Those from other ethnic groups who joined the Guyanese may also have been seeking a way of being Muslim that accommodated their experience of living in London with its accumulating complexity and contradictions. Zahara, a Bangladeshi woman I introduced earlier, often referred to her feeling of commitment to the community at the

⁶⁹ Infants and pre-pubertal children are considered in a pure state and go to paradise immediately at death. No prayers are therefore required although the status of prayers and recitations for the dead more generally is a matter that some, like Azzim, would dispute.

Guyanese mosque with which she has been involved in its various forms over thirty years. She described persuading her husband to buy the house in which she raised her family because of the plans for a mosque nearby. This sense of commitment and continuity runs alongside her accounts of the rifts and tensions with other Bangladeshis living locally. When I first got to know Zahara, she told me about the verbal attacks and threats she had been subjected to by Bangladeshi neighbours in shops and in the street over the fact that her eldest son was fighting with the British army in Iraq. This was particularly upsetting as there were incidents in the press at that time concerning threats by some Muslims to execute Muslim soldiers, but if she felt any doubts about her son's position she never said anything. When he was home on leave, they would go together to the mosque. Some time later, her younger daughter became involved with a local Bangladeshi man. His family were rural Sylheti and, according to Zahara, they were hostile to her Bengali family and to the relationship with her daughter. Eventually Zahara described how she had sought the support of Mr Rahman as 'the leader of our community' since both her family and the young man's father worshipped at the mosque. Though prioritising the mosque and her relationship to it over ethnically based forms of relatedness may be a response to the immediate problem of finding herself at odds with the local Bangladeshi community⁷⁰, Zahara had been an active member of the congregation for many years and in times of difficulty had turned both to the mosque as 'her community' and as a place for prayer. There have been a number of occasions when she had asked for prayers to be said for herself and her family at the mosque, and others when I found her there, praying quietly by herself. This is a life of ethical engagement and, as Keane suggests, without 'differing even clashing voices' and the need to manage conflict 'there would be no occasion for ethical consciousness' (Keane 2010: 77-78).

Zahara's sense of herself as Muslim has elements of the religious traditions in which she grew up in Bangladesh, such as the fact that she and her husband prioritised contributing to the building of a mosque in Bangladesh, and returning for ceremonies on death anniversaries, over *hajj*, but one can see elements that belong to her current life, her attachment to the Guyanese mosque and to the school in which she works, as well as her own way of managing what she acknowledges as her lapses in practice ('I may not

⁷⁰ The issue of difference is muted by the fact that originally the Guyanese also came from the sub-continent before partition and the formation of Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

always pray but . . .'). Referring to 'making her peace with God' she used a common English idiom but it was also indicative of a certain practical stance she took towards herself as a Muslim in which the possibility of forgiveness was available without, apparently, the same anxieties that preoccupied those in the Saturday classes. Nor was this mixture of thinking styles fixed over time. She first introduced herself to me firmly as a modern Bengali woman but she subsequently found occasions when she needed to modify this statement – 'Well, maybe only fifty per cent modern' – such as when she told me about her initial feelings of disappointment at her eldest daughter's engagement to a white British man, rather than to a Bangladeshi, feelings that were overcome in the preparations for the wedding. This bespeaks not only her shifting identifications but also her awareness of, and capacity to manage these different perspectives, often with humour. Such a capacity is not the given outcome of the norms of a particular social context, nor does it follow straightforwardly from the pressure of conflicting demands; rather it requires the sense of inhabiting a context, both social and imaginative, that can contain the kind of complicated realities and contradictory commitments that ordinary lives generate, the possibility of failure and the need to repair the resultant damage to external relationship and to the integrity of an ethical world.

Guyana as an imagined community

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the imaginative resources rooted in an idea of Guyana and in being Guyanese Muslims, that were sustained through being with others at the mosque, and which came to the fore in response to challenges and in moments of reflection. For the most part, however, they were absorbed into the flow of everyday life. The accounts I have given offered windows into what was carried within the implicitly relational nature of experience, relations that include those physically present, those absent or dead, as well as relationships to places and ideas. Mr Rahman drew on such currents to give a shape to his understanding of a situation.

'Arabs think of themselves as more holy because they have the language of the Quran. Pakistanis think the same way because they speak Urdu . . . but Urdu isn't the language of the Quran [it is however written in a script similar to Arabic]'. He implied that the Guyanese with their use of English were thought of as inferior by other Muslims. He countered this situation by saying, 'We're open and I see that our background helps us a lot – because we can see things differently from some other people who have not opened up their vision to the place where they (now) live . . . Although we're here, we don't say

we're at home . . . when we say home we mean Guyana . . . but living in this society we have to be part of the society here.'

In talking about the differences and hierarchy between Muslim communities, Mr Rahman described the way languages had become invested with significance through the perception of a privileged link to Islam. The Indians who migrated to Guyana lost their connection with both spoken and written Hindi (at language related to Urdu but written in a different script) and took on the language of the colonial power and the Afro-Guyanese. Yet here, Mr Rahman seems to see this loss of a language as linked to the freedom to approach the situation in London in a way which he describes as 'open', because, unlike Urdu- and Arabic-speaking Muslims, he sees the Guyanese as unencumbered by this kind of imagined relationship to Islam. The argument then seems to reverse. The paradoxical statement about Guyana seems to indicate that, for Mr Rahman, it was by retaining Guyana as a 'home' in the imagination that the Guyanese were enabled to live within the society as they found it in London. This can be understood in relation to Jayawardena's (1980) analysis – that in becoming a place that many, like Mr Rahman, will never see again, Guyana became a resource within the imagination to be used in new circumstances, just as the idea of being Indian became a focus of meaning for the Indo-Guyanese by becoming detached from material connections to India as a real, external and changing, place. Beyond this, the nature of Guyana as a place of social diversity and 'mutual exposure to the way that others live' (Kresse 2013) is felt to have created a style of thinking and feeling that enabled the Guyanese in London to prosper. A conversation with a young British-born Guyanese woman, two generations on from Mr Rahman, implies that the idea of what it is to be a Guyanese Muslim is still relevant as a point of ethical orientation, albeit in a changing landscape.

Milly, a Guyanese woman in her thirties whose husband was a Mauritian Christian, described the complexity of making her way as a Muslim in London among others whose Muslim practice is different, as well as among non-Muslims. She referred to her family origins as South American, which is geographically accurate but one of only two occasions on which I heard it put like that. It was clear that she did not pray five times a day, except in Ramadan when she said she made a special effort. She explained this in terms of her hectic life in which she had to combine childcare and work, but then added seriously that 'I'm not saying I don't want to give time to my Creator'. She contrasted her problems as a working mother with the situation in Pakistani families where she felt women tended not to work outside the home and where it was therefore easier to be more orthodox about

prayer. She went on to talk about a new Pakistani girl at her work. 'In her family you don't go out and mix, that's her environment. She lives with her in-laws and they are very strict so it's difficult for her at work where there are non-Muslims'. Milly asked if I had seen a recent TV programme about Muslim faith schools and observed that it must have been very disturbing for non-Muslims to see it. She thought it must have set up all sorts of images of Muslims as hostile to non-Muslims 'so that when they see women in a hijab they must feel that's what they are all like, hostile'. Of her non-Muslim work colleagues, she said that 'they don't see me as I am in the mosque [in a hijab]. I look just like any other woman but they know I am a Muslim'. She described a difficult encounter with the new Pakistani colleague who had asked about Milly's husband. When she had said that he was not Muslim, the colleague had replied, 'I didn't think so'. Milly said, acidly, 'Well! I wanted to ask her what she meant by that, but I didn't'.

The initial starting point, the placing of Guyana in South America, conveyed a location in the middle of another hemisphere rather than on the outer periphery of the Muslim world, suggesting an enabling position from which she could defend herself. Milly's train of thought and her perspective moved back and forth between her own religious commitments and how she managed them, her awareness of the different practices of other Muslims and the perceptions of non-Muslims. Though it was the encounter with the Pakistani colleague and the conversation with me that might be said to have created the 'affordances' (Keane, 2014) that brought these concerns into focus, they were live issues in her everyday life – how she thought of herself as a Muslim, how she saw other Muslims and how she imagined non-Muslims to perceive her. This train of thought remained in motion as the conversation ended; there was no resolution, only more uncertainty and ambiguity to be managed. Guyana and being Muslim Guyanese seemed, at some level, be a sustaining presence in her thinking and her confidence, as it has been for earlier generations, but Milly was also making her way into new uncharted territory that engendered a sense of vulnerability. Concerns with what it means to live within a tradition, to be aware that its endurance depends on defending it before others who may perceive matters differently, and an individual's sense of their limited capacity to embody its values in their own life are concerns at the heart of ethical experience. The concerns expressed at the mosque, in activity as much as in speech, were just these – the safety of their way of being Muslim, the need to open the mosque to others and the acceptance that not all Muslim Guyanese are practising or that they are practicing only to the extent that they felt was possible within the world in which they found themselves.

CHAPTER 6 – A freelance religious teacher

This chapter describes how a Guyanese freelance teacher, Azzim presented Islam in the classes he ran. In contrast to the understanding of a Muslim life held by other Guyanese at the mosque, for Azzim the divine revelation of the Quran was primarily an object of rational knowledge. The account he gave of how he came to hold this view echoes the transformation in the relationship of many Muslims to the Quran: once seen as a text only accessible through memorisation (Eickelman 1978), it became a source of knowledge that may be engaged with intellectually. Eickelman (1992, 2000) ascribes this shift to the impact of mass education, migration and globalisation. Having actively used the opportunities for study that came his way, Azzim was now committed to bringing his fellow Muslims back to the core text of their religion and to the realisation that much of what they took to be Islam was the result of a proliferation of cultural traditions. His stance was characterised not only by its focus on the Quran, but also by his confidence in his own ability to read and understand the revelation for himself. Islamic scholarship has sought to reconcile the implicit freedom of human rationality with submission to God's revelation, seeing both acquired and revealed knowledge as divine in origin (Halstead 2004). In keeping with this, Azzim saw his task as encouraging others to think for themselves about Islam.

Recent studies of Muslim education, both within Muslim majority societies (Keiko and Adelkhah 2011) and in Europe (Veinguer et al 2009), have focused mainly on the organisation of educational institutions, curriculum issues in relation to mainstream schools, and Islamic educational theory (Lahmar 2011; Boyle 2006) rather than the 'experiential domain' (Boutieri 2011). This chapter and the next examine the dissemination of religious knowledge as an intimate human experience. They describe encounters between a freelance teacher with a personal commitment to the passing on of his understanding of Islam and a group of adults who sought to learn from him. Though located within the mosque, the classes took place independently of any organisational framework.⁷¹ The setting for learning had to be created from scratch, and sometimes the

⁷¹ In its variable and informal organisation, this class more closely resembled the large number of madrassas attended after school and at weekends by Muslim children, who are otherwise educated within the mainstream educational system, than the much smaller number of formal Islamic schools that seek recognition within the regulatory structures of a larger educational system in the UK (Niehaus 2009).

pressure of other events within the mosque threatened Azzim's tenure on the physical space. The teaching had to cover not only the obligations and practice of Islam, but also the task of learning to read and recite the Quran, beginning with the Arabic alphabet but not the memorisation of the text. For Azzim, this teaching was the fulfilment of a religious duty; those who attended the class regularly did so as a matter of religious choice, because they found his teaching helpful.

A pivotal issue in Azzim's thinking was the ontological separation of the Creator from his creation, a transcendence that restricts contact between the human and the divine to an understanding of and submission to the revelation of God's will (Sayyid 2006). From this it follows that to transform the revelation into an object within human materiality was, at best, to create confusion and at worst, idolatry. However, the activity of teaching brought Azzim into a complex, mutually affecting engagement with other Muslim adults who themselves felt torn between the wish to be better Muslims, the living of their lives within British society and the traditions of religious thinking they had grown up in and remained attached to. The exchanges that emerged within the fluid space of the class complicate the apparently clear distinction between Islam as an objectified theology and as an embodied moral presence (Boyle 2006). Azzim questioned assumptions which were taken for granted, and as the class became aware of their own sometimes very different commitments, they found ways to voice them. While this new emergent form of thinking remained fluid and intermittent during my period of fieldwork, I suggest that over time it has the potential to give rise to new moral subjectivities and self-understandings, the capacity to speak about and reflect on them.

Azzim saw himself as involved in a project of religious education, *da'wa*. While the religious outcome that Azzim had in mind, and that motivated him as a teacher can be understood in the context of contemporary Salafi movements within Islam that seek to restrict the source of religious knowledge to the written text of the Quran and the Sunnah, aspects of his thinking suggested otherwise. Though his basic assumptions about Islam were very different from those expressed by Mr Rahman, Azzim was also a local religious figure in the sense that, though his ideas had obvious links to global theological issues, his thinking engaged with both his immediate surroundings and his own history.

The complexity of Azzim's position was apparent in the way he comported himself. Though he sometimes wore a white religious robe, he generally arrived for the classes dressed in ordinary casual attire with only a small white lace cap to indicate that he was

Muslim. This contrasted with the obviously Islamic dress, beards and styles of self-presentation of some other freelance preachers. At the same time, there was a composure and sense of purpose about him. Although I usually sat at the back of the women's balcony for Friday prayers, on one occasion when I knew Azzim was preaching, I managed to position myself near the front railings. I was struck by the vulnerability of the position of an imam, standing alone in front of the men (whom I could not see), and by Azzim's quiet, unemphatic mode of delivery.⁷² As I have described in Chapter 3, some preachers sought to occupy this space in a more obviously commanding manner. One might attribute this demeanour to aspects of Azzim's personality, but it can also be linked to his stance towards Islam, his suspicion of those who seek to make themselves into intermediaries between ordinary Muslims and God, his chosen role as an independent preacher, and its meaning to him as fulfilling the duty to undertake *da'wa*. In this, he saw his role and responsibility as to set out the nature of Islamic theology, not to persuade or to arouse feelings in others. This chapter explores the tension between Azzim's commitment to the text of the divine revelation as located outside the domain of the human, and the way that the living of out of this commitment as a freelance teacher drew him back into an engagement with human relatedness, both in his own experience and that of others.

The road to becoming a 'freelance' religious teacher

Despite the low level of general education in rural Guyana, Azzim managed to teach himself Arabic so that he could access directly the meaning of the divine revelation. Eventually, a preacher who was visiting Guyana selected him for sponsorship to study Islam in Saudi Arabia. Though one can trace aspects of his theological thinking to the theological ideas he would have had contact with there, there was something (never spelt out) that he disliked about this experience and he left Saudi Arabia after a year. He reacted sharply during one of the monthly Sunday Sisters' Circle meetings when some women from East Africa talked about a view that, as a Muslim, you were obliged to live in a Muslim country and that perhaps they should go and live in Saudi Arabia. First, he explained that the idea behind such an obligation was connected to doing *da'wa*, but the women who had raised this matter did not speak Arabic and so would be unable to undertake *da'wa* (nor were they sufficiently knowledgeable about their religion, though he did not refer to

⁷² Towards the end of my fieldwork, I noticed some occasions when he seemed to be adopting something of the more emphatic style common among the other preachers but in general, his manner reflected his emphasis on a cognitive rather than emotional link to the divine.

that). Then he added, 'Anyway, Saudi Arabia is all spies and disappearances,' and insisted that they were much freer in the UK: by implication, he meant freer to practice their religion. For Azzim, this idea of being free to practice did not mean, as the women perhaps meant it, being able to live as a Muslim within a social context of guaranteed Islamic form, but rather that one was free to think about Islam for oneself.

The idea of freedom was significant in Azzim's thinking in another sense. When he left Saudi Arabia, he came to the UK and trained as a mental health nurse. He now works in the NHS. Although he lives about an hour's drive away, Azzim has built up an association with the mosque based on his Guyanese origin, and his participation with his family in a range of religious and social events. This has allowed him to develop a space there for his own religious views, as a visiting preacher and teacher. He occupied a very different position from the two official Bangladeshi imams who have paid posts at the mosque: Azzim's independent, freelance status, made possible by his nursing job, was an important element in the way he conducted his life. It allowed him to be part of the rota of Friday preachers while retaining a critical distance from those beliefs and practices of the congregation with which he disagreed.⁷³ It also gave him the freedom to devote much of his time to informal and voluntary religious activities in various other places, including teaching Muslim students at the university near his place of work. He claimed no fee for the classes at the mosque, though the women organised a collection from time to time as a way of thanking him, and it seemed that his other activities also arose from his sense of religious obligation to engage in *da'wa*. His religiously committed life is a point of comparison with that of the president of the mosque. Both men took themselves, and their work, seriously and this, as Lambek points out, is the outcome of a process over time: 'seriousness (conviction, confidence and sincerity) is not something one "has" or starts with, or that is self-evident in any individual segment of discourse . . . but something one learns – or grows into' (2007: 73). The process of learning involves not only practical competence, but also the internalisation of identifications that can sustain a lifelong project.

I first met Azzim at a Ramadan meal near the beginning of my fieldwork when he was only just thinking about setting up a class at the mosque. At this meeting, the fact

⁷³ This seemed mainly to do with officiating at rituals for the sick or the dead that have no basis in the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* but, judging from remarks in the classes, would also include being involved in marriages based on family pressure or on the merely nominal conversion of one party.

that I also worked in mental health services, and that my research echoed his experience of continuing adult study, gave us something in common. He seemed happy for me to join the class if the venture got off the ground. During our conversation, he referred to his encounter, through his current job, with the value of 'a multi-disciplinary team', as if such a secular idea, current within public services, gave a similar positive framing to our different positions in relation to religion. Yet there is, of course, a huge unaddressed gap between the sharing of different professional perspectives within a workplace and the idea of different perspectives on a religion. So, though it was an opportunity for me to learn about Islam and, importantly, to observe others in the process of teaching and learning, I was aware that it also created some ambiguity about whether I would become a Muslim. However, if having a non-Muslim in his class over two years was a source of tension, this was contained, I would argue, by a mutual recognition of seriousness. Though Azzim sometimes made barbed comments about 'people who learn but don't change', he also commended my consistency and commitment to the class.

The dimension of time was relevant to the establishment of the classes as it was to the building of the mosque. During my fieldwork, I frequently heard people exchanging information about different classes and groups across north London, and I sampled a few. As Huq (2008) indicates, practice-oriented classes and study circles are a global phenomenon among women, but I got the impression that many such groups started and then faded out. It became apparent that establishing and sustaining the necessary individual and collective commitment was not straightforward. For Azzim, being a teacher was a serious outlay of time and effort. In fact, it was a family commitment, as sometimes he would drive over with his three young children, leaving them to mill about with the children of those attending the class; at other times, his Algerian wife came as well and looked after the two girls and a boy or oversaw their Islamic studies elsewhere in the mosque. His efforts to maintain the group continued through many setbacks. On some occasions, he and I would be there waiting alone; other days, the group that formed would be a completely different set of people from the week before.

A major point of contention for the religious study groups I encountered was the possible mixing of men and women within them. Azzim's venture in this mosque came into being because of an earlier failure, when a group of women he had been teaching in a small Hackney mosque, many of them Mauritians who sometimes visited the Guyanese mosque, decided that they should become a 'women only' group. I think he might have

preferred to teach a genuinely gender-mixed class at the mosque where I was doing my fieldwork but, although he made various attempts to include men in the monthly Sisters' Circle, and succeeded to some extent, it was only ever women who joined the weekly Saturday class. At first, Azzim's class consisted of a rather disparate collection of young, single women, mostly Turkish, dressed in ordinary Western clothes and a headscarf. Their motivation was hard to pin down and their attendance was very erratic. Some seemed simply to have time on their hands, having finished college or university and not yet found a job. Certainly, there was none of the strongly expressed desire to know about their faith that I heard from the group that emerged later, and their existing knowledge of Islam seemed very slight.⁷⁴ However, despite repeated setbacks, after about a year a group had formed with a core of ten or twelve regular members. They differed substantially from the earlier groups, being older, with children or jobs or both, and having come to the UK from different countries. Unlike those who attended more general ritual and social events, they attended the class because of an interest in learning more about Islam and in developing themselves as Muslims through study. It seemed that there was a much better match between what they were looking for and what Azzim had in mind. Over time, they became a committed working group where difficult ideas and feelings could be discussed. I describe this group in Chapter 7.

Though Azzim's view of Islam required a separation of the divine from the mundane, and his role did not require him to officiate at additional rituals at the mosque, he attended Ramadan meals with his family, the social celebrations of the Guyanese that took place at the mosque and fundraising events. Despite his adherence to a strict textual form of Islam, I will suggest that his own thinking, and the identifications that sustained it, were more complex. As a teacher, he offered both the focus of a text and support for a process of learning. Drawing on both his experience of Guyana and his active participation in the wider, non-Muslim society, his classes created a space for others to think about Islam – a space over which he did not have, nor did he seem to seek complete control. He saw his responsibility as being to teach; it was then the responsibility of the individuals in the class to decide whether and how to use what they had learned.

Establishing the transcendence of God

⁷⁴ Notwithstanding, one of these early members who disappeared from the group greeted me some time later in the mosque, dressed entirely in black, her face completely covered and wearing black gloves.

In contrast to the piecemeal human struggle out of which the class, as a working group, gradually emerged and the complicated encounter with his ideas that took place there, Azzim insisted on the simplicity, logic and coherence of Islam. This contrast between a framing of theology as creating an object of rational knowledge and the unpredictability and ambiguity of human life has emerged as a pivotal concern in recent anthropology of Islam. Both perspectives were visible within Azzim's classes and I will describe the way this contradiction surfaced and was managed while remaining ultimately irresolvable – an ambiguity that one had to either live with or dispel by opting for one element to the exclusion of the other.

Azzim firmly maintained that Islam's basic concepts – the unitary nature, or oneness of God (*towheed*), and God as external to his creation – were accessible to reason, rather than the passional modes of apprehension. For Azzim, it was the widespread lack of clarity about these two concepts about the nature of God, and their implications, that gave rise to confusion and error in both the thinking and practice of many Muslims. Yet his pedagogic style was not that of simply stating his view. Though he might sometimes correct something someone had said, it was more usual for him to prompt questions concerning the implications of a practice: 'What concept underlies this (practice)?' and 'What are you really saying?' This approach was in marked contrast to the way other preachers sought to exhort and persuade. Azzim sought to create a position from which to encourage others to think about Islam by building up a logical argument about the nature of God and looking at Muslim ideas and practices in the light of it. His approach was to examine what Keane calls the 'basic assumptions about what kind of beings inhabit the world, what counts as a possible agent and thus what are the preconditions for and consequences of moral action' (2007: 20). Azzim insisted on the logical truth that you cannot both create something and be located within it. From this, he insisted it followed that 'Allah is not in the world in any way whatsoever,' and that Allah could not be envisaged imaginatively, since he is not like any humanly perceived object. The visual representation of the divinity in Christianity had an important place in Azzim's thinking. He did not refer to the prohibition on depiction in Islam but stressed that the making of visual representations in Christianity implied a claim to *know* what God, Jesus or Mary looked like, a claim which must be false and therefore called into question other aspects of Christian theology. For Azzim, knowledge and 'knowing', rather than feeling or imagining, formed the basis for a religious life; knowledge of the conceptual structure and grammatical articulations of the text of the divine revelation, rather than a

relationship with God on the model of human emotional intimacy, must form the basis of a Muslim life.

Azzim saw these central tenets – the oneness and radical otherness of God – as engulfed by religious currents among Muslims that flowed continuously in the opposite direction, pulling the divine back into the material domain of human experience. His concerns echo both the ‘work of purification’ in the emergence of scientific rationality and the struggle to free Protestant Christianity from the materiality of ritual – with its religious specialists mediating between the individual soul and God – and the inevitable failure of projects that seek to dematerialise the human (Keane 2007: 23-25). The cultivation of a non-material relationship to the divine, freed of the need for mediation, also engenders a greater awareness of human embodiment of the divine within a material world.

The nature of the relationship between the rational and the embodied within human experience has been explored by other disciplines, which suggests both the connectedness of these modalities and the inherent tension between them. Connolly (2006) draws on the work of Spinoza to explore the ‘higher and lower’ registers of lived experience. Within a psychoanalytic model, the capacities of symbolic *and* embodied modes of functioning are interrelated in the capacity of the mind to function in an ongoing, live encounter with the raw impact of the world (Britton 2001). A similar argument is made by the neuroscientist McGilchrist (2010) with respect to the relationship between the abstracting, categorising function of the left hemisphere of the brain and the right hemisphere’s openness to the direct bodily impact of unprocessed experience. However, McGilchrist presents the situation as one in which the right-hemisphere capacities needed to live an embodied life in the world are continuously and inevitably undermined by the claims to clarity and certainty that come with abstract, left hemisphere rationality. This paradox was apparent in the Azzim’s class but never itself became an object of thought as it did in the understanding of ordinary Chitral Muslims who ascribed to the tension between the rational and the affective the power to disrupt, or even ‘rot’, the proper balance required to live a mindful Muslim life (Marsden 2005, 2008). This paradox suggests that an orthodox, text-based approach to Islam may be understood as creating both an object that can, in principle, be known through rationality alone *and* a bulwark against the fear of being submerged in the open-endedness of everyday life. From the point of view of Azzim’s reforming project, the experiences that emerged in the classes were a concrete manifestation of the impediments to ‘the work of

purification'. He found it necessary to counter repeatedly, and in different ways, what he saw as misconceptions by the women. However, as Azzim inhabited the same world as his students, a perspective that was neither that of a text nor of a cultural tradition would occasionally emerge in the challenge of the moment – a perspective that could integrate, momentarily, the different elements into a new, more complex perception combining the rational and the affective in a more creative, mindful capacity (Marsden 2005).

The Saturday afternoon class brought questions indicative of the women's preoccupation with detailed issues of practice and dilemmas of the everyday – the validity of variations in the movements of prayer, enquiries about whether one could attend weddings where one of the parties was not Muslim, and whether men and women could exchange Islamic greetings. Azzim repeatedly responded in terms of the need to get the 'foundations' right, without which, he implied, their many highly specific questions would not lead to the development of a capacity to think for themselves about the underlying issues. To many questions, such as one about a sleeping position that was said to be religiously favoured, he replied that 'it was a pity that very weak *hadith* were drilled into us [when we were young] while substantial things were ignored'. Azzim regularly asked a question to challenge what he felt to be widespread confusion about the radical separation between Allah and humankind: Can Allah do everything possible? The class generally thought, 'yes'. Even after this had come up on several occasions, and one or two women remembered that the correct answer was 'no', they could not recall why this should be. Trying to clarify the point, Azzim would press them to answer further questions: 'So can God make another God? No, he is unique. Can he lie? No, because one of his attributes is truth.' He continued to ask if God could sleep, drink, or go to the toilet? Each time he answered 'no', because, Azzim maintained, these are all human actions which God cannot perform.⁷⁵ The way Azzim asked the question clearly confused the class. I assumed that by inserting the word 'possible' into the question he meant to indicate those things 'possible to human beings', since his intention was to demonstrate how easily Muslims attributed human capacities to God and thus failed to grasp the radical otherness of God, defaulting implicitly to a position of an incarnate God. Beyond its intrinsic importance, there was an additional, human reason why Azzim felt it was so necessary to be clear about this distinction – in disputes with non-Muslims and atheists, one should not become trapped into saying ridiculous things. He insisted that the idea

⁷⁵ He always said 'can't' rather than 'doesn't' or 'chooses not to'.

that God was everywhere might lead one into a position where one had to agree that God was in a toilet.

The need to clarify the false assumptions of immanence, implicit in certain widespread understandings, such as 'God is everywhere', sometimes led Azzim to characterise these understandings in very concrete ways. It was unclear to me whether anyone in the class espoused these. Thus, an often-quoted reference in the *Quran* to 'Allah being closer [to you] than your jugular vein' (50:16) was generally understood by the class, and by other groups I attended, to mean that God was everywhere, without any further specification as to the form of this presence. Azzim would challenge this by presenting it as a claim to a literal physical presence. This was in order that he could oppose such a view, insisting that the quotation did not mean a physical presence at all. Setting up the issue in terms of a material presence marked an essential boundary against the errors he ascribed to both Christianity and Sufism, and allowed Azzim to maintain the distinctiveness of the position that Allah is 'present in creation [only] through his abstract qualities', as expressed in the ninety-nine names of Allah. No one in the group ever asked what it meant to say that God was present in the world through his abstract qualities or asked what was involved in the perception of these qualities. From Azzim's standpoint, the correct understanding of the 'closer than your jugular vein' quotation was that Allah is omniscient and his *knowledge* is everywhere. At any one moment, it seemed sufficient for Azzim to invoke on the one hand the idea of the ninety-nine names of God, with which everyone was familiar, and, on the other, to insist that this idea was not at all the same as the Christian conception of the omnipresence of God. This, Azzim maintained, meant a physical presence and therefore breached the doctrine of Allah as entirely external to his creation. Azzim often used Christianity to force a sharp distinction between the material and the immaterial and to demonstrate, by contrast, the rationality and intellectual coherence of Islam. Given the oneness of God, it followed that the idea of the Trinity was incoherent: presented as a claim to a physical presence, the Christian conception of an imminent God was at odds with the idea of a transcendent Creator. Azzim never referred to the revelation of God's will to Mohammed as the Creator entering the human phenomenal world, but there were times when the separation between the Creator and the created seemed less absolute. On one occasion, he said that 'Allah is not in creation; he *is* creation', thus seeming to demonstrate the complexity of the idea of God in a way that ran counter to his efforts to draw clear distinctions based on logical axioms.

Since Azzim saw humankind as originally both innocent and Muslim, the nature and universality of the currents of misconception that flowed through the class could not be addressed through an understanding of their source in the inevitable materiality of human being. These misconceptions were seen as having entered Islam from the outside and originating in the errors of other religions. However, if on one level the errors of other religions posed a threat to the integrity of an understanding of Islam among Muslims, the significance of the distinction Azzim emphasised between the humanly created world and the divine in Islam was also protected by its very contrast with Christianity and its theology of an incarnate God, the continuing imminence of God within mankind and its depictions of the Creator. Christianity served to clarify what Muslims did not commit to, while the presentation of the beliefs of others as logically impossible maintained an idea of the logical integrity of Islam.

Study and rational knowledge

Azzim maintained that the Quran provided the basis for an empirical knowledge of divine revelation and that an intellectual understanding was the only basis for being a Muslim. There were discussions among the women about felt belief (*iman*) but Azzim countered this with the view that such feelings were subject to inevitable vicissitudes and for this reason, it was only empirical knowledge of the revelation that could provide a secure basis for a Muslim life. This focus was sharpened through his descriptions of his encounters with Christians who, he said, described elements of their theology, such as the Trinity, as being 'a mystery' or appealed to their 'feeling' of being saved as the basis for their expectation of paradise. This, Azzim felt, was a completely unsatisfactory foundation for religion. He held that the foundational premises of Islam could be understood rationally as a scientific reality, without resort to faith with its association to the holistic grasping of 'a mystery' beyond human intellectual powers. On one occasion, he quoted a definition of the concept of belief as 'a condition or habit of placing trust in someone or something' and countered that 'it says nothing about evidence . . . if . . . someone believes a river or a monkey is God you just have to accept it, but in Islam we have logic, common-sense and scientific fact'. The idea that Islam is rooted in what are, and will ultimately be shown to be, scientifically provable realities was important, though it was something only invoked in an *ad hoc* way through confirmatory instances. For example, Azzim pointed out a reference in the Quran to the 'two easts' as something puzzling until one thinks of the fact that the sun rises and sets at different points throughout the year – the reference to 'two'

being explained as indicating the two most extreme points of difference during the year. The class also shared this view of the scientific basis of Islam and would bring references to science and scientists, such as a rumour that the last five astronauts had converted to Islam.

Like the unity of God, for Azzim, the divine revelation was a coherent whole and the Quran contained no contradictions. However, he did not specify whether the basis for this claim was empirical or whether it logically followed from a prior acceptance of its divine origin.⁷⁶ Unlike the Shi'a Muslims in Deeb's study who distinguish between that which is premised on faith, the existence of God, and that which is open to rational enquiry – the nature of a God-given order (2006: 27), Azzim made no reference to faith. This would have contravened his idea of the Quran's objective, rational nature. Thus, he did not say that, if one has accepted as a matter of faith that the Quran is God's revelation, then it must follow that it is without internal contradiction and any apparent contradictions must be due to human misreading. Nor did he refer to the statement at the beginning of the Quran that it is 'guidance sure, without doubt' (2:2). Rather he proceeded by taking the 'without contradiction' as an already established, but unstated fact and argued that *since* the Quran is without contradiction it must be of divine origin as no humanly produced text could attain such perfect coherence. At the same time, as independent evidence of its perfection, he quoted non-Muslim scholars writing in praise of the Quran as a piece of writing.

Though at one level Azzim sought an intellectual engagement with other perspectives, and would occasionally ask what I thought about something – for example, about his view that Jesus never claimed to be the son of God – the lens through which he approached theological issues as objects of thought also shaped what could be noticed and thought about. The Quran was taken to be the standard against which other religious texts were to be judged; using modern management-speak, he referred to it as the 'quality controller' of all other texts. When the women asked about the sacred texts of other religions, such as those of the Hindus, he conceded, to the surprise of some in the group, that there might be truth within them because all humankind was originally Muslim. He then added, however, that this was so only in so far as these texts did not contradict the Quran. Jews and Christians were said to have debased their revelation so only with reference to the Quran could one distinguish what fragments of truth remained

within their texts. However, Azzim did not speak as if he saw the cultural accretions that had grown up around Islam as due to a similar process among Muslims – a debasement of their revelation. This was because, unlike the Torah and the Bible, the Quran itself, he insisted, had remained unchanged down to the present.

The claim that the Quran met an absolute standard of coherence had the effect of making it essential that there must then be no internal contradictions in the text, since this posed a threat that could not be absorbed. As apparent inconsistencies were said to be used by those who were hostile to Islam to undermine the claim of divine origin, Azzim tackled this by presenting passages of apparent contradiction and giving explanations which sometimes drew on the precise grammar of the language. One such example concerned references to the angels bowing down to Adam at God's command 'except Iblis [Satan]' (2:34 and 18:50). He explained that this can be misunderstood to mean that, as in Christian theology, Satan is a fallen angel. However, in another *ayah* in the Quran, Iblis is said to be a *jinn*.⁷⁷ This could therefore be taken to constitute a contradiction. To counter this, Azzim carefully explained that while the phrase 'except Iblis' would, in English, imply that Iblis was an angel, this is not the case in the Arabic construction (*ilaa*). Though the women found the grammatical basis of such an explanation difficult to understand, the point that there was no contradiction in the Quran, and must be none, was easy to grasp and was sometimes referred to spontaneously by them as a reason why a certain reading must be false if it seemed to produce contradiction.

It was a puzzling, and sometimes uncomfortable, experience to be aware of the unacknowledged tensions with respect to rationality and faith, and the unrecognised ambiguity of 'thinking for oneself' about the Quran as the direct and unchanged expression of the will of Allah to which all Muslim must submit. Keller (2005) encountered a similarly difficult situation with respect to the scientific claims of her Seventh Day Adventist informants. She used Kuhn's (1962) work on scientific paradigms to understand how it was that her Adventist informants might be able to study, in an open-minded way, the possible meaning of a text while being unable to see issues that posed a challenge to the framework itself, that of literal Biblical truth. This 'third party' account is interesting but not the only lens through which I want to look at Azzim's position. That I should have found this situation hard to bear was indicative of my growing involvement in, and respect for the experience of my interlocutors and hence my difficulty in finding a legitimate space

⁷⁷ The *jinn* are a separate part of creation that has free will like humankind.

for thinking about my disagreements with them, a predicament for the researcher that is particularly acute in the study of religion (Clarke 2013). Whatever else it was, the battered little white and gold Quran that accompanied Azzim everywhere was an emotional object that had absorbed years of lived Muslim experience as he had struggled to read and assimilate the divine revelation. It was an object within his imaginative life as much as was Guyana. The book sustained his religious life and his commitment to engaging with divine revelation as something separate from, and challenging of a religious perspective that he saw as creating self-comforting emotional states borne of human wish-fulfilment.

Resisting the pull of human ways of being

Azzim's conception of the divine was of an entity intrinsically and absolutely separate from the world created by that divinity and therefore separate from all forms of human activity and human culture (though knowable through human intellectual activity). For him this radical separation of the divine from the human was the primary source of the theological imperative to purify religion of human materiality, the pull of which Judaism and Christianity had not resisted. However, he also maintained that the widespread lack of such a separation brought more mundane human difficulties in its wake. It was the culturally elaborated errors and additions that made Islam into a religion that its ordinary members could not understand, so that they required others, with claims to special knowledge, to tell them what to do. This led to the transformation of optional practices into burdensome additional obligations; and created, in place of a universal community of Muslims, enclaves of social, cultural and racial exclusivity. This, he maintained, was a violation of the universality of Islam as a revelation for all, based on the text of the Quran. As Azzim saw it, this allowed imams, sheiks and 'saints' to set themselves up as intermediaries between the believer and God, based on their own claim to piety and the use of other books and devotional literature written in other languages in place of a simple and direct access to God's revelation. The women supplied many examples of these phenomena both locally and in their home countries. Azzim insisted that no claim to a special relationship to God, to being a 'friend of God' (*wali*) could be legitimately made because, like piety, the relationship of *wali* only existed between God and the individual. It was only in the context of his critique of the misuse of the concept of *wali*, that I heard him use the word 'relationship' to describe the link with the divine. He never referred to his own commitment to Islam in terms of a relationship to God other than that constituted through study and submission. In his suspicion of an emotionally driven form of religiosity,

he told of Muslims who had suddenly taken on excessive additional religious practice rather than slowly building up their commitment; finding it impossible to sustain extreme levels of practice, they had then given up Islam altogether. For Azzim, this failure to sustain a religious life had to do with taking the desire to *feel* pious as a religious aim in itself. He was also critical of Muslims whom he characterised as loud in stating their views but ignorant of the most basic aspects of their religion: ‘They don’t know the *faraaid* of *woodoo* [the obligatory form of ritual ablution] but they want to establish a caliphate’. It was, by implication, proper knowledge of ‘the basics’ that would moderate the pull of human emotional states, whether expressed as individualised piety or through political action. However, these were criticisms of the failure of Muslims to fulfil the demands of their religion – a bad Muslim was not a Muslim at all and abuses of *sharia* or of women by Muslims were due to local cultural traditions or corrupt Muslim governments, rather than anything intrinsic to the religion itself.

Azzim did not regard his theology as an expression of personal feelings and human commitments, as they were for many others I encountered. For him, the revelation of Islam, as set down in the Quran, is an object of perfect coherence and logic that must be grasped intellectually through constant study rather than absorbed without conscious reflection from an environment of lived religious practices or as ideas cut loose from the textual framework of a revelation and handed down informally within families and communities or over the internet. He talked as if his own understanding arose solely and directly from reading the Quran. Though he was, no doubt, influenced by his year of study in Saudi Arabia; he almost never referred to it. This accentuated the sense of the divine as an object which could be grasped intellectually by the individual given sufficient effort and the gaining of knowledge through studying the grammar of the language of revelation; this would establish a link to the divine that was free from both human feelings and culture.

For Azzim, the oneness and radical otherness of God in Islam was in contradistinction to the errors of other religions. Since the world, all human beings and the *jinn* are created Muslim, all other religious traditions are errors and departures from an original natural sense of God. Unlike many other Guyanese, for whom Christianity is a kindred tradition, Azzim saw it as a place where the errors of human thinking about the divine were manifested. Religious leaders within Judaism and Christianity had caused, not merely errors of practice, but the deformation of their revelation from God. Christian

thinking and Sufi-influenced forms of Islam were built on the erroneous conception of God as being *within* creation – *within* us – or on ideas of a union with God or the possibility of our becoming *like* God. Yet, as he pointed out, these sorts of ideas were widespread among Muslims. Troubling thoughts were stirred up in the group as to how such errors might have arisen and this discomfort was expressed in different ways. One of the women said, 'This was how our parents brought us up to think when we were children'. An older woman in the group was prone, at such moments to say, 'We got these ideas from the Hindus [in the sub-continent before partition]'. By contrast, a young Mauritian woman with children anxiously contemplated her own part in the dissemination of error, when she admitted, 'I have always told my children that God is everywhere'. Though he often conveyed a robust sense of being able to live as a Muslim within a non-Muslim society, Azzim thought that these errors came from contact with non-Muslims, rather than having their source in human nature. Maintaining clarity within the domain of fundamental concepts required the creation and maintenance of a sharp distinction between the unchanging nature of the divine and of the text of the revelation to Mohammed, on the one hand, and the changeable unpredictability of the human, on the other. Such a distinction is not of critical significance if, as among the Guyanese described Chapters 4 and 5, you see being Muslim as, at least in part, instantiated in a way of living that you acknowledge to have been inherited and held within you as an identification with others, rather than based on your own cognitive capacity to incorporate correct knowledge.

For Azzim it followed from the central concept of a unitary God outside creation that there are no other sources of divine power and no favoured intermediaries to intercede for humankind. In case of need, one should rely only on God. He explained that this did not mean you should not take practical steps to help yourself, for example by seeking medical treatment in the case of illness. It was the use of material objects, as if their efficacy stemmed from 'religious' power located in them, that was idolatrous (*shirk*) since this was based on human beings trying to take control of power that belongs only to God. Seeing the hidden presence of idolatry in its various mundane manifestations was a recurring theme in his classes and sermons. At one end of the spectrum, this error might be the sale and use of little religious objects, such as the tiny Qurans on sale in the mosque shop and frequently to be seen hanging over the dashboard of cars parked near the mosque. Azzim felt that it was essential to be clear whether this was merely intended to be decorative, in which case it was permitted but pointless since they were too small to read as some decorative inscriptions on wall-hangings might be read, or whether the

object was supposed to have power, in and of itself, in which case it was *shirk* (idolatry). Azzim was systematic in trying to clarify the real reasons for even such apparently small matters as these little Qurans, as he felt that it was in these areas of unexamined ambiguity that serious religious confusion, superstition, and idolatry was spread among Muslims. Equally idolatrous, in Azzim's view was the tendency to use Quranic verses to generate new ritual forms (*bid'a*), or their inscription in ritual objects designed to bring about events in the world, as 'medicines', 'love potions' or to ward off *jinn*. This was something he knew about from experience and, although the way he had told the story about trying to find a job in Guyana was from the perspective of error, no doubt, at the time, his need for a tangible intervention had been great. It was only afterwards that he came to the view that he must trust in Allah.

The presence of *jinn* as an invisible, parallel creation was a very active, real and frightening idea for many of the women in the group. Although Azzim accepted both the existence of *jinn* as part of creation and the legitimate forms of prayerful supplication to God for protection practiced by the Prophet, he was critical of the widely held view among Muslims that the *jinn* are a powerful force in human lives. Beyond their legitimate place within Islam's view of creation, Azzim felt many Muslims accorded them a space that implied an infringement of the integrity of human agency. Rather than being passively at their mercy, he insisted that the *jinn* only had access to human affairs if human beings themselves allowed them entry. He argued that if we were not clear about this, we might use the *jinn* to evade responsibility for our own wishes and actions – 'the *jinn* made me do it' – as well as giving rise to the need for special, humanly improvised, ritual measures against them. In a similar vein, he maintained that these confusions, innovations and idolatrous practices were the result of a widespread inability among Muslim to trust in God alone, despite the frequent invocation of the name of Allah in greetings and interjections in Arabic that were interspersed by some, though not often among those in the class, in English conversation. There was an implication that such interjections might give a misleading impression of piety and trust in Allah. He often spoke about the willingness of Muslims to be taken in by appearances rather than substance. He maintained that a good Muslim name, the right kind of beard and pious dress was enough to convince many people that you were a good Muslim. In his view, this reliance on appearances betokened a lack of trust in Allah and led instead to a willingness to rely on religious leaders of various sorts who used these external trappings of piety to create the opportunity for them to gather dependent followers, to set up shrines and dispense

idolatrous material objects for money. He also felt there was a serious confusion in the minds of some people between God and Mohammed. In an appalled tone, he quoted those who said that if you removed the veil covering the face of God you would see the face of Mohammed. The widespread desire to 'see', going back, as Azzim pointed out, to Moses' desire to see God, was, he implied, based on a misconception about the nature of God and the limitation of human senses before the power of God. He argued that such misconceptions also led to dreams being given a misplaced status by many Muslims. He spoke of a *hadith* in which the Prophet said to the *sahaba* [his companions] that if he appeared to them in a dream, they should trust that it was him; this had become generalised to include everyone's dreams. After telling this story, Azzim would pause to see if people understood why this extension of the *hadith* was an error. He would then explain that while the *sahaba* knew what Mohammed looked like, we do not, so we have no way of knowing that it is not *shaitan* [Satan] who appears in the dream. An active awareness of the threat posed by *shaitan* was needed if human agency and judgement were not to be complicit in their own subversion.⁷⁸

One day in a sermon, Azzim spoke about a widespread tendency to speak of the 'miracle of the Quran' as if, as he put it, in doing so people were conferring a special status on themselves as Muslims, by association. He linked this phenomenon with the tendency for great excitement to be caused by the appearance of the name of Mohammed in the internal structure of a tomato or an aubergine, as if this was also a miracle. He insisted that the Quran was there to be studied and if there was a miracle (and his distancing use of 'if' was striking), then the miracle was in the language of the revelation, not in the book itself [as a material object]. During one of the classes he talked of how people put great store by treating the book of the Quran with respect, putting it in a high place, not on the floor, but that this was mistaken. The book itself was not what should be respected. The original revelation was not a book. It was, he said, like thinking your respect for your mother was shown by putting her picture on a high shelf, rather than the way you treated her. For Azzim this confusion underlay the supposed prohibition against a menstruating woman touching the Quran. He insisted that the reference to the purity of the Quran that menstruation was said to pollute, concerned only the original book of the revelation and referred to the permanent state of purity of the angels who surrounded it.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ This is similar to Azzim's view that Christian iconography is based on a claim to know what the figures depicted looked like.

⁷⁹ Ironically, this would seem to re-create an idea of a physical object.

Azzim taught the Islamic principle that everything pertaining to worship has been specified in the Quran and the Sunnah and everything else, all innovation of religious practice, is forbidden; to the contrary, that which is prohibited to a Muslim in daily life is limited to that which has been specifically prohibited, while everything else is permitted. Yet, as Azzim explained to the class, the ongoing growth of cultural traditions since the Prophet have led to two related forms of transgression: the proliferation of forms of religious ritual and devotional practices that are not part of the practice of the Prophet, and the development of additional prohibitions that are not founded on an explicit textual prohibition, such as the view that music is forbidden. As a result, over time, the forms of Islam in different cultural traditions, shaped by local circumstances and the exercise of human power⁸⁰, have made it difficult for Muslims to distinguish the 'basic tenets' of their religion and left them prey to social norms at odds with Islam. This was the basis of Azzim's view that there was no prohibition on music or on a woman touching the Quran during menstruation. However, despite the otherwise rather challenging attitudes of some of the women in the class, this opinion about menstruation did not seem to settle the matter. The question would often resurface as if they shared a doubt about the polluting power of menstruation. Perhaps Azzim also had more ambivalent feelings. He would say firmly that there was no reason for a menstruating woman not to touch a copy of the Quran and, indeed, that he thought menstruation was a difficult time when a woman might particularly be in need of the Quran, only, on other occasions, seem to pull back by agreeing with some of the women that it might be advisable to wear gloves. This ambivalence suggests the continuing pull of traditional thought on Azzim that was mirrored in the women's uncertainty and their identifications with their own upbringing.

Azzim believed that freeing oneself from the human forms that masqueraded as Islam was necessary if one was to practice the religion correctly. He would often acknowledge a natural tendency to do as our parents did, but at the same time insisted that on the Last Day each person would be responsible for himself and his own practice. It would be no good saying that others had guided you. He sometimes referred to his admiration for reverts (converts) who had to undergo a particularly severe form of rupture from their family backgrounds. He felt that they were not usually welcomed by other Muslims as they should be and must feel very isolated, an issue that Shannahan (2014) explores with respect to women attending mosques in the UK. Such discussions

⁸⁰ The example he often quoted being the misuse of patriarchal power that has led to the loss of a bride's rights to her own dowry as laid down by the Prophet.

evoked many painful questions in the class about the spiritual safety of family members. Azzim tended, if pressed, to say that of course one did not know how things stood between an individual and Allah, while at the same time maintaining firmly that some element of practice and belief, described by a member of the group in relation to a family member, was not Islamic. He was also of the view that you only needed to deny one of the core tenets of Islam to cease to be a Muslim. He said that you could practice in all respects but if you maintained, for example, that we would not be judged on the Last Day, that denial negated everything else. Thus, Azzim moved between a pragmatic attitude towards others and a firm line on what was required – or rather what he felt was required of him, since he made it clear that in teaching them, he had done his duty and it was for the women to decide and act for themselves. During one such discussion, he asked a young woman why she was staring at him and she replied, ‘Because you scare me’. It seemed to have been the uncompromising aspect of Azzim’s religious thinking with its spare, conceptual approach to theology that he sought to separate off from a context of family and human commitments that had frightened her. Yet if one aspect of his thinking aimed to purify and abstract essential religious concepts from their embedding in the complexities of life, another aspect was his willingness to think about the demands of that complexity, provided fundamental religious concepts were not at stake. This latter aspect created a quite different domain in which to contemplate human aspirations and failures.

‘A thinking mind’

Azzim sought to present his theology as logical, definite and unchanging, disembedded from a human context. Allah was to be known through rational thought and worshipped through a form of practice that reflected submission to the knowledge of his commands, rather than through cultural forms or emotional states. There was no sense that the aim was to identify with the perfection and coherence of God or to seek states of feeling, as Mahmood describes with respect to the women in the piety movement. Yet study itself is a human activity that on occasion elicited other kinds of response from Azzim and a paradox in the contrast between the completed nature of the object of his theology – God as an object of perfect coherence and logic – and the idea of study as a never completed process founded in the uncertainty of human forms of knowing. This paradox was never referred to but the classes themselves seemed to enact a way of closing the gap between divine perfection and the imperfect struggle to learn. This was not because the women so completely mastered what they were taught, but because they sought to bring the reality

of their lives to bear on the process. Just as de Koning (2013) describes the struggles of ordinary Muslims in the Netherlands as bringing to life the otherwise rigid and unfulfillable demands of Dutch Salafi organisations, Azzim's classes were a space for the creative potential of live human contact that brought expressions of concern and challenge from the women and elicited, in turn, different kinds of responses from Azzim. Such an exchange supported both learning about Islam and a learning from experience of what it could mean to live it.

When sufficient members of the class had gathered, and Azzim judged it time to begin, he recited, in a low voice, a brief prayer in Arabic. The class ended in a similar way.⁸¹ The implication of this framing was made explicit when someone in the class asked about an often-repeated idea that those who died while on *hajj* went straight to paradise. Without either endorsing or rejecting this view,⁸² Azzim responded by elaborating on the idea that paradise was the reward for the giving of our time to the worship of Allah, in which he included attendance at classes and the struggle to learn. Here his response opened up for thought what had been a rather rigid question that had invited a binary answer. An important dimension of his religious thinking emerged not only through what was explicitly taught, but also the way he managed his role and relationships to students. This modality, his way of being, carried his vision of a religiously committed life and his seriousness in living it. Regular attendance at the weekly Saturday class demanded considerable effort and commitment not only from the women⁸³ but also from Azzim. It took many months of uncertainty as to its viability before a sustainable group formed and a further period for the group to become able to tackle the task of religious learning that Azzim had in mind.

While Azzim saw coming to know the divine revelation as an intellectual activity, there were occasions when he spoke in language that acknowledged learning as a complex embodied process. If the effortful nature of learning was all too clear to the women, Azzim often referred to the pleasure of using one's mind. For him, the rationality of Islam, its logic and its simplicity, his own struggle to learn and the pleasure he got, and

⁸¹ This was in addition to the collective afternoon prayer that would fall at some (varying) point during the class.

⁸² He was sometimes very tactful and careful not to provoke dispute but it was unclear whether this was a matter of mood or part of a larger understanding within which the point at issue was deemed insufficiently important for an overt dispute.

⁸³ For the women, it was an effort to get to the mosque, often with children in tow, and there was the commitment of time to engage sufficiently with the homework that was set in order to keep up with the class.

continued to get, from 'learning something new every day' led to the idea that what was needed was 'a thinking mind'. Azzim insisted on the idea that you needed 'a questioning attitude' and a 'thinking mind' to 'live as a Muslim in the present'. This created an image of a continuous flow of living, questioning and thinking reminiscent of the work of William James cited by Crapanzano (2004: 18) – a thinking mind embedded within the unfolding, unfinished, open-endedness of human experience in contrast to the complete and perfect nature of the divine object. Such a mind was seen by Azzim as developed through an ongoing process of study rather than the acquisition of knowledge completed in childhood or after a period of attendance at adult classes. That what he meant by knowledge was something that had to be meaningfully lived was apparent in his intervention in a discussion about the scene in the grave, in which an angel asks the recently dead person whom they had worshipped and which prophet they had followed in life. Azzim took issue with a very literal account of this scene that seemed to assume the angel was seeking simply 'a correct answer' rather than an understanding of what had, in fact, guided the dead person during their lifetime. He said, otherwise 'perhaps we should just put a piece of paper with the answers in with the body!'

Seeing Azzim speak in different settings, in the classes, at Friday prayers and in lectures, it was apparent that at any one time certain issues preoccupied him, were being worked on and then presented in different places. He identified with the task of teaching and seemed to know that he had some talent for it while his own commitment to learning was central to his presence in the Saturday class. I suggest that the link between the impact of Azzim's presence as a teacher and the process of learning that it brought into being within the class is better expressed as identification than as mimesis. Identification implies the taking in of live qualities that can become the creative resources needed to encounter new situations. This would include both the intellectual potential of deuterolearning (Bateson 1972) and the emotional capacity to learn from experience (Bion 1962). In Chapter 7 I will argue that the sustained contact offered by a class, in contrast to the one-off contact of a lecture, provided the opportunities for such processes of identificatory learning to be established.

Though Azzim never referred to imagination as a reliable, or valuable element in a religious life – rather the contrary – his many references to the development of 'a thinking mind' evoked a quite different image of learning from that expressed in the certainty of logical relations within a conceptual system that he maintained was the only possible

connection to an abstract divinity outside creation. The idea of 'a thinking mind' suggested images of an organic process of absorbing, responding and reflecting on new experiences akin to respiration or digestion. Azzim once used the term 'introspection' to describe the self-scrutiny this process required, implying its moral rather than purely cognitive qualities, but he generally left this dimension unspecified. Azzim's use of language that reflected either an abstract or an embodied form of knowing generally shifted according to whether his referent was the divine revelation of the Quran, the idea of a Muslim engaged in various ways with the world around him or his immediate response to the class and the many disparate concerns they brought with them. Lambek (2000: 318) writes of the division within Greek philosophy between the abstract and the embodied – 'while I have privileged Aristotle over Plato it may well be that Plato's model is closer to the way some religions themselves operate, setting off a transcendent or ideal unchanging order from the mundane flux of everyday life'. There were times in the class when the demands of the immediate emotional situation required a capacity for an engaged reflectiveness that could link these two conceptions of the ethical. Daily life was then not simply, as one of the women said of her life before she actively sought to become more involved with her religion, 'just living just for the sake of living'. Rather it was infused with the impact of a transcendent revelation. In the extract below Azzim was trying to hold together, and keep in play, different perspectives and experiences within the group

Azzim said that he had a friend in Guyana, whom he referred to as a 'very good imam'. From other things he said, I assumed he meant that this man was not motivated by pride or greed as he clearly felt some imams were. However, he went on to say that 'his education level is zero and yet he is teaching [other] Muslims . . . of course the quality of information [he is passing on] is poor'. One of the women responded that it was just like that in Mauritius: 'If you fail in your academic studies they send you to study the Quran.' Azzim replied that 'it's because they think it's easier but actually it's more technically demanding, more technical than nursing'. He added that 'unfortunately most of our scholars have no knowledge of other academic fields and that's a big problem. You need knowledge of both [kinds]'. Another member of the group asked, 'How many people want their children to be an Islamic scholar? They want them to be doctors'. To this Azzim replied that 'any knowledge that benefits *is* Islamic'. In this exchange, Azzim created a space for ordinary human qualities, the uneducated man who is nonetheless, in some respects, 'a good imam', and challenges the preference among Muslims, both those in the class and beyond, for their children to be doctors rather than religious scholars and

imams. He does this by evoking a larger context - holistic approach to the qualities and failings of human being and an Islamic approach to *all* knowledge, linked to the idea that *all* creation is naturally Muslim. All knowledge is good and all correct knowledge is Islamic. This way of reasoning – the valuing of ‘secular’ scientific knowledge by encompassing it *within* the scope of Islamic knowledge – allowed a range of experiences to be brought together in an enlarged mental space. This was in contrast to the drawing of sharp distinctions described earlier in this chapter where the scope for thought was diminished by Azzim’s insistence on one correct interpretation of practice to the point where the young woman said, ‘you scare me’. I suggest that the qualities of thinking in the example above were created by the concerns being taken into a wider, more encompassing space in which complex accommodations could be made – a space that Azzim would see as the divinely created human capacity for thought.

If, when maintaining that there are no inconsistencies within the Quran and that the truth of Islam has been proved by later scientific discoveries, Azzim adopted the language of evidence and logical reasoning, at other times, he spoke as if the divine nature of the Quran could be perceived through its aesthetic qualities. He would refer to the beauty of the language, the elegance of the grammar and the musicality of its recitation by those who knew how. He was critical of the speed with which some imams led the prayers and spoke of the time required between each movement for the mind to focus and the bodily process of prayer to have its proper impact.⁸⁴ Whatever Azzim’s stated theological view, the classes were a site of complex and lively social and moral engagement. While the demands of correct practice were not something he was prepared to compromise on, despite the women’s arguments which I present in the next chapter, an idea of the complexity of a whole life allowed him to respond in a rather striking way to a member of the class who was worried about the situation of a couple in her extended family who were living together but not married. He said that though this was *zina* [the sin of unlawful intercourse] it was not the whole of their lives, implying that it was possible that there were areas of their lives in which they were living in accordance with Islam. This might be seen as at odds with his assertion that any negation of the basic tenets of Islam rendered one a non-Muslim but there was no indication that the couple were denying the validity of Islam, only failing to fulfil its demands. Here Azzim was talking holistically of human living, rather than of a cognitive link to a text, and this vertex seemed

⁸⁴ In the mixed group outside the mosque, the imam often spoke of how the habit of prayer becomes established such that the body feels the need to pray.

to have an intrinsic flexibility. Such moments relocated his abstract theology within the materiality and flow of human commitments and created the idea of the time and space of 'a whole life', rather than a focus on the moment of judgement on the Last Day. While this judgement is, in his view, an essential aspect of Islam, the encounter in the class suggested the possibility that the perspective of God's judgments could not be anticipated. Though, as I will describe in the following chapter, Azzim could be firm and uncompromising about religious obligations, he had also learnt from experience that telling someone they were wrong was not always helpful.

CHAPTER 7 - Encountering new forms of religious thinking

While for many of the Guyanese, and those associated closely with them, a religious world was experienced as the unproblematic outcome of having grown up in a Muslim community such that, to adapt Berliner and Sarro (2007: 5), the nature of what it is to be an adult is to be a Muslim adult, traces of more self-conscious theological currents within Islam were visible in some religious events within the mosque. This chapter describes the class that Azzim taught at the mosque on Saturdays in which his theological position encountered the complicated feelings of the women who attended it. While aspects of the Saturday class can be seen in relation to the objectification of Islam as knowledge and more individualised forms of pious religiosity, it also shows the confusion, loss and anxiety that can accompany even modest steps in this direction. This chapter builds on recent work that has sought to broaden understandings of Muslim lives to include women who yet feel able to voice 'controversial and often decidedly individual opinions' (Marsden 2008: 426), the range of attitudes towards practice and non-practice expressed by individual Muslim women in Europe (Jeldtoft 2011; Fadil 2011, 2013) and the complicated responses of Dutch Muslims, both men and women, to Salafi ideas (de Koning 2013) that arise from the fact that those who are Muslim also live within other non-Muslim domains and with other commitments (Rasanayagam 2011).

To suggest the range of more traditional religious assumptions within this congregation as to what can, and should, be explicitly known that constitutes the background context from which the Saturday class emerged, I will first describe briefly two other groups – a 'sister's circle' and a lecture. Though the three groups were not internally homogeneous, what was sought by those who attended them bespoke broadly different attitudes to the gap that divides the human from the divine and how it may be bridged (Keane 2013).

A Sisters' Circle, led by women for women, met once a month on Sundays and was largely devoted to the encouragement of pious feelings as something natural and within the compass of all. During my fieldwork, Azzim began to give a lecture in the second half of their meeting and later some men joined in for some of these lectures. However, the audience for both the first and second half of these meetings was variable, giving them the character of a series of individual events rather than constituting the ongoing context of study that the weekly Saturday class provided. Though Azzim presented his theological

position in the lectures and the class, the idea that an individual might take responsibility for their own religious knowledge was difficult for the lecture audience to engage with. While the obvious barrier was a core text in a language that no one except Azzim could read, it was also, Azzim insisted, connected to a particular attitude widespread among Muslims – an attitude of passivity and dependence on the mediation of religious specialists, that he sometimes referred to as ‘sheep following sheep’. By contrast, Azzim saw real religious knowledge as requiring of ordinary Muslims an active stance and regular study. Perhaps because he had mastered Arabic on his own, he glossed over the realistic barriers to achieving this. The requirement of active study that he envisaged was, to an extent, met within the weekly Saturday class where there was an effort to learn Arabic as the precondition for accessing the Quran, a more substantial engagement with Azzim’s ideas and more of a struggle with the implications of his theology for other ways of thinking and acting in which these women were engaged. Yet the ‘ambivalence, incoherence and failure’ that Osella and Soares (2010: 11) suggest should be included in studies of the religious lives of ordinary Muslim were present within the Saturday class, and the gulf that Woodhead (2016) suggests must inevitably exist between an everyday form of lived religion and scriptural authority, was temporarily bridged in the exchanges that took place in Azzim’s class. The women who attended felt able to speak about their own religious lives and, on occasion, to challenge him. Though overall, the outcome was certainly an increase in knowledge and greater attention to the demands of practice, the process of learning was complicated, and those complications will have continued outside the frame of the class in everyday experiences that further shape the way religious demands are understood and lived.⁸⁵

Recent work has located religious transmission in the embodied processes of apprenticeship learning (Marchand 2010), the internalisation of relationships (Lambek 2007) and the subtlety of what it means to experience a sense of understanding (Berliner and Sarro 2007). It is a perspective in which the relationships that learning creates are internalised as enduring identifications. The cognitive, emotional, and imaginative qualities of such relationships are absorbed and re-worked into a dimension that supports the emergence of new capacities and the creation of social forms such that living and knowing are the same thing (Toren 1993). This relational perspective is, in contrast to the

⁸⁵ De Koning (2013) describes the perspective of individuals as they move in and between their engagement with Islamic institutions, and the Salafi ideas they encountered there, and their private lives as a dialectic in which individuals adapt a utopian vision to the everyday circumstances, and, paradoxically, create a necessary bridge between the two poles.

essentially one-person model of self-development used by Mahmood (2005), consonant with the developmental perspective I described earlier. Here a two-person account of primary intersubjectivity forms the developmental matrix from which the later triangulated awareness of shared objects of interest and the space of multiple perspectives of secondary intersubjectivity emerges (Trevarthen 1998). Thus learning is inherently and profoundly relational. In the classes, the processes of learning were grounded in the relationships the women established with Azzim and with each other. It was on this basis that they struggled to assimilate a third object – his view of Islam, a new religious ontology of transcendence and the idea of thinking for themselves. By contrast, those involved in the more limited didactic experience of a lecture seemed to find it too difficult to engage in this experience.

Fostering pious feelings in the Sisters' Circle

The monthly Sunday afternoon meetings of Sisters' Circle were led by two Mauritian women and attracted an ethnically mixed group of individuals mainly of Mauritian, Guyanese, Somali and Ugandan origin. They were drawn from grandparental and parental generations, with the latter sometimes accompanied by their children. At its maximum, there could be twenty women present but attendance was variable, as was the religious knowledge and engagement of those who turned up. A phone list was kept of those who had attended in the past and sometimes women would ring round to try and encourage people to come. The purpose of the group seemed both religious and social, an opportunity for women to get together and to make use of the mosque as a space for them. As one Somali woman explained to me, women did not attend the mosque in Somalia so being welcomed in this mosque was one of the benefits of her new life in London. This is striking in terms of the study by Shannahan (2014) that suggests both the lack of facilities for women in many UK mosques and also widespread feelings of being unwelcome.

One of the women who led this group often gave a talk on a religious theme that expressed a view of piety as a state of feeling that could be fostered by emotionally toned images of relatedness to God as immanent in the human world, rather than rooted in a search for textual knowledge. On one occasion, she spoke evocatively about a part of the night, in the early hours of the morning, when prayer is especially rewarded: 'God comes down to meet us in order to help those who pray in the night'. She spoke of God as wanting to listen to our prayers and offer help. She went on to elaborate on the different

states of need people might be experiencing and to exclaim that ‘here is God coming towards us, but who is taking advantage of this opportunity?’ Another woman joined in to stress the marvel of this situation: ‘a chance which is wasted if we are not there praying at this special hour’. Another contributor expressed this expectation of reciprocity between God and the believer: ‘If we go one pace towards God, he will go ten paces towards us’. The images of relatedness to God and the opportunities for intimacy these ideas generated were described here in terms of their intrinsic value rather than linked to an account of the reward for particular kinds of practice and the calculation of merit to be gained on the Last Day, as was often the case in the sermons. Moreover, this scene of the night prayer was rooted in the conception of a potential fit between human beings and the divine. As one of the leaders put it, ‘heaven is made for us’. Such an idea removes the sense of struggle, and the anxiety about failure, that was present in the way some women spoke in the Saturday class. References to failure were generally muted, partial and mundane: ‘We should not just leave the Quran on the shelf getting dusty and only bring it down when someone dies. A page a day, it doesn’t have to be a lot . . . reading a lot without concentration isn’t any good, better something short. When we approach Allah he also approaches us. If we haven’t prayed for a long time, we should ask for forgiveness – he wants to be asked . . . once we are dead it’s too late’. There was no sense of an insurmountable barrier between the individual and God or the conditionality evoked by the insistence of some Friday preachers that God only accepts prayers performed correctly in conformity with his will.

Religious knowledge as an object possessed by a specialist

Some time after I joined the monthly Sisters’ Circle, Azzim started to attend the second half of the meetings. While the character of the first half of the meeting remained that of a self-help group, in the second half of the afternoon Azzim gave a short talk, after which he encouraged questions. Sometime later, men were invited to attend this part of the afternoon; initially it seemed to be largely the husbands of women who attended the Sisters’ Circle. Though the theme of the talk sometimes overlapped with a recent sermon he had given, or with an idea that he had talked about in the weekly classes, in reality this lecture often circled around the same points month after month. Ironically, while Azzim’s ostensible aim was to encourage ordinary Muslims to understand their religion for themselves, he became the focus for the firmly rooted idea that religious knowledge was something possessed by a specialist. This also had the effect of bringing to the attention

of the women in the first half of the afternoon, the nature and limitations of the knowledge available among themselves and they began to reserve matters that touched on religious opinions for Azzim to deal with.

After his lecture, Azzim would invite questions and the voicing of any disagreements. He encouraged those present to see themselves as engaged in study and as thinking for themselves, rather than passively relying on others. This was an idea that had some substance among those in the weekly classes but was a problematic expectation on the basis of monthly lectures with erratic attendance. His aspirations also seemed at odds with what those who attended the meetings felt they were coming for, or were capable of. The questions that were asked indicated that while some of those present had taken in what Azzim had said, others were more interested in airing familiar, pre-existing ideas. These 'questions' were often really statements that cut across, or even contradicted the theme of the lecture, but were voiced without any apparent awareness of this. The questioners, often disproportionately male, did not seem to have any expectation of learning something new or clarifying matter that would make a difference to what they already thought. Similar questions were voiced in much the same way by different people over time, as if entrenching a known and needed position.

At one of the gender-mixed lectures, Azzim announced that he would speak about the importance of religious understanding. Beginning formally with 'Brothers and Sisters in Islam', Azzim spoke about the importance of sound reasoning in religion and the fact that many people thought that you were not supposed to use your intellect in Islam. He quoted from the Quran to show that this was mistaken, that Allah had created human beings with certain organs and faculties and they should be used – in order to observe the signs of creation and to understand the revelation. He said that people who accepted that the intellect is necessary in science nonetheless felt that you did not need to use your intellect in religion. Yet when Allah created the universe, he made human beings intelligent and he revealed the Quran for mankind. Azzim summed up this link between reason and the divine plan for human living: 'reasoning is the sharia internally and the sharia is reasoning externally'. However, he argued that this link between human reason and the divine revelation had been undermined today by the fear of not understanding the Quran; this was fed by those who claimed knowledge and looked pious. While acknowledging that misreading was a serious matter, 'this fear has led us to put the Quran aside and take up other books, written by other people that claim to be saying what Islam

is.’ He was particularly critical of the development of devotional literature. He said that he had heard a lecture in another mosque recently in which not a single *ayah* (verse) of the Quran had been quoted but instead other things had been added, such as, what Azzim referred to as a fairy story about the *sahaba* (the companions of the Prophet) returning home from a journey to find their sins written on their doors and the process for atonement written there also. He said that the speaker was trying to show how pious the *sahaba* were but there was no basis for this in the Quran or in a *hadith sahih*⁸⁶. The speaker had also said that every inch of the earth was covered with angels, at which point Azzim had asked himself, ‘What about the hadith that the angels do not enter a house where there are statues?’ He insisted that, ‘most of what this man said was invalid but he had a long beard and a nice *thowb*⁸⁷ so we think that everything that comes out of his mouth is Islamic.’ The idea that Muslims were easily taken in by appearances of piety was a familiar theme in the Saturday classes. Here he linked it to the failure to rely on what was in the Quran and Sunnah, and to a tradition among Muslims that implied you should *not* use your intellect or your common-sense to think for yourself. ‘Instead we follow traditions and customs, we follow our parents and we think we are following Islam. We end up following things for which we have no proof or evidence but on the Last Day you will be responsible for yourself and you will be asked how you used your intellect.’

When the time came for questions it took some encouragement before a few of the men made comments, all of which seemed to contradict directly what had just been said; for example, ‘Not everyone understands the Quran so we must understand first from the *ulema* (scholars) and then go to the *Quran*’. Another comment from a man in the group consisted of a quotation in Arabic followed by the insistence that we need the *ulema*. Azzim replied that ‘the brother has quoted an *ayah* which indicates that if you don’t understand something you should ask those who do, and this is quite correct, but what this means is you should seek knowledge. If you haven’t understood something, you should ask for guidance, but if you ask ten scholars we all know you may get ten different answers, so it doesn’t say you should just follow’. Holding his small, battered ‘working’ Quran, he said he was ‘basing himself on the Quran rather than the hadith because the Quran is a book in which we have no doubt. Once you start on hadith . . .’. He trailed off ironically so as to imply, without actually saying so, that there was no end to the disputes

⁸⁶ This refers to a soundly based account of the practice and sayings of the prophet but at other times Azzim expressed more general reservations about the extent to which one should rely on hadith at all.

⁸⁷ The long white religious garment worn by men.

and misunderstandings if you go down that path. The discussion moved on and the women joined in with, by contrast, various specific questions: for example one sought an opinion as to whether it was permitted to put family photographs on the walls. Despite the topic of the lecture, the group was expecting Azzim to have specialist knowledge and to give them opinions. While this was true of both men and women, it was striking that the men were preoccupied with reinstating the position of the *ulema* rather than with asking any questions and that they did so by means of statements that might be said to enact their identification with male religious authority. They seemed unable to respond to Azzim's attempt to invest the group with the capacity to think. As will become apparent in the main part of this chapter, the women in the weekly class saw themselves more straightforwardly as coming to learn something, but they were also more able to be challenging with respect to areas of life with which they felt well acquainted.

If Azzim found the lectures frustrating he never said so, presumably hoping that at least a few individuals would be prompted to think about the content and that all would derive some religious benefit from the act of attending. Thus, what from one perspective might appear to be the enactment of a fiction – that learning and development was taking place – might from another perspective be seen as the slow establishment, through the regularity and solidity of Azzim's commitment to learning, of the pre-conditions for something new to be assimilated in the face of long established habits of thought and practice. Something very different was going on here from the enthusiastic adoption of new stricter forms of Islam among the women in the Cairo piety movement (Mahmood 2005) and this suggests the need to approach such religious meetings as those at the mosque in a different way in order to understand how some might attend an event such as this lecture, or the Sisters' Circle that preceded it, as part of a generalised pious intent, for social reasons, and because the mosque was perceived as a space open to them on a Sunday afternoon. Azzim sought to keep the lectures going, perhaps from an understanding of where the pious, but religiously uninformed, were coming from, perhaps from having a longer-term aim and because for him teaching was the fulfilment of a religious duty which was separable from the outcome of the event. Whatever Azzim's aim, these Sunday afternoon events gave a public forum to some of the different traditions within the congregation. Certainly no one seemed to be seeking a radically renewed form of Islam. However, as my fieldwork was coming to an end, some members of the Saturday class had started to attend the lectures and perhaps the character of the event would change.

Assimilating knowledge through commitment to a class

Though the Saturday class faced the same difficulty in accessing religious knowledge in that they were ordinary non-Arabic speaking Muslims, there were clearer feelings of inadequacy at having insufficient knowledge, a more focused desire to engage with the problem, an awareness of being in the midst of a multiplicity of ideas about Islam and a wish to live better Muslim lives. At the same time, there was also the pull of the Islam they had grown up with that was present as forms of practice and ways of thinking that did not easily give way in the face of Azzim's teaching. Unlike occasional attendance at lectures or the Sisters' Circle, the class provided a context not only for the acquisition of competence in Arabic and in recitation, but for a sustained relationship with Azzim and his way of thinking, with each other and with the experience of learning itself. Though this may be seen as a project of religious self-development such that Mahmood (2005) describes, there are a number of contrasts to be drawn. The Saturday class were a diverse group engaged in complex ways with post-migration experiences and with the non-Muslim host culture. Unlike the hundred or more who attended the religious lectures in Cairo, the class constituted a small, sustained group who came to know each other. In characterising the learning of those attending the piety groups as self-development, Mahmood draws on an individualised, one-person model of the mind and its capacities, albeit within the normative structures of a tradition. This perspective may have best reflected the thinking of the women themselves but I suggest that the processes within the class I observed can be better understood in terms of the relationships within the group and the sedimentation of past relational experience the women brought with them to the classes, which both sustained and complicated their learning.

Throughout this dissertation I have sought to bring anthropological understanding of the complex relational currents within my fieldwork material into contact with a body of developmental research and a psychoanalytic tradition that describes the mind as formed through the internalisation of relational states – not only relationships with the actual others of infancy but with the multiple others that are encountered, and come to inhabit the mind, over a life-time. Though the bodily nature of primary intersubjectivity in the early mother-infant relationships is relevant to an understanding of embodiment and identification, development perspectives have entered anthropological thinking largely in terms of the later emerging form of relatedness, 'secondary intersubjectivity', that looks

beyond the dyad to the world as offering a third object of mutual interest.⁸⁸ This developmental shift also ushers in the beginning of an awareness of objects within the domain of imagination. Rumsey (2010) brings this body of developmental work to bear on his ethnographic material, arguing that it is through the triangulation created by a joint object of attention that the capacity to create and share moral perspectives on the world emerges, not only in development but in social life. This 'third' object may not already exist and may require to be imagined into being – when a young child offers a toy to another person, what is presented is not only a material object but one clothed in the penumbra of meanings it has accumulated within the child's imagination. Using the example of a group of women who intervened in a local dispute by creating a new joint object of attention for two warring parties, Rumsey writes that the group demonstrated 'a profound capacity for what I call 'ethical imagination', whereby even in the total absence of a direct precedent for their intervention, the women recognised the novel circumstances they were in as ones that might empower them to act in ways that everyone could then [but only then] see the good in'. (ibid: 117) The action, that involved planting the national flag between the opposing groups of men and distributing gifts to both sides equally, had to be imagined into being but, once undertaken it created space for the warring parties to see things differently.

In the classes Azzim presented his theology, the women struggled with it and Azzim then responded to their struggle. The idea of triangulation is relevant to this struggle in that the situation was not just that of an individual woman disciplining herself in the face of the demands of a new view of Islam, but of a group with a background of prior relational commitments who needed to find, or rather to imaginatively create, a new ethical space within which to integrate what they were learning with their existing lives. This sometimes happened and sometimes failed. An important element in the psychoanalytic version of triangulation is that the complexity it brings is inevitably associated, to some degree, with anxiety and loss – for example, the pain of realising the limitations of one's own perspective or of seeing one's habitual religious practice in the light of a new way of thinking. Moreover, the assimilation of a new perspective impacted on prior, relationally embedded, commitments. Though those who came to the Saturday class had their own

⁸⁸ Both developmental research (Trevvarthen 1998; Hobson 1998) and clinical theory (Britton 1998) have argued that entry into a shared language world and the capacity for reflexivity emerges out of the triangulation created by the perception of a third object (including a human person) that opens a space of shared interest and relationships beyond the immediacy of the primary dyadic relationship, and the awareness of multiple perspectives.

individual motivations and purposes, I suggest that the class provided both a supportive external context and an experience of learning alongside the perspectives of others. Azzim's religious project was based on asking the women to give up the religious assumptions of their childhood and early adulthood and to stand outside their own feelings, their somato-affective responses in the present, so as to grasp the nature of the divine revelation from a new, and in a sense a one-person, cognitive perspective. This created painful uncertainties for the women as they oscillated between the sometimes conflicting demands of grasping Islam as an intellectual object and the embodied human commitments of their lives. Azzim was also part of the class that he had worked hard to create and was therefore also subject to the relational currents within it that re-embedded his own thinking within a social world of shared human significances.

It took Azzim about a year, and the weathering of repeated setbacks, before a regular group of ten to twelve women began to gather regularly as a weekly class on Saturday afternoons, and became a stable group that was able, over time, to engage with his teaching. This is not merely to say that it took a long time but that it was a process that required commitment and it was this moral dimension, as much as knowledge per se, that was transmitted in the class. This group of women were older than those in the earlier, failed classes, ranging in age from mid-twenties to late fifties, many with children, or jobs, or both. They brought with them not only their children, who played around at the end of the room, but past religious experiences that impacted on their learning. The educational level of the group varied. Two young women had degrees but were not, for the most part, in employment. Several had trained for, and continued to work in, the field of health and education and one worked in the finance department of a private sector company but many of the women had spent their adult lives bringing up families. Certainly, the group did not see themselves as the sort of graduate class that Huq (2008) describes and they did not have the analytical skills that she describes to bring to bear on discussions. However, while not everyone attended every class, over time a sense of commitment emerged, both to individual study and to a shared endeavour. Around the edges of this stable grouping, new members continued to arrive for a few weeks, generally only to disappear again, as if seeking something they did not find. However, despite Azzim's saying that 'the sisters will help you catch up', by the second year this was no longer possible, and the group became, in effect, closed, though one older Bangladeshi woman did manage to join late and became one of the most able in the group. Azzim used to refer to some of the women as 'scholars' and the group shared humorously in this idea but they

also identified with his approach to learning, his seriousness and commitment. Parkin writes of this relational aspect of learning as a process of 'exposure to like-thinkers' and of the 'absorption of percepts and convictions such that . . . they become unquestioningly a constituent part of the person' (Parkin 2007: 52). In some ways, Azzim was far from being a 'like thinker' as far as the women were concerned. Yet, as a Muslim who taught himself Arabic in Guyana, a Guyanese in Saudi Arabia, a Muslim nurse in the NHS and a freelance teacher, he was an outsider who had had to slowly make his own way, and this was something the women, from their different positions as migrants, could identify with. Moreover, his approach to the place of women in Islam gave them equality in learning and worship and a space that allowed, or at least did not inhibit, a good deal of argument. Though the women were not knowledgeable about their religion at the start, and they accepted that they needed to learn from Azzim, they used the space to bring their own thoughts and engaged with him rather than passively submitting to his authority as the teacher.

The women brought within them their involvement with the wider society, through work and family responsibilities, and their response to Azzim's teaching was complicated by their existing ways of practising and the accommodations they had made, often without realising it, to the world around them. Unlike Mahmood's informants who seemed to deal with this in terms of their aim of bringing their lives into conformity with their perception of the demands of Islam, these women talked as if they saw themselves as embedded within a world of relational commitments. Assimilating the demands of Islam was therefore a more pragmatic, piecemeal process. For them the class was sometimes a part of, and sometimes in tension with these other areas of their life. They were seeking to become better Muslims but, for the most part, this was within the lives they already had rather than in the expectation of a radical break with the past. This latter radical path was sought by only a very few of those I met. Azzim's attitude towards such a choice was one of concerned scepticism because, in his opinion, it often turned out to be unsustainable, so that the person gave up their practice all together. The stance of the women in the Saturday class can be compared with that of Liberatore's (2013) informants. However, while some of the young Somali women in her study veered uneasily between periods of devout practice and a wish to return to the world of shopping and clubbing, among the women I am describing a less extreme set of contradictions were brought into more sustained contact, at least within the classes. These were individuals who had ongoing engagements with worlds that were not framed in terms of Islam – the worlds of

work, school, and contact with public services – as well as a desire to re-approach, as adult learners, the religion of their childhoods, now with the addition of something akin to what Berliner and Sarro (2007) describe as the transformative experience of understanding.

The class was an ethnically mixed group. Three were Mauritian women who had been involved in the Hackney group, while the rest were originally from North Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Eastern Europe, Somalia, Eritrea and Sri Lanka.⁸⁹ On the whole, the women wore Islamic dress, though it was mostly colourful, and sometimes more like an adaptation of the short dress worn over trousers that was fashionable at that time. Only a young North African woman, her friend who came across London to the classes, and an older Bangladeshi woman dressed entirely in black. Apart from the two North Africans, everyone had grown up outside the UK. Although they had all been brought up as Muslims within their own countries of origin, there were frequent references to how notional the Muslim character of their society of origin now seemed⁹⁰. As adults in the UK, they now felt there was something they needed to learn about their religion. While migration had created a different relationship to their religion and the need to take greater personal responsibility, it had involved not only removal from a familiar setting but coming to inhabit a society in which they were now a member of a minority. Roy (2004) suggests this creates a need for a more defined personal religious identity in the present but it also involves managing the past in the light of this new knowledge. For example, during a discussion about making time to pray at work in the UK, one of the Mauritian women said that although they were given time off for prayer in Mauritius, ‘many people, and I’m sorry to say, many women used the time to shop’. Some even felt that it was easier to find a prayer space, or more manageable to pray in public buildings here than in Mauritius, implying that non-Muslims left you free to pray here and your actions did not carry the same burden of an implicit social pressure on others to do so.

Though the women wanted to learn about what was deemed a correct form of practice, when they found out what it involved it was sometimes difficult to reconcile these new obligations with the other demands of their lives. That the classes continued was in part to do with Azzim’s commitment, the coherence of his own religious project as

⁸⁹ Only one Guyanese woman ever came. She was rather elderly and had poor eyesight and found the required reading too difficult.

⁹⁰ While this new consciousness may be the direct result of migration, there were indications that it was also fed by globalisation and parallel development among those who had remained in Mauritius (Salvatore and Eickelman 2004).

it had developed over time and its consistency both with the way he spoke about his earlier life and with the way he behaved in the classes. This offered the women a space within which they could identify both with Azzim's seriousness and commitment and with each other in their common experience of migration and the uncertainty about the nature of the religious legacy that their home societies had bequeathed them. This suggests a different kind of coherence from that sought by the women in Mahmood's study – not a coherence created by a direct equation with the coherence of the divine revelation but a humanly generated coherence, acquired slowly and partially through the integration of study and life experience. In this process, the social support of the class was an important element but in addition some members of the class knew each other as friends: as De Koning (2013) suggests, these are important elements in both embarking on and sustaining projects of religious engagement.

The struggle to learn

Initially the class discussions were rather informal but, as the membership became more regular, elements of a curriculum emerged consisting of learning the Arabic language (from scratch), the rules governing recitation through reading aloud short *suras* rather than through memorisation, theology and the rules of practices covering ablution, prayer, fasting, charity, and *haji*. Two textbooks were introduced on *tawheed* (theology) and *fiq as-sunna* (interpretations of the obligations of practice). At the start, no one spoke Arabic or understood its grammar structure – even the young North African woman had only picked up a little of the dialect spoken by her parents. As he had had to teach himself, Azzim seemed rather deaf to the pleas of the women who found it very difficult to understand the grammar or to keep up with the homework, given all their domestic responsibilities. The women could be quite combative and a gently bantering atmosphere developed around ironically 'gendered' disputes as to who had the greater domestic responsibilities, to be replaced at critical moments by a sudden shared seriousness. In a sense, the classes were always on the edge of issues of great seriousness in which all shared, regardless of gender – how will I be judged on the Last Day and where will I spend eternity? By the time my fieldwork ended there had been a marked improvement in the group's knowledge of Arabic and recitation and, somewhat reluctantly, Azzim let them know that they were now the most advanced of any group he had taught. They had reached a point where they had sufficient understanding of Arabic for Azzim to attempt to expand on some points of interpretation through an explanation of the grammatical

structure of a sentence in the Quran. Yet the process of learning was more than the acquisition of competence in Arabic or recitation. What was being learned also involved taking in, and identifying with, an idea of Islam that was at odds with both the identifications the women had grown up with and many of the ways in which they had so far managed their adult lives in London.

At the start, they all expressed feelings of ignorance about their religion and there were many dismaying moments when the women were faced with the realisation of how little they knew – on one occasion, early on, it was clear that they could not name more than a few *suras* (chapters of the Quran). Equally painful was the discovery that something they thought they knew was not, in Azzim's opinion, part of Islam at all. Though one of the women once summed up the situation by saying brightly, 'the first thing we have to do is change', it was hard to find repeatedly that religious ideas and practices they had grown up with, and had passed on to their children, were not considered Islamic. This also created concern for the spiritual well-being of parents and grandparents, not only in life but also in death, as these family members were now understood to be beyond the help of traditional rituals for the dead. Although a few women I met sought a radical and uncompromising transformation as something to which they were so committed that there was for them no gap between this aim and its implementation, this was not so within the class. Rather, the acquisition of a new perspective was experienced as a complicated process with gains and losses that created anxiety. Learning was therefore slow, uneven and painful. Aspects of this process can be compared to mourning in that it involved the giving up of old ways of thinking with their 'sense of coherence and belonging' (Berliner and Sarro 2007: 5) and the pain of a rupture in a former way of being that had been taken for granted and relied on (Zigon 2007).⁹¹

The women were preoccupied with how things were done 'at home'⁹² but they were not too fearful to talk about their own complicated situations. Their willingness to discuss how things had been done, and continued to be done, in their own community, created a sense of all being in the same position. The fact that everyone was now resident in a non-Muslim country allowed a space for a new shared perspective to emerge. As a culturally diverse gathering, the class embodied Azzim's argument that Islam stood

⁹¹ Mourning has a particular place in the model of ethical development within psychoanalytic object relations theory.

⁹² 'Home' was sometimes a reference to the family home in the UK and sometimes to their country of origin.

outside any one culture. Moreover, he felt that, in general, native speakers of modern Arabic, amidst all the changing meanings of a living language, were not necessarily better placed to interpret the Quran than someone, like himself, who had learnt Classical Arabic *de novo*. As a non-Arab Muslim from the periphery of the Islamic world, he pointed out the failure of many Muslims to embrace the universality of Islam that was manifested in the racism implicit in its internal hierarchy. Many discussions in the classes revolved around examples of this. Talking about the need to marry within their own societies, a Pakistani member of the class spoke of the pressure within her community to choose a partner from within your own district of Pakistan, to which Azzim added dryly, 'preferably from within your own village'. On an occasion when someone repeated the Prophet's warning that there would be seventy-two forms of Islam but only one would be correct, Azzim added 'and each group think they are the ones who are correct'. He saw in this the tendency of Muslims to form cliques and cults, to which people are drawn, rather than following Allah through the Quran.⁹³ He insisted that there would be no separate spaces in paradise, 'no special place for the Guyanese. We are all in the same ship, all making the same journey'.

However, within his idea of the unity of Islam, a space for different perspectives, and for the complexity of the interaction between them, was created by his references to different scholarly traditions. When Azzim first introduced the idea that there were different schools of interpretation, and asked members of the class which *mathhab* they belonged to, it was clear that the women had never thought about this. They had all been brought up within a single (different) *mathhab* linked to their different cultural origins, not realising it was not itself simply Islam: 'I didn't realise I was Hanbali. I just thought I was Muslim'. Azzim was critical of religious teachers who held that it was better to teach only one school of interpretation as otherwise people would become confused, since he felt it deprived people of vital knowledge. Certainly, the idea that different schools drew on different hadiths to guide their thinking, or might interpret the same hadith differently, was something new to the class. They were not able to make much use of this knowledge during my time with them; it created a space for legitimate diversity but also generated uncertainty. Azzim might be able to point to different interpretations as to how, for example, one should define the conditions under which it was permissible to amalgamate prayer or gain a dispensation as a 'traveller', but the women still wanted to know what

⁹³ There is an unavoidable irony in his own commitment to one view.

they should do and were reluctant to take the responsibility for weighing these different interpretations for themselves, defaulting to a situation similar to that in the lecture. If, as Azzim insisted, divine revelation could, and should, be thought about by ordinary Muslims living ordinary lives in the UK today, it required not only commitment to study but also confidence to think within this complex normative system, which as Azzim acknowledged in one discussion was 'more technical than nursing'. It requires something different from the seeking of opinions, or following your own thinking without an understanding of the text as seemed to be happening among some of Liberatore's (2013) informants. There was also an inevitable tension built into the idea that there could be talk about the divine revelation among individuals who were engaged, to varying degrees, in non-Muslim social and cultural settings that might be experienced as being at odds with that revelation. Yet it may be that it is precisely through individuals managing pragmatically to live in the light of both kinds of experience that the ideals of a religious tradition are upheld (de Koning 2013).

Many said that in the past, 'we were not taught to think about Muslim ideas . . .', so that the classes involved a new relationship to knowledge, an idea which for some was linked to their experience of having children in the UK school system. Some remarked on how different education is in the UK from back home: 'My children are taught to discover things'. However, the women had different capacities to take in the ideas that Azzim was teaching and, though he created an atmosphere in which they could be quite challenging in some areas, such as the calculating of different forms of wealth in relation to charitable giving (*zakat*), it was apparent that there was never any direct questioning of Azzim's theology. Even his insistence that the idea that God is everywhere was not Islamic went unchallenged, although it came closest to negating a deeply established and widespread assumption within the group, and evoked quiet responses to the effect that 'I have always told my children that God is everywhere'. Yet this idea of immanence never seemed to disappear from the women's preoccupations.

Myriad opinions

Though the group made steady progress in Arabic and recitation, where the acquisition of competence was hard but not contentious, the task of understanding Azzim's theology was made more difficult by the fact that, being open and interested in religious matters, the women found themselves in the midst of all sorts of competing ideas that were at odds with what they were being taught in the class and that they found hard to sift and

discriminate for themselves. This gave a very different picture of the plurality of ideas from that described by Mandaville (2007) in which different discourses develop along progressively more diverse channels as ‘authoritative pluralisation’ (ibid: 110) that can, as he puts it, provide an ‘epistemic “toolkit” eminently suited for global life’ (ibid: 105). The situation differed also from what Bowen (2012: 9) characterised as ‘the latitude available within Islam’. If the women in this class did not accept everything Azzim said without question, neither did they feel free to steer their own way through the divergent religious opinions they heard about. Most of the women at some point felt other Muslims had told them something about Islam which they urgently needed to bring to Azzim for his judgement. They sought his opinion on such matters as whether women could visit cemeteries, whether one could interpret dreams, and a favoured sleeping position. One woman asked whether you should touch your arms to the ground when you pray. She said she did not but had heard other views. Azzim acknowledged that there were different opinions about this which had to do with an idea that men and women should pray differently. However, he explained that the Prophet had made no such distinction, saying only ‘pray as you have seen me pray’. Many questions revolved around the use of the Quran – as a decorative item in a car, a gift when people moved to a new house or something you held over the head of a bride. At first the group found Azzim’s insistence that these practices implied treating the Quran as having magical powers difficult to absorb. He asked why they would think of holding the Quran over the bride’s head – ‘she should have the Quran *inside* her head not held over it’. When they said that the bridal Quran was for *baraka* (blessing) he answered, ‘*baraka* comes from reading, understanding and practising the Quran – otherwise you could just have thousands of Qurans in the house!’⁹⁴

The ideas that the women brought to the group could not always be identified as products of different interpretative traditions. At one time or another most of the women used the class to express their confusion at the plethora of views on the Muslim TV channels, the internet and passed by word of mouth that were so diverse that it was difficult to see how anyone accepted the claim that their origin lay in the Quran or the practice of the Prophet rather than, as Azzim would point out, from the limitless sphere of gossip. Often these ideas would be reported as having come through ‘a friend’. This sometimes gave cover for embarrassing breaches of core obligations to be discussed but

⁹⁴ This was reminiscent of his retort to a very literal account of the scene in the grave – ‘perhaps we should just put a piece of paper with the answers in with the body!’

it also allowed some of the women to bring very strange reports about Sufis piercing themselves but there being no blood, that there was something special about the number seven in Islam, a 'saint' who was said to be able to fly or that you could tell the future with star signs and tarot cards. This last was reported by an Eastern European woman who eventually dropped out of the group. Insisting that the Quran was the source of her friend's ideas, this woman added, 'But of course, everyone has their own reading of it'. Azzim responded sharply, 'It's not a jigsaw puzzle'. Though some ideas were more unusual than others, the questions and reports from 'a friend' or an item on a religious channel, often created widespread confusion with different people joining in to say that they had also heard something similar. In a quieter moment, away from this confusion, but relevant to this apparent loss of the capacity to discriminate, one of the women remarked that she thought people found it easier to give up traditional ideas about medicine than about religion. Azzim's response was that 'the Quran saves you from all of this . . . it teaches you how to think' and, perhaps to try and avoid becoming himself such an alternative source of knowledge, he added that 'your evidence should be the Quran and the Sunnah, not me'. He complained that 'Nowadays people are quoting the TV . . . this sheik said this or that . . . there's an ayah that will answer the question of 9/11 and 7/7 . . . but the only way you can answer these things is by evidence . . . not by word of mouth'. Later, he took the opportunity of a discussion about family disputes that bubbled up in the middle of a class to repeat the point about evidence. Someone talked about a relative who had been saying things about another branch of the family. It seemed that the relative had heard something bad and now there was nothing anyone could say to him that made any difference. Azzim cut across her account to ask, 'Where does the problem lie? It lies in his concept of information – someone tells him something and he takes it for a fact'. He explained that this was what was happening in gossip but also in the way religious information was passed on, and he referred to an ayah in the Quran about people receiving information and spreading it without asking if it was right or wrong.

Some of these opinions had a quality of 'New Age' spirituality about them which Roy (2004: 165) argues is a common feature of current popular religiosity across faiths. The woman who was the main source of these ideas seemed to want to challenge any limitations on what could be thought and to keep every possible option in play despite, or because of the firmness of Azzim's position. Though this individual could be seen as rather different to the other women in the class, some studies (Jeldtoft 2011) suggest just such an eclectic range of practice among Muslims in Europe and the class was often drawn

in as if something irresistible was created by this way of speaking. However, one such discussion was brought to a sudden halt by one young woman saying very seriously that she thought the problem was that Azzim was saying things that people did not want to know because 'once you know them there is no going back'. In saying this, she seemed to be voicing something from her experience of encountering her own ambivalent response to what she was learning in the classes, such that she understood the 'New Age' questioner as resisting the underlying, non-negotiable implications of accepting Azzim's theology. This remark suggests that a mental space had emerged within which she could gain the distance necessary to distinguish her own thoughts from those voiced by someone else and so reclaim the capacity to reflect on the implications of what was being said.⁹⁵ This intervention cut across the atmosphere of confusion in the class. Though it was not possible to see what impact it might have had on the thinking of others in the class, I would argue that it was an example of the triangulation that I described earlier – opening up a mental space not as a once-and-for-all achievement but subject to vicissitudes, a space to be gained and lost. The moment had something in common with the vignette Keane (2014) quotes, in which a Polish woman speaks in such a way as to create an ethical perception of a Jewish child. The woman seemed to know from experience that the villagers saw the child as a dog to be thrown down a well, while also finding within herself an awareness that they were all, in fact, in the presence of a child. She brought these two perceptions together in her minimal and, as it turned out, life-saving observation – 'She's not a dog after all'. Where this capacity to create an ethical intervention came from remains obscure since, as Lambek (2007) points out, it is not itself a conscious goal. This suggests that the emergence of moral states that are not the conscious outcome of ethical self-fashioning require a different account – one in terms of ongoing embodied states of relatedness to others that carry within them the potential to rise to consciousness as imaginative states that can sustain reflective and ethical awareness. If such states flow continuously through the body in its environment, recurrent patterns may create the more stable identifications through which reflectiveness, deuterio-learning (Bateson 1972; Rappaport 1999) and the capacity to learn from experience (Bion 1962) emerge.

Accepting new obligations; managing new anxieties

⁹⁵ This is reminiscent of the evangelical Christian idea of the necessity for a capacity of 'discernment' through which the voice of God can be distinguished from one's own thoughts (Luhmann 2007; Luhmann et al 2010).

On matters concerning home and family, the pull of tradition and habit often reasserted itself. Questions would arise about whether a family were right to want the body of a dead relative to be returned to Pakistan or whether one could accompany elderly parents planning to visit a shrine in India. The woman sitting beside me explained quietly that the shrine was the burial place of ‘what they call a *pir*’.⁹⁶ The questioner explained that she was under pressure from her father: ‘They’re saying you get everything you ask for there’. It was unclear whether the speaker felt herself drawn to this claim, which would certainly have been at odds with what Azzim was teaching, or whether she was uncertain if she had to refuse their request. First of all Azzim said it was ‘an Asian thing’ and that people in Guyana would go for three months to Pakistan and visit shrines instead of going to Mecca. He then passed on to saying something general about Sufis. The woman on the other side of me said, ‘I used to be into Sufism’. When Azzim finally returned to the question about the shrine, Azzim said that the woman should ask her parents ‘if this person is greater than the prophets because Islam doesn’t allow this even for the prophets. The Quran says, “Call on me and I will answer your prayer”’. All this was very difficult for the group. One woman said, ‘I can’t tell my mother she’s not praying in the right way’; and the original questioner also said she could not say this to her father about his planned trip. Two forms of Muslim life, that might manage to co-exist on a day to day basis, suddenly became incommensurable. In response to this painful atmosphere, Azzim softened his stance, first describing how, when he was young, he had thought he should tell older Guyanese Muslims of their mistakes but that he had learnt from experience that this was hopeless; he finished by saying that ‘we know it’s part of their heart because they believe it’s part of Islam’ – a moving, affectively embodied image I never otherwise heard him use.

Continuing in this lighter vein, Azzim referred to some of the practices that went on around him when he was growing up in Guyana and included a mixture of Hinduism and voodoo, to which the group replied, laughing as if with relief, ‘Ah well, we don’t do that!’. At this point I realised that the children, who had been playing as usual on the far side of the hall, had crept under our table and were sitting listening as if they sensed that the conversation was about matters close to home.

Precisely because such matters were so close to home, they caused anxiety as to the source of these errors. While in the other class I attended, which was run outside the mosque by a Bangladeshi ‘freelance’ imam, religious practices of dubious provenance

⁹⁶ A saint – living or dead.

were often humorously denoted as ‘a sub-continent thing’ (a designation that implicitly included Muslims in the problem), in Azzim’s class, customs that appeared within Muslim traditions that the group felt were strange and arbitrary, were often attributed explicitly to the influence of Hinduism. There were also recurrent references to the practices of a sheikh in a nearby mosque and to observations on holiday about ‘the strange things people believe in Turkey’. In this way, aspects of Muslim practice that seemed unusual or suspect could be disowned, but this was not so possible with ideas and forms of thinking they identified with more. Anxiety about the *jinn* presented special difficulties. Everyone had encounters with practices used to ward off *jinn* that were not those of the prophet. Though Azzim was sympathetic towards those accounts where he felt the idea of possession was the expression of psychological difficulties, he was critical where other people got drawn in and exacerbated the situation. One of the Mauritian women told me of having brought a friend to talk to Azzim because she had been given an amulet to wear for protection against her fears. He felt that the friend was suffering from depression and advised her to seek psychiatric help. By contrast, a story was related about a woman in Mauritius who, as a result of contacting the *jinn*, was able to tell the future or make people do things. It was insisted that this woman was a Muslim and that this power had been in her family for generations, an echo of the blending of Muslim and traditional practices in Mayotte (Lambek 2002; 2007). Azzim’s reply was ‘Now I *am* worried’. In this vein, people would ask whether it was alright to seek ritual help from Hindus and some would insist that rituals performed by non-Muslims had been successful. Azzim said that he did not doubt the successful outcomes they were claiming but asked them to consider what must lie behind it – the power of *shaitan*. He insisted that neither the *jinn* nor *shaitan* had power over you unless you turned to them and made a friend of them. This thought made a great impact on one of the women in the class who said that ‘she had never thought that if you make a relationship with God you cannot be overcome by *jinn*’. Azzim himself never spoke in terms of a ‘relationship to God’, only of trusting in Allah, but the woman’s shock at this new perception seemed to be based on the concreteness of a human relational image that had occurred to her in response to what Azzim had said.

The whole domain of the *jinn* was extremely frightening to the women and they found it difficult to speak of. One woman said that she told her young daughter to say her prayers so that she would not have bad dreams about the *jinn*. Azzim replied abruptly, ‘But this isn’t true – *shaitan* is not a scary animal. Children must learn to grow up to handle these thoughts in a legitimate way’. Rather than turning to forms of thinking and rituals

that he saw as being themselves based on the power of *shaitan*, Azzim's reply emphasised the need for a serious engagement with these thoughts as impulses inside human beings that had to be managed by being owned and known. Though he did not put it this way, it might follow that taking such conscious responsibility is, for him, one of the functions of 'a thinking mind'. Coming to experience this domain as a matter of trusting in God, understanding one's own state in biological and in psychological terms, and taking responsibility for one's impulses, rather than claiming them to be caused by *jinn*, was central to Azzim's effort to detach Islam from culture and tradition.

Berliner and Sarro (2007) write of religious transmission as taking place within a moral community but for this group there was a necessary rupture that had first to be lived through. Perhaps on a par with conversion, this meant having to detach oneself from the assurances of one set of traditional practices and relationships before one had yet managed to establish oneself firmly in a new moral community and a new identification. One might question whether such a new, consciously acquired community can ever fully attain the status of a taken-for-granted moral world to be inhabited without further effort or the risk of returning to old ways of being.

Protecting oneself from error

Discounting the more unusual views, there remained nonetheless a range of opinions to be navigated, and this created unease and uncertainty as to how one could know whether one's practice was correct or sufficient. This could be seen as a form of doubt from which some people sought refuge in additional practices that were then interpreted as obligatory (*fard*), such as the wearing of the *nikab*. Yet such doubts are difficult to resolve in this way. As Laidlaw (2014) indicates in his critique of Mahmood's theorising of her interlocutors' experience as the exercise of ethical freedom, in these terms failures of religious practice can only indicate the need to try harder to bring yourself into conformity with the ideal rather than creating the possibility of reflection. In a discussion about the decoration of graves, Azzim said that it should be limited to identifying information. Yet it was clear that the class knew of many elaborately decorated Muslim graves. One woman became troubled and preoccupied with the possibility that others might add such forbidden decorations to her grave after her death and against her wishes. She did not seem to be able to take in Azzim's view that she was not responsible for what others might do. Such situations pointed to the fact that, in addition to the myriad opinions about what Islam required, and Azzim's strict definitions and sometimes pragmatic responses to

particular situations, the women had their own private need to feel that they were meeting the standard they required of themselves and their own ways of dealing with the anxieties this caused.

For some, contact with non-Muslims became a focus for this sort of anxious concern, prompting questions about visiting non-Muslims when they were sick, accepting a drink or food from a non-Muslim, or dyeing the hair, which Jewish women were said to do. While those who voiced these concerns were not generally those most actively engaged with non-Muslims at work, these anxieties seemed to exist as if unconnected to a daily experience of living within a pluralist society, that might have been expected to have given rise to accommodations in forms of practice that modified the sharpness of these distinctions. Sometimes it did. As Das (2013: 77) puts it in relation to the accommodations between Muslims and Hindus in India that happened not 'at a deep theological level or through deliberative reasoning – it was as if a certain mode of speaking and feeling . . . [was] created by proximity and friendship.' Some weeks, this sense of 'proximity and friendship' was absent from the class, replaced by a series of concerns which, for the most part, Azzim did not seem to share. He would insist that, where the food or drink was itself permitted, it did not matter from whom you received it – 'It isn't the person [who gives it to you] that makes it *halal* (permitted); so as long as it hasn't been prayed over in a name other than Allah, it's fine'. But, for some of the women, this did not seem to settle their concerns. Picking up on what he indicated were misplaced scruples, Azzim said with deliberate provocativeness, that he thought some Muslims felt that even touching a pig or saying the word was forbidden, and judging by the response in the group some did indeed feel this. Nor did he agree with the opinion brought by someone to the class that one should not use multi-faith rooms because the angels did not come to such rooms. Though not always obvious and perhaps not always felt, there were occasions when it seemed these ideas of contamination by non-Muslims were widespread and connected with the fact that Jews and Christians were held to have corrupted their scriptures. Thus, one older member of the group disputed Azzim's view that a Muslim man could marry a Jewish or Christian woman. Though she agreed that it had been permitted by the Prophet, she was of the view that these faiths were no longer as they had been at that time and therefore the possibility of such a marriage was no longer open.

Azzim was clear and unambiguous as to the status of certain practices and could be flexible about those issues he felt did not warrant the religious scruples felt by the women. Yet the class often seemed in anxious uncertainty as what they should do about the traditional practices of family members or about the gap between their own habits of practice which fitted in with the demands of their lives, and Azzim's interpretations of their religious obligations, which did not. As the young woman I quoted earlier had suggested, there was something they did not want to fully know about Azzim's teaching. This, in turn, raised a further uncertainty about how one could know that one was practising correctly and with the proper intention. As someone asked, 'How do you know that you are on the right path . . . does Allah send you a sign?' Azzim took this up by asking the class if Allah sent a sign and if there was some kind of feeling they should have. The group responded enthusiastically: 'For me, it's a peaceful feeling inside myself'. Someone else suggested 'a feeling of internal happiness', others that 'When you wake up, you do feel different' or 'If I'm doing something wrong, I feel that'. One of the Mauritian said. 'I learnt to be a better Muslim here than in Mauritius, even though there you are surrounded by Muslims. Here I feel I've got to do *salat* (prayer), not just live for the sake of living. There was no awareness when I was there, even of Friday prayers; I was not practising before coming here, not really fasting'. As far as the women were concerned, their new attention to religious practice had an impact on their bodily-affective state and it was this that informed their responses to Azzim's question. However, after letting this conversation run on for a while, Azzim said firmly, 'The answer is that your knowledge must be profoundly established . . . *that* should be your guide, not how you feel about it. Some people are waiting for a nice dream or a voice but that might be from *shaitan*'. He spoke of meeting a Christian on a plane who had told him, 'I'm a happy man because I know the truth. I feel it,' Azzim said scornfully, 'That's no different from spiritualism . . . they are basically just believing in their own desires'. Given the way the women had responded to the original question, this was a hard answer, at odds with their underlying sense that their state of feeling *was* their point of orientation. Though it was consistent with what Azzim had always said about the divine revelation as an object to be grasped rationally, it seemed to run counter to all the complicated human considerations of which he was willing to take into account in social situations. For him, the Quran was a source of objective knowledge that had to be engaged with intellectually and this marked it off in an absolute sense from individual feelings in a way that cut across, quite shockingly, a taken-for-granted way of being and thinking among the women.

It seemed that Azzim's knowledge and experience allowed him a freedom to think about the challenge posed by new situations that most of the women did not feel they had. For some, as their commitment to their religious practice grew, this predicament found a resolution in self-imposed solutions to the uncertainty in which they sometimes found themselves. One young woman said her parents had suggested she seek advice from Azzim about a situation that had arisen in her new job. There was to be a reception at which there would be alcohol. Her manager had said that soft drinks would also be available and that she need not come near the bar, but she was still unhappy about the event. Somewhat to her surprise, Azzim agreed with both the manager and her parents, and could see no difficulty as long as she was not sitting down at a table with others to drink. In fact, there was an implication that he did not understand why she was so worried and we later heard that she had decided to stay away from the event.

Another younger member of the class had spoken from time to time of wanting to marry a religiously observant young man. When this event occurred, several members of the class were invited to the wedding in a mosque some distance away. A large hall was laid out with round tables and our group, together with children, joined those already seated. It slowly became clear that the wedding entailed complete gender segregation, with the women's celebration taking place in the hall of the mosque, away from the ceremony itself. This was a stricter interpretation of Islam than any of the other women in the class had expected or were accustomed to, and unlike other Muslim weddings I had attended. The bride was led into the women's hall by female relatives; we never saw her with the bridegroom. As everyone crowded round with their cameras to greet her, it was explained that the bride's own strict religious obligations meant that no photographs should be taken of her. Talking to her much later, I understood that in organising her wedding in this way, she had gone beyond what was usual within her culture, beyond her own deceased parents' religious practice and against the wishes of her married brothers and sisters. Though she regretted the upset this had caused, she felt that her new religious sensibilities demanded it. Both these young women seemed to have felt an urgent need to adopt a stricter level of practice than that suggested by Azzim, their family or the rest of the class and it is not unusual for young people to seek to be more 'Islamic' than their parents (Rozario 2011). However, unlike some of the women who dropped out of the other gender-mixed group I attended outside the mosque, or the women that Mahmood writes of who, in such circumstances, sought stricter teachers, neither of them left the class to go elsewhere. This suggests a different response to the difficulties of practice, one

that allows continuing contact with different views rather than demanding an equation between the individual and a particular way of framing a religious ideal.

The way in which Naila engaged with religious ideas and the fear of failure was in contrast to these two examples. Though a conscientious student and diligent in her religious practice, her approach to falling short of what she felt was required of her was based on a willingness to admit openly to personal failure and difficulty. It was Naila who made comments such as, 'I used to do this', and 'I have always told my children that'. Though she was actively engaged in her own development as a Muslim and her references to failure were not complacent, she retained her own voice. In a women's discussion group in another mosque to which I accompanied her, the topic was exemplary Muslim women. In answer to a request for examples, Naila suggested Hagar who she referred to as the wife of Ibrahim. She spoke of how Hagar and the infant Ishmael were left on a barren plateau by Ibrahim but said that 'Hagar's reaction wasn't anger, confusion or despair, as ours would have been, instead she asked Ibrahim if it was Allah's will. When he said that it was, Hagar replied that, in that case, Allah would not abandon them'. After a pause, Naila continued, 'We say that Allah is the provider, but we don't really believe it because we then go out of our way to organise things ourselves'. Though her contribution here reflects Azzim's thinking, she often spoke up in the class even when what she had to say seemed contrary to general expectations. Moreover, there was a tension between submission and independence in her telling of the story of Hagar, as there was in many of Naila's contributions. She also took opportunities to let me know, in private, of some of the conflictual situations in which she found herself – for example feeling that she *should* go to a pub for a leaving party out of friendship for those she worked with, or her decision to send her son to an Anglican secondary school rather than a private Muslim school in order that he would gain a broader understanding: Naila felt that his religious education was sufficiently covered by his attendance at an after-school madrasa. Despite her openness in the class, these were matters that she chose not to raise there, perhaps not wanting the many different opinions that would be forthcoming. I also felt that my position, as an outsider in the classes and in the mosque, allowed her to speak of those areas of her life where she found herself between different social worlds. Yet they were also moral worlds with which she felt herself to be actively engaged and the implications of which she tried to reflect on.

During my fieldwork, a tragedy befell Naila's extended family. A cousin died in childbirth, leaving a baby and three other young children. There was a very painful discussion in the class about the need to accept Allah's will, with many expressing their difficulty with this idea. As the group was breaking up, Naila looked at me and said with great feeling that now she understood something. 'We say that we accept the will of Allah, but now that this has happened and I must accept it, now I know what it means to be a servant of Allah'. She made an accompanying gesture of taking something from the space in front of her down inside herself, as if consuming an invisible object. Her words and very moving gesture drew attention away from the external appearance of accepting God's will, enacted in ritualised speech, to the hidden effort it involved. Naila acknowledged the presence of a natural, internal resistance to absorbing such a shocking experience as being the will of God. Though her words were poignantly expressive, her gesture conveyed a sense that Naila experienced herself to be in a state in which language-based reasoning was breaking down – she was trying to manage the kind of fluid state in which the 'body registers its involvement with its sensory surroundings' (Hirschkind 2006: 77). While it did not resolve her distress, her gesture gave a bodily image to her sense that the situation required her to retain this painful experience inside herself and conveyed the hope that, if she did this, *something* would happen. This something could not be the undoing of the tragedy but might be a transformation in which her pain was experienced within a moral domain. Her action suggested an embodied mental function, akin to Azzim's idea of a 'thinking mind', that was able to effect such a transformation – a function that may re-establish what Crapanzano (2004: 104) calls a prayerful attitude, as distinct from the concreteness of actual prayer that is *to* someone, or something, *for* something (2004: 104). A prayerful attitude is, he suggests, akin to the elusiveness of hope. It also seemed, in this example, to be part of an effort re-create the shattered wholeness of a moral domain and to re-establish a way of being within it.

The conflict between the commitments of religious practice and the demands of everyday life

If Azzim showed flexibility in relation to everyday life, he was much stricter about the details of practice around prayer and fasting. The women found their encounter with this quite difficult as it revealed the accommodations they had assimilated in the course of their lives. One woman asked about what she obviously took to be a known and accepted dispensation. She said that if she woke late in Ramadan, so that she had missed the time

to drink, she would take just a sip of water. Azzim dismissed this immediately as having no foundation. He was similarly unimpressed by various examples that were brought of the legitimate dispensations to combine prayers under certain circumstances or to dispense with them when travelling. While being too ill or too tired to pray was something that only the individual and God could know, he seemed sceptical about the women's claims to meet the requirements for these dispensations. They would argue with him and complicated discussions ensued about journeys they had made or were going to make, plane routes and prayer times. But Azzim made it clear that he planned his travel in order to ensure that he *could* pray at the right times, rather than finding himself in situations where he could not. Despite their increasing attentiveness to their religious practice over the period I knew them,⁹⁷ it emerged that this way of looking at the matter was quite the opposite of how many of the women had seen their obligations. One asked, 'So you're saying that making sure you can pray should be the priority?' Clearly one can both know something and not prioritise it in practice, just as there is a gap between repeating the phrase that indicates the acceptance Allah's will (*inshallallah*) and actually doing so.

In one class, a woman wanted to ask about 'when we forget *salat* (prayer)', apparently expecting to be told how to make up the omission: the class was shocked to learn that this was not possible. Azzim insisted that the only thing you could do was express *tauber* (regret) and start to pray five times a day. This produced a sigh from some people who had thought prayer was like something you owed that could be made good later. Azzim was insistent that this was not so. One had to accept responsibility for what had happened – an idea similar to that put forward by Lambek as distinguishing the particular nature of moral responsibility (2010: 53). Azzim was adamant that it was not a matter of making up for something not done. Someone said that in Mauritius people say that they will watch a movie and make up the prayer later and, as often happened, another person added, 'I used to do that'. Azzim again said, 'No, there is nothing like that. Prayer is for the appointed time.'

Following an explanation of something called 'corrective *sujuds*', extra prostrations that needed to be undertaken when you became aware that you might have inadvertently missed something in your prayer, one of the women said she did not understand and, unusually, Azzim replied sharply, 'That's because you already have your own way of doing

⁹⁷ For example, I learnt from several of the women that they were now rising for dawn prayers and then going back to bed.

it'. Of course, all the women came with their own way of being Muslim, their own way of doing things, to which they felt an attachment and, much as they engaged with Azzim's thinking, the claims of relationships embedded and embodied in earlier forms of practice and ways of thinking remained. For them, the process of learning about their religion as adults was not only an intellectual engagement. It involved a painful disengagement from religious forms that carried the embodied relational commitments theorised as everyday religion (Schielke and Debevec 2012). Though this could be a source of anxiety, there were also indications that these difficulties could sometimes be met by improvisation and humour. During a discussion about prayer and the problem, outside of a mosque, of finding the correct direction in which to pray, one woman, whose job involves quite a lot of local travelling as a community nurse, said that she worked out the direction for prayer in terms of where she was in relation to her cousin's house, but added 'Sometimes when I'm out in Chingford it gets complicated'. Though Azzim suggested prosaically that she buy a prayer mat with a special compass, the woman's remark, which was made with humour, was also, I think, intended to carry her complicated sense of the compromises and approximations of daily life and the mundane geography of family relations within which she felt she was still operating. Moreover, this was a woman whose work involved her in visiting the homes of the dying in the middle of the night. Though the class never challenged Azzim's radically transcendent theology which it seemed that, at some level, many could not accept, they could, and did, retain a sense of the reality of their own lives, demands and commitments.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This account of Muslim lives within a mosque has been organised around the distinction between collective prayer, sociality and religious study. I have used my material to ground the argument that a moral world comes into being not only through the dissemination of theological ideas and the practice of collective and individual ritual obligations, but also in the complexity of feelings and relatedness as they emerged in the interweaving of these domains of activity with sociality. The fact that my research site was a mosque, rather than the extended web of lives lived across multiple settings, creates a focus on the intersection of these different aspects of communal life. Though I encountered different forms of engagement with Muslim practice among those I met at the mosque and a range of reflective awareness about this, participation in a congregation, however erratically or minimally, gathers up and gives form and continuity to experience. Thus my starting point was collective prayer, whether in the ritual of Friday or on other occasions when people prayed together in public. Though I develop my argument to include a wider understanding of the communal life of the mosque and the complexity within it, prayer remained an important ground of common experience that took place regularly and predictably and was open to all, whether they attended not.

The mosque as a physical structure with different internal areas for the public rituals of Islam and the social events of the community created the context for a collective attempt to live 'a morally sound life' (Dahlgren and Schielke, 2013) that was not reducible either to the efforts of an individual to live religiously or completely encompassed by Islam as a discourse. For many of those I met, religious and social commitments, being Muslim and being Guyanese, were woven together through the fabric of ordinary events. This is a view of 'ordinary' Muslim lives that goes beyond what can be understood within the framework of Islam; it includes the textures of sociality and communal life as a moral source (Rasanayagam 2011; 2013). Though this moral world was instantiated in different material forms – as collective prayer, sermons, teaching and social events – it is currents of relatedness, to both human and spiritual others, that carry the resources to manage failures from within and challenges from without.

I have suggested that bodily-affective states and their transmission between people carry fundamental qualities of intersubjectivity and the potential for awareness, and a sense of responsibility for the state of vitality within a social world that constitutes a moral

sensibility. The moral life of the mosque was carried in the unscripted responses of individuals to one another in the unfolding unpredictability of everyday sociality as much as in the synchronised comportment of ritual. There is an account within psychoanalytic object relations theory of the infant's dawning perception of a social world as not only a cognitive achievement, but also growing out of feeling states that extend beyond the self to include the awareness of others. In the course of development, such feeling states become our species-wide capacity for a profound sense of dependence on others, not only particular others, but in that larger more abstract sense that is evoked by such phrases as 'the human condition'. Both forms of consciousness of others are present in the sociality of everyday life. As Rasanayagam (2011: 164) puts it, 'a Durkheimian understanding would locate transcendence in the super-organic nature of society as an object above and beyond the individual. I seek to explore the transcendent quality of experience itself, in the immersion within a sociality that exists within and between persons, that is at the same time apprehended as extending beyond the contingency of any individual life. By participating appropriately in a household or wider community . . . individuals are immersed in a web of relations and obligations that locate them outside their own lives, a location that enables moral reasoning. Moral selves are not just the reflections or enactments of a pre-existing social order but are creative and continuously developing understandings that emerge from experience'.

From the perspective of many involved in Muslim renewal, Guyanese Islam, and even the practice of some in the Saturday women's class, would be regarded as failing, deficient in textual knowledge and practice, and not observing gender-separation or appropriate distancing from non-Muslims. Yet the Guyanese set a positive religious and moral value on gender-mixed sociality and on the accommodation of other faith traditions, as they do on the prayerful framing of social occasions and life-cycle events. The tension between the different ways of being Muslim that were present within the mosque reflected different attitudes to the inevitable gap between human ideals and the contradictions, ambivalence and failures that are the painful realities of ordinary life. I have described how this gap is managed in different ways. Some, like the young woman who wanted to be a religiously correct Muslim bride, seek to bring themselves into conformity with their view of the divine will. Others seem content to protect the ideal through the distinctions and differences that surround ritual, without necessarily feeling that such practices should extend out into the mundane world – the kind of distinction made by a Muslim community in Sumatra between the 'messiness of the human world

and the perfection of Islam' (Simon 2009: 258). Yet, for many Guyanese and Mauritians I got to know, and those who identified with them, being Muslim was not just inevitably, but properly lived out collectively within and through the acknowledgment of diversity and the contradictions of human culture, in which both men and women participate. It is not that the Guyanese lived lives that were always consistent with these ideas, but that these were the values to which they had recourse in moments of difficulty. They expressed their shared moral commitments through a pragmatic orientation to the unpredictability of engaging with others, rather than through a fixed, text-based understanding of their religious obligations. Yet within the mosque, this view had to be held alongside other Muslims who saw their own cultural and theological perspectives as offering the certainty of being the only right way. What was involved in managing these tensions and in balancing the claims of different perspectives was not taking up an abstract position, but a matter of the lived moment, something that must be accomplished in and through other things. This stance presumes a space between a conscious engagement with the explicit rules of a tradition, on the one hand, and immersion in a way of life that is largely beyond awareness, enacted but not reflected upon, on the other. It is this space that the anthropology of everyday religion and 'ordinary' Muslim lives has explored and to which my research seeks to contribute. This perspective shifts attention away from a religious tradition as transmitted through formal pedagogic processes to the multiple ways in which individuals actively create and come to know and inhabit their world, not only cognitively but emotionally and through bodily states, and to the ways in which this capacity is communicated.

To gather up the different aspects of Guyanese lives within the mosque and what is, for them, morally at stake within ordinary situations, I will give a description of the younger of the two Bangladeshi mosque imams, Bilal, in his role as a religious teacher of young children. It is a task he undertakes in a way that makes particularly transparent the exchanges that take place. A return to the apparent formality of a class may seem at this point paradoxical, but I will draw attention to the fluid processes within it and the complexity of what is being offered to the children. Here prayer, sociability and learning were all present as they were within the larger context of the mosque; on this small scale, the intersubjective states that are fostered in these different experiential domains can be seen to feed into, shape and sustain one another. It is for this reason, rather than as an example of formal pedagogy as such, that I will use this situation to re-introduce the themes of my dissertation.

Bilal was chosen by the mosque trustees as being sympathetically responsive to Guyanese views and his presence within the class reflects that Guyanese view. It also conveys his own sense of balance between his religious obligations and an ethical capacity to attune to others and the realities of the world beyond the mosque. Bilal's stance bridged the gaps between textual knowledge and the cultural traditions of ordinary Muslims, and between the formal rituals of Islam and the Guyanese sense of community. This description of Bilal is intended to re-connect the practical doing that characterised much of the life of the mosque, as elsewhere, and the reflections of some that illuminated their experiences of its moral qualities; the link between these two different modes of being was made visible in the process of teaching children and supporting their learning. To highlight the nature of Bilal's presence I will also refer to an earlier contact I had with a traditional girls' madrassa class in which a fixed body of knowledge was committed to memory without attention to understanding its meaning (Eickelman 1978). If this was an example of a traditional style of Islamic pedagogy, Bilal's teaching suggests the emotional complexity with which a rational objectifying stance to Islam as a body of knowledge may be inhabited and transmitted.

The transmission of moral capacity

Bilal was a young man in his mid-twenties. He preached on Fridays at a local mental health unit and occasionally at the mosque, took weddings and funerals and led prayers during the week. He took a class for children and another for adult men and represented the mosque at various community events, including the borough commemoration of Remembrance Sunday. His way of conducting himself in public conveyed both the living of a committed and knowledgeable Muslim life among the Guyanese and within a non-Muslim majority society and a thoughtful engagement with the emotionally complex experience of doing so.

I got to know Bilal because he was willing to let me sit in on a gender-mixed children's class for about twelve children aged between four and eleven years old, meeting on Saturdays⁹⁸. When I first attended, it was explained to me that the children were from second-generation Guyanese and Mauritian families who had not really

⁹⁸ Although, looking back on their arrival in London, Amina, the wife of Mr Rahman, had taken a relaxed view of such matters, it was clear that the trustees were moving towards encouraging formal religious education for children within the mosque. A dedicated space for teaching was planned for the new extension built after the end of my fieldwork.

practised their religion, and that the children therefore lacked a background familiarity with Islam. On later visits, it seemed that this demographic had changed and a wider spread of children now attended, including the daughter of one of the women in the Saturday class. Bilal offered a view of Islam that was in marked contrast to that in the traditional, gender-segregated class for girls I had encountered during a previous short fieldwork project. Not formally part of the mosque, the girls' class took place daily after school, in a section of the old hall screened off from that used by an equivalent boys' class. It was used mainly by more recently arrived East African families; the girls were all dressed in black *jilbab* and *hijab*. The class was taken by women from Uganda and Somalia, who taught Quran recitation through the rote learning of small sections of the Quran, with little, or no explicit discussion of religious ideas. They tended to avert their attention from questions the girls sometimes raised about their lives as pupils of mainstream borough schools. One young girl asked about listening to music during school music lessons and was left looking troubled and uncomfortable by the firm reply that music was forbidden, because it filled the heart and left no space for God.

Though the bulk of the time in Bilal's class was also spent in learning to read and recite Arabic, his style of teaching and manner towards the children drew on a different conception of the role of a teacher from that of the women who took the girls' after-school classes. Initially educated in the mainstream state system in London, as a teenager Bilal attended a religious boarding school at which he eventually trained to be an imam, coming to work at the mosque straight from this training. Particularly striking was Bilal's willingness to acknowledge the children's involvement in secular activities and Christian festivals like Christmas because, as he explained in conversation with me, he wanted to dispel the conflict they might otherwise feel existed between Islam at the mosque and the world outside that both the children, and he himself, inhabited. Bilal conveyed that he saw his role as helping the children to manage the complications of their lives in a non-Muslim majority society and, I would argue, this was accomplished, in part, by the way he himself managed such moments of perturbation when they emerged in the class. On various occasions when children were absent, he would enquire if anyone knew where they were. Other children, who were related, or who went to the same school, would then supply the information that the absent child was participating in some kind of performance or was at a party. Bilal would make gently joking comments about these activities – '*Another party?*' – but he accepted that, if a class takes place on a Saturday, this will happen. The religious responsibilities of the parents in such matters, that might

also have been a source of tension in these situations, were, tactfully, not mentioned. He used humour to ease those situations where different aspects of the children's lives collided. When a boy dropped a children's book on Islam in the bath so that it dried with the pages stuck together and could no longer be read, Bilal took it from him and carefully peeled the pages apart while, at the same time, enquiring whether the book had jumped or was pushed. His way of responding to the children can be understood as both a conscious stance, which he could explain and justify, *and* as emerging from his way of 'being in the world' (Zigon 2007), an ongoing way of comporting himself that extended beyond self-awareness into patterns of response that were the embodied outcome of his own life experiences. While such patterns emerge from within a lifeworld, this does not imply conformity to a single, coherent model. The self-consistency sought by the women in Mahmood's study was the conscious outcome of their response to an Islamic tradition and the claims to consistency within a discourse. Bilal managed the contradictions and difficulties that emerged in the class in different registers of being – through what he said, how he conducted himself and how he responded to the children creating a sense of balance between the mosque and the outside world. Since he has undergone a theological training and is practicing the obligations of Islam, the contrast with the accounts of the piety movement is not with respect to religious knowledge and commitment but rather reflects a different response to Islam, the non-Muslim world in which he grew up and the cultural traditions of the Guyanese. In the process, he created a new pedagogic setting for the children.

Bilal seemed comfortable with my presence and, on occasions when he was called out to deal with something elsewhere in the mosque, would say, 'Judy is in charge and she will help you with your homework if you ask her', which some of the youngest ones did. This was because he knew that I could read Arabic, but it was also indicative of his acceptance of my presence as a non-Muslim undertaking research on ordinary Muslim practice. While this response was consonant with the way he presided over the classes, and no doubt reflected aspects of Bilal's personality, it also indicated an attitude towards uncertainty and difference that can be linked to qualities in his religious stance. He conveyed a sense of someone who felt able to use his intellectual and emotional capacities freely. Though the senior imam agreed several times to meet me, somehow our arrangements to do so never materialised, and I felt he was less comfortable with the idea of my presence but perhaps, as a man with a family to support, also busier and more burdened than Bilal. Whether one can gain access to the lives of others in fieldwork may

be in part a matter of how one introduces oneself, as Dessing (2013) suggests, and 'the researcher's ability to negotiate an identity that is betwixt and between' (Lukens-Bull 2007) but it also depends on whether there is a space in the lifeworld of those we wish to study that an ethnographer can meaningfully occupy. The availability of such a space depends on the presence among those whose world we seek to understand of an idea of an unknown other whose wish to observe and to understand is felt to be mutually beneficial rather than a source of threat. This in turn reflects an attitude to the nature of 'knowing' more generally and to the place accorded to emotion with it. Bilal, like Azzim, offered me such a space.

Bilal generally wore religious dress, a long white *thobe* and lace cap which marked out his role, but he sometimes arrived in his ordinary clothes, explaining that he had been delayed by his other part-time job as a driving instructor. On one occasion, he arrived limping in a tracksuit, telling the class that he had injured his leg playing football. The children were well aware that he was an enthusiastic Sunday footballer – 'as long as there isn't a funeral or wedding I have to take at the mosque'. During the class, he sat on the floor surrounded by a circle of children. Most of the children wore ordinary clothes, with all-in-one *hijabs* for the girls. At the start of the lesson, they handed him envelopes with the payment for the class, or explained that they had forgotten it. News of a new baby at home or a grandmother visiting from the family's home country would be offered while he took the envelopes – 'Oh, a used envelope – recycling, that's good isn't it?' He set a low book-stand in front of him for the children to put their books on when they read to him and placed his phone at his side, answering some calls but just glancing across at the screen in response to others. There was a large ability range within the class – some struggled to recognise the letter sounds of Arabic while a few were learning to read brief passages of the Quran. The children were called up to read to him the pieces they had prepared during the week, while the rest of the group practiced, chatted or fooled around quietly. Mostly the children were eager to read and formed up like a line of twittering birds, whispering to each other while waiting their turn. However, on one occasion, a little girl burst into tears at the prospect, causing the others around her to laugh. Bilal hushed them, explaining her distress by saying, 'She is a passionate girl who wants to do well'. His attentiveness to the children in correcting their mistakes and in encouraging and congratulating their efforts, conveyed an awareness of their feelings and a willingness to help the class as a whole to manage them. This was accomplished in a way that addressed both the overt task in hand *and* facilitated the subtle intersubjective processes taking

place out of, or on the edge of, awareness by which the children might come to identify with the moral potential of what they were learning. This, I suggest, was not so much a matter of what he taught as his way of teaching and responding to them individually and as a group.

From this perspective, a central element in this process of transmitting a moral capacity, by which the children could internalise and embody aspects of Bilal's presence, was his willingness to accept their way of being, not only by responding to their questions, but by *absorbing* what it was that was happening in the room with the children. These currents within the class can be described in terms of the intersubjectivity of bodily-affective processes researched by developmental psychology but are also consonant with an account given by psychoanalysis. In a paper explicitly concerned with the relevance of psychoanalytic ideas to anthropology, Lambek (2002: 200) distinguishes between processes of introjection (the taking in by an individual of feeling states from others in the outside world) which he argues could be usefully taken up by anthropology, and projection. The latter describes a process by which an individual may rid themselves of the awareness of feelings, often by provoking them in others, which he suggests belongs to the domain of psychopathology. Though projection in this sense may be a necessary means of maintain emotional equilibrium that taken to extremes constitutes a pathological process, it is possible to see projection as a pre-reflective form of embodied communication (Bion 1962). However, for the communicative potential of projection to be realised, it requires a relationship, the presence of someone who registers and responds to its bodily-affective impact, thereby transforming it into a communication.⁹⁹ Such a response may consist of a non-verbal adjustment of an encounter that takes place out of awareness, or it may involve its reflective transformation by placing the event within an interpretive frame. It is this level of mutual responsiveness that I understand Zigon (2007) to mean by the inter-subjective moral background of the social world. He designates it 'moral' because it is a relational rather than simply physiological process. I suggest that in the class, Bilal was registering and responding (not necessarily always consciously) to this intersubjective background, as the children were responding to him, and to one another. They were gaining experience of learning, of being part of a group of children, within a Muslim space. Sometimes his responses took a verbal form – an enquiry, a joke, a protective remark – that acknowledged the children and the task of learning to

⁹⁹ In the absence of such a transforming relationship projection would continue to operate but within a less mindful domain.

be Muslim. The response could have been otherwise, as it was in the example of the girl who asked about listening to music in school. Both teachers are in the middle of an ongoing situation and both kinds of response carry the potential for a moral, rather than a physical account – ‘music fills the heart’ – rather than a response that only indicated that the remark had not been heard. The traditional woman teacher responded in a way that conveyed, unambiguously, her view that music was incompatible with Islam; Bilal felt he needed to enable the children to live as Muslims in a world in which musical performances and parties existed.

Bilal’s response is, in part, a considered judgement as to what is best in the circumstances but it is also of a piece with his attuned responses to the children. If, in Zigon’s terms, Bilal’s comportment maintained a moral background, his ethical interventions, in choosing to interpret absence for a party in a light-hearted manner or in protecting the crying child by attributing her tears to strong feelings, also drew on his own internal background understandings and identifications. His manner conveyed that these reparative interventions were well within his capacity as their teacher and a Muslim adult, and that this was a task he took responsibility for on their behalf. By contrast, within the religious framework of the teacher of the girl who listened to music, the response to the disruption caused by her question was to ensure that the child understood the implications of a heart with no space left for God and to present her with a form of comportment that reflected this view; the teacher did not appear to absorb the tension or help the child to manage the situation. The dilemma, and the uncomfortable feelings that surrounded it, were left for the girl to address. Though there was a verbal interaction between them, it did not offer a shared language in which to think about the experience of failure or a social context in which to manage it (Schielke 2009; Liberatore 2013). Faubion (2011: 85) takes issue with Zigon’s (2007) distinction between the moral and the ethical, as non-conscious and conscious responses respectively, implying a break in the continuity between these states. Both may be said to be rooted in and emerge from the same bodily-affective registers of unconscious intersubjectivity. The direct bodily sense of another’s state engenders the subtle attunements that make ‘keeping going’ possible but also feeds into that explicit, reflective, understanding of relationships in their social and discursive contexts that informs ethical judgement. Though the atmosphere was different, this continuity in the patterning of feeling states manifesting in different registers was apparent in both Bilal’s and in the traditional teacher’s ways of being with the children. This continuity between different registers of experience links the embodied

sociality described in Chapter 4 with the way some voiced their thoughts in Chapter 5, and renders the apparent randomness of everyday life a medium in which significant shared social experiences are carried. Both embodied feeling-states and verbal thought express in different ways that current within the flow of everyday life from which an experience of inhabiting a moral world arises. The nature of the relationship between these registers may be such that moral reflectiveness and creativity emerge, but there is an inherent tension between them that Chitrali villagers experienced as the danger that thought and feeling might produce an outcome destructive of real understanding (Marsden 2005). This is a tension that I have linked earlier to the neuroscience perspective of McGilchrist (2010).

Though Bilal maintained an approach that must have been familiar to the children from their primary schools, he would become serious at prayer time. After a lesson about praying five times a day, the children had been asked to memorise, at home, the names of the prayers and the time periods within which the different prayers should be performed. When, the following week, he asked one of the older boys about the homework, the boy read out the names and times as pairs of numbers. Bilal joked that he had made it sound as if they were football scores, as if this was entirely understandable, but when, shortly after, the call to prayer sounded, he told the children to listen carefully to the words and then withdrew his attention from them to recite the words quietly to himself. As the children left the room to pray, he reminded the girls, who went through to the balcony, to pay proper attention, rather than chatting. There was often at least one adult woman on the balcony who, even if unknown to any of the children, would assume responsibility for shepherding the girls into a line. On other occasions, my accompanying them may have kept Bilal's presence in mind so that the girls were able to organise themselves. Only once did I feel I had to intervene actively and that was when there had been a delay, during which the girls began a game of running along the chairs at the back of the balcony. Bilal went downstairs with the boys to the men's prayer hall to lead the prayer. On these occasions, I sometimes stood near the balcony railing from where I could watch him lead the boys, and any men present, in the afternoon prayer and so witnessed a further transformation, which the girls, like the women on the balcony, did not see directly in the way the men and boys did. Though there were opportunities to see something of this transformation at other times, this was a gendered division that remained even for the Guyanese. Bilal the young man, keen footballer, part-time driving instructor, and friendly teacher, became an adult performing his own religious obligations

with seriousness, and an imam leading other adults in this duty. To see an adult withdraw from an ordinary engagement with the world into prayer, as happened with the infants and their mothers on the balcony, brings the religious domain into focus in a different way from the more continuously disciplined demeanour of the traditional teachers of the girls' after-school class. Though the reverse of a 'moral breakdown' (Zigon 2007), such moments of heightened moral sensibility stood out from the background way in which Bilal conducted himself, attentive to the children but also aware of and, like his phone, accessible to the other concerns of his life. This conscious internal focus, emerging out of a background of attentive attuning to what was going on around him, lent a distinctive quality to his presence – that of a man with a religious life of his own, who recognised and could speak of strong feelings in the children as well as a being able to interact with them in a playful way. The classes offered the children not only an opportunity to learn about Islam and to learn to read Arabic but an experience of being with someone with an engaged moral sensibility, who wanted them to learn how to be Muslim as a form of moral life, and with whom they might come to identify.

Ethical capacity, pedagogy and the developmental process

Bilal's Saturday afternoon class and the traditional girls' after-school class offered contrasting versions of the pedagogic process with contrasting aims, though not necessarily predictable outcomes.¹⁰⁰ Both offered the opportunity to learn religious skills and to assimilate and identify with a way of being in the world. Whatever their private religious experience, the women teachers in the traditional class sought to present a model of self-contained, bodily comportment rooted in compliance to Islam and the avoidance of that which was deemed religiously inappropriate, in accord with Mahmood's analysis of ethics and piety among her informants. Bilal, on the other hand, communicated a view of Islam as embedded in the world as he found it, accommodating an involvement with non-Muslim others in the local community, a view consonant with that of the Guyanese trustees. Yet his religious practice also suggested the capacity to withdraw temporarily from that world to an internal focus, to a mindfulness of God. This constituted a coherent way of 'being in the world' but a coherence of a different kind from that sought through the piety movement – a sense of coherence that emerges through the experience of managing the contradictory realities of human being is qualitatively different from that

¹⁰⁰ Some of the young Somali girls I first met in the after-school class were among those chatting on the stairs during the Ramadan recitations (Chapter 2).

based on the exclusion of human contradiction through the equation of the self with divine command. Though in some ways Azzim took a Salafist view on the need for Muslims to know and practice in accordance with the texts of Islam, there were indications that were not consistent with this way of construing his religious position – not only his views on gender and music, but also his insistence that one must approach the text with ‘a thinking mind’, an individual interpretive stance that Hidayatullah (2014) argues is at odds with a Salafist approach to the Quran. The phrase ‘a thinking mind’ conjures an image of an organism functioning within an environment, one that suggests coherence as a potential outcome of the natural functioning of life processes. As such, it is something that can be supported but not taught.

Recent work in anthropology has linked the formation of ethical capacity with the nature of the pedagogic process, the paradigm for which is Aristotle’s account of the cultivation of virtue and the place of erotic relationships with adult men through which Greek youths became able to fulfil the expectations of maturity within society at that time (Faubion, 2001; 2011; Laidlaw, 2014). This approach to the making of virtue and personhood within a cultural discourse has influenced the ethnographic accounts of the creation of a pious Muslim self. Though Mahmood argues that the discipline of pious self-fashioning is the free submission to a tradition, rather than an externally imposed project, Laidlaw (2013) suggests that though engagement may initially be freely chosen, it requires that an ideal form of selfhood is internalised and identified with in such a way that the space of reflective freedom, essential to the ethical, is closed down. Ethical capacity, Laidlaw argues, requires a different pedagogic process – one in which the relationship between teacher and pupil promotes maturation, expressed both as the potential for the latter to move into the position of the former and as the sustaining of an openness to the complexity and contradictions of external reality and the internal states of ambivalence that this stirs up. Maturation is the unfolding of a life process. As such it can be protected and nurtured or derailed but not created or taught.

Faubion directly links what he sees as the capacity for complexity required for *autopoiesis* as gained through experience of human being in the course of development: ‘Individual human beings typically display such complexity, yet do so only after a considerable course of socialisation has taken place, only after a considerable dose of the intersubjective has already been incorporated into the self (and hence are never individuals in their pure individuality)’ (2011: 119-120). The argument that human beings

are formed in, and through, intersubjectivity is the basis of the link between the work of developmental researchers like Trevarthen and Hobson, psychoanalytic object relations theory and the relevance of both to anthropology. This perspective suggests the relationships of infancy and childhood, and the vulnerability and ambivalence of the infant's dawning sense of the other as both separate and urgently needed, not only as the primary foundations for an ethical engagement with reality but also offering a particular understanding of the processes of socialisation and pedagogy. If the pedagogic process is one in which a teacher consciously inducts the pupil into the mastery of exemplary practice as a third object, the relationship between carer and infant, adult and child, is itself both the medium and outcome of human developmental process. From this perspective, it is in the developmentally facilitating relationships of infancy and childhood that the identifications are established which enable later forms of learning through relationships with subsequent teachers. This, in turn, suggests that ethical capacity is not limited to formal teaching about a separate object of knowledge, for example the Quran, or conscious projects of self-fashioning, but includes that which is absorbed in the everyday experiences of living alongside others – the congregation as it gathers for prayer, for the *iftah* meal or for a memorial event as much as in listening to lectures or going to classes. These events are spaces in which 'ordinary' Muslims exercise moral capacity – an active and creative capacity that cannot be understood in terms of the explicit obligations of scholarly traditions or immersion in unreflective forms of traditional practice (Marsden 2008).

Living with the gap between the ideal and reality

Understandings of the gap between the ideals of a tradition and the reality for those who try to follow it are of central importance to anthropology, as they are to the religious practice of those whose lives the discipline studies. Difficulties of various kinds emerged within the different domains I described within the mosque and preoccupied those I got to know there. Yet the way these problems were understood and managed contrasted with recent studies of Muslim practice. Schielke (2009) describes the failure of disciplinary practices to produce the desired pious states for some and, as a result, their difficulty in maintaining their motivation to practice. In the accounts given to Gregory Simon by those of his Sumatran informants who had ceased to pray, there seemed to be nothing that could rescue them from their state of hopelessness; they could speak of their situation but, despite insisting that prayer would restore them to calm, they found themselves

unable to do so (Simon 2009). Deeb (2006) concludes her ethnography of Shi'a piety in the Lebanon with a chapter on those who found themselves unable, or unwilling, to fulfil its demands, whose predicament was expressed in disclosures to the ethnographer that were private and painful. A conception of cycles of hope and hopelessness or hope, doubt and disillusionment, has emerged in the literature, not only as a feature of the religious sphere but as accompanying human commitments generally (Pelkmans 2013). Doubtless such an experience is always, in the end, private but, in my fieldwork, there were indications that the gap between the ideals of Islam and the practice of ordinary Muslims might be lived through in such a way as to incorporate this inevitable reality. One concerned the way individuals construed failure; the other concerned the way the mosque functioned as a space within which the vicissitudes of practice could be managed, whether through collective ritual, through occasions that created a general sense of community or simply by the mosque 'going on being' there.¹⁰¹ Those in the Saturday class generally felt their failures to fulfil their obligations in the manner they were coming to know through Azzim as the result of competing human commitments, rather than a loss of motivation or 'sinfulness'. Others seemed to take the view that, although they 'did not always pray', they did not 'do bad things'. Being a Muslim remained their point of orientation and, as Milly put it, they gave time to their Creator when they could and turned to Him in times of need. In such a view, it is through a relationship to God and the emotional resources available within such a relationship that the gap between ideals and reality are managed. In a sermon given by Bilal, it was through dependence on God that the experience of failure could be repaired and it seemed that my Bangladeshi friend meant this when she said she was going to 'make her peace with God'.

Bilal appeared to be a man aware of the gap between the divine revelation and the failings of the human condition; in the class, this was manifest in his assumption that the children needed his adult presence to help them to manage this gap. By being attentive to the children's experience, he was modifying the difficulty these situations presented for them. However, there were indications that he would not think it necessarily helpful to undertake moral work on behalf of adults, as he did for the children. Over time I became aware of Bilal's involvement as a giver of religious advice by text and telephone to young men who were constantly presenting him with questions about what was, and was not permissible. Many such enquiries came from footballers who were concerned

¹⁰¹ From a developmental perspective Winnicott (1965) argues that it is through the continuity of the human environment, its going on being, that the infant personality gains coherence.

about clashes between prayer and match time. Though his advice was sometimes given in a rather light-hearted way, Bilal explained to me that there was a problem with the way people sometimes asked these questions and that it was necessary to prompt people to think for themselves, rather than simply giving them an answer. Though he rarely preached at the mosque on Fridays, on one occasion during Ramadan, Bilal described it as a time of forgiveness. He presented an image of God as desiring our requests to be forgiven and spoke of the enormity of God's capacity for forgiveness in comparison to our sins: we should not assume that we will not be forgiven, but neither should we just wait for *hajj* or old age. 'One should do it now . . . one should be really sorry . . . it is not just a matter of saying words'. He complained that some people asked the imam to say prayers for forgiveness for them. 'And I say to them, your sorrow has to be your own. I can be sorry for my sins but I can't be sorry for yours'. Later in the same sermon he spoke of the contrast between our need for forgiveness from God and our difficulty in forgiving others. This style of sermon, though it directs itself to private experience, also creates a kind of communality through the assumption of a common human need for forgiveness that is obstructed by the shared human weakness of prevarication and unwillingness to forgive others. The remedy he suggested for an inability to forgive someone else was to ask God to forgive both of you. The sermon also offered a common point of orientation to God as an object of relatedness. This relationship is characterised by both a measure of reciprocity – God is said to want us to ask for his forgiveness – and by the disparity between the felt enormity of human failure that makes the situation seem hopeless, and the still greater extent of divine forgiveness. The imagery was of God as knowing human needs and the demands of Islam as an expression of that knowledge – a fit between humankind and the Creator modelled on the intimacy of human relationships, particularly the dependency of child-parent and early educational relationships. The request for the imam to undertake this task of being sorry on behalf of someone else is an indication that such a direct relationship between the individual and God is not a perspective shared by all. Among some in the congregation, it was felt necessary for others to mediate with God, just as some people felt there was a need for others to be repositories of religious knowledge. Azzim never spoke of a direct emotional relationship with God; it would not have been consistent with his view of the radical otherness of God. He argued instead for a rational, cognitive basis for submission to God, eschewing both the need for the sort of mediation offered by sheikhs and saints and a dependence on feelings. It was striking,

therefore, that the notion of an emotional response to an imminent God kept surfacing as an elusive but persistent idea among the women in his classes.

Crapanzano (2004) examines the elusive nature of hope as it has appeared in literary, philosophical, and psychological writings and questions why it has been given so little attention within anthropology. Within Christian theology, hope is ‘an infused virtue . . . directly implanted in the soul by God’ (2004: 99); beyond this specific framing, he suggests, it is a state in which the awaited outcome is contingent on the agency of others and chance events. Zigon (2009) reads this as indicating passivity but this need not be the only interpretation. Though it involves recognising dependence on another, the situation in Bilal’s sermon is not one of resignation and of passively waiting for some external, contingent event. Here the individual must *do* something – in this case they must forgive others and seek God’s forgiveness. Moreover, repairing these relationships requires the prior recognition that something has in some way been damaged – failure has itself to become an object of awareness. As in the discussion in the women’s class about ‘missed prayers’ that cannot be made up for later, this recognition brings into focus the reality of conflicting commitments and the fact that what is past cannot simply be undone. The irreversibility of time creates the subtle nature of moral responsibility, demanding the capacity to accept and live with consequences that one could not necessarily have foreseen, consequences that include impact on the state of the imagined worlds on which human beings depend.

Describing the pervasive presence of hope as necessary to the living of a human life, Zigon quotes one of his interlocutors as saying, ‘without hope we do not live, we merely exist’ (2009: 268) – a remark that is strikingly reminiscent of the woman in the class saying that before she turned to her religion in London, she had been ‘just living for the sake of living’. What is it that is introduced into a life in this way? Is it, as Zigon suggests, the capacity to sustain a lifeworld and, if so, what would that sustaining mean? Crapanzano (2004: 104) distinguishes what is called forth by a ‘prayerful’ attitude to life from the concrete and instrumental nature of an actual prayer, that is made to someone and for something, and points, by contrast, to the fragile nature of ‘the prayerful’ and its link to hope. Does the turning to God for forgiveness that Bilal speaks of necessarily involve the concreteness of instrumental prayer or could ‘making one’s peace with God’ return the individual to that pervasive, open-ended, moral stance towards life that Crapanzano calls ‘the prayerful’? Certainly, as Dahlgren and Schielke (2013) argue, the

elusive nature of what it is 'to strive for a morally sound life' cannot be grasped simply by recourse to a designation such as 'Muslim'. As they put it, 'if we want to understand what it means to live a Muslim life, we need a theory about what it means to live a life more urgently than we need a theory of Islam' (ibid: 11). They suggest that an experience of 'wholeness and trust' has something to do with the capacity to maintain a sense of direction and that this has its source in 'the intersection of the individual and the intimate with the social and the communal' (ibid: 12). Such an intersection is an ambiguous shared space in which the fluidity of experience can find a form – an object that is felt to be whole and to which a relationship of trust can be anchored. What Dahlgren and Schielke suggest is akin to what Winnicott (1960), a paediatrician and psychoanalyst, called attention to as the transitional space between the infant and the adult care-giver. Within it, the infant's encounter with a cultural world first takes place. Here it is on the basis that the infant's own feeling of creativity is, at first, given priority through the adult's tactfully desisting from clarifying the ambiguity as to where the imaginative world of the child's play came from. Both framings attempt to grasp the creative potential of the encounter between individual experience and the forms of meaning and memory within a communal world. Recent work in the anthropology of Islam has used this perspective to explore the presence of the moral within the fluidity, ambiguity and creativity of 'ordinary' Muslim lives (Marsden 2005; Rasanayagam 2011; Simon 2014).

In her postscript to *Ethnographies of Doubt*, McBrien (2013: 253) suggests that hope and doubt are 'visceral and emotional' states. As such they are, I suggest, like Stern's 'vitality affects', embodied qualities flowing within and between individuals understood as permeable to their surroundings. In the work of William James that Crapanzano (2004: 18) cites, the mind, like the body, is alive through processes of perceiving and conceptualising, rather than to be understood in terms of abstract entities, percepts and concepts. Within this framework, higher cognitive functioning emerges from the recognising of distinctions and the making of discriminations within the flow of experience. These distinctions and discriminations are based on an engagement with the world that is both visceral *and* purposive; they generate the complexity of human experience and drive the need for thought. This reflective capacity is then, an emergent, but constantly shifting, outcome of a continuous process rooted in non-reflexive, bodily registers. Yet this reflective capacity has the potential to accommodate the range and open-ended nature of human responses, consciously contemplate alternatives, entertain doubts, and engage in increasingly complex ways with the perspectives of others. It is this

process that Laidlaw suggests is being reversed in Mahmood's account of the self-disciplinary practices of piety. Faubion (2011: 114) sees Zigon's conception of the outcome of conscious ethical interventions as a return to the unconscious moral background, suggesting a similar reversal to a less complex, less reflective state that he argues is contrary to the very nature of ethical capacity. Certainly, in the Saturday classes one saw the women engaged in both processes – with the complexity involved in accommodating Azzim's thinking into their lives and, sometimes, the need to shut it out.

When they were challenged, the Guyanese often felt that the complexity of multi-faith and gender-mixed relationships as a moral value was at stake. For Harry it was not just permitted to attend the funeral rituals of non-Muslims friends and relatives, it was important to affirm the positive moral value such relationships had had in the living of his life. That he reflected upon his experience from this standpoint suggests a mind and a form of shared Muslim space within which the messiness of human experience could be accommodated rather than kept at bay to protect an ideal. Though Azzim saw 'a thinking mind' as divinely given for the observation of creation in natural science, and for the study and understanding of God's revelation, it was also to be used to recognise unpalatable aspects of the human world – the urge to form groups who feel that only they are right and the evasion of human responsibility for impulses that then became located in the *jinn*. For all Azzim's insistence on the obligations of Islam and the women's continued difficulties and shortcomings with respect to them, the idea of a 'thinking mind' gave expression to the need for a space of ordinary thinking. Yet there were moments when that space disappeared – when the implications of Azzim's teaching were not only too demanding to meet, but too difficult even to recognise. At such moments, old ways of doing things became an inability to understand something new that was being said. The young women in the Saturday class, the one who stayed away from a reception and the one who sought to bring a wedding into conformity with a strict interpretation of Islam were responding to uncertainties and complexities created by Azzim's reasoning that they could no longer bear. At that point, they felt driven to create their own certainty. Yet both women continued to attend the class, rather than seeking another teacher, a different class and a stricter approach to the practical issues of life. In continuing to attend, they were not necessarily accepting that Azzim was right when he deemed such matters to fall outside what was forbidden in the Quran and the Sunnah. They may have been, but they may also have been continuing to struggle with the gap between a utopian vision and their ordinary lives.

The mosque as a material and imagined domain

My fieldwork site fulfilled some of the conditions that Roy describes for the reconstruction of a concrete Muslim community in a new country where the original 'solidarity group' puts down local roots and functions as a 'business network', builds a mosque that establishes links to the structures of power within a local area and on this basis, retains contact with younger generations (Roy 2004: 119). Though the community created by the sustained effort necessary to build a mosque was not beyond the influence of new forms of religiosity in a virtual, globalised community of Muslims (Roy 2007: 69-70), the mosque itself offered a countervailing local context, a physical place where different generations and different ethnic groups and traditions of religious practice could gather. While the women in Azzim's class may be said to be seeking something of an individualised, rather than communal religious experience, the involvement of many of them in the world of work and in the neighbourhoods in which they lived and in which their children went to school, and the location of the class itself within the mosque, also created concrete local ties.

The challenges to Guyanese Islam that took place during my fieldwork were on a small scale: the closing of the mosque doors and the drawing of a curtain. However, there was a sense of a larger field of difference and potential dispute: at stake were issues central to a Guyanese conception of Islam and the moral world – a form of life conducted within the demands of local material and social realities and through an openness to religious diversity and gender mixed sociality. Though religious issues were not often discussed among my informants, the shop was a place where doubts and disagreements were given voice, but in such a way that they were not, in my experience, followed up. It was in the activity of mosque building and in the communal life of the congregation, with its links to a local world in north London, rather than in the discussion of ideas as such that the Guyanese expressed a sense of commitment to a moral object that transcended individual relationships.

Liberatore (2013) describes a young Somali woman who felt alone with the religious doubts stirred by her new involvement with Islam in London; it was only later, through others that she found a language in which to reframe these doubts as an experience that others recognised as the vicissitudes of faith (*iman*). Liberatore suggests that what is needed to transform internal religious difficulties and doubts into an experience that can be faced, is a language in which to recognise the experience as a shared human dilemma.

In a similar vein one might argue that, as well as a space for worship, the mosque offered collective experiences and a shared everyday language, not as a means of resolving theological disputes but as a way of situating oneself and one's experiences alongside others. Just as Bilal's sermon recast many kinds of failure and doubt within the congregation in the light of the idea of a common human need for forgiveness, the routine life of the mosque provided an enduring physical space and reassuring evidence of an intact, shared, moral world, to set against the experience of vulnerability and doubt. Thus, when she felt in difficulties, my Bangladeshi friend could turn for support to the mosque as 'our community'.

One can see Bilal in his class, holding together a way of being committedly Muslim in the face of the pull of contradictory claims, as one way of managing these tensions between the human and the divine. Some of those I got to know at the mosque were not fulfilling the obligations of daily prayer but did attend the mosque on Fridays or during Ramadan. Yet for them, the mosque provided a Muslim space and a point of religious orientation in their lives that went beyond a surface Muslim identity acquired by birth, albeit the commitment to the mosque had much to do with communal relationships built up over the years. Deeb (2006) writes of only slowly becoming aware of the gap between public displays of Shi'a piety and individual failure. The relation between the public life of the Guyanese, those associated with them at the mosque, and such private experience of failure was, I suggest, at least potentially different. The mosque, as a public domain of prayer and sociality, offered a space that did not assume any particular level of practice or piety, in the way that Deeb's (2006) informants felt participation in Shi'a public rituals did. If the mosque was a place to turn to when life became difficult, it was also a place where the religious was interwoven with the communal and in which participation expressed enduring social ties.

In Zigon's work, a non-conscious intersubjective background is continuously woven out of ways of being with others. From the perspective developed in Hirschkind's ethnography, the moral nature of this background, created through our embodied capacity to attune to the somato-affective states of others to a sufficient degree to create expected, and expectable, ways of doing things, generates the means to create and maintain a shared world. Like the familiarity with the bodily movements and soundscape of collective prayer in a language that most do not understand, except at the level of its affective musicality, ordinary life proceeds based on our non-verbal bodily capacity to be

aware of one another and to sense the embodied state of things in terms of something like the dynamic contours of 'vitality affects' (Stern 1985). The 'state of things' refers not only to external social interactions, though ruptures at this level are most clearly observable. It also refers to the state of vitality within the commitment to a shared imaginary and the felt viability of those commitments and that world. The scenes in and around the kitchen during Ramadan can be read, not only by the researcher but also by those involved, as expressing the state of life within their community's commitment to being Guyanese Muslims, while the ritual for the sick sister carried currents of anxiety and vulnerability in the face of the task of 'maintaining the world' as Zigon (2009) puts it. This idea of a world inhabited with others extends the idea of the practice of virtue as a personal matter, albeit based initially within the inter-subjectivity of a pedagogic relationship, to include what Faubion (2011: 72) calls 'other-regarding virtues' such that others are not simply the means to a care of the self but become, themselves, objects of care. As he puts it, '[G]reek ethics is indeed personal, but unlike ethics grounded in a metaphysics of autonomy, of a radical and absolute freedom, it places ethical practice in the encompassing web of the house and polis' (ibid: 75). The mosque is a manifestation of such an ethical dimension of the other and the practical demands that must be met for an imagined world to find a public form, in this case, as a physical structure standing on a busy London street.

Jayawardena (1980) argues that the loss of a realistic, physical link to India for the Indo-Guyanese led to the emergence of a different relationship to being Indian and a different pattern of religiosity, among both Hindus and Muslims, from that which pertained among a similar population that settled in Fiji. He makes the claim that the importance of imagination in the meaning of India was in an inverse relationship to the material reality of that link – 'if a cultural entity exists mainly in the imagination it is the more susceptible to interpretations prompted by the need to shore up an ideal in times of anxiety and crisis, personal or public' (Jayawardena 1980: 432). This bears on an aspect of my argument that an imagined Guyana, like an imagined India before it, was an important element in the moral life of the mosque and an ethical resource that was invoked explicitly by some. It was a continuing resource because it was felt to maintain in a live state the community's relationship with its forebears. Thus, the mosque is *both* a physical reconstruction of a community within a specific locality *and* the manifestation of a community sustained by relationships alive within imagination.

The gender-mixed and multi-faith aspects of mosque events were the most striking features of this Guyanese-oriented world, marking it out from other Muslim traditions within the mosque. That attitudes to gender relations is the legacy of a specific migration and colonial history is underscored by the continuance of gender-segregated practices among South Asian Muslim communities who migrated directly to the UK (Werbner 1993; 2002) and to Canada (Qureshi 1993). Yet the importance of gender-mixed events went beyond resisting the divisions and exclusions that some other Muslim traditions practised. Though no one ever said it in this way, the lively gathering of men and women in the kitchen, the jokes in the shop and the freedom to socialise accorded to the younger generation, suggest that such relationships between men and women were not, as Rasanayagam (2011: 104) argues in his study of the complexity of Muslim life in a Uzbek village, just the result of 'a passive tolerance of difference' but a positive source of vitality and moral value for the community; similarly, for Harry, relationships with other faiths were an ethical resource. Though both kinds of mixing would be at odds with the religious practice of some within the congregation, and by and large these groups did not participate in such 'mixed' events, Guyanese sociability at the mosque had, nonetheless, a Muslim framing. It took place in relation to Ramadan, religious festivals and rituals prompted by the human need to turn to God, and the imam or one of the trustees said prayers before and at the close of such occasions. What may have begun in the loss of India among a group of migrants from the sub-continent had become, through the emergence of a new form of life, a new idea of Indian-ness in Guyana, and a subsequent migration to the UK, something distinctive and valued that, as in the dispute over the curtain, the Guyanese wished to protect. Yet the mosque not only reproduces the familiar customs of a Guyanese past: it also creates a situation in the present in which this heritage is re-cast in new terms, as was happening in Bilal's class. Though the inclusion of both genders and the encompassing of other faith traditions were felt by the Guyanese as a source of strength, this was not without its risks since relaxed gender-mixed sociality gives that freedom to the young that makes marrying out into other ethnic and faith groups more likely. Judging by the presence, at some communal events, of elderly, white British widows in ordinary clothes and with heads uncovered, this is not a new feature of Guyanese life. However, with the changing climate within Islam, the issue is ever more sharply focused and the larger and more prominent the mosque becomes, the more likely it is to be contested, on the ground, by other Muslims

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