The London School of Economics and Political Science

Transforming the self:

An ethnography of ethical change amongst young Somali Muslim women in London

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Abstract

This thesis is about young second-generation Somali women in London who, in recent years, have begun to practise Islam. Based on over 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork, it investigates their everyday experiences of piety in a range of contexts across London. I argue that an analysis of these young women's pious pursuits needs to account for the connections between the broader socio-political and economic context, and the affective, embodied, discursive, and cognitive dimensions of ethical self-fashioning.

First, I demonstrate how these young practising women are drawing on forms of knowledge derived from the Islamic discursive tradition, liberal discourses and Somali history. I explore how these women's ethical changes are initiated by current shifts in policies and discussions around the failures of multiculturalism, which have brought into sharp focus the questions of what it means to be Somali, Muslim, and British. Second, by extending a Foucaultian understanding of ethical change, I approach their practise of Islam by analysing the forms and means through which these young women imagine novel relations to themselves and to others including kin, friends, potential husbands, and God. I contrast these women's experiences with those of the first-generation in order to trace historical changes. An ethnographic investigation into their everyday lives in a range of contexts beyond Islamic places of learning, reveals the multi-constituted, relational, and constantly shifting nature of the practising self. Ultimately, through the concept of hope I investigate the forces that animate these young practising women's quests and account for their continuous, albeit fragmentary and often incoherent, attempts to transform themselves. This analysis moves beyond the anthropological literature on Islam and piety, which prioritises coherent, discursive traditions and often bounded models of piety. It further offers a challenge to current public and political representations of Muslim women in the UK, which tend to problematize Islam. Young practising Somali women, this thesis reveals, are intervening within, and transforming these contemporary debates around the Muslim subject.

Acknowledgments

It is impossible to express my gratitude to all the Somali women in London who shared their life stories, their experiences, ideas, and knowledge throughout the fieldwork period. Many women opened their homes to me, and took precious time out of their day to talk to me and include me in their lives. To preserve their anonymity I cannot mention their full names here, but I'd like to thank in particular, my two *hooyoyin* for their warm hospitality, and my closest friends (S, A, A, A) for their prayers, and enduring friendship. I am also indebted to the numerous Somali community organisations that provided me with the opportunity to volunteer and take part in their numerous activities. In particular, I thank Kayd Somali Arts & Culture, Ocean Somali Community Association, British Somali Community, Somali Eye Magazine, Newham Somali Development Association Ltd, and Kulan Youth Association.

I cannot thank my supervisors enough for their hard work, time and effort. Henrietta Moore has not only been a major source of influence and inspiration on my work, but also a caring, supportive, and patient mentor throughout the last five years. I always left her supervisions buzzing with energy and confidence about my project – something that, as many fellow friends know, is often difficult to sustain throughout the Phd journey. Mathijs Pelkmans has been incredibly supportive and encouraging of my work from the beginning. His perceptive comments, and attentiveness to detail have pushed me to ensure that I had rigorously backed up my claims, and to think outside the box. His sarcasm and light-heartedness have always helped me to keep calm and see the bright side of things. I also thank Catherine Allerton, Laura Bear, and Matthew Engelke who read and provided very helpful comments on sections of my work in progress. Thanks also to all involved in the running of the Anthropology Department, who ensure it is a vibrant and stimulating environment, and nurture their PhD students throughout.

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List of Illustrations

Glossary

Somali

Aros – Wedding

Ceeb – Shame

Daqaan iyo hadeed – Culture and tradition

Dibaab – Dowry

Dirac – A loose, long dress that has become increasingly popular amongst Somalis in the diaspora

Diya-paying group – lineages or groups united collectively by means of paying or receiving blood compensation.

Garbasaar – A shawl that is worn with a dirac or guntiino

Guntiino – A nomadic-style dress that wraps tightly around the torso and is tied on the left shoulder

Qabyl – Clan

Yarad – Bridewealth

Arabic

Abaya – A loose and ankle-length black robe or dress

Adab – Etiquette

Akhira – Next world, hereafter

Deen – Religion

Du'a – Supplicatory prayers

Dunya – Earthly realm, world of the senses

Fiqh – Jurisprudence

Hadith (plural: ahadith) – The authoritative scriptures which contain a record of the Prophet's speech and actions

Halal – Permissable and legal

Haram – Forbidden and unlawful

Halaqa – Islamic circle

Hubb – Love

Hijab – Veil, often used to refer to the headscarf.

Ikhlas – Sincerity

Ilm – Knowledge

Iman – Faith

Jahannam – Abode of punishment

Janna – The Garden

Jilbaab – An Islamic style of clothing consisting in a head wrap, a head cover that drapes of the chest, and a long skirt or dress.

Niyyah – Intention

Niqab – Face veil

Raja – Hope, anticipation

Salat – Islamic prayer

Sheikh (fem: Sheikha) – Islamic scholar

Sunna –Way of thr Prophet. Considered the second most important source of Islamic knowledge.

Sura – Chapter of the *Quran*

Tafsir – Explanations of *Quranic* verses

Tajweed – Knowledge and application of the rules of recitation of the *Quran*

Ulama – Islamic legal scholars

Umma –Community

<center>*   *   *   *</center>

I have avoided scare quotes as much as possible, particularly around the words culture, religion, authentic Islam, or tradition in order to ease the flow for the reader. As shall become apparent, I am not interested in these terms as analytical concepts, but I explore how they are appropriated, interpreted, and understood in various instances as means of engaging with the world.

I have chosen to italicise my informants' direct speech throughout the text in order to prioritise and emphasise their words and their perspectives above those of scholars, politicians, or media and public commentators.

Names and identities have been altered to protect the anonymity of individuals concerned.

All the photos are my own unless stated otherwise.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

I was sitting with a small group of female Somali friends in a Syrian restaurant in West London in the summer of 2010 when Muneera made a flamboyant entrance. She was dressed fashionably in jeans, sandals, and a loose, frilly top, with a designer bag hanging from her right arm. She wore her small *hijab* tied under her chin, a style she had assumed while in France, she later explained.[1] Confident, vibrant, and vivacious, her arrival interrupted our conversations; she smiled, exchanged kisses the Somali way – three times on the cheeks – before she sat down to order her food, allowing the conversation to resume. But before her order had even reached the kitchen, she announced her plan to leave her job as a sales manager in a large multinational firm. "*I want to start focusing on the deen (religion)*" she explained, "*and it's impossible to do it in this job.*" Her ensuing explication revealed two clear catalysts: the sudden death of one of her cousins, the gruesome details of which she also disclosed to a wincing audience, and the unexpected death of her boss, which came within a week of the former. "*I was so shocked. I couldn't believe it… that really did it for me. I started thinking so much, realising things… that young people could die and that would be it*".

Muneera explained how her boss had had everything he could have wished for in this world: a nice family, a big house, several cars, and luxurious holidays. Suddenly, it had all been taken away from him. She continued as we sat still waiting to hear more.

> "*I took a week off work, I couldn't do anything… It was at that point that I started questioning everything… what is the purpose of life? Why are we here? At some point in our lives we need to start thinking about these things. I have always worked, studied, tried to be successful, done my*

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[1] *Hijab* is used in this context to refer to the head covering. Although Muneera was wearing trousers and a top, practising women often also wear the *abaya,* a long black loosely fitted dress covering the whole body except head, hands and feet, or occasionally a *jilbaab,* a dress that covers the head, wraps around the face and drapes over the chest. Only some women wear the *niqab* or face-veil.

best… but never thought about these things. Now I want to focus on my deen."

Soon after this conversation, Muneera gradually began implementing her five daily prayers, wearing the *hijab* regularly to work, and seeking Islamic knowledge. She also asked her 30-year old friend Zaynab to introduce her to other practising Somali women in London. By meeting like-minded friends her age, she hoped to be counselled and assisted in her practice of Islam and to be invited to talks, lectures, and events. In fact, it was precisely for these reasons that she had joined us for dinner that evening.

Muneera and her Somali friends are the daughters of refugee parents who migrated to the UK in the last 20-25 years as a consequence of civil strife across the Somali regions. Their mothers, now in their 40s-60s, were raised mostly in urban areas in post-independent Somalia. Since settling in the UK many have become the single carers of large families, and although several are highly educated, they have struggled to find employment, or if they have, work in low-skilled, low-paid jobs, and are heavily reliant on state-support.[2] The second-generation, including Muneera and her friends, are in their mid-20s and 30s, and most were born abroad but have been raised in the northern and eastern areas of London.[3] Unlike their parents, many have university degrees from British universities and aspire to improved employment opportunities, financial security and independence. They work as teachers, community-workers, social workers, nurses, therapists, managers, and other occupations. At the time of my fieldwork most were unmarried and continued to live with their families, contributing to household expenses, which included sending monthly remittances abroad.

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[2] In only 5 of the 21 homes I frequented were one or both parents employed full-time, illustrating the difficulties first-generation Somalis face with seeking employment in the UK. Seven of the women in the 21 households had completed secondary school or university degrees in Somalia. However, language barriers, childcare and domestic responsibilities, and the fact that Somali qualifications are not recognised in the UK, have reduced their access to stable employment.

[3] I employ the label second-generation to refer to both young Somali teenagers and women in their 20s-30s, who were either raised in the UK or arrived when they were very young and have been described elsewhere as the one-and-half generation (Portes 1996).

This thesis is about young second-generation Somali women in London who, like Muneera in recent years, have begun to "focus on the *deen*". It explores their everyday experiences of practising Islam in a range of contexts across the city. This phenomenon has become increasingly common amongst Muslim, Somali youth in London in the last few decades, as a consequence of their engagements with global Islamic reformist discourses and teachings. My informants frequently announced that friends, who had previously no interest in religion, had suddenly turned to "practising". Muneera's experience was far from exceptional, and similar narratives of change, often repetitive in form and content, circulate amongst second-generations Somalis. Friends and relatives are often bluntly categorised in two camps: those who "practise" and those who don't. What is particularly striking about these radical shifts, is not only that they tend to coincide with a particular stage in these women's lives, but also, as we shall see, that they are markedly different from the religious changes experienced by first-generation Somali women.

This heightened popularity of reformist Islam unfolds in the current social and political context of the UK, where discussions and policies addressing minority issues have centred on the alleged "problems" of multiculturalism. The phrase "multiculturalism is dead" has become ubiquitous in recent years – brandished, debated, and contested from a range of actors across the political spectrum and across Europe. This retreat from multiculturalism has become rhetorically inseparable from the issues of cultural diversity, integration, migration, Islam and national identity. Under the shadow of the 1989 Rushdie Affair, and increasingly following the July 2005 bombings in London, the UK has witnessed a growing anti-Muslim sentiment as well as a public rhetoric that has linked Islam with the perceived problems of security, integration, and social cohesion. The figure of the burqa-clad Muslim woman has come to stand as a visible sign of difference, and as a symbol of Islam's incompatibility with universal liberal values and with British national identity.

Furthermore, Somalis have also been treated as a socially problematic community in London. Frequently, mainstream media and policy associates Somalis with youth gangs, crime, unemployment, *khat* abuse, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), portraying Somali culture as violent, "backwards", and oppressive towards women. In December 2009, the tabloid newspaper *The Sun* featured the following headline about

a Somali refugee: "We must be rental: Formal asylum seeker lives in luxurious £1.8 million home fitted out with the latest mod-cons – all paid for by housing benefits", reinforcing the negative construal of Somalis as welfare fraudsters. The state is also complicit in this simplistic portrayal of Somalis. Throughout the autumn of 2012, MI5 advertised a job for Somali Language Analysts. These adverts were published, amongst other places, in the East London paper. On a sand-coloured spreadsheet, the text of the advert was accompanied by a set of traditional Somali drums. Many of my informants were offended by the British government's aim to recruit "insiders" to supposedly "spy" on potential Somali terrorists; to them it promoted the negative construal of Somalis as violent Islamist militants. Beyond these possible latent motives, they were even more critical and bemused by the visual representations in the advert. The use of a set of drums in a recruitment campaign targeting bi-lingual second-generation Somalis symbolised a traditional, nomadic, pastoral Somali society and culture. For these young women, it revealed the government's excessive emphasis on visible signs of difference, and a stereotypical and un-informed understanding of Somali culture, and of the lives of second-generation Somalis in contemporary Britain.

As I demonstrate in the original vignette, young Somali women who turn to "focus on the *deen*", begin to appropriate and grapple with Islamic discourses, practices, and models of self-fashioning, with the aim of applying them to themselves. These processes have been investigated in the anthropological literature on Islamic piety, which explores the fashioning of religious dispositions, and which has dominated the study of Islam in the past decade (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). This thesis builds on this work by following recent scholarship on Islam in Europe, and focusing on how practising Islam in London partly involves drawing on the global, long-standing discursive tradition of Islam (Amir-Moazami & Salvatore 2003; Fadil 2008; Jacobsen 2011b).[4]

However, this ethnography argues that the piety literature portrays a coherent, bounded, and unilinear course of self-fashioning that fails to fully account for the

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[4] Following Asad (1986: 14) I treat Islam as a discursive tradition: "a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present".

experiences of young practising Somali women in London. As in Muneera's case, there are more factors involved than a simple embracing of Islamic teachings and discursive traditions: the context within which the narrative unfolds, the broader socio-political climate, her changing relationship with family and friends, her struggles at work, and so on. In short, my work suggests that Muslim women's pious pursuits cannot be explained solely through Islamic discursive models of self-fashioning. It therefore diverges from this literature in several, interconnected ways.

First, I stress the importance of attending to the contextual specificities and historical contingencies of these young women's practice of Islam. I point to the importance of multiple discourses and practices that impact on these young women's practice of Islam in the British context (section 1.4). Young second-generation women's experiences draw on discursive fields that emerge out of the following intersecting historical trajectories: the global Islamic revival (section 1.2), recent shifts in policies and practices around multiculturalism in the UK (Appendix B) and the last 60 years of Somali history spanning from post-independence to the present day diaspora in London (Appendix A). Whilst these broader historical circumstances provide the socio-historical backdrop of this thesis, I have placed them in the appendices in order to prioritise the individual narratives of my research informants, which bring to light their own experiences of this historical change.

Second, in contrast to the piety literature, this ethnography does not focus solely on discourse or on forms of argumentation and reasoning. Instead, it prioritises the embodied, and affective experiences of piety in a range of contexts, both within, and beyond, the mosques or other Islamic places of learning. It captures the multifaceted texture of these women's everyday lives, to reveal the fragmented, unstable, and frequently incoherent nature of practising Islam (section 1.5).

Finally, this thesis builds on these two considerations, in order to approach young women's everyday experiences of piety from a different theoretical angle – one that accounts for broader processes of social and ethical change. By extending Foucault's work on ethics, it engages with the concepts of the ethical imagination, problematization, and hope (Foucault 2000; Moore 2011). These theoretical tools inform an analysis of the forms, and means, through which young Somali women imagine novel relations to themselves *and to others*, through their practice of Islam.

They provide a different way of observing the historically specific dynamics of ethical change experienced by these women as they turn to practise Islam, accounting for *what drives* these shifts and *how* they unfold in the contemporary moment in the UK (sections 1.6 & 1.7). Ultimately, this theoretical lens will offer a more comprehensive and complex understanding of practising women's subjectivities, moving beyond the implementation of models of piety, to enrich the anthropological literature on Islam.

My work will also critically intervene within the current academic and political debates around multiculturalism, and religious and cultural change.[5] It does not treat multiculturalism, culture, or religion as descriptive terms, or as theoretical or analytical entities or concepts (Modood 2007; 2010; Parekh 2000; Taylor 1994).[6] I am not concerned with issues of diversity, integration or assimilation, or with providing answers to the questions that have emerged in debates around the demise of multiculturalism (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010; Meer & Modood 2009; Joppke 2004). Rather, following the work of Bracke and Fadil (2012: 40), who draw on Foucault, I analyse the "multiculturalism debates" as creating "distinctive fields of problematization" – areas of knowledge that have come to pose a problem for contemporary politics.[7] I trace a series of rhetorical and policy shifts around the retreat of multiculturalism (see appendix B) to unravel the ways ni which these debates have politically charged questions of what constitutes Somali culture, and what it means to be Muslim and British. The latter have become "problematized"; they have emerged as objects of thought that invite reflection and elaboration.

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[5] Equally the thesis departs from the literature on the Somali Diaspora on cultural and religious change and diversity (see section 2.2).

[6] Modood (2007; 2010) is arguably one of the most vocal advocates of multiculturalism in the UK. His approach is both descriptive and prescriptive, as he argues for current policies to embrace a "multicultural citizenship", which recognises individual rights, but is evolutionary and multi-faceted, and recognises and incorporates the views of different kinds of groups based, for example, on race, colour, and religion.

[7] Fadil and Bracke (2012) explore some of the "discursive contours" of European "multiculturalism debates" that have problematized the multicultural society by weaving together migration, integration, cultural identity, Islam, and secularism. They argue that debates about cultural difference ineluctably implicate discussions about nationalism and national identity.

I further address the particular forms of solutions articulated by a range of actors, including politicians, academics or public commentators to these "problems" concerning multiculturalism. Throughout I prioritise the solutions offered by young, practising, Somali women who similarly intervene within these areas of problematization. Whilst their solutions are shaped by these debates, they also rework the elements of these problematizations. Their ethical imaginations develop the conditions in which various responses to the "problems" of multiculturalism, culture, and Islam, can find form (Moore 2011: 21).

To these ends, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork amongst 21 Somali households in London between September 2009 and January 2011, and then sporadically throughout the writing-up phase of this dissertation (see section 1.8).[8] These households were based in the boroughs of Camden, Tower Hamlets and Newham (Map 1) and included Somalis from different clans, places of origin, and socio-economic backgrounds.[9] Within these households, my focus was primarily on young second-generation women and their mothers, the majority of whom were practising. In contrast to much of the literature on the Somali diaspora that tends to focus around interviews, or is based in specific spaces such as community organisations, mosques, and schools (McGown 1999; Griffiths 2002; Hopkins 2010), I followed individual women's trajectories across – and occasionally beyond – London. This approach enabled me to delve into the everyday fabric of these young women's lives and to gain a textured understanding of both generations' ideas of ethical self-fashioning in relation to kin, friends, or non-Muslims, and in a range of different contexts such as mosques, cafés and restaurants, homes, cars, and public transport. I conducted participant observation with both generations of Somali women, but also carried out narrative interviews on everyday life experiences and life-history interviews with 18 first-generation Somali women[10] who originate mainly, but not exclusively, from urban areas of the Somali

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[8] There are an estimated 70,000 Somalis residing in London (Hopkins 2006: 366). See Appendix A for a historical account of Somali migration to the UK.

[9] The clan-based system that traditionally structures Somali society has also determined patterns of migration and settlement in London. Whilst earlier migrants from present day Somaliland settled in Tower Hamlets and Newham, new migrants, predominantly from southern Somalia, have settled in other areas of north, south, and west London, including Camden (Griffiths 2000: 287).

[10] This includes some of the older women from the 21 households.

regions (Map 2).[11] I also interviewed non-practising Somali women and non-Somali practising women.

In the remainder of the introduction I situate the current Islamic reform within its historical context, and then proceed to review and critically appraise the anthropological literature on piety. I focus particularly on Mahmood's (2005) ethnographic monograph, which has become a key reference point for anthropological discussions on Islam, piety and subjectivity. In subsequent sections I engage with the broader anthropological literature on Islam to elaborate on the limitations of the piety literature and explore the debates arising from this work. In sections 1.6 and 1.7 I outline the theoretical concepts – ethical imagination, problematization and hope – that will be used to frame this ethnography. I conclude with a reflection on my fieldwork.

Map 1: London Boroughs

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[11] Although some of these women were not necessarily born in urban environments they moved to Mogadishu or to other large cities including Hargeysa, Burco, Berbera, Erigavo, and Galkayo for education or employment purposes or with their spouse following marriage. This urban-bias in my data may be due to the fact that urban Somalis were the first to seek asylum abroad thanks to superior financial resources (Lindley 2010: 117). It was easier for me to converse with these more established Somali women, given their superior English skills.

Map 2: The Somali Regions

(Balthasar & Grzybowski 2012: 148).[12]

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[12] The map excludes the Somali areas of the Ogaden and northeastern Kenya.

1.2 Islamic Reform

The current global Islamic reform movement originates in the 1970s in the Middle East and is part of a longer tradition of renewal (*tajdid)* and reform (*islah*) of Islamic faith and practice (Voll 1983). Following Osella and Osella (2008a: 1-2) reformism will be employed broadly in this thesis, to refer to a wide variety of traditions and "projects whose specific focus is the bringing into line of religious beliefs and practices with the core foundations of Islam, by avoiding and purging out innovation, accretion and the intrusion of 'local custom'". Universalist in its orientation, as we shall see, it is simultaneously embedded in local social, political and historical contexts (*ibid* 2008a: 7; 2008b). I therefore position the ethical changes experienced by both generations of Somali women in London within this global movement, and within an Islamic discursive tradition that has been constantly subjected to internal interventions since its inception (Amir-Moazami & Salvatore 2003: 55; Asad 1986). As Amir-Moazami and Salvatore (2003) demonstrate, this conceptualisation avoids depicting changes amongst Muslims in Europe as solely a consequence of migration to the West, or the result of an encounter with secular, Western societies (see section 2.2).

The resurgence that swept the Muslim world from the 1970s to the present day developed in opposition to Islamic modernism and in response to the crises of modern post-independent nation-states, neo-colonialism, and the disintegration of Islam as an integral part of society (Abu- Rabi'1996: 262). The movements were led by religious or lay leaders who gathered mass support and were opposed to the traditional *ulama* and state intelligentsia. Drawing on themes originally expounded throughout the 19th century, this movement was intensified by mass education and electronic media, which have since generated competing movements, groups, and individuals (Amir-Moazami & Salvatore 2003: 56; Eickelman & Piscatori 1996).[13]

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[13] Reformers including public intellectuals, educators and government advisors throughout urban areas of the Ottoman Empire applied traditional forms of reasoning to public activities with the aim of articulating a public discourse of a distinctive Muslim moral being (Amir-Moazami & Salvatore 2003: 56-57).

The contemporary resurgence, influenced by this renewalist tradition, nevertheless responded to new opportunities for reform that arose out of contemporary society. At least in some of its aspects it utilises "tones and symbols that have deep roots within Islamic traditions" (Voll 1983: 43). As Amir-Moazami and Salvatore (2003) point out, 20th century movements share two similarities with previous Muslim reformers. First, even though they were inspired by a variety of sources, they have maintained "a sense of belonging to a tradition". Second, they embarked on a critique of local customs, "situated mostly in the politics of authenticity, and the call for a revivification of the sacred core texts" (*ibid* 2003: 57).

Across the Muslim world the revival has been primarily a phenomenon of the young, urban, educated, middle-classes (Huq 2010; Osella & Osella 2008b; Brenner 1996). Its success amongst these classes has been a result of its ability to embrace a modernising, rationalising impulse, by supporting socio-religious reform and education (Osella & Osella 2008b), and thus combining "material and spiritual progress" (Deeb 2006: 5). Across urban areas in the Somali regions, revivalist movements had already begun to spread throughout the 1980s impacting on the lives of some of the first-generation Somali women (see Appendix A). They manifested themselves through the growth of political groups, Islamic welfare organisations, and groups aiming to deliver Islamic knowledge or *da'wa*, and more generally a growing sense of religious ethos, or piety (*taqwa)* in everyday life.

In Europe, the literature has emphasised the involvement of predominantly second-generation migrants, whose search for an authentic, universal Islam has also entailed a critique of the "backwards" cultural attitudes and practices of the older generations (Roy 2004; Schmidt 2002; Jacobson 1998).[14] As elsewhere, this new religiosity has been manifest in the growth of institutions of learning, and spaces of worship (Metcalf 1996). It has given rise to a recent surge in "public piety" (Deeb 2006) with the adoption of embodied practices and rituals – most notably the donning of the *hijab* and the implementation of prayer – as well as the embracing of new ethical sensibilities (Dwyer 1999; 2000). Young Muslims are increasingly engaging with

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[14] As we shall see, these generational divides are far from clear-cut, and reformist discourses have also been appropriated in different ways by first-generation Somali women (Chapters 2 & 5).

scholarly Islamic texts and modes of reasoning that were previously reserved for those trained at traditional religious institutions (Hirschkind 2006). This new form of religiosity is characterised by a "heightened self-consciousness" of textual knowledge (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996: 39), but with the aim of applying it to the self in order to cultivate a pious disposition. Emphasis is placed on organising one's everyday life in accordance with Islamic standards of virtuous conduct.

1.3 Pious self-formation

Whilst much of the earlier sociological and anthropological work on the revival focused on identity politics and identity formation (Roy 2004; Haenni 2002; Dwyer 1999), more recent scholarship has explored the formation of embodied forms of piety, and the acquisition of Islamic knowledge for the formation of religious dispositions and sensibilities (Henkel 2007; Deeb 2006; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). It is this latter perspective to which I now turn in order to elaborate on the inner logic of the Islamic tradition, as well as the historically specific forms of subjectivity which my own informants draw upon in their quests to practise Islam.

The work of Saba Mahmood (2001; 2005), in particular her monograph *The Politics of Piety*, is exemplary of this shift. Since its publication, it has been a catalyst for much of the subsequent discussions on the Muslim subject in anthropology (Jones 2010; Haniffa 2008; Pandolfo 2007; Deeb 2006) and for recent work on Muslim women in Europe and processes of ethical self-fashioning on which this thesis draws (Jacobsen 2011a; 2011b; Fadil 2008; 2009; Jouili 2008; 2009; Jouili & Amir-Moazami 2006). Mahmood's ethnographic monograph marked an important shift in the literature on the Islamic revival. It moved away from a focus on Islamic practices as signifying practices and markers of identity, to an analysis of embodied religious practices as disciplines centred on realising Islamic virtues and fashioning a pious self by transforming one's everyday life and one's relationship to God.

Mahmood's ethnography (2005) is based around the women's piety movement, *da'wa*, which is part of the Islamic Revival in Cairo and offers an alternative to secular modernity. Her analysis focuses on the argumentations, reasoning, dilemmas,

and struggles of her female informants, when implementing a virtuous self in Egypt.[15] The aims of her book are twofold: first, to unravel the conceptions of self, moral agency, and politics that underpin the practices of the piety movement; and second, to rethink the assumptions at the heart of a secular-liberalism of which feminism is a part. Detaching the concept of agency from the progressive politics of feminism, she argues, that the desire for freedom and for an autonomous will is not innate and universally applicable. This latter argument must be seen in light of feminist poststructuralist critiques of a transcendental subject and the on-going discussion of the incorporation of contextual and historical particularities into an understanding of the agentive subject (McNay 1992; Moore 1988).

The conundrum around which Mahmood frames her study is the apparent inconsistency as to why educated women would want to participate in Islamist movements, when the latter require their submission to patriarchal norms. Why would women submit to feminine virtues of shyness, modesty, and humility? Or, in relation to this thesis, how do we understand young second-generation Somali women's desire to submit to God and to Islamic structures of authority? The problem with these questions, Mahmood argues, is that they rely on a concept of agency that assumes a refusal to submit and an innate desire for freedom.

Through an analysis of the Islamic virtue of modesty (*al-haya*), Mahmood criticises two prevalent forms of feminist theory: the first seeks to expose the negative valuations of modesty and recuperate submerged representations of the feminine body, and the second denies any possibility of recuperating the voices of the subaltern (Mahmood 2005: 158-160). Instead she asserts the need to explore the logic of the discourse of piety and, influenced by Asad (1993; 2003), to investigate the concepts and practices by which it is constituted. The idea that women should desire to oppose patriarchal norms lies at the heart of a liberal feminist concept of agency that relies on the binary of docility *versus* emancipation or submission *versus* subversion. Mahmood does not deny that patriarchal norms govern the piety movement, but she

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[15] Although Mahmood's interlocutors are not engaged in formal political movements and their practices may appear to be apolitical due their sole concern with self-discipline and self-fashioning, Mahmood argues that the movement is political in that it seeks to realise and transform aspects of social life.

maintains that an analysis which focuses on submission *versus* emancipation would be misplaced, precisely because this is not a motivating factor or a desire for her informants. Rather, she points to an analysis of the different modalities of agency, and the different grammars or concepts from which particular affects and sensibilities derive. In doing so, she adopts a Foucaultian understanding of the self, which also informs this thesis: a self which does not exist *a priori* but comes into existence through power relations, by relating to particular norms and structures.

One of Mahmood's important contributions is her juxtaposition of feminist theories, which understand agency as occurring through processes of reiteration and resignification (e.g. Butler 1997), with her own informants' techniques of self-formation. The women from the piety movement do not fashion themselves through the notions of subversion, change, and disruption. Mahmood pays attention to how norms are lived and inhabited, not on how they are enacted and subverted: to the multiple ways in which women relate to particular norms. For the participants of the piety movement, the body is not a sign, but serves as a means through which they realise their pious dispositions. For example, the performance of modesty should not be understood as a significatory practice, but as the means through which a pious self is fashioned, as well as the ultimate endpoint of this ethical work.

> "Transgressing gender norms may not be a matter of transforming 'consciousness' or effecting change in the significatory system of gender but might well require the retraining of sensibilities, affect, desire, and sentiments – those registers of corporeality that often escape the logic of representation and symbolic articulation" (Mahmood 2005: 188).

Ultimately, Mahmood's separation of the concept of agency from progressive politics is a necessary step for understanding religious sensibilities outside of a secular liberal framework.[16] It enables her to understand pious women's desire to submit to patriarchal structures, to God, and to structures of authority. It presents a different

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[16] This is particularly pressing, Bangstad (2011) argues, at a time when Western politicians and public intellectuals have appropriated the language of feminism to portray Muslim men and women as the embodiments of non-Western norms and values. These representations have often been employed as justifications for the brutalities of military interventions in Islamic countries (see Hirschkind & Mahmood 2002).

way of relating to the self, which does not necessarily accord with a liberal-secular one.

Mahmood elaborates on these pedagogical processes of ethical self-fashioning and the ways they rely on a particular alignment between interior and exterior dimensions of the self (emotions, body, reason etc.). For example, she emphasises how prayer cultivates ethical dispositions and serves as both a means of inculcating piety and its ultimate endpoint. Ritualised behaviour, such as prayer, is an instrument or a practice of self-formation. For participants of the mosque movement, learning and training oneself to embody the "right attitudes" is central; through prayer one learns to instil the virtuous emotion of fear. This requires a reorientation of emotions so that they are not only motivating forces but also integral to pious action. Virtuosity lies in an ability to spontaneously perform conventional practices in both ritual contexts and ordinary life, thereby making an "*a priori* separation between individual feelings and socially prescribed behavior unfeasible" (Mahmood 2001:844). Hence, ritual behaviour is enacted through, and is productive of, intentionality. The ultimate aim is that these emotions will arise naturally along with the inclination to pray. Bodily gestures are therefore essential for achieving piety and also become necessary attributes of the self. External practices create inward dispositions and the implementation of a moral virtue requires the coordination between external and internal dimensions of the self.

This ethical work also destabilises the liberal assumption that emotions are assumed to arise spontaneously from the "true" desires of an individual, and exist in opposition to religious conventions. According to Mahmood, the relationship between desires and obligatory social conventions, within Islamic piety, cannot be assumed. True feelings ought to be cultivated through external behaviour such as prayer but are also the endpoint of an ethical self. Ultimately, mimetic reproduction does not subvert, but leads to the successful accomplishment of norms.

1.3.1 Interlude: Foucault and the ethics of the self[17]

Like Mahmood, my own analysis of my informants' processes of ethical self-making is indebted to Foucault's ethics of the self. Here, I turn to discuss this work first, to demonstrate the ways Mahmood draws on it in theorising her informants' processes of self-fashioning. I subsequently show the ways my work similarly builds on Foucault's ethics but departs from Mahmood's exclusive focus on the Islamic discursive tradition, to consider the ways ethical practices are informed by a range of intersecting discourses. I elaborate further on my theoretical approach to ethical change in section 1.6.

Anthropological scholarship on ethics and morality has recently moved beyond an understanding of ethics as the following of socially sanctioned rules or moral imperatives (Zigon 2007; Laidlaw 2002; Faubion 2001). This has partly been the result of a recent engagement with Foucault's work on ethics. In his later work, contained mostly in the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and in numerous lectures and interviews, Foucault (1985; 1990) develops the Aristotelian concept of positive ethics, which interprets ethics as practical activities that further a particular way of life. Thus, for Foucault, studying ethics is not about observing how a subject conforms to, or self-consciously reflects on rules, but entails an exploration of how human beings shape themselves into ethical subjects. It involves the relation of the self to itself, and the creative strategies "that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other" (Foucault 2000: 300). In contrast to his earlier work on technologies of domination, Foucault shifts his attention to technologies of subjectification: practices and techniques through which individuals actively fashion themselves. Individuals are conceptualised as agents who are self-determining and capable of challenging and resisting structures of domination and power relations (Foucault 2000: 299-300).[18]

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[17] This thesis adopts a Foucaultian understanding of the self. For a review of anthropological approaches to the self, subjectivity, and the subject see Moore (2007: Chapter 2) and Ortner (2005).

[18] Foucault theorises autonomy as divorced from self-consciousness and the rational ego. He claims, however, that some models of ethics (such as the Classical one which is not based on rules and codes) allow more space for autonomy.

By undergoing a genealogy of the desiring subject, in his second volume, *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1985) highlights the differences between Christian and Classical moralities, which offers an insight into the processes of social change (see section 1.6). He argues that the differences lie not in the content of moral norms and prescriptions but in the ways in which norms are lived, and the kind of relationships that one sets up in relation to these norms – the relationship between codes of behaviour and forms of subjectification which may vary from era to era (*ibid* 1985: 25-32). Foucault identifies four dimensions to ethics. First, the *ethical substance* refers to a part of the self or mode of behaviour upon which the individual works. Second, the *mode of subjectification* refers to the way in which an individual establishes her relationship to the rule. Because the subject is formed within the limits of a historically specific set of practices, this dimension recognises the ways in which power summons a subject to constitute itself in relation to its moral codes. Third, the *forms of elaboration of ethical work* or the *techniques of the self* refers to the means by which a subject works on the ethical substance and changes itself in order to become ethical. Finally, the *telos* of the ethical subject denotes the type of moral being to which one aspires. It is through the practices or techniques of the self that individuals give meaning to, and interpret, their experiences (*ibid* 1985: 26-28).

In her work, Mahmood explores how these four ethical dimensions might apply to her informants' virtuous conduct. By viewing the ethical substance as an outward form of religiosity, and divine law as the mode of subjectification, she analyses the specific techniques of the self (i.e. prayer) that require the coordination of outer and inner parts of the body. Such coordination is practised in order to accomplish the *telos* as the perfect model of piety based on the exemplary behaviour of the Prophet and a submission to God (Mahmood 2005: 28-29).

This concern with how individuals shape themselves into ethical subjects will guide my understanding of self-transformation throughout this thesis. On the one hand, as I demonstrate throughout, Mahmood's explication of Islamic pedagogical projects of ethical self-fashioning, her exploration of the concepts and assumptions underlying the Islamic discursive tradition, and her understanding of the Muslim female subject as constituted through the grammars and logics of piety, offers a partial insight into my own informants' understandings of themselves and their relations to others.

Throughout this thesis, Somali women's appropriations of this tradition will be evident in the ways they stress the importance of acting with the aim of "pleasing God", submitting to textual and religious authorities, and to Islamic modes of reasoning, and training oneself to embody a pious disposition through various techniques of self-fashioning.

On the other hand, my work shows how Mahmood's model of pious self-fashioning does not sufficiently capture the complexities of my informants' subjectivities. As I elaborate in the following sections, the work on piety largely neglects the broader socio-economic context in which these projects unfold; it focuses on the coherence of a particular discourse and overlooks the lived experiences of piety, as well as the ways that it intersects with other models of selfhood. My emphasis, therefore, will be on self-transformation, but on the ways both generations of Somali women draw on multiple, intersecting discourses, practices, and models to reconfigure the ethical substance, the modes of subjectification, or the techniques that constitute their ethical projects. In what follows, I elaborate on recent critiques of the piety literature, and then expand on how my work builds on these in the final sections of the Introduction.

1.4 Muslim piety in Europe

How are these pious projects of ethical self-fashioning enacted in Europe, within a heterogeneous, and majority secular public sphere? Mahmood's work on piety presumes that these practices of self-discipline are enacted in an idealised, homogenous, and unproblematic Muslim public sphere, away from the conflicts in social relations governing heterogeneous public spaces (Jouili 2009: 456).

Accordingly, Mahmood's ethnography lacks a coherent account of the wider socio-economic context within which the discourses and practices she explores circulate. The lives of her informants outside of the mosque and their socio-economic backgrounds, or other spheres of life within which they are embedded, remain largely unseen. Bangstad (2011: 6) notes that by limiting ethnographic work to the mosque and ignoring socio-economic status, Mahmood's work produces a dehistoricised and decontextualised study. As Van der Veer (2008: 812) elaborates, "her focus on the micro-practices inside the mosque seems to prevent her from looking at the micro-practices outside the mosque". Consequentially, she fails to relate religious practices

to the social fabric of Cairo or to situate the piety movement within the wider arena of Cairene politics.

Furthermore, the work on piety presents Islamic pursuits as monolithic in Muslims' lives. This captures only one model of selfhood – the pious Muslim subject. Accordingly, an enclosed, bounded notion of the moral self, defined by the discourses of piety is presented as the only moral discourse available for, and the sole defining feature of, her informants' lives. Both the pious "counterpublic" (Hirschkind 2006) and the pious self are juxtaposed with the secular public sphere and with a secular-liberal model of selfhood respectively. The secular is conceptualised as a hegemonic force governing the public sphere, and hence this juxtaposition reifies knowledge and power as domination by the West on the non-West (Bangstad 2009: 192). Often, the Islamic tradition is employed in these analyses simply to offer an alternative non-secular, embodied dimension of political subjectivity, in order to highlight secular-liberal concepts.

Recent scholarship on piety in Europe, builds on Mahmood's work to theorise the ways in which Islamic projects of self-discipline are enacted and negotiated in secular, European contexts (Bracke 2011; Jacobsen 2011b; Jouili 2009; Fadil 2008).[19] Focusing on the experiences of young Muslims in Europe, several authors have shown how pious projects of self-discipline are entangled with secular ethics (Bracke 2011; Fadil 2009; 2011; Jacobsen 2011a; 2011b; Fernando 2010; Jouili 2009; 2011; Salih 2009).

Jacobsen's (2011a) analysis of young Muslims in Norway, draws on Foucault's ethics to demonstrate how the "shaping and moulding of subjectivities takes place at the intersection of several internally heterogeneous and contested discursive traditions" (*ibid* 2011a: 76). By focusing on freedom, autonomy and choice as modes of subjectification, Jacobsen demonstrates how a liberal understanding of freedom is intertwined with pious concerns. For example, her informants stress the importance of choice in legitimising their religious practices and their obedience to God. The *hijab* is conceived of as a practice shaping the self that is "working for God" but

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[19] In Chapter Five I engage with the scholarship on Islam in Europe that investigates the changing nature of Islamic knowledge in Europe (Bowen 2010; Mandaville 2007; Peter 2006; Roy 2004).

simultaneously assessed according to an ethic of personal authenticity and autonomy. Piety, Jacobsen claims, should not be conceptualised in opposition to a liberal ethic, rather analysis should focus on the intersections, convergences, and tensions of people's relationships to these norms of ethical conduct (*ibid* 2011a: 79). Jouili's (2011) article in the same volume explores the ways in which devout women speak about gender norms in terms of both virtue and piety as well as through liberal norms. She positions her informants' discourses amongst a range of interventions within the larger discursive field, including current debates on gender and Islam, as well as governmental practices. She argues that devout Muslim women "critically intervene" and are partially shaped by the secular liberal discursive space (*ibid* 2011: 49).

This work contributes to an emerging field of study that builds on Asad's (2003) work on the secular[20] in order to explore the idea of a secular or liberal ethics that has its own techniques of self-fashioning, modes of subjectification and teleologies. Fadil's work (2009; 2011) seeks to denaturalise some of the practices of non-Orthodox Muslims such as eating during Ramadan and unveiling. She suggests these practices constitute secular-liberal techniques of self-fashioning, based on liberal modes of subjectification of freedom and choice which aim to fashion liberal moral subjects.

Most of this work relies on the narratives of the women themselves – on the ways they talk about themselves and their engagements with Islam. It privileges discourse above Muslims' everyday lived experience of piety. In contrast, Jouili (2009) explores the tactics of young Muslims in France and Germany, who are forced to negotiate self-disciplinary practices of prayer and donning the *hijab*. For example by praying in university basements Muslims visibly resist restrictions, turning prayer into a signifier of defiance. Alternatively, under more restrictive circumstances they may be forced to render their practices invisible, for example by praying whilst seated in the library. By resignifying these practices, by wearing hats instead of the *hijab,* for example, Jouili suggests these young Muslims subvert the constraints of secular public spaces.

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[20] Asad defines the secular as an epistemic category, secularism as a political doctrine and secularization as a historical process. The secular is an innately unstable "concept that brings together certain behaviours, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life" (Asad 2003: 25). It is conceptually prior to secularism and, as an enactment of power, defines certain practices of the self and particular forms of knowledge and practice.

In Chapters Two and Three, I trace, on the one hand, the particularities of recent political and public debates on multiculturalism, and Islam in the UK (see also Appendix B). I engage with recent scholarship that explores forms of public and political reasoning around the visibility of Islam in Europe (Moors 2009; Bowen 2008). On the other, I explore how my informants, like those of Jacobsen (2011a; 2011b), Bracke (2011) and Fadil (2008) draw simultaneously on intersecting Islamic, secular, and liberal discourses in their practice of Islam. Bringing together these two analytical approaches, my analysis reveals how my informants' processes of ethical transformation are partially shaped by these changing discussions around multiculturalism, but equally, how these young women critically intervene and transform these debates through their everyday practices.

1.5 Everyday experiences of piety: beyond the mosque

A further theoretical problem with the work on piety, on which this project builds, is its emphasis on the coherence of the discursive tradition of Islam. Schielke (2010b) maintains that the piety literature studies Muslims' involvement with religion as an outcome of a process of engagement with Islamic ideals. This bias has led to a privileging of "pious pursuits", and a focus on how individuals argue, rather than how they live. This has resulted from an anthropological preoccupation with concepts and rationalities rather than with people, and a concern with defining what Islam "is" (Schielke 2010b: 2). Much of this work has also focused on the discourses of religious elites or activists rather than everyday Muslims, thereby producing a distorted picture of everyday members of the revival. A series of interrelated problems have arisen as a result.

First, pedagogical processes are depicted as straightforward and coherent. By emphasising the ways norms are lived, for example, Mahmood explores what her informants say they will do and hence how they all seek to construe themselves as pious. [21] The actual experiences of her informants are only used to illustrate their

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[21] In a similar fashion Henkel (2007) investigates piety as a coherent process that leads to the acquisition of a pious disposition. He explores the ways in which Turkish Muslims transform heterogeneous spaces into Muslim places through their religious practices. His concern with his informants' quests for coherence sidelines the ways in which individuals actually implement and experience these projects.

work within these dominant pedagogical forms – their efforts in striving to achieve a pious disposition. Therefore, little is known about what her informants actually do: how they struggle or work to achieve a pious disposition, whether they ultimately succeed, and how they negotiate piety with other models of selfhood or other ideals. As observed by Cooper (2008: 29), Mahmood's work functions on an iterative level as her informants' experiences are only conveyed through her narration. Although her emphasis is not on subversion, her discussion appears static as she excludes any analysis of social change. Her informants appear captured within the disciplining dynamics of an Islamic tradition. This homogenous conception of piety, as well as a failure to see fragmentation, results in a form of cultural essentialism (Bangstad 2011: 30). Mahmood's ethnography falls into the trap of the "illusion of wholeness" (Ewing 1990) in its understanding of subjectivity as coherent (Schielke 2010a: 26).

Second, the actual implementation of these pedagogical processes, and the experiences and motivations of individuals engaging with them, are not topics of interest in the work on piety. Muslims become the function of particular discursive traditions, at the expense of the singularities of Muslims' empirical experiences (Bangstad 2011). As piety becomes a function of the Islamic tradition and hence of textual authority, individual Muslims function as representatives of these processes. In her work, Mahmood (2001: 831-832) does mention a young woman in her twenties, who is consistently struggling to wake up for the morning prayer (*fajr*) and interrupts one of the mosque lessons to seek advice on the matter. Her concern is addressed by Mona, a woman in her late thirties who, familiar with "an Islamic interpretive tradition of moral discipline", provides a detailed elaboration of the role of self-disciplines in cultivating a moral self (*ibid* 2001: 832). However, Mahmood stops short of explaining why the woman is experiencing difficulties, if and how she implements Mona's advice, and whether she ultimately succeeds. Her analytical concern with the discourses underlying the pedagogical processes of self-fashioning ignores their actual implementation; the reasons underlying these struggles and hesitations are side-lined in the process.

In contrast to Mahmood's account of piety, my ethnography prioritises the everyday experiences of implementing piety in a range of different settings outside the mosque and beyond Islamic places of learning. The emphasis is not only on their engagement

in the public domain, but also on intimate conversations and practices in a range of everyday settings. It additionally draws attention, not solely to discourse, but also to the embodied, affective and cognitive dimensions of practising Islam (section 1.7; Chapters Five-Six). In doing so, it joins recent anthropological work on Islam that has sought to displace the over-determining influence attributed to discourses and rationalities of piety, by acknowledging their inextricable ties with other contemporary attitudes, practices and discourses. Soares and Osella's (2010: 11) collection of essays suggest replacing an idea of Islamic piety/tradition with "Islam *mondain*" (Islam in the present world) by focusing on the different "ways of being Muslim in secularizing societies and spheres". A concern with ethical self-fashioning is only one part of this "new kind of sociality" which is also compatible with both producing and participating in modernity and the neoliberal economy (*ibid* 2010:11). "Islam *mondain*" emphasises lived experiences, and the "complex ways of being Muslim in the contemporary world in which Muslims reflect upon being Muslim, upon politics, morality, family, consumption, employment, media, entertainment, and so forth" (ibid 2010: 12). For example, Osella and Osella (2010) investigate the ways in which elite entrepreneurs in Kerala combine their commitments to reformist morality, with their involvement in the neoliberal economy, through their support of charitable educational initiatives. Other essays in the volume (Marsden 2010; Schielke 2010a) similarly emphasise the complexities of their informants' political, economic and religious engagements, and highlight the diversity and contradictory nature of Muslims' everyday lives. Rather than prioritising Islam, this work emphasises the actual world in which Muslims live, and avoids reducing analyses of Muslims to an Islamic tradition or to the micro-politics of ethical self-fashioning (Soares & Osella 2010: 12).

 Like my own work, Simon (2009) and Schielke (2009; 2010a), both explore the actual experiences of implementing Islamic ethics, and account for those individuals who may not adhere to a dominant moral selfhood, or who may negotiate pious concerns amongst a range of other ideals and models of selfhood. Simon's (2009) work explores individuals' experiences of prayer in Minangkabau, Indonesia and its role in constituting selfhood. In contrast with Mahmood's discussion of prayer, it points to the importance of attending to individuals' experiences of enacting prayer (*salat*). Different people come to understand *salat* differently: for some it acts as an

arena in which a coherent moral self transcends tensions (as for Mahmood's informants), whilst for others it is a place of struggle with social meaning whereby *salat* refuses a "secure place in discourses of moral selfhood" (*ibid* 2009: 270). Thus, moral selfhood is not a coherent process, but remains a struggle because it is built on contradictions, uncertainties, tensions, and anxieties. The practice of *salat* encourages an "embodied engagement" with these tensions (*ibid* 2009: 271).

Similarly, Schielke (2009; 2010a) describes the ambivalent or contradictory, and sometimes immoral views and experiences of young men in a northern Egyptian village. Subjectivity, Schielke argues, must account for ambiguities; whilst people may present their trajectory as coherent, they constantly shift between multiple, contradictory self-representations, torn between conflicting self-ideals. For his informants, romantic love, social respect, good character and self-realisation constitute other ethical "teleologies of the subject", which provide moral and normative frameworks for his informants (*ibid* 2010a: 29-30). Different conceptions of the self are present within a single culture, but also within the life of a single individual. As a consequence, Schielke maintains, ambivalence ought to be the starting point for the study of morality and ethical subjectivity (see also Marsden 2007b).[22]

A focus on my informants' everyday experiences will emphasise the ways they negotiate different teleologies of the subject, and multiple forms and modes of subjectification (Chapters Two-Four). This analytical lens will shed light on how practising Islam is rarely a straightforward or coherent project, but a fragmentary one marked by inconsistencies, contradictions, and doubt (Pelkmans 2013).

1.6   Ethics, imagination, and problematization

This section brings to bear the analytical insights of the previous two sections – a concern with contextual and historical specificities and an attention to lived

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[22] In his study of all-male sonic gatherings in western Pakistan, Marsden (2007b) argues that focusing on the "substrate of embodied dispositions" may ignore the fact that individuals may be involved in a multiplicity of gatherings that offer "very different forms of sociality, experience and social aesthetics" (2007: 485).

experience – on an elaboration of Foucault's work on ethics (section 1.2.3). The following two sections develop the theoretical concepts that will inform my analysis of ethical change across this thesis.

By conceptualising ethics as the ways in which norms are lived, and the relationship that the self has to itself (section 1.2.3), I have outlined how my thesis will explore the ways in which the four different areas of ethics (ethical substance, modes of subjectification, techniques of the self and *telos*) are reworked by young practising women by drawing on both Islamic and secular-liberal discourses (section 1.4). Here, I expand this analysis further and, following Moore (2011), I begin with the premise that the making of selves always involves establishing new relations *vis-à-vis* others, thus creating new possibilities for understanding oneself and self-other relations. I focus on how these different areas of ethics are altered and transformed depending on these women's relations with others, including kin, future husbands, practising friends, non-Muslims and God. I suggest we look at the specific forms and mechanisms of subjection which are engaged through these relations, and the "specific grounds for transformations in subjectivities" (Moore 2011: 74).

I draw on Moore's (2011) concept of the *ethical imagination*, which constitutes the means through which individuals *imagine* relationships to themselves and to others: "the way in which technologies of the self, forms of subjectification and imagined relations with others lead to novel ways of approaching social transformation" (Moore 2011:15). Whilst for Foucault, (2000: 117) ethical practice is informed by thought and reflection – an ability to stand back from acting and reacting – the ethical imagination also includes embodied dispositions, affect, and fantasy as well as processes of unknowing (Moore 2011). As Moore elaborates, the relation between self and other is relational, imagined, social and affective. It is also historically specific, taking particular forms at particular times (Moore 2011: 76). According to Foucault (2000: 291), ethical practices are proposed, suggested or imposed by a given society, culture or social group. They provide points of reference and not absolute limits (Faubion 2001: 89-90). Accordingly, there is an element that remains undetermined "in its active state of possibility" (Moore 2011: 16).

The ethical imagination, Moore (2011) elaborates, is a site of cultural invention. It provides for historical possibilities and offers a way through which to explore social

change, as people's ideas about themselves, ultimately determine the paths they follow and pursue. Thus, self-formation is always historically specific and is shaped by specific ethical problems that arise at a particular moment in time. Foucault's notion of problematization demonstrates how these ethical transformations are enacted, not as a direct result of socio-political change, but as "a set of located and embedded responses that take particular forms" (Moore 2011: 84).

In an interview published posthumously, Foucault (2000) elaborates on the concept of problematization as developed in his second volume of *The History of Sexuality*. He suggests problematization is "the development of a domain of acts, practices and thoughts that seem to me to pose the problems for politics" (*ibid* 2000: 114). In his book, he elaborates on how sexuality arose as a problem – as a work of thought, and an object of knowledge, that required scrutiny, analysis and elaboration. "For a domain of action, a behaviour, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it" (*ibid* 2000: 117). In this genealogy, he traces certain areas of ethical practice that began to be problematized with the advent of Christianity (e.g. fidelity, relationships with boys). The result of these particular problematizations was that certain sexual behaviours came to be seen as a domain of ethical experience. Foucault argues that change occurred, not in rules but in the ethical substance and the forms or modes of elaboration. For example, fidelity came to be interpreted as an observance of the rule, rather than a matter of mastering desires.

Social, economic, or political processes instigate, but do not determine the various different responses, and at times contradictory solutions, that constitute this terrain of problematization. In fact, Foucault (2000: 115) is not interested in analysing these problems from the point of view of politics. Rather, he scrutinises the positions and solutions politics takes on these issues and the reasons it provides. These solutions, he argues, develop out of the specific problematization, which defines, but does not limit the elements that constitute the different solutions. Problematization develops the conditions in which possible solutions can be given: it constitutes "the soil that can nourish them all in their diversity and in spite of their contradictions" (*ibid* 2000: 118).

The notion of problematization sheds light on the mechanics of ethical change. It "constitutes the dynamic interface between one discourse and another", inciting the transformation of ethical fields (Faubion 2001: 97). It thus enables us to theorise how historical and contextual factors come to bear on processes of self-transformation and how they engage the ethical imagination. As I suggested above, recent debates on multiculturalism have turned the questions of what constitutes culture, and what it means to be Muslim and British, into "problems" or objects of thought. These problems are instigated by a range of socio-political factors, but what interests me is the way they have emerged as areas of knowledge that have come to pose a problem for politics.

Whilst I focus on some of the solutions to these problems proposed by policy makers, media pundits, or public culture, my central focus throughout is on the responses of young second-generation Somali women. I pay attention to the ways in which their ethical imagination is engaged in these forms of problematizations. As Moore (2011: 16) demonstrates, in contexts of social change the ethical imagination is brought into play by new ideas, ways of being, and people's own theories of change. My informants position themselves within these areas of problematization but also contribute their own understandings, and their own solutions to these problematized areas. They provide their own imaginations of self and self-other relations, thus altering the conditions in which possible responses can emerge and take form.

I demonstrate how ethical change unfolds as young second-generation women draw on a range of intersecting discourses in order to negotiate multiple teleologies, and rework the substance of their ethical projects and the mode of subjectification that is being problematized in these debates. I inquire into the ways they imagine novel self-other relations through their changing engagements with culture, religious practice, and knowledge, as well as their novel aspirations for marriage and the afterlife. In order to trace historical transformations, I examine the continuities and discontinuities between these young women's engagements with these notions and those of first-generation Somali women. I argue that practising Islam is shaped, but not determined by, historical forms of problematization, as these young women bring to these problematizations new forms of understanding self and self-other relations.

1.7 Time, hope, affect

People's imagined ideas about themselves and others always contain a dimension of aspiration (Moore 2011: 22). The ethical imagination enables us to theorise how individuals perceive and imagine change but also to unravel "the potentialities of the relationalities they engage and make possible" (*ibid* 2011: 22). Hope is created through shifts in forms of subjectification, animating the ethical imagination, processes of self-fashioning, and resulting forms of agency (*ibid* 2011: 144). It propels us forward and "attach[es] us to the world, to ourselves and to others through imagination and fantasy" (*ibid* 2011: 22). As I demonstrate in what follows, young women's practice of Islam entails shifts in forms of subjectification, which involve reorienting the self forward in time. Hope is, thus, crucial in energising these young women's quests for self-transformation.

Throughout I engage with the recent anthropological literature that has focused on the temporal character of hope, by emphasising hope as a form of orientation towards a possible future (Miyazaki 2004; 2006; Crapanzano 2003).[23] In his ethnography on the Suvavou people in Fiji, Miyazaki (2004) develops a framework for approaching moments of hope. He shifts attention away from a focus on hope as a subject of study, and develops an analytics of hope as a method. According to Miyazaki (2004: 5), hope lies in the "radical temporal reorientation of knowledge" for the future. Through this perspective, he accounts for his informants' persistent attempts to seek compensation from the state after having been removed from their lands. Miyazaki interprets their perseverance as an enduring hope to confirm their self-knowledge and truth of who they are. Building on Ernst Bloch's (1995) concept of the "not yet", Miyazaki approaches hope as an anticipation of fulfilment that requires constant repetition, and involves an oscillation between openness and closure. Hope, he insists,

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[23] Hope as a category has emerged amongst social theorists as an alternative framework for critical thought, brought about by a sense of lost hope in progressive politics (Zournazi 2003). For other anthropological work on hope see Hage (2003) and Zigon (2009).

should not be seen in terms of its own endpoint, but as the maintenance of a prospective perspective.[24]

In what follows, I similarly approach hope as a force that animates my informants' engagements with new forms of knowledge and thus reorients their relations to themselves and to others in time. However, building on Miyazaki's work, I also draw attention to the experiential dimensions of these young women's temporal reorientations – the ways this prospective orientation entails an affective experience of potentiality, intensity, euphoria, and excitement (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Stewart 2007). For example, in the following chapters I consider my informants' experiences as they reconfigure their relations to God, through their engagements with Islamic knowledge. I also point to the ways in which these experiences of intensity and potentiality are registered, interpreted, and described through the idiom of "high *iman*", or simply "*iman*". Although *iman* literally means a firm belief that arises out of knowledge and conviction, my informants employ the term in everyday usage to refer to an affective experience of excitement and euphoria that results from imagining new connections with others.

This experiential dimension of hope is drawn from Islamic discursive models of emotions and affect, but cannot be reduced to it. Mahmood (2005) for example, offers a theory of hope as emotion grounded in the Islamic discursive tradition. Hope (*al-raja*), fear (*al-khauf*) and love (*al-hubb*), she argues, are emotions that her informants seek to cultivate so that they may arise naturally within the self. Her purpose is to demonstrate how emotions should not be assumed to arise spontaneously but may be cultivated as both modalities and motives for pious action (*ibid* 2005: 140). Hope is conceptualised as an emotion, constitutive of a pedagogical project. Similarly, Hirschkind (2006) – on whose work I elaborate in Chapters Five and Six – argues that the practice of listening to cassette sermons amongst members of the Islamic revival involves the honing of affective-volitional dispositions and orientations that form part of the visceral background that informs ethical action. For example, listening can involve the process of *inshirah*, the "opening the heart" in order to achieve closeness

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[24] Miyazaki (2006) also investigates the ways in which hope works as a reorientation of knowledge towards the future, in the life of a Japanese security trader.

to God, which is both indispensible to action and serves to motivate action by reforming and attuning the heart and making it more receptive to God.

These pedagogical conventions inform my informants' thinking; hope, love, and fear are emotions which they work to cultivate as modalities and motives for action (Chapters Five and Six). Furthermore, these young women draw on the Islamic discursive tradition as they capture and represent their affective experiences. However, by drawing on Miyazaki's (2004) analytical framework, I argue that both Mahmood and Hirschkind depict a static model of emotions, which cannot fully apprehend the character of a hopeful moment (Miyazaki 2004: 22). In contrast, I draw attention to hope as a prospective orientation – a means of engaging with the world – that is generated as young practising women appropriate new forms of knowledge. Although my informants may describe their affective experiences through the terms derived from these Islamic models of piety, these experiences are never fully captured by them (see Chapter Five, section 5.5). My analysis reveals a discrepancy between representations of affect and the ways in which it is experienced. Accordingly, my understanding of hope differs from that employed by Mahmood and Hirschkind. It involves an affective experience that is generated through temporal shifts in subjectification, as my informants imagine new relations to self and others, and is only partly captured through the language derived from Islamic teachings. I elaborate further on these themes in Chapters Five and Six.

1.8   Reflections on fieldwork

Gaining access to the field in an urban setting is a frustrating process. Urban lifestyles rarely lend themselves to dedicating long periods of time to a "researcher". In my case this was compounded by the fact that I had planned to conduct much of my research in domestic settings, hoping to be able to follow the trajectories of individual women across London. First-generation women, in particular were initially sceptical and reluctant to participate. They worried this was yet another one of the many policy-based research projects targeted at Somali women, which they felt rarely translated into visible improvements in their lives. Furthermore, many women lead busy lives between work, childcare, and domestic responsibilities. This undoubtedly played a part in their initial reluctance to participate, questioning the extent to which my research would bring them any direct benefits.

My research focused mainly on female members of 21 Somali households in London. This was both a deliberate choice, but also one dictated by the difficulties of gaining access to the everyday lives of men. Pious women tend to respect *purdah* (gender separation) whenever possible. Some men did feature in my research, as the fathers, husbands, and brothers of my informants, and I did conduct some interviews with young Somali men. However, most husbands and older brothers were absent from the houses I frequented, often because they worked or socialised outside the home, or because they lived elsewhere. Thirteen of the twenty-one homes I frequented throughout my research were female-headed, either because the couple had divorced, or the husband had moved back to Somali-speaking territories or in some cases had passed away. As typical of many other Somali households in London, most of the ones I frequented were relatively large compared to British standards, with an average of five children per home. The majority of women, in addition to looking after their families in the UK, sent remittances home on a monthly basis.

I initially contacted several Somali organisations in Kilburn, Camden, and Tower Hamlets. I explained that I was conducting research on generational and religious change and the organisers allowed me to volunteer in the organisations, introducing me as a student-researcher. I began voluntarily teaching English at supplementary classes for Somali teenagers, teaching ESOL (English as a second language) lessons for adults and volunteering at youth clubs in Camden, Tower Hamlets and Newham. I took part in as many activities organised by these organisations as I could, including women's dance classes (*buranbuur*), meetings, and celebrations (see Figures 1, 3 & 4). I supported a Somali woman with her campaign to become a local councillor, and I was involved in a local campaign against FGM. For a year I conducted interviews, and wrote and edited articles for *Somali Eye*, an English magazine based in Tower Hamlets that catered for a diaspora readership. During and after fieldwork I volunteered on a weekly basis with *Kayd: Somali Arts and Culture*, an organisation that coordinates regular artistic and cultural events in London and in the Horn of Africa, including the annual Somali Week Festival in Bethnal Green London, and the Hargeysa International Book Fair (see Figure 4).

The initial months of my fieldwork were by far the most challenging. I was living with my sister in Battersea, in South-West London, as I was still working out where I

should move for access purposes. The benefit of this experience was that I came to know the London tube and maps almost by heart, but the long commutes from Battersea to East London were exhausting. My evenings were spent frenetically writing field notes in my diary on tube journeys home, and I soon felt that the sheer distances – sometimes travelling for two hours to get home from an event – were demotivating and hampering my research. Living so far from my informants' places of residence significantly limited my opportunities to interact with individuals on a daily basis. However, after several months I found a house in Hackney in North-East London, which allowed ease of access to the boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Camden, where the majority of my research took place (Map 1).

After having moved to Hackney, I almost immediately noticed that I was developing greater rapport with both the students and the organisers of these Somali-run organisations. Nevertheless, it was often difficult to ask questions in these settings, and I therefore began to organise interviews with older Somali women. I conducted both narrative interviews on their experiences of everyday life in the UK and "back home" throughout the post-independence period, as well as life-history interviews. In total I conducted interviews with 18 first-generation Somali women (including women from the 21 households), who had migrated to the UK in the last 20-25 years from both urban and rural areas across Somali speaking territories. Some of the women were happy for me to interview them several times and this enabled me to ask follow up questions or explore themes in greater depth. Unless the women were comfortable with the idea, I rarely recorded these sessions, and the interview always took place in their homes. As Somali hospitality dictates, I was almost always offered food and tea following the interview, and my vegetarianism had to be temporarily shelved for fear of insulting my hosts, whose meals were mostly meat-based.

Conversations during interviews were often informal, and although I had prepared a list of topics I usually allowed the conversation to flow naturally, occasionally bringing it back to my list of themes. Initially I began with life histories, which generally required minimal prompting. The women were more than happy to speak at length about their lives, recounting minute details of their pasts, and reflecting nostalgically about their youth and the beauty of Somalia, while also expressing deep sadness about the present situation there. I was often shown photographs and

pamphlets, or introduced to poetry recitation or music from the 1970s-80s. My interview topics also touched on themes regarding their everyday lives in London, their religious education, and particularly some of the personal, religious, and familial changes experienced since living in the UK. In addition, I produced 21 kinship diagrams of families I frequented throughout my research, collecting biographical information of extended kin, and marriage patterns.[25]

Several months into my fieldwork I was asked by some of the women I met at the community centres in Camden and Tower Hamlets whether I could teach them, and their children, English in their homes. We agreed that I would teach voluntarily and I began spending my afternoons in their homes, teaching, eating, and conversing with the children and watching evening TV. At that stage I was frequenting six households on a weekly basis and through these contacts I was introduced to other women who were happy to be interviewed or visited on an informal basis. Although these visits enabled me to gain an insight into Somali familial life it was often difficult to converse with the older women. As mentioned, most of the homes were female-headed, or the husband was rarely in the home during the day. A typical day involved a mother juggling chores such as cooking, cleaning, and collecting children, whilst also entertaining a steady stream of family members informally passing by, as well as numerous phone call to and from friends and relatives. Rarely did the women have time to sit down and converse with me. On occasions when we organised meetings for informal conversations or interviews, my informants would often cancel with very little notice, or ignore my phone calls to them when the time came. This was an even greater problem when I had lived in Battersea, and had travelled across the city for one interview!

I quickly began to feel like I was constantly nagging and relying on other peoples' generosity for interviews and access, something which was not helped by my very limited understanding of Somali: some of the older women had little English, and I was relying on others for translation. Despite these difficulties, I did manage to develop very close friendships with three first-generation Somali women who had lived in Mogadishu until the 1990s. Their stories feature most prominently in Chapter

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[25] These kinship diagrams will inform my analysis of marriage practices in Chapter Four.

Two. I began by teaching them English and accompanied them to *Quran* lessons, but soon we developed a more intimate relationship, and I often went with them to weddings, friends' houses, and other social occasions. I spent many afternoons sitting in their living rooms, conversing, eating, and drinking Somali tea. They also introduced me to their extended network of kin and friends in the local area.

One of the most significant events in my fieldwork was the day I met a young woman in her mid-20s, whom I shall call Layla. We met by chance at a Somali event and it was Layla who introduced me to many other young practising Somali women in their mid 20s-30s. At that point I had mostly frequented older women, teenagers, and some young non-practising women who worked at the community centres where I volunteered on a weekly basis. It was through Layla and her friends that I began to learn more about young women's understandings and experiences of practising Islam. From the start she showed a willingness to answer my questions patiently, but also demonstrated an interest in my life. Soon, accompanied by Layla, I began frequenting Islamic lectures, classes, informal Islamic circles (*halaqa*) as well as weddings, parties, and dinner outings. I spent much of my time in their family homes, as the majority were unmarried at the time of my fieldwork and lived with their families. I also accompanied these young women on a range of activities across and beyond London, including to a Sufi Festival in Sötenich Germany, a fundraising hike in Scotland, and a trip to the Ihsan mosque in Norwich, and several weekends away in Liverpool and South Wales.

Throughout my fieldwork, different people, depending on the interactions, positioned me differently in relation to them. For many of the older first-generation women I was very much an outsider: I was a white, young, non-Muslim and unmarried woman, and had little or no understanding of the Somali language. The fact that I was Italian did, however, facilitate some of my interactions. Several women who had been raised in Mogadishu spoke Italian and they enjoyed sharing some of the same vocabulary (*pasto, lasagne*) or commenting on similarities between our two cultures, in contrast to the British whom they considered individualistic, cold, and distant. Often, my informants would comment on the inhospitable attitude of their English neighbours, who rarely greeted them in passing and showed no interest in welcoming them into the neighbourhood. Furthermore, their interactions with non-Somalis were few and

far between, particularly if they were not in employment. The fact that I was not British meant the older women felt free to express quite openly the racism and social barriers they had encountered in British society.

Unlike my experience with the older Somali women, many of the Islamic spaces that I frequented with my younger practising informants were hugely diverse and included Muslims from across the world, as well as many white-British converts. As a non-Muslim I was still positioned as an outsider despite sharing age, gender, and a similar level of education with many of the women. Although I tried to avoid answering questions about my faith as much as possible, attending Islamic classes and events meant that I was constantly questioned about my beliefs, my motivations for being there, and whether I would ever convert. Sometimes my outsider role proved incredibly valuable to my research; some women felt they could open up with me and discuss issues that they felt unable to mention to other Somalis or Muslims. For example, I describe in Chapter Three, a young Somali women who told me she no longer had faith and that she struggled to explain this to any of her Muslim friends or family members. Although I tried as much as I could to be honest about my personal lack of belief, often the young Muslim women I frequented wanted to know exactly with which passage of the *Quran* I disagreed, or had difficulties accepting. These questions would then turn into a discussion about the different interpretations of the text, and the nuances of the opinions of scholars and Muslim feminists.

These exchanges were insightful and often enabled me to rethink many assumptions regarding religion, Islam, my own Catholic upbringing, and my current lack of faith. The work of feminist scholars on religion and the postsecular (Bracke 2008; Braidotti 2008; Mahmood 2005) was hugely influential to my thinking throughout the fieldwork process, as I reflected on my own secular-liberal assumptions, and my informants' quests to practise Islam. By engaging with these young and informed women in debates surrounding Islamic texts, I learnt about the ways they engaged with textual knowledge, and the importance they attributed to reading, analysing, interpreting and debating. However, many of these young women often stressed that there was a limit to scrutinising the texts, to reasoning, and to taking issue with a particular verse. Ultimately, for them, reason had its limits which one had to accept, and often, one simply had to rely on faith. In their view, they could explain the texts

to me, but ultimately whether I accepted them or not was only in God's hands. Although they continued to engage in discussions with me, they accepted that they only had a limited role to play in my ultimate acceptance or rejection of faith. After a few months my friends stopped questioning and accepted my participation in classes, daily prayers, and fasting.

My experience of conducting research on faith however, was an unsettling process. I noticed the ways in which I, like Susan Harding (1989) experienced a form of liminality, alternating between belief and disbelief. In her ethnography on Fundamentalist Christians in the U.S, Harding describes how, when driving home following an interview with a pastor, she suddenly breaks to avoid an accident, only to ask herself: What is God trying to tell me? In that moment, Harding feels she has spoken with her voice but not her words; she had begun to share the knowledge, vision, and sensibilities of a believer. Likewise, throughout my research I noticed the ways in which I gradually began to speak differently – interspersing my English with Arabic phrases, changing my tone and altering my clothing. But more surprisingly, I began to think of myself differently, particularly in the presence of my practising friends. Because practising Islam for my informants involves, above all, a shift in self-understanding and the establishment of a relationship with God, I found myself thinking in these terms, reflecting on fate and the presence of God, and reminding myself about death. These thoughts would have been completely alien to me prior to fieldwork.

Ethnographic fieldwork inevitably means that the relationship between the researcher and one's informants is never fixed or clearly defined, as one shifts between the roles of a friend, daughter, volunteer, teacher and so on. Throughout this thesis I have to my best abilities sought to omit sensitive material, protect anonymity as much as possible, and in some cases sent copies of the chapters to informants who expressed a desire to read them. In order to do so, I have had to change names, biographical details, identities, and locations. Somalis in London, particularly those belonging to the same clan or living in the same area, are well acquainted and I have been rigorous in my attempt to ensure that the individuals mentioned are not recognisable.

Much of the data on young practising women presented in this thesis is discursive; it involves conversations I had with my informants and numerous debates and

discussions they had amongst themselves. Whilst it may appear that I spent more time talking with them, rather than observing behaviour, this bias is in fact a reflection of how young practising women spend much of their time talking, debating, and critically reflecting on their own experiences. The fact that my fieldwork was spent, for the most part, over coffee or dinner, in bedrooms, prayer rooms or walking and talking around London, is a result less of my own research design, than of their everyday practices and engagements.

Historically in anthropology there has been a divide between the subject of one's research and the audience of the written monograph. Somalis, and particularly those in the diaspora, however, approach the writings of non-Somalis with a unique curiosity and critical eye. At least one member of each of the Somali households I frequented had read or knew about I.M Lewis' (1994; 1962) eminent ethnographic work amongst the northern pastoral Somali society – something quite unusual in anthropology. Throughout my research my Somali friends often reminded me of the complex politics of representation into which I was immersing myself by writing about Somali women. From the day I met Zaynab, a young practising Somali woman, she questioned my reasons for writing about Somalis, and my entitlement to do so. "*Why are you interested in Somalis? What have you got to say that we can't say ourselves?*" she would often ask me in a blunt outspoken way. Her attitude was understandable given the ways in which middle-class white European writers have represented Somalis and Muslims in the mainstream media.

Similarly, in spring 2012, I participated in a discussion with a couple of young Somali women on the recent popularity of Mary Harper's (2012) book *Getting Somalia Wrong.* One of the women expressed her annoyance at white liberals who, she argued, represented themselves as Somali "experts". Lewis' work on Somalis, she felt, had dominated Somalis' own understandings of their clan system and Somali society for decades. "*We'd prefer if you didn't dominate representations, so that we don't have to see ourselves through your words*", one of the women commented, directing her words at me.

It is with her words in mind, that I would like this thesis to be read; it is not a general account of the experiences of Somalis in London, but rather a historically situated account of a small group of two generations of Somali women. It explores the ways in

which young practising Somalis relate to the Islamic tradition and come to understand themselves, and others, differently in the process. It does not seek to provide a coherent account of these women's lives, nor a linear historical narrative, but rather explores the recursive and fragmentary processes of ethical change. My hope is that this thesis will challenge simplified depictions of Somali, Muslim women in Europe, and offer a glimpse into these young women's experiences of self-transformation.

1.9   Chapter Outline

The following two chapters take as a starting point the rhetorical and political shifts around multiculturalism that have dominated the last decade in Europe, and that have led to the problematization of cultural differences and Muslims' place within British society (Appendix B). I explore the ways young Somali women position themselves within these areas of problematization by reconfiguring their understandings of themselves, and reworking their relations with others through the concepts of Somali culture and religious practice and faith. I trace the differences between their understandings and engagements with these concepts and those of their mothers.

Chapter Two investigates the ways in which second-generation women problematize and objectify Somali culture. They emphasise the importance of choice as a mode of engagement, with the aim of fashioning themselves as autonomous subjects in relation to culture and Somali kin. In doing so, they separate themselves from their mothers and Somalis whom they perceive as traditional, because they are unable to fully objectify, and sufficiently update, Somali culture.

In Chapter Three, I explore the ways these young women engage with the problem of what constitutes the Muslim subject, and a series of interrelated problems around the visibility of Islamic practices. The process involves a reformulation of the relationship between exterior practices and interior dimensions of the self, prioritising interiority – intentions, values and an affective relationship with, and submission to, God. They simultaneously separate themselves from mothers and cultural others, realign their relations to non-Muslims, and in the process alter and rework the Islamic pedagogical tradition from within.

Chapter Four brings together the two previous chapters and the different ways in which these second-generation women fashion themselves *vis-à-vis* culture and Islamic practice and faith. The chapter is based around a marriage event organised for, and by, young second-generation practising women. I argue this event is a technique of self-fashioning through which these young women transform themselves and negotiate their relation to culture, Islam, and God by drawing on both the Islamic tradition and a liberal ethics of choice and autonomy. By creating imagined engagements with potential husbands, these women manage coexisting ideals of social mobility, financial security gender equity, romantic love, and love for God. In doing so, they also alter the meanings and practices attached to marriage.

Chapter Five investigates the ways in which two generations of women relate to, and establish, what constitutes authoritative Islamic knowledge. It traces the ways in which first-generation women have begun to reason about, and understand, the meanings of texts. Subsequently it explores what the younger practising women understand by "seeking knowledge". Contributing to the literature on Islam in Europe, it argues that young second-generation women emphasise most importantly a commitment to Islamic structures of authority, as well as the liberal concepts of choice and autonomy. In addition, it points to the importance of affective processes as crucial to determining their long-term commitment to a particular source of knowledge.

The argument about affect, time, and hope is taken up in Chapter Six. This final chapter explores the temporal dimensions involved in practising Islam, arguing that in order to fully capture the character and potential of practising, we need to explore the relationship between self-making and time. It suggests that two temporalities are crucial to the younger women's engagements in pious projects: a focus on the immediate present, and on the distant future of the hereafter. Paying attention to these temporalities enables us to capture the ways in which these young women engage in self-making – in imagining themselves and their relations with others – in the temporal domain of the afterlife. It is an engagement with this temporal dimension that, alongside other imagined engagements, animates their actions in the present time on earth.

Figure 1: *Buranbuur* dance class in Mile End, 2010

Courtesy of Ocean Somali Community Association.

Figure 2: Zaytun Somali Restaurant, Stepney Green

Zaytun was formerly a Somali restaurant and was frequently visited during my fieldwork.

Figure 3: Somali wedding in central London, 2009

This content has been removed for reasons of copyright

Figure 4: Somali Week Festival, 2011

Courtesy of Kayd Somali Arts & Culture

Chapter 2: Updating Culture: generational changes and historical transformations

2.1 Disputing Somali culture

It must have been a rather strange sight for Idil, after returning from a long day at university: her mother Sofia who is regarded by Idil as relatively computer illiterate and computer-phobic, was sitting in the living room with her face glued to the computer screen and her Italian friend/ anthropologist slouched in the couch beside her. But in fact, true to self, Sofia was not engaged in any profound computer programming or analysis. Instead, she was undertaking one of the more commonplace and elementary of computer tasks: sifting through a YouTube search for "Somali songs" and translating the lyrics for me. We had been chatting all afternoon, lazily sipping Somali tea as the topic of conversation had drifted to Somali music and dancing. Sofia explained to me, as she hummed her favourite tunes, that back in the 1980s in Mogadishu it was common to attend dance and theatre performances. Reminiscing about these "good old days" in her country, Sofia excitedly clicked on the mouse switching from *buranbuur* poem songs to popular romantic tunes.

Once Idil had made sense of the situation she tried to slip away to her room but Sofia, at that moment, had an inspiration; she called her back and asked her to demonstrate her *Nikko* dancing to me. Since this is a very sensual dance which involves moving hips and bottom to a drum beat, it is contentious amongst religiously-minded Somalis: *Nikko* is rarely danced at religious weddings or in mixed gatherings. Because Idil was not, unlike her mother, practising Islam, she did not mind performing it in front of both male and female company (something Sofia wilfully turns a blind eye to). In fact, it was one of those aspects of "Somali culture" that she was proud to celebrate and acquiescing to her mother's wish, Idil returned from her bedroom with a flowered *dirac* (loose Somali dress) and a scarf tied around her hips used to accentuate her bottom. After a quick search on YouTube for the correct drum beat, she turned her back to us stuck out her bum and swayed to the beat. It was beautiful, controlled, and rhythmic and she showed me the way she had adapted the movements to reggae in order to dance in nightclubs. But while Idil was dancing Sofia's two Somali neighbours, Nimo and Ilhan, dressed in black *jilbaabs,* walked into the house. Nimo

sat on the couch, watching and smiling but Ilhan remained standing, observing with her arms folded and a stern look of disapproval painted across her face.

For a while no one took any notice, but after a few minutes Ilhan had had enough and she dashed to one of the shelves, picked up the *Quran* and began reciting the opening s*ura* (chapter). Once finished, she turned to Sofia and reminded her that music and dancing were cultural practices that were *haram* (forbidden) and incited *Shaitan* (Satan). I had foreseen the response before the *Quran* was even put down, because a mood of mischief had crept into the air, particularly between mother and daughter. Sofia jumped up and also began dancing, whilst Idil swayed more energetically, lifting her long *dirac* to reveal her bare legs.

2.2   Problematizing culture

It is trite to say that culture has been a contentious concept in anthropology. However, just as anthropologists have turned away from culture, it has, in recent years entered public debate and politics. Through claims to authenticity and uniqueness, culture has come to serve as a form of governmentality and is institutionalised in multicultural policies; in turn, it has been appropriated as a way of making claims on state resources as well as being implicated in contests of representation and value (Phillips 2007; Moore 2011: 34-35). As Yudice (2003) notes, this culturalisation of politics has also been fed by the social sciences and their concern with diversity (Yudice 2003).[26]

This chapter is not concerned with theorising Somali culture as an entity or analytical category, but instead explores the historically specific ways in which culture has been objectified, reworked, and deployed. I suggest that debates around multiculturalism and diversity, which surfaced in the UK throughout the late 1960s with the surge of immigrants from the former colonies, and more recently have centred on the demise of multiculturalism (see Appendix B), have given rise to a series of problematizations around the meaning and make-up of culture. A series of interrelated queries around a

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[26] According to Yudice (2003) culture has been employed as a resource for sociopolitical and economic amelioration; it has been invoked to solve conflicts over citizenship and cultural capital. Cultural citizenship, he contends, is a form of "cultural power" (an extension of Foucault's biopower) whereby culture, as resource for politics and a form of governmentality, is invoked both to resolve, and assign responsibility for a range of problems.

subject's relation with culture, and what it means to have, or belong to, a culture, have emerged as areas of knowledge and governance, and as political issues that need to be addressed and tackled (see section 1.6). In this section I trace the ways culture has been dealt with in public and political discourses, academic work and policies on multiculturalism in the UK. The rest of the chapter returns to the themes raised in the original vignette, and focuses on how two generations of Somali women navigate their ways around these problematizations and seek to fashion themselves through reworking their understandings of, and their relations, to Somali culture.

Baumann (1996) has argued that British hegemonic public discourse equates community, ethnicity and culture and has reified culture as an imprisoning cocoon and as a determining force.[27] Building on this insight, Phillips (2007) explores how a reified culture is used in multicultural legal and policy frameworks. She contends that minorities have often been represented as bounded communities defined through their cultural characteristics and juxtaposed to a liberal autonomous self. Culture, she maintains, is employed across the political spectrum as a way of demonising and stereotyping individuals from minority, non-Western groups. Multicultural frameworks have made recourse to culture as a way of referring to race, thereby reproducing fixity, defining groups in totalising ways, seeing people as separate and different to the majority culture, and thus predicting the behaviour of minority groups. For example, whole ranges of behaviours deemed unacceptable, such as forced marriages or female genital mutilation, have been attributed to cultural characteristics. This deployment of culture has produced a "radical otherness" and has depicted minorities as incapacitated by culture and as lacking in autonomy (*ibid* 2007: Chapter Three). It has produced "a determinist understanding of culture that represents individuals from minority or non-Western cultural groups as controlled by cultural rules" and as juxtaposed to the liberal, autonomous agent and culture (*ibid* 2007: 101).

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[27] In his ethnography of multi-ethnic Southall, Baumann (1996) shows how these discourses are in turn employed by ethnic minorities as a way of making claims for public resources and to compete in local politics. However, they coexist with what he defines as a "demotic discourse", which individuals from ethnic minorities employ to question the congruence of culture and community, and recognise that culture is processual and dynamic. Although Baumann's informants employ both discourses, the hegemonic reification of culture dominates the ways they talk about their own community, ethnicity, and culture as a bounded whole.

As other scholars have shown, these cultural representations, which are readily accepted in popular discourses, have also been highly gendered. Often minority men are depicted as perpetrators of violence against passive female victims (Phillips 2007: Chapter Three). This notion of culture relies on the stereotyping of minority – and very often, Muslim – gender relations, and serves as a means of suppressing difference (Ewing 2008).

In the mid-2000s, as a consequence of various national and global events, the legal and policy frameworks in the UK, which were originally structured around race-relations and ethnic diversity, were extended to recognise religious differences (see Appendix B). As I elaborate in the following chapter, the debates that ensued throughout this period have also contributed to the problematization of (Islamic) religious practices and the female Muslim subject in the public sphere. Here, however, what interests me is the ways that the incorporation of religious diversity within existing frameworks has meant that religious communities (e.g. Muslims in the UK) have often been treated in political and public discourse as a bounded community with a shared culture (Werbner 2009). Religious diversity, as a consequence, has largely been conflated with, and managed within, existing frameworks of cultural diversity.

The literature on cultural and religious change amongst Somalis in the diaspora has often inserted itself within, and fed into, these debates (Hopkins 2010; Valentine et al 2009; Valentine & Sporton 2009; McGown 1999; 2007; Tiilikainen 2003; 2007; Isotalo 2007; Lilius 2001).[28] It has sought to address and offer a range of responses to the questions that are problematized in public and political discussions. For example, scholars have explored the changing sense of being Somali in the diaspora (Hopkins 2010; Langellier 2010; Valentine & Sporton 2009; Kusow 2007; Bjork 2007a; 2007b; Fangen 2007), or the changing relationship between Somali ethnicity, culture, and Islam (De Voe 2002; McMichael 2002; McGown 1999). Furthermore, much of this work has sought to address issues of diversity, integration or assimilation.[29] Whilst I

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[28] In Chapter Four I engage with the literature on the Somali Diaspora that deals with changes to kinship, clan and gender.

[29] For other work on the Diaspora and processes of adaptation, integration or assimilation, see Engebrigtsen 2007; Bigelow 2010; McMichael 2002; De Voe 2002.

do not dispute the data presented in these studies, and in fact build on them throughout this chapter, my theoretical approach departs from this literature in two interrelated ways. First, I seek to understand the categories of Somali culture and religion as historically specific notions that have become objectified as particular forms of difference and have come to pose a problem for politics in the contemporary moment. In what follows, I treat culture as a means of engaging with the world and with others (Moore 2011: 11). My emphasis, therefore, is less on assessing what constitutes Somali culture or Somaliness as a form of belonging, or on determining changing cultural and religious identifications. Nor do I seek to address the questions of integration and assimilation. Rather, I focus on how, and why, my informants concern themselves with these particular questions around culture and religion at this moment in time, how they understand these categories, and the ways they employ them in processes of self-fashioning.

Furthermore, I suggest that the diaspora literature has unduly prioritised the migration process as an explanatory factor that accounts for these religious and cultural transformations. As a consequence, much of the emphasis has been on changes that result as a consequence of engagement with the host society. McGown's (1999) study *Muslims in the diaspora: The Somali communities of London and Toronto* is a case in point. Her book approaches religious change through an exploration of the "mechanisms of integration" from the perspectives of the immigrant population and the political culture of the host society.[30] By prioritising the process of migration, this work not only neglects the historical specificities of current debates on integration that have problematized culture and religion as described above, but it also fails to account for the ways that changes amongst first- and second-generation Somalis are the result of long-term historical factors, and an engagement with a variety of discursive traditions and practices. For example, it insufficiently accounts for the internal transformations that are constitutive of the global Islamic tradition (Amir-Moazami & Salvatore 2003; section 1.2), and it pays insufficient attention to the ways some of the changes examined originate prior to the process of migration (see

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[30] McGown argues that the encounter with an individualistic, secular society has "forced" Somalis into a "crisis of identity". Religion, in her account, plays a functional role: it serves as an "anchor" for Somalis providing "an oasis of tranquillity amid the dislocation of refugee straits and the turmoil of adjusting to a new culture" (*ibid* 1999: 97).

Appendix A). In contrast, my work positions my informants' experiences at the interstices of a range of discursive traditions and broader historical trajectories (Chapter One, section 1.1).

In the remainder of the chapter, I draw out the ways Somali women's ideas about culture intervene within these areas of problematization around the make-up of culture. As Foucault (2000: 118) notes, problematization determines the elements that constitute the different solutions that arise as a result; it shapes but does not determine the responses. These women's ideas and relations to culture, I suggest, are shaped by contemporary debates on multiculturalism, but are also historically specific ideas of Somali culture that have developed throughout Somali history, and reformist discourses on culture and authentic religion. In order to frame this chapter, I begin by unravelling the different understandings of culture that are at play in the original vignette. The first half of the chapter explores the ways first-generation Somali women have changed their ideas about culture in the last 60 years. In the second half, I consider how second-generation women seek to further update and rework Somali culture in the process of rethinking their understandings of self and self-other relations.

2.2.1 Nikko dancing as culture

I return briefly to the initial vignette in order to identify some of the themes that will be developed in this chapter. At stake in the incident above are conflicting ideas about the make-up of culture and the elements of Somali culture deemed suitably compatible with religion. Idil, a second-generation non-practising Somali woman saw *Nikko* as a dimension of culture, a resource that she had actively embraced and enjoyed celebrating and displaying to others. Taught by a young cousin, she had learnt to update and adapt this practice to suit a variety of contexts, ranging from weddings to clubs; *Nikko* was a part of her Somali culture and whether it conflicted or not with religion, this was not a concern for her at that point in time. Interestingly, *Nikko* is a dance that the majority of first-generation Somalis associate with the minority *Jareer-Bantu,* who are descended from pre-Somali populations and recent immigrant Eastern Swahili groups originally brought to Somalia as slaves (Lewis

2008: 6). For Idil's parents *Nikko* is therefore not an authentic Somali dance, but one that has been appropriated from minority cultures of African and slave descent.[31] Idil's appropriation of *Nikko* is a way of reworking and updating an objectified notion of Somali culture, as a set of practices, objects, or values. As I explore later in this chapter, crucial to her deployment of this notion of culture were the ways she fashioned herself through a creative, willing and autonomous engagement with culture.

Ilhan, on the other hand, a first-generation religiously minded mother, had identified any form of dancing, including *Nikko*, as a cultural practice, conflicting with a religious requirement and awareness of modesty. These treatments and reifications of culture and religion are, I argue, historically specific. As I explore in the following section, first-generation Somali women have only recently come to adopt a discourse that separates religion from culture, and identifies certain practices as cultural (whether Somali or Bantu). Second-generation women, on the other hand push this discourse further, as has been amply illustrated in the literature on the diaspora (McGown 1999; Talle 2008) and that on second-generation Muslims in Europe (Jacobson 1997). In doing so they accuse their mothers of not being able to fully separate religion from culture.

Sofia instead, who was familiar with *Nikko* from her days growing up in Mogadishu, had only recently begun learning about Islam, as I explain in more detail below. She was torn between conflicting interpretations and prioritised her loyalty to her daughter and passion for dancing above appeasing her religiously minded friends. This conflict between the aspects of culture which ought to be abandoned, and those, which should be appropriated and celebrated is, I illustrate, a topic of heated debate amongst my informants. It also points to the instability of the category of culture. Sofia's participation in the dancing further demonstrates the arbitrary nature of separating religion from culture; it indicates the impossibility of fully reifying culture as object,

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[31] *Jareer* literally means "hard-haired" and is a discriminatory way of referring to the African descent of the Bantu populations. Traditionally, Bantu do not belong to the main Somali populations; Somalis have tended not to intermarry with the minority "*Jareer-Bantu*" and the latter have largely been socially and politically excluded and marginalized within Somali territories. Many first-generation Somalis do not think of themselves as black African but of Arab descent.

and the difficulty of transforming embodied practices such as dancing into cultural objects.

In what follows, I trace the origins of debates about Somali culture to the 1950s. Through a series of narratives of first-generation Somali women, I explore the ways these understandings of culture have played out in the lives of these women, and how they intersect with the recent impact of reformist discourses.

2.3   Tradition and culture: post-independence Somalia

The romanticisation and valorisation of "tradition and culture" (*daqaan iyo hiddo*) amongst Somali people can be traced back to the 1950s with the emergence of a new urban middle-class. Many of my first-generation Somali female informants were socialised and educated in an urban milieu throughout the late colonial period and following independence. In Appendix A (section 2) I describe this historical context in more depth, and outline ways in which, following independence, discourses of modernity, freedom, development, and equality became increasingly prevalent across these urban areas, particularly in the capital Mogadishu. These discourses became intertwined, at both the government and local level, with the reified idea of Somali nomadic, traditional culture (Kapteijns 1999).

Kapteijns (1999: 152) explores the ways colonial rule, through its insistence on delineating an authentic Somali tradition and defining and applying customary law, created a body of "state-sanctioned tradition". Assuming this reflected the "tribal" nature of local society, it simultaneously suited the universalising European notions of fairness and order. This allowed the state to emphasise what it regarded as authentic tradition. "This articulation of tradition also focused narrowly on politics, kinship and men", and overemphasised patrilineality over other principles regulating resource sharing; politics and kinship thus became a part of the colonial understanding of pastoral society (*ibid* 1999: 152-153). This articulation was reinforced by I.M Lewis' ethnographic monograph (1961) published under the auspices of the British colonial government. It further enhanced, amongst Europeans as well as Somalis, an idea of northern Somali pastoral politics and kinship as representative of authentic Somali tradition (*ibid* 1999: 151). This rendition of tradition simplified local realities and presented a timeless and monolithic conception of a northern traditional society.

Colonial interpretations of Somali traditions similarly "discounted social change and presented a timeless, essential truth about Somali society" (Kapteijns 1999: 152). Despite extensive academic criticism (Cassanelli 1982; Ahmed 1995), this idea of cultural authenticity persisted throughout the post-independence period, and was appropriated and celebrated as a national signifier of *Soomaalinimo* (a national Somali community identity).

It was amongst urban middle-classes throughout the 1970s that the imagined idea of an authentic Somali tradition and culture became widespread and was appropriated by nationalist movements. Kapteijns (1999: 155) notes the ways Somali cultural authenticity and national identity were framed in terms of the northern pastoral tradition. As a result, pastoral tradition was invested with even more power than before "because it now symbolized an authentically Somali national identity contrasting starkly with colonial (or neo-colonial), 'modern', European values" (*ibid* 1999: 155). At the same time, aspects of traditional culture associated with clan ideology, or seen as threats to an ideology of women's rights and equality, were denounced as "backward" impediments to modernisation and progress in favour of a pan-Somali identity (see Appendix A).

Ideas about an authentic Somali tradition were intertwined with ideals of moral womanhood, in both anticolonial nationalist struggles and throughout the post-independence period (Kapteijns 1999). Throughout the 1970s the Somali Women's Democratic Organization (SWDO), a subgroup of the Socialist Party, was dedicated to improving equality of women in different aspects of Somali society. Its main focus was on family planning and health care, but members also promoted traditional cultural activities such as poetry, handicrafts, and folk dancing (Akou 2011: 79-80), illustrating the ways women, in government rhetoric and policy, were made to stand as symbolic markers of modernisation, nationalism, and cultural authenticity. Akou (2011) similarly describes the ways in which government pamphlets, banknotes, coins and stamps, throughout this period, idealised women as symbols of traditional life. Women were typically depicted wearing clothes associated with nomadic society, such as the *guntiino* and *garbasaar*, or imported "African" style dresses. As we shall see in Chapter Four, tradition and cultural authenticity also played a role in discussions of modern love and companionate marriage.

However, women throughout the 1970s-80s remained ambivalent about the role of tradition, criticising the ways it posed a barrier to their own emancipation. The following poem is an exchange between a man, who invites women to remain true to their customs and culture, and a woman, who ultimately turns away from tradition, which she sees as an obstacle to her development.

Male (Maxammed Jaamac Jaaf):

In the old days it was custom

That a girl perfumed her hair

And braided it

She wrapped around her waist

A wide cloth belt with fringes and an ornamental cord

And wore a white dress

But something has changed…

You, women, have destroyed our culture

You have overstepped the religious law

And destroyed our religion

Girls, won't you behave?

Female (Mariam Mursal):

What was custom in the old days

And a hundred years ago

And what has been left behind

Don't make us go back on that well-worn road

For we have turned away from it with effort…

First get some education and learn how to read and write

Don't try to turn back, you country hick, people who have woken up

(Kapteijns 1999: 139).

As we shall see in the narratives that follow, first-generation Somali women reflecting back on their lives in Mogadishu, oscillate between a romanticised notion of culture, and an idea of culture as an impediment to modernisation and emancipation. However, in the last decades and following their movement abroad, they have begun

to understand tradition and culture through the lens of reformist Islam. Whereas in the above poem, religion and culture are equated and positioned as the seat of morality, today amongst Somali women, religion is increasingly being favoured as the authentic moral base of Somali society.

2.3.1 Sofia and Nimo: post-independence Mogadishu

Sofia, whom I mentioned in the initial incident was born in 1960 – the year of Somali independence – in Hoodan, a district of Mogadishu, and lived in the capital until the onset of the civil war in 1992. Her father ran a small grocery shop and was a government-employed Arabic and *Quran* teacher until his death in 1980. Sofia's mother, who had become widowed following a marriage that had been arranged by her family, married her father "out of love" as Sofia described to me. However, she was very often ill and it was therefore Sofia's maternal grandmother who did most of the housework and looked after the children. At the age of five Sofia started attending *dugsi* (*Quran* school).[32] She completed secondary school and after two years of participating in the urban and rural literacy campaigns initiated by the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) under Siad Barre (see section Appendix A, section 2) she attended the University of Afgoi studying English and History at an Anglo-American state-funded institute. In 1984, following the completion of her degree, Sofia began teaching at a secondary school, and that same year she married her first husband. Following a first divorce she remarried and gave birth to her first daughter Idil in 1990.

Nimo, her friend who was also in the initial vignette, was born fifteen years after Sofia in 1975 in Mogadishu at the height of Siad Barre's military regime, which seized power following a military coup and governed the newly formed republic between 1969-1990. Her father, a police officer, married her mother when she was 18, although Nimo was raised by her maternal grandmother and her aunts, uncles and cousins who shared a large house in Hamar Weyne, the centre of Mogadishu. The

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[32] The education system in Somalia was only standardised in 1972, when Somali became the official language of instruction. Prior to 1972 education was not fully state-funded and instruction was in Arabic, English or Italian.

family wealth came mostly from a paternal uncle who owned a successful import/export business.

Raised throughout Barre's socialist regime, both women benefited from the education policies of the time, which encouraged women's education under the banner of modernisation, development and women's rights (Appendix A, section 2). These women's narratives echo some of the themes of self-emancipation, "awakening" from custom and culture, and a future of education and modernisation, also present in the song exchange above, between Mariam Mursal and Mahammed Jaaf.

Sofia often reminisced about her life in Mogadishu throughout the 1980s; she spent most of her free time going to the cinema, the beach, restaurants and *concerti* (theatre and dance productions). "*We all wanted to be Western back then!*" she explained, referring to her choice of modern leisure activities and clothing. On one occasion she showed me photographs of herself in tight 80s dresses, her hair afro-styled posing for the camera. As I sat on her living room couch she pulled out a big pile of old photographs, many of which were of her friends and relatives posing in photographic studios. Her clothing was a complete contrast to the *hijab* and long dresses which I saw her wearing everyday in London: in one photo she wore tight high-waisted jeans and sandals, in another she was in a *guntiino* and her friend wore a Western-style top revealing her bare shoulders; in another still she posed with male friends and male cousin. "*Look at this, we're holding each other! That's not allowed now!*" she pointed out. "*We used to wear all sorts… mini skirts even!*" Her photographs captured the amalgamation of modern, urban lifestyles with national celebrations of traditional culture, as represented by the *guntiino*. Sofia has also shown me with great pride photographs of herself in a *guntiino* – what she defined as traditional dress – taking part in national celebrations at school and university. As she often pointed out to me, gender segregation (*purdah*) was not a concern for her as it is now; many of their friends had boyfriends, and hardly any unmarried woman wore *hijab*. At school the

hijab, considered a sign of "backward tradition", was banned as a threat to a secular education, and an ideology of modernisation and progress.[33]

Most Somali children, including Sofia and Nimo, attended *dugsi* (*Quranic* school) from an early age and were taught about religious obligations such as prayer and fasting. As I discuss further in Chapter Five, religious instruction focused on learning to read, recite, and memorise the *Quran*, not on translating, understanding, and reasoning about the meaning of texts.[34] As a first-generation Somali woman explained in an interview, when I asked about her early religious education,

> *"From the age of 4 I went to dugsi (Quran school) with my brothers and sisters. Just down the road… Aged 6 I started going to normal school, formally, but I still went to dugsi from 3-4 in the afternoon. In Somalia every three or four houses, they have dugsi… you learn the Arabic alphabet, then you learn to put words together, and then memorise the text… at age 7 I learnt how to pray."*

The *Quran* in Somali was not available at the time and, although Arabic was taught at school, few could understand what they were reciting. A friend of Sofia recalled, "*I had Quran education, but it wasn't that important in Somalia. I wanted to be as Western as I could!*" – once again drawing on the discourse of modernisation and emancipation.

Furthermore, young women received very basic religious instruction at home. As another first-generation Somali woman pointed out to me, her mother, who had now passed away, knew very little about religion:

> *"My mother, she knew how to pray… she knew that if you did something bad like stealing or backbiting you went to hell, and if you were good you went to heaven… she told us to cover when there were men … but religion*

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[33] Figures 5 & 6 show some of the forms of dress worn by Somali women in the 1970-80s. In contrast, figures 3,4 & 7 capture a range of clothing worn by first-generation women in London throughout my fieldwork.

[34] As I noted in Chapter One, seven of the twenty-one first-generation mothers I frequented were highly qualified, having completed secondary school or university in Somalia.

was like culture to her… it was something she had heard. She didn't go to dugsi, didn't follow the Quran… she heard it from someone else, and didn't exactly know its meaning… Every year people become more modern."

Nimo recounted to me how Somalis seldom followed religious obligations such as praying, wearing *hijab,* and respecting *purdah* (gender segregation). Partly this was due to the discourse of socialist modernisation prevalent at the time, which conflated religion with tradition and positioned both as impediments to socialism and progress. But Nimo also blamed a lack of conscious awareness of religious norms and practices. Religion, she explained, was understood in the past as synonymous with culture, as an embodied sense of practices, norms and values. "*We knew how to pray, recite, it was part of everyday life… we knew what was right and what was wrong*" I was told by Nimo on one occasion. Religion, she elaborated, was learnt in the same way as one learnt to perform housework or other familial duties. In retrospect, Nimo, like other Somali women who grew up in this context, explained that even though she knew certain practices were "wrong", she did not feel compelled to abandon them, precisely because they did not know *why* they were wrong.

2.3.2   Sofia and Nimo: religious transformations in the diaspora

With the onset of civil strife in 1992 and following the birth of her second daughter, Sofia was forced to abandon her home in Mogadishu and seek refuge in southern Somalia and finally in Nairobi (see Appendix A, section 4). Thanks to her husband's connections with the Somali embassy in Rome, Sofia was given a visa to work in Italy as a housekeeper. She often spoke to me about this humiliating and painful experience of being separated from her family and sacrificing her academic and professional aspirations in order to financially support them. In 1998 after four years working in Italy, Sofia joined her younger brother in London where she was granted refugee status and indefinite leave to remain.

Nimo was forced to leave the capital in the middle of secondary education and abandon her plans to pursue higher education. In Kenya, where she escaped with her family, she married her maternal second cousin and only a couple of months after their relocation to the UK in 1990, she was pregnant with Hawa, her first daughter. In

London, Nimo lived with her six children and her husband in a flat in the same council block as Sofia, who lived alone with her three daughters. As the only Somalis in the building, the two women became close friends. During the course of my fieldwork, Sofia divorced her husband, who for the past ten years had lived apart from her and had contributed very little to the family income and who, she suspected, had probably married another woman in Kenya. Although her brothers and sisters also lived in London, she received very little emotional and financial support from them. Nimo had become her main source of support; the two women helped each other with household chores and child rearing, participated in the same *hagbaad* (money exchange) and regularly lent each other money.

Sofia had only started learning about religion in the last two years when I met her, thanks to the influence of Nimo, whose husband had encouraged her to "research" Islam. Sofia and Nimo had begun attending *Quran* classes and lectures at the local Somali mosque, like many Somali women in London (see Chapter Five). They had also acquired, and begun to reflect on and implement, reformist teachings. Like many of her friends, Sofia retrospectively described her lifestyle in Mogadishu as morally "wrong" and ignorant of religion. "*Step by step I started studying and I realised I was wrong*", she explained. Going dancing, attending *concerti*, mixing, not donning the *hijab* were practices she now condemned, blaming her lack of knowledge about religious obligations. Whereas a few years previously she might have enjoyed wearing colourful *dirac* (Somali dress) at weddings, watching romantic films, and listening to music, her increased knowledge of Islam, had, she claimed, taught her that these cultural practices should be discarded. The initial *Nikko* dancing incident demonstrates, however, that she sometimes felt ambivalent about this choice.

> "*When you see food and it doesn't look good you say: that's not good! But you've only seen it then, you haven't tried it. When you try and taste it, it's actually good. I've tried and tasted religion now, and it's like I'm becoming a Muslim again. [It feels like] I used to belong to another religion and I'm only now becoming Muslim.*"

Nimo herself had been through a similar change. She began to wear *hijab* when she was married in Kenya, but only on arriving to the UK did she come to understand the importance of reading and understanding the meaning of the *Quran* and knowing and

reasoning about Islamic rules, obligations, and requirements. *"Religion is the basis of Somali culture. That's why we are good people",* Nimo explained to me. However, she continued, Somalis had abandoned religion throughout the 1970s-80s. Although at the time she had regularly attended *dugsi,* and had been taught to recite the *Quran* and *hadith*, to pray and fulfil religious obligations, she now considered this knowledge insufficient and inadequate. She had never been told the meaning of what she was reciting, nor why it was important. She explained: *"In Somalia… I knew I was a Muslim, but I didn't understand the meaning, and I didn't understand the Quran. Before I thought that dress was [a matter of] culture, but here I have started understanding and realising that the Quran says to veil. I understand the meaning"*. Since coming to the UK, Nimo added, and accessing the translation of the *Quran* in Somali, and attending lessons and lectures, she had begun to reflect and mould her behaviour according to Islamic obligations grounded in the texts.

As I further elaborate in the next chapter, most of my first-generation female informants raised in the former Somali Republic, did not cover their heads with a *hijab*, and many wore a *garbasaar* (shawl) to cover their heads only after marriage (e.g. Figures 5 & 6). Many older Somali women living in London today who, twenty years earlier would not have concerned themselves with Islamic clothing, have now begun to don the *hijab*, *abaya* and *jilbaab* justifying it as a process of "religious awareness" (Talle 2008; McGown 1999). This has not been a process unique to the diaspora context, however, as the *jilbaab*, *niqab* and *hijab*, which had previously only been worn by Arab and Persian settlers, had become increasingly popular throughout the 1980s in Somali territories as a consequence of the influence of Islamic reform movements (See Appendix A, section 3). As Sofia explained: *"with time we have changed our dress, our way of talking and interacting with men…. Now we know the meaning of the Quran… thanks to translations, books, people around me talking about it the whole time."*

As with many practising second-generation women, for Sofia and Nimo, the manner in which one dresses is a matter of religion, not culture. Traditional clothing, such as the *guntiino*, is not sufficiently modest for everyday interactions and should be reserved for women-only events. However, there exists a diversity of opinions concerning this recent adoption of the *hijab* and *jilbaab*. Some women, for example,

have come to see the adoption of a black or colourful *jilbaab* as part of Somali culture. As Nafisa further articulates in the next section, it is a reflection of a renewed moral consciousness within Somali society; the *hijab* and *jilbaab* have acquired a sense of collective morality and kin honour (see Chapter Three). Whereas in post-independence Somalia, morality was represented and embodied by traditional dress, this has now been replaced by Islamic dress (section 3.4). Still, other women are critical of the ways this supposedly "Arab-style" form of clothing has taken over as representative of Somali dress.

In a discussion I had with Sofia, Nimo, and another friend on religion and culture, Sofia explained that she understood "religion" as part of being Somali, but as qualitatively different from culture. While "religion comes from Allah, culture is something shared between people", she claimed. This was representative of a newly acquired way of talking about culture *vis-à-vis* religion, influenced by reformist discourses.

> *"Before in Somalia we knew [about] religion, but we didn't understand it… It was like driving a car without having taken lessons. Before I knew how to drive, but now I have a full understanding of it: I know what I have to do to turn, park, go around roundabouts… Now we know what religion says and we're much more conscious about it, so we can explain our behaviour."*

Religion had previously been a part of everyday practice, such as driving a car without lessons, learning to cook or perform daily tasks. Now they have begun to reflect on religion, turning both religion and culture into two separate objects. As Nimo explained, religion has helped her decipher which parts of culture are *haram* (forbidden), "wrong" or unnecessary. Not wearing *hijab* and backbiting, she claimed are two things in "Somali culture" that religion has taught them are wrong. Others frequently mentioned clan divisions, dancing to music, ignoring *purdah*, visiting graves and emotional mourning at death. Religion is no longer seen as inherited, but consciously learnt in formalised ways. This acquired knowledge constitutes a series of facts, which serve as a moral framework from which to scrutinise, choose, or select elements of culture. Culture, as a consequence, has been reduced to a set of practices, objects, attitudes, and values.

2.3.3 Nafisa: teaching Somali culture

Nafisa was born in 1955 in Bedelweyne, central Somalia, but moved to Mogadishu with her family aged 15. Her father was a doctor, who after serving in the Ethiopian war in 1977, became a critic of the Barre regime and was jailed until the civil war. Nonetheless, Nafisa attended school and university and throughout the 1970s, worked as a criminal lawyer in Mogadishu. She was married by her family to a patrilineal first cousin, who worked as a doctor in the capital, and they had five children together. Throughout her early career, Nafisa, an advocate of the Barre regime's progressive agenda, had campaigned in support of the new legislation on inheritance that had led to the execution of ten theologians in 1975 (see Appendix A, section 2). Family law had to be changed, she reasoned at the time, as it stood as an impediment to fully achieving women's equal status in Somali society. When I first interviewed her in London, however, she explained how in retrospect she had been wrong and misguided in supporting these legislative changes. "*I didn't know my rights as a Muslim woman. Now I do, I know why these [Islamic] laws [on inheritance] make sense*".

Nafisa blamed the regime, its attack on religious practices, institutions and leaders, coupled with its pervasive corruption, and exploitation of clan alliances, and nepotism. It had resulted in the moral laxity that presided throughout the 1980s. Echoing some of the same critiques voiced by Sofia and Nimo, Nafisa elaborated:

> "*In my lifetime when I was working in Mogadishu, people had core values. I could not do certain things, [such as] go to my neighbour and beat her up, or take her stuff. But this is exactly what happened in Somalia during the civil war. There was a change in morality during the 1980s, and core values were lost. In my view the government is in charge of keeping morality, and the government at the time [failed to do this].*"

She illustrated this vision of immorality with an example. Prior to the 1980s, women who opportunistically dated men in order get promotions, or to climb the social ladder, were considered immoral. Throughout the 80s, however, this behaviour was endorsed by society. "*Those who grew up in the 80s will never know of that morality that existed before*", she explained.

Nafisa's narrative not only describes immorality in terms of a lack of values, symbolised by women's sexuality. She also suggests that the state should be responsible for upholding moral norms. Most importantly, however, she depicts Somali history as separated in two periods: a distant, traditional and moral past and an immoral transitory phase governed by corruption, modernisation, and personal and clan-based aggrandisement. Her narrative corresponds with Sofia and Nimo's discussions of the lack of religious and moral knowledge in the 1980s. Morality was only regained in a subsequent phase in the diaspora. However, this has not occurred by returning to tradition but through an engagement with religious texts. Religion and religious leaders have come to replace the state as upholders of communal morality.

Nafisa had herself experienced religious change during her lifetime, which, she felt, was a reaction to having been uprooted, and having to rethink and reconstruct an idea of herself. "*When I came to in this country I found I was a number in the Home Office. I felt I had lost my identity, tradition, culture, religion*", she explained to me in an interview.

> "*It's a reaction to being uprooted ... I wasn't feeling in control of my life, I didn't know what would happen to my life. Security makes you choose to either blend with people, or to keep your own identity. And you go back and find out: what is my identity? First I realised how important my image to others was. For example, I started covering my hair, and before in Somalia I never used to. Here I started because I was asserting who I was: a Muslim woman from Somalia.*"

For Nafisa, this conscious engagement with an objectified notion of religion and culture had occurred with her forced migration abroad.

In the UK, Nafisa had founded one of the few female-led Somali community organisations in the 1990s, which coordinated a range of projects for Somali women and teenagers, ranging from supplementary English classes to providing health training to mothers. Amongst many other activities, she campaigned to introduce Somali as a GCSE subject in Camden schools, and ran a Somali cultural programme in a local primary school, which introduced children to Somali language, games and poems. At an annual educational achievement award ceremony for Somali children in

the borough of Camden, Nafisa delivered a speech first in Somali, and then in English. She stressed that Somalis in London ought to maintain three things: language, culture and identity. Everyone who had the opportunity to study Somali at GCSE should do so, and then she elaborated on what she meant by culture and identity. *"Remember that you are Muslims most importantly… So pray, pray pray – it's very important. It will help you be good, be a better person… it's when you've fallen on your knees that you most need to pray."* Then she continued, *"You are British-Somali. Remember that! And don't forget the Somali aspect!"* she exclaimed, reiterating the importance of acquiring the Somali language and knowledge of Somali history. *"The sky is your limit!"* she concluded, encouraging and motivating the younger generations present to pursue their dreams.

Questioning Nafisa about her involvement in these activities, she explained,

> *"Because I studied back home, and I'm educated, I can make sense of who I am, [and what it means] to live in a western context... I want to be a role model for my people and especially the younger ones. A lot of kids are very confused… [they've been] brought up here they don't know who they are. [I feel] I should be giving them an identity. I tell them: you're not British you're Somali-British."*

Similarly to Nimo and Sofia, Nafisa had adopted a reformist discourse that stresses the separation of religion from culture; religion has been cast as a conscious, collective moral framework used to monitor and assess culture. Having learnt to reflect on religion, she was able to identify both the negative and positive aspects of Somali culture and had redrawn an understanding of both. Religion and culture were no longer part of everyday practice, but two interlinked objects of knowledge that could be transmitted to the younger generations. According to Nafisa, religion was constitutive of being Somali, something that, as we shall see later, is contested particularly by younger practising Somalis. She explained to me in a second meeting:

> *"Other Black British speak English and, although they might have a religion, they are Christians and this brings with it a series of connotations: they drink, eat pork, and wear different clothes. Somalis have a language, a culture that dictates what to wear, eat and drink, how*

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a man should court a woman, ask for her hand in marriage… I taught
these young people about Somali history and geography, about Somali
love songs that are as good as those written by Shakespeare! I taught
them about the problems of clan, the caste system, and forms of
discrimination against minority groups such as Gabooye."

As an educated woman, Nafisa had taken the responsibility to instruct young Somalis to embrace the good parts of an inherited Somali culture (i.e. love songs, language, religion, etc.) and reject the bad parts (the clan system, cast discriminations). Her discussions draw on a pan-Somali discourse, I describe further in Appendix A (section 2), through which some aspects of tradition, including the clan ideology were considered an impediment to progress, whereas other aspects were celebrated as authentic representations of Somali culture. Nafisa also draws on a reformist discourse that separates religion from culture. In contrast to Nimo and Sofia, however, she fails to fully prioritise religion, and classifies as cultural practices, elements that the others would regard as religious prescriptions (e.g. on clothing, food, and courtship).

2.4   Religion and culture: generational and historical changes

In the last 20 years, these women have begun to engage with reformist Islam and with a discourse that prioritises and separates authentic religion from tradition or culture. Whilst some women encountered these discourses prior to migration, for others, this shift has coincided with changes in the lifecycle, and forced migration to the diaspora (see Appendix A). As the experiences of Nimo and Sofia demonstrate, for many of my first-generation informants, it has resulted in a conscious engagement with Islamic scriptures, and an awareness of the meanings of texts (McGown 1999; Tiilikainen 2003; 2007). McGown (1999: 95) explores the ways that, since migrating to the UK, Somalis have experienced an "increased religiosity" and a "heightened awareness of their religion" manifested in the ways their adherence to Islam has become more self-conscious. Unable to take their identity for granted, they have sought to reimagine it by separating "religion" from "cultural habit".[35] Similarly, Tiilikainen (2003) claims

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[35] See section 2.2 for critiques of McGown (1999).

that Somali women in the diaspora are increasingly gaining religious knowledge. She argues that Islam has come to serve as a moral framework, signifying continuity with the home country, healing from past and present sufferings, as well as change and challenge.

As I show in the previous sections, my data supports these findings. First-generation Somali women have begun to consciously engage with religious knowledge, with the aim of implementing it on the self (see also Chapter Five). Nimo suggests that her previous ignorance of religion was tied to her unfamiliarity with the meaning of religious texts and the ways religious practices were part of her everyday life. For all three women, religion and culture had not been consciously thought about as distinct categories. In recent years, however, these women have begun to draw new distinctions between the categories of religion and culture. Somali women who do not make these separations are often criticised by other religiously-minded women for being traditional. What I wish to stress here, however, is how *the mode of engagement* to culture has changed. In the last 50 years, religion has come to provide these women with a moral basis from which to "pick and choose" amongst objects, attitudes, and practices that are thought to constitute Somali culture.

First-generation Somali women's understandings of the category of culture and its relation to religion is often a source of debate and contestation. Their attempts to grapple with these issues demonstrate the unstable boundaries between these two concepts, but also highlight how these women insert themselves within current problematizations around culture. Ilhan, whom I introduced in the initial vignette, makes a clear distinction, asserting that certain cultural practices, including *Nikko* dancing are incompatible with religion. According to many practising Somali women, most forms of music and dancing are considered immodest and hence contrary to Islamic ethics and norms. *Nikko* constitutes a cultural practice, which was popularised precisely because Somalis were previously ignorant of religion. Sofia, on the other hand, appreciates these divisions, but her discourse does not always map onto practice. She enjoys dancing and does not always see a clash with religious prescriptions, particularly if it is performed in women-only environments. Furthermore, whilst most of these women agree that religion ought to be prioritised above culture, they disagree on whether the two constitute completely different

categories. On the one hand, Nimo understands religion and culture as qualitatively different, and prioritises the former as the source of morality, on the other Nafisa sees religion as part of Somali culture.

This discourse of religious authenticity is based on a long tradition of renewal and reform, which stresses the "purification" of Islamic faith from cultural superstitions and practices (Voll 1983; see section 1.2). They are also discourses employed by many contemporary Islamic scholars in Europe, such as *Sheikh* Hakim-Murad or Tariq Ramadan, and reiterated by second-generation Somali women. Despite the fact that first-generation Somali women have begun to adopt this discourse, and discern cultural practices deemed to clash with Islam, second-generation Muslims often direct these criticisms at their parents.

In a lecture on YouTube, entitled *Islam vs. culture and Superstition*, Dr. Abdullah Hakim Quick, an American-born Islamic scholar, who was popular amongst my second-generation informants, explained:

> "It is crucial for Muslims to go back to the authentic sources… when we are making our judgements, we should be using the *Quran* and the *Sunna*, the sayings of the scholars as a basis… to give us a consciousness to make decisions in the things that we are doing… There is a problem I call Islam vs. culture, whether it be outside of America or American culture, which clashes with Islam. And many of us learnt Islam from our parents… and so we say that's what they do in our country. We pray like this, we don't marry those people over there because they live by the river, we live by the mountain..."

The scholar contrasts a cultural Islam, or the Islam learnt from parents, with an authentic Islam based on scriptures. The latter, he argues, encourages a conscious and reasoned engagement with texts as opposed to an inherited form of religious practice. In contrast, cultural Islam is ridiculed for its "backward" or traditional embracement of practices such as marriage prohibitions, which have no basis in religious scriptures (see also Chapter Five).

Another popular scholar amongst second-generation Muslims, Yasir Qadhi, elaborates on the generational gap between Muslim migrant parents and their children. In a series of lectures on *Culture clash: Immigrant Muslims raising children in the West,* available on YouTube*,* he poses a question to Muslim first-generation parents:

"I want to ask the parents to think about a human phenomenon... it's part of our nature to want our children to be like us, to keep our ways and our traditions… but I ask you an honest question, how similar to your parents are you? It's not going to happen, be realistic, be pragmatic. We as people who have been born and raised here cannot act the way you were our age. We can't! We have grown up in a time and culture that is radically different! There are elements that will be preserved, like religion… there are things that won't. Don't get angry if certain elements are lost – retain the most important. And those are religious in nature."

Yasir Qadhi stresses the importance of generational change, of allowing second-generation Muslims to abandon aspects of their inherited culture as long as they retain the authentic teachings of Islam. Religion here is presented as a form of continuity with cultural practices, as opposed to the radical break or clash depicted by Abdullah Hakim Quick.

Drawing on these scholars, many second-generation Somali women criticise their parents for not fully separating out and prioritising religion over culture, and for failing to adequately choose amongst different aspects of culture. This discursive strategy, which is illustrated in the following section and recurs throughout this thesis (sections 3.4; 4.4.1 and 5.3), has also been noted amongst other young Muslims in Europe (Ewing 2008; Roy 2004; Schmidt 2002; Jacobson 1997; 1998). Jacobson (1997), for example, explores how amongst second-generation Bangladeshis in London, ethnicity is perceived as an attachment to traditions and customs and denotes an attachment to a country or region of origin, whereas religion is understood as an attachment to an absolute truth and to a global community. This "collective ideal" enables young people to feel part of a global trend, and thus to reject their parents' teachings on these grounds (Jacobson 1997; Gardner and Skakur 1994).

Whilst these forms of identification are certainly true of my second-generation informants, my interest is in how they involve new understandings of the self and self-other relations. These women's critique of the cultural attitude of their parents – which also ignores the changes that many first-generation Somali women are undergoing – is deployed as a way of differentiating oneself from the older generations and from a Somali past (see Chapter Six). It is employed to contrast an inherited, and hence traditional or cultural attitude to culture, with a mode of self-fashioning based on liberal choice and autonomy. As the following example demonstrates, what is at stake in their criticisms of the older generation is their perception that their mothers have failed to fully engage with culture in a conscious, willing and autonomous manner, so that it continues to be unconsciously inherited as part of their lifeworlds.

2.5 Second-generation Somali women: a play on FGM

Throughout my fieldwork I volunteered on a campaign project entitled *Community Against FGM*. Implemented by a local community organisation in Tower Hamlets in partnership with the national charity Forward UK, the project aimed to raise awareness about female genital cutting or mutilation.[36] The first phase involved conducting primary research with first- and second-generation Somali men and women about the practice. Amongst many of the preliminary findings, the organisers learnt that the practice was still widespread and, although some women had abandoned it out for fear of prosecution,[37] this had not altered their attitudes towards the practice. The campaign, therefore, set out to tackle and alter the attitudes held by a diverse group of first-generation Somalis. In addition, based on the findings it also aimed to encourage men, who they felt took a passive stance on the issue, to pressurise families and communities into abandoning the practice, and to empower young women to speak out against perpetrators.

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[36] The campaign used the term FGM (female genital mutilation) and I shall from hereonin employ this term. Forward UK is an African women-led UK charity that works towards advancing and safeguarding the sexual and reproductive health and rights of African girls and women.

[37] FGM has been a criminal offence since 1985 but in 2003 under the FGM Act it became illegal, *inter alia,* to travel abroad and assist a non-UK person to undergo the practice on a British national or resident.

At the heart of this campaign was the message that FGM was a cultural practice that had no legitimacy in religious texts. The project recruited a small group of Somali *Sheikhs* (religious scholars), mostly in the east London area to cooperate and reach a consensus on the illegality of FGM in Islamic law, and to raise awareness about the cultural nature of the practice. Despite initial disagreements amongst the scholars about the extent to which circumcision was *sunna*,[38] those who were able to find a consensus on the issue were invited to participate in a series of workshops in schools, community centres, and mosques with Somali women and men across different age groups. It was hoped that the scholars would use their authority in the community to exert their religious opinion and override any cultural understanding of the practice. Thus, the project presumed that Somalis already prioritised religious knowledge over cultural practices and would be persuaded by the arguments presented by the scholars.

The project culminated in a play entitled *The Muted Cry,* which was first performed in October 2011 throughout the Somali Week Festival (SWF) to an audience of men and women of all ages, and followed by a discussion panel. SWF is an annual event that takes place throughout Black History Month. Funded in part by the Arts Council, it is held annually at Oxford House in Bethnal Green, east London and aims to celebrate Somali arts by inviting a range of international Somali poets, writers, comedians, artists, and musicians (see Figure 4). Most of the artists are first-generation men from Somali-speaking territories who attract an older audience of both men and women. While young Somalis occasionally attend poetry, music, or comedy events with first-generation artists, they often complain that they do not understand the language or humour, and feel somewhat alienated from these aspects of their culture. However, some of the SWF events are specifically organised to showcase women's artistic productions and others are aimed at second-generation playwrights and poets and frequented by younger Somalis in the diaspora.

The *Muted Cry* was an event that sought to highlight, but also bridge, this generational divide. It was performed on a Thursday evening in a large hall crowded with mostly Somali women of different ages and only some non-Somalis and Somali

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[38] Some scholars maintained that some form of circumcision was *sunna* (based on the Prophet's teaching) whereas others denied it. It was only the latter group of religious scholars that took part in the workshops.

men. The play features Hodan, a young Somali girl who is taken by her mother from the UK to Hargiesa on holiday, where she undergoes FGM, and returns to London traumatised by the practice. As the play unfolds, familial conflicts and disagreements are revealed: Hodan never appears on stage but her father, worried of tarnishing the reputation of the Somali community and the honour of his family, prefers to brush the incident under the carpet. The mother is informed, by her son, of the criminality of her act and the possibility of prosecution. However, concerned about her daughter's health and plagued by guilt she ignores his warning. Meanwhile Hodan's cousins, and brother, all second-generation Somalis, angered and frustrated by these reactions, debate the religiosity of the practice and finally appeal to a Somali *Sheikh*, who appears on stage holding a *Quran*. The stage lights are dimmed and a spot light highlights his upper body, as he informs the audience that FGM is a non-religious, cultural, and traditional practice: there is no Islamic evidence for the practice, except for a "weak *hadith*". The *Sheikh* continues:

"Moving on to the way Somalis practice female circumcision, that method is one which is opposed to Islamic ruling and tradition and it has nothing to do with Islam. This method is one which is traced back to ancient cultures and traditions and religion is very much opposed to it. The religion is opposed to everything which harms the person, their body, their mind and psychological well being. Therefore, it is unlawful and forbidden and this harmful way Somalis practice female circumcision should be stopped. Everything that harms a Muslim person is not allowed and forbidden. May Allah guide us to the right path."

The play concludes with a call for the eradication of the practice so that Somalis may progress into the future, reiterated by the following dialogue amongst the younger generation:

Ali: Youngsters... Are we crazy, or empty of any thought process, have we no shame... We, the educated, we, who claim to be modern and yet we have been convinced that some cultural and traditional practice….
Naima: This method of female circumcision brings shame on to the culture and tradition of the Somalis, it is a stigma and black spot against the Islamic religion and it is damaging and traumatic for girls, it is

unlawful and totally forbidden in Islam. Everyone else has progressed and is in the 21st century apart from us.

(*Enters a crowd of young women and men*)

Mukhtaar: Who is pushing this practice? Are men supporting this, are women propagating this practice. Guys speak up, are you guys supporting the continuation of this practice in our community?

Guys: No… No… No

Naima: Are the girls happy for our community to become a *butcher house for girls*?

Girls: No… Noooooooooo. No!

Naima: Then what devil is pushing this practice in our community and why won't it stop?

Ali: I will tell you why this practice will not stop: it is because of the lack of knowledge and the lack of power and connection of our community which is helping this practice. Look, none of us here support this practice, yet still it is going on…

The performance was followed by a discussion panel including representatives from *Daughters of Eve Project*, *Negaad* a Somaliland-based NGO, *Forward UK* and *Equality Now*. Diverse arguments were raised against the practice: some used the language of rights; some highlighted the health and medical implications; while others gave graphic descriptions of the practice, condemning its brutality. Referring to the play, many of the panellists emphasised the necessity that religious scholars begin a public dialogue, and avoid delivering conflicting messages regarding the practice.[39]

The play sends a clear message that FGM is a cultural practice that must be discarded because it contradicts religious practice and belief. Circumcision is cast as a negative cultural, ethnic, and traditional practice that religious knowledge should seek to eradicate. These accusations are also often voiced by younger Somali girls towards their mothers, who employ this discourse to mark themselves as different from the

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[39] Since the original screening of the play, the organisers have recorded it on film, and added Somali subtitles. It has been screened on several different occasions and employed as an awareness-raising tool in workshops across London.

first-generation (Talle 2008; Johnsdotter 2007).[40]

Culture is condemned as traditional, barbaric and uncivilized. The final dialogue of the play reinforces the associations between religion, education, awareness, modernity, and future progress. Religious knowledge must serve as a means of uniting the Somali community, enabling them to collectively select amongst elements of their culture that do not conflict with religious textual knowledge. Although campaigns to eradicate FGM were also present throughout the 1980s in the former Somali Democratic Republic, these were articulated through a discourse of tradition vs. modernity. We can see how this has now been replaced with reformist ideas that stress religion vs. culture and tradition.[41]

Written, directed, and performed by second-generation Muslims in English, the play also marks a clear generational divide. Hodan's mother forces her to undergo FGM, and her father ignores the younger generation's plea to reflect on, and confront, the problem and consult a *Sheikh*. The woman is represented stereotypically as the carer of familial well being, as well as emotionally vulnerable and easily persuaded by others, whereas the father is presented as authoritative and the defender of family honour. Both parents are represented as adopting a cultural attitude, uncritically performing cultural practices. In the final scene described above, only the younger educated and modern generation stand at the front and call out for the eradication of the practice. Ali cries out to the young to reflect and act, rather than passively allow the practice to continue in order to avoid the errors of his parent's generation. The young must scrutinise their actions and values in order to separate themselves from the practice; only reflection on these unconsciously adopted cultural elements, which are associated with the past, will enable progress into the future. The play is, therefore, also a critique by second-generation Somalis of their parent's inability to approach culture as object, and to fully separate religion from culture and act independently of culture.

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[40] See Hussein (2008) for a report on changing attitudes towards FGM amongst Somali women in the borough of Waltham Forest, London.

[41] Efforts to eradicate female genital cutting were already present throughout Barre's regime. For example, in 1988 an international seminar was held in Mogadishu with the aim of spreading awareness of, and eradicating the practice.

2.6 Culture and self-fashioning

I have argued thus far that what is at stake in these criticisms of the second-generation towards their parents is a process of self-stylisation, through which young women are constituting new self-other relations and engaging the ethical imagination by distancing themselves from the past, and from older kin. Young Somali women are seeking solutions to a problematized notion of culture, and in so doing, are refashioning themselves. As we have seen, they argue that older kin inherit culture; culture is thus presented as determining of their actions and practices.

Commenting on the culturalization of political and civil conflict, Wendy Brown (2006) argues that liberalism has imagined and positioned non-liberal people as ruled by culture in opposition to liberal people who *have* culture. This juxtaposition is played out in a series of oppositions between non-liberalised culture and moral autonomy, freedom, and equality. The liberal subject is assumed to have an ability to abstract herself from a context. The opposite consists of an "organicist creature considered to lack rationality and will, [whereby] culture and religion... are saturating and authoritative" (*ibid* 2006: 301). For the liberal subject, culture and religion become a "background", that can be "entered" and "exited"; culture is thus rendered extrinsic rather than constitutive of the subject, it becomes "food, dress, music, lifestyle, and contingent values" (*ibid* 2006: 301). The latter, on the other hand, involves an "optional" relationship to culture – the non-liberal is determined by cultural rules. In section 2.2 I argued that policy and legal discourses on multiculturalism portray culture as a determining force, so that cultural and ethnic minorities are seen as constrained by culture and juxtaposed to the liberal autonomous (Western) self (Phillips 2007). Second-generation women are therefore drawing on and twisting this discourse by positioning their mothers as determined by culture, and imagining themselves as autonomous agents, able to articulate an "optional" relationship to Somali culture.

These young women's criticisms are captured by the ways in which they ridicule older Somalis for their habits and for their "typical Somali" forms of behaviour. A running joke between many second-generation Somalis in London refers to two imaginary figures, Halimo and Farah. These names signify the stereotypical, traditional, Somali woman and man, and are often used by younger women to mock

mothers and older kin. These figures are given old-fashioned names and their behaviour resonates with ideas of tradition and culture. Halimo is said to be abrupt, wears mis-matching colourful *dirac* and *garbasaar* (northern Somali dress and shawl), has a traditional conception of gender relations, often makes embarrassingly racist remarks,[42] and is overly preoccupied with clan. Halimo is cultural, rather than religious, and therefore ignorant of both British culture and religious knowledge. Maryam, a young practising Somali woman was particularly skilful at acting out an imaginary Halimo. Occasionally, if one of her friends donned a particularly bright *hijab* or pronounced an old-fashioned Somali expression, she would imitate and mock her by calling her "Halimo", thus using the figure's name to describe a particular behaviour. At weddings, much to our amusement, Maryam frequently enjoyed imitating Somali traditional "Halimo" ways of dancing. These performances were also replicated in my informants' behaviour towards "freshies" – Somalis who have recently arrived from the Somali regions – as I describe in Chapter Four. Through these imitations, and by mocking traditional behaviour, young Somalis present themselves as different, educated, and aware of these unconscious dimensions of culture. Humour is used as a way of separating themselves from older generation and Somalis.

As I have illustrated in the previous section, young Somalis, like some of their mothers, stress the importance of choosing the aspects of Somali culture which are compatible with religion and reject the practices, objects, or values, (e.g. FGM, *Nikko* dancing, clan ideology, etc.) that conflict with religious knowledge. Moore (2011) elaborates on this process of objectification in her discussion of alternative rites of passage (ARP) amongst the Marakwet in Kenya. As a consequence of pressure from NGOs, ARPs have been implemented as a means of eradicating the practice of FGM by celebrating positive cultural values and practices and discarding others, like the play I described above. ARPs, Moore claims, have emerged as a set of "identifiable processes and practices" which stress key "positive" cultural values, whilst rejecting traditional practices such as FGM. These rites position parents as tied to culture and represent a transfer of power, from parents and kin networks to pastors and NGOs. As

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[42] Younger Somali women often ridiculed their mothers for considering themselves ethnically different and morally superior to other African women.

Moore (2011: 53) points out, "choosing the good parts has become emblematic of modern ways of thinking and doing, as people increasingly engage with a process of self-fashioning cast in the idiom of new forms of knowledge."[43] Embracing the "good" parts of culture is crucial to young second-generation Somali women's processes of self-making. These engagements are shaped by multicultural policies and discourses in the UK that reify cultural difference and equate it with ethnicity and bounded notions of community (Baumann 1996).

Young women emphasise the importance of participating in cultural events, wearing traditional Somali clothes, eating Somali food, and reading and reciting Somali poetry, as a way of celebrating Somali culture. Similarly, Valentine & Sporton (2009: 742), note how for young teenage Somalis, the importance of "being Somali" was "produced through everyday domestic practices, from the language spoken, clothing worn and faith practiced, through to the food eaten" (see also Hopkins 2010). Somalis talk about Somali culture as a set of inherited practices, values, and objects that they willingly embrace.

In the initial vignette Idil, Sofia's daughter, identifies *Nikko* as a cultural practice, one that she has embraced and enjoys displaying to others. It is this conscious engagement with culture that young women often stress. During Somali Week 2011, Huda, a young second-generation woman exhibited and sold Somali crafts that she had collected on her previous visit to Hargeysa. Amongst the most popular items were those used by Somali nomads to collect, sieve, and carry camel milk. It was unclear to other participants of the event whether these were objects used in the past, or whether they were employed by present-day nomadic Somalis. As people approached her stall at the festival, Huda proudly explained the purpose and use of each item, sharing her enthusiasm, and appreciation of these cultural items. Culture was reified for her as a set of objects pertaining to an ahistorical nomadic pastoral tradition.

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[43] Moore argues that a new model of knowledge has emerged, marking an epistemic break from a process where individuals learnt and were transformed through action, to one where they learn through accumulating knowledge in formalised settings modelled on contemporary educational practices. This deployment of culture in Marakwet, Moore concludes, is not only a consequence of national politics, Christian and NGO advocacy, international legal instruments and human rights discourses, but also of new forms of knowledge, agency, and self-fashioning. (*ibid* 2011: 54).

Similarly, Anab, a young second-generation woman, frequently stressed the importance of celebrating aspects of her Somali culture. At university she had set up the first Somali society, and had been an active participant in a second-generation led movement campaigning against clan ideology, and in favour of political change back home. She often shared with me her passion for Somali arts and poetry *"I love that aspect of Somali culture and I love to revive it in my own self"* she explained on one occasion. She had begun to compose her own poetry, drawing on traditional Somali poetry genres. When I discussed this chapter with her over dinner at my house, she added, *"When I speak Somali, I really like it cause I feel it's what makes me Somali, and I'm proud of it… When I look at myself in the mirror wearing a head wrap, I feel that somehow I'm connecting to my grandmother, I look at myself and think of the connection between us… through this object."* Embracing the "good parts" of culture was a way for Anab and many other second-generation women to connect with Somali kin, through a willing engagement with what they perceive to be a shared culture.

This engagement with culture also includes embracing a set of "positive" values of hospitality, care, and kinship loyalty, and reciprocity. Aman, for example, another second-generation Somali woman, claimed that older Somali women were overly preoccupied with kin obligations precisely because they had been "educated" or socialised in this way. Unlike them, she had the distance to critically consider the burden of financially supporting extended kin. However, she stressed it was one of those dimensions of culture that she had learnt to accept. *"Us Somalis… it's something we'll always have to do",* she explained, *"sometimes it's too much though and we need to separate ourselves from it. But not like they do here in the UK, where everyone does for themselves, we need to find something in between."* For Aman, the older generation simply helped kin because they had always done so, whereas women of her generation had the choice and could therefore learn to negotiate a "safe" distance from this cultural value and norm.

Whilst this process of selection and objectification is evident in the engagements with Somali culture of both generations, younger women stress that the older generations are unable to fully objectify culture and adequately "pick and choose". In selecting amongst identifiable elements of culture, however, the content of culture has not

remained static nor has it been emptied of meaning. As with Anab's reworking of Somali poetry, the following example illustrates how young women actively seek to update and revise Somali culture.

2.7 Updating culture

Miss Somali was organised in 2010 in West London by a group of young, mostly non-practising Somali women. Amongst them was Idil, Sofia's daughter, who worked at Nomad radio, a web-based radio programme featuring Somali shows and music and issues relating to the Somali community in London. Like other initiatives such as *Sheeko* magazine, or *Somali on Air*, another radio program, Nomad aims to portray an alternative image of Somali youth in the UK, who are often associated by the media with youth gangs, crime, unemployment, or FGM.

Promoted as an event that encouraged "Beauty with Principles" and one that would build "socio-economic bridges in the community" *Miss Somali* was advertised across London and was awaited in trepidation and excitement by Somali youngsters. Organised in a conference hall, and costing £20 per head, the event was marketed as a glamorous, modern, and professional affair. The logo (Figure 9) that appeared on the Facebook group and also adorned the stage, captured the manner in which the organisers sought to merge traditional Somali culture, with modern ideals of education and development as well as contemporary styles. It was described on Facebook as follows:

"The Union Jack (in the shape of Somali speaking territories) is supposed to represent "integration" into the UK. The leaves symbolise peace, natural beauty, and cultural and traditional backgrounds (roots). The scroll at the bottom stands for intelligence, development and perseverance. We've chosen the colour scheme to signify sophistication, sleek and modern. Silver was purposely considered as it is a precious (hence the crown), classy, elegant and distinguished [sic]. We have had a lot of positive feedback about the logo, many people said it was creative yet simple."

I attended the event with my friend Deeqa, a woman in her mid 30s who had spent her teens in Mogadishu and subsequently moved to Italy to attend university in Rome. She had recently moved to London in search of employment, and worked part-time at a community centre. Non-practising, she arrived beautifully dressed in a *dirac* and *garbasaar* across her shoulders, with her hair nicely done up. Although the *dirac* originates from northern Somali territories it only became fashionable amongst Somalis in the 1960s (Akou 2011), and amongst Somalis in the diaspora it has come to symbolise traditional Somali cultural dress. It is typically worn at weddings and other Somali events. Because some *dirac* are made of semi-transparent fabric, practising women prefer not to wear it outside female-only events.

"*I never wear this*!" Deeqa laughed, "*but at a Somali event it's ok*!" As we made our way up the red carpeted stairs, the handrails decorated with pink ribbons, I could not help but notice an X Factor resemblance to the event: the jury was positioned in the front row, the lights were dimmed and there was an air of forced glam and sophistication. The resemblance might not have been unintentional, as the Saturday night program is one of the most popular shows amongst young people in Britain, and those with a Somali heritage here are no exception.

In contrast to Deeqa, most of the young women were dressed in formal Western evening wear and the men donned suits. Professional photographers had set up a studio at the entrance to the theatre for anyone interested in having their picture taken, and a few volunteers were selling soft drinks at the bar. This was nothing like the Somali Week Festival or the many community events organised by the elder Somalis; it purposefully aimed at celebrating Somali culture, whilst portraying it as modern and fashionable.

I could sense Deeqa's unease with the spectacle that was unfolding in front of her. Not only did she feel older than the people present, but she also felt more "authentically" Somali. Throughout, she commented on how these youngsters knew very little about Somali history and culture, which became apparent as the evening progressed. The event consisted of musical and theatrical entertainment, but its centre-piece was a fashion-show/beauty-pageant during which the contestants were assessed on their outfits, and their answers to various questions posed by the jury. The contestants walked down the catwalk in front of the jury showing off four different

outfits. Traditional wear constituted one of the four categories, and each contestant was asked a question about Somali culture. The only contestant in *hijab,* who had tailored her dress out of a Somali Republic flag, was asked to describe the flag and label the five Somali territories in the Horn. Deeqa sighed with the response, relieved these young girls had at least a little knowledge of their country. Another young woman was questioned about her favourite Somali food. The event continued with the women displaying a series of contemporary Western outfits, interspersed with performances by aspiring female Somali poets, a Nigerian comedian, and the rapper Que. When *Miss Somali* was announced, the clapping and excitement of the audience drowned out her voice out. She pranced back on stage, provocatively holding a Somaliland flag above her head, as a crown was placed on her head with the crowd erupting in further applause.[44] Deeqa looked away, irritated by what she saw as a divisive political statement in a space that, for her, was meant to be celebrating pan-Somali traditional culture.

As we walked away from the event, Deeqa commented on her disappointment with the event. "*Most of it had nothing to do with Somalis*!" she complained. Having been raised in Mogadishu, Deeqa felt that younger Somalis were ignorant of what was really and "authentically" Somali. Similarly, many of the older mothers whom I frequented throughout my fieldwork often lamented the ways in which they felt their children had lost any sense of Somali culture. Sofia, for example, whose daughter Idil was in the organising committee of *Miss Somali* complained on numerous occasions about her daughter's detachment from Somali culture. "*My daughters are not proper Somali daughters*" she moaned one evening, *"I love them anyways, but sometimes I look at them and don't recognise them… we don't have the same feelings even though we are mother and daughters.*"

Idil saw her participation in Miss Somali as a way of engaging with, and updating, Somali culture. It was a way of willingly connecting with her older kin, including her mother. Her mother Sofia, however, did not feel this connection. According to her,

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[44] The Republic of Somaliland declared independence in 1991. It remains internationally unrecognised and the issue of independence is hotly contested amongst Somalis in the diaspora.

Somali culture was more than that: it was also about sharing feelings and inherited dispositions; aspects she felt she had failed to transmit to her daughter.

2.8   Conclusion

I began this chapter by suggesting that culture has become problematized in the contemporary moment, giving rise to a series of questions around the make-up of culture and people's engagements with it. These queries have been taken up by two generations of Somali women. As I highlighted in the original vignette, the practice of *Nikko* dancing raised a series of concerns amongst a small group of Somali women; Is *Nikko* authentically Somali? What is the relationship between this aspect of culture and religion? How should we engage with Somali culture? What is our relation to a Somali past and to Somali kin? Throughout this chapter, I have unravelled the ways in which a diverse group of Somali women engage in this area of problematization, by formulating different responses to some of these queries.

By investigating changes across two generations of Somali women, I have traced a series of historical shifts. First, I explored how Somali traditional culture was reified, romanticised, and objectified in various ways throughout the 1950s-1970s, and how first-generation Somali women, who were raised in Mogadishu throughout the period, engaged with this notion of culture. Second, I considered how, in recent years, reformist discourses have impacted on the ways in which both first and second generations understand and relate to Somali culture. Throughout both periods, culture has been increasingly reduced to a set of values, practices, objects, and attitudes; religious knowledge has been prioritised and has come to provide a moral framework informing the process of selection amongst a set of cultural elements. This has allowed for the "bad parts" of culture (clan ideology, dancing, FGM, etc.) to be discarded, and the "good parts" (clothes, food, kin values and obligations etc.) to be retained. However, as I demonstrated through the *Miss Somali* event, young second-generation Somalis have simultaneously been working to update and rework Somali culture in distinct ways, forcing older Somali women to question the authenticity of these claims and criticise their daughters' lack of attachments to culture.

These historical transformations, I maintain, reveal the younger women's historically specific engagements with the ethical imagination. As I have shown, young women

appropriate liberal concepts within multicultural discourses and policy frameworks, alongside reformist discourses, and a reified notion of Somali tradition and culture, in order to reformulate their own understandings of themselves and their relations with others. Debates about culture become a means through which these women engage in processes of self-making. However, the meanings attached to culture are malleable and constantly shifting because the women's relations to culture constitute constantly refracted subject positions. They cannot therefore be taken as descriptive terms or analytical entities precisely because they constitute historically specific means of engaging with the world and with others.

Second-generation women emphasise liberal concepts of choice and conscious awareness as modes of subjectification to culture. Their ultimate aim – or *telos* – is to construe themselves as autonomous subjects *vis-à-vis* older kin, a Somali past, and Somali culture. In order to differentiate themselves through processes of dis-identification and disavowal, they associate older Somali kin with the past, but also construe them as determined by culture, and as unconsciously inhabiting culture. These young women's relations with their older kin therefore acquire a temporal dimension: young women seek to break with the past and project the self forward (see chapter Six).

Contrary to dominant discourses on multiculturalism, which equate religion with culture and community (Werbner 2009: 30), young Somali women separate religion from culture, and understand themselves differently in relation to each notion. As I explore in the following chapter, public representations of Islamic practices, such as the donning of the *hijab*, frequently equate the latter with community values. In contrast, young Somali women stress the importance of understanding these practices as religious, rather than cultural. Their modes of engagements and practices of ethical self-fashioning, in relation to religious practice and faith, differ and engage different elements of the ethical imagination compared to those outlined in this chapter.

Figure 5: Somali woman, Mogadishu, 1979

This content has been removed for reasons of copyright

Figure 6: Somali woman, *circa* 1980s

This content has been removed for reasons of copyright

Figure 7: Mother and daughters, Whitechapel, 2013

Figure 8: Young women, Whitechapel, 2013
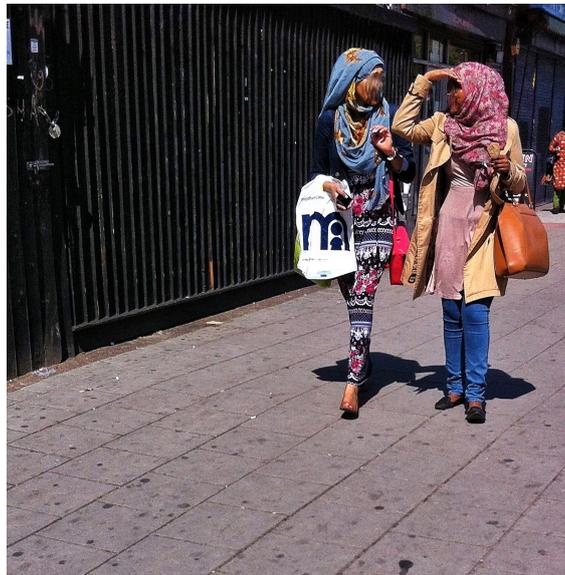
(Faces have been obscured to protect the anonymity of the individuals concerned).

Figure 9: The *Miss Somali* Event logo, 2009

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Chapter 3: Multiculturalism and the problematization of the Muslim subject

3.1 Make Bradford British

In February 2012, my practising Somali friends, Layla and Ifrah, advised me to watch *Make Bradford British*, a Channel 4 two-part reality TV show. They had both seen it that week and were looking forward to exchanging opinions on the show, a common event whenever a TV program featured Muslim participants or characters. A year following Cameron's speech in Munich on the demise of multiculturalism (see Appendix B), the program is presented as an experiment in multiculturalism – an opportunity to question how individuals from different classes, cultural and religious backgrounds can live together, and whether there is such a thing as a shared sense of "Britishness". "Is this a future defined by difference? Or one which brings us together as a nation?" the program editor, Heenan Bhatti, purports to investigate. *Make Bradford British*, he insists, offers "a positive contribution to the on-going debate around what constitutes a collective national identity". [45]

Set in one of the most notoriously "segregated" cities of the UK, in the first episode, the project managers and "community and diversity experts", Taiba Yasseen and Laurie Trott bring together 100 British citizens from Bradford to sit the *Life in the UK* test. [46] Eight participants, representing different ethnic, racial, class and religious backgrounds, are selected, out of the 90 individuals who failed the test. Amongst them is Damon, a metal sheet worker, who lives in a predominantly white area of Bradford, Maura a former magistrate from a middle-class suburb, and two young Muslims, Sabbiyah and Rashid. The participants, encouraged by the organisers to "be honest" and display their prejudices, are asked to share a large house, with the aim of recreating a microcosm of a multicultural society. Tension builds as Rashid, a devout Muslim and former rugby league player, insists on participating in congregational prayer at the mosque, five times a day. The almost exclusive focus of the episode is

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[45] http://www.channel4.com/programmes/make-bradford-british/articles/why-bradford

[46] A pass on the test is a requirement, under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, 2002, for anyone taking up British citizenship.

on the "problematic" nature of this Islamic practice; the other inhabitants of the house complain as Rashid's trips to the mosque disrupt vital decision-making processes such as drawing up shopping lists and Sabbiyah argues with him at the dinner table over his interpretations of prayer. He is filmed explaining, "a person who prays in congregation gets the reward 25 to 27 times more than a person who prays individually". His commitment depicts prayer not only as a barrier to successful integration but as part of a straightforward point-accruing system. The episode ends with a trip for the group and Rashid compromising on his Mosque praying; he prays in a forest instead, a scene that moves Maura to tears.

In part two, the participants are paired up and made to live in each other's homes. Sabbiyah, the young *hijabi* Muslim woman, is paired up with Audrey, a mixed-race landlady of a Bradford pub. On her first day of serving soft drinks in the pub, a white middle-aged man in the pub attacks Sabbiyah. "How long have you been in this country? Why are you dressed like that?" he asks provocatively. "I was born and bought up here… it's my identity, it's part of who I am", the young woman replies, taken aback by the comment. "If you were born here, why not take up our identity… our wear? When was the last time you dressed in a mini skirt and a low cut top?" he questions. "I don't want to wear a mini-skirt and a low cut top! I'm covering my modesty" Sabbiyah responds trying to defend herself. At that point, another woman intervenes on the man's behalf: "I don't mean no disrespect, but this young lady looks beautiful in what she's got on… but it don't fit in, it's not like us. If you're in England, be like English people". Intimidated Sabbiyyah retreats, sobbing quietly in the corner of the pub: "I've never questioned my identity, never, for the first time I felt myself questioning it. Am I really British? Can I ever be seen as British?" Although Audrey initially struggles to empathise with her, she reflects on the racist abuse she received in the past, noticing how this has now shifted to the Asian (Muslim) community.

In the meantime Damon, who subsequently explains that he used to think mosques were "terror camps" and "secretive places", is invited to live with Rashid, who makes every effort to "show good character" and the "good" side of Islam through his hospitality and his constant references to the virtues of Islam. Damon attends congregational prayer at the mosque, and in one of the final scenes of the show, he

reflects on what he has learnt from his encounter with Rashid: "Islam is not a bad religion… the ways of life are the old British ways." As the program is brought to a close, this statement stands as a final summary and resolution to the initial tensions and conflicts. Not surprisingly, Channel 4's political intervention and contribution to the multiculturalism debate is a simplistic, naïve statement encouraging an embracement of difference and recognition of shared values. Echoing political discourses on Britishness and national identity, it proposes that recognition of "shared British values", will overcome the problems, and associated threats of segregation and marginalisation.

In a series of interventions by the participants and organisers following the show, Sabbiyah embraces and further develops the proposed "solution" to the problem of multiculturalism. Questioned during an online interview on whether she understands Islam as compatible with Britishness, she replies:

> *"Yes Islam and Britishness are compatible for the following reasons: Islam promotes loyalty and love to one's homeland, it promotes wellbeing and contribution to one's community, and it promotes love and equality towards your neighbours. It ensures civil liberties and rights. Britishness to me is all of the above and thus Islam and Britishness work hand in hand."*

Her response reveals a similar resolution to that envisioned by the program editors, whereby shared values of loyalty, equality, love, and a commitment to civil rights, define what it means to be both British and Muslim.

On a Saturday evening, following the screening of the first episode, Layla and Ifrah, who had initially advised me to watch the show, came around for some food. As the conversation drifted from the latest YouTube hit, to the Channel 4 programme, Ifrah, a young 26-year-old practising youth worker, accused the participants of the show of over-reacting to Rashid's desire to pray in the mosque. *"Why can't they just tell him what they've decided when he gets back?! Why are they making such a big deal of this?!"* Layla, a 25-year old teacher, sighed, *"He makes Islam seem so stupid and simplistic though*!" The mistreatment suffered by Sabbiyah in the second episode, infuriated them further. Their frustration, however, unlike my own, was directed less

at the editing and directing of the show, and more at the participants. They worried about perpetuating stereotypical representations of Muslims and often criticised the depiction of Muslims in media and film. One such example is the Peter Kosminsky series *Britz*, which narrates the story of a young second-generation Muslim brother and sister in Bradford who, soon after the July 2005 bombings, take divergent paths: the brother takes up a job at MI5, whilst the sister trains to become a jihadist. My friend Ifrah had on one occasion expressed her anxieties about the show, which she felt contained unlikely, stereotypical, depictions of the Muslim community as segregated and patriarchal, organising jihadist meetings on university campuses, and training in jihadist camps in Pakistan, and so on.

However, *Make Bradford British* pleasantly surprised these young women by the end, and both commended Rashid's presentation of Islamic virtues, and the ways in which he challenged Damon's prejudices. *"It's stereotypical, but at least the end is not the usual stuff about Muslims… Rashid redeems himself at the end, he's good!"* Layla exclaimed. Although *Make Bradford British* had reinforced the problematic nature of Muslim practices, according to my friends, it had fallen short of reiterating the "usual" conventions of other TV programs. It offered a positive resolution to the question of how to be British and Muslim, stressing interior virtues and values – aspects of Muslim subjectivities that my informants too were keen to emphasise – above the practices of prayer and *hijab*.

3.2 The problem of being British and Muslim

This chapter takes recent public debates on multiculturalism as a starting point and treats them as a distinctive field of problematization that centres on the question of what it means to be British and Muslim (see sections 1.6). As Foucault (2000) argues, within this general terrain of problematization – of the relation between Islam and Britishness – a set of intersecting domains offer a series of problems and challenges for politics and for self-formation. In what follows, I focus on the problem of what constitutes a Muslim subject, and on a series of related queries that are reproduced in debates on multiculturalism, and exemplified in shows such as *Make Bradford British*: what does it mean to be a Muslim? How do we know who is a Muslim? Do external practices make one a Muslim? This chapter is concerned with the ways in which this problem is articulated through a preoccupation with exterior practices,

such as Rashid's prayer and Sabbiyah's *hijab*, and with the relation between interiority and exteriority.

These problematizations are evident in the current shift in public and political discourses and policies, where the notion of multiculturalism has become inseparable from the supposed "problem" of Islam. In Appendix B, I note how a recurring concern amongst politicians and public commentators is the notion that multiculturalism is producing segregated communities with conflicting values. At the heart of these discussions is, I suggest, a growing anxiety about Muslims' supposed "difference", and their place within the UK. In the post 9/11 climate, and increasingly following the July 2005 bombings in London, the Muslim problem in the UK has been debated through the lens of security, as Muslims have been associated with a global discourse of "cultural dysfunctionality", "separatism", violence and terrorism (Meer *et al* 2010; Werbner 2009; Grillo 2007). Muslims' supposed "illiberal" values, are seen as a threat to British national identity. As reiterated in *Make Bradford British* and in Sabbiyah's comment above, "British values" and "Britishness" are often evoked in public discourses to contrast a set of universal values of human rights and democracy, with essentialised notions of supposedly non-liberal, Muslim values. Accusations against Muslims' allegedly non-liberal, conflicting values have been sparked by a series of national events including the Rushdie Affair, the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's suggestion in 2008 that Islamic law should be formally recognised in the UK.[47]

Here, I move beyond descriptive and prescriptive approaches to multiculturalism (Modood 2007; 2010), in order to critically examine the historically contingent nature of these problematizations and the forms of self-fashioning they enable and constrain (see section 1.1). I begin this chapter by exploring the interconnections between political debates and public perceptions, drawing out how these debates in Europe have been framed through a liberal-secular logic which has over-emphasised visible signs of difference. At the centre of this chapter is a focus on how young practising

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[47] Mehdi Hassan (2012) has argued in the New Statesman that the recent "halal hysteria" by tabloid newspapers, about Muslims' disregard for animal rights, is indicative of another wave of accusations against Islam's incompatibility with British values.

women, such as Layla and Ifrah, intervene within this terrain of problematization and position themselves differently in relation to these debates.

Within these debates around multiculturalism and the Muslim subject, certain practices such as the donning of the *hijab* or *niqab* have been singled out as objects of concern and scrutiny, and "attributed a status of exceptionality"; they have come to stand as religious symbols, as markers of authentic Muslim identity, and of the growing visibility of Islam (Bracke and Fadil 2012: 49). The *hijab* has become "fetishized" and symbolically overloaded; something Muslim women, as we shall see, simultaneously critique and reinscribe (Tarlo 2010: 75-6). In the UK, the issue of the *niqab* entered public debate relatively late following Jack Straw's demand in 2006 that Muslim women remove their *niqab* (face veils) during consultations in his constituency. He insisted that the *niqab* represented a "visible statement of separation and difference". Overnight, as Tarlo (2010) notes, the media transformed the issue by maximising otherness and obscuring the pre-existing debates on the *niqab* amongst British Muslims. The tabloid newspaper *The Sun*, ran a headline "Take off your veils" whilst *The Mail* and *The Telegraph* framed the issue by inserting a "Muslim problem page" dealing with anxieties about multiculturalism, and concerns about security, education and employment law (*ibid* 2010: 144).

In his ethnography of the headscarf controversies in France, Bowen (2008) explores similar public debates, and unravels the historically constructed reasons underlying the law that led to the headscarf ban in public schools in France in 2004. His ethnography revolves around the ways in which politicians and public figures have reasoned about, and justified, their arguments and policies about Islam, politics, and public life. He traces the development of French state secularism, *laïcité*, and its grounding in Republican ideas of citizenship. He further accounts for these controversies by unravelling the historical relationship between the state, religion and the individual, the role of state institutions, the impact of the colonial past, and the role of the media in shaping public opinions.

A Republican way of life, Bowen explains, requires that individuals agree on basic values. State institutions such as public schools, are designed to ensure uniformity and neutrality; they have the responsibility to guarantee individual freedoms, such as freedom from pressures, emanating from the family, community, and church (*ibid*

2008: 29). It is for this reason that Islam is seen as a threat to Republican values and national identity (see also Ewing 2008 for Germany). In France, these political discourses have permeated media depictions and popular perceptions around the visibility of Muslims in the public sphere. As in the case of the UK, the headscarf has been rhetorically linked to concrete social problems, such as the growth in communalism, and a lack of social mixing, the influence of "Islamism" in France, and the denigration of women. Furthermore, a Muslim's everyday behaviour, such as prayer or the donning the *hijab*, has come to be treated as a sign of one's values, and read as an unwillingness to "fit" into France (Bowen 2004a). As elsewhere in Europe, these popular depictions are revealing of the ways in which the headscarf has evoked deep-rooted feelings of fear, anxiety, and discomfort around national belonging, citizenship and sociality (Moors 2009).

A recent body of work has investigated how these debates on multiculturalism supported by an underlying secular-liberal ethics (Asad 2003; see section 1.4). Fernando (2010) points out how argumentations around the headscarf in France are framed in terms of either personal choice or religious duty.[48] As others have noted, they have often revolved around a "liberated" female national self who is contrasted with its Muslim (oppressed) other (Bracke and Fadil 2012; Ewing 2008).[49] Fernando insists that legal frameworks and political and public discourses on religious freedom in France, and in Europe more generally, assume that religious practices are merely signs, or outward manifestations, of religious conscience and religious choice. Public discourses make a distinction between belief and practice, whereby the latter is constituted as "a second-order contingent expression of belief" (Fernando 2010: 27). According to this logic, banning the headscarf "does not constitute a violation of religious liberty because it has no effect on the believer's [inner] conscience" (*ibid* 2010: 26). Personal choice constitutes religious conscience, and the latter is divorced from submission to religious duties or practices. The problem with this articulation,

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[48] Similarly, Bracke and Fadil (2012) argue that these debates are often mediated around a set of regulatory structures, amongst them is gender. They focus on the limitations of the question of whether the *hijab* is oppressive or emancipatory.

[49] This strategy of reinforcing boundaries of the nation through the demonisation of the "other" is not a new phenomenon (Ewing 2008; Said 1978).

Fernando goes on to argue, is that it leaves practising Muslims with no discursive space in which to conceptualise or articulate practices like veiling, which pious Muslim women consider a religious duty, albeit one that is inseparable from inner desire and choice (*ibid* 2010: 29).

Make Bradford British inserts itself within this political context, offering its own solution, but also contributing to the problematization of Muslims in the UK. In what follows, I explore how young second-generation Somali women understand and make sense of what it means to be a Muslim by reflecting on the questions posed by multiculturalism debates. I investigate the manner in which they respond to these popular representations, and negotiate their processes of self-fashioning by altering their ideas of exterior practices, such as wearing the *hijab,* as well as interior dimensions of the self. I draw on recent anthropological work, which has also explored how pious Muslims in Europe manage these visibly Islamic practices in environments where they are seen as problematically "other" (see section 1.4; Bracke 2011; Fadil 2011; Jacobsen 2011a; Jouili 2009). For example, these scholars explore how Muslim women, for whom these Islamic practices are primarily ethical techniques of self-discipline, challenge, negotiate or at times appropriate secular or liberal modes of subjectification.

Building on this work, this chapter highlights how through multiple strategies of negotiation, young practising women reconfigure their understandings of interior and exterior dimension of their selves. I am interested not only in the different ways these women negotiate what they regard as an over-signification of exterior practices, but more importantly in the ways in which they rework their understandings of themselves by prioritising interiority (see Jacobsen 2011b: Chapter 6). In doing so, they distance themselves from the past, by insisting that they, unlike their mothers, work from the "inside-out". Their understandings of the relationship between interiority and exteriority, and their prioritisation of interiority are, I argue, indicative of historical rearrangements and generational differences. The problematization of exteriority leads these young women to refashion contemporary Islamic pedagogies that stress the dialectic, mutually-constitutive relation between interior and exterior processes of the self, crucial to the fashioning of a pious Muslim subject (Mahmood

2001). By emphasising interiority, they rework the elements that are being problematized in public debates.

The next section will proceed to look at Layla and her personal problematizations of the relationship between interiority and exteriority. I highlight how her critiques of her parents' excessive preoccupations with exteriority and her concerns with being "too Muslim" in the workplace impact on her choice to don colourful skirts and *hijab*. I contrast her decision with Ifrah, a practising woman who, following a period of reflection, decides to adopt the *jilbaab* as a personal and collective challenge. Finally, I compare both of these women with Fatima, a non-believer, who continues to wear black *abaya* and *hijab* in order to appear visibly Muslim to her family and friends. These three narratives are woven together throughout the chapter to illustrate the ways second-generation Somali women constitute different, unstable and, at times contradictory, subject positions and in order to rethink notions of interiority and exteriority, faith and practice.

3.3 The problem of interiority and exteriority

Layla had had a difficult week when she came around for a coffee and chat. She had been arguing with her parents about her clothing, and her Muslim appearance had also been questioned in her workplace. Troubled and uncertain she had written a poem, in order to share her experiences and solutions with her friends, including Ifrah whom I introduced in the initial vignette. This is a fragment of her poem *Inside-out, Outside-in*, which she had written and recorded on her laptop:

> *Sister A is dressed in black, covered from head to toe, but she is empty inside. She looks down on people, judges them, and when I smile at her as she crosses me on the street she glances at me expressionless and hands me a book on Islamic rules of modesty. Sister B doesn't even look like a Muslim on the outside, but when our paths cross she smiles and I can feel the warmth of her heart, the goodness emanating from her soul. We exchange greetings and part ways. But what if sister A merged with sister B to make Sister C? Someone who is God fearing, who strives to act and refuses to give in to desires and temptations, whose warmth of the heart and whose iman are visible on the outside. Sister C covers herself to*

please her Creator; she is beautiful not because of the curves of her body (because these cannot be seen by other men except her husband) but because of what she is inside.

Following the recording, she explained,

> *"Islam is about the middle way, that's why I say inside out, outside in, ultimately I think it's better to be a good person inside, but it's about balancing the two…. I think the inside is most important, but I've also seen how the outside works to make people more aware. If I'm wearing a hijab I'm less likely to shout, be loud and aggressive, swear… my behaviour changes as well because I'm representing Muslims, so I have an obligation in that sense."*

Layla was questioning and problematizing the relation between interiority and exteriority and what it means, for her to be a Muslim; the poem captures her attempt to reconcile parental pressures, Islamic ideals, and a secular-liberal gaze. The "sisters" in the poem capture some of the different subject positions available to Layla, which I will analyse in more detail throughout the chapter.

Layla, explicitly set out to attempt to define, and make sense of "the middle way"; she sought a sister C who could adequately balance the "inside" – a "warmth of heart" and emotional connection with God – with external practice. This recognition of the mutually-constitutive relation between exterior and interior dimensions of the self is informed by contemporary Islamic reformist teachings that emphasise the ways in which obligatory acts of worship, such as donning the *hijab,* are techniques of self-fashioning which ought to arise from, but also cultivate, correct attitudes, intentions, and emotions (Mahmood 2001; see section 1.3). Modesty, for both Ifrah and Layla, is more than simply donning the *hijab*; it is a moral virtue acquired through the coordination of outward behaviour and inward dispositions (Mahmood 2005: 135). As Layla explained, the *hijab* works to make her "more aware" of her behaviour. Similarly, Ifrah explained to me, "*Once you have the hijab, it shifts the way you behave, the way you feel. You start being modest in dress and behaviour*". Modesty requires training oneself to cultivate emotions and sincere (*ikhlas*) intentions (*niyyah*) that subsequently motivate one to act. As Jacobsen (2011b: 316) points out in relation

to young Muslims in Norway, the "inner" *hijab* relates to consciousness of modesty, and the "outer" *hijab* refers to both the manifestation of inner modesty and to its disciplinary dimension. Ultimately, as this chapter will demonstrate, what constitutes the "middle way" is unclear and unstable; whilst most young second-generation women agree with Layla's insistence that the "inside is more important", they vary in their negotiations of exteriority with interiority.

3.4   Sister A: exteriority as cultural

To return to Layla's poem, Sister A is depicted as judgemental, fixated on rules and regulations and on perfecting external practices, whilst being "empty" on the inside. Her attitude to the *hijab* reflects the ways in which Rashid's prayer is depicted in *Make Bradford British:* dogmatic, un-reflexive, un-reasoned, and an obstacle to successful integration. By discarding sister A, Layla positions herself against a prioritisation of exteriority. This could be seen as a distancing from a strict adherence to rules and obligations pertaining to particular interpretations of Islam, as well as from an Islamic tradition that emphasises virtuous action above states of mind (Asad 1993: 219). Sister A also epitomises the cultural attitude towards the *hijab* from which Layla and many second-generation Somali women distance themselves, and attribute to their parents (see Chapter Two).

Layla frequently argued with her parents about her clothing. Although she worked as a secondary school teacher, she continued to live at home with her parents and five younger siblings. Raised in a religious home, as a child she had been strongly encouraged to don the *hijab* by her parents, but throughout her degree, she began to reflect on religion and question her reasons for wearing it. "*I started thinking, am I just wearing it because I've been told to*?" she had asked herself. In retrospect she wishes she had not been pushed to wear it as a child. "*Children should not be taught rules regimentally, but they should learn to accept them themselves",* she had explained to me. Like the other female members of her family, she consistently wore the *hijab*. However, unlike her older sister and mother, she alternated long colourful skirts and loose long-sleeved tops with the occasional *abaya*.

On one occasion, she described an argument she had with her father:

"I had a photo up on my laptop of us on a trip abroad and I was wearing jeans with a dress on top down to below my knees. He saw it and was like: so is this what you wear when you go off with your friends? I was so offended so I started arguing back. I told him he was so bothered about exterior appearances and that wasn't what mattered at all. You could have a girl in bikini with the best character in the world. But I guess that's all he sees, the exterior. He doesn't know all the worship and things I do."

I tried to reassure her, reminding her that she was in fact extremely pious, and she replied modestly:

"No I'm not that pious… but I try and he just doesn't see that. He doesn't understand that I'm very conscious of God; I know that I will be judged by Him and I try my best to be good. He [dad] just sees me as a bad Muslim, I guess it doesn't help that my sister wears niqab… I was just upset he judged me so quickly, didn't even hear what I was going to say…. I upset he didn't trust me, and he doubted me so much. And I don't understand why he's so obsessed with exterior things like that! It's not that hijab doesn't matter, it does, and I know that, but it's not the main thing. I know so many people who wear hijab but don't practise or anything"

For Layla's parents, only the *jilbaab,* an Islamic style of dress that covers the head, and drapes over the chest, commonly worn by many young and older Somali women was sufficiently modest. Layla thought her sister's decision to wear the *niqab* had been influenced by her father, and on another occasion she made clear that this parental pressure on her was far from sporadic.

"We have an on-going battle, everyday. "Why don't you wear hijab??" And I tell him "I am wearing hijab, this is my opinion!" I've never really cared about doing things to please my parents though, if it goes against my religion. Like the jilbaab, I wasn't going to wear it to please my dad, the intention is wrong and I would have resented it. I do things to please God and so far as it's considered modest that's ok."

When we discussed the reasons why she felt different in contrast to her parents, she explained:

> *"that's the way they were brought up I guess. Exterior things matter so much to them, they always have. It's a cultural thing, Somalis generally are like that… I don't know, to me sincerity is really important. I'd rather explain to my parents my opinion and let them understand me and why I do things, show them I am actually doing what's best. I don't want to lie to them, and just please them like that…"*

Layla's comments reflect an important distinction made by many young second-generation Somali women between the cultural attitude of their parents and their own commitment to an authentic, transcendent Islam.[50] As I argued in Chapter Two, "cultural" is employed to refer to a mode of subjectification based on an uncritical acceptance of inherited practices. Similarly, here it is used to refer to submission to parents, kin, or community. According to Layla, her father is cultural because he judges without listening to her reasoning, focuses excessively on exterior appearances, and constantly pressures her and her sisters to adopt the *jilbaab*. Unlike her parents, Layla and her practising Somali friends adopt a reasoned, but also emotional, engagement with practice, drawing on Islamic pedagogies of self-discipline (Mahmood 2001). Although the *hijab* is an obligatory practice, crucial to her fashioning as a pious self, it is "not the main thing", according to Layla, but one of many practices that cultivate interior emotions, intentions, and dispositions. What matters most to Layla is her internal, sincere, and personal connection with God.

These critiques were reiterated by some of Layla's practising Somali friends. On one occasion, as we were having coffee with other friends, Ifrah explained how the Somali youth she worked with had raised this issue with her in a workshop. She accused the older generation of perpetuating the "problematic" discourses about external practices: *"Generally it's constantly about being seen by the Somali community. That's what matters. There's constant talk amongst women 'did you see*

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[50] This process of separating culture from religion, and associating the former with coercion, and as something of the past, is a common discursive strategy amongst second-generation Muslims (see Jacobsen 2011b; Ewing 2008).

so and so wearing this, and so and so what she was wearing?' " Her friend, who had been overhearing our conversation added:

> *"If you're wearing trousers that's not considered modest. It's too western for them. But then you get so many Somali women wearing abaya to avoid getting glances or comments. But it's ridiculous, you get Somalis who wear it but don't pray! It doesn't make sense! Older women are very strict about religiosity. But they are also aware of how they are seen by outsiders… ceeb (shame) you know? Or maybe because they want to cling on, they're worried they might lose their identity."*

For many Somalis, teenagers and older first-generations, the *hijab* and *jilbaab* have in recent years also become a marker of collective morality, honour, and Somali culture (Talle 2008: 65). As I discussed in Chapter Two, for many of the older women I frequented, covering one's head and body was articulated in everyday conversation as signifying religiosity; it was unquestionably the "right thing to do" and was a marker of a "good Somali woman". As an external manifestation of moral integrity, women should be seen by others to be morally sound, and immoral behaviour is deemed shameful (*ceeb*). For older women, ensuring their daughters are visibly moral serves to enhance their own moral integrity, and that of their kin, as well as to increase the younger women's opportunities of marrying well. Muneera, a young mother who felt the pressure imposed by other Somali women explained: "*If I wore jeans, I would be gossiped about day and night! It's shameful for a married woman not to dress like this. So in a way it protects me, people don't question. Also it looks really bad on my family if I don't wear this.*"

Similarly, as Isotalo (2007) describes for Somalis in Finland, trousers have come to be associated with excessive assimilation into the host society, a loss of faith, shame, and a threat to the moral integrity of one's clan. Therefore, for older Somali women, the *hijab* is both a religious duty, which they realise they neglected in the past, but is also constitutive of Somali culture and morality. For younger women, on the other hand, it is seen as cultural when imposed by others, and religious when it is adopted willingly, and as a consequence of reasoned engagement with Islamic texts and teachings.

For practising Somali women, modest clothing is not solely about identity, nor about complying with community pressure that may involve accusations of shame (*ceeb*), of being "judged" or "seen" by others. Unlike themselves, their mothers are, on the one hand, excessively focused on clothing and external markers of piety, and on the other, inconsistent with their practice.

Ifrah explained in respect of the teenagers who attended the youth club, whom she presumed had been influenced by their mothers:

> *"It's conflicting, if you're wearing something that doesn't represent what you feel inside. It's just an external manifestation that doesn't match what's inside. It's a bit superficial. But Somalis are like that: religious on the outside, maybe because they're kinda encouraged to dress like that."*

However, the younger second-generation women's disagreements with their parents' cultural attitude towards the *hijab* neglect how many older Somali women have also begun donning the *jilbaab* and *hijab* as a consequence of a reasoned engagement with texts and a discourse of Islam and authenticity (Talle 2008; McGown 1999; see also Chapters Two and Five). Their daughters' criticisms, therefore, are more about their own concern with distancing themselves from a perceived judgemental attitude, a prioritisation of external practices and a submission to the norms and dictates of the Somali community.

These young women's criticisms of their mothers' prioritisation of the external reflect many of the characteristics attributed to Muslim communities by the media and popular discourse. Interestingly, these young women appropriate the language employed in debates about multiculturalism, in order to criticise their mothers' practices. According to the younger generation, older Somali women are wearing the *hijab* because they feel judged by others; they are embracing it out of social pressure to conform, not out of reasoned choice and an internal connection to Allah. This cultural attitude towards donning the *hijab* is understood as susceptible to judgements, and therefore a sign of submission to others. It is perpetuated, as the following example illustrates, by their mothers, whom the young women argue "segregate" themselves from mainstream society.

In April 2011, a few days following the French ban on wearing *niqab* in public spaces, I met with Layla, Ifrah, and some other practising friends at Nadifa's house in Stepney Green. Sauda, an occupational therapist in her 30s, who was the most politically engaged of the young women, mentioned the ban and reflected on the UK and on her own situation:

> "Hijab will never become a problem here. But things are getting tough… it's a political ploy though. In times of recession, low unemployment, they blame it on immigrants who steal welfare money, this ghettoisation thing. I don't see it. They just want to target us, but Muslims aren't ghettoised at all, we're all over the place, you get all sorts of Muslims in west London. Multiculturalism is the best thing we have; we can walk around freely, feeling safe, Muslims all want to come to the UK."

Sauda was referring here to Cameron's Munich speech, delivered a few months previously, and the rhetoric on the failure of multiculturalism, Britishness and supposed segregation of Muslim communities, and a lack of shared values. For Sauda and many of her practising friends, the UK, unlike other countries, was a safe haven for Muslim women, who could wear the *hijab* in relative freedom, thanks to multiculturalism. To these young women, who identified as British, Somali and Muslim, the talk of ghettoisation did not make any sense. It applied more to their parents, who had not been raised in the UK, and as refugees had relied significantly on welfare support. Ifrah explained: "*A lot of our mothers have come from war torn places, then had loads of kids, and have always been housewives, that's the culture, the women are at home. They hang out with Somalis. So it's very strange to have to go to work all of a sudden.*"

Layla agreed, but contrasted her generation, with that of their mothers: "*Our generation has had loads of opportunities, and there's no excuse for us not to get out there. It's our responsibility to take part, and contribute. We have no excuse.*" In contrasting their own duties to participate and contribute to the British public sphere, with those of their mothers, these young women redirected public critiques of multiculturalism at their parent's generation and their cultural attitude to Islamic

practice. Multiculturalism assumed that Islam segregated Muslims, but what was in fact to blame was the "bad part" of culture (Chapter Two).

As I discussed in the previous chapter, young women's insistence on a separation between religion and culture is informed by contemporary reformist teachings that stress the purification of an authentic transcendent Islam from cultural practices. This is a rhetoric expressed by European Islamic scholars and actively embraced and reproduced by young Muslims in Europe. For example, during an Eid party organised by my informants in a community centre in Bromley-by-bow, a female scholar argued in a talk delivered on *Women in Islam*:

> "Women should get involved in their community in order to voice their own concerns and represent other women. They should support their Sisters to ensure that the services needed for women are in place. Women should work to challenge media stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed… It's men who use culture or cultural norms to oppress women. Islam does not oppress them…. Muslims should go out there, in hijab and show what they are capable of achieving."

The scholar adopts a popular liberal feminist objection to multiculturalism that insists that multicultural policies empower male elders in communities, often to the detriment of women and children (Okin 1999). According to the speaker, Islam offers a solution: it provides a way for women to challenge oppressive cultural and patriarchal norms, to participate in the wider public sphere, and to challenge stereotypical representations whilst maintaining their modesty. Unlike media representations, she contends, women are oppressed because of men's appropriation of culture, not because of Islam.

3.5   Problematizing exteriority: From sister A to sister B

In the poem, Layla's distancing from Sister A also represents a critique of public representations, such as those in *Make Bradford British,* that over-emphasise and problematize practices, such as prayer and *hijab* as crucial to Muslim identity. Following the show, Layla and Ifrah had commented on their frustration with the participants, who, in the first episode, portrayed Rashid's prayer as a problem. Their

annoyance was exacerbated by the mistreatment of Sabbiyah, who had been portrayed as a victim of racist, anti-Muslim accusations, despite defending herself by stressing the importance of modesty, choice and identity. Layla and her friends shared with Sabbiyah the experience of being judged by exterior appearance in the workplace. However, they felt that, unlike Sabbiyah they were able to defend themselves and negotiate the over-determination of exterior signs of difference in more effective ways. In what follows, I illustrate the ways in which Layla and Ifrah negotiated their exteriority differently, despite sharing a similar conception of interiority. In doing so, I illustrate how their decisions had exposed them to different forms of exclusion.

Throughout her teacher-training course in religious education (R.E.), Layla had experienced and become frustrated by the over-signification and stigmatisation of her *hijab*.

> *"I get targeted cause I'm a Muslim! Every time a lecturer says something about Islam, he looks at me, to justify what Islam says. He's questioned me and so have others on whether I can teach RE objectively as a Muslim. They think it's impossible cause I carry it on my head. I've never been in an environment where I'm the only Muslim. But I get treated as a Muslim, I really wish they would just treat me as Layla!"*

Layla resented the way others saw her solely through her religion. *"They see the hijab before they see there's a person there!"* she explained. The presence of this religious symbol made her lecturers doubt her ability to think and teach anything that fell outside of her faith.

On another occasion, following a lecture, Layla had been questioned by one of her university classmates, "*Excuse me, what's your background*?" she had demanded abruptly. Surprised Layla had replied, "*My parents are Somali why?*" "*Do you think that if you weren't a Muslim you'd choose Islam?*" the classmate continued. Annoyed, Layla retorted: "*What do you mean by that? That I'm blindly following Islam? No I've actually done a lot of study into it, I know a lot about my religion. How am I meant to answer that question? I don't know! I can't tell you.*"

As Layla recounted this incident to me, she pointed out: *"She must just assume I wear hijab cause that's what I've always done, or that my parents force me!"* Frequently, my informants were confronted, particularly in work environments, with non-Muslims assuming the *hijab* was a sign of a cultural, traditional identity, imposed by their families and communities. As we saw earlier, hegemonic discourses in the UK often conflate religion with culture (Werbner 2009: 30) and understand culture as an imprisoning and determining force (Phillips 2007; Baumann 1996). Her classmate assumed the *hijab* was what Layla would have described as a cultural symbol of patriarchal subordination, not something she had willingly adopted.

Sauda, the practising friend of Layla who I introduced in the previous section, had had a similar experience when she first started wearing *hijab* at work:

 "When I started wearing hijab at work I got asked so many questions, and I don't even wear abaya, imagine if I did! People started saying I looked better before, asking me why was I wearing it. One person said to me: oh of course you're not allowed to take it off. And I shouted back: I don't want to take it off!! They couldn't sit in front of someone who wears hijab, it bothered them! And I was the only one in the office... but we have Muslim clients the whole time!! They just couldn't take it from one of their employees. I should give them a crash course on Islam cause they have clients!"

As with Layla's example, her work colleagues had assumed that the *hijab* was a sign, imposed on her by her culture or community. Sauda, instead, had responded by emphasising she did not *want* to take it off – that it was her choice to wear it. As with Layla, she employed a liberal discourse of choice and autonomy, to "talk back" to a dominant narrative that positions the *hijab* as a normative practice, antithetical to autonomy and choice (Bracke 2011; Jacobsen 2011a).[51] This strategy echoes

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51 Bracke (2011) explores the multiple strategies young Muslims employ to "talk back" – in Althusseurian terms – to a dominant discourse that presents them as oppressed victims. Whilst some women might rely on the vocabulary of liberalism, re-signifying the terms of debate in order to stress an emancipation gained through Islam, others, for example, might react by educating Muslim women about their rights in Islam.

Sabbiyah's reply in *Make Bradford British* that she did not "want" to wear mini-skirts and low-cut tops; she had the "choice" to wear what she wanted.[52]

These discursive strategies constitute only one way in which Layla sought to negotiate her practice. Following several weeks of feeling judged by her exterior appearance, Layla phoned me one evening to discuss her current coping strategies:

> *"I've really tried to be less Muslim this week! I've tried not to speak about Islam. I'm actually considering dressing less Muslim, maybe wearing Western clothes like jeans and a long top, rather than black abaya. Of course I can't take off my hijab, so I can't escape the fact I'm a Muslim."*

She began to wear colourful long skirts and patterned loose-fitting tops, rather than her usual black *abaya*, although she did wear the latter in certain situations and particularly amongst other Muslims. She shopped for long-sleeved shirts and tops, dresses and shoes in major high street shops, such as Topshop, Debenhams and Primark and picked up her *hijab* in markets in Whitechapel. She layered her *hijab*s in different colours, and adorned her clothing with bright coloured bangles. By combining elements from difference places, experimenting with a range of styles, and incorporating a concern with modesty with Western clothing, she articulated and realised what Tarlo (2010) has described as an individualised, cosmopolitan "Islamic fashion".

Layla hoped that dressing "less Muslim" would enable her to manage how those around her interacted with her, and would encourage them to focus less on her exterior appearance, and more on her virtues and interior dimensions of self. In line with a secular logic, she was recognising the *hijab* as simultaneously a sign of her interior dispositions and as a religious duty (Fernando 2010). Acting and dressing "less Muslim" was a way of "re-signifying" her clothing practices, similarly to Jouili's (2009) French and German informants who were forced to negotiate the

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52 This emphasis on choice and autonomy as a mode of subjectification by which second-generation Muslim women negotiate the practice of donning the *hijab*, has been noted elsewhere in the literature (Jacobsen 2011a; Fernando 2010).

donning of the *hijab* in restrictive secular environments (see section 1.4). Reflecting Sister B in the poem, Layla was placing greater emphasis on interior virtues, dispositions, and manners. Her aim was to encourage others to appreciate her "good character" (*aklaaq*), which she deemed more representative of what it meant for her to be a Muslim. She had, in fact, applauded Rashid in *Making Bradford British*, and his success in bringing this to the fore.

Layla was also distancing herself from a prescriptive understanding of modesty by focusing instead on the "inner" virtue of modesty which could be expressed differently in practice: as long as one was revealing only face and hands, it did not matter how that was achieved in practice. As the following example illustrates, she had appropriated this attitude towards practice from European Islamic scholars.

On a Friday evening in October 2010, Layla and I attended a talk delivered by *Sheikh* Babikir[53] during which he spoke, amongst other things, about how Muslims should avoid creating barriers with non-Muslims. Instead they should impress non-Muslims with their hospitality and, their manners (*adab*). Following the talk, I heard Layla say the following to a friend:

> *"I think he's completely right about being a Muslim through manners – through the person you are, not through a uniform. That's the universal aspect of Islam, it's what unites all cultures. I don't think we should wear things that stick out in the West, or that create divisions amongst us."*

 "Modesty varies with culture", Layla explained to me when I asked her about *Sheikh* Babikir's comment: *"Sometimes cultures pass off things as being the only way to be modest, like Somalis with the jilbaab and wearing black, but that's not the only way to be modest."* Furthermore, Layla felt quite strongly about not alienating others through her dress. In order to do *da'wa* (raise awareness of Islam), she had to present herself as approachable.

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[53] *Sheikh* Babikir Ahmed Babikir has been working in the UK since the 1970's. He is currently the *Imam* of Yusuf Islam's Islamia School, and also leads on weekly *da'wa* circles at Cricklewood mosque. He studied the Islamic Sciences in Sudan under *Sheikh* Fatih Qaribullah (Radical Middle Way: n.d).

Her focus on Islamic virtues and manners also merged with a liberal public discourse on multiculturalism and "British values". On another occasion, she had explained to me, following a discussion of Cameron's speech, *"Our aims happen to coincide with Western ones; Freedom, democracy, justice, equality these are also Muslim values."* The language of values enabled her to position herself as both Muslim and British, within debates on national identity. This corresponded with the teachings of one of her favourite scholars and academics, *Sheikh* Abdul Hakim-Murad, who argued in a lecture entitled *British and Muslim*:

> "Islam, once we have become familiar with it, and settled onto it comfortably, is the most suitable for the British. Its values are our values. Its moderate, undemonstrative style of piety, still waters running deep; its insistence on modesty and a certain reserve, and its insistence on common sense and on pragmatism, combine to furnish the most natural and easy religious option for our people."

The *Sheikh*, interestingly, attempted to reverse the dominant discourse on values, stating that it was not Muslims who had appropriated British values, but that British values were in fact Islamic.

Layla's emphasis on values merges Islamic understandings of virtuous conduct, with political discourses on national identity, and understandings that "shared values" offer a solution to the problem of how to be British and Muslim. This is reflected in the final resolution of *Make Bradford British*, where Damon accepts Rashid as British because his Muslim values resemble British ways of life. Furthermore, it also represents a secular-liberal understanding of the religious subject, with faith understood as private – a position reflected in Layla's poem with Sister B who exemplifies interior "goodness" and "warmth of heart".

However, these negotiations were far from straightforward and not ones with which Layla was completely satisfied. Articulating a "middle way" for young practising women such as Layla and Ifrah is both a personal and social struggle, which requires negotiating how they think and feel about practice and faith, and managing how they will be viewed by others.

3.5.1   Ifrah's *jilbaab*

The threat of being judged and targeted as a result of her exterior appearance was a serious preoccupation for Ifrah. She typically wore the *hijab* and black *abaya* and had, on several occasions, been the target of verbal abuse on the streets or on public transport. She felt that more modest forms of clothing would have further restricted her employment opportunities. *"Especially after 7/7 bombings we really got targeted. You never see a niqabi at work do you?"* She explained to me, *"Of course you can wear it, but you make a choice of not applying for jobs where you can't wear it."* Although she would have liked to wear it, she felt that clothing such as the *niqab* was not suited to her work life.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I met with Ifrah and Layla for a walk around Tower Hamlets. As we wandered through back streets and alleyways, and occasionally popped into shops to browse the latest Islamic clothing, Ifrah unexpectedly announced that she had decided to wear the *jilbaab*. As mentioned, the *jilbaab*, often worn by practising women and particularly by first-generation Somalis, is a loose Islamic dress that covers the head and drapes over the shoulders and chest. It typically comes in dark colours and is considered by some practising women, such as Layla, to be too cumbersome and sombre, making them "stick out" in London. Layla and I looked at her with surprise, but Ifrah reassured us that she had already thought about designing her own *jilbaab*, by adding creative twists to a piece of clothing that was otherwise quite banal in style. *"It's just that I want to keep moving upwards. I think I'm ready for that and I think what was stopping me before was fear. I had real fear of doing it, but I think I can face that fear now, I'm ready for it."*

I asked her what she meant by fear and she mumbled how it was tied to her previous experiences, but she wouldn't expand further on that occasion, perhaps because the thought of her past evoked bad memories. She had previously told me how the adoption of the *hijab* and *abaya* had been a personal struggle for her. This was not only because of the stigma attached to them, but also because she felt judged by her non-practising friends. As she explained on that occasion:

> *"It was so hard. The first few months I was properly depressed. I just felt so uncomfortable in abaya and hijab. People started treating me*

differently, everyone was staring at me. I noticed when I was with friends they thought they couldn't do certain things around me, like listen to music, or stuff like that. They thought they couldn't say certain things, so they made me feel like the one that sticks out. I didn't feel comfortable; I felt boring, like the crazy side of me wasn't there anymore, like I couldn't be happy and loud and me. I didn't feel I was in my skin. But at the same time I really wanted it and I'd decided it."

Her decision to don the *jilbaab* was tied to her idealised and prescriptive understanding of modesty and pious conduct. Unlike Layla, for whom modesty was a virtue that could be practised in a range of different ways, Ifrah envisioned the *jilbaab* as the ideal modest form of clothing. She explained to us that afternoon that the *jilbaab* was more effective than the *abaya* in masking her shoulders and figure. Furthermore, in the same way that the *hijab* made Layla "more aware", the *jilbaab* would further strengthen Ifrah's interior *iman* and work as a self-disciplining practice to further improve her behaviour.

Initially Layla struggled to accept her decision and the two young women heatedly debated the issue. Ifrah continued to explain her decision:*"I've done a lot of research into it and I've learnt that the ideal is what the wives of the Prophet used to wear, the jilbaab".* Layla hesitated and then gently challenged this perspective:

"But that was the clothing suited to the time. The Prophet's wives had to be protected more than others. To me, modesty can be reached in different ways... if you look at the hijab it's practiced in different ways across the world, but they're all modest in different ways... and here I think it's important not to stick out but to adhere to social contexts... so to work I wear a shirt and long skirts cause I'm meant to have a professional look"

Ifrah retorted:

"But some cultures wear hijab and it doesn't cover their shoulders, like the Syrian trench-coat. Also, I wear jilbaab not to fit into social contexts, but to adhere to an ideal and to please God. To get more rewards – that's my only intention. Instead, by trying to fit in you're pleasing others. It's

my jihad, my struggle, and it really is hard. It's my own personal struggle to satisfy my Creator."

Layla continued to disagree:

"But Islam isn't about struggle… you should be happy! I just don't see it that way. Although part of me wishes I did have an ideal because it would make it easier for me, and I'd know what to work on. But I just see character as more important, not exterior clothing."

But Ifrah refused to give in: *"I see character and manners as really important, but also the outer"*.

Whilst Layla insisted on prioritising interiority by emphasising the virtue of modesty, and the importance of character and manners, and not "sticking out", Ifrah felt her position was excessively focused on "pleasing others", rather than "pleasing God". She directed at Layla the cultural critique that practising women often employed to distance themselves from their parents: a cultural mode of subjectification involves an uncritical submission to kin, community, or social pressure, whereas their engagements with Islamic practices result from a personal and intimate relationship with God.

Layla initially struggled to accept Ifrah's decision, as she felt Ifrah was being cultural by prioritising external behaviour. However, on another occasion, she explained to me how she was slowly learning to accept her motivations, *"I think it motivates her and sends a constant reminder"*, she explained, *"and she sees it as a struggle, against what people think about her. She feels stronger when people comment and ridicule"*. Although Ifrah's decision had initially surprised Layla, she later explained to me how Ifrah's adoption of the *jilbaab* did not actually reflect the cultural attitude she attributed to her parents. Unlike her parents, Ifrah was familiar with Islamic pedagogies that stress the connection between exterior practices and interior intentions, emotions, and dispositions. In addition, Layla explained, Ifrah was aware of the importance of interiority and occasionally, in conversation, also privileged it above exteriority. Her emphasis on exteriority was a way of motivating herself to be

pious. In fact, she had often stressed the importance of being Muslim "through manners" in similar vein to Layla.

For Ifrah, donning the *jilbaab* was also a statement of her inner strength, determination, and commitment to faith. It came to represent not only a personal struggle against experiences of marginalisation, but also a collective struggle that connected her with the experience of other Muslim women in the *umma*. "*I feel really brave you know, it was so hot the other day and everyone on the tube was staring at me. One man moved away when I sat down!*" It was akin to her adoption of the *hijab*, which she had gradually begun to see less as a restriction, and more as a visual marker of choice and identity.

> "*A Sheikh once said that the hijab is a protection for women as the beard is for men. It's also a symbol of practising. If you're wearing it, men won't bother coming up to you, because they know you're practising. So it makes sense, and you get used to it. But it's not a fashion accessory. You have to be aware of what it means to wear it.*"

Ifrah employed a liberal discourse of resistance to defend her decision to become more visibly Muslim – one echoed in Sabbiyah's insistence on clothing as a marker of identity. These items of clothing stood as powerful signs of her practising Muslim identity, and offered her protection from both Muslims and the non-Muslim public. By articulating her decision through a personal and collective metaphor of struggle, she adopted a confrontational stance, rejecting negative images and taking pride in a stigmatised identity (Jouili 2009: 265). The *jilbaab* stood as a signifier of legitimacy and defiance.

However, both Ifrah and Layla were aware of the exclusions and restrictions which they faced wearing Islamic clothing in public places. Layla had sought to overcome these as much as she could, but Ifrah had accepted that her decision would further limit her movements across the city, and particularly her employment opportunities. Like Layla's decision to be "less Muslim" Ifrah's adoption of the *jilbaab* was a distressing choice negotiated within spaces of exclusion.

3.6 'What matters is what I think and feel': Fatima as a practising non-believer

Fatima, like Layla and Ifrah, was a young second-generation Somali woman who had begun to practise Islam during the early years of her university degree. However, in the last few years, after a long period of struggling, hesitating, and trying to convince herself otherwise, she had decided that she was no longer a Muslim. The day we met for an interview, I had not even the slightest inkling of learning about her non-belief; dressed in *hijab* and *abaya*, she looked like she had always done when we met in public.

One of the first questions I asked when I learned of her decision was why she was continuing to wear *hijab* and *abaya*. She explained her decision was a pragmatic one that enabled her to negotiate the pressures from her family and other Muslim friends and acquaintances. Non-belief, but even more so removal of the *hijab*, she explained to me, was incomprehensible to her family. *"I'm not praying and they comment on that, but somehow that's it, it doesn't matter too much. If I ever took off my hijab, that would be the end of it, then they would start accusing me of all things. It's culture!"* Fatima shared with Layla an understanding of cultural attitudes as an excessive preoccupation with external appearances. By maintaining her dress she remained, at least to her family and outsider observers, a Muslim.

With very little prompting on my part, she divulged the difficulties encountered following this drastic change. She differentiated between values and faith, and elaborated on how her understanding of the former remained "Islamic", despite her lack of faith:

> *"My feeling of right and wrong is Islamic. It's just difficult to think about these things without referring to religion cause that's what I've always done. And in a way I don't want to fall back into a Western idea of good and bad because I realise how much it influences us without us even knowing, and I don't really agree with it. I have a void in that sense."*

According to Fatima, she could continue to be a non-Muslim, yet share Islamic values and participate in Islamic practices. Like Layla, being a Muslim (or non-Muslim) was

not about adhering to a set of rules and values, but was instead connected to having, or not-having, faith:

> *"I've decided not to tell people that I don't believe. To be honest, what matters to me is what I believe personally… But it's also very weird. I'm not a Muslim inside, I know I don't believe, but everything else about me is Muslim. I don't drink, I dress like this, so people around me think I'm Muslim. My identity for them is Muslim. But maybe that doesn't matter?*

Fatima attempted to reconcile her behaviour by separating practice from interior belief, reflecting the distinction Layla made in the poem between Sister A and B. Although others saw her as a Muslim, what mattered to her was her lack of belief. Donning the *hijab* did not affect her non-belief, as it simply stood as a sign of her identity, not a manifestation of her authentic internal self. As she explained later, "*I hate Muslims who think you believe whatever they do. I never again want to be told how to think and feel, what matters is how I think and feel.*"

Fatima was drawing on a secular prioritisation of interior religious conscience and religious choice (Fernando 2010). The *hijab* did not impact on her interior thoughts and feelings, but usefully worked as a signifier in her relation with her family. Her comments also reflect a liberal-secular mode of subjectification which stresses the importance of personal authenticity (Taylor 1994) and the "expectation and demand that one's acts should express an authentic inside of who I am and who I choose to be" (Jacobsen 2011b: 314; see also Fadil 2008: 273). For Fatima, her faith had infringed on her own thoughts and feelings. Her freedom from faith, was articulated according to a liberal conception of "freedom of conscience" – an ability to think and feel as she pleased.

Jacobsen (2011b: Chapter 6) notes how this attitude towards the *hijab* is becoming increasingly common amongst young Muslims in Europe, as the practice of wearing it has come to depend more on the authentic feeling it expresses. Whilst this was less common amongst my practising informants, Anab, a young woman in her mid-20s justified her decision to remove her *hijab* by drawing on this liberal discourse. Although she still considered herself a practising Muslim, she argued, "*It didn't feel right anymore, I wore it but I wasn't connected anymore, it didn't feel like it was me.*"

Since removing the *hijab* she had been frustrated by the assumptions made to the contrary by both Muslims and non-Muslim. *"I don't understand why my religiosity and spirituality need to be assessed by whether I'm wearing it!"* she explained. Her prioritisation of internal spirituality through the removal of her *hijab,* also posed a challenge to the over-signification of the practice in the public sphere.

3.7 Inside-out reconsidered

To return one last time to the poem, Layla insists that interiority alone is insufficient, as her resolution lies somewhere in the middle, with Sister C, who is capable of balancing interior and exterior dimensions of the self. I have demonstrated above how Ifrah and Layla differently negotiate the "middle way" depending on their personal negotiations of family pressures and workspaces. I have also illustrated how both women shift between different positions; on the one hand, exterior practices do not matter and interiority is prioritised, on the other, there is a connection between interior and exterior dimensions of the self and the *hijab* or *jilbaab* do impact on the ways in which they act and "feel" inside.

Central to both women's ideas is their knowledge and application of Islamic pedagogical projects of ethical self-fashioning, as explained by Mahmood (2001; 2005). In Chapter Six, I describe how Layla advises her friend on how to remain consistent in her *iman* and in her prayers. She stresses the importance of "fake it till you make it" – repeating prayer in order to instil a habit which will, in turn, generate and strengthen sincerity in one's intentions and motivate action. Layla's understanding of prayer requires a particular coordination between emotions, intentions and actions in which practices are constitutive of a self-disciplining process and are both the means, and the ends, to fashioning a pious self. When contrasting her attitude towards external practices with that of her father, Layla had emphasised the importance of "sincere intentions" and interior dimensions of the self. Her father failed to understand her intentions to wear the *hijab* to please and connect with God and to instil and cultivate interior virtues and emotions. Fashioning a moral self, according to these young women, and in contrast to their parents, requires a careful coordination of outward behaviour and inward dispositions (Mahmood 2005: 135).

Yet despite this understanding of Islamic pedagogies, both women negotiate their practices in different ways, though they both ultimately prioritise interiority. According to Layla, "the inside is most important". This emphasis on interiority, I argue, indicates a reworking of this Islamic pedagogical model, which results from the problematization of exteriority. It is also illustrated by another young practising woman, mentioned in Chapter Five, who contrasts her understanding of *iman* with that of her mother, who works from the "outside-in". As I illustrate below, for both Layla and Ifrah the interior experience of *iman* is constituted through virtuous conduct, but it is most importantly an emotional experience of connecting with God. These women are both drawing on Islamic discursive traditions, but it is this insistence on interiority, and its shifting and unstable relation with exteriority, that indicates, I suggest, a historical change in understandings of what constitutes a Muslim subject.

3.7.1   Interiority as affect

On one occasion when Layla explained the problems she faced in the workplace to her friend Latifa, who advised the following:

> "*You need to strike a balance between being social and maintaining your spirituality. You can do hijra in your head;*[54] *it doesn't have to be physical. Just take yourself out of the context. Increase your ibadat (*acts of worship*), so that these people don't suck it out of you.*"

Performing "*hijra* in [one's] head" exemplifies Latifa's insistence on interiority, and is ultimately crucial to her negotiation of exteriority and her understanding of what constitutes a "proper" Muslim subject. Focusing on her personal feeling of connection with God, Latifa suggested, would help negotiate social relations and avoid isolating herself, without compromising her faith. What mattered ultimately was not

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[54] *Hijra* means migration or flight, and refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration in 622CE from Mecca to Medina. It is used more generally to denote Muslim migration away from non-Muslim lands, but in this case Latifa is adapting this concept to encourage Layla to undergo a mental migration from a non-Muslim space to a Muslim space inside her head, that will connect her with God.

necessarily what she did and looked like, but that she was able to maintain an internal, spiritual connection with God.

Similarly, on another occasion Layla expressed her uncertainty about how she should negotiate handshakes with other men. On the one hand, she knew modest behaviour required her to avoid shaking hands with men. On the other hand, however, she realised that in a context where others failed to recognise this, she may need to negotiate this practice.[55] She was attending an interview for a job and was uncertain as to whether she should shake the hand of her interviewer. Prior to attending, she contacted a *Sheikh* whom she knew well, and trusted, to discuss the matter. He advised her that provided her intention was simply to succeed in the interview, she should shake his hand. Avoiding shaking hands could compromise her success, making her appear unfriendly and "religiously biased". By prioritising her interior intentions and the importance of an internal connection with God, Layla was able to negotiate the practice, without feeling she had compromised her modesty.

This understanding of interiority as a connection with God, and an affective experience of faith is also shared with Ifrah (see section 1.7). For example, on the day she announced her decision to don the *jilbaab*, Ifrah described the feelings she hoped to achieve:

> *"When I went on umrah (pilgrimage) I wore niqab and I felt so good. I don't think it's a good idea to wear it here… but I liked the feeling of being enclosed, feeling connected, and the jilbaab will help with that."*

The *jilbaab* offered her protection and accentuated her relationship with Allah. It enveloped and "protected" her, and created a distance from others so that she could focus on her connection with God. The endpoint, which Ifrah achieved through physical withdrawal, was similar to Latifa's concern with doing "*hijra* in [her] head". The aim for both women was to move away from caring about how the *hijab* affected their relationships with others, to focusing on an emotional connection with God. As Ifrah explained:

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[55] Both Fadil (2009) and Deeb (2006) discuss the ways Muslims negotiate the practice of hand shaking.

"I've stopped caring how people see me, what people think of me. I used to be so worried at the start. Even when I first started practising and wearing this I was worried what my friends would say, but now I know I have Allah, so I don't care. Now when people stare me up and down I look away and I just ignore it. I'm happy and confident with who I am, I have nothing to hide."

The experience of connecting with God enables both Ifrah and Layla to discard "what others think", and to feel at ease despite judgements by their parents, other Somalis, and the wider public. As revealed by their comments, it is a personalised experience of affect that enables them to feel confident, whether they are wearing *jilbaab, niqab* or *hijab*, and to retreat, at least emotionally, from the public sphere. Whilst Ifrah initially struggled, felt uncomfortable with the *hijab*, and feared others' comments, eventually, as she strengthened her connection with God, she stopped caring and worrying about what others thought of her.

What draws Ifrah and Layla together as young second-generation practising women, and differentiates them from their mothers, is this shared affective experience of faith and of self-transformation. In Chapter One (section 1.7) I stressed the ways in which my informants experience novel forms of self-other relationships, and particularly those with God, as affective (Navaro-Yashin 2009). I noted how they interpret and describe these occurrences as moments of "high *iman*". The importance attributed to these experiences is manifested in the manner in which they frequently discuss and ask after their mutual states of *iman*. Comments such as, *"How's your iman doing?"* or *"My iman's really low this month"* were common in everyday conversations amongst my informants. They testify to the extent to which faith, for these young women, is objectified; it becomes possible to refer to *iman,* as denoting an affective state separate from practice.

This understanding of faith as affective is captured by a comment Layla made, following a *halaqa* session that she delivered on prayer: *"I'd say it's a connection between the heart and the mind. You feel it as well, in your heart. But if you only feel it and haven't quite made sense of it, it's not complete and if you think you have it, but don't feel it, that's not enough"*. Following the session, I asked her to elaborate more

precisely on this experience, asking her to reflect on her thoughts, bodily sensations, and feelings:

> *"It only happens when I'm in a good spiritual state. When my iman is high, I feel God. It's like a feeling, like something is surrounding my heart, wrapping it. Sometimes I feel really warm but not always. I feel overwhelmed by something, at peace, and my body feels really good, my thoughts are fixed on Him."*

Similarly, Maryam another young practising woman contributed her understanding of what it meant to "feel connected" with God, and to have a "high *iman*": *"Sometimes I walk down the street and I feel so good, I feel that connection, that feeling of excitement, like something bursting in my chest."*

This somatic experience of *iman* as a feeling of energy, excitement and potentiality is, I argue, produced through, but is also constitutive of, my informants' novel embodied engagements with others – in this case with God (see section 1.7). Layla's comment, in particular, captures the ways in which her experience involves a temporary moment of warmth and potentiality, which flows through and transcends the mind and body split: this affective experience is not independent of thought and language, but can never be captured fully by language (Moore 2011: 185; Navaro-Yashin 2009). These experiences are crucial to these young women's understandings of interiority. Although their emphasis on "inside-out" draws on Islamic pedagogical models (Mahmood 2001), it simultaneously reworks these around the questions posed by the debates on multiculturalism, such as those on the visibility of the Muslim subject. These understandings of interiority, which are also shared by non-believing young second-generation Somali women, are indicative of broader historical transformations.

3.8   Conclusion

This chapter has argued that multiculturalism debates are indicative of a problematization of the question of how to be British and Muslim. As illustrated by the TV program *Make Bradford British,* this question has emerged as an object of thought and inquiry, giving rise to a series of queries surrounding the Muslim subject.

Foucault (2000: 118) argues that problematization not only "develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to" (section 1.6). *Make Bradford British* offers a solution, albeit one that reflects popular, and normative political discourses on the supposed "problem" of Islamic practices in British public spaces.

This chapter has outlined the ways that young second-generation Somali women intervene in this terrain of problematization by rethinking the relationship between two *ethical substances* – interiority and exteriority. I have detailed how Layla and Ifrah, two practising second-generation Somali women, negotiate exterior practices depending on their experiences of work environments and their relationships with their parents. In so doing, I have pointed to their different attempts to find a "middle way" between interiority and exteriority, and the ways these solutions are often unstable and negotiable. Furthermore, I have stressed how any negotiation, even if it involves appearing "less [or more] Muslim", cannot be divorced from the constraints of hegemonic discourses on multiculturalism, national identity, and the Muslim "other". As Jouili (2009: 467) citing Butler points out, negotiations occur within a "field of enabling constraints" whereby any form of resistance is a painful process of making difficult and fraught moral choices. Layla and Ifrah's choices are also partially constituted within, and constrained by, normative practices in British public spaces.

These practising young women draw on a heterogeneity of intersecting discourses with the aim of fashioning themselves as pious subjects. The *ethical substances* (exterior practice and interior dimensions), as well as their *modes of subjectification* (submission to God, and choice) draw on both an Islamic discursive tradition of ethical self discipline and a liberal ethics of autonomy (see section 1.4). According to Jacobsen (2011b) this intersection of two contrasting models of the self results in the "willing submission" of young Muslims to Islamic traditions that brings about a subjectivity that is "appropriate to ethical self-determination and aesthetic self-invention … into the field of religious identity and practice" (*ibid* 2011: 382). This new kind of subjectivity differs to that articulated through liberal registers. Fadil (2008: 244-251) similarly states the importance of heterogeneous discourses in her work on young Orthodox Muslims in Belgium. However, she disagrees that these

intersections produce a new kind of subjectivity that is distinct from the one found in liberal secular societies. Rather, she insists that liberal registers are crucial to the practices of her informants (*ibid* 2008: 245). She argues that this convergence of different traditions results, instead, in the "double articulation of the category *autonomy*", which can be mapped onto two different axes. On the one hand, young Muslims employ liberal ethics on a horizontal axis to articulate their intersubjective relations, and to express their autonomy from others, including kin. On the other, they employ both a liberal discourse of autonomy and Islamic ethics in their vertical relations with God. These two traditions coexist in "non-contradictory ways"; for these young women autonomy is a *consequence* of their subjection to God (*ibid* 2008: 250). A discourse of freedom and autonomy is not, therefore, necessarily "at odds with the idea of submission to God, but is rather achieved through it" (*ibid* 2008: 251). My work accords with Fadil's claim, and I have shown how these two traditions are employed differently when these young women engage with culture and relate to older kin (Chapter Two), and when they engage with Islamic practice and faith, and relate to God. Fadil's analysis points to the importance of including the self-God relationship in an understanding of ethical practice, and in the following chapter I expand further on the importance of self-other relations. I complicate Fadil's argument by exploring how young women's ideas about their relations to potential husbands do not fit either the horizontal or vertical axes. Furthermore, as I stress throughout, these young women's imagined relations with others are constantly being remade, and are therefore unstable and contextually variable.

By comparing practising women's insistence on interiority with a non-believer's understanding of non-faith and a practising non-*hijab* wearer, I have sought to emphasise the diverse forms of negotiations employed by what Fadil (2009; 2008) has described as orthodox, non-Muslims and non-orthodox Muslims. Contrary to Fadil, I have focused on the similarities between these women, in order to illustrate how second-generation Somali women are transforming the relationship between interiority and exteriority. For Layla, Ifrah, Fatima and Anab, exteriority alone does not make one a Muslim, nor does the manifestation of virtuous conduct (although for Layla and Ifrah both are incredibly important). For these young women, the solution is a prioritisation of interiority as a personal and private experience of affect and thought.

These processes contrast with the practices of older first-generation Somali women, who, according to younger women, prioritise exteriority and emphasise the *hijab* as crucial to their religion. Overlapping with these generational differences are shifting Islamic discursive traditions. Asad (1993: 219) writes that, *deen* (invariably translated as religion) "relates more to how one lives than to what one believes ... For Muslims ... it is virtues – mastery of the body, the ability to be patient, and the capacity to judge soundly – that matter, not states of mind". Mahmood (2001), referring to more contemporary reformist traditions, stresses the dialectic, mutually-constitutive relation between interior and exterior processes of the self, crucial to the fashioning of a pious Muslim subject. These young second-generation Somali women are, I argue, further shifting the relationship between interiority and exteriority, and transforming and reformulating what it means to be a Muslim in Britain in the context of shifting policies and discussions.

Chapter 4: Sincerely seeking an ideal husband

4.1 Seeking a suitable Somali

 "*We're doing a Somali marriage event*!" Zaynab announced excitedly, as I arrived in the café to join some of my friends before one of our weekly Islamic classes. I then remembered that Zaynab, Sauda and Nadifa, three unmarried, practising women in their 30s, had been contemplating the idea of a marriage event a couple of weekends ago. As we sat sipping tea and munching on chocolate bars, they proposed their plan and bounced ideas off one another. "*These days it's just so difficult to find a professional Somali who's also practising", Z*aynab explained, "*so what's wrong with organising an event to see what we get?!*" Not all embraced the idea with equal enthusiasm. Some younger women remained sceptical about participating in the event and contributed to the discussion with a degree of detachment. Ifrah claimed she was too "romantic" for this kind of event, while Maryam was hesitant and felt the occasion might be uncomfortable and embarrassing: "*It's pride I guess. I don't want to appear desperate*". Sceptical the event would attract only "desperate and ugly men", she confessed that she preferred to help with the organisation of the event, rather than take part herself. Zaynab assured them both it would not be embarrassing, as the people attending would be in the same position, and would hopefully maintain some degree of confidentiality following the event. Nadifa, meanwhile, provided further justifications for the event, "*Ideally we'd meet men in normal encounters, like in a café, or studying, but that just doesn't happen that easily. And there's nothing un-romantic about facilitating meetings with appropriate men!*" Zaynab nodded and explained how many of her practising friends were also struggling to find suitable Somali men. "*What's wrong with us? We are normal aren't we?! I mean why can't we find people? There must be men who are like us?!*"

This chapter unpacks the question of how and why these young, practising, and highly educated Somali women organised a marriage event in order to find suitable Somali husbands. I approach the practices and debates involved in the organisation of the event as techniques of self-making: as actions these young women employ to transform themselves (see section 1.3.1). Building on Foucault, I focus here on the multiply-constituted subject (Moore 1994) on the ways in which these young women

manage a plurality of teleologies of the subject (autonomous, pious, and good Somali) and modes of subjectification (exercising choice and autonomy, acting for the sake of Allah, pleasing kin), in their imagined relations with future, potential husbands. This allows me to bring together the previous two chapters, and to account for the ways in which young second-generation women construe different, yet coexisting, subject positions as they attempt to transform themselves differently in relation to an idea of culture, religious practice and internal belief. Marriage lies at the fulcrum of contradictory identifications implicated in their processes of self-transformation. Here, I focus on how these different teleologies are managed and negotiated by young practising women through their discussions and debates about marriage ideals and expectations. In doing so, I build on the anthropological literature on the everyday practice of Islam (Schielke 2010a; Soares & Osella 2010), pointing to the ways that young Muslims pursue piety alongside other contradictory ideals, reflecting the complex and fragmentary nature of everyday experience.

The topics of marriage and courtship were a constant source of excitement, stress, and curiosity amongst young practising Somali women. Many had started practising in their early to mid 20s, a time at which they were also expected to marry. Through their encounters with friends, relatives, or religious scholars they were frequently exposed to reformist teachings concerning marriage and love, or to instructions on appropriate (or *halal*) courtship practices. Contemporary reformist teachings instruct young Muslims to pursue a companionate marriage based on pious virtues and ideals. Yet for these young women, socialised in the UK and raised by Somali parents, this ideal coexists alongside notions of romantic love gained through films, music, and popular culture, pressures from their kin to "marry Somali" or marry within their clan (*qabyl*), and personal ambitions of socio-economic mobility. In what follows, I examine recent changes to understandings of marriage and love amongst second-generation practising Somali women.

I build on two bodies of anthropological research on marriage and romantic love. First, I draw on recent scholarship that has juxtaposed Islamic reformist teachings with ideals of romantic love. Marsden (2007a), for example, has pointed to the existence of love relationships in societies where values of male honour and female

modesty constitute important sources of moral value.[56] In Chitral, in the North-West Frontier in Pakistan, romantic love has existed in poetic discourses and everyday experiences of elopement marriages long before the influences of "Asian modernity" and Bollywood films. However, Marsden shows that cross-gender love and elopement are seen by increasingly dominant Islamising discourses as a threat to individual and collective honour. Similarly, other scholars working on the Islamic reform have tended to focus on the ways these movements both oppose "romance relationships" and simultaneously seek to transform what they regard as traditional marriage practices. Masquelier (2005) demonstrates the ways Islamist movements in Niger seek to find a solution to the difficulties experienced by young men in getting married, by reducing the price of bridewealth and by speeding up marriage contracts. Although Masquelier notes that romantic love is "making inroads" into the moral imagination, marriage amongst Mawri couples in Niger continues to be less about companionship and intimacy and increasingly about motherhood, domestic life and economic survival (*ibid* 2005: 68). Schielke (2009), in his analysis of moral ambivalence and fragmentation maintains that, for Muslims in Egypt, romance and love are antithetical to – yet coexist alongside – ideals of rigid sexual morality. He argues that, "love represents an ethic of desire and commitment … that stands in stark contrast to the religious discourse on chastity and the social practice of parental control over marriages" (2010: 30). Less is known about the manner in which global reformist discourses in Europe, where Islam is a minority religion, are appropriated and merged with ideas of romantic love, and how this has altered marriage practices and meanings.

A second body of work explores how the discourse of love and companionate marriage has become a marker of the "modern" in different contexts around the world (Faier 2007; Masquelier 2005; Ahearn 2001; Roefel 1999). Romantic love is depicted as an increasingly popular ideal in a globalised world, that presents "narratives which situate social actors in relation to modernity through the discourse on what is 'traditional' and what is 'modern'"" (Donner 2012: 5). Hirsh and Wardlow (2006) explore the shifting expectations for marriage in a variety of contexts, and the ways in

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[56] Abu-Lughod (1986) demonstrates the ways in which discourses of sentiment and intimacy exist alongside dominant discourses of honour. See also de Munck (1996).

which a companionate ideal, based on a notion of "modern love", is becoming a crucial element of modern relationships and modern personhood. This companionate ideal, they argue, is composed of a series of elements which interrelate in different ways, in different contexts: an emphasis on the emotional closeness of a couple, a privileging of the conjugal couple over family relationships, an idea that companionship is a deliberate goal of marriage, and a "modern" discourse of love based on the idea that a person is a better partner because of his or her unique characteristics (*ibid* 2006: 5). Crucial to this narrative is an ideological association with the idea of an egalitarian relationship between husband and wife, although as Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) note, this does not guarantee that the eventual marriage will be egalitarian.

There is an assumption within this latter body of ethnographic work that romantic love and companionate marriage are external ideals, which encroach upon, and transform local practices, as well as being implicated in a teleological narrative of modernity (Giddens 1992).[57] As Osella (2012) notes, this idealised narrative assumes that marriages based on love and companionship will eventually replace marriages based on financial and pragmatic considerations. For many young Somali women raised in the UK, romantic love constitutes only one of several marriage ideals, from mainstream films, music and popular culture, which they draw on in particular ways. On the one hand, these young women appropriate these ideas in order to assert their aspirations for an intimate, egalitarian, and upwardly mobile companionate relationship. On the other hand, they infuse these ideas of love as emotional intimacy with Islamic ideals of a companionate, virtuous marriage, and spiritual love. Ideas of romantic love are not, therefore, simply the result of external, global forces, nor are they necessarily incompatible with reformist discourses.

Through the practices of planning and discussing the marriage event, these young practising women draw on and merge a range of intersecting discourses and practices on marriage. These multiple discourses are not simply encroaching and transforming their understandings of marriage; they provide points of reference that these young

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[57] Giddens (1992) depicts a modernist narrative in which marriage based on intimacy, monogamy and choice becomes increasingly globalised.

women employ in their creative attempts to reimagine their relationships to themselves and to potential husbands, Somali kin, and God. I begin by exploring some of the historical changes in marriage practices amongst Somalis, including some of the more recent transformations in kinship and marriage in the diaspora. The literature on the Somali diaspora examines changes to clan, household structure, and gender roles (Griffiths 2002; Affi 1997), but little mention is made of the ways in which marriages are imagined and formed in the diaspora, especially amongst younger generations. Furthermore, very few studies focus on the impact of Islamic reformist discourses on marriage. This chapter aims to fill this void by providing an ethnographic account of the marriage experiences and aspirations of young practising Somali women. I intertwine a description of the organising and eventual unfolding of the Somali marriage event, with my informants' practices of searching for a husband, and their discussions about the expectations, pressures, and possibilities of marriage.

4.2 Courtship and marriage: past and present

Based on his research throughout the 1950s amongst nomadic pastoral Somali society in the former British Protectorate of Somaliland, I.M Lewis (1961; 1962; 1994) presents one of the earliest accounts of marriage practices within Somali society.[58] Although his work reifies a monolithic and timeless account of Somali society (section 2.3), it offers a useful point of departure from which to unravel some of the developments and continuities in marriage practices amongst Somalis in the present-day diaspora.

According to Lewis, parents and senior agnates often controlled choices of brides, and personal preferences were only considered to a limited degree (Lewis 1994). Pre-marital relations remained formal with no intercourse or love-play occurring publicly before marriage (Lewis 1962: 12-13). Several of the older Somali women I interviewed stressed how their parents, who had married in the 1950s-60s had either only met on several occasions prior to marriage in the presence of kin, or in some rare cases, had never been introduced before their engagement. Lewis identifies two

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[58] His insights, which resulted in a series of monographs on kinship and politics, are however most applicable to pastoral societies and less relevant to southern Somali cultivators such as the Dgil and Rahweyn.

components to the marriage transaction, which are still important to marriages in the diaspora: an individual aspect, represented by the *mahar* (a woman's personal dowry) and the corporate aspect represented by *yarad* and *dibaad* (bride-wealth and dowry*)* (Lewis 1962: 21-22). The *mahar* is the legal aspect of the marriage; it was traditionally less in value, compared to the bridewealth, and the amount was agreed upon between the couple, although normally the payment was postponed until divorce. The bridewealth, on the other hand, is received by the girl's father and distributed amongst close agnates within the *diya*-paying group.[59] The dowry, paid by the wife-givers is decided by the girl's family and is designed to enable the couple to set themselves up, although it remains legally in the property of the man. Marriage was typically virilocal and exogamous, as marrying within the *diya*-paying group was seen to be threatening cohesion.[60] Elopement marriages (*masaafo*) were also frequent if a spouse's family was unable to raise sufficient sums for the bridewealth or if kin were opposed to the marriage (Luling: personal correspondence).

Divorce, Lewis (1962: 34-38) notes, was and continues to be common amongst Somalis, and no particular stigma was associated with it. The cause for marriage instability, according to Lewis, lies in the structural position of women as wives, who remain more attached to their own kin and retain, upon marriage, much of their pre-marital legal status, thus remaining "clients" amongst their affines.[61] This instability, he argues, is further accentuated and reflected in the ways in which affinal relations lack the political allegiances offered by agnatic relations (1994: 47). In marriage, a woman is treated as a "protected relative" and is never fully identified with her husband's kin; she is bound to his kin only through her children. Furthermore, while first marriages are more likely to be arranged by kin, there was often more choice involved in later marriages. This was true of marriages throughout the 1950s but also

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[59] The diya-paying group is a lineage or group who collectively receive or pay blood compensation.

[60] Marriages were not endogamous for southern Somali groups (Luling: personal correspondence)

[61] Interested primarily in the structural features of marriage and divorce, Lewis' account pays scant attention to the actual empirical observations of marriage. He identifies reasons for frequent divorce such as incompatibilities, strife between co-wives, infertility and external pressures from kin, but fails to develop these explanations or to give them any significance in his analysis of marriage instability. Lewis' structural-functionalist explanation, and his over-emphasis on clan and agnatic filiation have been the source of much debate and criticism (Ahmed 1995).

much later. As many of my first-generation Somali women informants relayed to me, they were subjected to much more pressure from kin in the first marriage compared to subsequent arrangements.

Following independence, and with the expansion of the urban middle classes, the discourse of modernity, nationalism and cultural authenticity also had a significant impact on marriage ideals and practices (see Appendix A). Kapteijns' (1999) analysis of love songs reveals dominant discourses on marriage in post-independence urban Somali society. Kapteijns explores how the popularisation of the love song, developed by the new urban middle class intellectuals and influenced by post-independence struggles for equality and freedom, reflects the ideals of a new urban youth culture. A rejection of the wisdom and religious morals of rural elders, and an assertion of individual emotions over the "discipline of male-dominated family and kin-group" are recurring themes throughout the songs (Kapteijns 1999: 111). Romantic love, based on mutual consent and the solemn commitment of both partners, is portrayed as a central value within marriage. This is juxtaposed with marriage typical of traditional pastoral society, as described by Lewis, whereby one needs approval from male elders, and where "the husband-provider [is] in charge of an obedient wife" (Kapteijns 1999: 132). Nonetheless, this breaking away from an imagined tradition is depicted as incomplete. Both marriage partners employ the concept of tradition, rooted in pastoral traditional culture and customary law, as a tool for legitimising the marriage (*ibid* 1999: 149). Companionable marriage, therefore, is discursively depicted as interlinked and inseparable from tradition. The latter is positioned as the seat of morality and is opposed to a frivolous, immoral modernity (see Chapter Two).

Whilst I avoid drawing an analytical opposition between "love marriages" and "arranged marriages" (Osella 2012: 244; De Munck 1996), most of the first-generation participants in my research, including Sofia, Nimo and Nafisa, whom I introduced in Chapter Two, and who were raised in urban areas in post-independence Somalia, often drew on a discourse of love and companionship when they discussed their own marriages. They contrasted their own relations with their husbands, with those of rural or traditional Somalis, and those of their parents. Seven out of eleven female Somali informants, who were raised in Mogadishu throughout the 1960-80s told me they had married out of "love". They often enjoyed reminiscing and

recounting their love affairs. Ubah, for example, had met her husband at a bus stop in Mogadishu and she described to me how he had pursued her and that she had initially refused his advances:

> *"He worked near my house and saw me go to the bus stop. One day he stopped me and asked for my number, but I refused. A few days later he saw me again and asked me to go for tea, so I accepted. It was ok back then, [as long as it was] in a public place. I gave him my office number and he always called me there. We saw each other for two years and then he came to my house to ask my family to marry me."*

Similarly, Sofia recounted her husband's love and adoration: *"When we got married my husband loved me so much! I was so amazed I couldn't understand why he loved me so much, what I had done to deserve it!? Maybe I had been blessed!"* As indicated by Ubah's comment, courtship might often last several years and the couple attended cinemas, concerts, and other social gatherings together. Shamso, who married a work colleague explained how she had had several boyfriends, and her *"parents would know, but not always. If they knew they would usually push for marriage."* However, women from smaller cities, towns or rural areas, were less likely to have experienced as much leniency in courtship and marriage. Amongst the women from rural areas that I interviewed, few employed the same language of love and companionship to refer to their husbands and many emphasised that their marriages had often been organised by their kin, but that they had had the choice to reject a proposed spouse.

The literature on the Somali diaspora elaborates on some of the transformations that have altered kinship and marriage practices in the diaspora in the last two decades, which form the backdrop to this chapter. It points to the increase of female-headed households coupled with a decline of male authority and a changing attachment to clan and kinship. In addition, in what follows, I argue that changing relationships to tradition, and the impact of reformist discourses, have also altered meanings attached to marriage. In his book on changing notions of clan identity, Griffiths (2002) explores the unprecedented growth of single women with children. Ladan Affi (1997) terms this the "single-mother phenomenon", which she attributes both to the fact that

women and children migrated alone without male counterparts, but also to the high rate of divorce in the diaspora.[62] A redefinition of gender roles, where women often raise a family without the support of men, whilst men expect to exert authority within the home as they did in Somalia is seen as a prominent source of conflict (Affi 1997: 443). A lack of extended networks of support to help with household chores has placed extra burden on women, and further accentuated marital conflicts. "A state of unease in gender relations" Griffiths (2002: 113) claims, was common in a range of the households he in which he conducted interviews. The loss of status for men, due to social, educational, and economic barriers, has meant that few men are able to fully support their households, thus losing their role as breadwinners. On the other hand, women have had greater adaptability to altered economic and social conditions, and for those who had previously been dependent on men, state benefits have allowed them to secure an income for themselves and their children, leading to a sense of "disposability" of men (Griffiths 2002: 111). The "displacement of male authority in the home" is perceived as having had significant implications for the stability of the conjugal couple (*ibid* 2002: 112-3). Similarly, my data from 21 Somali households in Camden, Tower Hamlets and Newham reveals the prevalence of female-headed households where men (husbands and older brothers) are rarely present and only intermittently exercise influence.[63]

Although changes in gender relations and the absence of extended kin in the diaspora may suggest a decline in the importance of clan, Griffiths (2002) demonstrates the linguistic and practical reification and persistence of clan in London (see also Bjork 2007b). Since 1991, clan loyalty has intensified and inter-marrying has become increasingly common (Lewis 1994: 52). This insight, however, is more pertinent to the first-generation. Divorced women form closer attachments to their own clan (patriline) rather than that of their husband and their children. Practical and financial networks of support, for example *hagbaad* (informal credit schemes), are organised by these women within their own clans, as are financial and material transfers to

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[62] Crosby's (2006) study of resettled Somali women in Georgia and gender roles, indicates that amongst her informants, 56% were married, 20% single, 16% divorced, and 8% widowed.

[63] As I noted in Chapter One, thirteen of the twenty-one households that I frequented throughout my research were female-headed.

Somali regions, which often work to reconstitute feelings of family loyalty and relatedness (Lindley 2010; Decimo 2007; Hammond 2007). First-generation Somalis generally wish for their children to marry a Somali spouse, preferably within their clan, or into a clan with which they have a particular affinity. Whilst the significance and amount of bridewealth and dowry payments has declined, some of these transactions are still considered important to marriage and the maintenance of kinship relations.[64] During my fieldwork, a newly wed Somali woman in her 20s, decided to divorce her husband who was from her mother's clan, who was opposed her decision. Negotiations between both spouse's male kin persisted for over a year because the young woman, who could have sought the intervention of the Sharia Council, chose not to do this, as it would have meant bypassing the authority of her male kin who were working to convince her husband to grant her a divorce. As illustrated by her experience, marriages continue to be largely a matter negotiated amongst male kin. [65]

For the younger second-generation, marriage practices are changing and clan is becoming less relevant. Griffiths (2002:123) notes how younger generations are often critical of clan and tribalism, or feel that the role of elders is disconnected from their own lives. Instead, they have developed new forms of identification based on their school, or area of residence, for example. Nonetheless, the importance of marrying a Somali spouse continues to be a significant consideration. Young Somalis tend to assert their own choice in marriage, although they often recognise the pressures exerted by their families. Furthermore, they maintain that marrying Somali is a way of retaining their culture (see Chapter Two). Data from my kinship diagrams of the 21 Somali households shows that the majority of marriages of the last two generations have been amongst Somalis. However, members of the second-generation tend to assign less importance to clan affiliation than their parents.

The impact of religious reformist discourses on marriage has not been explored in depth in the literature. Like the previous chapter, this one focuses on the experiences

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[64] In the diaspora *yarad, gabaati* (engagement money) and *dibaad* have declined in amount and significance. An average *yarad* might range between £100-500. The husband and his family are additionally responsible for paying for the wedding reception, the bride's clothes, and jewellery.

[65] The importance of clan continues to be celebrated at marriages. For example, the *buranbuur* song, which is typically sung by a female elder, often offers praise to the clan of bride and groom.

of young practising women. For these women, bridewealth payments (*yarad*) are seen as irrelevant, or of minor importance when compared to the *mahar*, thus reducing the place of agnatic kinship in the marriage. Increasingly, practising women are requesting a non-monetary *mahar*, such as asking that their husbands teach them to recite the *Quran* or accompany them on the *Hajj* (pilgrimage). Similarly, practising young women place more importance on the *nikah* (Islamic ceremony), prefer to have a modest *aros* (Somali wedding celebration), and often criticise Somalis who spend on lavish ceremonies.[66] They draw on reformist scholars who argue in favour of reducing marriage expenses and prioritise the importance of marrying a "good Muslim" as opposed to someone from the same ethnicity or clan. Practicing women tend to prefer women-only weddings and avoid music, with the exception of *buranbuur*, which is considered a traditional dance and is sung and danced to the beat of a drum (see Figure 1). These second-generation youth are also distancing themselves from the marital relationships of their parents. Such marriages are seen as traditional, unequal in terms of gender, and as having resulted in a high rate of divorce, invisibility of men in the household, and an inability to secure a stable source of income for the family.

4.3 Situating the marriage event

Returning to the marriage event with which I opened this chapter, I elaborate on a series of factors that account for why these young women decided to organise such an event. Since practising Islam, young women's interactions with men, and their available opportunities for courtship, have been radically altered. For many of these young women, practising has entailed acting modestly and therefore changing or reducing the manner of interaction with men who are not their *mahram*.[67] Whereas they might previously have had intimate friendships with members of the opposite gender, since practising they seek to alter these friendships, which are no longer regarded as appropriate according to Islamic norms. Maryam explained on one

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[66] Weddings in the diaspora are amongst the most important of social gatherings. Many of my informants were invited to at least one aros (Somali wedding ceremony) a month, and these took place in hotels or in large community halls (see Figure 3).

[67] *Mahram* is a term to refer to unmarriageable kin, e.g. brother, father, uncle, etc.

occasion, "*Since I started practicing I don't really know any men. I used to have loads of male friends but I changed my number and haven't been in touch you know. I just don't know anyone*". Furthermore, many of the women try to avoid mixing with men too often, although this is sometimes unavoidable, particularly at work. The socialising that does occur with men often maintains a large degree of separation, such as avoiding physical contact.

In addition, practising has meant that these young women stay away from certain places such as clubs, pubs and bars, music concerts, and "gender-mixed" social occasions such as weddings. Non-practising Somalis frequently socialise in mixed-gender environments with other Somalis, including shisha cafés, bars, clubs, restaurants and parties. Shisha cafés run by Somalis across the city are popular places for young second-generation Somalis to frequent on a Friday or Saturday night. Mixed weddings are also a prime location for engaging and meeting other Somalis; women conceive of this as an occasion to dress up and often spend hours styling their hair and doing their make-up for the evening.[68] Dating or having a boyfriend is generally considered shameful (*ceeb*) or forbidden (*haram*) amongst older first-generation Somali parents, and lacking in modesty or *haram* amongst practising women. Nevertheless, many non-practising young women do date, but until the man seeks a marriage proposal from the woman's father, boyfriends/girlfriends are very infrequently introduced to families. Practising women, on the other hand, criticise and tend to avoid mixed weddings and environments that are not *halal*. As Ardo, a young practising Somali woman, instructed the youth group where she worked: "*Marry swiftly if you've found the right man. It's the halal way of being with a man, so it's best not to delay*". She concluded by explaining the inappropriateness of dating and of pre-marital sex. Meanwhile, Islamic lessons, one of the few places where women are more likely to meet practising men, are considered inappropriate places for courtship.

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[68] Practising women are often critical of mixed Somali weddings for being cultural and not properly religious. They criticise women who might usually wear *hijab* throughout the day and take it off for a wedding, and the men who gather at the back of the room to "check out" the girls dancing. Mixed weddings, therefore, become the target of criticism by practising women who see these occasions as "meat markets" and prefer, whenever possible, to avoid them.

In view of these limitations, seeking a "recommendation" or being "set-up" by friends, family, community leaders or a *Sheikh* is a common solution. This process typically occurs when a young person, who is interested in getting married, mentions her interest to a sibling, or older relative in order to seek a "recommendation". Community leaders, scholars, or *imams* also compile matrimonial lists. However, young women look upon these options with scepticism, as they involve entrusting someone else with the task of choosing one's spouse. Furthermore, by seeking recommendations from parents or older Somali kin, one runs the risk of being introduced to a cultural Somali. Amongst my informants, friend recommendations are sought more willingly and more frequently than those from family, community, or mosque leaders. Friends are considered more appropriate judges of character and better placed to identify suitable men. If asked to do so, female friends will consult friends, or family friends to gather whether they know anyone appropriate for the individual at hand. Occasionally, these propositions occur in prayer rooms and I have witnessed Somali women approach each other asking about marriage availability. For example, on one occasion Maryam's cousin had asked her to look out for a "good religious Somali woman" who spoke fluent Somali and was possibly interested in returning to Somalia at some point. Maryam assumed the task and approached Somali women in the mosque or at Islamic classes, enquiring whether they met the criteria and were potentially interested in her cousin. If they agreed she would jot down their number and hand it to her cousin. It was up to him to call the woman and converse in order to become acquainted and assess if they were in fact compatible.

Telephone or email conversations are usually the first form of contact between a man and woman who have been recommended by others. The first conversations, I was told, are usually relatively formal, and focused around topics such as education, employment, religion, ideas about married life, and children. Whilst many initial "set-ups" fail after the first few conversations, if there is mutual interest the couple may continue to speak for sometime until they arrange a meeting. Some couples told me they met for a coffee after initial conversations, whereas others arranged for the man to visit the woman's father at home. If initial encounters take place outside the home, if the relationship continues, it is expected that the man should approach the woman's father to ask for her hand in marriage. Proposals, however, are not always successful, especially if the couple do not know each other beforehand. Because dating is

discouraged, my friends explained their preference of meeting in public places before making an official engagement. However, if the relationship continued, telephone conversations served an important role in maintaining contact, learning more about the person, and talking intimately in *halal* ways.

Websites and chat rooms have become increasingly popular amongst young practising women. They enable users to maintain an element of privacy and choice in their selection of marriage partners, whilst also opening up a wider array of potential spouses, and bypassing the authority of kin, and community or religious leaders. Accordingly, websites such as *singlemuslim.com, imuslimmarriage.com, muslimmatch.com, muslims4marriage.com, and muslima.com* are increasingly common ways of seeking a husband or wife. Like the marriage event, women may often be secretive and embarrassed about their use of such websites. On *singlemuslim.com*, the most popular amongst my informants, registration is free and users can set up a profile including personal details, such as country of origin, income, physical characteristics, a profile photo, personal descriptions of oneself, and a range of other characteristics including religiousness.[69] One can also indicate what is sought in a husband or wife, and the privacy settings can be regulated, in order to control who has access to the profile photo. Users may see who has viewed their profile, but only men can initiate a conversation. Once a profile has been set up one can search for a potential spouse using the criteria mentioned above.

The *singlemuslim.com* website boasts over 500,000 users worldwide and contains a live chat option, a news page for comments, and a range of articles on marriage, advising the users on issues ranging from how to be a wife/husband, to courtship, marriage etiquette, and birth control. The article on *Finding a Companion* presents matrimonial websites as one of the contemporary "new ways" of seeking a husband, and cautions users to be careful of non-*halal* websites.

Several of my informants set up profiles on these websites. Nadra, for example, created a profile, which included a short statement stating that she was looking for a

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[69] Required questions include stating the level of religiosity (from very religious to not religious), consistency in prayer, whether one wore *hijab* or preferred a man with a beard.

man with "*good character, patience and ambition*", who would help her improve her relationship with Allah. She had set her profile photograph as private, and spent hours everyday searching through men's profiles. Much to her disappointment, however, the majority of men were of Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin and she excluded these from her list without reading their profiles. These men, she explained, expected their wives to spend their days cleaning, cooking and caring for their mothers – something she was unprepared to do. She enjoyed sifting through profiles, checking potential candidates' employment statuses, and assessing their level of piety. However, after a couple of weeks of using the site, she decided it was excessively time consuming and too difficult to assess the suitability of the men based solely on their online profile.

Of the young practising women I knew who were married or got married during my fieldwork, only one found a spouse – an English convert – on *singlemuslim.com*. Another had known her Somali husband prior to practising, and another married a Somali work colleague. Meanwhile Anisa, a woman in her early 20s, married a former colleague she became reacquainted with at a mixed wedding; whereas a friend of hers met her husband at university. Of the seven weddings I attended throughout my fieldwork, two were organised through a recommendation. The first was a woman in her mid 30s who was introduced to her Somali husband by a relative and the second, was a young woman in her mid-20s, had been recommended to an English convert by mutual practising friends. As I explore below, many Somali families often discourage marrying converts or non-Somalis.

The organisers of the marriage event had tried to meet a potential husband in many of the above ways. However, following several unsuccessful attempts, the women began to feel increasing pressure from family and friends to get married. As Zaynab's comment, "*Why can't we find people?*" suggests, my friends often complained about the scarcity of suitable men. They found it increasingly difficult to find a husband who fitted their criteria: practising, Somali, and professional. The idea of the event, therefore, seemed like a logical step. It opened up possibilities, while enabling them to set the criteria, monitor the interactions, filter adequate participants, and, ultimately, organise an event for, and by, themselves. They would ensure that the environment was adequately *halal*, but would also be free of parental, kin, or community control.

4.4 Breaking with tradition

4.4.1 Seeking modern, professional men

The idea of organising an exclusively Somali marriage event was a contentious one for all involved, and one which required careful negotiation and planning. All the young women were adamant that they did not want to marry cultural Somalis (see Chapter Two). Somali men who have recently arrived to the UK from Somalia are often referred to as "freshies" or "fresh off the boat" and are considered to be undesirable partners by these young Somali women. They are thought to speak little English, have "old-fashioned" or traditional manners, ways of speaking, comportment and dress and, furthermore, hold traditional ideas about marriage. Moreover, they are rarely employed in professions these young women would deem suitable, and which would guarantee financial stability. The term "freshie" therefore is used to refer to stereotypical and undesirable characteristics.

As I described in Chapter Two, these young women criticise and ridicule a presumed unreflective attitude to culture, which is associated with traditional kin, "freshies" and older generations. They position themselves in opposition to the "freshie" or cultural subject – an "organicist creature" in Wendy Brown's (2006) words – who is unable to articulate an optional relationship to culture and ethnic belonging. In doing so, these young women constitute themselves as autonomous liberal subjects against a traditional figure who lacks rationality and will, and for whom culture is all-encompassing and authoritative (*ibid* 2006: 301).

Whilst a reformist discourse emphasises the importance of marrying a good Muslim, and overlooking ethnicity or culture, these young women often found themselves negotiating this ideal with the importance of maintaining their culture (Chapter Two), as well as with the pressure exerted from kin (section 4.6). Whilst Layla and others had reservations and disagreed with the exclusivity of the event, Zaynab, Nadifa and Sauda were amongst those who advocated a Somali-only event, and argued it was an ideal way of managing their own expectations with those of their kin: "*At least I can say I've tried. If I don't find anyone then I'll look elsewhere. But at least when my mum will ask why I'm not marrying Somali I can say I even organised an event!*" Zaynab explained, and Sauda added, "*It's a way of maintaining our culture.*"

In negotiating these conflicting ideals, they often drew a distinction between cultural or traditional, and Western, Somali men. These two categories of potential husbands were distinguished according to an assumed idea of gender relations. "*They expect us to stay home, do the cooking and cleaning… just be a traditional Somali wife*" a young practising woman once commented, referring to the former category. These young women perceive traditional Somali men to be similar to their parents. They are criticised for not having, or for not desiring, an egalitarian companionate relationship based on mutual choice (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). Many second-generation women criticise their parents, and other first-generation Somalis, for having traditional or "patriarchal" gender roles, whereby the woman is assumed to remain in the home and perform the household and childcare chores, and to be subservient to male authority. A practicing Somali woman in her 20s described in an interview the ways she felt that her mother's marital relationship was different to her own because her mother stayed at home: "*The man is the breadwinner, its part of Somali culture*" she added. Other young women claimed that their parents had an "arranged marriage" and "little choice", and that their mothers had fewer education and employment opportunities than their fathers. In the case of female-headed households, men who have not divorced their wives are assumed to have a second wife "back home". Hodan, for example, explained how her mother had been married to a distant cousin when she was fifteen. She continued to live with her husband even though, according to Hodan, he spent half the year in Somaliland with his second wife and children. "*I would never take that! I always tell her to chuck him out, and she won't!*" she exclaimed.[70]

Accordingly, these young practising women espouse a companionable and egalitarian relationship based on mutual choice (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006). Whilst they recognise these marital ideals are also part of Western culture, they argue that these ideals are present within the Islamic tradition. In this way, Islam is seen as "more" emancipatory, because it advocated these principles prior to the development of Western feminism (see below section 4.5).

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[70] These stereotypical portrayals of traditional gender roles do not accurately reflect the reality of their mothers' lives.

Muneera's relationship to tradition was, however, ambivalent. She explained: "*I'm not a very good Somali wife, and sometimes I feel bad about this. So I make all these promises, like cooking breakfast in the morning, dressing up in dirac, burning incense.*" Her comments demonstrate a conflicting attitude towards marriage. On the one hand, "traditional roles" are perceived as old-fashioned and based on unequal gender relations, but on the other, a good marriage is viewed as inextricably tied to Somali tradition or culture.[71]

Similarly, these young women negotiated these ideals with what they regarded as traditional Somali marriage practices (section 4.2). Ifrah, a young practising woman described her ideal marriage to me as traditional, yet Islamic:

> *"I'm a bit of a traditionalist. I've always loved a family… so I really want to be the mum who looks after the home, who cares for her husband… I want to be a caring, supportive wife, looking after home and family. However, this does not mean that I have to have an inferior relationship to my husband. Housework and child work are valued in Islam, not like in the West."*

There is an interesting twist here. Whilst tradition is associated with housework, and the "West" with women's emancipation from the home, these women recognise that the problem lies in the devaluation and lack of financial and social recognition of housework as work. Islam, they insist, unlike the West, places value on the latter, through its commitment to the ideals of gender equity and mutual companionship.

Many young second-generation women also attack traditional Somali men as well as their parents for their inability to maintain a stable, financially secure marriage, which in Islam is considered a husband's responsibility. The high rate of divorce, the frequency of female-headed households and the absence of male figures are often held up as evidence to support their scepticism towards marrying Somali men. Ifrah, for example, often explained that she had been against marriage until she began

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[71] Interestingly, this idea of a modern companionate marriage as inextricably tied to tradition was also a prominent theme for the young urban middle classes in Somalia throughout the 1970s (Kapteijns 1999).

practising because she felt that many of the Somali marriages she witnessed were "dysfunctional". She explained to me: *"I used to be so anti-marriage before I started practising. Just cause I saw so many divorces around me, I was convinced I would end up as a divorcee; I just didn't see the point in marriage."*

Somali men are held responsible for many of these failures. This negative perception is tied to the stereotype of the Somali man who lounges and "lingers" outside Somali restaurants and cafés, chewing *khat* and who is unemployed and "useless" at looking after his family. *"I don't want to get one of those men who linger outside Internet cafes and Somali shops!"* a friend told me in a conversation about Somali men. When I questioned Sumaya on what she thought was the problem with Somali men she replied: *"Maybe the reputation of being lazy. They look at their relatives who haven't aspired to higher things and they just like to be comfortable, going into IT, bus driver… maybe they haven't seen successful Somali men, so they don't aspire to do much."*

Many young second-generation Somali women have been raised in contexts of considerable financial strain. Their families often arrived as asylum seekers with very few resources and due to a series of social, educational, economic and language barriers, have struggled to find employment. This has been particularly true of men, who have often experienced a loss of status, and in some instances have returned to the Somali regions. Although the picture of Somali men depicted by these young women is a gross simplification, it is true that many first-generation Somali men have been unable to support their families and have struggled to find employment in the UK. First-generation Somali women have been faced with the difficulties of sustaining often very large families of children and, at times, extended kin.

The young women's choice of a "professional" Somali man, and their desire for social mobility should therefore be seen as a way of distancing themselves from the negative characteristics associated with their parents' marriage and, as asserting a preference for a cosmopolitan marital relationship based on social mobility, financial security, choice, and egalitarian values. Their imagined relationships based on love, equality and companionship coexisted and converged, therefore, with pragmatic and economic considerations (Osella 2012: 244). As we drove home in Sauda's car, the evening after first discussing the event, we talked about the ways in which we could

ensure it attracted "professional" candidates. The advertising, Zaynab claimed, was crucial in this regard. It should state explicitly the desired criteria and ought to be circulated in the right places, through appropriate media: via email in mosques, Somali businesses, and across business networks. The word "professional" referred to both education and employment: a man with a university degree and a graduate full-time job. For most of the women, attracting a man with a good salary, which guaranteed them a comfortable life, financial security, and status, was an important consideration.

Most of the young women are university educated and worked full-time. An educated man, with whom to converse and share ideas and interests, was considered a necessary requirement for a marriage partner. Accordingly, level of education is very commonly used amongst my informants, and particularly older generations of Somalis, as a marker of status.[72] "*No freshies… we want to have a proper intellectual conversation with people!*" Sauda joked. Ideally, the man would be like them, raised and educated in the UK and sufficiently Western. "*We have nothing in common with a freshie*" Nadifa explained, "*We want someone who is employed, is ambitious, but also has a good character, is practising, more than just praying… actively learning religion*" summarising Zaynab and Ifrah's perspectives.

4.4.2 Seeking Solutions

Following preliminary discussions my friends designed a leaflet advertising the event. Alongside indicating the "religiosity" of the occasion, by including a passage from the *Quran*, the leaflet specified the aim of attracting "professional" and practising Somalis between the ages of 25-40 (Figure 10). The leaflet was circulated via email and Facebook, and disseminated in mosques, community centres, university prayer rooms, Somali restaurants, and shops. After the initial advertising, my friends decided to assign me the task of answering phone calls. In this way they would not be recognised should a relative or friend call to enquire about the event. I was told to explain to the men on the phone that the women were in their late twenties/early

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[72] For example, amongst older Somalis, those educated at either Mogadishu or Hargeysa universities consider themselves better educated and hence of higher status to those who had not received any formal schooling or university education.

thirties, practising and professionals. The event was free and the venue would be disclosed upon registration. Having been assigned this task, I received regular phone calls from my friends, who were curious to know who had called and whether I deemed any to be suitable candidates. These discussions revealed further criteria which the young women used to judge whether a man was "desirable". I was told to ascertain the level of English of the enquirers by listening attentively to their accent and language skills, as this would identify whether they were "freshies" or not. If the men demonstrated insufficient conversational English, they should not be allowed to participate in the event, and I was told to cut them from the list.

One of the first phone calls I received was from a man in his late 20s. He attempted to speak Somali but I asked him to speak in English and we conversed for over 20 minutes. He had a strong Somali accent and I feared he would be deemed unsuitable. Pleased to hear a *Sheikh* would be attending, he asked whether it would be a mixed event and in what manner people would interact. "*Its good to have a halal meeting like this, where we can meet sisters interested in religion, but who also want to maintain culture*", he said to me. He elaborated this point further, and the following day he sent me a text describing himself. Aged 28, he was currently enrolled on an MSc in chemical and process engineering. He added:

> "*I work as well in order to feed my family. Due to my strong iman my main goal that I am here this country [sic] is to educate and migrate to Islam country as it is difficult to raise children here According to hadith…*
> *I am looking for a woman with iman and taqwa and good character. Been [sic] professional is not important for me.*"

I forwarded the text message to my friends and Zaynab rang back laughing hysterically, "*The grammar!! What did he sound like?? Was his accent good? Think we can cross this one out!*" I was surprised, as I thought his level of education would please my friends. However, I was soon instructed as to how to interpret messages and speech in order to effectively "spot" a "freshie". His message was apparently replete with "giveaways". This was apparent not only from the standard of his written English, and willingness to migrate to an Islamic country, but was also implicit in some of his priorities and comments, such as being "able to feed my family".

A few days later I received a more successful phone call. Kadar seemed friendly and his English was fluent, with an East London twang. Although still a student he was keen to get married, and he praised the event.

"At the end of the day if I marry a white girl my culture is lost. I lose everything Somali. It's good to marry a Somali girl, you maintain your culture, language all these things. But if you've grown up here it's good to have a Somali girl who you understand, who's grown up here as well. Religion is important and I could marry a Muslim, that's good as well. But it's not the same as marrying Somali and someone practicing. In that way you have culture and religion. Usually it's the men who organise these things, but it's different that the girls organise, it's a good initiative. It's not the traditional way but it's good.

When I hung up the phone I immediately rang my friends and described the conversation. Nadifa asked me what he sounded like and was relieved to hear he had grown up in the UK. However, she was concerned that he was perhaps too young for her friends.

Kadar had also shown a proper engagement with his culture. Although he prioritised religion above culture, he demonstrated an ability to constitute an optional relationship to culture (Brown 2006; see Chapter Two). In his view marrying "Somali" was not completely necessary, but it was a preferable option, and a way of maintaining a connection with his culture. The young women shared a similar conception of the place of culture within marriage: aiming to share, with their prospective Somali husbands, a similar set of values and practices, such as language, norms and practices surrounding Somali marriage, and kinship relationships. Furthermore, Kadar recognised that an event organised by women was unconventional and not "traditional", but commended it nonetheless and was keen to be involved.

The day before the event I overheard one of the phone calls Zaynab made to the participants. She was calling to ensure they would all be attending, and perhaps also wanted to ascertain that the participants fitted the criteria: *"We're looking for practising brothers, interested in the deen (religion)"* I heard her explain: *"All the*

sisters are practising, they pray five times, some do even more, some are students of knowledge.” She waited for a response and then proceeded, *“But they are also professionals. Do you have a job?”* The other women and I sniggered at the bluntness of her question. *“May I ask how old you are?”* I guessed the man then asked her why she was involved in such an event because we heard her reply: *“The event was set up by a group of us, who felt that Somali women were looking outside for practising professional brothers, so we wanted to give Somalis a chance.”* She hung up the phone demoralised.

On that same evening as we sat in my house making final plans for the night, and ensuring all the participants had confirmed their attendance, we received a phone call from a “freshie”. Zaynab answered the phone and after a long conversation in Somali she hung up and turned to us with a discouraged expression. I was curious to know what exactly was wrong with this man so I probed my friends who, reluctant to speak badly about him, were not articulating their disappointment. *“He just doesn’t speak the lingo. He’s awkward and says the wrong things. [For example:] I want a beautiful Somali sister, who is young and knows her culture, is close to culture, these kinda things. He wants a traditional wife”* Zaynab explained. *“I asked him if he had a job and he was like: I work here and there – come on, that’s not for us!”* Nadifa, having understood the “type” added, *“He just expects different things from a wife. We want someone who speaks good English, has a stable job, that kinda thing.”*

Disheartened, we sat around thinking about how to remedy the situation. Nadifa, Zaynab, and Sauda had invested time and money into hiring the venue, including buying refreshments, printing leaflets, and distributing them. Desperate, we decided to contact a Somali *Sheikh* who had previously congratulated us on the event and offered his support. The phone call was a success: the *Sheikh* promised to contact Somali brothers who attended his mosque, whom he knew were looking to get married. An hour later the phone started ringing intermittently and, having heard about the event from the *Sheikh,* around ten Somali men registered. Zaynab’s face visibly lit up as the phone calls became easier and more frequent. Only on one occasion did we hear her tell a 40 year old divorcee *“unfortunately we are looking for men without children, its just the preference of the girls really.”* Hanging up she explained to us, *“We don’t want to be looking after another wife’s kids!”*

The *Sheikh*'s support guaranteed that the men attending would fulfil at least two of the three criteria. The young women could only hope and pray that the men would also be "professionals". By seeking out practising men, the young women were certain they would not enter a traditional marriage, but one based on a companionable relationship of mutual love, and respect and a shared faith and practice. The young women reasoned that "within Islam" men are required to be the breadwinners, and that finding a practising man should also guarantee them a degree of financial security.

4.4.3 Choosing a husband

As the event made clear, these young women stressed the importance of choosing one's husband, and prioritising their own preferences, over those of kin. Often they resorted to Islam in order to justify their choice, arguing that their religious tradition supported these liberal ideals. Yet, in what follows, I explore how choice of spouse was employed as a mode of subjectification alongside, and often within the limits of, Islamic ideals regarding virtuous conduct, emotions, and love for God.

Several of my informants had received proposals from men of different ethnic backgrounds, and occasionally the young women found themselves arguing with their parents about these choices. Conflicted, the young women often sought advice from a religious expert. On a marriage course by *Sheikh* Rabbani, which I describe in more detail below, the lesson was followed by an hour-long Q&A session. One of the most common questions addressed the issue of how to deal with parents who disapproved of a marriage with an individual from a different community, cultural background, or ethnic group. The *Sheikh* advised that while Muslims had an obligation to be good, gentle, respectful and righteous towards parents, they did not necessarily have to obey them. "If parents say no to someone who is of 'good character' and good in deen (religion), then hold your ground. Don't get angry, don't lecture them on Islam, just address their concerns." He advised his audience further:

> "Speak to them with respect, they might be worried they won't be able to communicate with your spouse, or the in-law, worried you'll move somewhere else... so try to address that, be understanding, the reasons

might not seem completely unreasonable, talk practical things… slowly you can convince them of your choice."

Ultimately, however, the *Sheikh* insisted that what mattered was choosing to marry someone of piety "You don't have to listen to what parents say in terms of marriage", he stated. However, although the conjugal couple was considered more important than family relations, supporting and respecting one's kin was also seen as virtuous.

Islamic discourses could be employed strategically to advocate choice and autonomy in marriage *vis-à-vis* one's kin. Sumaya, for example, explained to me that when she began practising and learning about religion she "*also started to realise [she] could marry whom [she] wanted… religion taught [her] that.*" This of course meant any good Muslim man, but this designation was not conceived of as limiting. The newly married conjugal couple typically move away from their parent's homes into a new house after marriage. My informants claimed that although the extended family was an important source of support in their marriage, it ought to play a minor role in marriage choices, and also in the dynamics between a husband and wife. As one woman described to me, a modern marriage also signifies "*Not involving the tribe in your marital arguments*", though this was always difficult to avoid in a situation of divorce, for example. The concept of choice through Islam, for my informants, involves a distancing from family through an adherence to religious practices and obligations. A religious marriage enables these young women to negotiate the traditional constraints and pressures of their kin, to champion "gender equity" and choice, and to transform the meaning of love and marriage in the process.

Povinelli (2006) argues that the love relationship based on intimacy and choice is a liberal mode of self-governance. The intimate contract is presented, she contends, as distinct yet always imminently under threat by economic and political contracts. Typical of what she terms the "autological subject" – the subject-in-love – exists in opposition to the "genealogical subject", who is governed by the "drags of descent" and whose actions are dictated by culture and tradition. The liberal subject "is presumed to become sovereign at the moment she projects herself as her own authentic ground" (ibid 2006: 46). According to Povinelli, the autological subject cannot exist without its mirror. For young practising women, choice and equity are

ways of asserting a difference *vis-à-vis* their parents. Yet, this liberal mode of subjectification coexists and intersects with these women's desire to submit to God, and hence also to Islamic norms of pious conduct. Through discussions, debates, and practices around marriage, these young women simultaneously construe themselves as autonomous and pious subjects. Marriage and their imagined relations to a potential husband become the terrain through which these young women negotiate and manage different modes of subjectification and conflicting teleologies. In what follows, I explore these tensions as they play out in relation to romantic and spiritual love.

4.5   Reformist Teachings: the Islamic conjugal couple

Islamic reformist teachings constitute an important source of authority in young practising women's reworking of their marriage ideals and aspirations. These women receive ample advice on the importance and benefits of marriage by attending Islamic courses and lectures, listening to online lectures, and reading books and pamphlets that circulate in mosques or Islamic bookshops.[73] Scholars often emphasise the primacy of the conjugal couple based on mutual respect, rights and responsibilities, Islamic virtues, and spiritual love. As I noted above, the young women contrast a traditional marriage with an ideal companionate marriage, based on gender equity, choice and social mobility – one, they argue, that is drawn from both the Islamic tradition but is also central to Western culture. Hence, contrary to the literature (Hirsh & Wardlow 2006; Masquelier 2005), their marriage ideals are not based on an appropriation of a global modern ideal of companionate love. They emerge from their simultaneous engagements with ideals of romantic love and notions of a pious relationship that aims to uphold Islamic virtues and cultivate spiritual love. As I have shown above, these ideas also coexist alongside concerns pertaining to financial security.

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[73] The *Sisters Magazine* is often a source of advice and information regarding marriage and love. Some of the courses, lectures, or books consulted are delivered or written by a range of scholars such as *Sheikh* Faraz Rabbani, *Sheikh* Babikir, *Sheikh* Al-Kawthari, *Sheikh* Reda Bedeir, Hamza Yusuf and Yasmin Mogahed.

In January 2011, I attended a one-day Islamic marriage course with two practising friends. Led by *Sheikh* Rabbani[74] at SOAS University, it was intended for married couples, as well as those seeking marriage. The course, entitled *True Love, Getting Married: Clear and Practical Guidance for Success* was divided into four lessons and included a final Q & A session. It touched on a series of lessons including the importance of marriage in Islam, an analysis of passages from the *Quran* on marriage, advice on selecting the appropriate spouse, the *fiqh* (law/jurisprudence) of marriage, and a summary of Al-Ghazali's comments on the ideal characteristics of a spouse.

"Marriage is a spiritual act, it is half our deen"; the *Sheikh* began the course, citing the *hadith* and unravelling its meaning. He explained that Islam was divided into two parts: the first constituted our relationship with the Creator, the second our relationship with creation, which was based on our ability to uphold and sustain good character (*aklaaq*).[75] "Marriage is the key test of good character, it is half because you are relating to creation. No relationship tests like marriage does; it nurtures good character if it's successful", he explained. Prayer and similar acts of worship, he elaborated, were partly "selfish acts" which worked to improve oneself and one's relationship with God. Marriage, and our relationships with others, on the other hand, represented the real test of sincerity because they required effort in upholding good manners and embodying the exemplary behaviour of the Prophet.

A good marriage, therefore, was one in which the conjugal couple supported each other in the pursuit of pious virtues. Marriage, he explained, reiterating the importance of companionship and choice, facilitates our journeying on earth: "We have to make our life comfortable, and a spouse should be a companion, a source of support and assistance. Choose a companion who will help you get where you want to go". Marriage constitutes the means towards the fashioning of a pious self: "Marriage gives you focus, it stops you from drifting and helps uphold taqwa (piety)."

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[74] *Sheikh* Faraz Rabbani was born in Karachi, Pakistan, raised in Toronto, Canada and currently lives in Amman, Jordan. He holds a BA in Economics & Commerce but has also studied the Islamic Sciences in Damascus under scholars such as Shaykh Haytham Idilbi and Shaykh Abd al-Rahman Kharsa. In Canada he was the Educational Director of SeekersGuidance (Sunni Path: n.d.).

[75] *Aklaaq* has a specific meaning in Islam and refers to the ability to implement virtues, by drawing on the exemplary behavior and manners of the Prophet.

Throughout the course *Sheikh* Rabbani emphasised the importance of mutual respect and support, and reciprocal rights and responsibilities. Based on the concept of "gender equity" or "gender complementarity", the *Sheikh* encouraged both men and women to "nudge" their spouse into adopting the *sunna* by sharing tasks at home and helping each other out in everyday life. "The Prophet did the cleaning, the cooking, and fixed his own sandals", he reminded the men. Gender equity is based on a naturalised notion of gender difference, which considers men and women to be naturally different yet equal in the eyes of God – a notion that has become popular in discourses of authentic Islam (Jouili 2011; Deeb 2006). Deeb (2006) notes in her discussion on "gender *jihad*" amongst her Shi'i female informants, that the concept of equity relies on feminist textual reinterpretations. These interpretations claim that, if applied correctly, Islam can eradicate many of the problems women face in patriarchal societies. From these women's perspectives, Deeb shows, the notions of gender equity and gender *jihad* also prove to the West that Muslim women can be both pious and modern.[76] As noted above, my informants claim that gender equity demonstrates the ways in which the Islamic tradition has already incorporated many of the values associated with Western culture. On one occasion, as we discussed her role as a wife, Muneera, a practising second-generation woman, explained to me: "*Western culture has become part of me and so I think everything has to be equal. But actually I have learnt that equity is also part of Islam*". The companionable ideal, therefore, merges both assumed Western and Islamic attitudes and values.

Similarly, young Muslims often reminded one another of the Prophet's exemplary behaviour: "*He used to help out at home, mend his own clothes, he never used to hit them or anything. He had real respect. Responsibilities have to be shared, a husband can bring the children to school, help out at home*", Ifrah explained. In reference to a passage from *Sura al-Nisa* (chapter "The women") of the *Quran*,[77] which was

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[76] This notion of complementarity is often used to explain how women are considered to naturally embody characteristics that men lack, such as mercy, kindness, patience, generosity and so on. Other Islamic scholars (e.g. Feminist Islamic scholars) may, however, use the language of liberal rights to assert gender equality and its presence within Islam. My informants tended to refer to the former concept, but occasionally also employed the language of gender rights and equality.

[77] The meaning of the following translated passage was frequently debated amongst my informants: "Husbands should take good care of their wives… If you fear high-handedness from your wives,

frequently discussed and reinterpreted amongst these women, Ifrah commented: "*Both husband and wife should obey each other, not in the sense of obeying orders but in the sense that they work together for the same goals, they co-operate and respect each other.*" In unravelling the passage, she emphasised the importance of mutual respect, support, and cooperation between the conjugal couple.

According to these young practising women, "gender equity" was legitimated by its contrast with the traditional gender roles of their parents, and also in relation to the contradictory and unstable notion of the West. According to some women, Islam already encompassed certain rights and values present in the West, which were not, as others claimed, necessarily opposed to those of Western society. In a lecture addressing a large audience of young Muslim women in central London in 2012, Yasmin Mogahed, a popular feminist Muslim scholar from the US, addressed the topic of Muslim women's empowerment.[78] The problem, she articulated, is that in our societies "We allow anyone other than our Creator to define success, failure, happiness, and worth… and in so doing we have entered into a form of slavery". First, she explained, referring to a popular, simplified, notion of Western feminism, women have made men the standard of their success and worth. "As women, we will never reach true liberation until we stop trying to mimic men and value the beauty in our own God-given distinctiveness" she insisted. Second, she argued that the advertisement industry has defined women through the standard of beauty; our worth is judged on whether our beauty "pleases men". Instead, our relationship with God ought to be the only true standard, and the only path to empowerment. She concluded:

> "We don't need the society's standard of beauty and fashion to define our
> worth, we don't need to become just like men to be honoured, and we
> don't need to wait for the love of a prince to save or complete us. Our

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remind them [of the teachings of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, then hit them" (*Quran* 4: 34).

[78] Yasmin Mogahed lives in the US, and holds a B.S. Degree in Psychology and a Masters in Journalism and Mass Communications. She has taught Islamic Studies, and served as the Sisters' Youth Director for the Islamic Society of Milwaukee. She previously worked as a staff columnist for the Islam section of InFocus News, and is currently an instructor for New Dawn Institute, and a writer for the Huffington Post. Her latest book is entitled *Reclaim Your Heart* (Yasmin Mogahed: n.d.).

worth, our honour, our salvation and our completion lies not in the slave but in the Lord of the slave."

Amongst young practising women, Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet and the first female convert to Islam, was often treated as an exemplary figure of the ideal Muslim wife. On numerous occasions I was told about the way she "comforted, cared and supported" her husband. My informants, who wished to inform me about the gender equity and importance of choice in Islam, reminded me that Khadija worked, was older and wealthier than the Prophet, and that she chose to propose to him. The Prophet did not take a second wife while he was married to her, and he respected and loved her immensely. This, my informants claimed, was truly a perfect marriage. Equality, monogamy, mutual support, and choice were already present in Islam, and hence, my informants insisted, there was no need to draw on Western society to find these ideals.

4.5.1 Transforming Romantic love

Love was frequently a topic of conversation amongst my informants. "*Do you believe in love?*" Ifrah asked her friends over dinner at my house one summer evening. Frequently, she had interrogated me on the same issue. She continued, "*I believe in soul mates; that two people can be so alike, and complement each other, and they just know it and feel it.*" Layla, who was generally more of a pragmatist regarding these issues, hesitated and then replied, "*I believe in love. But soul mates? Is there really just one person?*" But Ifrah insisted on the concept, comparing the idea of soul mates to close friendships: "*You can be soul mates with friends… when you're very close, and you tell the other person everything and feel for each other…*" Layla nodded, this time in agreement, then hesitated for a moment and added, "*Actually you're right, there's evidence for soul mates in the Quran.*" She took out her iPhone and searched for the relevant verse from the *Quran*: "*The sacred unity of two unknown souls written by fate from birth*". This *Quranic* passage, she explained, was also frequently reproduced on Muslim wedding invitations. As we continued to discuss the issue, Zaynab knocked on the door. As she made herself comfortable around the table, we introduced her to the conversation. She retorted, "*I don't know, I'm sceptical. Love is overrated. And it never lasts… anyway, love like it is in the movies doesn't exist*".

This scepticism, concerning "love in the movies", was, in fact, shared by many young second-generation Somali women. Raised in the UK, these women are avid consumers of Hollywood films, romantic novels, soap operas, and popular music.[79] Yet, I often heard them make similar pragmatic and sceptical remarks regarding these romantic portrayals of love. Ifrah agreed with Zaynab that love which was typically represented as "superficial", or as lustful, based on physical attraction, was not "real". As Idil, a young woman in her 20s put it, *"I don't think love at first sight really works. If I have a car crash and ruin my face will that end love? That's just physical attraction, infatuation."*

In the course mentioned above, *Sheikh* Rabbani cautioned his audience to exercise restraint in marriage, recommending both partners to fast regularly as a way of restraining desires and lowering their gazes. As has been noted elsewhere in the literature, reformist discourses strongly oppose cross-gender relationships based on desire, passion, romance, and sex (Schielke 2010a; Marsden 2007a). Yet, amongst these Euro-American Scholars, this does not result in a complete opposition to a love relationship, but to a separation between a love relationship based on physical desire and lust, and an Islamic one based on emotional closeness, spirituality and love for God. Marriage should not be a fulfilment of desires based solely on beauty. The *Sheikh* explained: "Your partner is not a commodity. Do not fall only for beauty, it's not enough… look at the underlying virtues of your spouse. And only marry if you can take on the responsibilities." Similarly, he criticised those who married for money. Following a citation of a *hadith* from *Al-Tirmidhi*, he explained, "Marry the one of religion and character. The one who marries for wealth will be impoverished by Allah, the one who marries for beauty will not be satisfied, and the one who marries for honour and status will be abased." By emphasising "good character", pious marriages were presented as superior to the "dysfunctional" marriages of Western societies. "Marriages fail these days because we have become self-centred. We need to start

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[79] Amongst the Somali teenagers whom I tutored or frequented over the course of my fieldwork, many spent their weekends watching romantic comedies such as, *27 dresses, Step up 2, Honey*; catching up on the latest soaps such as Eastenders and Hollyoaks and sharing rap/hip hop/RnB music. In an assignment I set them based on Oscar Wilde's ideal husband, many wrote about their ideal husband as being someone caring, supportive, loving, with a good job, truthful and honest, who helped around the house, and someone to "share everything with".

caring for each other for the sake of Allah", *Sheikh* Rabbani argued throughout the course.[80] Similarly, as I described above, young practising women replicated some of the *Sheikh*'s teachings by separating physical attraction, or "love at first sight", from love as an emotional intimacy based on a notion of soul mates.[81] This latter form of love, they argued, was more realistic and could be found not only in Islam, but also in contemporary culture.

Throughout the early stages of my fieldwork, one of the most popular films amongst young Somali teenagers and older women was *The Twilight Saga*: a series of films depicting the love between a young teenager called Bella and a vampire called Edward. The romantic relationship portrayed through the film is one of care, mutual affection and loyalty, not lust or physical attraction. Many of these young women went to see the film for the 2009 *Eid* celebration. For weeks they all spoke with excitement about the movie. Ifrah and Maryam, two practising friends, had seen the movie several times. *"Twilight is so beautiful, it's about real love, they love each other sooo much. They would die for each other. I wonder if that love really exists…"* Ifrah pondered. The film captured love as a spontaneous and unconstrained emotion based on an idea of soul mates or companionship, centred on an appreciation of the uniqueness of a companion's characteristics (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006).

However, many also recognised that, according to Islamic teachings, these unique characteristics ought to be founded on Islamic virtues. Jane Austen's novels and film reproductions were often mentioned as exemplary of the ideal romantic relationship. Sumaya, for example, had seen the BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice* a dozen times. On one occasion, she even organised with her friends a *Pride and Prejudice* fancy dress party! I heard Sumaya say on several occasions that Elizabeth Bennett, the main protagonist of the novel, could have been Muslim, as she embodied all the

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[80] The *Sheikh* also advised his audience to reflect on the following pragmatic issues when considering and selecting a compatible spouse: righteousness and *deen*, good character, attractiveness, reasonable marriage expenses and *mahar*, similar ideas about children and child-rearing, the importance one attaches to virginity, and family background.

[81] This criticism is also echoed in contemporary Islamic scholars' teachings. As Hamza Yusuf claims, in a lecture frequently cited by my informants entitled: *Womanhood: An Islamic Perspective,* the conjugal couple in Islam is different to the Western model. In the secular West, the couple is based on sexual pleasure. In Islam, the couple is ordained by God, sexuality is not separated but is part of the sacred, something enjoyed by both partners.

virtues of a Muslim wife: modesty, humility, honesty, and intelligence. Sumaya also saw Elizabeth's critical attitude towards social mores and norms as reflecting her own criticisms of older kin's cultural practices. Most importantly, Elizabeth was outspoken, not afraid to speak her mind and was certainly not submissive to male authority, particularly in her relationship with Darcy, her future husband. Sumaya and her friends longed for this kind of love relationship – one in which love arose as a spontaneous emotion between the couple, but also developed as a consequence of learning about each other. In the novel, Elizabeth only begins to love Darcy after she has *learnt* to overcome her pride and prejudice, and to see Darcy for who he really is, with his "true" characteristics and virtues.

My informants oscillated between these two understandings of love, as a natural emotion that arises thanks to an appreciation of the unique characteristics of an individual on the one hand, and that love is "learnt", as it is understood within Islamic reformist contemporary teachings, on the other. During my fieldwork, one of my young practising friends divorced her husband after less than a year of marriage. On one occasion we discussed whether she had been in love. *"Well I was attached to him, physically, emotionally, spiritually. I wasn't in love that's the thing. I think that grows. I was just attached and was learning to love"*, she explained. What is revealing about this comment is the way she was drawing on reformist discourses about "learning to love" and "loving for the sake of Allah", in order to make sense of her marriage. According to the young woman, love is more than an *attachment,* it is an intense and unique emotional experience, yet it does not necessarily arise naturally, but can be "worked on" or "learnt".

Similarly, Muna, a young married woman in her 20s had been introduced to her husband through an aunt's recommendation. Prior to her marriage, she had only met her future husband in the presence of her family and conversed with him via phone and email. They had immediately "clicked", she explained, and after half a year they had decided to marry. As we sat in a coffee shop discussing her marriage, I asked her about her first few months of married life. She described the first few weeks as lonely. She missed her family, especially during her honeymoon: *"But Alhamdulillah we worked at it, we had to get to know one another, especially our personalities. You have to get used to small things around the house. At the beginning we set down*

ground rules of what we could and could not do!" "And love?" I enquired. *"It comes after marriage, it's natural.* You *start doing things for each other you don't realise, you become willing to do it. Like a mother for her child. But the idea is that you work at your marriage, with the intention of pleasing Allah.* And *inshAllah He'll help you."*

This idea of learning to cultivate love is, as I describe in Chapter One (section 1.7), based on Islamic ideas of self-discipline. According to Islamic pedagogies, emotions such as love, hope, and fear, ought to be cultivated so that they may arise naturally within the self (Mahmood 2005). Mahmood demonstrates how emotions should not, as in the liberal tradition, be assumed to arise spontaneously, but may be cultivated as both modalities and motives for pious action (*ibid* 2005: 140).

Spiritual love for one's husband should also be an extension of the love one instils for the Prophet and for God. *Sheikh* Babikir,[82] during a brief talk I attended with my informants on *Love in Islam*, argued that the spiritual type of love was what kept us alive, gave us wisdom, and was characterised by longing and searching. The love a believer has for the Prophet, he explained, is meant to be a yearning love that leads the believer to love Allah. "The more you love, the closer you are to true faith*"*, he explained, adding, "No love comes out of ignorance, you need to know what you are loving… and knowledge is gained through experience". Accordingly, learning to love God involves teaching oneself to love Him through praise, worship, and experience of his creation, as *Sheikh* Babikir claimed, but also by rationally learning His attributes by reading and engaging with the scriptures. Learning to love a husband is similar. While praise and worship is reserved solely for God, love can be learnt by appreciating a husband's naturally good traits (*fitra*), and his pious virtues.

Following the lecture Nadifa commented on the *Sheikh*'s definition of "deep love" (*mawabba*):

> *"This is a spiritual love that God puts between a husband and a wife at marriage, love that is inside, deep, spiritual, that Allah blesses your marriage with, He gives you the potential for deep love when you get*

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[82] See section 3.5 for biographical details

married, places that potential in your heart and then it's up to you to find
and work on it."

Similarly, Yasmin Mogahed, in the lecture I described above, criticised women who made romantic love their sole purpose in life. Those who make marriage and romantic love their ultimate aim, she argued, are chasing a mirage and will never be content. "Completion cannot be found in places other than God", she insisted. She contrasted two types of love. The first type is based on what, "You get from them [husbands], how they make you feel". This type is ultimately unstable and can never be fully satisfied. Another type of love arises between people who love each other for what they are: "The beauty you see in them is a reflection of the Creator". This love is stable and constant. "Learn to love in the right way… for Him, through Him and by Him", she argued, "and you will learn there is a space in the heart reserved only for the Creator". Love for one's husband ought to ideally be an extension of one's love for God.

This latter type of love is illustrated by many of the Sufi poems that some of my informants learnt to recite. Sumaya, for example, had begun to memorise and sing the *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*, an ode in praise of the Prophet.[83] The poem captures the sense of "longing" or "spiritual love" described by *Sheikh* Babikr, as well as the second form of beauty captured by Yasmin Mogahed. It is unclear in the poem whether the poet is referring to the Prophet or to his loved one. I asked Sumaya about the *burda* poem, curious about how she distinguished love for God, from love for her husband. She replied:

"Well the burda is good because it makes you think about love, the way
you might have experienced it: that attachment, that waiting around for
him, longing, not being able to be apart. Everyone can relate to it. But
he's talking about love for the Prophet. The idea is that you should love
your husband for the sake of Allah, so you should love God more than
your husband... I'm not exactly there, but inshAllah. Only when you love

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[83] The *burdha* is a poem or ode of praise to the Prophet Mohammed, composed by an Egyptian Sufi, *Imam* al-Busiri.

God more than yourself have you achieved real piety… but we should all strive for that love."

Although Sumaya was working towards instilling a "spiritual love", this ultimately remained an ideal, which she felt she had not accomplished in practice. The ultimate aim was for her to transform the emotions she felt towards her spouse into spiritual love – a form of extension of her love for Allah. Her love for her husband ought not take over the space reserved solely for her love of God. Yet, as she pointed out, and as the discussions above demonstrate, the kind of love relationship envisioned by these young women fused idealised notions of romantic and virtuous love acquired through films such as *Pride and Prejudice,* with notions of spiritual love gained through Islamic teachings. Through these ideas, the young women sought to articulate novel ways of thinking about their relations to potential husbands on earth.

4.6   Practical impediments to a pious relationship

As discussed, young practising women hold ambivalent attitudes towards marrying Somali. They refuse traditional men in favour of those who maintain a "choosing" relationship with their culture, emphasising choice, equality, and financial security, yet also try to select a husband who embodies Islamic virtues. However, this picture is further complicated by the pressures exerted by their kin, and the young women's feelings of obligation towards them. As Zaynab explained when justifying the need for a Somali-only event, it served as a way of "maintaining culture", but also as a way of abiding by her mother's wishes.

Most Somali parents wish for their daughters to marry either Somali, or at times endogamously within their own clan. In certain circumstances, where the young woman has little connection with her patriline (i.e. her father and paternal uncles), female kin may encourage marriage within the matriline. Furthermore, there is a preference for marrying one's daughter to a respectable clan with a good reputation, and to a man who has a stable source of income. An unmarried woman in her mid-20s may be a source of concern for parents, as she may be reaching unmarriageable age. Furthermore, control over young women's sexuality is a preoccupation not only for the parents, but also often for the extended kin. If dating, she is considered to be acting immodestly and can be a source of shame (*ceeb*). During my fieldwork, a

Somali man who proposed to a young practising Somali woman faced opposition from his father and uncle who discovered a few days prior to the marriage that gossip circulated about the young woman's shameful behaviour before she was practising. Whereas the young man decided to pursue the marriage, refusing to listen to the rumour and arguing that she had changed, his father refused to meet his new bride and banned her from visiting his home. Concerns with male honour and female modesty are particularly acute for older Somali generations. However, I have also witnessed young Somali men distinguish between modest young women whom they claim are suitable for marriage, and other young women, who are only suitable for dating.

Pressure usually originates from the young woman's own patriline, and is exerted either by organising meetings with potential spouses or by refusing the young women's marriage choices. Sahra and Ifrah often spoke about the pressures exerted by their families. Both in their mid-20s, they were nearly past the "marriageable" age by Somali standards. In reference to her father, Sahra commented on how he would often "give her the talk". On one occasion she described the incident: *"He walked into the room and announced: you should be thinking about marriage, it's about time isn't it?"* Although she tried to dismiss these comments, at times, following these incidents, she would contact her closest friends asking them to look around for her, as she trusted their recommendations more than her father's. *"Preferably not a Somali, I need to start looking around, before my father sets me up!"* she had told them. Her fears were exacerbated when her father and uncle occasionally threatened to organise for an eligible Somali man to visit to the house.[84]

> *"He wants me to come in to serve the tea, so that the guy can check me out spend a few minutes out there and then leave. That's the way it's done, he said. I don't get him! My uncle thinks that's the Islamic proper way… but it's not! As if! I'm not going to serve them tea! What am I, a trophy wife?! So that he can just have a quick glance at me?!*

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[84] Ardo and Layla were amongst a couple of young women who had voiced their disagreements about holding a Somali-only event.

Sahra was worried that once the man had come to the house he would feel compelled to marry her, not because he liked her, but solely to please her kin. When she recounted the incident, Ifrah burst out laughing.

> *"I've had that done to me too! My brothers and sisters don't tell me they've invited someone, they just get me to serve tea! And then a few weeks later they say: Ifrah, do you remember that man you served tea to? Are you interested?"*

Sahra's comment resonates with some of the themes explored above. Her uncle, in Sahra's view, was confusing Islam with tradition or culture. Islamically, she had the right to choose her spouse, and these meetings were not condoned in the *Quran* and *hadith*. She also felt that these traditional practices encouraged a marriage based solely on physical attraction. She considered the practice of "serving tea" degrading and submissive, objectifying her body to a male gaze. In her mind, it was representative of the "backward" and cultural gender norms.

Yet some of these meetings did come to fruition. For example, Muna, whom I introduced above, had been introduced to her husband through a family meeting. Ifrah, who in that case had ridiculed the practice, had on another occasion decided to follow up on a family recommendation. For a few months she had conversed on the phone with her potential new spouse, only to realise that they did not share the same expectations for marriage.

Throughout my fieldwork I heard of cases where parents refused a husband because he was not Somali. However, I did not hear of anyone refusing a potential husband on the basis of clan. For many parents, marrying a non-Muslim was completely out of the question, unless the husband converted to Islam. In several situations, where a potential spouse was a non-Somali Muslim, the parents were initially unhappy with the marriage choice, but after a few months decided to give way to their daughter's choices. Asiya, for example, struggled initially to convince her father to allow her to marry a convert whom she had met on an Islamic website. After several months of persuasion, however, the marriage went ahead. Furthermore, many parents, particularly those more religiously inclined, accepted the "religious argument" often

presented to them from their daughters: that they ought to be able to marry any good Muslim regardless of his ethnicity.

Nimo's practising daughter, for example, had met her husband through an online Islamic class and he had come to visit with his sister and brother-in-law to propose to her. "*He's Somali, from near Kismayo*", Nimo, a first-generation Somali woman, whom I introduced in Chapter Two, told me on a visit to her house. "*He's from another family (meaning clan)... But he's Somali*", she explained and then corrected herself, "*Any Muslim is good. If he's religious and a good man we can't refuse him. But you know, it's nice to share the same culture.*" Occasionally however, young couples will marry without their kin's consent, hoping that they will be accepted in the future. For many young practising women, this is seen as an unfavourable option because often they wish to "respect" their kin and avoid severing ties for the future.

4.7 Sincerely Seeking

A few days prior to the "Sincerely Seeking" marriage event, the organisers planned a meeting at my house to discuss the format of the evening. As I cooked pizza, they sat drinking tea and discussing the details, assigning each one of us a role for the evening and listing the things that needed to be bought beforehand. Unfortunately, having left the preparations to the last minute, they had insufficient time to contact a *Sheikh* to introduce the event and therefore needed someone else to take that role.

 "*We need someone to speak about the benefits of marriage and the benefit of having these halal events… to set the right tone*", Sauda suggested. "*Someone who can give a speech, recite a few hadiths… but also be entertaining and hip!*" Nadifa added, "*Set the scene, so it doesn't look like speed dating, and it's done with proper adab (manners/etiquette). We need a speech, it's the cultural way. You need a speech to start something. Somalis will like that!*" she remarked. So in an effort to ensure that the event was sufficiently cultural and religious, they set about phoning friends and relatives, eventually settling for Zaynab's married sister. As a practising mother of four she had the authority to lead the event.

After many discussions of the possible activities and discussion groups, Nadifa wrote out the plan for the evening:

6:30-7 Registration (assign numbers and name tags to participants)

7-7:15 Speech on the benefits of marriage

7:15- 7:45 Discussion groups on topics: (led by the organisers)

   a) What are the ingredients to a happy life?
   b) What are the problems of getting married in a modern world and how do we alleviate these problems?
   c) Is it important to do *hijra*?
   d) Problems of living in the west
   e) Islamic schools *versus* public schools

7:45-8:15 Refreshments

8:15 Talk on adab of speed-dating

8:15-9pm 3 minute speed dating

9pm closing remarks.

We discussed what we were going to wear, and most agreed it preferable not to don the "usual *abaya*". As we sat back, exhausted after an evening of planning, the young women made a pact: if one of them found a husband through the event, they had the obligation to start the domino effect, using her husband's networks to find a suitable partner for the others.

On the evening of the event I headed down to the venue early in order to help out with final preparations. When I arrived, Zaynab, Nadifa, and Sauda were printing out the registration forms and programmes, and together we carried the food, forms and stationary down to the hall. Zaynab was walking around, clearly agitated: the atmosphere of anxiety and nervousness was palpable. Zaynab feared the men might not show up and imagined the embarrassing situation of sitting in a room full of women waiting for a man to show up. As planned, Sauda had dressed up in a long black dress, tightly fitted around the waist and a light green *hijab*. She had also applied a thin layer of make up to her cheeks and eyes. Zaynab and Nadifa, much to her disappointment, were dressed in their "usual *abaya"* but before we made our way

to the hall Zaynab asked to borrow some eyeliner from her friend and applied it quickly and rather carelessly to her eyes. I thought at the time that she may not have wanted to give the impression that she was too hopeful of finding a suitable partner. I was assigned the task of sitting at the entrance, registering participants as they arrived, and handing them a nametag. Soft drinks and light snacks were arranged in the room next to the main hall, which had struck me, upon arrival, as sterile, bleak and lifeless. Intended for large audiences, the room had tiered seating facing a large stage. Tonight, however, the seats were empty, the stage dusty, and the walls were bare. Hoping that the event would be a success, I nervously pondered as to whether the event was going to create a positive and vibrant atmosphere.

Zaynab's sister, Koser, who had been asked to fill the role of the *Sheikh* by delivering an introductory speech, arrived a few minutes before the event to practice her speech. Everything was ready and we sat in trepidation awaiting the arrival of the participants. Several women and only two "freshie" men had arrived half an hour after the event was intended to commence. As I sat at the entrance, the first two men had walked in. Looking straight past me, one of them addressed Nadifa, who was standing on the other side of the hall, in Somali. Ahmed was in his 40s, chubby, dressed in jeans and a large puffed coat and his friend wore a large black leather coat. As I asked them to fill in the registration forms, Sauda, who was walking around nervously, glanced at me with an expression of concern. Her fear of failure, of having "only freshie men" was actualising before her eyes. We had registered twenty-five men that week, but feared they might not attend. "*Somalis are always late, don't worry*", I tried to reassure her. The men had taken their seats on the tiered chairs and helped themselves to the refreshments. Layla and Maryam had arrived at this point and they sat next to me, peering into the hall and giggling about the two "old freshies". Zaynab was the most agitated: "*You know what, it's sadaqa (charity), even if people don't show up we get a reward for organising this.*" Sauda added: "*It's true, we did it because we feel there's a need for it. Our intention is for others to benefit from it. Even if just one person finds another, it's worthwhile.*" Despite these justifications, the organisers were beginning to get impatient. About one and a half hours later, only seven women and three men had arrived, but the speech could not be prolonged any further and the event was forced to start. Koser began her speech:

"We decided to organise this event because it is increasingly difficult for young women to meet practising Somali men in a halal way with the appropriate adab. It has become apparent that many Sisters are looking outside for marriage (not that there is anything wrong with that). Many have said that they feel there are no suitable and eligible Somali Brothers available. We do not believe this to be the case and so, Insha'Allah, we hope that this event will dispel such negative perceptions."

She stated the benefits of marriage in Islam, reciting the *hadith*: *"Marriage is half of religion"*, concluding with a blessing and a *du'a* (supplicatory prayer). The chairs in the hall were then rearranged in a circle for the discussion groups. The women sat on one side, with the men on the other. Layla refused to take part, explaining she had simply come to help and so I sat with her at a distance on the tiered chairs, and she translated some of the comments the men made in Somali. Ifrah also refused to take part and took my place at the door. As she said, she was "too romantic", and this type of event was not her "way of doing it". During the discussion more participants strolled in, culminating in seven men and approximately twelve women.

The older men dominated the conversation, but this was "typical Somali" according to Layla. *"They're just repeating the same thing. I'm really not interested in Somali men. That guy reminds me of my brother, and the other guy could be my dad!"* she whispered. The other young women participated in the discussion, although several seemed disengaged and occasionally stood up to come to talk to us. The organisers engaged in the discussion although they gave the impression they were not personally "seeking".

The first topic addressed "the ingredients to a happy life" and a young woman opened the discussion, mentioning the importance of stability, good role models, and a happy home. A younger man stressed the significance of being ambitious, sharing goals and responsibilities. Ahmed's friend spoke about a life focused on religion (*deen*) and his priority of teaching children about the Prophet, and about religion and culture, adding it was something in which a wife should be particularly adept. Layla giggled at this comment: "Here we go", she whispered. Ahmed's friend had, in "typical Somali" fashion, made reference to traditional gender roles, something from which the women

wished to distance themselves. Sauda had suggested the second topic – problems in getting married in the modern world – which was intended to be a good test for "unsuitable men". As she had commented, *"I guess if people talk about the problems of women wanting their own way, their own independence, too assertive, changing family roles, that will be a clue!"* she had told me. As predicted, the older men made remarks about the ways in which modern society had "ruined" women, making them excessively concerned with money, "buying new *dirac*", and, in the process, disposing of their husbands. Meanwhile, the younger men lamented the loss of culture and religion, while some of the women spoke about the difficulties of raising children in a secular country faced with crime and similar social problems. The next topic, on the need for *hijra* (migration to Islamic countries) also caused division between the men and women. The latter noted it was unnecessary as they could perfectly well "practise religion in the West", while the men, both young and old, stressed the importance of returning home *"to our roots, to our culture, and religion… to raise our children in a Somali way."* This, I felt, would be interpreted by my friends as a clear indication they were insufficiently Western. The conversation then shifted to a reflection on the poor attendance of the event. *"Somali men are embarrassed, they think something like this is shameful, but what is shameful is that they don't come to these events!"* one of the older men exclaimed. *"There's a taboo on this type of event… people are embarrassed to admit to their friends, but I think it's ridiculous, there is nothing wrong, and it's better to meet people in this way that in other non halal environments, like going to clubs and stuff like that"* Koser added.

At this point I was asked to exchange places with Ifrah to finish registering the men who were strolling in almost two hours late. As I sat in the corridor outside the hall, Maryam burst into laughter. *"This is hilarious, really entertaining"*, she said while imitating Ahmed's comment on women's extravagant shopping needs, ridiculing his "old fashioned" manners, and use of Somali expressions.

Following the discussions, we prepared the hall for the speed-dating event. The chairs were placed in pairs facing each other and aligned in four parallel lines. As planned, Nadifa stood up and explained the rules, remarking: *"I'd like to advise people to renew their intentions before this. It's important to have the right intentions. Marriage should be for the sake of Allah, and I ask Allah to bless this gathering. May*

we be honest and sincere in seeking our partners." Her brief talk reemphasised the religious dimension of the event. Provided "intentions"[85] were "pure", there was no need for parental approval or religious supervision of the event. Male and female participants were directed to talk for three minutes to each other, after which the men were to rotate clock-wise to speak to the next woman. Everyone was provided with a sheet of paper on which to write three people they may wish to contact in the future. With the consent of the individuals, the organisers would subsequently email the contact details requested on the form. Because of the over-representation of women over men, the organisers opted out of this part. Though the younger girls were reluctant to participate, they felt that it would be rude not to do so.

The event ended after the speed-dating and the men thanked the organisers. The men appeared less nervous than at the beginning of the evening, and seemed eager to exchange contact details with the women. One of the younger men apologised as he left the hall, *"We should be inviting you, not this way round",* he exclaimed, to which some of the young women rolled their eyes. The mood had livened up towards the end, and an initially embarrassing situation had been transformed into an entertaining and amusing evening. After clearing and tidying the room, we jumped excitedly into the car and, without discussion or much consideration, headed to a restaurant on Edgware road.

During the journey, and later at the restaurant, we reflected on the event and assessed the evening. It was decided that it had not failed, and had definitely picked up towards the end of the evening, as younger men had arrived. However, none of the women, perhaps with one exception, had found a potential match. Reluctant to speak negatively about the men, one of the women noted how a young man was, *"Just really honest and sincere… spoke about the importance of having Allah in the marriage and he was really nice about the event, said it was such a good idea to organise something like this."* Yet she didn't seem interested. Only one woman showed an interest in a man who was, *"Doing well for himself, works in marketing, he seems into his deen, proper practising."* Embarrassed, she suggested she might be interested in meeting

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[85] This focus on intentions runs throughout the thesis, as younger women use this idea to claim they can judge things for themselves and that there is no need for others to monitor their behavior.

him again. She was hesitant, however, worried someone else might be interested in the young practising professional or that perhaps he had written someone else's name on the form.

At the restaurant, Zaynab took out the forms they had used for the speed-dating section. Unlike the women, all the men had noted preferences. Indeed for days following the event we received and ignored text messages and phone calls requesting we send the women's contacts. Zaynab sifted through the forms and commented on the men, praising a couple for their academic achievements. As we sat at the table Zaynab asked if anyone had found a potential husband. The women shook their heads or kept quiet. I turned to Maryam to gauge her thoughts: *"They were alright you know. One guy is really academic, smart guy. Another has a good job, but I guess they're just not my cup of tea!"* Why? I pressed. *"Just not attractive to be quite frank with you! Plus I could see it from the way they spoke Somali that they were the cultural types. They look like the guys who'll just sit and expect you to do all the work! Plus they didn't seem interested in the deen"*. Non-Somalis, she suggested, were her next target, a thought that resonated amongst the young women that evening. The next event, they all agreed, would be open to all Muslims, not only Somalis. *"At least we did our best",* Zaynab added. *"We've started a good Sunna and will get rewards for it."* She had done her best to organise a "virtuous" *halal* event, and Islamically, her action would be judged for its intention not by its final outcome. Hopefully, her mother would also appreciate that she had limited it to Somalis only.

4.8 Conclusion

I have shown how the Sincerely Seeking marriage event is one of many techniques that young practising women employ to negotiate and reconfigure different modes of subjectification (choice, pleasing God, respecting kin) and different teleologies of the subject (autonomous, pious, or good Somali daughter). By focusing on these women's strategies and their pursuits for suitable husbands, I have emphasised how piety demands more than the implementation of Islamic ideals, as these young women draw in different ways on a range of coexisting discourses including: Islamic notions of spiritual love and companionate marriage, a liberal emphasis on choice, intimacy, and romance, aspirations for financial stability, and inherited ideas about Somali kinship, tradition and marriage.

Throughout, I have pointed to a set of historical transformations relating to the meaning of marriage and courtship in the diaspora. First-generation Somali women, who were raised in urban areas throughout the 1970s-80s, were exposed to the ideas of romantic love, companionship, and to ambivalent attitudes towards tradition. More recently, second-generation Somali women have begun to infuse notions of romantic love with ideas of spiritual and virtuous love, highlighting the ways in which reformist ideas of marriage are not necessarily in conflict with romantic ideals (Schielke 2010a; Masquelier 2005). Furthermore, young practising Somali women are moving away from an emphasis on clan, stressing the importance of choice and equity and negotiating the pressures exerted by Somali kin to marry a Somali man.

Although Islamic ideals are *discursively* prioritised above other elements in marriage, in practice this depends on a range of factors, including a woman's commitment to Islamic virtues and norms of conduct. Furthermore, as we have seen, these young women often remained ambivalent about their expectations: they emphasised the importance of economic stability and social mobility, but downplayed its significance when discussing Islamic ideals, or refused traditional men, and expressed the importance of "respecting" their kin's propositions. Finding a suitable professional, practising, Somali man who "fitted" all of these criteria proved to be a challenging, if not impossible, mission. As a result, second-generation women were often forced to compromise on some of their expectations. Throughout my fieldwork I witnessed a number of practising women opting to marry a non-Somali – often a convert – but also some who chose to marry a "professional" Somali man with a stable income in the hope that he would, with time, become more committed to his practice of Islam.

As we have seen in previous chapters, social change involves more than a process of embracing and combining a multiplicity of global or local discourses on love and marriage. These young women are doing more than simply mixing different elements from reformist teachings with liberal notions of romance in a process of "bricolage". Instead, they are reworking these discourses, and refashioning marriage in relation to enlarged visions of the self and self-other relations. Whilst the elements that are being transformed are those that are problematized in the contemporary moment, through imagining their relations with potential husbands, these young women constitute novel forms and possibilities of being in the world. Ethical practice, therefore, does

not only involve thought and reflection, but also includes fantasy and the imagination (Moore 2011). These women's imagined relations with potential spouses are neither the same as their horizontal, intersubjective relations with kin, nor their vertical engagements with God (Fadil 2008: 244-251), but they reside somewhere in-between. On the one hand, second-generation women emphasise that a relation with a future spouse ought to be based on choice, equity, romantic and spiritual love, and should therefore be prioritised over cultural constraints and above their relations with Somali kin. On the other hand, they point to the importance of "pleasing" or "submitting to God" through their marriage. A husband should not be prioritised over God, but loved for God, through Him and by Him; love for a husband should extend from one's relation with God. Nonetheless, the latter, as Sumaya makes clear, is often difficult to attain in practice. This self-husband relation is unstable and constantly reconfigured by these young women. By discussing, imagining, and fantasising about an ideal husband, these young women strategise and seek to shift their understandings of themselves. These practices shed light on the workings of the ethical imagination, as a site of creativity and potentiality, through which they can remake themselves and manage their relations with others. In Chapter Six, I pick up on these themes to explore how these young women imagine potential marriage partners in the temporal domain of the afterlife.

Figure 10: The Sincerely Seeking Leaflet

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Chapter 5: Mosque hopping and *iman* boosts: changing engagements with Islamic knowledge

5.1   Somali mosques and "mosque hopping"

As we waited patiently for Layla's mother, Fadumo, to make her way down from the flat, *Quranic* recitation blared out of the car stereo, drowning out the children's bickering. Layla sat behind the wheel, her head resting against the car window, with her three younger siblings and I squashed into the back seats. It was a warm summer evening during Ramadan 2010 and having filled our stomachs with *sambusa, baaris,* and *hilib* (samosa, rice, and meat) and cleaned the kitchen following a long afternoon of preparations, we were running late, as usual, for *tarawih* prayers.[86] Because Layla was the only licensed driver in the family, her filial duties often required her to taxi around different members of her large family to mosques, weddings, tuition classes or the homes of friends and family. Luckily, today we were only dropping them off at the local *Al-Huda* Somali mosque, a few minutes' drive from their flat (Figure 11). As Layla stopped her car in front of the mosque, the kids jumped out excitedly, ran and waved goodbye, while Fadumo struggled to catch up with them. As we sped off to the East London Mosque (Figure 12), I glanced back to see them slipping in with many other latecomers. Layla and I picked up a couple of friends on the way and finally parked the car in front of the mosque. The prayers had only just begun and we squeezed in amongst the crowd to find a spot, and touching shoulders with strangers as we joined the prayers.

Throughout Ramadan, Layla and her friends prayed in most of the large mosques in London, in what they called "mosque hopping", with a diversity of Muslims of different ages and ethnicities. Some of the more popular mosques included Goodge street mosque, Finsbury Park, Regents Park, and Brixton. Most evenings, following *Iftar* (fast-breaking meal), I drove around with Layla, picking up her friends on the way; this sometimes meant driving from Tower Hamlets to Newham, and then into the city centre. Most evenings, we experienced a new style of recitation, a different form of prayer or a new setting. Rarely did they consider attending the local Somali

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[86] Prayers performed in the evening during the month of Ramadan.

mosque, which for their mothers and younger siblings was a familiar and regular space of worship and sociality. Layla preferred not to attend these gatherings; she didn't like being recognised by her kin, as this distracted her from her worship. *"Everyone's like: 'oh you're the daughter of so and so'… They judge me and ask me why I'm not wearing the whole black jilbaab thing!"* she explained. The last time she had attended she had done so solely to please her father, who was eager for her to listen to a Somali talk, but had decided to wear *niqab* so as not to be recognised.

These different preferences between mother and daughter were not unique to Fadumo and Layla, and this Ramadan routine was far from exceptional. Throughout the year, second-generation practising Somali women rarely attended classes or lectures at the local Somali mosques, but instead drove around London to a wide range of events and classes, organised by independent organisations or mosques, which were delivered in English and aimed at younger Muslims. "Mosque hopping" was, in fact, a regular weekend activity and "seeking knowledge" was characterised by a relentless search for what they deemed authoritative knowledge.

Starting with the different spatial practices of first and second-generation Somali women – attending Somali mosques and "mosque hopping" – I argue that these are indicative of two contrasting modes of engagement with religious knowledge. They reveal changing ideas of what constitutes authoritative knowledge, and transformed expectations of what knowledge is expected to provide.[87] By tracing continuities and discontinuities across these two generations, I point to a series of historical reconfigurations in order to explore first, where and how knowledge is transmitted and consumed, and second, the mechanisms used to establish, and modes employed to relate to, authoritative knowledge.

The chapter is organised as follows. I first begin by contrasting the first-generation's forms of learning and modes of relating to knowledge with the second-generation's critiques of these processes and their own forms of learning. Older first-generation women have only recently begun to engage with Islamic texts with the aim of reading

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[87] Jensen (2006: 652) explores how converts in Europe "shop around" for knowledge. As I elaborate throughout, "mosque hopping" is not indicative of free choice, but a liberal mode of subjectification based on choice, which is, however, limited by an Islamic discursive tradition.

and reciting, but also understanding, and applying them to their own practice. Previously, throughout their upbringing in the Somali regions, emphasis was solely on memorisation and recitation and on learning religious practices through observing kin. As I discussed in Chapter Two, most older women now understand religion to be different to, yet constitutive of, Somali culture, hence their preferences for Somali mosques.

I subsequently turn to the younger second-generation. There has been a tendency in the literature on the Islamic reform to portray young Muslims as engaged in a reflexive, self-conscious, and rational form of Islam, as opposed to their parents who are bound by a non-reflexive, embodied engagement with knowledge (Jouili & Amir-Moazami 2006). This juxtaposing, however, does not fully capture the experiences of first-generation Somali women. It should instead be seen as strategy for "authentication" that is constitutive of a tradition of renewal and reform and opposes a traditional Islam with a true, authentic, Islam (Deeb 2006). In what follows, I explore the ways this strategy is employed by the younger generation, in order to make sense of their own change and to distance it from that of their mothers.

I investigate the wide range of spaces of learning, and the scholars with whom these young women engage, and highlight the processes involved in "hopping" or selecting mosques. I then elaborate on three intersecting modes of subjectification that are crucial to my informants' engagements with knowledge: a liberal concept of choice and autonomy, a submission to Islamic forms of reasoning and to structures of authority, and an experience of affect. The ability of particular forms of knowledge to facilitate or transmit these modes, determines whether my informants consider them authoritative. An experience of affect and potentiality is, I argue, crucial in determining any long-term commitment to knowledge.

Recent sociological and anthropological scholarship on Islam in Europe has argued that with a growing objectification, fragmentation, and pluralisation of authorising discourses and institutions, Islam has become increasingly individualised. Scholars have treated individualisation as an indication that Muslims are engaging in debates, asserting their interpretations, and hence integrating and adapting to European structures (Cesari 2003; Mandaville 2001; 2003). Others have investigated individualisation as a dimension of agency – as a social fact to be observed and

measured. Roy (2004), for example, has argued that globalisation and Westernisation, and the concomitant loss of social authority and a system of social and juridical coercion, has resulted in the task of seeking knowledge falling onto individuals. A democratisation of the religious sphere, Roy cautions, does not, however, necessarily result in "critical" liberal or secular discourse. Nonetheless, it has led to a privatisation of religiosity stressing the individual and the inner self, and a shift from focusing on norms to emphasising ethics and values (*ibid* 2004: 191).

My interest is not in unravelling whether young practising Somalis are becoming more individualised, or more European. Rather, following recent scholarship, I argue that knowledge is a condition for becoming pious, and therefore engagement with knowledge is both deliberative and disciplinary (Hirschkind 2006; Jouili & Amir-Moazami 2006). As Jacobsen (2011b: 293-4) notes in relation to Muslims in Norway, the fragmentation of authority structures does not result in the autonomous appropriation of the Islamic tradition, but in "a complex and structured process of contestation" in which authorities are simultaneously subjected to, challenged and resisted. Nor should the practice of "mosque hopping", and personal choice, be seen as disembodied from authorising discourses and Islamic structures of authority. Following Fadil (2008: Chapter 2), I treat my informants' emphasis on individually choosing a mosque, scholar, or interpretation, as a mode of subjectification grounded in a liberal ethos of autonomy and authenticity, which coexists and intersects with a submission to the Islamic tradition, modes of reasoning, and structures of authority. Processes of individualisation are, thus, modes of engagement that should not be divorced from institutionalised Islam (Peter 2006; Amir-Moazami & Salvatore 2003).

I move beyond an emphasis on reason and choice to argue that a sustained commitment to a source of knowledge is primarily related to whether it transmits a feeling of potentiality, excitement, and euphoria: affect is a crucial component of what, for these young women, determines authoritative knowledge (see section 1.7). The practice of "mosque hopping" is ultimately determined by the affect – or "*iman* boost" in my informants' words – transmitted by a particular source of knowledge, but it is ultimately grounded in, and limited by, a commitment to Islamic structures of authority and normative ideals.

By drawing on one of the young women's most popular scholars, *Sheikh* Ibrahim, I suggest that authority rests not only on his ability to draw on Islamic scholarship, and on what my informants term Western ideas of knowledge, but also on his ability to engender affect and a feeling of potential self-transformation. This importance of affect in Islamic learning must be understood as grounded within the Islamic pedagogical tradition, whereby emotions, evoked in sermons or lessons, are constitutive of a project of ethical self-disciplining (Deeb 2006; Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2001: Chapter 4). As I have argued in Chapter One (section 1.7), this remains, however, a formal idea of affect whereby the Islamic discursive notion of affect is conflated with people's affective experiences. My work points to the importance of intensity and excitement, which is grounded in these traditions, but is also a feeling that these young women describe as "high *iman*" or "*iman* boosts" and that they believe to be transformative. As I have argued thus far in the thesis, "shifts in subjectification" which engage with the ethical imagination, project the self forward, and create hope, which, in turn, animates these self-transformations. A long-term commitment to knowledge is therefore dependent on whether it transmits this potentiality and hence facilitates these self-transformations.

Finally, I elaborate on the intersections between these three ways of relating to knowledge by drawing out the ways that these young practising women debate different criteria for assessing the validity and authority of knowledge. "Mosque hopping" is ultimately structured around these three modes, but the relationships between them are often a source of disagreement and negotiation. Through debates with like-minded friends, these young women both reinforce normative ideas about Islamic knowledge, whilst including and articulating a range of new criteria on which their assessments are based.

5.2   Reading the *Quran* in Somali

Every Thursday evening, Nimo's husband drove his children, wife, and his friend's wife, Sofia, to *Quran* lessons, in their local Somali mosque in Islington.[88] Frequently advertised on Somali satellite TV channels, the Somali mosque, which had sprung up

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[88] Sofia and Nimo are introduced in Chapter 2 (sections 2.3-2.3.3)

in the last year thanks to donations from the local Somali community, runs weekly *Quran* lessons for both children and adults. The lessons for women, which I attended with Nimo and Sofia, were in Somali and were frequented by over twenty middle-aged first-generation Somali women. The mosque had only just opened, and still smelt of fresh paint. The women sat in a circle on the ground, in a simple room on the top floor of the mosque, where the furniture consisted simply of a red carpet and white washed walls. The teacher, Aziza, also taught *Quran* to older women at one of the local community centres on Sunday afternoons, and organised informal lessons in Somali women's homes. The class followed a similar format every week, focusing primarily on reciting and memorising the *Quran*. In turn, the women repeated passages from the *Quran*, with Aziza correcting their vocalisation and pronunciation. She played a cassette tape to demonstrate the correct pronunciation, used diagrams to explain where in the oral cavity and throat one pronounced certain sounds, and referred them to a Somali-language textbook for the rules for correct pronunciation and recitation (*tajweed*). In one of the first lessons in September just after Ramadan, Aziza explained to the women the importance of correct recitation: "*The Quran helps you when you die… It's like a cloud when the weather is hot. Every word learnt to perfection will be rewarded.*" The class, which lasted over two hours, usually concluded with the Somali translation of the pronounced passage of the *Quran* or *hadith*, and a brief explanation of the meaning of the text followed by a short discussion.

These lessons conveniently coincided with the classes arranged for Somali children, which were also very similar in content and structure.[89] The classes were mixed, with approximately 80 children divided into classes of 15-20 students. Because these classes are run by, and for, Somalis, religious education becomes equated, for many youngsters, with ethnicity and culture. The students are taught, in a combination of English and Somali, how to read, recite, and memorise the *Quran*. Throughout the class, the children are instructed on the meaning of the *Quran,* the 40 *hadiths,* and the *seerah* (life of the Prophet), as well as the fundamentals of their faith and obligatory

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[89] Typically Somali children, between the ages of 8-16, attend *madrasa* at least once or twice a week, although this varies with different families. Because of the scarcity of Somali mosques, many organise informal classes in the teacher's home, where parents pay a small contribution of approximately £5 per student per week.

practices. Nimo's daughter summarised succinctly the structure and purpose of the lesson: *"We recite the Quran… they teach us to pray, and things we should and shouldn't do."* This rule-based approach to teaching was further reinforced when Sofia's younger daughter showed me her class notebook, after a year of attending classes. The first part was divided into five sections, each focusing on a different pillar of Islam, and in the introductory section she had neatly written, *"Muslims must do the five pillars if they want to be good Muslims, please Allah, and be happy in the hereafter… in order to get to paradise and not be threatened by Shaitan."* The second part was dedicated to transcribing the *hadith* in English. Each *hadith* was accompanied by a few short sentences elaborating on the virtues and vices in Islam.

In the last 10-15 years, Somali mosques have sprung up across London and many older Somali women attend weekly classes or weekend lectures in Somali at these centres.[90] *"These days, everyone is learning, even old people. We all became more religious when we came to Europe… When I came to this country, that's when I started going to classes, learning Arabic, how to write, and how to translate"* Farhia, a woman in her late 40s, explained. Because few older women are fluent in English or Arabic, these places of learning allow Somali women to access and understand Islamic scriptures, as well as provide a familiar environment and a space of socialisation with friends and relatives. Somali *Quran* lessons are also run in most of the major mosques in London,[91] and many women arrange for female teachers to attend informal gatherings in the privacy of their homes. Most of these classes focus on reading, reciting, and memorising the *Quran*.

Furthermore, Somali translations of the *Quran*, as well as textbooks such as the one mentioned above, are widely available in major Islamic bookshops. Women who are too busy to attend lessons and lectures read the *Quran* in Somali in their spare time, or listen to tapes or CDs of *Quranic* recitation. As Halimo explained to me, *"When I came here, I started learning. I didn't go to classes. I bought CDs of the Quran, or*

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[90] By Somali mosque I mean a place of worship run and attended by majority Somalis and usually administered by a Somali *imam*. Some examples include *Al-Huda* mosque in Stepney Green (Figure 11), Tottenham mosque, or Islington mosque.

[91] For example, the East London Mosque runs weekly *Quran tafsir* (explanation) classes in Somali (Figure 12).

CDs in Somali and I listened, on my own." When I first met Sofia she was reading books in both Somali and English, and she showed me her two favourites: *Women in Islam* and *Heroes of Islam*. However, this was rare amongst many of the Somali women I met, and most gained their knowledge by attending the gatherings I described above, discussing Islam with their friends and relatives, or listening to one of the many Somali satellite TV channels, or to *Islam channel* or *Peace TV,* in English.

As I have elaborated upon throughout, first-generation Somali women's engagement with textual knowledge is only a recent phenomenon, which has led to their conscious appropriation of the *hijab*, the practice of prayer, and other religious obligations, as well as an engagement with a reformist discourse that separates authentic Islam from cultural practices. Since coming to the UK, some Somali women like Nimo and Halimo have begun to criticise their former education and emphasise the importance of engaging directly with religious texts. Whereas in the past, religious knowledge was, like culture, transmitted through embodied practices, knowledge is now learnt formally by engaging with Islamic texts, and referring to religious specialists. In Chapter Two (section 2.3.1) I explained how the textualisation and objectification of knowledge amongst first-generation Somali women has led many to differentiate religion from culture; whilst the former is based on scriptural authority or specialists of this knowledge, the latter is transmitted through personal relations. I once pestered an old Somali woman in her 80s – Nimo's mother's age – about her knowledge of the afterlife. She responded in Italian, "*You should read the Quran, Somalis don't know these things.*" However, it is important to note the diverse spectrum of engagements amongst first-generation women. Whilst some solely attend *Quranic* recitation classes, others read a range of Somali or English books on Islam, or listen to sermons and classes, and reason about the content of these in ways quite similar to the practices of the second-generation.

Towards the end of one of the Thursday *Quran* lessons that Sofia and Nimo attended at the Islington mosque, Aziza, the teacher, made a comment that was unusual, given the focus of the classes: "*It is not enough to know the Quran, we must also believe from the heart. The Prophet told a man he would go to heaven even if he didn't know the Quran perfectly provided he forgave and helped others. God forgave him for not*

knowing the Quran." Inculcating practices and correct dispositions, Aziza emphasised, was more important than being able to recite the *Quran*. The former, she intimated, arose from inner faith, and a proper understanding of the religion. Although she had spent most of the lesson focusing on *Quranic* recitation, Aziza was suggesting to the women to focus on the content of the religion – to engage with the teachings of the *Quran*. Sofia nodded in agreement, "*belief and doing good things is most important*", she whispered to me. Later that evening, we discussed her religious change with her first-generation Somali friends. Nimo reflected on her past:

> "*We learnt Quran and hadith off by heart, but we didn't know the meaning. I knew some before, but I didn't know like now. If you learn and know meaning you learn that hijab, praying, and fasting during Ramadan are compulsory. You learn to do good things, forgive, not backbite… but before we didn't know, we didn't understand, so we wore hijab one day and then threw it away. Now we know the aya (Quranic verse), so we know we have to do it.*"

Only since moving to the UK have they begun to engage with texts differently. The aim is to read the *Quran* in Somali, understand the meaning of texts, and employ that knowledge to reflect on, reason about, and correct one's practices and behaviour towards others.

For many of these women their previous "lack of knowledge" had meant a conflation of religious and cultural practices, and what they termed an "ignorance" regarding proper knowledge and practice. I have elaborated at length on this argument in Chapter Two, and explored the ways a range of different women make sense of the differences or overlaps between the notions of culture and religion. Here, I focus on the ways these reformist discourses have impacted on their knowledge practices. Islamic Knowledge, for some of these older women, is seen as constitutive of being Somali; whilst for others it is only compatible with, but not necessarily constitutive of, being Somali. What they have learnt to do in the UK is to recognise and self-consciously reason about scriptures, in order to identify and correct their everyday practices. For the large majority of these women, seeking knowledge consists in learning to recite the *Quran*, consulting Somali translations of the scriptures, and trusting Somali authoritative figures to interpret and explain the meanings of the texts.

5.3   "For my mum it comes with the culture"

Despite the changing engagement with Islamic knowledge experienced by the first-generation of Somali women, young second-generation practising women, raised in the UK, differentiate their own engagements with knowledge, from those of their mothers, and even identify deficiencies in their mother's education with some of their own earlier religious instruction. Layla, who I mentioned in the initial vignette, felt she had learnt a lot of facts as a teenager, but had never been taught "*What Islam was all about*", whilst Maryam had only learnt to recite a couple of *sura* (chapters from the *Quran*), thanks to an aunt who had also taught her how to pray. In their opinion, their knowledge was superficial, focused around rules and obligations that rarely explained the reason why certain practices were necessary. "*I used to go to madrasa as a child, but I hated it. I don't think I was taught Islam properly. It was so boring, it didn't make me understand the religion at all… reading Arabic, a language I didn't even understand!*" Maryam explained.

As I describe in the introduction, Layla refused to attend the local Somali mosque with her mother, but instead drove to the larger, and more diverse, East London mosque, in the company of her friends. She did not find the forms of learning in Somali mosques particularly engaging, or relevant to her life. Often delivered in Somali, she felt the language, style, and content did not suit her Western tastes. She also disagreed with what she regarded as cultural modes of relating to knowledge (see sections 2.4 & 2.5). Discussing the attitude of older Somali women, and particularly her mother, towards religion, Layla pointed out that the excessive focus on the implementation of practices was a way of conforming to others' behaviour. She explained that "*Islam isn't about restrictions, doing this, doing that, wearing jilbaab. It's more about loving and connecting with God.*" She also thought that the women in the mosque were "cliquey", not welcoming to non-Somalis, and excessively preoccupied with cultural concerns; they spent too much time judging each other and discussing clan and family matters – all things Layla found irrelevant and distracting. In short, Somali mosques had a contrasting notion of religious knowledge and tended to confuse religion with Somali culture.

This critique of the cultural practice of Islam was reiterated by Hamda, a young woman in her 20s, who had started encouraging her mother and younger sisters to

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practice Islam more seriously, and to pray regularly. However, she continued to see a divergence in the way she and her mother practised:

> "I think for my mum and her generation it is sometimes a by-product of who they are. It's a given. It comes with the culture. She didn't start wearing hijab until she came here. So I think when she came here she made more of an effort to practise her religion. But with our generation we made an active intent to go to lessons, classes, to learn the Quran, the meaning. That's not present in my mum and her generation."

According to Hamda, her mother practised not because she intellectually, critically, and spiritually engaged with knowledge, but because she had inherited it from her culture and unquestioningly accepted knowledge from Somali religious authoritative figures. Hamda contrasted her mother's "effort to practice" here in London, with her own "intent to understand"; her mother had begun implementing practices, but without fully and consciously reasoning about, or understanding, the meaning of scriptures. Hamda was, in fact, downplaying some of the changes experienced by the older generation, which I described in the previous section, in order to position herself as engaged with Islamic knowledge in a reflexive and authentic way. Interestingly, this was also a critique that the older first-generation Somali woman had made of her own parents (see section 2.3.1).

Therefore, although some older women are engaging with the meaning of Islamic texts with the aim of perfecting their practice, as I highlighted earlier, many young second-generation women understand their mothers' learning as inadequate and as solely, and overly, concerned with enacting obligations. When I questioned Khadija, a young woman in her mid-20s, in an interview, about how her *iman* was different to her mother's, she replied:

> "I do something whilst understanding the reason. If you do something and you don't know the purpose and value it's not really there is it? If you learn something you want to implement it right? I said to my mum, 'you went umrah and what have you changed from that?' My family – all they do are the 5 pillars. They don't want to know extra. And you know what, we should really truly seek knowledge and understand things. There's no

purpose in doing something and not understanding it cause the meaning of it is lost.

According to Khadija, her mother focused solely on fulfilling basic religious obligations. Although she may have had some understanding of the *Quran*, she did not engage with knowledge so as to fully understand the reasons, purpose, and value behind practices. This was not, according to Khadija, the "true" and authentic way of seeking knowledge. These young women frequently criticise their mothers for seeking knowledge solely from a single source, and for trusting and unquestionably accepting Somali *Sheikh* as authoritative.

Young practising women often accuse their mothers of failing to focus on their own internal transformations and their spirituality (section 3.4). Zaynab, for example, compared her approach to faith with that of her mother:

"My mum is very disciplined, she goes to talks at 8:30am, fasts every Thursday. I can't do that. Her iman is higher than mine I guess, but we're also very different. My mum has learnt about the heart, but she works from the outside-in. She's more about doing things, praying, hijab, actions, and all about the haram and halal…"

For Zaynab, her mother was practising and had learnt to correct her practice of Islam, but had not worked on her spiritual and emotional connection with God, which was crucial to these second-generation women. She had not transformed herself into a practising subject by engaging with knowledge in ways Zaynab deemed "proper" or authoritative.

These criticisms directed at the older generation, as I have sought to illustrate, are not representative of the first-generation's actual engagements with knowledge. Although many older women, such as Hamda's mother, are taking the lead from their own daughters' engagements with religious knowledge, some women see their daughters' criticisms as an attack on Somali scholars and Somali culture. As I mentioned in the original vignette, Layla was often encouraged to attend the local Somali mosque. Her parents hoped that by encouraging her to attend these mosques she would combine her religious fervour with an attachment and loyalty to Somali kinship and religious

structures of authority. Her father also perhaps hoped that attending the mosque would increase the likelihood of her finding a suitable Somali husband.

5.4 New forms of learning

Education has been central to Islamic reform, and, as I elaborate below, knowledge (*'ilm*) in the Islamic tradition is inseparable from faith and action. Studying is seen as a means of cultivating faith, and faith emerges, and can grow, through knowledge. Young practising women often speak about "seeking knowledge" as marking a particular stage in their lives. The phrase is employed to refer to a range of practices – from reading or listening to Islamic sources, to attending classes and lectures, as well as to differentiate their engagement with knowledge from that of their parents.

Sheikh Ibrahim, one of the young women's favourite scholars, whom I mention in more detail below, once described the essence of "seeking knowledge":

> "The first words that Allah revealed to the Prophet were the words, 'to recite.' And not a recitation that is based on custom or culture, but read in the name of Your Lord. It's a sacred recitation. The Prophet has stressed the importance of knowledge. We're an *umma* of knowledge. We're an *umma* of learning…"

The *Sheikh*'s statement encapsulates the important connection between knowledge and the transcendent *umma*. It echoes many of these young women's critiques of their mothers, and their emphasis on abandoning culture or custom, for a transcendental form of knowledge.

Often, this quest for authentic knowledge coincides with practising Islam and with attending university with young, like-minded, Muslims. As Anab explained:

> "From the age of 18 I started thinking: Why am I a Muslim? Is it because I was born into the religion? And I realised it was something that happened to me rather than something that I chose. With Somalis, when you ask questions to the elders they answer in a very rigid way. They say: you have to do it cause you'll go to hell! So that didn't do it for me, so I got in touch with young Pakistani Muslims who lived in my area and I

started going to conferences, lectures, reading books… and that's when I discovered that there were Islamic books written in English! Tapes, DVDs, videos, everything! It was really interesting! And at these conferences I met young people who were wearing hijab and practising religion."

Anab had realised that Islam was something she had unquestionably accepted, not willingly chosen. In making sense of herself, she had turned religion into an object of intellectual inquiry, a process common amongst newly practising women (Jacobsen 2011a; 2011b; Roy 2004). As I pointed out in the earlier section, many young women had, like Anab, found the learning they had received as children, which focused on the recitation of the *Quran* and the learning of rules and regulations, unsatisfactory. These teachings had taught them to perform certain obligations, but had not encouraged them to fully comprehend their faith. "Seeking knowledge", for Anab and many other young women, signified a jettisoning of Somali culture and their families as sites of learning in favour of learning through the English medium, and amongst young Muslims of a similar age, and the wider transcendent *umma*.

It is the importance attached to choosing amongst a diverse range of forms of knowledge and modes of argumentation and interpretation that most notably distinguishes these young women from their mothers. Most of these young women "hop" around the "field" of Islamic education, as Bowen (2010: 108-109) describes it, within which teachers and institutes differentiate themselves by degree of professionalisation, choice of language, and choice of sources (*ibid* 2010: 87). [92] They experiment with different forms and styles of learning, contending that each fulfil different needs, and attend to different aspects of their self-development. I elaborate on each of the different forms of Islamic education in turn.

First, and most importantly, my informants have benefited from the recent surge in independent institutes and organisations that have flourished in London in the last decade. Like many young practising women, Anab began attending conferences and

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[92] Bowen (2010: 109) employs Bourdieu's concept of the "field" to describe Islamic education in France, suggesting that, in contrast to Bourdieu, it does not entail a notion of quantifiable symbolic capital, nor is it a bounded religious field distinct from the secular sphere. Rather, it involves "a set of repertories and pedagogical possibilities all having to do with 'education' but with reference to various ideas about Islam and to various strategies for advancement within French society."

lectures, and frequenting classes run mostly by independent Islamic organisations, which she discovered thanks to her newly acquired networks of friends. Most young Somali women do not understand Arabic and therefore attend places of learning which emphasise the English medium. These organisations, which attract a range of young Muslims and are based across London in places ranging from rented out conference centres to privately owned buildings, are becoming increasingly popular amongst second-generation Muslims in the UK. Although the South Asian Deobandi and Barelwi traditions of reform are the most widespread in London, these organisations represent a wide range of Islamic "schools of thought" and scholarship from across the Muslim world (Birt 2005; Werbner 2004). Teaching styles and methods are diverse ranging from learning directly from Islamic scriptures, to approaching the Islamic Sciences from a range of religious texts, and employing texts to focus on a particular theme or problem usually relevant to the lives of Muslims in the UK. The latter form of teaching and learning is becoming increasingly popular amongst my informants and, similar to that of British higher education, emphasises critical evaluation and self-directed learning, and adopting topic-based teaching with a variety of sources (Gillat-Ray 2006: 63). Many of the young women frequent institutions in which teaching is action-oriented, with an emphasis on self-improvement and *da'wa* (spreading awareness). In these institutes teaching is generalist, often focused on "real-world problems" (see Bowen 2010: 86-87). For example, most of my informants were not concerned with gaining an official qualification, but to learn in order to further their own personal development.

Second, young second-generation women may also occasionally attend mosques or institutes that provide traditional teachings in Arabic and the Islamic Sciences.[93] Most of the young practising women attended a *tajweed* course, and a couple were learning Arabic in order to engage directly with Islamic texts and scriptures. Only one of my informants was training to become a recognised *'alim* (scholar), and had signed up for an intensive evening professional course with an independent Institute in East London. However, she abandoned the course after two years, due to the workload and other family commitments.

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[93] For example, The East London Mosque, Taybuun Institute, and Ibn Jabal Institute, provided such courses.

Third, whilst formal lessons provide much of the initial knowledge for newly practising women, my informants often organise *halaqa* (Islamic circles) sessions as informal ways of sharing and learning Islamic knowledge from like-minded individuals. These sessions also strengthen the idea of gaining authentic knowledge by engaging with other young Muslim friends, in contrast to the older generation who learn from other Somalis or from kin. Habibah, a young 20-year-old Bengali woman, for example, organised a fortnightly circle in her local community centre, over the course of two months. She invited most of her practising and non-practising friends, including many of my Somali informants. She hoped that by inviting non-practising friends, she might encourage them to begin seeking and implementing knowledge. Every fortnight, the young women rotated the role of chairing the session. My informants based their talks on lectures or courses they had recently attended: Layla spoke about knowledge and prayer, Zaynab about the diseases of the heart, Habibah about *iman* and the difficulties of practising. "*These sessions are great, cause we can discuss the issues we face as British Muslims practising our faith*" Habibah explained. Her comment highlights the differences between these sessions and those of their mothers; these *halaqas* were based around a particular topic that was relevant to these young women's everyday lives and addressed the challenges of practising Islam in the UK.

Similarly Nadifa, a young woman in her 30s, organised *seerah* (the study of the life of the Prophet) sessions at her house on Sunday afternoons. These sessions consisted of reading and taking notes on a passage from the book *Muhammad: Man and Prophet* by Abdil Salahi. The aim was to draw on the incident described, relate it to one's own life, and discuss how best one could apply and embody the Prophet's behaviour and characteristics. These sessions lasted less than an hour, but the rest of the afternoon provided an opportunity for socialising, relaxing, and often sharing food and watching Sunday television.

Fourth, independent study is also crucial to the process of "seeking knowledge", and many of my interlocutors shared and circulated amongst themselves mp3 recordings of various scholars, YouTube and Halaltube videos, internet sites, books, and DVDs. Layla, for example, would often fall asleep at night listening to Hamza Yusuf's talks, whereas Anisa would walk around the streets of East London with the words of

Anwar Awlaki in her ears, while Nimo did the housework listening to *Quranic* recitation.[94] Through these media these young women listen to English-speaking scholars from America to Saudi Arabia, reinforcing a feeling of connection to a wider transnational community of knowledge. Carrying electronic recordings, on their phones and iPods allowed them to select whichever speaker they find most emotionally engaging at a particular moment in time, thus enabling them to switch easily depending on their personal moods and tastes.[95]

Finally, these young women also consume non-Islamic sources. On another occasion, Anab, who had been practising for over seven years, explained to me how she no longer attended lectures and consumed Islamic books and recordings as avidly as she had done when she first started practising Islam. More recently she had taken to attending self-help courses:

> *"In the last couple of years I've done loads of self-development courses. The landmark forum, you do a three day course where you learn to develop yourself and work through issues you've had in your life; you do workshops on commitment and discipline, on being adventurous in life, letting go. I don't think they clash with religion at all for me, coming up with lists of improvements…"*

For Anab, different sources of knowledge, not only specifically Islamic ones, could be employed as long as they were used with the ultimate purpose of disciplining the self and inculcating pious dispositions. Similarly, Ifrah often consulted a blog entitled *The Change Blog* that offers advice on how to go about leading a life that is "radically different" from one's current life. These consumption practices indicate that what is at stake is not solely related to Islamic reform, but is part of a quest for self-

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[94] Hirschkind (2006) similarly describes how, amongst pious Muslims, listening to cassette sermons does not solely entail accumulating factual knowledge, but also involves cultivating a set of affective-volitional dispositions.

[95] It is worth mentioning the transnational dimension of these different forms of learning. As Bowen (2004b: 882) points out, these Islamic public actors are part of a "transnational Islam" as "a public space of reference and debate". This transnational space constituted through the circulation of ideas, diverse modes of reasoning, debate and contestation, is not tied to specific places, nor is it "post-national" or dependent on migration patterns.

transformation. As I have argued throughout the thesis, the message of reform is appealing precisely because it offers a means for radical change. Knowledge, therefore, is meant to assist these young women, at least temporarily, in their processes of self-transformation.

In the following section, I elaborate on this theme by exploring in detail the content of my informants' most popular set of classes, offered by a Liverpool-based scholar, *Sheikh* Ibrahim Osi-Efa. I point to the importance of the experience of affect, which is grounded in, but not determined by, the Islamic tradition in the women's engagement with what they deem to be authoritative knowledge.

5.5 *Sheikh* Ibrahim: affect and self-transformation

In September 2010, a few days after *Eid-ul-Fitr,* news spread that the Crawley Educational Institute (CEI) was opening a new academy in London. CEI is known amongst my informants for its close connections with centres of Islamic learning in Tarim, Yemen. The lessons offered in London were free, with a single payment of £50 for the course material. As part of a three-year course aimed at young professionals, the academy was running weekly evening lessons, from 7-9pm at a Quaker institution (Friends House) in Euston, on the Islamic Sciences.[96] Advertised by a professional website and a Facebook group, the course was based around Islamic scholarly texts, and on traditional styles of learning, and was intended solely for the acquisition of personal knowledge, offering no final qualification or *ijazah*. The timing and venue conveniently suited my informants, who had been searching for a course they could attend regularly that would fit around their work schedule. When they learnt that *Sheikh* Ibrahim would be delivering some of the classes, they jumped at the opportunity to sign up.

The *Sheikh* was well known and respected not only for the depth of his knowledge and his personal piety, but also for his charisma. Born and raised in Liverpool, England he has also studied in Yemen, Syria, and Mauritania and is the founder of

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[96] These included *Tafsir, Hadith, Shmail of Imam Tirmidhi* and *Aqida,* and were taught by a range of different scholars.

several Islamic initiatives in the UK.[97] Renowned for his knowledge of the Islamic sciences, he was a source of inspiration for many of these young women, who often travelled across London to attend his talks, or exchanged online videos, or recordings of his lectures. Every week for a year, I travelled in Zaynab's car journeying from east London to Euston. With *nasheed* (Islamic vocal) music playing on the car stereo, these journeys to and from *Sheikh* Ibrahim's classes not only provided an opportunity for socialisation, but also a moment for sharing and exchanging our personal experiences and opinions of the classes.

On the first day of the course, as I arrived with a group of four young Somali women, we were directed to the basement room of Friends House, where the room was bustling with energy; some were finishing off their *maghrib* prayers, while others were catching up with friends they hadn't seen since the start of Ramadan. As was typical of these events, the room was split in two by large boards, separating the women from the men. Rows of chairs on both sides faced a stage furnished with a table, chair, and microphone for the teacher and, at the back, a large projection screen. We signed our name at the entrance and swiftly walked with our heads down, past the men's section, to sit in the final rows of the women's section. Many of the women were between the ages of 20-30, from a range of different backgrounds, including British converts. Recognising some of the female attendees from some of the other talks by the scholar, we exchanged a few brief greetings before a prompt start to the class.

Sheikh Ibrahim's classes took place fortnightly and were the most popular and best attended of the CEI classes. Lasting two hours, the *Sheikh* dedicated each class to one or more chapters of the *Book of Numbers*. Written by Al *Imam* Muhammad Umar Bahraq al Hadrami, the book touches on various aspects of Islam, ranging from jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to spirituality (*tasawuuf*). The chapters are based around a poem and are arranged in numerical order, to aid memorisation of the text – something the

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[97] Sheikh Ibrahim Osi-Efa currently lives in Liverpool and works primarily in the UK. He is the founder of a range of Islamic initiatives including Ibn Abbas Institute, Starlatch Press, Badr Language Institute, and the Greensville Trust. He studied for three years in Syria and Mauritania, and for six years in Tarim, Hadramaut, Yemen, under al-Habib Kazim al-Saqqaf, al-Habib 'Ali al-Jifri and al-Shaikh 'Umar Husain al-Khatib (Radical Middle Way: n.d.).

Sheikh encouraged the students to pledge to do throughout the course and about which he circulated a weekly email reminder. Throughout the class, most of the women took extensive notes and some recorded the lectures on their phones.

On the first day, the *Sheikh* sat behind the table, his power-point presentation projected behind him, and began by reciting the *Basmala*[98] and a couple of verses from the *Quran*. His introductory class started by outlining the importance of knowledge: *"Knowledge comes with responsibility to teach and practise… it is concomitant with action, Allah does not befriend anyone who does not have knowledge or does not apply it…"* he explained.

> "There are those who speak of different types of intelligence, but what we're interested in is religious intelligence. Those with religious intelligence abandon the world, they give up the hope of staying on this earth, and they embrace the hereafter. These are the people of deen (religion), who find it hard to think outside of it. Those who engage in true knowledge are never lonely, it becomes sustenance of the soul all the way through death and the afterlife."

He continued by contrasting secular education with religious knowledge, and critiquing the Islamic studies courses offered by British Universities:

> "The problem with studying Islamic knowledge at places like SOAS is that their mission statement has nothing to do with creating God-fearing people. This is not religious knowledge. Before you study subjects like the natural sciences, you must study the sacred. This will protect you from incorrect interpretations of the universe."

The *Sheikh* then proceeded by supporting his statement with textual evidence from the *Quran* and *hadith*, citing both the book of *hadith* and the chain of transmission, which are crucial to establishing the authenticity of Islamic sources of knowledge:

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[98] The phrase *b-ismi-llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīmi*, (In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful) is often pronounced before any class, lecture, or recitation.

"On the authority of Abu Darda: Whoever traverses a path in search of knowledge, God will make the path to paradise easy for him. Verily, the angels will lower their wings for the seeker of knowledge out of pleasure for what he does…"

According to the *Sheikh*, religious knowledge is different to secular knowledge; it does not entail an accumulation of facts or the development of particular skills, but involves cultivating a "religious intelligence". Knowledge creates "God-fearing people" and thus facilitates the individual's connection with God and with the transcendence of the afterlife and the *umma*. If applied appropriately, it provides "protection", and "sustenance for the soul" that can lead one to paradise; those who "seek knowledge" are ultimately rewarded. Furthermore, knowledge enables the believer to accept the volatility of this life and project herself to the future. Whilst this chapter is concerned with different understandings of knowledge, and forms of authority, Chapter Six deals with the way religious knowledge equips the believer to shift her own sense of temporality by disregarding the near future of life on earth, and projecting herself into the distant future in the hereafter.

Following the initial introductory class, in the subsequent session the *Sheikh* moved to a discussion of *wa'ad* (admonition). As the course outline informed us, this class aimed to:

"Nurture and create an environment which arouses heedless hearts and invigorates the resolve of the slothful... [To address] the direct causes of spiritual inactivity in order to make ears attentive to the light of prophecy that forms the essential content of this text" (Course outline).

One of the purposes of studying this book, the *Sheikh* explained, was to "place knowledge inside the heart… in order to motivate, to create sincere intentions." The purpose of *wa'ad* (admonition), he explained, was to dilate the heart, and make it more receptive to receiving knowledge. Drawing on Islamic traditional pedagogical models, which presume a particular relation between emotions, virtues, and actions (Mahmood 2005: 140), the *Sheikh* proceeded to instruct his audience about how to experience knowledge:

"One of the signs of the affected heart is the heart that begins to tremble, that is shaken by words. When the eyes fill with tears, the words inspire love for Allah and fear and hope for the afterlife. Knowledge should hit you inwards in the heart, and the eyes will start to swell as an outward sign… Human nature is to procrastinate, but the deen is immediate and we need to move swiftly to good deeds."

Again, this statement was followed by textual evidence from the *Quran*, and *hadith*, which he projected on the screen, allowing the students to note down the references. He then delivered his own *wa'ad* (admonition):

"Humans live in hope and fear of staying in this world, and are never ready to let go. But we need good deeds. We need metaphysical provisions for a long journey ahead. But time on this *dunya* (this world) is short! Death is near! Don't procrastinate!"

Following this warning, the *Sheikh* proceeded with a long, captivating, and emotionally charged, description of the Day of Judgement. The tone and content of each sentence was measured carefully so as to generate tension; his voice gradually ascended in some sentences but he interspersed this technique with a sporadic peppering of bellows, often causing jolts in the women. His eyes widened and he visibly became more agitated; he used his hands wildly to emphasise points, even banging the table for issues of particular pertinence. His imagery also created stirs in the audience, which could be expected given his depictions of the numerous disbelievers and sinners who will slip into the depths of hell as they cross the *sirat* (bridge or road) that traverses the summit of hellfire:

"Some will cross in a wink of an eye, like lightening, or a tornado. Others will fly over it, and then some will walk, crawl on their knees. Others will slip before they even set foot on it, with the dogs at the bottom, commanded to catch those who fall! All this relates to how quickly you implement knowledge here on earth! Abu Bakr, his faith never wavered, he'll cross like a tornado…"

His deep solemn voice, echoing across the room, made the audience shiver. The talk finished with a long *du'a* (supplicatory prayer), after which we all packed away our belongings and left in silence, visibly shaken by his performance. "*Wow, that was intense!*" Maryam whispered as we made our way out, "*I needed that! It freaked me out alright! It's good though, it makes me wake up and do things… won't be sleeping through fajr tomorrow!*" Ifrah nodded, her eyes damp from tears, "*That was inspiring, mashallah… you really feel you're there on the Day of Judgement, like you've lived it!*" As the *Sheikh* had intended, his talk had affected their "heedless hearts" inspiring fear and hope for the afterlife. We walked outside and as we sat in the car ready to go, Zaynab continued to ponder: "*I'm so scared of going to hell!! So so scared! I really don't do enough…*"

This form of admonitory talk (*wa'ad*) aims to cultivate a sensibility towards death and instil emotions and virtues of fear, sadness, and humility. Hirschkind (2006), in his ethnography of cassette sermons in Cairo, elaborates on the importance that members of the Islamic revival attach to cultivating a sensibility towards death, which they achieve through a series of techniques and practices of "death remembrance". Sermons encourage believers to learn about death, and to reflect on it, in order to live with "dead eyes" – with the constant presence of death. They enable a "tasting" (*dhawq*) of death, which involves constituting death as a habit of thought, heart, and body. The processes of refashioning one's sensory experience and infusing one's sensibility towards death with the correct emotions of fear, sadness, and humility are thought to open the believer's heart towards God (*inshirah*) (see Chapter Six).

Like in Hirschkind's (2006: 188-192) description, the pedagogical materials consumed by my informants, emphasise some aspects of death more than others. For example, these teachings often stress the imminence of the eschatological future by focusing on the cataclysmic events that are thought to precede and anticipate the "Final Day", and point to the anticipatory signs that have already begun to unfold (e.g. the eruption of the Icelandic volcano in 2010). This is typically coupled with a constant reminder of the brevity of life and the possibility of imminent death. There is frequently a focus on the terrors and torments of the period in the grave. Finally, teachings recount the details of the terrifying elements of the Day of Judgment, emphasising, for example, the solitude and complete isolation of the individual on

that day. In particular, my informants frequently remind themselves of the crossing of the bridge *(sirat)* over hellfire, across which all must cross before the final judgement. For those without faith or who have no good deeds, the bridge will appear thinner than a hair and they will plunge into the fire.

Ifrah explained to me how, having read Al-Ghazali's book *Remembrance of death and the Afterlife* and listened to *Sheikh* Anwar al-Awlaki on death and the afterlife, she had begun to regularly conjure and "make real" an image of the afterlife. Her narration remained very close to the scriptures:

> *"Then the bridge terrifies me, 'as thin as a string and as sharp as a needle.' People will literally be falling straight into hell from there. It's really freaky. Some people won't even make it... and I always think about the sirat. Your iman will be your torch, here on your forehead, so the more you have the easier it will be to cross."*

Perplexed as to why Ifrah would spend so much time thinking about, and visualising, death, I questioned her about it. She replied:

> *"I want to know. I want to be prepared for it so that I'm not confused when it happens. It motivates me if I know what's going to happen to us. I'm so scared about not knowing what's going to happen to me – about what God's going to do to me. I think about it so much. I read about it, and it freaks me out that I want to be prepared. It makes me scared but that's a good thing. At the same time, it makes me hopeful that I might make it to janna (paradise) instead."*

Although fear is more frequently emphasised in pedagogical settings, as it is thought to have a stronger impact on moral action, as Ifrah stressed, a believer ought to oscillate between hope *(al-raja)*, fear *(al-khauf)*, and love *(al-hubb)*. These emotions and virtues should not be assumed to arise spontaneously but may be cultivated as both modalities and motives for pious action (Mahmood 2005: 140) (see section 1.7).

Sheikh Ibrahim often complemented these admonitory sermons with his more frequent talks on love (*al-hubb*) for God and the Prophet. At one of the many lectures we attended on the Prophet, *Sheikh* Ibrahim explained:

> "Every time we look at the Messenger, we are being immersed in the beauty of the divine. Sometimes we may engage in His light and we become immersed in the majestic nature of the divine. The Prophet is the one who makes manifest, who clarifies the connection with Allah and the 99 qualities of Allah. Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, was asked, 'how was the actual character of the Messenger?' And she said: 'His character was the *Quran*.' He was the *Quran* who walked amongst people. So when we study the Prophet, we study the *Quran*, and when we study the *Quran* we study Allah."

These talks often revolved around the *hadith* of the Prophet's character (*shama'il*), or stories from the *seerah* (life of the Prophet). Drawing on traditional Islamic theology, the *Sheikh* explained how the Prophet embodied the divine qualities of God; he manifested attributes on earth, which were otherwise incomprehensible to the human mind. For the believer, knowledge of the Prophet should, by extension, also entail knowledge of God. A personal connection with, and love for, the "One Being" could be established through this knowledge, but this connection could also serve as a means of "knowing Him" better. As the *Sheikh* claimed, reason (*'aql*) had its limits, and one could not comprehend God solely with the use of the intellect. Hence, knowledge of God is not solely an accumulation of facts, but involves the cultivation of emotions and virtuous dispositions of love, hope, fear, and humility that will make one's heart more receptive to God (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005).

Knowing, however, must result in virtuous actions, as *Sheikh* Ibrahim explained, highlighting the connections between knowledge, faith, and action: "This is not about what you know, but how you are, your embodiment. Knowledge is about moving swiftly to good deeds." Maryam, in fact, was always careful not to attend too many classes. "*I'm not coming to this talk today*", she explained to me one day, "*I just need to implement what I've learnt so far, instead of piling and piling knowledge. You know, I'll be held accountable for this, I'll be questioned on what I did with all that*

knowledge.” Cautious of the responsibilities that came with acquiring knowledge, Maryam appreciated the importance of moving "swiftly to good deeds".

Whilst the *Sheikh* had alluded to the importance of accepting the limits of reason (*'aql*), during another class, and drawing on the work of Al-Ghazali, he elaborated on the important use of reason (*'aql*). Reason, he claimed, should serve the purpose of fashioning a pious self by channelling and employing the "good" to tackle the "bad forces" within the heart:

> "You are human by virtue of the soul, that metaphysical dimension that resides in the heart. Everyday Allah unleashes forces into your heart… you have to become equipped, through knowledge, at dealing with these bad forces that have already taken force in yourselves. Religion comes from within, listen to the good, this is defined through your knowledge… If good intentions occur within it [the heart] then the body, by extension, will move in a manner deemed appropriate…"

In the following Chapter (section 6.5) I elaborate in more depth on the Sheikh's reference to the heart and the limits of reason.

Following the classes on the Prophet, the young women left feeling excited and uplifted. This was a reaction I observed on many other occasions. *"Wow I needed that, needed that iman boost! That was amazing mashallah…"* Anisa commented, *"That was really exciting, I feel better!"* She had been feeling "low in *iman*" of late, and was certain that attending one of *Sheikh* Ibrahim's classes would help her recover the lost enthusiasm, and encourage her to pray more regularly. Sauda, similarly commented, *"These kinds of talks, they're good for me, really inspiring. I need the inspiring intellectual side of it, thinking through, working to better myself."* Amongst the first to introduce us to *Sheikh* Ibrahim, she had persuaded her friends to attend by emphasising the scholar's ability to evoke emotions of love for God:

> *"Sheikh Ibrahim really has that love for Allah, for the deen, and he transmits it to you. You know, spirituality is so important. Everything else comes easily if you have love in your heart… things like praying, wearing*

> *hijab, they'll seem like nothing if you have love for the Prophet and for Allah."*

Similarly, Layla, with whom I attended a similar class on the Prophet, added: "*The depth of his knowledge is incredible, mashallah. And he has so much love for the Prophet, and for Allah. You can feel it. You really feel it inside you… the way he describes the Prophet, the way He is.*"

Through the idiom of "*iman*", the young women were describing a feeling of potential connection with the transcendent – the visceral, spiritually uplifting affect which they experienced by attending these classes. They often discussed and compared their respective levels of *iman*; "*I'm on a high*" or "*I'm not feeling it*", were oft-repeated phrases, which corresponded to individual moods as well as varying levels of commitment, motivation, or inspiration. Ifrah compared and contrasted this affect with music: "*Music makes you experience highs, you feel so good, positive, like everything's alright. It's like when you feel you're high in iman, but it also darkens your heart, and it takes away time between you and Allah. You're meant to feel those emotions for the sake of Allah, not music.*" Although the same emotions were evoked, music, unlike religious talks, did not connect them with Allah and was therefore the wrong cause for their feelings. The importance of the transmission of this emotional experience, from these classes, was captured by Maryam's comment, "*Even if I'm not listening to the talk it's good to come to the classes… to get some inspiration.*" According to *Sheikh* Ibrahim, Islamic knowledge ought to be approached in specific ways: by employing reason "correctly", and learning to implement knowledge into their everyday practices, thus altering interior attitudes and dispositions.

As I have shown, these young women speak in terms of traditional Islamic conventions regarding emotions, actions, and reason in their projects of ethical self-fashioning. In particular, Ifrah's comments reveal how she appreciates the importance of inculcating virtuous dispositions and emotions that motivate her into action and make her more receptive to God. However, there is also another dimension that I wish to stress here. Although Ifrah's comments indicate that she is clearly rehearsing these pedagogical conventions, the affective experience of these emotions differs from the formal understanding of emotions that both Mahmood and Hirschkind develop in their analyses (see Chapter One, section 1.7). I argue that they conflate discursive

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traditions with the lived experiences of individuals implementing these norms and practices, thus neglecting the latter.

Instead, I suggest that my informants' experiences of *Sheikh* Ibrahim's lectures, as captured by their use of words such as excitement, inspiration and so on, are not solely a reflection of these discursive traditions. I contend that these emotional experiences of euphoria and excitement do much more than motivate these young women to embody a pious disposition. Rather, they capture the potentiality of radical transformation offered by the practise of Islam. These affective experiences, described as "high *iman*", result from shifts in subjectification, and are animating forces that reorient the self in time (Miyazaki 2004). In these instances, affect circulates and reverberates amongst the women. More than the content of the talks, what matters to these young women is the *Sheikh*'s ability to provide a feeling of potentiality, a feeling of the possibility of understanding themselves, and their relations with others, differently. Knowledge that creates this excitement is appealing, and therefore authoritative, in the long term.

5.5.1 Islamic scholarship

Thus far I have stressed how the practice of "mosque hopping" and seeking knowledge from a diverse range of sources is based on whether a particular scholar is able to instil virtuous emotions that open one's heart to God and produce an experience of excitement and potentiality. In this section, I elaborate further on the ways that "seeking knowledge" is embedded in, and limited by, the discursive traditions of Islam, structures of authority and Islamic forms of reason. I subsequently turn to explore the ways in which my informants debate and contest other criteria for establishing authority, including the extent to which knowledge ought to be Western in its form, style, and content.

In one of the last classes, during the final question and answer session, *Sheikh* Ibrahim, who had been discussing the life of Abu Thalib (an uncle of the Prophet) throughout the class, was asked by a student whether he regarded Abu Thalib a Muslim. The *Sheikh* responded: *"There are multiple hadith that speak about Abu Thalib and the ulama are in difference of opinion. But the vast majority of the ulama*

are in the opinion that Abu Thalib died as a believer." The student disagreed with the *Sheikh*, and the conversation continued as follows:

> Student: "But there's a *hadith* that says Abu Thalib will have fire on his chest."
>
> *Sheikh*: "No, the *hadith* says Abu Thalib will be placed in the shallow waters of the hellfire, and that *hadith* is *sahih* (sound). What does that say? Is it proof of *shirk* (sin of idolatry)? If we want proof of his *shirk* then show us proof… show him declaring loyalty to *hubab*, or to *manad*. You're not going to find loyalty to that. That *hadith* is actually a proof against… that is a punishment reserved for disobedient believers."

The *Sheikh* was warning the student against accusing others without authentic evidence. Instead, by referring to a *hadith sahih,* Ibrahim was drawing on traditional chains of transmission, which in Islam are used to ascertain the authenticity of *hadith* statements. In doing so, he offered authentic evidence to the student that the punishment awaiting Abu Thalib was one reserved for disobedient believers, not disbelievers. The student continued, *"But you can't say..."*

> *Sheikh*: "This is not an argument. If you open a book of *aqeeda* (creed) you will see that *jahannam* is the lowest *darakat* of hell. Let's ask Allah to open us up to understand the religion, amen, amen, amen…
> So, *jahannam*…"
>
> Student: "but…
>
> *Sheikh*: If you let me finish, it's called *adab* (etiquette)… (long pause) Eventually *jahannam* will be free of all those who have been punished. There are different opinions on this topic… (long pause)
>
> No one can stand and accuse others of being wrong, when the *ulama* disagree! That's a principle of religion, and *akhlas*… I wish I could do for the Prophet, what Abu-Thalib did for him. If you believe that, hold your tongue in *adab*. Tell us of what you did? We all stand before Allah with our opinions; let's just hope that our opinions concur with the religion. You take your opinion and hope that you stand in good faith with Allah. But whatever opinion you hold you must have *adab* with that opinion. And especially if you hold opinion against!

Following the class, Maryam, Layla and Ifrah discussed the incident on the way home. Maryam, who was amused and shocked by the arrogance of the student, could not believe he had almost angered the *Sheikh*, who always displayed composure and a virtuous character. "*That guy, he's so rude!*" she giggled. The young women often showed great reverence for scholars, and the student's complete lack of etiquette and respect troubled them. Layla, was particularly impressed by the way Ibrahim was able to restrain his anger: "*Mashallah… he was right to stress adab. And instead of arguing he made du'a for the student. That's what we should always do. He didn't attack him, but prayed he can have better knowledge!*" According to Layla, the *Sheikh*'s comment, "Let's ask Allah to open us up to understand the religion", demonstrated his knowledge of Islamic teachings and his personal piety, and hence confirmed his authority.

In an article detailing the styles of reasoning that are grounded in Islamic traditions of civic duty, Hirschkind (2001) argues that this public arena of debate is both normative and deliberative – a domain of subjection to authority and the exercise of individual reasoning. Whilst participation in this arena involves argument, criticism, and debate, ultimately, religious authority provides the foundation on which opposing viewpoints are articulated. The ultimate aim of reasoning is disciplinary, in that it is geared towards ethical self-improvement, and an argument therefore depends on its ability to move the self towards correct understanding, modes of being, and acting. The ability to act and speak reasonably and to conduct an argument in a calm and respectful manner rests on an "evaluative background" – on the inculcation of virtues and emotions of fear and humility (*ibid* 2001: 21-22).

Sheikh Ibrahim had demonstrated this thorough knowledge of Islamic scriptures. His argument involved the proper interpretation of Islamic sources and, therefore, like for Hirschkind's (2001) informants, religious authority provided the foundation for his debate with the student. In his classes the *Sheikh* always displayed referenced quotations from the *Quran* and *hadith* on his power-point slides to support his claims with scriptural evidence. In the discussion with the student, he corrected the student's understanding of a particular *hadith*, demonstrating his superior knowledge of the tradition. My informants often stressed the importance of presenting scriptural knowledge. Citing the source in support of one's argument demonstrated proof of

one's interpretation. Habibah, for example, had recently downloaded an application on her phone that enabled her to check for herself the authenticity and reliability of *Quran* and *hadith* references, on any given topic. Checking references enabled the young women to read the text themselves, ascertain its reliability, and decide the extent to which it supported the scholar's claims. Nonetheless, my informants were cautious about arriving at their own interpretations (*itjihad*), but instead relied on those of scholars who, in their eyes, possessed sufficient Islamic scholarly knowledge.

The fact that *Sheikh* Ibrahim had studied traditional Islamic Sciences under scholars in Mauritania, Syria, and Yemen lent him further credibility with the young women**.** As Layla described, "*A Sheikh is usually trusted through scholarship, the chain of narration through which he's learnt, where he has studied.*" Similarly, Habibah explained that she always checked "*the background of teachers and looked at whether other Sheikhs accept them.*" Scholars who had studied in renowned Islamic Universities such as Al-Azhar or The University of Medina, or under important scholars or descendants of the Prophet, were regarded as particularly knowledgeable. The form of knowledge they had was often termed traditional or "Eastern", and was considered by some to be closer to "true" or authentic Islam. These young women felt that some preachers, for example Tariq Ramadan, did not possess this scholarly Islamic knowledge.

Furthermore, *Sheikh* Ibrahim had demonstrated that "true" knowledge was more than an accumulation of facts. His tone and manners illustrated that he embodied the virtues of humility and modesty; not only was he a powerful charismatic orator, but his actions also manifested his own embodiment of knowledge, his own personal piety and connection with God. As we continued discussing the *Sheikh*'s dispute with the student, Ifrah added, *"These days, people have no idea how to discuss religious matters. He's right that we should not go around accusing people of disbelief – who are we to judge? It's between you and Allah"*

She respected the *Sheikh*'s humble and non-judgemental attitude, exemplified by his reminder to avoid judgement and accusation. The *Sheikh* had displayed his own *adab* and his own ability to conduct debate in a calm, respectful, manner, in accordance with the virtues of civic debate (Hirschkind 2001). He directed the student to reflect on his unfounded accusation of Abu Thalib in his criticism of the *Sheikh*'s lesson.

Ultimately, he explained to the student, this form of criticism was not conducive to the formation of a pious self. Instead of criticising others, the student ought to reflect on his own intentions and comportment in the eyes of God. Argument and debate are justified only if the ultimate aim is to move one or oneself towards pious action.

5.5.2 Western knowledge and liberal choice

For knowledge to be authoritative it must, first and foremost, be situated within Islamic structures of authority, and also within orthodox Islamic notions regarding reason, emotion, knowledge, and action. Yet, my informants often also stress the importance of a liberal concept of choice and autonomy in reference to a particular source, style, or interpretation of religious knowledge. Western knowledge, they claim, facilitates their exercise of choice through its format, style, and content. The extent to which authoritative knowledge ought to be Western is, however, often a source of debate and contestation.

Layla articulated her views by contrasting Western and Eastern scholarship. On one occasion, I heard her discuss with a friend the work of *Sheikh* such as Ibrahim Osi-Efa, and Abdal Hakim-Murad, a British Ba-Alawi scholar and Cambridge lecturer in Islamic Studies:

> *"Scholars like them, when they talk about a certain issue, they trace debates historically, provide different opinions on an issue, rather than state one point blank. They appeal to a Western intellectual audience. They bring Western scholarship and combine it with Eastern knowledge. They have a Western way of structuring their thoughts."*

Layla pointed out that knowledge should also appeal to a "Western intellectual audience", partly referring to the academic format and the style of classes such as *Sheikh* Ibrahim's. The layout of the room as a university lecture hall, the use power-point slides, and the Q&A sessions, all resembled academic forms of teaching and lent persuasiveness to the class. Anab suggested, in an interview that scholars should "modernise" their teaching techniques:

> *"I think they [scholars] should do workshops, they should use slides, and structure their classes around activities. We should sit in small groups*

and ask questions… in this day and age you need to keep the principles of
Islam but you need to cater to people – the way in which they are learning
at the time. No one does workshops! But that's how people learn these
days, not the other way that people often find boring."

Lectures and workshops contrast with the traditional lessons delivered in Somali mosques where emphasis is placed on recitation, memorisation, or dictation from a teacher.

More importantly, however, the young women, as Layla had pointed out, appreciated the *Sheikh*'s ability to "structure his thoughts" in a Western way. Hamda elaborated on this idea, "*At university… I saw many young people, young women and men, who were looking at religion from the intellectual point of view."* A good Western scholar, according to the young women, ought to provide multiple interpretations; his or her role should be one of guidance. It was then up to the individual to critique different opinions, and select an appropriate interpretation that would facilitate her self-transformation.

For example, in the incident above, the *Sheikh* had emphasised the plurality of opinions on Abu Thalib, and stressed that everyone was entitled to their own opinions, as only God knew the truth. The young women appreciated this exposition of multiple interpretations, as it provided them with a basis from which to draw their own conclusions, and formulate their own opinions on the issue, while remaining grounded in tradition.

On a separate occasion, Layla contrasted this "Western academic style" of teaching, with that of a Bengali female scholar, whom she had asked about the compulsory donning of the *niqab*. The *Ustadha* had told her that it was *fard* (obligatory) and elaborated very little on her claim. This answer had been insufficient for Layla, who explained:

"She didn't explain much, or provide opinions. She said it was worn by
the Prophet's wives and so it was fard. The face is beautiful and should be
protected. She didn't explain the context that the Prophet's wives needed

to be protected, as they were associated with Him. She didn't go into debates about the different interpretations of modesty…"

The female scholar had failed to provide multiple interpretations that would enable Layla to forge her own opinion. This was unlike what she termed the Western form of relating to knowledge, which emphasised the importance of weighing up, and choosing amongst, alternative opinions and a range of schools of thought.

The idea of Western knowledge is also used to refer to what Bowen (2010) has described as a mode of reasoning based on the "objectives of scripture" (*al- maqâsid*). This approach encourages Muslims to assess normative statements against what are seen to be the overall objectives of God's revelations – a complex system, not easily reduced to a set of rules. This approach, Bowen argues, "offers a term that resonates with the history of Islamic scholarship and at the same time offers a mechanism for justifying innovative practices, for mediating between a practical exigency and a system of Islamic norms" (*ibid* 2009: 82). Layla was, in the above statement, criticising the *Ustadha* for failing to contextualise the *hadith*, and failing to prioritise the overall objective (guarding modesty) above the prescribed form (*niqab*). She also criticised her for failing to provide multiple opinions, thereby enabling her to choose amongst different interpretations. According to Layla, *niqab* was obligatory for the wives of the Prophet *at that time*, but may not be necessary to life in the UK today. In a non-Muslim environment, Layla insisted, the *hijab* was sufficient to accomplish the virtue and overall objective of guarding modesty. As we saw in Chapter Three (section 3.5.1), although her friends contested her view, it enabled Layla to adopt a more flexible and pragmatic attitude to her clothing.

Within this discussion, personal choice is a mode of subjectification, albeit one that is primarily limited by the Islamic tradition and is also determined by the experience of affect. In what follows, I present some of my informants' disputes regarding authoritative knowledge in order to highlight the interconnections between the three modes of subjectification – choice, affect, and submission – and the ways of establishing authoritative knowledge. These debates, on which mode ought to be prioritised, are often articulated by reference to a "Salafi-Sufi continuum" (Jensen 2006).

5.6   Debating knowledge: Sufis, Salafis and "bad *imam*s"

Zaynab was always quick to voice her disagreements and views on matters in relation to what she defined as "Sufi practices". She had attended *Sheikh* Ibrahim's classes regularly for months, without expressing a word of discontent. Then, on one occasion, he delivered a lesson on the importance of *dhikr* (remembrance), a practice of collective worship, often associated with Sufi practices, which involves the chanting of the names of God, or verses from the *Quran* or *hadith*. As we sat in her car on the way back to East London, Zaynab complained to the others:

> " I don't get it… isn't it better to worship God by not sinning, by avoiding sins and doing good deeds? What's the point of repeating His name over and over? This wasn't done at the time of the Prophet and there are so many hadith proving that. Reading Quran to music isn't sunna and the Prophet didn't do it. He didn't play musical instruments."

Layla, who had attended many of these *dhikr* sessions, interjected by emphasising the importance of intentions and the overall objective of *dhikr*:

> "To be honest I don't see the problem with group dhikr. I don't agree with tariqa (paths, schools of Sufism) though. I don't like the exclusiveness and I don't understand why we have to have a teacher, why you need to follow a path. But I don't understand what the problem with worshipping God in unison is –if the intention is to worship God, I'm sure you can't be punished for that. It doesn't make sense!"
>
> Zaynab continued: "But it's an innovation (bid'a)…"
>
> Layla: "Yes, but there are good and bad innovations and worship surely can't be a bad one."
>
> Maryam intervened: "To be honest I don't like referring to someone as Salafi, Sufi, whatever. When I went to the Sufi soul festival, I told one of my Salafi friends and she was so against it. She was saying these people do this and that and it's not even true!"

Layla, who at that point was beginning to get frustrated with Zaynab's accusations, summarised the differences between Salafis and Sufis:

"People say all sorts of things about Sufis – that they think they're at one with Allah, so they don't pray… but I've never met someone like that. Salafis place little emphasis on the internal, and I don't like the way they say things, the harshness, they have different manners. They spend half their time saying what we shouldn't be doing, what others do wrong."
Maryam: "I understand though, it's hard for us because we had quite a Salafi upbringing – emphasis on rules and stuff – so it's hard to pull away. You feel torn between them."

These comments reveal the ways in which these young women articulated disagreements on what constitutes "true" and authoritative knowledge, and the ways in which they categorised different forms of knowledge and attached importance to the three modes of subjectification. The young women only rarely discussed the differences between *madhabs*; many did not adhere to a single *madhab*, but selected accordingly amongst the four different legal schools.[99] However, they very often debated the nature of Islamic knowledge according to a "Salafi-Sufi continuum" (Jensen 2006).[100] This distinction is a vernacular categorisation and does not necessarily coincide with scholars or organisations that self-identify as either Salafi or Sufi.[101]

This juxtaposition should also be seen in the context of a growing influence of, and opposition to, Wahabi/Salafi scholarship in London. The Saudi sponsorship of mosques, organisations, books and pamphlets has significantly impacted on the forms and styles of knowledge available to British youth (Al-Rasheed 2005). My research confirmed that many young Somali women were drawn, at least initially to, Wahabi rhetoric. Imbued with an empowering and simple message of a strict, individualised adherence to Islamic scriptures, it is particularly appealing to young Muslims. This

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[99] Bowen (2010: 65-66; 75) notes how this process of combining different juristic traditions is common amongst some scholars in Europe, who teach Islam on the basis of a set of Islamic principles.

[100] Roy (2004) classifies these polar opposites of Salafism and Sufism as neofundamentalist Islam, and humanist and ethical Islam.

[101] *Sheikh* Ibrahim does not self-identify as a Sufi.

form of knowledge is contested by, particularly Sufi scholars, who defend the centrality of *ijazah* (authorisation to teach an Islamic discipline), and the idea that true religion is transmitted through a connection back to Prophetic origin (Birt 2005).

I have already demonstrated the ways in which the "Salafi-Sufi continuum" is employed to juxtapose knowledge that is based on fixed rules and regulations, with knowledge that considers the overall objective of the scriptures, the importance of contextualisation, and which is ultimately seen as more flexible and pragmatic. For some of my informants, Salafi knowledge – also referred to as the "*haram* vs. *halal*" approach (Bowen 2010: 64) – denies complexity, and is excessively strict, focusing solely on exterior practices (sections 3.4 & 3.5). For others, however, it is attractive because it motivates them to act and provides clear, universal, and straightforward rules on how to conduct oneself in everyday life. As Zaynab had pointed out, it is considered closer to the Islamic tradition because it avoids innovations (*bid'a*), and emphasises the *Quran* and *sunna* as its sole sources of evidence.

Like many of these young women, Maryam experienced ambivalence towards these two forms of knowledge. She enjoyed listening to Salafi scholars; throughout the winter of 2010, for example, she exchanged with Zaynab, and recommended to others, the DVD of *Sheikh* Feiz on death and the grave. "*It's really good for me*" she explained, "*It makes me so scared that I wake up the next morning and start praying on time, stop wearing make-up. Sufi talks don't do that for me!*" Having watched the *Sheikh* Feiz DVD, I can confirm that it is, in fact, quite terrifying! Set against a soft and peaceful background melody, the *Sheikh*'s shout of "There's no fleeing from death*" even made me jump from my seat when I first heard it. Nevertheless, Maryam insisted on watching it over and over again:

> "*I think I need the shock factor. I like talks about death, the grave, and the afterlife. Not because I need to know for the sake of it, but cause it really gives me a kick in the back. I freak out and worry more about doing good things. The Sufis never talk about these things; they never mention death. When I'm with Sufis I'm less on guard cause they're so relaxed.*"

At the same time, however, Maryam explained to me, "*Sometimes Salafis are too strong… You know what I mean, they're a bit judgemental.*"

This obsession with rules, as Maryam had pointed out in the car conversation, was similar to the Islamic education they had received from their parents, focused on form and not meaning. It was also very similar to Somali culture claimed Anab:

"They're not open about things. It's like Somali culture – being told all the time what to do. And there isn't much encouragement to find out for yourself. It was just like: 'these people are bad watch out for them!' Your educational scope is limited in that way, I don't like it. About doing it cause you have to and I don't think Islam is like that. I want it to be something personal that helps me become a better person. I think people should decide for themselves."

Following one of the viewings of *Sheikh* Feiz's DVD, Layla, who could not understand Maryam's obsession with the scholar, explained: "*I don't see the point in being so angry. I don't like the attitude of Salafis, they are arrogant and too black and white about things, they always think they're right and tell others they're misguided! I've had so many Salafis tell me I'm wrong, because I go to mixed classes…*"

For Layla, the Salafi approach, based on strict rules, paid insufficient attention to aspects of spirituality, and to the "internal" dimensions of faith (section 3.7.1). She summarised succinctly the differences between the two approaches: *"The Salafis are strict about rules, and the Sufis have the spiritual dimension, but sometimes they are missing on the rules and obligations. Islam is the middle way, so we should strive for that."* The "*Sufi*" approach, was considered not only more inspiring and more likely to cause the type of affect that *Sheikh* Ibrahim's classes transmitted, but it also provided more choice and flexibility of interpretation.

Despite these categorisations, Maryam and some of her other friends attended events and classes across the "Sufi-Salafi continuum", emphasising the importance of diversity and the liberal mode of choice. For example, Maryam and I, together with a group of friends, had attended the Sufi soul festival in 2010 in Germany, travelling by coach from London with a large number of Muslims who were part of the Naqshbandi *tariqa*. On the journey home, Maryam, who had never attended a Sufi gathering before, discussed the event with her friends. As one of the few women dressed in a

black *abaya* and *hijab*, she had felt a little bit out of place. She expressed her scepticism of certain practices, such as singing the *Quran* or purchasing photographs of the Naqshbandi leader whom she had witnessed at the festival, but she had been "intrigued", and had enjoyed the "happy atmosphere" and the "kindness and sharing vibe" of the event. Yet, participating in this festival did not preclude her involvement in what she termed more "Salafi" events. As she pointed out: *"I prefer to pick and mix. I'm not sure I'd take everything about Sufism, but it was good to experience it and see what it was all about. I'm interested in everything; I'd even go to Shi'a talks. I think once you identify as one thing, it becomes a bit like a cult…"*

For Maryam, "mosque hopping", and choosing, enabled her to avoid identifying with a sectarian Islam, or a group identity or cultural affiliation, but instead indirectly emphasised a commitment to a universal, transcendent Islam. The following example demonstrates how these young women debated and negotiated the importance attached to choice, submission to Islamic norms, and affect.

In early June 2011, Maryam, who had at that stage entirely abandoned *Sheikh* Ibrahim's classes, began attending weekly classes at a newly founded independent institute in Whitechapel. Her friend, Hibo, who had recently started practising Islam, had persuaded most of her close friends to attend in order to gauge their views on the classes. The funding and administration of the organisation were not known to Maryam, but the classes were free, and the centre ran a range of different courses ranging from the Islamic sciences to more thematic ones on the hereafter, the life of the Prophet and His companions, etc. The first one I attended was titled *Heroes of Islam* and was taught by *Sheikh* Faisal. Maryam had warned us that he was a controversial "Salafi" scholar[102] in the media, but that, nonetheless, his lessons were inspiring and insightful, provided that you were able to "put aside" his opinions. Although Layla was sceptical about attending, she had been persuaded by her friend's enthusiasm about the course and had decided, on that day, to try it out. Five of us walked in past the men at the entrance and made our way to the top of the building, where a TV link with the room below was set up, and a few rows of chairs had been

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[102] *Sheikh* Faisal is linked to the political organisation, Al-Muhajiroun. He had been deported from the UK in 2007 for inciting racial hatred.

laid out for the women's viewing of the class. There were only six other women in the room and the class had already started; the *Sheikh* was discussing a *Khalifa,* making constant analogies between the historical context and our current situation in the UK. I could tell Layla was not enjoying the class and she looked at me, eyebrows raised in amazement, as he spoke the following sentences: "Our time is one of strife and occupation! This is a land of *kufar* (non-believers). We've been in this country how long? And still they are *kufar*…" He proceeded by instructing his audience to voice their discontent at the fact of living "side by side to gays, lesbians, disbelievers... We shouldn't accept it!" he concluded.

We walked out of the talk silently, as if afraid to open our mouths until alone. This was the first time we had attended such a politicised talk, and once sufficiently distant from the building, my friends instantly began debating the content of the talk. Layla was shocked, not only by the content of the talk, but also by the violent and angry tone of the *Sheikh*; much of what he said, she thought, was misguided and she strongly opposed any of us attending these talks again. But the other women answered back, with Maryam explaining,

> "Ok it's definitely a bit extreme, and it really wasn't like this last time.
> But you just have to learn to take the good things, the knowledge of the
> Khalifa or the Prophet, and then leave the rest. His Islamic knowledge is
> good, but his opinions not so much… so just leave those. But you know,
> I'm not stupid, I can choose for myself, think with my own head and
> decide what I think is good and what is a bit extreme."

Zaynab joked, "*Panorama will be in here next! This guy is wanted! But Maryam is right, you just leave out the violent stuff.*" Hesitating for a moment, she added,

> "But also, he has a point. Muslims have become too apologetic these
> days; we don't stand up for things. In East London we should stand up for
> ourselves and make the environment more Islamic. Next to where I live
> there are prostitutes. I should fight to make the environment more Islamic
> and get rid of that."

Maryam joined in and added "*My iman has been so stable since I've been going to these classes. They make me passionate and give me energy! And I stand up for myself. I used to ignore the EDL (English Defence League) and now they make me angry!*"

Layla felt alone in fighting her case, but she stated her points calmly and clearly. "*I know you're all smart and can judge things for yourself but I just don't like the environment*", she explained. She felt his reasoning was not particularly intelligent or insightful, it created rifts between people, and references to Islamic scriptures were employed solely to advocate violence, this was not a message worth listening to, she concluded. Hibo, who had introduced the women to the course, noticed Layla's increasing irritation and stepped in to mediate the discussion: "*It's important to do our own research on this topic. Go home now, research him, and what he's saying, and make up your own minds. We don't have to take everything he says.*"

This incident brings to the fore the ways in which these young women engage with, and navigate their ways around, different forms of knowledge and varying public debates about Islamic knowledge. Nimo's comment, in which she joked about the BBC news program Panorama, suggests a critical awareness of the discourse of the "bad *imam*". As Birt (2006: 693) notes, the "good *imam*", in public debates in the UK, has come to be defined by reference to models of "civic religion", in a policy context of community cohesion, and counter-terrorism. This ideal figure of the "good *imam*" must be trained in the UK, embody civic virtues, interfaith tolerance, and pastoral skills, and must work as an agent of national integration, fighting against extremism. In contrast, the "bad *imam*" has been defined as foreign-trained, and an agent of religious and cultural divisiveness.

However, for these young women, such government and popular discourses on Islamic knowledge are irrelevant, if not a source of ridicule; a "good *imam*" is not necessarily one who promotes integration and community cohesion. What constitutes authoritative and "proper knowledge" is contested and negotiable. Maryam's comment, "*I'm not stupid, I can choose for myself, think with my own head*", was a direct challenge to a public discourse that treats Muslims as passive receptors of extremist rhetoric by radical foreign *Sheikhs*. Maryam pointed out how her critical

intellect enabled her to "decide" and judge what she desired to take away from the class, and she could, therefore, ignore some of the more "extreme opinions".

Most importantly, this incident is indicative of how these young women establish what constitutes authoritative knowledge. Maryam's comment *"I can choose for myself, think with my own head"* points to the way in which she understands herself as being able to dissect different aspects of knowledge: facts, emotions, interpretations, and modes of reasoning can be differentiated from one another. It is her knowledge of Islamic scriptures and correct modes of reasoning that enables her to choose amongst these different aspects of knowledge. A liberal emphasis on choice is curtailed and delimited by the Islamic tradition. Affect has no place here, precisely because, as Maryam suggests, although the *Sheikh*'s "facts" might be "good", his interpretations are dubious. Affect can only be experienced if scriptural knowledge and the correct Islamic modes of reasoning are in place. Similarly, choice is dependent on an understanding of the Islamic discursive tradition, as the following incident demonstrates.

A few weeks later, following the "bad *imam*" incident, I learnt that Ardo, who had kept silent throughout the previous debate, had decided to abandon these classes and had recommended the same to her friends. Her brother-in-law, who she claimed had superior knowledge to herself, had explained how these courses were most likely affiliated with *al-muhajiroun* (a banned Islamist organisation based in the UK). They had a hidden political agenda and even though she could ignore their opinions, slowly, he explained to her, they would influence the way she thought:

> *"He doesn't think I have the tools to argue back yet. And he was right. I went to another class and the Sheikh kept going off course and bringing in his opinions, so I stopped going. I'm going to enrol on the online Islamic University run by Bilal Phillips and others."*

According to Ardo, her insufficient religious knowledge made it difficult for her to dissect the teaching appropriately and hence choose in an informed way. Ardo began informing her friends about the problems she had with these classes and slowly, following her suggestions, her friends decided to abandon the institute.

Ardo's example demonstrates the fact that choice, as a liberal mode of subjectification, should only be exercised within the boundaries of the Islamic discursive tradition, according to these young women. The ultimate aim is self-fashioning as pious subjects, and the establishment of a connection with God. Yet, as I have demonstrated in the previous sections, a long-term sustained commitment to a particular *Sheikh* or source of knowledge is ultimately determined by a personalised experience of affect, and a potential for self-transformation. These young women constantly revise and reassess, debate and negotiate, ideas of knowledge but, ultimately, rely on personal feelings and choices in determining whether they take on board any particular lesson. As Nadifa summarised,

> *"I listen to everyone, then do my own research and take what I feel is good, what my heart feels is right. Ultimately it is a personal thing. You need to think about what fits you as a person; you need to judge your intuition. I don't get myself bogged down with things too much and just think: does this feel right to me?"*

Reasoning and choosing are not exercised in isolation, but, as I have demonstrated, arise through, and are shaped by, debates and contestations with friends. These heated discussions amongst themselves are, in fact, crucial to their quests for knowledge and for self-transformation. Should knowledge simply engender a spiritual feeling and connection, or should it motivate or scare believers into action? Should it be political and seek to Islamise the environment, as *Sheikh* Faisal suggests? These questions remain unresolved for these young women, as they experiment with, and seek out, different forms of knowledge.

These networks of friends play a crucial role in supporting, discussing, and sharing the process of practising. They replace the support previously provided by kin, which diminishes in importance when these young women distance themselves from Somali mosques, and their mothers' ideas of learning and knowledge. Following one of *Sheikh* Ibrahim's classes, during which he discussed the rights and obligations of neighbours, Layla reinterpreted his teachings: "*Maybe we should create our idea of who counts as a neighbour, by including friends and acquaintances and creating a community in that way. Treating our friends as neighbours.*" By creating a community based on friendships and acquaintances, Layla was advocating for a

Muslim *umma,* based on faith and structured around egalitarian, intimate, relations of trust, to replace the structured hierarchies of kinship relations.

Most of my informants became close friends throughout their quests for knowledge. In fact, it was only by "hopping around" with them to various classes, and through sharing books and DVDs, that I was able to become intimate with them and share their emotional turmoil and relentless quests for knowledge. These processes of sharing emotions, debating, advising and ultimately hoping, are not only constitutive of their processes of learning and engaging with knowledge, but also connect them, as a network of friends, to a larger community of believers.

5.7 Conclusion

"Knowledge is meant to be a transformative means to seek the pleasure of Allah. Sometimes young people complain that Sunday school is a form of torture. Why? Because they find no meaning in it. It's just a bunch of points of information that have no meaning in their lives. We seek knowledge for Allah – the knowledge that you need to get ahead with your relation with Allah. This is something we need to think about when we educate our children. We say: learn this, learn this!! And the kid is probably thinking: oh no oh no! Rather, if you look at what the early Muslims used to say: raise your children with love of Allah, love of the Messenger, love of his companions and family, and love of the righteous. If you have this love, your knowledge will have direction." (*Sheikh* Faraz Rabbani: 2009)

I began this chapter by contrasting Layla's "mosque hopping" attitude to religious knowledge with her mother's preference for local Somali mosques. I suggested these differences pointed to generational changes in understandings of where, and how, Islamic knowledge is sought, what constitutes authoritative knowledge, and how it is established. Older Somali women are moving from a focus on enacting obligations to a personal engagement with the meaning of texts, with the aim of applying it to their practices. On the one hand, they are participating in processes of reform through an increased rationalisation and objectification of knowledge (Eickelman 1992), but on the other, for many older women, religious knowledge remains constitutive of their

understanding of Somali culture. Young second-generation Somali women argue that, unlike their mothers, knowledge is not associated with culture, but with a personal relationship to God and the *umma*. It is not an uncritical enactment of practices but instead assists a more profound transformation in the ways they understand themselves. As *Sheikh* Rabbani puts it, knowledge for these young women constitutes a "transformative means".

This chapter has detailed the importance attached to "seeking knowledge", by young practising women, reflecting a range of sources, modes of argumentations, and interpretations. In addition, I have explored the interconnections of three ways of relating to knowledge: a liberal concept of choice, a submission to an Islamic mode of reasoning and to structures of authority, and an experience of affect. These young women engage with knowledge, and also determine what constitutes authoritative knowledge, in these three ways. A submission to the Islamic structures of authority, with the ultimate aim of fashioning oneself into a pious subject, is central to my informants' engagements with knowledge. Yet this mode of subjectification, as I have demonstrated, intersects with both choice and affect.

The literature on Islam in Europe has emphasised the importance of choice, and the individualisation of practices, amongst young Muslims as a consequence of movement to the West (Peter 2006; Roy 2004). In contrast, I treat choice, as well as submission and affect, as a dimension of subjectivity – as the ethical valorisation of certain features of the self (Jacobsen 2011b: 375). My informants' emphasis on choice therefore becomes an attitude involved in the making of subjects, but one that exists in constant tension with obedience and submission (*ibid* 2011b: 373). As I have shown, structures of authority remain crucial, and delimit any choice of Islamic knowledge. This particular theoretical emphasis on choice, as Jacobsen (2011b) points out, enables us to explore choice not as a sociological explanation of how young Muslims act, but as a mode of engagement, and a condition for self-realisation through which they come to understand themselves at a particular historical moment in time.

Whether knowledge is able to engender potentiality – an experience of affect – is fundamental in determining my informants' long-term commitments to a particular source of knowledge. The importance attached within the Islamic tradition to a

scholar's ability to transmit virtuous emotions of fear, love, and hope, has been explored at length in the literature on Islamic piety (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). I have brought to the fore how my informants experience these emotions as a form of excitement, intensity, and potentiality. I emphasise that authoritative knowledge engenders affect, a feeling described as "*iman* boosts" or "high *iman*", and which captures the potentiality of these young women's processes of self-making, and their newly established connections with others, including God. It is the struggle of sustaining a feeling of "*iman*" that further fuels this continuous quest for knowledge, resulting in this "hopping around", and choosing between various interpretations, opinions, and schools of thought. I have suggested that although a commitment to structures of authority is crucial to their engagement with knowledge, ultimately, what dictates whether they continue to seek knowledge by any given scholar is if they feel that this source is assisting their own personal transformations – whether they feel that a scholar is enabling them to think of themselves, and their relations with others, in radically different ways.

However, this feeling of excitement and potentiality is difficult to sustain in the long run. It is precisely for these reasons that engagements with knowledge are often fleeting; there is always the possibility that these young women may turn elsewhere for knowledge. As we have seen, interest and commitment to a particular source of knowledge was not always sustained over a long period of time. Disagreements amongst my informants, regarding authority, frequently ensued, forcing these young women to question their commitment to a particular class or course. For example, as the winter months approached, attendance and enthusiasm for *Sheikh* Ibrahim's classes slowly waned. One Monday evening Maryam announced in a text message, "*No more CEI, I'm free! Not doing it for me*!" The classes no longer inspired some of the young women and others noticed little improvement in their everyday actions. Gradually, they turned elsewhere for knowledge and guidance.

Finally, these generational changes also point to different understandings of what knowledge is, and what ought to do. For older women, Islamic knowledge is predominately understood as a set of facts that inform proper conduct, whilst for younger women authoritative knowledge not only encompasses facts, but also enables ways of thinking, reasoning, and feeling. These differences highlight historical shifts

and a reworking of the meaning of knowledge – from a set of facts guiding action, towards a means of transforming cognitive and affective states.

At the same time, these young women's younger siblings are engaging with knowledge in much the same way as their mothers; they are learning religious obligations as – in *Sheikh* Rabbani's words – "a bunch of points of information." These divergences reveal contrasting ideas of what constitutes "proper" or authoritative knowledge. What interests me is the way they are indicative of how processes of Islamic reform play out unevenly between generations, but also across individual lifecycles. The reform of Islamic knowledge, therefore, cannot be said to coincide with a particular moment in time.

Figure 11: Al-Huda Mosque, Stepney Green

Figure 12: Mother and son, East London Mosque, Whitechapel, 2013

Chapter 6: Temporalities of self-transformation

6.1 Pondering Paradise

This final chapter draws together some of the themes developed throughout the thesis by exploring the complex relationship that self-making has to temporality, that is, to my informants' sense of being in time. I show how practising Islam involves predominantly two interconnected temporal orientations: a focus on the self-God relationship in the immediate present, and an imaginary process of self-making in the distant-future. I argue that understanding these temporalities reveals the ways in which hope animates their quests for self-transformation. I begin with a vignette in order to situate this argument.

On a late summer evening in 2010, I was sitting in Layla's small, cluttered bedroom in the flat where she lived with her family of six in Bromley-by-bow. Maryam was snacking on *khimis* (chapatti type pancakes), and lounging on the bed, her head resting on her palm, whilst Layla had her eyes glued to the screen of her laptop. Maryam raised her head, interrupting the silence: *"Ifrah was really worried the other day. She worries that she'll be married to her ex-husband in Paradise… But surely God wants everyone to be happy? I told her she probably won't be forced to put up with him!"*

Ifrah, a close Somali friend who was very devout, had spent the last few months listening to lectures and watching DVDs about death and the afterlife. She frequently discussed her findings with her friends. Initially, her new-found preoccupation struck me as peculiar, and I tentatively asked my friends, *"So do you have husbands in Paradise?"* *"Oh, Maryam wants to marry Trey Songz!"* Layla joked, referring to Maryam's love of RnB and her occasional allusions to the "hot" rapper. To which Maryam quipped: *"I don't know cause I'm not married yet but I probably won't want to be with just one person!"*

Intrigued by my friends' references to American popular culture in the context of Islamic eschatological debates, I pursued the point, *"But will there be marriage?"* Layla, who was always more informed than her friends on theological matters explained, *"Not in the contractual sense probably, there's no need for that. The*

reason we have it here is to protect the people involved. Also, Paradise will not have restrictions. We can't even imagine it. Maybe you can choose whatever you want." Maryam nodded in agreement but then with a shy, yet mischievous, face commented: *"I once asked someone if you could have sexual relationships with lots of different people in Paradise! But maybe I don't want sexual relationships but just intimate relationships with different people, not only your husband. It gets boring you know!"*

Layla interjected: *"You have intimacies with friends, you get close to them on earth…"* To which Maryam replied: *"Yeah but it's different, we're not allowed to be intimate with men, so that might be allowed in Paradise. To sit around chat, like we're doing now, that kinda thing."*

I had known the young women for over a year at this point, and this was the first time they had openly shared their thoughts about intimacies with men. I was curious to hear more and so I said, *"But does sex exist in Paradise?"* Layla explained: *"No, not in the same way… you have to imagine everything will be different, relations with people will be different, with your husband, friends…"* At this point, Maryam burst out: *"Of course sex will exist! It's one of the pleasures that we'll be able to enjoy freely in paradise. Like food, sex is really important. Not that I know, but we should be able to enjoy it!"* Layla responded: *"Yeah they say men can have up to four wives, and loads of virgins, but they don't really say what women get… I think anything could be possible to be honest."*

6.2   Self-making, time and hope

This chapter is concerned with the temporalities involved in practising Islam, and particularly in these forms of exchanges between these young women on the nature of Paradise (*janna* in Arabic).[103] What do we learn when we take seriously their practices of discussing and imagining themselves in Paradise, and how can we make sense of the temporalities and the processes of self-making that are implicated in these conversations? I suggest that the piety literature (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005),

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[103] Whilst sacred time has been explored at length in the anthropology of Christianity, this has been less true of the anthropology of Islam (with the exception of Deeb 2009; Smid 2010; Schielke 2012).

which I reviewed in Chapter One, has neglected the ways in which processes of self-making take place in the temporal domain of the distant-future. Here, I elaborate on how my informants' relation to God in the present moment, and their understandings of themselves and their relations with others in the distant-future of the hereafter, provide an insight into the complexities of their engagements with the *ethical imagination* (Moore 2011).

As I noted in the previous chapter, Hirschkind (2006) addresses these questions relating to the distant-future in his ethnography of cassette sermons in Cairo. He explores the ways in which sermons encourage believers to cultivate a sensibility towards death, through a series of techniques and practices of "death remembrance" (*ibid* 2006: 184-8). Although Hirschkind argues that the fear of death and hell are considered to have the greatest effect on moral behaviour, he also mentions that the hope of acceptance into Paradise can encourage believers to mind their actions. In relation to temporality, Hirschkind (2006: 184) suggests that these practices revivify an awareness and experience of death in daily life, and serve to fashion a virtuous self by constantly bringing the future into the present. Life is not only undertaken as a preparation for death, but also actions in the present are geared towards the hereafter.

My own material, however, complicates this analysis somewhat. First, "death remembrance" which, according to Hirschkind, cultivates a sensibility towards death, is based on the teachings delivered mostly through sermons, which are closely tied to scriptural evidence. As we have seen, my informants draw on teachings and scriptures, but they also elaborate on, and discuss these amongst themselves. In doing so, they introduce and explore issues that are not necessarily defined within the Islamic tradition, and they grapple with concepts that are thought to be unimaginable to the human mind. The nature of Paradise in Islamic eschatology is defined as the "unseen" and should not be subjected to reasoned speculation and analogy. Nonetheless, these young women speculate about these issues, and most importantly, fantasise about their own selves and their relationships with others in Paradise.

Second, according to Hirschkind, this practice of creating a sensibility towards death takes place in the present moment; for his informants "the present is always figured as collapsing toward the future", as they strive to fashion themselves into pious subjects in present time (*ibid* 2006: 190). Although Hirschkind does take his informants'

claims that there will be an afterlife seriously, he does not explore their actual experiences of time. According to his analysis, self-fashioning takes place in a single temporal domain. For my informants, in contrast, these discussions both serve to orient themselves towards death in the present, but also involve another experience of time. By imagining themselves in Paradise, they are engaging in projects of self-making in the time dimension of the distant-future.

In Chapter One, I outlined the connections between self-making, time, and hope (section 1.7). I conceptualised hope as a form of temporal orientation (Miyazaki 2004), and drawing on Moore (2011: 144) I suggested that hope is created in "shifts in forms of subjectification"; it animates the ethical imagination by projecting the self forward in time. Throughout this thesis, I have explored how practising Islam involves reconfiguring new relations to self and others, as these young women engage with a range of different discourses, practices, and forms of knowledge. In what follows, I analyse the temporal dimensions and related potentialities of these young women's shifts in forms of subjectification and processes of self-fashioning.

The following has been inspired by the work of Jane Guyer (2007), but in it, I also reformulate her discussion in terms of my own material. In a stimulating essay, Guyer details a recent shift in temporal framing within both monetary theory and evangelical Christianity. Both emphasise the immediate present and the distant future, leading to the systematic evacuation of the near-past and the near-future – the middle range. As a period of time that "fills the gap" between the enforced presentism and the distant horizon, the near-future has become "punctuated", rather than enduring, and eroded of mid-term reasoning. Building on this insight, and reflecting on Christian fundamentalists' everyday experiences of time, Crapanzano (2007) elaborates that for his informants the near-future has not been entirely evacuated, but instead has rather become devalued.

My argument is two-fold. First, drawing on Guyer, I explore how practising Islam involves, on the one hand, a process of self-making that renders the self and its relationship with God permanently present. This experience of time involves distancing the self from the past, and simultaneously devaluing the near-future. On the other hand, practising also entails imagining the afterlife as another time dimension in which to pursue further projects of self-making. I am not suggesting that

the near-past and near-future are devoid of activity. As we have seen in Chapter Four, practices and debates around marriage are one indication that this temporal realm is teeming with activities. Rather, I show how for many of these women, the near-future is devalued, and is cognitively and discursively assumed to be less important in their lives. My interest in this Chapter is primarily in the dominant ways in which these young women experience *religious* time. Building on Guyer's work, however, I argue that these temporal frames are hardly ever fully embraced in practice, and require constant work to sustain. In the final section of this chapter, I explore the ways my informants experience and negotiate multiple, conflicting, and contradictory temporalities, that coexist with their experiences of sacred time.

Second, I suggest that analysing the relationship between self-making and time provides an insight into the experiences of excitement and potentiality that, I have argued throughout the thesis, energise the practice of Islam. As I described in the previous chapter, this affective experience of hope as a reorientation of the self in time, is captured by my informants' references to "high *iman*". Building on this insight, I also explore the ways in which "low *iman*" is employed to denote a temporary hesitation and an experience of doubt that results from these women's engagements with multiple temporalities.

I now turn to consider two narratives of young, practising Somali women: Maryam, whom I introduced in the original vignette, and her close friend Zaynab. I draw attention to the ways in which these narratives, which resemble the experiences of Muneera, the young practising woman with whom I opened this thesis, are "techniques of the self". These narratives produce a sense of rupture with the past and of God's immediacy in the present.

6.3   Breaking with the past, enforcing the present

Maryam first shared her story with me a few months after I met her, during a long tube journey to a mosque in North London. Most of her close friends had already heard her story several times and, later, I too overheard her reiterate sections of it to others during the course of my fieldwork. Maryam had started practising Islam in the last two years, following months of panic attacks and bouts of depression.

> *"That's when it all started. I'd be sitting on the train, and my heart would start thumping so hard, as if it was exploding out of my body, my head spinning, and I felt dizzy. I felt something had taken hold of my body and it was killing me. I actually felt like I was going to die."*

She decided to drop out of university and began working in retail hoping she might recover, but her panic attacks became more frequent and intense. Sessions with a psychologist proved fruitless and soon her family suspected she might have a *jinn* (in this case a bad spirit). Her uncle proposed reading the *Quran* to her, and slowly she witnessed some improvement in her condition. Eventually, he referred her to a specialist *Sheikh* who helped her "flush out" the *jinn*. *"Whenever they read the Quran, I got this feeling inside me, a good feeling that took over my body, inside. I had no control over it"*, she explained.

She frequently depicted her spiritual change as a drastic and sudden bodily experience, and intimated that she had been "chosen by God", for which she felt fortunate. Prior to her transformation, she had labelled herself as "anti-religious" and claimed her change had been unexpected and "against [her] will", as God had taken her over and she had had very little choice in the matter. *"I hated religion before that. Yes I believed in God deep down, but I didn't like religion and I hated all religious people, I thought they were ruining their lives. So I definitely didn't think this would work."*

Her lifestyle before the panic attack, in contrast to her current pious disposition, was a brew of clubbing, partying, and aspiring to financial success.

> *"I was so different. Those were my heydays! Back in the day, I'd go out clubbing, partying... I was actually really ambitious. I'd signed up to a few modelling agencies, I wanted to do so many things. Mostly cause of the lifestyle, I wanted that lifestyle of money, celebrities, having a car, nice house, success... I didn't care about anything else".*

As we drove around London, she would often point out the nightclubs and high street shops that she used to frequent with her non-practising Somali friends. *"I had so much fun. Sometimes I really miss those days!"* Maryam explained, revealing her

ambivalence about the past and the difficulties she had encountered in making a complete break. Her narrative of her "heydays" was torn between nostalgic memories of carelessness and enjoyment, and a period of depression, with neither meaning nor purpose.

> *"I started thinking about the purpose of life, why I was here, all these questions. And I started reading loads on Islam. I had nothing at that point: I'd stopped studying and working; I was just at home, so really there was nothing. Life was going nowhere, I stopped seeing a purpose in all the things I used to do."*

Like Maryam, her friend Zaynab also frequently shared her experience of becoming a practising Muslim with close friends. I heard it for the first time during a car journey to West London, and I observed her repeat it to a newly practising acquaintance months later over dinner and on several other occasions. Zaynab had studied IT at university during the 1990s Internet boom and lived and worked as a consultant in West London. She explained, *"I used to think all I wanted was a good job, loads of money, a car, and beautiful clothes. I was living in Kensington at the time, I'd saved some money!"*

It was during one of her Harrods shopping trips that she had suddenly felt faint and collapsed:

> *"That morning I went out with my sunglasses, capris, I was meeting a friend in Harrods, and we were picking out a dress for a party. We were going round the designer section… suddenly I felt dizzy and I collapsed… I thought I was going to die",* she explained. *"They called an ambulance and everything. But at exactly the same time in the shop, a woman who was eating an ice cream collapsed, and whereas I woke up fine, she was taken away in an ambulance. I had been saved, I'd been given a second chance."*

It was following what Zaynab thought was a near-death experience that she began to reflect on herself and she moved back to live with her mother in East London. Soon afterwards, she began praying and donning the *hijab*. Interestingly, however, her

"break" happened to coincide with the burst of the Internet bubble, job loss and the ensuing difficulties of securing an alternative stable income. "*I had to give up my friends, my life, things… I changed completely, you wouldn't recognise me. I used to think success was working hard, making money. My idea of success is completely different now. But I don't regret a thing and I don't miss it at all!*"

At that point, the two young women had been practising Islam for just two years, but these types of narratives were also common amongst women who had been practising for a longer period of time. Within reformist Islam there is a preponderance of personal testimonies and narratives of religious experiences and conversions, available on the Internet, on YouTube, and in the pedagogical literature (Jacobsen 2011b: 299). Although they are presented as personal and intimate stories of transformation, what is striking is not only the frequency with which they are repeated, but also the similarities in structure and religious rhetoric. For example, both narratives follow a similar sequence of events starting with a trigger, usually a near-death or similarly traumatic event. This is followed by a period of awakening, self-discovery and realisation; often, the individual presents herself as seeking answers to existential questions. A break with the past and a process of self-transformation ensues, as a consequence of learning and reading about Islam and adopting virtuous practices and dispositions. These testimonies also employ the language of self-realisation, but emphasise the importance of God as the ultimate agent: Maryam suggests that her change was "against her will" and solely God's doing and Zaynab points to the fact that she was "given a second chance" – presumably by God.

These narratives provide a framework for understanding, but most importantly shaping themselves as subjects in relation to the past, present and future. The past is positioned as a period "before practising"; practising involves a rupture in the timeline of a person's life that severs it into a "before and after between which there is a moment of disconnection" (Robbins 2007: 11). Drawing out the details of their past "heydays", for example, serves to performatively recreate and reinforce disjuncture and a distancing from their old selves. It also objectifies the past as a time of ignorance and immorality. For example, the presence of a *jinn* in Maryam's narrative indicates the ways she has begun to reconceptualise her past life as immoral, governed as it was by Satanic forces.

But what and whom are these young women breaking away from? As in many accounts of conversion, their attempts to "break with the past" are simultaneously attempts to reconfigure the determinations of a particular social context, and relations with kin and traditional others (Meyer 1998; Keane 2007). For these young women this "break" and reorientation signals a move towards a self who is free from what they perceived to be Western and Somali cultural and social obligations and restraints. I elaborate on each in turn.

Young women frequently recount their lives prior to practising as a time of youthful enjoyment, as well as a period characterised and determined by superficial attachments to worldly pleasures. Consumerism, immediate pleasure and gratification, material success, and an aspiration for social mobility are now problematic and unsatisfactory, precisely because they are seen as being immoral, unfulfilling and as having no progression and no defined endpoint. "*Life was going nowhere*" Maryam commented retrospectively. For both women the recent past is presented as dominated by the promises offered by capitalism and consumerism, and is therefore bereft of any long-term fulfilling future.

This rupture is associated with a distancing from non-practising friends, and is frequently described as a movement away from some of the negative dictates of "Western culture". Although my informants employ the term Western in complex, polyvalent ways, here it is used to refer to an immoral and excessive attachment to, and dependence on, "wordly" desires and pleasures. My informants feel that associating with other non-practising young women risks drawing them back towards their old selves and threatening their new-found sense of discontinuity. These friends are positioned in the past; they have not yet undergone this process of self-transformation since they remain constrained by Western culture.

The past, however, is also governed by traditional or cultural attitudes and practices. Cultural Somalis, as I have elaborated at length throughout the thesis, are considered incapable of separating themselves from social constraints, traditions and practices. The performance of these narratives has, therefore, the effect of constantly pushing away the past, and simultaneously constituting the new and the now (Coleman 2011).

The present is characterised by newly forged friendships, based on care, responsibility and control, with other practising women.[104] It is within these new contexts that these intimate stories are voiced and shared. Through these performances of "self-accounting", young women insert their own personal narratives within a larger collective narrative of the *umma*. By partaking in this experience of self-transformation with like-minded Muslims, they constitute a shared experience of time, and also imagine themselves as connected to a transnational community of believers.

However, there is also another dimension I wish to stress here. Webb Keane (2006) notes that language, thanks to its characteristics of being both embedded in context but always capable of being extracted and inserted into another, is able to bridge the gap between visible and invisible worlds. For example, prayers and chants "that are stripped of contextualization cues can make a particular moment in which they are used seem to stand beyond a particular time and place" (*ibid* 2006: 312). The relatively stable structure and therefore abstractable nature of these narratives has a similar effect in that they index the divine, as beyond time and space. A distant agent – God – stands as the ultimate agent structuring these narratives and therefore guiding these processes of self-transformation. The contextualization of these narratives in everyday settings and interactions has the effect of bringing the distant closer, of bringing "into the immediate context voices attributed not to the bodily speaker but to normally distant beings" (Keane 2006: 312). By performing these narratives emphasis is placed on the now, and on – to use Matthew Engelke's (2008) words – God's immediacy and presence in their lives. As I have shown, this presentism is reinforced by the distancing from, and reworking of the past, but also, as the following section's example illustrates, by a devaluing of the near-future.

6.4   Devaluing the near-future, rethinking the present moment

On a Friday evening in the spring of 2010, I attended a talk at East London Mosque with my practising friend Zaynab, whom I introduced above, entitled *dunya vs akhira*

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[104] Although siblings are also important here, often because of age or differences in experiences, some practising women find they are not at the same stages of practising as their siblings.

(this world vs. the hereafter).[105] As we walked in, the talk had already started and the women's prayer room was crowded, yet hushed, except for the voice of the teacher, *Ustadh* Abdullah Hasan, which emanated from a loud speaker. Women young and old, mothers and children, sat on the ground listening attentively with their backs resting against the walls; some had note-pads on their laps, others were busy trying to keep their children silent. We tiptoed our way to the end of the room and sat cross-legged on the carpet opening our notebooks as the scholar continued: "Life is a deceiving enjoyment, in the hereafter lies real enjoyment" he exclaimed. "[It is] as the likeness of vegetation after rain, thereof the growth is pleasing to the tillers, afterwards it dries up and you see it turning yellow, then it becomes straw."

Drawing on *sura* (chapter) *Al-Hadeed* (verse 20), he proceeded to outline the different stages of life on earth. First, he explained, we start as toddlers and life is immersed in play (*la'ibun*). When we get older, we need entertainment and amusement (*lahwun*) to keep us busy. Our teens are obsessed with pomp and appearance (*zeenatun*) and as we become independent and make money we are inclined to boast and show off (*tafaakhur*). Marriage and children produce rivalry and jealousy as we pile up wealth to leave for our children. These stages in life, he concluded, are analogous to the stages of a crop, as it grows, dries up, turns yellow and prepares for death. "The *dunya* is like a mirage, the *dunya* is like a station on a journey, we'll have to give everything up eventually."

In Islamic eschatology *dunya* literally means closer or lower and refers to things relating to life in this world – to the now. It is juxtaposed to the *akhira*, the hereafter, which exists beyond and apart from the measure of time. However, the two are related to both time and space: *dunya* is a physical space and a time on earth, and *akhira* is both a place (i.e. Gardens) and eternity, or the hereafter (Smith & Haddad 1981: 6-7). In the *Quran* (7:172), time or life on earth is a period in between "pre-time" and eternity. During this period believers are encouraged to recognise and remember the divine truth they experienced in pre-time (Hermansen 2008: 310). Muslim theologians

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[105] This was a very popular topic and my informants attended numerous talks that touched on the theme throughout my fieldwork. For example, one of the young women invited Suleiman Ghani's wife to deliver a halaqa on *dunya* vs. *akhira* in March 2010. The young women also listened to, and recommended, online talks on the topic, for example, Hamza Yusuf on *dunya* vs akhira.

have described the *life on earth* as a path of return (*ma-ad*) – or a journey, as *Ustadh* Hassan describes it – towards God in the life to come (*Quran* 7:29).

The *Imam*'s critique of consumerism and material accumulation resonates with many of the practising narratives shared amongst my informants. The present moment of life on earth is reduced to, and characterised by, the persistent and unending accumulation of material possessions, all of which cannot be considered "real" and cannot provide true fulfilment, because they do not last beyond the present. Life on earth is understood as a preparation for the afterlife, involving a detachment from the temporary and seductive gratifications of the near-future of life on earth - what Crapanzano (2007) has described as the "devaluing" of the near-future. Believers should not only *recognise*, but should also live the everyday in a state of *constant awareness* of the dream-like qualities of this world (*dunya)*. Practising involves envisioning a self that is not distracted by *this world*, but acts in the immediate present whilst orienting itself towards the afterlife.[106] For example, as I described in Chapter Four, young practising women are encouraged to prioritise their love for, and relationship with God. Their relationship with their husbands on earth should be an extension of, but also secondary to this self-God relation – something that is not always achieved in practice. Similarly, these young women perform virtuous actions towards their family, friends and acquaintances, but they almost always stress that these actions enable them to "please God" in the present moment.

Following the talk, Zaynab and I stepped outside the mosque and walked down nearby Brick Lane. We passed the Bengali restaurateurs, enticing us with their curry deals, and clubs and pubs now teeming with partygoers. We settled for some Lebanese food and mint tea. Discussing some of the difficulties of focusing on the hereafter, Zaynab described how her atheist colleague challenged her at work. *"The other day she came back to me and said: I've been thinking about you Zaynab and I just don't know how you do it. You've spent all your life preparing for death. Where*

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[106] *Death is closer than the strap of your sandal"* *Sheikh* Ibrahim repeated several times in one of his lessons. *"Move swiftly to good deeds… don't get hung up."* My informants often reminded themselves that they could easily die the next day and it was important to be prepared. *"We're not meant to be sitting on our ass all day… or spend our day praying… we should always be active, doing good deeds"*, another young practising woman put it.

has your life gone? It's been wasted! With a calm smile oozing of peace and self-contentment, Zaynab pronounced, *" Life here is so insignificant compared to life after and if you know that, you see this life in a different way."* She might have renounced "success" in the *dunya*, but ultimately this period of time was short and insignificant, solely a journey towards the afterlife.

This distancing from the present moment entails a devaluing of plans and aspirations for the near-future. This is what differentiates these young women from non-practising others. Idil, for example, a 22-year-old Somali woman who I introduced in Chapter Two, was, in her words "un-interested" in practising. When I asked her about this, she clarified,

> *"I guess I'm just not at that stage… there are still so many things I want to do before. For example, I don't want practising to get in the way of my future... I have so many other things to think about right now... I want to go travelling, partying, enjoy myself. I just want to get those out of the way before I start practising.*

Idil understood practising as an impediment because it required abandoning her aspirations for the near-future and understanding the present as a preparation for the afterlife. For young practising women, Idil's attitude was "too Western"; it focused excessively on fulfilment on earth, and adopted an insufficiently expansive understanding of time. Idil was neither ready to put the past fully behind her, nor abandon her plans for the near-future on earth.

6.5   Bringing God into the immediate present

I have stressed how the repetition of narratives of self-transformation engenders a self-God relationship that is immediately present. This sense of immediacy, however, is also forged through my informants' heightened concern with acts of "purification". Frequently, these young women emphasised that the performance of acts of self-discipline (Mahmood 2005), ought to be directed at exploring their "hearts" in order to "purify" their selves and instil a "connection with God" in the immediate present – a feeling of *iman*.

Layla, who I introduced in the initial vignette, occasionally organised *halaqa* (Islamic circles) at her house or in the mosque for her close practising group of Somali, Bengali and English friends. In one of her sessions she explained to us the importance of developing a "healthy" and "pure" heart.[107] A heart could be "purified" by worship (*ibadat*) and by performing good deeds with sincere (*ikhlas*) intentions (*niyyah)*, she explained. This should be done by employing reason ('*aql*) in order to discipline the self in the immediate present. She advised us all to examine our hearts and learn to recognise the signs of an unhealthy heart.

> *"We must pay attention to the twinges in the heart. It's an organ that should feel and it should motivate us…our soul is in our heart… that's the good part of us, it gives you signs... you should always base things and decisions on what your heart says to you… it should change the way you think... your brain depends on your heart."*

Shaitan could be responsible for making a heart "impure" as could one's own lower self (*naf*). Learning to identify evil thoughts and feelings as signs of an unhealthy heart was fundamental to spiritual success.

On the day of the *halaqa,* one of the women present interrupted Layla and asked her to elaborate on the signs of a "healthy heart". "*If you're doing something bad and you feel a twinge in your heart – a feeling you shouldn't be doing something and that stops you – then you have a healthy heart. It's more than guilt, it's preventative'*" Layla explained. According to Layla, "goodness" resides in the heart and learning to identify "corrupting forces" through constant self-scrutiny, reasoning and practice is an integral dimension to becoming a practising Muslim.

Ifrah, who had been listening attentively, intervened in the discussion to relate her own experience to Layla's explanation:

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[107] Most of my informants were familiar with and often discussed ideas about the heart and the diseases of the heart, derived from al-Ghazali's (1995) *On disciplining the soul and breaking the two desires. Books XXII and XXIII of the revival of the religious sciences*. Hamza Yusuf's (2004) *Purification of the heart: signs, symptoms, and cures of the spiritual diseases of the heart* was also a popular source of information on these topics amongst the young women.

> "Recently I have spent a lot of time thinking about myself. I think I really know what part of me is me, and what part is being influenced by the Shaitan, or by jinns. When I feel like doing things and I'm positive and active, that's me. But when I start saying: ooh I feel lazy, can't be bothered, I'm not up for it... I just know that's not really me."

Ifrah had scrutinised herself and begun to turn inwards in search of her true "natural" essence. According to my informants, a "pure" heart should lean towards God and His attributes and desire to perform "good" actions in order to seek His pleasure. Hesitations or feelings of laziness therefore can only be signs of an "impure" heart. Layla nodded in agreement with Ifrah and explained, "*I always blame myself actually. If I don't do something it's my fault.*" In this way, she reasoned, she would be motivated to discipline herself and work harder to "purify" her heart rather than place the blame on an external entity. "*I think ultimately we are to blame. Because we've been given the tools to ward off evil. If you do enough du'a, enough worship then you should be fine. And you are the one in charge.*" Ultimately, it was up to the women themselves to take charge; self-discipline ought to arise from individuals' own desire to purify their souls and seek a connection with Allah.

Similarly, on that day in the Lebanese restaurant, Zaynab elaborated on her concern with "thinking about the hereafter" with an example:

> "The other day I had to give a halaqa (Islamic circle/talk). And I was doing it for myself, and for others, to be closer to God, to strengthen my iman. I was having coffee with friends [non-practising], chatting and laughing, and they were trying to keep me there, and I told them I had to go to work on myself, on my religion. I needed to accumulate brownie points for the hereafter! I could've stayed there and followed this world (dunya), not done the lecture, but I chose not to. And I felt my heart was pure as a consequence. It was clean, that's why I could do it. It felt more important than anything else.... it's about not caring too much about dunya. It's about realising it's not the most important thing".

Zaynab's reference to "brownie points" indicates her awareness of the concept of reward in Islam. The performance of good or "commended" actions is thought to reap

rewards in the afterlife, and this utilitarian view on virtuous behaviour has become a dominant feature of reformist Islam (Schielke 2012: 138).

Many of my informants, however, criticised it for being too concrete, utilitarian and materialistic in nature. Instead, they stressed a range of different motivations, desires and goals that informed their religious practices. Most importantly for Zaynab and many of the other young women, delivering the *halaqa* was important because it was a way of bringing the hereafter into the present, but also a means of connecting with God; having a clean "pure" heart and performing actions with the intention of feeling "closer to God". A Facebook post of Zaynab's succinctly captures her idea of self-transformation: *"The most important relationship is the one you have with yourself and with God!"* By delivering the lecture, instead of having coffee with her friends, she was able to prioritise this relationship.

Zaynab was drawing on ideas about the connections between her divine spirit/soul (*ruh*) and its "natural" inclination towards God. In understanding themselves, my informants draw on Islamic concepts of the self whereby the self is composed of three domains: the *ruh* (divine spirit), *naf* (will, soul or desiring principle) and *'aql* (reason, intellect, faculty of moral discrimination) (Smith & Haddad 1981; Metcalf 1984: 10).[108] Embodying pious dispositions entails employing reason to control emotions and desires by learning about, and learning to embody virtuous conduct. Therefore, a pious self is a self that is disciplined and controlled.

The aspect of the self that requires disciplining is one that has been distracted from, or has forgotten its nature *(al-fitra)* (Jacobsen 2011a: 74*)*. This natural self is found in the *ruh* (divine spirit), which resides in the heart. Believers are encouraged to follow their divine inspiration (*ruh*) or natural disposition in order to "purify" themselves and aim for unity with God. By looking inwards at their *ruh*, they can learn about and

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[108] The relationship between the *ruh* and *naf* is left unelaborated in Islamic scriptures (Smith & Haddad 1981). At times the soul is used interchangeably to refer to both.

connect with God. A "pure" heart is one that has forged a connection to the transcendent.[109]

Practising entails disciplining the self so as to experience a constant connection with God. This can be accomplished by acts of worship such as prayer, but also virtuous actions, as long as these are performed with sincere intentions, or with the aim of "pleasing Allah". Believers are encouraged to avoid "delaying actions" and instead "move swiftly to good deeds" in the immediate present. Instilling virtuous dispositions through these bodily techniques is thought to make one more receptive to receiving the presence (or words) of God and drawing closer to Him.

This is a point made in the extensive literature on prayer, which stresses the manner in which the embodied act constitutes a willing submission to God and forges an imaginative engagement with divinity (Simon 2009; Mahmood 2001; Parkin & Headley 2000; Bowen 1989). Bodily techniques such as prayers can work to evoke the presence of God within the believer. Similarly, the pronunciation and recitation of passages from the *Quran*, or the practice of *dhikr* (remembrance), which involves the repetitive invocation of God's names, are similarly thought to fill the worshipper with Godliness. As we have seen, my informants described this experience of forging a connection with God as one of excitement, euphoria and potentiality captured by the term "high *iman*". The importance of this connection is illustrated by the anxiety around the potential for disconnection. The latter is captured by the expression "low *iman*", which I elaborate on below, and is used to denote a physical experience of doubt, laziness, lack of motivation, and depression. As I have discussed throughout (Chapters One, Three and Five), these preoccupations about one's *iman* illustrate my informants' concerns with maintaining this newly forged connection in their everyday practices of self-fashioning.

For example, on one occasion Ifrah, a young practising Somali woman, defined "selfishness" as a spiritual disengagement from Allah – an inability to "connect" with God. She had been feeling low and had, as a consequence, isolated herself from her

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[109] The self oscillates between two sets of parallels whereby God/*akhira*/*ruh* are juxtaposed to Shaitan/ dunya /*nafs*. Reason ('*aql*) is the faculty responsible for shifting the self away from the latter set of parallels and towards the former.

practising friends, temporarily abandoned her prayer, and had begun listening to music as a response to her problems: *"I've been selfish… I'm not used to turning to Allah… I always think about myself and then, separate, there's my relationship with Allah, so I have to sort myself out first on my own before I connect, if you get what I mean… I've been in limbo this period."*

Because she appreciated the importance of "connecting with Allah" and saw herself as inextricably bound to God, she interpreted this experience as one of "selfishness", one in which she thought she could rely on her own means to recover from an experience of "limbo" rather than turning to Allah for help. Ifrah had temporarily felt a "disconnection" – an inability to understand herself as connected to the transcendent. This temporary severance manifested itself as a physical discomfort; it was experienced as a threat to self, indicating the significance of the self-God relationship.

6.6 Rethinking the practice of pondering paradise

Having outlined the first temporal dimension crucial to these young women's processes of pious self-making, I return to the practice of pondering paradise that I described in the initial vignette in order to explore some of the limits of Hirschkind's (2006) analysis (and the larger work on piety). As I mentioned earlier in relation to Hirschkind's work, contemporary reformist teachings encourage believers to reflect on, and orient themselves towards death and the afterlife. As I elaborated in Chapter Five, scholars such as *Sheikh* Ibrahim often encourage my informants to develop an awareness of, and a sensibility towards, death in their everyday life, which includes cultivating fear of the afterlife, as well as hope for eternal bliss and love for God and His Prophet.

Similarly, my informants often draw on these teachings and on Islamic scriptures in their discussions on death and the afterlife in both pedagogical settings and everyday conversations. They frequently describe the various punishments that will befall disbelievers and the various categories of sinners in Hellfire (Jahannam). Paradise, which is known as *janna*, or the Garden/s tends to feature less in formal teachings. Nonetheless, the scriptures provide a detailed description of this realm as seven-tiered, with the Garden of Eden at the top. Paradise is a physical realm: beautiful gardens are

depicted, flowing with rivers of honey, water, milk and wine, with celestial food and maidens (*hur*) who remain perpetually virginal (Hermansen 2008: 319). Things forbidden on earth, such as wine, will no longer have the same inebriating and corrupting effects in Paradise. Unlike the Fire (*jahannam*) where torture will be purely physical, joy in the Garden exceeds the flesh. The *Quran* states that the faithful will be "content, peaceful and secure", their houses will have thick carpets and brocade sofas, the streets will be familiar and they will eat and drink abundantly but remain perpetually healthy, beautiful and young (Smith & Haddad 1981: 89).

Textual knowledge regarding the afterlife should, according to the normative view held by my informants, be approached literally (not symbolically). However, what is not specified ought to be seen as inconceivable to the human mind; believers are thus discouraged from reasoning about it beyond the descriptions they find in the *Quran*.[110] The abodes of the hereafter are considered beyond time and history, and truths in the life to come are considered beyond comprehension. As I described in the original vignette of this chapter, Layla, who is considered more knowledgeable in religious matters than Maryam, describes the ways in which a believer ought to engage with the topic of Paradise. She intervenes as a reminder to Maryam to appreciate the limits of reason: *"We can't even imagine [Paradise]"*. The afterlife is beyond reason and unimaginable to the human mind.[111]

My informants' reflections on Paradise can be understood by drawing on Hirschkind's analysis as a pedagogical practice in which young women instil in themselves an "eschatological sensibility". Pondering Paradise is similar to the techniques of "death remembrance" of thinking about other aspects of the eschaton; it is constitutive of a project of orientating the self towards death, of living in the immediate present and cultivating the correct virtues and emotions, so that they may arise naturally within the self (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). Discussions about

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[110] One's fate in the hereafter is also a matter considered to be beyond the realms of reason. My informants understood their fate to lie in God's mercy (*rahma*) and hence the efficacy of practice in securing salvation was ultimately understood as uncertain and unknowable.

[111] Contemporary writings in particular stress that it is better not to speculate on what the *Quran* does not explicate specifically and clearly (Smith & Haddad 1981: 131). However, diverse interpretations exist, with some scholars claiming the afterlife should be approached only literally and others arguing the afterlife should be seen as a spiritual state.

Paradise instil hope (*raja*) and motivate these young women to act in the present so that they may reap the rewards in the life to come.

However, I suggest that Hirschkind's analysis is limited as it does not fully capture what is happening in these settings. Whereas Paradise is not as important a topic in pedagogical settings, discussions such as the one I began this chapter with were very common amongst my informants.[112] These young women, I suggest, are not solely drawing on Islamic scriptures and orienting themselves towards death, but are positioning themselves within the afterlife, within the temporal dimension of the distant-future. They are also engaging in fantasies of self-making in relation to this next world, assuming that they will continue to be themselves in the afterlife. By speculating on the nature of their intimate relationships – sexual partners and so on in the heavenly realm – they imagine themselves in another temporal and spatial dimension. Simultaneously, they critically reflect on this new dimension, wondering, for example, whether one might have to remain married to one's ex-husband in Paradise. In the absence of concrete knowledge they "fill the gaps" so that their lives in the hereafter become an inverted image of their current lives on earth.

As I have shown, these novel forms of relating to kin, non-practising friends, God, and potential husbands, entail shifting and repositioning the self and self-other relations in time. Practising, therefore, unfolds within two temporal frameworks. These reorientations are experienced as affective, as demonstrated by the excitement and potentiality that circulated amongst the young women as they reasoned about, imagined, and forged these new relations. However, as I elaborate below, practising is fraught with inconsistencies and tensions. Temporal frameworks are embraced only partially and never fully capture my informants' everyday experiences of practising Islam. Shifts in forms of subjectification involve constantly reorienting the self in time, but are never stable and never fully achieved in practice. Therefore, hope that is generated in these shifts and that energises these women's quests, is also connected to doubt.

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[112] In other instances I recorded their discussions on a range of topics including the nature of their homes, their bodies and leisure activities in Paradise.

6.7 Multidimensional temporalities

I have argued that my informants learn to devalue the near-future by focusing on the immediacy of the present and projecting themselves forward in the distant-future. However this remains a desired ideal; in practice a devaluing of the near-future is rarely fully accomplished. As Chapter Four revealed, these young women are occasionally involved in seeking, reflecting and elaborating on their imaginary relationships with a future husband with whom to share their life on earth in the near-future. In doing so, they not only negotiate a set of overlapping ideals of selfhood, but also contradictory temporal frameworks.

This section reflects on the multiple, overlapping temporalities that permeate these young women's experiences of practising Islam. It brings to the fore how the contrast between my informants' experiences of multiple temporalities and Guyer's (2007) ideal representations of time. These young women's experiences of ambivalence and contradiction illustrate the ways in which practising is produced through cycles of hope and doubt, as doubt is always intrinsic to any forward projection of the self (Pelkmans 2013: 28-31). I return to Maryam, who imagined and laughed about the kinds of relationships and sexual intimacies she might have in Paradise. Her experience here is not unique, but merely indicative of the fragmentary processes involved in practising Islam.

A few months following the conversation on intimacies in Paradise, Maryam and I were browsing the clothes aisles of *New Look* in Stratford Shopping Centre, and catching up on our weekend. In the previous week, Maryam had found the implementation of Islamic practices in her day-to-day life challenging. She blamed her difficulties on her non-practising friends with whom she had spent the last weekend. "*I've just been having all these desires you know*?" she explained. That afternoon I asked her whether she regretted becoming a practising Muslim – whether she missed her previous lifestyle? "*God did it for me, so I can't regret it.*" I probed slightly further, "*But do you miss it?*" "*Yes sometimes I do.*" A brief silence ensued as we stepped outside the congested shopping centre, until she continued:

> "*You know what though? I'm freaked out paradise will have restrictions...*
> *I'm worried I'll be disappointed. I know I shouldn't be saying this but I've*

given up so much stuff here and I just want to make sure it's all worth something. I know they say there are no rules, no restrictions, but I'm not sure. I need to find the evidence for it. I've asked lots of people, but I haven't really got a good answer for it, I've done a bit of searching myself but nothing."

Intrigued, I probed further, and she explained:

"Most people don't care what's in paradise. They love worshipping God so much it doesn't matter to them and [for them] there's no point thinking about it. But I'm giving up so much here. I just want to make sure it's worth it. I shouldn't be saying this I know... but I'm worried [that] I'll be let down. Do you get what I mean?"

It was clearly disconcerting for Maryam to even enunciate these thoughts out-loud, but I tentatively asked one final question as to which restriction was of most concern for her:

"Shame, I'm worried there will be shame in paradise. There is [shame] here and that's why we cover up, be modest, not wear make-up, [don't] listen to music, control desires, have to be careful with things... but what if paradise is like that too? I just don't get how a place can work without rules... but they say paradise is completely different beyond imagination... I'm so bad, doubting all these things. I just want to make sure I'm rewarded for all the things I've given up."

The tone of the conversation shifted thereafter, as we pondered on what Paradise would look like without rules and regulations. Maryam's thoughts drifted back to her love for R&B music and she pondered the types of songs she would have playing as she entered.

Maryam was once again thinking about Paradise. This time however, she was worrying and questioning how self-making could continue in an unknown and undefined temporal domain. Would conditions allow her to fashion herself, as she desired? Would it be a sufficient reward for the sacrifices she felt she had made on

earth? Maryam sought a definite answer for something that could not be understood. Her search for "evidence" illustrates an almost involuntary desire to gain solid knowledge and to rationally understand that which cannot be experienced in this life.

Maryam also doubted her commitment to a temporal frame that encouraged her to distance herself from the past and from experiences of the near-future on earth. Frequenting her non-practising friends illustrated she had not fully ruptured with her past, and reminded her of some of the practices of her earlier "heydays" that she had abandoned since practising Islam. This confrontation with her previous lifestyle placed her in an ambivalent and conflicting situation. The near-past and the near-future had once again become relevant temporal dimensions in her life. Torn between her friends' lifestyle and her commitment to her religion, she doubted her decision to devalue the present moment and abandon her worldly aspirations and gratifications. She had become drawn between different temporalities and models of selfhood (a practising self living in the immediate present and projected in the distant-future and a non-practising self committed to the near-future and near-past). This ambivalence led her to doubt her own commitment to practising.

6.7.1 Managing doubt and a fluctuating *iman*

A few months after these initial conversations about ambivalence, hesitation, and doubt, I met with Maryam again and asked her whether she had pursued her research on the topic.

> *"I've asked scholars and stuff and did some research but to be honest I've decided to stop looking into it. I think it's the kind of thing that no matter how much you research we just don't know. It's probably bad for me to keep wanting to know more, you know? I shouldn't be so keen to keep wanting to know, it's a bit selfish maybe."*

By answering in this way, Maryam asserted her own agency in the sense that it was up to her to either ask more impossible questions, or to accept the limits of human understanding and reasoning, as is deemed "correct" within Islamic discourses. As I was also intrigued by her suggestion that it would be selfish to want to know more, I asked her to reflect on that.

> *"It's bad. I should just accept and trust paradise will be as great as God says. That we can't even imagine it... [Hesitating she added,] but you know… sometimes I feel like I really need to know. Especially when I hit rock bottom, I really need something to keep me going, when my iman is down."*

I asked her when she was likely to "hit rock bottom" and experience "low *iman*" and she explained this normally occurred when she was neglecting her obligations, for example, when she was not concentrating during her prayer or praying at the required times. She continued:

> *"Or when I'm just thinking: why on earth am I doing all these things?! Sometimes it's really bad, I feel I don't want to do [all those things], like why am I bothering kinda thing. Sometimes Shaitan (Satan, devil) can whisper things to you... So I need motivation, something to make sure that it's all worth it. If not it just feels so abstract sometimes, like I'm relying on something abstract that I can't understand."*

Maryam had grown accustomed to a fluctuating *iman*. The first couple of times she hit "rock bottom", she failed to understand why God was punishing her despite all the sacrifices she had made. By conversing with others, she had learnt that uncertainties were common and constitutive of the nature of *iman*, and had realised she could interpret her situation differently. Her doubts were depersonalised and transformed into objects through her application of the concept of a fluctuating *iman*.

> *"I think it's God's way of giving me a push in the back... I've realised now, when I'm in the lowest of the lowest, I have to reflect on what God's trying to tell me. I asked a Sheikh about this and he told me to do this, cause I used to doubt everything so much. He told me to use the time to reflect on myself, to think hard about what I could've done to displease God… so now I use it as a time to be self-critical, to analyse my actions. I've still a long way to go and these periods really teach me that, they make me a better person. I need those kicks!"*

The second conversation I had with Maryam about her uncertainties is illustrative of

the ways she sought to manage her doubt by seeking to map her experience onto an understanding of sacred time. Once her feelings had been expressed, she was driven to seek coherence, pull herself "out of doubt", and learn to apply the appropriate religious linguistic tools. She learned to understand the "signs" of low *iman* and of *Shaitan*, and to interpret her experience through this lens.

As Maryam recounted to me, Layla had advised her to stop worrying about heaven: "*It's true there will be no obligations in janna, but it's impossible for us to even imagine what it will be like, it's beyond our imagination. I really don't understand why you're concerned, you should just trust God that it will be amazing.*"

Instead of dwelling on the matter Maryam was advised to trust in God, to increase her acts of worship, recite the *Quran* daily, and reflect on God's greatness and her relationship with Him in present time. Layla insisted prayer and other acts of worship would eventually work as self-disciplining techniques that would instil trust, an immediate connection with God and hence impact positively on her interior *iman*. She would eventually see these practices not as restrictions but as ways of "pleasing" and "connecting" with God.

As Maryam confessed in our second conversation, having initially sought different opinions on the matter she had now decided to abandon her search. By conversing with others, she had learnt the limits of her intellect (*'aql*) and that the nature of paradise was incomprehensible to a rational mind. For Maryam, this signified an interpretation of her "low *iman*" or periods of hesitation, as either interference from Satan and therefore external to her self, or as signs from God. If she was struggling it could be either Satan drawing her away from Islam or God punishing her for a bad deed, and warning her to practise. A fluctuating *iman*, Maryam learnt, was an integral dimension to faith, and one must learn how to recognise and manage it. Doubt could only be a sign of God's dissatisfaction with one's actions, and only through increasing "good actions" and acts of worship could this be resolved. By "reasoning correctly" and orienting her self towards God and the afterlife, Maryam was able to tackle her doubts.

By consulting her practising friends such as Layla, Maryam had initiated a search for coping mechanisms to address her doubts, thereby turning uncertainty into an object

that required a practical solution. *"My iman is so turbulent… it goes up a little, then down, but it's never really high and stays there"*, she described to me during the second conversation. Maryam had employed the idiom of "low *iman*" to interpret and conceptualise her experience of ambivalence, and had identified its signs: feelings of uncertainty, depression, loss of hope, lack of motivation, and laziness. These were all now treated as manifestations of a "low *iman*" that required specific counter-actions in order to re-establish a feeling of potentiality and "high *iman*". However, in the process of interpreting her experience through a fluctuating *iman* – an understanding of faith as inconsistent – the doubts were marginalised and never fully addressed.

A "fluctuating *iman*" served as a linguistic tool to objectify doubts but also as a conceptual device that allowed Maryam to reason about doubt in a particular manner and to reorient herself towards the transcendent, distant future. As I noted above, most of my informants complained about states of "low *iman*" as a way of expressing uncertainties and doubts and sharing their feelings, experiences and coping strategies.

Recognition of the fluctuating nature of *iman* was essential in order to overcome these moments of feeling "low". As Khadija, another young Somali friend who had been practising for several years explained to me,

> *"I think you have to realise it's a process… you'll evolve, you'll mess up, sometimes you'll go back on something you wish you hadn't … but it's always good to surround yourself with good people, good environment, and try to reconnect, increase your ibadat (worship), go to lessons and courses for an* iman *boost!"*

For example, Habibah, who often complained of "low *iman*", explained her problem to Layla *"My iman is really low – I don't know what to do anymore. I can't even pray… the last few months I've been praying late, missing my prayers, not feeling my prayers, listening to music, swearing, going places I shouldn't… it's gotten really bad."* Layla had, on that occasion, advised Habibah to start praying regularly in order to reconnect with God and re-instil a feeling of *iman*. Even if she did not "feel" like praying, Layla had advised her to "fake it" and repeat her prayers as this would ultimately help her generate sincerity and a willingness to act. As I pointed out in Chapter Five, advice from like-minded practising friends was crucial to the ways in

which my informants sought knowledge and direction in their everyday experiences of practising. These informal exchanges served to reinforce a commitment to normative practices and ideals but also created informal hierarchies amongst these young women.

"Low *iman*", I suggest, is therefore used to express a lack of excitement and potentiality or hope. It signals the inability to successfully reorient oneself into the future by reconfiguring one's relation to self and others. "Low *iman*" denotes an experience of disengagement that necessitates "reconnection". It rests on the recognition of the cyclical nature of self-transformation, as a process of wavering between the correct/incorrect use of reason and between hope and doubt (Pelkmans 2013: 28-31).

As Khadija notes, getting oneself "out of doubt" requires limiting one's exposure to un-Islamic contexts and engagement with un-pious individuals. In doing so, the model of a non-practising self, which is oriented towards the near-future, becomes "less socially relevant" and alternatives to practising Islam are discarded (Pelkmans 2013: 22). Because uncertainties are objectified, depersonalised and naturalised as fundamental dimensions of faith, a believer no longer feels isolated; anxieties are shared with others and made sense of collectively.

Interpreting one's experience of doubt through the idiom and concept of a "fluctuating *iman*" enables my informants to temporally reorient themselves in the immediate present and project themselves into the future, thus repositioning their self-other relations in time. Identifying doubts as "low *iman*" eventually works to re-establish horizons of hope. Doubts in this way work to invigorate faith as they naturalise and rationalise – yet also marginalise – the unknowable, encouraging individuals to strive for consistent and continuous practice. Although doubts and the experiences of multiple temporalities may appear to steer individuals away from faith,[113] if interpreted and rationalised "correctly" they may also invigorate their quests.

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[113] Although this chapter focuses on practising Muslims who are able to manage their doubts in such a way so as to re-invigorate their quests, there are of course young Somali women whose doubts steer them away from faith altogether (see Fatima in Chapter Three for example).

Maryam, Habibah, and Khadija's experiences highlight the ways in which the process of self-formation is, in fact, fragmentary, incoherent and unstable for most young practising women. Although Maryam aspired to be coherent in her practice, she was living in a context where multiple temporal dimensions (and models of selfhood) coexisted. I have shown how Guyer's (2007) outline of a recent shift in temporal framing corresponds with one of the dominant ways in which some of these young women experience sacred time. These idealised ways of understanding time are prevalent amongst some of the Islamic teachings these young women encounter, and are taken up and reproduced in everyday practices and conversations. Through Guyer's work, I have shown how the practices of these young women differ in relation to other anthropological accounts of Islam, where emphasis is placed on implementing projects of piety in the near-future (Deeb 2006; Mahmood 2005). I am not denying that these projects are not present amongst practising Somali women. For example, we have seen throughout how young women who seek to be "good Somali daughters", or search for professional, practising, Somali husbands on earth, are involved in processes of self-fashioning that unfold in the near-future. Rather, my point is that these projects are most often devalued amongst many young practising women.

My analysis also extends beyond Guyer's (2007) work in several ways. Whereas Guyer's account deals with abstractions, discourses and texts, this chapter has focused on how representations of time are experienced in everyday life. First, I explained how these young women, through the practise of Islam, position their novel relations with others within two interconnected temporal frameworks. Subsequently, through Maryam's example, I illustrated the way in which these temporal frames are maintained through constant "work", and suggested that these models of time are constantly being questioned and debated. I pointed to the presence of multiple temporalities within a single subject, and to the ways in which practising involves constantly oscillating between them. As we have seen throughout, my informants engage with multiple forms of knowledge in their projects of self-fashioning. Hence, their understandings of time are derived not solely through Islamic teachings, but also by engaging with Somali histories transmitted through their kin, public and political debates, or popular culture in the UK.

6.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, I return to the initial questions about how to theorise the interaction outlined in the original vignette, and what it tells us about the complex relationship between self-making and time.

I have argued that Hirschkind's analysis, and, more broadly, the work on piety (sections 1.3 and 1.3.1) that has dominated the anthropological study of Islam in the last decade is limited in its understandings of temporality. As recent scholarship has pointed out, and as I argued in the introduction, this body of work tends to emphasis the coherence of an Islamic discursive tradition, rather than the everyday experiences of Muslims (Schielke 2010a; 2010b; Soares & Osella 2010; Marsden 2007b). This may explain why Hirschkind, as well as Mahmood's analyses focus on how their informants reproduce this tradition, as opposed to their ideas about self-transformation, and their dynamic experiences and engagements with Islam. As a consequence, Hirschkind depicts how Muslims in Cairo draw on contemporary teachings in order to orient themselves towards death and the afterlife in the present moment; he assumes that self-making occurs in a single temporal dimension.

In contrast, my informants' conversations indicate that they discuss these issues, and grapple with concepts that are not necessarily grounded in the scriptures and teachings. An analytical focus on their conversations in everyday settings, and their creative engagements with discursive traditions has brought to the fore the ways in which their perceptions of self-making are neither limited to textual reproduction, nor unfold solely within the present moment. Thus, the everyday experience of practising involves two dominant yet not determining, coexisting, and mutually reinforcing temporal dimensions: a presentism that focuses on establishing an immediate connection with God, and an imaginative engagement with and forward projection of the self into the distant-future. It is this last dimension that has not been given sufficient attention in the anthropological work on Islam.

These different experiences of time map onto different ideas and imaginings of self-making. The processes involved in self-making on earth have an endpoint and an aim – establishing a connection with God and preparing for the hereafter - and can be known to these young women through an investigation of Islamic scriptures and

teachings. On the other hand, self-making in the distant-future is eternal and transcendent. Whilst some guidance is provided in Islamic texts, the nature and ultimate aim of the afterlife remain uncertain and undefined. The young women only know that it will be radically different to life on earth, but they are asked to accept its existence and unspecified characteristics as an act of faith. It is for this reason that their ideas of self-fashioning in the distant-future are often imagined in opposition to their lives on earth. My informants are reflecting on self-making in a different temporal domain, which is, however, not known in its entirety.

The question remains as to why these young women embrace these temporal frames. Why they have they become increasingly popular in the contemporary moment? In her essay, Guyer does not elaborate on the reasons why these temporal frames have become prevalent. She does, however, mention that they coincide with a historically specific period of uncertainty in 21st century America, but she purposely avoids making a causal argument between uncertainty and temporality. Moreover, she leaves unspecified to whom these temporal frames apply, precisely because her thesis is concerned with the content of texts rather than temporal experiences. Drawing on this point, I do not wish to suggest that it is my informants' relative economic uncertainty, nor their socio-economic marginality that leads them to devalue the not-so-distant past and future. This would offer an overly simplistic explanation for the current popularity of reformist Islam in London and elsewhere. Rather, I suggest that these temporal frames are increasingly popular in the contemporary moment precisely because they enable new ways of being, and novel possibilities for self-transformation. The forward projection of self-making, which takes place in different temporal dimensions, animates these young women's commitments to these pious pursuits. In particular, the distant-future presents the potential for continuing a process of self-fashioning beyond death. An analytical focus on temporality and self-making, I would like to suggest, brings into sharp focus the hope that fuels these young people's engagements in these projects of truth

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Chapter 7: Conclusions

Ladan was about to make some drastic changes to her practice of Islam; but this was not the first time that she had embarked on a process of self-transformation. At 18, Ladan, a second-generation Somali woman, had become disenchanted with the "party scene", and began to practise Islam "as a Salafi", as she put it to me. This transition was a difficult period in her life. Spending increasingly more time attending Islamic classes and conferences, rather than socialising in bars and clubs, she had become distant from many of her school friends. "*It taught me what I was made of*", she stated on one of our first encounters in 2010, "*It showed I had real determination and stamina.*" However, after a troubled marriage with a Somali man, Ladan became dissatisfied with what she called, the "rigid" or "black and white" ways of the Salafis. In contrast to both her previous engagement with Islam, and her mother's, who she claimed practised Islam in the cultural way, Ladan now described herself as "*more of a 'Sufi'*". Subsequently, following her university classes, Ladan enrolled on a series of self-development courses, and started to experiment with different spiritual practices. She had also come to appreciate that she "*Had to focus on the inner as much as the outer*". She explained: "*I think people should decide for themselves… everyone has their own personal journey*". Three years after our initial meeting, while I was in the final stages of writing this thesis, Ladan told me that she had decided to remove her *hijab* as she felt it no longer had significance in her life. Her relationship with God was personal and spiritual, she reasoned, and did not need to be symbolised by what she wore on her head. In conjunction with this, she had also begun to engage differently with Islamic texts. Ladan now challenged many of the mainstream textual interpretations, which she had previously accepted unquestioningly. Invoking a discourse of liberal choice and autonomy, she commented, "*Some of the statements, rules and obligations just don't make sense to me*". Yet she did not want to renounce her commitment to these "truths" entirely. Furthermore, she had recently made friends with who she termed "non-practising, liberal Somalis", and even more controversially, had started to date a non-Muslim – a decision with which she felt uneasy. If her mother found out, "*That would be the end of it*", she joked. Torn between the opinions of her newly acquired friends, and Islamic textual authority, Ladan felt ambivalent about her decision, and her engagements with Islam.

In the past decade, the scholarship on Islamic piety has dominated much of the anthropological study of Islam (Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006). This work has been influential in denaturalising the secular-liberal subject and analysing the specificities and formations of religious subjectivities on their own terms. However, it has portrayed piety as a straightforward, coherent, and bounded project. Building on this work, this thesis has argued that the everyday experiences of piety cannot be captured solely through Islamic discursive models of piety. By developing an approach that reveals the multifaceted dimensions of practising Islam, this thesis has considered the importance of a range of intersecting discursive traditions and practices that present themselves to practising women in a given socio-political context, and in a range of places beyond the mosque. Alongside discourses, this thesis has stressed the importance of the somatic and affective experiences of young practising women, as well as their forms of reasoning and argumentation. Moreover, it has attended not only to self-fashioning, but also to the importance of historically specific self-other relations.

I have argued that young Somali women's practise of Islam is best approached by investigating the forms, and means, through which they imagine novel relations to themselves and others, including kin, friends, potential husbands, and God. My thesis contributes to the anthropological work on Islam by revealing the ways in which these ethical imaginations enable novel ways of approaching social change (Moore 2011). Drawing on the concepts of the ethical imagination, problematization, and hope, it unravels the broader dynamics of ethical change present in these young women's pious pursuits. In what follows, I address the ways in which my ethnography has engaged with these concepts, concluding with a critical reflection on my contributions to the work on Islam and female Muslim subjectivities.

First, I consider the ethical imagination, which has served as a site from which to observe processes of social and ethical change. Extending a Foucaultian (1985: 28-29) understanding of ethics, this thesis has approached ethical change as a process that involves delimiting a part of oneself (the ethical substance), reconfiguring technologies of the self, and the modes of subjectification to a moral code, and imagining novel relations to others (Moore 2011). Throughout, I have traced these

changes by contrasting the ways in which two generations of Somali women imagine novel relations to themselves, and others. We have seen how first and second-generation women engage differently with the ethical imagination as they relate to, and make sense of, notions of culture, Islamic practice, and knowledge. However, ethical change is rarely straightforward or coherent, but rather is a recursive and fluctuating process characterised by contention and disagreement. A cross-generational perspective has avoided producing a linear trajectory of change and, instead, has brought to light the diversities across individual lifecycles, and between women from the same generation.

Furthermore, my ethnography has revealed the multiple, and at times contradictory, ethical projects of second-generation practising women. By investigating the ethical imaginations of these women, it has provided a complex and multi-faceted account of subjectivity. These young women are not solely engaged in pious pursuits. Rather, they negotiate contrasting modes of subjectification (pleasing God, choice, affect, and respecting kin), and different teleologies of the subject (pious, autonomous, and good Somali daughter). For example, by drawing on reformist teachings alongside liberal discourses, young Somali women reconfigure their relations with Somali kin. The latter are discursively positioned in the past, as the young women emphasise that, unlike their traditional mothers, for whom Somali culture and religion are determining forces and inherited dimensions of their life-world, they are able to constitute a "choosing" relationship to culture. They claim that what they share with their kin are not inherited dispositions, but rather a set of objectified values, norms and objects, which they choose to embrace. Nonetheless, these young women also feel an obligation to respect and please their kin. Hence, as we saw in the example of marriage, being "a good Somali daughter" is one amongst many teleologies among, which coexists with, and often contradicts, these young women's attempts to fashion themselves as autonomous subjects *vis-à-vis* a shared and objectified culture.

Through their efforts to embody a pious self, these young women have begun to prioritise an internal, embodied, and affective relationship with God. Many emphasise how they seek to reconfigure themselves as inextricably bound to God in the immediate present. Through their engagements with practices such as prayer, the donning of the *hijab,* or seeking knowledge, they emphasise interiority as an ethical

substance, and stress the significance of "pleasing God", or "submitting to God", as a mode of subjectification which coexists alongside a liberal notion of "choice". Similarly to Fadil (2008: 251), for these young women autonomy is achieved *through* their subjection to God. Their practising friends and the larger *umma* are crucial in assisting these young practising women's quests to establish a self-God relationship, as they separate themselves from non-practising friends and Somali kin.

These transformed relations with kin and God also impact on their aspirations for future husbands on earth. As we saw in Chapter Four, young practising women seek to position their idealised relations with future husbands somewhere in between their relations with kin and with God. A marital relationship ought to be one based on choice, equity and companionship, but at the same time, it should also be an extension of one's spiritual love for God. Material and social aspirations, alongside attempts to "respect kin", are often in conflict with these imagined relations with husbands. Finally, as shown in the last chapter, these relations with others on earth often stand in contrast with imagined relations with others in the distant-future of the afterlife. This temporal domain presents a further coexisting site of self-fashioning.

By placing these women's self-other relationships at the centre of my analysis, I have emphasised the importance of attending to the creative and intersubjective self. This approach has explored the manner in which the self interacts with others and negotiates discourses and practices, but is never fully determined by them (Jean-Klein 2000; Sökefeld 1999). As we have seen, differences are internal to the subject, as these young women shift between and inhabit a range of subject positions within different discourses (Moore 1994). Hence, their practice of Islam cannot be fully captured by a single model of ethical self-fashioning (Mahmood 2005). Nor does it involve, as Jacobsen (2011b) suggests, a new kind of subjectivity, constituted at the intersection of the Islamic and liberal discursive traditions. Instead, my analysis builds on Fadil's (2008: 250-251) claim that these young women's subjectivities should be conceptualised in terms other than exception or idiosyncrasy to liberal standards. As her analysis of orthodox Muslim women reveals, different traditions coexist in non-contradictory ways. They are employed differently depending on whether these women are engaging with God on a vertical axis, or relating to kin or other individuals on a horizontal axis (see section 3.8). My work complicates this analysis

further, by investigating the unstable and variable nature of a range of self-other relations. As evidenced by these women's refractory engagements with the notion of culture, they draw on a range of discourses and negotiate multiple modes of subjectification in their relations with Somali kin. In their processes of self-fashioning, they draw on different forms of knowledge, acquired through Islamic scholarly texts, popular culture, and intimate discussions with friends. My work has brought to the fore the complex and unstable relational matrix which these women are constantly redrawing in their everyday experiences of practising Islam. What is particularly interesting is the way in which these different relationalities are connected with each other. As these women imagine novel relations with potential husbands, they simultaneously transform their relations *vis-à-vis* Somali kin, and God. Shifting one form of self-other relation involves transforming the entire matrix. Moreover, I have considered the ways in which the relation between self and other is not only historically specific, but also affective, imagined, and embodied (Moore 2011: 76). As I elaborate below, this should be understood and positioned within different temporal frameworks. These relationalities are shaped, but not fully determined, by contemporary forms of problematization.

Therefore, Foucault's notion of problematization furthers an analysis into how ethical change is initiated, how it unfolds, and the extent to which it is shaped by the intersections of Somali history and migration, as well as the Islamic tradition of reform and the recent history of public discourses and policies on migration in Britain. It enables us to link broader contexts of social, economic and political change with processes of self-fashioning, and to account for the workings of power. According to Foucault (2000: 117-118), transformations are not only the result of external socio-political factors, but also involve responses and solutions that take particular forms and emerge out of historically specific ethical problems. Foucault maintains that at a given moment in time, attention comes to rest on a set of questions or "problems" (*ibid* 2000: 114). This thesis has centred on two areas in particular which have become the object of scrutiny, analysis, and elaboration in contemporary Britain: the question of what constitutes culture, and an interrelated concern with what it means to be Muslim and British. These questions have become problematized through recent shifts in political rhetoric, popular culture, and policies around multiculturalism in the UK, which have connected multiculturalism, Islam, and

cultural diversity to a host of issues relating to integration, segregated cultures and communities, violence, and extremism.

These questions have instigated a variety of responses and, at times, contradictory solutions, which themselves have developed out of these specific problematizations. For example, we have seen how policy makers have objectified and deployed culture as a form of governmentality, how popular culture has provided answers to the problems of being British and Muslim, how academics have similarly addressed these questions, and how Islamic reformist teachings have presented their own understandings of culture and religion. Throughout, I have positioned these discursive solutions alongside those proposed by young practising Somali women who, through their processes of self-fashioning, similarly intervene within, and contribute their own responses to these problematizations.

In so doing, I have explored how young Somali women engage with different forms of knowledge, but also actively rework these from a different perspective, thus transforming and challenging these problematized notions in the process. For example, Somali culture has come to be understood as a set of values, objects, and practices distinct from religion. Whilst dominant discourses and policies construe minorities in the UK as determined by their culture, young practising women articulate a "choosing relationship" to their culture. On the one hand, Somali culture signifies a romanticised and reified notion of Somali pastoral society, while on the other, as we saw with the *Miss Somali* event, it has been appropriated, updated, and celebrated by second-generation Somali women.

Chapters Three and Five pointed to the ways in which young practising women are transforming Islamic notions of faith, practice, and knowledge by problematizing the relation between exteriority and interiority. These transformations, I argued, should not be treated as illustrative of how Islam in Britain is becoming more "European", "reflexive", or "individualized" (Mandaville 2007; Roy 2004). Nor should change be conceptualised solely as the result of migration to the West, or of the increasing "translocality" of Islam. Rather, I have shown how changes are historically and contextually specific responses that draw on available discourses and practices. Problematizations serve as the "dynamic interface" (Faubion 2001: 97) between different intersecting discourses. They precipitate transformation from one ethical

field into another, and as we have seen, they nourish the elements – culture, Islam, and Britishness – that constitute ethical change, but do not determine the sorts of responses that emerge. My informants' reworkings of faith, practice, and knowledge should be seen as particular forms of transformations that unfold within these problematizations, but are also challenging the Islamic discursive tradition from within (Amir-Moazami & Salvatore 2003). Furthermore, Layla and Ifrah's contrasting attitudes to the *jilbaab* showed that these transformations are non-linear and fragmentary. Whilst interiority is prioritised amongst second-generation women, at the same time exteriority remains crucial to their practise of Islam, as they constantly experiment and engage with Islamic practices in multiple and complex ways. Throughout, I demonstrated that the Islamic reform cannot be captured by a single historical trajectory, nor does it necessarily correspond to a particular moment in time.

In sum, young practising women employ historically specific Islamic and liberal discourses to address these problematized issues, but these discourses only provide points of reference in their processes of self-fashioning. As Moore (2011) demonstrates, there is always an element that remains undetermined and open to radical potentiality. Novel ways of imagining the self and its relation to others emerge in the gaps, through unclosed possibilities. It is for this reason that ethics, for Foucault, is the conscious exercise of "freedom", as individuals always have the possibility of choosing the kind of self they wish to be, even though freedom is historically specific and shaped by existing discourses and practices (Laidlaw 2002: 322-327). Whilst for Foucault it is an ability to stand back and reflect that constitutes ethical practice as "freedom", for my informants it involves much more than the work of thought. It is not only through the processes of thinking, discussing, and implementing discursive traditions that young women transform themselves, but also through forms of attachments that are embodied, affective, and arise imaginatively (Moore 2011). What drives these young women's ethical projects is not solely their ability to reflect and to creatively select a particular self which they wish to be amongst different available discourses, but most importantly the potentiality, excitement, and euphoria that comes with imagining novel ways of being. These moments of thinking, reasoning, and fantasising are reinforced by, and inseparable from, affective processes. Hence, it is not enough to focus on the discursive context (Mahmood 2005). An analysis of practising Islam needs to account for the

connections between the broader socio-political and economic context, and the affective, embodied, and cognitive dimensions of self-fashioning.

Finally, an affective experience of potentiality, which is captured through the phrase "high *iman*", is generated through the temporalities involved in these women's attachments to novel understandings of self and self-other relations. These shifts in subjectification often involve "breaking with the past" and projecting the self forward in time. Indeed, any attempt to imagine novel ways of being involves repositioning oneself *vis-à-vis* others in time. As I explored in the previous chapter, many young practising women employ dominant Islamic representations of time in refashioning their relations with others, however, these coexist and conflict with other available representations of temporality. For example, their pursuits for suitable husbands, or their attempts to fashion themselves as "good Somali daughters", involve pursuing ethical projects in the near-future, as well as negotiating dominant religious forms of temporality. As I suggested above, these women are not only negotiating multiple temporal frames, but their relational matrices are inseparable from their understandings of time. Therefore, following Miyazaki (2004), I have argued that because practising involves reorienting the self in time, it can be said to be "hopeful" in that it is animated by a forward-looking horizon. My work further contributes to the literature on hope, by exploring hope not only as a framing device for aspiration, but also as an affective and embodied orientation that animates processes of self-fashioning.

Yet this "prospective momentum", as Miyazaki (2004: 8) points out, can only be sustained by a ceaseless repetition that maintains a constant anticipation of fulfilment. Hope can only be sustained if the self continuously reorients itself in time. For this reason, these novel imagined self-other relations are unstable, refractory, and in constant flux, as self-transformation is never complete. The temporality of practising Islam is exemplified by comparing Muneera, the recently practising young woman with whom I began this thesis, and Ladan, who, having experimented with a range of Islamic traditions began to abandon her commitment to Islamic forms of knowledge. These women capture two instances in the non-linear, and constantly shifting trajectory of practising Islam. But Ladan's example is also illustrative of the manner in which a move away from practising Islam entails reconfiguring her relation with

herself but also with her mother, friends, and boyfriend – it shifts her entire relational matrix. Thus, she is experimenting with yet another way of engaging with what it means to be Somali, Muslim and British. The process of practising Islam only temporarily enables these young women to imagine themselves otherwise. In order to sustain a prospective momentum, these women need to constantly reposition themselves in time, and hence endlessly look elsewhere in order to sustain their quest for self-transformation. These young women's relationalities are therefore in continuous fluctuation and transformation, and cannot be captured by a single static model, as discourses never fully determine how the self constitutes and transforms its relation to self and others. As we saw in Chapter Five, the majority of women constantly experiment with different Islamic traditions or teachings, meanwhile others, including Ladan, may seek forms of knowledge outside of the Islamic tradition in order to assist their self-transformations.

Through drawing on the literature on subjectivity, ethics, and social change, this thesis has rendered intelligible the contextual and historical specificities of these young women's pious subjectivities, and the mechanisms of, and driving forces behind, their ethical transformations, thus enriching the anthropological work on piety and Islam. This thesis, however, should also be read as a critical response to the contemporary problematization of the female Muslim subject in public debates and academic and policy writings. The Muslim woman in Britain has come to stand at the fulcrum of a range of interconnected, and politically charged issues. For example, debates around the retreat of multiculturalism have interlinked the Muslim woman with a determining view of culture, an understanding of Islamic practices as visible signs of difference, and of Islam's incompatibility with British "values". Islam has been rhetorically associated with the ensuing problems of migration, integration, and national security. My work has sought to challenge these understandings of religion and culture, and to deconstruct the ways in which connections between these disparate notions are often treated as self-evident (Foucault 2000: 201). By exposing the historical conditions that have made these understandings of religion and culture appear axiomatic, I have revealed their historical singularities – the ways they are shaped by problematizations that have arisen at this particular moment in time. Furthermore, I have pointed to the importance of exploring different understandings of these concepts in order to shift attention away from the "problem" of the Muslim

woman – to move beyond the current impasse in policy, political thought and public opinion, and to shift the terms of debate on which these discussions of multiculturalism have come to rest. By turning to the multiple perspectives and ethical imaginations of young Somali practising women, I have unravelled the ways in which they lead to novel forms of being and engaging with the world, thus providing alternative ways of thinking about these notions. Young Somali women's practice of Islam should be seen as a form of intervention within current problematizations, but also as an effort to pluralise and transform contemporary debates on culture and Islam in the UK.

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Appendix A: 1950s Somalia to the present diaspora

The Somali presence in the UK, and the experiences of two generations of migrants, must be understood in light of a history of colonialism, nationalism, urbanisation and nation-state building, and the subsequent civil war and state collapse. This appendix traces key events throughout Somali history and migration from the 1950s to the present day and the formation of a global diaspora in the last 20-25 years.

1. Post World War II: Urbanisation and Somali nationalism

The earliest Somali migration to the UK dates back to the 19th century, during a period of British colonial rule in the former Protectorate of Somaliland. Following the Berlin Conference in 1885, colonial powers began to partition the Somali-speaking region, and in 1897, it became divided between four colonial powers. The UK possessed the Protectorate of British Somaliland (since 1991, the self-proclaimed Somaliland), and the Northern Frontier District (NFD, since 1963 the North-Eastern Province in Kenya), Italy seized *La Somalia Italiana*, France *La Côte Française des Somalis* (Djibouti since 1977), and Abyssinia (Ethiopia), the Ogaden and Haud areas (Lewis 2002: 40-62) (Map 2). It was during this period that migrants, predominantly from the British Protectorate of Somaliland, worked as sailors and traders with the British merchant navy and established communities around major UK ports such as London, Liverpool, Bristol, and Cardiff (De Montclos 2003: 44; Griffiths 2002). They were involved in the seafaring trade, which intensified following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and generally worked as crew and boiler men on British ships throughout World War I (Kleist 2004; Holman & Holman 2003). The Somali community in the borough of Tower Hamlets in London originated from this period and consisted of males, mainly from the British Protectorate, who were automatically entitled to British citizenship (Map 1). Whilst some settled permanently, many continued to maintain economic and social ties with the Somali regions. With the expansion of the steel industry in the UK during the 1960s, Somalis who were already in the country began to settle in the midlands, and in the north, in order to take advantage of growing industrialisation. It was not until then that women and children began to join the men, and the communities were further expanded (Harris 2004: 22-23).

In the period following World War II, Italy was forced to renounce its colonies in Africa, and *La Somalia Italiana*, was taken over by the United Nations and governed as a protectorate. In 1949 the British also gave up control of British Somaliland, and both territories were joined and governed as a protectorate. Throughout this late colonial period a large number of Somalis began to migrate to emerging cities or coastal towns within the protectorate in pursuit of education and employment. With the increasing commercialisation of the pastoral economy, and its incorporation into the world economy, clans began to lose control over the resources and means of rural production. This led to the disruption of traditional kin relations, and a growing exploitation of pastoralists by an emerging merchant and middle class in coastal and urban areas, who obtained revenues from exports of pastoral goods (Laitin & Samatar 1984). These new developments resulted in the expansion of the coastal towns and interior townships of Somaliland and led to an increase in the number of people associated with the economic and administrative activities of the colonial state (Kapteijns 1999: 103).

These new male urban classes were amongst the first generations to receive formal education, and worked as lorry-drivers, clerks, interpreters, traders, and teachers, for the colonial, and subsequently postcolonial state and economy. Somali men who had been educated in universities abroad, such as in Europe and the Middle East, returned to work as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and engineers. Together they participated in a new urban lifestyle, were active advocates of a modern, progressive agenda, and supporters of formal education and women's rights (Kapteijns 1999: 101). Furthermore, they were fervent nationalists, many of who participated in the 1950s colonial resistance, and the struggle for political independence and unification of the Somali regions (*ibid* 1999: 155). They explicitly denounced clan identity and instead advocated a common Somali and Islamic identity calling for a *Soomaalinimo* (a national Somali communal identity), which would unite all five colonial Somali divisions.

2. Independence and the regime of Siad Barre

In July 1960 Somalia and Somaliland merged to form the new Somali Republic, with Mogadishu as its capital. Urbanisation continued to escalate as the population of Mogadishu went from less than half a million to more than two million between 1969

and 1990 (Lewis 2002: 265), and other major urban areas, including for example, Kismayo, Merka, Baidoa, Galkayo, Bosaso, Burao, Erigavo, Hargeysa, Berbera and Borama, grew rapidly in size (see Map 2).

Many of the transformations I explore in relation to the experiences of first-generation Somali women (Chapters Two, Four and Five), originate in the post World War II period of rapid social change and rural-urban migration. I shall therefore examine this period in some depth. Following independence, Somalia joined in debates on modernity, freedom, development, exploitation and equality (Kapteijns 1999: 101). European lifestyles and clothing became increasingly popular throughout this period, and remained so until the 1980s-90s; fashionable clothing was sold in boutiques owned by British and Italian expatriates and was popular amongst urban Somalis (Akou 2011: 69). Urban women entered formal education and employment, and as we saw in Chapter Four, love and companionate marriages came to replace traditional marriages arranged by clan families (Kapteijns 1999). At the same time, there were attempts by both Somali citizens, and the government throughout the 1970s, to reimagine and valorise traditional Somali nomadic culture, and rethink the ways it might apply to modern life – a trend that was widespread throughout Africa and the Middle East in the 1960s and 70s (Akou 2011; Kapteijns 1999: 155). Women were often at the fulcrum of these debates on modernity, tradition, and culture.

It was not long following independence until many Somalis became disillusioned with the new government as the country plunged into economic stagnation. Aid dependency increased, as did rural proletarianisation and corruption; nepotism became rampant and the gap between the lower and upper classes widened (Lewis 2002: Chapter 10). In 1969 the government, under Prime Minister Egal, came under accusations of clientalism and neo-patrimonialism along clan lines, and President Shermaarke was shot dead in a military coup. Members of the Somali military, and police forces, announced the rise of a new revolutionary order, and the establishment of the Somali Democratic Republic. In January 1971, the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) under general Siad Barre issued its policy programme

The new SRC oversaw a period of nationalism and reform, which acquired an ideological edge with the adoption of Scientific Socialism in 1970 (Lewis 2008: 39). This led to a period of nationalisation of the economy; foreign banks, factories,

plantations and other businesses were seized in an attempt to reduce dependency on foreign imports. The Council embarked on a program of reform and progress, with the aim of fighting poverty, disease, and ignorance (Lewis 2008: 36; Lewis 2002: Chapter 9). Amongst the SRC's mandate were the aims of guaranteeing the right to work, promoting social justice, eradicating illiteracy, establishing orthography for the Somali language, and eliminating corruption and the tribal system (Samatar 1988: 84-85).

In terms of education, the SRC introduced an official Somali alphabet based on Latin orthography, and issued an intensive and extensive literacy programme. In 1971, all schools were nationalised and old school materials were replaced with Somali textbooks, as Somali became the official administrative and national language (Samatar 1988: 100-103). Following the success of an urban literacy campaign, a rural campaign was launched which sent 30,000 urban students and teachers into the countryside to teach reading and writing to the nomadic population (*ibid* 1988: 102). Revolutionary youth camps were set up for orphan children, who were housed, fed, taught, and clothed. By 1978, although most schools were in urban areas, student enrolment was on the rise in both primary and secondary schools, and the student university enrolment tripled (*ibid* 1988: 102-103). Adult literacy increased from 7-10% in 1969, to 60% in the 1970s (*ibid* 1988: 103). However, despite the SRC's commitment to boost employment, many of the jobs created were within state structures, and very little was done to tackle the agricultural sectors (*ibid* 1988).

The SRC was also committed to furthering women's rights, and many urban first-generation women benefited from policies that encouraged women to go into education and employment. In 1975, a new family law was passed giving men and women equal rights in divorce and inheritance, and the *diya* practice (blood money) and other aspects of customary law (*xeer*), which were considered a traditional source of inequality between the genders, were outlawed (*ibid* 1988). This was part of a general assault on the traditional structures of society in the effort to secure modernisation (Lewis 2002: 209-223) (see Chapter Two).

In February and March 1971 a general "Campaign against Tribalism", officially named *ololeh*, and designed to "exorcize corruption and to resuscitate pan-Somalism and national unity", was launched (Samatar 1988: 107). Drawing on previous

nationalist struggles and promoting a pan-Somali identity, the aim was to appeal to a united Somalia across clans and lineages by diminishing the roles of clan-based institutions and practices. Somalis were encouraged to call each other "comrade" (*jalle*) instead of "kinsmen", and weddings and burials were no longer to be clan-based affairs. Instead, marriages were symbolically stripped of kinship and religious significance, taking place in Orientation Centres, and burials were to be conducted in local neighbourhoods, although the extent to which these took place is debatable. Emphasis was placed on local settlement as a unit of allegiance, rather than clan, as the SRC divided the country into eight 8 provinces that were further divided into 15 regions and 78 districts (Lewis 2008: 40). Official lineage titles (e.g. *duya, 'aaqils*) were renamed peace-makers (*nabaad-doons)* and clan alliances were banned (Samatar 1988: 108; Lewis 2002: 209).

Although religion was conflated with tradition and, in many cases, seen as an impediment to socialism and progress, Siad Barre sought, at least in rhetoric, to link fundamental values of Islam to socialist policies. In a speech in 1972, he declared that, "Ours is the religion of common man. It stands for equality and justice. Consequently, socialism as applied to our particular condition cannot identify religion as the obstacle to the progress of the working class and therefore cannot negate it" (cited in Samatar 1988: 108). However, this was only temporary and in 1974 the regime introduced sanctions on religious expression, and passed new family laws, arguing that previous arrangements, supported by religion, had resulted in the abuse and exploitation of women. The law that sought to equalise inheritance of both men and women provoked considerable protest, particularly amongst *waddads* (Somali *ulema*). It ultimately led to the execution of ten theologians in 1975, who were accused of counter-revolutionary activities (Samatar 1988: 109).

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, much of the socialist rhetoric had not been translated into reality (Samatar 1988), and Barre had begun to exploit clan divisions to his advantage. The government became increasingly reliant on quashing political dissent through fear and violence. In 1971, two senior members of the SRC were arrested and accused of counter-revolutionary ideas and many others were imprisoned or forced into exile (Samatar 1988: 109). The novels of Nuruddin Farah, particularly the trilogy *Variations on the theme of an African dictatorship* capture the everyday realities

under an increasingly authoritarian military regime. Lewis (2002: 210-211) has described the ways in which Barre built a "Maoist cult" as he displayed statues of himself in front of public buildings, presented himself as the "Father of the Nation", and controlled the two main radio stations.

3. Reformist movements

The impact of Islamic reformist movements throughout the 1980s also began to be felt in the Somali regions. Somalis formed their own Islamist groups, such as *Itaxaad al-Islamiya (Islamic Union)*, a Wahabi or Salafi influenced group (McGown 1999: 36), which arose in opposition to the Barre regime. Like *al-Islah al-Islamiya* these groups were funded by Islamic associations in the Middle East, their leaders were trained in Saudi Arabia, and in Somalia, they set up *Quranic* schools and promoted Islamic education (Adan 1994). *Jama'at al-Islah* (Society of Reform), which identified with the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun)* was actively involved in the provision of social services such as hospitals, clinics, food, housing, and education.[114]

Reformist movements were especially popular in Somali urban areas amongst the young middle classes. They began to change the landscape across the region, as Islamic education and forms of dress originating in the Middle East, which had previously only been worn by Arab and Persian settlers, including the *niqab*, *abaya*, and *jilbaab,* spread across Somali-speaking territories (Akou 2011). Members of these reformist movements began criticising the approaches of their families, by attacking well-established Sufi practices within Somali Islam; they destroyed tombs, decried dancing and drums, and demanded that men grow beards and that women wear *hijabs* (McGown 1999: 35).

Because of Somalia's geographical position, relations with the Middle East have also been an important part of economic life across the Somali territories. In 1974 Somalia joined the League of Arab nations, as the only member where Arabic was not a first

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[114] McGown (1999: chapter 1) argues that these Islamist movements continued to have a presence throughout the 1990s in both London – in Whitechapel and Regent's Park mosques – as well as in Toronto. However, throughout my fieldwork I did not notice any affiliation to these movements amongst my female informants, although some of the women were familiar with the organisations.

language. Thanks to these new diplomatic ties, Somalis migrated to Saudi Arabia and to other countries in the Gulf. Increasingly they worked in the oil industry, a migratory pattern which increased following the rapid rise in oil prices throughout the 1970s (Kleist 2004: 5). Others migrated to Gulf countries and further overseas for religious education, business, and family reunification (Kleist 2004: 7), and many sent money home through the informal *hawaaalad* transferring system (Lindley 2010).

4. Civil War and State collapse

By the early 1980s, following an intense period of drought, dwindling aid, a shrinking economy, and a costly counter-insurgency, Somali society was on the verge of collapse. The Ogaden War of 1977, which caused an influx of thousands of Somali and Oromo refugees into Somalia, coupled with the end of the 1974 friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, which had brought money, weapons and administrative and organisational support to Somalia, further impoverished the country and weakened the regime (Lewis 2002: Chapter 10). In 1980, following the Soviet Union's backing of Ethiopia, Somalia signed a deal with the US, exchanging their use of airbases for military support (Samatar 1988: 141).

Resistance to the regime was intensifying in the North, as the Barre regime, which had centralised much of the Somali economy, had further enhanced the political, economic, and social differences between the North and South. Barre sought to crush opposition through imprisonments, executions, confiscations of businesses, and other forms of abuse (Adan 1994). Two major opposition groups formed: the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), which was largely dominated by the *Majarteen* clan based in Ethiopia, and the Somali National Movement (SNM), led by the *Isaq* clan and based in London. As these resistance militias took hold of the city of Hargeysa in 1988, Siad Barre ordered a series of aerial strikes killing thousands and forcing many to claim asylum abroad. Many *Isaq* clan members joined already-established relatives or settled in London. In 1991 the United Somali Congress (USC), which aimed to unite all opposition groups and take hold of the government, ousted Barre from Mogadishu. However, the other groups refused to accept the USC authority, thus leading to the collapse of the State.

Throughout the early 1990s, civil war spread across the country and following a

general uprising, Siad Barre fled Mogadishu in 1991, and sought exile in Nigeria, until his death. In the same year the Republic of Somaliland, the former British Protectorate, building on the struggles of the *Isaq*-led SNM, declared independence. Despite inter-clan fighting continued throughout the 1990s, Somaliland has witnessed relative peace since 1996 (Kleist 2004: 7).[115] The civil war, throughout the 1990s, produced another cohort of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK (Kleist 2004: 7-8).

Until 2000, following the failure of the 1991 US led intervention *Operation Restore Hope*, Somalia remained without a central government and large numbers of Somalis were internally displaced, with many migrating to refugee camps in neighbouring Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Yemen (Harris 2004: 24). Throughout this period the Somali population in the UK changed significantly. A higher proportion of single women, children, and young people were forced to migrate, and family reunifications increased.[116] Furthermore, migration intensified from the southern areas of Somalia, particularly amongst those sub-clans, who had been persecuted by the Barre government (Port Cities London: n.d). Many who migrated to the UK were recognised as refugees and granted British citizenship.

5. Diaspora and Somalis in London

In recent years Somalis have spread across a "global diaspora" ranging from Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, to Zambia and Tanzania (Kusow & Bjork 2007).[117] The cost of migrating has, at times, meant that family reunification has been a scattered process, whereby a small number of family members have migrated alone, in the hope that the rest of the family would join later (Kleist 2004: 10). Some Somalis came directly, but

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[115] Puntland declared itself an autonomous region in 1998.

[116] Between 1988-1994 a special concession from the British government allowed UK Somalis to apply for family reunions for relatives, rather than the relatives having to go through the embassy in Ethiopia (Griffiths 2002). However, throughout the 1990s Parliament passed several immigration and asylum laws that made it harder for people to claim asylum. For example, applications could only be made once the claimant had reached the country of destination which, coupled with stringent visa requirements and the Immigration (Carriers Liability) Act of 1987, made this difficult without the use of illegal means (Lindley 2010: 117).

[117] For recent work on the formation of the Somali Diaspora see Horst 2007; Kleist & Hansen 2007; Kusow 2007; Kusow & Bjork 2007.

often the process of migration was not straightforward and many spent time in refugee camps or in transit in Ethiopia or Kenya prior to their relocation, with others still arriving through a smuggling process (Lindley 2010: 118).

The UK now hosts the largest Somali community outside of the Somali regions (Harris 2004: 24) with an estimated 70,000 Somalis residing in London.[118] Whereas many Somalis followed kin, countrymen or social networks, others were drawn in by language or a reputation for religious tolerance (Harris 2004: 24). Today, Somalis who arrive in the UK are mostly secondary migrants from the wider diaspora who hold refugee status or citizenship in another EU country (Van Liempt 2011; Lindley & Van Hear 2007; Nielsen 2004). Many avail of their transnational connections to move to the UK, so as to pursue education and employment opportunities, as well as to join families and settle in already established communities (Nielsen 2004). In recent years, there has also been a rise in return migration to Somali-speaking territories, particularly to more stable areas of the North. Some, who spend half the year in Somali regions, are part of what Hammond et al (2011) has described as the "part-time diaspora". Somalis also maintain close ties with their home country, through the sending of remittances and regular contributions to kin, household, or community projects (Lindley 2010; Horst 2008; Hassan & Chalmers 2008; Kleist 2008; Hammond 2007; Al Sharmani 2006; 2010).[119] However, the latest drought and famine and continued political crisis in Somalia, has meant that Somalis have continued to migrate into neighbouring countries and across the diaspora.

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[118] This estimate is made by community organisations in London. The 2001 UK Census recorded 43,373 persons born in Somalia and residing in the UK, with 33,831 (78%) in London alone. There are a vast number of policy-based studies on Somalis in the UK (e.g. Harris 2004; Change Institute 2009). For studies of Somalis in the boroughs of Camden, Tower Hamlets and Hackney, see Hemmings 2010; Holman & Holman 2003; Khan & Jones 2003; Griffiths 1997; CSC 1998.

[119] Lindley (2010) offers an in-depth account of the Somali remittance process based on fieldwork conducted in London, Hargeysa, and Nairobi.

Appendix B: The Multiculturalism debates in Britain

In what follows, I trace a series of shifts in policies, and in public and political perceptions on multiculturalism, that have been unfolding in the last decade in the UK.[120] Following a brief summary of the origins of multicultural discourses and legislative and policy frameworks, I show how multiculturalism has, in recent years, come under attack in a wide range of public and political debates across the political spectrum. I suggest that both defenders and opponents of the concept have contributed to the problematization of the "multicultural society" (Bracke & Fadil 2012).[121] Within these debates, the place of Islam in Britain has become inseparable from the issues of integration, cohesion, and national identity.

1. The rise of multicultural policies and discourse in Britain

Discussions of multiculturalism and ethnicity first arose in the late 1960s and 70s, following on from the race-relations paradigm of previous years, and as a consequence of a growing surge of migrants, particularly from South Asia and the former colonies (Modood 2010: 9). In 1966 Home Secretary Roy Jenkins' speech marked a turning point for minority issues in the country. He described integration "not [as] a flattening process of assimilation, but as equal opportunity, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance". Although not universally or uniformly accepted, mainstream politics and public opinion increasingly recognised the claims made by minorities to be accepted as "different", and to challenge negative discrimination (Grillo 2007: 980).

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the legal and policy framework with respect to minorities included ethnicity (but not religion) as a recognised group. This paradigm

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[120] Multiculturalism has been employed to define a host of different things, including a demographic condition, a set of institutional accommodations or state principles, or a set of objectives of a political theory (Vertovec 1998; 2007). This thesis, however, does not approach these debates from a normative perspective, nor does it treat multiculturalism as a descriptive term. Rather, similarly to Grillo (2010) and Lentin & Titley (2011), it documents these rhetorical shifts, but also treats them as "fields of problematization" (see Chapter One).

[121] For recent multicultural theories in Britain see McGhee 2008; Kundani 2007; Phillips 2007. For political theory on multiculturalism see Baumann & Vertovec 2010; Kymlicka 2007; Modood 2007; Taylor 1994.

had developed throughout the 1970s and was to a large extent exported from the US (Modood 2010). The Race Relations Act (1976) recognised the rights of ethnic and racial minorities and created the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), now the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which monitors the implementation of the Act. Many of the multicultural public policies in the UK have been implemented at the local level (LEA). For example, the Swan Report (1985) *Education for All* was responsible for introducing multicultural education in schools and educating children with the idea that Britain is a multicultural society. Government support was also extended to ethnic minority organisations to provide advice, representation, or facilities, catering for the local needs of minority groups.

The publishing of the Parekh Report (2000) marked another defining moment of political engagement with multicultural policies, representing New Labour's commitment to multiculturalism. Produced by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CMEB) in 2000, and sponsored by the Runnymede Trust, the report was chaired by political philosopher, Bhikhu Parekh. Emphasising pluralism and diversity as an asset to the UK, it sought to simultaneously promote a meta-narrative of "Britishness" under which diversity could flourish (Meer & Modood 2009: 477). According to the report, Britishness was not something individuals possessed, nor a single view of history, but being British entailed "learning the grammar, vocabulary and syntax of the prevailing form of life and knowing how to participate in its on-going dialogue intelligently and intelligibly". This New Labour commitment marked a "policy recognition of Britain's historical multi-national diversity" and a sustained attempt at furthering awareness of cultural diversity across public institutions, particularly at the local level (Parekh 2000: 71-3).[122] However, despite initial political backing, the Parekh report quickly came under a series of criticisms including, for example, the claim that it contravened universal values and political equality in the public sphere (McLaughlin & Neal 2004).

2. The demise of multiculturalism

[122] Many of the existing Somali youth clubs and community organisations were set up throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, to provide advice and support to recent asylum seekers and refugees on local services, and to support the educational and professional development of Somali youth.

Since the early 2000s, there has been a widespread attack on multiculturalism and a growing scepticism towards what has been seen as the prevailing liberal ideologies that have dominated policies since the 1970s. Across Europe, politicians and media pundits have begun to promote a "post-multicultural" approach, and to reassert ideas of integration, cohesion, and common values (Vertovec 2010). Although anti-multiculturalism attitudes had existed prior to this moment, the "backlash" in recent years employs new language, rhetoric, and images, which converge across the political spectrum (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010). As Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) demonstrate in their analysis of public discourse, and local and national policies in Europe, multiculturalism has been treated as a fixed ideology or dogma, accused of promoting separatism, and of rejecting common national values. By developing values at odds with those of Western (secular society), so the dominant argument goes, multiculturalism has been seen as a threat to social cohesion and has thus provided the conditions for the growth of extremism (Grillo 2007: 980).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, this rhetoric has proliferated in the UK in the speeches of politicians, religious leaders, and in the media, as well as in policy statements and strategies, and public and popular opinion. These interventions have "moved disjointly, influencing one another" and have often revolved around highly politicised events that have sparked a series of debates in government and in the media (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010: 27). Partly driven by a majority opinion that maintains that accommodations to diversity had "gone too far" (Kymlicka 2010), these mainstream debates have also come to converge and interact in complex ways with the xenophobic rhetoric of populist minority right-wing movements, such as the BNP, EDL, and UKIP (Grillo 2007).

Opposition from progressives and centre-left commentators has also been particularly vocal and has similarly taken a number of forms. Amongst academics, multiculturalism has been blamed for failing to address social, economic, and political inequalities, reifying culture, forcing "communities" to compete for resources, privileging patriarchy, and threatening liberal democracy (Alibhai-Brown 2001; 2004;

Okin 1999).[123] In the media, debates have been equally fervent. For example, in 2004 the editor of the left-leaning *Prospect* magazine, David Goodhart, published an article entitled "*Too diverse?*" in which he explores the existing tensions, amongst liberals, between the concepts of solidarity and diversity. The article concludes with a series of policy recommendations to promote greater integration in British society. Reprinted in *The Guardian*, this essay sparked a series of critical responses and debates amongst a range of academics, journalists, and policy makers (e.g. Parekh, Rattansi, Younge, Kimlicka and Blunkett).[124]

An overarching concern throughout these debates has been a belief in the "divisive character" of multiculturalism (Grillo 2007: 985), which separates communities, undermines social cohesion, and fractures national identity. For example, Trevor Phillips, chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and co-author of the Parekh Report, has been amongst its most vocal critics. In an interview with *The Times* in 2004, he infamously alleged Britain was "sleep-walking towards segregation" and he called for the British government to stop its support for multiculturalism, claiming it fuelled "separateness".

Islam has come to occupy centre stage within these debates around diversity, as the "problem" of multiculturalism has become inseparably linked to the "Muslim problem" (Ghannoushi 2006). As Grillo (2010) notes, this has coincided with a change in British discourses on minorities that has mutated from "race" to "ethnicity" in the 1990s, and "religion" in the present period. The catalyst for this in the UK was the 1989 Rushdie Affair, which marked the first time religion entered British public and political debates around multiculturalism (Modood 1990; 2010; Werbner 2002). Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* was considered offensive by a large majority of Muslim youth in the UK who, backed by major Islamic organisations,[125] took to the streets in

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[123] Defenders of multiculturalism include Rattansi 2012; Modood 2007; Vertovec 2007; Giddens 2006; Parekh 2000; and Grillo 2005; 2007.

[124] In a similar vein, in 2010, Munira Mirza, Deputy Major for Education and Culture for London, edited a special feature for Prospect magazine entitled *Rethinking Race*, that explored some of the failings of multiculturalist policies.

[125] This includes the OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference), the lobbying branch of the UKACIA (UK Action Committee on Islamic affairs) (see Lewis. P.1994).

protest, demanding the withdrawal of the book from public circulation, and campaigning for the extension of blasphemy laws to cover Islam. The reluctance of the government to respond further infuriated the protesters. Although responses amongst British Muslims varied widely, particularly with regard to the issued *fatwa* (ruling) by Ayatollah Khomeini sentencing Rushdie to death for apostasy, the crisis marked the first time that British Muslims articulated a political identity, made demands for recognition, and looked to the British establishment to intervene on their behalf (Modood 1990; 2010; Werbner 2002). It marked the first internationalisation of their struggles through sharing their frustrations, and campaigning with others across the global *umma* (Geaves 2005; Modood 1990). It also signalled an important moment in which young Muslims mobilised along religious, rather than ethnic or racial, lines, and responded to an attack which they felt had left them marginalised and insulted (Modood 1990).

Following the Rushdie Affair, criticisms of Islam as an intolerant and oppressive religion erupted in the media, and amongst a range of commentators across the political spectrum. Throughout the 1990s, the UK witnessed an intensification of anti-Muslim sentiment (Allen 2005: 54-55)[126], as the authorities further failed to respond to the marginalisation and discrimination faced by the Muslim community. Comparing the incident to the July 2005 bombings, Werbner (2009: 29) notes how, for mainstream public opinion, the event "seemed to underline an unbridgeable chasm between European values of citizenship and the rule of law, and Muslims' vengeful transnational politics". Liberal commentators struggled to reconcile their support for what they saw as a fight against oppression with the challenge posed to the liberal principle of freedom of speech (Jacobson 1998: 39). The framing of the issue, in terms of a supposed incommensurability between Muslims' concern with blasphemy, and the liberal concepts of freedom, has continued to permeate public discourses on Muslims in Europe, as evidenced more recently by the Danish cartoon controversy (see Mahmood 2009; Asad 2009).

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[126] In 1997 the Runnymede trust published a report on Islamophobia, one of the first major reports to document the discriminations faced by Muslims in Britain and to popularise the word Islamophobia. It published a follow-up report in 2004

The summer riots of 2001 in the cities of Bradford, Burley, and Oldham,[127] further intensified the linkage between multiculturalism and Muslims in Britain. These convergences were compounded by 9/11 and, in 2005, by the 7/7 bombings in London. Attacks on multiculturalism intensified as "diversity" was blamed for fuelling segregation, violence, and Islamic extremism. For example, in the aftermath of 9/11, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont wrote an article, *Down with multiculturalism, book-burning and fatwas*, published in *The Telegraph*, blaming Muslims, and their defiance of liberal values of freedom of speech, for the failures of multiculturalism (Allen 2005: 62). Similar reactions erupted in the media, exemplified by Melanie Phillips' (2006) book *Londonistan: How Britain is Creating a Terror State Within,* which described the rise of "Islamism" in the UK and the policies and attitudes, including multiculturalism, that had enabled "terrorism" to flourish.

These arguments were echoed in the Home Office *Community Cohesion* Report (2001), which set out to investigate the causes of the disturbances in the Northern cities. It suggested that "multiculturalism's allegedly divisive character stems from a supposed institutionalization of difference and undermining of "cohesion", [and] "common values"" (Grillo 2007: 986).[128] It was the lack of cohesiveness and leadership that was blamed for the riots, not economic deprivation or racism (Werbner 2005: 748). As Werbner notes, by blaming economic and political problems, on politically neutral cultural issues, the government strategically depoliticised the notion of multiculturalism. "What was thus racialised, pathologised, and indeed criminalized was the internal social cohesiveness and cultural distinctiveness of the ethnic community, and secondarily, of the white working class communities" (Werbner 2005: 748). Islam or Muslim culture was positioned as a threat to British values and

[127] See Allen (2003) and The Home Office (2001) *Community Cohesion Report* (also known as the *Cantle Report),* which investigated the background to the riots that took place between the majority white population, backed by extreme-right parties such as the BNP, and South Asian youth.

[128] The Report was written by the Community Cohesion Review Team and chaired by Professor Ted Cantle, founder of the Institute for Community Cohesion, which was set up in 2005: http://www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/home

identity.[129] As Lentin and Titley (2011: 14) note, "community cohesion" emerged within this report as a "technology among many put to work in fostering social cohesion on the terrain of culture" (Chapter Two-Three).

As I explained in Chapter Three, these rhetorical transformations culminated with Cameron's 2011 speech at the Munich security conference, during which he blamed "state multiculturalism" for an increase in segregation, violence, the development of conflicting values, and a loss of national identity. Coinciding with an English Defence League (EDL) protest in Luton, his speech stirred up controversy, particularly amongst Muslim groups and commentators.[130] Rehearsing the rhetoric of separatism and extremism, Cameron (2011) stated, *"Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream… We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values…"* Although Cameron made a clear distinction between Islam and extremism, suggesting that only certain isolated Muslim groups were promoting extremism, he argued against the passive tolerance of previous years in favour of "an active, muscular liberalism".[131] The latter, he claimed, actively promotes certain values such as freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law and equality of race, sex, or sexuality. The event sparked predictable reactions from mainstream media, as well as Muslim commentators. Farooq Murad, Secretary General of the MCB, criticised Cameron's decision to approach multiculturalism through the lens of security and denounced his omission of any reference to the EDL and its violence against Muslims in the UK. A few months later, the *New Statesman* featured a special issue entitled *Who are the English? A nation in the grip of identity crisis*. On the front cover the magazine published a cartoon drawing of Cameron's face, but with the addition of a long beard and a Muslim prayer

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[129] Further anxieties around Muslims' loyalties to the UK, were raised following the 7/7 attacks, when it emerged that the bombers were in fact British-born.

[130] See the Muslim News (25/02/11) for various articles in response to Cameron's speech.

[131] Interestingly, in a strategically political move in 2007, four years prior to his speech, Cameron had stayed with a Muslim family in Birmingham, following a visit of Sparkbrook ward, a deprived, inner-city ward in Birmingham. He wrote a column in the Observer, praising the ward for its community cohesion and suggesting "we cannot bully people into feeling British" (Cameron 2007).

hat.[132] The figure of Muslim Cameron captured the contrast and supposed incompatibility between Islam, and the Conservative government and (elite) British society.

The extent to which these discursive shifts have actually impacted on the multicultural policy frameworks, has been a topic of academic debate. On the one hand, Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) argue that this backlash against multiculturalism has significantly reworked only the *terminology* politicians and journalists employ to talk about minority issues. They suggest that multicultural policies, particularly those implemented on a local level relating to education and religious accommodations, have remained largely unchanged. As McGhee notes (2008: 85), hostility to multiculturalism has been "an exercise in avoiding using the term 'multiculturalism' rather than moving away from the principles of multiculturalism". In fact, the early 2000s witnessed the proliferation of a series of reports accommodating of religious diversity (Home Office 2001; Ansari 2002). In the last two decades, practical and financial provisions for Muslims, including the provision of halal meals in schools, uniforms that accommodate the donning of the *hijab*, or the right for parents to withdraw children from some aspects of sex education, have also been introduced and implemented at the local level in recent years. Although Muslim schools' requests to establish voluntary aided schools were rejected throughout the 1980s and 90s, in 1998 funding was extended to the first Muslim schools, the *Islamia* Primary School in London and *Al Furqan* in Birmingham. Legal changes have, in recent years, also sought to address forms of religious discrimination. The 2001 census introduced the question of religion, an issue the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) had campaigned for throughout the previous decade. In 2000 the European Employment Directive (2000) was passed, which prohibited direct and indirect discrimination in employment, and was implemented in 2003. In 2006 the Racial and Religious Hatred Act extended the crime of incitement to racial hatred, to religious hatred, and the Equality Act of 2006[133] protected

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[132] Articles included an intervention by Jon Cruddas MP for Dagenham and Rainham, arguing for the British to "rediscover tradition and English virtue", and an article by journalist Mehdi Hassan, in favour of multiculturalism.

[133] The Equality Act of 2010 consolidated previous anti-discrimination legislation.

individuals from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, in employment, education, when providing goods, facilities, and services, using or disposing of premises, and exercising public functions.

On the other hand, Grillo (2007: 988) notes how a shift in language has also had an impact at the policy level, which has moved towards a greater emphasis on civic integration (Joppke 2004). Through an analysis of a series of reports published in the early 2000s, Grillo (2007) shows that policies stressed the need to address economic and social exclusion and simultaneously emphasised greater cohesion and identity.[134] He terms this a shift towards "cohesion with diversity" with an emphasis on common values, and a civic notion of Britishness. The Crick Commission, which was established in 2002 to oversee the implementation of policies from the *Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act*, introduced, amongst other things, a series of reforms intended for those seeking citizenship, including the English language test, *Life in the UK: A Journey to Citizenship,* and the ceremonial oath. The Home Office (2004) *Strength in Diversity* consultation paper stressed the need for common civic values and an inclusive notion of Britishness. In contrast to Parekh's (2000) notion of multiculturalism, this paper views diversity as both a "source of strength", yet a possible force of "segregation" and "fear and conflict" (Grillo 2007: 991). Similarly, in 2007 the Commission on Integration and Cohesion published *Our Shared Future*, which included recommendations on mainstreaming integration and cohesion at the local level (Grillo 2010: 55).

More recently, the controversial updated version of the Prevent Strategy 2011 is the clearest indication of a shift in government policy. The strategy aims to address "extremist thinking", and to support groups who promote counter-terrorism and integration, whilst cutting funding to "extremist" – including non-violent extremist – groups. Public money has been directed only to organisations that support "fundamental and universal" British values. Mainstream Muslim organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain, which had, under New Labour acquired a quasi-official status as the voice of Muslims in Britain, and the Federation of Student

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[134] These reports include for example, the *Strength in Diversity* consultation (2004), the community cohesion panel final report (2004), *Improving opportunity, Strengthening society* (Home Office 2005). See also David Blunkett's (2002) white paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven*.

Islamic Societies (FoSIS), have been accused of not doing enough to tackle extremism.

The backlash against multiculturalism, which has dominated contemporary politics in Britain since the mid-1990s, provides the historical backdrop to this thesis. In the first three chapters I show how this shift in academic and political rhetoric, and policy, has served to question, problematize, and mould in particular ways, understandings of culture, Islamic practice, and faith. In turn, as this thesis makes clear throughout, these debates have also partly shaped my informants' own processes of ethical self-fashioning.