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### Belonging Narratives of Second-Generation Pakistani Muslims in Sweden

Kazi, Uzma

2024

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Kazi, U. (2024). *Swedish-(Par)Desi: Belonging Narratives of Second-Generation Pakistani Muslims in Sweden*. [Doctoral Thesis (monograph), Department of Sociology]. Lund University.

*Total number of authors:*

1

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PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00

# Swedish-(Par)Desi

## Belonging Narratives of Second-Generation Pakistani Muslims in Sweden

UZMA KAZI

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY | FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES | LUND UNIVERSITY





Swedish-(Par)Desi



# Swedish-(Par)Desi

## Belonging Narratives of Second-Generation Pakistani Muslims in Sweden

Uzma Kazi



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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

by due permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Lund University, Sweden.

To be publicly defended on 22<sup>nd</sup> of November at 9 AM  
in the School of Social Work Auditorium (Sh128),  
Allhelgona kyrkogata 8, Lund.

*Faculty opponent*

Tahseen Shams

University of Pennsylvania, United States of America

Organisation LUND UNIVERSITY  Author: Uzma Kazi	Document name Doctoral Dissertation	
	Date of issue 20241122	
	Sponsoring organisation	
Title and subtitle: Swedish-(Par)Desi Belonging Narratives of Second-Generation Pakistani Muslims in Sweden		
<p><b>Abstract:</b></p> <p>In an unprecedented Muslim migration context in Sweden, with changing demographics as well as pressures on the welfare state, how Muslim family background is negotiated in Sweden is strikingly understudied. For second-generation Pakistanis, inheriting a Muslim identity from their parents can barely be considered a windfall gain. As they forge both roots and routes to embed into the country in which they were born and raised, second-generation Muslims acknowledge/react to the pressures associated with holding a Muslim identity that has been '<i>spoiled</i>'. Moreover, in re/deconstructing, maintaining and dissolving this identity, they are also actively making choices between competing and seemingly opposing <i>identity scripts</i> i.e. religious/ethnic (parental transmission within the Pakistani diasporic context) and secular (Swedish societal context).</p> <p>Drawing on material from 42 qualitative interviews conducted in three major cities of Sweden, this thesis focuses on the personal life stories of participants who I categorise as 'Pakistani-Muslims' and 'Pakistani ex-Muslims.' These categories are based on their identification and disidentification with a salient familial Muslim identity, which they negotiate as part of a continuum within the 'diaspora space' to forge alternative ways of belonging as a minority within the Swedish society.</p> <p>Using the concepts of 'identity,' 'boundaries,' and 'belonging,' this study explores, through participants' narratives, the mechanisms that trigger and suppress expressions of agency. These mechanisms both constrain and empower individuals, shaping how they navigate their personal and social identities within various contexts. Subsequently, this thesis elaborates on some key findings: the re-signification of the family as a power equal to the welfare state and the continuing meaningfulness of religion in the lives of most second-generation Pakistani Muslims. Additionally, it explores their complex identity strategies, divided into four 'diasporic bargains,' through which the participants seek to balance the cognitive load and emotional investments in various relationships of commitment for maintaining and reproducing social bonds throughout the life course.</p> <p>Lastly, the importance of looking to a focus on '<i>generations</i>' (first, second and third) as well as '<i>sibling-sibling</i>' dimension is a crucial methodological consideration in understanding how (dis)continuities are bridged through ruptures, sutures, and new pathways in construction of identities, boundaries and its concomitant belonging.</p>		
Key words: Belonging, diasporic bargain, Boundaries, Cultural repertoires, Muslim identity		
Classification system and/or index terms (if any)		
Supplementary bibliographical information		Language English
ISSN and key title 1102-4721		ISBN 978-91-8104-231-3
Recipient's notes	Number of pages 404	Price
	Security classification	

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# Swedish-(Par)Desi

## Belonging Narratives of Second-Generation Pakistani Muslims in Sweden

Uzma Kazi



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The cover art features a bird, symbolizing freedom and mobility, yet it is enclosed within a cage that represents the societal structures that shape its existence. The merged figures of a man and a woman in the background suggests a blurring fluidity away from essentialising gender roles and identities. Their gaze towards the caged bird functions as a dual metaphor: it reflects their own circumstances as they adapt to a new environment, while the bird itself embodies the next generation, looking outward towards and seeking understandings from the parents' migrant journey.

This entire scene is framed within a *jharokha*—a small, traditional window in South Asian architecture that creates ventilation between the private space of the home and the vibrant life outside. The *jharokha* thus not only captures the tension between confinement and openness but also serves as a bridge, symbolizing connections in transitions - encapsulating the title Swedish-(Par)Desi.

Cover art by Fatima Khan

Cover frame design accessed through Pinterest, curated and arranged by Sara Baig and Khadeejah Bucha Kazi

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Faculty of Social Sciences

Department of Sociology

ISBN 978-91-8104-231-3 (print)

ISBN 978-91-8104-232-0 (electronic)

ISSN 1102-4712

Printed in Sweden by Media-Tryck, Lund University

Lund 2024



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**MADE IN SWEDEN** 

*To Adeena and Khadeejah.*

*This work is for you - to remind you that  
home is not just a place, but the people,  
memories, and stories we carry within us.*

*To Ayesha*

*The charge of the night brigade*

*To all pardesis*

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# Acknowledgements

Concatenation stands at the core of this thesis, serving as a testament to the connections that bind us. Each link in this chain of knowledge relies on the others, emphasizing that a PhD is not a solitary endeavour. Rather, it is a collaborative effort, enriched by the support, insights, and encouragement of those around us.

I am deeply grateful to the participants of this study, who not only shared their time and stories with me but also extended their warm hospitality by inviting me into their homes. Many of them went out of their way to make the process easier, even insisting on meeting me where I was to save me the trouble of travel. Their willingness to share their experiences made this research possible.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my supervisors, Christofer Edling and Erika Willander, whose guidance and unwavering support have been invaluable throughout my doctoral journey. The unwavering support of David Wästerförs as an internal committee member has been instrumental in providing sharp and novel insights that have been crucial in refining my arguments. Thank you for your guidance.

Britt Marie Rönn, I would not be where I am if it were not for you. My gratitude knows no bounds.

Susanne Lindberg, Rose-Marie Olsen, and Malin Möller, you embody the unsung heroes behind every academic front stage performance. Your tireless dedication and administrative prowess deserve my heartfelt appreciation!

Sara Élden, Terese Anving, Lisa Eklund, Åsa Lundqvist, Chares Demetriou, Johanna Essevald, Lisa Flower, Priscilla Solano, Nina Gren, Alison Gerber, and Erik Hannerz - our conversations have profoundly shaped my academic journey. Each discussion has been a steppingstone, you have been influential voices in this pursuit.

Dalia Abdelhady and AbdulHadi Khalaf, thank you for being not only intellectual mentors but also trustworthy and reliable sources of academic support.

Carl-Göran Heidegren, the unassuming underdog of classical sociology, is undoubtedly the most exceptional teacher I have had the honour to learn from. You are a diamond—rare, polished, and one for the ages.

For the cover art, I owe my gratitude to Fatima Khan. Reuniting after 19 years, during my stay as your guest in Norway, I admired a sketch in your home. Months later, when you visited me in Sweden, you brought it to me, framed, as a gift. In some

cultures, it is a beautiful gesture to gift something a guest admires, and you honored that tradition with such grace. Now, I return that honor by making it the cover of my work—a tribute to our diasporic friendship.

Oriana Quaglietta, your grounded quiet passion has been an inspiration, not least your nerdy genius in always being there for Endnote, Nvivo and MS Word troubleshooting that saved me hours! Marie Larsson your grit courage and ability to show deep compassion has been restorative. You are friends of both mind and soul—the finest sociologists I know—and your insights have deeply shaped my thinking and work.

Kim Jepsen, Thallia Assan, Tanja Dittfeld and Iram Khawaja, thank you for your invaluable contributions as insightful and critical readers. Your sharp analyses, engaging discussions, and thoughtful reading suggestions have significantly elevated the depth and rigor of my work.

James Root, you embraced my unconventional approach of bartering food for editing notes—it added an unexpected and delightful flavor to this journey. Your willingness to engage in brainstorming sessions and your keen eye for detail during last-minute checks of written texts have helped beyond measure.

Freja Morris, thank you for your resounding presence and pragmatic wisdom. It has been an anchor—especially in the final stretch. Linn Alenius, your smile brightens countless hearts. Your kindness, commitment to self-care during the most intense writing stretches, and unwavering discipline lifted our spirits, even through the darkest, rain-soaked winter days. Daniel Karlsson, your playful chair-racing adventures in our PhD room have forever transformed the notion of joy at work, reminding us that even in the midst of serious pursuits, there is always room for fun. Anika Habib, you are a true *chota packet bara patakha*! Your wit and charm make every conversation a delightful escapade, proving that good things really do come in small, loud, and wonderfully witty bundles!

Sweetest melodies are found in the company of those who truly understand us. Annas Zakir and Marium Iqbal, thank you for being the harmonious notes in my life.

Rabab Hassan, in this journey of migration, where the ties of blood can sometimes feel stretched the warmth of your presence has made Sweden feel more like home.

Sara Baig, Sanam Fadul, and Marium Farooqui, my friends for all seasons, your unwavering support has been a reminder that true friendship transcends time and distance. Here's to countless more seasons together!

Shaheryar Kazi, thank you for being the Timon to my Pumba and for always having my back. With you around, life feels like a never-ending feast of 'rice plate eating'!

Mama, your unwavering resilience and culinary artistry have been an intergenerational gift and sanctuary in the diaspora space. Baba, I have inherited your love for books and held steadfastly to the principles you've instilled in me, always emphasizing the

importance of integrity. The lessons of living with dignity and steadfastly holding to my values in the face of adversity have not only shaped who I am but also served as my guiding lights. After all, life may be a feast, but it is the hearty recipes of integrity and resilience that nourish the soul. So, here's to cooking up a life well-lived, one delicious lesson at a time!

My beloved girls, Adeena and Khadeejah Bucha Kazi, in you I see the embodiment of beauty and grace. You both shine with kindness, intelligence, and empathy, illuminating every room you enter. Your unwavering support has been integral to my PhD journey; you anchored me, pushed me, and demonstrated remarkable patience. May you continue to blossom into even more extraordinary beings. I love you endlessly and with all my heart.





# Glossary

<b>Ammi/ Abbu</b>	Mother/Father
<b>Assalam-o-alaikum</b>	Islamic greeting in Arabic ‘peace be unto you’
<b>Alhumdulillah</b>	Praise to God
<b>Ayat-ul-Kursi</b>	Verses from Surah Barakarah in the Qur’an It is commonly recited during prayers, before sleeping, and during times of distress
<b>Daada/ Daadi</b>	Grandfather/Grandmother on the father’s side
<b>Chacha/ Chachi</b>	Uncle/Aunt on the father’s side; specifically, Chacha is father’s younger brother, and Chachi is father’s younger brother’s wife.
<b>Desi</b>	While originally referring to people from the Indian subcontinent, <i>desi</i> is often used in a broader cultural sense by those living abroad to emphasise their shared heritage.
<b>Dadiyaal/ Naniyaal</b>	Patrilineal/Matrilineal lines of family
<b>Dupatta</b>	A long scarf that goes with the shalwar kameez
<b>Deen</b>	Religion
<b>Gymnasiet</b>	Swedish high school
<b>Högstadiet</b>	Swedish middle school from grades 7-9
<b>Iftaari</b>	The act of opening the fast in Ramadhan
<b>Inshallah</b>	‘If God wills’/ ‘God willing’
<b>Jamaat</b>	Refers to an assembly of congregants, specifically in this thesis when Ahmadi participants refer to Jamaat they mean Ahmadi congregation
<b>Khandaan</b>	The extended family/kinship network
<b>Kalima Shahadat</b>	The Islamic declaration of faith
<b>Maamoo/ Mumaani</b>	Mamoo is mother’s brother; and Mumaani is mother’s brother’s wife

<b>Mashallah</b>	Expression of thankfulness
<b>Mushaira</b>	Traditional gathering or poetic symposium in South Asian culture, particularly in India and Pakistan, where poets come together to recite their poetry.
<b>Namaz</b>	The daily prayer ritual that is performed five times during the twenty-four-hour day
<b>Nana/ Naani</b>	Grandfather/Grandmother on the mother's side)
<b>Nikkah/Nikkahnaama</b>	Religious wedding ceremony when official marriage document papers (Nikkahnaama) are signed
<b>Nykterist</b>	Someone who practices or advocates for abstinence from alcohol.
<b>Paindu</b>	A derogatory term referring to a person who is unsophisticated, rural, or uncultured
<b>Phuppo</b>	Paternal aunt (father's sister)
<b>Qari Sahib</b>	Tutor who teaches to read and recite the Qur'an. And imparts Islamic knowledge.
<b>Qaida</b>	A book for beginners to learn the Arabic language. It is used to teach children the Qur'an
<b>Qur'an</b>	The Holy Book of the Muslims
<b>Ramzan/ Ramadhan</b>	The month of fasting from dawn till dusk
<b>Rishta</b>	Potential or actual proposal for marriage
<b>Rukhsati</b>	When the bride leaves her ancestral home with her husband
<b>Shalwar Kameez</b>	The Pakistani dress, a 'shalwar' is a loose harem like pant and a 'kameez' is a shirt that goes on top of the shalwar
<b>Sharmindagi</b>	Embarrassment
<b>Shaadi</b>	Wedding
<b>Taya/ Tayee</b>	Uncle/Aunt on the father's side; specifically, Taya is father's older brother and Tayee is father's older brother's wife.
<b>Topi</b>	Usually a white coloured cap made of cotton fabric or crochet that children and adults wear on their head when they go to the mosque or read the Qur'an.

# Introduction

As a Swede, born to a Pakistani father and an Iranian mother, I've always had to deal with a mild identity crisis. My international schooling wasn't much help, in fact it only reinforced it. I am a Swede, but I don't 'look' like one. At least I guess that's the case because of the invariable question posed 'where are you actually from?' Growing up, I tackled with reconciling two main identities – that of being an immigrant and my own understanding of myself as a Swede.

[..]

It is difficult being a woman as it is, but being a brown Swedish Muslim woman in today's world is actually scary. Even though one has spent a lifetime dealing with identities, attempting to shed the stereotypes that society forces onto one, I have now become 'the other', the enemy that does not belong. To be an active citizen in one's community is no longer enough. What is most frightening is the ease with which we normalise these situations and adapt ourselves to these preconceived roles? Speaking up is difficult and in the midst of dealing with day-to-day life one doesn't notice how the acceptance creeps in because of the incremental nature of how attitudes evolve.

(Copied from blogpost of a participant<sup>1</sup>, dated November 2016 [emphasis added])

The writer of the above blog post, Maham, is a 33 year old PhD student in Political Science and a self identifying Pakistani-Muslim, born and raised in Sweden. She refers to several identity troubles that create in her a 'mild identity crisis': the first is to be born to parents with their own national and cultural heritages and amalgamating their two separate histories into her own place of birth and citizenship status 'as a Swede'; the second is that she does not 'look' like a 'Swede', which invites constant questions about her 'origins'. The reconciliation she seeks in the first quote is between two identity labels, one that is assigned to her by others and one that she assigns to herself – being *perceived* as an 'immigrant' in the case of the former and her own understanding of herself as a 'Swede' in the case of the latter.

Against the backdrop of an unprecedented refugee migration crisis, the ongoing securitisation of Islam (where Islam is seen as an existential threat to European political

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<sup>1</sup> Used with permission. The participant explicitly approved using her post without any modifications.

and security interests), the tendency of European secularism to render religious visibility in the public space illegitimate, and the rise in global presence of a Salafist Islam, Maham reflects in the second quote on how being brown, Muslim, Woman, and Swedish is a cause of deep existential angst, experienced as a 'scary' everyday reality.

The culmination of her racial, religious, and gender identities boxed into stereotypical representations prevalent in society, which she navigates, mostly to shed its associated stigmatisations, makes her feel 'other[ed]' and placed in the vulnerable position of 'the enemy' who does not 'belong'.

Sweden, a multicultural social-democratic welfare regime (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2010), proud of its ability to maintain values of equality (Schierup & Ålund, 2011), is known for its generous labour migration and asylum policies. Despite Sweden advocating tolerance and openness to immigrants including Muslim immigrants and almost 30 years' experience with successive integration programmes (Heath et al., 2016), Maham does not feel she is a valued member of the society. Even with full citizenship rights in Sweden, she feels outside of what Jeffrey Alexander (1993) calls the 'national community' (cited in Cesari, 2013b: xvi).

The inclusive, equal, welcoming, tolerant, diverse, national identity discourse of Sweden is experienced as alienating rather than self-affirming in Maham's everyday life. One may then ask, what are the conditions under which Swedes, born and raised in Sweden to migrant parents, create meaningful identifications with both their foreign backgrounds and Sweden, creating a sense of home/belonging, expressing their Swedish and other identities, and feeling pride in contributing to Sweden?

When I started this project in 2015, its title was 'Are you a *good* secular Muslim-Citizen? The Muslim identity as a Stubborn Floating Lump in the Melting Pot of Swedish Integration'. Since I had just arrived from Pakistan, a Muslim majority country with non-Muslim and secular minorities, the idea of a post-Lutheran secularised majority with a Muslim minority was an intriguing prospect to explore. Particularly the shift in religious positions of non-Western migrants from the Global South - from being taken for granted in their home country as a part of the majority to suddenly being stigmatised in the host country as a minority. Moreover, I was interested in understanding how contours of religiosity of Muslim migrants shifted, became entrenched, and/or evolved in the new context, especially for the children of migrants who are born in Sweden.

This led me to reflect on considerations about what it means to be a Muslim in the world today and the experience and meaning of being a Muslim in Sweden. To address how Muslims understand themselves as Muslims, exploring what and with whom they are negotiating their experiences, meanings, and understandings, and why. Furthermore, to examine how they come to terms with what they understand about themselves.

Maham's blog post exemplifies intricate positions of individual subjectivity that I also encountered during face-to-face interviews with participants in this study. It highlights their cognisance, thoughtful reflection, and ability to express the complexity of their experience articulately. The positions they inhabit are socially and historically contingent and contextually bounded - intricately intersecting with categories of gender, class, race, religion, generation, and place to manifest narratives of belonging as 'Swedish-(Par)Desi[s]'.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'pardesi' in Urdu evokes the sense of being a stranger or someone who is wandering while 'desi' refers to South Asian heritage. Together, they reflect the tension of being Swedish, yet simultaneously feeling disconnected from full belonging, wandering in between the possibility of worlds they inhabit. The wordplay on 'par'<sup>2c</sup> adds depth, suggesting both a contrast (but) and the possibility of wings - implying movement, pushing against gravity as resistance, transcendence and growth. (Par)Desi thus, deploys the metaphor of a caravan and defines the future of belonging as the locus of portable plurality. This title uncovers identifications that are translocal and intersectional rather than binational, producing forms of resistance countering the image of the second-generation as largely passive and isolated, stuck in the middle between origin and destiny (Anthias, 2009; Soysal, 2000).

There are several components in the title that serve to introduce the reader to the different parts of this dissertation. 'Belonging' as the main theoretical concept guiding individuals' experiences of feeling at home; 'Narrative' is the primary method of inquiry in this study; 'second-generation Pakistani(s)' refers to the specific group I study; 'Muslim(s)' highlights the religious identity of primary curiosity; and 'Sweden' provides the context in which the study takes place.

The analytical focus of this thesis is first on how belonging or not belonging to a 'group', whether Pakistani or Muslim or Swedish, is a relational and negotiated experience that is reflected on by the participants in their narratives. Second, it focuses on the simultaneous experiences of inclusion and exclusion across social groups and social situations. And third, it interrogates how individuals, with the bodies they have, in the spaces that they exist and navigate, as well as the situations they find themselves in, engage with boundaries and transform them.

As reflected in Maham's quotes, the second-generation participants I interviewed seek to establish a meaningful life betwixt and between expectations of 'active' citizenship or 'proper integration' (Olwig, 2011), as expressed in public debate and through their everyday interactions in their neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, and local politics on the one hand, and the ambitions and desires for respect, dignity, and

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<sup>2</sup> Par is also nuanced to mean 'over' or 'upon' and 'however'.

a better life for themselves and their families on the other. The ability of the participants to understand their own contradictions between perception and self-understanding about 'belonging to' and 'not belonging to' Sweden makes narratives about subject positions a task that is both urgent and necessary.

## Piecing the Swedish Puzzle

The social meaning of 'immigrant' that permeates everyday life in Sweden is to be a representation of social problems (Trondman, 2006). Immigrant families are associated with experiences of long-term unemployment, social allowances and housing segregation, and children growing up in these families may not speak Swedish. This discourse around the figure of the 'immigrant' trickles down to everyday interactions and practices between those with an immigrant background and those without, creating a 'normal' and a 'deviant'. And in so doing, constructs hierarchical social relations of power, whereby some members are differentially privileged over others, standing in contrast with norms of equality and solidarity in society.

Moreover, Muslimness is often portrayed as contrary to Scandinavian national cultures. Muslims are, at least within parts of the political spectrum, understood as not only difficult, but impossible to integrate (Cato, 2012; Jacobsen, 2010; Otterbeck & Cato, 2011; Schmidt, 2007b). The discourse on radicalisation and securitisation has also grown in Sweden on account of Islamic terrorism (Schmidt & Otterbeck, 2014). With the so-called migrant crisis of 2015 and the rise of immigration-critical parties in many countries, it is no exaggeration to say that the question of the status of non-European immigrants has become an issue that divides European societies and politics, Sweden being no exception (Thurfjell & Willander, 2021).

Religious identity lies at the core of this debate because recent demographic changes are contributing to a transformation of the religious landscape. A Christian and increasingly secular European majority is giving way to a multireligious population with a large and growing minority of Muslims. In no country is this development more prominent than in Sweden: The Pew Research Center predicts that by 2050, 21 percent of the Swedish population will be Muslim; the highest percentage in Europe (Pew, 2017). This demographic development obviously entails a major change in the religious situation of Sweden. A large population carrying not only a religious identity but one that differs from the traditional Lutheran one obviously stands in stark contrast to the majority of Swedes, who tend to view themselves as not being religious.

By exposure to dominant ways in which Muslims are depicted and represented in a Western imaginary (Dessing et al., 2016) how do Swedish-Pakistani Muslims

acknowledge and react to the pressures and power associated with holding a ‘Muslim identity’. If identity is understood as fluid and multiple, what constellations of multiple identities are the so-called ‘Muslims’ negotiating with? If these identities are in constant flux, what choices are they actively making between competing and seemingly opposing scripts and knowledge traditions i.e. religious/ethnic (parental transmission) and secular (Swedish societal context)? In what way is a balance achieved between religious, ethnic, and national identity dimensions? And is it possible to switch in between and across different dimensions comfortably?

I argue that identities are created by intergenerational co-histories that are met with contentions, frustrations and disjunctions, and they are deconstructed and reconstructed in the life course of an individual. The social environment, with its various institutions, can serve as a catalyst in triggering a certain aspect of an identity more than another at a certain point in time. The Swedish context highlights the tension between a post-Lutheran secular national identity and a minority religious identity, making it an ideal environment to study the complex negotiations of agency, belonging, and self-perception that Muslims in Sweden experience.

## Conceptual Clarifications

While a rounded account of the theoretical assumptions underpinning ‘belonging’ is elaborated in Chapter 3, I outline below the perspectives and terms that have guided this study.

Since I centre narratives of lived-life experiences as the basis of this study, I am inspired by symbolic interactionism to pay attention to micro-contexts of interactions, situations, and the meanings individuals attach to them (Blumer, 1986; Collins, 1994; Goffman, 1967; Mead, 1934). I emphasise how people construct and negotiate their identities in everyday encounters, focusing on the subtle, often overlooked, dynamics of social interactions.

Moreover, since social reality is constructed through experiences and meaning making, social constructionism provides a valuable framework for understanding how individuals and groups collectively shape their perceptions of reality (Anzaldúa, 1987; Butler, 1990; Hacking et al., 1986; Mahmood, 2011; Narayan, 1997). I pay attention to how shared meanings and interpretations arise from social interactions, influencing identities, relationships, and power dynamics. It allows me to explore how people actively create and negotiate their sense of self and belonging within a given cultural and social context.



Lastly, and importantly, the nuances I aim to produce are possible through the lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1996; Phoenix, 2006; Truth, 2024). I understand approach intersectionality as a feminist endeavour, that is further scaffolded by post-colonial and decolonial theoretical approaches (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 2012; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1994; Tlostanova et al., 2019). The cross-fertilisation of these perspectives allows me to understand the theoretical concept of belonging more fruitfully.

Belonging is thus broadly understood as an emotionally charged and ever-evolving social location—a position within the social structure shaped by identification, embeddedness, connectedness, and attachments (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013). Belonging also encompasses connotations of closeness, familiarity, inseparability and intimacy (Röttger-Rössler, 2018: 240). Belonging is understood as a desire for attachment, as an emotional investment (Dahlstedt et al., 2017: 198). As Floya Anthias suggests, belonging arises when people share values, relationships (including attachments to artifacts and landscapes), and practices, often reinforced by rules and regulations (see Anthias, 2006, 2020). Ghasan Hage adds that belonging results from a combination of trust, safety, community, and a sense of possibility (2002, 2006). It is a blend of individually acquired, interpersonally negotiated, and structurally influenced knowledge and life experience, making it a central dimension of social life.

It is important to include ‘diaspora’ here, I believe, despite its potential overuse in recent academic discourse, since contrary to the concept of migration, according to Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) diaspora transcends the binary of citizen and foreigner, the linear model of movements from origin to destination. The strategy of claiming a space within the nation by moving beyond it can be called fundamentally diasporic in drawing on identifications and models of identity that exist, according to Paul Gilroy, ‘outside of and sometimes in opposition to the political forms and codes of modern citizenship’ (Gilroy 2000: 252).

While ‘migration’ fails to capture the experience of those born into a nation without fully belonging to it, and ‘minority’ does not adequately reflect their transnational connections, ‘diaspora’ can bring both dimensions together. It acts similarly to disidentification as a ‘third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it ... a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology’ (Muñoz, 2013: 11). In this study, the notion of diaspora describes a population that does not share a common origin—however imaginary it might be— but a contemporary condition (El-Tayeb, 2011) in the diaspora space (Brah, 1996) which includes the immigrants and their descendants, and those who are constructed and represented as local. Therefore, diasporic identities, as Brah declares, ‘cannot be read off in a one-to-one fashion straightforwardly from a border positionality, in the same way that a feminist subject position cannot be deduced from the category *woman*’ (Brah, 1996: 102-104). Within this combined and

broadened understanding of diaspora, the concept is transformed from a term of temporal and spatial displacement focused on the past toward one of permanent productive dislocation directed at the future.

While the term ‘second-generation’ is often criticised by migration scholars for binding children of immigrants—who are born and raised in the country of settlement and may have little connection to their parents’ country of origin (Dahinden, 2016; El-Tayeb, 2011)—to the positionality of their parents’ immigration status; I use it in this study for two reasons. First, it helps to distinguish between the historical period in which pioneer immigrants settled and the context in which their offspring were born, framing reference points to their identity formations and belonging. Second, these individuals are not understood in this thesis as ‘second-generation immigrants’, but rather ‘children of immigrants growing up in the diaspora’ therefore navigating unique cultural and social landscapes.

Lastly, integration, a key concept related to migrant adaptation and settlement in Europe, has also been increasingly criticised by academic scholars in recent years (Favell, 2022; Spencer & Charsley, 2021) as an insufficient tool to capture complexity and dynamics of settling processes among contemporary migrants (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). As a term commonly used by participants in their narrations - in societal as well as academic discourses - it animates many a discussion in this thesis. I use ‘embeddedness’ (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022) in place of integration when soliciting an analysis to signpost that I am critical of the term and offer its use as an alternative perspective that provides insights into complex and dynamic processes of adaptation, belonging, attachments and settling in contexts of uncertainty and wider socio-political changes. Far from being a one-off event, migration is a dynamic process which unfolds in changing social contexts, through changing and grounding of lives, particularly across generations. Beyond a simple dichotomy of continual mobility, on the one hand, and permanent settlement on the other hand, it is necessary to understand the complexity, messiness, multi-dimensionality and diversity of migration experiences and changing processes over time.

## Research Aims and Questions

The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a Muslim in Sweden. Generally, this research aims first of all, to study everyday lives of Muslims who negotiate (choose amongst competing scripts) and navigate (guide/direct their lives) between different levels of interactions i.e., micro (individual) and meso (institutions of family, education, labour market, mosque) and macro (state/society);

to bring to fore the challenges Muslims face to embed themselves into the Swedish secular welfare society.

More specifically this research aims to firstly trace how Muslims negotiate their identities having been exposed to intergenerational transmission of religious socialisation; to see shared and divergent patterns; and to see interactions between 'religious' (Muslim) socialisation and 'Swedish' socialisation through institutions and peer groups. Secondly, it specifically aims to locate the points in time in which being Muslim becomes more salient i.e., activation/deactivation mechanisms of a religious (Muslim) identity during transitional phases in the life course. Thus, the following research questions are asked:

- Q1) How do second-generation Pakistanis experience and negotiate their Pakistani, Muslim and Swedish identities?
- Q2) What do these experiences and negotiations look like? How do they make sense of these experiences?
- Q3) How do these negotiations inform belonging of second-generation Pakistanis?

To effectively address the research questions posed, the following section outlines the research method that has been deemed most suitable for fulfilling these inquiries. This approach will ensure that the study comprehensively captures the nuances and complexities inherent in the subject matter.

## Narrative as Method

The narrative approach puts individuals, their lives, their experiences, and the broader socio-cultural contexts in which they are situated at the forefront of both theoretical and substantive concerns. This framework is essential for investigating belonging among second-generation Pakistanis and Muslims in Sweden.

I therefore conducted a total of 42 life story interviews, comprising a diverse group of participants. The sample included 21 males and 21 females, along with one second-generation expert and one Swedish convert turned Muslim expert. Additionally, I interviewed two parents and two third-generation individuals. I also incorporated field notes and audio recordings from participant observations to enrich the analyses of identity and belonging negotiations in relevant chapters. I explored the methodologies of interviewing sibling dyads and parent-child-sibling triads, which have provided valuable insights into the evolution of religious identity across generations.

The study theorizes 'belonging' through the lens of narrativity, introducing the concept of the 'diasporic bargain'. This concept emerged from the narratives and explained the negotiations second-generation Pakistanis make between their Swedish, Pakistani, and religious identities to achieve various outcomes in Sweden. Ultimately, enriching the understanding of how meaning-making, particularly at the level of 'self' is an essential dimension of 'making things equal' to restore respect, dignity, and integrity.

Before moving forward, I would like to sensitise the reader to the following consideration: when making distinctions between Muslim/secular, Muslim/Atheist, native/immigrant, religious/non-religious, tradition/modern; rational/ dogmatic etc. a risk is that the researcher herself contributes to the reproduction of stereotypes and prejudices. Even though the ambition to avoid stereotypes and simple categories is admirable, it is often difficult and sometimes even problematic to use a language free of categories to guide analysis. I may be inclined to use terms such as ethnic Swedes/ native Swedes/ white Swedes or first-generation Swedes/ non-white Swedes/Swedes with a foreign background/ second-generation Pakistanis as a way of developing an alternative language when discussing contemporary identities to explain, describe and analyse narratives when making distinctions between groups. There may be a noticeable tension in the text sometimes, because of the way the participants 'talk'.

Though I am privileging stories and experiences, I do not wish to essentialise any group or collective. If I am giving the impression that this is reality for everyone, I must clarify that it is only true to the participants' experience of their reality. I am not passing any of this off as truth, rather it is how they talk about their experience as being true to their reality. I am not generalising at all, or rather that is hardly the ambition. The ambition is to show the contours of Swedish-white normativity and the ethnic ordering (or othering) in it, and how it is negotiated.

Narratives are not presented as real or true; rather how cultural repertoires and habituations are being related to, questioned, and held on to, because of how they resonate with the participants. By avoiding stable distinctions between certain groups of people I could try to stay neutral, but then I won't be true to my research undertaking, which reveals much more complexity, and contradiction than neutrality.

Studies of power, everyday life and the constant processes of identity construction involve dealing with how people refer to, use and label each other. These social and cultural differences constitute both a basis for discrimination and a celebration of cultural diversity in the Swedish context (Johannson, 2008). Given my choice of topic, I cannot shy away from these labels that are a part of the identity discourse, more so, because in some instances, they are specifically highlighted in the voices of my participants. Forewarned is forearmed, I remain warned of reifying categories and I remain armed with reflexivity. I will not posit the Muslim subject as a bearer of a culture or religion that deterministically encloses her.

Rather, my ambition is to lay bare the conditions of interactions – socio-economic, political, intellectual, religious, and so on – and levels of interactions – local, regional, national, transnational, global, and so on – which go into defining, provisionally as it always does, what is immanent or not.

## Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2: This chapter begins with describing the Swedish context further, specifically focusing on the secular state, a minority/majority lens and representation of Islam and Muslims. It presents the *case of* ‘Muslim identity’ as the problématique of this thesis and motivates Pakistani diaspora as the case chosen to study this problématique. The second part of this chapter rounds up research on Muslims in Europe and Sweden, particularly about identity and belonging negotiations between first and second-generation.

Chapter 3: This chapter deals with belonging as main theoretical concept. Belonging, divided into understandings of ‘to long/to be longing’ as the past oriented nostalgic component vying for one’s history as one looks ahead to new horizons; ‘to belong’ as the boundaries of inclusion and recognition fostered by commonality, mutuality and attachments explored in civic, cultural, racial and moral dimensions; and ‘to not belong’ as exclusion and misrecognition fostered by discrediting and disqualifying terms such as foreigner, stranger, alien, whiteness. Being valued or not being valued leads to alignments or misalignments, that lead to continuities or discontinuities in narratives of self. This multifaceted nature of belonging is examined through dimensions considered key for this thesis i.e. resources of/for belonging, meaning making of/for belonging, and negotiations of/for belonging.

Chapter 4: This chapter revolves around researching Muslims in Sweden. It is a reflection-in-action on the research process, from choosing a sample to deploying advertisements and recruiting participants, to the interview situation, and transcribing, coding and collating the narratives into thematic exploration. A detailed account is offered to gain an understanding of the research process.

Chapter 5: In this chapter second-generation narrate their significant memories of relationships and traditions in the family the sum of which are described as formative impressions on their identity and sense of belonging. Sweden is a diaspora space within which the Pakistani family<sup>3</sup> transmits and cultivates ethno-cultural and religious

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<sup>3</sup> In this chapter all references to the Pakistani diaspora and the Pakistani family are particular to the accounts of the second-generation participants who I interviewed. I make no attempt to generalise beyond the scope my interviews.

traditions to their children in explicit and tacit ways, towards emotional, material and spiritual ends. I divide these upbringing practices into three major strands of narratives that relate to desi nurture (Pakistaniness), Muslim nurture (Muslimness), and Swedish nurture (Swedishness) in the family juxtaposing generational relatedness and separateness for belonging among the second-generation with inherited repertoires. Through an analysis that is descriptive, this chapter examines how ethnic, religious, and national belonging are not just separate aspects of identity but are deeply intertwined.

Chapter 6: This chapter delves into the experiences of second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden, who, despite being raised with the belief that they are part of an egalitarian and culturally diverse society, frequently encounter a starkly different reality. The status of insider/outsider, mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and perceptions of proximity through sameness/difference animates closeness and distance in 'connections' - whether they are *near* (local urban context), *dear* (friendships), *peer* (school/education context) or *career* (professional context). In the analysis that follows, I examine the attributes highlighted by interlocutors when they encounter racialising gaze of white Swedes, how they interpret what these interactions reveal about Swedish perceptions of them, and their responses to these racialising experiences.

Chapter 7: This chapter sheds light on how second-generation individuals negotiate intimate relationships within the context of family while growing up in the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. It shows whom they marry and fall in love with to highlight how they negotiate their Pakistani, Muslim and Swedish identities through love and arranged marriage. The cases are divided into two streams. The first is called 'Love and Intimacy in Mixed marriages' with distinctions based on ethnicity and religion in inter-racial/inter-religious and inter-racial/intra-religious marriages. And the second is called 'Love and Intimacy in Arranged Marriages,' which is contingent on sameness of ethnicity and religion but includes distinctions based on location, such as marriages to Pakistan, from Pakistan, and within Europe.

Chapter 8: This chapter will map processes of negotiating a Muslim identity, navigating it in the context of evolving beliefs, societal pressures, and life experiences in the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. In the first section, 'Crossing Boundaries', the narratives will highlight stories of second-generation participants who were exposed to Islam within their families but no longer adhere to its beliefs or practices. The next section, 'Shifting Boundaries,' will focus on individuals who may have initially practiced their faith quietly but became more overt and active in their religiosity over time. In the final section, 'Maintaining Boundaries', the narratives will explore the experiences of believers who struggle to reconcile their religious beliefs with their daily lives, ultimately finding resolution through their own interpretations.

Chapter 9: Inspired by Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of patriarchal bargain, I conceive the term 'diasporic bargain' to underpin bargaining strategies employed by the

participants to make sense of their experiences and negotiations as Swedish, Pakistanis and Muslims. Four bargaining strategies are derived from the research material. It offers a rounding up of empirical chapters that have thematically explored intersections of ethnic, religious and national identities and raises the level of abstraction. Key takeaway is that identities are always multiple, cross-cutting and entangled. Bargaining involves navigating multiple options simultaneously, considering both the available choices and the potential for additional alternatives. Bargaining always occurs with permutations of (both-and) as well as (both-and-more). This means that bargaining isn't just about making trade-offs; it is about incorporating multiple layers and embracing potential expansions beyond the initial options.

## *Chapter 1*

# Background

## The Social Context of Sweden

The phrase ‘social context’ may refer to the socio-cultural forces that shape people’s day-to-day experiences that directly and indirectly affect an individual’s personal and collective identity (Burke, 2009). These forces include historical, political, legal structures and processes (e.g. colonialism and migration), organisations and institutions (e.g. schools, clinics, and community), and individual and personal trajectories (e.g. family, interpersonal relationships). Notably, these forces are co-constitutive, meaning they are formed in relation to and by each other and often influence people in ways of which they are not consciously aware (Burke, 2009).

However, social environment is not simply a fixed entity that inevitably impinges upon individuals. People select, construct, and negotiate environments partly on the basis of their self-beliefs of efficacy (Bandura, 2010). I will move on to review briefly some aspects of this tension.

## A Secular Society?

In international comparisons, Sweden stands out as a country in which the general shift of values in the Western world from traditional religious values to secular-rational and individualistic values is most advanced (Lövheim, 2008: 206). There has been in Sweden a gradual decoupling of religious identity from citizenship and national identity (Lagervall, 2013: 526). Accordingly, then, religion has gradually become a private matter not to be publicly demonstrated and lifestyles have become highly individualised (*ibid.*). Sweden is often considered one of the most secular societies in the world (Brömssen, 2007: 143; Elander, 2015: 148; von Brömssen, 2010). Considering that less than a quarter of the Swedish population claim to believe in the existence of a God, Sweden also has one of the lowest levels of aggregate religiosity in the world (Edling et al., 2014: 616). Over the past few decades, globalisation and immigration have transformed Sweden into a pluralist, multi-ethnic



society with implications for the range of faiths<sup>4</sup> practiced in the country (Cato, 2015; Elander, 2015; Larsson & Sander, 2015)

Hagevi (2017) reasons that when immigrants come into secular contexts, they bring their religion into a social setting where religion is perceived as non-existent<sup>5</sup>. Religious pluralism tends to produce ‘the coexistence of different frequently contradictory world perspectives and value systems in a space where they directly interact’ (Beck, 2010: 152). Religious commitment exhibited by Muslims in Sweden may stimulate discussions and debate through interactions with their secular counterparts making both parties more conscious about their own relationship with and position on religion (ibid.). Increased interactions lead to ‘comparisons between world-pictures of the various religions and discussions of their relevance in everyday life’ which ‘act as a form of existential stimuli’ (Beck, 2010: 41). Individuals in otherwise religiously passive segments of society may become increasingly interested in religion as they reflect on their own and others’ religious identity and its impact on society. This is what Beck (2010) calls *the paradox of secularisation*, which results in increased (good or bad) religious interest/revival in society.

This secular environment in Sweden is instrumental in facilitating religious freedom, allowing Muslims to organize and practice their faith without substantial hindrances. The state’s secularism does not negate the presence of religion but instead creates a landscape where multiple religious expressions can coexist (Willander, 2019, 2020). A significant milestone for the Muslim community in Sweden was in 1976, when the Ahmadiyya community established the first proper mosque in Göteborg. This was followed by the construction of a Sunni mosque in Malmö in 1983, funded by the Muslim World League in Saudi Arabia and Libya, and a Shiite mosque built by Khoja Muslims from Uganda in Trollhättan in 1985 (Larsson and Thurfjell, 2013). Notably, it was not until 2000 that Stockholm saw its first purpose-built Sunni mosque (Sorgenfrei, 2018: 233-244). These developments exemplify how a secular state like Sweden can provide the necessary framework for religious communities to thrive and express their identities openly. Interactions of my participants with their peers at school,

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4 Religious diversity is a noticeable phenomenon in Sweden: The Muslim community is quite a big religious congregation in Sweden with more than 100,000 registered members. There are about 100,000 Roman Catholics, more than 100,000 Orthodox Christians and 10,000 Jews. Approximately 25,000 are followers of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Bahá’í. Apart from these ‘world religions’ we also see several religious constellations under the name of ‘New Age’ and/or new religious movements (Andersson & Sander, 2009).

5 There is although, soon after, an awareness of ‘Swedish paradox’ reflecting a situation where the majority population has an extremely weak Church (associated belief in God and resurrection) but still continues to make use of the rites and rituals of the Church in important life situations (Jänträ-Jareborg, 2010a: 669).

work, friends, neighbours and other figures of authority occur in this Swedish secular context<sup>6</sup>, affecting the way they narrate themselves and the ‘others’.

## Minority/Majority Lens

Sweden, a previously homogeneous society as regards ethnicity, language, and religion has transformed significantly during the last 60 years: from a departure country to a destination country with regards to migration from 350,000 in early 1900’s to now more than 2 million inhabitants of foreign origin (Jänterä-Jareborg, 2010a) from a Lutheran majority heritage to a multi-confessional society (Willander, 2019) and from total dominance of the Swedish language to more than 200 spoken languages (Jänterä-Jareborg, 2010b).

As a sequel to immigration into Sweden, religion has gained a new kind of visibility in the Swedish society. Much of this new visibility of religion in Sweden can be attributed to Islam’s new presence in the country as demonstrated through newly built mosques<sup>7</sup> (with minarets), religiously articulated dressing codes, celebration of Ramadan, and increasingly, the founding of schools with a religious curriculum (Hjelm, 2015). This in turn challenges the majority society’s understanding of the role of religion, principle of neutrality, and distribution of resources (Jänterä-Jareborg, 2010a).

On the individual level, second-generation migrants can feel the pressure of conforming to and negotiating with (and in between) minority and majority memberships, which also gives them a special place to reflect on their bargaining power. The absence of racial privilege, combined with differences in economic, political, and religious circumstances among individuals and groups, leads to varying power dynamics within minority communities. These disparities can shape both actual and perceived

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<sup>6</sup> Secular or Secularization in this study is to be understood as signifying that religion ‘means less and less to more and more people’ (Brömsson, 2007). Moreover, in international research today the concept of secularization is called in question, and researchers often prefer to talk about religious changes. Religions tend to adopt new forms and patterns, and some researchers even talk about religion and its revival (Sigurdson & Svenungsson, 2006)

<sup>7</sup> Sweden is home to nine purpose-built mosques (Larsson & Sorgenfrei, 2024). Among these, the mosques in Uppsala and Göteborg, as well as two in Stockholm and two in Malmö, are managed by Sunni congregations. In addition, Trollhättan boasts a single purpose-built Shiite mosque, while the Ahmadiyya community has established mosques in both Göteborg and Malmö. Furthermore, Muslims in cities such as Stockholm, Gävle, Västerås, and Sundsvall have acquired old churches, converting them into mosques; a notable example is the significant Shiite Imam Ali Center located in Järfälla, just outside Stockholm. Several more mosques are currently in the planning stages (Larsson & Sorgenfrei, 2024: 206). However, a large number of Muslim prayer rooms and congregational centers are situated in basements, apartments, or warehouses, and there is no reliable estimate of their total number (Larsson & Sorgenfrei, 2022).

positions of influence or marginalisation among members of the same minority group (Kuusisto, 2010). For example, individuals with greater economic resources or political connections may wield more power or have better access to opportunities than others within the same community. Similarly, religious differences can create internal divisions, where some groups or individuals may feel more empowered or, conversely, more alienated, contributing to complex and often unequal power structures within the broader minority group. These internal hierarchies can affect how members of minority communities experience and respond challenges relating to discrimination and integration efforts.

### **(Re)Presentation of Islam and Muslims**

Religion attracts increasing attention in the Swedish public debate due to internal changes in the society but also due to external/international developments. Muslims are portrayed as challenging the (present) content of Western nation-states and national discourses through different visibilities and, arguably, more dedicated and visible practices of their religion (Schmidt, 2011).

Based on twentieth century country-by-country worker migration and refugee statistics, as well as the estimates of the Swedish Muslim community, the estimated number of Muslims living in Sweden is commonly placed at around 400,000 persons (Berglund, 2013b: 207). Of these, approximately 110,000 are thought to be formal members of one or another Islamic congregation<sup>8</sup> (Elander et al., 2015: 148). The number of Muslims born in Sweden is also increasing: approximately 100,000 people are thought to be school-aged or younger (Bevelander & Otterbeck, 2010). Islam enjoys the same legal status as other religions, and Islamic organisations are entitled to state funding proportionally to the size of their membership (Alwall, 2002).

A study by Otterbeck and Bevelander (2012) on Islamophobia in Sweden explores the political, social, and media landscape surrounding Islam and Muslims. It finds that Islamophobia is pervasive, fuelled by political rhetoric and media representations that often portray Muslims negatively. Public attitudes reflect a growing fear and suspicion of Islam, leading to discrimination and social exclusion of Muslim communities (also see Abrashi et al., 2015; Gardell, 2011, 2015). The political current, as elaborated by Mulinari and Neergaard (2012) especially the rising power of Sverige Demokraterna (SD) has shifted its focus on the central task of interpellating an expanding racism against Muslims. SD's depiction of Muslims oscillates between a powerful and threatening other (Muslim as terrorist; Muslim as well organised, Muslims overtaking

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<sup>8</sup> What about informal numbers?

Sweden) and notions of a weak and problematic other (a burden for the welfare state and the Swedish nation).

Threats, harassment, assault, ethnic agitation, slander, and discrimination are the most frequent hate crime categories reported to the police by immigrants (Bunar, 2007; Kolankiewicz, 2015). Most hate crimes reported to the police during the initial years of the new millennium were not committed by organised white power activists but by more or less common citizens. Borell (2010) notes that attacks on Muslim communities often occur in two scenarios: when Islam and Muslims are thrust into the spotlight due to negative international events, like terror attacks by Muslims, and during the establishment or construction of mosques and other Muslim institutions (see also Borell, 2015).

However as Berglund (2015) argues, such opposition against Muslim communities does not preclude support. She exemplifies that in response to the attempted firebombing of an Uppsala mosque in 2015, Swedes rallied in solidarity by covering the mosque's doors with hearts, flowers, and messages of love in a gesture called 'love-bombing'. Large demonstrations supporting Swedish Muslims were also held in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö, protesting this and other recent attacks at the time.

Zenia Hellgren (2019) examines how class, race, and geography intersect to impact immigrants' opportunities in Stockholm, particularly Muslims. She emphasises that these groups face substantial obstacles due to racial and spatial segregation, which restricts their inclusion and access to essential resources. Negative perceptions and stereotypes further stigmatise their neighbourhoods, reinforcing segregation and marginalisation. This dynamic results in unequal opportunities in education, employment, and social mobility, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and exclusion within these communities. Eliassi (2017) details that institutional racism in Sweden is evident in the way social workers, particularly those who are white, often frame immigrant integration around cultural differences while downplaying or denying the role of racism in their work and society. This colour-blind approach to welfare and integration assumes a universalism that overlooks the unique needs and experiences of non-white immigrants. As a result, integration is paradoxically used to enforce hierarchies of belonging, where cultural conformity and assimilation are seen as prerequisites for equality.

The research by Bevelander and Otterbeck (2010) and Roald (2013) delves into the complex intersections of sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and cultural identity within Muslim immigrant communities in Sweden. These studies highlight the tension between traditional views on homosexuality and the broader societal push for gender equality. Mulinari (2009, 2016) further explores gender equality issues through the lens of marginalised women, while Listerborn (2015) examines the veil as a symbol of both

oppression and empowerment. Hellgren and Hobson (2008) and Alinia (2020) focus on the discourse surrounding honour killings, framing it within the broader challenges of integrating Muslim immigrants into Swedish society. This body of research underscores the multifaceted and often contentious debates surrounding identity, rights, and cultural integration in Sweden's Muslim communities. The kinds of words that are associated with being Muslim factor into how one views an identity that one subscribes to and has an impact on self-definition, self-esteem, sense of belonging.

## The Case of the Muslim Identity

A question I had in mind from the outset revolved around the solidification and the dilution of the 'Muslim' identity in a secular context. In a culture where religion is not valued as a repertoire that orients and guides the way people live their lives and engage in publics outside of the private sphere, it is especially interesting to study what occurs when two different cultures (or shared understandings and repertoires) meet.

Muslim congregations reported in 2011<sup>9</sup> that they had 110,000 registered members in Sweden. According to figures given by the *Samarbetsnämnden för statsbidrag till trossamfund* (the Swedish Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities, SST), one third of Muslims in Sweden indicate that they are practicing (i.e. they follow the prescribed laws of Islam and they regularly visit mosques and pray on a daily basis), while the remainder are secularised (i.e. they do not follow the laws of Islam and they see a separation between religion and state) (Elander et al., 2015). The latter can be considered 'cultural Muslims' (Berglund, 2013b: 208).

The question is how Muslims define and construct their religious, ethnic and national identity within a certain context correlates with the question of how they use Islam as a religious, political and cultural marker. Being confronted with new challenges such as secular society and minority status, Muslims are becoming more aware of the need for reinterpretation of Islam and the adoption of new organisational forms to keep it alive. It is a process which has two main aspects: the interpretation of Islam and its practical use. There are first of all the 'substantial' differences – ethnic origin and language – which have a decisive influence on Muslim understanding of Islam. Also, political, psychological and other factors have an influence on the Muslim way of living. In addition to this, Muslims of course act in the world like other people, motivated by

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<sup>9</sup> The official statistics show that the number members and participants within Muslim congregation eligible for state grants has increased. The increase goes from 100,000 people at the start of the SOM-survey period 2007 to close to 140,000 people at the end of the period in 2016 (in Willander, 2019: 45).

similar needs and interests. The concept of ‘identity’ must integrate the multifaceted nature of being Muslim, which includes both the universality of being like any other person and the particularity of having a religious dimension, as well as the uniqueness of individual experiences.

## Pakistani Diaspora as the Case

The empirical case I choose to study is the Pakistani ethnic immigrant community/minority diaspora in Sweden. There are several reasons why this is an important case.

First, although the Muslim community in Sweden is ethnically, linguistically, culturally and religiously diverse (Larsson, 2007), it is possible to divide the Muslim community <sup>10</sup> into seven different sub-groups <sup>11</sup> based on the migration waves in Sweden of which Pakistani-Muslims are one (Anwar et al., 2004: 219).

Second, the social, economic and political milieus from where immigrants migrate has a major impact on how they will articulate their religious identity in their private and public lives in the host country. In the words of a young male immigrant who escaped with his family from Bosnia and arrived in a Swedish town in 1992, one’s religious approach in a new country is strongly related to one’s previous experience: ‘Here are Muslims from many countries. Many newly established groups. What you bring with you from your homeland and your culture influences how you practice your religion’ (Elander et al., 2015: 147).

Third, the Muslim identity trajectory within the Swedish context is an under-researched phenomenon compared to other ethnic groups in Sweden and suffers from paucity in academic literature. This invisibility and lack of the ‘Pakistani’ voice in research could be attributed to its relatively small population, approximately 28,614 foreign-born persons in Sweden (SCB, 2023) and 7,453 persons born in Sweden with two Pakistani parents, and 1,901 persons born in Sweden with at least one Pakistani parent. Bigger communities command greater space, crowding out smaller voices in academic research. To focus on this community is to give it a voice.

Moreover, migration trends to Sweden from Pakistan also showcase a few trends: between 2000 and 2022, there has been a notable increase in family-based migration

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10 Although many Muslims have come from countries such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Bosnia and Somalia, it is important to stress the point that Muslims in Sweden come from more or less all regions of the world.

11 Turkish Muslims, the Arab Muslims, the Iranian Muslims, the African Muslims, the Pakistani Muslims, the Balkan Muslims and others

to Sweden from Pakistan, with approximately 500 family members arriving, making it the sixth-largest group during 2020-2022 (SCB, 2024: 70). Between 2015 and 2022 there is a particularly strong upward trend in migration from individuals born in Pakistan. By 2020-2022, this group, with around 1,400 individuals, was the largest, significantly surpassing other nationalities like Iraq, which had just under 700 migrants (SCB, 2024: 84). Notably, about 80% of these migrants held Pakistani citizenship (SCB, 2024: 85). This significant increase in migration from Pakistan to Sweden further underscores the urgency and importance of studying this community.

Fourth, most, if not all Pakistanis are Muslims<sup>12</sup> which makes it more probable that I shall be able to find a 'Muslim' sample. A 'Muslim' for this study is someone who self-identifies as one, or someone who has (at least one) self-identifying Muslim parent.

Fifth, my study will allow for distinctions and comparisons to be made on the 'Muslim experience' between Pakistani and other more researched ethnic communities in Sweden. It could also account for the heterogeneity of the Pakistani community/diaspora/migrants within other countries in Europe.

Sixth, in order to understand how practices connected to 'other places' may be intimately tied to the 'local context' of everyday life, the Pakistani diaspora as a transnational community located in a transnational social field spanned by homeland ties as well as global networks is an important social form within which individual identity is shaped and formed (Vertovec & Cohen, 1999: xv). As volume and density of family and kinship-based ties, preserved through transport, electronic communications, trade, investment and cultural interdependence, enlarge economic transactions and social interactions, the home and host societies dissolve into one another (ibid: xvi). The frequency of interactions within a social field creates a loop in which ideas, ideals, values, norms etc from host and home country circulate and affect each other intimately. Pakistanis frequently visit their home country, fetch ideas from there, take their children back to visit both to showcase their success as well strengthen their own ties and their children's identity, have to show families back home that children are being taught cultural and religious values. Parent generation was not as well off as the first so travel was not as frequent. When the children became older, they have better jobs than their parents and are in a better financial situation to go back; which they do if they have a Pakistani spouse or relatives who are still alive. Otherwise, some don't go back at all which shows a 'break' in connection with home country of their parents (Fieldnotes, 2017-2018).

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<sup>12</sup> According to a recent survey by US-based Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Muslims comprise 96.4% of Pakistan's total population, it is assumed the same proportion would apply to immigrants from Pakistan in foreign contexts <http://pewforum.org/The-Future-of-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx>.

Seventh, within the same nationality there are different sects/denominations within the 'Muslim' religious frame (most common ones are Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadi<sup>13</sup> sects). I do not make distinctions or stick to one denomination. All 'Muslims' are a welcome addition to my theoretical case.

Last but not the least, idea of generational ruptures and continuity are a vital litmus test on evaluating religious change within minority diaspora over time. In the long run, second- and third-generation immigrants may develop "softer" interpretations of their parents' religion even become secularised (Elander et al., 2015: 147) or host the revival of religion in the absence of any other revolutionary identity available to them in a secular frame. Most Pakistani's came to Sweden in the 70's and 80's. Since there is a tendency in this group to marry young, a quick extrapolation from time of migration to present day means that there is more than one generation living in Sweden, possibly even a third. The Pakistani diaspora fits with my focus on second-generation.

Pakistan has itself has experienced waxing and waning religious inclinations. It is a state that was created in the name of Islam, so a major part of Pakistani identity is being Muslim (Anwar et al., 2004: 85). In my own experience going back and forth to Pakistan in different decades, and as was observed in the 'talk' among the first-generation parents in the 'Mushaira'/poetry recitation event I attended at an informant's home, progressive elements have slowly and systematically been silenced, journalists are kidnapped, activists are murdered, students are lynched and killed. Under blasphemy laws, in a democracy, free speech is a crime punishable by death at the whim of fellow citizens and the state has no recourse. Conservative religious elements are being transferred to political arena. Pakistan has a large demographic dividend but poor welfare arrangements propelling unemployed uneducated youth recruitment into Islamist organisations in high proportions. Geopolitical connections, i.e. Arab funding into mosques, the government has poor control on madrassahs and mosque activities.

Pakistan's evolving religious landscape, characterised by increasing conservative influence, state repression, and poor governance over religious institutions, has led to a stifling environment for progressive voices and a troubling recruitment of disenfranchised youth into extremist groups. When second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden discuss their sense of belonging, they often compare their experiences to the repressive and conservative climate they associate with Pakistan, highlighting Sweden's relative freedom and progressive values as a contrast. This comparison offers them a lens through which to balance their multiple identities for a coherent sense of belonging.

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13 The community in Sweden built the country's first mosque in Gothenburg in 1976. They have also constructed a mosque in Malmö and have congregations in Stockholm, Kalmar, Luleå, and Arvika. According to information from the community, there are over 1,500 Ahmadi Muslims in Sweden.





## *Chapter 2*

# Literature Review

## Muslim Identity: A Mushrooming Research Field

In recent years, the study of Muslim identity has rapidly expanded. This field explores the complex dynamics of identity formation among Muslims, particularly in relation to migration, integration, and the pressures of secular and multicultural societies. With increased global attention on Muslim communities, this research field delves into how identity is shaped by social, political, and religious influences, offering valuable insights into the lived experiences and challenges faced by Muslims today. In this chapter, key developments and trends in this burgeoning field will be reviewed.

## Islam in Europe

Although world religions transported themselves across continents and through the centuries ‘without the aid of federated administrative structures’ (Levitt, 2001) and faith communities have always provided fertile ground for social capital formation, minority mobilisation and migrant integration (Levitt & Waters, 2002), the domestication of different faiths in Western Europe, in an age of globalisation, has become a curiously complicated process. Among nation-states that accommodate different religions, Islam, in particular, has been increasingly accorded importance in scientific studies and recent political debates on migrant religiosity (Carol & Koopmans, 2013) within Western Europe studying how social integration is affected by individual levels of religiosity other aspects of research are media representation. For example Saeed (2007) identifies common stereotypes in media portrayals of Muslims, such as depicting them as extremists, culturally alien, or involved in criminal activities. The study highlights how media coverage tends to focus on sensationalist and negative stories about Muslims, such as terrorism or conflict, while neglecting positive contributions and diverse experiences within Muslim communities (see also Poole, 2014; Poole & Sandford, 2002). In a similar vein Ahmed and Matthes (2017) notably

exemplify in their meta-analysis how media coverage of refugee influxes can either humanise or demonise Muslim refugees, affecting public support for integration policies and influencing the social integration of these new arrivals.

Brah (1996) explores the questions of 'experience', 'structure' and 'agency' through an analysis of the education system, careers services and labour-markets as they affect the lives of a section of South Asian young people and women in Britain showcasing their strategies and responses. Graham and Khosravi (1997) analyse the challenges faced by Iranian and Afghan refugees in Sweden, including issues related to resettlement and identity. Vertovec and Cohen (1999) focus on transnational ties and show how South Asian diasporas in the UK engage in economic activities that support their families back home and participate in cultural practices that reinforce their ties to their heritage. Through the concept of 'super-diversity' in urban areas, Vertovec (2007) shows its effects on diasporic communities. Khayati and Dahlstedt (2014) investigate the role of diasporic identities in social and political mobilisation within European contexts.

Abbas (2007a) explores how multicultural policies impact the integration of Muslim youth in Britain, and Modood (2010) critiques the multicultural policies implemented in the UK, evaluating their effectiveness in fostering social inclusion and addressing issues of inequality (for varieties of arguments see Meer & Modood, 2009, 2011; Modood, 1997; Modood et al., 1997).

The literature underscores the diversity within Muslim communities across Europe, illustrating varying experiences and levels of integration influenced by factors such as nationality, socio-economic status, and religious observance. Key themes include the impact of media representations, the role of multicultural policies, and the negotiation of identity in diverse European contexts.

However, there is a need for more nuanced studies that address the intersection of religion and other aspects of identity, such as race, class, gender, and generation and how these influence integration and social cohesion.

## Muslims in Europe

Research in multiple subjects such as continuity and change in the making of Muslim identities, the development of mosques and Muslim associations (Karlsson Minganti, 2004) the struggle to establish Muslim schools in the European context (Doomernik, 1995) and in Nordic countries (Aslan, 2009; Berglund, 2012; Karlsson Minganti, 2007). As regards establishment of Muslim institutions like the mosque, Waardenburg (1991) examines they are not just places of worship but also as hubs for cultural activities and social support for Muslim immigrants (see also von

Brömssen, 2010). He also looks at the establishment of Islamic primary and secondary schools in countries like Belgium and the Netherlands, which aim to balance Islamic teachings with the national curriculum. On the contrary, Rath et al. (1997) provide examples of the resistance faced by mosque construction projects in places like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, where local opposition often arises from concerns about integration and changes in neighbourhood character. They discuss initiatives in cities like Utrecht, where municipal policies aim to foster dialogue between Muslim institutions and other community organisations to address integration challenges and enhance social harmony. Focusing on identity and integration on one hand and radicalisation and extremism on the other, Vertovec and Rogers (2018) to analyse how some young Muslims in Europe are susceptible to extremist ideologies and the factors contributing to this vulnerability. They provide examples of how disenfranchisement, lack of social integration, and experiences of discrimination can make certain youth more receptive to radical messages (see also Marilena et al., 2020; Murshed & Pavan, 2011; Verkuyten, 2018).

On the construction of a Western Muslim identity and the situation of young Muslims in Europe (Otterbeck, 2006) observes the role of Islamic youth organisations and he highlights that youth-led events and educational programmes that aim to foster a strong Muslim identity while addressing issues related to integration and social cohesion. Akpınar (2007) explores how Turkish Muslims in Germany adapt their religious practices in a new cultural context. She looks at the adaptation of Ramadan fasting practices and how Turkish Muslims in Berlin balance traditional observances with their daily work and social lives in a secular environment.

von Brömssen (2016) discusses the challenges faced by women who wear the hijab in the workplace and how they negotiate their professional and personal identities within a predominantly secular Swedish context. Fernando and Joppke (2009) analyse the hijab in the context of European integration policies and the political responses to Muslim practices in public life. They pinpoint legal restrictions on wearing the hijab in public offices and schools in countries like France and Germany, and how these policies influence Muslim women's social participation and identity. Jakku (2018a) shows attitudes connected to 'saving' Muslim women follow a secular epistemology within which there are clear tendencies towards translating religion-based truths/interpretations as compulsion. Secularity understood in this way creates an internal contradiction between secularism's ideal of freedom of religion and the state's desire for regulations that break down the public/private barrier, thus directly opposing ideas of the individual's freedom (for nuances see Göle, 2003, 2006; Hamel, 2002)

In terms of political participation of Muslim communities Shadid et al. (1996) in their study show involvement of Muslim organisations in Dutch municipal elections. Cases are highlighted where Muslim organisations have mobilised to influence local

policy and community services by advocating for their interests and addressing community needs. In a follow-up study they discuss prominent Muslim politicians in the Netherlands, who used her platform to address issues related to immigration and integration, reflecting the growing political influence of Muslim individuals and organisations (Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002). Cesari (2013a) looks at how religious identity influences political activism among Muslims in France. She features the activism of Muslim groups in advocating for anti-discrimination laws and policies and discusses how these groups mobilise around religious identity to influence public discourse and legislative processes, such as campaigns for the right to wear religious clothing in public institutions and efforts to combat Islamophobia.

## Social Responses to the Establishment of Muslim Institutions

Research on Islam and Muslims in Sweden has often concentrated on examining the interrelations between certain of these formal Muslim entities and the various authorities, representatives and gatekeepers of Sweden (Berglund, 2007, 2013a; Berglund & Larsson, 2007; Svanberg & Karlsson, 1997; Svanberg & Westerlund, 1999). In her study of Muslims' lives in Sweden, Karlsson Minganti (2004) not only canvasses the lives of those identifying themselves as devout believers but also embeds it within the debate of mosque establishment and problematises relations between minority and majority, freedom of religion, contestation of public space, and politics of heritage. In studies that have ventured to explore young Muslim involvement in organised religious activities this issue found that the older first-generation founders of mosques and/or Islamic associations are gradually being replaced by younger second- and third-generation Muslims, all of whom have been raised and socialised in Europe.

It is commonly accepted that modernisation, globalisation and the emergence of modern mass media has unsettled traditional religious authority (Caeiro, 2010; Mandaville, 2007; Masud, 2009; Salvatore, 2007, 2014; Van Bruinessen, 2003). Modern mass media have allowed for a tremendous increase in the number of voices in the public sphere (De Koning, 2016; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003: x). This has also affected Islamic authority in European countries. The authoritative frames and institutional settings that emerged in the early years of migration are still functioning, but their legitimacy is questioned by a growing number of Muslims born and raised in Europe (Peter, 2006a, 2006b; Sunier, 2014; Volpi & Turner, 2007).

Göran Larsson and Erika Willander (2024) writing from Sweden about Muslims and social media argue that studies that focus on how Islam and Muslims are portrayed

and discussed in social media – often rather negatively or even hatefully – should be complemented with future studies that focus on how Muslims use social media. The subversion of power from producers of social media from users of social media adds to the variability of everyday ‘lived religion’ particularly from the perspective of Muslim users (Larsson & Willander, 2024).

Notably in this line of argument, Morten Stinus Kristensen (2023) writes about Danish Muslims navigating hegemonic Danishness on social media. Danishness on this digital counter public provides direct challenges to hegemonic Danishness’ one-dimensional representation of Muslimness. When it comes to questions of gender and claims to ordinariness through quotidian posts on life as a Danish person who just happens to be Muslim, these social media practices are racial projects that undercut hegemonic Danishness’ racialisation of Muslimness as non-Danish, monolithic, and culturally deficient.

And similarly Rikke Andreassen (2013) contributes to how Muslim women use blogs and social media to challenge notions about their marriage practices and preferences to men’s lack of education that was reduced to a question of Muslim women’s refusal of ethnically Danish men. Whereas the historical criticism of Danish women engaging with foreign men did not include the women’s voices or their sides of the story, these new debates do include voices from Muslim women – and often these voices challenge the interpretations of their situation uttered by the many ethnically Danish men who dominate the media debates. The interaction of the Internet makes a difference, as women’s voices are heard, and their participation in the debates destabilises the well-known picture of white men saving brown women from brown men.

A wide variety of issues of faith that were undisputed are now put into question. However, to attribute these developments simply to overarching societal transformations and modern communication technology ignores the ethical dimensions that are at play. But instead of remaining at a rather general and often abstract level of analysis, we should pay more attention to the very personal and individual level where reflections begin with ambiguities and dilemmas. The examples taken from my fieldwork I discussed all start with personal deliberation (see Sunier 2018).

## Identity Formation

It has also been found that this younger generation is actively involved in developing an approach to Islam that often departs quite radically from their parents’ more traditionalist brand of Islam (Jonker & Amiraux, 2006). The results of a survey carried out by (Berglund, 2013) distributed to young Swedes who identified themselves as

Muslims, indicates that a majority of the respondents considered their belief in Islam to be a private, personal matter, and a positive social and spiritual resource. They harboured low level of confidence in religious leaders, and contrary to being involved in mosque activities, preferred to spend their leisure hours earning money, being with friends and/or working out at the gym.

In a similar vein, (Silvestri, 2011) studied 132 women in five European countries that explored intersections between everyday concerns, lived experiences and conceptualisations of faith, beyond the traditional ‘performance’ of religion. Commensurate with Berglund’s study, she draws attention to the fluidity of religious adherence within the effect of national cultural-political imaginaries, and the spiritual and intellectual efforts involved in making the ‘lived’ religion a resource for individual agency (Dessing et al., 2016).

Individual representations of second and third-generation Muslims draws attention to an obvious challenge for the Swedish state: how to recognise, accommodate and work with Muslims who choose to remain unaffiliated with a national Islamic organisation. This is a question that has been raised not only within Swedish society, but within several other European countries as well (Bectovic, 2011; Drees & van Koningsveld, 2008).

Schmidt (2004) highlights four themes in Islamic identity formation: visibility and aesthetics; choice; transnationalism; and social ethics. She concludes that identities are continuously affected by aspects of the local and the contextual, and in particular by the conditions and legislation of the host nation-state. For example, a crisis event can impel a particular identity – in this case, religious – to become even more central to an individual’s concept of self.

Through asserting the primacy of their religious identity over other forms of social identity, religion became a powerful base of personal identification and collective association for these young Muslims (Peek, 2005). Showing how economic disadvantages can lead to feelings of marginalisation and affect immigrants’ social mobility and identity formation, Bectovic (2011) surmises that they as a result often reinforce class-based identity markers within their communities.

As found in a social capital approach, social integration also directly influences religious expression, especially within the most cohesive Turkish minority group. Maliepaard and Phalet (2012) Dutch Muslims with more minority contacts identify more strongly with their religion, whereas those with more majority contacts identify less strongly.

## Socialisation, Family Formation and Western Consumption

Socialisation processes in immigrant families also reveal the disadvantaged position of the female gender. Referring to the much-publicised instances of forced marriages, genital mutilation and honour killings that have created moral panics, Hagelund in Grillo (2008) articulates that patriarchal immigrant cultures and family structures have become a key site of conflict in the Scandinavian debates about integration, multiculturalism and ethnic relations (also see Akkerman, 2007; Hagelund, 2002; Keskinen, 2016). In the case of Norway, subjected to patriarchal familial relations, mothers, entrusted with the responsibility of childrearing, remain removed from learning the native language of host country, from the education systems and labour market. This exclusion and social marginalisation, if passed on intergenerationally could have grave consequences for social integration of future generations (*ibid.*).

Attributing such characteristics to an immigrant out-group creates tendencies for in-group homophily between both natives and immigrants presenting another angle on family formation, taking intermarriages as a sign of positive social integration, Carol (2013) studied the attitudes of natives in Belgium, Britain, Germany and Switzerland and Muslim migrants of ex-Yugoslav, Turkish, Moroccan and Pakistani origin. She finds that once religiosity is controlled for, all migrant groups become significantly more positive about intermarriage than natives thus showcasing religious identity among migrants and cultural practices/racial preference among natives are associated with reluctance to intermarry. An interesting assertion is made, that nation-states provide a structural framework, e.g., intermarriage attitudes in Western Europe within the educational system that allows individuals to meet and cross religious and ethnic group boundaries in spite of their religious attachment. She proffers this a policy gap in creating more positive contact between natives and Muslim minorities.

The emphasis on gender, family, sexuality, and reproduction are crucial to citizenship highlighting how personal and intimate domains intersect with political and social identity (Plummer, 2001; Roseneil et al., 2013). These realms shape the norms, values, and behaviours that a society expects of its citizens, influencing ideas about who belongs and who does not. In Sweden, studies dealing with marriage among persons of Muslim background have concluded that moral values and intimacies undergo various transformations due to their complex and hybrid experiences within the culture(s) in which they live (Andersson et al., 2015; Farahani, 2007; Gerholm, 2006; Lundqvist, 2020).

Studying displaced masculinities of Iranian men in the diaspora in Sweden, Shahram Khosravi (2009) finds that representation of Iranian men is framed through stereotypes



of 'primitive masculinity', viewing them as oppressors of women and violators of Swedish norms (Khosravi, 2009: 598). The 'Swedish way of thinking', 'the Swedish sexual culture', and the Swedish 'civilised masculinity'—in terms of 'caring' and 'saving' of Muslim women (2009: 609) —are thus produced. This dynamic reinforces a hierarchical gaze that intertwines power structures based on gender, class, and race. Migration has shifted power dynamics between Iranian men and women. Iranian men, who once held a controlling gaze over women, now find themselves subject to the dominant gaze in Sweden, which renders them (in)visible in the same way their gaze influenced women's visibility in Iran .

Exploring the theme of gender, diaspora, and sexuality through the narratives of Iranian women Fataneh Farahani (2017) reveals both similarities and contrasts. Amid the complexities of diaspora, narratives highlight how sexuality informs indentity formation in Sweden, Iranian women navigate sexuality as a means of identity formation; how sexuality is seen as a means of resistance by asserting sexual agency to subvert gender roles on one hand and authority of men on the other. This includes reconciling the value placed on virginity in Iran with Sweden's more liberal attitudes. By examining their stories, we gain insight into the diverse ways these women resist, maintain, adapt their sense of self to redefine their sense of home and belonging, challenging simplistic binary constructions of homeland attachments and hostland embeddedness (for diasporic narratives on virginity see Farahani, 2007; for nuances on diasporic masculinity see Farahani, 2012; and Farahani & Thapar-Björkert, 2019).

Cross-border marriages challenge the boundaries of the nation by enabling non-members to enter and reside in the national territory without having been invited to do so. Cross-border marriages also threaten the normative vision of the 'good family' as the social institution that produces and raises the new members of society and the new members of the nation. Cultural reasons are increasingly proffered to highlight supposedly unacceptable ways of 'doing family' (Strasser et al., 2009) within migration populations, with gender and intergenerational relationships often at the heart of the constructed dichotomies (Fischer & Dahinden, 2017). So-called 'forced', 'arranged', 'sham' and 'grey' marriages threaten the supposedly love- and consent-based relationships that are the foundation of 'modern families' in 'modern societies' (Bonjour & De Hart, 2013).

The relatively recent politicisation of cross-border transnationally arranged marriages in many European nation-states reveals the extent to which these marital unions challenge boundaries between 'us' and 'them' in at least two different ways: established definitions of both the 'good and legitimate citizen' and the 'good family' (Bonjour & De Hart, 2013; Schmidt, 2008) are under threat when citizens and residents marry 'outsiders'.

For example, Rytter (2012b) argues that, in the public perception, real Pakistani marriages are viewed with suspicion and stand in contrast to the typical motivations

behind Danish marriage, and are frequently condemned in political and public discourses (see Rytter, 2010a, 2012a; Rytter, 2012b; Schmidt, 2011, 2011b, 2011e). Liversage and Rytter show (2015), one consequence is that some cousin marriages that the authorities would define as forced take place instead in Sweden, while other couples may be separated for years while trying to prove their marriage was not forced.

In a similar vein, Frenandez and Jensen (2014) destabilise ideas of 'modern' and 'traditional' marriages and question the efficacy of the state's attempt to legislate morality through family unification laws. They empirically and comparatively illustrate in their case how the legislation affects both the intended targets (intra-ethnic marriages among Danes of immigrant descent) and the unintended targets (ethnic Danes who marry non-European spouses, namely, Cubans). This comparative perspective highlights the cracks in the moral agenda of the state's efforts to shape family formation and, ultimately, the contradictions of attempting to promote 'modernity' over 'tradition'.

The findings from Anika Elwert's (2020) study on attractiveness of partners for intermarriage support the notion that country of birth serves as a boundary in the native marriage market. This study illustrates the fact that this boundary manifests itself not only by excluding immigrants of certain immigrant groups from the pool of marriage partners, but also by allowing them in - if they have something to offer in return. In the Swedish case, this is likely to be age.

Osanami Törngren (2016, 2018) examines how intermarriage patterns among immigrants and the native population can reflect broader integration processes. She identifies that while intermarriage may indicate a level of integration, it does not uniformly correlate with it. Various factors such as cultural background and socio-economic status play critical roles in influencing marriage choices and experiences. Higher education levels among immigrants often facilitate exposure to diverse social networks, making it more probable for them to marry outside their ethnic group. Perceptions of cultural proximity can significantly affect intermarriage rates. Groups with strong familial and cultural ties tend to exhibit lower rates of intermarriage, indicating that cultural values and norms heavily influence marriage decisions. This research underscores the need for further understanding of how intermarriage shape's identity and belonging for future generations in a diversifying society.

While many opponents construe the growing presence of Muslim headscarves in Germany as evidence of creeping Islamisation, religious activism can also be interpreted as an attempt on the part of migrant offspring to forge positive hyphenated identities (Mushaben, 2008). Rooted in urban culture, material consumption, and specific mosque communities, young women especially, are breaking with traditional gender roles, building social capital and acquiring the participatory skills necessary to bring 'civil society' into their own communities (ibid.). This blending of Islamic behaviour with Western consumption in Sweden is found in a *blatte* identity (Lacatus, 2007). As a Swede

of Arabic descent, proud of his Muslim background, the protagonist actively engages in resisting the assimilative forces within the wider society through his 'gangsta' identity (ibid: 82) characterised by symbolic markers other than the 'black skull' (ibid:80). That is, choice in clothes, hip hop music, and attitude towards women (Lacatus, 2007). Thereby the stigma of blatte is converted into a charismatic and cool identity.

Of a similar conception is *Taqwacore* originally conceived in Michael Muhammad Knight's 2003 novel, a subgenre of punk music dealing with Islam, its culture, and interpretation. The name is a portmanteau of hardcore and the Arabic word Taqwa, which is usually translated as 'piety' or the quality of being 'God-fearing', and thus roughly denotes reverence and love of the divine. The scene is composed mainly of young Muslim artists living in the US and other Western countries, many of whom openly reject traditionalist interpretations of Islam, and thus live their own lifestyle within the religion or without (Fiscella, 2012).

Racially unmarked white universal norms underpinning major debates about the transformation of family life have effectively excluded consideration of families from minority ethnic and religious backgrounds.

## Stereotypes and Discrimination

In 2004 a report based on a survey of the attitudes, perceived vulnerabilities and conduct of young Swedes from a diversity of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds; its findings indicate that the percentage of young Muslims who consider themselves 'vulnerable' within Swedish society is greater than that found in any other group. These findings were confirmed in a similar survey conducted two years later (in Otterbeck & Bevelander, 2012). In 'Veils and wooden clogs don't go together', by studying converts, the reaction of family and friends is observed. Van Nieuwkerk (2004) concludes that it is the visibility, the identity markers or alternatively what is seen as demarcations, that are regarded as problematic. The lifestyle choices of the converts i.e. halal meat, no alcohol, the code of modesty and veiling symbolise backwardness and a return to patriarchy; something family and friends find perplexing, illogical, irrational, and disempowering against liberty and freedoms that the Dutch society (women) have enjoyed (Van Nieuwkerk, 2008). Similar studies have been nuanced with comparable findings in Denmark (see Gudrun Jensen, 2008; Herbert & Hansen, 2018; Oestergaard, 2009), Sweden (see Jakku, 2018b; McGinty, 2006; McGinty, 2007; Roald, 2004a; Sultan, 1999), and a Scandanavian comparison of Sweden, Denmark and Norway (see Roald, 2004b, 2004c; Roald, 2006).

In conflicts over Islamic instruction in schools and the regulation of women's attire all attest to the socially constructed nature of religious recognition in Germany. The dubious distinction of rendering Islam physically visible in urban settings, confirms the permanent nature of migration, as well as the need for a broader value consensus in a would-be global city (Mushaben, 2008). Overt national policies banning headscarves in public service professions in France and in public schools provide covert hints that this practice is increasingly at odds with European Union directives addressing gender equality and religious discrimination (ibid.)

One integration challenge as highlighted by Berglund's study in Sweden (2013b) is the discrimination that children of immigrants of certain ethnic backgrounds face when sending job applications. A photo with a head scarf or a Muslim name (ethnic markers) serves as barrier to labour market participation on account of discrimination (ibid.). Similarly, Shahram Khosravi (2012) examines how Muslim immigrants in Sweden change their names to more Swedish-sounding ones to mitigate social stigma and enhance integration. The expectation is that bearing a 'white' name will be 'rewarded with white privilege' (Khosravi, 2012: 78). Name-changing does not eradicate structural discrimination or racism, but it may diminish the risk of being discriminated against in the initial phase of applying for a job or housing, or during social interaction. Khosravi further draws parallels between Jews in early 20th-century Germany and Muslims in contemporary Sweden, noting that both groups changed their names to escape discrimination. While Jewish name-changers sought social elevation, Muslims in Sweden aim for better job prospects. Despite adopting Swedish-sounding names, Muslims remain marked as 'other' due to restrictions on using existing Swedish surnames. Changing names as an exercise to gloss over their 'fundamental imperfection,' that is, their Muslimhood (Khosravi, 2012: 79).

In *Navigating Colour-Blind Societies*, Amani Hassani (2024) conducts a comparative ethnography of racialisation, class, and gender in the lives of young Muslims coming of age in societies, where race is deemed insignificant. The factors discussed contributing to the racialisation of urban spaces in Copenhagen reveals incorporating 'non-Western' as a criterion for assessing socio-economic status. This racial categorisation serves to distinguish between 'white (affluent) space' and 'non-Western (deprived) space'. Consequently, a class-based analysis of Copenhagen's geography becomes closely linked to an examination of how these spaces are racialised. Even though many of young Muslims grew up on public housing estates, the fact that they had access to free higher education and affordable rental housing close to urban centres helped secure their middle-class positioning. This is a significant point to understand how the young people in the study were able to deploy resources and rights in the same context to challenge the inferiorisation of Muslim Others in political discourse and public imagination (also see Hassani, 2023).

Moreover, Hassani (2022) shows how young Danish Muslims use city spaces to challenge their categorisation along racial and gendered narratives, especially the conflation of these into the archetype of the ‘submissive Muslim woman’ beneath the ‘aggressive Muslim man’. Using Saba Mahmood’s (2005) concept of agency—not as direct resistance, but as actions within existing structures, she shows while young Danish Muslims resisted the racialisation of Muslims through social interactions, challenging the structures behind it was beyond their reach. Support from their Muslim communities aided their rejection of negative stereotypes, fostering social mobility. Middle-class status gave them an edge, allowing them to counter Islamophobia through their work, social engagement, and daily life—opportunities less accessible to those in more vulnerable positions.

At the same time, ethnographies of Muslim communities in multiple localities have mushroomed but do not provide a clear picture of the most significant trends in terms of acculturation or social practices of Muslims. While it is both interesting and important to study large religious organisations as well as the processes by which institutionalisation occurs, it is equally important to ascertain the extent to which and how these institutions are being used by the communities they purport to represent.

## Contribution

Having outlined the predominant themes in the literature, I will now delve into the specific dynamics of the Nordic context. This focus will provide a foundation for discussing my own contributions to the field.

The literature on Pakistani Muslims in Norway highlights critical insights regarding discrimination, identity struggles, and evolving familial dynamics. Midtbøen (2016) reveals significant ethnic discrimination in the labour market through a field experiment showing that second-generation Pakistani candidates face a 25% lower chance of being invited for job interviews compared to those with Norwegian-sounding names. This finding is echoed by Larsen and Di Stasio (2021) who demonstrate that Pakistani applicants in both Norway and the UK systematically experience disadvantages, emphasizing the persistence of ethnic bias across European labour markets.

In exploring identity, Muhammad (2009) addresses the tensions faced by second-generation Pakistani youth, particularly regarding dating practices that conflict with their parents’ traditional expectations. This theme of navigating cultural dichotomies is also reflected in Shakari’s (2013) thesis, which emphasizes how first-generation parents prioritize cultural ties to Pakistan while their children develop hybrid identities. For instance, while parents stress educational success, they often clash with their children’s desires to adapt to Norwegian societal values.

The evolution of parenting practices is examined by Aarset and Smette (2024), who elucidate how second-generation Pakistani parents blend heritage with Norwegian norms, promoting gender equality in household roles, contrasting with the patriarchal traditions of the first generation. Østberg (2009) further explores how Norwegian-Pakistani adolescents negotiate their integrated plural identities, noting how young girls may wear hijabs at home but adapt their attire in public spaces to avoid exclusion, exemplifying the challenges of fitting into multiple cultural contexts.

Lastly, Taj (2016) highlights the role of Norwegian Pakistani mosques in fostering interfaith dialogue and women's rights, noting initiatives that empower women to participate in community decision-making, thereby challenging traditional gender roles. Collectively, these studies illuminate the struggles of Pakistani Muslims in Norway, though they leave gaps in addressing the mental health impacts of these experiences, suggesting a need for further exploration of the emotional well-being of this demographic in a complex social landscape.

In a recent work Hashir (2023) finds that the post-migration generation (second-generation) expressed a stronger connection to their religion than to their ethnic background, a sentiment echoed by the earlier migration generation, who have distanced themselves from Pakistani culture due to its increasingly negative reputation. Both generations aspire to forge a new cultural identity by blending aspects of Pakistani and Norwegian cultures, resulting in a hybrid identity that encompasses both heritages. While they have preserved certain elements of their ethnic background and national ties, their religious connection remains significantly deeper.

The body of literature examining the experiences of Pakistani migrants in Denmark reveals intricate relationships between law, identity, and transnational practices. Mehdi (2003) explores the practice of *mahr*, or marriage gift, among Muslim Pakistanis within the Danish legal framework. He argues that while Danish law recognizes *mahr* as a legitimate practice, its implementation often leads to tensions between cultural traditions and legal norms. For instance, Mehdi demonstrates how some Pakistani couples face challenges when negotiating *mahr* in a legal context that does not fully comprehend its cultural significance, leading to feelings of disconnection and frustration.

Building on the themes of family and mobility, Rytter (2013) examines the generational shifts within Pakistani families in Denmark. He argues that migration causes significant upheaval in familial structures, influencing relationships and expectations among family members. An example from his study shows that younger generations often feel caught between traditional familial obligations and the modern Danish lifestyle, leading to a re-negotiation of familial roles and identities. Rytter emphasizes that this upheaval is not merely a disruption but also an opportunity for re-defining relationships and individual identities within the diaspora.

In another article, Rytter (2010a) addresses the phenomenon of intensive transnationalism among Pakistanis in Denmark. He highlights how many Pakistani families maintain strong ties with their homeland through regular visits and remittances, which create a sense of dual belonging. Rytter's research demonstrates that these transnational practices allow individuals to navigate their identities in both Denmark and Pakistan, enabling them to balance cultural heritage with adaptation to a new environment. This is exemplified through accounts of families who celebrate traditional Pakistani festivals in Denmark while also integrating aspects of Danish culture into their lives.

Rytter (Rytter, 2010b) further explores negotiations of identity and belonging in his article, 'A sunbeam of hope.' He discusses how Pakistani migrants in Denmark strive for acceptance while grappling with their cultural identity. Rytter provides an example of individuals who articulate their belonging by forming community organizations that celebrate Pakistani culture while simultaneously engaging with belonging to Danish society.

Together, these studies present a multi-layered view of the Pakistani migrant experience in Denmark, highlighting cultural practices, legal structures, and personal identities. The literature collectively underscores the importance of understanding the nuanced experiences of Pakistani migrants as they negotiate their place within Danish society while maintaining ties to their cultural roots.

In an overview of this research field, I did not come across studies that specifically tried to link everyday lives of second-generation Muslims who navigate and negotiate between different levels of interactions i.e. micro (individual), meso (family, education and labour market, mosque) and macro (nation-state) especially within the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden.

Moreover, in the last decade, from little academic conversation taking place from the individual viewpoint that brings to fore the challenges Muslims face to integrate into Western secular regimes, there is now an avid interest in this niche. Contemporary research is slowly shifting its focus from the power centres of Europe—Great Britain, France and Germany—and placing importance on the implications of Islamic identity formations in the 'periphery' of Europe, in this case the Scandinavian countries of which Sweden is a part.

In an unprecedented Muslim migration context in Sweden, with changing demographics as well as pressures on the welfare state, studies on the Muslim experience engenders further inquiries on this theme.

This empirical study, carried out in Sweden, with its generational focus on the Muslim identity in the Pakistani diaspora with a focus on belonging, both methodologically as well as theoretically, aims to contribute to this research theme.

## Chapter 3

# Conceptualising Belonging

As Pakistanis, Muslims, and non-native<sup>14</sup> Swedish persons of colour, this research inquiry assumes that these identities speak to the lived experience of the participants as related to time, meaning and context. Thus, moving away from the idea of *given* ‘groups’ or ‘categories’ of gender, ethnicity, religion and class (Anthias, 2008: 5). The notion of ‘belonging’ both in its simplicity and everyday usage has intuitive and common-sense notions that relate to ‘being a part of’, ‘being at home’ or feeling ‘safe’, ‘secure’ and comfortable (Röttger-Rössler, 2018). Belonging involves the value placed on inclusion, the judgements made about who fits within a group, and the boundaries that define who is in or out. It is therefore contended that belonging entails manifold processes of negotiations and is constructed as an outcome of these processes. This chapter thus understands the concept of belonging from three perspectives.

*Resources offfor belonging* examines how belonging can be leveraged as a valuable asset, offering individuals social capital, support networks, and a sense of security. A narrative identity approach assumes that social action can only be intelligible if we recognise that people are guided to act by the structural and cultural relationships in which they are embedded and by the stories through which they constitute their identities. This section highlights how belonging provides access to family, diaspora, religion, and national identity as resources that help individuals navigate their environments and achieve personal and collective goals.

*Meaning(making) offfor belonging* delves into how belonging contributes to the formation of identity and purpose. Boundaries help differentiate, categorise, and structure an understanding of the world, which is essential for making meaning. When distinctions blur, boundaries are generative, shaping new meanings into existence. To analyse individual narratives and understand what is truly desired, it is essential to unpack the identifications and attachments people form. Individuals often narrate their quest for meaning and connection in their lives, extending beyond mere membership in groups, cultures, institutions, societies, or nations. This section explores how

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<sup>14</sup> Nativity refers to temporal relation with national space based on lineage, descent and birthplace (see Duyvendak, J. W. (2023))



individuals and groups create and sustain a sense of belonging through meaning derived from boundary distinctions shared experiences, values, and cultural practices. These elements shape their understanding of themselves, helping them make sense of their place in the social world.

*Negotiations offfor belonging* focuses on how belonging is situationally and interactionally negotiated. Through specificity of relational dynamics, challenges faced, and compromises rendered, participants highlight the context of Swedish cultural diversity, migration, and shifting socio-political landscapes. This section examines the tensions and strategies involved in navigating subject positions and securing a place within various social spheres. The situated and interactional negotiations of second-generation participants emphasise their pursuit of a deeper sense of belonging and identity.

## Underpinning Belonging

There are a few reasons why ‘belonging’ is an appropriate concept considering its etymology. Heuristically, even in its root words ‘be’ and ‘longing’, there is an immense amount of analysis that can be appropriated and explored. Since the topic deals with exploring participants’ belongingness within Swedish, Pakistani and religious repertoires, this involves analysing what is deemed valuable in these repertoires and how that value is assessed. Additionally, how individuals gain or lose value based on these identity repertoires and how these processes relate to different meanings and interpretations of belonging.

The ‘be’ in belonging can be interpreted as Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’ which refers to a person’s self-awareness and concern for their own existence (Heidegger, 2002: viii). This includes their sense of identity, their relationship to space and place, and their ability to find meaning and purpose in life. This self-concern shapes their capacity to care for and engage with others, influencing their opportunities for survival, adaptation, and success. Be(ing) also implies action and motion, aligning with notions of ‘doing’ and ‘practicing.’ The individual achieves uniqueness not by isolating themselves from others, but by forming distinct relationships that allow them to remain authentic without being subsumed by the social they-self (Wheeler, 2011). In this way belonging becomes an active process of navigating between personal authenticity and social engagement.

Meanwhile ‘long’ refers to length of time which can imply staying power (staying in one place) of the individual, accumulation of capital (economic, cultural, symbolic), gaining experience, as well as being counted as a part of a society (social membership).

Moreover, 'to long' may refer to nostalgia, an ache, to wish for or desire something that is not in reach, possibly because it is in the past, missing from the present, and anticipated for in the future. Belonging thus has an affective dimension. The essence of longing is rooted in emotional attachments and social bonds.

Elsbeth Probyn (2015) and Judith Butler (1990, 1997) both explore the fluid and dynamic nature of identity, desire, and belonging. Probyn distinguishes between *being* (identity) and *longing* (desire), where longing drives individuals toward something perpetually out of reach, reflecting a direction rather than a destination. Butler complements this by viewing desire as an indeterminate force that shapes and is shaped by the performative acts of identity formation, without aiming for a fixed end. Both scholars highlight that belonging is not just a discursive process but also an affective and embodied experience, deeply felt and physically lived, intertwining the emotional, physical, and social aspects of identity.

Pfaff-Czarnecka's (2001) distinction in the German language between the *individual's relation to a collective* (Zugehörigkeit) on the one hand and *collective belonging* (Zusammengehörigkeit) on the other, something not immediately discernible in the English word 'belonging'. She elaborates that an individual's *belonging to* a collective has a connotation to be 'apart' pinpointing to a tension inherent in belonging, namely a distance between the self and we-collective. Whereas collective belonging stands for 'togetherness' or 'being a part of' as *belonging with*. This distinction becomes of interest when we shift our perspective from group dynamics geared at maintaining the collective status quo to a consideration of an individual's embeddedness in a collective, its seeking access to it or trying to abandon it.

Belonging is an emotionally charged and ever-evolving social location—a position within the social structure shaped by identification, embeddedness, connectedness, and attachments (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013). Belonging also encompasses connotations of closeness, familiarity, inseparability and intimacy (Röttger-Rössler, 2018: 240). Belonging is understood as a desire for attachment, as an emotional investment (Dahlstedt et al., 2017: 198). As Anthias (2006, 2020) suggests, belonging arises when people share values, relationships (including attachments to artifacts and landscapes), and practices, often reinforced by rules and regulations. Hage (2002, 2006) adds that belonging results from a combination of trust, safety, community, and a sense of possibility. It is a blend of individually acquired, interpersonally negotiated, and structurally influenced knowledge and life experience, making it a central dimension of social life.

The above leads us to think that if belonging is a practice, something that is in the 'doing' and what one 'does', then another of its dimensions is performance. Constructions of belonging have a performative dimension through '[s]pecific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual

and collective behaviour, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachments (Yuval-Davis et al., 2006: 202-203). Social location and social identity therefore emerge as a result of social practices (Dahlstedt et al., 2017: 199).

Belonging to a culture generally means being part of a universe of shared learning (Therborn, 1991). This raises the issue of identifying the specific characteristics, abilities, or values that individuals must possess to belong to a particular social community. When forced constructions of identity and location through power relations or symbolic power orders are resisted and contested, the sense of 'not longing' (or longing differently), and '(un)belonging' come into play. These boundaries are drawn in complex ways (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lamont et al., 2001; Pachucki et al., 2007). Borderlands are experienced when people are confronted with the fact that they are constantly questioned, trivialised or rejected by means of their colour, sexual preference, class, religion or gender (Anzaldúa, 1987). These exclusions stem from rigid social hierarchies that categorise people into somewhat fixed notions of superiority and inferiority. These borders are the consequence of the incapability of certain groups to deal with difference and to incorporate it as something that is immanent, not a detriment, to the human condition (Marotta, 2021).

In this regard both Georg Simmel (1908) and Alfred Schutz (1976) understand the stranger as someone who comes today and stays tomorrow, but, while physically close, is socially and culturally distant (Marotta, 2016). The stranger embodies foreignness as both a psycho-cultural and geographical matter (Simmel, 2011). Unlike a wanderer who comes and goes, the stranger arrives and stays- yet retains the freedom to leave as a wanderer (ibid.). Although present in a place, the stranger never fully belongs, carrying qualities into a place that do not and could not belong there.

Sara Ahmed critically draws on Simmel's paradoxical definition of the stranger as one who is near, but far and refers to Schutz's analysis of the stranger that is concerned with the 'situation of approaching', coming closer to those who are home (Ahmed, 2000: 24). Yet, unlike Simmel and Schutz, Ahmed's account unpacks how the construction of social spaces and notions of belonging are constituted through processes that differentiate between strangers and neighbours (ibid.). Ahmed's analysis further delves into how 'we' (dominant majority) recognise strangers, whether as a figure of danger, an object to fetishise/a commodity (to consume, to refine), or a subject of 'celebrated' difference. She emphasises that the stranger is the thing which makes the body, the neighbourhood, the nation itself. Ahmed also argues that the act of 'welcoming,' as much as expulsion, also produces the figure of the stranger- but a kind of foreignness that must be translated into terms 'we' (dominant majority) understand.

The ambivalence of the stranger, foreignness and a wandering self, ties to the title of this thesis in referring to the Urdu term 'pardesi'. Pardesi evokes a sense of both physical

and emotional distance- being in a place where one doesn't quite belong, or someone who carries the identity of a stranger in the land of one's birth. Although the term doesn't inherently imply a transient wanderer, there is often an implicit understanding that a *pardesi* might be in flux or not fully settled, thus having the potential to move between spaces, both physically and socially. A stranger is therefore an ambivalent figure, neither an outsider nor insider, neither friend nor foe, but rather someone in between. The participants' stories reveal that this sense of in-betweenness is central to their experiences. The boundaries between exclusion and inclusion are constantly being challenged, resisted, conditionally accepted, or blurred, as they negotiate these lines in their everyday lives to establish a sense of belonging.

In, this regard Avtar Brah's (2000) discussion of otherness and belonging through the Urdu words of '*ajnabi*', '*ghair*', and '*apne*' also deserve a mention. She describes these terms as follows:

An '*ajnabi*' is a stranger: a newcomer whom one does not yet know but who holds the promise of friendship, love, intimacy. The '*ajnabi*' may have different ways of doing things but is not alien. They could become '*apne*'; that is, 'one of our own'. The idea of '*ghair*' is much more difficult to translate, for its point of difference is intimacy; it walks the tightrope between insider and outsider. The difference of the '*ghair*' cannot be fully captured by the dichotomy of Self and Other; nor is it an essentialist category. Yet it is a form of irreducible, opaque, difference. Although these terms may often be used in contradistinction to each other, they do not represent opposites. (Brah, 2000: 285)

In other words, a stranger can be an '*ajnabi*' (a foreigner) without necessarily being '*ghair*' (an outsider) and has the potential to become '*apne*' (one of our own). This transformation requires recognising that difference is not a limitation to be erased for acceptance, but rather a productive aspect of society that need not conform to sameness to be acknowledged. The threshold of these borders is experienced as unbelonging through exclusion by others (Dahlstedt et al., 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2011a) or created as an alternate belonging by self-exclusion from others (May, 2016). The self, defined by both distance from and closeness to others, can experience belonging through feelings of not fitting in, ambivalence, or estrangement. Not belonging everywhere, all the time, is just as much a part of everyday life as belonging. The connections formed beyond the immediate contexts that affect belonging allow individuals to feel secure in not always fitting in. This non-belonging can help one remain authentic to the full range of their allegiances and identity. Belonging thus, analytically, besides uncovering processes of inclusion or exclusion (Yuval-Davis, 2011b: 18-21), offers nuance to also show what goes on in the borderland between inclusion-exclusion.

The concept of identity, being categorical, falls short in capturing the nuanced and evolving ways social life and boundaries are collectively shaped. Instead, belonging offers a more dynamic lens, where subjectivities and identifications better reveal how

individuals authentically navigate their connections to one or multiple groups. Initially focused on religious identity, particularly Muslim identity in the Swedish context, my research shifted to explore how identity is a trouble that is ultimately resolved in belonging. Through participants' life stories, it became clear that belonging is a fluid, performative process, addressing the tensions of identity by embracing commonality without erasing individuality. Pffaff-Czarneca (2011: 4-5) in her article "From 'identity' to 'belonging' in Social Research" surmises that while identity is relational in the sense that it positions itself vis-à-vis 'the other', belonging's relationality comprises of forging and maintaining social ties and in buttressing commitments and obligations. She elaborates that identity caters to dichotomous characterisations while belonging highlights its situatedness and the multiplicity of parameters forging commonality, mutuality and attachments. Moreover, identity politics and politics of belonging also differ from one another; the former alludes to exclusionary properties entailed in the notion while the latter is also equally prone to effecting social exclusion, it also works on widening borders, incorporating, defining new common grounds. Furthermore, whereas identity highlights homogeneity of any collective unit, belonging stresses commonness but not sameness (ibid.).

Belonging, therefore, enriches our understanding of how individuals navigate social life and offers a broader framework for exploring the complexities of human experience. Divided into understandings of 'to long/to be longing' as the past oriented nostalgic component vying for one's history as one looks ahead to new horizons; 'to belong' as the boundaries of inclusion and recognition fostered by commonality, mutuality and attachments explored in civic, cultural, racial and moral dimensions; and 'to not belong' as exclusion and misrecognition fostered by discrediting and disqualifying terms such as foreigner, stranger, alien, non-whiteness. Being valued or not being valued leads to alignments or misalignments, that lead to continuities or discontinuities in narratives of self.

In the sections that follow, the multifaceted nature of belonging is examined through dimensions considered key for this thesis. First, the section on *resources offfor belonging* will highlight how access to social, cultural, and institutional tools shapes one's ability to belong. Next, the focus will shift to meaning making, exploring how individuals interpret and understand their place within different communities by operationalising boundaries. Finally, the section on negotiations for belonging will examine the ongoing processes by which individuals reconcile their identities with societal expectations in various situations and interactions.

## Resources of/for Belonging

Building on the notion of resources of/for belonging, this work explores the Pakistani diaspora, Islam as a religion, and Swedish national identity serve as critical resources within the context of belonging. These elements will be examined as forms of capital in the Bourdieusian sense, where they are not merely static identities but dynamic assets that individuals can mobilise to navigate their socio-cultural environments. The Pakistani diaspora offers a transnational network that provides social capital, enabling members to access support, opportunities, and a sense of community across borders. Islam, as a religious identity, serves as a symbolic and cultural capital, offering a moral and ethical framework that shapes both individual and collective actions within the diaspora. It functions as a source of belonging that transcends geographic boundaries, uniting individuals through shared beliefs and practices. Swedish national identity represents a form of civic and political capital within the context of the host country. For members of the Pakistani diaspora, negotiating this identity involves engaging with and, at times, challenging the dominant cultural narratives of Sweden. This process highlights the dual role of national identity as both a resource for integration and a site of potential exclusion. By examining these elements as forms of capital, this work will analyse how individuals within the Pakistani diaspora strategically employ their religious, cultural, and national identities to gain social mobility, maintain cultural continuity, and navigate the complexities of belonging in Sweden.

### Diaspora (as Resource)

To understand the complex articulations of ‘belonging’ among my interlocutors, I employ the concept of ‘diaspora’ both methodologically, using Pakistanis as a case study, and theoretically, to highlight the case of ‘Muslim identity.’ The International Organisation for Migration (2019: 49) defines diasporas as ‘migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background, referring not only to first-generation emigrants, but also their foreign-born children, as long as they maintain some link to their parent’s home country.’ These links—cultural, linguistic, historical, religious, or affective—distinguish diaspora groups from others. In the context of global mobility, diaspora refers to transnational communities connected to more than one country, facilitating relationships across borders and fostering a sense of belonging to multiple communities (Vertovec, 1997; Vertovec & Cohen, 1999).

Originally used to describe forced displacement, ‘diaspora’ now generally refers to those who identify with a ‘homeland’ but live outside it (Brubaker, 2005). This

experience of dispersion (Brubaker, 2005; Butler, 2001; Vertovec, 1997) often leads to a nostalgic dream of returning, which in turn influences boundary maintenance as dispersed populations seek to preserve a distinct identity in relation to host societies (Brubaker, 2005; Safran, 1991; Tölölyan, 1996).

Rogers Brubaker (2005) in his work on the “‘diaspora’ diaspora,” critiques the traditional criteria defining diaspora: dispersion in space, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance. He questions what counts as dispersion and downplays the idea of a single cultural connection or teleology of return, noting that the South Asian diaspora, for example, often focuses on recreating culture in diverse locations rather than returning to a specific homeland. Brubaker argues that boundary maintenance is crucial, enabling the diaspora to function as a distinctive community linked by transnational ties. However, he also acknowledges the counter-current in diaspora studies that emphasises hybridity, fluidity, and syncretism (Brubaker, 2005: 5-6).

The sociological interest in boundary maintenance, according to Brubaker, lies in its persistence across generations. He poses the question of how boundaries are maintained by second, third, and subsequent generations, emphasising that the long *durée* and multigenerational staying power make the concept of diaspora relevant. This is an assertion that resonates with my research questions, and it is in this regard that the concept is deployed, since most participants are born and raised in Sweden. If the diaspora loses significance for later generations beyond the initial pioneers who emigrated, it remains relevant only for the first-generation immigrants. While critical of older perspectives that were assimilationist and methodologically nationalist, and teleological, Brubaker suggests viewing diasporas as a category of practice, project, claim, and stance, cautioning against imposing groupness and encouraging scholars to focus on the struggles themselves without presupposing they will result in bounded groups (2005: 14).

Claire Alexander (2017), makes three important qualifications in her critique of Brubaker’s arguments, encompassing the issues of place, difference and history when talking about diaspora(s). First, on the issue of place, she problematises Brubaker’s partiality and preference rendering the site of arrival as key focus, as it has the potential for essentialised assumptions around identity, belonging and homogeneity. Alexander convincingly argues, in line with critics of diaspora theory (Alexander et al., 2015; Kalra et al., 2005) to revisit places of origins as a more worthwhile endeavour. Migration and places and patterns of settlement are shaped through what they have termed *mobility capital*, ‘a bundle of capacities, predispositions and connections, often rooted in the family and group histories of mobility’ (Alexander, 2017: 1553), which can underpin the rituals and resources of diaspora mobilised to stake new claims of status and citizenship in the present. Alexander prompts, to build into diaspora theory a

recognition that places of origin are not simple points of departure but an integral part of the ongoing process of transformation that diaspora entails.

One way of avoiding the sticky question of origins and opening up the possibility of commonality and exchange, as well as specificity and difference is the idea of ‘diaspora space’ (Brah, 1996; Gilroy, 1993). For Brah, in contrast, diaspora space is:

[...] the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. Here tradition is itself continually invented even as it may be hailed as originating from the mists of time. What is at stake is the infinite experientiality, the myriad processes of cultural fissure and fusion that underwrite contemporary forms of transcultural identities. (Brah, 1996: 208)[emphasis added]

Diaspora space underpins conditions of contemporary transmigrancies, crossing borders, territorial and otherwise, and the multiple power geometries where the play of power is both coercive and productive, and where identities and a sense of belonging are produced and contested. In other words, diaspora space, as distinct from diaspora, highlights the *entanglements of the genealogies of dispersal* with those of *staying put* (Brah, 1996:242). Alexander (2017) articulates that Brah’s ‘diaspora space’ could provide the basis from where diasporas might stake their claims, focusing not on the *end* rather than what is actually at *stake*.

While diaspora is significant for understanding the broader context of the second-generation experience within immigrant families, diaspora space more directly addresses the unique realities of second-generation participants as Pakistani, Muslim, and Swedish-born individuals. It highlights how these intersecting identities influence their lived experiences and inform their complex sense of belonging.

Besides *space* and *place*, Alexander brings up the matter of *scale*. Challenging the continued importance of and ongoing role of nation-state (or states in their various guises) in shaping diasporic identities. Claims-making functions across scales – often simultaneously and multi-directionally – from the transnational through the national to the local and even in the intimate spheres of domestic life; for example, through marriage (Alexander, 2013; Alexander et al., 2015). Any study of diaspora identities necessitates, then, a recognition of, and engagement with, what Keith (2017) has referred to as ‘the shifting optics’ of diaspora – with a multiplicity of layers and spatial entanglements that is easier to ‘think’ in the abstract than to ‘do’ in practice.

Alexander further critiques Brubaker’s lack of attention and engagement with the link between diaspora and race or ethnicity (2017: 1550) as a possible answer to the



puzzle of why the concept of diaspora matters. Retaining Gilroy's (1997: 328) classical definition of the idea of violence at the point of origin, coupled with minoritisation, discrimination and exclusion at the point of arrival (Alexander, 2017), subaltern status may become a defining characteristic of diaspora with a caveat that definitions and understandings of diaspora get modified 'in translation' (Butler, 2001: 191). I would also contend that these modifications occur through generations.

Reflecting on new forms of migration and settlement, emergent forms of belonging and the precarities of ongoing global inequalities, dislocation and violence, Alexander (2017) offers three directions which are more fruitful to the above scholarly pursuit. First, to seek to reconnect, conceptually and empirically, the complex engagements between 'here' and 'there', while recognising that neither places of origin nor arrival remain unchanged through this process (Alexander et al., 2015; Jalais, 2016; Sinatti & Horst, 2015) in (Alexander, 2017: 1553). A second emerging trajectory is to reconnect with some of the origins of diaspora theory – and in particular its 'roots' in religion (Dufoix, 2008; Keith, 2017). This shift has brought focus on the role of secularism and new diasporic religious communities (particularly Islam) as troubling the certainties of the nation-state, particularly in western Europe (Brubaker, 2015, 2016b). However, Alexander pauses to reflect and warns that there are dangers inherent in the positioning of religious identities – and particularly 'Muslims' – either as a priori 'entities', or as a self-selected 'stance', occupying an uncertain space between ascription and choice (Alexander, 2017: 1554). Finally, whether examining dynamics of diaspora spaces as micro-encounters of difference in the everyday (in Glick Schiller, 2015), or performance of 'vernacular and encapsulated aesthetics' (in Werbner & Fumanti, 2013: 163) where groups do not necessarily want to enter into a dialogue with the state, nor do they only wish to challenge narratives of the nation or insert themselves into it. The political potential of the diaspora is oftentimes eschewed in favour of experiencing 'sensory saturated spaces' (ibid.).

Piggybacking on Ian Hacking's position on the power of categories, Brubaker (2017) in 'Revisiting "The 'diaspora' diaspora"', claims that language of diaspora contributes to 'making up people' and to 'creating new ways for people to be' (see Hacking et al., 1986: 223, 229). Except, he qualifies, to not see the language of diaspora as being imposed *on* people, but rather as it is appropriated *by* them, which enables the telling of new sorts of stories and shaping of new sorts of self-understandings and subjectivities (Brubaker, 2017: 1559). I would add, belonging is intimately related to processes of inclusionary and exclusionary discourses within the framework of specific citizenship regimes that divide people into different categories with different degrees of power and value (Eliassi, 2013: 38). An eye on diaspora formation in countries of settlement lends insight into how norms, practices, meanings, and identities shape the discursive field of rights, duties, thresholds, and boundaries of citizenship (see Isin & Turner, 2002).

Moreover, Brubaker (2017) acknowledges Alexander's critique of his formulation of diaspora as 'project, claim or stance' as sociologically presentist, historically impoverished and limitingly one-sided. He agrees with Alexander about the importance of studying the deep significance of 'then' and 'there' in shaping of subjectivities in the 'here' and 'now'.

Avtar Brah notes, 'while at the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey...not every journey can be understood as diaspora' (1996: 182). Steven Vertovec (1997) suggests that there are at least three discernible meanings of the concept 'diaspora'. These meanings refer to what he calls 'diaspora' as social form, as a type of consciousness and as a mode of cultural production (see also Vertovec & Cohen, 1999)

Diaspora as a social form involves the social relationships, political orientations, and economic strategies that arise from migration (Vertovec, 1997). These include collective identity, ties with the homeland, divided political loyalties, and economic support for kin.

Diaspora as a type of consciousness reflects dual or multiple identities, as described by Paul (Gilroy, 1990, 1993) and 'double consciousness' by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903). This in-betweenness, as James Clifford (1994) highlights, creates an empowering awareness of multi-locality and stimulates connections with others. This consciousness comes out of the borderland experience. Anzaldúa describes a borderland as 'a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary' (Anzaldúa 1987: 25). These borderlands are physical, psychological, spiritual and sexual. They are complicated and conflicting spaces often outside dominant discourse.

Vertovec (1997) notes that this consciousness also prompts self-questioning and redefines religious practices within the diaspora (Brah, 1996), and can drive resistance and engagement in public spaces for social justice.

Diaspora as a mode of cultural production involves the creation of films, music, poetry, and art that reflect and negotiate diasporic identities (Khrebtan-Hörhager & Kim, 2020). These cultural products express marginalised identities and political demands (Abdelhady, 2008, 2011), facilitated by globalisation, which enables the global flow of cultural objects and meanings, leading to creolisation, negotiation, and constant transformation.

In light of the above discussions, diaspora can be seen as capital that second-generation individuals leverage for status and identity making. As cultural capital, second-generation individuals often have a deep understanding of both their heritage culture and the culture of their host country. This bicultural fluency allows them to navigate multiple cultural contexts, which can be used to gain social status, particularly in diverse or multicultural environments where such skills are valued.

Being part of a diaspora often means having access to a transnational network of family, friends, and community members. As social capital, these connections can be used for opportunities in education, employment, and social mobility. The ability to connect with different communities can also enhance one's social standing both within the diaspora and in the broader society. Diaspora communities frequently engage in entrepreneurial activities, often leveraging connections and resources across borders for economic capital: second-generation individuals can tap into these networks to create businesses or gain access to markets, using their diasporic identity as a bridge between cultures and economies.

Second-generation individuals may leverage their diasporic identity as symbolic capital, as a source of pride and authenticity, using it to craft a unique identity that distinguishes them from others. This can involve embracing and promoting cultural heritage, leading to recognition and respect both within the diaspora and in the wider society.

Diaspora identity can also be used to engage in political or social movements, advocating for issues relevant to both the homeland and the host country. This activism can enhance one's status within the community and beyond, positioning them as leaders or representatives of a broader group.

In summary, second-generation individuals can leverage their diasporic identity as a form of capital in various ways to enhance their social status, economic opportunities, and personal identity, navigating and bridging different cultural and social landscapes.

### **Family (as Resource)**

In a diasporic context, with competing perspectives and clashing sensibilities, culture becomes a repertoire of capacities—a toolkit of habits, skills, and styles from which various strategies of action are constructed (Swidler, 1986: 277). Culture is the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning. Culture consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life. Social processes of sharing modes of behaviour and outlook within a community take place through these symbolic forms (Swidler, 1986). Swidler suggests examining how individuals use culture to understand the different ways culture is held or used, from intense ideological commitment to casual use (Swidler, 2013: 35). Winchester and Guhin (2019) extend this by highlighting the interplay between Swidler's idea of cultural repertoires and normative frames, where cultural practices are both tools and subject to evaluative standards. Cultures are dynamic, evolving over time, and the process of cultural reproduction is

inherently one of cultural transformation. Social processes of sharing behaviours and outlooks within a community occur through these symbolic forms.

For first-generation immigrants, identities like being Pakistani and Muslim are often taken for granted in their country of origin but become disrupted by the diasporic experience in a new cultural and institutional milieu. This disruption creates a creative tension between ‘home’ and ‘dispersion,’ allowing the concept of diaspora to reflect a homing desire while remaining cautious of fixed origin discourses. Consequently, the process of settlement or re-grounding—whether of identity, culture, nation, or diaspora—can both resist and reproduce dominant forms of home and belonging (Ahmed, Castañeda, et al., 2020: 277; Long, 2018). Though not all notions of home are rooted in family, this association remains a dominant feature in understanding home as a site of relatedness (*ibid.*).

Berger notes that ‘the social world intends, as far as possible, to be taken for granted. Socialisation achieves success to the degree that this taken-for-granted quality is internalised’ (Berger, 2011: 23). Socialisation broadly refers to the effort to ensure the continuity of a social system across generations (Bengtson & Black, 1973). Societies transmit their objectivated meanings through socialisation, wherein a new generation<sup>15</sup> is taught to live according to the institutional programmes of the society. Thus, socialisation is essentially a learning process.

However, socialisation is not confined to the family; it extends to various spheres—religion, diaspora communities, and national identities—all competing for an individual’s loyalty by offering distinct values and a sense of belonging. As second-generation immigrants grow up in Pakistani families with cultural and religious traditions contrasting with the majority society, these families become sites of identification struggles, where ethnicity, religion, and citizenship are contested (Brubaker, 2013). Informal socialisation at home, when confronted with Swedish formal education, media, labour market, and political institutions, forces a reflexive scrutiny of their identities, illustrating the complexity of socialisation where various forces compete for influence over the individual.

This thesis views second-generation individuals as active participants in their social world, not merely passive recipients of external influences from parents, imams, or teachers. They are seen as agents capable of both influencing and being influenced by their complex environment (Ostberg, 2009). While their lives are interwoven with familial stories, they also possess the capacity (Bradby, 2017) to create new stories and

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15 Generation in this chapter refers to relational component of a relationships between child and parent, it also refers to an age component that relates to life-course. While parents and children occupy space in a similar socio-historical moment, their social locations and roles create a separation in their experiences.

reconfigure existing attachments. Historically, socialisation theories were unidirectional, with parents portrayed as active in transmitting values and children as passive recipients. The focus was on intergenerational continuity and the conformity of the younger generation to established norms (Kuczynski et al., 2014) ). However, this thesis draws on Guhin et al.'s (2021) call for a post-functionalist approach, emphasising socialisation's role in both reinforcing and resisting systems of oppression. While socialisation is essential for understanding how individuals integrate into a social world not of their choosing, the participants in this research demonstrate agency and creativity in navigating their environments, albeit within the constraints imposed by institutions like race and gender, and processes like racism and patriarchy. This thesis thus explores both intergenerational continuity and change within the Pakistani diaspora<sup>16</sup>.

Socialisation also involves individuals not just learning objectivated meanings but identifying with and being shaped by them. Bourdieu (1977: 86) describes this as *habitus*—a system of internalised structures common to members of the same group or class. These internalised structures shape individuals' worldviews, making them feel 'at home' in their environment, which they perceive as natural and unproblematic (Reay et al., 2009: 1112). However, *habitus* also highlights the discomfort of 'unbelonging,' akin to a fish out of water (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 127).

In 'The Family as a Realised Category', Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1996) argues that the family is a socially constructed entity, legitimised and maintained through social practices, symbolic power, and state institutions. This perception of the family as natural is a result of social processes, including symbolic power, social capital transmission, and misrecognition, which sustain social hierarchies. The state plays a crucial role in enforcing and normalising this social category.

Anette Lareau's work 'Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life' (Lareau, 2011) aligns with Bourdieu's view of the family as a site of social reproduction. She demonstrates how different parenting styles across social classes transmit cultural capital, reinforcing social inequalities. Lareau's concept of 'concerted cultivation' among middle-class families aligns with Bourdieu's notion of how families foster the accumulation of social capital. Social forces, such as economic changes and social movements, reshape family dynamics, reinforcing the understanding of family as a

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<sup>16</sup> This motivation is tied to three important ideas: The first is that socialisation is a bidirectional process incorporating the influence of both children and parents. The second is that children and parents are active interpretive agents who construct new meanings during transactions with each other. The third emphasises the nonlinear or qualitative change that emerges from dialectical interactions between human agents (Kuczynski et al., 2014).

socially contingent construct. This perspective can be further expanded to consider the role of ethnicity in parenting practices within specific ethnic communities.

David Morgan's (1996) notion of 'family practices' resonates with Bourdieu's idea of the family as a constructed category. Morgan emphasises that family is not a fixed entity but is constantly created and re-created through everyday practices, supporting the view that family is a social rather than merely biological construct. Family is seen as something people actively 'practice' rather than something they simply belong to. These practices involve the routines, rituals, and interactions that constitute family life. Morgan highlights the importance of everyday activities—such as cooking meals, caring for children, or maintaining a household—that people engage in as a way of reinforcing familial bonds and roles. The concept underscores the relational aspect of family practices, meaning that these activities are performed in the context of relationships with others, and they contribute to the ongoing negotiation and construction of what it means to be a family. Family practices can vary significantly depending on context and are subject to change over time, reflecting the fluid and adaptable nature of family life. Morgan's approach allows for a broader and more inclusive understanding of family, recognising that 'family' can be constituted in a variety of ways beyond traditional structures, including non-biological relationships and chosen families.

Carol Smart's (2007) work intersects with and extends Bourdieu's idea of the family as a socially constructed category. However, she moves beyond the traditional frameworks of family sociology by introducing the concept of 'personal life.' Smart argues that family life cannot be fully understood through the lens of structural categories alone like Bourdieu's focus on symbolic power and social capital. Instead, she emphasises the importance of everyday practices, relationships, and emotional connections that shape personal life.

Mehdi's (2024b) concept of *mélange familism* in immigrant families describes a hybrid identity formation where elements of cultural heritage blend with the norms and values of the new environment, creating a unique form of familism that is neither entirely traditional nor fully aligned with the host culture. This concept reflects both adaptation to the host society's legal and social frameworks and resistance to fully abandoning traditional values, allowing families to maintain a connection to their cultural roots while integrating into broader European society. It also highlights intergenerational dynamics where tensions and negotiations arise, as younger generations, born or raised in Europe, may embrace more of the host society's values while older generations seek to preserve traditional practices, leading to a dynamic interplay between different cultural influences.

Mehdi discusses how *mélange familism* impacts legal and social issues, such as marriage, gender roles, and family law, in the context of European multiculturalism, where the blending of cultural norms can create challenges in applying laws based on

different assumptions about family and gender roles. In terms of gender relations, *mélange familism* involves negotiating gender roles and sexual expectations, with traditional norms being reinterpreted or modified in the European context, leading to both empowerment and constraint for women within these families.

Especially salient to this discussion is Fauzia Husain's (2020) conceptualisation of 'sexual projects' of Muslim women as the ways in which these women navigate, construct, and express their sexuality within the frameworks of their religious, cultural, and social contexts. Husain uses the term 'sexual projects' to emphasise that sexuality is not just a private or individual matter but is actively shaped by broader societal norms, religious beliefs, and gender expectations. She argues that these sexual projects are not uniform; they vary significantly based on factors such as class, education, and exposure to global discourses. For example, some women might engage in 'halal dating,' where they seek romantic relationships within the boundaries of family constraints and family reputation while others might practice *purdah* a system of modesty and seclusion, to show devotion to God to assert their sexual agency.

Juxtaposing 'halal dating' in Pakistan with 'hook-up culture' in the United States, Husain animates a creative discussion on similarities between the two, looking at intent and outcomes. She exemplifies intertwined desires of women; on one hand to maintain their religious identities while on the other hand also negotiating modernity, personal and sexual desires, and societal pressures. By framing sexuality as a 'project', Husain points to the active role that Muslim women play in shaping their sexual lives. She thus challenges simplistic notions of Muslim women as passive or oppressed and instead presents them as agents who make complex choices within the constraints and possibilities offered by their environments.

Family, associated with the notion of home, denotes a social, political, and cultural space that fulfils people's lives with spiritual and existential meaning (Boccagni, 2023: 554). Home entails material and symbolic dimensions and can be experienced as a space of affection and oppression (*ibid.*). More broadly, home is at once a space of intimacy, comfort and longevity, as well as violence, estrangement and disruption. The narratives of participants illuminate the multifaceted nature of home in the diasporic experience. Home can serve as both a refuge and a site of struggle, fostering connection yet also causing disconnection, serving as a resource for belonging while simultaneously posing challenges to it.

## **Religion (as Resource)**

In 'the idea of an anthropology of Islam', Talal Asad (2009) argues that since all instituted practices are oriented to a conception of the past, Islam should be seen as a 'discursive tradition'. An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim

discourse that addresses itself to the conceptions of the Islamic past (when the practice was instituted) and future (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or the long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). He further contends that not everything Muslims say or do belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition. Nor is an Islamic tradition in this sense necessarily imitative of what was done in the past. For even where traditional practices appear to the anthropologist to be imitative of what has gone before, it will be the practitioner's idea of what is apt performance and of how the past is related to the present practices that will be crucial to the tradition, not the apparent repetition of an old form. Individuals construct identities in the local contexts of their lives. To develop a view on themselves they employ a fluid treatment of both structural and agentic aspects of identity. We will see across the chapters that groups are both positioned by others and are proactive in defining and positioning themselves.

Franceschelli and Obrien (2015) drawing from Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, introduce the concept of 'Islamic capital' in the specific context of intergenerational transmission, as both a tool for transmitting and as an object of the transfer. Their analysis suggests that 'Islamic capital' is a significant resource used by parents to exercise control over their children and reinforce their influence on the children's future life chances. 'Islamic capital', in combination with other factors such as South Asian cultures, acted as a source of legitimisation for internal family roles and supported parenting in a range of ways: it informed the family system of values; and it was used to transmit sense of morality and to control un-Islamic practices. The results show how the Islamic idea of 'the right path' became embedded in parental teachings and was assimilated by their children. In addition, Islam was employed to inform aspirations and to generate social capital by providing a common platform of values across generations. In this regard, Islam supplied parents with networks and resources for young people's socialisation, including the community, the extended family and the mosque.

In 'What Is a Muslim?', Akeel Bilgrami (1992) evaluates multifaceted nature of Muslim identity, highlighting the diverse interpretations and practices within the Islamic community. He examines how historical developments, and cultural contexts have shaped contemporary understandings of what it means to be a Muslim. The article emphasises the internal pluralism of Islam, including its various schools of thought and sects, and how modernity and secularism have influenced Muslim self-perception. Bilgrami explores the tension between personal faith experiences and broader communal definitions, noting the impact of theological disputes on identity. Ultimately, he reflects on the evolving nature of Muslim identity and its implications



for future intercultural and interfaith dialogue, underscoring the complexity and dynamism inherent in defining what it means to be a Muslim today.

In *Notes towards the definition of Identity*, Akeel Bilgrami (2006) continues to explain the conditions under which an identity becomes important for an individual. Bilgrami distinguishes between first-order identities, which are core identities people directly identify with (e.g., being Muslim), and second order identities, which involve reflecting on and valuing those first-order identities (e.g., how being Muslim fits with other aspects of life). First-order is about 'what' you identify with; second order is about 'how' you understand and prioritise those identities. He thus defines identity as 'relevant and intensely held desires that their possessors reflectively endorse could be said to be an initial working definition of identity'. Implicit in this is the assumption of agency, valuation comes from agency and looking at one's capacity to justify what ones thinks one is capable of. So, in practice one may be able to think bigger thoughts but in practice realises that one is constrained by both oneself and by the structural demands on oneself. Instrumental role of an identity lasts till the goals these identities serve are achieved, but not all identities have merely an instrumental role in an agent's psychological economy. Their role may be more subtle for instance be a source of self-respect and dignity when one is feeling especially vulnerable; may be a source of solidarity and belonging when one is feeling alienated from one's social environment. When they serve a subtle function, it is too crude to describe them as instrumental or temporary. They have an intrinsic value. That is valuable to generations for their continuity.

Bilgrami's explanation of identity can explain why some of my participants have left Islam since; being Muslim alienates them from their other cross-cutting commitments, as well as considering of issues of power, hierarchy, and social status that become central to the self-ing/othering processes, to accumulate privilege, it is deemed wise to shed a stigmatic identity. It also explains to a certain degree why parents are so keen on transferring religious values and the Muslim identity to their second-generation Swedish-born children, as a way of keeping loyalties to their past, alive in the present. Moreover, connecting Bilgrami's with Bourdieu's idea of Islamic capital in Francheschelli and O'Brien's work highlights how identity operates as a form of cultural and symbolic capital, influencing both individual agency, family, and other social dynamics. This connection deepens our understanding of how identities are not just personal attributes but are also resources that people use to navigate their social life, with implications for power, recognition, and social cohesion.

As homeland attachment, custom and language lose their valency when memories fracture, especially amongst those born in the diaspora, the argument here is that religious alternatives open up the possibility for a new, more mobile, 'homing desire' (Brah, 1996: 179-180). Unlike assimilation, maintaining universal religious (as

opposed to homeland cultural) boundaries, manages the problem of cultural identity without the risk of losing all sense of a 'chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger, 2000). The chain of memory refers to the significance of passing down religious memories across generations through storytelling, rituals, and cultural practices (Hervieu-Léger, 2000). This process enables the preservation and adaptation of religious identity while emphasising the interconnectedness of memory, culture, and identity within religious contexts. Thus, new 'routes' may be imaginatively continuous with 'roots.'

Of course, recalling Anthony P. Cohen (2013) the symbolic construction of community rests upon shared symbols- not unchanging meanings suggesting that the pathways individuals forge in their spiritual journeys can seamlessly intertwine with their ancestral traditions. This interaction between established heritage and evolving practices reflects a fertile relationship where both past and present coalesce, enriching the understanding of religious identity. In this way, the chain of memory not only preserves the legacy of faith but also allows for its transformation and relevance in contemporary contexts.

Melissa Wilde's (2018) framework of 'complex religion' brings this discussion together by challenging the tendency to study religion in a vacuum, instead emphasising that religious groups and individuals operate within broader social systems. For instance, how people experience and practice their religion can be influenced by their socio-economic status, racial background, or gender roles. Additionally, political and historical contexts often shape religious institutions and doctrines, influencing everything from religious leadership to moral teachings. Wilde argues that religion is deeply intertwined with other social factors such as race, class, gender, and politics, and that these factors collectively shape religious beliefs, practices, and identities. She claims religious identities are not static or purely doctrinal but are dynamically shaped by the social environment. This means that to fully understand religion, it should be understood as an interconnected and multi-dimensional social phenomenon, rather than as a simple, isolated aspect of life.

This thesis understands religion from complex religion framework and brings these interconnections forward in the chapters to come to show how participants use religion as a resource in their everyday lives in Sweden.

## **Swedish National Identity (as a Resource)**

The work of Avtar Brah (1996) as well as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1983; 1993) began to locate the articulation of social divisions within the context of power relations and the state, and was central to the entry of intersectionality within the European context. Diversity and integration discourses in relation to European developments in the management of migration are regarded as being underpinned by

a hierarchisation, culturalisation and essentialisation of difference. The migrant 'identity' becomes salient in how people are placed hierarchically within societal systems of resource allocation and inequality and how struggles about membership and entitlements become more politicised where there is competition over resources.

During the last half-century, Sweden has often been hailed as a migration-friendly welfare state (see for example Jensen et al., 2017; Koopmans & Statham, 1999). Moreover, Sweden has been viewed as an example of 'exceptionalism' vis-à-vis the rest of the world, i.e., as an ideal society without the problems ensuing from colonialism, racism, and xenophobia. However, as Loftsdóttir and Jensen (2012) have argued, 'the interwoven racial, gendered and nationalistic ideologies associated with the colonial project form part of contemporary Nordic identities'. Moreover, the accounts of migrants who came to Sweden in the 1970–2000s reveal that it has become tougher to feel at home in Swedish society (Hanoush Ratiba, 2023).

Swedish citizenship is a powerful resource that offers legal rights, social benefits, and a sense of belonging. However, racialisation can complicate this experience, making citizenship a more tenuous and contested identity for racialised individuals (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). Discrimination has effectively undermined the idea of exceptionalism. The current centre-right-wing government coalition explicitly argues that integration policies should be 'demand-driven' on the one hand, and 'emphasise the individual's own responsibility,' on the other (Regeringen, 2023). This means that migrants are to a large extent held responsible for their own shortcomings, and they are subjected to increasing demands to adapt to 'Swedish' ways of being, speaking, and behaving. But what counts as 'Swedish'? According to Hubinette and Lundström (2014: 246), 'the central core and the master signifier of 'Swedishness' is constituted by 'whiteness'. The dominant understanding is that 'a Swede is a white person, and a non-white person is therefore not, and cannot fully become a Swede' (ibid.).

Hubinette and Lundström's account of hegemonic whiteness in Sweden, i.e. that white perspectives and privileges bind white people together regardless of e.g. social class and political affiliation (Hubinette and Lundström 2020), as well as Ahmed's (2007) phenomenology of whiteness with everyday racism (Essed, 1991) will explore how the racialised (immigrant/Pakistanis and religious/Muslims) navigate and negotiate whiteness in Sweden. The boundary of nation-state acts as a producer of differences and as an internal homogeniser of populations (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 174).

According to Foucault's concept of subjectification, becoming a subject is a complex process shaped by societal and historical influences. People develop their identities through interactions with various power dynamics and discourses, which either enable or restrict certain ways of being. This process involves both stability and change: stability in terms of one's location and context and change as individuals push beyond

these boundaries. To become a recognisable and accepted individual in a given context, a person must understand and align with the prevailing discourses and norms.

Moreover, 'Panopticon', Foucault's (1977, 2020) theoretical prison design where inmates are constantly visible to a central watchtower, serves as a powerful metaphor for understanding racialisation. In the Panopticon, the possibility of being observed ensures self-regulation among inmates. Similarly, racialised individuals are subject to constant surveillance, both literal and metaphorical, which enforces conformity to racial norms and expectations. This pervasive visibility creates internalised control, where racialised individuals may alter their behaviour due to the awareness of being watched, thus perpetuating the racial norms imposed by societal structures.

Stuart Hall (1996) sees the concept of identity to denote the point of suture where two dynamics intersect: firstly, the discourses and practices that seek to interpellate us (Hall, 1996: 5; 2006: 47-49), addressing and positioning us as social subjects within these discourses; and secondly, the processes that shape our subjectivities, constructing us as subjects who can be 'spoken' to and defined (Hall, 1996: 4-5). Identities are thus, 'points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.' Steph Lawler (2015: 2-3) refers to identity as 'my sense of myself, others' perceptions of me, my reactions to others' perceptions, the social categories that attach themselves to me and to which I attach myself'. Highlighting important differences between them, she claims that any discussion of identity always means we are in the presence of not one but many persons – or perceptions of a person. Identities can be burdensome because when they exist, they tend to form a picture of a 'typical' member of a group creating stereotypes. According to Appiah (2018: 10-13), among most significant things people do with identities, is use them as a basis of hierarchies (of status and respect) and of structures of power (such as class, caste, race and ethnicity).

As Michel Foucault (in Kelly et al., 1994) elegantly pointed out, power relations, rules and norms are always in transition, and usually there is also resistance and attempts to redefine and change relatively stable structures. However, some distinctions, norms, rules and agendas are undoubtedly firmer than others (Johansson, 2008). In this spirit, as mentioned earlier in the introduction, this thesis critically examines the concept of integration, recognizing its similarities to assimilation. While discussions around integration could have drawn on the concept of 'recognition chains' (Lamont, 2023) to stress the synergies between immigrant communities and their contributions to culture and societies of settlement, the term remains insufficient. As such, the notion of 'embeddedness' is proposed as a more fitting alternative, offering a perspective that moves beyond the assimilationist tone (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022) in place of integration when soliciting an analysis to understand the complexity, messiness, multi-dimensionality and diversity of migration experiences and changing processes over time.

It is important to note as this section on resources of/for belonging comes to a close that as individuals become more reliant on their resources, their dependency on them grows. This reliance can create constraints, potentially leading to feelings of alienation and a sense of unbelonging. These resources, therefore, act as a double-edged sword: while offering support, they can also foster new limitations. But having more resources to rely on creates hedges against risks of overdependency on only one resource.

Therefore, the question of 'who belongs' and 'who does not belong' in the national imagery of Sweden from the perspective of the Pakistani-Muslim participants is intersubjective. Being immigrant and being Muslim are both considered 'spoiled' identities (Goffman, 2009). Therefore, making it important to shed light on belonging as a meaning-making endeavour for those who identify with both identities.

## Meaning Making of/for Belonging

This section argues that second-generation Pakistani-Muslims are shaped and defined by boundaries and differences. These boundaries and differences, in turn, derive their meaning from the identities and experiences of these individuals.

Recent literatures on national identity and state building have looked at boundaries and borders to show that place, nation, and culture are not necessarily isomorphic. They also pinpoint the extent to which national identity, like nation building, is defined relationally and emerges from dynamic processes of interaction and negotiation between local and national forces (Lamont, 2014).

The concept of boundary has been central to the study of ethnic and racial inequality as an alternative to more static cultural or even biological theories of ethnic and racial differences. The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrick Barth (1998) rejected a view of ethnicity that stressed shared culture in favour of a more relational approach emphasising that feelings of communality are defined in opposition to the perceived identity of other racial and ethnic groups. Recent studies building on this work analyse how a nation-state acts as a producer of differences and as an internal homogeniser of populations (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 174).

It is useful to distinguish between symbolic and social boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize people, objects, practices, and even time and space—tools through which individuals and groups define and negotiate reality (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Social boundaries, on the other hand, are the tangible expressions of these differences, seen in unequal access to resources and opportunities. They manifest in enduring patterns of 'connubiality and commensality' (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 168).

In line with Hall (1997: 236) it is firstly assumed that meaning making involves categorisation and classification. This in turn generates hierarchies of difference that produce a given symbolic order, which then structures societies. These processes also echo Barth's (2010) arguments that groups come into being by people categorising themselves as distinct from others. Secondly, meaning making is understood as empirical practice in which people draw on (and create) repertoires of meaning to interpret and motivate action (see Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023: 427). Repertoires are 'relational' in that the meaning of the elements that make up a repertoire are created through dialogue and repertoires are deeply anchored in local contexts (ibid.). Thirdly, repertoires are theorised as fundamentally discursive. Meaning making in repertoires through the lens of Foucault, approaches discourse as language and social practice that constitute knowledge as power. Power is productive (and not simply repressive) and operates at the most micro levels of social relations (Foucault 1972 & 1976, in Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023)

As humans, we depend on groups for survival and thus have developed a fundamental need to belong to social groups. Living in human societies, each of us belongs to some groups, but not to others. That is, we spontaneously divide people according to ascribed categories (e.g., ethnicity or gender), achieved states (e.g., occupation or political affiliation), and other relevant distinctions—or, more generally, based on perceptions of similarity, proximity, and common fate (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 170).

In this regard a number of cultural sociologists and anthropologists have been more concerned with the accomplishment of boundary-work, that is with what kinds of typification systems, or inferences concerning similarities and differences, groups mobilise to define who they are. In other words, they are more concerned with the *content* and *interpretative dimensions* of boundary-work than with intra-individual processes. The notion of boundaries has become a fertile thinking tool, in part because it captures a fundamental social process, that of relationality; which points to fundamental relational processes at work across a wide range of social phenomena, institutions, and locations (Lamont, 2001: 171).

Jacobsen (1997) in studying young British Pakistani adults and their sense of belonging to the British societal community, concludes that the perception of the national identity of Britishness in the lived experience of her Participants does not have one fixed content. Rather, she argues, that belonging to the British national identity is given different meanings by specific 'boundaries of Britishness'.

By drawing 'civic' boundaries, belonging is given meaning as a juridical matter, based on formal citizenship. By drawing of 'racial' boundaries, belonging is defined in terms of ancestry or 'blood'. By drawing of 'cultural' boundaries belonging is characterised as a matter of the culture, values or lifestyles to which one adheres. The cultural boundary

of Britishness defines as British those individuals whose behaviour, lifestyle and values are perceived as typically British.

The cultural boundary is a much more ambiguous boundary than the two that have been described above, since notions of 'British culture' can encompass a wide range of social phenomena. To be culturally British might mean, for example, to be attached to the majority language, established religion and cultural heritage of Britain; or to exhibit supposedly 'typical' British moderation, tolerance, reserve and modesty in one's day-to-life; or to have knowledge of the famous people of contemporary Britain, and of currently popular modes of speech, dress and food; or to be familiar with the key social and political institutions of modern Britain, and the essentially rationalist, individualist norms which underpin them. Hence the cultural boundary of Britishness takes different forms for different sectors of the British population, and can perhaps best be conceived as comprising a constantly shifting amalgam of many of the above and other elements (1997: 193).

This study on the perceptions of Britishness has a lot of parallels to my participants' perceptions of Swedishness, and I can effectively use this framework for understanding and analysing practical, performative and dialogical boundary-work and its impact on symbolic and social boundaries for belonging.

Boundaries, by marking limits and differences while drawing and re-drawing borders, contributes to a richer understanding of my participants' belonging needs as Swedish native-born children of migrants. Belonging to a nation means sharing in given polity's well-being and enjoying civic rights, which reciprocating by performing civic duties, in particular by paying taxes. Within this dimension of a civic boundary, most participants feel they belong. When they define themselves as 'Swedish-Asians', 'Swedish-Muslims', 'Muslim-Swedes', 'persons of the world' and 'on a journey' and describe the content and interpretive dimensions of their identification for belonging to Sweden based on cultural and moral boundary-work, we see manifold positions worthy of empirical and theoretical elaborations. When the participants encounter everyday racism, they recall these experiences as 'moments of unbelonging'. When racial and cultural boundaries are invoked in interactions with their fellow 'Swedish-Swedish' citizens, it casts a shadow of doubt on where they belong and how they ought to belong, vis-à-vis how they choose to belong. Without the concept of boundaries (civic, racial, cultural, moral).

When boundaries operate as repertoires for meaning making the resulting interpretive repertoire creates an equivalency chain. For example, when the dominant culture of society values diversity, individuals with an ethnic heritage feel positive and worthy (culture=diversity=ethnicity=positive and worthy). On the contrary when Islam as a religion is considered suspect and a threat to societal values, the ethnicity from whence one derives one's religion, previously valued, becomes a source of negative

feelings and poor self-worth (religion=threat to society=ethnicity=negative and unworthy).

Meaning making considers classification, hierarchy of difference, relationality and repressive power/productive power to give a sense to participants how to retain, repair and shed their identities. Boundaries when invoked shore up as affect- emotions that surface as moments of separation are experienced. While this thesis does not use affect as a concept, and more as a heuristic understanding of emotions of anger, sadness, disappointment, shame etc. it does recognise that emotions create a movement that require meaning making to understand one's sense of belonging (joy, validation, recognition) and unbelonging (isolation, unhappiness, misrecognition).

While the concept of belonging projects a positive normative valance and has value for most of my participants as they describe their various belonging(s), they also elicit experiences whereby certain exclusionary practices make belonging a negative experience for them. While the concept remains constant, when the context changes, its application criterion changes. For example, a participant reflects on feeling out of place both in Pakistan and Sweden. In Sweden, she is excluded based on a racial boundary of not being white; in Pakistan, a cultural boundary is invoked, where her lack of fluency in Punjabi marks her as an outsider. Despite the constant desire to belong, the boundaries that disqualify her from belonging change, affecting her sense of belonging in each context.

For a person to position herself as a recognisable and accepted being in a certain context, the person has to read, decode and subjectify herself to the discursive logic prevalent in the context. How one chooses to act or respond is what the next section on negotiations is about.

## Negotiations of Belonging

In this section, negotiations of belonging reflect how the meanings derived from cultural repertoires are intersubjectively interpreted by participants in their interactions in situational contexts.

Erving Goffman's work on social interaction refers to 'face work' as strategies and actions individuals use to maintain their social image, or 'face,' during interactions with others (Goffman, 1967; Scott, 2016). It involves managing impressions, protecting one's dignity, and upholding the respect of others in social situations, often to avoid embarrassment or conflict.

In 'Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity' Anthony Appiah (2018) makes three assertions about identity. One, that every identity comes with a label and ideas about



why and to whom they should be applied; two, one's identity shapes one's thoughts about how one ought to behave or not to behave e.g. because I am a this (Muslim), I should do that (pray)'; and three, it affects the way other people treat you (Muslims are extremists/backward) and gives them reasons to do things to you. By accepting certain identities people give them normative significance. They are saying that identity matters for practical life; for their emotion and for their deeds; it gives them reasons to care about and help one another and to feel solidarity with other members of the group, and rules about how they should behave.

The Goffman-esque (2009, 2016) approach views people's presentational behaviour as a process of negotiation. People offer definitions of themselves in interaction contexts which the audience either accept or challenge. Thus, an image of oneself is presented that is in line with the definition of the situation. And in choosing a face to present, the individual follows a certain 'line' or commitment to a certain position (Goffman, 1967: 5). The participants manage how others perceive them by strategically highlighting different aspects of their identity—such as being Pakistani, Muslim, or Swedish- adjusting their self-presentation to align with the situation at hand. By doing so, they actively negotiate belonging and acceptance using identity as a flexible tool to balance their positions vis-à-vis demands of family, diaspora, religion and national identity.

Uma Narayan (1999), in discussing feminist epistemology, argues that oppressed groups, such as women, the poor, or racial minorities, gain an 'epistemic advantage' from understanding both their own contexts and those of their oppressors. While dominant groups, like men, dictate societal practices, the oppressed must learn these practices to survive, whereas the dominant group has no such need to understand the oppressed. For example, colonised people had to learn their colonisers' language and culture, while colonisers rarely learned the native culture. This dual knowledge gives the oppressed critical insights by allowing them to view each framework from the perspective of the other (ibid:222).

That said, she continues to cogitate on the many ways in which an individual may deal with the situation. First, the person may be tempted to dichotomise her life and reserve the framework of a different context for each part. Individuals may navigate the pressures of different lifestyles by adapting behavior to each context, aiming to 'get the best of both worlds.' Alternatively, they might assimilate into the dominant group or reject it entirely, embracing their own values despite the risk of marginalization. In this way an individual negotiates their position with their location, what Floya Anthias (Anthias, 2020) calls translocational positionality for belonging.

Moreover, Narayan (1999) inadvertently points to agency as primary stance for an individual's negotiations. Naila Kabeer (1999) defines agency as the ability of individuals to make choices and act upon them, even in the face of constraints. Agency

involves not only the actions people take but also the processes of decision making, reflecting their capacity to pursue goals that matter to them. Kabeer emphasises that agency is central to empowerment and must be understood in relation to the resources and structures that either enable or limit individuals' ability to exercise their choices. Moreover the capacity to act with purpose and intent in pursuit of meaningful change and social justice, is also driven by a commitment to honour one's ancestors and to positively impact future generations (Gilpin-Jackson, 2024). It involves transcending personal interests to align one's actions with broader values and collective goals, thereby connecting individual efforts to a larger legacy and societal transformation in asking the question to oneself 'what am I called to do?' (ibid:9).

Narratives show there is more at stake in participants' situational interactions. Respecting ancestors and preserving generational legacy is crucial for participants, as they draw strength from their heritage, honouring the sacrifices and traditions of those who came before them to shape their identities and values in the present. The strategies participants use to navigate interactions with both co-ethnic and white Swedish others involve showing 'face' not only for themselves but for the broader immigrant, Pakistani, and Muslim communities. Through social courtesy, they present an image that aligns with the expectations of local norms to build trust and ensure smooth interactions.

Goffman (1974: 21) denoted 'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world at large. Interpretive repertoires help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organise experience and guide action:

Social frameworks provide a background for understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being. Such an agency is anything but implacable; it can be coaxed, flattered, affronted and threatened. What it does can be described as "guided doings". These doings subject the doer to "standards", to social appraisal of his action based on its honesty, efficiency, economy, safety, elegance, tactfulness, good taste and so forth. A serial management of consequentiality is sustained, that is, continuous corrective control, becoming most apparent when action is unexpectedly blocked or deflected and special compensatory effort is required. (1974: 22)

There are few important elements that I borrow from Goffman to understand negotiation of the participants. as can be summarised from the above paragraph and contextualised to the current endeavour: one, there is wilful agency i.e. it is active, processual and it is contentious (generation of interpretive frames that not only differ from existing ones but challenge them) (Benford & Snow, 2000: 614). Two, an evaluation of positive or negative sanctions from (an)other that guides action i.e. inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms that defer to power asymmetries within each cultural membership (Lamont

& Molnár, 2002: 171); and lastly an assessment of commensurability and preservation of self-identification to the various cultural memberships one belongs to authentically. Referring to critical inventory of self, (Radhakrishnan, 1993: 754) explains ‘an authentic identity is a matter of choice, relevance and a feeling of rightness. In other words, authentication also means ruling out certain options as incorrect or inappropriate’. He continues to clarify (1993: 754):

[W]hat I mean by ‘authenticity’ here is that critical search for a third space [...] The authenticity I have in mind here is an invention with enough room for multiple rootedness; in other words, there need be no theoretical or epistemological opposition between authenticity and historical contingency, between authenticity and hybridity, between authenticity and invention (my emphasis).

Thus, authenticity is crucial to the individual project of ‘coming to’ or ‘arriving at’ identity, that is constructed as is just as much bounded by the cultural repertoires to which people have access and the structural context in which they live.

The interpretation of these repertoires is gradually built up as a reservoir and is backpacked, filled with experiences (or memory of those experiences) road maps, guidelines, advice, tactics, tools, lessons and lifelines, upon which thus build up bargaining strategies that shape the ways in which social actors are predisposed habitually see their social world and how they tend to act within it. While both family, religion and nationality are seen as resources that provide safety, security and generational attachments; homing desire of the second-generation in the diaspora space is the locus of competing interests, rights, obligations, and resources where members are often involved in bargaining, negotiation and possibly even conflict.

Bargaining takes place in the context of ‘rules of the game’ set by intersecting cultural repertoires, including kinship structures, religious norms, and national political cultures. Bargaining is a form of boundary-work relying on resources, meaning making and negotiations. Individual actors employ elements for manufacturing versions of actions, self, and social structures and this allows for contradictions, exceptions and transformations within a delineated repertoire (Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023).

The concept of the ‘diasporic bargain’ is thus conceived to understand ways in which second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden negotiate their identities and agency by balancing the joys of belonging and the pain of exclusion with bids for dignified existence and respect within both private and public spheres. This bargaining process is not merely a negotiation of cultural practices but also an exercise in navigating power dynamics across intersecting cultural repertoires—Pakistani, Muslim, and Swedish. The *patriarchal* bargaining strategies posited by (Kandiyoti, 1988; Kibria, 1990, 1995; Lim, 1997) resonate with the *diasporic* bargaining strategies employed by second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden.

Just as the women used their bargaining power to negotiate within existing structures rather than completely subvert them in the latter studies, second-generation Pakistani-Muslims may navigate their cultural, religious, and national identities by leveraging the 'diasporic bargain'. The idea of agency is therefore, tied to the capacity of individuals and groups to negotiate their identities and roles within multiple, often conflicting, cultural frameworks. This involves balancing the perceived expectations of traditional Pakistani kinship structures, Islamic religious norms, and the individualistic as well as egalitarian values of Swedish society.

## Conclusion

This chapter deals with belonging as main theoretical concept. Belonging, divided into understandings of 'to long/to be longing' as the past oriented nostalgic component vying for one's history as one looks ahead to new horizons; 'to belong' as the boundaries of inclusion and recognition fostered by commonality, mutuality and attachments explored in civic, cultural, racial and moral dimensions; and 'to not belong' as exclusion and misrecognition fostered by discrediting and disqualifying terms such as foreigner, stranger, alien, whiteness. Being valued or not being valued leads to alignments or misalignments, that lead to continuities or discontinuities in narratives of self.

This multifaceted nature of belonging is examined through dimensions considered key for this thesis i.e. resources of/for belonging, meaning making of/for belonging, and negotiations of/for belonging.



## *Chapter 4*

# Fieldwork: Researching Muslims in Sweden

This thesis is based on 42 qualitative interviews with Swedish citizens of Pakistani descent who have grown up in a Muslim family environment in Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö and Lund. This chapter will provide an overview of the research design and method I have used to explore and record the experiences of second-generation Pakistanis growing up with both ethnic and religious influences in terms of family practices and upbringing in Sweden. Most interviews took place in Urdu and have been translated and transcribed into English. Additional material taken, are observations from participating in a Mushaira event (poetry recitation); a day-long annual event in a Mosque in Göteborg; a New Year's Eve dinner at a participant's home; and a go-carting afterwork with a participant, his cousins and friends. Each interview on average lasted two hours 30 minutes; the shortest interview being one hour 30 minutes; and the longest four hours 30 minutes. Interviews have been face to face and carried out in contexts ranging from participants' home, cafes, office spaces, a bench by the train tracks, a hotel lobby, and in a mall.

This chapter comprises of three main sections. The first section will ground this project in symbolic interactionism. Within this context, I delve into the significance of narratives and storytelling as integral components of social life in general and life history research in particular, discerning it the most fitting approach within qualitative methodologies for the present undertaking. The second section will present the research design. I will go over the characteristics of my sample, how I gained access to research sites and participants, as well as the data collection methods. An ancillary important addendum to each of these sections will comprise of ongoing critical reflections of advantages and disadvantages of using narratives as a qualitative methodological tool for this research. The last section provides an overview of how I have analysed the interview material. It also provides a framework of my initial coding based on the research questions, the theoretical concept of belonging; guiding the consolidation of analytical themes. The questions regarding voice, authenticity, interpretive authority and representation are extremely pertinent and have been deeply significant in the 'doing' of this research and will also be elaborated upon. The

multiplicity of ‘voice’, ‘gaze’ and ‘seeing’ has occupied much theoretical sensitisation and conceptualisation of written analytical work. Reflexivity and perspective-taking around these fault lines is the wisdom I render to achieve a fair bargain given my choice of research tools. The chapter ends with some final remarks on the contribution this research makes to the overall use of narratives as praxis in accounting for making sense of experiences in the social ambit.

## Deliberation on Social Reality and Social Knowledge

This thesis is inspired by the traditions of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986; Collins, 1994; Goffman, 1967; Mead, 1934) and social constructivism (Anzaldúa, 1987; Butler, 1990; Mahmood, 2011; Narayan, 1997) in trying to understand how identity and belonging is negotiated among second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden. Symbolic Interactionism focuses attention on micro-level interactions; identity formation, meaning and symbols, power and inequality, labels and communication processes that occur in everyday life and examine how people construct meaning, identities, and social relationships through these interactions. Moreover, its qualitative methods; ethnography, participant observation, in-depth interviews correspond with the overall goal of this project as well as the theoretical concept of belonging. Firstly, it puts the participants front and centre and tries to understand their experiences of being Pakistani (immigrant) and being religious (Muslim) in Sweden. Secondly it explores the meanings they give to their identities. And lastly, the values they negotiate between these identities towards fulfilling the human need to belong.

Social reality is shaped by human interactions and negotiations, also depending on the participants’ access to that reality and the investigator’s inherent involvement in the process of documenting such constructions and negotiations.

To address the first point, I contend that this thesis relies on stories of its research participants<sup>17</sup> to gain access to their social reality and relies on the content of their stories to build upon social knowledge in this field of study. Humankind has creatively and innovatively interrogated, explored, and developed the content of stories to create narratives to understand itself. We are all thus, enmeshed in stories, and that, is a reasonable place to begin looking for the answers to my research questions. To address the second point, I gain wisdom from Howard Becker’s (2017b) pragmatism. He claims that there is no position from which sociological research can be done, that is not biased in one way or another.

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<sup>17</sup> Research participants are also called interlocutors and interviewees in this thesis. These terms are used interchangeably.

## Life Story Narratives

Building on the tradition of sociology articulated most vividly by C.W. Mills (1959), a narrative approach to research illuminates the intersection of biography, history, and society, which stands as a diverse inspiration for social scientists, and scholars. Narrative provides a practical means for a person to construct a coherent plot about his/her life with a beginning, middle, end – a past, present and future (Hyvärinen, 2008; Kim, 2015; Riessman, 2008). Phelan and Rabinowitz (2012: 5) describe narratives as ‘somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or something.’ As much as it is an emergent and situational activity, it is also a multi-purpose communication involving a teller, an occasioned telling, and an audience (Woodiwiss et al., 2017).

Thus, narrative is a communicative event, not a thing; it includes stories, but is not reducible to these; its tellings are (oral, visual, written) texts which involve ‘writerly’ (authorial) and ‘readerly’ (co-participant, audience) dynamics (Woodiwiss et al., 2017). Stories are present in many if not all narrative framings (see Frank, 2010; Hyvärinen, 2008; Labov, 1997). Narratives reveal the world’s impact on individuals, allowing us to feel part of their story. Beyond referencing past experiences, narratives create new experiences for audiences (Riessman, 2008: 28). In this thesis, narratives are biographical life stories obtained orally from participants in face-to-face interviews.

As a social practice central to our everyday lives, narratives are a way for people to interpret and give meaning to their lives (Atkins, 2010; Atkinson, 1998). Accordingly Reissman’s (2008) narratives offer insight into the process of identity construction. Narratives help in understanding and making sense of human experience (Kim, 2015). They are an important means for discovering how we construct our lives and bring order to our experiences (Brown et al., 2008). Constructionism with its strong recent presence within the social sciences (Burr, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008) has been adapted in many of its features by contemporary narrative researchers (Esin et al., 2014).

Holstein and Gubrium (2008) submit that the constructionist approach to narratives is distinct. They say this based on its critical attention to the diversity, contradictions and failures of meaning; research participants’ own generations of meaning; and to the mutual constitution of meanings between participants, researchers, the research context and the wider context. Here context refers to many different levels and complex relations of power. However, the constructionist approach also shares commonalities with narrative frameworks that rely on analyses of social positioning, or performance, or some variety of complexity theory (Esin et al., 2014). The narratable self thus conjoins subjectivity and interiority with relationality and contextuality (Phoenix, 2008; Presser, 2005; Presser & Sandberg, 2015; Woodiwiss et al., 2017). This approach



aligns with the goal of understanding Muslim identity across different levels of interaction, including the individual (micro-level) and the family, education, and labour market (meso-level). Also to include the stance on researching Muslim identity as a negotiated product of intergenerational co-histories that are affected by the political, economic and social discourse of the social environment within which one finds oneself; that is continuously de-constructed and reconstructed during the life course of an individual.

As all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 2013), considering the position of those involved in the research is important, although not in terms of a unified or ‘finished’ identity (Andrews et al., 2013; Haraway, 2013). From this perspective, the storyteller is not a unitary self, making holistic sense of his/her life in the telling. Rather, she struggles over meanings of experience and the multiplicities of her personas and selves (Riessman, 2003; Squire, 2020). Riessman (2008) acknowledges the variability of narratives, recognising that stories can change depending on the context and the audience. This variability is an important aspect of understanding the fluidity of identity and experience through narratives. Moreover, it also stresses the performative aspect of narratives where the act of telling a story is seen as a performance.

Narrative emphasises the active self-shaping quality of human thought, the power of stories to create and refashion personal identity. Through the construction and recounting of narratives, individuals form and re-form who they have been, are presently and hope to become. Narratives thus privilege positionality and subjectivity (Riessman, 2003) offering a way out of the reification that mechanistic modes of human behaviour may unwittingly impose (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). For example, narratives can help challenge reductionist discourses of migrants and migration, by presenting alternative knowledge of migrant lives and identities (see Erel, 2007; Inowlocki & Lutz, 2000). More broadly, narrative and other forms of qualitative research that bring migrants’ perspectives to the fore enable a critique of the ‘homogenising constructions of identities’ (Yuval-Davis & Kaptani, 2009: 58) that frequently constrain their lives and opportunities (Mehdi, 2024a; Mirza, 2020; Phoenix, 2013). An intersectional approach, which highlights the multiple position/ing of individuals and thus problematises group-based categorisations, is particularly useful in that regard (Anthias, 2002; Yuval-Davis & Kaptani, 2009).

For this study to understand dynamics of identity and belonging has meant to collate many different ‘stories of the self’ (Bradby, 2017) into lived-life trajectories of each subject. If time past is history and time living is present, in a sense all collected data is in history. To quote the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard ‘we live life forwards, but we understand it backwards’(in Germeten, 2013: 623). A life lived cannot be fully understood in either direction—forward or backward. It is not coherent or consistent, but rather a continuous process.

In interviews, participants rarely provided chronological accounts. The researcher thus constructs a 'new' story with a logic that may be different from the order in which things are presented by the subject. The logic is controlled by the researcher and derives from selections of statements that form the basis for creating a holistic life story narrative (Germeten, 2013). How narratives are ordered, deciding which segments to analyse, means putting boundaries around them. This is an interpretive decision, that depends on the researcher (Riessman, 2003).

Narratives offer long-term reference points to replicate, live up to or overcome (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). These stories can continue to influence how the narrator views him/herself and makes decisions to act (Holley & Colyar, 2009). To understand formation of identity and negotiations for belonging among second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden, the life story narrative brings to attention the migration context of immigrant communities (i.e., where they migrate from and where they migrate to) as well as the compelling reasons for the parents of second-generation Pakistani-Muslims to migrate from their home countries (see appendix VIII for these migration routes). It also shows how the biography of the parents and their memory of cultural and religious traditions back home in Pakistan (there) are entangled with its intergenerational ethno-religious transmission in Sweden (here) thus occupying a central part in socialisation processes and identity making of subsequent generations in the place of settlement.

Grown-up children of first-generation Pakistanis in the simplest sense have a relation to Islam through family history. Religion as it was transmitted and practiced in the home country of the migrants is being reproduced in the host country through generational transmission in a new time and under very different societal conditions. All the different stories of one's own life and stories that are passed on generationally contribute to the overall narrative of being Swedish with a Pakistani and Muslim heritage.

Change in place (migration) and time (generation) produces a new (post-migration/diaspora) space for reflection. I try to capture timing of events across the life course of my interlocutors through life stories and represent their experiences into narratives of belonging that contribute to an overall picture of each participant's identity journey. Situating their frames of reference, how they see themselves compared to the parent generation on one hand, as Swedish nationals on the other, and as subjects with agency in between. Although self is not entirely discursively constituted, and while having agency, this is not in circumstances of people's own making. Consequently exploring these interconnections, remains central to the ethical, analytical and political debt that feminist researchers owe to 'the people of flesh and blood to whom something really happened' (Ricoeur, 1988: 118).

Narrative research is centred on values of empathy, mutuality, sensitivity, and care (Cole & Knowles, 2001) which ties in neatly with the way that I have engaged in

conversations with my interlocutors, made observations and participated in events, but also made claims to knowledge.

Narrative research is also about growth, survival and reproduction (Becker, 2017a; Faraday & Plummer, 1979; Plummer, 2019) and allows insight into alterations, adjustments, transformations, adaptations, resistance, conflict and endurance which translates into reinventing oneself and renegotiating with one's identities to belong. This approach helped me weave between and across spaces, relations and events, as it is the totality and the sum of all experiences that are bound up in identity making. To not be fixated only on religion as something existing in a vacuum.

Considering these components of narrative research as method it has been a rewarding enterprise towards the service of my research interest. I was able to examine my interviewees' current positions in relation to their respective backgrounds, through which trajectories, including processes of identity formation and belonging, could be explored. Furthermore, considering how people present different experiences in the context of their life more broadly enabled a complex understanding of the meaning-making processes involved (Cederberg, 2014).

Realistically, life story interviewers should remember that it is possible that what they are getting from those they interview is not the whole truth. They can be pretty sure, however, that what they are getting are the stories participants want to tell. The researcher's main epistemological questions concern the connection between the narratives as presented and the life that has been told, and the fit will never be perfect. The social world will always be an interpreted world, from both the participant's and the researcher's view.

## Field Work as Process

For reasons of transparency and ethical duty towards researching a minority community, I have tried to report diligently the systematic and sequential steps I took in the research process before entering the field, during the time I was in the field, and after I left the field. This section thus, has three main parts.

The first is 'Prelude to fieldwork' which refers to all the preparations I did prior to face-to-face encounters with the research participants and is further sub-divided into two segments. An important part of the fieldwork process is how all my deliberations on what to do, where to look, who to interview, and what to ask, are a product of my intersectional positioning in the social world. Thus, first and foremost, in the segment on prelude to fieldwork, I pause to contemplate on my personal attributes, motivations and perspectives, to alert the readers to my role as a researcher in this process.

Thereafter, the second part continues with the prelude to fieldwork but focuses on characteristics of the sample for potential participants in this research, gaining access to that sample and employing recruitment strategies.

The last part in this section is 'Navigating the field' which describes those occasions where I was 'face to face' with my participants both in the interview settings; as well as during participant observations: a Go-Carting Go-Along, a New Year's Eve dinner, a Mushaira (poetry recitation social event) and attending a one-day long annual religious event at a Mosque in Göteborg.

The following sections detail the content under each stage of the research process.

### **Prelude to the Field: Researcher Role and Positionality**

Certain troubles knock on the door of one's consciousness in the form of a question. For me, it came in the form of 'Are you a secular Muslim?'. The context of this conversation was a request for a two-day extension on an end-of-term paper deadline that happened to fall on Eid weekend at a university in Sweden where I was enrolled as a Bachelor student between 2012-2013. As much as I was immediately engaged by the formulation of the question, I was also amused. I was engaged because it was a seemingly innocent surface-level question that could easily be resolved by a 'yes/'no' binary response but it had provoked in me a deep-level introspection and reflection. I was amused by the reason for asking of such a question, the trouble that lay underneath it and the relief/disquiet expected from my response. I had never thought of myself as a secular Muslim, I didn't know such a label existed. I later realised that the question was essentially asking, 'Are you celebrating Eid in the same way I celebrate Christmas?'. In other words, if I was a 'religious' or a 'believing' Muslim. If the holiday was a cultural event devoid of its religious past and meaning, or a religious one with all its past and meaning intact. Interestingly, I understood 'secular' as a separation of Church (read religious) power from the state. I understood this interaction as implying that to be a Muslim in Sweden was appropriate if it was a part of my heritage, as an empty-shell signifier, but a surprise if actively believed in. The above conversation lasted approximately five minutes. It has stayed with me a long time. It forms the basis of the curiosity for this dissertation. *Being Muslim*, is a personal trouble, a trouble that is negotiated in my everyday life in Sweden.

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I was born in Karachi, Pakistan to a Sindhi father and a Punjabi mother. These two languages were spoken at home by my parents though we replied in Urdu or English which was the medium of most of our education. My father was a Banker and my mother a housewife. His job took us to Beijing, China when I was 6 years old in 1985, where we lived for 5 years. We moved to New York in the USA where we lived for 2.5 years before moving back to Karachi. I left for a 2-year educational sojourn to Texas,

USA in 2001 before returning and staying in Karachi for a few more years. I married and moved within Pakistani cities for a few years. I moved to Sweden with my partner and our two children in 2011 as a transnational family. I moved back to Pakistan in 2014 then moved back to Sweden in 2015 as a PhD student and a single parent. What is instructive in this information is that I have been on a perpetual move for most of my childhood and adult life, and with each move in a different phase of life course and social status, which has had implications on how I make sense of who I am and my place in the world.

While a transnational life opens one up to new perspectives and privileges, not being rooted and lacking a stable home has brought with itself challenges that are till today, a trouble, especially since I am an 'immigrant' in Sweden and am raising two 'second-generation' children with hyphenated identities. Rootedness and feeling of belonging are also personal troubles.

Problems in society help account for problems that individuals experience. Mills (1959) felt that many problems ordinarily considered private troubles are best understood as public issues, and he coined the term sociological imagination to refer to the ability to appreciate the structural basis for individual problems. By recognising the interconnectedness between personal challenges and wider societal factors, the sociological imagination encourages individuals to view their own struggles as embedded in larger social contexts. In situations where the 'self' (researcher) encounters 'others' (research participants), in their questions, demands, statements, and concerns; I have become more conscious of the world(s) I inhabit.

In this process of becoming conscious, I have become aware of what I have overlooked in previous similar encounters, in other places, in other times. Embodied as a person of colour, a migrant from Pakistan, a mother, and a Muslim woman; I have a repository of my own collected experiences, that I brought to my participant observations and to the interview situation. While I followed the protocols of a researcher throughout the research process, I drew on my 'insider' knowledge to build rapport and remained cautious of overstepping boundaries by remaining conscious of my 'outsider' position.

Dvora Yanow (2009: 278) contends, within the ontological and epistemological presuppositions underlying interpretive research, 'objectivity' - the ability of the researcher to stand outside the subject study - is not conceptually possible. She highlights the importance of interpreting and presenting ethnographic interview material as a form of writing. It underscores the role of both the researched individuals' perspectives and the researcher's interpretations in creating a comprehensive ethnographic narrative. This contention is in harmony with my approach towards this research. Narrative interviews are an ethnographic and autobiographical portrayal of the participants' lives. It is a dynamic process that involves engagement with the

researched community, emphasises analysis of material through the intersubjectivity of knowing between the researcher and the researched, and the reflective and relational character of writing such research. I thus contend, the researcher cannot avoid 'interviewer effects', rather it is a useful tool for reflection. Moreover, the researcher is thoroughly implicated in the research process from fieldwork to writing. Reflexivity, accountability and transparency is the armour the researcher is cognisant of in order to safeguard the quality of research without causing harm to the research participants and researched community.

In her classic essay, 'Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?' Judith Stacey (1988) discusses the violence inherent in qualitative methods when boundaries of insider/outsider and friendship/researcher are unclear and where women's historically trained capacity of relatedness increase a participant's vulnerability. I believe full disclosure, conscious awareness of relation positions of the participant and the researcher, and a feedback loop are ways to overcome issues of vulnerability and academic 'violence'. I am still well within the reach of my participants, since I haven't technically 'left the field', I am still in Sweden, I am still at the university, the participants have my email address, my phone number, my office address, and in the consent form they signed, they also have an email to my boss, the head of the Department (a quick google search of my name also exhibits my home address).

In case I publish something that is unethical or has overstepped boundaries participants specified; they have access to recourse. As mentioned in the next section, a participant dropped out after giving a three-hour interview, and her decision was respected. A participant chose to be off the record, and those accounts are not mentioned in this thesis. Another participant wrote back objecting that I had used her sibling's interview information with her and reminded me of the ethics there, I responded with an apology.

While I share my Pakistani background with the participants, the content of our lives is significantly different as regards age, transnational experiences, dexterity in Urdu language, actual experience of living in Pakistan, having all my family members there, and lastly, my own religious inclinations differ vastly from the variety of identifications I encountered in my sample. Reflexivity has been central to my search for participants' 'truth' of their experiences and interpretations, and I aim to combine it with an urge to provide an analytical understanding of the social ambit by placing the social utility of knowledge at the core of the research aim (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2010).

I have also attempted to listen to and learn from the voices of the people I interviewed, I have tried to avoid a reductionist focus on the migrant and religious background per se, an approach that in the past has contributed to the culturalisation of social problems (ibid.). I tried to immerse myself in the participants' world to understand the classed, gendered and racialised social relations which shape their

everyday experience of living in Sweden. This approach is in line with the ethics of doing interpretive research, such that vulnerabilities of human subjects must be balanced with the benefits of knowledge generation against the risks of harm to them. To the best of my abilities, I have tried to carry out collaborative research. And have been sensitive to issues of interpretation and representation of my participants in writing this thesis.

### **Prelude to field: Sampling, Access, and Recruitment strategies**

This section will continue with reflecting on the decisions I took when selecting the sample for this research undertaking, appraise the process of gaining access to my participants, and feature all the interactions that occurred during recruitment prior to face-to-face interviews.

#### *Who is in the Sample?*

There are great variations in the forms and level of zeal in religious practice among Muslims. Researchers often have to contend with decisions on whom to include in a study of Muslims. Many Muslims are not practicing believers, although they are often counted as such in the public debate (Elander, 2015). Active Muslims are easy for researchers find, precisely due to their visibility and activism (Schmidt, 2004) but overexposing this particular group leaves other groups of Muslims underexposed, and eventually risks becoming hegemonic ‘evidence’ of political and public understandings of Muslims as particularly (and dangerously) religious (Meer & Modood, 2009; Schmidt, 2007a; Thurfjell & Willander, 2021). I too had to deliberate upon where to look and whom to choose: should the data only cover and include Muslims who are active and believing Muslims or should the definition be wider and include persons who belong to a Muslim cultural tradition? (Jeldtoft, 2009; Jeldtoft & Nielsen, 2011). Is a Muslim name enough for someone to be considered a Muslim (Bilgrami, 1992; Brubaker, 2013)? Though the intention was not to steer clear of active Muslims when considering who counts as a participant in this study, I did want to ensure that I acquired a spectrum of Muslim experiences.

Therefore, a ‘Muslim’ for this inquisition is someone who self-identifies as one, or someone who has (at least one) self-identifying Muslim parent. At the simplest level, as long as a participant’s parents had some connection to Islam, and they grew up with the religion as a part of their upbringing, they were eligible for recruitment.

Diversity of origins (national, ethnic, religious etc) opens up a pluralism of Islam’s being practiced, not to mention individual preferences (Otterbeck & Bevelander, 2012). As a country of origin for whom religion is of central importance in public and private life (Anwar et al., 2004; Jacobsen et al., 2015; Larsson & Sorgenfrei, 2021;

Sorgenfrei, 2020a, 2020b), I have narrowed my focus on variations of religious negotiation and different registers of Muslim subjectivity found within the Pakistani diaspora. Malmö, Göteborg and Stockholm have the largest Muslim populations (Anwar et al., 2004) and have been the key cities that I have relied on to access my participants.

Although the Pakistani-Muslim community is not a typically hard to reach population (Abrams, 2010), it has similarities that render it invisible without access to a gatekeeper. Talking about and reflecting on one's religious identity in the current political milieu with a stranger is hardly a best-selling proposition. Based on previous experience, I knew that initial contact requires someone within the community who trusts me and can vouch for me to potential participants. This trust-based referral initiated a snowball sampling process. I employed a 'maximum variation' purposive snowball sampling strategy to capture a wide range of perspectives (Patton, 2002, 2014).

To ensure a reasonable sample size, I combined multiple snowball seeds by building connections with several gatekeepers. These strategies and goals were subject to change based on ongoing reflections while enlisting participants. Finally, since sampling is rarely predetermined or finite in its numerical size, often it is difficult to know when a study will be 'theoretically saturated,' or when further data collection will stop yielding new theoretical insights (Abrams, 2010). Keeping in mind my research objectives, intending to work with a heterogenous sample (see next paragraph on diversity of sample), I kept in mind the recommendation for twelve to twenty data sources 'when looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation' (Guest et al., 2006: 61); but did not decide on a number before starting to look for participants. The goal was to achieve as much variation as possible in life stories to be able to answer the research questions.

In an attempt avoid a reductionistic account of identity it is important to conceive it through multiple frames of reference that is, to examine the interconnections of religion, race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, and sexuality, as well as myriad other identities that compose the self (see Vertovec & Rogers, 1998; 2018). Moreover, Halliday (1999) purports that while all those who are Muslim certainly consider Islam as part their identity, Islam is never its sole source. My aim is to explore when and how individuals in this study identify primarily as Muslims, often overlooking other identities. Additionally, I will examine when they identify as something other than Muslim to show what other in-between positions exist. This focus on intersecting identities will be emphasised throughout the selection of participants and analysis of interview material.

According to Voas and Fleischman (2012) uprooting oneself and moving to another country is a major life event. This first-generation experience determines upbringing of



the second-generation in the familial domain, and in turn affects their ethnic, religious, and national convictions/commitment.

Some researchers include in the second-generation those children born came to the host country before the age of 12 (Portes & Zhou, 1993). However, most scholars make a distinction between the second-generation and 1.5 generation to differentiate those children born in host countries (second-generation) from those who moved to the host country before reaching adulthood (1.5 generation) (Gans, 1992; Min & Kim, 2000; Peek, 2005; Rumbaut, 1991).

In this study second-generation refers to those who were born in Sweden<sup>18</sup> to migrant parents or those who accompanied their migrant parents to Sweden before age 10. In the text I may refer to the participants as second-generation in totality, but analytically I draw attention to some as second-generation and others 1.5 generation<sup>19</sup>. Some participants moved to Sweden when they were 6-7 years old, that is the reason the oldest participant in this study is 49 years old. She has a 23-year-old daughter who is third-generation, whom I also interviewed. The term second-generation in this thesis reflects second-generation in the Pakistani diaspora, *not* second-generation immigrants. The second-generation are born and raised in Sweden, hence they are not immigrants, though they are diasporic. I make a conscious choice to use generation as an intersectional location, to indicate accumulation of generational capital gains in Sweden. Thus, within this research, I will refer to the participants as second-generation Pakistanis.

The interview guide comprised of a range of semi-structured questions around the themes of family, school, work, leisure, religion and politics, making it possible to gain insights into the various identities an individual subject possesses, identifies with, and activates in different social situations (for more details see appendix 1). While my focus is on the second-generation, for the sake of greater clarity and considering nuances that could be attributed to particular generations, the interview guide asks questions relating to parent generations' migration experiences in order to locate second-generation narrative within that intergenerational context.

### *Where Can I Gain Access?*

Choosing an appropriate strategy in gaining access to the field is considered to be paramount in ensuring a high response rate (Johl & Renganathan, 2010: 42). Finding

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<sup>18</sup> The most common understanding in contemporary research is that second-generation refers to those children of immigrants who are 'born in Sweden' (Roald, 2002)

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that the self-understanding of participants about their generational placement in Sweden vis a vis their parents is sometimes noted as different from how researchers have assigned. A participant thought she was first-generation and wanted to understand how I defined second-generation.

individuals to interview or observe can be challenging especially if the study is on individuals that are not connected to an organisation (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Often in the early access process it is important for the researcher to have someone of the community to vouch for his or her presence (ibid.). To begin with I made a mental list of everyone I knew in my small circle of personal contacts, preferably families who had been living in Sweden for approximately 5 years, who were in a position to provide information about participants for my research topic, who they thought could fit my criteria (second-generation Pakistani-Muslim) and be interested in participating. I circulated the news within these personal contacts that I was looking for participants for my project.

Meanwhile, I had previously done fieldwork on gender role negotiations within Pakistani families for my bachelor's thesis and had made contact with three second-generation Pakistani women in Stockholm and Malmö. I started sifting through the interview material acquired from those conversations as well as made contact with these participants as an alternate starting point for chain referrals. One of these three contacts, before withdrawing her own interest from participation in my current research saying, 'it doesn't feel right' and she wasn't comfortable with the idea, gave a clue as to why when I asked her to recall if anyone else would be interested. She said: 'Uzma, who would want to talk so intimately about this, we are all in the same circle, it will become uncomfortable'. I met this participant at an Iftaari<sup>20</sup> during the month of Ramadhan. She had recently been incorporated into the transnational group where in the future there was a possibility to bump into me more often. 'Talk' and 'gossip' within the group is common and affects trust. When I had initially established contact with her for an interview in 2013, I was soon leaving for Pakistan indefinitely, and she would never have to see me again; so to her it would have no long-term connections. Also, the time frame for producing a Bachelor thesis is quite short so once the story is out, it is also soon over and forgotten. A PhD is four to five years, that is enough time for information to travel in a small community when trust is low. Though she comforted me that it wasn't that she didn't trust me, she just did not feel up to it. I did not get any referrals from her (fieldnotes, May 2016). Being a Pakistani-Muslim myself, I had assumed that my 'insider position' could be exploited as a strategic advantage to 'get in' to the field, since my 'outsider' position as a researcher (Lee, 1993) offered little bargaining resources beyond my (fairly newfound) academic respectability.

In this particular situation I found both my positions to warrant a setback. From my own experience of being in the Pakistani community, people don't have a hard time opening up or trusting someone, unless they know they will be quoted. The fear is of misrepresentation more than being unable to 'open up' to someone. The idea that a

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<sup>20</sup> Meal prepared to break Muslim fasting

person belongs to a university and results will be published on such a personal and sensitive issue could hinder recruitment (Fieldnotes, July 2016). The second participant met me and suggested she did know many Pakistanis, and could perhaps refer me to her son. Her hesitation also compelled me to put that snowball on hold.

During this time, in 2016, my ethics approval came through (Dnr 2016/227, see Appendix III). Migration regime changes in 2008 and a migration crisis in 2015 had led to a narrative of immigrants as a problem in general and Muslims as a threat to society in particular in Swedish media discourse (Abdelkader, 2017; Abrashi et al., 2015; Berglund, 2015; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2012; Otterbeck & Bevelander, 2012). Communities that are considered to be vulnerable to discrimination, stigmatisation and possible violence on account of their marginalised immigrant and religious identities require ethical vetting from the Lund University Ethical Review Board (see Ethical review page on Lund University website). Since I could now introduce my research more formally backed by an institution, I could offer more recourse and safety to my participants such as anonymity, confidentiality and the option to withdraw from the research at any point in time. When they signed the informed consent (see Appendix IV), they had access to my personal information as well as names of my superiors i.e., the head of department and supervisors in case an issue or complaint needed to be raised.

I thus, shifted gears from a benign to a more assertive approach in gaining access. According to Kolb and Van Maanen (1985) such a shift may entail a combination of strategies, to which I further add hard work and luck. I increased the frequency of interactions (mostly by phone calls and text messages) with my personal contacts from whom I had requested leads. Moreover, I spread word in the Pakistan Cricket Team both in Malmö and Stockholm to generate interest. I sent hard copies of an advertisement for my research (see Appendix V) with one of the players to distribute amongst the team members. I learned there were a handful of second-generation Pakistanis in the Cricket team (Fieldnotes, Dec, 2016). It is important for researchers to establish relationship with gatekeepers to gain access to multiple participants. These gatekeepers' maybe individuals but often are organisations (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). To create a distinction between access gained from formal and informal channels, I shall, in the subsequent sections, refer to 'gatekeepers', those individuals who belong to formal organisations that referred me to participants and leads from personal contacts as 'snowball seeds' or 'sample seeds.'

I also visited one Mosque in Lund with my advertisement, and two Mosques in Malmö. When I went up to the person in charge of the Mosque and asked if I could speak to someone about my research, there was confusion. First one person showed up, then another, and then a last one whom I could speak with. Most of this conversation was in broken English and sign language since I didn't speak Swedish, they weren't very good at English, and no one spoke Urdu. They looked at me very sceptically, asked me

where I was doing research, then asked me if I was a Muslim (yes), then asked me where I was from (Pakistan), looked at each other, said something in Swedish. They told me I could put up 'one' flyer on the mosque bulletin. When I offered more, they said 'one is enough', even though I urged that another one could be put up in the ladies' section of the Mosque, which was downstairs. They said I could put up 'one' on my way out. Eventually I negotiated putting two, one for each section of men and women.

The first Mosque I visited in Malmö; I came face to face with an old gentleman who looked up when I walked into the reception area with an open expression that changed to a grumpy grunt when I handed him an advertisement for my project in Swedish and English. He spoke to me in Swedish and from what I could make out, he said someone would get in touch with me; but no one did. Given it was only a year since the Swedish 'migration crises' uproar, where immigrants and particularly Muslims were implicated as a social problem, it wasn't not surprising that I raised mistrust and suspicion in the gatekeepers. Research could come at a cost to the vulnerable. My curiosity could have been seen as meddling and sensationalism rather than as a genuine interest in making the situation for this minority any better.

This first visit made my fruitful visit to the second Mosque in Malmö a delightful experience. I was given a guided tour of the premises; the person in charge was extremely forthcoming and promised to connect me to participants who fulfilled my criteria. This gatekeeper was crucial to opening doors for me, and was extremely supportive and cooperative (Fieldnotes, September-November 2016). The goodwill this gatekeeper showed me was based on an insider position and in this case it was beneficial. Since I wasn't only looking to recruit 'organised' or 'practicing' Muslims, I asked a friend's husband to put up advertisements in the second Mosque in Lund without physically visiting, thinking perhaps my physical absence could render me faceless and less threatening. Advertisements as a strategy to gain participants is not particularly successful for South Asian samples (Douglas et al., 2011) and were a long shot. They did not generate any interest. In an age where we are constantly bombarded with all kinds of messages to participate in different activities this is a bit expected (Fieldnotes January 2017).

One person who had been living in Sweden for ten years in my personal network said something that was intriguing about early migrants to Sweden who would now have children that could count as second-generation for my sample. He said he knew some Pakistanis whom he was introduced to when he first arrived, but the diasporic community that settled in Sweden in the 70's and 80's forms a unique generation that are connected between themselves but do not engage with the transnationals who arrived in Sweden as students or as professionals post Y2K (Fieldnotes, May 2016). They were closed to those located in another migration-time frame, in the sense that they have their own community that is settled and is well-knit and bonded. He said

that generation of diaspora did not engage with the new transnationals and probably honoured traditions, beliefs, and practices subscribing to the Pakistan of the 70's and 80's. The older Diaspora considered itself to have a higher status in hierarchy, have extended networks of kin and kith, having accumulated cultural, political and economic capital by living in Sweden for a longer period of time. Moreover, the new migrants would also pose as competition in the job market. After a while the novelty of having more of one's own kind wears out. The established and the outsiders to the established (unestablished) become the two kinds of diasporas that coexist side by side in some competition with each other for authenticity.

Two chance events occurred that had an unprecedented impact on gaining access to my participants and recruiting them. In February 2016, my daughter had an appointment with a doctor, who had a Muslim name. When we arrived for the appointment, I observed that the doctor looked Arab, spoke perfect Swedish and switched comfortably to English on our count. I was talking to my daughter in the examination room in Urdu when suddenly and quite unexpectedly, the doctor joined in on the conversation in Urdu! We started talking more and right before we were leaving, I decided to ask her if she would like to participate in my project. She gave me her number and said we could talk about it. Three months later she agreed to be interviewed, and this was to become the very first interview for my project.

Another bonanza moment occurred when I was on a playdate visiting a Pakistani family. I was introduced to someone who lived in Stockholm and was visiting Lund. Upon hearing the topic of my research, she showed genuine interest and asked me if I was looking for people. When I replied in affirmative, she said she could help me. I also handed her 10-15 advertisement copies (which she also distributed via email and shared on Facebook with her network) to place in the mosque where her family frequented and to hand out to anyone who she thought would be interested. This sample seed was instrumental for gaining access to participants in Stockholm.

One lesson I learned during this phase of research, for my choice of topic, resonated in words of C.W. Mills (1959: 195) that said 'great thinkers do not split their work from their lives [...] use each for the enrichment for the other'. My interpretation is that one has to be able to overlap between personal and professional life in looking for creative ideas for doing research, keeping an eye on opportunities to exploit if and when they present themselves. In the above instances, my insider position as a Pakistani meant I could bypass the requirement of ethnographic based research for the researcher to live and show commitment to the community before being trusted with the information that he/she is seeking (Johl & Renganathan, 2010: 42). Moreover, using my ability to be sociable and be socially available supported building webs of relationships which provide a researcher lateral and vertical connections to people (ibid.)

In August 2016, I did, eventually, manage to get two access points to second-generation participants through the new generation of diaspora. In the first case, a parent from the established diaspora who had children in the second-generation was a friend with my personal contact's parent in Pakistan. My friend was able to help me connect to one of the adult children of the second-generation. The second access point also came from a personal contact who knew someone born and raised in Sweden. These sample seeds had connected me to several participants in Stockholm, Lund, and Göteborg.

### *How Did I Seek Participants?*

In this section I will relate the way I recruited my participants and reflect on the implications of my sampling choices and their manifestations in the practice. For a visual presentation of the access points and recruitment process, refer to the Snowball Map (page 72 Figure 1 time<sub>1</sub> and Figure 2 time<sub>2</sub>).

When I received contact details from the (two) gatekeepers and (four) sample seeds I began to recruit. I started by sending a short text message where I introduced myself, the topic of my research and requested a time to talk in order to elaborate more on my research. If they had already been briefed by the sample seed and gatekeeper, I skipped the text message stage directly by placing a phone call. Once an interest was established through a text back or phone call in the affirmative, a mutually acceptable time was decided upon. The participants' email was requested so that the informed consent could be read in detail prior to the meeting, and if there were any questions they could be solicited (several email exchanges occurred during this stage of recruitment).

I typically received a very positive response from my participants who showed genuine interest in being part of the project: 'It sounds like a great topic and a much needed one'; 'glad to finally hear someone is researching about us and what is important to us'; 'it will be so interesting to see what you find out'. One participant made a noteworthy remark: 'We are well integrated into the Swedish society compared to Pakistanis in England, why shouldn't we be studied?'. At this juncture in recruitment, I had a backup plan, in case the Pakistani sample was too small I would expand to a South Asian sample. After hearing the above quote, I decided to take a decision to stick to the Pakistani case (Fieldnotes, September 2016). This was also a good time in the interaction to request participants to circulate widely in their friends and family networks that I am looking for people to participate in my project; a task that was taken on with much enthusiasm, especially in the case of sample seeds. At the point where interviews took place, the participant and the researcher had already talked to each other, exchanged several texts and emails, and established some rapport.

Snowballing as a sampling technique to find participants within the Pakistani community worked well as a strategy. A limitation of the snowball is that a researcher gets more of the same i.e., one finds that the seed recommends people who they know,

based on shared characteristics (age, gender, education, economic background etc). I was able to get a variation by using several channels in terms of institutional gatekeepers and civilian sample seeds. I specified who I am looking for with careful detail to allow the gatekeepers and sample seeds to broaden their horizon of memory and networks to who they could connect me to. A positive is that power imbalances are redressed through this strategy; I as a researcher lose power when the sample seeds are making decisions on who constitutes my sample. I am restricted to their preferences, their relationships of trust, and subsequently to those participants who agreed to participate either on account of genuine interest or out of goodwill.

Class homogeneity among participants is partly a product of the means which were available for me to draw the sample from but also my own limitations and resources. One of my sample seeds said to me that she could recommend some more participants who worked in family businesses or did odd jobs; they had not pursued higher education, did not speak Urdu or English, and spoke only Swedish. The idea sounded exciting, to have this class variation in my sample, but keeping in mind my language and time limitations, I decided to not pursue these participants. I am aware that my sample lacks these voices.

The advertisements I placed at the mosques (Lund, Malmö and Stockholm); at a very popular Pakistani Grocery store (in Malmö); distributed among my participants and personal contacts; and circulated within the Cricket Team (in Malmö and Stockholm) did not generate any interest. Only one advertisement a sample seed circulated among her friends generated interest. I was emailed by a participant who was interested in partaking.

This participant later connected me to yet another sample seed. Besides Malmö, Göteborg, and Stockholm, I also recruited participants from Lund. Some sample seeds were based in Lund, so their referrals included participants living in Lund. Place has a role in how identity is shaped and negotiated. Taking this into consideration, I interviewed these participants out of curiosity and to explore the possibility of tapping into their network of friends to broaden my sample. In some cases, the strategy worked and in others I just ended up with great interviews.

In the figures below, I show how the sampling strategies became fruitful in gaining access to the sample and getting interviews. In the key, there is indication for what the alphabets stand for, and what the shapes indicate. The number within the shape stands for the age of the participant. Standalone square boxes represent initial contact. For example, in figure 1, the 'F' box in the bottom left corner means that a personal friend became the sample seed, and I gained access to three participants from this contact. The initial contacts did not participate in the research, nor were they interviewed. The 'F' box above the bottom left, shows that a friend connected me to sample seed. This was a 34-year-old second-generation female who introduced me to her two female

friends who were siblings aged 30 and 32 respectively and another female friend who was also 32 years old. She also introduced me to her sibling brother who lives outside of Stockholm who is also 32 years old. The green line in figure 1 represents the snowball activity in Stockholm and in Skåne.

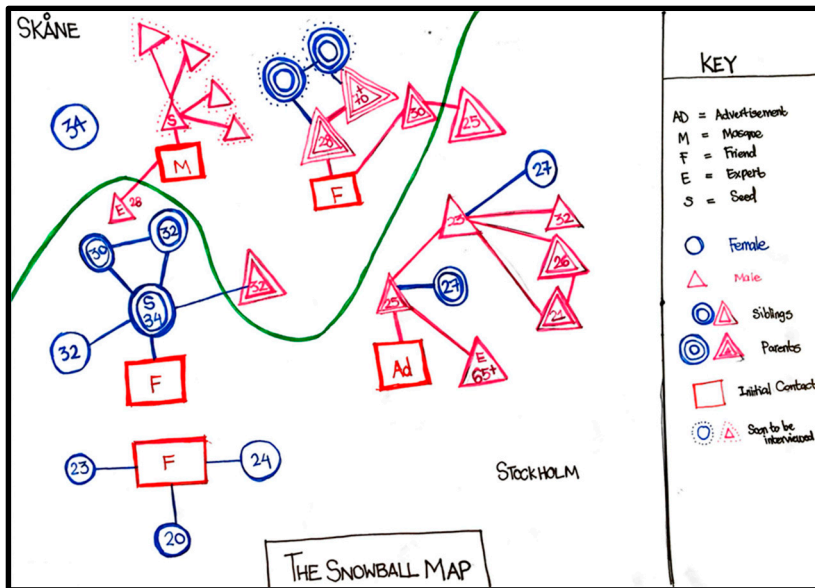


Figure 1:<sup>21</sup> as at December 2016

Below, Figure 2 shows the more holistic picture of what the sample looked like by 2018 when almost all interviews had been conducted. The green lines demarcate between the specific cities I was able to generate participation from: Göteborg, Lund, Malmö and Stockholm. The black lines show the direction of snowball. For example, in the right bottom corner in Stockholm, a 'F' friend suggested I get in touch with 'S' the sample seed. The red boxes represent access points, these were not participants. The 'S' sample seed connected me to three different female participants ages 20, 23, and 24. It is in this way that these figures can be comprehended to gain an understanding of how access was gained for recruitment of participants in the field.

<sup>21</sup> The idea for this snowball map was conceived in a discussion with Lisa Eklund at the Department of Sociology, Lund University.



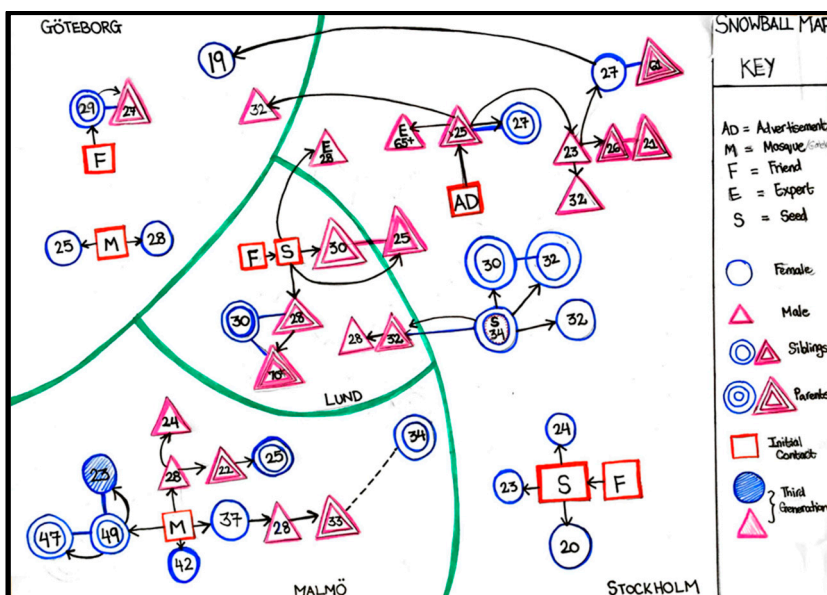


Figure 2: as at January 2018

When recruiting participants, I based selection on self-defined Muslims or off springs of first-generation Pakistani-Muslim parents. The idea was as I say below in response to one of my participants who after reading the consent form sent me an email with the following text:

[...] there's just one thing that could be a problem: your study is about being a Muslim in Sweden. How much of a Muslim does one need to be to participate in your study? If it is not very strict then we can talk more about it when we meet, but I don't consider myself a Muslim since I don't pray, I don't completely refrain from alcohol etc. My mother and father both grew up in Muslim families and consider themselves Muslims (even though they are not "active Muslims" in any sense) and I also grew up in Muslim conditions, but during the years the distance between me and religion has become greater and greater. What do you think?

(Amin 27, Male, second-generation<sup>22</sup>)

Interestingly when I recruited the above participant's sibling for an interview, I received almost the exact same response in an email:

<sup>22</sup> Email excerpts are used with permission

Thank you for the document (informed consent). From this it seems you're looking to interview Muslims in Sweden, and just so that there are no misunderstandings, I'm not Muslim - though my parents are/were and I did have Muslim influences while growing up (and identified as Muslim during my early years of life). Does that still work for your interview?

(Alina 29, Female, second-generation)

I had anticipated this would happen. When looking for a variety of 'Muslims' my expectation was that I would first recruit self-defined Muslims for whom this religious identity is salient. Through through these participants it is possible to find other participants who may have belonged to Muslim families but no longer follow the religion and its practices in their everyday lives. Within the community it is not possible to openly reject or give up being a Muslim so if individuals choose to, they 1. either stay away from the community altogether 2. selectively meet other community members who may not openly side with their decisions but privately offer support and maintain ties. If I had advertised specifically that I am looking for all kinds of Muslims, I may have diluted interest from the Muslim community.

Also, I may not have been taken seriously. And I may not have gained access to some key gatekeepers who I approached formally in an institutional context. By focusing on a self-defined Muslim participant to get the snowball rolling, I was able to find those who strayed from this identity. Using different channels and planting multiple sample seeds, allowed for variation within religiosity levels. It is important though in the pre-entry phase of fieldwork to be very sure and to think through sampling before recruiting. Some considerations may occur organically, but it is important when researching a sensitive community (because of religion) to be very clear in one's research interest and to plan and organise entry and exit.

One participant lead was surprised when I called and referred to him by his Pakistani name. He said very few people called him by that name, since the sample seed was a part of his 'Pakistani network' he was known in that circle by his Pakistani name. When I got this participant's contact details, I was given a Pakistani name. When I called and asked him 'is this Amin?', he started mimicking my voice jokingly as if he had mistaken me for someone else. When I introduced myself, he sheepishly apologised and said, 'no one calls me by my Pakistani name I assumed you were Aameena Bhabhi'<sup>23</sup>. He told me most of his friends know him by his Swedish name. I asked him what he would prefer to be called in our interaction. He was more at home with his Swedish name, but since I came through the Pakistani network, I could call him by his Pakistani name. I settled with the Swedish name because that was the name he used in his everyday life at home, with most of his

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<sup>23</sup> Bhabhi is a generic term of reverence for a brother/cousin/friend's wife.

family and friends and at work. At this stage of recruitment, I discerned an unfolding analysis of identity and the intricate dance of belonging negotiation as the participant exhibited sophisticated bicultural competence, seamlessly switching between identities to align with the cultural context of either the Pakistani community or the Swedish milieu.

In the next section, the interviews that resulted from recruitment process are discussed.

## **Navigating the Field: Interviews and Observations**

### *Life Stories and the Interview Situation*

The empirical foundation of this research is life story interviews. The first interview took place in May 2016 and the last in January 2018. At the time of the interview, when I met my participants, there was a sense of familiarity since several text messages, phone calls and emails had been exchanged. I picked up one of those points as a conversation starter and small talked till we found a place to sit and sign a physical copy of the informed consent. I have done interviews at cafes, at the participants' homes, at office spaces, outside train tracks, at an empty office building lobby building right opposite a mall, and on a sideway street. Each interview on average lasted 2hours 30mins, the shortest interview being 1hour 30mins and the longest 4hours 30mins.

I have done 42 life story interviews. The make-up of the sample I was able to enlist, and interview is as follows: Male (21); Female (21); second-generation expert (1); Swedish convert turned Muslim expert (1); Parent (2); third-generation (2). I recruited a total of (37) Second-generation interviews and sibling-dyads interviews (11 pairs), parent-child-sibling triad (1) and parent-child dyad (1). One participant withdrew her interview, and one parent wanted to remain off the record. These interviews are depicted in table form below (for a detailed summary of participants see appendix I):

Table 2

Brief Summary of Interviews	
Description	Number
Male	21
Female	21
Age	19-49
First-Generation	2
Second-generation	39
Third-Generation	1
Expert	2
Sibling-Dyads	11
Parent-child Dyad	1
Parent-Child-Sibling Triad	1

as at January 2018

The language that participants were most comfortable with in most cases was Urdu and Swedish. In other cases, they were fluent in English and Swedish. Since I only speak English and Urdu, we were able to get over the linguistic challenge, and found a common language permutation to converse in. Sometimes the participants preferred speaking in Urdu because they didn't have to lower their voices or whisper, they could just talk and say whatever they wanted, being interviewed in a café where tables are close to each other and there is a lot of activity, they could be at ease knowing that others around them don't understand what they are saying. Switching comfortably between Swedish when the waitress came by or when placing an order for something, then switching back to Urdu when talking to me. One could tell by the accents they have a Punjabi touch and that they are not native per se to the language.

Any conversation, including qualitative research interviews, also consist of eye contact and body language (Bradby, 2017; Germeten, 2013; Osanami Törngren, 2020; Osanami Törngren & Ngeh, 2018). Nonverbal communication generally helps us to understand language better, but can also hide, minimise, or enlarge anything that is said. This may be exhibited through the example of one participant of my participants who underscored religious invocations in form of 'speech acts'<sup>24</sup> though in written form over texts emphasised his religious convictions in practice over texts before we were scheduled to meet and also sending me a text that he will be late because it was the call for prayer:

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<sup>24</sup> Everyday speech acts 'bismillah' 'jazakallah' 'mashalah' 'inshallah' 'assalamualikim' 'khudahafiz' or 'allah hafiz' 'eid' 'ramzan' or 'ramadhan'

It's Assr at 16.30, so straight after that, I can meet up.

I'm in [mall] now so just gonna pray Assr (azan 16.30) than I'll give you a call inshallah'

(Participant, Male)

The first text message came during the day to confirm our meeting time. The second text message popped up when I arrived at the stipulated meeting place. I felt the participant was trying to make a concerted effort to present himself as a practicing Muslim. Brian Fay (1996) cautions social scientists to be aware of the dialectical reverberations they create in others, who they are and how they are seen by those they study, what behaviour their presence precipitates. What I observed and found amusing was the expression on his face when he saw me. He dropped the 'act' almost immediately. Meaning, if he were to 'act' corresponding to his earlier persona on text messages, he would have greeted me with an expected 'assalam-o-laikum'. Instead, when he saw me, he said 'hi' and shook my hand. My actual presence perhaps was different from his imagined persona. It provoked a certain degree of self-consciousness-and in this way altering, heightening or dampening certain forms of self-presentation he had prepared to shore up.

This alludes to the display of emotions in relation to the interviewer or the interview activity at hand what it brings to the social analysis. Later the participant mentioned how he expected me to be much older and different than I was, he said perhaps it was the choice of topic that made him think I would be a much older person in real life, also someone who was seriously and strictly interested in practicing Muslims. This is a reaction I received repeatedly throughout the duration of my fieldwork. I felt my participants relaxed when they thought I was younger than their expectation, and became less formal, and more friendly. People have a tendency to present themselves/ position themselves as different from the discourse (of the 'Muslim'). They may have a different agenda in mind than the agenda that the researcher has come in with (Jacobsson & Åkerström, 2013).

The interview method is as dependent on the asking as it is on the answering (Germeten, 2013). There was coproduction of knowledge, sharing, reframing, reflection, twisted questions and humour (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). These moments in the interview were both a challenge, the point at which rapport had been established, where our personal stories had intertwined with each other, and both the parties could make a claim on each other's statements said in the past of interview time without worrying about the other taking offence or being thrown off by the intimacy of the new question coming back at them. It was taken in stride.

As time passed the participants opened up more. The same question had another answer when I asked it an hour or so into the interview. Throughout my interviews, one observation was that there is a relationship between time passed and dialogical trust.

The longer the interview, the more trusting the participant became, if initially reserved or hesitant. Also, time allowed for deeper reflections, and more than one interpretation by the participant on the same question. One sibling-dyad interview was informative as joint memory work brought forward new stories and different memories from growing up in the family, and how siblings talked about their parents. Sometimes power would shift, and a participant would suddenly ask, 'what is your story?', 'why do you care?' or 'why are you asking this' and I had to respond, sometimes in a monologue, till the participant was satisfied, and we could continue with the interview. If I did not follow cues from my participants, I could offend them and risk an abrupt end to the interview. One has to be active in listening to foster continued trust, interest and connection during an interview to get to the 'stuff' thick descriptions of one's life story are made of.

There are those who love to talk, conversation flows, there are others who retreat too quickly after having answered a question directly waiting for the next question as if it were rapid fire round, there are those who bunch up; who bite their tongues and others who just don't get it, why these questions are even interesting. Some even said to me 'cool, can you really get a job doing these things?' 'Can you get a PhD on this topic?'. It almost seemed too unimportant to grant it as the kind of status that comes with a topic of research for a doctorate! It almost put me to shame sometimes, perhaps grateful too for the privilege.

As connections grow, conversations flow; I take liberties, the participants take liberties and then sometimes they suddenly withdraw. Interviewing is a craft. I have in my other interviews in older projects been more benign, been more of a listener, interjecting sparingly. Getting adjusted to how much I talked in these interviewing was initially to my own irritation when listening to the interviews, though through the duration of the interviews I realised had I not talked as much, I wouldn't have had the participants open up as much as they did.

Usually I make my presence small, I shrink in space and size, and allow the voice of the participant to be bigger than anything in the room, agreeing with them, urging them on. This interview process has been different where I have been provocative, challenging, arguing and counter arguing; not threateningly so, but with sensitivity, humility and a hint of humour. I chose the timing of my dialogical interjections, I almost never did it in the beginning except with those who were from the start claiming a non-Muslim identity. Reflecting on myself I did so because I thought they are already self-critical and counter-positioned to the narrative that was the heart of my research. Since they were outside those boundaries, they would have a view that they would elicit as specifically their own, positioned against the view of the 'others' whose pack they

had left, who they still associated with. They had ‘triple consciousness’ in the sense that they are different from their families, strangers to their own kind, different from their Swedish counterparts, though closer to them than their parents and Pakistani peers, and to Muslims in general. As for the youngest in my sample, I gave them more room and more voice, while challenging them the least.

Those participants whom I felt were extremely straight forward in their replies and very ‘innocent’, I did not feel like unnerving them. Those who did not feel conflicted, were very comfortable in themselves, and were, as was my perception, in a bubble; so I let them be in a bubble. I am aware that I could have gotten different responses had I been more provocative. However, in the instance of these participants I felt even if I were at times a bit challenging they did not latch on to the challenge, and secondly that it would hurt the interaction in some way, perhaps if they felt they were misrecognised or that I was misusing their trust, or if I was straying outside the territory that I had initially recruited them for - (one participant asked me, ‘[...] but that isn’t the crux of your research to question, isn’t it to understand what it means to me? Why talk about what it could be or could mean when I can tell you what it does as is?’). I carefully managed the cues from my participant. They also told me ‘X and Z would be of great interest to you, they are really more into it, they study more, they abide by it more’. They assumed the kind of person I needed for my project should be super religious and follow all the injunctions, follow teachings, and rituals regularly and diligently. Dialogue during the interviews was marked by many pauses for reflection, requests for clarification, and minor deviations into matters we had not originally intended to explore.

I also did a follow-up reflection on how many interviews is enough or if saturation was reached. I stopped interviewing when adequate diversity was reached in terms of gender, age, class, education, location, religiosity, and similar patterns were emergent. That said, even though the patterns were similar, the stories rarely were. At a certain point in the field, I felt the material I had acquired through the interviews was very rich, dense, versatile and complex; and it was more than enough to answer the research questions. Taking stock of the practicalities involved post-fieldwork i.e., of transcribing, analysing, and writing up the results; I decided 42 interviews were enough.

### *Participant Observation*

During 2016-2019 I attended and participated in several events within the Pakistani community I was researching. During the event I kept a notebook handy to jot down thoughts, reflections, descriptions of the places I was in, quotes from the participants, anecdotes and stories they relayed. I also made voice notes in my phone to record observations. Throughout this process, I asked the participants if it was acceptable to take notes in my notebook, record audio and video clips, and photograph the event. Below I give a brief overview of the events I participated in.

I was invited to a Mushaira (Poetry Recitation) at a participant's home at the request of her parent. A famous first-generation Pakistani Canadian poet was expected to recite his work at this gathering. This gathering was seminal to the observation of first-generation nostalgia and longing for the homeland decades after migration. Moreover, the first-generation immigrants who attended this event with their families, including their second-generation children, came together for the event from England, Germany, Denmark and Canada, showing how important it is for Pakistanis in the diaspora to foster relationships and maintain connections. These first-generation immigrants were friends in Pakistan and maintained their friendships post-migration.

Towards the end of an interview, one participant invited me to join him, his cousins and his friends, some of whom I had already interviewed, for go-carting. His cousins were leaving to go to England, and he wanted to spend time with them. Most of these young men had grown up together in an immigrant neighbourhood and remained friends long after their life took them in different directions. It was insightful to observe that the group of friends were all people of colour and children of immigrants to Sweden. Also, the camaraderie, cultural references, humour and friendly jibes displayed the content of friendships and its value in the diaspora.

I received an invitation from the female head of mosque events organising committee to attend an annual day-long event at a Mosque in Göteborg. I was picked up from the train station by a family that was travelling by car to the event from Oslo. I arrived at the mosque and was received by the female who extended the invitation. She ushered me to the second floor of the mosque which was the designated female section of the mosque. She introduced me to a volunteer and advised her to take care of whatever I needed till the end of the event. This observation highlighted the importance of religious observance and the ritual of gathering. The speakers, both men and women, spoke on different topics related to religion such as prayers, piety, prophecy, injunctions in the Qur'an about immigration and how to navigate everyday life as a Muslim in Sweden. Moreover, the organisation of the event was impeccable, with a lot of initiative, involvement and volunteering effort from adolescents aged 15-18 and young adults 19-25.

A participant invited me to a New Year's Eve dinner at her home. All attendees were either first-generation Pakistanis or second-generation Pakistanis. This event aided observations about gender roles in Pakistani partnership, presence of family elders in gatherings with friends, fun as an inclusive activity with children and adults, and humour as pun in interactions.

These observations are useful to corroborate with participant narratives. This content will be used in to contemplate on identity navigation and belonging negotiation in relevant chapters on the themes of ethnicity and religion (chapters 5,7,8); friendships (Chapter 6) , partnership and gender roles (chapters 5 and 8).



## After Fieldwork: Synthesising and Consolidating Material

*After fieldwork* indicates those situations that arose after the interview and participant observation had come to a close. It refers to interactions that occurred between me and my participants either at their behest when they had a follow-up question, query or concern; or at mine either when/if the interview ended rather abruptly and there were still a few questions that needed answering, when I was following up on a promised referral, or when I ran a tiny survey on the preference among my participants for face to face vs Skype interview.

### Transcriptions

Because of the sensitivity of the topic and the small size of the Pakistani community, I transcribed all the interviews myself, though it was an arduous task that took almost nine months to complete. To outsource the transcribing process meant that if I let someone who can understand Urdu listen in, they get all the details of my participants and that would be a breach of trust. The question I asked myself was would they have given the same kind of interview had they known someone else from the community known or unknown to them would be transcribing what they said word for word and inadvertently be party to all the personal details shared with me? I answered myself in negative.

Moreover, I could exercise the level of detail needed for analysing narratives. Furthermore, I translated the interviews from Urdu to English as I transcribed, leaving some sentences as they were, because of the emphasis that the participant was trying to make by use of certain words and idioms.

Transcribing the interviews personally helped in my effort to generate descriptive and analytic accounts of participants negotiations in varying social and cultural context. And partial processing of the complex framing and unframing of differentiated and undifferentiated experiences could be highlighted at this stage.

While transcribing some themes started to emerge 'being desi', 'being immigrant', 'being Muslim', 'not being Muslim', 'being Swedish'. Also, as mentioned in the distinctions participants made between 'us/them', 'here/there', 'then/now' also became evident and important for the analysis of taking shifting positions within their narrative. The major analytical themes that surfaced while listening to the interviews and transcribing them consistently revolved around three aspects of identity exploration and the negotiation of belonging. The first is constancy and change across time, the second is sameness vs difference and the third is agency. As a next step, I re-read the transcriptions and started to summarise all the interviews under the major themes.

Then I exported these summaries into Nvivo, mostly as a data management system, to create further codes under each major theme, and to be able to quickly access the transcriptions and the corresponding narrative text relating to the identified themes under relevant codes, when writing the empirical chapters. The narrative text under a code could be a two-page conversation, a long monologue by the participant, or a shorter quote on a topic. I reiterate, due to the sheer number of transcribed pages which amount to over 1,100 pages, I used Nvivo only as a data management system, to facilitate ease of access and save time.

## **Narrative Analysis**

By focusing on the salience of being Pakistani and Muslim in the daily lives of the participants, semi-structured questions asked around the themes of family, school, work, leisure, religion and politics, made it possible to gain insights into the various identities an individual subject possesses, identifies with, and activates in different social situations. According to Riessman (Riessman, 2000, 2008), one can approach narratives in different ways: How is the story told? Who are the characters in the story? What is my (the participant's) place in it? Who do I (participant) resemble? Given the nature of the story being told, almost all of these strategies have been used to unpack the 'what is going on here' question for each identified analytical themes and sub-plots and storylines. I also focus on disruptive life events i.e., personal accounts of experiences that fundamentally alter expected biographies. I also sometimes focus on spoken discourse i.e., the actual talk from face-to-face encounters before, during, and after the interview situation; reflecting on these analytics together, in tandem, respecting participants' ways of organising meaning in their lives, and following them down their associative trails.

According to Riessman (1993) personal narratives are deeply social. Referring to Mills (1959) she elaborates what we call 'personal troubles' are works of history as much as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit and the societies they live in (Riessman, 1993). When the participants reflected on their childhood and their parents' lives: 'there were many jobs back then', 'you could get a job without learning Swedish', 'there were not many foreigners here', 'there were no options for halal meat', 'there was no formal mosque'; it tells us a lot about social and historical conditions of their living and the process of integrating into a new context. These stories are informative of changes in society from a then/now perspective.

As self-understanding beings, persons have narrative identities. The narrative model is geared to representing the complex temporal and conceptual continuity of a person's life, and has this capacity in virtue of synthetic strategies that allow the co-ordination of heterogeneous aspects of time and human experience (Atkins, 2004). In the

following examples, participants are aware that given the particular time in the life course, and absence of wisdom based on life experiences, access to a different set of resources would have resulted in a different outcome:

As I reflect on it now, we were all nationalists back then, putting the Swedish context head-to-head with our different nationalities, giving the latter more weight, religion had no place in our identity.

Back then I did it for X reason, now I do it for Y reason.

If I hadn't gone back to Pakistan, then I would be more Swedish like my sisters.

The participants explain continuities but base them on different explanations, they also realise they could have had different trajectory had circumstances been different, since circumstances are what they are and who they are today. They weave the then into now to give themselves a coherent identity, realising though, that they have in them the ability to have another identity if only under different preconditions. This is an example of how one can view agency, a greater weight is placed on external pressures making demands on an individual (structure-motivated agency). Given this developmental, intersubjective, practical, conception of selfhood, personal identity mediates and synthesises diverse and heterogeneous aspects of life through narrative. Particularly the ability of narrative to coordinate different orders of time.

The analytical themes revolved around three aspects of negotiating belonging. The first is constancy and change across time, the second is sameness vs difference and the third is agency. I also focus on life events and turning points i.e., personal accounts of experiences that fundamentally altered identity and sense of belonging.

Stories about upbringing in the Pakistani family, education in Swedish schools and experiences of labour market were all tempered with narratives about sameness and difference, mainly comparing second-generation experience with what is considered 'mainstream' native Swedish experience of Sweden. They highlighted differences between men and women, parent generation and second-generation, between different residential locations, between different immigrant communities and between the Pakistani community as regards class, education, gender and religion. It is vis a vis all these positions that the participants situate themselves, navigate their identities and negotiate their belonging.

Some stories about agency centre around the decision to leave Islam and being Muslim or choosing to marry a Swedish partner who have converted to Islam or choosing to be called by two different names in different social situations.

Interpretation and representation are in line with ethical principles elucidated earlier. Perspective of the participants is front stage and centre using their stories to the conceptual lens of belonging in order to answer the research questions. The analysis

focuses on two categories of understanding oneself. The first is understanding oneself in light of intergenerational relationships with co-ethnic others (parents, siblings, cousins, Pakistani and Muslim friends) and understanding oneself in light of interactions with native white Swedes.

These two analyses are not mutually exclusive. They nurture and shape each other. It is in this way the participants come to an understanding of their various identities and their identifications. Identity is seen as a strategic tool the participants use to negotiate belonging. Belonging is broken down into understandable terms that generate from the stories of participants such as trust, familiarity, duty, dignity etc. as they come to grips with their needs, emotions, practices, feelings, experiences, and meanings that help them live a fruitful life rich in depth of experience.

## Evaluating the merits and limitations of Narrative Research

All research has its limitations. The time it took to start the snowball sample till the actual interview took approximately three to four weeks, and in a few cases, up to a year. There were cancellations, off the record interviews, one drop-out, and re-bookings were a regular feature of recruitment. It is very difficult to follow a timeline when research is dependent on human beings as the subject and object of study. It was both daunting and challenging to spend time writing and sending emails and text messages back and forth, making phone calls. Sometimes, I had to consciously slowdown the recruiting process to space the contact to allow the participants a recuperating period to ignite interest again. Not only is gaining access to participants and setting up the interviews time consuming, interviews themselves are time consuming. Transcribing interviews took approximately nine months, thus requiring a lot of energy. Many times, in an interview a participant would start to cry, or get upset, sometimes angry at a question, or had to rush because of an emergency. The interview situation makes demands on the researcher to be adept at emotional management of self and the participant. Besides transcribing, sorting and organising the extremely messy storylines from the narratives takes a lot of processing time.

Another limitation or critique raised by feminists towards life history research is that it tries to understand historical events, cultural change and impact of social structures on individuals' lives adding much signification to the role of the researcher and the role of the social actor that acts as a narrator (Chase, 2003, 2008). Accountability of the researcher and the research process is one recourse to this limitation. Keeping a notebook of my own thoughts, reflections and biases during and after the interviews

was one way to deal with all the ideas and emotions an interview situation or observation generated. It served as a good strategy to debrief and to keep a check on myself during the research process. Another conscious effort I made is staying close to the interlocutors' interpretation of their own narrative and storylines and relating it to my theoretical concept of belonging. Lastly, analysed material was sent back to some participants. They were asked to comment on whether they thought the interpretation held within their own perception of what they offered in the interview and my goal of interpreting identity and belonging negotiations.

Merits of narrative research include the ability to reframe and rephrase questions during interviews to triangulate responses. The organic sibling-dyad interviews and parent-sibling-child triad served to cross-reference narratives and multiple perspective-taking entailed a different analysis than individual interviews, offering a rich and novel nuance to understanding identity and belonging negotiation. Moreover, the sense of completeness, well roundedness, and thickness of the rich life stories collected, that form the foundation of empirical material used for analysis in this thesis, made the use of this approach worthwhile.

## Contribution to Life Story Narratives

My initial interest in interviewing second-generation in the Pakistani diaspora was to see how they took the intergenerational socialisation of religion into their identities and made it into their own. When I found a 'deviant' case, where the identity articulation was straying from 'typical' e.g., when a participant said they grew up in a Muslim household and used to be Muslim but were not anymore, while their sibling was a practicing Muslim, I went to the parent generation to carry out interviews to see why parents' religious socialisation fail to materialise in the second-generation.

I also did a sibling interview to see how the same parental socialisation yielded success. My motivation to carry out sibling interviews was to generate gender differences. During the interviews I realised that between siblings, the line of birth determined the ability to negotiate with parents. A child's personal disposition allows for changes in parental strategies as does the order of birth. I do not mean order of birth in the psychological sense but in the sense of parents becoming more seasoned in their parental roles, understanding the intricacies and nuances of raising children, becoming less strict, restrictive, and conservative down the order of birth. Children's experience of being raised by their parents is affected by their parents' life course. Social, material and psychological changes in the life course translates into parental scripts that have been updated and reassessed such that there is more letting go in terms of autonomy

and freedom granted to children, as each child grows up. That said, some children in the family, bear the burden to live out the parents' upbringing in its full form and in some cases that one child is enough validation for the parent generation to allow the others along the line of birth more autonomy and freedom (Fieldnotes, 2017).

It is in this way, trusting my instincts and guided by my intuition to allow an organic flow in sampling between and through participants in the field, that I was able to carry out sibling-dyad interviews as well as parent-child-sibling triad interviews to elucidate the value of doing research along generations within the diaspora. Moreover, when I found an opportunity to have an interview with a third-generation participant, I did that too, to map the trajectory of a Pakistani and Muslim identity from the parent generation to the second-generation, to the third-generation.

To the best of my knowledge, the kind of material I have generated, and am consolidating into chapters for this thesis, is not an endeavour previously undertaken. The life stories represented in this thesis are novel because it triangulates different versions of the same reality of parents and their children because of how life is remembered and is a function of memory. These narratives forge connections between different national contexts, historical moments and personal events in a way that shows the messiness and complexity of everyday life.

## Ethical Considerations

As mentioned earlier, topics concerning race and ethnicity, religious or philosophical convictions, and personal date in general requires vetting from the Regional Ethical Review Board. The consent form contained information for the participants for their protection and so that they could know their rights and recourse in relation to acquiescing for my research. Some participants were hesitant and uncomfortable in signing the consent form. Once introduced through a trusted source, participants tended to rely on my 'word' most of the time. Signing documents instead of forging trust, in some instances garners suspicion among the participants and becomes an impediment to getting consent for an interview. I had to explain and convince some participants that the consent form document offered them some power and protection in case they wished to withdraw their consent or if they had to file a complaint or disgruntlement with my conduct.

I anonymised real names of my participants to aliases not only for intext-citations but also in transcripts and audio file names. The participants were informed in advance that their interviews would be recorded. Most of the time I kept the interview device in front of them and told them they were free to pick it up and stop the recording when

they wanted something to be off the record, or when they decided they did not feel comfortable with recording anymore of the conversation.

I tried to be very careful and responsible about participants confidentiality. Pakistani community is relatively small and interconnected. Even if someone does not know someone, they know of someone. Therefore, I was very careful when booking interviews that there was at least an hour between each interview, especially when I was planning on using the same setting for several interviews, so the participants don't cross paths. I avoided taking names of other participants or sharing their stories with each other, unless I had prior permission. I was strict with this confidentiality especially when carrying out interviews with participants who were related to each other and had recommended names for their cousins, friends, parents, children, or siblings.

When transcribing I also anonymised cities and residential areas the participants currently live in or used to live. I asked participants if I could use their localities and cities. Those that agreed to it, are the ones whose biography is detailed for analysis. I discussed in detail with my participants how the interview material would be used. As illustrations, I provided them with internet links to open-access dissertations available on the Lund University website. This allowed them to gain insight into the expected format of the final thesis.

I also faced some ethical dilemmas after the interview situation. A few days after an interview took place, I received a friend request on Facebook from a participant. I did not want to be rude in light of our recent animated conversation that lasted several hours and resulted in access to two more participants. Moreover, I truly felt as someone new to Sweden that it could be a friendship I could gain from. I very politely and heavily heartedly declined, saying that I would appreciate if this request could wait until the research project was finished, to avoid conflict of interest. In a similar vein, one evening I received the following message from a participant inviting me to an event:

How is it with your PhD studies? I wanted to invite you to Jalsa Seeratun Nabi SAW (a fete celebrating the Prophet of Islam peace be upon him) on 26th November at 2pm in masjid. I hope you will attend.

(Female 32, second-generation)

While the above could have been an interesting event for my research to attend, I had some interviews lined up that were from a similar sample pool. My presence at the mosque could affect the potential agreement because my status as a newly arrived Pakistani made the participants feel comfortable that their confidentiality would remain intact. I did not want to disturb the balance. I replied, 'I will try my best' and did not attend the event.

There are two cases in particular I would like to highlight whereby two participants called upon their protection and ethical standards as per the consent form. In the first case, a potential participant had been texting me since May 2017 showing her willingness to take part in my research. She kept checking in with me from time to time. Four months later we agreed upon a date, and I travelled for several hours from Lund to interview her. I had a good interview session with her. She left on the note that if she was out of the country in case, I needed her for a follow-up interview, she would be willing to give me an interview via Skype. Six hours after the interview took place, she sent me a message saying she wanted to withdraw her participation. I asked her if she was comfortable sharing why and she replied, 'I didn't realise how personal the interview would get.' This exemplifies the agency of the participant, expressing a change of mind, and staying firm to her decision. Moreover, it highlights the importance of a consent document that allows a participant this right and calls the researcher to her ethical duty. I copy the excerpt below:

I feel have said too much. and post-interview I no longer feel the trust in you/your capacity to utilise the conversation we had into a research study, not knowing what you will choose to highlight, and if someone finds out that it is me, it will have negative repercussions for me and therefore I shall no longer participate.

(Female 23, second-generation, used with permission)

While I was deeply disappointed and felt helpless, I had to comply. And I also appreciated the candour and courage of this participant to stand up for herself. This interview had a storyline I had not heard in any of my interviews. I had to contend with my ethical obligation and move forward.

In the second case a participant challenged my ethical standards while carrying out the interview with her in line with the confidentiality clause in the informed consent. She contacted me a few days after the interview had taken place and said the following in her message:

Hi Uzma, how are you? I just had a few questions that crossed my mind, and I hope that you don't mind me asking them. One thing that I thought of was if you consider us Ahmadis as Muslims? Because many people think that we should have same rights as everyone else, but at the same time do not consider us Muslims. Your study is based on Muslims in Sweden, so this might affect it. Second question, you maybe shouldn't tell me what you asked my brother since it's confidential? Feels like I'm "attacking" you with these questions, but I come with love. Have a great day.

(Female 25, second-generation, sibling-dyad, used with permission)



I was in a quandary after this exchange. We set a time for her to call me and I tried to explain why I took the liberty of mentioning something that was a shared aspect of the family (the number of people in the household) that was not deeply personal or private to the sibling. That said I had learned from my mistake and apologised for my indiscretion. I made an even stricter mental note in my mind. In the future I will use each interview situation as a discrete event. Researchers need to develop a reputation for consistency, integrity and show commitment to the community they are researching, after explaining in detail that one, a self-defined Muslim regardless of denomination and discourse for my study is a Muslim and two stressing that the privacy of my participants is of utmost importance to me and to the research, we parted on an amicable note.

Power can come into play when data collection is complete and results have to be written. Subjectivities are then presented and represented. That is when a researcher can exercise power. To counter this, I shared my analysis with some participants especially the ones that were cautious and felt vulnerable sharing some stories.

## Conclusion

This research conducted in Sweden on second-generation Pakistani-Muslims offers unique material that contributes to the debate about immigrant Muslims in Europe in general and the context of Sweden in particular. Pakistanis are a small community that have not gained academic attention in Swedish academia with regards to ethnic and religious identity negotiations for belonging.

I have done 42 life story interviews. The make-up of the sample I was able to recruit, and interview is as follows: Male (21); Female (21); second-generation expert (1); Swedish convert turned Muslim expert (1); Parent (2); third-generation (2). I recruited a total of (37) second-generation interviews and Sibling-dyads interviews (10 pairs), parent-child-sibling triad (1) and parent-child dyad (1).

Life story narratives are analysed using a constructionist approach. This approach puts individuals, their lives, their experiences, and the broader socio-cultural contexts in which they are situated, to the forefront of both theoretical and substantive concerns and foci for investigation to understand belonging, as a second-generation Pakistani and Muslim in Sweden.

I also used field notes and audio recordings from participant observations that is incorporated in analyses of identity and belonging negotiations in relevant chapters.

The interviews that were conducted in Urdu were transcribed into English from Urdu. Those that were conducted in English were transcribed directly. When

transcribing I have also anonymised cities and residential areas the participants currently live in or used to live in. I have asked participants if I could use their localities and cities. Those that agreed to it, are the ones whose biography is detailed for analysis.

The content of the interviews was subjected to narrative analysis by: considering how the autobiographical and present self is constructed/presented through time (then/now); looking at discrete stories around critical incidents/life events and turning points; and looking at extended stories by focusing on detailed transcripts of interview excerpts; paying attention to the structural features of discourse; coproduction of narratives through the dialogic exchange between interviewer and participant; and a comparative approach to interpreting similarities and differences among participants' life stories (Riessman, 2000).

The analytical themes that surfaced while listening to the interviews and transcribing them consistently revolved around three aspects of identity exploration and the negotiation of belonging. The first is constancy and change across time, the second is sameness vs difference and the third is agency. In the chapters to come, 'being Desi', 'being Immigrant', 'being Muslim', 'not being Muslim', 'being Swedish' are all positions the participants take while making identity distinctions 'us/them', spatial distinctions 'here/there', and temporal distinctions 'then/now' that add richness and nuance to their narrative about identity and belonging as Pakistanis and Muslims in Sweden. These intersectional positions are central to the analysis in the forthcoming analytical chapters.



## Chapter 5

# Growing up ‘Desi’

I was on a personal visit to Stockholm when Ilma called me, by chance, to ask if I were available for a *Mushaira* (poetry recitation) event that was being hosted at her home. Ilma said that she was keeping her promise to introduce me to her father as well as representing her father, who upon hearing of my interest and proficiency in Urdu, wished for me to join in on the evening.

Ashfaq Hussain, a prominent Urdu poet and scholar from Canada, who is known internationally for his visionary poetry and literary work, was visiting Stockholm and was a friend of Ilma’s father. He was expected to recite some of his old and new works.

Ilma met me at Stockholm central station, and she escorted me and my daughter to her home. The moment we reached, she introduced me to her parents, her sister-in-law, her brother, her brother’s father-in-law, and her own father, and excused herself. When she returned, she had changed into a beautiful shalwar kameez and upon finding me at ease, continued to help her brother and sister-in law in the kitchen.

The women were all dressed in shalwar kameez, some with a dupatta draped loosely on their heads. Two women next to me were discussing the upcoming Eid congregation at the mosque and the after-prayer Eid-festivities.

The men were divided in their attire from wearing formal jackets on top of shalwar kameez to semi-formal shirts with either jeans or dress pants. One of them continued wearing his *namaz* (prayer) cap after returning from offering his prayers in a separate room.

It was a small gathering of 25 people. The evening stretched on late into the night. Most of the conversation flowed in light and easy hues, set against the buzz of children running around and the hum of adult chatter in Urdu, Punjabi and Swedish.

Dinner was delicious and hearty, making it easy to settle into the evening’s rhythm. Time seems to fly at such gatherings, following the familiar Pakistani tradition of guests arriving fashionably late and staying even later. Hospitality dictates that guests stay for as long as they like. By 23:00, my daughter was dozing off in my lap, and still, there was no sign of the recitation. I had to excuse myself, but the host insisted I stay for just one poem. He asked the poet to recite his favourite piece for me.

Ashfaq Hussain chose the poem ‘Zooming’, which has been highly praised in the past. I have translated it into English below.

When I look from the sky, I see the vastness of the earth  
In that vast earth there is a small city with a spindling web of streets  
In the spindling web of streets there is an abandoned lane  
In the abandoned lane there is a large lone shady cypress tree  
Under the shadow of lone shady cypress tree is a small house  
In the small house there is a patio set in mud  
In that mud is a budding rose  
Inside the body of the budding rose lies a fragrant core  
In that fragrant core lies a heart that is an ocean  
I have become lost in the expanse of that ocean  
I have, alas, become too large for this Earth

New theoretical translations and ways of conceptualising diaspora speak the language of ‘becoming’ as an intersubjective way of existing in the diaspora space. In this poem Ashfaq Hussain takes the idea of ‘becoming’, with its positive connotations of figuring oneself out as one goes and grows along life’s journey; to refer to the diaspora space as one that is equally conducive to its members ‘becoming’ quite lost. The journey begins from the vantage point of zooming out and appreciating the ‘vastness of the earth’ that is able to accommodate the enormity of the human race and zooms into ‘becom[ing] lost’ and ‘becom[ing] too large’ for the vastness of earth.

Embarking on a migration journey with a suitcase laden with hopes and dreams is a poignant endeavour, fuelled by aspirations of achieving success and fulfilment. However, the paradoxical outcome of realising those dreams can be disorienting, leading to a profound sense of being lost amidst the very achievements that were once the focus of one’s aspirations. This internal turmoil sets the stage for a chaotic denouement, as the individual grapples with an existential crisis. This tumultuous journey may ultimately result in a poignant realisation – that no place truly encapsulates the essence of who one has become.

The yearning for a home, a sanctuary that resonates with the transformed self, becomes elusive, as no physical space seems adequate for the complex amalgamation of experiences, aspirations, and evolving identity. The narrative thus unfolds as a contemplation of the intricate relationship between personal growth, the pursuit of dreams, and the elusive quest for a place to call home.

In its choice of descriptive words, referring to certain streets, trees, houses, the courtyard and patio, the poem depicts an imagery that reminds one of rural village homes. It highlights belonging from the point of view of having gotten lost, longing for the motherland and things as they were. It is also about zooming into one’s roots

from the past from where one stood rooted in the present (rooting routes, and routing roots). In a diaspora, nostalgia is a child longing for the mother it left behind.

It was a beautiful poem, elicited with poise, grace, and without pretension. As I was leaving, the parent promised to present me with two books of his poems in Urdu, written with his friend living in Germany via Skype sessions. They composed the poem like a relay race, with one person writing a line and then passing it on to the next, who would craft the following line before handing it back. This back-and-forth continued until the piece was complete. Despite being physically separated, participants could engage in a shared literary tradition, blending modern communication tools with age-old practices of poetic composition. Through this digital relay, they maintained and adapted their cultural heritage, ensuring that the essence of Urdu literature thrives even in a diasporic space.

In this chapter, the second-generation participants narrate their significant memories of relationships and traditions in the family, describing them as formative impressions on their identity and sense of belonging. We make up selves from a toolkit of options made available by our culture and society. It is in dialogue with other people's understandings of who one is, especially significant others, that one develops a conception of one's own identity. Sweden is a diaspora space within which the Pakistani family<sup>25</sup> transmits and cultivates ethno-cultural and religious traditions to their children in explicit and tacit ways, towards emotional, material and spiritual ends. I divide these upbringing practices into three major strands of narratives that relate to desi nurture (Pakistaniness), Muslim nurture (Muslimness), and Swedish nurture (Swedishness) in the family juxtaposing generational relatedness and separateness for belonging among the second- generation with inherited repertoires. When parents, cut off from their past, now have the opportunity to cultivate their own and their children's future, how is parenting envisioned? Presented with the opportunity to start from scratch, what do parents hold on to and what do they let go of and why?

These are a few questions that guide this chapter to understand the dynamics of 'home' in the diaspora, particularly what 'growing up desi' in a Pakistani family entails. Through a descriptive analysis, the chapter examines how ethnic, religious, and national belonging are not just separate aspects of identity but are deeply intertwined.

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<sup>25</sup> In this chapter all references to the Pakistani diaspora and the Pakistani family are particular to the accounts of the second-generation participants I interviewed. I make no attempt to generalise beyond the scope my interviews.

## ‘Pakistaniness’: Ethnic Belonging

In this section, I highlight specific Pakistani practices that are stressed in the family, which they continue to relate to in ways that are socially significant to their everyday life in Sweden, as well as those that they weigh in as a problematic ‘difference’.

### *‘Desi Atmosphere’ of Home*

Participants describe ‘home’ as a physical space that embodies and reflects a deeply rooted Pakistani ethnic identity. Arghan describes this experience in the following excerpt:

A: It’s always been Pakistani culture at home. I wouldn’t say that it’s in a very strong way but, in the house, the environment has been Pakistani.

U: In what way?

A: I mean you’ll see we are watching the Pakistani channels and generally the *desi* atmosphere...

U: Pakistani channels?

A: Yea, like PTV and those that would come at that time I remember when we were young there were only two channels PTV (Pakistan Television) and ZeeTV (Indian television). Then ARY (new Pakistani channel) came. And the channels kept increasing.

U: And the atmosphere, you said?

A: So, the atmosphere at home, yes, the people my parents were meeting. It’s always Pakistanis. Not a lot of Indians but a lot of Pakistanis [...] Mom was in shalwar kameez always at home. She is, even now. She wears a dupatta but no hijab or anything. When she goes out, she can be normal.

U: Normal?

A: Outside she will have a, umm, she is one of those modern women. She is very into religion, and she reads namaz she does all that. But when she is outdoors, she knows that this culture is different so she will adjust to the culture. But I have to say that, umm, seeing the culture in Pakistan how the family is there, umm it was not 100% in that way here. We were loosened up. We were not strict. My parents were very loosened up and they let us do whatever we wanted to do as long as we were doing it right. If we were doing something wrong obviously, they will be there saying that this is not what we are supposed to do.

U: Like what were you not supposed to do?

A: You know, come home late night, meeting friends till really late, uhhh not doing homework. Things like that.

(Arghan 31, Male, second-generation)

Arghan stresses experiencing a very typical ‘Pakistani culture at home’, highlighting the intentional preservation of cultural identity within the family and an interplay between the culture of his parents’ homeland and his country of birth. Throughout this conversation, Arghan makes distinctions between ‘home’ and ‘outside home’.

‘Des’ or ‘desh’ refers to country or homeland. A ‘desi’ is a countryperson who has connections to the Indian subcontinent; India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, but lives outside of that spatial context (Shankar, 2008; Ternikar, 2019). A desi is thus, someone who is a member of South Asian diaspora. Desi culture refers to food, fashion, beauty, movies and music from the subcontinent. Being desi<sup>26</sup>, in the context of being born, raised and living outside of parent’s homeland, means that one has grown and evolved into someone with significant cultural competence.

According to Arghan, the ‘desi atmosphere’ at home is shaped by Pakistani TV, which bridges the gap between diasporas and their homeland. Families consume Urdu-language content, stay updated on socio-economic and political changes in Pakistan, and enjoy Pakistani music, films, and dramas. Alonso and Oiarzabal (2010) argue that internet and mobile technologies help diasporas maintain identity and connection, countering the effects of spatial and temporal distance. This exposure to language, politics, and entertainment serves as a tacit form of upbringing for the second-generation, subtly integrating them into their parents’ heritage.

The emphasis on the family’s social circle being predominantly Pakistani shows who parents engage with for leisure and recreational activities. These connections with other Pakistani families and their children create a sense of familiarity, attachment, and community, influencing their children’s feeling of belonging to the diaspora and by extension maintaining a connection with the homeland through social interactions in Sweden.

Arghan’s mention of his mother wearing shalwar kameez at home but adjusting her appearance to ‘normal’ when going out reflects a common negotiated experience in diasporic communities (see Kalra, 2009). However, more importantly, he attributes this to her being ‘modern’, suggesting that her discerning ability to strategically adjust

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<sup>26</sup> The colloquial terms ABCD or BBCD refers to American-Born Confused Desi or British-Born Confused Desi. It is an informal term used to refer to members of the South Asian diaspora who were born or raised abroad. It creates a distinction between first-generation immigrant parents and second or later generations.



the visibility of ethnic markers in public and private domains helps her manage her public and private personas.

As an extension to this claim, Arghan simultaneously mentions his ‘mom’ being ‘very into religion’ and observing religious practices such as reading *namaz* at home, suggesting his mother’s intersectional commitments – as a modern woman, contextually adapting ethnic markers while upholding her religious identity. Her practice marks the *home space* as an evolving cultural and religious sanctuary contributing to the overall ‘desi atmosphere’ *at home*. This also showcases the intersections of gender and generation with ethnicity and religion in a migration context.

Parental control, described as ‘strong’, strict’, or ‘loosened up’, reflects a permissive approach that balances freedom with corrective intervention. Parents allow children to explore their interests but step in to guide behaviour within set boundaries, blending leniency with trust and responsibility to fulfil family rules and expectations.

### *Cultural Continuity of Shalwar Kameez*

Taha, an intensely reflective thirty-year-old law student, living and studying in England at the time of this interview, thinks first of his mother when prompted to think about home, and then articulates her image in a shalwar kameez, the ethnic Pakistani dress. In doing so, he sheds light on the canvas of a desi home as a place where his mother is a central character. She constructs home and she is embodied within it. bell hooks (hooks, 2009) talks of home both as a place that has to be constructed by the individual for themselves and also as a place of resistance and healing. Taha is not the only one who, when asked about describing home life, circles to the parental figures in the family, especially female, in ethnic clothing. This attire not only reflects the ethnic memory of the parental generation, but it is also preserved through its transmission to the second-generation, who become carriers of this cultural continuity through their own experiences. The fragments below exemplify this:

My mother would wear shalwar kameez at home so did my Daadi (grandmother). My Daadi insisted we wear shalwar kameez, so I got into the habit of wearing shalwar kameez at home. Even now, as soon as I reach home, I change my clothes immediately and get into shalwar kameez. The comfort in those clothes is something else. My grandmother says you should wear shalwar kameez outside as well, but we don’t.

(Haniya 20, Female, 2.5 generation)

In Ramadan I wear the shalwar kameez at home, and when I go to the mosque, I change into shalwar kameez these are the only times ...

(Zarar 22, Male, second-generation)

Practices are changing now. Wearing Western clothes is commonplace in Pakistan, some girls who came here through transnational marriages don't wear shalwar kameez (national dress) to the mosque. It was shocking for us. Because we were told shalwar kameez is appropriate attire at the mosque when we were growing up. Even now we uphold it. We tell our parents that Pakistan has changed. We tell them 'you think we are doing something wrong by doing this or that, but you know nothing about what's really happening in Pakistan. You still think Pakistan is the same as when you left it'.

(Maleeha 32 and Marium 30, Sibling-dyad<sup>27</sup>, Female, second-generation)

What we wear on our body is a marker of identity. It is a form of expression. A performance of gender, class and ethnicity. It is a symbolic representation of one's heritage and homeland re-oriented to fit into the present, a reminder of who one is in a new context. Haniya grew up in a multi-generation household with her mother and father, her paternal grandmother and grandfather, and her paternal aunt. While her mother was working during the weekdays as a doctor, it was her retired grandmother that was responsible for her care, along with her aunt.

Some of the habits that she developed had to do with her grandmother's concerted efforts. One of which is that Haniya was taught to come home and change into shalwar kameez. Switching clothes means switching ethnic codes, a cognitive shift from the public domain to the privacy of the home.

Haniya remembers her grandmother, her mother and her aunt wearing shalwar kameez at home. For her to follow in their footsteps was to feel close to the women in the family, to be able to discern what attire belonged to which context, and to show agency by making her own choice, different to the wishes of her grandmother, in choosing to not wear the shalwar kameez outside the house. In the interview, Haniya mentioned that she is aware that her grandmother's mental and bodily dispositions evolved in Pakistan, whereas she was born and raised in Sweden and thus she is better able to judge what feels culturally out of place and would make her stick out. Thus, she uses the closeness and comfort offered by the shalwar kameez as something to be worn only in one's private life, such as the home, family dinners, Pakistani gatherings and the mosque. Haniya also refers to how personally gratifying and taken for granted this practice of changing into the shalwar kameez has become, such that she now looks forward to coming home and getting into its comfort.

Zarar mentions his father 'never goes out' wearing the shalwar kameez and only wears it in the evenings inside the home. However, he mentions other occasions when the shalwar kameez is more frequently donned both by himself and his father such as the

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<sup>27</sup> Marium and Maleeha, sisters, were interviewed jointly and therefore their stories and perspectives are presented together throughout this thesis.

month of Ramadhan when visits to the mosque are more frequent, for Friday prayers, and for occasions like Eid.

Marium and Maleeha reflect on changing practices within the Pakistani diaspora as new members join from Pakistan, where clothes and everyday fashion have evolved from the 70s when their parents migrated. What was once 'unthinkable' is changing the contours of acceptability of what can be worn in the mosque on account of the influx of new female members who bring updates from the so-called original homeland. According to Marium and Maleeha, 'shock[ingly]' normalising wearing Western clothes in the mosque, thus, opening up new ways of performing being desi in the diaspora.

Code-switching is a part of the family practice, and work of women and the elderly, and is a concerted cultivation of ethno-racial socialisation in Sweden. Growing up in the diaspora means being adept at understanding that there are two domains of interactions in which a switch is required. Inside the home, different rules and activities manifest in attire, negotiating a fashion sense that is seen as appropriate. Outside the home is another domain that has to be proprietarily kept up, alternating clothing codes while upholding family norms of decency and piety.

Moreover, during my interviews, I noticed that the participants were being creative in their choice of clothing by embodying desi fusions that are considered hip, such as wearing tie-dye kurtas with jeans, a dupatta with a dress, using embroidered shawls as winter scarves, wearing nose-rings, jhumkas,<sup>28</sup> bangles and anklets with jeans. This juxtaposition produces a situated reading of 'diaspora' as a localised cultural form, the product of globalising transnational flows.

Dressing up in shalwar kameez is as normal as it is novel in Sweden for the second-generation. Keeping up to date in Pakistani fashion is important for both men and women, though women are more invested in keeping up with trends in Pakistan. Eid, weddings, family dinners, and community gatherings are all occasions where performing the Pakistani ethnic identity is important. Wearing the latest trendy Pakistani clothes and being able to afford expensive designer labels is also a way to show taste, distinction and class. Dress has a practical and symbolic use - how it is worn, when it is worn and by whom - is constantly being negotiated in the diaspora.

### *Preserving Urdu Language*

Family is also an important domain for the preservation and maintenance of multiple heritage/mother tongue languages, especially in the diaspora. The participants' linguistic repertoire comprises of Urdu, Punjabi, Swedish and English languages.

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<sup>28</sup> A jhumka is a traditional type of earring commonly worn in South Asia, particularly in India and Pakistan. It typically features a bell-shaped design, often with intricate embellishments and hanging elements.

Generally, a common thread among all participants was that the parents spoke Punjabi to each other, siblings spoke with each other in Swedish, and the parents spoke Urdu with all the children. The majority are from Punjab, with a few exceptions from Sindh (mostly the metropolitan city of Karachi). A participant wistfully recalls his father telling him that Urdu was his ‘gift’ to him – from father to son, from the first to the second-generation. The following excerpts reveal how this inheritance is treasured and maintained:

We speak the same Urdu that they spoke in the 70’s because that is what we learned. Today we speak better Urdu than those children who are growing up in Pakistan.

(Maleeha 32 and Marium 30, sibling-dyad, Females, second-generation)

We spoke only and completely Urdu, no Swedish at home. We were not allowed to speak Swedish at home at all. My mama was like you will be able to learn Swedish from school and by virtue of being in Sweden, but if you don’t speak Urdu or learn it then it will be lost. And then we had an option in school to have a subject in mother tongue, so we learned Urdu. There were different teachers for it.

(Khadeejah, 23, Female, second-generation)

While I speak perfect Swedish, I know Urdu and I give importance to *my own culture* in the same way. It is for this reason that I speak in Urdu with my children so that when we go to Pakistan, they shouldn’t feel like they cannot speak Urdu. They can be part of conversations and feel connected. I’d feel so embarrassed (*sharmindagi*) that my children don’t know Urdu. One thing that impacts this language transmission positively is that my husband is from Pakistan, and we never speak Swedish with each other; that is why there is a continuity in our Urdu. But then when I meet my brother for example, we say *salaam* in Urdu and then we revert to Swedish as our language of communication, it is our habit. My second brother has a Pakistani wife, so we speak Urdu with her, the first brother has an Arab wife and with her we speak Swedish, so this is how communication goes in the family.

(Seema 34, Female, second-generation [my emphasis])

The 1960s and 1970s are considered the golden era of Pakistani cinema. The Progressive Writers’ Movement continued to influence Urdu literature, with many literary Urdu journals, books and poetry being published. Media channels like PTV used the Urdu language as the main medium for television drama serials, televising live events like *Mushairas* and *Ghazal*<sup>29</sup> evenings. This is the level of Urdu Marium and

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<sup>29</sup> Ghazal is classical poetry known for its lyrical beauty and emotional depth. Ghazals are often sung or recited in musical performances.

Maleeha were taught to speak at home. Within the realm of linguistic proficiency, their self-perception is that their eloquence and fluency, observed during their visits to Pakistan, stands at an advanced level. This is in stark contrast to their contemporaries, cousins of the same age, whose linguistic aptitude appears more rudimentary. As they mentioned later in the interview, families in Pakistan are more invested in sending their children to English medium schools. Few prefer to study Urdu language and even fewer take Urdu as a subject beyond compulsory education.

The anxiety and fear around losing one's language in the diaspora space becomes evident in Khadeejah's narrative. These emotions in the context of multilingual parenting show how and why the language of the past is brought to the present and future. We perform different selves in different languages. Losing language could be losing a self. For a self to be known is to have it mirrored, and language serves as that medium through which one becomes recognisable to oneself. In this case, the mirror is the second-generation to whom the Urdu language is being transmitted. The linguistic repertoire shows affective dimensions in the language practices of families. For Ahmed (2004: 10), 'it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects, that surfaces and boundaries are made'. Thus, the way families use language not only reflects their emotional responses but also delineates cultural and personal boundaries, shaping their sense of identity and belonging.

Having married a spouse from Pakistan plays a crucial role for Seema in positively influencing the transmission of Urdu within the family, since the natural mode of communication between the couple is Urdu, thus contributing to a cultural environment at home where the continuity of the language is reproduced in the upbringing of their third-generation children. Seema bears personal responsibility and personal investment in maintaining her linguistic heritage, which would otherwise cause her 'embarrassment' for breaking a lineage, an inheritance, causing disconnection between the third-generation, their father's origins, and the paternal grandparents. Urdu has to be kept alive in the family through concerted efforts, because losing the mother tongue is like losing the motherland. Language is an ancestor in the diaspora space. That said, while the linguistic landscape within the family continues to be shaped by the diverse cultural backgrounds of spouses of the second-generation, switching occurs between Urdu and Swedish languages.

Ilma spoke very enthusiastically about introducing me to her father, who writes poetry in Urdu. While she gave the interview in English herself, she sheepishly qualified that she was extending concerted efforts to learn Urdu. The following conversation ensued with her:

U: You said your father writes?

I: Yes! my dad was a journalist in Pakistan and wrote for the Urdu papers. In Sweden, he became a poet and started writing a lot of Urdu poetry [...] whenever he would write something new, we would sit around the dinner table, and he would recite his poems for us.

U: what are the poems about?

I: it is a lot about women's rights and politics and..... yea social life and issues regarding inequalities in general. He is prolific. He can like sit here and write a poem about the table or the atmosphere in this café. He is really deep in thinking about such kind of things so yea he liked to have all of us around on Saturday's so he could share and read his new material aloud. And then he had to explain it to us. Because I don't understand it. He uses such different and difficult Urdu words uhhhhhh but it's nice! He had three books that were published!

U: Wow, I should meet him. Maybe you could introduce us?

S: You should, and I will!

(Ilma 27, Female, second-generation)

Ilma's eyes brighten and she has a warm smile as she talks about her father endearingly and his passion for Urdu language. Connection to a language is also a connection to the people one loves. Writing in Urdu in the diaspora is a way of enacting the portable plurality of home as a caravan. The tongue also needs to feel at home. The ears, when they hear the sound of Urdu, feel at home. Sometimes home is a language. And belonging is the intimacy of a ritual that is steeped in the common act of gathering, listening and participating in the aesthetic medium of Urdu poetry fostered around the dinner table.

The above passage illustrates how Ilma's father's poetic endeavours emphasise the importance of aesthetic aspects in preserving and appreciating the homeland language. In publishing his books, he leaves a tangible cultural legacy for his diaspora children. He also makes an intentional effort to instil values such as women's rights, participating in politics, and standing up for social issues to create awareness in the younger generation. When we parted, Ilma said she would keep in touch and would introduce me to her father as soon as possible, which is what led to the observations captured in the introduction of this chapter.

### *Second-generation Desi Names*

Naming a child is a family practice. The combination of a new-born's first and last names serves as a marker of identity both for the child, for the family and for those with whom he or she interacts. Names can also label someone as belonging to a certain ethnic

group within a society. Arham, who has a Pakistani father and a Finnish mother, spoke about the choice of her name as a practice that was based on a value of embracing both the diversity of family life at home and the host context in which the family was residing. Arham stressed that her family would go to Pakistan so she could learn Urdu. She would also visit her grandparents in Finland with whom she would speak Finnish to 'keep up with both sides of the family'. When I asked her about her name she said:

The choice to name me was deliberate. They (parents) chose a name on the basis that it would work anywhere in the world. It was really a mindset they gave me. They gave me so many options to choose between and then it was always like you have to choose who you will be, but we will show you all the options.

(Arham 27, Female second-generation)

From the above example we can see that Arham's parents, who both belong to different ethnic groups as well as religious traditions make a 'deliberate' choice to use names unique to their community and blend in by choosing names typical in the host society. Arham's real name has a religious connotation to an Abrahamic tradition that both her parents subscribe to; her mother in the Christian-Finnish tradition and her father in the Islamic-Pakistani tradition. They also chose a name that blends in the societal context of Sweden. This arbitration points to ethnic and religious maintenance, which is a product of inter-racial and inter-religious marriage, coupled with living in an actual third space of Sweden. Parents raise their mixed children to recognise both or all of their heritages for a healthy identity. Arham emphasises the value of diversity; being able to encompass manifold heritages and being able to exist anywhere in the world with a name that has social currency in Sweden and global currency outside of Sweden.

Bestowing a name signifying collective affiliation, however, may say something about favouring a particular 'side' of their child's family, racial, ethnic or religious heritage, and create dilemmas in their interactions with others and relationship with themselves. Which is what Amin in the fragment below, highlights as his foremost experience of not feeling Swedish, and the relation of that feeling to his Pakistani name that made him stick out to signal an out of place-ness that he had to negotiate by changing his name:

A: I remember we were speaking Urdu at home and Swedish in kindergarten that's the earliest memory of not feeling entirely Swedish. Also having a different name [...] Mostly, I felt like everyone else, except when someone called my name.

U: Why was that?

A: I think I was just annoyed with the fact that people often got my name wrong and didn't know how to pronounce it. They read it and they would elongate certain vowels,

and I had to keep correcting everyone. It's just this unusual name Pakistani name. I have never heard anyone else have that name before uhh and I just kind of felt not very comfortable with the name. That is why I just asked my parents to ... I think I was like 8 or 9 years old, so I just asked them if I could change it to a more normal name. They thought it was fine, they wanted me to be comfortable with my name, so they allowed me to do it. Since I was allowed to choose my own name, so I chose this name.

(Amin 28, Male, second-generation)

This fragment shows the variegated emotions that come to surface when one has an ethnically unusual name. It makes one feel 'not entirely Swedish' speaking directly to difference and how it affects one's belonging. It becomes 'annoying' and 'not very comfortable' to have an unusual Pakistani name that he has never heard of -and neither have his peers or teachers. Not having something in common affects Amin's belonging. And he decides to take charge, approach his parents with his problem, and with their permission, changes his name to something more 'normal'. Amin mentions being born and raised in a university town, in a mostly white and middle-class neighbourhood, and attending a kindergarten where he was the only brown kid, whose family spoke Urdu at home and carried out Muslim traditions. Interestingly, since the participants predominantly had working-class parents, the idea of changing their names was not something that came up as frequently, since multi-ethnic working-class neighbourhoods were conducive to that difference, which did not translate to these negotiations.

Deeper into the conversation, Amin mentioned that he still uses his Pakistani name selectively among co-ethnic others. Mostly with his father, his father's friends, and when he visits the mosque with his father. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, when I was enlisting Amin as a participant, we had a telephone banter when he mistook me for a Pakistani family friend's wife since I was speaking Urdu. Moreover, when we began our interview, Amin started his introduction with his two names, one Swedish and one Pakistani/Muslim, and left it to me to choose which one I wished to refer to throughout our interview. He also said that his Swedish name, the more 'normal' name, was reserved for his wife, his Swedish in-laws, friends and his workmates. Since Amin has a toddler, I asked what his name was, and he said the following:

His name is Felix. It's not like a Muslim name or Pakistani name. We chose his first name as global name, Pakistani middle name (Ahmad) that is my dad's family name and Swedish last name (Löbertgård) from my wife's side.

Amin also shared an interesting story about his wife's grandfather creating his own last name, that Amin's wife has, and that he too has adopted as his last name, that has now been passed on to their child. Amin said in our conversation that he wanted to continue fostering all the bonds that have been important to him and his wife and thus, they



have decided as a couple to name their children in a strategic manner that is more global, pays heed to their heritage and also nurtures bonds between both sides of the Pakistani and Swedish family. Amin is making a negotiation in favour of an individualised personal name over traditional affiliative naming practices to make navigating the Swedish social context easier.

Typically, in the Swedish context, second-generation makes creative use of their ethnic names because of the Evangelical Lutheran Swedish religious landscape it is easy to change Pakistani or Muslim names to more neutral sounding names by changing spellings or pronunciations. For example, Younus becomes Jonas, Yusuf becomes Jonah, Sarah becomes Sara, Daniyaal becomes Danial, Sofia becomes Sophiya, Aida becomes Eda, Harris becomes Harry, and Adam while maintaining the spelling can be pronounced in a Swedish way.

Immigrants with an ethnic first name are automatically identified as ‘others’ in social encounters and may consider changing their name. The immigrant’s decision whether to keep or change the ethnic first name may stem from the desire to minimise labelling and discrimination (Bursell, 2012, 2021; Bursell et al., 2021; Khosravi, 2012) to preserve the affinity to the culture and community of origin, or to better integrate socially, economically, and culturally in the host society.

According to the theory of symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 2001; Stryker & Serpe, 1982), focusing on how individuals interact with one another to create symbolic worlds, an individual’s first name may signal different layers of identity in everyday social encounters. By ascribing a symbolic meaning, naming practices may serve as channels to form identities (Girma, 2020). The first name individuals use in a social interaction is an important symbolic representation of their identity. For children of immigrants, the first name plays a much more significant role in the social context in which names are given, as we shall explore in the next chapter.

### *Feeding the Desi Family and Gender Roles*

Food is an important way to pass on culture. Food can be an important way to create nostalgia and signal home, although immigrants often hold onto imaginary homelands and ideas of culinary consumption or cooking to maintain collective ethnic identity. Food is both a metaphor and symbol as well as a material practice. Daily food consumption practices provide an important and accessible way to reinforce, modify or transform identity, and women have a key role in this process. Morgan (2011; 1996) has commented that food is a particular symbol of women’s care work in families. Relationships between family members were also partly constituted through food, since the preparation of food, how and when it is eaten, and with whom, are activities in which religious and cultural values around gender and generational divisions are brought to bear, as exemplified by Amna’s account below:

Cooking was my Daadi's (paternal grandmother) job. In the absence of my mother, she was the one cooking. Sometimes when my Naani (maternal grandmother) was around then she would cook. Papa does know how to cook but not that much, does it too oftentimes but it's usually my Daadi's job [...] If there is a family over then mostly yes girls usually do it, I don't know, it is kind of a tradition thing, so then it can't be that Bhai (brother) will go and make chai (tea).

(Amna 24, Female, 2.5 generation)

Cooking as 'Daadi's job' suggests a multigenerational living arrangement where different generations reside together, and cooking duties were traditionally associated with and expected to be performed by Daadi as a regular part of her role within the interdependent family. Interestingly, 'in the absence of [her] mother' it is either the two grandmothers or her father taking over cooking responsibilities. She does not mention her mother cooking for the family during the interview. Amna's mother is a doctor, and her father is an academic. Once again, it may seem that occupation and time flexibility is a bigger factor in who cooks rather than gender, though it is predominantly the females who are engaged in this activity.

The narrative suggests retired grandmothers, the father, and the second-generation tend to have the time for cooking. However, when guests are present, it is 'tradition' and expected that it 'can't be' the brother (Bhai) who makes tea, sets the table or serves food. Indicating a greater propensity to uphold Pakistani cultural norms in multigenerational families, especially where grandparents reside with their children and grandchildren. Passing on ethnic foodways and its ancillary practices on to their children and grandchildren are both important reasons for Pakistani women in the diaspora to use food as a way of preserving and passing on identity (Ternikar, 2019).

This account indicates that certain roles are assigned based on gender norms rather than individual capabilities or preferences, but alternatively, also leave out women who don't have the time to perform these tasks, showing there is room to negotiate the 'traditional' and 'expected' when lack of time and value of paid work trumps care work that is considered a female domain.

In the fragment below Maham, when reflecting on division of tasks at home, pointedly framing a progressive portrayal of gender dynamics within the household, where both parents are actively engaged in caregiving:

Papa taught us mathematics, geography and language at home in evenings. Papa would make us do homework daily on the kitchen table while mama would be cooking so this is how the dynamic in the household would be looking like. I remember Papa standing in the kitchen and loading the machine. He wouldn't just walk away from the table after eating.

(Maham 34, Female, second-generation)

Maham's description exemplifies a collaborative approach to household tasks based on each parent's strengths and expertise. While the mother is narrated as feeding the family, her father too 'just doesn't walk away' and is offering nurture and care by assisting with academic responsibilities by helping the children with 'homework' and housework by 'loading the machine' illustrating a division of labour rooted in practicality and efficiency rather than rigid gender roles.

Khizer below also provides an additional viewpoint on household chores within his family:

In our home, mom was out working, and dad was cooking at home. She was *the working mom* so that was the big difference compared to all my uncles who are married to housewives, and all my Phuppos (paternal aunts) who are also housewives. So that was definitely a big difference. We were at home with Dad many nights waiting for mom to come home after night shifts. Dad always took pride in being handy and knowing how to cook. Dad would cook desi food, and mom would cook traditional Finnish food. She was a doctor, so she was working quite a lot of late-night shifts. Sometimes we got food from outside quite a lot too. Dad has a huge community of friends so there would be families helping out now and then as well.

(Khizer 25, Male, second-generation)

Traditional roles of the mother as breadwinner and the father as the primary caregiver and homemaker are reversed. This challenges conventional gender norms, particularly within Khizer's extended family where the uncles are married to housewives and the paternal aunts are also housewives. The impact of the mother's demanding job, particularly the night shifts, necessitate the father's involvement in caregiving and meal preparation. Showing the ability for men to adapt to the changing needs of the family and even taking 'pride' in being handy and being able to cook 'desi food'. Khizer additionally highlights his father's Pakistani 'community of friends' stepping in to offer support. This shows that the collaborative nature of caregiving and household management, extends beyond the nuclear family unit to include broader social networks in the Pakistani diaspora.

Khizer's portrayal of his parents as a couple, particularly the flexibility of his father as a Pakistani-Muslim immigrant man in Sweden, shows marital dynamics are reshaped not by rigid adherence to traditional gender roles or patriarchal norms, but rather, through pragmatic decisions focusing on the family's collective prosperity. The mother's demanding career as a doctor necessitates the father's involvement in domestic duties, highlighting how their partnership evolves in response to their shared goals and the realities of modern life, rather than being constrained by static conventions.

Masooma in her narrative also illustrates a departure from traditional gender roles and suggests a more egalitarian approach to household duties within the family:

In our home Abbu (father) was always cooking, cleaning, washing the dishes. Sometimes he would bring us home from school sometimes it was Ammi (mother). So, we have never really seen a strict mould for men and women to be tied in, that a woman is 'supposed' to do this. When my husband came into the picture, he also saw this, and he was young, and his father too helped out around the house in Pakistan. They had no sisters, so they had to help with the house chores, otherwise when girls do house chores brothers get a free pass. That is why, in my family, such issues never arose. Even now, it is the same; we do things together.

(Masooma 31, Female, second-generation)

Masooma reflects on her upbringing, noting that they (she and her siblings) never witnessed strict gender roles dictating which tasks men or women were 'supposed' to do. This lack of a rigid gender mould in their upbringing has influenced their perspective on gender roles. She highlights the role of her husband's upbringing in shaping his attitude towards household chores, noting that his father also helped out around the house in Pakistan. Exhibiting that values and practices change not only in relation to place but also in relation to the values and practices of the family, emphasising the universality of care, kindness, and generosity, with an attitude towards household work without the caricature of patriarchal residue.

### *Culture of Hospitality*

Closely related to food practices and feeding the family, is the idea of a culture of hospitality in the Pakistani family that also has its roots in sunnah of the Prophet<sup>30</sup>. Hospitality generally means warm welcome and treating the guests or strangers with dignity and honour. Magnanimous behaviours and sense of reciprocity are expected both in guests and hosts. A sense of ethics in hospitality dictates that both guests and hosts deal with each other with a sense of sincerity and responsibility. Marium and Maleeha remark on this practice in their home as a part of Pakistani culture and its values that are upheld in Sweden:

Maleeha: Whether it is immediate family, in-laws, friends or family friends, we have been taught to extend courtesy, generosity, and importance. These are Pakistani ideas of mehmaandaari (hospitality) and giving extra respect to susraal (in-laws). When someone comes to our home as a guest, we give them that importance and welcome.

Marium: Yes, for example, when my sister-in-law is visiting, Maleeha will hold a party for her and my mother will host a dinner for her. That is a given. That is Pakistani

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<sup>30</sup> Islamic hospitality entails warmly welcoming guests, generously providing for their needs, showing respect and honour, ensuring their safety, displaying kindness and good manners, accommodating them for a reasonable duration, and praying for their blessings and well-being.

culture, a Swede will not feel obligated to make such efforts. I tell my sister-in-law in advance, so she is prepared and packs clothes for these events. These are Pakistani values.

Maleeha: Yea, like we have just come back from Canada. We went there for my Khala's son (maternal first cousin) who was getting married. From Pakistan my Mamoo (maternal uncle) and younger Khala's (maternal aunt) entire family came and we all - uncles, aunts and cousins lived together for four weeks with our children in Khala's house! This is a typical Pakistani thing.

(Mariam 30 and Maleeha 32, Sibling-dyad, Females, second-generation)

Mariam and Maleeha's depiction of hospitality practices serve as a means of maintaining cultural identity, fostering social bonds, and creating a sense of belonging within the Pakistani diaspora. They have both grown up in Sweden, are working professionals, married to Pakistani husbands and have children. They talk about home as a hospitable space that is open to kin and other kinship-like relations but make a pointed emphasis on this idea of 'mehmaandaari' or hospitality as something they derive from their Pakistani repertoire. This stress in assertions of ethnic particularities is contextual (Mand, 2006), and can be used to demarcate boundaries between different groups (Ballard, 2008; Barth, 1998).

Bourdieu sets out that family has an institutional objective dimension, which determines 'social obligations' amongst family members, as well as an affective dimension, which transforms these social obligations into 'loving dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1998). These loving dispositions serve to bond family members by what Bourdieu calls 'family feeling', which involves devotion, generosity and solidarity, as well as 'exchange of services, assistance, visits, attention and kindness' (ibid: 22). Hence, family exists as the reciprocal obligations and bonding amongst members, as well as part of the social structure, which creates the social expectations and the social understanding of family itself.

An added layer to extended family protocols is the mention of 'susraal' and the nuance that falls into the domain of women's care work in the diaspora. It gives women power and status within the ethnic community, and places value on interpersonal relations and family ties. Mariam juxtaposes this expectation with Swedish culture, suggesting if she was raised in a Swedish family, she may not feel the same sense of obligation to host elaborate dinner parties for visiting family members and in-laws, which underscores her understanding of differences in cultural norms and social expectations. Exemplifying ways of being 'Swedish' with ways of being 'Pakistani' and straddling that reconciliation with ease.

Maleeha nuances hospitality with 'host[ing]' by talking about their recent trip to Canada for a family wedding. Maleeha's narration shows diaspora connections are forged beyond just the home country, that relations supersede spatial distance and are

sustained beyond that boundary owing to kinship affinities. She also emphasises the practice of communal living during the trip, with multiple generations of family members, including uncles, aunts, cousins, and children, all staying together in the Khala's house for four weeks. This reflects a cultural norm within Pakistani families to eschew hotels in favour of hosting relatives in private homes during extended visits, fostering a sense of intimacy and togetherness, over privacy, regard for personal space, and individual autonomy. Once again, this is subscribed to the domain of 'a typical Pakistani thing'.

As such, family is influenced by specific historical and socio-economic conditions and has a decisive role in the maintenance and reproduction of a certain social order through the accumulation and then the intergenerational transmission of different forms of capital.

### *Breadwinners and Housewives*

The binary trope of male breadwinners and female housewives is a common one among the participants especially when they refer to their parent's generation and the way family was structured when they were growing up. When I asked Zain to describe how the structure of family roles was set up in the household when he was growing up, he shrugged his shoulders and replied matter-of-factly with the following response:

Z: It is very traditional for all first-generation Pakistani immigrants to Sweden or elsewhere where fathers are working and mother is staying home and taking care of the kids I mean, that's a very general thing for first-generation immigrants.

U: All first-generation Pakistani immigrants? Same story?

Z: [looks down at his hands for a few seconds thoughtfully and then looks back at my face] Actually, my mom was a teacher in Pakistan. When she came, she was working at my fathers and Taya's business at the shop. She worked there together with my Taya's wife. Both brothers and both wives were working in the same place. But the men had more jobs as well. They had a couple of shops that they collectively managed. When I was born, my mother went deaf from one ear and the other one did not work well. She wears an apparatus so from then on, she became a stay home mother and took care of us.

(Zain 21, Male, second-generation)

Zain refers to a 'traditional' first-generation setup as regards the breadwinning role and mentions that as a very 'general thing' in the pioneer generation. Interestingly when I probed him a little bit more, he nuanced his initial reply and spoke about his mother as working professional prior to her marriage in Pakistan. After she got married and moved to Sweden, she started working with her sister-in-law in the family business. In

lieu of childbirth and a health tragedy, she had to give up work life and become a ‘stay-at-home-mother’.

First-generation female migrants came as transnational brides to Sweden. These women had to build new networks of support through community relationships, learn a new language in formal and informal settings and develop skills that would be integral to a more comfortable settlement. Memories of loneliness, fear, isolation and, in some cases, tears and depression marked the early part of their settlement. Growing up a family without the support of extended family relationships also adds to increased burden of child rearing in Sweden. Thus, while Zain’s family maintained a trope of the ‘traditional’ male breadwinning role, there is depth and nuance to that narrative.

Also, as our conversation continued, Zain was setting up this stance to compare how first-generation (them) and second-generation (us) have different expectations from gender roles since the second-generation is born and raised in the context of Sweden where each individual has to work. In the first-generation, expectations are in transition, both the religious responsibility of Muslim men to provide for women, children and their families, and as cultural expectations of male honour as breadwinning Pakistani men. Thus, while women are making efforts to integrate into the labour market, it is more about an aspirational lifestyle change rather than the obligation to provide for the family as an equal responsibility to be shared with their husbands. Alternatively, Zareesh provides her outlook to how she perceives the relationship between home, her mother and everyday life when she was growing up:

When we were young Ammi (Mother) was home and Abbu (Father) would work. Now she works and I think it was good for us that she stayed home because she was always there when we would come back from school. If I look back, I liked that then. Because for breakfast Ammi was there and then when we would come home, we had food while she was there. In the evening, we spent time uhhhh so I liked that.

(Zareesh 25, Female second-generation)

Zareesh furrowed her eyebrows, looked at her hands, shifted her weight and after a deep breath she narrated the above, visibly struggling with positioning her mother as a stay-at-home-mother. Her narration had a tone of justification- her mother’s decision to stay home, her own positive experience of having access to her mother and balancing that with how I will interpret and read that decision, given the frame of living in a feminist state, that is built on productive work by all citizens.

Before she started speaking, she spent a few minutes articulating Swedish peers and their family life making comparisons to her own experience of the same. While making that comparison in the present on her past, she reflected that she liked the fact her mother was always ‘there at home’ when she was growing up, which ‘was good for us’,

‘had food’ in her presence, and ‘spent time’; and is something whose value she attributes to herself compared to families who have working mothers with young children.

Juxtaposing ‘home’ as domain of her mother and ‘work’ as the domain of her father, Zareesh exemplifies how everyday practices are moderated in constructing identities, that visibilise certain contributions at the expense of those that are invisibilised and are deemed unremarkable. While appreciating her mother’s presence in the home space as a source of predictability and comfort, it is in the ambit of personal meaning where the efforts of her mother are recognisable. She adds by saying ‘*now* she (mother) *works*’ giving work a meaning in terms of domestic unpaid reproductive care work and paid productive work in the labour market, marking the boundaries of work inside (home) and outside (labour market) with differential meaning and value.

In Sweden, civic values and norms relating to family life and gender equality (Grip, 2020) and being a ‘good’ parent the ‘Swedish way’ (Elmersjö et al., 2022) are strongly emphasised for newly arrived immigrants. Such that the Swedish gender equality is represented in terms of Swedish women are ‘out in society’, are educated, they work and are financially independent and in this way are also better role models for their children (Hudson et al., 2023). (Andersen et al., 2018) argue that in a world increasingly defined by mobility, it is important to approach citizenship, not just as juridical rights, but as embodied, practiced and performed acts of what it means to be a good citizen. In this perspective, citizenship is not merely a formal acquisition of rights but a dynamic process of becoming, encompassing various cultural, social, and spatial expressions.

The perception of how a typical Swedish family is organised vis-à-vis the Pakistani immigrant family creates a third space for the second-generation participants to pick and choose practices from each that are not merely inherited from either context but are imbued with personal meanings, significations and representations. Thus, this narrative seeks not only to understand how gendered and ethnic identities are constructed through organising of family life and gender roles but also emphasises a particular racialised, desi gendered performance that takes place within and outside of an immigrant home, that has its own logic and dynamics. That may, at first blush, defy the categorisation of ‘good’ parenting with its stress on immigrant women particularly, doing family the ‘Swedish way’, although the lived experience tells a different story.

While principles of gender equality, responsible citizenship, and good parenting are shared both by migrant and Swedish families alike, the way they are played out are different. In that, the pressure to succumb to a time frame in the life course can be seen as patronising and irrelevant to the Pakistani parenting script. Especially the m(other) who is the recipient of othering classifications: the at-home immigrant woman’s lack or low level of participation in society, her portrayal as passive and bound by tradition (Hudson et al., 2023). Stories about lived experience offer social intelligibility towards



how intimacy is conceived, making different individual choices than those socially expected, because alignment with one's values and personal meaning is a form of resistance, since its cost is not having lives and loves counted (Butler, 2002).

Moreover, in the diaspora as narrated by the participants, who stays home and takes on more household responsibility, depends more on the nature, status, and earning potential of jobs held by either parent, than it does with their gender, as exemplified by Khizer in the following fragment:

My father held working-class jobs for most of his life and mom was a professional doctor. He has always been employed in, like what should I say, lower class service jobs minded like cleaning, gardening, supplying labour to different places factories. So, there was a contrast there as well Dad being like hardworking and self-employed but spending more time with us, and mom being a professional doctor being at work most of the time.

(Khizer 25, Male, second-generation)

Khizer highlights an alternative narrative to Zain's 'traditional' and typified classification of male breadwinning trope in the first-generation, exhibiting intersectionality of gender, class, employment, and immigrant status both challenges and shapes familial dynamics and the distribution of household responsibilities within the diaspora context. Khizer recounted how his father, initially a student from Pakistan, faced challenges continuing his studies in Sweden due to a lack of proficiency in the Swedish language, ultimately leading to his withdrawal from university. Subsequently, he embarked on a path of working-class employment, never resuming his formal education throughout his life. His mother, also an immigrant but Nordic in descent, also a university student but with better language proficiency, was expectedly more successful in her education and career. The contrast between the father's working-class jobs, which involve manual labour and service-oriented tasks, and the mother's professional career as a doctor underlines the disparity in their respective employment statuses and by association, wage earning potential. His mother's professional career demands her presence at work for extended periods, resulting in less time available for household responsibilities. These dynamics challenge traditional gender norms by illustrating how household roles are not solely determined by gender but are instead shaped by the nature of the parents' occupations, immigration trajectory i.e., South-North or North-North, and their respective time commitments<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> The second-generation marriage narratives in chapter 7 showcases (or example in Effat's and Seema's narratives) the same negotiation from a different generational location; where second-generation women participants have more 'Swedish' capital than their Pakistani husbands who are travelling to Sweden for a transnational arranged marriage. With Pakistani credentials, skills that require translation,

In conclusion, while the traditional roles of men as breadwinners and women as stay-at-home mothers persist in Pakistani diasporic narratives, a deeper understanding of lived experiences emerges through personal narratives. First-generation male immigrants in Sweden often possess advantages in language proficiency, networks, and labour market experience compared to their transnational spouses. Despite this, many immigrant mothers prioritise learning Swedish and enter the workforce before starting families, taking breaks during childbearing years before returning to work when their children are older. This pattern reflects Zareesh's account of her mother's early presence and Zain's mother's inability to work due to health reasons. Additionally, Khizer's father assumed the role of a stay-at-home parent during his children's early years due to his immigrant status, earning less and having a job with flexible hours, contrasting with his Nordic wife's career as a doctor. Overall, most first-generation women understood breadwinning as a male responsibility and female productive work in the labour market as an expression of personal aspiration and self-actualisation.

To sum up Pakistaniness, ethnic belonging plays a central role in shaping how Pakistani families in Sweden maintain a connection to their cultural heritage. This section explored the ways in which traditions, language, and community ties are preserved, and how these contribute to a collective sense of Pakistaniness in Sweden. Notably, all aspects of Pakistaniness for ethnic belonging finds meaning in the context of the family while also referencing practices against a narrative understanding of Swedish family and Swedish societal norms. At the forefront of participants' discussions is the question of how much of one's Pakistaniness can be preserved without compromising the process of embedding into the context of their birth and fostering a sense of national belonging. The significance of these cultural practices to their everyday life and sense of self greatly influences their commitment to upholding them.

## ‘Muslimness’: Religious Belonging

Growing up in a ‘desi’ family also means growing up Muslim. Belonging to the family means belonging to its religion and religious practices. Religious practice is, therefore, in the narratives of participants, a fundamental family practice.

In this section, participants describe their religious experiences of growing up in a Pakistani family with the family as a resource of religion and religion as a resource in itself. It shows how religion, as embodied sacred capital is transmitted, and thereupon

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and no knowledge of Swedish; their wives are the main breadwinners and providers for their husbands. Household work is distributed based on time divisions and status of jobs between the partners.

negotiated. It also shows the heterogeneity of religious practice between families and among the participants.

### *Religious Socialisation*

Ayesha reflects on religious upbringing in a Pakistani home as an orientation of the body towards practices that parents are routinely performing, such that they become a part of one's own embodied practice.

A part of the upbringing at home is that when the older members of the family are praying, children learn, and as they grow older, they start praying themselves.

(Ayesha 34, Female, second-generation)

Ayesha is stressing on the tacit ways one becomes attuned to certain religious practices, by watching and listening, and also by becoming aware of time as reserved for 'sacred' activities versus time reserved for 'leisure' activities (Becher, 2008). While for Ayesha these activities are a natural part of the everyday life of the family, Zain reflects on his religious upbringing in his parents' concerted efforts towards cultivating cultural and religious repertoires for rituals:

Z: My first memories from when I was four years old, I remember my father used to pray namaz and my parents, they took me for Umrah<sup>32</sup> when I was 4 or 5 years old, I have some memories of them offering namaz in Saudi Arabia. I have never seen him not pray his namaz and it is the same with my mother [...] they would keep 'Zikr'<sup>33</sup> (remembrance) always. Before it was once a month now it is once in a week because of their ill health [...] My parents fasted every year during the month of Ramadhan. When we came of age, we too fasted with them. Also, in terms of Pakistani national day or Eid we would always get a haircut buy new clothes. These activities were emphasised so that there is appreciation for Eid.

U: Eid is an Islamic ritual, no?

Z: Precisely Pakistan is also an Islamic country so of course it is linked [...] It is a Muslim country so that holiday is celebrated even though it is celebrated on different days it is a part of the country you assume Eid to be Pakistani or from any other Muslim country.

(Zain 21, Male, second-generation)

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<sup>32</sup> Umrah is a minor pilgrimage. Unlike Hajj, which is mandatory on affording Muslims, Umrah is a voluntary spiritual journey to Mecca-Medina in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>33</sup> 'Zikr' is a gathering where Muslims get together and read parts of the Qur'an together and sometimes pick a verse of the Qur'an and engage in its interpretation and relevance to present time.

The above dialogue illustrates how bodily hexis, the physical embodiment of social practices and dispositions, how social structures ingrain in the body through habits, gestures, and skills (Bourdieu, 2004), is cultivated through rituals and family practices. Their intersection forms a cohesive cultural and religious identity within Zain's family.

A memory of his parents performing Umrah in Saudi Arabia links the physical *movement* of travel to ritual practice. It has resonance with the way bodies *move* in prayer and sway to the gentle rhythms of Qur'anic verses. A soft whisper that reverberates in the physical space where 'Zikr' is performed, creates an exchange of energy that comes from fellowship of presence. Holding religious gatherings as a ritual involves planning, creating time, offering food, clearing space, and the ancillary responsibilities that are an offshoot of hosting an event.

Children are witness to these events which have an impact on their feeling of being a part of a religion and a faith community, familiarity, commonality and affinities. Zikr thus, as an effort on the part of families for concerted cultivation of ethnic and religious socialisation, activates affective and communal aspects of belonging.

Sacred activity thus becomes an integral part of domestic and family life in Sweden. The month of Ramadhan, for example, has many strands of meaning. Ramadhan is seen as a coming-of-age ritual, a special time for the practice of religion, an opportunity to link to kin and community, and a defined sense of fasting with the Muslim Ummah all over the world. Eid is another event that associates grooming and dressing in ethnic clothes with bodily hexis. It is in bodily hexis that the personal combines with the social. The body is a mnemonic device upon which and with, the very basics of culture are imprinted and enacted.

In a similar vein, Maira speaks about what it means to be raised in a religious family:

Our family, we are religious, we have kept all the religious traditions and the religion. From the very beginning we were taught about basics about Islam like learning the kalma and everything my Daadi who lived with us. She was the one who taught us quite a lot because we were spending quite a lot of time with her. I was 6 something when I started reading the Qur'an. At the time we would go to the mosque and that is where I have read the Qur'an. Everyone was studying on their own and then when it my turn then the teacher would hear me recite the Qur'an [...] Sometimes mama reads and we sit and listen, she reads translation in Urdu and sometimes she will read a few pages. My brother who is younger than I am he has also gone to the masjid too, but afterwards there was an imam who would come to our place to teach us at home. The youngest brother has read the Qur'an on Skype. You know like the new generation thing. The Skype teacher is from Pakistan and lives in Pakistan.

(Maira 24, Female, 2.5 generation)

Maira speaks about what it means to be raised in a religious family. The passage highlights the importance of family, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, cultural connections, and an adaptive approach to religious education within the context of the Islamic faith. What I find intriguing about the above passage is the range of actors and institutions involved in this transmission: experts such as imams at the mosque and grandparents in the family.

Religious education starts at an early age so that it becomes a part of one's bodily disposition with its daily and rhythmic disposition. As argued by Abby Day (2009), the self-defined, personally authenticated family emerges as one of the most pivotal sources for meaning, morality, and even transcendence - domains traditionally linked with religion. In the following passage, Nauphil purports that the 'work' of cultivating a religious repertoire starts at a young age:

I think in my life from the very beginning what I remember and what I have seen is that in our home the environment, while not conservative, there is an orientation towards religion like namaz and Roza and other basics. Our father was the key figure. He would recite Ayat-ul-Kursi<sup>34</sup> to me and my older sister before we went to sleep every night. He would also recite the entire namaz to us. Listening to that settled down in our brain. I have a younger brother, but he is four years younger than me. He was very small when the *work started* on him (laughs). At an early age we started Qur'an school in Malmö, the big Islamic centre/masjid. We lived close to there at the time. We would go there three times a week. Ammi couldn't drive so our father would take us. Me and my sister also went on bicycles. It was about 3-4 kms and we would go after school on Saturdays and Sundays and one weekday.

(Nauphil 35, Male, second-generation)

While one might assume that women bear the burden of transmitting religious education to the children, and though the scale remains heavy on the side of women taking on that role whether as mothers, aunts or grandmothers, in Sweden, it is the person with the most leisure time that takes on that responsibility. Also, those actors that are primary caretakers. Fathers are extremely involved in imparting religious education to their children in Sweden. They practice by doing, teaching, and spending time with their children. They transport the children to and from the mosque, accompany them for haircuts, purchase new clothes for them, find an imam to ensure the community's children have access to a teacher, and assist in the teacher's immigration process. These are all actions performed to ensure religious continuity to the next generation.

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<sup>34</sup> Ayat-ul-Kursi is often recited for protection against evil and harm. Many Muslims believe that reciting this verse can provide safety and peace.

Participants' familiarity with their world stems from both their existence in and their engagement with it. Bourdieu (2000: 130) conveys this by stating: 'I know confusedly what depends on me and what does not, what is "for me" or "not for me" or "not for people like me", what it is "reasonable" for me to do, to hope for and ask for'. Thus, participants recognise their parents' efforts and involvement as a significant expression of the value of religion within the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden.

Bourdieu further asserts that the body is an instrument of knowledge (Bourdieu, 2004). Knowledge is as exclusively explicit or codifiable as it is practical and corporeal. Importantly, for Bourdieu, this form of knowledge is qualitatively distinct and retains its own 'logic' (Bourdieu, 1990: 11). The things we take for granted are a result of being conditioned and adapted to societal norms from early childhood -norms that had to be gradually and painstakingly learned over time. This is how social agents, the argument implies, come to 'know their place' (ibid.).

In the context of the family, the participants learn their place in religion and their identity as Pakistanis in Sweden. It is within this diasporic space that most personal contestations occur. Once the participants have been shaped by these influences, they begin to question and challenge the very forces that determined their identity.

Inter-racial and inter-religious marriages have a slightly different contour of religious socialisation. There is more creativity, openness and generality in how religion and religious practice is conceived as a family practice. Arham reflects on growing up with two religions in the following fragment:

Religion was there from both sides, Dad being Muslim and mom Christian. We would like to call ourselves Muslims because my father is a Muslim. My mother was always saying that it is not about labels, but it is rather about we all believe in one God.

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation)

While the presence of both Muslim and Christian influences from the parents suggests a complex religious landscape, Arham's identification as Muslim primarily stems from their father's influence, indicating the significance of paternal religious authority in shaping individual religious affiliations within the family. However, her mother's perspective 'it is not about labels' challenges the notion of rigid religious markers, emphasising instead a unified belief in 'one God'. This suggests a fluid approach to religious identity, where familial discourse encourages a broader understanding of faith beyond denominational boundaries. Similarly, Alina's mother grew up in India and then in London. She later moved to Pakistan after the partition and then moved to Sweden as a bride. Already before she arrived in Sweden, Alina described her mother as someone who was a 'free thinker' and was not bound to set normative familial or religious practices:

Mom seems to already have been a bit of a free thinker [...] I don't know how much Atheism there was in India and Pakistan, but I think that she had that sort of influence like very early. Now I am generalising, but she was very artsy and she wanted to do things her own way she always went her own way and I think she probably felt like trying out something else, that was the way she was.

(Alina 29, Sibling-dyad, Female, second-generation)

Arham reflects on her mother's disposition towards free thinking and individualism, particularly in matters of faith. The characterisation of her mother as 'artsy' and someone who 'always went her own way' stresses her independent and unconventional mindset, which could have led her to explore alternative belief systems beyond the religious traditions of her cultural background. The phrase 'trying out something else' implies a sense of curiosity and openness to different philosophical or spiritual paths.

She speculates that their mother's agnostic/atheistic inclinations may have been influenced by her early travels, surroundings and personal experiences, possibly indicating a departure from the religious norms prevalent in India and Pakistan. In so doing, she acknowledges the role of cultural and societal norms in influencing religious identity formation.

In a similar vein, Alina's brother Amin, reflects on their mother's ritual of night-time prayer as an individual expression of her relationship with spirituality despite not being religious:

Mom would say a prayer before we went to sleep always, that's the only time we prayed [...] Because usually Muslims pray five times a day, isn't it? I think it was more like superstition.

(Amin 28, Sibling-dyad, Male, second-generation)

Amin's interpretation of their mother's prayer as 'superstition' suggests a scepticism towards religious rituals and their efficacy. This interpretation may stem from the disconnect between the mother's agnostic beliefs and her engagement in religious practices, leading Amin to view the prayer as a habitual or symbolic gesture rather than a sincere act of devotion. This ritual serves as a departure from the mother's professed agnosticism, indicating a possible adherence to tradition or a sense of comfort derived from the act of prayer.

While Amin and Alina's father grew distant from religion, he kept close connections to other Pakistanis and by association with Muslims in the diaspora. His rich and close relationship with Pakistani and Muslim community members, engagement with religious debates, and visits to the mosque, despite his feeling distant from religion, make him come across as much more religious than the mother. Ambivalence and

contradiction in parents get transmitted to the children, such that Alina and Amin are both spiritual but not religious. Therefore, the quality of second-generation individuals' relationships with their significant others ultimately shapes their relationship with religion.

### *Halal Food*

An element within the religious repertoire of Pakistani families is negotiating with Islamic injunctions regarding food practices. Most participants and their families did not eat pork or drink alcohol which are among activities or behaviours declared haram<sup>35</sup> (sanctioned, unlawful, forbidden) as opposed to halal (allowed, lawful,) in the Qur'an. Below Nauphil describes the logistical efforts made to secure halal food and also to understand abattoir processes which may previously have been taken for granted in Pakistan:

I would say that a lot of Pakistanis in the beginning, because it didn't exist much, halal meaning *zabiha meat*, so there wasn't a lot of focus on this. In that time, also because of shipment costs and demand, you could only get halal meat and food in Denmark. We didn't find any halal food in Sweden so in that time we would go in a ship to Copenhagen the car would go in the ship and we would do shopping there and then come back to Sweden. So, I would say that uhhhh majority there were families I wouldn't say that there weren't any but majority families did not focus so much on this.

(Nauphil 35, Male, second-generation)

Eating is an integral part of human behaviour and characterises a way of life. Consumers belonging to different ethnicities and religious groups favour different food types such as Kosher, vegetarian or halal food. In the absence of halal meat and other Pakistani food in the Swedish market, families negotiate how to consume halal food and procure desi food stuff to fulfil their Islamic dietary teachings as well as reproducing Pakistani cuisine in Sweden.

Nauphil recalls that his family and others in their circle, didn't 'focus' a lot on the label and practice of halal food in its absence in Swedish consumer market. While eating pork meat was strictly avoided, most families were able to eat other meat and food without feeling they were not in accordance with their faith. Moreover, families living close to Denmark were able to access its halal food market and would purchase in bulk to stock their pantry and freeze meat for future consumption.

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<sup>35</sup> Cheating, theft, murder slander and backbiting; foods such as certain meat, substances that intoxicate, even the emotion of anger is haram or forbidden.



Maham, another participant similarly related her parents taking road trips to Oslo and Copenhagen from Gothenburg to procure halal meat and other foodstuff: ‘in the end my parents were like “we can’t do this!”. If it is not pork, we eat everything. Now we eat halal at home but when we are eating out, we don’t care as much’. Belief systems bear on time, effort and money, which are all resources first-generation immigrants regard important.

Maham’s parents saying ‘we can’t do this’ shows both a recognition of practical challenges and a need for pragmatism over strict observance of dietary restrictions. At the time of the interview Maham relates given availability of halal labels, the family upholds a distinction between religious practices inside ‘eat [ing] halal’ and outside the home ‘not caring as much’. This reflects a negotiation between religious principles and the realities of navigating secular spaces, where the boundaries between religious observance and secular practices may become blurred.

In Chapter 8, ‘halal’ is detailed more, showcasing contextual fluidity towards understanding a religious boundary that is cultivated as a reflective tool, that guides the second-generation in their identity formation and belonging negotiations.

### *Modesty As a Virtue*

Cultivating certain virtues is a part of being socialised into the desi familial norm. What one wears is both related to identity, self-presentation, and values relating to modesty and piety that have both religious and ethnic punctuations. The female body is policed more in this milieu.

Not values, I thought it was ok to go out, my mother would say wear long shirts, don’t wear short clothes, don’t wear tight clothes, and I started getting irritated why is she saying these things, because everyone at school was dressing in that way and I wanted that I too should wear the same clothes. At that time, I didn’t understand. In this way I started to adopt, that I want to wear those clothes that my mother does not want me to wear, tight pants, short shirts.

(Maleeha 32, Female, second-generation)

Maleeha’s narrative demonstrates an interplay between individual agency, familial influence, and peer pressure in shaping identity and behaviour. Maleeha’s ‘irritation’ at her mother’s guidance and preferences highlights the role of clothing as a site of negotiation and resistance in the family, where individuals navigate between competing cultural values and personal desires in the process of self-discovery and self-definition.

Maleeha says she didn’t ‘understand’ her mother’s interference and her use of authority because ‘everyone at school was dressing this way.’ This example shows how Maleeha’s mother is upholding standards of modesty from a context that she was

accustomed to and is creating moral boundaries on behalf of her daughter so that norms of the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden are upheld. Whereas, for Maleeha, fitting in with her peers as a teenager and being aligned with contemporary fashion trends is more important. Both actors struggle to effectively communicate their perspectives and underlying motivations, leading to a breakdown in understanding. Without a shared framework for interpreting and translating their respective scripts of belonging, they may find it difficult to reconcile their differences and find common ground.

Similarly, Effat relates an interesting story about what happens when a female violates certain dress codes that are approved by the community. And given the family hierarchies and community expectations descendants of immigrants negotiate these pressures to avoid negative attention:

E: In my Jamaat<sup>36</sup> I knew if someone saw me in a group with boys it would be badnaami (bad reputation) and Ammi said once as well. One day me and my friends were wearing a tank top with a sweater. Since it was so hot, I took off the sweater and I was biking home. An uncle from our Jamaat saw me and called my father. He said your daughter is in this clothing riding a bicycle, keep an eye on your child otherwise she will go out of hand. The clothes were the problem not the biking, the sleeveless arms and the broad neckline.

U: What happened?

E: Nothing happened or would happen. But for my parents it was embarrassing that someone was calling about me.

U: What if no one called?

E: Even then they wouldn't like that. Reputation was very important. 'Beti awara ho gayee hay' (daughter has gone astray) no one will marry her; reputation will go bad. You know in our culture the boy may themselves be of questionable character, but they want a naik (pious) wife (laughs). My father, he didn't believe in sakhti (hard control) but in some areas like clothes, it was very strict in our home.

(Effat 49, Female, 1.5 generation)

This narrative reflects how Effat navigates religious norms of modesty with cultural pressures, particularly regarding reputation management and gender norms. This scrutiny as the narrative shows, extends beyond immediate family to the broader community, as evidenced by the incident with the community 'Uncle' in the Pakistani diaspora policing Effat's behaviour.

The fear of 'badnaami' or bad reputation emphasises the importance placed on upholding traditional norms within the diaspora. The emphasis on 'the clothes were the problem not the biking' shows that autonomy is granted provided modesty be

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<sup>36</sup> Ahmadi congregation

upheld, particularly in attire, highlighting gendered expectations placed on women. Despite Effat's assertion that 'nothing would happen', the fear of social repercussions and the potential erosion of reputation loom large in her mind, particularly as she did not wish to be the source of her parents' 'embarrass[ment]'.

The juxtaposition of the protagonist's actions with the community's idealised image of a 'naik' (pious) wife (in the future) underscores the double standards and contradictions inherent in the diaspora's value system. The fear comes from first-generation parents keeping an eye on each other's children as a service to themselves, because if Effat acts out according to Jamaat's value system and gets away with it, then their own daughters will have the precedent to do the same, and things will be 'out of [their] control'. There is also 'virtue politics' at play in the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. Virtue can be used as moral capital to signal a status, and sometimes in the diaspora, those who are not doing economically or professionally, they can use the virtue card to gain access to respectability by using gossip as a tool for reputation management.

In the larger picture of narratives, community members taking allowances to call family members regarding their children. Second-generation having grown up in a different context, consider each family's decision its own. They mind their own business, and do not interfere in such matters, once they have their own families.

## ‘Swedishness’: National Belonging

Second-generation participants born and raised in Sweden, always reference their upbringing, learning to be Pakistani and Muslims, through the lens of also being Swedish. Values and practices learned at home, through the extended family, wider ethnic community networks, as well as from trips to Pakistan are reflected alongside 'Swedish' socialisation through institutions of school and the labour market, as well as in informal social interactions with Swedish peers.

By highlighting what they are not allowed to do, the participants, in this section, reveal the boundaries their parents place on them that curtails their perceived sense of Swedishness. They experience these boundaries through their parents' authority and control, which they must negotiate with deference and respect having internalised their position as children in the family. Moreover, an added feature of familial socialisation in the cultivation of Pakistani and Muslim repertoires means that the second-generation participants also negotiate understanding 'who they are' and 'where they are from' as they grow up in Sweden in their Pakistani families.

The latter half of this section brings into focus the ruminations of participants as they try to understand their positions, referencing their parents' country of birth with their own to forge a sense of belonging.

*'Individualism in Sweden and Family Hierarchies in Pakistani Family'*

Zimal frames a general tension in this section with an assessment of the kind of pressure descendants of Pakistani immigrants' face in their families when growing up in Sweden. The reference to 'Swedish others' is seminal, who are considered to have it easy. He expresses the tussle between family expectations, social expectations and personal expectations for interpretations of success and achievement in the following excerpt:

In Sweden it's kind of like individualism, here you are still individual and it's all about being yourself so who cares what your family thinks. If I go over to the Pakistani side, it's kind of especially being from an immigrant background you know our parents gave up their livelihoods back in Pakistan to come here and to start from the bottom, it is kind of like, we expect you to do something with your life, you have to become something, like a lawyer, an accountant a doctor or whatever. There's kind of always these expectations from day one so we don't have to suffer like they did. If you look at a typical Swedish, they are just normal people they don't care if they don't have a career or an education so what they don't have these kinds of pressures. All they are told is to be yourself an individual so it's like crack on, do whatever you wanna do no one is gonna stop you for example they don't have that kind of family hierarchies.

(Zimal 26, Male, second-generation)

Zimal pinpoints to the intersection of personal aspirations, social mobility and parental deference in this narration. He juxtaposes a narrative typification of how he understands two distinct cultural paradigms. The individualistic culture of Sweden, where personal autonomy and self-expression are valued in the statement 'all about being yourself, so who cares what your family thinks' with the relational-collectivist culture of his Pakistani heritage, where familial expectations and norms play a significant role in shaping his identity: 'we expect you to become something, you have to do something with your life'.

Zimal compares this to his Swedish peers who 'don't have these kinds of pressures.' This 'pressure' stems from the sacrifices parents have made to immigrate, whereby they have had to start at the 'bottom' and have to make their way up. Their expectation for him to pursue a prestigious career stems from a desire for upward mobility. This reflects the insider/outsider dynamics that immigrant families navigate as they strive to find their place in Swedish society.

Likewise, in the following excerpt, Khadeejah provides additional insight into first-generation parental strategies aimed at guiding second-generation children towards

futures that transcend their own mere survival narratives and instead foster thriving careers:

The Swedes I was in class with, I didn't think that studying was of that importance the way we stress it in our homes, that if you don't get good grades there would be repercussions. There was no such attitude. Passing was big enough deal and the highest goal to strive for. Some were like I'll go into music, or ill become a barber. No one was thinking about a serious professional career or had the aspiration to become a doctor and study medicine. My mother wanted me to become a doctor. It wasn't forced, we weren't made to do anything. There was so much competition between us cousins that I didn't feel the need to compete with my peers in class because they were already behind. Or parents would discuss their children's academic achievements amongst each other. That was little hard I felt. The pressure. But also, they made it interesting. Because of the existing competition between the cousins, we would find ways to do things better than each other for example our parents would say if you learned this you will get a bicycle or if you do this then you will get this, so it was incentivised. Competition was something that motivated me at least, my sister didn't care, but I was competitive, I wanted to be the first in everything and better than everyone.

(Khadeejah 23, Female, second-generation)

The 'stress' on education in 'our homes' juxtaposes with 'pressures' that desi children face in their families in Sweden. There is a longing in the landscape of this narration, whereby Khadeejah contrasts the privilege of having Swedish parents with the expectations imposed by Pakistani parents, equating 'just passing' as satisfactory for the former while for her, nothing short of excellence was anticipated by the latter. The dominant discourse of Swedish society places a perceived discursive burden of deservingness and worthiness on immigrant parents, which is transmitted to their children. On one side, immigrant parents have high ambitions for their children due to their sacrifices. On the other, they must overcome stereotypes of laziness and prove their deservingness. It is important to note that the second-generation is expected to outperform their first-generation parents, with their competition often being other children of other immigrants, particularly those from within the extended family. Swedish peers are not seen as competitive or ambitious enough to be considered true rivals. There is no overt 'force', but rather a tangible 'pressure' that affects individuals differently.

When we went home, studying was number one priority. When I would go over to my Swedish friend's house, I noticed he could do anything. His parents were not home, we

would play video games for a long time. So, it felt like he doesn't have any restrictions. Then I felt like, we kind of do need restrictions.

(Arsalan 28, Male, second-generation)

The restrictions imposed at home were deeply rooted in prioritising education above all else, creating a formidable expectation for upbringing. For the second-generation, striking a balance between 'fun' and 'achievement' was feasible when comparing themselves to their peers, whereas first-generation parents tended to perceive leisure, fun and play as secondary. Sometimes as a diversion and mutually exclusive to achievement necessitating restrictions, curfews, and strict parental authority to maintain control.

I took some time off from school. Like a lot of Swedish kids do, to work. I was working odd jobs, it helped me develop people skills, and I became more social and outgoing. But my father did not understand. He still does not understand that. He still thinks one should concentrate fully on studies.

(Amin 28, Male, second-generation)

Amin's decision to take time off from school to work aligns with the norms of Swedish culture, where such breaks are common for gaining life experience and social skills. However, his father's disapproval suggests a divergence in values regarding education and career focus. His father's insistence on prioritising academic pursuits highlights the boundaries of belonging within the family, where adherence to traditional expectations may be valued over personal autonomy and exploration. In the fragment below, we can uncover some insights that help elucidate this parental conduct:

Z: He said about the Swedish people, if you do well, they get jealous of you. And he said you always have to work twice as hard than a Swedish person.

U: How so?

Z: That's what he said to me [...] it's his experience. He said they can't get over that thought.

U: What thought?

Z: That you can do better than them.

U: Can you say more?

Z: My father is a working-class guy. He said, when you work in a factory, when working-class white persons with Swedish background sees an immigrant doing better or a person who has come to Sweden a few years ago working alongside and getting better and doing better, they don't like it. I read some research on it too a couple of years ago. It reminded

me [...] its small kind of things my father said to me he always taught me to treat people well. Even if they treat you bad, show them respect. That is the values I have gotten from home and that's the values I have had all my life. So now it's a different type in my case, but I keep values in mind.

(Zarar 22, Male, second-generation)

Zarar's father offers him a thought-provoking piece of advice. Although Zarar may need to exert twice the effort to attain the same opportunities as a native Swedish individual, he might not receive the recognition or acceptance he deserves from his peers for his accomplishments. This advice encapsulates a dual challenge: first, the need to transcend mere survival and thrive within a particular environment, and second, the delicate task of maintaining success without provoking jealousy or resentment, particularly from those who might react negatively to an immigrant's achievements.

For the participants, respect for parents remains paramount. However, children often engage in critical reflection on their upbringing, noting that they were directed without explanations. Questioning parental authority is uncommon, as it may be perceived as disrespectful. This contrasts with the upbringing of parents in their home countries, where questioning authority was less common. In the narrative below, Mizhir, reflects on the perceived contrast between Pakistani and Swedish parental dynamics.

I think for us Pakistani kids if the parents say stay home you compromise. If you want to go out or to meet friends and Ammi (mom) says 'no first go get me this and do that first', then you say to friends 'ok I cannot go right now.' But that's the way it is. You compromise, you compromise for the family, and you see that it is going to be the same thing once you get married you compromise for the family again so that's understood.

(Mizhir 29, Male, second-generation)

Mizhir notes the traditional obedience to parental commands and the willingness to prioritise family needs over personal desires, demonstrating respect for parental authority and familial harmony. Mizhir extends this notion of compromise to future marital relationships, suggesting a cultural continuity in values across generations. Overall, his narrative underscores the significance of compromise and respect for parents within the Pakistani diaspora community, bridging cultural traditions with contemporary societal norms.

Several participants noted observing the relationships their Swedish peers had with their parents and found it unimaginable that they themselves could interact with their own parents in a similar way. When I inquired about the behaviour in question, they provided the following list: cursing openly, disrespecting parents in front of their

friends, slamming doors in their parents' faces, and talking back rudely; highlighting a distinction between constructive communication and heated verbal conflicts, where a child is permitted to be disrespectful. By deeming such behaviour as inconceivable in their desi family, they mark a boundary between the two cultural contexts, particularly in terms of the parent-child relationship.

*'We Were Not Allowed to Date'*

Desi youth in Sweden often grapple with cultural expectations that dictate strict boundaries around dating, which stand in stark contrast to the freedoms enjoyed by their Swedish peers. The excerpts below shed light on this contrast:

No, I never had ... I was not allowed. That was clear I was not allowed to have a boyfriend at the age 15 or ... after 15 it was never...we never talked about it. I feel that you are not allowed to have boyfriends but then if it's that serious that we want to get married, then our parents are oh nice ... good she found someone!! So, there is that contradiction.

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation)

Well, I actually don't know what my parents would say if I told them I am dating someone, I don't know probably they would react [...] I don't think I would tell them till I was sure [...] If I would date someone, I wouldn't tell I won't tell anyone till I am sure it is the one. Then I would tell them. Because I don't want to talk about my personal life and discuss everything and tell everyone.

(Kinza 23, Female, second-generation)

M: weren't allowed to date, this was a big ... so that is the funny part. My parents never actively said that you are not allowed to date, it was the good girls and good boys don't date ... the word 'date' is never used. So, there was an emphasis on sleeping around is not something you do. My mom's talk with me and my sisters when we became teenagers was like never let a guy touch you in a way that you don't want to. Treat yourself as special. Like a temple and do not let anyone tell you that oh let's have close intimate relationship. My mom was always very careful with the wording. I am very much a prude, and I had this concept when growing up that I don't date, and the person I will date will be the one I will marry. So, my ex-boyfriend which ended ... it was not my current husband ...

U: Wait, so, you *did* date?

M. (giggles) I did! Sooooo... then you know differently. When we went to Pakistan, we were like everyone dates over here but no one tells mama and papa. And we just felt that..dating would happen and there was a full scene.. but obviously you won't tell this to your children. It's always been there ... the conflict.

(Maham 34, Female, second-generation)



When one is 'not allowed to date' one does not know how parents 'will react' when one does. Arham reflects on the clear prohibition against having boyfriends at a young age, highlighting the strict boundary imposed by parents. There is also an added feature to this boundary, which is that 'we never talked about it'. Somehow it was 'clear' without having been communicated. However, there is an underlying contradiction wherein parents shift their stance from strict prohibition towards romantic involvement to acceptance 'oh good she found someone' - if the relationship becomes serious enough for marriage. Suggesting a pragmatic approach rooted in cultural and familial considerations.

Moreover, dating, as a normative practice in Sweden, is seen as a practice that is alien to the Pakistani family. Children derive their ideas of romance, relationships and marriage from their parents' narratives on their marriage and family life. Which is why even though dating and having boyfriends is normal and every day in Sweden, it is 'clear' without ever having been communicated, that it rests on the 'outside' of the boundaries of legitimate family (and community) practices involving relationships.

That said, within the restrictions, admonition, warnings, use of authority and boundaries parents set for their children that are based on first-generation experiences and standards of conduct, there is possibility of agency that is up to the second-generation to negotiate. Because in essence, these standards of conduct are technically a list of do's and don'ts that are up for personal interpretation according to individual valuations that is beyond parental control.

Interestingly, all three participants agreed to having dated - *but* with the intention to marry. So, while marriage is the point of alignment with parental values, the way to get there can be negotiated and parents need not be informed, until a personal decision has been made. Kinza emphasises that unless she herself is 'sure' about 'the one' there is no point in involving anyone in her personal matter. Romantic involvement is a private matter, to be shared only with parents in case it is serious and has reached the stage where one wishes to be married. At that stage, parental involvement becomes necessary as does their approval.

Maham describes a parental emphasis on modesty and the sanctity of relationships, devaluing promiscuity. Maham's reflective frown is lightened up with a giggle when I interject as she gives away that she has in fact dated. She acknowledges the slip. She then explains when she visits Pakistan, she realises dating is common there too, contrary to what she and other second-generation individuals in Sweden have been led to believe by their parents, who suggest that dating is not part of the Pakistani culture. Thus, highlighting the complexities of navigating cultural expectations as 'the conflict' - an internal struggle between adhering to parental values and exploring personal autonomy in experiencing relationships, while upholding the boundary of marriage as a correct intention for the same.

### *'Moving Out'*

Rather contentious in the participants Pakistani family is the idea of moving out of one's parents' home, the meaning of which is in stark contrast to what is considered an everyday phenomenon and norm in the Swedish context. In the narratives below, we find three different outlooks on this notion from the perspective of second-generation individuals:

M: Here as soon as the children are 18, they leave home to live on their own. That is a difference otherwise.

U: Is there something wrong with that? Moving out at 18?

M: No, it isn't wrong. But if that is the sole purpose of your life then yes, it is problematic. There must be other perspectives, no? If there aren't any apartments, if housing is difficult, then stay another year with your parents, it isn't the end of the world.

(Masooma 31, Female, second-generation)

S: They are more they are quickly more independent after 18 they shift; they stay busy, and they prefer to stay alone.

U: And you?

S: Well, you know us desi people we like big gatherings everyone sits together in a living room, and we talk to each other. Among Pakistanis this is more common.

U: Have you ever thought of moving out?

S: I did. I lived alone for 6 months when I was studying engineering ... then I was living alone for half a year. And I learned a lot from that experience. But then I thought washing my own clothes, cooking, all that Ammi would help out, but I learned how to become independent and because of that I started to appreciate things at home - home food and everything you understand? Then I got admission into the medical institution so then I came back home.

U: So that they should cook for you, and they should do your cleaning eh? You don't wash your own clothes?

S: I do want to but when I come home mama has already done everything. You know how it is (laughs) mama... (laughs)

(Shaheryar 23, Male, second-generation)

They used to think that when we are 18, we will leave our parents' home and disappear and our thinking was that we are going to take care of our parents and we will live with them, this is how our thinking was different.

(Atheel 24, Male, second-generation)

While the perception of moving out is considered a serious, akin to a coming-of-age ritual in the Swedish context, second-generation Pakistanis don't see it in the same way. With Masooma saying that moving out needs to be deliberated upon with more practical considerations like the housing market and one's own economic position and capacities. There are other ways of exercising autonomy and independence than moving out being 'the sole focus of one's life'. She juxtaposes concepts such as independence and solitude, which are more prevalent among Swedish youth, with the close-knit familial bonds and vibrant social networks characteristic of desi culture.

Moreover, Shaheryar relates leaving home for six months and realising that the responsibilities interfered with the level of concentration his medical school education would require. He jokingly talked about his mother's love and missing her food and care. Also, once again emphasising the value of education foremost, parental support and care in order to achieve that, though that burden falls on his mother, who is a homemaker.

Perhaps the coda to these narratives is offered in Atheel's fragment, that while their counterparts are thinking of leaving to take care of themselves, desi children are staying back to take care of their parents as adults. And they take on this responsibility without conceiving it as a burden or as obligation. They see it as their duty. And thus, in collating the notion of 'compromise' in Mizhir's narrative in the last section, with Shaheryar's ability to take on his mother's care and love as a gratifying, fortifying and nurturing gift. These different meanings of moving out show that the norms of familial responsibility and care stand out in contrast to the perceived Swedish norms of parenting, whereby one is moving out and the other is moving back in.

Moving out encompasses various scenarios in desi families in Sweden as expounded upon by the participants. Such as marriage, pursuing studies abroad, or securing a job in another city. Examples include a participant's journey to Poland to study medicine, another relocated to the north of Sweden for her dental training, another got an internship in China, and another moved to study law in England. Additionally, there's the narrative of Baber, who wants to remain in a joint family settling down with his wife and children in his parents' house rather than moving out.

Technically all of the participants except one, have moved out of the parents' home. To study, or if homes are becoming overcrowded, or in the event that individuals get married and wish to have houses of their own. There is some resistance from the parent generation to allow second-generation children to move out on their own. Second-generation don't contest this too much because it allows them to save time and money, offers safety, and gives them more time with their family.

### *Navigating Curfews and Restrictions*

Participants families have curfews and restrictions that are internal to their own sense of values and what is considered permissible. In the larger context of their interviews, the participants said they could stay out late for studying, and for work; but not for parties and hanging out with friends. This remained so for both boys and girls. They were, as children until they became young adults, primed to study and work. And this was heavily monitored by sanctions and rules about their movements as illustrated by the following examples:

We spent our weekends with our cousins. Mom's brother has three children who are age fellows [...] we have always been around each other a lot. So, weekends were with them both inside and outside. And when I was young around third grade or something we didn't really go that often over to our friends it was mostly family engagements. We went to birthday parties. Not allowed to go for sleepovers (only to cousins for sleepover was allowed). I never had a sleepover at my place.

(Zareesh 25, Female, second-generation)

K: to be honest there shouldn't be an age limit. My brother is 30 and even today when he is out all night my mother will still phone him and ask him where he is.

U: Do they live together?

K: Yes, they do. So, I mean like parents are always going to be parents and if they don't care in that way it will be weird. yea, no... with age of course you should trust your children, at some point, when it is a sensitive age around teenage of course I understand that then parents are more vigilant and stricter. But after a while they let go. They see that the child has become more mature.

(Kinza 23, Female, second-generation)

Late-night parties, drinking alcohol, stuff like that; we could have done that, to be honest, because our parents were not strict at all. But we didn't do it because I have no interest to honest, I didn't have any interest. So, I don't know how that came into me how I have this integrity or this discipline I really don't know it is very easy to get influenced especially when you are at that age, especially when you are a teenager. I don't know but I've always been like this, I'm not interested, and my friends in college also knew, that Sanaya is not into these things, and we will not push her. In school she meets us and even after school but when it comes to certain things, I don't like it.

(Sanaya 31, Female, second-generation)

Pressures of teenage activities across cultures remain the same. By virtue of being in Sweden and knowing the restrictions their parents grew up with and now they have to negotiate with their parents, they see these activities as strictly being a part of the

Swedish milieu. Most participants' narratives about their parents homing desire and re-grounding strategies revolved around ensuring that their immediate relatives were invited from Pakistan to work in Sweden, so that future wives and children could have companions, familial support in raising children, and playmates in the form of cousins. Thus, 'family engagements' and 'sleepovers with cousins' compensated for the same practice but without needing friends outside the family circle. Trust is a boundary that is shared between family members and family friends. Without acquaintance with other families, outside the circle parents have created; they are reluctant to send their children for play or for sleepovers to someone else's home.

Kinza observes that, in her experience, there isn't a specific age at which Pakistani parents stop treating their adult children as if they were still kids. Citing her brother's example, who is 30 years old, yet their mother still monitors his activities, and this dynamic is mutually accepted by both parties. Children become more indulgent of their parents so-called 'control' and reframe it as being cared for. Although there is a 'sensitive' age where 'trust' has to be earned by children and there is an age where trust has to be espoused by parents for a workable understanding in the parent-child relationship.

Sanaya attributes to herself a penchant for personal integrity and discipline versus socially risky behaviours such as alcohol and late-night partying. These activities have the potential to harm one's social mobility and aptitude for success. Social class has to be earned for children of immigrants through hard work during teenage years and as young adults, an ethos that has led Sanaya to a prominent professional career. Children of immigrants have more to lose if they mess up. She also appreciates her friends (mostly second-generation immigrants from other backgrounds) who were respectful of her personal choices and did not 'push her', instead they were protective of her interests and helped her stay focused.

### *Am I a Swede?*

Participants reflect on their childhoods and upbringing in their family where cultural identity from their parents' homeland is preserved in the home. As tempered across the length of this chapter; family roles, language, religious beliefs, sexual practices, hospitality, and maintenance of multigenerational homes reinforces a 'Pakistan-like' environment in the private sphere. There are also distinctive cultural norms that relate to the migration trajectory of the parents as well as strategies of social advancement. The latter relates to values attached to education, social capital emanating from ethnic networks, material resources, knowledge and communication, transferable skills and competencies, human capital, and so on (Anthias, 2009: 9). The following excerpt illustrates how parents perceive their place in Sweden, which serves as the foundation for the second-generation to understand their own place in their country of birth:

The *foreigner* has a problem. He never settles. Very few foreigners I have seen who are physically and mentally adjusted here. Those who start to dream in Swedish. Well dreams...if a Swedish comes in my dreams I speak to that person in Swedish and if it's a Pakistani I speak in Urdu. But I don't dream in Swedish.

(Talat 62, Male, first-generation parent [my emphasis])

I am a Swede, I am born here, this is my country, but I am connected to Pakistan through my parents. Parents confuse us growing up, telling us we are Pakistanis. They have one foot here and one foot there. I have both my feet here. When I started to think like this, my perspective on life changed.

(Shahzaib 32, Male, second-generation)

I was very confused growing up thought I was Pakistani living in Sweden, but I was actually a Swede with a Pakistani heritage, and it wasn't until recently uhh that I actually got some structure and some clarity. I started calling myself more of a I am *a Swede* and that's where I think my identity came back to me and before that I was very confused.

(Muneeb 27, Male, second-generation [my emphasis])

Pakistan is about where you are coming from and in Sweden it is about where you are headed: in Sweden we focus on where you want to head and where you come from is not that important in the decision of uhhh studies of marriage people want to know where you are heading and jobs...but in Pakistan a lot of your decisions are based on where you come from, if you are from the right family, from the right I don't know even some class and so you are materially and even.. identity is still much more collective in Pakistan

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation)

I always think that there are two different worlds, but I am very happy that I have got the chance to experience two different worlds for me it is something positive and I can handle it because *I am a flexible person*.

(Sanaya 31, Female, second-generation [my emphasis])

Parents' longings often shape the identities of their children, sometimes leading to confusion as the children navigate their own sense of self. As these children grow up and reach different life stages, they gain a clearer understanding of who they are and how they contribute to the societies they live in. This process involves negotiating their identities in relation to their parents' expectations. By actively using their interpretive repertoires, they assess how their inherited identifications impact their opportunities and life chances. Through a careful balance of authenticity and tact, they find a position

that honours their personal agency, eases the pressures from their parents, and aligns with their roles as citizens in their societies.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we learn that being Pakistani is not a pre-given or fixed set of codes. It is instead animated through the interpretative efforts of intergenerational relations and shaped by their changing context (Khoja-Moolji, 2023). In this process, participants, growing up desi, personalise vocabularies and invest old terms with new meanings (Shankar, 2008).

In considering participant narratives both continuities and innovations are observed in participant narratives. Their stories gave voice to a nascent Pakistani second-generation diasporic cultural milieu in Sweden.

Everyday dynamics of race, class, language use, and gender intersect with immigration histories and local places to make being desi an active negotiation to illustrate how diaspora is used for relational boundary-work and meaning making. The chapter unpacks how the use of diaspora implicitly or explicitly contributes to drawing of or maintaining boundaries for a relational and processual approach to collective identities.

Finding one's place within this margin/centre dynamic becomes paramount, as families seek to balance Pakistaniness and Muslimness with embeddedness into Swedish society while striving for acceptance and belonging as 'new' Swedes whose historical roots extend beyond Sweden.

## Chapter 6

# Negotiating ‘Otherness’

## Being the ‘Other’, Meeting the ‘Other’, and Being ‘Othered’

This chapter delves into the experiences of second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden, who, despite being raised with the belief that they are part of an egalitarian and culturally diverse society, frequently encounter a starkly different reality. These individuals articulate their encounters with otherness in various contexts: in friendships that are marked by subtle exclusions; in neighbourhoods where they are often seen as outsiders; on buses and streets where, casual interactions reveal prejudices; in schools where the promise of equality is frequently belied by discriminatory practices; and in the labour market, where opportunities are often constrained by biases. These experiences stand in sharp contrast to the ideals of inclusion and equality that they have been taught to associate with Swedish society. Through their narratives, I examine how second-generation Pakistani-Muslims navigate encounters with otherness, how they negotiate their identities within a framework that often marginalises them, and how they reconcile the dissonance between internalised societal ideals and the exclusion they face.

Belonging is a *bid for connection*. It is relational. It is negotiated with an(other) and/or several others. And it says something about what is at stake in interactions that create closeness or distance in relations. The status of insider/outsider, mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and perceptions of proximity through sameness/difference animates closeness and distance in ‘connections’ - whether they are *near* (local urban context), *dear* (friendships), *peer* (school/education context) or *career* (professional context).

When analysing interactions that impact the ways in which individuals are subjected to racialising gaze from members of the dominant majority and their response to racialising structures in how they come to accept themselves as legitimate subjects - it is not the fact that they occur, but where and when they show up and the fact that they repeat themselves that is important: ‘It may not be that one specific person’s questions are problematic; rather it is the fact that it has happened 20 times before’ (in Jakku,



2018b: c.f. Molina, 2010: 79). The *uncoordinated repetition* of the *same questions, utterances and behaviours* by unrelated people upholds the pattern.

According to Harris (2013) 'everyday' multiculturalism is in ordinary social spaces in which people of different backgrounds encounter one another, and consists of the mundane practices they construct and draw on to manage these encounters. This implies that everyday multiculturalism is a dynamic and lived field of action in which social actors construct and deconstruct ideas of difference, belonging and place.

In the analysis that follows, I examine the attributes highlighted by interlocutors when they encounter racialising gaze of white Swedes, how they interpret what these interactions reveal about Swedish perceptions of them, and their responses to these racialising experiences.

## Near Connections: Local Urban Domestic Context

The processes of racialisation in urban space significantly impact the experiences and sense of belonging for second-generation Pakistani-Muslims. Routine everyday interactions and public encounters shape how they perceive their place in society and navigate their identities.

During the interview, Ilma reflected on moments when her immigrant background, marked by her brown skin, was the target of verbal attacks by white Swedes. Initially claiming she couldn't remember, she soon recounted two detailed experiences, and as she continued, more memories and incidents surfaced than she had anticipated, surprising her with their vividness. She describes an encounter with an 'old' lady on the street and an interaction with a 'friendly' man on an empty bus. Both situations initially seemed benign and harmless but ended with surprising and unsettling conclusions:

[...] I guess it was one month ago uh... it was an old lady who was taking her bags and going up from the stairs and I just asked her 'do you want help?' and she started to yell at me 'don't take my bags, you will take my bags and run away that is how you immigrant people do' and stuff like that so... those kind of stuff they are happening in social life all the time but nothing really personally happened to me...

[...] I was on the bus. I was going home. I think it was 10 or 11 o'clock in the evening. And it was wintertime, so it was like really dark. The bus was empty. And it was just me and I was sitting at the back. And this guy gets on and he sits next to me. He starts to talk 'oh where are you from?' and yea I sort of socialised with him. It was ok and then he starts like 'oh your skin tone is like my shit', and I was shocked coz I... I wasn't expecting him to say anything like that because he was really nice in the beginning and then I was like 'oh I don't think you should say something like that'. He was like 'no

that's the colour of my shit like your skin'. I got scared [...] he went on 'I don't know what you are doing here but we don't have any place here for people like you here in Sweden' and stuff like that. Then he was too much. My station was coming so I was like 'you know, I am Swedish as much as you are, because I've been here all my life. I'm born here so I am Swedish, and it doesn't matter to me what you say because this is my country as well! And he was like 'no this is not your country! Your parents are not from here, so this is not your country!'. And I was like 'I am born here, and this is my country! If you are born in another country, then you are from that country. So, it doesn't matter what you say!'. And then I jumped off when the bus stopped.

(Ilma 23, Female, second-generation)

In the first story, the ordinary act of kindness becomes an extraordinary event when the offered *help* is seen as a *ploy* to 'steal', something that '*you* immigrant people do'. This encounter suggests deep-seated prejudice against immigrants, in this instance viewing Ilma as inherently untrustworthy, deceptive and likely to engage in a criminal activity. It also points to the pervasive stereotype that immigrants are potential threats and are to be feared.

Ilma's response to this racialising experience is one of resigned acknowledgement. The shift from third person that such incidents 'are happening in social life all the time' to first-person that nothing has 'really personally happened' to her, implying a degree of emotional distancing normalisation of the extraordinary event back to an ordinary event. Another way of interpreting this would be that while she thinks *it is bad* that these things happen all the time, she *didn't feel bad* when it happened to her, nor did she *take it personally* or *get offended*. This response highlights a coping strategy where Ilma recognises the frequency of such prejudice but attempts to minimise its personal impact, possibly to navigate daily life ignoring such confrontations and its incumbent distress. It also suggests a form of resilience or detachment developed to cope with the ongoing racialisation in social interactions.

In Ilma's second story several layers of racial malice, white superiority, and inadvertent ideas about national identity and belonging come into play. Initially, the encounter appears benign, with a seemingly friendly conversation. However, it quickly devolves to one of blatant hostility 'your face is the colour of my shit' that shocks Ilma. All interlocutors struggle with the question of 'where are you from?' as children of immigrants. Not knowing how to interpret the intention behind the question nor how to appropriately respond to the unclear intention. Ilma perceives the question positively until the shift in interaction pits the information provided against her to 'put her in place' (Anderson, 2015: 15). Floya Anthias (in Smith et al., 2021: 92) describes the *everyday aesthetics of location* as the ways in which aesthetic judgements are tied to the inhabitation of space and the racialising potential of ways of looking at such spaces and

at the social relations which exist within them. Brah's (2022: 103) optimistic outlook of diaspora *space* in its transformative potential of entanglements between those who stay put and those who move, fissures in this encounter as the gendered, racialised and othered aesthetic of Ilma's presence is attributed to an excrement.

The man's remarks underscore an ingrained sense of white superiority, that is in itself a response to conjured up fears of racial dilution of national character through the presence of people of colour (Brah & Coombes, 2000). By using 'shit' as a metaphor, that stands for something impure, dirty, disgusting, smelly, waste, belonging outside the human body etc. Ilma is dehumanised; and whiteness is fortified as an impenetrable racial boundary that is implicitly superior to the civic boundary of citizenship (Jacobson, 1997).

Exemplified by 'your parents are not from here' the man's assertion that Sweden is not Ilma's country reveals deep-seated, exclusionary ideas about national identity. His argument rests on a racialised definition of who qualifies as a 'real Swede' implying that only those of white, presumably native-born lineage, truly belong. This notion invalidates the lived experiences and identities of second-generation immigrants like Ilma, disregarding their right to claim the country as their own. Ahmed (2013: 194) argues histories of contact impress upon surface of bodies at the time as they create new impressions about them. The 'moment of contact' (ibid.) between Ilma and the man is deeply influenced by historical prejudices and societal impressions that perceive racial others as perpetual outsiders. The man's reaction is not just an isolated incident but a manifestation of ingrained histories of exclusion that continue to shape contemporary interactions and identities in Sweden (Hübinette, 2012; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017).

Ilma's response, asserting her Swedish identity and challenging the man's prejudice, is a powerful rebuttal. She shows her agency, resilience, and willpower in the face of the 'moment of contact'. She emphasises her birthright and lifelong residence in Sweden, which should unequivocally affirm her belonging. However, the man's insistence that her heritage disqualifies her from being Swedish exemplifies a broader societal challenge: the struggle for individuals of diverse backgrounds to be recognised and accepted as legitimate members of their nation, irrespective of race.

According to Anderson (2015: 15) regardless of a coloured person's previous negotiations, putative achievements, or claims to status; the person is reminded of her provisional status, that she has much to prove in order to really belong in the predominantly white space. Even when the norm of civility in public space is violated, Ilma remains discreet and defends herself in a deeply unsettling, hurtful, and shocking situation. In terms of privacy and personal integrity, both high ideals of the democratic, gender-equal, Swedish welfare state, Ilma—a young woman from a minority ethnic group—is palpably violated. Understanding the impact of her positionality highlights the bodies upon which the burden of intersectional inequalities is wrought. Her

discretion also partly normalises the transgression as a part of the micro-politics faced by the second-generation.

If Ilma's presence serves as a 'mirror' for the man, disrupting his idealised self-image and creating aesthetic dissonance, the 'mirror' plays an even more significant role in Nauphil's experience. It summons his sense of difference into existence:

I felt this difference for the first time I still remember I was 11 at that time uhhhh I was playing outside in the snow ... there was a little boy who was 5 or 6 years old ... I was 11 at that time and I was wearing a cap. He called at me ... shouting loudly '*Jävla Kebab Jävla Kebab*'<sup>37</sup> pointing and laughing ... I became so distressed! I had heard this for the very first time in my life I was really bothered and taken aback. I stopped playing and went home. He was such a young boy ... why would he say that I kept thinking. When I think about it today that imagine the kind of things that must be discussed in his family because a child learns from his family a child is innocent. When I got home ... when I came in ... when we enter our home there is a mirror in front of the door. I stood there a while and I looked at myself in the mirror. I saw that my cap was really low, and I thought to myself 'he didn't even see my eyebrows leave alone my hair how did he know that I had black hair?'. I thought our skin was the same and our hair I thought it was only the hair that was different and then slowly I began to understand as we grew older ... this thing ... in the mid-90s there was a lot of racism a lot of growth in that direction that I began to see[...]. This was my first experience though, that I had that affected me ... it was right in the beginning in the very first year of moving in the white Swedish neighbourhood.

(Nauphil 35, Male, second-generation)

Nauphil recalls the above incident was when his family moved to a predominantly white Swedish neighbourhood. Before that, he lived in a neighbourhood which was 'mixed' and 'international' known for housing immigrants and foreigners. Shift in neighbourhood is a celebratory moment for the immigrant family. It shows an improvement in the family's status. Their social mobility signals 'immigrant success.' In one environment he blended in and in the other he stood out. Though initially he didn't experience that difference, he related the above incident as a turning point.

Sweden's historical and demographic history has a mix of ingredients that long upheld the view of the Swedish race as 'beautiful and physically and aesthetically perfect' (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011: 44). The young boy's use of the slur '*Jävla Kebab*' to refer to Nauphil highlights how physical appearance, specifically the aesthetic difference of racial and ethnic markers, becomes the focus a racialising gaze. The term

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<sup>37</sup> 'Jävla' is a Swedish swear word used similarly to the English word 'fucking' but the Swedish 'jävla' is slightly milder than its English counterpart, closer to bloody, damn or frigging.

'kebab' is also used derogatorily to denote Middle Eastern or South Asian heritage, reducing Nauphil's identity to a stereotype associated with immigrant communities.

In the context of the story, Nauphil's experience can be seen as a metaphorical mirror stage. The harsh and external reflection of his identity through the racial slur is jarring and distressing. When Nauphil looks at himself in the mirror at home, he engages in a moment of self-reflection, literally and figuratively. It forces Nauphil to confront an imposed version of himself, much like the child in Lacan's theory confronts its image in the mirror within a linguistically structured, socially regulated relation (in Grosz, 2002: 31-33). Bhabha describes this as the first stages of self-identification where one's existence is called into being in relation to the look or locus of an otherness (Bhabha, 2012: 44). Contemplating on the boy's young age indicates to Nauphil that children internalise racial socialisation within the home and community to reproduce prejudices.

The experience in the predominantly white neighbourhood, where racism is more pronounced (see Anderson, 2015), serves as an ongoing 'mirror' reflecting a distorted and prejudiced image of the self. It also underscores the profound impact of societal mirrors in shaping one's self-perception of recognition and misrecognition. Nauphil's initial belief that only hair colour differentiated him from others highlights a naive understanding of racial dynamics that is shattered by this experience. What he *faces* makes him *see his face* in a new light. The moment marks the beginning of a deeper understanding of racial dynamics and the subtle, often unspoken ways in which non-white individuals are distinguished and marginalised.

By reflecting on personally experiencing the mid-90s as a temporal context of rising racism in Sweden, Nauphil further situates his encounter within a broader societal trend. The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence (Bhabha, 1992). During this period, according to Nauphil, xenophobic attitudes increased, making it even more challenging for children of immigrants to navigate their everyday lives. While he makes sense of his experience retrospectively, this event is narrated as having a profound and lasting impact on Nauphil's sense of identity and belonging.

Nauphil's account shows how he responds to an uncomfortable encounter. 'I stopped playing and went *home*' demonstrates the retreat into a safer, more familiar space in response to the hostility encountered. Hospitable and homeliness of 'home' are juxtaposed against humiliation and hostility of being 'outside the home.'

Nauphil overcomes his emotions of sadness, shock, surprise and distress over time as he begins to make sense of his place within a racially stratified society. Later in the interview he said, 'as I have kept growing, I have changed my values. There are many good people and many not so good people you meet them all for who they are.' This statement reveals a resilient and discerning approach to dealing with racialising experiences. He recognises diversity among 'good' and 'not so good people' and does

not paint all 'Swedes' with the same brushstroke. He stresses on the ability to adapt, grow, and maintain a balanced perspective despite challenges one may face when racialised as an immigrant.

What Nauphil 'beg[an] to see' is corroborated by Zarar after he relays a story where he and his family were on a road trip around Skåne and stopped to rest in a small city where a group of white people called them 'Jävla Afghaner'. When one person in Zarar's family confronted the accosters, they got roused into starting a fight. After taking a few seconds to breathe after narrating the story, Zarar continued towards the following resolution:

I got to that conclusion because if I don't change my picture of as a human how to treat a human I can go if they are racist to me, I should be nice to them because that is the only way for me to make them understand that my values are exactly like yours.

(Zarar 22, Male, second-generation)

Continuing to be 'nice' to offenders shows Zarar's politics of care for inclusion. Brownlie and Anderson's (2017) formulation of putting the 'kin' back in 'kindness' is similar to Zarar's assertion of seeing humans as kin and therefore liable to one's *kindness* despite their *unkindness*. While this approach aims to dismantle the perceived 'otherness' by highlighting universal human qualities, it correspondingly foregrounds that 'absence of kindness' is also patterned. The imbalance in who inflicts harm (white Swedes) and who responds with kindness (racialised individuals) highlights that the emotional burden of managing these interactions falls disproportionately on the racialised.

This imbalance is also reiterated by Ilma reflecting on her experiences of being othered by white Swedes. She uses the word 'block' to describe emotional and cognitive distancing of white Swedes from building a connection when questioned about their prejudice. In response to a racial attack when Ilma says to her colleague 'all Muslims are *not* terrorists' and 'all immigrants are *not* on socialbidrag', her colleague *walks away*. According to Ilma, in her experience, white Swedes who interrogate minority difference often lack the understanding to appreciate nuance and show curiosity, quickly jumping to conclusions that they then rigidly defend.

Being seen negatively also involves witnessing others-like-oneself experiencing the same treatment. In the following excerpt, Atheel describes two incidents that foreground experiences of foreignness as a double burden, one as a witness, and another as a recipient:

A: I was on the train standing next to woman and a man last year. There was a woman was wearing a hijab they said to her umm how do you say foreigner?

U: (Shrugs)

A ... yeah *jävla invandrare* go back to your country' [...] so at that time I was angry but then I thought through discussions this can be solved ... I feel though ... their thinking is so small what can one say...one can't make them understand either that if someone is wearing hijab why do you want to send someone back? And why do you think it is forced? The women I know who wear the hijab, they have made their own choice to wear it.

A: It has happened to us too. We were told *what are you doing here go back to your country* you are taking our jobs when we were young and playing football in the park and people who were passing by would say what are you doing here go back ... 'why are you playing here?'. This would happen too many times.

U: How does that make you feel?

A: uhhhhh (sighs) First I think 'where is home?'. In Pakistan I am a foreigner here I am a foreigner so where is home for me? Somewhere in the middle? Where do I go. All my life I have thought about this predicament that when I go to Pakistan people say look, he has come from abroad and then we say that okay we are from abroad. And when we are here, the first thing they ask is not my name but where I come from, I tell them I come from Malmö- but they want to know what country I am from so ... what to say...

(Atheel 24, Male, second-generation [my emphasis])

In the first part of the story, the hijab worn by the woman is the primary attribute that triggers the derogatory label '*jävla invandrare*'<sup>38</sup> from the man and woman on the train. Hijab – a visible maker of Muslimness – perceived as foreign and an unwelcome symbol, moves them to say, 'go back to your country.' Suggesting that its wearer does not belong in Swedish society.

Atheel's experience playing football in a neighbourhood park highlights how his visible difference invites invasive scrutiny, even in innocent moments of play. The invocations 'go back to your country' and 'you are taking our jobs' can be interpreted as threats related to perceived economic competition. They suggest a desire to remove or restrict immigrants from certain spaces or opportunities. Anthias (2016: 80) describes this form of boundary-making and hierarchisation that constructs racialised others as a 'danger.' In this case as a danger to the security of the livelihoods of white Swedes. As such, this relates to the politics of belonging in terms of resource allocation - what we share with others and to what this sharing relates (Anthias, 2016: 76) denoting contestations and struggles over who does and does not belong. Thereby Atheel's mere presence is dangerous and threatening; social acceptance is thus denied.

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<sup>38</sup> Roughly translates to 'damn immigrants' or 'bloody immigrants'

On one hand, Atheel reflects on entrenched prejudices and the futility of dialogue alone in combatting them. He demonstrates resilience by seeking to understand prejudiced perspectives. On the other hand, he confronts existential questions of home and belonging that interrogate his legitimacy both in Pakistan and Sweden. Finding himself *lacking* full belonging in both contexts, his transnational lens enables him to see that fixity of belonging is not possible. It cannot be tied to a fixed place or location. Instead, it emerges from crisscrossing connections, creating various contradictory positions for the possibility of belonging (Anthias, 2016: 83).

When 'otherness' is enforced, regardless of context (Sweden and Pakistan), questions of 'home' become both contentious and productive. Atheel, visibly perturbed in our conversation, resigns to being seen for his 'foreignness'. He chuckles and shrugs to state 'what to say?' to show that he still has not found his answer. And to be in the state of a question is also to be in a state of becoming to belong.

One's desire to coexist is in tension with others' desires of the same, the terms of which are still being negotiated, is also exemplified by Faris in the excerpt below, reflecting on racial biases in law enforcement that contribute to feelings of dehumanisation among immigrants and hurt coexistence:

Four months ago, the police stopped me, and I organised a political campaign on that issue. The police stopped me at Rosengard police station my brother is a police officer a police inspector he called me at 12 o'clock in the night and he said my wife she went to sleep can you pick me up from work today. And I said okay no problem. I went to pick him up. I drive into the police station. And a civil police officer with his car he stopped my car inside the police stations parking. He came to my car he asked to lower the window and started asking me what I am doing at the station. I said 'I'm gonna pick up my brother' and he said, 'no you are not picking up your brother, why are you here?' I said, 'I am here to pick up my brother' and he said, 'no you are not here to pick up your brother why are you here?' I said, 'I am here to pick up my brother.' I told him three times. Then he said ... if somebody has committed a crime, they interrogate him... he said, 'interrogation time is over so you cannot pick up your brother'. I said, 'what do you mean?' He repeated his answer. I said what do you mean? He said 'I have met a lot of people like you and you always creating a mess and people like are doing this and that, so I am just taking precautions. We started to have a heated argument. I told him that I have worked with the police before. I know your values and my rights, and you are going outside of your values, and you are stamping me with something I am not. That is very wrong, and you are not doing a good service for the Swedish community. During that discussion my brother finally comes out from the office from the main door. When the policeman sees my brother approaching the car he backs up and he moves away immediately. This stuff happens all the time. With every immigrant. Well, not every immigrant. But lots of immigrants. I have been stopped driving my car at gunpoint by the police. Just because they want to see my licence and they brag with their gun because



they see me as dangerous judging from my looks. So, when you are in that kind of an environment you are starting to feel less human if you reflect it happens always.

(Faris 29, Male, second-generation)

This quote highlights a racialising experience marked by misjudgement and misuse of authority by a white Swedish police officer. The participant, who goes to pick up his brother (also a police officer) from the station, is repeatedly questioned by a civil officer despite explaining his purpose. The officer's suspicion and hostility, evident in his insistence that 'interrogation time is over,' reflects a prejudiced perception, treating an innocent bystander as a criminal who is being 'interrogated.' A term used to formally investigate someone who has been arrested for a crime. Interrogations are conducted to elicit information, confessions, or admissions of guilt from a suspect, always within the legal boundaries that protect the rights of the individual being questioned. Faris is treated with suspicion and hostility as if he were indeed a suspect, dangerous signalled by his ethnicity. The resolution comes when his brother arrives, prompting the officer to back off, without remorse or an apology.

Describing the everyday surveillance of people of colour and immigrants in underprivileged, heavily policed, and stigmatised neighbourhoods in Sweden as dehumanising and exclusionary (see for example Wästerfors & Burcar Alm, 2020), Faris responds by organising a political campaign. As a student of international relations and human rights in a well-known university, Faris' proactive stance against racial profiling and misuse of authority leverages his 'outsider' experience to strengthen his 'insider' position within Swedish society.

In conclusion, urban multicultural encounters show every(body) is not welcome even when diversity is celebrated as a part of public Swedish discourse. Everyday spaces like the train, bus, playground, streets become sites of exclusion and racialisation for immigrants, where their presence is questioned and met with hostility. While everyone does 'gets on' and 'gets by' in urban spaces, this section shows how whiteness moves 'through', 'on' and 'up' more easily (see Redclift et al., 2022). From the above narratives, it is palpable that Swedish whiteness is the norm and a hierarchy of belonging against which 'other' ethnicised groups are measured. The burden of being racialised for their markedness falls disproportionately on the interlocutors. Dis/ease felt by the interlocutors is converted to feeling affectively at a resigned ease with the discomfort they face, normalising racialising processes, while putting their racialisers at ease in their presence.

## Dear Connections: Friendship Context

Friendships are non-institutionalised and intimate connections among people. On the other hand, they are embedded in structural power relations in society. As the role of more traditional and established sources of social care, such as family, community and work are being challenged (Pahl, 2002), friends are becoming ‘comforters, confidants and soulmates’ (Pahl & Spencer, 2018: 197). Friends have a prominent role in ‘enabling’ belongingness and social support (Languilaire & Carey, 2017: 102). In lieu of these connections, where friendships can have the potential to enhance the experience of belonging, this section will lend to an understanding of the nature of friendship formation for the participants and their everyday interactions in contexts of ‘difference.’ It will untangle how friendship ideals are understood, cultivated, enacted and negotiated in practice.

When asked about friendships, most interlocutors generally find white Swedes ‘hard to make friends with.’ Having experiences in their immigrant heavy neighbourhoods, friendships with other Pakistanis in their communities, and having travelled abroad; forging ‘close’ interpersonal relationships with Swedes is deemed comparatively harder.

In the quote below, Zain who was born in Sweden, later moved to England with his family at age 6 and returned to Sweden at age 18 on account of his father’s illness, describes his experience of interacting with fellow Swedes upon his return. He had mentioned in his narration earlier how he didn’t have ‘Swedish’ friends and when I asked him to reflect on why that was so, he answered:

I said it is hard to make friends, but I do have friends, I made a lot of friends [...] they are Swedish-foreigners<sup>39</sup> I have very few Swedish-Swedish<sup>40</sup> friends [...] I think most people with foreign backgrounds that are born here don’t have many Swedish friends. I was born here, then raised in the UK, then I moved back, I found it hard to communicate with them [...] I don’t get an opinion, I don’t get a real sense of if they are having fun with me or not, they are very neutral.

(Zain 21, Male, second-generation)

Reflecting on his positionality, interaction rituals and friendship norms, Zain clarifies that he *does* have friends, but they are ‘Swedish-Foreigners’ not ‘Swedish-Swedish’ friends. Researchers studying friendships have shown that ‘it takes time and effort to

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<sup>39</sup> Swedish-Foreigners means children of immigrants who are born in Sweden. In a few cases participants also refer to someone with Swedish citizenship that was born in a foreign country as a Swedish-Foreigner. In the above example Zain is referring to the former definition.

<sup>40</sup> Swedish-Swedish refers to children born in Sweden to two native-white Swedish parents.

develop meaningful, close, trusting relationships' (Pahl, 2000: 86; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014: 263). As someone 'starting from scratch,' he shows an understanding of the value of time investments in enduring social contact to quality of friendships, he gives credence to his own assessment in his subsequent qualification, 'most other people' with immigrant backgrounds, also 'don't have many Swedish friends [if any]'.

In the material, also highlighted by Povrzanović Frykman and Mozetič (2020), migrant-specific 'constant comparison' is at work in the course of narrative production in interview situations. Zain follows up with other assertions about Swedes, that they are: '*hard* to communicate with', '*hard* to be friends with', and that it is '*harder* to foster a deep and intimate connection' because one never knows where one stands with them. These comparisons about the 'Swedish-Swedish' people are made in relation to 'Swedish-foreigners'. Masked emotions that come across as 'neutrality' shows a discipline in emotions that Zain finds hard to read. Friendship boundaries are carefully navigated with a sense of not really understanding what the boundaries of tacit friendship norms are and one is in doubt of whether one is *close* and enjoying each other's company or not. Thus, revealing to him the lack of security and continuity in these relations.

Atheel restates some of what Zain experiences in his interpersonal relations, but he relays his experience as more inner directed rather than outer directed. It's something inside him that holds him back:

Swedish people ... uh... I can hang out with them, but I cannot get too personal with them. I don't have that... how do I explain... jhijhak (hesitation) I cannot know about them, their inner... I cannot laugh at their jokes I don't understand their jokes. I can do my schoolwork with them; at my job I can coordinate with them [...] I have really tried to be close. I don't know what it is that holds me back and pushes me back.

(Atheel 24, Male, second-generation)

Atheel describes his feeling in Urdu as 'jihhak', which translates to 'hesitation' whereby getting personal or too close is not a possibility. His voice trails off at 'I cannot know about them, their inner...' as he tries to think of another word but instead shifts the conversation to not being able to understand 'their jokes'. Having a 'good sense of humour' often means sharing similar perspectives and values with others (see Partington, 2006). In friendships, humour arises from playing with these shared values and experiences (Knight, 2013). Atheel's inability to 'laugh' at jokes or 'understand' them indicates he lacks the shared background that humour in friendships relies on to bond and construct solidarity. Inadvertently also explaining his disconnection that he is unable to articulate. He is conveying something similar to Zain when he says he has a hard time knowing the 'inner' feelings of his Swedish counterparts. In the absence of

that depth, he finds it hard to appraise friendly relations. He says he ‘really has tried’ as if to convince me of his utmost efforts in trying to get close.

He lists the things he feels he can do quite successfully with Swedes. These alignments are academic and professional, but they are ‘thin’, ‘circumstantial’ and did not travel beyond these contexts to a more personal realm, remaining ‘partial’ and characterised by ‘limited intimacies’ (Hollingworth, 2020: 566). He does recall having that kind of closeness when he was much younger. But growing up and coming into adult life, he has accumulated different experiences (exemplified in earlier section) that play out in the form of this hesitation, something that ‘holds [him] back, pushes [him] back’. From a new social location (becoming an adult, venturing into the job market, studying at the university) one sees oneself differently from another’s eyes and vice versa. The accumulation in one’s cultural repertoires and experiences of being racialised, expands the arc of one’s vision. He is beginning to understand his position in society as something that results in increasing distance in friendships rather than decreasing it.

In conversation with Masooma, and sisters Marium and Maleeha, lack of Swedish friendships was attributed to not having ‘common interests.’ There are no common interests, they elaborate, because the activities that they as Pakistani second-generation and their Swedish counterparts engage in, are completely different. They had somewhat similar accounts but were elaborated on differently:

U: what kind of common interests?

Marium: They would talk about oh we went to a bar, or we went to the club maybe not club at that age, but this is what we drank, this boyfriend, this is where we spent last night, we did this and that. And our parents had brought us up with strict standards.

Maleeha: Like in the evenings, we didn’t go out, or into the city to meet up with friends. If we went out, all three of us sisters would go together. Besides that, with friends, going out, there was very little interaction. We only interacted with other Pakistanis and we had no other friends.

(Marium 30 and Maleeha 32, Females, second-generation)

They had different weekend plans, parties, clubbing, drinking and not telling their parents. I was the opposite, I would tell my parents everything, plus I wasn’t very interested in these activities.

(Masooma 31, Female, second-generation)

Masooma takes a more personal stance for the lack of common interests between herself and her Swedish peers. She relates it as her individual decision to not partake in the kind of activities she ‘wasn’t interested in’ and she insinuates that some of these

activities may be outside permissible lines of parental boundaries. Which she had no intention of crossing, because she ‘would tell her parents everything’ as opposed to her peers who exercised a little more freedom in that regard. Marium on the other hand explains that there were strict parental controls on when, where and what time she and her sisters were allowed to go out. Their activities were monitored and who they could go out with was also scrutinised. The curfew timing, parental involvement and approval, meant that friendships were once again not fostered with ‘Swedes’ because their leisure activities, such as ‘partying, drinking, clubbing, dating and having boyfriends’ did not meet the approval of Pakistani parents. Girls have the added responsibility for upholding cultural rules of the family, resulting in heightened regulation and surveillance from parents because of fears of Western society compromising their daughters’ alignment to their familial cultural norms (Franceschelli & O’Brien, 2015; Shain, 2000, 2010; Werbner, 2005).

That said, these rules remain the same for both genders in this study. The domestic family is the main space where young people learn about Pakistani culture and Islam. As mentioned earlier in chapter 5, career aspirations of Pakistani parents in the diaspora for their children propelled them towards competitive subjects like such medicine, law, pharmacy, dentistry or generally self-employment<sup>41</sup>. The interlocutors’ cultural and religious upbringing as well their commitment to being successful, having high educational ambition, and proving themselves to Swedish ‘others’ helped regulate their behaviours (see Zaidi et al., 2016). Leisure activities that are deeply embedded in Swedish culture for teenagers, can impede academic goals.

Growing up in highly policed, densely populated neighbourhoods with significant foreign populations, children of immigrants, particularly those who are gendered and racialised, faced greater risks when engaging in behaviours like hanging out on the streets, drinking, or possessing drugs. Such actions not only increase their vulnerability due to existing stigmatisation but also reinforce stereotypes of being troublemakers, underachievers, and criminals or terrorists. This risky behaviour reproduces stereotypes and damages the reputations of immigrant groups in general and Pakistani community in particular<sup>42</sup>.

Not only do Marium, Maleeha, and Masooma, but also most of the women interlocutors align with their parents’ values, prioritising academic success and avoiding behaviours that could jeopardise their social mobility goals. Boys, on the other hand,

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<sup>41</sup> Car dealerships, taxi service businesses, travel agencies etc.

<sup>42</sup> In Chapter 4, a participant mentions that Pakistanis consider themselves to be a ‘model minority’ in Sweden, better integrated than Pakistanis in Denmark, Norway and the UK. Moreover, they compare themselves to ‘Arab’ immigrants in Sweden, who are discursively constructed as unable and unwilling to integrate.

had more freedom than girls while growing up, possibly due to traditional roles of breadwinning and the perceived need to be street smart and tough (see Franceschelli & O'Brien, 2015). That said, the participants, as immigrants, expressed a shared understanding that the need to achieve social mobility transcended gender considerations.

Besides common interests, lack of mutuality in hospitality norms is also noted as creating a barrier-distance (a term used by Javed to describe his experiences with white Swedes) in mixed-friendships while growing up. An interesting account was shared by quite a few of the men<sup>43</sup> interlocutors regarding food norms within a Swedish home. Ghazanfar remembers when he would go over to a Swedish-Swedish friend's place to play video games or hang out, and it was time for dinner, he would not be invited to eat with his friend. As a guest in a Swedish home, Ghazanfar would be 'asked to wait' in his friend's room while the friend 'would eat dinner with his family' and would join Ghazanfar back in the room 'when he was done eating'. Ghazanfar, he makes a lucid comparison between not only a Pakistan home and a Swedish home, but also between the Swedish home and the home of his foreigner friends. He reflects on the feeling of being on the outside even while being physically inside a Swedish home in the following excerpt:

If a Swedish came over to a Pakistani, he would for sure eat with us but if I would go to a Swedish family, I will not eat with them. I have (other Swedish-Foreigner) friends who have also experienced this. I'm not the only one. This was very common. Maybe not now. But if I go to a foreigner uhh like one of my friends, two of my friends, one is from Columbia and one is half Thai and half Swedish, you go to their place and they are like 'oh come on let's eat', it felt like you are at home. In a Swedish family's home, I didn't feel at home. So, I don't know what it's like now, but it was like that.

(Ghazanfar 25, Male, second-generation)

Ghazanfar describes the Pakistani home as open, welcoming, and generous to all, not just family, contrasting it with the Swedish home, which he perceives as a deeply private space that isn't open to everyone and can sometimes feel unwelcoming and lacking in generosity. This reflection is then extended to similar others who are also referred to as Swedish-foreigners. Although they have a different national heritage, their home environment and norms of inclusivity resemble those of a Pakistani home. The level of comfort, connection, and feeling of mutuality (of inclusion) experienced in one's own home and at the home of 'other foreigners' is juxtaposed to the opposite feeling in a

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<sup>43</sup> Boys went over to each other's homes to play football or video games. Women participants mentioned girls usually hung out with their boyfriend's afterschool, at malls or coffee shops. This difference in activities accounts for why only the men among the participants related the food norms at homes of their friends.

Swedish home, where he does not feel at home. In the following excerpt, Atheel echoes Ghazanfar, highlighting the ‘openness’ of his Pakistani family. He adds that owing money in friendships with white Swedes creates a sense of indebtedness or reciprocity, rather than being seen as simply sharing resources generously:

When they came to our home then we would ask them to dinner, we are more open in that regard. This is a difference. And another difference was in money. When we would buy something, we didn’t give too much importance to every ore or every krona we spent we didn’t make too much of it, but Swedish were more like oh you owe me two kronor back, but we didn’t do this. This is another difference. There are many small things.

(Atheel 24, Male, second-generation)

In the participants’ homes, hospitality norms require that everyone present eats together. If friends are visiting, they join the family for the meal. When norms of reciprocity and generosity are different, it is experienced as an uncomfortable feeling, being on the ‘outside’ while being ‘inside’ someone’s home. Being ‘excluded’ while being ‘included’ creating a barrier in (mis)understanding what friendship means.

Moreover, Atheel points out that with a Swedish friend he feels he must keep track of every penny that has been spent on him or has been loaned, whereas for him, money is not that important; not something that is mentally calculated or accounted for each time friends are together. It’s not the responsibility of paying back a loan or spending that is deemed problematic, but the fact that ‘every ore<sup>44</sup>’ is accounted for, which in a friendship is experienced in bad taste and as an injury, since it shifts the weight of the relationship to what Hollingworth (2020) refers to as a different value-scale.

Not being offered to join the family for dinner time, the friendship is seen as having use-value i.e. immediate short-term personal benefits, but not exchange-value i.e. long-term strategic social network connections. Friendship derives its value for the participants when based on generosity. It loses its value when it becomes transactional or reciprocal.

A participant in Hollingworth’s study illustrates a stark contrast in friendships: his ‘black working-class friend would risk his life’ to save him from a burning building, while his ‘white middle-class friends would call the Fire Brigade.’ This example, coupled with Atheel’s experiences of Swedish friendships lacking basic hospitality and requiring meticulous financial calculations, suggests that such friendships offer little personal sacrifice or support. Atheel’s hesitation in forming close bonds with white Swedes becomes clearer, as he feels these friendships wouldn’t save him from a metaphorical burning building.

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<sup>44</sup> Ore refers to every penny.

In May 2022 #Swedengate was a social media controversy that emerged when a Reddit post revealed that some Swedish families do not offer food to visiting children during mealtimes. The hashtag quickly went viral, sparking widespread debate about Swedish hospitality, cultural norms, and social practices. Critics like the activist/journalist Yasmine Abdullahi (2022) argued that this practice exemplified a lack of hospitality and inclusiveness, reflecting broader issues of social isolation and cultural insensitivity. Whereas defenders like ethnologist Håkan Jönsson (2023: 46-49), largely verified Ghazanfar and Atheel's assertions, suggested that the practice was misunderstood and rooted in Swedish values of independence and non-intrusiveness, rather than rudeness or exclusion.

Sharing of food as an important tool for creating social bonds irrespective of time place, and cultural settings? (Falk, 1994; Jönsson et al., 2021; Wrangham, 2009). Marcel Mauss (1954) deals with food in his groundbreaking study of the gift. To accept a gift of food is to accept a relationship with another person. The offering of meal from someone is a symbol of friendship and it promotes mutual generosity (Shirazi, 2018: 22). To not offer food in the context of second-generation diasporic friendships with white Swedes<sup>45</sup> is felt as a rejection or 'barrier' to connection and creates a 'distance' that ails inclusivity.

While in Sweden not owing someone anything is embedded into the moral logic of social life (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2022; Jönsson, 2023; Trägårdh, 2014b), for otherness to be subverted through friendships and for belonging to be fostered through friendships, unsettling food norms in Sweden could be seen to source connection. Instead of offering explanations about the Swedish culture, a shift in hospitality norms could be seen as valuing the difference of Swedish-foreigners by changing social practices to bridge the felt divide/distance in cross-cultural friendships. Ghorashi et al. (2018: 383) argues that friendships can counteract the everyday policing of national identity, creating new possibilities for belonging. This author concurs and adds that fostering diversity and appreciating differences in transcultural interactions require shared responsibility between white and non-white Swedes. This necessitates opening a space for committed dialogue beyond mere debate.

Analysing friendships through the lens of commensality (Jönsson et al., 2021) goes beyond trust, attunement, shared interests, and meals. It encompasses emotional communion and mutual support as essential components. Effat in the excerpt below,

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<sup>45</sup> While 'newly discovered' this experience regarding food norms is not new; it is deeply rooted and not well studied. Thus, it is relegated to the home cultures of the few Swedes that the participants had friendships with when they were young. It remains to be seen, if it is a practice that is being negotiated in cross-cultural friendships among Swedish-Swedish and Swedish-Foreigners,



with deep sadness, relates the following incident as the one that led to estrangement with her Swedish friends from high school who she would on occasion ‘catch up’ with:

I see friendships differently, now that I have grown as a person, the difficulties I have faced, the times that have befallen on me. They [white Swedish friends] don’t give my problems that much importance. They are happy in their lives. And there is a distance. Like my youngest son, he had bone cancer. My Pakistani friends supported me, but my Swedish friends didn’t. I told them once and they went on to another conversation. One of them she said, ‘oh so sorry to hear’. When I spoke to her the next time she never asked, ‘how is your son?’ She never followed up. And I felt a bit sad and hurt. She would talk about her own daughter, her ballet lessons and performances. I thought I am going through so much; my child’s life is ... and she has no interest in me and on top of that she is talking about daughter’s activities.

(Effat 49, Female, 1.5 generation)

Effat experiences a distance in her friendships, feeling Swedish friends lack empathy during personal hardships like her son’s illness. This contrasts with Pakistani friends who offer support. The Swedish friends’ apparent disinterest in Effat’s personal struggles reflects a failure in emotional commensality, where empathetic connection and compassionate understanding are seen as crucial components for sustaining meaningful relationships.

The formulation, when ‘I’ have problems and ‘they’ are happy, suggests a potential norm of keeping personal struggles private and not burdening others, while freely sharing positive aspects of life. This might reflect a social stigma against discussing negative or difficult topics within friendships, where there is an unspoken expectation to maintain a positive atmosphere.

Several interlocutors mentioned that their sense of white Swedes is that ‘they are only into themselves, they care only about themselves.’ That sense feeds into friendship norms that often emphasise bonding over quality time and enjoyable activities rather than sharing personal struggles. In their view, there is a distinction between systems for support and help, with friendships typically not viewed as platforms for addressing personal problems. It is intriguing then to consider what second-generation diasporics can expect from Swedish friends and to understand what friendships are intended for in the Swedish context— whether they primarily serve as spaces for joy and positive experiences rather than avenues for mutual support and sharing challenges. One such challenge is the commensality of religious belief in friendships. Jamshaid in the excerpt below, comments on why he started maintaining distance from ‘Swedes’ and had to break off his friendship with a very ‘good’ white Swedish friend:

I was friends with Swedes. But then I suddenly withdrew because they are a bit disrespectful towards religion and God. I am friends with mostly Pakistanis and some Indians. [...] I used to have a very good Swedish friend but with him the reason why I withdrew because he would straight up *abuse* God. I thought one day I may lose my temper with him. Maybe my iman is misplaced but the respect for God is so etched that it is unacceptable to be around someone who disrespects God.

(Jamshaid 32, Male, second-generation [my emphasis])

Commenting on religious homophily as a possible resolution to find commonality in friendship formation, Maira in the excerpt below, also reflects that it is not the sole determinant of close friendships:

The thing is one usually gets along with others with whom one has things in common. It is easier to connect to those that have a foreign background, not Swedish background. Somehow, I feel that it is much easier to have the same religion; it becomes easier to connect. But I do have friends who are not Muslims. One of my best friends is Christian. If I connect well with someone, I don't think about their religion [...] let's say someone with an Arabic background who are not Muslim, they aren't quite similar but like our thinking our families are the same, and we have so much in common.

(Haniya 20, Female, second-generation)

The experience of being children of immigrants is often intertwined with religion, that fosters a sense of connection among individuals sharing similar backgrounds. Within these friendships, individuals find comfort, safety, and a lack of judgement, allowing for easier understanding of nuanced cultural aspects. This pattern emerges consistently among participants, who express a preference for relationships with others who share their immigrant heritage, family values, cultural background and religion. Among these people, they don't have to 'defend' or 'explain' themselves. Their differences are 'understood' and are 'acknowledged.' However, the tendency to gravitate towards similar backgrounds inadvertently creates barriers and reinforces perceptions of 'others' among different cultural groups.

## Peer Connections: Education Context

This section explores various aspects of racialisation within educational settings, encompassing incidents such as exclusion from cliques, instances of bullying, being undermined by teachers, and the misrecognition of Muslims and Islam, as narrated by the participants. In such environments, individuals often find that their primary sources

of relational connection are limited to other immigrant children with foreign-born parents.

*'Cliques' Were 'Not Easy to Relate To' and 'Wouldn't Let Others In'*

Recollections from the school years highlight the transition from högstadiet (upper secondary school) to gymnasiet (high school) as pivotal in experiencing otherness. Growing up in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, many did not encounter tangible differences until changing schools outside of their neighbourhoods. School dynamics reveal deeper social processes affecting identity, belonging, and peer influence, influencing educational experiences.

When you go older age like uhhhh 7th or 8th grade at that time we had groups. There were four groups two male and two female. Sub divided into one male Swedish, one male foreign, one female foreign, and one female Swedish (chuckles) [...] They happened on their own there were a few who would move from one group to another [...] sometimes all would mix. It wasn't a problem but if we looked closely the class was automatically divided [...] they wouldn't exactly sit together during free time or after school.

(Muneeb 27, Male, second-generation)

The formation of groups based on ethnicity suggests a stratification within the student body. This stratification can be influenced by perceptions of cultural differences, language barriers, or even stereotypes. By segregating into groups based on hierarchies of ethnicity, students may inadvertently reinforce in-group–out-group status dynamics. The establishment and maintenance of these boundaries shows the influence of peer norms and social structures in the school. Gravitation towards familiar groups displays people falling into place by knowing their place 'automatically'. While Muneeb thinks it's not really a 'problem', what it does indicate is groupings that are already established creating barriers to interactions and hindering efforts towards fostering a more inclusive and welcoming school climate.

Javed further describes his experience of moving from a school in an immigrant diverse and segregated neighbourhood in Stockholm to an inner city-centre upper middle-class high school based on his good school scores and achievement record. He describes the 'culture shock' of encountering a 'white space' (Anderson 2015, Ahmed 2007) and has a feeling of being 'out of place' and 'at the right place' concurrently:

The first thing you notice is that everyone is white (laughs) to be frank. And then I can't put a finger on everything. It was difficult in the beginning. I liked the school, I belonged there. But the kids weren't as easy to relate to; they were much more cautious when befriending someone; so it was bit more difficult to get into a group. There were a few (kids) also from the ghettos. They were really easy to relate to. Those were my first

friends. We were also three coloured people in a room full of white people [chuckles] of course you become friends!

(Javed 30, Male, second-generation)

The lack of access to certain spaces makes it difficult to relate to people who are usually absent when they do appear and take up space. The second contrast, something he jokingly mentions and then takes a moment to laugh at himself, is how 'everyone is white'. And third, the experience that it was hard to relate to his peers, difficult to make friends, and get into a group. His description travels from an underprivileged to a privileged neighbourhood, from mixed-race to an all-white school, from a majority to a minority status within the classroom where tacit power asymmetries come into play and rules of inclusion and exclusion and fitting in and sticking out are experienced.

Spaces take shape by being oriented around some bodies, more than others (Ahmed, 2007). If we are shaped by 'what' we come into contact with, then we are also shaped by what we inherit, which de-limits the objects that we might come into contact with (ibid.). Javed has inherited his parents class status and shared place of residence that brings into reach certain resources while putting other resources out of reach just as it brings certain people more in reach than others. As he moves up and into major society, he is carving a future away from his 'inheritance' status and into his 'arrival' status based on his achievements and talent. It is a new turf; it has new rules of engagement, and he finds it difficult 'in the beginning' to navigate this space. The first friends that he can relate to are those from similar backgrounds and social status.

For people of colour, friendship 'is a lifeline and a way to be seen in a world when feeling overlooked' (Brown, 2021: 203). People who go through the same experiences, are the ones that connect with each other based on those experiences. The expectation that comes from being in an upper middle-class school, the hard work that has gone into getting there, and the motivation to continue, and the difficulty in making adjustment to the new 'orientation of gaze' that creates barrier-distance, pushes 'immigrant' kids together in solidarity and friendship, in turn reproducing the perceived barrier-distance (also detailed in sections that follow). There is risk and work required in making oneself 'fit in' without the appropriate invitation for the same being initiated from the giving end.

Creating distance is a multi-directional phenomenon. Alina recounts behaviour of her peers changing drastically in Högstadiet, which she ascribed to coming-of-age rituals in Sweden. This shift led her to distance herself from her classmates:

People changed like in 6<sup>th</sup> grade [...] their activities ... some of them had to get their stomach pumped and they would brag about that and like they wouldn't pass their exams and they would like fail in school and I was just like yeah this is not who I am so I didn't

really have a lot of friends and I didn't want to uhh change in that direction so I never really socialised a lot with them.

(Alina, Female, second-generation)

I had different goals and values. My everyday life was different. Afterschool I went straight home, and I took my book and sat in my chair read a book and I had some ice cream and that's what I did; I loved reading books [...] they went out drinking, partying, and living life.

(Masooma 31, Female, second-generation)

We (him and his siblings) had other activities after school. Homework, Qur'an, school and maintaining regular prayers after school. In the evenings it was family time together.

(Shahzaib 32, Male, second-generation)

The behaviour Alina was distancing herself from was something she thought as reckless and irresponsible, and which she further elaborated upon as 'they were throwing it all away!'. She didn't want to associate herself with that behaviour, it was not okay for her nor was it the kind of person she was.

Alina's perspective reflects her frame of reference. Stories about growing up, including Alina's, were carefully crafted with details about how hard their parents had to work to settle in Sweden, to find jobs, to learn the language, and sometimes to settle for low wage working-class jobs below their qualifications. It is not surprising that Alina finds drug use and alcohol consumption as a waste of her time and steering her away from her goals and ideals of achieving success and making use of opportunities that were available to her; that she as a child of immigrants cannot be taken for granted. She chooses to distance herself from friends who may influence her in a bad way.

Masooma's account illustrates a clear divergence in leisure activities and personal values. This difference in daily routines and lifestyle choices highlights how cultural upbringing shapes interests and social habits, leading to a natural separation between her and her white peers. On the other hand, Shahzaib's account exhibits the importance of structured religious and family activities in his upbringing. The commitment to Qur'an school and regular prayers, followed by family time, left little room for socialising in ways typical of his white peers. Contrary to Mante Vertelyte's article on educators' strategies to mix immigrants students with white Danes so that the 'immigrant' children can be positively influenced by white Danes, in this example children from Pakistani background see behaviours of their white peers as negative and detrimental to their success in school. And so, they choose to make friends, white or otherwise, who have similar interests and life goals.

Friendships are thus, not defined solely by cultural differences, as doing so would contribute to the culturalisation of friendship. The real issue is the inability to imagine new ways of being together, creating friendships, and exploring inclusive, creative activities where peers with different interests can connect and have fun together. Halleh Ghorashi (2018) argues for the importance of ‘unusual’ friendships and their potential to unsettle normalised practices of othering, thereby producing new narratives of connections in a variety of urban settings.

*‘Had to Endure Bullying, I Just Pushed and Pushed.’*

Another form of exclusion, beyond group formation and cliques, is bullying. This behaviour not only enforces group boundaries but also significantly impacts the sense of belonging. Through bullying, certain groups maintain their cohesion and dominance, further marginalising those who are different. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle of exclusion and reinforces social hierarchies, making it even more challenging for racialised children to feel accepted and integrated within their peer groups.

In the excerpt below, Effat describes her ‘horrible’ experience of going to school and growing up in Sweden.

When we arrived, I was four years old, and we lived in an area with a lot of foreigners. My father couldn’t afford anything else. At that time in school, I was not able to speak in Swedish. I was literally not talking. Then we came out from the hood. My parents did not want us to go to school there, there were no good schools there. So, they moved here when it was possible. That is when I started learning proper Swedish. I was behind on a lot of things, because I did not have the right support. I had to do a lot on my own. So, I started observing by listening to my classmates. Listened carefully to how they talked and how they pronounced things. I mimicked. And became perfect at Swedish. Also, I didn’t know how to swim. It was not a part of my education. Everyone at school could swim and I was drowning ... ‘I cannot do this’, I thought. Then I started taking my own lessons after school. The coach would be there. But I went on my own. Day in day out. I became so good at it that I won the medal for school championship. I just pushed it pushed and I said to myself I just have to be better!

[...] I was always by myself. I endured a lot of bullying. A *lot*. Because I was black. They had never seen that before. I was different. My hair was black. I was not white. They were like ughhh ‘she smells!’ They would throw things at me. Always coming up with ways to ... it was *horrible* growing up here. But that made me stronger. When they did that, I thought if they are ignorant so be it. I will be stronger. I will be more. I will not go with this. I am more than how they treat me. I am more... [...] I didn’t have any friends. I’m Muslim. I could not drink alcohol. I could not go to the parties. It was the most difficult time between grade 6 till 9. If you fit in and adjust yourself to that, then you lose yourself. You have to be strong with who you are and then you can endure.

[...] I met these people at a reunion a few years ago. That was my victory. They were shocked. They did not manage as well in their life as I had. They were like 'Wow! You are so successful, you are so beautiful, so clever, what happened? How did all this change?' I was like '*now* you respect me, because I rose above you.

Effat's story emphasises a pivotal moment in her educational career when her family moved 'out from the hood' referring to an immigrant-dense neighbourhood that struggled with economic hardships and limited access to quality schools. She learned 'proper' Swedish after she moved into the predominantly white neighbourhood and white school; showing how resources are distributed among neighbourhoods in Sweden that differentially impact learning goals of children of immigrants, that may also affect their outcomes as exemplified by Eshaal in describing she fell 'behind on a lot' at school. She had to rely heavily on her own initiative 'push and push' to reach not just the level at which her peers were, but also to perform above and beyond.

Eshaal takes on immense personal responsibility to overcome obstacles and succeed, which was also often driven by a desire to honour her parents' sacrifices and migration journey.

She also faces compounded pressures of 'a lot of bullying' due to her marked (non-white) body that is racialised as the 'other.' Eshaal is subjected to cruel remarks and physical harassment, that make school, a major part of her everyday life, a hostile and isolating environment.

When I asked her if she ever shared this with her parents, she said she couldn't because they weren't proficient in conversational Swedish, so 'what could they do?' Additionally, she had to 'learn Swedish to help them ... fill in forms, translate documents, find buses ... that was all sort of my responsibility.' Eshaal's experience demonstrates the 1.5 generation, who arrive in Sweden at a later age than the second-generation born in the country, and often face unique challenges and responsibilities.

Eshaal's experiences highlight the symbiotic relationship between parents and their 1.5 generation children. Unlike their second-generation counterparts, who grow up fully immersed in Swedish culture and language from birth, the 1.5 generation must navigate the complexities of adapting to a new cultural environment while also taking on responsibilities that bridge cultural and linguistic gaps for their families. This mutual dependence creates a dynamic where children are not only recipients of parental care but also essential contributors to the family's adaptation and integration in their new homeland.

These experiences are further intensified by her religious identity as a Muslim that limit her ability to participate in activities like drinking alcohol and attending parties. She mentions scyear 6 and year 9 as particularly formative as the social pressures to conform were at their peak. She refrains from 'adjust[ing]' or 'fit[ting] in' to not 'lose'

herself, making it even more challenging to form friendships. Moreover, she uses her religious identity as a resource to stay 'strong' to 'endure' the bullying and negative behaviour of her classmates.

Eshaal's reunion encounter serves as a powerful redemption story. Despite adversities, Eshaal's resilience and determination enabled her to succeed beyond her bullies' expectations. They are astounded by her achievements and transformed persona. Their surprise and newfound respect mark her triumph over their earlier scorn, allowing her to reclaim her dignity and self-worth.

Being bullied in Sweden for being an immigrant, foreign, coloured, and Muslim are common experiences shared predominantly by the second-generation in this study. Seema (34, Female) highlights:

What we (children of immigrants) experience is the same, just manifested differently. We still have to set an example. To live here, to go through it all, and come out being like yourself; the main thing is that if you have confidence in yourself, you can do and overcome *anything*! If you don't, then you are gone. And this comes from *home*. From the *family*.

The experiences of resilience and achievement among children of immigrants highlight the normalisation of otherness in their lives. Despite facing challenges unique to their immigrant status, they navigate these adversities, viewing them as opportunities to 'set an example' and assert their identities and their belonging to their geographical 'home.' The source of their resilience often stems from familial support and upbringing, where confidence and self-belief are nurtured. The 'family' foundation in the context of 'home' not only instils resilience but also empowers them to overcome obstacles and thrive in diverse cultural landscapes.

#### *Patronised and Undermined by Teachers*

Participants talked about their experiences of utterances by their teachers: 'Oh wow your Swedish is really good', 'Oh you are such a good student, how come?' 'Oh, you are Muslim.' As students, the participants felt ambivalent in such situations, unsure how to feel or express themselves, as their achievements seemed like exceptions rather than the norm. In such instances, participants felt ambivalent, not knowing whether to perceive such comments as compliments or insults.

In the following example, Masooma describes her decision to wear the hijab, mimicking a religious practice at school and how that signal espoused a 'strong reaction' from her teacher:

I remember when I was in second or third grade when I started feeling that I am a Muslim, not about being a Pakistani, but more about being a Muslim. I wanted to wear



a scarf. So, I took hijab at school. My teachers really reacted at that. I was either 9 or 10 I was young. No one in my family takes the hijab. I really wanted to try it. And I tried to explain to them that I had done this myself, but they couldn't understand it. They thought it was something that was coming from the family. That someone has forced me. It didn't occur to me then but now thinking back I guess they must have been thinking that I had been forced. I remember I had a teacher she reacted very strongly; she thought I was being oppressed. I said to her I've done this myself and on my own, but she didn't agree. I began to feel so bad that everyone around me was reacting in this way that after two days I took it off. I was quite sad that no one understands that I want to do this on my own for myself.

(Masooma 31, Female, second-generation)

When Masooma 'started feeling that I am a Muslim', she decides to show how she feels by wearing the hijab as a religious marker of her identity to signal her Muslim-ness. She mentions that 'no one in my family wears the hijab' which is not surprising since the traditional Pakistani dress has a dupatta (long scarf) worn loosely around the head and neck by Pakistani women. It seems that growing up with foreigners from other Arabic and African countries, there is an inter-penetration of religious markers where the Pakistani dupatta is being replaced by the Arabic hijab. Religious articulations are evolving, responding to a greater availability of choices made possible by interactions with other 'foreigners' in a migrant neighbourhood who share the same religion, creating a different way of 'doing' religion than previously done (or known) within the family. There is more possibility for diffusions and combinations than before. So when she decides to take the 'hijab' it is an individual decision not respected by her teachers because it is being judged from a dominant discourse of what Jahnine Dahinden (2014: 337) describes as the 'oppressed Muslim woman' who is 'forced' into making decisions and is 'oppressed'; nothing she says is to be taken at face value or is convincing because she is alienated from understanding what an individual decision is, when acting in the capacity of a 'Muslim' woman, especially, in this case, as a young Muslim girl.

Masooma describes how she tried to convince 'them' that it was her own decision, but 'they' didn't understand it, and in the end, she gives up the hijab and is sad that she is misunderstood for trying to do something on her own and for herself. The strong reaction from the teacher is indicative of how social norms drive reactions when confronted with something that deviates from what 'normal' Swedish children ought to do at a certain age. Masooma is a child, and children should have neutral bodies not religiously marked bodies. Also, the culprit is the family (collective) not the child (individual), as the family (read immigrant) is forcing its decisions on the children and the children in the family have no autonomy, another stereotype in the dominant discourse, families (read immigrant) have more agency and authority than the children

who have none. Misrecognition is at the heart of these interactions. The teachers, in attempting to safeguard Masooma's autonomy, inadvertently strip it away.

The narratives below further highlight the complex ways children of immigrants navigate being patronised, undermined, and on the receiving end of biases/prejudices from their teachers in educational settings:

In school nothing significant happened. I mean maximum you may be getting an A, and a teacher would give you a B otherwise they (teachers) don't show anything (prejudices).

(Shaheryar 23, Male, second-generation)

In school, we had a session where in the morning world news was shared. It was so Eurocentric. The definition of 'world news'. I asked my teacher why she didn't discuss Palestinian occupation, or the War in Afghanistan? I got called antisemitic and a Paki after that. I got so angry. I used to agitate. And provoke my teachers for their biases. Once I was being naughty and this teacher, she couldn't handle me, so she grabbed me by the neck in the classroom and said, 'you little shit, I'll throw you out and stuff like that'.

(Faris 29, Male, second-generation)

My strongest memory when I was growing up, even if there were difficulties with other people, I was thinking that I would just study and I was focusing on that. I knew many second-generation growing up here, in school, made to think that they are foreigners that they will not get good jobs because they are not Swedes [...] I just ignored. I didn't think I was Swedish, or I was Pakistani I'm me and I have a bright future because I am positive but when I started into college then it was 90-95% Swedes you felt a little different of course but I have always been very neutral.

(Sanaya 31, Female second-generation)

Arsalan's experience, echoed by several other participants, is indicative of teacher biases and prejudices. By describing grade downgrading as 'nothing significant,' he minimises the impact of this form of discrimination, suggesting that he has come to accept it as part of his educational experience. The fact that he notes this as the primary way teachers displayed prejudice implies that other, more overt forms of bias were either absent or less noticeable to him. This speaks to the subtle yet pervasive nature of academic discrimination, where biases are embedded in seemingly minor actions that collectively affect students' self-esteem and academic progression. Many participants felt they were consistently unable to achieve high grades especially in Swedish language classes. Despite downplaying it, Arsalan's comment reveals a critical insight: grading practices, though often overlooked, can be a significant source of bias and indicators of deeper systemic issues within educational institutions.

Faris's story exposes more overt forms of discrimination, when he challenges the curriculum that portrays 'world news' from a Eurocentric perspective neglecting issues significant to students with foreign backgrounds, leads to accusations of antisemitism and racist epithets by his classmates. This is representative how quickly students can be marginalised and stereotyped when they challenge the status quo for inclusion.

This narrative also exposes the power dynamics at play. The teacher's physical aggression — 'grabbing Faris by the neck' and calling him 'you little shit' a stark abuse of authority. 'I'll throw you out' is a threat that both literally and figuratively is indicative of solutions akin to 'go back to where you came from' and 'you don't belong here'. Emphasising sameness and under-communicating differences is a way of building solidarity and equality in the classroom. When that equality and solidarity is challenged by someone claiming their difference, they are literally 'thrown out' or metaphorically 'cast out' from the common 'we'. While the actions of the teacher breach classroom etiquette, it is Faris that is punished and mistreated. The voices and concerns of marginalised students are often suppressed, reinforcing their sense of alienation and injustice highlighting the resilience required by children of immigrants to navigate and challenge biases while striving for educational equity and recognition of their identities.

### *Misrecognition of Islam and Muslims*

Dissemination of information about Islam, presentation of facts about Muslims all lead to students feeling othered. Interlocutors' experience emotions of sadness, dejection, disappointment, frustration and sometimes anger at the consistent normalisation of degradation of Islam and figure of Muslim in their classrooms:

I was in gymnasiet I felt that I was usually alone uhhhhh meaning that whenever there was a topic on Islam, it was negative. Like Muslims torture animals for halal meat. And that genital mutilation of women was an Islamic practice. I was alone there was no one who was on my side. Usually, I was in between the Swedes I was studying and sometimes when there were Muslims among me, they couldn't defend it they didn't have knowledge about this themselves so what could they say. But thankfully I could say something. Sometimes I felt sad that I couldn't because there were some things that I just couldn't say. I was afraid that if I give an answer and then they will retort then I will give an answer and then I may not have an answer in the end for the question so then I wouldn't do it.

(Faryal 33, Female, 1.5 generation)

Faryal expresses feeling isolated felt when discussing topics related to Islam in the classroom. When Islam was discussed, the teachers often highlighted the worst aspects of cultures associated with Muslims, framing Islam in a negative light. She often found herself defending her beliefs without adequate support from peers or teachers. Her fear

of being unable to adequately respond to challenges reflects a deeper sense of vulnerability in expressing her identity in an educational environment.

Otterbeck (2002) argues Swedish religion textbooks selectively present ‘facts’ about Islam that tends to create a biased overall portrayal. According to him, the texts encounter two pitfalls. Firstly, they create a sense of detachment from Islam, akin to criticisms directed at Orientalism studies. Secondly, they reinforce the perspectives of Islamists exclusively, thereby marginalising alternative expressions of Islam. Additionally, by framing Islam as a movement that conflates politics with religion—a stance often stigmatised in Swedish societal discourse—they accentuate the process of ‘othering’ Islam (Otterbeck, 2005). In the textbooks Islam is also the religion symbolising inequality between the sexes, traditional clothing worn by Muslim women as a vivid means with which to represent these inequalities. Moreover violence, represented by hudood punishments, jihad, terrorism, martyrdom and free will or predestination were topics commonly discussed- broadly linking Islam and Muslims to threats and tension in societies (for a further discussion see Javed’s narrative in Chapter 8).

Curriculum and textbooks could act as an intercultural instrument that can be used to reduce a feeling of social exclusion among pupils from a family with foreign backgrounds. Regrettably, not only does the school environment hinder such discussions, but it also erects barriers to intercultural friendships, as illustrated by Arham below:

(In business school) for the first time I met people who had never had a Muslim friend ever. I was shocked. Did you ever actually grow up in Stockholm without having a Muslim friend? When 25% of the population in Stockholm has a non-European background!’

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation)

Moreover, she goes on to relate how ‘shocked’ she was at meeting people ‘who had never had a Muslim friend’ before, until perhaps they befriended her, and she is quite exasperated as she recalls how segregated the city must be to make it hard for ‘people’ to meet ‘Muslims’ even with a fairly high diversity rate. This can be contrasted with earlier discussions about friendships. Not having ‘Swedish’ friends as immigrants or ‘Muslim’ friends as a native is an indication of how cocooned lives of immigrants and natives are. When interactions are limited between people in societies where Muslim migrants from various backgrounds do not have personal relations with native ‘others’, there is a chance ‘representations’ of Muslims overshadow the (re-)presentation of Muslims in face-to-face interactions, that do not go beyond mere formalities because of ingrained misconceptions about them.

Sometimes interactions with the 'Swedish other' are experienced as brazen, audacious, insensitive and 'shocking' to the sensibilities and realities of children of immigrants, especially as Muslims. This is a similar account of 'shock' by many of my interlocutors when they leave (here) high diversity context schools to move (there) into low diversity context schools; something that is indicated by 'class' i.e., quality of neighbourhood and quality of school resources, 'race' ratio between (us) non-natives and (them) natives in a classroom, and the highly competitive nature of getting admission (achievement), and yet the inability to feel membership to a group feeling out of place and sticking out.

In the following excerpt, Marium describes how she comes to realise 'what they ('Swedes') really think about us', how she feels she is seen by her peers and the strategy she employs to overcome the feeling of exclusion, alienation and misrecognition:

M: I began to understand how to interact with them to be in their good books. The biggest thing that was in their mind, the Swedish, was that they were against non-native immigrants. At that time, I understood in their heads *what they really think about us*. For me, this was the *biggest shock*.

U: What year was this?

M: It was 2002, so this is 15 years ago but then too people had these ideas, that non-natives, foreigners, are on social welfare they don't work, and they are eating for free, and they are using our resources. They are terrorists and Islam forces women to do purdah and they used to say it openly. I was not very strong Islamically at the time because it was that age that when one doesn't know which path to take even if we were attached to religion at home, we went to the mosque regularly every weekend even then. Every individual is different, someone gets wisdom (aqal) early some get it late, I wasn't very strong, so I started to adopt a lot of their culture.

(Marium 30, Female, second-generation)

Marium realises she has to navigate the new school environment in a different way, to counter the perception the 'Swedes' in her school have about the 'others'. Marium tends to use the term 'foreigner' and 'non-native' synonymously with 'immigrant' as well as 'Muslim', an interesting show of how discourse imports its way into the language and imaginaries of people living their everyday lives. Looking at the time frame of the interaction Marium describes, it is perhaps not all that surprising, since 9/11 was a recent event and the reportage of Muslims as perpetrators of a preposterous injustice had raised securitisation concerns. What is happening there trickles down and affects interactions here. The prejudices held by her peers about non-natives in general, as being welfare abusers, become enlarged as the same are also terrorists and oppressors of women. Most of these views are consistent with the Swedish textbook representation of Muslims, Swedish media and politics (see for example Abdelhady & Malmberg,

2018; Bevelander & Otterbeck, 2013; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2024; Jakku, 2018a; Lundby et al., 2017; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2012).

According to Marium, essentialist and culturalist perceptions about immigrants, especially their children, hinder her sense of belonging in Sweden, despite being born here. She identifies three elements of Swedish identity that her white peers assume she lacks, making her feel compelled to constantly prove herself: that social welfare is seen as a sacred right earned through fulfilling work obligations, Swedish neutrality is challenged by those associated with violence and terror, and gender equality condemns any act or object perceived as oppressive to women. Anyone not fulfilling these criteria, and presumably upholding the opposite of these criteria are assumed to a part of belief systems that are contradictory, can be 'openly' criticised, even if it negates 'neutrality', even if it is uncomfortable for 'others' who are the target of this debate.

In the spirit of neutrality, it is acceptable to be openly antagonistic towards a marked religion/religious minority. Instead of getting to know someone to see if stereotypes hold, the function of stating opinions as facts, is meant to keep 'others' in check, subtly hint that they are suspect and are being 'looked at', so as to proffer two solutions: 'be like us to be us' or 'be yourself and be left out'.

Marium feels the pressure and says, 'it was that age one does not know what path to take' and as she 'beg[ins] to understand how to be on good terms with *them*' she 'start[s] to adopt a lot of their culture'. She says she 'wasn't very strong' and was late in getting 'wisdom', something she attributes to Islam; but she also alludes to Islam being the 'path' that was both a part of the problem for her to navigate among her Swedish peers as well as part of the solution.

She adds another story to her educational journey to elucidate this point about finding confidence in herself through her Muslim identity. After a brief stint at the medical university, she changed her field and enrolled in another university with her sister and started wearing the hijab. Reflecting on this period, she recalls, 'Only two girls dared to talk to us in those three years.' She started wearing the hijab a year after getting married. When asked about her decision, she said, 'I don't remember precisely why. My younger sister started wearing it a year before me, and I felt that I should do it too. Before I got married, others' opinions mattered, but after marriage, I didn't care.' During this time, she reflects on her maturity where wearing the hijab no longer hinges on others' acceptance or rejection. She challenges her own assumptions about the perceived religiosity of hijab-wearing individuals. She finds solace in the companionship of her sister amidst a lack of friends during her studies. She prioritises her studies, household, and family responsibilities, signalling a shift in focus and potentially spiritual growth.

Experiencing increasing alienation and exclusion at school and university, Marium finds solace in her husband and child, and her sibling which strengthens her bond with

them during her studies. Graduating, she faced challenges finding employment despite securing interviews with her CV. Months later, realising her hijab was a barrier during interviews, she removes it. When I asked her why, she lamented, 'God will understand, these people don't. So, I took it off. I haven't worked so hard and sacrificed so much to be unemployed.' This decision reflects her pragmatic approach to career obstacles while navigating societal prejudices, while also showcasing why family, partnership, siblings and religion become resources of belonging.

That said, relationships between students and supportive teachers can serve as powerful sources of belonging and may have significant emancipatory potential. When teachers show genuine interest and guide students in the right direction, it can have a profound impact, fostering personal growth and academic success. Shaheryar (23, Male) recalls a critical moment in his second year of school when his math teacher noticed his declining grades and association with the wrong crowd. The teacher took him aside, tapped his head firmly, and said, 'You were here,' raising his hand, 'and now you are here,' lowering his hand. The teacher emphasised Shaheryar's intelligence and urged him not to squander his potential, prompting him to refocus on his studies. This encounter marked a turning point for Shaheryar, eventually inspiring him to pursue a career in medicine.

Experiences of othering in school and educational settings, thus, underscore the challenges faced by marginalised students, while also emphasising the transformative potential for growth and resilience through these encounters.

## Career Connections: Professional Context

This section explores experiences of otherness in professional contexts, focusing on the racialisation in work environments and career. Interlocutors discussed challenges such as navigating drinking in work cultures while being Muslim, facing prejudices and stereotypes in work situations, struggling with direct conflict resolution or feedback from peers and superiors who undermine their work, being labelled as immigrant and consequently misjudged. They also emphasise the pressure to work twice as hard to prove themselves as both good immigrants and good Muslims yet remain uncertain about receiving fair treatment and recognition in their professional spaces.

The following is a vivid illustration of an incident Amin relates where a client openly questioned his competence as an immigrant reflecting a broader societal issue where immigrant professionals are unfairly judged based on their ethnicity rather than their qualifications:

At work a client came in at the blood donation centre. When he saw that his appointment was with, he told the receptionist in front of me 'I don't really like it when immigrants handle me here, they don't know what they are doing'. The receptionist asked the client to wait. And said to me 'you will have to take this'. I nodded [...] I just thought of the client as a mentally ill person. You can't talk back to the clients we really need their blood. We have directions that if something like that happens you always must step back. Afterwards he (client) was upset he said something (inappropriate) because I still did it. And it went really well. The receptionist told me when it was all over that the client was guilty that he said something.

(Amin 28, Male, second-generation)

While relating this experience Amin is nonchalant and shrugs his shoulders resolving the uncomfortable situation through a lens of compassion, attributing the client's prejudice to 'mental' illness rather than confronting the bias directly, likely as a coping mechanism to mitigate personal distress and maintain professional decorum. He resolves the situation for himself by complying with the directive to step back and prioritise the centre's need for blood, illustrating a common response to avoid escalation and protect his job security. Amin, whose response in these situations is that he overcompensates a negative perception by being exceedingly polite and adept at his job. While the client is sheepish and guilty afterwards, he is too proud to admit to Amin himself that he misjudged Amin's competence based on his racial status. The receptionist, witnessing the interaction, conveys the client's feedback to Amin, and both consider this the conclusion of a successful donation.

When I probed Amin a little about his detachment and indifference to the incident, he reflected on the inescapability of being Pakistani or being an immigrant that for him, is the physical body itself. In Sweden, where the majority population is more light-haired and light-skinned, his brown colour is 'marked', signals 'foreignness', serves as a clear boundary demarcating who 'looks' Swedish and who doesn't, and results in the inevitable question 'where are you from?'. 'I don't want people to have a negative image of immigrants', says Amin. He makes it a point to 'convey a positive image'. I ask him why he considers himself an immigrant if he is born and raised here, and the following dialogue ensues:

A: [...] I want to convey the positive image.

U: Why?

A: To prove myself, because I don't want people to have a negative image of immigrants, and also that is why, often in society in general I... I...like I am very nice to people.

U: And you consider yourself an immigrant even though you were born here?



A: Yea I do I think that. The thing is I do, because when people take a first look at me, and they see me as an immigrant. I have dark hair; they see that I am not born here, and I am not from here.

U: But you are, aren't you?

A: I am, exactly, but they often think that I am not and that I have another *back heritage* because people, even if you are born here, people often ask where are you from even though I speak full in Swedish but *they see on me* that I have some other heritage.

U: And what do you think about that?

A: I think people are often just curious just want to make conversation. And I really don't take any offence to it.

(Amin 28, Male, second-generation)

'When people take a first look at me, they see me as an immigrant'. Even if Amin feels differently, he is 'looked at' as an immigrant. Who one is, is a matter of how one is seen, that over-rides who one actually is. One's civic status as a citizen, civic boundary (Jacobson, 1997: 188) is different from one's social status, in terms of racial and cultural boundary (ibid.). Embodied in a non-white body signal one as being an immigrant in interactions in Sweden. This racial boundary, in the form of skin colour, facial features and physical appearance (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011; Lundström, 2017; Osanami Törngren & Nyström, 2022) creates a separation which defines people along flesh, blood and ancestry (Jacobson, 1997: 193). If someone does not look the same as those who were always citizens and were always 'here'; the ones who come later in the life course of the nation, and look different, or not white, will continue to be misrecognised as immigrants, even if they are currently in the second and third generations.

Thus, being immigrant is not merely a question of migration and crossing borders, it is a socially constructed marker of difference that enables social control of 'others' who are subordinated through naming and drawing boundaries between 'us' and 'them' (Eliassi, 2010: 79) through a racial boundary that is closed and exclusive.

The conclusion Amin has arrived at is that the racial boundary is deeply ingrained in everyday interaction and hard to challenge, and therefore he chooses not to be bothered. He buys into the status he is given by performing opposite to what is expected of him. By participating in a specific social game, individuals confirm that they recognise it as important (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 98-99; Rytter, 2011: 20). Power which gives access to the values at stake in the game, is unequally inscribed to positions taken (ibid.). Amin subverts power by participating in the game on his own

terms, transgresses by going off-script<sup>46</sup>, by being ‘extra’ nice and polite, even in uncomfortable situations. He does this in a response to being labelled as an immigrant, a stigmatised position, as an attempt on his part to shape others’ impressions of his self-presentation steeped in positive appearance and polite mannerism to make the interaction as smooth as possible.

Moreover, Amin could also be playing the game to become re-racialised through his performance. As Mulinari and Neergaard (2017: 91) point out, racialisation is an ongoing process and several of the immigrant groups that first came to Sweden have since been partially “de-racialised as the ‘migrant other’ and re-racialised as white”. New migrant groups fill the position of the racialised other over time.

Another aspect Amin highlights is that on his body people can see his ‘back heritage’. While speaking Swedish proficiently, being in a professional capacity in the public space in a prominent position indicates that Amin possesses some proficiency in navigating the milieu but in no way does it lead to trust nor intimacy among those to can ‘see’ through the appearance of false impressions. Being an immigrant is a justificatory position, a front-stage performance because of an unknown backstage story that is held hostage to distrust and impression management in interactions. It is spoilt and must be redeemed and recovered through managing the self in interactions.

This Goffman-esque approach views people’s presentational behaviour as a process of negotiation. People offer definitions of themselves in interaction contexts which the audience either accept or challenge. For a person to position herself as a recognisable and accepted being in a certain context, the person has to read, decode and subjectify herself to the discursive logic prevalent in this context. Identity and ethnicity, as this fragment shows, has no core beyond an embodied state, rather seen as relational and discursive processes. An important aspect of becoming a subject is that the subject is not formed in a void; the processes of formation must be seen as embodied, contextual, and historical. And open to different interpretations for staging and staking a claim for recognition.

Interestingly, while I got no stories of racialised employees who account for or file an incident report of microaggressions, in the following excerpt, Zareesh relates how a client at an optometry clinic felt compelled to file a ‘complaint’ because he thought she was inappropriately dressed for her job:

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<sup>46</sup> Or perhaps Amin is right on-script to show his gratitude towards Sweden to show his appreciation for his national belonging. Immigrants are assumed to be better off in Sweden than in the rest of the world. This ranking locates Sweden positively “in a global hierarchy of racist/non-racist countries” (Fozdar, 2008, p. 537). According to Eliassi (2017: 21) such comparisons are often articulated to discard the urgent need of the Swedish society to improve its unequal ethnic relations. By articulating this comparison, it is suggested that immigrants should be happy about their life situations and grateful to the generous Swedish society and should avoid complaining about racism in Sweden. Talk about racism is perceived as betrayal of the generosity of the benevolent Swedish people.

When you are a customer, you can give feedback about your experience at the shop. So there someone complained about me that he didn't like that a girl with a hijab was working at the store. I didn't even help him I didn't even talk to him I was just sitting on the side. He found it weird that I was wearing full sleeves, and it was summer. In the store it is cold, and I am easily cold even if it is summer and I was wearing a sweater too. He filed a written complaint that he did not like that a girl was wearing full sleeves clothes and a scarf and that she works here. I found it very off putting [...] yes yea... he was anonymous, but I knew exactly who he was because he wrote a comment, and I helped him with it. Two or three times later when he came back, I was the one who helped him uhh so then he asked me 'where are you from' and I said Pakistan, but I was so angry at myself later why didn't I say Malmö! because it was a slip of tongue, and I wished I had done that differently

(Zareesh 25, Female, second-generation)

The complaint implies discomfort due to cultural differences rather than any professional misconduct, showcasing cultural stereotyping and attributing one's presence to racial markers. It also reveals underlying power dynamics. In many service environments, customers hold a significant amount of power. The notion that 'the customer is always right' can often lead to employees, especially those from marginalised groups, feeling vulnerable and exposed to discrimination. In this case (and arguably in Amin's case too), the customer's complaint about the employee's appearance is an exercise of this power.

The customer's discomfort with Zareesh's attire is not about the clothing itself but about the visible markers of her cultural and religious identity that disrupt the norm. The hijab is a symbol of Muslimness. The threat of the Muslim foreigner is dependent on the construction of an alien insider that is disrupting/eroding the Swedish ideals of gender equality and sexual freedom. Its insurmountable foreignness<sup>47</sup> in not being native to a legitimate Swedish tradition and an extension of migrant familial relationships.

This 'veiled tradition' is interpreted as a 'ritual of migration' that sheds light on the complexities of reproducing traditions in a new setting (Nordin & Westergren, 2023). It acts as a 'cultural prism' for issues of integration, often justifying Islamophobic stereotypes. For instance, the formal complaint against this tradition mirrors a citizen's arrest, where individuals take the law into their own hands to address what they perceive as wrongdoing. Anthias (2016: 80) calls it deficient behaviour of the racialised other that is in need of correction. This comparison highlights how deeply embedded biases can prompt vigilante-like actions of 'some others' (white male Swedes) against 'other

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<sup>47</sup> With respect to the law, the debates of banning the face-covering "burka," "full-covering veil," "face veil," and "niqab" have been discussed in the parliament over 38 times (Frisk and Gillette, 2019).

others' (women of colour in hijab) under the guise of upholding societal norms, thus perpetuating xenophobic attitudes and behaviours.

Philomena Essed (1991: 160) in writing about everyday racism argues that whites exercise covert pressure with the aim of enforcing cultural assimilation. This 'need for control' as she goes on to explain is expressed by members of the dominate group who demand that racialised minorities adapt to 'Swedish [my emphasis]' ways of living become a feature of a certain kind of racism that is unique to the national context (ibid.). Assimilative pressures impose a multicultural facade while reinforcing hierarchical social structures that privilege Swedish culture over Zareesh's religious and cultural practices. This allows some individuals to complain while burdening others with the consequences, deflecting responsibility from the systemic issues at hand. The customer, feeling empowered by the consumer feedback system, leverages his 'native' power (Duyvendak, 2023) to express his lack of feeling at home, by seeing a girl in a hijab. The anonymity of the complaint further complicates the power imbalance, as it allows the customer to express bias without accountability.

On the other hand, asking the very same person who the customer is going to complain about to assist in filing that complaint shows how disempowered Zareesh perceives herself to be in the situation. She then has to process and internalise the hurt and frustration from this incident, while continuing to serve the same customer later, even assisting him politely despite knowing his prejudiced views; what Arlie Hochschild (1979: 565-569) calls emotional dissonance in the case of the former and surface acting in the case of the latter.

This situation impacts Zareesh's sense of identity and belonging. She is angry at herself for not asserting her identity by saying 'Malmö' instead of 'Pakistan.' When she says 'Pakistan,' she inadvertently prioritises her ethnic origin over her current identity as a member of the local community in Malmö. Her subsequent regret reflects a desire to assert her belonging to Malmö and be recognised as a local, not as the outsider she was labelled. Zareesh's experience is a profound example of the emotional labour required of marginalised employees, who have to constantly evaluate their reactions to discriminatory behaviours and seek ways to protect their emotional well-being.

Eshaal's assertion of 'they are just ignorant; they don't have knowledge' may be prefaced as one of parochialism in explaining inappropriate behaviour by white Swedes in professional situations. In the following fragment, she describes an interview situation where unseemly questions were solicited from the new manager she was assigned to after her company was acquired by another:

E: There are so many ignorant people in Sweden. I mean they say they are not racist, and I don't believe they are, but they are just ignorant they don't have knowledge, they

would give me questions like ‘how do you feel walking on the streets when everybody looks at you? What does your husband say about you working?’

U: Who was asking these questions?

E: I had a position and then a new manager came in. He came from a small town in the middle of Skåne and I was the first foreigner he ever saw. Yea, and then he asked me these questions in the interview. He loved me like a daughter, and I knew he was not racist but he was just ignorant.

(Eshaal 47, Female, second-generation)

Eshaal shrugged her shoulders as she replied to my question on navigating situations of conflict. She said, ‘there are so many ignorant people in Sweden’. With a slight frown and a thoughtful tone, she measures her evaluation ‘I mean they are not racist; I don’t believe they are’. She is careful not to conflate questions that originate from ignorance of experience and possibly from curiosity, with racism nor view it as an overt attack on her racial, religious or immigrant status. She explains that the new manager ‘came from a small town in the middle of Skåne’ and ‘I was the first foreigner he ever saw’. She is aware that people from small towns with low diversity ‘lack knowledge’ about ‘non-native others’ and may ‘look at’ the person who ‘sticks out’, projecting a small-town mentality onto big city life. She scoffs and shakes her head at the content of the questions. She is hardly an anomaly in the diversity mix of Malmö city work life. Moreover, she has been the primary breadwinner for her family for most of her married life, so the question ‘what does your husband say about you working?’ referring the trope of third world ‘immigrant’ husbands exercising control over their wives’ decisions to work, does not apply to her, nor to any other Pakistani women among the interviewees. She continues to say warmly that her manager treated her like a daughter, another clue that talks to the demographic of her manager, and she reiterates that people are mostly ignorant, not racist.

Sanaya relates an account where she had to negotiate an uncomfortable situation that arose around social drinking, where she complained there was lack among Swedes to accept that there are people who do not drink. In her case, because is a woman of colour and though she does not openly declare herself to be Muslim, she does feel that meanings get attached to her ‘not’ drinking that take away her agency to be able to say ‘no’ without offering a justificatory explanation to sooth the person asking the question, something she dislikes being accountable for:

Me and my sister used to work for the same company. There was a woman who couldn’t accept that we were not drinking. She was so angry we had to tell her we don’t, and you have to accept that. That is a strong memory, she couldn’t accept it, she couldn’t understand why someone who was getting free champagne for a celebration will say no.

No is a no, it is my own choice you have to accept that. That I remember. But not in the way that we discussed it further, you know you go deeper that it is something religious something like that. That has never happened. And I think that in my opinion if you are religious or not, if you don't feel like it, the other person has to accept that'

(Sanaya 31, Female, second-generation)

Breaking certain social norms come with social sanctions. Not drinking at a company event is going against the grain of what is considered a normal celebratory gesture and is followed by censure, questions and anger by a fellow colleague. This surveillance of an '(un) approving' social behaviour is deemed unacceptable and has to be accounted for, opening up space for certain actors (native Swedish) to play out their power positions at an interpersonal level. Implicit in Sanaya's narration is that her religion could be held suspect as the reason for her not drinking, though the question is not explicitly solicited. It is also implicit in her account that had she been a Swedish woman of native origin, her decision would raise no questions. It's the particular body (immigrant/coloured), in the particular place (social event with dominant norms), with a particular stigma (religion/oppressed Muslim woman) that is hailed for questioning.

When relating the above narration Sanaya held an amused expression, that became more serious when she got to the part where she says 'a no is a no'. She reflected that no one has actually explicitly taken the discussion down the religious path, but she has a firm expression on her face when she ended her response with 'if you don't feel like, the other person has to accept it'. While Sanaya could manage this situation well because she described herself as a 'confident person' who knows 'what she wants', and has 'never succumbed to peer pressure', in contrast perhaps Maira wishes to avoid being in spaces where she is aware of persistent norms that she does not want to partake in, that will raise questions, that will in turn make her feel out of place and on a 'hot seat' where she will be up for questioning. To avoid questions and raised eyebrows, sometimes translates into avoiding such interactions altogether. She concludes, it is okay to be a Muslim in Sweden as long as you know how to defend yourself. When I asked is that a necessary condition, she vehemently replied 'yes!'.

Effat shares a story where at a work dinner she is indulgently prodded by her colleague to 'take a sip' of champagne rationalising on her behalf 'one sip won't hurt' knowing well that she is a Muslim woman who does not drink. She manages the situation by pretending to drink, touching her lips to the glass. Additionally, during a Christmas party game, she is called to dance with her boss, an uncomfortable situation she navigates by exchanging her dance card with a colleague. 'I had to compromise,' said Effat. Her experience emphasises how disproportionately Muslim women are subjected to uncomfortable and patronising situations in the workplace, leading to minority stress. Her colleague's behaviour not only shows a lack of respect for her

religious beliefs but also a broader lack of acceptance for diversity. Thus, female immigrants experience a unique form of discrimination related to their immigrant background in excess of the gendered discrimination faced by women in general on the Swedish labour market.

The above narratives are congruent with the basis of the minority stress, presuming that some stressors are unique or magnified for minority group members (Meyer, 2003). The indulgent and patronising tones are alienating, the demand to fit in makes one suspect to scrutiny, and tactical on the spot diplomatic thinking can be exhausting, contributing to minority stress.

Zarar says the following on his experience in the job market and in trying to establish a career in politics and just more generally finding a job as an immigrant in Sweden:

I haven't faced that much ... but I can feel in politics for example I can feel how it is for a foreigner ... to get a place to establish himself is much harder for him uhhh person with a foreign background to come into politics and get to and come to a position where you can speak [...] it is more difficult when you look for work. I have experience with my friend. He gave his CV to a company and got rejected. We took the same CV, and we changed the name, and we send it off to the same company and few months after and the result was that he was given a chance for an interview. So thats ... that's a small thing.

(Zarar 22, Male, second-generation)

Zarar's anecdote relates the subtle but pervasive discrimination that individuals with Muslim names or foreign backgrounds often encounter in the workplace. Despite having similar qualifications, the person with a non-foreign or non-Muslim sounding name received a chance for an interview, whereas the individual with a Muslim name faced rejection initially. Many participants reiterate this that Muslim and/or foreign sounding names disqualify them from competing fairly in the labour market (see Arai et al., 2016; Bursell, 2014; Khosravi, 2012). Thus, revealing systemic biases in hiring practices that adversely affect individuals from marginalised or minority backgrounds as additional barriers to securing employment opportunities (Bursell & Bygren, 2023). It suggests that unconscious or implicit biases play a role in decision-making processes, influencing how resumes are screened, and candidates are evaluated (ibid.).

Initially downplaying personal experiences of discrimination in the utterance 'I haven't faced that much' Zarar acknowledges broader systemic challenges of equal opportunity faced by immigrants in both politics and employment. Ending with 'that's a small thing' indicates a resigned acceptance of such biases as commonplace or minor in the larger context of immigrant integration challenges.

Zarar's ambition to enter politics serves as his proactive response to the challenges he faces. As he tests his theories and gathers evidence, he is concurrently completing his

education, viewing it as a stepping stone to entering politics and effecting change from within the system. As a politically active member of the youth action wing of the Social Democrats, he also writes blogs, serves as a jury member when possible, and participates in public hearings at the courthouse on issues important to him. He states, 'I have driven many questions about human rights during campaign time to our party... about racism. Sweden has passed, signed, and ratified legislations that they aren't following, so I have tried to raise my voice for this.' This approach reflects his strategy to address systemic issues directly, leveraging his future position to advocate for reforms that can mitigate the very challenges he and others like him encounter.

Shaheryar and Atheel's narratives below, also highlight that in addition to challenges entering the job market, maintaining employment is particularly difficult for children of immigrants:

Swedish people lack courage to say things to your face. They say things behind your back. Someone said something ... there was a conflict ... like someone complained that 'he keeps sitting here and he doesn't do any work'. I said, 'say it to my face!'. I am a medical student. Someone asked me to clean a table, and I said it is not my job to do that. That does not mean I am lazy. I don't do any work if it's not in my job description. You understand? She works there as a permanent employee, and I am a temp that's why, I think.

(Shaheryar 23, Male, second-generation)

I have distributed newspapers, I've worked at a gym, I've also worked at a restaurant, and I've worked at an old home. I have also worked in different factories. I cooperated with everyone at my jobs. In this one job, where I was competing with a colleague for a position, he started to talk bad about me. That he takes too long at completing tasks, he doesn't do tasks thoroughly, doesn't listen to instructions. I cooperated with him. I said, 'look if you have a problem with me, please tell me to my face I am not after anyone's job I don't intend to work in this field, so you have no reason to be scared of me.' I just want everything to be said to my face not behind my back! I hate it. If there's a problem ill fix it! For the first time in my life, I had heard that I am a slow worker, so I got really angry at the allegation! People at work said a lot about him too behind his back, but I never engaged, never talked about him with anyone.

(Atheel 24, Male, second-generation)

Both Shaheryar and Atheel express frustration with colleagues who talk behind their backs instead of addressing issues directly. They find the whispering, gossiping, constant surveillance, and unfounded attacks on their reputation distasteful. This behaviour contributes to a poor work environment and reflects weak leadership. For Shaheryar creating a hierarchy among tasks to force others to do work outside their job



description, then labelling them as ‘lazy’ or bad workers, reveals a lack of self-accountability and transparency. Atheel on the other hand is ‘really angry’ at being called a ‘slow worker’ by a white Swedish colleague he is competing for a position with, who also maligns his reputation by saying he does not collaborate and is careless at completing his tasks. Atheel gives detailed examples of all the jobs he has worked, and the number of colleagues he has cooperated and collaborated with to suggest his breadth of skills and adaptability.

Atheel, having heard many times before ‘*they* (immigrants) are here to steal *our* (natives) jobs’ thinks this is the stake in this situation with his colleague. He pacifies his colleague by saying ‘I don’t intend to work in this field’ so he can back off. Moreover, Atheel’s refusal to retaliate against others despite hearing negative comments about them underscores his commitment to professionalism and fairness. This behaviour can be seen as a form of indirect communication that might stem from cultural differences but also can perpetuate misunderstandings and assumptions about work ethic of immigrants in general and children of immigrants in particular.

Review of labour market research reveals that there are strong arguments suggesting that discrimination against migrants—in particular against non-European migrants—is rather extensive in Sweden (see for example Ahmed et al., 2023; Behtoui et al., 2020; Bursell & Bygren, 2023; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2023; Rydgren, 2004). What the above stories reveal are mechanisms of exclusion by white Swedish gatekeepers, be they customers, peers or bosses that help reach a deeper understanding of the practice of ethnic discrimination in the workplace that lower social trust. Camilla Hallgren (2005: 331), writing about everyday racism among young men and women from immigrant backgrounds in Sweden, argues cogently that one aspect of ‘not belonging’ is being watchful at all times, needing to constantly be alert, and being ‘on the edge’. Discrimination erodes social trust, weakens connections between people, and ultimately impacts the sense of belonging among children of immigrants.

Atheel asserts his competence while challenging stereotypes through proactive communication and a steadfast focus on collaboration and improvement. Shaheryar insistence on delineating his responsibilities based on his job description reveals a strategic approach to navigating workplace expectations, demanding clarity balancing assertiveness with professionalism. These narratives show how individuals from minority backgrounds may confront and manage perceptions of racialisation and professional expectations, advocating for clarity and fair treatment in their work environments.

Arham, a 27-year-old politician, refers to an interactional occurrence where sometimes fellow Swedish counterparts say to her ‘oh you are Muslim!’ and that makes her feel that ‘they actually had *prejudices* from before’ about Muslims that they did not register in her person and were surprised at finding out she was a Muslim.

Oh, you are a Muslim! I see that people are (pauses for a few seconds) so they don't say it but several times I have noticed they say 'ohhh are you Muslim? It's another way to say that they actually had some kind of prejudices before and so in that sense I have noticed it. I was campaigning during Ramadan last year and then this journalist came to ask about our campaign and I said yea its going well I am enjoying and I made a joke like yea but let's say I am not so happy about the sun because I am fasting and then he was like 'Oh are you a Muslim?' and I said yea and he said 'I never reflected upon that before' and then I could tell that because it is not usual to have my position in my age, he didn't say it out loud but I could see that he himself was reflecting. He had realised that he himself had prejudice that he was assuming because I was the front girl that I must not have come from a Muslim family, and I should not be fasting.

(Arham 28, Female, second-generation)

When a perceived lack of an identity is suddenly made available, and is met with surprise or amazement, the reaction is interpreted as 'they had some kind of prejudices before'. She reads it as an image in the minds of 'Swedish others' about who a Muslim (woman in this case) is, what a Muslim does or is supposed to look like. To find someone that does not fit that image, and to express it in the formulation 'oh, are you Muslim?' or 'oh, you are Muslim!' displays an incongruence in the person she is as a Muslim, 'the front girl' in a political campaign versus the person she ought to have been as a Muslim, and therein lies the prejudice, 'that I must not have come from a Muslim family and I should not be fasting'. Moreover, the fact that the journalist she was in conversation with had 'never reflected upon that' she could be Muslim meant that she was the 'good immigrant' perfectly integrated and seen as 'Swedish' since she showed no conspicuous signs of bearing a Muslim identity (reference). That said, when one does (re)present oneself as a 'Muslim' as Arham does, a previously non-racialised interaction may risk becoming racialised (Jakku, 2018).

Ignorance culminates as misrecognition of religious people in Swedish society. The inability to conceive of religion having a positive role and the idea of upholding religious values while fighting for social justice and equality as incognizant are the two main concerns that are raised by Arham in the excerpt below. She argues that one doesn't necessarily preclude the other, 'religious people are also on the good side':

People have this view that Muslims don't question things, that we just take things for granted, we are indoctrinated, and we are just following [...] I normally remind people that the revolutions in the Middle East were done by Muslims. People did not leave Islam and then overthrow the dictator. They were Muslims overthrowing the dictator. Anti-slavery people were also religious people. I sometimes have to remind that the Social Democrats, people who started the party over a 100 years ago they were Christian they were not atheists so we have to thank the Christian population for starting a secular party, yet people tend to forget [that] religious people are also on the good side [...] my

biggest challenge or fear is that here in Sweden, I will not be judged for my performance. I will be judged for being a young Muslim woman wanting to be a mayor. I may have done everything perfect or even more than non-Muslim male counterparts. But then the day of election people might just feel that this white man feels so much more reliable I am not willing to make a young Muslim woman the mayor of my city and they might vote for him. It has nothing to do with our actual performance and I think that's my I continuously fight. Which is why I keep statistics of everything. To get through this male dominance white area zone my strategy has been to keep statistics of everything I do in the sense that before the election day I will hand over to my party a list of all the people I have met all the articles I have written all the bills I have passed everything so that I will say this is my performance but in Sweden. I will not be judged for this I will be judged for being a young Muslim woman wanting to be a mayor that is my fear...a fear let's say..but I can...a fear which I think has some truth.

(Arham 28, Female, second-generation)

Arham states very clearly the kind of prejudices 'people' have about Muslims. She refutes misgivings by saying that as a product of a bi-racial, inter-religious marriage between her parents, and in the capacity of a second-generation Muslim woman, she actually reflects much more than an ordinary 'Swedish' person would. Each layer of intersection that is added to her identity unfolds new frontiers to be explored and questioned simultaneously. One doesn't have to place one's religious identity on hold or shed it first before embarking on projects that pertain to democracy, liberty and welfare. These struggles can coexist. She also contends that to erase inconvenient truths from history or to forget that a lot of people fighting to have secular political party or voting for one, came from a Christian background. It may be argued that religion was precisely the reason for the fight, that said, to assume that Islam has had the same kind of power as the Christian Church in Western Europe, is to start conflating histories, and mismatching realities. The idea of progress in modernity was the separation of religion and state, if not its complete removal. Religion has become an anxiety generating presence in the form of Islam and Muslims in Sweden.

Arham faces additional challenges as a Muslim woman aspiring to a political career in Sweden. She 'fears' that despite her exemplary performance, voters may favour a white male opponent based on prejudice rather than merit. Her proactive strategy features her awareness of the systemic barriers she faces and her determination to overcome them through 'fight[ing]' for transparency and accountability. The fact that she harbours these *fears* and expresses the need to *fight* once again shows how she needs to be watchful, alert and on edge.

Seema, a 34-year-old dentist working in a clinic in Skåne narrated a story that shows the emancipatory potential in *noticing* and *acting upon* racialisation in professional workplace. Seema shares an experience where a patient called to change their

appointment upon noticing that the name on her referral belonged to a 'foreigner.' The patient requested a 'Swedish' doctor instead. Upon hearing this, Seema's boss instructed the receptionist to inform the patient if she wished to stay at their clinic, she would have to be treated by the doctor to whom she was referred. She was otherwise welcome to seek care at a different clinic. Seema's story vividly illustrates how exclusion can be turned on its head when someone in a position of power stands up for their employee. Seema's boss could have easily acquiesced to avoid conflict. Instead, she chose to confront the prejudice head-on. Seema reflects in the following way:

The thing is in Sweden law is very stringent. You cannot discriminate anyone especially on the basis of religion, face, name, colour, gender etc that is why they don't say a lot of things even though they may think about it. For example, after that incident happened, my chief she pushed me to take a leadership course so I can apply to become the chief in the future. She really pushes me forward into the limelight because she sees potential. She does not see if I am Swedish or a foreigner what matters is my work

This act of standing up for Seema was more than just a rejection of the patient's discriminatory request; it was a profound affirmation of Seema's belonging and worth within the professional environment. It showed Seema that her boss recognised the injustice and chose not to overlook it. This support not only made Seema feel valued and defended but also made a powerful statement that such biases have no place in their clinic. Moreover, being seen and supported even 'after the incident' in an intentional manner from her boss shows mutuality in belonging. Everyday racism, when taken notice, can become a productive space with emancipatory potential for all involved actors. It can foster bonds of affiliation (Scheff, 2007) and create more equitable conditions for living the quotidian as a community, where feelings of injustice are shared and there is sense of empowerment about eradicating this injustice together that is also shared (Williams, 2015: 20-25).

The narratives in this section on 'Career connections' communicate that in Sweden, the concept of equality is normative rather than creative or innovative, and it often lacks attunement to 'other' people and/or cultures. The interviewee's narratives have a clear point to convey: the Swedish nation welcomes 'others' under multiculturalism but is assimilative in its approach which doesn't necessarily translate into active collaboration or mutual understanding. In practice, there is more emphasis on surveillance and bare tolerance rather than genuine acceptance.

## Conclusion

A common experience that many of the participants share is that of not being allowed to belong. Despite their efforts to embrace national customs and publicly declare their sense of belonging as ‘Swedish,’ individuals from minority backgrounds frequently encounter scepticism from the majority society regarding their identity. This ongoing questioning creates a sense of frustration and detachment, as they are persistently reminded that they do not fully belong to the Swedish ‘we’ collective. These experiences of being othered result in what can be described as unhomely moments—periods of reckoning and emotional unravelling.

Echoing writers in the black radical and post-colonial traditions (e.g. Baldwin, 1988: 1117–1129; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Puwar, 2004) this chapter brings to attention how the *white gaze* is not just a reflection of, but a generative force in shaping racialised social relations in everyday life of the participants.

Whether on a bus, train, or playground, a racialised body often triggers acts of racialisation. Expressions such as ‘your face is the colour of my shit,’ insults like ‘jävla kebab’ and ‘jävla invandrare,’ shouts of ‘go back to your country,’ accusations of ‘taking our jobs,’ and racial profiling by police illustrate the prevalence of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments. These experiences significantly affect the sense of belonging for second-generation Pakistani-Muslims. Examining where we live, shop, and play reveals how micro-practices form abstract ethical relations and expose social justice issues. The city does not always embody kindness if we consider Goffman’s (1959) view of civility as a shared morality nor notions of cooperation and solidarity. The section on *near connections* shows spatial closeness with white Swedish others can intensify racial tensions. Attribution of labels create an awareness of alienation, which heightens a sense of otherness and affects feelings of inclusion.

Subsequently, *dear connections* lend an understanding of the nature of friendship formation for the participants and their everyday interactions in contexts of ‘difference—since friendships have the potential to both enhance or limit the experience of belonging. For the participants it is ‘hard to make friends’ with white Swedes and even harder to feel ‘closeness’ not knowing where one stands with ‘them.’ For most Pakistani participants growing up in a desi family, common teenage activities such as drinking, staying out late, going to parties, and having boyfriends were unacceptable according to family standards. They were primed to create focus on their education, and activities such as Qur’an classes, Urdu language classes, and homework. Norms of commensality in friendships with white Swedes, such as not being invited to share meals with friends while under their roof, coupled with the perception of friendships as transactional, made it difficult to sustain these relationships over time and beyond specific settings. The inability of white Swedes really ‘feel’ other human beings are seen as reasons for

what a participant called ‘barrier-distance’ between ‘us’ (Swedes with a foreign background) and ‘them’ (white Swedes) when making friends. Thus, very few second-generation Pakistanis have white Swedish friends. Most befriend Pakistanis and children of immigrants from other ethnicities.

Experiences of othering in school and educational settings in *peer connections* highlights the challenges faced by marginalised students. Narratives in this section exemplify that the educational system often fails to recognise and address the unique pressures faced by children of immigrants. Teachers and school administrators may overlook the additional help these students need-particularly in combatting bullying, fostering inter-racial mixing of students, giving space to marginalised students in the classroom to voice their perspectives, changes in the curriculum to include histories of minorities that gives their cultures value, and offering genuine encouragement rather than showing surprise at their success. This leaves them to navigate these challenges largely on their own. This self-reliance, while commendable, highlights a critical gap in the support structures that should be in place to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students.

*Career Connections* reveals ‘complaints’ about a Muslim woman’s hijab, patients rejecting treatment from an ‘immigrant’ or someone with an immigrant-sounding ‘name’, and ‘surprise’ when a successful non-hijabi woman is revealed to be Muslim. Participants perceive a prevailing belief that immigrants will inevitably fail to integrate fully into Swedish society through institutions like the labour market, gender equality norms, and educational and economic success if they retain cultural allegiances. There is always some standard of Swedishness that is not met or is misrecognised in the performance of Swedishness by the second-generation. Those who do succeed are viewed as ‘exceptions’, leading them to feel at odds with their Swedish identity. Also prompting them to distance themselves from experiences of Swedishness that don’t align with their own. Boundary-work is being done, but it is as Bhabha (1984) writes, is the world of ambivalence where one is ‘not quite/not white’.

Participants feel ‘uneasy’, ‘judged’, ‘alone’, ‘angry’, ‘frustrated’, ‘humiliated’ and ‘sad’ and by their experiences of everyday racism in various contexts. Microaggressions from encounters like the one’s described in this chapter, create what Meyer (Meyer, 2003: 675) calls minority stress, that is, ‘excess’ stress to which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed to because of their minority, position. Participants remain silent, resigned, become extra polite, cordial and diligent, and learn to ignore these microaggressions. However, by continually adjusting their perspectives and responses, they may inadvertently normalise the very practices they seek to counter, making the racialising behaviours seem like an expected part of everyday life. Silence and resignation to accept such behaviour, does not recognise racism as a communal and

social phenomenon but as a problem between specific individuals, overlooking and downplaying its existence and effects.

Additionally, it reveals the significant emotional and cognitive work racialised individuals undertake to counter negative experiences, striving to maintain a balanced view of humanity. This complex 'dance' (Anderson, 2015: 14) showcases strength of the racialised and the pervasive challenges they face in fostering genuine inclusivity.

Furthermore, these challenges also present productive opportunities. They become spaces for resistance and self-definition, enabling individuals to engage in a struggle over representations and a politics of representation itself. This process is crucial for building up their national identity, rising against marginalisation, and asserting their place within the broader Swedish social fabric.

## *Chapter 7*

# Negotiating Arranged and Love Marriages

This chapter sheds light on how second-generation individuals negotiate intimate relationships within the context of family while growing up in the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. It will show whom they marry and fall in love with to highlight how they negotiate their Pakistani, Muslim and Swedish identities through love and arranged marriage. Cases are explored reflecting on the experiences of participants in navigating the realms of marriage and family, while also negotiating their concepts of romantic love, care, understanding, and commitment.

The cases are divided into two streams. The first is called ‘Love and Intimacy in Mixed marriages’ with distinctions based on ethnicity and religion in inter-racial/inter-religious and inter-racial/intra-religious marriages. And the second is called ‘Love and Intimacy in Arranged Marriages,’ which is contingent on sameness of ethnicity and religion but includes distinctions based on location, such as marriages to Pakistan, from Pakistan, and within Europe.

Studying intimate relationships, particularly marriage, within the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden holds significant importance within the context of Swedish values of gender equality, sexual liberation, and individual autonomy for belonging. This exploration provides insights into how these values intersect with cultural norms and practices within immigrant communities.

## Love and Intimacy in Mixed marriages

This section delves into the intricate dynamics of intimate relationships within the context of multicultural unions, particularly among second-generation Swedish-born Pakistanis. Love is a source of belonging and it is sustained by intimacy. It also explores relationships between second-generation Swedish-born immigrants from other minority backgrounds and majority native Swedes. The experiences of individuals



navigating love and intimacy across cultural and religious boundaries, within the framework of mixed marriages, will be explored.

The notion that intimacy is achieved and sustained rather than simply ascribed through marital status centre on adult, often sexual, relations, theorising them in terms of individualised, negotiated interactions, in contrast to previous models that emphasised gendered roles, responsibilities and obligations. Belonging is also a social location- position in the social structure experienced through identification, embeddedness, connectedness and attachments. It is a combined result of trust, feeling safe, community and the sense of possibility.

### **Narratives of Love: Inter-Ethnic and Intra-Religious Marriages**

A distinctive feature in these stories is that while narrators cross boundaries of ethnicity with greater ease, sometimes even preferring it, religion notably remains a salient common denominator for marriage. The following stories illustrate the various ways in which religion mattered when it came to love and marriage for the participants of this study.

#### *Eshaal: 'He Needed to Convert'*

The first story that exemplifies the importance of religion as a strong boundary marker for mixed unions is that of Eshaal, a 47-year-old woman who is one of the oldest participants in this study. She was three years old when she accompanied her parents from Pakistan to Sweden. She is a part of the Ahmadi community, and she has lived in Sweden all her life. She is a successful professional and has received several accolades in her career for her achievements.

It was a warm summer day when we met in her house. We sat on her veranda on an outdoor sofa. She poured me a glass of cold water and sat down opposite me. She was wearing a T-shirt with a Shalwar and a light breezy sweater. She exuded ease, confidence, and looked at me indulgently, making eye contact, waiting for me to ask her questions. It took almost an hour to get through pleasantries and for her to get comfortable with the pace and depth of personal sharing. She told me she's currently married a second time to a Swedish husband who is a convert to Islam. Thus followed a conversation that started from her mother pressuring her to marry her first cousin from Pakistan. The strips from the interview are collated according to the timeline of her marriage to tell her story.

Eshaal delineates her mother as the central protagonist of her marriage story:

My mom said, it is time you got married. Now you have to get married [...] It was my first marriage. I was 22 when I first got married.

[...] That's the thing. Because we are cousins. That was common when I was younger. My children would never do this now, I didn't know better. I mean I had no experience. I did not know of any men around me, because the Jamaat here was none, no men here my age, and then my mother said that come with me to Pakistan.

[...] and then I had this discussion with my father and I asked him what he thought about this and he said I want you to know whatever your decision is never feel obliged to marry because of my opinion, because you feel I want this for you, I want what you want so it is your decision, that was the first time I was like ok. Otherwise, I thought okay my parents want me to get married then I just have to do it. When I talked to my dad, I felt better.

[...] then I went to Pakistan, and I said to myself that if I will not get married now I never will, because I don't know any men (laughs). And I don't know anyone who I should marry. I live so far off in Sweden, and nobody will come to Sweden, so I did it because of that I said let's just do it. I talked to him one day. And we got married on paper nikah. Then he came here a year after. Then we had a function here in Sweden.

Despite the impression conveyed by the woman seated before me and the self-portrait she painted of her younger self as ambitious, driven, and goal oriented, Eshaal's account of her marriage revolved more around her mother's desire for her to wed and her own compliant reaction. Her mother comes across as a main character keeping account of 'time', which has a direct relation to Eshaal's age (20's), and knowing when ('now') one 'ha[s] to get married' as much as it is about understanding time as relieving oneself of one's parental duty and obligation to find eligible partners for one's offspring. Eshaal's mother already had a 'rishta' of her 'cousin' back in Pakistan.

Marriage arrangement in the South Asian context, rishta means 'proposal' or 'match', but also has the wider sense of being 'well-connected'. Within the normative ideals of marriage arrangers, a good rishta connects people who are socially and personally well matched with respect to education, personality and physical characteristics (Charsley et al., 2020: 99; Rytter, 2012a: 576; Shaw & Charsley, 2006: 407). I asked her why her marriage couldn't be arranged with someone at the Jamaat (Ahmadi congregation) or in Sweden, 'that's the thing' she said, 'because we are cousins'. According to stories told by second-generation narrators about their parents, cousin marriages do not feature prominently. The pool back home for eligible brides is larger for first-generation men whose mothers, key to arranging their marriages, are still living in Pakistan. Women who came as first-generation brides to Sweden are now arranging marriages of their descendants. Dislocation from the homeland, increased physical distance, and infrequent trips are reasons for their lack of connections back home. Thus, first-cousins

become eligible foremost as it fosters alliance between families (Werbner, 2002) and there is a perception of trust and safety with such an alliance.

It could also be seen as a social debt, or an obligation accrued to one's kin back home offered as an opportunity for young members of extended family to have a better life. Arranged marriage to a cousin is seen as a kind of flow of capital that follows the logic of remittance, except it is in marriage, and the direction is from there (Pakistan) to here (Sweden). Since the cousin is Eshaal's maternal aunt's son, the marriage to her cousin marriage contributes to 'moral economy of kin' which refers to practices of individual family members from minority ethnic groups who work together to ensure well-being of the whole family (Bolognani & Mellor, 2012). Transnational family ties scaffold transnational family life in the second-generation through arranged cousin marriages and ensure a continuity and connection with family and to homeland (Fernandez & Jensen, 2014). Cousin marriage is the 'ultimate gift' of one's child to show loyalty and belonging to the family left behind and giving it room to belong in the continuity of family lineage in the country of settlement.

Eshaal rationalises as she further reflects on why at the time, it was the best course of action. It was a 'common' practice *then*, which would *now* have no relevance, since her own children 'would never do this'. I noted she didn't say *she* would not do this to her children. She removes herself from the equation of a decision-maker in her children's partnership choices. Giving them full autonomy while respecting their proclivities. It signals the transformation and change in the boundaries of parental intimacies between first-generation parents/second-generation children, and between second-generation parents and their third-generation children.

She continues giving several accounts of her own misjudgements: 'not know[ing] any better', having 'no experience'. She continues to say there were 'no men around me' in general and 'no men my age' at the Jamaat (congregation). As mentioned earlier, dating and having boyfriends does not fall in the ambit of what is permissible in belonging to the Pakistani family, it is not a part of the Pakistani repertoire, nor a part of parents' marriage story. While participants do negotiate dating, out of respect to their parents and sometimes to ward off community policing, they maintain these relationships in secret. That said, most Ahmadi congregants among the participants in this research are more strictly endogamous compared to others- exceptions (exogamous love marriages) occurring further down the sibling order in strict households. By the time parents reach the third or fourth child, they are older, have less authority, their controls loosen up because older siblings have honoured their wishes, and siblings offer support to each other to follow their own choices. They act as a buffer against the parents, their authority and their threats. Life course of parents and sibling order matters immensely in explaining the loosening up of parental authority and control.

Though Eshaal would have done her bidding as per her parents' wishes, the authoritarian tone of her mother's decision to marry her off with the 'talk' with her democratic father whose calm reassurance of the decision ultimately being her choice, made her 'feel better'. Her father's support is a resource and locus of decision making restores 'power to' make a decision. It is considered a sign of respect and a proof of a decent upbringing for young people to allow their parents to take an active part in the decision about where (in what family, in what country) the marriage is to take place. Young members of the family also need their parents' collaboration and approval so that they can formally give their *rishta*: that is, suggest a marriage connection between two families. A formal proposal is seldom made by young couples themselves.

Becoming of marriageable age combined with the pressure from her mother makes Eshaal perceive marriage as needing an urgent redress, expressed as 'if I will not get married now I never will'. For Eshaal it is a now or never scenario which is subject to pragmatic deliberations to make a viable decision in order to not miss out on marriage altogether. Scarcity of suitable partners in Sweden, geographical distance between Pakistan (place of partner selection) and Sweden (destination for couple), and her own inability to '[not] know any men' are significant meanings in her story. Eshaal's pragmatic approach is further evident in the decision to spend a day talking to her potential husband, and proceeding with a *nikah* (Islamic marriage contract) before her partner relocates to Sweden and a small ceremony marks their marital journey.

This concludes the first part of Eshaal's narrative about marriage.

The following is the second half of the story that led up to Eshaal's divorce. Eshaal did not seem very comfortable talking about her ex-husband. She spoke rather sparingly, seeming closed off. She remained the main character in her story and throughout her interview she put herself front stage and centre of all her decisions, tribulations, strength, and bravado. She spoke truthfully about her parents without blame and spoke matter-of-factly about the events in her life. She reflected first on the time it took for him to settle down in Sweden. She had to fill out all his visa documentations, pay the fees, arrange moving out into an apartment and also earn her way through it all. What follows below is her conversation from the interview where she describes the breakdown of her marriage and the process of her divorce as a 'painful' and 'hard' period in her life:

E: It took a while [...] he started working. My father helped him to find something he worked in a warehouse. The time that we had was good and the children we had are perfect. I don't regret it because I have learned from it, because I know how hard it is.

U: What is hard?

E: Bringing a husband from Pakistan. It's hard for them too. As it was for me.

U: How would you describe your marriage with him?

E: It was good because I came to like him, I had no experience from before, here there is a person you are committed to and then you grow to like that person. But also, as it happened in our case we grew apart because, I ... he didn't have the education, and I have more the drive and I wanted to go places and be someone. We started to drift. We didn't have much to talk about anymore. Now, when I remarried, my current husband is an engineer, and there is something more substantial there than only a commitment.

The experience of bringing a husband from Pakistan to Sweden, required a period of adjustment and struggle articulated in 'it took a while' before the husband found employment with the help of Eshaal's father, showing the importance of networks for newly arrived migrants. The discrete mention of 'work[ing] in a warehouse' suggests a blue-collar job, possibly indicative of the challenges first-generation immigrants face in securing employment in a new country. These challenges can be exacerbated when their educational qualifications don't directly align with local requirements, and when language barriers further complicate matters. In this scenario, Eshaal's father helps his son-in-law get the job, highlighting the extent of the professional networks that the new immigrant can tap into based on his skillset.

Despite these initial difficulties, Eshaal reflects positively on their relationship expressing contentment with the outcome. However, the acknowledgement that 'bringing a husband from Pakistan' is 'hard' underscores broader challenges faced by second-generation negotiating their own marital preferences with parental involvement and expectations vis a vis demands for transnational kin as potential spouses. Both for herself and the transnational spouse who is making the journey for the sake of marriage and for the family they wish to build together. The exchange highlights the shared struggles and resilience required by both partners in navigating the complexities of immigration, marriage and integration.

It is interesting to observe how the responsibility of being the primary breadwinner in this narrative, shifts to the spouse who is more financially stable and established. This change in the traditional breadwinning norm, particularly when it transitions to the female partner, sheds light on the effect of shifting gender dynamics. Correspondingly, in emphasising the difference in 'care work', the home and work split, between herself and her husband, Eshaal is also making her divorce accountable.

Lack of 'experience' and 'commitment' in the form of marriage combine to give rise to affection and companionship for some time. Though for Eshaal, a commitment needs to be cemented by other factors that are 'more substantial'. It is evident that for Eshaal, education, ambition, and shared goals play a crucial role in her discernment of a successful marriage. 'We didn't have much to talk about anymore' encapsulates fundamental breakdown in communication and therefore, connection between Eshaal

and her former spouse. Feeling uninspired with the lack of intellectual stimulation as well as shared aspirations, slowly graduated to distancing between the couple which led to the eventual breakdown of their relationship. This highlights the importance of compatibility between individuals, their personal attributes and shared values in fostering a fulfilling and enduring marital bond. That is not guaranteed by marrying someone from the same family, same ethnicity and same religion. 'Now', in her second marriage to an engineer she has something more 'substantial'. A deeper connection in terms of compatibility of intellect, ambition, and shared aspirations. This shift highlights the importance of intellectual and emotional connection in a marriage for Eshaal, as well as the significance of finding a partner who shares similar values and life goals. By emphasising differences to her first husband underlining similarities to her second husband, Eshaal makes both life events of her divorce and remarriage accountable.

In this next excerpt Eshaal relates the period of her struggle. She feels abandoned and alone. Her parents, especially her mother, comes across as a main antagonistic and adversarial character:

E: [...] My divorce was the first of a kind in Sweden. It's still these young ladies say we find so much inspiration in what you did coz they could never imagine to get a divorce and you actually did and that gives us hope that we can also do that. It was really a struggle. No one supported me. I was all alone.

U: Your father didn't play a role?

E: No. He did not, he was afraid of my mother. My father did not give much of his opinion on this. He could not do much. But my mother was very dominant saying 'I will kill myself; I'll commit suicide if you get a divorce, then your divorce will be to blame for this'. I knew he would support me. But she was very clear that never. 'Over my dead body will you get a divorce' she said. When I came to her with problems after 6 years saying I cannot do this anymore it's so tough on me there is really a problem here, she said 'No you just have to endure. Go back and just keep on'

U: Did you have children?

E: When I first approached them (parents), I did not have any children. She (mother) was like 'Beizzati ho gi humari' (we will be disgraced). She was always saying 'what will other people think'. It was always very important for her because the community is small, and she had an important position in the Jamaat. She would say 'you will never find someone else, and you will be alone, who will marry someone who has already been married, it will be a disgrace to all of us and you, how can you put us through this'-it was these kinds of things.

U: You went back?

E: I did. Then the kids came along. Then I had same problems. I went back to speak to my parents. It was the same dialogues. Then I thought, I cannot do this. I cannot put them (children) through this. It is my responsibility to fix this, so I decided to take that responsibility.

U: So, six years and no children, you didn't have the courage to take the step. But thirteen years and two children later you found the strength?

E: Yes, my children gave me the strength to get a divorce. I was the one with the better salary and was managing the expenses and my work. I was the one getting the kids ready, dropping and picking up the kids from school, preparing the food. He slept the whole day. Because he worked nights. It was very hard on me. It was a difficult time. I had to do it. Otherwise, you sacrifice yourself. It is easy to sacrifice yourself. I sacrificed myself living in such a relationship. But I could not sacrifice my children. Growing in such an environment.

When Eshaal talks about her divorce, she refrains from portraying herself as a victim and instead emphasises her actions as pioneering and empowering. By stating that her divorce was 'the first of a kind in Sweden,' she positions herself as a trailblazer, suggesting that she broke new ground rather than succumbing to a common fate after an arranged cousin marriage. Additionally, she highlights the impact of her actions on others, noting how young women in her congregation find inspiration in her decision to divorce. This implies that she sees her experience not only as a personal journey but also as a catalyst for change and empowerment in the lives of others facing similar situations. The choice of language 'I was all alone' and 'no one supported me' frames her experience as a challenging yet ultimately a triumphant endeavour.

In the midst of the family drama, Eshaal's father emerges as a figure of submissive silence and invisibility, overshadowed by the dominant presence of her mother. Despite his daughter's predicament and the strain in her family dynamics, he remains passive and largely absent from the conflict. Eshaal indicates that her father's reticence stems from fear of her mother's strong personality. While she believes her father would ultimately 'support' her, his silence and acquiescence to her mother's demands underscore his subordinate role within the family structure. By describing her father as incapable of asserting himself, Eshaal conveys a feeling of being isolated and unsupported in her struggle. This portrayal highlights complexities of familial power dynamics and the impact of a mother's dominance on the rest of the family. It also nuances female power in so-called patriarchal familial orders, showing how gender dynamics play out in the Pakistani diaspora, as women engage in what is termed as patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti, 1988). Additionally, the entrenched gender roles and expectations within traditional family structures become observable. Whereby certain

spheres of influence are designated as primarily feminine and off-limits to male intervention.

Eshaal animates her mother and her emotionally charged threats, such as 'I'll kill myself' and 'over my dead body' - to make it understandable that she conformed to her mother's wishes, for the time being. Divorce crosses a social boundary, that threatens familial order, normatively justifying moral blackmailing as a means of exerting pressure and control. As a significant social stigma, its repercussions lead individuals to fear the loss of social status, support networks, and acceptance within their communities. Despite Eshaal's pleading that 'I can't do this' and 'it's hard on me', she is given marching orders to 'go back', 'get on' and 'endure'. Eshaal's wish to divorce emerges as a failure on the part of the family, a loss in status, and at a cost to the family reputation. This reflects a mindset that places the needs and desires of the family above those of the individual. Reinforcing notions of familial duty and obligation above personal needs. Eshaal returns to her marriage for another six years and has two children meanwhile.

The statement 'my children gave me the strength to get a divorce' highlights the transformative power of parenthood in empowering Eshaal to stand up for herself. She underscores her role domestically as the primary caregiver and financially as primary breadwinner. She uses evaluative phrases to rationalise her failing partnership. Eshaal's description of her husband's behaviour, particularly passivity in terms of household and caring tasks on account of his tendency to sleep during the day after his night shifts accentuates the imbalance and strain in their relationship.

From this we can infer that Eshaal invokes her husband's working-class job, with erratic hours, night shift-work and physical labour, when accounting for her divorce. He is unable to rise up to everyday demands of the family. Eshaal's self-sufficiency feels like a one-sided marriage. This leads back to Eshaal's reflection 'it is hard to bring a husband from Pakistan'. What she means is that it is hard to develop a relationship on equal terms with someone who is late to arrive to the scene. There are several arguments to this hardship: from settling in the newcomer, integrating him into the labour market, language inquisition, and general physical and emotional toll that takes to arm oneself with necessary skillset to navigate the new turf.

This echoes the discussions surrounding first-generation Pakistani brides migrating to Sweden as outlined in Chapter 6. However, in the second-generation experience among the participants, men arriving as first-generation transnational grooms face comparable discomforts and hurdles, while second-generation women wield greater power in negotiating the terms of marriage. This shift is attributed to the higher social, economic, and familial capital that women in the diaspora possess in Sweden compared to husbands immigrating from Pakistan (Çelikaksoy et al., 2010; Charsley & Bolognani, 2019; Pszczółkowska, 2018) While this disparity can be negotiated in



strategic ways with careful planning by willing partners as we will see in the next section on arranged marriages (example of Seema and Marium and Maleeha), later in the interview Eshaal stresses her first husband's lack of drive as her major source of her discontent. Presenting herself as ambitious, driven, with the ability to 'push' through adverse circumstances; her husband's complacency, lack of initiative and being content with status quo that eventually amplifies the disparity between their unequal educational, economic and social statuses.

It is important to also note that six years in the marriage and no children is when she first approached her mother with the proposition to divorce. Eshaal was reaching out to her mother as her child in that stage of her life course. When she approached her mother a second time, thirteen years later with two children in tow, she is now head-to-head with her mother *as a mother* herself. And that is when the power relation equalises. As Eshaal's mother endeavours to shield her child from a perceived challenging future, one she cannot fathom or endure herself, Eshaal prioritises the protection of her own children above any allegiance or loyalty to her extended family.

From Eshaal's narrative, we can see that alienation can result from belonging *to* the family, and theretofore, belonging *with* the family becomes tenuous when individual rights and family values clash with each other. Belonging with the family feel like an assault on personal freedom and an acute misinterpretation of marriage and its meaning. The social reward of belonging to the family is felt at the risk of losing authenticity and self-worth, where the latter has precedence since meaninglessness also leads to alienation from self, that is detrimental to personal belonging. Failure to belong to the family is a triumphant moment of standing up for oneself. And thus, belonging means self-awareness self-assertion, boundary-setting, emotional detachment, deconstructing cultural practice of marriage and its normative expectations.

In essence, Eshaal's experience of not belonging to her parental family (in this situation) serves as a catalyst for a deeper, more meaningful sense of *personal* belonging. One that she roots in authenticity, self-expression, and personal empowerment through her actions. In standing up to her mother, Eshaal learns to trust her own agency, advocate for her own needs, and forge her own path in life. This sense of agency and self-determination enhances her sense of personal belonging and fulfilment.

In the last part of this conversation on her divorce, Eshaal utters the word 'sacrifice' as 'easy' because it offers inclusion as a reward, but it is at the expense of feeling lost. In line with her beliefs regarding love, which emphasise open communication without judgement, as well as care marked by empathy and respect for personal preferences, she consciously opts for a challenging path of a wilful self-imposed estrangement. This decision reflects her desire to establish new boundaries. This is further explored in the following excerpt on her second marriage:

U: When did you re-marry?

E: Three years maybe (after the divorce) so my first husband married already a year after our divorce he remarried and they had kids, and my children were devastated, they felt their father has moved in with a new family, new children, he doesn't love us anymore and so on and my focus was on them that I would not put them through that. So, when I met my current husband my first condition to him was, I am a Muslim woman and in order for us to continue our friendship and relationship you have to convert, you need to commit that you will one day be a part of this family, that is a part of the commitment. I mean imagine this was several years ago we have been married 8 years so he is 6 years younger than I am, Swedish and then pressured (*laughs*) of course he was scared what am I getting into umm so err we did not talk for a half a year or something, but he said that when we met again one day, he said he could not stop thinking about me and that this is what he wanted to do. So, what he did is that he went to England where our Jamaat is, he lived there and studied the practiced Islam because it was important for him to be a good role model for our children and it was important for me and he understood that. In order for him to join this family and to be a role model he needed to convert to a Muslim so the children would not get confused on our identity as a family. That's what he did, although I told him I don't want any more children, my children should always feel that they are always priority number 1 for both of us, we already have children we don't need more children we have enough to focus on with these two children they need all the love they can because they are, all of this is so hard on them, so this is the commitment that we did [...] No he wanted to do that he did it voluntarily though to go to that extent was not necessary [...] Now he does all the fasting, all the days fasting and prays five times a day he is like a really good Muslim now better than I am (*laughs*) [...]

Eshaal shows consistency in her narrative identity, demonstrated through her unwavering commitment to her children's emotional stability and security. When discussing her current husband, she emphasises her initial condition that he convert to Islam, not for her own sake, but to ensure that her children feel a sense of belonging and continuity within their family structure. Marriage within the boundaries of Islam is crucial for many individuals and families. This may be blurred in some contexts as elucidated by Charsley and Bolognani (2019) when non-Muslim partners convert for the purposes of a religious marriage. This decision reflects her prioritisation of her children's needs and her determination to shield them from further 'devastation' and emotional upheaval, which she feels her divorce has caused. The importance of this commitment for the cohesion and identity of their family is stated in her religious expectations from her new partner.

Eshaal's clear communication of personal preferences and boundaries, as well as her insistence on commitment and understanding from her partner, shows the confidence and determination with which she navigates the complexities of her relationships. Her

journey from a marriage that was ‘hard’, to a divorce that was a ‘struggle’ where she felt ‘alone’ and without ‘support’ alongside a dominant mother saying ‘you have to endure’; Eshaal carves her own path risking her family’s disapproval and standing up for herself to finally finding a partner with whom she derives strength, feels supported, and can count on. She has built something ‘substantial’ in her conjugal bond and said she was happy and content. Moreover, her parents had accepted her marriage and were very proud of having a convert as a son-in-law and were moved by his sincerity and honesty in being Muslim.

Eshaal, reflecting on her marriage, said that she receives a great deal of admiration from the young women in her community, for introducing the possibility of success in a cross-cultural marriage. Inadvertently, she helped create bridges of understanding between first generation and their descendants, by showing through her marriage the possibility of having Swedish natives as potential husbands, sons-in-law, family members, and committed members of the congregation. According to Charles Tilly (2004), certain interactional forms like marriage constitute a social site; whereby through the mechanism of a conversation -at a small scale- it may cause much of incremental boundary change.

Eshaal’s marriage opens up a conversation among younger second-generation women in the congregation. It becomes symbolic in the sense that her example may be used as a precedence for future unions. It takes one member to push boundaries and take a stand, this action invites others to follow suit.

During our interview, we reached a point where Eshaal got a bit irritated at being the one giving out personal details about her life. She leaned forward and looked me directly in the eye and asked boldly with a slight edge to her tone:

F: What about you, are *you* married?

U: Not anymore. I am going through a divorce.

F: Ahh..you should find a nice Swedish man

U: Would I convert him?

F: Hahahahahahaha

This became a turning point for the interview. After this point Eshaal opened up more. Sometimes in an interview situation, participants can get frustrated with giving so much of themselves away to someone who offers nothing in return. A bid is made to reclaim some of their own trust by asking something in return. I respected that bid in most of my interview situations. And the result is an openness that gave way to richer stories. Eshaal’s face softened when I told her I was in the process of a divorce. And she threw herself back on the sofa and roared with laughter when I retorted to her suggestion of

finding a 'nice Swedish man' with 'would I convert him?'. Eshaal became thoughtful after that and gave another explanation for the reason of her condition for conversion. She said she couldn't risk losing her family a second time and going through that turmoil yet again for a man. And she was happy in her new life. Her children and her successful career gave her immense joy.

I would like to draw the reader's attention to a final argument. In the larger context of Eshaal's interview, her marriage story unfolds in recounting her position as a middle child amidst an older and a younger sibling. Situating her negotiations in relation to her siblings is an important finding on its own.

Eshaal's older sister Effat was sent back to Pakistan because she went to Tivoli (an amusement park in Copenhagen) with her friends without her parent knowledge. The parents found out which led to severe consequences. Which she described as a 'relief' because she didn't have to make choices that were too different from her family now. She went through matriculation (tenth grade) in Urdu which was an enormous transition for her- having studied only in Swedish language as her mother tongue. She settled in quickly and took on the challenge. She became acclimatised into the larger family's religious norms and learned fluent Urdu language rather quickly. Upon her return a few years later, she felt like a misfit in school, had a hard time getting along with her sisters. Eventually she marries a cousin who is extremely religious.

Eshaal's youngest sibling 'went in the opposite direction' according to her. She dyed her hair blonde, wore blue colour contacts growing up, and was not interested in maintaining a connection with the Ahmadi congregation. She married a Swedish man and gave up on religion and being Pakistani.

As siblings progress down the birth order, their adherence to parental expectations typically diminishes, perhaps reflecting the waning influence of ageing parents. Older siblings often serve as a source of pride for parents, embodying the desired traits and cultural values that strengthen familial ties to country and religion. As parents age, they may lack the ability to enforce their wishes on all their children equally and effectively.

Eshaal's journey from her first marriage to her second, the themes of belonging, marriage, and family intertwine to shape her path. Through her narrative, Eshaal concludes that belonging and fulfilment stem from honouring one's own truth and walking away from certain social expectations.

*Maham: 'When I Met Him, He Was Not a Believer, Now He is a Muslim'*

While Eshaal had clear intentions and demands when she was proposed to from her suitor, another participant, Maham goes through an internal debate revolving around a crisis of faith upon falling in love with a non-Muslim.

Maham is a 35-year-old woman. Her Pakistani father came to Sweden for an adventure and stayed back. He met and married a Finnish woman of Christian

background. Maham describes herself as a Pakistani-Swedish-Muslim who is married to a Swedish adoptee of Cuban origin who converted to Islam for their marriage. The following excerpts are from a conversation between us where she describes the process in her relationship from a courtship that eventually led to marriage to her husband:

M: When we were seeing each other, I told my husband that I will introduce you to my uhhhhh parents the day you have proposed so when you are ready to get married you can meet my parents and that was like ...from the start. So of course, I knew him. We were good friends and then we became a couple but not officially... I did not for example move in together I was very clear from the beginning that I will not spend night at his apartment, we will not move in together, and you will not even be invited to my home before we are officially engaged. And even when we are engaged, I will not stay at your place but then when we got engaged, we also did the nikah to make things more convenient.

A boundary is constructed to protect what one values. In the above excerpt Maham shows how she values intimate relations and sets certain limits and ground rules to her interactions with her partner based on precautions and progression deemed necessary within the horizon of the relationship she hopes to foster. She uses the phrase 'when we were seeing each other' rather than 'dating' to show the contour relationship is different from the normative ideas of dating in the Swedish society. Parents come into the picture when a 'propo[sal]' for marriage is made, until then the relationship is not worth seeking an audience with one's parents nor is its information deemed important to be conveyed. Maham emphasises that she was 'very clear from the beginning'.

This clarity which women in relationships express and stress upon, shows an ideal of intimacy based on honesty and trust that is dependent entirely on communication that gets straight to the point. We also see that a relationship has the potential to blossom into something more if an initial friendship exists between the couple first. Maham uses the word 'couple' and subsequently qualifies it as 'not officially'. For it to be official she is looking to Swedish standards of what such a declaration may purport and scales it back to her own values while setting boundaries that have personal meaning for her. She gives examples of 'not moving in', 'not sleeping over at his apartment' and 'not being invited to my home' until 'we are *officially* engaged'.

There are different logics of 'official' at play here that have different logics of operationalisation in practice. While in the context of *outsider* logic of the Swedish society, the norms around dating and intimacy may be more relaxed, with cohabitation before marriage being more widely accepted and seen almost a necessary precursor to being an 'official' couple. In the *insider* logic of family and faith community, 'official' means an 'engagement' or a 'nikah' (religious marriage ceremony). Wherein intimacy is typically reserved for committed relationships sanctioned by marriage (Karlssohn Minganti, 2016). She therefore decides to do a marriage ceremony with the engagement

to make staying together easier for them, and permissible on account of her marriage<sup>48</sup>. Maham's rules and boundaries exhibit a negotiated insider/outsider logic, whereby she is 'seeing someone' but doing so on her own terms that are neither in consonance with her family nor with the wider society. They are her own creation and are negotiated with her partner.

Meaning making is an empirical practice in which people draw on and create repertoires of meaning to interpret and motivate action (Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023). Marriage decisions fall in the realm of interpretive repertoires of meaning (Anthias, 2002) that are relational, discursive, historically contingent social systems that generate knowledge and are produced by effects of power within a social order (Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023: 427). Maham's meaning making can thus be understood as 'doing power' (ibid.). Doing power creates conditions for belonging featuring a sense of self that is integrating its plural identities such that integrity and continuity are aligned with the social context (Gest, 2018). The bedrocks of individual autonomy and freedom, emblematic of both national belonging and gender equality in Sweden, is being expressed as a bricolage in determining personal boundaries of intimacy in a relationship. Hybrid expressions of intimacy that transcend conventional categorisations are birthed as a result, offering couples a myriad of avenues for seeking meaningful connection.

In the forthcoming appraisals, Maham elucidates her negotiation process regarding what she perceives as her religious convictions and the religious mandates to marry within her faith community:

U: In terms of religion was that a problem between the two of you?

M: Uhhmm its uhh... it was because when I met him, he was not a believer. Now he is a Muslim so there was no issue. I never told him, uhhh I never told him that it's an issue. But it was an issue for me. I told him that I care you are a good person. But I will raise our children as Muslims. And if you want to tell them God doesn't exist then you do that. And let's see who wins!

U: So, it was a battle?

M: Yea (*chuckles*) but then there was ...I got questions from other people, the people who knew about us. Not the older generation, but my generation, they knew and they were like how will this work and uhh I was just stupid and in love let's say so I was like we will make it work!

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<sup>48</sup> Traditionally, the bride and groom do not meet without chaperones until they are married. Even after the nikah (ceremony), the Rukhsati (departure ceremony) when the bride departs with the groom after the wedding reception—is conducted under the vigilant care and supervision of family members, accompanied by parental prayers and blessings.

U: Do you think it is stupidity? Now that you are wiser?

M: (*laughs*) No but I think I didn't have a plan at that time so in that sense I didn't have a strategy. I was just madly in love, and I thought it would work. But then I got these questions about, and I had these inner, not doubts, but questions. That's when I felt ... religion was never a big ... there was never ... it was never hard to be Muslim because making Islamic choices for me is always making the better choice. Not drinking and not doing bad things but at this time I was not quite sure. That's the first time I was like ... is this really ... does Islam really say I cannot marry a non-Muslim? If he says that I can raise our children as Muslims because people's concern was like your children will not be Muslim if you don't get married to a Muslim and I was like but I have an agreement with this person they would anyway get a Muslim upbringing so then really does it matter if he is not Muslim? I did research I tried to look into Islamic literature trying to see what the meaning is behind not being allowed to marry a non-Muslim? And what I found most often ...ok... I don't want to say what is true in Islam or not. I don't know that much, but what I found was a lot of the arguments about back to like you will not be able to bring up a family with Islamic values.

Maham reflects on her partner's transition from non-belief to Islam, highlighting the initial challenge she faced in reconciling their differing religious perspectives. Maham also acknowledges the internal struggle she experienced, suggesting tension between her own religious convictions and her commitment to the relationship.

'Does it matter if he's not a Muslim?' perhaps is the most seminal question Maham asks that guides the content of her confusion building up to a frustration in navigating the future of her relationship. She could not turn to the 'older generation' for advice because they don't know of the relationship. Her own generation of friends and peers add to her quandary with their scrutiny and questions about how the relationship 'will work' reflecting broader societal attitudes towards interfaith relationships. While love and commitment may initially motivate couples to overcome such challenges, pressures and internal conflicts can present ongoing obstacles that require negotiation and compromise. Social identities of marriage partners are among the most sensitive and acute indicators of community or class feeling (Wood, 2018). Articulations of sameness, difference and plurality scout scope for success of a relationship in how we conceive of ideal partners and what are the most important boundaries for marriage. For most believing participants religious sameness is mandatory. Differences in class and ethnicity are more negotiable, especially if core personal attributes and temperamental traits of both individuals are aligned.

Maham tries to solve her dissonance. Even in the conversation, as she sat across from me, I sensed her demeanour change. I could feel the past frustration well up and come to life. Though well-expressed, she struggled to find words that matched her predicament. Like 'that's when I felt' (her voice trails off), 'Islam was never a big' (she

takes a few seconds again to rephrase what she means) and finally uttering 'it was never hard to be a Muslim'. Muslim means to submit, to surrender and to turn oneself over (Nasr, 2009: 8). Maham's assertion that 'making Islamic choices for me is always making the better choice' contrasts with her struggle to reconcile the idea of marrying a compatible partner solely based on religious affiliation. In this instance, she felt the usual *ease* she felt adhering to Islamic choices dislocate into a *dis-ease* if it meant 'surrendering' to the ruling of not marrying her chosen partner. The easy choice became a hard choice, forcing her to 'turn over' in her contemplation of her beliefs.

Understanding the meaning behind why it was 'so important to not marry a non-Muslim' fuelled her desire to educate herself so she could come to her own decision. Maham's narrative underlines a need of alignment in their beliefs in order to make meaningful decisions that are significant for their lives. This means religion is no longer viewed primarily as involving the unquestioning compliance with religious rules and practices. Instead, it is seen as an aid to growing in spiritual awareness, to living by moral principles, and to acting authentically and responsibly.

We may infer, it is within this context of diversity that intermarriage between Muslims and members of other religions is being measured by second-generation in the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden as an option. Maham explicates in the following excerpts:

[..] I think the second-generation like some are... like my husband he's a convert and he has Swedish parents so not like that, but he is also makes me think about what is culture and what is religion. A lot of things that Muslim second-generation thinks is Islam is just the Pakistani culture. That's what I wanted to like for example like choosing a husband what's the logic no one ever explained me what is the reason?

[..] I never had to take it all the way because Alex told me all of a sudden that he is a Muslim, and I was like I have known you for so long you are not a Muslim and then he is like 'Yea I am. I was growing up as an Atheist in an Atheist society. I never reflected upon religion before I met you. And now I have for the first time at the age of 27 made a decision' [...] yea and he started to reflect about Islam and then he became a Muslim, so I got a short cut out.

Living in Sweden without the cultural baggage that comes from an understanding of 'Islam' that is misconstrued with 'Pakistani culture' presents an opportunity. Second-generation is able to challenge parental transmission of religion. Though first-generation parents do not engage in this process of reflection, their descendants, lamenting the tendency to superficially accept inherited beliefs without question start engaging in a process of critical inquiry and self-reflection. They ardently seek to reconcile their cultural heritage, their religious identity, with their national belonging in a personally meaningful and authentic way. They draw on insights from individuals with diverse belief systems in their marriage narratives, projecting a new



understanding and nuanced interpretations of their own lives, transcending cultural and religious boundaries.

Maham expresses surprise and confusion upon learning about her partner's conversion highlighting the unexpected nature of the revelation. 'I have known you for so long you are not a Muslim' and he responds that he is. A string of reasonings follow for his change of heart. First of which is that 'I never reflected upon religion before I met you' since he perceives the Swedish society, that is in fact strongly rooted in a Christian tradition, as an 'Atheist society' and therefore sees himself as an 'Atheist'. Maham depicts her encounter with her partner as if she was bringing a new perspective to him, a Muslim perspective. She defines herself as a major religious impact on his personal life. Moreover, the phrase 'he started to reflect about Islam and then he became a Muslim' foregrounds the partner's flexibility and subsequent conversion, indicating a willingness to commit, engage with and understand Maham's beliefs as his own. This shared meaning and purpose turns into Maham's interpretation of unity and seems to deepen their bond. Understanding what faith means to Maham, that it guides her life's choices, her partner dignifies her through his conversion by making the choice to be with her easier for her. This is reflected by Maham in saying 'so I got a shortcut out' of the situation. And through these negotiations, they navigate their differing beliefs, fostering mutual understanding and respect as they strive to reconcile their individual identities within the context of their love for each other.

U: What would have happened now, that you reflect, had he not?

M: I think we would have gotten married anyways

U: And it wouldn't have changed anything?

M: I think that what I made sure was the guarantee that we share the same values, so I was really like so what I was thinking at that time I remember was that I know so many people who call themselves Muslims, but they don't act according to the values. And here I have this person who I think is living like a Muslim but who has not just you know been given faith from the start and its quiet and especially since it doesn't come from a neutral environment but from an ... let's say more of an anti-environment where you think religion is something bad so I was like it wasn't fair against us and him because if he was brought up in a Muslim family it ... I mean he is anyway taking the values he is fasting but he is not believing but he is understanding the logic, so ...

Maham's negotiation for love and intimacy is illuminated by her statement 'I would have gotten married anyways' and further contemplation on shared values within their cross-cultural relationship. One pivotal statement is: 'what I made sure was the *guarantee* that we share the same values. Here, she emphasises the importance of shared values as a foundation for their relationship. Another significant quote is: 'I know so

many people who call themselves Muslims, but they don't act according to the values.' This reflects Maham's recognition of genuine adherence to moral principles over religious labels. In a similar vein Sardar (2017: 203) argues that the Qur'an does not provide definitive rules of conduct for each and every situation but offers moral references, a set of spiritual principles on how to orient our lives and on how to guide and change individual and social behaviour. To forget the moral principles and hold on to practices as guidelines strips them of their meanings. He further makes a point that the challenge of understanding the Qur'an is to understand it in our own time (ibid: 372), which is what Maham as a second-generation Swedish Muslim is exemplifying by her critical reflections, introspections and research. She describes Sweden as an 'anti-environment' where 'religion is something bad'. This makes her appreciate her partners moral values even more. Evolving organically in a 'quiet' way aligned with her own Islamic ones. He may not have been brought up with faith but in his practice, he believes without belonging, making Maham eager to resolve her dissonance.

Additionally, the phrase 'he is fasting, but he is not believing but he is understanding the logic' highlights her partner's sincerity in adopting shared values, despite not being raised in a Muslim environment. It also questions if one can be a believer without belonging to the said religious ritual without belief, and if the meaning and value of the rituals is equivalent when one believes compared to when one doesn't. Once again, we come to the distinctions of 'belonging with' and 'belonging to'. Maham's partner seems to belong with without belonging to (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013), and she speculates if that is valuable enough for being a believer in a practice without having the said faith. Synergies between individual choices, commitments, practices, quests, hopes, desires, on one hand, and collective processes, on the other, concentrates upon positional movements of persons, while mostly taking collective constellations merely as context for social-boundary-work.

Innovation in marriage thus becomes tied to personal efforts of couples and/or individuals (Carsten et al., 2021), to establish a kinship relation with an 'outsider' particularly in marriage towards a creative and dynamic vision of a shared future (Moret et al., 2019).

Maham had a very interesting view on how in a multicultural context, young Muslims in Sweden have the opportunity to meet all kinds of people which helps in choosing partners from a wider variety of Muslim backgrounds. It offers the space to debate what is an Islamic tradition and what is a Pakistani tradition. She explains in the following excerpt:

M: For me it would be harder to get married to a conservative politician than a non-Muslim but for my brother who is also a social democrat who is a leftist and a Muslim

it would be much easier to be married to a Muslim but who has completely different political views so it's ... yea ... it's really individual but that's what is nice about Swedish Islam. I mean the older generations still want ... still have the preference that we would still choose someone who is from our let's say from their cultural background, but it is really changing now. Now there are so many like... Swedish Muslims they just see each other as Swedish Muslims I think here you have so many intercultural marriages but what is united these cultures who have never met before is that they actually share Islam. And both ways and it's also bringing together a lot of people who in the previous generation had nothing to do with each other like [...] because we mix with so many Muslims from all different kinds of cultures so we actually have a *great opportunity to question everything with Islam like is this really an Islamic tradition or is this a Pakistani tradition* and some other friends would say is this an Eritrean tradition or is this an Islamic tradition so we actually see the differences which the Pakistanis don't because they just assume the taken for granted.

Maham speaks to the evolving nature of cultural and religious identity among Swedish Muslims. In what she refers to articulations of 'Swedish Islam'<sup>49</sup>, Maham claims there is a growing trend of 'intercultural marriages' where individuals from different backgrounds come together under the common bond of Islam. This suggests a shift away from traditional preferences based on cultural background towards a more inclusive view of identity centred around Islam. Islam becomes a unifying force as people increasingly see each other simply as 'Swedish Muslims,' transcending cultural barriers. She also uses the words 'privilege' and 'opportunity' to describe how in Sweden, Muslims have the chance to engage with diverse cultural perspectives and question the conflation of Islamic traditions with cultural practices. This suggests a more critical approach to understanding Islam separate from cultural influences, which may not be as readily available in more homogenous societies like Pakistan.

Thus, principles behind belief can be sieved from cultures and deepen understanding of one's faith. This further suggests that while cultural background may have been a significant factor in the past, Islam now plays a more central role in shaping identity and relationships. Wimmer (2008) calls the process of brightening of the Ummah boundary emphasising civilisational commonalities (McLoughlin, 1996) at the expense of ethnic boundaries (see also McLoughlin 1996). Hence boundaries may become more or less emphasised, or 'bright,' in different times and contexts (Alba, 2005).

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49 This idea of Swedish Islam not only shows up in other interviews in this study, but many authors have also referred to this articulation for believing Muslims in Sweden (see for example Carlbom Aje (2006); Olsson Susanne (2009); Alwall Jonas (2002); Sander Åke (1997); Larsson Goran (2006); Elander et. Al. (2015).

*Nauphil: 'I Wanted to Look for Someone Here (Sweden), Who Was Not From There (Pakistan)'*

In the previous examples, Eshaal and Maham marry Muslim converts, signifying the importance of religion foremost as the key to a marital union. The fact that the former is a native Swedish man, and the latter is a Cuban adoptee raised by Swedish parents holds less importance. In Nauphil's situation, religion continues to remain uncompromisable, though he is more intentional about who he chooses as a partner, to avoid some of the complications and negotiations Eshaal and Maham have had to undergo. When I asked him how his marriage came about, it sparked the following conversation:

N: I guess my marriage was a Love-Arranged marriage.

U: Is she Pakistani?

N: No, she is from Iraq. I mean she is second-generation Iraqi. She came when she was very young. She was one or two years.

U: How did you meet her?

N: When I was working. I met her there and talked to her. When we decided to get married, then she gave me her home reference. I talked to my sister first about my wife. My sister talked to my parents. Then my sister met my wife. And then my family met her.

U: What was your parents' reaction?

N: Of course, they had it in their hearts at the time that she should be from our culture. They did have that feeling a lot. But I didn't have that interest. My mother was looking for a girl for a long time and I didn't feel like it [...] I was 26 when I got married, but my mother started looking for girls when I was 23, around that time. But I wasn't interested.

U: Where was she looking?

N: She was looking in Pakistan. And I would tell her if you want to look for someone for me, look for someone here. I don't want anyone from there [...] I got married in 2010. I am living with my parents. I never separated from them.

U: Why didn't you want a wife from Pakistan?

N: I was thinking that I am 24. If someone comes here, then she would have to go through a process for her visa for at least a year. Then, when she comes here, she would have to learn Swedish. And the time till she gets 'in' the system [...] My sister, she got married quite early, when she was 21. Her husband is from Pakistan. I didn't want to [...] no ... seeing her ... that... I would give my sister her own example. She got married very early. She had time to do all this. I wanted to have children right away. I didn't want to wait for too long before. I didn't want to wait for these kinds of things. My

values changed a lot during this time. At that time, I had other values and now I have other values.

U: For example?

N: Well, at that time I really wanted that my wife must work. She must have a job. But now, my values are, that it is up to her. If she wants to work, she should, but if she doesn't, then she shouldn't. Because I don't think that this burden should be on her. Now my values have changed in this regard.

(Nauphil 35, Male, second-generation)

Nauphil's narrative shows how individual preferences for a marriage partner evolve in a diasporic transnational field. It also charts involvement of a range of actors that facilitate 'love' and workplace as a potential place to meet future partners.

It also depicts a journey of seeking intimacy and proposing marriage with utmost respect for both the potential love interest and familial traditions. Beginning with a mutual decision to marry, symbolised by the quote 'when we decided to get married,' the process unfolds meticulously, as Nauphil navigates familial involvement with consideration. By first confiding in their sister, and subsequently involving their parents, Nauphil ensures that the decision is made collaboratively, respecting the familial fabric deeply ingrained in Pakistani cultural traditions. Importantly, his sister becomes a pivotal figure in facilitating the introduction, embodying the delicate balance between individual choice and familial approval. This deliberate approach not only honours familial bonds but also preserves the dignity of the potential partner, evident in the mutual exchange of home references and respectful meetings. Through these steps, Nauphil emphasises the significance of paternal acceptance, as reflected in the quote 'and then my family met her,' recognising the importance of familial harmony in the union. Overall, this narrative serves as a testament to the elegance and reverence with which Nauphil navigates the intersection of personal desire and cultural tradition, ultimately fostering a foundation of mutual respect and understanding in the pursuit of intimacy and love.

Nauphil's family desired a bride for him 'from our culture' specifically 'from Pakistan' suggesting a preference for endogamy within the family and that transnational ties be maintained with the country of origin. Nauphil's assertion 'but I didn't have that interest' that he lacked interest in marrying someone from his culture specifically from Pakistan, contradicts the expectations of his family. Nauphil is more inclined towards finding a romantic partner within the boundaries of the nation-state who shares his migration experience in Sweden and follows the same religious beliefs, rather than a transnational partner from the ancestral country of origin. For him, the familial

preference for cultural homogeneity within the ethnic background holds less significance compared to these shared experiences and beliefs.

Instead Nauphil, while acknowledging his mother's efforts to find him a bride requests her to realign her focus towards his inclinations and interests. He delays his marriage and his mother's advances until he finds someone who aligned with his personal preferences even if it meant deviating from his family's expectations.

Nauphil's narrative echoes Effat's experience of settling transnational marriage migrants from Pakistan in Sweden. He observed the challenges his sister faced in settling her husband (described in detail in the next section) decided against it. He said his sister could do it because she was younger and had 'time' and could afford to 'wait'. He wanted to start a family and opted instead to build a relationship with someone who grew up in Sweden and shares his understanding of the society, aiming to start a marriage on equal footing. Rather than making sacrifices to settle a partner in a new country, Nauphil seeks to create a relationship where both individuals can thrive and grow together, supported by their shared experiences and mutual appreciation for one another.

His narrative aligns with Çelikaksoy, Nekby et al., (2010) work on assortive mating in Sweden who purport that as individuals with immigrant background have higher levels of country specific human capital, such as local language skills, cultural know-how, institutional information and local networks, they develop common characteristics and experiences with other individuals living in that country. Such that the social boundaries defining different marriage markets such as by ethnicity or immigrant background become thinner and lose their strength (Çelikaksoy et al., 2010: 68). Other factors become more important such as, in Nauphil's narrative, religious and career homogamy becomes more critical in the decision-making process for marriage.

During the course of his preference for a marriage partner, he mentions 'My values changed a lot during this time. At *that* time, I had other values and *now* I have other values.' Initially, he sought a spouse who pursued a career, contributed equally to household responsibilities, and shared financial burdens. However, upon meeting his wife, he experienced a transformation in his perspective. 'Now' he saw himself as the provider, especially given that witnessed his wife go through the process of childbearing, childbirth and child rearing. He did not feel she needed to be burdened with financial responsibility, unless it was for her own growth and passions. He said she had full access to his resources as her own and he considered her an equal partner in his earnings. He professed that he never left his parents' house. He lives with his wife and children with his parents because he likes the idea of his children and family growing up under the shade and guidance of the grandparents. Even though the parents are self-sufficient and healthy and have made no such demands, he steadfastly advocates for a joint-family arrangement, illustrating his commitment to nurturing familial bonds across generations.

## Narratives of Love: Inter-Ethnic and Secular Marriages

In Sweden, people from different backgrounds are forming relationships based more on shared values and beliefs rather than just ethnicity or religion. This is especially true for couples where both partners don't follow any religion. Instead of dealing mainly with religious differences, these couples have to navigate through their diverse cultural experiences and perspectives. The stories below delve into how these couples manage their relationships, showing how identity, culture, and shared values play a role in their unions.

### *Javed: Secular Couple and a Muslim wedding*

Javed, though disconnected from his Pakistani ethnicity and no longer practicing Islam, remains mindful of his parents' Pakistani-Muslim background. When revealing his desire to marry a Swedish woman, he navigates the delicate balance between personal preference and familial approval, respecting their sentiments despite his own divergent cultural and religious affiliations. He describes his relationship with his partner and subsequently talks about how he negotiated his marriage with his parents:

J: It was very easy between us. We moved in less than a year which is not very Swedish. After we moved in, after a few weeks we got engaged. She wanted all of that also so it was very easy.

[...] I think the nikah was very very important for my dad. For him it's not about saving face it is about my son has gone through a Muslim wedding and that was the key. First, I really opposed to the nikah because I knew it was a religious ceremony and back then I was still a bit ... rigid. I was like are we going to be registered as Muslims now? I didn't know how it worked and then they (parents) were like no its just a paper you sign and I was like no I don't want to sign a paper I want to do it the official way and then it was fictional paper (nikahnaama) so there was a maulvi (priest who officiated the wedding) and then I said ok if it is like that and if it pleases you, then it is ok.

U: Really it was a fictional paper? Wasn't a real..

J: Yea he was I think he is allowed to do proper marriages but he said this is very common I do this a lot so it was just a paper and you write the things out and we did that and my parents were really happy and it's worth it you know this is what you want so now my parents can say without any regret to their friends yea Javed has done the nikah. That was the important part.

(Javed 30, Male, second-generation)

When Javed met his current wife, he felt an instant connection because their values were the same, and so he felt it was very 'easy' to signify that he felt 'at ease' in his relationship to her. He subsequently continues to say that they moved in together after

a year which was very 'un-Swedish' of them both, especially since they also got engaged a few weeks after moving in with each other. Throughout Javed's narrative he commented on some of his attitudes, behaviours and practices as being quintessentially Pakistani or Swedish. In this case, his understanding of romantic relationships in Sweden is that they progress slowly, with couples taking their time to get to know each other before moving in together or getting married. On the other hand, in the Pakistani context, a lengthy courtship, typically under the framework of either engagement or *nikkah*, is discouraged, leading to a quicker journey from proposal to marriage.

Javed offers insight into the significance of the *nikah*, a Muslim wedding ceremony, within his family narrative. The emphasis on the father's perspective reveals the significance of generational continuity and respect for one's cultural rituals. His father's sentiments go beyond 'saving face' in front of the community and show the role of rituals and traditions in affirming familial connections and heritage. Illustrating how cultural practices carry deep emotional significance beyond their immediate religious or social function Javed's commitment to the *nikah*, albeit superficial, buttresses his father's sense of mutuality as a dimension of belonging based on shared understanding. Doing the *nikah* serves as tacit self-evidence of a promise to the sentiments of the family in Javed's story. In doing that, he has renewed his belonging to his family, and his father can with pride tell his friends his son had a 'Muslim wedding'. Javed, despite being opposed to religion and signing something that was fictional, goes ahead with it because though fictional, the consequences of his parents' happiness were real. And he said it was 'worth' going through the charade.

This narrative demonstrates how descendants of migrants navigate their beliefs during religious ceremonies, which are deeply rooted in cultural heritage and shaped by familial expectations, which according to Javed, 'was the important part'.

In a similar vein, Faris describes his brother's marriage to an ethnic Swedish woman. Despite her cultural and religious background, the family's primary concern was for the marriage to follow Islamic customs and 'etiquettes.'

[...] My other brother is married to a girl; she is ethnic Swedish yes [...] they just wanted him uhh to follow Islamic etiquettes. He had a long relationship with his wife and he told his parents it was serious. They had one demand that you can do whatever you like uhhhhh but we have to meet her and we have to see if we feel comfortable with her and then you have to get married in an Islamic way.

U: She converted?

F: No, she didn't convert. They had the *nikah* in the mosque.

(Faris 29, Male, second-generation)



The parents' requirement to meet the woman and ensure their 'comfort' with her before marriage reflects the importance placed on familial approval and compatibility. The fact that the couple had a nikah ceremony in 'an Islamic way' at the mosque, without the daughter-in-law converting to Islam, demonstrates a negotiation of religious traditions within the context of intercultural marriages in Pakistani diasporic families. Moreover, it shows the bare minimum terms of familial boundaries in accepting new members. Such that family and individual integrity are protected.

Furthermore, we can conclude that participants in the Pakistani diasporic context in Sweden, continue to attach importance to the opinion and approval of their family in their marriage decisions. New members who are introduced to the family, as exhibited by the stories Javed and Faris share, enter not only coupledness but also the realm of extended family networks. Whence a show of mutuality and sense of comfort, are important for the well-being and functioning of both the individuals and the family.

## Love and Intimacy in Arranged Marriages

Now I turn to narratives of arranged marriages. This exploration illuminates the multifaceted nature of arranged marriages as mechanisms for cultural exchange and connection, challenging conventional understandings of love and partnership in multicultural contexts.

However, the practice is not without its complexities and controversies. Critics argue that importing arranged grooms perpetuates patriarchal norms and reinforces inequality, as it often places the migrant in subordinate roles within marriage dynamics.

Additionally, there are concerns about the potential exploitation of individuals involved in these arrangements, particularly regarding issues of consent and agency. I examine how these cross-border unions shape cultural negotiation, identity formation, and notions of love and intimacy within contemporary Pakistani diasporic communities.

### Intra-Ethnic and Intra-Religious Marriages

This section explores narratives arranged marriages that involve individuals from the same ethnic background or ethnicity who also share the same religion. Among the participants of this study, in the second-generation, it is men that are imported to Sweden as transnational migrants for marriage compared to female brides. Participants duly shed light on the dynamics and experiences of their unique matrimonial arrangement.

*Seema: Importing An 'Arranged Groom' from Pakistan*

At its core, the concept of importing arranged grooms revolves around individuals, typically women, residing in countries outside of Pakistan, who choose to marry men from Pakistan through arranged marriages facilitated by their families or communities. This practice reflects the enduring influence of traditional matchmaking methods, where familial ties and cultural compatibility take precedence over individual choice.

S: I am married to my cousin from Pakistan. But my other friends nor my co-workers, not even my children know. I mean among the Pakistanis here, they know. But no one else.

U: Why?

S: Because in this country it is considered profane almost, as if you have married your own brother. And I don't want, my children are not that old right now to understand this. Why should people make poke fun at them. My brother says what does it matter you'll have to tell them someday. He's gotten married to an Arab, it is easy for him to say, there's no relation there! I say to him 'be quiet'. It's my decision. It's up to me.

[...] But as a child I used to say I will never marry a cousin. We, Pakistani girls, we would talk to each other. We have grown up here, we would listen to these people, and I also knew that my mum and dad are also not related. So, I knew it would be a problem. I once took my father out for a stroll alone and sat him down to tell him that if he ever tried to marry me off to cousin in Pakistan I'd run away from home (laughing). And he said don't you worry! I am the oldest on my father's side. I knew my mum's side there are boys my age. But we hadn't seen each other in that way.

U: What happened then?

S: It was kismet. We (Seema and her cousin) developed an understanding.

U: How?

S: My grandmother got ill. She was in Pakistan. Internet was new. We would chat, he (cousin) on one side of the computer me on the other while my Mum and Khala talked to each other while we typed messages for them. Then we started talking to each other. And that is how we reached where we are today. My Naani died during that time and my mother was very depressed. Doctor recommended we take her to Pakistan. School had just finished. So, I went with her. That is when my Khala proposed. She had proposed once before but I had said no. This time when she asked, I said yes. My mother was like what?!? Then she (mother) called my Abbu, and he said let me talk to her (Seema). I was a bit shy, so I asked my father to come on messenger so we could chat. He asked, 'has someone forced you?' I said no. He said, 'what if you come back here and change your mind? or you say you don't want to do it anymore'. I said, 'I won't'. Everyone was trying to pressure us to do a nikah, but my mother was adamant that we won't. Because she (Mother) said there is guarantee if she (Seema) changes her mind.

We got engaged. Pakistan is a different environment. And it is easy to make a decision (about marriage) because the general ambience is such. I didn't change my mind when I came back (to Sweden).

S: [...] I think I made the right decision. I ... don't think there is any other man who would've been more suitable for me. Because he is very calm, relaxed, stress free and he is soft-tempered. He never loses his temper. That is the biggest thing. We complete each other. Also, we were both very young, so we got along. I was 21. He was 22. He was young. I was young. We started everything, from scratch together. That is the reason why we have stabilised now in life and together. Also, I waited five years to have a child. The same as my mother. I had my baby girl after five years. I was studying the dentistry, and everyone said now she'll end up with a baby. But that was not so. He was learning Swedish. I was working. We lived at my mother's place for a while, we saved money, bought a tiny flat with our money.

Seema starts by talking about keeping her marriage to her cousin from Pakistan a secret. A secret has the ability to scandalise or haunt in distressing ways (Smart, 2007: 107-108). Even though some people in the Pakistani community know about it, she doesn't tell her friends, co-workers, or even her kids because of the stigma attached to these marriages in Sweden. She's worried her kids might get teased or treated unfairly if people found out, and she wants to avoid them feeling confused about their identity. 'Profanity' has a role in boundary formation (S. Ahmed, 2005) and serves as a boundary mechanism that exacerbates otherness in habitual spaces (Fortier, 2020) by the effect of disgust as something that is offensive to normative tastes (Ahmed, 2013). By professing 'my children are not that old right now to understand' that she married her cousin, she believes there's a right time to reveal the truth, and she wants to be the one to decide when that is. Meanwhile, keeping it quiet is narrated as a protective barrier for her family.

Contrarily, as a young girl, she felt very strongly about the subject and would tell her parents 'I will never marry a cousin.' I asked her why she thinks this would be the case she points to growing up in Sweden and knowing that it is a 'problem'.

She further stresses that it was something 'we Pakistani girls would talk about' and something that she knew was not a part of the family marriage story since her parents were not related to each other. Consciousness in general and feminist consciousness in particular, explicated by Uma Narayan, 'is not a hot-house bloom grown in the alien atmosphere of foreign ideas, but has its roots much closer to home' (Narayan, 1997: 6). First, having lived in and coming of age politically in the Swedish context and growing up in the Pakistani diaspora a significant part of Seema's sensibilities and political horizons are indelibly shaped by both diasporic and national realities. Second, the ways in which her concerns and analyses of a cousin marriage are rooted in and responsive to the problems women face within their familial and national contexts goes

to argue that they are not simpleminded emulations of Western feminist political concerns, nor does it portray ideas originating out of a Western, bourgeois, modernist perspective.

Pakistanis are a small community and news about cousin marriages reach diasporans in other contexts. Furthermore, in Pakistan, urban residents and affluent families, who are increasingly educated, have shifted away from marrying within extended family circles. Instead, they seek matches for their children among those who share similar socio-economic status and educational backgrounds. Women like Seema, embedded in certain contexts, cognizant of the social turf they have to navigate, are aware of problems they face, since they have a repository of knowledge from listening to stories that circulate in the diasporic community. And they use the resources they have and the opportunities they are presented with to resolve their problems.

If feminist consciousness is related to marginality, then it is the marginality that is the teacher and brings to awareness the ideals and principles of justice. Knowing she was the oldest child from her father's side in the family and that means she would be the first to get married, since marriage follows a sibling order and the cultural order of oldest gets married first in the Pakistani family, Seema takes matters into her own hands. She orchestrates a situation by taking her father out 'for a stroll' and warns him that if he dared to marry her off to a cousin she would 'run away from home'. Thus, her story comes full circle when she does decide to marry her cousin wilfully and in her depiction her father takes her aside and asks her 'are you sure?' Seema and her father assume unusual roles in this narrative. Whereas Eshaal's parents represent traditions from Pakistan in normative ways even in Sweden, Seema's parents especially her father, is surprised by Seema's decision to uphold a tradition she herself was disinclined towards. Seema's actions reveal that her father holds himself accountable to the promise he made to his daughter, even though it's Seema herself who chooses to break that promise by arranging her own 'love' marriage to her cousin.

Seema describes her initial connection to her cousin during a time of family crisis as 'Kismet' or fate/destiny, which could also be explained as being facilitated by 'the internet', highlighting the role of modern communication tools in fostering relationships across distances. Somewhere between sending messages between the two sisters, their children fell in an understanding that had romantic notes. And thus, when she returned to Pakistan her maternal aunt (cousin's mother) proposed and Seema said 'yes'.

Between having told her father she would never marry a cousin, to refusing the same proposal a few years prior, to saying yes to and even initiating the same proposal and that too a cousin marriage that she was vehemently opposed to, raises more questions and doubts in her parents. She describes an elaborate network of confirmations of her consent that was first sought by her mother, who then put her husband in charge for a

more formal enquiry from their daughter. Seema describes feeling shy and embarrassed having to speak to her father, who was at the time in Sweden, about her potential marriage on the phone. She therefore chooses the 'internet' once again as the comfortable medium, both figuratively and literally, to 'chat'. Her father, representing Seema's interests and preferences, asks her if this is her choice, and if she has thought about it long and hard, and if she is feeling the pressure of the Pakistani context and giving her consent out of a sense of duty or obligation. When Seema answers in the negative, he asks what if 'you come back and change your mind?' to which she replies, 'I won't.' Seema is thus engaged on that trip, but her mother does not perform the 'nikah' which is the religious ceremony of marriage on paper, to keep Seema's options open.

We can observe the eclectic contours and heterogeneity within arrange marriages. Comparing this process to that of Eshaal shows a marked difference between the way arranged marriages come about. It almost seems as if Seema arranged her own marriage and though she does not overtly call it a love marriage, in the sense of Maham saying that she would marry her partner despite the religious differences and perhaps even her parents lack of approval. Seema developed an 'understanding' and she was willing to, with her parents' approval and under their guidance, arrange her marriage with someone she could envision a future with. Despite the scrutiny regarding her intentions, hinting at an emotional spur of the moment or catching feelings kind of a decision, Seema holds her own, and does not change her mind upon her return to Sweden.

Moreover, she chose her father as her confidant and support to rely on when discussing her personal preferences and we see that he rises to the occasion and stands up for her and keeps a door open with his question 'what if you change your mind' for Seema to think that may well happen and if it does it is okay. Furthermore, Seema's mother too in protecting her daughter's interests, performs a small engagement which is easier to break than a nikah whose consequence is a divorce. Both Seema's parents are aligned in providing their support and protecting her best interests. This kind of an arranged marriage contrasts to the debates of 'sham' and 'forced' marriages where parents are seen as threats to their children's well-being and are considered villains unable to safeguard their offspring's agency, personal freedom and choice.

For Seema, marrying her cousin was merely the starting point of the decisions and negotiations required to envision a sustainable future together in Sweden. In the following excerpt she describes the process of integrating her husband into the marriage, her family in Sweden, and also into the Swedish society:

S: I had to decide where to study university. I chose a university that was 12 hours' drive-up North from where I live. Both parents helped with my decision. Ammi (mother) was

very concerned. I was moving away for the first time. He (husband) joined me there [...] I lived there alone, because I had my nikah, otherwise my mother would have never let me go.

U: Why so far away?

S: I went there because I knew I am now married to my husband from Pakistan. And I wanted him first and foremost to learn the Swedish language. And so, I thought, it is better to start his base where there are no Pakistanis, that is where we should live. We had so many friends, my parents, my brothers, and they all speak Urdu, then he wouldn't learn any Swedish. So, I thought no its better that I study at the university and he studies language and we both start on this life together. It went so fast he learned the language in five months! Because there was no one who spoke any Urdu or English. And the community there was very supportive. Even at the supermarket when I'd tell someone his Swedish wasn't too good, but he'd like to talk anyway to practice they would be like yea yea sure (laughs). But it also depends [...]

U: Was this the plan all along?

S: Yes! Me and father talked about this. My father said yes you are thinking the right way. So, we did it like this. He (husband) still remembers that city. When he first came from Pakistan, he was like this (makes a disappointed face) (laughs heartily) it was so cold, so much snow, so much! I have lived in Sweden all my life but I haven't seen as much snow as I have there. But it was good. Those three years were the only years I lived away from my hometown.

U: Then what happened? After that?

S: He did small, odd jobs. He would distribute newspapers like metro, it was a new newspaper so he would stand and hand out at the stations. He never made a fuss about the kind of job he did, and I also never commented on his jobs. Whatever he wanted to do I was ok with it as long as it was not in the black market. Whatever job he did, we decided, it must be from an honest living. Doesn't matter how much we bring home as long as it is from an honest day's work. He (husband) says you have supported me which is why we are here today. Allah ka Shukar hay (thank almighty) he now works for a company in Skåne. We have seen it all together. We have really worked very hard, and we have had many tough days. The kind of family I come from I have always gotten whatever I have wanted. So, for me at one time ... it was hard. And for my father to not help me, was hard for him, because I am the only daughter. I said to him as well as my mother, that I don't want any help- no money. If my husband sees this, he will never work. He (father) would secretly give me money. We would hardly have any spare finances if we both needed to go to the city we would have fare only for one way. And we would both walk the way back home.

As mentioned earlier Swedish-born Pakistanis do not move out of their parental homes unless there is a socially approved reason. Seema was a married woman, which marks a

coming-of-age ritual and her ascent into adulthood, whereby her decisions for her new family (couple) supersede the needs of the parental home. She also illustrates a strategic approach to integrating the husband into Swedish society, facilitating his language acquisition and ultimately securing a place in the labour market.

The decision to relocate to a place where there were 'no Pakistanis' and predominantly Swedish speakers demonstrates a deliberate effort to immerse him in the language 'first and foremost' and the culture of Sweden. By telling a story about how she selected a location where both she and her husband could focus on studying different things together, Seema presents herself as deeply engaged in integrating her husband in Sweden and in ensuring a shared experience that would enable them to navigate their new life together more effectively. She is also emphasising the supportive environment they encountered, both within their social circle and in public interactions, further facilitated his language learning process and integration. This strategic decision was not made lightly; Seema consulted with her father, who reinforced her approach 'yes you are thinking the right way', indicating a thoughtful consideration of their long-term plans and goals. Despite initial challenges and cultural adjustments, the experience proved beneficial, fostering a sense of independence and adaptability. Seema, in focusing on the importance of proactive planning and strategic decision making, manages the process of integrating her newly migrated spouse into Sweden.

This excerpt provides insight into the migrating groom's need to establish himself independently and maintain his self-esteem in the new coupling situation. Seema mentioned in the interview that she and her husband lived with their parents after they moved back from north of Sweden. Her parents offered their home in the interim period while the new couple got settled, secured employment, and were able to save enough money to move to a reasonable accommodation. The emphasis on 'honest living' and earning through legitimate means, away from the lure of the 'black market', symbolises Seema's commitment to her citizenship status and national belonging. It also communicates her desire for her husband to contribute to the household and feel worthy in the eyes of his spouse.

Seema's narrative serves as a testament to the potential success of an arranged marriage when executed thoughtfully. By intertwining the traditional practice of a cousin marriage with Seema's path of self-empowerment and assertiveness, a renewed sense of promise is breathed into this longstanding tradition. That said, in Pakistan itself there are several iterations to how a marriage is arranged grants greater autonomy, choice and decision-making power to individuals involved in the process based on class, caste, level of education, urban-rural location, and family experiences in general. Moreover, cousin marriages have a higher tendency among immigrants than in their homelands (Razack, 2004: 138). In Pakistan, as mentioned earlier, because the

marriage market is extensive and diverse, cousin marriage though still an occurrence, is just one of the many available options.

Seema recalled the early days of her marriage as ‘exciting’ and ‘happy’. She witnessed her husband’s willingness to sacrifice personal comfort and endure hardship, showing resilience and mutuality coupled with a strong sense of commitment to his marriage and a desire to build a life together with his spouse. Seema’s narrative exemplifies the importance of autonomy, self-worth, and mutual support in the process of settling into a new marriage and establishing oneself in a new environment. Settling in with a spouse is a shared responsibility and there is awareness of a support cushion in the form of parents. Arranged marriage to a groom from Pakistan though ‘hard’ as described by Eshaal, becomes Seema’s ‘happy’ experience that fuels shared connections in retrospect. It is also a function of age, as Nauphil mentioned earlier reflecting on Seema’s marriage, with time on one’s side, there is room for a relationship to blossom.

Hence, the convergence of familial backing, strategic preparation, migrant groom’s cooperation, mutual consent, comprehension, and life trajectory establishes the essential prerequisites for a prosperous arranged marriage.

When I asked Seema to think about marriage from her perspective today, if she were to marry in Sweden, what comes to her mind, she responds:

S: I think I’d be with someone who was a convert. They are good Muslims. This was my dad’s philosophy that marry whoever as long as he is a Muslim. But my mother is not like that she wanted him to be a Pakistani.

U: It is important that he is a Muslim?

S: Oh yes. It was important for me. I wouldn’t even dare to think otherwise. But that said that kind of a situation never arose because I was 19 when I got engaged and 21 when I had my nikah. I never had time for anything.

For Seema the requirement of her partner being Muslim is non-negotiable, reflecting a deeply held value and commitment to her faith. This conviction is unwavering, as indicated by her assertion ‘I wouldn’t even dare to think otherwise.’ She could never entertain the idea of being with someone who did not share her religious beliefs. Despite the pressure from societal norms and familial expectations, her steadfast adherence to this criterion underscores the significance of religious compatibility in Seema’s personal life choices.

Speaking on behalf of her parents, Seema says her father’s preference emphasises religious compatibility as the cornerstone of a successful union over ethnicity and cultural background. However, Seema’s mother holds a contrasting view, placing importance on finding a partner who shares a Pakistani heritage. This highlights the



interplay between cultural expectations and religious beliefs in shaping marriage preferences within the family.

That said, having orchestrated to become 'engaged at 19' and 'married by 21', curtailed the opportunity for exploration for partnership preferences and consideration of alternative options. While she does not explore why she felt a sense of urgency to get engaged so young, she hinted at the pressure from her peers who all had boyfriends, to whom she could now say 'she was engaged' and that stopped the questions and relieved her from the pressure of not being attached romantically to someone.

*Marium and Maleeha: 'Grooming' The Arranged Grooms to Settle In Sweden*

In the following example, similar to Seema, Marium and Maleeha share in their sibling interview their marriages also got arranged to grooms from Pakistan. Though unlike Seema, these grooms are not cousins. The sisters talk about the strategy they devise to settle their husbands into their families and to Sweden:

Marium: We have seen typical roles in our family despite being in Sweden. As in our father was on the sofa and mom working in the kitchen or around the house [...] we were very nervous when we had to choose a life partner for ourselves. This was *the one thing* we really didn't want. We made it very clear to our husbands that is not how things will work in our marriage. Nor how things work in Sweden.

U: How did you get married?

Marium: My mother would keep looking for rishtas. She found a contact and introduced us. Then we both talked to each other. We took six years. Then we got engaged in 2007. My husband came from Pakistan here to do his Masters, but we were engaged from before. He came here with that mindset that we would get settled here. I would not go to Pakistan. So, he studied computer sciences here and then he got a job [...] His university was in another city he would come visit us and live with us sometimes so we could get to know each other. We didn't really know him that well. Him and I, we were in touch through messages internet and phone, but it is not the same as meeting in person. It also gave mama and papa an opportunity to get to know him, my siblings too, he could get to know us.

Marium and Maleeha both started the conversation about their marriage reflecting back on gender roles in the family. They attributed the 'typicality' of distinct domains of male and female work between their parents as a trait of specific to Pakistani husbands. It made them 'nervous' signalling a discomfort and the 'one thing' that they found undesirable for their own marriages. They had made up their minds to 'clear[ly]' demand flexibility from their husbands who were coming to Sweden as arranged grooms.

Marium's mother is a salient actor in finding a suitable rishta for her daughter in Pakistan. Developing intimacy in a transnational context took time. It also took strategic planning. Once Marium got engaged, her fiancé started to look for education opportunities that would make his transition from Pakistan to Sweden easier. He joins a degree programme, gets a student visa, moves to Sweden, and starts to live in a city nearby to Marium's family. It is important for Marium to continue the courtship in person chaperoned by her siblings and parents. 'Meeting in person' allows her to assess in-person compatibility with her fiancé. And for her parents also to have the 'opportunity' to interact with their future son-in-law who they didn't 'know that well'. 'He too' could get to know the family. The narration of these interactions' projects liminal spaces where the couple has power to change their decision. If any of the variables contributing to the potential success of a partnership are not fulfilled, and the connection is disrupted, there is room to terminate the relationship.

The next part of the conversation was delightful to observe as the two sisters talked about a phase in their life that they experienced as a turning point, contributing to their empowerment. They giggled, talked over each other, laughed, high fived, and mischievously confessed their desire to move away from their family tiresome desi-ness. And how they planned and used tactical means to win their approval. Maleeha had been financially independent for three years after her studies completed, specified she was 23 years old, and was irritated with her mother for putting unreasonable restrictions on her mobility. Being admonished for staying out late with friends or at an office event, was felt as over-parenting, described as a desi trait.

Maleeha passionately said: 'desi parents need to understand at one time their parenting has no value for us'. This statement is indicative of the evolving nature of attachments in the family that are a dimension of belonging. These attachments entitle certain actors in the family to take up space and have a say in lives of its members. In this case, this connection is being disrupted between Maleeha and her mother because this entitlement based on a taken for granted attachment is being felt as suffocating and oppressive. It has 'no value' and is therefore not valuable. Imposition of unreasonable parental authority is a mechanism for boundary change (Tilly, 2004: 219). The upside of living with parents was that Maleeha had been saving money for a long time. She could afford to buy a place of her own. This is when Marium and Maleeha devise a plan:

Marium: At that time, I was about to get married, and I thought when she buys a place we will shift in it with her, because my husband was studying and I was still studying and we knew it would take us some time before we settled down.

Maleeha: They didn't have anything, and I thought I have to buy a place of my own anyway, and I thought *she too* should *get out of our parents' house*, and I should take advantage of the situation, so then I thought it all out.

Maleeha who was unmarried at the time, could not formally move out according to the standards of the family. Marium, two years younger, was still studying and about to get married. Marriage being the ultimate permissible context for moving out, Maleeha buys an apartment and offers it to her sister so 'she too' could 'get out of our parents' house' when she got married. Being the next in line for marriage, Maleeha could use the situation to her 'advantage'. She describes it as follows:

Maleeha: By the time she (looks at her sister) got married in 2010, my husband got his visa to come here. These two (refers to her sister and her husband) shifted there (in my apartment) after their marriage. When my husband came here (Sweden), we had done our nikah already, so he shifted there. Then when my husband came here (Sweden) he shifted in with them. So, six months these three lived together till we had our rukhsati. Then I also shifted there. So, these two and me and my husband, and her one-month-old baby, all lived together.

Marium: We lived together for two years.

Maleeha: Yes. We had a really good time together. My husband who came from Pakistan he didn't feel lonely. Also, we all had each other's support. And out of all these four I was the only one working!

Marium: (laughing heartily) Yea, I got married quite quickly after my studies and became pregnant, my husband was looking for a job, and her husband was learning Swedish, she was the only one earning for all of us!

Marium and Maleeha: (both start laughing together and say) Good times!!

Marium and Maleeha navigate moving out of their parental home with tact, knowing which strategy to employ, in order to avoid negative consequences. Moreover, while resisting the controlling mother, they do not wish to invite her displeasure. Thus, achieving the same goal albeit in a roundabout complex way.

Social navigation is the practice of 'moving in a moving environment' (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013: 9). It is a process that unfolds in a myriad of confrontations with social boundaries and pressures exerted by rules and regulations (ibid.). 'Belonging together' in the family feels restrictive when solidarity is demanded at the expense of absolute consensus, which Maleeha exemplifies comes in the form of display by not moving out of the parental home. Crossing the threshold the parental home that is guarded tightly by their mother is a form of boundary crossing. Spatially moving away (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011) is seen as a cultural mechanism (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that lessens the confines of collective belonging among first-generation parents. Internal processes of familial micro-politics for belonging has roots in trivial squabbles between parents and their children or between siblings in the diaspora. The fact that the sisters chose to live together with their respective husbands and a new-born baby, illustrates

their continued attachment to each other while creating a fluid family structure that was more suited to their needs, away from the parental home. It also exhibits importance of mutual support in times of transition offered by kin.

They offer various explanations why their arrangement was fruitful. Transnational husbands suffer both emotional and career setback upon their move to Sweden. Since the two couples lived together for two years, it gave time to the latecomers to get settled without feeling 'lonely'. The arrangement provided material and psychological support to each member of this chosen family. The two husbands from Pakistan found solace as well as inspiration in each other forming a lasting friendship fostered through proximity in their mutual struggles. Migrants devise adaptive strategies better to cope with the multitude of practical challenges with which they find themselves confronted.

Maleeha being the most economically resourceful person in their family, took on the breadwinning role until all the other three found their bearing, Marium playfully teased her sister for taking advantage of her apartment and financial support. Both sisters affectionately looked at each other and reflected back on this time fondly as 'good times,' emphasising the strength of their familial bond and mutual support. This story along with Seema's, shows cultural practices such as arranged marriage exhibit merits when afforded the opportunity to evolve and acclimate to contemporary circumstances.

Reading the stories together, these second-generation descendants challenge the assumption, that arranged marriage- as a characteristic of patriarchal cultures- suppress women's agency and choice. On the contrary, Seema as well as Marium and Maleeha's stories show women who opt for an arranged marriage are not just passively following cultural diktats. They are capable of steering their way around cultural expectations to achieve what they want from a marriage. They do this by modifying the existing norms of marriage in their culture to shift the balance of power in their favour. Their agency takes various shapes and forms which, though not always easily recognisable to a Western cultural sensibility, can nonetheless be 'fit for purpose' for achieving what they want from the institutions of marriage and family (Pande, 2015).

In line with a post-colonial view of feminism, these stories offer insights into thinking about agency in much more complex ways. Veena Das (in DiFruscia, 2010: 137) has argued that there is a tendency to view agency as something to be detected only at 'moments of resistance or at moments of transgression'. Das argues that this is a flawed model of agency which borrows from a certain kind of heroic view of resistance, and which does not give due recognition to the daily struggles, tactics and strategies which are involved in enacting everyday life (ibid.). Both Seema as well as Marium and Maleeha's experiences show how they negotiate with the tradition of arranged marriage to evolve it in line with contemporary values of individual expression, freedom of choice and agency.

However, this interpretation is in keeping with what they see as befitting a Pakistani cultural sensibility; where the respect for elders (izzat) and traditionally defined channels of communication and propriety are also to be valued and observed. This shows how they negotiate their Swedish and Pakistani identities. Moreover, these narratives also tell us about agency that is resourceful, clever and culturally sensitive. Furthermore, both Seema as well as Marium and Maleeha show what teenage or generational rebellion in the Pakistani diaspora looks like in a Swedish setting.

### *Arghan: Arranged Brides from Pakistan*

While the last section focused on narratives of women in the second-generation who shared their experience of arranged marriages with grooms from Pakistan, this section will focus on narratives of men who share their stories about their arranged marriages to brides from Pakistan.

In the previous section Seema's story exemplified her parents unfailing support in her choices. And Marium and Maleeha found comfort in sisterly backing and support towards each other. Arghan is the only participant I interviewed who felt betrayed by his parents unwittingly arranging his marriage on a trip to Pakistan. He described this as his 'biggest problem' and narrated the story as follows:

A: My biggest problem was this is the biggest problem of my life I got married when I was 18. THAT was the biggest problem. That was actually the reason why I left university [...] I was stupid [...] I'm sorry I have to say it's my parent's fault [...] I don't know how my parents were thinking. Now they say to me they thought if we let this guy stay this way maybe he will get spoiled.

U: What way?

A: I was very independent, and I made some investments and *started making a lot of money*. That is why they asked me to get engaged to the girl I liked. She was two years older than me she was 20. I was 18. I said okay. We got engaged. Two weeks later my father says to me it takes about four or five years to get the visa so why don't you do the nikah? It will start the visa process. I was like cool I'll do it. [...]. This was July. When I got back, I started university and got busy. December same year she got the visa. In only four months. Seriously. Obviously, that meant I had to go back to Pakistan and bring her here otherwise it would get complicated.

U: How was that, to get married at 18? Being here in Sweden?

A: Weird it was BIG weird [...] it was weird for me to tell my friends. It was the biggest problem personally. I didn't have a house, I didn't have a job, I hadn't done university. I haven't achieved anything in my life and I am sitting here with a wife! I didn't know what to do. So that made me drop out of university and start my own business. I started there. Alhumdulillah I'm really happy with what I did. I am still in the same business.

Today I have got a big showroom [...] I'm very happy. We are very happy together yes! [...] We waited for the kid at least six years to have a child. She was studying to become a psychologist at a university in Pakistan. She wanted to complete her studies but then everything happened. You know how parents are ... *sometimes this paindu mentality. It strikes them and they just flip. They don't understand what they are doing, they think they are doing the best for their kids but that's not true.* [my emphasis]

Arghan conveys a deep sense of frustration that result from the emotional and practical consequences of being coerced into a life-altering commitment as 'the biggest problem of my life'. It was an embarrassing situation for him to be married at the age of eighteen without an education and a place of his own. He claims it was his parents' 'fault' who exploited the moment by using pressure tactics and took advantage of the situation. While he consented to his marriage, he felt betrayed by his father who tricked him into thinking that if he does the nikah ceremony (religious marriage) it would be easy to apply for spouse visa which would take up to five years. During that time Arghan could finish his studies.

As mentioned earlier, nikah is the Islamic legal marriage that is followed by rukhsati, which is when the bride leaves her parental home to go to her husband's home. To secure a good match, parents sometimes carry out the nikah but delay the rukhsati<sup>50</sup> until a later date. This was the trick his parents used to convince him to get married. Except that his wife got her visa in four months and the Pakistani family started to pressure Arghan to come for rukhsati and to take his bride with him. To avoid the 'complication' he did his bidding.

The intersection of a child getting 'spoilt' for one set of parents in Sweden and the potentiality of a good transnational rishta for their daughter in Pakistan on the other end, meant both children had to drop out of their university education. This shows that, on the one hand, value of a good marriage is narrated as more than a good education for some parents in the diaspora, and on the other hand, my study's narrators are quite capable of criticising precisely this.

Moreover, financial independence appears to become a double-edged sword for Arghan. Through his financial investments he starts 'making a lot of money'. That is what sets his marriage in motion. The intersection of being young, with a lot of money, in Sweden – according to Arghan's story leads to his parents thinking he may go astray. That money is better spent on a family rather than personal luxuries a lone young man may decide to spend on. While having money or being economically sound can lead to independence, in Arghan's case it led to his parents curtailing his independence by

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<sup>50</sup> The ceremonial departure of the bride from her parental home to her husband's home after the Nikkah (wedding).

adding the weight of marital responsibility. In the excerpt below, Arghan narrates the background of a 'big fight' with his parents when he decided to move out:

A: It was a big fight my parents didn't speak to me for six months when I left the house.

U: what happened?

A: I was living with my wife at my parents' house for two years. Then I left. I was 20. They didn't want us to leave. So, we had a big fight and we left the house. It was nice living with them but there was no freedom. When you live with your parents you are not active in the same way you cannot have your friends coming over to meet your wife or something like that it doesn't make sense. I had built my own company I wanted to start my own life in my house.

U: Ok

A: I didn't even tell them. I bought the house. (chuckles) When I got the house key and the house deal was settled, I brought a big truck to get my stuff out of the house. I had like six friends in the truck ready for my orders. I told them go in the house, go upstairs to my bedroom, pick all my stuff up and bring it to the truck. (Laughs) That is what I did. My friends went in picked my stuff and started loading the truck. My dad came down and he was like what the hell is going on? I said I'm moving. He said why? I said I want to get my own life. You have decided everything for me, taken all the big decisions for me. Now I am deciding my own life, and you are not taking over anymore.

U: and your parents? are they still mad?

A: Nahh! (chuckles) After six months we went to meet them, and everything was fine. Now we eat dinner there almost every day. After work, I go to my parents from office. My wife and kid get there a bit before me. And we all eat together. It's all great now.

Arghan laughed heartily relating the above 'independence' story. Moving out, something taken for granted growing up in Sweden, has to be navigated delicately in a Pakistani family in the diaspora.

While his parents did not want Arghan to leave with his wife, and it was 'nice' living with the parents, he needed 'freedom' to 'start [his] own life' that made 'sense' to him. He devises a plan, in the same way as he had been tricked by his family, he springs his move on them as a surprise. Once he had access to his new home, he drives a truck to his parents, decidedly not going inside himself to avoid being pressured to change his mind and sends his troop of friends to his bedroom to 'pick all my stuff up' and load the truck. Arghan's father demands to know what is going on and with finality and confidence of a man in charge, he tells his father 'I am deciding my own life, and you are not taking over anymore.'

Arghan's story displays the unusual form agency takes in managing to make good out of a bad situation to live a Swedish life with a Pakistani background. Moreover, in

the first and second-generation descendant tussle there are beginnings of cultural transformations. This shows the kind of 'negotiation work' that is done to maintain the everyday. Specifically, the ways in which stories show empirically how theoretical ideas of agency and resistance are lived- the ways in which the ordinary and the extraordinary are braided to pay attention to small moments of resistance as integrated and carried forward into ordinary life.

In the following excerpt Faris offers another nuance on why the practice of arranged marriage continues to hold value and potential for second-generation in Sweden:

U: Was it an arranged marriage?

F: Yea I think it was

U: And he didn't have a problem with that?

F: No, he didn't. My oldest brother he just, he is more, he is more Pakistani than all of us siblings. I think and he had the vision that he wanted to keep the Pakistani culture somehow in the European society. He felt that that it had the chance of getting lost if he had kids with a girl who is Swedish.

U: In your congregation, aren't there girls from Ahmadi families here and other Pakistani families?

F: Yea there are. But he wanted to have uhhh a relationship with the country of Pakistan because we don't have so much family left in Pakistan, and he wanted literally wanted for his kids to have a home over there as well so he figured out that that was the best way for him.

(Faris 29, Male, second-generation)

Relationship to a woman from Pakistan means maintaining a 'relationship with the country of Pakistan'. There is a deeper assumption in the role of women as 'cultural carriers' – that of cultural homogeneity between men and women, and therefore a perception of a shared common culture which is to be transmitted (Kalra et al., 2005). Faris' brother's decision to marry someone from Pakistan is driven by a desire to maintain and transmit Pakistani culture to future generations as he perceives a risk of cultural dilution 'Pakistani culture would get lost' if his children were to have a Swedish mother. This type of family formation occurs in the context of being racialised and marginalised in relation to a white dominant culture. The motivation is to create a sense of history and belonging through marriage. A gender critique of nationalism reveals the ways in which the nation is construed in terms of familial and domestic metaphors, where 'the woman' is enshrined as both the symbolic centre and boundary marker of the nation as 'home' and 'family' (McClintock, 1995: 354).



Nativity of one partner from Pakistan overcomes the marginality of one's perceived migrancy as a second-generation descendant, fuels the desires to maintain a connection with Pakistan due to limited family ties there. He 'wanted his children to have a home over there' showing the relevance of Pakistan as a literal home that remains a powerful referent for his sense of connection and belonging, exemplified in the choice of a marriage partner. The construction of transnational ties is concomitant with establishing roots in the host society whereby such processes may well be mutually reinforcing, to feel a sense of belonging. For such individuals, the capacious capacity of having multiple homes in a diasporic space is what contributes to a sense of home.

Choice of a marriage partner is a form of micro-politics constitutive of power relations given that meaning making is embedded in hierarchising categorisation. Someone from the 'mother' land is capable of being a 'mother' to one's children. This is exhibiting how individual symbolic boundaries are internalised and externalised through metaphorical and literal mobilisation of borders through a marriage decision.

### *Bride And Groom from Europe*

These are cross-border marriages where the couple have same ethnicity and religion but one spouse lives in a different location/national border. These marriages are arranged through one's networks, that begin to operate informally in new locations to keep track of Pakistani families who could be sought after for potential rishtas. Marriages can thus be arranged between good matches, as exemplified by Shahzaib's cross-border arranged marriage particularly within the context of Pakistani diaspora in Scandinavia:

U: Is she Pakistani?

S: Yea her origin is from Pakistan. Actually, she is born in Pakistan. She moved to Norway when she was a year old. She doesn't have any memories from Pakistan.

U: When did she move to Sweden?

S: She moved here when we got married two years ago.

U: And how did you meet her?

S: Through my parents

U: Through the Pakistani network?

S: Yes

U: It's that broad that it spans ...

S: (jumps in) Oh yeah! It spans over the whole of Scandinavia, and the United Kingdom sometimes.

U: Seriously?

S: Yeah Yeah

(Shahzaib 31, Male, second-generation)

The narrative form of Shahzaib's story is very condensed. He uses few words to describe his marriage. Yet he manages to convey a precise account of his marriage. Shahzaib takes advantage of my insider position and refrains from detailing what he presumes are taken for granted arguments and justifications. This makes Shahzaib's style of talk possible. His narrative shows the strength of shared Pakistani diasporic consciousness between the researcher and the researched. And more so, how it can be used to quickly provide relevant answers end a topic in an interview conversation around things for which there is a mutual context (Abbas, 2010).

### *Swedish Pakistani Brides to Pakistan*

None of the participants I spoke to, married or moved to Pakistan, nor did they contemplate it as a possibility. Though one participant did say that her two sisters were settled in Pakistan. One of them was planning to return to Sweden with her husband and children. The other was well settled and happy with her life in Pakistan.

In the diaspora, marital dynamics between individuals of differing nationalities entail navigating mobility options within the social field of Sweden and Pakistan, both viable settlement destinations. Throughout the marital journey, relocation decisions hinge upon factors such as accrued human capital, economic fluctuations, and the political ambience of the respective locales.

### *Aspirations of Love Among the Unmarried*

In the previous sections, narratives of love and marriage centred on stories of married participants. The following narratives detail the marriage aspirations of the unmarried men and women participants.

Honestly, I really don't care if she is Swedish, Pakistani, African, Chinese ... I really don't care. I have been with women from different nationalities ... and there haven't been many differences. I haven't had an opportunity to be with a Pakistani girl so ... my parents ... that's the only thing that I would care about. That she gets along with my parents. And they like her. Other than that, the women I have been with they know what Islam is, they know about Ramadhan and know what Eid is ... they are very educated so that's not a problem. It would have nothing to do with that. And my parents are very open-minded.

(Ghazanfar 25, Male, second-generation)

In this narrative, Ghazanfar stresses that nationality is inconsequential in his choice of partner, having dated women from various backgrounds without having faced notable differences. While he values a basic understanding of Islamic practices such as Ramadan and Eid, 'the only thing I would care about' is that his partner gets along with his parents and gains their approval. Primary importance of familial harmony in Ghazanfar relationship choices is echoed in the following narration by Faris who highlights his lack of 'attraction' for a partner who does not share the same values of honouring the needs of elderly parents:

F: I have dated many Swedish women and other non-Muslim women. It does not work.

U: Why not?

F: Well, my family is very important to me. I want my parents to live with me even when I am married. They have worked so much in their lives; I want to take care of them till the end. Swedish girls and non-Muslim girls don't understand that. Why put them in a difficult situation? A situation they cannot understand.

U: So?

F: I will marry a Muslim woman. They understand. Not that every Muslim woman will agree. But at least she will understand.

U: Will *she* take care of your parents?

F: NO! Not at all! Islam is very clear on this. It is *my* responsibility alone as their son, not her responsibility as my wife or daughter-in-law.

U: What if you fell in love with a non-Muslim Swedish woman?

F: I couldn't. I have tried. It did not work. I am just not attracted ... (takes a few seconds) I don't *feel* any attraction towards someone who cannot understand the status of parents and family in Islam. It's about the values. How I value want to value them. And it is unfair expect this from them.

(Faris 29, Male, second-generation)

Despite having dated non-Muslim Swedish women, Faris finds these relationships untenable due to cultural differences, particularly regarding family dynamics and responsibilities. He emphasises his desire to care for his parents, a value deeply rooted in his Islamic beliefs, which he feels is not understood by non-Muslim partners. This value becomes a key factor in his attraction, or lack thereof, to potential partners. Thus, values around family and exalted status of parental care and respect not only guide Faris's choices but also significantly influence his capacity for love, attraction and attachment.

When I inquired about Faris's desire for a Muslim wife, mentioning the traditional expectation in South Asian families that women care for in-laws, he vehemently rejected this practice as an exploitation of women's labour and a misallocation of responsibility. This exchange features both the continuity and evolution within Pakistani families in the diaspora, where traditions persist but are continually reinterpreted and reshaped by each generation.

Shaheryar has another spin on culture as an 'influence' that can bond individuals in a romantic relationship based on shared understanding but also leaves room to be shaped by 'mixing' two 'CD player[s]' in a 'good way':

My girlfriend, you met her, she is Pakistani and I am Pakistani, so...our culture is a source of influence ... she understands that. And we are serious. What I want to say that we have grown up in Pakistani environment. Those who have a bit more wisdom they have a CD player inside their heads that is Swedish and there is a Pakistani CD as well and it depends on you how you mix it out in a good way and use it in a relationship.

(Shaheryar 23, Male second-generation)

Shaheryar's narrative speaks to importance of heritage (anchor) in a romantic relation where understanding is more intuitive among those who share cultural foundations. Combined with bicultural competence (embedding) to make decisions that are relevant to the context of their lives. Using the metaphor of a 'CD player' with both Swedish and Pakistani discs, Shaheryar believes wisdom lies in skilfully blending cultural influences to enrich relationships, accenting the adaptive nature of bicultural experience in forging a sense of belonging in a multicultural context. He emphasises choosing a partner who 'fits into' the family mosaic and shares both the family's immigrant *past* and second-generation *present*, to build a *future* in Sweden.

Mizhir on the other hand embraces the potential complexities of marrying someone from a different country, viewing it as intriguing, inevitable and 'fun' rather than problematic:

I mean there's always going to be some confusion if the person I marry is not from the same country as me, that is going to raise questions, but that's the interesting part to me, in a way, it depends, because I am more Pakistani-Swedish so I am already mixed, I am not Pakistani-Pakistani so the next generation is going to be different no matter what, but if it is a new person in your life and I think that is the fun part in a way. So, it doesn't matter which country or colour or city as long she has a strong identity and knows who she is. Only that she gets on well with the family.

(Mizhir 33, Male, second-generation)

Mizhir's mixed Pakistani-Swedish background places him squarely within a multicultural context, fostering an eagerness to embrace further diversity in future generations. His view of identity is fluid: his parents are 'Pakistani-Pakistani', he identifies as 'Pakistani-Swedish', and envisions his children as 'Pakistani-Swedish-and more'. Prioritising self-awareness and authenticity over ethnicity, race, or nationality in romantic relationships that he views as mere labels, reflects his progressive mindset. This outlook also signals acceptance of inevitable generational change and a readiness to embrace the evolving dynamics of intercultural contact and progression.

While 'getting on' with 'family' remains central and recurring theme in the aspirations of love among men including Mizhir, below the female participants provide further insight:

Right now, I am thinking it will be better and easier to have a Pakistani husband. You understand the culture and the language it's the big thing when I have kids it's easy. Also, it is easy to be with larger family. But then I don't know what I would do if I fell madly in love (laughs)

(Ilma 27, Female, second-generation)

I don't want to have a boyfriend to have something to do in my free time only to get to know someone for something serious. I talked to mama once that if I like someone and if someone likes me and if it is something serious between ...then she said, 'if it is something serious then I'd like to meet him otherwise you cannot have anyone.' Also, for me, it is important he is Muslim, doesn't have to be Pakistani. But if my parents refuse, then I will not be able to do anything.

(Naima 19, Female, second-generation)

Yes because mine for example will not be from anyone from the Jamaat if I were to get married ..I mean *he would be Ahmadi* but not from here ..there aren't any boys here [...] *the others don't even consider us Muslims* so if they don't consider us Muslims then the families will have issues so that is the reason why..I think it will be difficult otherwise because not everyone is open.

(Zareesh 25, Female, second-generation)

The above narratives highlight the continuing importance *marriage* as the only form of legitimate relationship in the Pakistani diaspora. While the participants 'date' which they refer to as 'seeing someone' the only time it gains any significance is when it is serious enough to end in marriage. Otherwise, oftentimes their relationship remains a secret from family and friends, except those whom they trust. This is a principle all second-generation participants despite their gender subscribed to. Ilma while laughingly says all her rationality about a harmonious marriage can falter if she 'falls

madly in love', she seriously thinks that she would prefer to marry a Pakistani man so that there is continuity in culture and language to the future children. That said, she also thinks it will be 'easier' to merge lives if there is common ethnicity and language.

On the other hand, Naima seeks a Muslim partner, placing less emphasis on ethnicity but prioritising her parents' approval above all else. Without their endorsement, she believes no relationship can progress. Naima is one of the youngest participants in this study and an only child. The combination of age, gender, and being an only child amplifies the burden of attachment and parental expectations. Examining participants like her in longitudinal follow-up interviews could provide valuable insights into the interplay between parental influence and individual preferences leading to the eventual bargain between the two generations.

Additively, Zareesh hopes to find a match in a Pakistani man who is an Ahmadi Muslim. But she is aware that she has no age fellows in Malmö congregation. Her options are to look to other Ahmadiyya congregations in Sweden and abroad, including Pakistan. With a bit of sadness and disappointment, she says that the 'others' referring to all other Muslim communities 'don't consider us Muslim' and thus that limits her options. Across generations, Ahmadi participants retain the trauma of exile from Pakistan and their marginalised status as non-Muslims, forged by continued bonding around building a strong community that shares this 'marked' Pakistani identity and ongoing struggles for recognition as Muslims. Consequently, Ahmadi Muslims in the study demonstrate stronger ties to their congregations compared to other participants. The trauma of exile and religious marginalisation serves as a catalyst for productive resistance, evident in their choice of intra-faith marriages.

These stories showcase how individual desire for romantic relationships evolve amidst bicultural identities, familial pressures, and generational transitions. The range of nuances for this negotiation - while keeping *fitting in* with the family as a constant for a relationship to bloom into seriousness - also considers the affirming importance of mutuality in *values, attraction, mixing bicultural CD's, fun, ease, seriousness, and politics of identity* as strategies to seek appropriate partners.

## Conclusion

Marriage and boundaries are intimately connected. The institution of marriage, thus, emerges as a crucial avenue to understand belonging. Studying how second-generation individuals navigate intimate relationships offers opportunities to examine how community and societal norms and expectations shape relationship dynamics. It also

shows the struggles and possibilities that arise from balancing cultural traditions with contemporary values.

Some of these insights are summarised hereunder.

The tendency for cousin marriages increased in the second-generation compared to the first-generation in Sweden which is prompted by several reasons. Firstly, scarcity of suitable partners in Sweden among oldest members of second-generation men and women when they come of marriageable age. Secondly, the pioneering role of first-generation mothers in orchestrating the matrimonial affairs of their progeny is paramount. Their displacement from the homeland has severed their ties to the broader marriage market in Pakistan, leaving them reliant solely on connections within their immediate extended family. There is a perception of trust and safety with such an alliance. Arranged marriage to a cousin is seen as a kind of flow of capital that follows the logic of remittance, except it is in the form of marriage.

In the stories second-generation descendants relate about first-generation, marriage migrants are predominantly women. Whereas in the second-generation marriage migrants from Pakistan are men. The shift in men as dependents demonstrates how marriage migration turns gender dynamics of power on its head when arranged grooms are men. Narratives depict men facing comparable discomforts and hurdles, while women wield greater power in negotiating the terms of marriage. This shift is attributed to the higher social, economic, and familial capital that women possess in Sweden compared to husbands immigrating from Pakistan. Notably second-generation women use elaborate strategies to incorporate their arranged grooms from Pakistan into the socio-cultural and economic fabric of their new home.

The complexities of cousin marriage that result in a divorce reveal individual engagements with social boundaries and the personal shaping of life choices. Divorce crosses a social boundary that jeopardises belonging. It threatens familial order justifying moral blackmailing as a means of exerting pressure and control. As a significant social stigma, its repercussions lead individuals to fear the loss of social status, support networks, and acceptance within their communities.

While being Muslim may trump other allegiances for believers as exemplified by conversion stories of ethnic Swedish partners, personal preferences and experiences drive decisions. Whereas belonging stresses commonness, but not necessarily sameness. Commonness tends to build upon a common cultural denominator – that however can be created anew and reshaped. In mixed union, belonging is not simply about fitting into predetermined roles, but about embracing individual authenticity and finding connection through understanding and support. As institutions, marriage and family, in the first generation, transmit notions of familial duty and obligation to the second-generation enforcing them above individual needs.

Young members of the family desire their parents' collaboration and approval. The fact that couples with a more secular outlook, had a nikah ceremony in 'an Islamic way' without parents demanding conversion of the partner from 'outside' the ethnic and religious community, demonstrates a negotiation of Islamic rituals and traditions within the context of intercultural marriages in Pakistani diasporic families. Moreover, it shows the bare minimum terms of familial boundaries in accepting new members signifying a cultural repertoire deeply anchored in transnational processes.

Connection between first generation and their descendants is constantly being disrupted because of entitlement position of the former in a Pakistani family that is when taken for granted is felt as suffocating and oppressive. Imposition of unreasonable parental authority is a mechanism for boundary change, altering the contours of belonging between family members.

Intimate relationships affect one's religious beliefs. Believers are influenced by Islam as a reservoir of moral knowledge rather than a collectivising straitjacket. Religion is no longer viewed primarily as involving the unquestioning compliance with religious rules and practices. Instead, it is narrated as an aid to growing in spiritual awareness, to living by moral principles, and to acting authentically and responsibly. Living in Sweden additionally offers second-generation Muslims the opportunity to engage with diverse cultural perspectives and question the conflation of Islamic traditions with cultural practices. Particularly insightful is how they use familial and societal rules as resources, either by upholding them or subverting them through resistance for belonging. Thus, emphasising their own personal interpretation also a resource.

The dynamics of arranged and love marriages in the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden defy simple categorisation. Extending Rubya Mehdi's concept of 'mélange familism' introduced in Chapter 5 to marriage decisions can insightfully show how tradition and modernity often coexist and intertwine in nuanced ways. In Pakistan too, various communities uphold traditional values while adapting them to contemporary contexts and times. Similarly, within the diaspora, arranged marriages often reflect a mix of cultural heritage and individual choice, challenging the binary view of tradition (shared history) versus modernity (contemporary condition). Islam, often mischaracterised in the West as conservative, actually presents itself as modern, further complicating the understanding of marriage practices among Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden. Arranged and love marriages exist on a continuum, blending cultural continuity with adaptation, rather than fitting neatly into 'traditional' or 'modern' categories.

In Nauphil's narrative, factors like religious and career homogamy become central to his marriage and family decisions, which he approaches in a self-serving manner. For others, like Faris's brother, maintaining ties to Pakistan is key; choosing a spouse from Pakistan ensures that future children can maintain language skills and connections with extended family. Additionally, the importance of caring for parents and living in a



multigenerational home influences the choice of a marriage partner who agrees to this arrangement.

Second-generation participants show dexterity in exploiting the opportunity structure in Sweden to gain educational, social and economic capital. The fact that the locus of early socialisation of the two generations (first and second) is separated not only in time but also by countries with differing social and cultural systems, the participants possess insider knowledge in Sweden, that allows them to know the rules of the game in a way their parents don't, and they use it to their advantage- and to benefit future generations.

## Chapter 8

# Negotiating Religion: ‘I am/was Muslim’

This chapter will map processes of negotiating a Muslim identity, navigating it in the context of evolving beliefs, societal pressures, and life experiences in the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. In the first section, ‘Crossing Boundaries’, the narratives will highlight stories of second-generation participants who were exposed to Islam within their families but no longer adhere to its beliefs or practices.

The next section, ‘Shifting Boundaries,’ will focus on individuals who may have initially practiced their faith quietly but became more overt and active in their religiosity over time.

In the final section, ‘Maintaining Boundaries’, the narratives will explore the experiences of believers who struggle to reconcile their religious beliefs with their daily lives, ultimately finding resolution through their own interpretations.

This chapter also connects how religion is transmitted to the second-generation by the parent generation and how it evolves in/through their everyday experiences in Sweden. To understand if religious identity is becoming diluted, concentrated, or dormant in the family and/or in individual’s life, paying attention to turning points and critical incidents in the participants’ narratives.

## Crossing Boundaries: Not Being Muslim

While most individuals in this study self-identified as Muslim, a few notable ones, though raised within religious family contexts, made the decision to disaffiliate from Islam. Transitioning from a Muslim identity to one without religion is not a straightforward process. The stories they share below, show that their path to reach this moment as well as the articulation of their reasons for leaving the Muslim faith was filled with unexpected twists and turns. In exploring this theme of ‘not being Muslim’ or in other words what one is *not*, brings to fore *who one is*. In so doing, distinctions of individual and group belonging, as well as manifestations of non-belonging become evident.

*'I Couldn't Like Being a Muslim'*

During fieldwork, when Javed was contacted by his sister on my behalf to participate in the research, he initially refused and then agreed to meet me upon his sister's insistence. I asked him when we met why he refused and he said, 'I don't consider myself Muslim anymore and you were researching second-generation Muslims, so I told my sister it won't work'. I pointed that he said 'anymore' so there was a time he *did* consider himself a Muslim. He smiled and said 'Yes'. The following narrative encapsulates the multifaceted nature of identity formation and nuanced evaluations that underpin religious *disaffiliation*:

[...] up until I was 19 or 20 something like that I guess up until that point I guess [...] I mean it's a long process it took me a year finally. I stopped calling myself Muslim, but I still believed in God. So, yea that's there also summarised.

[...] I believed in being a Muslim, I liked being a Muslim [...] no if you ask my mom, I was one of, me and my dad were the two who were the most practicing Muslims during my brought up. I remember trying to pray five times a day, I took the Roza (fasting) very seriously [...] I didn't do these things because it was expected of a Muslim not to, more or less. And I wanted to be a *good* Muslim.

[...] It was between ages thirteen to fifteen when I started doing this. They (parents) were like yea we have a *good son*.

[...] But then of course when you get into teenage years like sixteen and seventeen and I remember I had a lot of discussions. Me and my younger brother with my parents. Questions like why can't we do this? Especially why can't we have girlfriends? We are living in Sweden, *everyone* does, all the *other guys* do but *we are not allowed*. I might have started to question earlier but I still considered myself Muslim

[...] Desi parents 'No we are not going to discuss it; this is just how it is.' You know ... they are very firm and strict. The explanation is *we* are Muslims and Pakistanis, and *we* do it like this. Same with arranged marriage, they said 'everyone else has done it and you are expected to do it too.' End of discussion.

[...] So, it started out with my girlfriend [...] I was opposed to arranged marriages [...] then a friend who gave me a book called 'God Delusion' [...] another incident with a friend when his mother passed away, he got double the inheritance than his sisters.

[...] in the end being Muslim was also being Pakistani, for me it kind of goes together, being so opposed to this culture it was natural that I leave this culture.

(Javed<sup>51</sup> 30, male, second-generation)

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<sup>51</sup> Javed has read and approved this analysis.

In his early upbringing, Javed reflects that he had a strong personal commitment to the Muslim faith. He genuinely believed and enjoyed being Muslim. Especially since it was also a source of a close bond with his father, who was also devout. Their dedication together as father and son in religious practices such as praying five times a day and the family practice of observing fasting during Ramadan, indicated his 'serious' intentions. Moreover, despite external temptations like smoking and drinking, he chose to abstain, not solely because it was expected by religion, but because he sincerely wanted to adhere to the principles of being a 'good Muslim.' Being a good Muslim earns him his parents' pride in having a 'good son' showing his parents value and appreciate Javed's commitment to his faith and his strength of character. Being a good Muslim also relates to being a good Pakistani - listening to his parents, not having girlfriends and arranged marriages. Thus, by being a devout Muslim, he fulfils their expectations of what constitutes a 'good son' in the cultural and religious context of the family.

'But then' as he enters his mid-teenage years, a significant shift occurs in his faith commitment, a change he hadn't previously questioned. He begins to engage in discussions, particularly questioning why, as children in a Pakistani family, they were not allowed to have girlfriends like everyone else. At a certain point in the interview, Javed humorously recounts how various life events—such as leaving religion, moving away from his hometown, and choosing a job—were shaped by pivotal incidents, often involving romantic interests: 'in my life's rebellions, there's always a girl.' Therefore, it is unsurprising that he could withstand pressure from his peers for not smoking or drinking, instead it is his desire for a girlfriend that prompts his existential questioning. On one hand, the emotion of romantic love impacts him causing a sense of longing and an inability to conform to familial expectations, on the other hand, in disconnecting from conventional narrative of his peers by not having a girlfriend, makes him feel like an outsider on both fronts.

Experiencing sexuality in a restrictive environment spurs him to take action in ways that substance use did not. He grapples with challenges to his masculinity and struggles to fit into the culture of boys in Sweden. Furthermore, his parents' preference for arranged marriage does not align with his own beliefs, further fuels his sense of discord. His irritation can be sensed in 'we are living in Sweden' and not being 'allowed' to do what is considered an individual right, choice, and decision.

Javed's crisis is exacerbated by his parents' lack of engagement with questions that trouble him, something he attributes to as endemic to a 'desi family.' He sees the rules as strict and firm representing family hierarchy where conformance despite a reasonable explanation is expected from the children. Adherence to norms is justification for the norms in the statement 'we are Muslims and Pakistanis, and we do it like this' which is perceived by Javed as circular and unsatisfactory.

Social locations of first-generation with its Pakistani background and second-generation born and raised in Sweden are in tension when families uphold normative values from normative context of their country of origin at home in the country of settlement. Deference to parents by children is an ideal of family on which constructions of family rely, it is also a boundary imbued with symbolic value. Boundaries when take shape of boundedness may cause opposite reaction from members who do not respond well to control and authority that is not earned through mutual engagement and bargaining.

In Javed's narrative it is possible to see patterns of fractured communication, which is connected to contestations and ruptures within identity boundaries (Pakistani and Muslim) and feelings of relatedness moving away from a 'we' collective of the family towards 'we' collective of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 2010). Javed's reflection also shows how the two generations from their different social locations are making bids for connection to/from each other. One (Javed) asks for communication and bargaining whereas the other (parents) demands complete deference to their authority as well as loyalty to cultural and religious traditions without question. The way cultures of relatedness are organised reveal tensions and contestations between endurance and elasticity around the meaning and practice of family (Long, 2018). Continuity is seen in 'everyone else has done it and you are expected to do it too' giving up personal sense of agency for familial belonging. 'End of discussion' signifies a perceived finality by Javed that is evidence of his parents not being open to integrating his concerns in a discussion that is important to him.

As a response to authority of his parents which he views as misplaced and unjustified, he gives several reasons for why he decides to leave religion. Javed's narrative underscores personal relationships, intellectual exploration, and social justice concerns in his departure from Islam. His rejection of arranged marriages, engagement with atheist literature like 'The God Delusion,' and observation of gender inequality in inheritance practices in Islam collectively informed his decision to renounce religious and cultural affiliations.

Additionally, being so 'opposed' to this culture, implies that rejecting aspects of Pakistani culture, which Javed perceives as integral to a Muslim identity, ultimately leads to a sense of alienation as well as detachment from both religious *and* cultural belonging. The desire to belong, by determining one's own personal meaning in 'native' subject positions of being Pakistani and being Muslim, are thus, not given nor stable. There is nothing natural about belonging, other than the feeling of being someone who naturally belongs. As can be seen in Javed's narrative the desire to belong is a negotiated and contested desire which is never given. Rather it is a space where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle producing new subject positions (Brah, 1996: 205).

In Javed's narrative, 'end of discussion' implied in the desi family's inability to show flexibility and adaptation to its young members results in 'end of relation' to the culture and religion of parents. It shows what exactly is at stake in this space – the infinite experientiality, the myriad processes of cultural fissure and fusion that underwrite contemporary forms of transcultural identities (Brah, 1996).

Whereas the above serves as one part of Javed's evaluation where his identity questions are intimately connected with his inability to bargain or negotiate as an individual with parental authority, it is juxtaposed with his intellectual reading of 'the God delusion' and notions of equality.

In the section that follows, there is another dimension to his evaluations accounting for his disaffiliation with being Pakistani and therefore being Muslim. In the following excerpts, negative peer experiences and Javed's complicity with an internalised racialisation discourse affect his desire to belong:

[...] We were going to the cinema and two Somali women were walking down and they were wearing this complete burqa<sup>52</sup> you know and this guy in our group looks at them and says 'are we were in a Star Wars movie? *I really hate religion!*'. I didn't say anything, but that *made me really uncomfortable*.

[...] I remember that made me *uncomfortable* was when the discussion about religion, especially Islam would pop up in school. It was not a positive or fair depiction compared to other religions. I just sat there. *Quiet*. I didn't really *engage*.

J: [...] I have had some bad...there was this one guy who was obviously a racist.

U: Why do you say that? Why do you say he was a racist?

J: He would say...do you know what the 'blatte'<sup>53</sup> is?

U: Yeah.

J: Yeah, that's a very... I mean he would just say...we would talk about going out to parties and people .... kinda rude and he would say *jävla blattar*<sup>54</sup> and he knows I'm sitting there. I would be a blatte, and I said, '*excuse me??*' and he didn't say anything to that. I mean obviously he has issues with immigrants. I definitely felt more outside here in Skåne in

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<sup>52</sup> A burqa is a full body covering worn by some Muslim women, particularly in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan. It typically consists of a long garment that covers the body from head to toe, often with a mesh panel or grille over the eyes for visibility.

<sup>53</sup> In the online dictionary at the Swedish Language Council, blatte (blattar pl.) is defined as a derogatory term used in the past in reference to African people and presently about foreigners and immigrants to Sweden (in Lacatus, 2007: 80).

<sup>54</sup> 'Jävla' is a Swedish swear word used similarly to the English word 'fucking' but the Swedish 'jävla' is slightly milder than its English counterpart, closer to bloody, damn or frigging.

university than when I started gymnasiet in Stockholm. At my department at university in Skåne people were very open in saying they *don't like religion* and that was *hard* to hear. I mean still back then being Muslim was a big deal for me. Also, there were a lot of self-declared atheists in the class, which was new for me, *I couldn't like being a Muslim*. I could never really argue about it because I didn't have the ... if you say ... facts you know.

The one thing common with the above stories is how Javed experiences and responds to ethno-racial exclusion by taking a subaltern position in interactions outside the home – those he describes as impacting his identificatory trajectory. As Javed's narrative unfolds, his parents' migration to Sweden from Pakistan for economic reasons, the family's working-class status, combined with living in an underprivileged neighbourhood, and growing up Muslim in Sweden; all contributed to what he called his 'invandrare' (an immigrant) status.

So, when his friend makes fun of 'Somali women' in 'burqas', he displays his discomfort by 'not say[ing] anything.' Butler (1997: 183-186) attributes such experience to the discursive field of speakability and unspeakability in which things that can be expressed and zones of silence where experiences that cannot be expressed are retained. The coupling of particular bodies with specific spaces is at the heart of this silence, from which Javed himself is not precluded. By mere description the women in question are immigrants, persons of colour and wearing a garment that signals the religion Islam which means they are Muslim. Javed shares their immigrant background, religious identity, and complexion. His sense of belonging within the close circle of friendship is abruptly challenged when, in his own lived experience, he might be read as someone who has a greater affinity with the women whom his friend mocks. Silence as a response takes precedence over speaking out, as it could endanger his friendship and his own positionality.

Jokes and innuendos often serve as subtle vehicles for discourses, allowing ideas and cultural norms to circulate quietly between individuals. These seemingly casual remarks can carry deeper meanings and assumptions, influencing perceptions and behaviours without overt acknowledgement. Through humour and indirect comments, powerful messages about identity, power, and social norms can be conveyed, shaping interactions and relationships in subtle yet significant ways (Choudhury, 2024; Sandberg & Tutenges, 2019; Zimbardo, 2014).

The reference to Star Wars denotes fantasy, temporal displacement, and otherworldliness- belonging to the realm of imagination (out there) and not reality (out here) thereby marking and circumscribing some bodies as being 'out of place.' 'Known' through a limited set of framings<sup>55</sup>, these bodies jar and destabilise an exclusive sense of

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<sup>55</sup> Some of the most common representation of Muslim women in Sweden includes biases where they are presumed being connected with honour violence victims, sexually constrained, oppressed by their

place (Puwar, 2004: 11) for those who feel they ‘naturally’ belong. Brah’s articulation of diaspora space is key here as it highlights the entanglements of the genealogies of dispersal (out of place) with those of staying put (in place) (1996: 242). As the ‘unknown’, who defy Swedish conventions<sup>56</sup> and boundaries, the presence of the figure of the Somali women disrupts the social and psychic space inasmuch that not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders’ (Puwar, 2004) and front ‘stranger danger’ (Ahmed, 2000).

Javed’s silence can be seen as an enactment of his subaltern identity and power relational positionality in negotiating the dominant discourse with ‘dominant others.’ His perceived invandrarer (immigrant status), has not (yet) earned the right or the place to speak with authority and therefore he upholds the zone of silence whereas his friend in his white Swedish body-at-home is able to speak out his disdain at something that disrupts his comfort without being conscious of his choice of words and their consequence.

To feel at home and to belong is related to the desire to be seen as someone who does need to explain themselves or defend their presence (Khawaja, 2014a: 18). Interestingly, Javed’s silence and his friend’s outburst are both indicative of responses to disruption felt to their sense of feeling at home and their desire to belong. Although, it is their subject positions that determine the content of their responses. Subalternity signifies the peripheral response of silence in the case of the former, contrasting with the unquestioned privilege of an outburst in the case of the latter, who occupies the dominant centre.

Moreover, the statement ‘I really hate religion’ also explains Javed’s silence. Javed at the time was practicing Muslim and liked being a Muslim, something his friend claimed he hated. Sara Ahmed’s (2004: 119) insightful analysis of what she terms ‘affective economies’ shows how emotions ‘do things,’ producing ‘the effect of a collective’ (national) body as they circulate. Emotions thus play a crucial role in the ‘surfacing’ of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs. Emotions work to align subjects with some others and against other others. Emotions like contempt, fear and disgust also ‘stick’ to certain bodies. Being Muslim, cherished by Javed for fostering a strong father-son bond and a source of pride within the family, is perceived as a potential threat to his friendship and

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homeland patriarchal cultures and passive (Bredstrom, 2003, p.83). Farris (2017) coined the term Femonationalism to describe the recent trend of anti-Islam agendas in the name of gender equality, and the way this generates further racist and anti-immigration ideologies. In lived experiences it creates boundaries against non-Swedish ‘others’, legitimizing unsavoury comments jokes and innuendos as governing informal social spaces for the purpose of social control.

<sup>56</sup> Gender equality, sexual liberation and the value of freedom and choice.



to the ideals of a 'good' society. Risking camaraderie through confrontation, silence on his part seems to become the preferred means of expressing discomfort.

In a similar vein, in the school context, as a student in a classroom, a student in relation to a teacher about Islam, once again he finds himself in feeling uncomfortable in the situation. The expressed discomfort is regarding discussions about Islam in school wherein he detects a discrepancy in the portrayal of different religions, with Islam receiving negative and an unfair treatment.

The choice 'not engage' during these discussions may signify a sense of alienation or marginalisation, stemming from a perceived lack of representation or understanding of one's own beliefs and identity. To remain 'quiet' is also a strategic practice. It reflects a desire to avoid conflict or further marginalisation within the social context of the school environment to preserve a sense of personal integrity. Moreover, it might also be a strategy to avoid reproducing the stereotype of the troublesome immigrant boy and student who challenges the class and the teacher (see for example Berglund, 2017; Brömssen, 2007; Gilliam, 2014; Gilliam, 2022; Khawaja, 2014b; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2010). A consideration of the terms of coexistence in school allows us to see how less obvious and more nuanced exclusion operates within institutions via tacit reservation of privileged positions for some others compared to other others (Puwar, 2004).

Writing on depiction of Islam in Swedish textbooks, having analysed seven textbooks on religion that were sent to him by upper secondary teachers for an analysis, Otterbeck (2005) determines that the understanding derived on Islam from the textbooks is problematic to say the least. It promotes Islam as a political religion impossible to secularise, a religion filled with strict rules and demands, brutal in its conception of justice, and upholding a gender-based apartheid. These representations<sup>57</sup> thus preserve the position of Muslim as different from 'us', when they are defacto part of the contemporary Swedish 'us'. Given the biased portrayal of Muslims in Swedish classrooms and the general media, it is unsurprising that these representations incite unsavoury opinions. This often leads to strong responses from Swedes towards Muslims and the visibility of Islamic symbols in the public sphere (Göle, 2003; Koobak & Thapar-Björkert, 2012; Listerborn, 2015).

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<sup>57</sup> In the textbooks Islam is the religion that symbolized inequality between the sexes, traditional clothing worn by Muslim women became a vivid means with which to represent the inequalities between the sexes in the religion of Islam; Muslims, Arabs and Islam became associated with the Saudi Arabian interpretation of Islam; Thus, the role of women, violence (represented by hudud punishments, jihad, and martyrdom) and free will or predestination were topics commonly discussed. In 1993, Kjell Harenstam, a scholar of comparative religion, did a study of Swedish textbooks on religion. He found that the way in which 'facts' about Islam are selected and presented in these books often results in a biased overall picture (in Otterbeck, 2002).

With over 400,000 Muslims residing in Sweden, Otterback (2005) is moved to argue that 'lived plurality of Islam is present in the classrooms of Malmö, but not in the textbooks', a problem he claims has to be taken more seriously (see also Berglund, 2013a, 2017; Brattlund, 2009; Jeminovic & Ejupovic, 2014; Rissanen, 2020, 2021).

Whether textbooks in school or a walk to the cinema, micro-expressions of social and political discourse seeps into the way bodies-at-home (Javed's peer) choose to talk about perceived foreign-bodies-at-home (women in burqa) and educators use biased school textbooks to render a narrow understanding of religion (Islam) while Muslim pupils (Javed) are present in the class. The power of the situation in which Javed finds himself- as an insider who is on the outside by subscribing to a religion that seems beyond redemption, there is no choice but to remain 'quiet'.

The way boundaries are drawn follow different logics of inclusion and exclusion where meaning is being derived from interactions. When Javed enters university, he encounters another kind of bias against religion that disrupts his positive identification with being Muslim and his embodiment as an ethno-racial 'other'. His peer's derogatory comment 'jävla blattar'<sup>58</sup> demonstrates what Mulinari and Neergard (2017) call micro-processes of racialisation that produce the 'migrant other' through use of derogatory naming as 'svartskalle' (blackkull) or 'blatte' (wog).

Javed's peer's refusal to acknowledge his objection 'excuse me' and lack of response also reflects a power dynamic where Javed's claim to re-assess the slur by bringing attention to his presence is ignored as being irrelevant to the situation. Silence as the fitting response and the appropriate feeling rule frames the conventions of feeling (Hochschild, 1979) in this social exchange. What is shared in the particularity of friendship means offence has a cost, it may put someone on the inside outside in the place of the 'other.' Knowing how to show appropriate emotion and to manage it is to dignify oneself. Private subjective felt experiences and public observable expressions are subject to social rules and social control (Hochschild, 1979, 1998).

Being in a minority status vying for social membership with the larger 'we' collective symbolises silence as the necessary emotion work to uphold being a part of an anti-racist, colour-blind, immigrant welcoming, multicultural nation. Speaking up challenges the structural order, where the very act of expressing a feeling and the body manifesting it are seen as more problematic than the entrenched cultural predispositions of equality and freedom that have long been established. The social context of the feeling, despite the harsh and derogatory comment, invites Javed to deny

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<sup>58</sup> The racial regime in Sweden in the opinion of Mulinari and Neergard (2017) is characterised on the one hand by a continuation of historically rooted racism towards Jews, Roma and Sami, and, on the other hand, by a variation of *racialisations of migrants and their children* (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009), *especially Muslims* (Mulinari & Neergard 2012) and *Afro Swedes* (Mångkulturellt Centrum 2014) re-invoking colonial racist discourses of the 'the Other' [my emphasis]

his feeling of discomfort as being and un-feelable feeling (Hochschild, 1998: 5). The emotional outburst is justified on unmarked bodies whereas silence is appropriated by marked bodies showing investment in the conditions of subordination to feel included among dominant others (Ahmed, 2004). The 'moment of contact' is shaped by past histories of contact, which allows the proximity of a racial other to be perceived as threatening, at the same time as it reshapes the bodies in the contact zone of the encounter (Ahmed, 2013: 200) .

According to Javed's conception of racism, in light of the racial slur, is summarised in his statement 'obviously he has issues with immigrants', meaning racism is directed at those who are considered foreign by virtue of their embodiment (black skull/dark hair) that signals someone whose socio-cultural belonging extends beyond the current spatial location to 'somewhere else.' The figure of the immigrant is thus stigmatised and racialised and someone overtly using a slur is deemed a 'racist'.

Being included and being othered are concomitant processes occurring in tandem in Javed's experience and narrative. By his peer's side Javed is camouflaged by whiteness within the boundary of friendship in an academic/collegial setting. But when a racial boundary is invoked- in a moment of shared intimacy in the form of an 'inside' joke- Javed feels exposed and insecure of his insider position when the object of his peer's ridicule is in fact a version of Javed himself that is reflected in his statement 'I would be a blatte too'. Being an outsider is a specific mode of being an insider, that is, one has to be inside a particular space in order to be categorised as an outsider to it (Hage, 2006) and to be able to decipher the codes that violate norms of inclusion making belonging a tenuously negotiated process, especially for the racialised. Javed experiences an ambivalent situation where his white colleague deracialises him to treat him as an insider/ friend while racialising others like Javed whom he does not know in derogatory terms. By racialising others people also racialise themselves, except that their own whiteness is the place of unquestioned privilege.

The invisibility and perceived neutrality of whiteness both as a standpoint and a location of structural advantage (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 2020; Ignatiev, 1994), obscure its role in maintaining systemic inequities. In contemporary Sweden hegemonic whiteness is upheld through a colour-blindness that constantly reinscribes whiteness as the normative, yet unmarked, position that, for example, effectively forecloses, silences and excludes experiences of everyday racism among non-white Swedes (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014: 426) Whether or not these deracialisers still notice that the friends and colleagues they have whitened are phenotypically different from them (as in the case of Javed) is worth studying (Gans, 2017: 350).

Coming from an underprivileged area in Stockholm that has a reputation for being a 'troubled area' in the city, with working-class immigrant parents from Pakistan, who are less educated- are some explanations Javed offers for feeling on the 'outside' in the

engineering department at a prestigious university in Skåne where most of his peers who are local and come from rich highly educated Swedish families with engineering background. While Javed said he felt 'lost' in the new setting, his peers were able to navigate the milieu with ease. Additionally, Javed mentions when he tells his peers where he is from, a 'troubled' area in Stockholm, they 'expect the worst' and are surprised to find him contrary to their expectations revealing their implicit biases and preconceived notions about people from underprivileged neighbourhoods. The mental role of spatial partitions becomes evident from the way neighbourhood boundaries graphically outline rather elusive social class differences (Zerubavel, 1993: 9). Javed's experience illustrates the intersectionality of space, boundary, race, and class. His *geographic origin* in a marginalised area, his *working-class* status, spatial and social *boundaries* that delineate his 'troubled area' from the prestigious university and his *racial identity* collectively shape social inclusion and exclusion, contributing to his feelings of alienation impacting the expectations of those around him and his own sense of belonging.

Non-phenotypical characteristics such as speech patterns, names, clothing styles and noticeable behaviour patterns and activities can also serve as definitional criteria for class, a prominent feature of racialisation processes. Moreover, religion too, has always been treated as a potential racial characteristic, especially if religious populations vary phenotypically from racial dominants and have historically been seen as suspect and threatening (Gans, 2017: 351).

Being in a new city and starting university in a department that has its own 'culture of distinction'<sup>59</sup> compared to the gymnasium in Stockholm, where previously his claim to be a Muslim was legitimate and normal, Javed finds his Muslim identity among self-proclaimed atheists who openly 'hate[d]' religion difficult to defend and uphold. Under the gaze of his peers Javed feels displaced, liminal, delineating from normal in ways deemed unacceptable.

By incorporating the processes of surveillance and subjectification, Foucault's concept of 'panopticism' (Foucault, 2020: 303-304) can be utilised to analyse Javed's statement 'I couldn't like being a Muslim'. What is implied is an embodied process of subject formation whereby the individual (Javed) is made into the object of a normalising and disciplinary gaze (interactions with so-called dominant others) for the purpose of self-regulation and conformity to enable or disable certain versions of subjectivity geared towards the discursive logic present in the context. In this logic Muslimness is not possible - the open hostility from his friends and peers creates an environment would invite further judgement, scrutiny and negative attention. He feels constrained in his positionality to

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<sup>59</sup> Javed describes his departmental milieu as elite, white, wealthy, and right-wing insofar as their opinions on immigration and Muslims.

confront or react directly because the cost is too high, it is better to preserve energy and maintain emotional composure until occupational, economic and social status can be gained (Lamont et al., 2016: 175-176).

Javed's hesitation to engage in arguments about religion due to a perceived lack of 'facts' underscores the challenge of advocating for one's beliefs in the face of intellectual and ideological opposition. Diasporic individuals in non-Western contexts often may lose knowledge of their own cultures and practices and be ashamed of the little that they do know and therefore try to be as much as possible like the members of the dominant group (Narayan, 1999: 222) to overcome feelings of marginalisation and powerlessness and restore a positive sense of self and re-affirm the desire to belong. Therefore, the logical response is to distance oneself from an indefensible identity that diminishes self-worth.

In the following excerpts the process of surveillance and subjectification from a racialising gaze is experienced by Javed in his romantic relationship as a Muslim man and in a professional setting of an interview in the labour market as descendant of immigrant parents. Javed relates these experiences as follows:

[...] I remember one time she (girlfriend) said she thinks religion is dumb and stupid and religious people who follow something are dumb and stupid. Being Muslim was important to me at that time. She knew that. I was her *boyfriend*! I was extremely offended by this, and I was like I don't know if I want to continue with this. She apologised [...] we just didn't talk anymore about it. We talked very little about religion. And we broke up eventually.

J: [...] at the end of my first job interview the panel asked me 'are you *adopted*?' I was taken aback. I replied, 'no I am not' and they said, 'oh your Swedish is so good.'

U: What does that mean? Why that question?

J: You see, in order have good Swedish you can be adopted but you cannot be an immigrant.

U: Why?

J: Because the only way to have good Swedish, in their minds, is if you have Swedish parents and you live in Swedish areas. But not when you are a Pakistani kid, with Pakistani parents, living in a ghetto! Even though the area where I was interviewed in Stockholm has many South Asian immigrants.

What is interesting is that the girlfriend had dated a Muslim man prior to her relationship with Javed and was now once again with another one. So, while multiculturalism and diversity bring people in close quarters to each other, providing opportunities for intimacy, it also challenges the very the principles upon which it stands

showing that some discursive logics outweigh others in private. Javed once again finds himself navigating an insider/outsider position in an interaction with his girlfriend who openly says to him she thinks 'religion was dumb and stupid', in so saying, not only creates a boundary of me-us (secular-smart and intelligent)/ them (religious-dumb and stupid) but also crosses the boundary of mutual respect and recognition of differences.

The injury one feels in a personal relationship where equality norms are violated by casting a partner's religion in derogatory terms, marks another tenuous moment in Javed's desire to belong. That contradiction creates tension in personal relations with the 'other'. What is worth paying attention to is who *takes liberty* and who *suffers the injury*, to observe how power operates as symbolic violence in intimate relations where one partner belongs to the dominant culture and the other to an ethnicised and racialised minority culture (Singla, 2018). In saying that his '*religion* was dumb and stupid', and 'people' who follow religion are also dumb and stupid, is a similar situation to his peer in university referring to '*other* others' as 'blatte' in his presence; as a condemnatory and judgemental gaze (Khosravi, 2009).

The normalisation of a racial slur in a friendship in the case of the latter and blatant dismissive judgement of an identity of one's partner who has a strong attachment to the religious beliefs in question; shows a lack of sensitivity that is normalised and experienced as the unquestioned privilege of whiteness that those who invoke this privilege themselves are alienated from. The girlfriend asserts a form of intellectual and moral superiority, implicitly positioning her own secular or non-religious beliefs as more rational and valid, showing how Swedish whiteness intersects with secularity incrementally to bolster one's status in a mixed-couple relationship, pointing to the pervasive nature of secular privilege and the marginalisation of religious identities. Contrary to mixed unions being romanticised as signs of 'integration' (Osanami Törngren et al., 2016) breaking down racial boundaries, this example shows the challenges of navigating mixed coupledness with the dominant Islamo/xenophobic gaze in the Swedish society (Khosravi, 2009).

'I was her boyfriend' highlights that if something so crude is said about someone so close, what would the reaction be towards someone who was more distant and less known, showing the extent to which racial prejudices can operate in interpersonal and institutional relations. Some relationships fashioned in the public realm play out in the personal realm. Carrying the weight of being religious in a secular society, bearing an identity that is 'spoilt' in public discourse, places Javed outside the hierarchy of power, as can be seen by his response, he is 'offended' and does not know if he 'want [s] to continue with this'. In feeling the emotion of offence, he resists having to justify his position, thinking instead to *act* rather than *speak*. Who is relegated to a state of justification and who is in the authority to demand, ask, or state (as if speaking the truth) shows a lack of 'power with' but rather 'power over' (Allen, 1998) and brings

under consideration the notion of subalternity, which is in this case attributed to the partner who is male, person of colour, and Muslim vis a vis the partner who is female, white and secular.

Subalternity is experienced as a situation that asymmetrically privileges certain positions of certain actors over others. The social location of actors with their constellation of intersections combine to decipher how power will operationalise, and who it will favour or privilege, in a given social context, in a given social situation. Feeling voiceless as a subaltern, or having a voice, but one that is unable to speak to the privileges of his significant other, he cannot speak to defend himself or to be heard. Even though his girlfriend ‘apologises’ they ‘just did not talk anymore about it’, the elephant in the room stays in the room, except that the elephant is now aware that it is too big for the room. Ignoring something is more than simply failing to notice it.

Indeed, it is quite often the result of some pressure to actively disregard it. Such pressure is usually a product of social norms of attention designed to separate what we conventionally consider ‘noteworthy’ from what we come to disregard as mere background ‘noise’. Megan Boler (1999: 180) refers to ‘inscribed habits of (in)attention’ a form of affective selectivity pointing to the practices, ideas, discourses that we are used to not pay attention to for example race, whiteness, and difference. Avoidance of difficult conversations that can reveal deep-seated issues of power imbalance, lack of respect, and cultural insensitivity in the relationship while raising broader societal challenges of integrating diverse beliefs and identities in a way that honours and respects each individual’s lived experience.

Speaking of elephants in the room, in another room, a professional one where Javed is being interviewed for a job, particular social conventions of attention and communication are displayed in the solicited question ‘are you adopted<sup>60</sup>?’ There is a clear racialising dimension to the idea of who can be expected to speak fluent, ‘correct’ Swedish: bodies coded as white are often associated with fluency in the language, while non-white bodies are not (Ben-Zion, 2014: 35; Hübinette et al., 2012: 23). When understood as an adopted<sup>61</sup> child, who has grown up in a Swedish middle-class family,

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<sup>60</sup> According to the fourth official report of Adoption – till vilket pris? (Adoption – at what price?) published in 2003, Sweden had the largest population of intercountry adoptees in Europe and the highest per capita rate of intercountry adoption in the world (in Yngvesson, 2015). Moreover, Ben-Zion (2014: 24) describes Stockholm as the Capital of Trans colour Adoptees. For latest numbers see Statistics Sweden. June 20, 2023. Number of adopted children in Sweden in 2022 by country of origin. In *Statista*. Retrieved April 25, 2024, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/531218/sweden-adoptions-by-country-of-origin/>.

<sup>61</sup> Adoptees also face ‘special dilemma’ ‘of belonging to the majority culture but of often being met as though they do not’ (Cederblad, Höök, Irhammar, & Mercke, 1994, p. 78, emphasis added). Cederblad noted

one can be ascribed other social significations: motivated, good with the language (Swedish) and a high-performing Swedish individual (Trondman, 2006: 438). 'But not when you are a Pakistani kid, with Pakistani parents, living in a ghetto!' then one is ascribed the status of an 'immigrant' a category of Swedes of colour who are racialised, proletarianised and in many cases also criminalised (Hübinette & Andersson, 2012: 101). By calling Javed adopted a boundary is invoked that places him closer to the white Swedish 'we' collective which shows how things become meaningful only when placed in socially created categories giving them a name, an identity and certain valued or devalued characteristics (Zerubavel, 1993).

Perhaps meant as a compliment, Javed is taken aback and slightly offended by the insinuation especially since the context is a professional and not a personal one, and there is a hierarchy involved in one party (white, male Swedish) offering a job and the other (brown, male, ethno-racial-Swedish) seeking it. Moreover, there is racial appropriation at play, whereby the 'good' characteristics of Swedish society are projected in Javed's success and not attributed to his immigrant parents who most often are a fixed to a category prone to fail at raising good successful children unlike their Swedish counterparts (references to studies that show immigrant parents as failures). What is striking is taken for granted ways of noticing certain characteristics and ignoring others. performed by members of particular social communities (Zerubavel, 2006) showing where the power to notice and to bring something to attention rests without accountability or recourse.

Javed does not speak up at school, he does not speak up with his friends, he does not speak with his girlfriend nor in the job interview. His silence, in a way, positions him as the perfect 'non-confrontational Swede'<sup>62</sup> (Daun, 1996: 76) , an example of what Homi Bhabha (1984) calls the double face of 'mimicry', emulating by practice and resisting by silence, the ambivalence of being in a 'third space'; knowing one's privileges, but not yet with the knowledge that they can be enacting without having earned them first, in so doing, experiencing being 'uncomfortable' and 'offended'.

To decry 'stigmatisation' by 'speaking up' may be seen as making excuses; the idea of demonstrating one's worth by being upwardly mobile rather than decrying stigmatisation and discrimination in everyday interactions is an individualist response to 'being overlooked' and made to feel 'unimportant' (Lamont, 2016). Being a part of

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that in Sweden, the adoptee was 'juridically an immigrant,' but that 'emotionally, in the view of many adoptive parents, the adopted child differs from other immigrant groups' (1994, p. 75).

<sup>62</sup> "Conflict avoidance should perhaps therefore be interpreted as a kind of Swedish 'self-understanding,' a symbolic construction of one's own cultural identity, in opposition to the malevolence [occurring] in other parts of the world." (Ehn, 1983 in Daun, 1996:76). This means that a cultural norm that prescribes harmony and amicability can make an aggressive person rein in his or her feelings in certain situations.



the whole and being the whole are different feelings associated with belonging to a nation. Javed's family history in Sweden has no lineage that can be traced back to contributing to the whole or being the whole. It is a story in the making and a script that is still being written.

The understanding rendered to power in this dissertation and key to understanding participants' narratives is understood not solely as something prohibitive and repressive but also as something productive that creates and shapes subjects (Foucault, 1991, 2000). Javed's trajectory, traced through the critical incidents cited above, creates the productive space to re-evaluate his desire to belong with how to belong as a Swede. He starts shedding the 'parts' of his identity that are holding him back from being, according to him, successfully integrated into the whole of Swedish society.

Moving to a new city away from the city where he grew up, joining academia, and leaving Islam are the first of his journey. In the subsequent stage, he meets a like-minded white Swedish woman, falls in love, and marries her. When they have a child, he is given a Swedish first name and both Javed and his wife decide together to change both their last names to a new Swedish one. With this decision no trace of Javed's Pakistani-Muslim heritage remains nor is transferred to the subsequent generation. Going through these life events he finally he comes to a point in our interview where he says:

[...] I am Swedish *now*...I feel Swedish [...] My friend calls me a coconut (*laughs*).

[...] In the end I think it's the fact that I am not *invandrare* anymore, you know the word? I am *not immigrant anymore* [my emphasis].

The distance to be covered between the fixed positions of 'invandrare' and 'Swedish' requires movement and a sense of direction that one is also concurrently being directed towards. A bulk of Javed's experiences provide him with evidence that despite the national context of diversity and multiculturalism, policing of the boundary of Swedishness, is based on either-or logic, that you are more of/less of one and thus you cannot be both-and (Brubaker, 2016a; Hage, 2006). Needing to prove to oneself and others that one is Swedish but 'the Swedish' that is different from its immigrant 'others,' while gesturing toward the histories and inequalities that set migrant bodies into motion, also brings to surface how subjects choose to align with some others against other others (Ahmed, 2004). In practice, this entails adopting behaviours and characteristics perceived as more Swedish and downplaying visible aspects of Muslim and Pakistani identity.

In understanding the nature of home and belonging, it's crucial to grasp both the anchored moments in place, location, and context, as well as the fluidity and deviations from these anchors. Transitioning from a marginalised neighbourhood to a university

town, attaining elite status through education, advancing economically in a professional field, gaining social acceptance through marriage to a Swedish partner, and nurturing a Swedish family all mark significant shifts that 'now' allow Javed to identify as and 'feel' Swedish.

In the sense of having some kind of closure and a fairy tale ending, Javed concludes 'In the *end* I think it's the fact that I am not invandrare anymore' reveals the source of his existential angst - of not feeling included, accepted, and discredited - that becomes a productive resource for reimagining inclusion, reinventing acceptance, and renovating social/insider status. That said, the choice an agent makes seeking to solidify their insider status comes at the expense of eroding the nuances within insider identities (Hage, 2006) inadvertently upholding binary thinking. Moreover, it is those who deeply value their sense of belonging and fear its fragility that often resort to striving for higher status by distancing themselves from stigmatised labels (*ibid.*), which we see Javed's case as he moves away from disqualifying labels such as invandrare, blatte, working class, Pakistani, and Muslim.

Symbolic violence includes dispositions to acting which involve forms of classification, subordination, hierarchy and domination (Bourdieu 1980). These related to social fields such as language, education, religion, family structures and state power (Bourdieu, 1985). Individuals may be involved in classification struggles as they play the rules of the game within fields, in an individualistic jostling for power where they seek higher forms of various capitals (Anthias, 2020: 35). In shedding his Muslim identity, Javed can be seen as employing a strategy to fulfil his desire to belong by 'becoming' more socially mobile in Sweden.

Interestingly, according to Javed's perspective, being Swedish requires proof, achievement, or attainment. However, his friend's reminder of being labelled a 'coconut' - outwardly brown but inwardly perceived as white - suggests that despite overcoming various hurdles to secure his current sense of safety, his identity remains contested. He identifies as white but is perpetually confined within a brown body.

To draw conclusions from Javed's narration on his trajectory from how he 'loved being a Muslim' to 'I couldn't like being a Muslim' the following excerpts poignantly illustrate the 'longing' in the desire to belong:

[...] I asked my mom once when I was in university: 'have you ever questioned your life like how it ended up?'. And she just sat there ... silent for a while ...and then she said: 'No we never thought like that when I was brought up.' I asked her another time: 'Have you ever questioned your religion? Why can't I go to a club with my other friends?' And she said ... well in the end she said something like... 'some things you are just not meant to question, you just can't have answers for everything'. That really didn't sit well with me. I mean especially since in academia everything is about learning and you know searching for answers so..I don't know that did not fly with me at all, just accepting..

[...] I always wondered since I came to this city, it is very academic and all around there are discussions going on. I wondered, was my upbringing so because I came from a working-class family? You know I ask myself, if my parents, still Pakistani, brought up in Pakistan, you know were highly educated, had seen stuff, would it be different?

[...] I asked her you know 'why do I need Islam in my home?'. The last time we had this ... was a couple of months back only ... and I asked my mom, ok so tell me is this worse that I left Islam, but I am the man I am or that you have a son like a Muslim friend I had who is doing drugs and is into criminality- which one of us is worse? And she said of course you are the better one. Then I said, 'what's the problem then?'

Javed's conversation with his mother when he is going through an existential crisis at the university, questioning religion and his immigrant status in light of his experiences adds to his frustration at not finding answers he is seeking. There is a generational and experiential divide between mother and son. Parent generation has been socialised in different social and cultural system. Besides their experiences in the labour market or in language classes, they might not always be aware of the cross-pressures to which their offspring may be subjected since certain features of their children's socialisation is beyond their own range of experience (Brah, 1978).

While for Javed's mother the response some things are not 'meant to be questioned' or being okay with not having 'answers for everything' is aligned with her life, Javed finds he cannot 'fly' with the logic of staying blissfully in a perpetual state of question, a way of thinking that is not aligned with his life in academia nor with the dominant culture. In this dialogue, the underlying question he poses to his mother revolves around ascertaining the purpose of maintaining an identity that constantly requires defence; that is ridiculed, minimised stigmatised and rendered deviant – especially if its value cannot be articulated by the very people who are the source of its inheritance? Without an explanation, how is Javed, who was beginning to internalise stereotypical portrayals of immigrants and Muslims and measuring himself against them, supposed to find closure?

This is a touching moment. There is something very poignant and earnest about the dialogue between a mother and a son as they try to dig deeper into an existential exploration and ponder on the generational divide between them. The situation requires epistemic humility on both ends. Especially since both Javed and his mother seem to be ill equipped to bear the burden of the other's generational existential. Though in the moment there is a woeful melancholy that hangs heavy, the vulnerability can open a productive portal for playful 'world'-travelling (Lugones, 1990).

Lugones' analysis underscores the importance of fostering and embracing diverse ways of *knowing* within familial relationships. By engaging in playful world-travelling and adopting a loving perception that respects and values different cultural perspectives,

individuals can cultivate deeper understanding and connection across generational and cultural divides.

We observe Javed embracing a compassionate perspective as he reformulates his question to himself, probing his mother's uncharted territories with a nuanced inquiry to travel into her 'world'. This approach nuances his examination, intertwining interpretations of religion with complexities of working-class lives and mentalities. Additionally, when his mother emotes her disappointment to Javed about him not being Muslim, he solicits questions towards her in a way that in principle subverts his mother's disappointment into pride at the kind of human being he is. If to be a Muslim meant that he becomes a better human being, which his mother agrees he is in his principles without the Muslim label, 'what is the problem then?' he asks effectively challenging her perspective.

Moreover, when Javed's mother expresses her disappointment in his non-Muslim identity, he redirects the conversation in a manner that subtly transforms her disappointment into pride in the person he has become. 'What's the problem then?' he inquires, effectively challenging her perspective.

Leila Ahmed (1999) in her memoir *Border Passage* writes about Islam, as she received from the women in her family in Cairo before she moved to the United States. Much like the women she inherited Islam from, the content of Islam was gentle, generous, pacifist, and inclusive, with a touch of mysticism. For them, religion primarily concerned inner virtues. While outward expressions like prayer and fasting might signify true religiosity, they were not necessarily paramount. Being Muslim was about conduct, internal disposition, attitude toward others, and the state of one's heart. Ahmed is conscientiously considering the ethical principles of Islam, recognising the diverse pathways of belief within the faith. And stressing that spirituality itself is a process of waxing and waning intensities.

Migration disrupts the memory chain for both the first and second-generations. The first-generation clings to a simplified version of Islam, fearing it might lose its relevance for future generations in a new context (Bilgrami, 1992). Meanwhile, the second-generation experiences this inherited version as outdated and restrictive, particularly in terms of social mobility. Thus, Javed question to his mother, is like Leila Ahmed's description of different ways one can be Muslim, a self-development that is internal and aligned with broader Islamic principles even if he does not subscribe wholesale to the identity.

When the context in which religion is inherited is lost, it is like inheriting a broken history- looking at oneself through shards of broken mirror projects an unrecognisable image. One forgets what it is like to look at an unbroken mirror that projects an image that is whole and not in pieces. Javed is examining the deeper significance of being a Muslim with his mother, transcending mere labels, and questions whether focusing

solely on the label itself serves any meaningful purpose. The question 'what is the problem then' lingers between mother and son. Just as some questions ought to. Without resolve and without judgement. To allow the planted seed to germinate.

Which brings the analysis to a place where temporality and life course offers another space for exploring one's repertoires for interpreting one's subjectivity. The following excerpts show Javed's reflections (now) on his past conduct (then) and his longing to return to being Pakistani (now):

[...] I look back a lot about how I told my parents I was not Muslim I would just like to go back and redo it. I hate myself for how I was back then - because it was black and white. If you look at how Islam is viewed in the world today... it is...there is ONE label and that is the Muslim, you are - if you say you are a Muslim. That is wrong. Being Muslim, if I just look at my closest relations, it is a spectrum. They are soooo different and they all consider themselves to be very strong Muslims What I am saying is that I did wrong, I don't agree with myself.

[...] The older I get the more I am going back to being Pakistani, which is weird I cannot explain... gemenskap this community feeling, secure feeling, like everyone belongs, not that I don't think I belong but there is still a barrier, a distance here that I don't feel in Stockholm [...] I have a very Swedish life here and a very Pakistani life there. For me Islam happens in Stockholm<sup>63</sup>.

Javed undergoes a profound journey marked by a sense of remorse and dissatisfaction with himself, along with a recognition of wrongdoing and a lack of sensitivity, which initially foster an 'arrogant perception' characterised by a monolithic view of Muslims. However, this perspective undergoes a significant transformation into a 'loving perception.' Time emerges as a critical factor influencing one's self-conceptions and perceptions of others, entailing relational work and shifts in interpretive repertoires. Islam becomes intertwined with working-class status, further compounded by factors such as immigration, ethnicity, and religion. To achieve social mobility, Javed feels compelled to forsake Islam and shed working-class identity. The metaphorical barrier-distance, illustrated by the epithet 'coconut' bestowed by a friend, suggests that belonging transcends superficial appearances and delves into deeper layers of identity.

Moreover, Javed reflects a clear boundary-making process between his past religious life and his current identity. By saying 'Islam happens in Stockholm,' he indicates that his connection to Islam is now confined to interactions with his parental family in Sweden, while his own nuclear family life is separate and free from religious influence. This distinction creates clear borders between his religious past and secular present,

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<sup>63</sup> Javed's analysis has been vetted by him. All references to locations are used with permission.

ensuring that these aspects of their identity do not blur and allowing him to navigate both spheres without conflict, despite his nostalgia.

This journey involves the realisation that discontent, and joy often stem from the same source, leading to the metaphorical opening of a 'third-eye' (Anzaldúa, 1987). The comprehension of 'double vision' shows consciousness expands to understand that the individual subject is seldom able to carry out the perfect 'dialectical synthesis' that preserves all the advantages of contexts it inhabits by transcending all its problems. There may be a number of different 'syntheses' each of which avoids a different subset of the problems and preserves a different subset of benefits (Narayan, 1999: 223).

In the following excerpts, Amin and Alina, two siblings who were interviewed separately, said they grew up with Muslim influences and identified as Muslim during my early years of life, but both mentioned at the time of participant selection 'I am not Muslim' (Alina) and 'I don't consider myself Muslim' (Amin). Since their stories and reasons entangle for leaving Islam entangle, they are presented together:

*'Father Became Distant'*

[...] I think they (parents) were, from the start, uh... religious in the sense that they did what their culture told them to do. But I think deep down inside, they didn't believe religion. That's what I think.

[...] My father became distant from religion [...] since beginning of his life, but since the culture is strong when it comes to this, he never openly said it [...] to me of course he says it if he would say it openly his friends will not like it at all. He is always pretending to be Muslim because of the culture and that is very interesting [...] even to his closest friends well that's because culture is the way it is.

U: So, your dad does the rituals when it is necessary to belong in a group?

A: Yes

U: And he wouldn't do it in private?

A: No.

U: And your mom?

A: She has completely abandoned religion.

U: Would she be able to say to them that I have abandoned my faith?

A: No, actually she is... she might still have that part (faith) with her relatives (there in United States) but not here, not with her friends here and the people she knows here.

U: And you?

A: The thing with me is that umm with my father's friends I never talk about religion. I have always been taught that you shouldn't like bring it up so I don't do it, I just like..and I never get asked if I believe or not so that's good (chuckles) because I don't really want to lie. Umm but umm I guess I kind of somehow pretend still since I don't openly say it. But with my friends who are mostly non-Muslims I am honest and say I don't believe... in religion.

[...]

A: My mom she actually became distant from all of her Muslim friends slowly, because my parents aren't together anymore and so ... I think it was like a clash because my mom, she doesn't really like the culture because it often suppresses women.

U: Culture is the Muslim culture or the Pakistani culture?

A: both I think

U: It's difficult to make a distinction?

A: uhh I guess but the culture that I have been a part of has always been like, I mean ... for instance in the groups that we were meeting there would always be a small room for the women and they were sitting there and talking only about their children and things like that and the men were in a bigger room and they were talking more about like political things and bigger issues and it was always very very divided [...] it was always like my mom had to eat after the men, it was always like that. Also, when we were at other people's places it was always like the women cooked and the men ate and left and then the women ate with the kids it was always like that and I have never been a fan of it I don't like it.

[...] people here really have a negative view of the Muslim religion even if they don't openly say it. The view on like immigrants and Muslims is going downhill. There are so many things happening in the world ... so if I was...like uhhhhmmm heavily Muslim, *it would be hard to melt into society*, I think so..

(Amin 28, Male, second-generation)

### *'Breaking Up with Religion'*

[...] We socialised a lot with Muslim families, and I always felt that even though my parents are Muslim that our family was still a little bit different from theirs [...] I feel that might have opened up options which then led to my choosing to not be Muslim.

[...] I thought I'm Muslim and I don't eat pork and I believe in Allah because that is what my parents were saying and because that's what just by association I did too. And then I think maybe around age 10 I started thinking about it more like what is this actually and how do other people practice it how do my parents practice it and what does it mean to me, does it mean anything to me? uhh and I think if I would say a

specific time from when I broke up between religion and me I think that would be maybe 15ish something like that.

[...] I started questioning my own choices it wasn't because my parents were doing something in one way or the other it was more that I wasn't really feeling it. I suppose I wasn't really feeling that there was a presence that I could sort of turn to you know, it just wasn't there, and I think later on as I thought more and more about it, I still find that sometimes I do have spirituality. I'm more of an agnostic I suppose I don't believe in nothing, but I don't believe in one specific thing either.

[...] I think also here for me my identity I suppose is more Swedish and because I think my mom and dad their identities to me aren't really to me Pakistani or Muslim

(Alina 29, Female, second-generation)

Amin describes his distance from religion in terms of his father becoming distant from religion. Amin's father<sup>64</sup> is a political refugee to Sweden who had to leave Pakistan in late 70's because he was fighting for democracy in the country. In Sweden, according to Amin, his father upholds religion to the extent that allows him cultural membership into the group of his Pakistani friends but was not keen on transferring religion (Islam) and religious beliefs to his children.

Moreover, according to Alina and Amin, their mother was a free thinker long before she arrived in Sweden, by virtue of her travels and her keen interest in literature and the arts as a young girl. After her divorce to their father and remarriage to a Swedish man, she had shed her religious identity altogether, though it was not something she openly declared to her relatives who she maintained close transnational relationship with. Alina more than Amin also maintained that contact. Notably, Alina and Amin's mother had no living relations in Pakistan anymore nor an ancestral home. Most of her relatives were scattered across continents in the Pakistani diaspora in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Alina mentioned that the family met regularly at pre-decided destinations across the world during summer. Or the relatives travelled between these countries to each other's homes to maintain familial ties. Tahseen Shams (2021) insightfully offers the concept of 'heartland'—distinct from immigrants' 'homeland'—to better distinguish Muslims' religion-based diasporic expressions from their ethnicity based transnational ones.

The heartland lies in the hearts of these actors and their relations, that is no longer bound to a location. It is a more complex nexus than one fixed to origin and/or destination countries. It brings to fore the transcendental quality of contexts that impact immigrant identities and belonging through their myriad global connections

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<sup>64</sup> I had a three-hour interview with Alina and Amin's father. He chose to remain off the record.



that influence not only how others view immigrants and their descendants but also how immigrants and their descendants view themselves.

According to Alina, there are few Pakistani or Muslim attributes that are upheld in the family in Sweden. Besides their father's emotional and strategic connection to religion to remain friends with his Pakistani friends, and their mothers extended relations abroad, both siblings identify as spiritual-ethical beings but not as religious ones. Moreover, Alina being closer to her mother maintains ties with her maternal relatives (abroad) and Amin being closer to his father maintains ties to his group of Pakistani and Muslim friends in Sweden. Neither sibling has visited Pakistan and has no connection to the country since their parents have no connection to the country.

Post-colonial partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 impacted both families such that they have roots in United India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Given that their father was exiled from the country (East Pakistan) and their mother's relatives were scattered across the globe, while their father maintains an emotional attachment to homeland their mother has no emotional or material attachment to Pakistan. The father, according to Amin, maintains language as a medium to maintain connection to the Pakistani community in Sweden, the mother on the other hand has mastered Swedish and her home language is either Swedish or English, like Amin and Alina.

Amin as mentioned earlier (Chapter 4: 85; also see Chapter 6: 155-156) has a Swedish name which he uses for his wife, Swedish colleagues, and friends; and when he is with his father's friends and acquaintances he knows through his father, he uses his Pakistani name. He switches between names very comfortably when he switches between his company. He said he did it as a courtesy and a show of respect for his father to whom it mattered: 'I don't feel like it is a problem, it's not that big a deal for me. I am willing to do that for him (father) you know, with his part of like friends in his life *because I really care about my father*' (my emphasis). Amin's belonging is closely tied to his father's sense of belonging whose sense of belonging is tied to his friendship groups that serve as a temporary respite and provide him with a homely feeling. Belonging to the father-son (kin)ship bond fosters a sense of (kin)dred intimacy in offering (kin)dness to enrich relational experiences by recognising shared humanity and interdependency (Brownlie & Anderson, 2017: 1224). Belonging is about caring. And caring means acts of kindness that culminate in interlocking material, relational, symbolic and imaginative everyday practices (Werbner, 2013: 409), such as spatial and situational name-switching.

In their interviews, both siblings highlighted the lack of nuance they encountered in their childhood concerning the cultural normative structures upheld by the Pakistani community and their intersection with religion, which negatively impacted their efforts to maintain their ethnic as well as religious identity. Consequently, like Javed, they equated being Pakistani with being Muslim, prompting them to relinquish both

identities. Additionally, Alina expressed that throughout her life, she primarily sensed ‘the absence of a presence,’ a feeling compounded by parental ambivalence (see Chapter 6: 160-161) and experiences of cultural-religious contradictions, leading her to identify as ‘spiritual,’ abstaining from belief in either ‘nothing’ or any ‘specific thing.’

Like Javed, who grew up in an underprivileged area of Stockholm, Amin and Alina face similar challenges despite growing up in a white, middle-class neighbourhood in Lund<sup>65</sup>. Their visibly non-white appearance marks them as immigrants, which they already negotiate with (see Chapter 6: 141). To add to that another layer of complexity in straddling a Muslim identity that is perceived negatively poses the dilemma of ‘it would be hard to melt into society’. Social context is far from neutral or innocent in recognition of identities that are valorised or stigmatised. Social actors understand implications of hidden social forces that direct their actions. Alina’s reflection that to her, her parents are neither Pakistani nor Muslim; that along with the siblings’ own interpretations of culture and religion, and the valuation of those identities in the national context; all contribute to them leaving behind Pakistani and Muslim identities for a more Swedish one. This shows how Amin and Alina negotiate the ‘we’ of the nation with the ‘we’ of the family and ‘we’ of the self. Reconstituted as Swedish confers Amin and Alina with a sense of worth, establishing a positive valorised subjectivity, and an identity they can align with their conscience.

From their narratives, several conclusions emerge. Firstly, the parent generation’s connection to religion as influential figures for their descendants shapes the latter’s religious affiliation. The maintenance or abandonment of this affiliation hinges on the quality and relevance of this relationship to the descendants’ sense of belonging. Secondly, the interpretative repertoires of the descendants play a crucial role in their negotiation of ethnic and religious identities within the context of national belonging. Lastly, the connection to family extends beyond the homeland(s) (parental and descendants) to heartlands, whereby family makes the place more salient than place on its own.

## Shifting Boundaries: Being Muslim

Whereas in the previous section we saw participants creating a distance between their stigmatised identities- immigrant and Muslim- that are defined negatively, reified, and subordinated in discourses and interactions, in this section participants reflect and

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<sup>65</sup> Understanding of perception and discourses of certain identities (immigrant and Muslim) crosses the boundaries of residential segregation in terms of economic class.

introspect reasons for the awakening of the stigmatised identity of Muslim in the Swedish context and how it is deployed for positive self-identification.

The dynamic interplay of contextual factors often leads individuals to experience a gradual transformation in their awareness and expression of their Muslim identity. This evolution is characterised by a shifting of boundaries, wherein dormant aspects of one's Muslimness are gradually awakened and become more pronounced and conspicuous (see for example Alwall, 2002; Berglund, 2013b; Carlbom, 2006; Olsson, 2009; Ramadan, 2003). As individuals navigate various contexts and encounters, they may find themselves becoming increasingly attuned to their Muslim identity, due to changes in social, political, or personal circumstances. These shifts in awareness and expression between internal convictions and external influences are explored below.

### *'Cousin From Pakistan'*

[...] it was not in school. Probably coming to college and university that's when the difference started to play ... after age 15 ... because in school as I said everyone had everyone was a foreigner, so it was natural to ask where your *second parent* was coming from or whatever, so you still belonged to that group. *But then* going on the college especially like you meet *pure Swedes* especially in university ... that's also when I started exploring my Muslim identity a little bit more.

[...] I don't know where the turning point came well there was there were a few moments.

It happened when my cousin moved from Pakistan to Sweden and as you know no matter how religious or non-religious you are in Pakistan everyone prays Friday prayers and everyone fasts in Ramadan [...] I started hanging around with him a lot and he was living with some Pakistanis well and somehow without any formal schooling I just picked up the language combined with travelling to Pakistan back and forth [...] Now that I remember there's another friend where it all started from. This was a guy who was brought up in Pakistan whose dad got posted in Sweden. We became very good friends. So, my dad knew his dad and that's how we got to be friends. And he was from a very religious family so they would pray five times a day do all the right things, *things Muslims are supposed to do*, things that show outwards. I spent a lot of time at his place. So, when I was with him, spending time and staying at his family's place, I would start praying as well. And fasting. That and then my cousin, I think that's where the big change happened.

[...] I sort of got my eyes opened. So, I started reading up more I started going with him to Friday prayers at first, I wouldn't understand anything not speaking the language then there would be some people translating. I started looking at a lot of YouTube clips going to some sites to listen to lectures. Also, in the big mosque they have an organisation

called SUM<sup>66</sup> so they would have lectures in Swedish as well and they have yearly conferences. I started attending these events and reading up learning more and more about my religion. It started from going to Friday prayers to praying five times, doing maybe 10 days of fasting first year of Ramadan or 15 days -20 the next then to fasting the entire Ramadan, and from not eating halal to eating halal and uhhh yea so slowly slowly embracing my religion more and more let's say from 15 till 17. And that's college as well so I would take time off from school and work to go and say Friday prayers.

(Khizer 25, Male, second-generation)

Growing up in a Finnish-Pakistani home as well as going to a Finnish international school that admitted children who were descendants of mixed marriages involving at least one Finnish parent, Khizer felt he 'belonged.' In school, everyone had at least one foreign parent, leading them to view themselves in some sense as foreigners. Given the context of school and his social circle, it was both common and normal for students to inquire about each other's second parent's origins. Khizer described his father as being 'a bit of a patriot' valuing his Pakistani identity with 'love and affection' displayed by his restraint from obtaining a Swedish passport until he could hold both Pakistani and Swedish citizenships.

Consequently, Khizer and his sister had loosely been socialised into being Pakistani and Muslims, given that Khizer's mother had a Finnish Christian family background. Thus, the first time he started exploring his 'Muslim identity a little bit more' was when he goes to a Swedish college where he meets 'pure Swedes'. These are Swedes who have two white Swedish parents with traceable lineage in the country. That is when his embodied and familial ethnic and religious difference is so stark that he first feels the need for some reconciliation with the 'difference' of his multiple identities against the perceived 'sameness' he encounters in college. While Khizer has always been in possession of a religious/sacred capital<sup>67</sup> (Bourdieu, 1986), it becomes more meaningful once activated through explicit contrast (Scott, 2018: 36). When he encounters a space that is unmarked by whiteness (Brekhus, 2008: 1063; 2020: 109-110) his marked body now sticks out (Ahmed, 2013).

Khizers's journey from not actively participating in religious practices to adopting them is further influenced by his interactions with religiously observant friends and family members showing the significant role of social networks in shaping beliefs, behaviours, and identity formation. The relationship between bodies, places, and mobility - with specific histories locations and forms of displacement and emplacement

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<sup>66</sup> Sveriges Unga Muslimer (Sweden's Young Muslims) formed in 1991 disbanded in 2020.

<sup>67</sup> The term 'sacred' is adapted to capital to show how religious or spiritual resources function similarly to capital in various social and economic contexts.

also become apparent. Both his friend's family as well as cousin have moved from Pakistan showing the relationship of those who move with those who stay put such that 'staying put' is not without movement (Ahmed, Castada, et al., 2020: 10). This also shows how geographical distances shrink, places that are elsewhere impact here and now (Anthias, 2020; Shams, 2020), through contact and relationships that are kin or kin-like. The movement of people compresses geographical and cultural barriers, highlighting the significance of diaspora space (Brah, 2022) as dynamic portals. This space serves as revolving doors, showcasing the flow and interaction of identities not as isolated constructs but as fluid and diverse exchanges.

Thus, contact with diasporic kin and kin-like relations whose technologies of self (see Mahmood, 2011: 13) are more aligned with religious and cultural practices from the country of his father's origins are consequently used as resources in Khizer's own identity activation vis-à-vis his belonging needs and their emplacement to Sweden. Khizer's interactions with his friend increases his exposure to religious observances, such as Friday prayers and fasting during Ramadan, which he describes as 'things Muslims are supposed to do' exhibiting the lack of such practices at home translates for him to a not so real/inauthentic representation of being Muslim. The sociality of encounters or the intensity of what it means to *live with* others involves distinguishing oneself from them (S. Ahmed, 2005: 104). This can activate a dormant identity, making its boundaries more salient and noticeable (Tilly, 2004: 223).

Upon his cousin's arrival, he starts hanging out with him and his other Pakistani friends that improves his Urdu language. It adds to his zeal for acquiring more religious knowledge, learning proper rituals, and practice. It also makes him realise what is missing from his upbringing -garnering a yearning for more authenticity when making a claim about who he is. There is a tension between 'being' and 'doing' in belonging to his Muslim identity. Khizer wants to feel his 'being' Muslim by 'doing' (performance/practice) Muslimness; a change whereby its cause is felt as residing in him rather than the situation or the context. Exhibiting auxiliary characteristics as those attributes that are expected to go along with an identity or role. These are performances of authenticity that give meaning and a sense of belonging (Brekhus, 2020) through consistency of and sincerity in practice.

It is important to note the practices that make Khizer's religious habitus more aligned with his Muslim identity are prayers, fasting, and eating halal food. He stopped drinking alcohol and going to parties. During this phase he stopped spending time with his friends and focused only on his learning. He also mentioned feeling a bit disappointed with his parents for not teaching him Islam properly and for not following practices that were now seemingly important for him to feel a sense of belonging to being Muslim. The fact that he had to embark on this journey on his own, while he had the support of his parents, he mentioned laughingly that they were scared 'with my

beard and being locked up in my room' that he was becoming radicalised. Islam and being Muslim in what Khizer described as 'routines and rituals' is extremely important to him, and he balances that with what he calls 'soft universal values in the Qur'an' that preach love and doing good deeds. He looks up to his mother who is 'is a cushion and balance that make me stay away from extremes and his sister whose religiosity motto is *Religiositet är inte i sjalen, det ligger i själen* translating to something like 'your iman or your level of faith is not in your scarf it is in your soul.'

The sliding scale of familial religiosity that places importance on both 'being' and 'doing' in varying scales keeps Khizer in check in his search for personal authenticity as a Muslim. He describes his current Muslim identity is a master status as well as a lifestyle choice. Negotiating one's authentic individual membership within a collective identity involves a balancing act between demonstrating commitment to the group through conformity to its codes and values and representing oneself as individually authentic (Brekhus, 2020: 84).

Khizer recognises that his family (as a group) perform their Muslim identities in unique and personal ways compared to his Pakistani friend and cousin from Pakistan (group of kin and kin-like social relations) who focus more on overt and stricter interpretations of performing practices of faith. Since authenticity is also a function of scope and duration, Khizer while being more religious than his family members and having gone through an intensive period of activation has over time become more balanced and accepting of the fact that there are as many Islam's as there are Muslims.

Interestingly, while Khizer's dormant Muslim identity became activated because of a realisation of his stark racial difference and a religious yearning on account of social connections to other practicing Pakistani-Muslims, his sister Arham in the excerpt below, offers another reason for her own unexpected interest in her Muslim identity.

*'Thank You SD For Giving me my Faith Back'*

[...] I didn't reflect upon my Muslim identity till the Sweden Democrats became a factor in Swedish politics. So, I wrote an article once saying thank you Sverigedemokraterna<sup>68</sup> for giving me my faith back!

[...] When I was 16 ... that means it was 2005 that's really when the Sweden Democrats also started to factor in Sweden. It is when people talked about being Muslim and about Islam whether this is Swedish or not. Then there was also, this I find it sometimes funny... not too deep ... but actually there was this Band *Outlandish* from Denmark, and they used to sing songs about changing the world. They also had a very proud Danish

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<sup>68</sup> Abbreviation (SD) is a nationalist right-wing political party in Sweden with considerable influence in Swedish politics known for its anti-immigration policies.

uhhh and Muslim identity. One of them is from Pakistan, one from Latin America, and one from Middle East. They were all religious and two of them were Muslims. I started to listen to them very much in gymnasium. They contributed quite a lot to having this pride for being Muslim, that it was not something you hide [...] that said, there was no reason to bring it forward either.

[...] I have reflected that we have very different ... like my brother he *also* became *more religious* when my cousin moved to Sweden. For him it was more just the spiritual thing I think it was something he was missing. For me it was not something missing. It was more the need to to defend myself against ... uhh... I had the right to exist the way I wanted but then the Sweden Democrats came, and they started to have this racist propaganda and that's when I felt like wow, I'm uhh I have an *obligation* now to say that I am Muslim. Sort of to show it more than I would have done otherwise. Especially since I am ... *I am quite successful* [...] I wanted to show a side ... something that is completely different from what the Sweden Democrats are trying to convince the public about Muslims. So, I had to show that I am a Muslim, active in politics, active in the red cross, a black belt in karate, a dancer etc. I just never used to mention that I am a Muslim.

[...] I started a hashtag two years ago. Hashtag mentioned that I am a Muslim, so I encouraged people to uhhh I have been in so many interviews for different things, but they never mention that I am a Muslim apart from when I am asked to come to some kind of an interview after some terrorist attack. I got sick of it. I mean I've studied at a very prestigious business school, but I never get any questions about business, but I get questions about terrorism, and I never studied terrorism or safety not even political science so that's when I started this hashtag mention that I am a Muslim ... meaning that when you do good things or everyday things, just update all these things on Facebook. It can even help someone. It could be like I went to a concert hashtag mention that I am a Muslim. Because I want when someone googles a hashtag, they should see all different kinds of Muslims.

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation [my emphasis])

Arham's religiosity in its dormant state was more about 'being' Muslim quietly and privately. The only religious practice she remembers from her childhood as relating to being a Muslim was not eating pork at home as 'something that Muslims don't do' and going for Eid prayers which she said was more about having a nice dress and going along with her father to the mosque. Another element was her father stressing on her knowing the Kalima shahadat<sup>69</sup> 'if you know that *there's no God but God and the Prophet PBUH is his messenger* that is all there is to being Muslim.' Coupled with that, according to her, there was a lot of emphasis on being a nice person and on behaving well towards others.

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<sup>69</sup> Kalima Shahadat is a **Declaration of Faith**, is a fundamental concept in Islam that encapsulates the core belief of the religion.

When she was in gymnasium, she encountered a similar experience as her brother where '[she] was a little shocked how people found being half Finnish half Pakistani as something original or special' that brought her ethnic background to the forefront. Especially in terms of 'it was normal for *us* to know *at least* three languages' and being used to peers 'from multicultural backgrounds of Finland-Kurdish, Gambia-Finland, Palestine-Finland.' When SD started gaining traction in Swedish politics framing the discourse around representing immigrants and Muslims as a threat (see Dehdari, 2022; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2019; Kenes, 2020; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2012, 2019) it becomes an additional catalyst for 'reflecting on [her] Muslim identity.'

This reflection was complemented by her interest in a music band called Outlandish, something she shyly and almost embarrassingly reveals. The ethnic and religious backgrounds of the band members along with the locus of their musical interests that explored issues of cultural identity, faith and spirituality, social issues, and personal struggles - made her more aware of how belonging is as much about 'being' as it is 'political'.

In other words, the political climate in a society can reignite a dormant identity, make it more political, and make people take it much more seriously than they previously in their everyday life. Especially since an identity valued by a vast majority of people not only in the society but across the world is being cast in racist tones, justifying inequality and discrimination. Swedishness as a common self-representation upon which the reality of a nation depends if inaccurately represents its (diasporic) minorities can lead to a fragmentation of the commonalities it purports to garner (Calhoun, 2003: 561). Thus, leading to the strategy of a dormant identity that 'hide[s]' to one that is overtly manifested as 'pride'; paying homage to the very source that seeks to stigmatise Muslims by the utterance 'thank you SD for giving me my faith back!'

Moreover, a sense of self is premised on both *distance from* and *closeness to* others; and power and reflexivity are central elements to how belonging is both negotiated and constructed (May, 2016: 750). Arham's 'poly-vocal internal dialogue' (ibid.) for interpretation of meaning becomes visible in her reflection between her brother and herself on the reasons for becoming 'more religious'. While her brother's catalyst is a spiritual 'missing' that appears in the shape of their cousin - her own awakening appears in the form of a political party whose dominant discourse of misrecognising both immigrants and Muslims as a monolithic homogenous category creates the need to 'defend', protect, protest, and 'answer back' (May, 2016: 750) as a strategy to oppose total domination of self by 'others'.

The privilege of being successful is additively seen as an 'obligation'. As a calling- to mobilise personal power 'to show it (Muslimness) more' such that 'different kinds of Muslims' are given space to represent themselves in demotic discourses to counteract the dominant ones (Baumann, 1996: 6). The hashtag 'I am a Muslim' on a public



platform draws attention to the active process of *making culture* rather than the static state of *having a culture*.

Rather than accepting labels and succumbing to the feeling that she does not belong because of her parents' immigrant backgrounds and her Muslimness, she makes it more balant. A personal response to counteract misrecognition, naming her own criteria against which she judges those who misrecognise her. Vanessa May calls this resistance a symbolic reversal whereby it is no longer the dominant group that decides where the boundary between 'us' and 'them' lies. Rather it is the dominant group that is excluded from the person's 'us' (2016: 760).

Coming back to the poly-vocal internal dialogue, it is observable from Arham's narratives the several interlocutors she is conversing with: right-wing racist propagandists; discursive extremist Muslims; Swedish peers and colleagues; non-Muslim 'others'; newspaper journalists and media presenters; struggling underprivileged Muslims. Arham's narrative shows personal responsibility for being a Muslim individual separate from a group identity while constantly being a part of that group identity, making distinctions for claims to respect, dignity and pride in her multicultural background and multiple identities with her several 'others' that become situationally significant. Valuing something that is previously invisible (religious identity) by making it visible, shows both the *value of visibility* and *visibility as a value* in belonging negotiations.

Ironically, while Arham's intentional visibility is a counter strategy to correct the tarnished image of her Muslim identity, the same visibility is discriminatively conflated with general representations of Muslims, where she is solicited for answers to terrorism-related events by peers and media. Arham is highlighting a common issue where Muslims are often only associated with negative connotations in Western mainstream media (Kasirye, 2024; Macdonald, 2006; Navarro, 2010; Zine, 2024). Cumulatively, her academic and professional achievements are overlooked and are instead pigeonholed into discussions about terrorism, an area she has no expertise in.

Similarly, Leila Ahmed (2005) expresses a parallel frustration in an interview on Muslim women and other misunderstandings<sup>70</sup>: 'I get constantly called and asked to explain why Islam oppresses women; I have never yet been asked, why is it that Islam has produced seven women prime ministers or heads of state and Europe only two or three?' This contrast accentuates a broader issue: the selective focus on negative stereotypes rather than recognising and celebrating the positive contributions and advancements within Muslim societies.

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<sup>70</sup> This highlights a broader issue of professional and academic underrepresentation and misrepresentation faced by Muslims not only in Sweden but elsewhere.

Consequently, Arham's hashtag confronts the politics of stereotyping with the 'politics of visibility' as a positive grassroots effort to be included in the public imagery. She is among individuals who do not withdraw from public interaction nor disidentify with Islam but insists on acting and speaking up as a (Karlsson Minganti & Österlind, 2016; Khawaja, 2011) refer to politics of visibility among individuals who resist imposed representations of their identities in search of legitimacy and recognition as citizens.

Interestingly, the Foucauldian idea of subjectification<sup>71</sup>, whereby an individual is made into the object of existing discourses and thereby becomes a particular subject; is seen in Arham's activation of consciousness as a Muslim subject on account of the shift in political discourse (Foucault, 1977), a strategic essentialism that is an authentic display of ethically anti-strategic morality (Foucault, 2007: 377). Arham in becoming visible is producing counter-conduct whereby she confers all her positive attributes previously ascribed to her as an individual to her specific individuality as a Muslim woman. Arham is defining who she is in this precise moment of history. In so doing, her struggles 'against subjection' and choice 'for a new subjectivity' could also be described as a struggle against a certain type of conduction and for another form of conduct (Foucault, 2007: xxx).

To conclude, rendering a *stigmatised* personal identity as *charismatic* by making it hyper visible serves as a corrective and a sign of positive difference for Arham. This act functions as an 'obligation' to subvert negative representations, affirm belonging, and enlarge the canvas upon which inclusion is rightfully granted to citizens as part of the Swedish multicultural political milieu, while also resisting succumbing to a right-wing agenda. Her 'success' both calls her to duty as a Swedish subject and cushions her from the pushback in claiming other 'marked' identities as authentic. The broader ethos of freedom, justice, equality and diversity that are granted to her by her Swedishness is used to leverage the claim for recognition of her 'marked' identity as Muslim.

Conversely, in comparison to Arham's response, we previously saw Javed disidentify from the stigmatised/marked identity of 'Muslim' to maintain a sense of belonging to the (imagined) nation as a racialised subject, so that he can affectively feel a sense of possibility as it translates to upward social mobility (Seet, 2021: 227).

The same socio-political context affectively moves different actors to take different positions. Between Javed<sup>72</sup>, Arham and Khizer, the former seeks to accumulate capital

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<sup>71</sup> Also referred to as subjectivation (see Foucault 2007:231 and Foucault 2010: 5)

<sup>72</sup> While Alina and Amin also mentioned in their interview, had they been Muslims, it would have been hard for them to 'feel' like they were a part of Swedish society because 1. They would be misrecognized for the worst attributes of the extreme Muslims and 2. their claims for appropriate subjects would have to be justified and constantly defended. I don't include them here because while they do experience negative representation as immigrants, they shrug off negative representation of 'Muslim' as not

to pass as white and thus seeks to remove the taint of immigrant Muslim, and working-class identities; the latter on behalf of having one white parent, middle-class status, attending prestigious educational institutions and having successful careers, mobilise their privilege to move in the opposite directions of making their religious identity (by association immigrant identity) more salient and visible. Between the siblings too while both become 'more' religious, the vocabularies of motive are different (Mills, 1940). The social *play* of privileges allows identities to be *played* out differently. It is the intersectionality of their privileged upbringing with educated open-minded Muslim-Christian parents

By no means does this reflect that any one position is morally superior to another. The ethos of conduct is based on personal values that are moved in a particular direction for personal enlargement of space for self-fashioning (Brubaker, 2016a). These narratives show that Muslim identity is mobilised by some, evaded by others, used perhaps abused even, lacking in clear boundaries and shifting over time with contexts (Calhoun, 2003: 565). It is, as Brubaker and Cooper argue, not sharply bounded, fixed and prior to the relationships and struggles of social life (2000). Being Muslim matters, but in a different way for Javed, Arham and Khizer.

### *9/11 Terrorist Attack*

As mentioned in Chapter 7, it may be important to reiterate here too that many participants like Ghazanfar below, highlighted 9/11 as a turning point for instances of explicit finger pointing, bullying and jokes:

After 9/11, everyone who had dark hair or Muslim name *they* would say 'oh look a terrorist' and *things like that*.

(Arsalan 23, Male, second-generation)

When 9/11 happened, I was about 16 years old. Then people knew Islam and who Muslims was were. And they linked it with terrorism. And then another system started.

(Nauphil 35, Male, second-generation)

G: There was another time because we were going in Malmö we were going to a bar, and you must give your id and I did. But since ... I don't ... like.. maybe my beard... I was stopped and questioned.

U: Why is the mullah going to the bar!?

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applicable to their own or their family narrative, and one less stigmatized identity to carry the weight of and negotiate.

G: Yea [chuckles] they asked me a lot of questions. Asked me to state the last four digits for my personal number. Asked where I lived and so on. You could just feel it on people at the time...

(Ghazanfar 25, Male, second-generation)

Events like September 11 terror attacks can shift social boundaries, redefining who is considered part of the in-group and who is excluded showing how inclusion and exclusion are not static states, but dynamic processes influenced by historical and social contexts (Abbas, 2005, 2007b; Jakku, 2018a; Larsson, 2005; Mattsson, 2019; Modood, 2008; Rytter & Pedersen, 2014). The narrative shows how external labelling 'oh look a terrorist' affects self-perception and identity formation among those targeted. They are forced to navigate a world where their physical appearance or name automatically places them in a suspect category. Even though Ghazanfar claimed *he* did not take it seriously because he knew his peers were goofing around, except when labels stick, they stick to the marginalised who are dehumanised and delegitimised. Their identity justifies surveillance, reinforcing exclusion.

The value of a joke, in who it makes fun of, can produce the ambiguous effect of either laughing at someone or laughing with someone, associated with negative experiences, especially those of aggression, humiliation, and confusion in the case of the former and positive emotions, such as joy and camaraderie in the case of the latter (Sandberg & Tutenges, 2019: 565). Given the context of 9/11, with its very real consequences for Muslims across the world, 'joking' about calling those with visible features as 'terrorists' and 'things like that' has the dual effect of self-aggrandisement and belittling the already stigmatised 'other'. Meaning is not anchored to intent; instead it is produced by the discourse that surrounds the subtext of the joke in the arenas in which it circulates (Askanius, 2021: 160)

Valentina Bartolucci (2012) usefully examines ways in which the terms radicalism and terrorism are conflated in the post-9/11 world, suggesting further that terrorism is 'uniquely seen as *Islamic terrorism* [and that] *all Muslims* come to be casually linked to terrorism' (ibid: 562–82). The figure of a Muslim becomes a metaphor for barbarism and violence, meaning that Muslimness has become synonymous with terror. Ghazanfar's name and his beard become suspicious when he is entering a bar. An interrogation ensues. It may well be a random spot check, but the fact that he can 'feel it on people' means the social environment post 9/11 also becomes pregnant with fear and justifies claims by non-Muslim others to know what kind of Muslim they are, almost becoming a demand for Muslims to fulfil their civic duty by offering an explanation (Roy, 2000: 23–24).

This suggests that processes of identification—that by the immigrants themselves and that by others—are located in a larger geopolitical tapestry that subverts territorial

borders. Tahseen Shams (2020: 3) refers to these places as ‘elsewheres’; places that are neither the immigrants’ homeland nor hostland but that are nonetheless important to immigrants’ identity formation.

Thus, global events have local manifestations causing social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion to shift, using physical and cultural markers to redefine who belongs. Increased profiling, inappropriate jokes, and an offensive approach to demanding to know what kind of Muslims peers, colleagues, and friends are, thereby reshapes social identities and interactions.

*‘He Turned me to His Direction’*

From macro-level global events that shape identity, Effat in the excerpt below brings attention for activation of her Muslim identity to a much more personal and intimate reason:

My husband is very religious. Congregation is his life. The second day of our marriage he went to masjid [...] when he came home at 12am in the night I was of course sitting waiting for him a bit mad. He said, ‘don’t stop me from God, he is first then it is you.’ If you just don’t stop me from this, I’ll keep you happy. I understood how important it was for him. He then slowly turned me to this direction.

(Effat 49, Female, second-generation)

Effat was married in Pakistan and moved her husband to Sweden. According to Effat, her husband’s actions and decisions were deeply rooted in his religious identity, which dictates the way he organises his life and interactions. While she knew this, she is still ‘a bit mad’ when as a newly married bride her husband prefers the mosque over spending time with her. Though as she would later come to understand and appreciate, he turns out to be as much a family man as a man of God. She balances her personal expectations against his religious commitments by spending time together with him in spiritual practice, thus becoming more ritualistically religious than before. Interestingly, later in our interview she said if she had married a less religious man then she would have been less religious. Thus, while *being Muslim* is important to her and a non-negotiable, *‘doing’* Muslimness in terms of practice is less significant and more negotiable for her showing the content of her belief that is open to dormancy/activation when not prompted by external influences.

‘Turn[ing] towards’ and ‘turn[ing] with’ encapsulate the essence of fostering togetherness, signifying a shift in attention and connection towards someone. This act of turning symbolises a mutual interaction where *asking* and *offering* become modes of engagement, creating a synergistic bond. Effat’s generosity is reciprocated by her

husband's efforts to keep her happy, illustrating how offering and kindness are fundamental to belonging and enabling religious activation.

Intimate relations can ignite a dormant or a more laid-back religious identity to shape marital dynamics. Effat's story illustrates that bonding and 'belonging with' in a marriage can be significantly enhanced through shared religious practices and values. Her husband's strong Muslim identity and her own willingness to embrace it highlights the process of aligning personal and religious values. Effat stressed that it was through communication, understanding, and mutual adaptation that the couple was able to build a strong emotional connection. Their unified sense of belonging anchored around their faith made their marital bond possible.

It is important to note that more generally marriage and having children intensified the importance of religious identity for many participants. Every decision, from selecting a partner to naming children, involves considerations about how to practice Islam in Sweden.

### *'It's Time I Explore My Mom's Religious Side'*

Growing up in her Pakistani family, Ilma experienced diverse influences: a mother deeply rooted in religion and a father who had distanced himself from his faith before moving to Sweden. These contrasting perspectives provided Ilma with a broad spectrum for identity exploration. When we met, she was in the midst of a period of religious reawakening, and she describes her journey below:

I am like brought up in a family there is ... my mom is a Muslim, and my dad is an atheist.

[...] It was a really big confusion if we were Muslims or not [...] They respect each other a lot in their religion. She (Muslim mom) has never pushed me towards anything. And my dad always said that 'don't say you are not a Muslim or if you say you are a Muslim then read about it. Don't just say just coz you have seen your mom practicing. Read about it and make your own decision. Mom is more like this is like this and she gives me no explanation, but my dad does.

I: I am taking lessons online to learn Arabic and Qur'an. I started to learn how to pray I didn't know how to pray before. For 6 years I am more into religion.

U: Why is that?

I: It was like, well *one of the things* was that I didn't know what I am. I felt like, its, it comes.... I have been...totally Swedish since I was a child, and my parents haven't stopped me from anything. My other siblings had other rules but for me I could do whatever I wanted being the youngest. There comes a time in your life that you realise that it's not... it's not actually you. You are doing it. You are having fun. But it's not *going anywhere*. And then, there was this Pakistani guy who I was getting engaged with.

*And then* like suddenly things happened so we broke up and that time it hit me really hard. His version of Islam was very conservative and patriarchal. I really liked him. But it couldn't work. It took many years for me to come back and that was the thing I wanted to know what am I? like am I more a person who doesn't believe in a religion or am I more a person who wants to believe religion and why? So, I thought, I have been on my side for all my life, why not explore my mom's side.

(Ilma 27, Female, second-generation [my emphasis])

Although the family identified as Pakistani and by extension Muslim, Ilma's upbringing was open-ended, shaped by observing her parents' practices rather than explicit guidance. This dynamic left her uncertain about her own religious identity. At the time Ilma turned to religion to seek answers, she said her life 'was not going anywhere'. She wanted to understand where her choices in life were leading her.

While Ilma admired the balance her parents achieved despite their differing beliefs—her mother a Muslim, her father an atheist—she struggled to find the same harmony with her Pakistani-Muslim fiancé. His strict interpretation of Islam led to unresolvable friction, ultimately causing her to end the relationship. Making the questions about religion and how to negotiate them in a relationship even more salient.

Ilma had recently begun fasting and striving to pray more regularly, while also reflecting on her self-fashioned religious education. To decide whether she will choose to 'belong to' the Muslim collective identity, she first wishes to explore the terms of 'belonging with' herself as a Muslim, prioritising personal significance for upholding practices. While she was a state of awakening when we met, she felt she was more of a 'mixed' and 'multicultural' person. Although she resisted rigid labels, she emphasised her desire to understand the meaning behind her choices. Exemplified in her utterance about her life not 'going anywhere', in her quest for discovering another version of herself her desire for belonging is a combination of 'aiming at' another future yet unknown by 'referring back to' Islam (Arendt, 1996: 9).

Despite having different reasons both Ilma and Khizer's narratives of activation of their Muslim identity points to *practice* as key to their awakening, with an emphasis on self-education and individualisation of meaning. Building on Butler (1990), Saba Mahmood sketches a broader notion of performativity. Using religious rituals to accentuate bodily practices and self-discipline, she is able to capture cultivation of a particular subjectivity through practice (Armour & Ville, 2006; Mahmood, 2011, 2016; Topal, 2017). This underlines how personal religious practices are crucial not only for the expression of faith but also for the formation and reinforcement of individual religious identity, making such practices central to one's sense of self and community.

The concept of self-styling denotes the specific forms in which religious belonging and religious practices among young Muslims take shape (Sunier, 2016). Performing namaz/prayers and fasting while being an act of religious duty<sup>73</sup> are as such far from only being formal and externalised acts. Through techniques of training and disciplining it becomes an embodied practice that shapes the self-formation (Khawaja, 2014b). Moreover, *feeling* of being Muslim being created by disciplinary techniques and the *desire* for being Muslim is conceptually understood as a relationship between memory, bodily acts and the constitution of the self (Mahmood, 2016: 214).

Notably, religious authority does not rest in the hands of parents or religious scholars alone. It is seen as an individual responsibility to sift through different mediums for self-fashioning of a religious identity: one's own interpretation of the Qur'an, Islamic books, catechisms and manuals, television, YouTube and Instagram, imam, family members and friends are all sources of education. Making conscious choices of whom to follow is the negotiation through which Islamic discursive tradition begins to be lived (Dessing et al., 2016; Jeldtoft, 2011).

An added dimension is that both Khizer and Ilma mention is the importance of 'go-to' persons whom one can 'look up to' in one's religious journey. Khizer starts going to a local mosque as a venue for worship where he also finds a mentor in an imam<sup>74</sup> who is a Swedish convert to Islam and has nuanced approach to Islam and being Muslim: 'I was lucky enough to find a scholar that I could go to, someone I looked up to'. However, since women participants in this study (except those belonging to Ahmadi sect) typically do not attend mosques regularly and often pray privately at home, their access to an imam is more limited, highlighting a gendered dimension in physical *access* to religious guidance. Ilma's 'go-to' person is her sister, who married a Pakistani man and resides in Pakistan. Through Skype video calls, Ilma seeks her sister's guidance and consults her father for clarifications and discussions. Thus, while mentors are important to one's religious journey, Khizer's and Ilma's experiences reveal that resource of accessing guidance are gendered when seeking a community of practice.

Lene Kühle's (2006) research suggests differently from my participants. According to her research second-generation mosques in Denmark are indicative of the future of Islamic practice in Europe. While first-generation mosques are divided along ethnic lines

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<sup>73</sup> See verses 'Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer and stand before Allah, devoutly obedient.' (The Qur'an, 2: 238) and 'Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakat will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.' (The Qur'an, 2: 277)

<sup>74</sup> I interviewed this Imam in particular. And while he does have women congregants and welcomes their questions, he does admit that women in general don't seek him out for questions on a one-on-one basis as much as men.



led by imams from the ‘homeland’; second-generation mosques are led by reverts and the language spoken is local. Second-generation mosques represent a more settled and confident Muslim presence, with a focus on contributing positively to the broader society.

### *Moving to Another Country*

When I interviewed Ghazanfar, he had just moved to Sweden after spending three years studying in Shanghai. Like many other participants, move away from home served as a significant catalyst in deepening his understanding of his personal moving triggers the effect of *missing* that acts as a *call to action*. Rituals that he once avoided or performed begrudgingly out of family obligations now inspire self-reflection and personal meaning in the absence of parental authority, as exemplified by Ghazanfar:

U: Do you still do rituals? In the way that you used to when you were home?

G: Yea sometimes. I pray. That’s it.

U: Is it every day or is it Fridays...

G: Now it’s kinda hard I have work going on. Sometimes in the morning when I wake up or whenever I come home early.

U: What does it mean to you now, to do this?

G: uhhhh it feels kinda nice ...sort of a ...you can say this is some sort of a yoga for me. I kinda feel like it’s something I like. I feel kinda relaxed-ish, but there’s something there ... personally for me ... I mean before they (parents) said like oh you had to do it.

U: Like a duty?

G: Yea, exactly

U: And now?

G: Now it feels like, it feels...nice. Yea ... It feels like I am home. I mean when I wake up I know like it’s a routine I can see her in my head asking ‘did you pray?’ She would always ask me that when I was home. And now I have that in my mind. Maybe because when I pray it feels like I am at home, like feels sort of a ohhh a little bit memory. Its kind of like a mixed thing. It feels natural. It becomes natural.

(Ghazanfar 25, Male, second-generation)

In this narrative, Ghazanfar’s practice of prayer is linked to memories of his upbringing and the expectations set by his mother in particular. Muslim parents nurture their children in the faith, intertwining religious practices with family traditions, as for them, faith and family are inseparably linked (Pedersen, 2014).

The concept of a 'chain of memory' refers to the continuity and connection of past experiences to present practices (Hervieu-Léger, 2000). This chain of 'believing' unites the believer with 'others' in the community of belief whereby collective memory as expressed in the tradition forms the basis of the community's being (ibid.). The memory of his mother asking, 'Did you pray?' acts as a cognitive and emotional link that connects Ghazanfar's current actions with his past. This memory chain helps to sustain the internalised practice of prayer in his life, giving it a sense of continuity and personal significance.

On the other hand, practice that is commonsensically categorised as religious, such as the prayer may not be performed with a deliberate religious motivation (Sunier, 2018: 114). The performativity of religious subjectivity is evident as the practice shifts from an externally imposed duty to an internalised, self-authenticating routine that feels 'natural', 'nice', 'relaxing' and 'like home.' Thus, religion may be perceived as a shared understanding with a collective memory that enables it to draw from the well of its past for nourishment in the present (Hervieu-Léger, 1998, 2000) giving it qualities that are connecting to religion in memory but not in practice.

The adaptation to the ritual as inheritance does not change what is being recited in the prayer procedure nor the method of praying, but it does so in *meaning*. Innovation makes heritage equivalent to codes in the social field that are understandable to 'all others' as valuable, e.g. likeness of prayer to yoga or meditation drawing on a shared cognito-experiential understanding of self (Faruque, 2021: 34) that makes a religious ritual understandable to others that are unfamiliar to the religious field (Bourdieu, 1991).

Ghazanfar is aware of the *presence of his mother* more than he is aware of being in the *presence of God* when he is praying. Thus, for him, religion is about maintaining a connection to his mother, which by its practice leads to continuity of Islam and his identity as a Muslim without deliberate motivation to Islam or being Muslim in that moment of naturalised practice. Praying as a personal expression shows his faith in his mother's teachings and by that association, faith in God. Religious identities thus, become more salient when figures of attachments become configured in the present because of their distance and absence. The practice of prayer thus, becomes the practice of 'homing' in the translocational diaspora space.

Hervieu-Léger's chain of memory resembles 'linked lives' as a way of describing chains of relationships across generations (Bengtson et al., 2002). Individuals' lives are *not* individual lives. They argued that individual life trajectories are meaningful in the context of the other lives with whom they are linked - that run in parallel, cross and interfere with individual subject. Process of identification and construction of meaning is tied to emotions of *missing* as a *missing link* that becomes salient in certain temporal transitions like moving away from home and in reconstructions of home in linked lives

of individuals. Where lives have become interwoven and embedded at a material, emotional and metaphorical level - it becomes impossible for relationships (familial and religious) to simply end (Smart, 2007: 45). Thus, feeling of absence from the attachment to one's mother creates a desire for closeness that is mobilised in prayer.

*'Mosque Became a(n) (Un)Safe Place'*

The mosque helped me a lot ... that was my safe place [...] uhh somewhere growing up ... I could have become a different person ... becoming uhhhhhhh gangster or something. I had those kinds of friends. Somehow ... at home there wasn't a possibility to feel safe I think because my parents had four other issues, we were four siblings, and my dad wasn't there, in our young age and then when he came back to Sweden the beginning it was chaotic. Because everybody had to restructure a new order somehow. The mosque helped me a lot. That was my safe place somehow. Initially, when I went to mosque I misbehaved and acted out. But the older guys, they didn't react in a wrong way. They were just being okay. Like in class at the mosque, we were three or four kids who were disrupting class, even throwing the chairs around and stuff, but the teacher was *always relaxed* and somehow step by step we wanted to learn from him. How to be like that. How to be so relaxed in a situation so tense, I gave in and started paying attention.

(Faris 29, Male second-generation)

During our interview Faris recounts that his father who owned a successful taxi business sold it to return alone to Pakistan to be with his ill mother in 1989. His father started a new business in Pakistan while his wife stayed in their host country with the five children. His father did not visit them during this period, but the family visited twice in this period. His mother managed the household during this challenging time. His father finally returned eleven years later in year 2000, when Faris was 12 years old. This is the background that grounds his story in not finding sanctuary and peace at home given the family's conditions of diasporic existence with a marked period of parental separation where his father was performing familial duties in his homeland.

This narrative highlights how the mosque provided a sanctuary during a chaotic childhood, steering Faris away from a potential life of crime. Despite initial misbehaviour, the patience and calmness of the older members and teachers gradually influenced him. The mosque's supportive environment helped him find stability and personal growth, contrasting with the instability at home.

At the time of our interview, Faris was gaining a university degree in international relations and human rights at a prestigious university, was volunteering for homework support to children from immigrant backgrounds in an underprivileged area, was a football coach for young adults from 'troubled' neighbourhoods, had a part-time job at the gym, was the chairperson for the youth wing at his congregation engaging youth in

religious studies, sports, providing strategies for job hunting and tips on their CV's, and lastly working part-time for the Social Democratic Party. He credited his successes entirely to his mentors and teachers at the mosque. In recounting his journey, he contemplated the contrast between his potential path without religion and the person he ultimately became, thanks to the influence of his role model at the mosque armed with faith at his side.

While Faris's encounter with a compassionate teacher at the mosque strengthened his religious identity, provided a safe space, and a sense of belonging, Shaheryar (23, Male) and Arghan (31, Male) had the opposite experience. Their experiences were marked by fear and harsh treatment, making the mosque an (un)safe place that suppressed their religious identities and distanced them from their faith.

For example, say you said a word incorrectly he would slap us. This is why a person does not want to come close to Islam because one is fearful and scared. From childhood one relates the hitting with Islam. This is the wrong way. That is why I say uneducated people they don't know anything about Islam they have just done rote learning and they perpetuate dogmas without making it relevant to the times. I feel like slapping them myself [...] then there was a physics professor who became the imam at the mosque. He was really good. He would give lectures and teach us Qur'an with logical believable answers to our questions.

(Shaheryar 23, Male, second-generation)

Shaheryar and Arghan grew up attending the same mosque, where local Pakistani parents had arranged for a religious teacher to come from Pakistan to instruct their children in Islam. Shaheryar described being 'dragged' to the mosque every weekend for two hours, highlighting his reluctance. The teacher's outdated explanations and harsh methods fostered an association of fear and negativity with religion, leading the boys to perceive Islam as their parents' faith, not their own. Despite their complaints about their, the parents turned a blind eye. Determined to change their situation, Shaheryar, Arghan, and a few other students filed an anonymous complaint with the police. The ensuing investigation resulted in the teacher being sent back to Pakistan. A new teacher, a physics professor, was hired as the imam. His logical and relatable answers rekindled their interest in and respect for religious teachings.

In many immigrant communities, the family and religious institutions often serve as primary sources of socialisation and control. By challenging the authority of both, the boys demonstrated an ability to navigate and resist the expectations placed upon them. Their actions feature the capacity for agency within marginalised groups, showing that individuals can actively shape their own experiences and resist overbearing practices.

This episode also highlights the role of civic education and awareness in empowering young people. The boys' knowledge of their rights and the legal system enabled them

to take effective action against an abusive situation. This suggests that education and awareness are crucial in fostering agency and empowering individuals to challenge and change unjust circumstances.

At the time of our conversation, while both Shaheryar and Arghan identified as Muslims, they felt distant from their Muslim identity due to the deep impact of their early experiences. Although they valued faith and spirituality, they embraced ethics of Islam as integral to upholding their Muslim identity, viewing the dogma as an unnecessary inheritance from their parents. They appreciated the new imam for making the understanding of being Muslim in Sweden more relevant to their daily lives. This was particularly significant as both their partners were ritualistically religious, and in Arghan's case, his children were being raised as third-generation Muslims.

The mosque, as a space for religious and communal activities, can significantly influence one's religious identity, either strengthening or weakening it based on personal experiences. For those with positive experiences, such as Faris, the mosque serves as a sanctuary that reinforces and validates their faith, providing a sense of safety and belonging. In contrast, for individuals like Shaheryar and Arghan, the mosque becomes a place of fear and rejection, which diminishes their connection to their faith and makes the mosque an alienating space. Thus, the mosque's impact extends beyond its physical presence, embedding itself in the emotional and symbolic aspects of individuals' lives. The connections formed within the mosque—both familial and religious—continue to shape and affect personal identities deeply (Smart, 2007: 45). The struggle for conformity and individuality is visible in this. Attachments and detachments—how connections between individuals and communities are disrupted and remade, as understanding ruptures and continuities is at the heart of belonging.

## Maintaining Boundaries: Individualising Muslimness

While the previous two sections explored the deactivation of Muslim identity and the reactivation of a dormant Muslim identity, this section will focus on the continuous negotiations that practicing Muslims make in their everyday lives. It will highlight which aspects of religion participants value that shape their horizons of possibility for the future. These negotiations are relevant to both those with an activated Muslim identity and those whose identity has always been salient. In the following section I will continue to elaborate on body as a locus of spiritual practice.

## *Negotiating Halal<sup>75</sup> Food*

The important thing is that the earning should be halal honest and earned through sweat and hard work, read the first kalma, say bismillah, and that's it, the food is halal.

(Marium 30, Female, second-generation)

If you go out and eat at a restaurant sometimes it is not halal so fine you know it's not the end of the world. Because if you go into the details then you can't really be free. I have been all over the world. It doesn't occur to me. As long as it's not pork I'm ok with it just do bismillah and eat it. It is hard to go to a business dinner and say I only eat halal; you can't always do that. If you do that means you are deliberately trying to make yourself look different. And putting up boundaries.

(Mizhir 33, Male, second-generation)

Not on the agenda. We are a liberal family in that sense. That has changed *now* starting from me and I think and the rest of them try to, but they are not probably that strict.

(Khizer 25, Male, second-generation)

For example, what we do in I mean here I do ask for halal food just to increase awareness that there are people who eat halal food

(Shahzaib 32, Male, second-generation)

In Sweden no uhh I have started questioning what halal food is and the more I question the more I don't believe that halal means halal. Halal to what we have been raised as believing, the way the animal is killed, how the blood was drained was the body clean. But I think what is more.. the chicken that we get here the chicken that says halal lived in a box and was injected with hormones to make it grow that is not halal. Halal is not just about how the chicken is slaughtered it is about the *whole life of the chicken* from the time it is born till its death. That is why I prefer ekologisk<sup>76</sup> food. If the animal has been offered a good life and has not been injected with hormones, its life has not been altered, then it is halal to eat.

(Zain 21, Male, second-generation)

If halal meat is not available, then I'll just become a vegetarian, it is not a problem for me [...] my children can decide for themselves when they grow up.

(Masooma 31, Female, second-generation)

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<sup>75</sup> Surah Al-Baqarah (2:173) prohibits carrion, blood, swine flesh while also outlining that there is no sin on those compelled by necessity. Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:3) prohibits dead animals, blood and swine while making an exception for those forced by necessity.

<sup>76</sup> ecological

The above quotes illustrate that motivations and meanings assigned to eating halal vary and are influenced by context. Most second-generation participants emphasise that they purchase halal products for home use when available. And when they are out, they negotiate situationally.

Masooma stresses that halal encompasses the earnings used to buy food, which must come from honest work, not interest, gambling, or deceit. In the interview she elaborates on the importance of being employed in socially beneficial jobs as a Muslim. Noting that income from harmful activities, like selling drugs or alcohol and other illegal activities, is not halal. Thus, the purity of the earnings<sup>77</sup> is as crucial as the food itself being halal. Integrating faith by reciting the 'first kalma' and saying 'bismillah' aligns actions with Islamic principles<sup>78</sup>. This ensures that the income and the resulting sustenance are pure and permissible.

On the other hand, Mizhir negotiates the principle of halal with a pragmatic and flexible attitude that allows him, as a businessman, to navigate global travel and diverse social settings without feeling restricted or overly concerned. He stresses on being 'free' from strict interpretations of halal whose rigid adherence can create unnecessary barriers and signal deliberate self-segregation. He believes this can make one appear intentionally different, which he views as counterproductive to social cohesion. Instead, he recites 'bismillah' and refrains from 'eating pork' to balancing religious principles with practical considerations, valuing freedom and social cohesion over rigid boundaries. This approach allows him to maintain his faith while navigating diverse environments without feeling restricted or isolated.

Interestingly, Khizer's recent foray into exploring his Muslim side is making him more conscious of his food choices through which he is strengthening personal connection to religious beliefs through dietary preferences. Meanwhile while Shahzaib deliberately asks for halal food when he is out for dinner or shopping so he can advocate for Muslim food choices and create awareness to influence the market by making demands as a Muslim consumer. Khizer's food choices reflect personal beliefs, operating at an individual level. Shahzaib, however, engages at a meso level, impacting markets and raising awareness of halal options. This contrast illustrates differing scales of influence: Khizer on a personal level, Shahzaib on a societal one.

Zain's viewpoint transcends conventional religious interpretations of halal, stressing ethical dimensions, prioritising the entire life cycle of the animal, not just its slaughter method, as crucial to halal standards. This approach underscores a deeper concern for animal welfare and ethical food production practices. Zain is referring to the principle

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<sup>77</sup> Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:88) there is permissibility to eat of that which God has made lawful and good.

<sup>78</sup> Surah Al-An'am (16:119) affirms the need to say Allah's name over everything one eats.

of ‘tayyab’<sup>79</sup> in the Qur’an and Islamic dietary law that requires food is not only halal but also that it is wholesome and fit for human consumption (Al-Teinaz, 2020). If something is not fit for consumption and wholesome it automatically becomes haram. This means that all foods must be produced in hygienic conditions to ensure that no food pathogens are allowed to contaminate the food. Thus, by favouring organic options, Zain aligns halal principles with ethical consumption, showing a deeper reading of the Qur’an<sup>80</sup> to nuance his understanding of dietary choices beyond the particularities of slaughter.

During our interview Masooma contemplated on the impact of meat consumption deeming it environmentally unsustainable and harmful - her ethical stance evident in her willingness to adapt and consider vegetarianism. She prioritises alignment with her principles, even if it means redefining ‘halal,’ fostering a connection to nature and leaving room for her children’s future choices.

Constant vigilance and monitoring of one’s practices is a critical element in ethical formation of a Muslim subject negotiating halal. This economy of self-discipline, therefore, draws attention to the role self-directed action plays in the learning of an embodied dietary disposition and its relationship to conventional ways of being vis-à-vis pragmatic action (Mahmood, 2001: 846). While submission to external authority (read God) is a condition for a subject achieving its potentiality (ibid.), the various interpretations offered for the meaning behind halal shows that the freedom of individuals resides in their ability to mobilise their *desire* to act out of their own will, reason, and interests to belong to their faith rather than submit as hardliners to manifestations of conventional<sup>81</sup> religious will. Thus, any exploration of submission must also consider freedom. By making hierarchical structures of social relations, architecture of the self, and the interrelationship between its constituent elements that makes a particular imaginary of freedom (Mahmood, 2001) both possible and visible in their negotiations. It also attends to the role religious traditions of bodily discipline play in becoming a certain kind of an ethical-political subject with a vision for the self, society and future generations.

### *Negotiating Hijab*

The narratives about hijab from women among the participants hereunder build on hijab narratives of *taking it off* in Chapter 7 by now describing strategies of *putting it on* or *putting it off*.

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<sup>79</sup> Tayyab means ‘good’, ‘pure’ or ‘wholesome’.

<sup>80</sup> The verse (5:88) previously mentioned has the Arabic word ‘tayyab’ for ‘good’; indicating that food has to be both lawful and be pure and wholesome.

<sup>81</sup> Constrained by customs and rules.



U: Have you also thought of wearing the hijab?

S: Yes. Many times. Many times. I don't think I have that kind of strength right now. My concern also is that I work with patients. Now especially I have a new job. My last workplace, I worked there for 10 years. I thought one day I appear with a hijab what will everyone think, what happened to her? The world is a bad place, one thinks about others.

(Seema 34, Female, second-generation)

I started wearing the hijab right before I started working. I didn't want people to think that my husband made me do it.

(Zareesh 25, Female, second-generation)

It came from within, and I took the step. A lot of people reacted when I first started doing the hijab. Before no one would ask me about where I am from and about my religion, now it is a part of my identity, people can look and know that I am Muslim. There were strong reactions in the beginning. Then, it became comfortable. It is in Pakistan that I felt its seen as more problematic among my relatives. Why is such a young girl wearing a hijab and looks like an aunty. Here I have no problem. That said I do know that many people have faced problems on a daily basis because of the hijab here. In the train especially [...] I have worked at a hospital at the reception and then at a kindergarten and an elderly home. People usually focus on my work for which I get a lot of appreciation.

(Haniya 20, Female, 2.5 generation)

It is not a problem anymore. People are becoming more accepting now than they were. I wear it all the time.

(Saira 23, Female, third-generation)

The first impression of the hijab is so wrong right now. About Muslims. That you cannot get close to anyone's heart if your first impression is that you are extreme (both siblings nod in agreement). I just feel people are not afraid to talk to you, when I tell them later, after we have talked that I am a Muslim I am religious, that's something else. So, modesty in appearance is more important.

(Marium 31 and Maleeha 32, Female, second-generation)

The concept of hijab is that people shouldn't look at you. (Laughs) But when you are covered here then people do look at you more.

(Maira 24, Female, 2.5 generation)

Seema describes her emotional desire to veil and how often the thought crosses her mind. But she is painfully aware of the stigma the veil carries and how in her perceived

image will be distorted and misrecognised reducing her entire being to a person with a spoilt social identity. She expressed the wish to climb in her professional career and for her to do in the said social context, that she finds that her moral career will have to wait. Once she has accumulated enough 'professional capital' or expert standing, her decision to veil will convert the discreditable attribute to a charismatic one. What she will then signal from her professional title and her hijab/veil is that both are achieved statuses, and that does not preclude the other. A decision to veil at the beginning and in between her career could negatively impact her opportunities.

Subjects are aware of the discrimination they face in employment if they choose to express their religious identity. Seema did not want to take that risk. And admits that it is her failing, her lack of strength to follow her heart, but she gives up a part of her identity rationally to accumulate a positive evaluation of herself through 'others'. There is a private interpretation of the public context that the subjects are invested in and make negotiations within order to live out their moral commitments to their personal identities. Temporality being key in explaining Seema's story about *putting off* the decision to wear a hijab to manage her worth in the eyes of her professional others.

Zareesh's *putting it on* story, like Seema's, combines a personal religious goal with impression management to determine the right timing for starting to wear the hijab. Zareesh decides to start wearing the hijab before getting married to avoid any assumptions that her future husband forced her to wear it. She recalls a story from her workplace where colleagues speculated that a woman's husband made her wear the hijab, stripping her of personal agency. By choosing to wear it now, Zareesh ensures her decision is seen as her own.

Feeling an inner calling, Haniya's decision to wear a hijab initially provoked harsh reactions (then), which have tempered over time (now). She emphasises that while she was previously invisible as a Muslim woman (then), the hijab now makes her highly visible (now). Context also plays a significant role; she was surprised by her relatives' shock in Pakistan (there), as she expected more understanding compared to her peers in Sweden (here). Once again temporality and context are both determining factors in impression management, she decided to wear the hijab, making her identity as a Muslim woman more visible. Despite this, strategising differently from Seema's decision, she maintains a focus on her work to stay competitive and is valued for her hard work.

Echoing Haniya's sentiments, Saira who has grown up under the influence of her grandmother and mother who also wear the hijab, that it's easier to navigate the Swedish environment with their guidance and support. While it may have been a problem *before* she thinks *now* it is gaining recognition and acceptance as an agentic choice of Muslim women that is governed by their own preferences.

Like Haniya and Saira, Marium and Maleeha want to wear the hijab for the ‘comfort that one is doing something for God.’ However, contrarily they believe the ‘first impression’ of the hijab is so ‘wrong’ and ‘extreme’ that it creates a boundary where ‘heart[s] are closed’ and connections are lost before they can be made. The perception of temporality between the two sets of women may be on account of their age, class, education and generation. The former set in its early twenties has the support of two generations of women and men in the family, who are middle-class highly educated doctors and engineers and grew up in an affluent neighbourhood; whereas Marium and Maleeha are in their thirties, have one generation of working-class parents with low education, grew up in an underprivileged neighbourhood, and have worked their way up to their current middle-class status that may be threatened by overt religious symbols.

Another layer of self-appraisal of the latter women comes from showing that they are ‘good Muslims’ and so they choose not to wear the hijab, whereas both Saira and Haniya who do wear the hijab are interested in showing they are ‘good professionals.’ Thus, the decision to wear or not to wear the hijab intersects with contextual temporality, particularity of social locations and the perceptions of societal expectations that they think will grant them with worth and respect.

Lastly, reflecting on its meaning and value, Maira believes the reason behind the hijab is to be invisible and avoid attention. However, she finds that wearing it in Sweden draws more attention to her, contradicting her desire to *blend in by standing out*. Consequently, she chooses not to wear it.

Anchors are footholds which are actively used by migrants for establishing their sense of stability and security allowing the processes of embedding i.e. the ways in which migrants develop strategies, such as social networks, to help navigate the contingencies of specific structures, such as the labour market in a given context (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022: 5). Through their choices regarding the hijab anchored in their religious beliefs, women cited above, navigate the delicate terrain of belonging and inclusion by seeking acceptance while preserving their sense of self amidst evolving temporalities and intersectionality of social locations in their embeddedness to national belonging.

Navigating stigma, the victimology of the oppressed Muslim woman, intense reactions from colleagues, familial support in adopting the hijab, generational and socio-economic factors, and evading undesired visibility all illustrate differentiated embedding (Ryan, 2018: 26-27). This concept portrays embedding as dynamic, graduated, and multi-layered, involving varying degrees of attachment, trust, and reciprocity across different sectors.

### *Negotiating Inner Hijab: Bikini*

By embracing inner spiritual and moral integrity, Arham in the quote below, challenges conventional norms to redefine what it means to embody modesty while wearing a bikini:

I think there is no problem in being Muslim and wearing a bikini coz I also embrace the concept more about the inner hijab! it's not if men are not able to or other females if they are not able to control themselves I am not the one who will be judged for that they will be judged for that I know that my mind is clear and clean so I cannot take the responsibility for other people's minds.

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation)

Concept of 'inner hijab' involves exploring the ethical principle<sup>82</sup> that focuses on the internal spiritual and moral state rather than just external appearances. The idea of the 'inner hijab' emphasises personal piety, intention, and inner modesty. Arham also introduces 'responsibility' as highly relevant to her negotiation, which is also a concept with immense import in Islamic ethics (Beekers & Kloos, 2017; Brown, 1999; Hourani, 2007). The extent to which certain acts are halal or haram is subject to complex theological deliberation and interpretation. Responsibility and agency are inherent aspects of this reasoning in being considered a virtuous agent.

Notably, modesty seems to be predominantly a female burden among the participants I interviewed. While the men did talk about being polite, chivalrous and respectful of women, they do not specifically comment on modesty, have a view on inner hijab or lowering their gazes.

### *Negotiating Alcohol*

In the passages below, participants navigate the complexities of alcohol consumption that presents a unique challenge for Muslims<sup>83</sup>, whose religious beliefs often discourage or prohibit its use.

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<sup>82</sup> Surah An-Nur (24:30-31) The Qur'anic verses subject both men and women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity as a better choice for believing men and women. And ends with 'surely Allah is All-Aware of what they do' meaning that Allah is aware of *intentions* behind actions which is what solidifies Arham's interpretation of the inner hijab. Interestingly both men and women are instructed to guard their private parts. And for women to draw covering over their necklines and not display their charms beyond those to those whom it is acceptable (listed in the Qur'an). Hijab is not used in the Qur'an as a word that signifies head covering for women. That is a cultural derivative of a normative discourse around modesty and therefore women use this freedom to make their choices.

<sup>83</sup> In the Qur'an there are four stages of forbidding intoxicants particularly alcohol. The first starts with (16:67), the image of fruits from which strong drinks are made is presented as a sign of God's generous

I find that as a personal thing. Where you think it is okay to adapt. For example, yesterday I went for Jumma prayers. I went there because of my own personal reasons I wanted to go myself. Not that someone told me to go. No one forced me, I just felt like it is time to go and pray namaz. Later tonight, I might go out and have a beer. It's no problem for me, but I think it's still about personal choice. From an early age Ammi and Abbu said they've always treated us as adults. Like make your choices and stick by them. And make sure *you make the right choices*. But Ammi Abbu were also quite open-minded. They understand that you adjust to the society you live in. Without compromising one's principles. So that one can live anywhere. I've worked in China, in the US as well, and now here again. So, I have found a balance.

(Mizhir 33, Male, second-generation)

Marium: I don't drink because it is in the religion. And I think it is a very good prescription. Because many people who only for the sake of religion do not drink also stay away from a lot of problems. If you look from a societal perspective, a lot of youngsters get into vulnerable situations because of drinking. So a thing that is so risky and cannot be controlled why should you put yourself in that situation? If I am around someone who is drunk I ... I am a bit creeped out ... because I cannot know what their next step is. If I was not Muslim, I would make the same choice. Because there is nothing good with alcohol, it is not a good influence.

Maleeha: I have tried it. There is no attraction in it for me. And I know one day my children will try it too. My job is to tell them to make good choices. I have never felt the need, after I tried it. Alcohol is a toxin. It harms the liver.

(Marium 30 and Maleeha 32, Female, second-generation)

I don't drink alcohol so then uhhh that I had questions about but then I developed some kind of strategy some would ask *oh its only because you are Muslim*, and I would feel like no I think they get away so easily explaining my decision by religion. So, I used to tell them that I'm a nykterist<sup>84</sup> like a non-drinker before I'm being a Muslim. I made the decision not to drink alcohol before I developed my Muslim identity so...even if it was allowed in Islam I wouldn't drink. The religious logic makes so much sense that you don't need to be religious to understand it [...] when I started gymnasium I would hold this glass of cider in my hand during the party but then I wouldn't drink and I'd take a small sip and just keep it [...] later, when I had made some *good friends* I had the *courage*

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provision for human beings. Then there are verses in the Quran that forbid Muslims to pray under the influence of any intoxicant (4:43). The Quran also says that alcohol contains some good and some evil, but that the evil is greater than the good (2:219). The finality of forbidding alcohol is verse (5:90) that uses the word *Khamr* meaning 'concealed' or 'obscured' denotes every substance the use of which obscures the intellect, including drugs (see Muhammed Asad (1980)).

<sup>84</sup> A nykterist is a person who abstains from alcohol consumption, often as part of a lifestyle choice. In Sweden, Nykterism is often associated with temperance movements that advocate for sobriety

to tell them and their reaction was so positive. They complimented me on being so strong to not give in to the pressure. My best friend Monica would always defend me and say well uhh she is smarter than you, why do you ask her, you are such a party pooper why would you want to discuss this like, so they were always defending me.

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation [my emphasis])

Mizhir emphasises the importance of ‘personal choice’ in matters such as religious observance choosing a more a fluid approach that matches his lifestyle. He attributes ‘making good choices’ and being responsible for those choices to his upbringing. Showcasing the importance of parental transmission of *moderating* religious and cultural values through *moderation* that allows space for children to make their own decisions. Mizhir’s mixed identity that has Muslim, Pakistani and Swedish tenors, tempers moral with cultural boundaries to feel at ease and at home in all settings that are a part of his life, such as the mosque on one hand, and his friends on the other. He celebrates all his identities in moderation and has a sense of pride in being competent in striking a balance that is not ‘extreme’.

On the topic of upbringing, the siblings Marium and Maleeha also reflected in their interview that drinking is not a family practice and thus it ‘feels out of place’ in their daily lives and ‘they feel out of place’ in settings where the idea is to drink. Marium explains her abstinence in terms of religion but further frames it as taking personal responsibility to mitigate vulnerability and risks, prioritising self-care and ethical conduct. Her decision transcends mere piety, emphasising individual agency and accountability in avoiding harm to oneself and others. It also reflects an ongoing process of self-formation and negotiation of *influences* within one’s environment.

Maleeha on the other hand stresses on making ‘good choices’ and sees her own lack of ‘need’ and ‘attraction’ towards drinking as a personal preference rather than a religious mandate. Using biology to describe alcohol as a ‘toxin’ and the harm to the liver as an organ in the body, she uses scientific claims to defend her choice to not drink as a better choice. The evaluations the siblings use to back their decisions show how the interlocutors differently ‘value’ the same practice.

Arham has one set of evaluations for herself and another for ‘others’ to ask her about her decision not to drink. She identifies herself as a ‘nykterist,’ emphasising her non-drinker identity predating her Muslim affiliation. This is a response she has constructed as a retort to (mostly) Swedish others who question her choice. Whereby she underscores universality of her logic against drinking - highlighting that the rationale for abstaining from alcohol can be understood and appreciated beyond religious contexts.

Arham’s initially keeps her abstinence a secret, fearing exclusion and negative judgement. Over time, as trust develops, she gains the ‘courage’ to share her choice with

good friends. The friends' positive reactions and admiration for the speaker's strength against peer pressure signify a turnaround, leading to increased feelings of inclusion. The best friend, Monica, actively defends Arham's decisions to others, reinforcing feelings of acceptance and belonging within the group. This transition from secrecy to open support underscores the importance of trust in fostering inclusion and respect. And continuing defensive positions show the importance of 'drinking' together as seminal to social connection and acceptance in Swedish collegial settings, especially as a person of colour who is also Muslim. Arham's strategy as a 'nykterist' counters the social pressure, the assumptions she feels people make about her. Her ability to control the narrative about herself shows self-assertion in maintaining personal boundaries on her own terms. And like Marium, implying some religious prohibitions are self-evident and logical, transcending religious boundaries.

These examples reveal the participants' negotiation of inclusion and exclusion both within their religious framework and the Swedish cultural milieu. Their choice to abstain from alcohol is often seen by peers as a dogmatic adherence to religious norms, leading to potential exclusion from social activities where alcohol is prevalent. This judgement can create a sense of being out of step with the broader Swedish social context, which values social drinking as a norm.

However, participants navigate this delicate balance by asserting their decision as autonomous and personally meaningful, rather than strictly religious. This approach helps them maintain their religious principles while striving for inclusion in Swedish social circles. By framing their abstinence as a personal choice rather than solely a religious mandate, they counteract exclusionary judgements to promote an understanding for themselves among peers.

### *Negotiating Religiosity*

To summarise the larger section on navigating religious boundaries, the participants' insights illuminate the various ways one can negotiate being Muslim. These narratives reveal how perceptions of Islam and Muslim, often seen as static in discourse, reflect a dynamic and enriching aspect of the participants' lives. For those who continue to engage with the Qur'an as a guide, with parents as transmitters, and with the second-generation as recipients, Islam is more dialogical than dialectical in the diaspora space. In this section, the interlocutors' narrations show that religiosity is negotiated with oneself both in terms of its *interpretation*, *utility of practice* in their everyday life and in their role as *second-generation parents* with third-generation children.

### *as Interpretive*

Participants generally talk about religion as good guideline to distinguish between right and wrong (Marium, Amna); as a tool to get through life (Khizer); as a philosophy that

answers existential questions (Atheel); as a set of instructions (Effat); as a way of surviving anywhere in the world (Arham). Religious people are described as those who ‘have faith’ (Alina) ‘follow the Qur’an’ (Zain, Zimal), practice the ‘five pillars’ of Islam<sup>85</sup> (Seema), have ‘Imaan’ or faith/belief in the existence of God (Annika), ‘live purposefully’ in the world (Maham), and are always in a ‘relationship’ with and ‘connected to God’ (Mariam and Maleeha).

In the excerpts below beyond mere adherence to doctrines and rituals the degree of religious observance, belief, and involvement in a community, encompasses a rich, interpretive process where individuals engage with religious texts, symbols, and practices:

For me there is a difference between faith and religion. You can be Muslim in faith and choose to not follow the religion and you can choose to be Christian not choose to go to church and not choose to celebrate Christmas.

(Alina Female, second-generation)

To say someone is religious is *when they believe in God*. When they behave in a way that is ordered by the book, that’s how I see religious people. Personally, for me, to be a religious person means to go to a church or a mosque, that shows me something, that you are *faithful*. You pray five times a day that shows me that *you have faith* and that you also ask for forgiveness and you are a *humble person*. Other than that, just basic manners if you are religious. But you must know why you are religious; you have to ask yourself it is not enough to just believe in the book literally. You have to trust your instincts. You don’t have to trust people you have to trust yourself.

(Zain Male, second-generation)

It’s the *process of personal filtration* what you think is right for you, you keep it, and what you think is not right for you then you don’t do. The way I see it that is not the purpose of going to the mosque to show that you are a Muslim. You go there for your own self-satisfaction, you get that peace of mind, that I am still connected with God.

(Mizhir 33, Male, second-generation)

Being religious is taking the moral message of religion which are the same for all three religions and then applying it to your *lifestyle* [...] religion is the foundation to the modern-day society. It’s the same rules only those rules were improved to fit our world today. So, err ... *even atheists can be better Muslims than Muslims*; they might not eat pork, they might not drink alcohol, they might you know do yoga which is in a sense praying but just not believe in God, that is the only difference. I’m really grateful that I

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<sup>85</sup> 1. Shahada (declaration of faith) 2. Salat (prayer) 3. Zakat (giving alms or charity) 4. Saum (fasting) 5. Hajj (pilgrimage).



have learned whatever my parents *forced on to me* in the early ages, it has really *come back* at this age, and that is really nice and I *love* the fact that they did that *but at the time* they were doing it I didn't understand, why do we have to read the Qur'an, why do we have to read the Qaida, I don't want to.. I didn't understand. *Now I think* belief and faith can help people focus their attention to *positive meaning* in life.

(Zain 21, Male, second-generation)

For me it is someone actively working towards what the book (Qur'an) describes. So, you actively try to pray, fast, you do your charity, you do all the little bits here and there that's for me religious. When I say religious maybe I'm talking more about the Pakistani way, what my parents have taught me, so I'd definitely say it's their ideas. I like the idea of giving back to society through charity, I like the idea of having to fast 30 days every year because it *resets my immune system*, it *resets my body*, it makes *me feel good*, it *detoxifies* everything. I don't buy into the nitty gritty stuff I look at the kind of system it gives you the good stuff that you can take away something from.

(Zimal 26, Male, second-generation)

Alina separates practice from faith, suggesting one can believe in Islam without practicing it, as such believing as 'belonging to' a religion but not 'belonging with' religious practices.

In contrast, Zain distinguishes between having 'faith' and being 'faithful,' linking faith directly to *practice* and *behaviour* rooted in Qur'anic guidance. For Zain, being a faithful Muslim requires action, with the Qur'an read as a responsibility to 'trust [one]self.' This introspection shows that individuals exercise significant agency and make demands on themselves to arrive at an internal conviction rather than mere literal acceptance of religious texts. Thus, belonging is performative, a chain of actions imbued with personal meanings that connect Muslims all over the world.

Mizhir moderates his faith emphasises the process of 'personal filtration' in his approach to religion. He considers 'opinions' from various sources—religion, parents, and the mosque—without seeing them as 'strict rules.' Instead, he selectively adopts what resonates with him personally, 'filtering out' what doesn't. This process allows them to maintain a personal connection with God, seeking self-satisfaction and peace of mind beyond demonstrating his faith publicly. For Mizhir to be 'faithful' is a private matter and the dialogue he has is directly with God and himself. Interestingly, Mizhir's description of a connection to religion as a connection between individual and God sounds similar to Lars Trågård's (2014a), description of statist individualism rooted in the duality of the individual and the state for national belonging. Though unlike the silent powerlessness of Swedes regarding the welfare state whereby the individual's only means of exerting power is via political parties and membership in associations that have a consultative role (Berggren & Trågårdh, 2022: 203), the relationship between

individual and God remains unmediated, open for interpretations, and empowering individual decision making. Belonging is therefore anchored in faith as interpretive and empowering, contrasting with the Swedish social fabric where it is mediated through structured state relationships. To show this idea here is to understand why religion remains important and reproduces itself over generations contrary to the secularisation thesis. Like Mizhir, Zain interprets ‘religion as the basis for modern society’ to show that the allegiance of citizens to a state and believers to a faith share similarities. This explains why religion remains important for Muslims balancing ethnic, religious, and national identities today. Zain suggests that the core moral values of Islam, which are shared with other religions, can be tailored to modern lifestyles. Even those who do not believe in God might inadvertently embody Islamic principles – *belonging without believing* through their *ethical* choices and behaviours.

In ‘actively’ engaging with the teachings of the Qur’an, such as praying, fasting, and giving to charity, Zimal values practical aspects of religious practice that improve individual and societal well-being. Zimal highlights fasting’s physical and spiritual benefits, as well as the social impact of charity. He emphasises that his understanding of Islam is shaped by his Pakistani upbringing, cautioning against cultural influences that obscure the broader positive guidance of religion.

#### *as Utility of Practice*

Interpretation of religion in one’s life builds in part on the utility of practice. Looking at the examples above but also the examples from the broader interpretations of maintaining practices such as eating halal food, piety, modesty, wearing the outer hijab and navigating an inner hijab, associating romantic love with personal and family values, and views on alcohol consumption; there are several gains from these practice that explain religious reproduction.

I see it as a *good power*, as something positive that gives us greater meaning. Islam offers better choices. And being Muslim gives us the ability to make those better choices.

(Arham, Female, second-generation)

I think the psychological and spiritual well-being cannot be neglected and religion helps in *nurturing* this this is my own personal view. I believe my religion says if you do *mehnat* (hard work) and make dua (prayer) these two things *need* to go hand in hand. I think it is *dangerous* to neglect your spirituality ... spirituality is *extremely* psychological. In order to look after that, you have to remember that this is a part of me, and I am also a part of the world, so I don’t think it contradicts I think it speaks very much to each other.

(Maham, Female, second-generation)

I find answers in Islam. About death, about how to face difficulties with grace and gratitude, how to be patient, to be humble, how to approach struggles, loss and pain. To give more if I have more. To be a good friend. A good child. A good parent in the future. And to be a good contributor to society wherever I am.

(Amna 24, Female 2.5 generation)

It's about understanding your own self, building your own character, dealing with your envy, ostentation all these values come through religion. Becoming a good *person* a good *human being*. That is central to my understanding of being Muslim. I feel that (non-religious) others don't have the same tools as we have. In today's world, here too, Muslims and humanity are considered two different things. For me seeing other people's humanity comes from my religion.

(Shahzaib 32, Male, second-generation)

We have been taught by the Jamaat that we have to respect the rules of the country in which we live so we try our best to show in whichever way possible that we care about this country.

(Maleeha 30 and Marium 32, Female, second-generation)

Arham describes religion as a *good power* referring to transcendental quality of empowerment that comes from a belief in God. There is movement in power and that movement is towards being a 'positive' force in society encouraging her individual actions to positively impact as many people as possible. Arham has a prominent political career in Sweden which aligns well with her ideas of power for 'good' and religion as the backbone of the principles she stands upon to make 'better choices' to hold herself accountable. This explanation to uphold religion consistently shows up in narratives of believing interlocutors.

Another utility in practice is that religious practice provides *inner peace*. Through the catchphrase 'spiritual is psychological' Maham articulates the 'danger' of not 'nurturing' one's spiritual life. Moreover, she stresses interconnectedness between self, spirit and universe is a part of human nature. To separate oneself is to lose oneself. Adding on to Maham's reasoning, interlocutors relay 'feeling a sense of calm', 'balance', 'tranquillity', 'grounding', and 'rootedness' when engaging in spiritual practice.

Amna explicates the utility of practice in terms of satisfaction in finding *answers to existential questions* through religion. Islam provides purpose, ethical guidance, resilience, and community support. It teaches acceptance of death, patience in suffering, and fosters a sense of belonging. Connecting individuals to a higher power, Islam offers hope and a vision for one's future.

For Shahzaib understanding one 'self' and building 'character' through religious 'tools' appropriates Islam as a gift, a prestigious inheritance, that once accumulated with

one's cultural capital becomes a symbolic source for a superior and sophisticated understanding of self and sense of belonging, especially within the diaspora space. By contrasting himself with non-religious others, Shahzaib reinforces his own status and prestige within the religious field, expressing adherence to religious principles as valuable and rewarding. He positions non-religious others as losing out on possessing these unique 'tools' by disregarding religion's potentiality in offering a nuanced understanding of 'humanity'<sup>86</sup> and 'equality.' Whereas in religion difference is treasured, by contrast in Sweden, using the example of Muslims, expounds on its discrediting attribution akin to a terrorist -thus by association Muslims in general lose their humanity to their social construction. Being Muslim allows him to be able to differentiate identity from humanity in a way that he thinks his Swedish identity does not allow. Thus, reinforcing his belief in his faith the ideas of which have immense utility in practice.

An added layer of the value of congregation in diaspora communities is highlighted by Marium and Maleeha. The (Ahmadi) Jamaat is cited as a source of guidance in promoting ideas of civic responsibility, ethical citizenship, and peaceful coexistence. Utility of religious practice upholds the role of congregation in fostering embeddedness to the host context.

### *as Parenting Third-Generation Children*

Second-generation parents are more open-minded than their first-generation counterparts, having grown up in Sweden and understanding the shared life struggles and experiences. I focus on two key narratives: *raising* children as Muslims and *naming* them with Muslim names. The following excerpts illustrate their perspectives and how religiosity is negotiated across generations.

Marium: A relationship with God is the first thing you need to do with a kid.

Maleeha: (pitches in) all other things namaz (prayer) etc. is to build a connection. Once that connection is established then the pathway to become a good human being opens [...]. I don't *tell* my child to pray I want him to learn looking at us, not to tell him, but for him to *see and emulate* [...]

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<sup>86</sup> Shahzaib briefly mentions a verse from the Qur'an as a basis for making his argument about why people who are not acquainted with religion may 'lose out' on learning about oneself through learning about others; and the instruction to appreciate different communities, nations and religions as a part of God's plan. The actual verse in the Qur'an is from Surah Maidah (5:48) 'To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ'.

Marium: (continues) If my son asks me then I say that we have been taught that the first thing a good Muslim tries to do is to establish a relationship with God. So I tell him that just the way I show you that I love you, by listening to you, by sitting next to you, by talking to you, by spending time with you; in the same way God has created us he wants us to do Ibaadat (worship), to talk to him, to pray to him, show our respect and devotion. If we want something, if we don't understand something, we pray that whatever is best for us should happen.. Right now, our response it is at this level. Hopefully it will *sink in*. [...] Our parents said that if we maintain ties with the Jamaat then our children will turn out to be good human beings. They will have their culture and values with them. Our parents have always kept us connected even if in the middle we may have gone a bit astray. So now, it is *not so much for us* as much as it is for the *children*.

(Maleeha 32 and Marium 30, Females, Sibling-dyad, second-generation)

Marium and Maleeha discuss the import of intergenerational transmission of religious teachings in the above conversation as essential for raising morally upright individuals within the community, demonstrating a commitment to preserving religious and cultural heritage between parents (first-generation), children (second-generation) and grandchildren (third-generation). As a broker generation, Marium and Maleeha continue to rely on their parents' advice about how to raise children that remain faithful to the congregation. Agreeing that establishing a relationship with God is central and building connection through ritual practice, particularly the daily prayers. Marium emphasises the role of prayer in expressing love, respect, and devotion to God, paralleling it with familial affection.

According to Hervieu-Léger (2000) in modern, secular societies, religion often competes with other forms of collective memory and identity. Marium and Maleeha's dialogue shows the pragmatic way to bolster conviction and transmit religiosity to third-generation children in the diaspora space is leading by example and putting one's own practice at the centre of transmission hoping that it would one day 'sink in'.

Effat in the excerpt below talks about how she names her children to represent the family's Muslim heritage:

F: Maria and Jonas

U: Multicultural names, is that intentional?

F: Yes! The ring to it. I wanted Muslim names I consulted my mother, that was important for me, that was the one thing that I wanted that was important for me, to have a Muslim name; a name that would make life easier for them, an easily pronounceable names living here in Sweden.

U: Important to you in what way?

F: Because we are Muslims, I am a Muslim, the children were born Muslims, so I wanted them to have Muslim names. My husband is also a converted Muslim.

(Effat 49, Female, second-generation)

The dialogue reflects a thoughtful approach to naming third-generation children in the Swedish context while retaining the classificatory identity of being Muslim. Knowledge about the self and the way that knowledge is presented to 'others' is captured in this strategy to name one's children according to Islamic heritage yet since Sweden has a longstanding Christian-Lutheran tradition, and Muslims share religious lineage with Jewish and Christian tradition, names become a way of bridging one's identities. Thus, the names Maria and Jonas (Yunas) signal Muslimness to oneself and to Effat's larger family and the Ahmadi congregation, but it also represents one's Swedishness in the diaspora space. In consulting with her mother, Effat shows she values the opinion of her first-generation elders in naming her third-generation Pakistani-Muslim-Swedish children.

Effat's own experiences growing up in Sweden, while a source of her strength and ambition, lurk in the background in making decisions that may impact her children's social mobility in Sweden. By choosing names that are culturally significant yet easily pronounceable in their host country, the family aims to provide their children with a strong sense of identity while also protecting them from potential biases in school and the labour market because of their names. Thus, balancing cultural preservation with practical considerations for 'to make life easier'.

This strategy of naming third-generation children shows the nuanced ways in which families with immigrant backgrounds navigate their dual identities and seek to optimise their children's opportunities for social and economic success in domains such as the family, congregation, school and the labour market.

Both naming children and being caretakers of building third-generation's relationship with God through ritual practice shows ways in which religion persists over time emphasising the importance of collective memory for collective identity maintenance. While memory is central, religion is not static. It adapts and evolves as it is reinterpreted by each generation. This means that the chain of memory is dynamic, allowing for innovation and change within the framework of continuity.

## Conclusion

Chapter brings to fore how second-generation makes sense and create meaning of their Muslim identities in the Pakistani diaspora.

The first section on 'Crossing boundaries' analyses narratives of those participants who have wilfully left Islam. For Javed to give up Islam is to give up being working class and being immigrant. To be socially mobile in Sweden, he must achieve the status of a middle-class professional, an identity that is closer to being Swedish than being Pakistani and Muslim. Amin and Alina's parents' pre-migration Muslim identity was already in question. Since religious practices are family practices, when the family is not upholding religion as a family practice, the memory chain of religious transmission is broken, and religion loses its currency in the second and subsequent generation as a family practice. Relationship to the homeland is also lost when one's family is scattered and becomes more and more diasporic as in the case of Alina and Amin. Relationship to homeland is replaced with relationships with family wherever they may live as a heartland. The latter extends to anywhere in the world as long as the relations are kept alive.

The section on 'Shifting Boundaries' analyses narratives of those Muslims whose faith was lying dormant until an external event animated their identities into a more conspicuous existence. Different events trigger one's Muslim identity such as arrival of a cousin from Pakistan, a right-wing party that is has a populist anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric, the impact of events that occur elsewhere that reverberate globally like 9/11, moving to another country, and growing up in a multireligious home with Atheist and Muslim parents – giving the offspring the opportunity to explore each identity during her life transitions.

The section on 'Maintaining Boundaries' shows how believing subjects negotiate with boundaries they consider salient for faith and practice as Muslims. Halal food, love, hijab, alcohol, and various interpretations of religiosity are highlighted to show what being a Muslim means. Making good choices to live as an ethical human being with a higher purpose that is oriented towards a transcendental will but grounded in interpretations of everyday life. The diversity and variety of interpretations animate the discussions around boundary maintenance.

Outsider is a specific mode of being an insider. A meaning of wilfully crossing boundaries is to show oneself as an insider. This might be expressed in Baldwin's view that to 'accept one's past – one's history' – as he put it – 'is not the same thing as drowning in it; it is learning how to use it' (in Meer, 2023: 333). In Western societies, being visible is often seen as a sign of power and existence. For feminist, post-colonial, and minority groups, gaining visibility has been crucial in their struggles for recognition and rights. However, being seen doesn't always mean being understood; visibility can

sometimes lead to misrepresentation, where people are reduced to stereotypes. Just noticing visible differences doesn't automatically mean truly understanding them. The narratives in this chapter reveal a deep 'longing' for recognition in the quest for belonging. Javed seeks freedom from negative labels; Khizer and Ilma find religion as a connection to their parents' heritage; Arham uses the hashtag #IamMuslim as a political statement against Swedish stereotypes about Muslims. For Faris, the mosque is a safe space that strengthens his faith, while for Arsalan and Shaheryar, it feels unsafe, causing them to distance themselves from their religion. These examples illustrate how spaces, symbols, and personal experiences can either reinforce or challenge one's connection to faith, culture, and society; ultimately shaping their sense of self and place in the world.

Paradoxically, the demands made on Muslims to integrate and become a part of Swedish/European collective are often equated with the demand to become more individualistic. Whereas Muslims in this study on their own are a fluid and varied collective that have exercised agency and choice creatively as exemplified by their interpretations about Islam and being Muslim. Their reflections on the utility of religious practice in the diaspora space highlights spiritual ethics of living in/with 'difference.' Inasmuch as Muslimness is enacted for resistance/subversion of discredit.

Immigrant religious traditions are commonly seen as a burden to be left behind in the process of intergenerational integration (Foner & Alba, 2008). But religious practices are also family practices. Muslim parents raise their children as Muslims because that is what the family is for them. Thus, what is perceived as a burden is converted into productive family bonding experience. Also, what is felt as a burden initially, is highlighted by second-generation later in their life course as a source of immense personal power and self-understanding. Even Javed, Alina and Amin, who left Islam find themselves being drawn to the communality and sociality of Pakistani and Muslim ways of being, as explored in the next chapter on the 'diasporic bargain.'





## *Chapter 9*

# The ‘Diasporic Bargain’

Narrative analysis in the constructivist tradition seeks to bring to fore the mutual constitution of meanings between participants (Esin et al., 2014). After carefully listening to the interviews, transcribing them, and summarising the key themes and topics that emerged from the analytical concept of belonging and the research questions posed, a discernible pattern appeared. Participants’ narratives revealed common strategies employed to foster a sense of belonging.

Inspired by Deniz Kandiyoti’s concept of patriarchal bargain, I offer conceptualising the term ‘diasporic bargain’ to explain the bargaining strategies employed by the participants to make sense of their experiences and negotiations as Swedish, Pakistanis and Muslims. Kandiyoti (1988: 275) argues that ‘patriarchy’ no longer refers to its classical form- that form has already succumbed to historical transformations that have opened up ‘new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations.’ I would also argue same for diaspora that has lost its traditional ‘root’ metaphor and describes a population that does not share a common origin but a contemporary condition (El-Tayeb, 2011: xxxv).

While ‘sharing a common origin’ and ‘sharing a contemporary condition’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive modalities, ‘origins’ can be replaced with ‘shared history’ (Brah, 2022: 90). The interweaving of shared histories and contemporary conditions creates common struggles, providing a space where individuals can bargain and secure a fair position for themselves. Thus, showing agency in its complexity. The opposite of agency points to notions of patience and passion. Veena Das describes these as two instances where although one allows things to happen to them, it is not to be equated with passivity. To understand agency in the bargaining strategies employed by the second-generation, Gilpin-Jackson (2024) suggests considering the question, ‘What am I called to do in this moment?’ reflecting El-Tayeb’s idea of diaspora as a contemporary condition. Highlighting agency as actions that are informed by the need to work toward change and social justice, to honour ancestral legacies, and to pave the way for future generations.

Meaning making is an empirical practice in which people draw on (and create) repertoires of meaning to interpret and motivate action (Abji et al., 2019; Chaudhary,

2024; Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013; Ferree, 2003, 2016; Lamont, 2000). Swidler (1986: 273) talks of ‘culture as a ‘toolkit’ of symbols, stories, rituals, and worldviews, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems’, also labelling this toolkit a ‘repertoire’. Adopting the latter term, Dahinden and Korteweg (2023: 427) argue that these repertoires are ‘relational’ in that the meaning of the elements that make up a repertoire are created through dialogue. While both family, religion and nationality are seen as resources that provide safety, security and generational attachments; homing desire of the second-generation in the diaspora space is the locus of competing interests, rights, obligations, and resources where members are often involved in bargaining, negotiation and possibly even conflict.

Bargaining takes place in the context of ‘rules of the game’ set by intersecting cultural repertoires, including kinship structures, religious norms, and national political cultures. Individual actors employ elements for manufacturing versions of actions, self, and social structures and this allows for contradictions, exceptions and transformations within a delineated repertoire (Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023).

The concept of the ‘diasporic bargain’ can be understood as a framework through which second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden negotiate their identities and agency within both private and public spheres. This bargaining process is not merely a negotiation of cultural practices but also an exercise in navigating power dynamics across intersecting cultural repertoires—Pakistani, Muslim, and Swedish. The *patriarchal* bargaining strategies posited by (Kandiyoti, 1988; Kibria, 1990, 1995; Lim, 1997) resonate with the *diasporic*<sup>87</sup> bargaining strategies employed by second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden. Just as the women used their bargaining power to negotiate within existing structures rather than completely subvert them in the latter studies, second-generation Pakistani-Muslims may navigate their cultural, religious, and national identities by leveraging the ‘diasporic bargain.’ The idea of agency is therefore, tied to the capacity of individuals and groups to negotiate their identities and roles within multiple, often conflicting, cultural frameworks. This involves balancing the perceived expectations of traditional Pakistani kinship structures, Islamic religious norms, and the individualistic as well as egalitarian values of Swedish society.

Synthesising the findings from the various topical strands in this thesis, four key diasporic bargaining strategies emerge. The narrative strategies of ‘diasporic bargain’ reflect the time, context, and life stage of the participants, highlighting that the social world is always interpreted—both by researchers and participants. As time passes and

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<sup>87</sup> This conceptualization was greatly informed by my conversation with Aimen Bucha, currently at the Saida Waheed Gender Initiative at LUMS in Lahore, Pakistan. She encouraged me to explore what might unfold if Kandiyoti’s concept of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ were reimaged as a ‘diasporic’ one.

participants' circumstances change, their experiences will evolve, and their life stories may take on new meanings. Although their narrative positions may shift in the future, even when recounting the same events, these narratives still offer valuable insights into a particular version of social reality for a specific group, at a certain time, in a specific place, related to a particular individual.

These strategies are thus, snapshots. While they outline overarching patterns drawn from detailed analysis, they are not exhaustive or exclusive. Another reading or new interviews could reveal additional strategies. Participants may also employ all four strategies depending on the situation. At a level of abstraction each participants' narrative revealed a *master* bargaining strategy for belonging. That said, within particular situations and specific encounters, participants tactically used one, more, or all the other strategies. Moreover, participants also move between these bargaining strategies when commitments and/or attachments shift on account of major life events and turning points, as we have seen in Chapter 8. Identities are always multiple, cross-cutting and entangled. Bargaining always occurs with permutations of (both-and) as well as (both-and-more).

A final word-these strategies should not be seen as the only approaches available to second-generation Pakistanis, but rather as tools to understand how *this group* finds meaning and fosters belonging. Since belonging is an ongoing process, these strategies highlight a moment in that process, and they may evolve as participants continue to negotiate their positions in society. This framework of bargaining strategies helps us to think, as Anthias argues (2009) of lives as located and of our identities as always relational to our location, both situationally and in terms of the ways in which the categorical formations of boundaries and hierarchies produced in relation to gender, generation, ethnicity, religion and class (amongst others) impact us within a time and space context.

## Ex-Muslim Bargain: Swedish Belonging

In the end being Muslim was also being Pakistani, for me it kind of goes together.

(Javed 30, Male, second-generation)

I think my mom and dad their identities to me aren't really to me Pakistani [...] both were distant from religion [...] before coming to Sweden.

(Alina 29, Female, second-generation)

The ex-Muslim bargain suggests that when participants equate being Pakistani with being Muslim, where one is deemed mutually inseparable from the other and incommensurable with the Swedish repertoire, then both the Pakistani and Muslim identities are rejected for one's Swedish belonging. This implies that to be fully accepted or belong within the Swedish context, one might feel pressured to reject cultural values from the parents' country of origin and the religious tradition of the family, as they are not seen as aligning with the dominant cultural or societal norms. Moreover, both the Pakistani cultural repertoire is seen as intertwined with contradictions and ambiguities that are similar and inseparable.

In this bargaining strategy the dilemma is not just about rejecting religion because participants 'do not believe in God.' Rather, they identify as 'seekers' or 'agnostics' believing in spirituality but not in religion. So, while they retain values from their Muslim repertoire, they relegate it to ethics rather than religion. They continue to explore and question their beliefs without claiming a religion. In a similar vein, this ongoing exploration creates a space where, once a certain level of self-understanding is reached, there is an inclination to reintegrate appreciated elements of the Pakistani culture as well. While they leave Islam to bargain their belonging, their narrative unveils a longing to move toward a 'hybrid' identity that harmonises the valued aspects of their heritage with the principles they have adopted in their Swedish lives.

I get the question a lot you know what are you? And I don't know anymore. If a Swede would ask me, are you Swedish or Pakistani, I would say I am Pakistani. If a Pakistani would ask me, I'd say I'm more of Swedish.

(Javed 30, Male, second-generation)

When I meet my father's friends I use my Pakistani name. When I am with my Swedish friends I use my Swedish name. I'm Swedish but also Asian/Pakistani.

(Amin 28, Male, second-generation)

Participants demonstrate not only how they negotiate their positions in relation to others, but also how they adjust their self-perception, presentation, and emotions throughout this process.

An important caveat is that individuals can change their own position, but not the field itself, through acquisition of different forms of capital over time by adhering to the rules of the game and increasing their capital (Bourdieu, 1977). As a strategy of social advancement and class mobility, the participants who dis-embed from their Pakistani and by association Muslim identity, still realise that class advancement and mobility capital gains do not erase the fact that they are too 'foreign' to be white in Sweden. The kinship they hope to feel is with fellow Swedes is betrayed by their s(kin).

So, while they are Swedish, they feel Swedish, when asked how they would define themselves, they realistically say 'Swedish-Pakistani', 'Pakistani and Swedish', 'mostly Swedish but also Pakistani'. They add Pakistani to denote a 'back heritage' even if they do not relate to Pakistan or being Pakistani.

Moreover, while the participants bargain for belonging in the context of Sweden, they aspire to be 'citizens of the world', 'person of the world', 'mixed' and 'hybrid'. This shows that they move between bargaining strategies. Based on the context at hand that racialises them as foreigners, and a future context where they hope to pass as 'persons' or 'citizens' without having to label who they are, retaining their influences without naming or claiming them.

Notably, Alina mentions that for her home is where her brother is. So if her brother leaves Sweden to settle somewhere else, even though her parents live here, she would move closer to him. Since she wants to build a life around his family especially since being a sister and an aunt to her brother's children is extremely important to her. Based on this strategy, Alina would move to the cosmopolitan category when the time comes. A 'sense of belonging' and a 'feeling of home' are thus slightly different articulations. While Alina thinks she belongs in Sweden, she feels at home where she can be close to her brother. Highlighting that for her belonging is tied to place, but home is rooted in personal connections.

## Hybrid Bargain: Swedish Muslim Belonging

I am a Muslim Swede [...] Swedish Muslim sounded natural linguistically but then at the same time when I said it, I questioned it coz ... uhhh... my Swedish identity is something that is not necessarily permanent, but my Muslim identity is. If I move to UK and I spend the rest of my life in UK I might not say I am a Swedish Muslim. The country part could differ depending on where you feel at home, where I belong is Muslim [...] part of my religion.

(Khizer 25, Male, second-generation)

I am Swedish, accepting that changes the perception of how to live here in the future. The second-generation born here needs to understand that we are Swedish and that we are Swedish Muslims. I think it would be difficult for a person to understand how to contribute to this country without this sense. The message I want to to others is that yes, *my parents* are from Pakistan, and *we* are Muslims, but *I am from here* and I am here to stay. This is where my kids are going to grow up.

(Shahzaib 31, Male, second-generation)

When being Muslim is equated with being Swedish, it often leads to the rejection of being Pakistani as a standard for belonging. In other words, if the identity of being Muslim is aligned with or expected to conform to Swedish norms and values, then the cultural identity of being Pakistani is often dismissed or considered incompatible with these norms. This means that for individuals trying to fit into Swedish society, embracing Swedish ideals and practices may require distancing themselves from their Pakistani heritage. As a result, the cultural markers and values associated with being Pakistani are often overlooked or devalued in the pursuit of acceptance and integration within the Swedish context.

These individuals often find a sense of commensality between their Muslim and Swedish identities, though there is a distinction in how they synergise them. Some prefer to identify as Muslim-Swedes rather than Swedish-Muslims, reflecting the belief that their Muslim identity is intrinsic while their Swedish nationality and citizenship might be more vulnerable to political shifts or societal pressures. This distinction highlights their commitment to their Muslim identity as a fundamental aspect of who they are, despite potential challenges to their acceptance or status as Swedes. The assertion of being Muslim-Swedes accents their attempt to reconcile their cultural and religious heritage with their national identity, while acknowledging that the latter could be at risk due to political or social changes.

A lot of things that second-generation thinks is Islam is just the Pakistani culture. I am very Swedish, it's quite easy to be Swedish because Swedish is to be allowed to be who you are. So, I am Swedish Muslim. Because Islam is like you have the Pakistani Islam and you have the Arabic Islam and its completely different from and now what's growing here is the Swedish Islam where you actually also have the luxury of thinking without cultural barriers, since the context is neutral to religion.

(Arham 27, Female, second-generation)

In reflecting about their Pakistani and religious heritage vis-à-vis their place of birth, participants bargaining as Swedish Muslim or Muslim-Swedish hybrids, find more commensality between their Muslim and Swedish identities. Based on Islam's ethical principles of social justice, individual freedom, collective fellowship and community, welfare arrangements, gender equality and commitment to work and paying taxes, they find that their Muslimness and Swedishness have much in common. While taboos, moral corruption, classism, patriarchy, coercion, inequality in gender roles, excessive authority, and resistance to change is attributed to parental culture. Separating Pakistani culture from Muslim religion, refashions Muslimness in Sweden free from the intermixing of value traditions in the case of the former, from ethical practices in the case of the latter.

## Cosmopolitan Bargain: Defying Labels for Belonging

I have more faces than people imagine, and I can match my surroundings with ease.

(Zimal 26, female, second-generation)

I take religion from the heart and from understanding. If you get so many identities at once, you have a different thinking, also if you have moved around and travelled. People may not think like that.

(Zain 21, Male, second-generation)

Home is everywhere but Sweden is home because my parents are here.

(Mizhir 33, 1.5 generation)

I am a human on a journey. Not limited by borders or boundaries. I am curious, open, and I wanna do everything.

(Ghazanfar 25, Male, second-generation)

When an individual's identity includes elements from Pakistani, Swedish and any other cultural experiences, and these are combined with their Muslim identity; it creates a complex, interconnected sense of self. Each aspect—whether cultural or religious—shapes and informs the others, leading to a broader, more inclusive understanding of both their faith and cultural identity. Akin to what Al Deek describes as to 'celebrate a beginning which adds to and fertilises further multiple points of other displacements' (2016: 20). This combination allows the person to navigate their identity with greater flexibility, embracing multiple perspectives and fostering a cosmopolitan approach to belonging.

It is important to note that this frame has similarities with 'ex-Muslim bargain' except in an opposite way. While the cosmopolitan frame embraces all the identities the participants are exposed to and identify with, such as, being 'Pakistani' being 'Muslim' being 'Swedish' and any other influences, even if they are not necessarily too religiously inclined, the 'Swedish' belonging rejects the 'Pakistani' and 'Muslim' identities as redundant, inconsistent and incompatible with being Swedish. This distinction is subtle but important for highlighting the unique nuances in the participants' narrative positions, which could be further refined in future analyses.

These participants are the ones who are on the move and mobile. They are 'trying to forget it (identity) all' are on a 'journey' and resist being 'labelled' into a single identity believing they can adapt to various environments. They feel at home in many places, although they see Sweden as their 'home base' due to the strong familial ties that anchor them there. Finding an anchor allows them to move freely and continue to discover 'elsewheres' (Shams, 2020) that shape who else they can be.



## Muslim Bargain: A Good Human for Belonging

I mean it depends on how you yourself make the situation. Some people are even afraid of saying they are Muslims hmm I'm not afraid of any of that and I don't to be honest I don't care what other people think I just do my thing which I am comfortable with and just do it [...] I think they can mix and go along coz I don't really see any contradictions in the case that I can practice my religion right now I mean coz even the secular people could be extremists in their views and thoughts and atheists could be extremists in their views and thoughts. The main important thing is respecting each other and being tolerant against each other that he beeves something else and I believe something else, but we can still be I mean uhh human beings together not I mean imposing and I mean your opinions on someone else I don't think that is the way to do it. I know atheists and I know Swedish secular people who are very uhhh negative towards religion but in some cases I do answer them back that you do what you believe, and I do what I believe you need to respect that.

(Seema 34, Female, second-generation)

When both the Pakistani and Swedish cultural and socio-political domains are compromised or 'spoilt,' in the participants' view, embracing the Muslim identity becomes the ethical path to belonging and being a 'good' person.

The participants view both Pakistani and Swedish cultures as equally 'Western,' sharing traits of moral degradation—such as freedom that undermines modesty and piety—and a decline in family values, with a focus on individualism. On a macro level, both are seen as increasingly materialistic and capitalist. Consequently, they reject both as viable foundations for belonging. However, while they perceive the Pakistani state as corrupt, they find the Swedish state to be ethically sound, with stringent law enforcement applied equally, despite acknowledging everyday discrimination.

Identifying as 'Muslim first' helps them simplify their identity and reduce complexity. By using their Muslim identity as their primary lens for societal positioning, they distance themselves from the issues associated with solely identifying as either Pakistani or Swedish. Whereas the Pakistani and the Swedish individuals are confined in bodies of 'marked' valency that is 'immigrant' and 'native' or 'coloured' and 'white' respectively, the body which is the object of normative judgement is neutralised when one is only a 'Muslim' since participants perceive Muslims are not limited to such classifications of caste, colour, and creed. Although Muslims can come from any background, the participants recognise that being an immigrant is sometimes associated with being Muslim. Which is why they do not defend Pakistan or their Pakistani background, openly criticising it, but strive to salvage the image of Islam and Muslims in their everyday life.

They accept they can never be Pakistani because like a participant said when in Pakistan, they are considered foreigners and are white-washed; and when they are in Sweden, they are still foreigners-persons of colour. They have thus accepted they can never be either/or, hence they are Muslims, born and raised in Sweden. They have come to terms with the fact that they can never fully belong to either Sweden or Pakistan and have little aspiration to do so, except in Sweden where they aim to be good citizens, driven by religious obligations. They work diligently, learn the language, and pay taxes, not merely as a civic duty but because their religious values dictate that being a good Muslim entails being a good citizen. Thus, when the ethnic borders dissolve, they do so in religion. When ethnic distinctions and boundaries become less significant, religion often remains as a primary or unifying factor that transcends or replaces these ethnic identities.

Moreover, they define their Muslim identity in a way that distances themselves from religious extremism, favouring a more scholarly and moderate approach to their faith. While they feel oppressed by certain cultural expectations, they find liberation and equality through their religious beliefs, which hold that all individuals are equal in the eyes of God. Thus, religion, particularly being 'Muslim' first, reconciles multiple and complex identities.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of the 'diasporic bargain' offers a nuanced lens through which to understand the intricate processes by which second-generation Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden navigate their identities and belonging. Through this bargaining, individuals are not passively caught between conflicting cultural repertoires, but rather actively negotiate, redefine, and reconcile their identities through boundary work for meaning making. Whether aligning more closely with Swedish values, Muslim ethics, or a hybrid of influences, they employ dynamic strategies that evolve with time and context.

These fluid negotiations underscore the scope of agency within their diasporic experiences, revealing identities that are always in flux, relational, and responsive to both internal desires and external pressures. As these strategies highlight specific moments in the ongoing process of belonging, they invite future research to explore how these negotiations may shift over time, offering deeper insights into the evolving nature of identity in multicultural societies. Ultimately, the diasporic bargain encapsulates the complexity of diasporic life—where identity is not fixed but constantly mediated by personal experiences, social structures, and the ever-changing 'rules of the game'.



# Concluding Reflections

## Revisiting the Research Problem

This thesis organised life stories of participants to showcase thematically how second-generation Pakistanis in the diaspora space of Sweden experience and negotiate belonging through their Pakistani (ethnic), Muslim (religious), and Swedish (national) identities. Moreover, the content of these experiences and negotiations is also brought to fore to further understand their impact on the sense of belonging for the second-generation participants.

In Chapter 1, this understanding is deemed crucial to understanding the social context of Sweden, in particular the place of immigrants and Muslims in its national imagery. As Willander (2020: 33-34) argues, in 2017 only about 40 percent of the Swedish population agreed with the ideal that immigrants should be able to practice their religion freely in Sweden. Negative attitudes towards immigrants' religious freedom were moreover associated with the belief that immigration constitute a threat against Swedish culture and Swedish values. In a country that experienced a rapid and extensive period of migration from the 1990 and onwards, these attitudes on how religion should be practiced are critical for those who uphold religion to understand themselves as a cohesive force, not as contributors of fragmentation in society. Especially as children of immigrants, persons of colour, with multiple identities and cross-cutting commitments and loyalties, having a minority status juxtaposed with negative representations of immigrants and a stigmatising Muslim identity, puts the participants in a tenuous position. This chapter also motivates looking at the research questions through the Pakistani diaspora, a group that is underrepresented in research studies in Sweden. Moreover, it looks at the Muslim identity as a 'case of' this research inquiry.

Chapter 2 highlights a gap in the literature as regards an intersectional approach to studying immigrant and identities. While most studies on Muslims in Sweden emanate from Sociology of Religion, Migration Studies, Race and Racialisation and Radicalisation and terrorism streams, little attention is paid to combining these knowledge areas to produce more nuanced knowledge.

To reasonably answer the research questions, Chapter 3 offers the concept of belonging as a theoretical anchor for this thesis. Belonging is understood as a charged social location—a position within the social structure shaped by identification, embeddedness, connectedness, and attachments (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013). Besides social location, belonging also accents processes of inclusion and exclusion, as well as practices, the performative aspect of everyday life. Belonging is thus conceptualised for this research as resources of belonging, meanings of belonging and negotiations of belonging.

Rendering the Pakistani family, Islam as religion, and Swedish nationality as resources, a Bourdeasian lens aims to see how familial, sacred/Islamic and civic ‘capital’ can be mobilised for belonging. Moreover, ‘repertoires’ whether cultural or interpretive, animate how participants create meaning in/through boundaries and thereby negotiate their belonging intrinsically and instrumentally in social situations.

Chapter 4 maps methodological decisions and overviews fieldwork to fulfil the ambition stated in Chapter 3. Using life story narratives, 42 interviews were conducted with participants ages 18-49, in three major cities in Sweden. Interviews were conducted in Urdu and English languages. They were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Life story narratives were analysed using a constructionist approach. This approach puts individuals, their lives, their experiences, and the broader socio-cultural contexts in which they are situated, to the forefront of both theoretical and substantive concerns and foci for investigation to understand belonging, as second-generation Pakistanis and Muslims in Sweden.

In Chapter 5, we learn that being Pakistani is not a pre-given or fixed set of codes. It is instead animated through the interpretative efforts of intergenerational relations and shaped by their changing context (Khoja-Moolji, 2023). In Sweden, the first-generation family homing practices for second-generation children exhibit ‘element of individualisation mixed with aspirations to retain elements of tradition’ (Smart & Shipman, 2004: 501). At play are the complex processes of change as customs, values, and attitudes immigrants bring from home begin to shift in the context of new hierarchies, cultural conceptions, and social institutions the first-generation parents confront in Sweden (Foner, 1997: 967).

Rubya Mehdi’s (2024b: 75) idea of *mélange* familism animates the description ‘growing up desi’ based on the combination of values and norms of distinctive family typologies of relational-collectivist (Pakistani) and individualist-collectivist (Swedish). *Mélange* familism processes to widen the range of plausible context-sensitive adjustments within and between generations. This adjustment is a type of contextual synthesis. More than ‘switching’; it is about ‘evolving’ and ‘negotiating.’ *Mélange* familism is built through constant negotiating and bargaining from within for the new boundaries, reconciles contradictory values in unpredictable ways, helps ignore and preclude irrelevant practices, and is generally an innovative process. Canvassing

intergenerational socialisation and family practices, this chapter signposts second-generation's 'origin story' from where negotiations and bargains begin to account for continuities, disruptions and transformations for ethnic (Pakistani), religious (Muslim) and national (Swedish) belonging. Belonging is explored through embeddedness, connectedness and sentiments on one hand, and autonomy, equalitarianism and social conduct on the other.

In Chapter 6, a common experience that many of the participants' share is that of not being 'allowed' to belong as 'Swedish' no matter how hard they try to adopt national customs and or declare that they feel 'Swedish.' Encounters with members of the dominant majority who raise questions about and racialise their immigrant background and religious identity, creates frustration and detachment from 'Swedishness' impacting their national belonging.

Being 'othered' shows that status of immigrants with a foreign background, and immigrants with a foreign background who are Muslim, deeply intersects with race, ethnicity, class, and, consequently, gender and sexuality. These relationships reproduce themselves in situations where 'Swedish-foreigners' have their 'spoilt' identities called to attention by the unmarked 'Swedish-Swedish' natives.

While growing up desi, managing familial socialisation and expectations on one hand, the second-generation starts bargaining with first-generation parents by making claims to their Swedish identity. The bargaining power that their Swedish identity gives them in the familial domain, gets lost in translation in the everyday urban context of their lives, in their localities, educational contexts, friendships and their professional careers. The ascription of migration and religion to people reproduces non-belonging regardless of Swedish citizenship status (Dahinden & Korteweg, 2023). This is the structuring force in the discursive repertoire of narratives in this chapter.

In Chapter 7, the focus shifts to competing imperatives for intimacy and partnership of second-generation on account of straddling Pakistani, Muslim and Swedish ideas of sexuality and agency. Fauzia Husain's (Husain, 2020) conceptualisation of sexual projects is a helpful accessory to understand that anticipations about and aspirations for sexuality and partnership is shaped by multiple sets of social relations e.g., class, gender, religious hierarchies. Involve actions unfolding over time, the sexual projects conceptualisation stresses the relational and temporal dimensions of agency, attending to multiple sets of relations not just those patterned by cultural, religious and national discourses. Second-generation participants' negotiations and decisions about dating, marriage and spousal selection are shaped by their boundary-making and identity-work (Shams, 2022). Especially inter-racial marriages present a boundary-dilemma that forces participants to think about the 'definition, meaning and significance of the boundaries that mark their identities' (Kibria, 1997: 524).

In Chapter 8, negotiating boundaries of Muslimness forms the core of the analysis, by using the lens of ‘complex religion’ (Wilde, 2018) for meaning making and boundary-work (Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013). Some participants wilfully leave Islam, their narratives captured in ‘Crossing boundaries’ to attribute oneself as an insider in Swedish society. ‘Shifting Boundaries’ analyses narratives of those Muslims whose faith was lying dormant until an external event, for example, a right-wing party with anti-Muslim rhetoric gains political power or the impact of events like 9/11 alerted their religious identities into a more conspicuous existence.

## Overview of Significant Findings

Studies consistently show that immigrant parents often seek to preserve their cultural and religious values, viewing these as essential elements of identity that must be passed down to their children. In the case of Pakistani immigrants in Sweden, this research highlights how parents, drawing from their own upbringing in Pakistan, emphasise the importance of Islamic values and cultural continuity. This is often reinforced by maintaining strong transnational ties, such as sending remittances, arranging marriages with relatives back home, and even inviting elderly parents to live with them in Sweden.

Research also shows that second-generation immigrants often grapple with tension as they reconcile their parents’ expectations with their own lived experiences. In Sweden, the participants challenge frameworks their parents uphold—rooted in a version of Pakistan that mirrors the past—that feel out of step with their contemporary condition. In response, many participants, while respectful, assert their Swedish identities to gently contest their parents’ ways of life. Additionally visits to Pakistan often reveal a more progressive and modern Pakistani society than their parents remember. These trips, and interactions with cousins and family friends, accentuate how Pakistan has evolved, leaving parents somewhat anchored in outdated perceptions. Although this push back can initially lead to initial expressions of displeasure and dissatisfaction from the parents. Over time, within the participant pool, most families find ways to bridge these divides, adapting to change and gradually releasing old expectations, which fosters a more harmonious blending of both cultural worlds, as exemplified in the concept ‘*mélange familism*’.

The multifaceted role of religion within Pakistani immigrant families in Sweden is also highlighted through this research. Religion is valued as an heirloom, a cherished legacy passed down through generations. It serves as a moral compass, guiding principles of piety and ethical behaviour. Additionally, religion is seen as a duty, not only to the community but also to the broader society, reinforcing a sense of

responsibility and belonging. Moreover, findings suggest that in multigenerational households, where grandparents are present, religious identity often becomes even more salient. This intensifies the pressure on children to conform to traditional values, which may not always align with their personal experiences or aspirations.

In the context of family life, religion plays a crucial role in the reproduction of family values, which are perceived to be under threat in Swedish society. The institutions of family and religion mutually reinforce each other, working together to preserve cultural identity and continuity in a new cultural environment. This symbiotic relationship helps to fortify family ties and religious adherence, making both institutions more resilient in the face of external pressures.

Despite their best efforts to mobilise a Swedish identity in public life, members of the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden often find that this identity falls short of granting them full social acceptance. Within the family, the adoption of a Swedish identity can facilitate some movement in determining status, allowing individuals to negotiate cultural expectations to assert their autonomy. However, outside the private sphere, in the public domain, they face persistent challenges of racialisation and otherness that curtail their ability to fully embed and be recognised as Swedish. Being bullied at school, racialised in urban settings, discriminated at school and misrecognised in professional spaces, even their inability to sustain friendships with white Swedes beyond a formal context are cited as examples. Their attempts to align with Swedish norms often lead to feelings of alienation, as their differences are highlighted and scrutinised, both by peers and by other actors.

This scrutiny—the gaze—plays a crucial role in shaping how they perceive themselves and make decisions regarding their cultural and religious affiliations. The internalisation of this gaze can lead to a fractured identity, where their sense of belonging is constantly negotiated and contested. Thus, while the participants may attempt to project a Swedish identity, the racialised scrutiny they face often forces them to retreat into the safety of their family, and their cultural and religious roots. This ‘dance’ between public identity and private affiliation is indicative in the title of this thesis, *Swedish-(Par)Desi*. While the participants are proud of their national Swedish identity, their visible and embodied markers of desiness, signals an(other) identity that is hard to reconcile in the eyes of the majority. Thus, they occupy a paradoxical space—they are both Swedish and desi, but these identities do not always harmonise seamlessly. Instead, they embody the contradictions of their lived experiences.

The second-generation participants are generally better educated and more socially mobile than their parents, often securing better jobs, higher salaries, and boasting home ownership. Women, particularly daughters, have gained more bargaining power within their families, challenging traditional gender roles from within. However, arranged transnational marriages, often involving women, persist. These women develop



strategies to integrate their future husbands into Swedish society in creative ways, balancing traditional expectations with contemporary realities. In mixed marriages between Pakistanis and ethnic white Swedes, conversion to Islam is common, particularly when the Pakistani partner is a woman. These dynamics focus the ongoing negotiation of identity in the face of both family expectations and contemporary societal pressures.

Religious identity among the second-generation varies widely. Some adopt conservative practices, others find ways to reconcile their religious upbringing with the secular Swedish society, and some reject religious identity altogether. This diversity in religious expression demonstrates that not all second-generation individuals occupy a 'hybrid' position. Rather, they may adopt polarised positions, fully embracing either their religious or secular identity. Religious practices such as praying, fasting, and abstaining from pork, alcohol, and premarital relationships are especially significant for those who remain religious. Moreover, this research suggests that while the second-generation may retain certain cultural practices like language, food, and festivals, their ethnic identity may ultimately dissolve into religious identity. This shift raises questions about the future of diasporic consciousness in subsequent generations and the practices that will be upheld as these identities continue to evolve.

## Research Contributions

Research on the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden is virtually non-existent, marking a significant gap in the academic understanding of this community's experiences, challenges, and identity formation. This thesis is the first of its kind to address this void, offering a pioneering exploration of the Pakistani community in Sweden. By doing so, it contributes to broader discussions on migration, integration, and diasporic identities within the Swedish context. The research uncovers unique aspects of the Pakistani experience in Sweden, shedding light on their cultural, social, and generational dynamics in a way that has not been previously documented.

The concept of the 'diasporic bargain' is introduced in this thesis to conceptualise the various bargaining strategies employed by members of the Pakistani diaspora in negotiating their identities and navigating their socio-cultural environments in Sweden. This concept helps to explain the nuanced ways in which individuals and families reconcile their cultural heritage with the demands and expectations of the host society. The diasporic bargain framework offers a novel analytical lens that captures the complexity of these negotiations, providing deeper insights into the adaptive strategies of diasporic communities.

The thesis also employs the sibling-dyad and the parent-child-sibling triad as methodological tools to explore the dynamics within Pakistani families in Sweden. These tools are instrumental in understanding the intra-family relationships and the transmission of cultural values and identities across generations. By focusing on these family structures, the research highlights the role of sibling relationships and parental influences in shaping the diasporic identities of Pakistani-Muslims in Sweden. This methodological approach allows for a more comprehensive examination of the familial and generational processes that contribute to the formation of diasporic identities.

Through a generational lens, the research primarily examines the second-generation of Pakistanis in Sweden but also brings to light the experiences of the 1.5 generation and the emerging third generation. The findings reveal significant differences in how these generations articulate and interpret their identities in relation to Swedish nationality and their Pakistani heritage. The study shows that the 1.5 generation, those who migrated as children, have distinct experiences from the second-generation, who were born and raised in Sweden. Furthermore, the emerging third-generation's identity is largely shaped through the lens of their second-generation parents, indicating a complex layering of cultural identity over time.

This thesis makes several pioneering contributions to the study of the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. It addresses a previously unexplored community, introduces the innovative concept of the diasporic bargain, and employs unique methodological tools to understand family dynamics and generational identity formation for belonging. By doing so, it provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how diasporic identities are negotiated and transmitted across generations within the Pakistani community in Sweden.

## Future Explorations

This thesis sets the stage for several promising avenues of future research that could deepen and broaden the understanding of the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. One potential area for exploration is the combination of longitudinal and biographical interviews, coupled with a focus on family units rather than just individuals. Longitudinal studies would allow researchers to track changes over time, capturing the evolving nature of diasporic identities and familial relationships across different generations. Biographical interviews, when conducted with entire families, can reveal how shared and individual narratives intersect and influence each other, providing a richer, more holistic understanding of the diaspora's experience.

While researching marriage and partnership decisions in Chapter 5, the decline in transnational marriages emerged as a critical trend. Future studies could build on this by exploring how this trend affects the broader social and cultural dynamics within the diaspora, such as the maintenance of ties to Pakistan and the integration of newer generations into Swedish society. Additionally, these studies could examine how the experiences of second-generation Pakistanis in these marriages inform the decisions of the third generation regarding partner selection and family formation. This decline appears to be linked to the negative experiences reported by the second-generation in arranged marriages, where the cultural and social differences between spouses have often led to challenges in marital satisfaction and family cohesion. Future research could investigate the reasons behind this shift more thoroughly, examining how these experiences shape the marriage preferences of the third generation and what this means for the preservation or transformation of cultural practices within the diaspora.

Religion continues to play a vital role in the lives of Pakistani families in Sweden, particularly when it has been strictly adhered to through the institution of marriage. In cases where second-generation Pakistanis have chosen religious spouses, the transmission of religious values to the third generation is often more conservative. However, there is also evidence of increased negotiation and reinterpretation of religious practices, influenced by the lived experiences of the second and third generations. Future research could explore how these negotiations are evolving, particularly within the context of a secular society like Sweden, and what this means for the future of religious identity in the Pakistani diaspora.

A limitation acknowledged in this thesis was the researcher's inability to speak Swedish, which restricted the recruitment of participants to highly skilled professionals who spoke Urdu or English. This limitation highlights a significant gap in understanding the experiences of second-generation Pakistanis who may not have advanced educational or professional qualifications and who are employed in family businesses or low-skilled jobs. Future research could address this gap by including a broader range of participants, thereby offering a more nuanced class perspective on the second-generation experience. This would help to reveal how socio-economic factors intersect with cultural and religious identities within the Pakistani diaspora.

To supplement the findings of this thesis that emphasise religion and family as key resources for belonging, it would be valuable to include the voices of queer Muslims within the Pakistani diaspora in future research. This inclusion could provide a crucial contrast to the predominant narratives and offer insights into how queer individuals navigate their identities within the context of a conservative community. Such research would contribute to a more inclusive understanding of the diverse experiences within the Pakistani diaspora, highlighting the intersections of sexuality, religion, and cultural identity.

Finally, the works of Thapar-Björkert and Farahani (2019) ), which explore the epistemic modalities of racialized knowledge production in the Swedish academy, along with those of Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert, and Knobbblock (2019) on the value of decolonial feminism in Sweden, contribute significantly to unsettling the foundations of identification with Swedish academia. Additionally, the insightful efforts of Kawesa, Knobbblock, Vlachou, Koobak, Mehrabi, Tlostanova, and Lykke (2023) from the collective they refer to as ‘Loving Coalitions’ highlight how racism and Othering permeate Swedish academic and knowledge production practices. This reflection emerges from the exercise of writing this thesis where the academic field itself deserves a critical examination from the point of view of scholars in the diaspora. This is a very important strand for future research.

The future research directions outlined above build on the foundational work of this thesis and open up new possibilities for understanding the complexities of the Pakistani diaspora in Sweden. By exploring these areas, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced picture of this community’s evolving identity, relationships, and integration within Swedish society.



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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Information about Participants

	Name	Gender	Age	Generation	Language used at Interview	Religions in Family	Own Religion	Marital Status	Education	Occupation
1	Javed	Male	30	Second	English	Islam	Non-Religious	Married	Masters in Computer Science	Engineer
2	Alina	Female	29	Second	English	Islam	Agnostic	Single	PhD in Biochemistry	PhD Student
3	Amin	Male	28	Second	English	Islam	Non-religious	Married	Bachelors in Biomedical Engineering	Student
4	Talal	Male	62	First	Urdu	Islam	Atheist	Married	Bachelor in Arts	Journalist, Poet; now retired
5	Jamshaid	Male	32	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam			
6	Akbar	Male	28	Second	English	Islam	Islam			
7	Masooma	Female	31	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Married	Bachelors in Social work	Socionom
8	Malecha	Female	32	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Married	Bachelors in IT	IT industry
9	Marium	Female	30	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Married	Bachelors in IT	IT Industry
10	Khizer	Male	25	Second	English	Islam & Christianity	Islam	Single	Masters in Business Economics	Working with Dell
11	Arham	Female	27	Second	English	Islam & Christianity	Islam	Married	Masters in Economics	Politician
12	Maira	Female	24	third	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Single	Medical College	Graduate
13	Atheel	Male	24	Second	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	Nursing Programme	Student
14	Eshaal	Female	47	Second	English	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Married	Bachelor in Economics	Change Manager
15	Yasir	Male	28	Second	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Married	Religious education (7yrs)	Imam
16	Zabir	Male	65+	Convert	Urdu/English	Christianity	Islam	Married	College Graduate/ Extensive religious education	Imam
17	Nauphil	Male	35	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Married	Gymnasium	Entrepreneur-Minhaj-ul-Quran head for Sweden
18	Zarar	Male	22	Second	English	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	Bachelor International relations and Human Rights	Student-Politician
19	Faris	Male	29	Second	English	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	International Relations and Human Rights	Student-Politician

	Name	Gender	Age	Generation	Language used at Interview	Religions in Family	Own Religion	Marital Status	Education	Occupation
20	Jawaria	Female	42	Second	English	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Married	Masters in Economics	Non-profit, company bankrupt
21	Arghan	Male	31	Second	English	Islam	Islam	Married	Gymnasium	Car Showroom owner
22	Zimal	Male	26	Second	English	Islam	Islam	Single	Chartered Accountancy	Accountant
23	Sanaya	Female	31	Second	Urdu/English	Islam	Islam	Married	Masters in Biomedicine	Sales programme Coordinator
24	Gazanfar	Male	25	Second	English	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	Yrkeshögskola Business	Student
25	Mizhir	Male	33	Second	Urdu/English	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	Masters in Economics	Entrepreneur
26	Muneeb	Male	27	Second	English	Islam (Sunni & Shia)	Islam	Single	IB graduate	Entrepreneur
27	Zain	Male	21	Second	English	Islam	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	Bachelors in Economics	Student
28	Ilma	Female	27	Second	Urdu/English	Atheism and Islam	Islam	Single	Masters in Economics	Student
29	Maham	Female	34	Second	Urdu/English	Islam (Sunni & Shia)	Islam	Married	Law Degree and enrolled in Political Science	PhD Student
30	Shaheryar	Male	23	Second	English	Islam	Islam	Single	Medical College	Student
31	Faryal	Female	33	Second	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Married	Masters in Peace and Conflict studies	Medical Secretary at hospital
32	Kinza	Female	23	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Single	Medical College	Student
33	Subah	Female	28	Second	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Married	Medical College	Dental hygienist
34	Shahzaib	Male	32	Second	English	Islam	Islam			
35	Haniya	Female	20	Third	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Single	Medical College	Student
36	Naima	Female	19	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Single	Gymnasium final year	Student
37	Effat	Female	49	Second	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Married		
38	Seema	Female	34	Second	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Married	Medical College	Dentist
39	Zareesh	Female	25	Second	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	Medicine-Ophthalmology	Ophthalmologist
40	Sofia	Female	25	Third	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Divorced		
41	Ayra (Drop-out)	Female	23	Second	Urdu	Islam-Ahmadi	Islam-Ahmadi	Single	Bachelors Degree	Student
42	Hunza (Off record)	Male	70+	First	Urdu	Islam	Islam	Divorced	International Law	Civic/non-profit Organisations

## Appendix II: Interview Guide

*NOTE: Not all questions will be asked, these questions are intended to cover main themes that pertain to the research questions*

### I: INTRODUCTION

- Do you have any questions before we begin?
- Please tell me a little bit about yourself

### II: BEING A MUSLIM (OR NOT):

#### i. HOME

- Can you describe your experiences of growing up in your family?
- How would you describe your life at home? Current family structure?
- When did you first learn about Islam? And from whom?
- How is religion practiced in your family? (Prayer, Qur'an schools, fasting, festivals, food regulations, dress codes, male-female relations? etc)
- Could you describe family relations at home?
- Division of work and responsibilities between parents/spouse/other family members?
- Who is your role model? And why?
- In what ways do you relate to (or not) being a Muslim?
- How does your family relate to the Swedish society?

#### ii. SCHOOL

- Can you describe your experiences at school (your educational experience)? (Teachers, peers, curriculum)
- Is there any way in which the norms and values you learn from your interaction at school differ from what norms and values at home?
- How do you identify yourself at school? What/who do you identify with?
- Are there any ways that you think your everyday life is different from those of your peers/friends?
- Are there any similarities/differences among your peers/friends when it comes to attitudes, values etc? What do you (dis) agree about?
- Have you ever had any disagreements in the classroom? With your friends? With school regulations? On what occasions and why? How were these disagreements resolved? How did it make you feel?

- Do (did) you have any role models in your educational experience?

### iii. **WORK**

- Could you please describe your work life and employment experience?
- How do you balance paid work and obligations at home?
- Have you ever had any disagreements at work? On what occasions and why? How were these disagreements resolved? How did it make you feel?
- Who are your role models at work?

### iv. **LEISURE**

- Could you please describe what you do in your free time?
- Who with and where do you spend most of your leisure time? (general/specific patterns)
- Who are your role models?

### v. **RELIGIOUS LIFE**

- Can you describe your attitude/relationship to Islam? What role does it play in your daily life?
- Do you think your religious values are compatible with secular values? Is it possible to be a secular Muslim?
- Who is a 'good' Muslim? What are some of his/her values?
- Which Islamic values do you appreciate the most? What is negative? Difficult?
- In what ways do you find Islam different from other religious worldviews? From the secular Swedish worldview?
- Which Islamic values would you like to see the Swedish society adopt?
- Who are your religious role models?

### vi. **POLITICS**

- What does secular mean?
- Who is a 'good' citizen? Who is a 'good' Swedish citizen? Who is a 'good' Swedish Muslim citizen?
- Is there a place for religion in politics?
- What kind of politics is incompatible with Islam?
- Who has the ultimate authority in society? State or God?
- Who are your political role models?

### **III: BELONGING**

- Have you visited your parent's country of origin?
- Where is home? Is your home different from the home of your parents?
- Describe your relations with your parent's ethnic community and the Swedish community? Are there any similarities/differences?
- Where do you feel most yourself? Sweden or somewhere else?
- What languages do you speak?
- Self-ascriptions: How do you see yourself? Primarily Swedish? Primarily Muslim? Both? Someone else?

### **IV: ADAPTATIONS AND CONFLICTS**

- Describe some moments in your life that changed the way you think? Or had an impact on the way you think (distressful/inspiring)?

### **V: FUTURE ASPIRATIONS**

- Education
- Professional/work
- Personal relationships
- Where would you like to live in the future? Your future generations?



## Appendix III: Advertisement

**DID YOU GROW UP IN SWEDEN?**

**DO YOU SPEAK URDU OR ENGLISH?**

Would you like to participate in a research project  
About

**BEING MUSLIM IN SWEDEN?**

*The purpose of this study is to understand how everyday lives of Swedes growing up and living in Sweden are informed/impacted by being Muslim, and the manner in which this Muslim identity is shaped, how it evolves and is performed in various social interactions i.e. family, gender, education, ethnic group, place of residence, and the labour market.*

You have to be age 18 or above to participate.

Participation is voluntary.

No compensation will be paid.

**If you are interested, please contact**

Uzma Kazi

[uzma.kazi@soc.lu.se](mailto:uzma.kazi@soc.lu.se)

046 2223462



## Appendix IV: Informed Consent

### Consent to participate in a study on 'Identity Formations of Muslims in Sweden'

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to understand how everyday lives of second-generation migrants growing up (and living) in Sweden are informed/impacted by being Muslim, and the manner in which this Muslim identity is shaped, how it evolves and is performed in various social interactions i.e. family, gender, education, ethnic group, place of residence, and the labour market. The aim is to bring to fore the experiences of being a Muslim in the Swedish secular welfare state.

The study will be carried out over the period 2016-2018. After the first interview, the researcher may contact you after 12 months for a repeat interview. After the second interview, you may be contacted again in another 12 months for a third and final interview. When you consent to this research, please bear this in mind. If you would like to be contacted again, please state so explicitly on page 3 before you sign this form.

The study is a doctoral researcher at the Department of Sociology and Uzma Kazi, a PhD Candidate, is the researcher carrying out the study. Responsible authority is the Department of Sociology, Lund University (Head of Department Britt-Marie Johansson). Contact information can be found below.

#### **How is the research conducted?**

When you agree to be interviewed, we will meet at a place of your convenience and choice (e.g. your home or a café). It will be carried out in Urdu, English or Hindi. We will talk for an hour. You will have time to talk about your experiences growing up as a second-generation Muslim in Sweden. The conversation will be tape-recorded, and the audio file will only be used for transcriptions of the interview. If you wish, we may also do a so-called "go-along" together with you, that is, join you in your work/school/leisure during a day or so.

Participation in this study is voluntary. No compensation will be paid.

#### **The researcher's responsibility**

In all research, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the research participants are not exposed to any kind of personal risk. This means that the researcher is to respect your integrity and make sure that all information about you – names, places etc. – is confidential. Practically this means that your identity will be safeguarded, and a code will be used to identify you, rather than your name or other personal information. In doing this, your person or your experiences will not be recognisable in the material that will be analysed and shared by the researcher. All information that is generated about you within the study will be identified only with a code.

The study has been approved by the Ethical Review Board at Lund University (Dnr 2016/22).

It is important that you are fully aware that your participation is optional, and that no compensation will be paid. If you are interested in participating, we will provide you with more information about the study, about secrecy and the ethical guidelines that we follow to protect your personal integrity, and you will also be asked to sign an informed consent form.

When the study is completed, the findings will be published in scientific articles and a dissertation in the form of a book. The researcher may also write articles for popular scientific media. If you want to, we can also share the results with you.

### **What will happen to the information you share?**

The information you share will become the basis for this study. The analysis, as well as quotes from the interviews and research encounters, will be published in conference papers, as well as in scientific and popular scientific publications, as well as the researcher's final dissertation in the form of a book. All information will be kept safely (the audio file and code key will be kept separate, locked places).

### **Contact persons**

The person responsible for the research is Uzma Kazi at the Department of Sociology, Lund University (uzma.kazi@soc.lu.se, 046-222 3462)

Responsible authority is Lund University, and Britt-Marie Johansson, Head of Department at the Department of Sociology, is the authorised representative for the responsible authority (britt-marie.johansson@soc.lu.se, 046-222 8850).

If the services of an external transcriber are used in the study, this person is bound by the same regulations as the researchers.

I am aware

- that my participation in the study is **voluntary** and that I at any time can interrupt my participation without any repercussions.
- that all information about me will be **encoded**. This means that no information in the results published can be put in connection with me (such as names, places etc.).
- that I **can withdraw** all information within one month without any repercussions.
- that all information (electronic and written) will be treated according to the prevailing directions on **secrecy** and research ethics. This means that all information will be protected according to appropriate technical and organisational arrangements.

( ) I have received verbal and written information about the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions, and they have been answered. I give my consent to participate in the study 'Identity Formations of Muslims in Sweden'

( ) I agree to be contacted again twice for repeat interviews

This document is part of the information kept about the research participant and shall thus be handled according to fundamental directions about secrecy and research ethics.

This form has been prepared in two copies, of which the research participant keeps one.

Place \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's name \_\_\_\_\_



Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Participants contact information (will only be used for contacting participant within the study)

Email \_\_\_\_\_ contact number \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix V: Persons with Pakistani Background in Sweden

Population by Country of Birth and Country of Origin, 31st December 2023, Total

Country of Birth/ Country of Origin	Foreign Born	Born in Sweden with two Parents born Abroad			Born in Sweden with a Foreign born Parent	
		Parents	Father's country	Mother's country	Father's	Mother's
		Country of birth	of birth	of birth when	country of birth	country of birth
		when they have same country of birth	when both parents have different country of birth 1	both parents have different country of birth 1	when born in Sweden	when born in Sweden
Pakistan	28 614	7 453	1 390	1 317	1 330	571

1 Summation to the kingdom as a whole, continents or other groups of countries cannot be done for these columns, because each person here is counted twice, once under the father's country of birth and once under the mother's.

<sup>1</sup> Summation to the kingdom as a whole, continents or other groups of countries cannot be done for these columns, because each person here is counted twice, once under the father's country of birth and once under the mother's.

Foreign-born and persons born in Sweden with one or two Foreign-born parents by Country of Birth/Country of Origin 31 december 2019, total						
Country of Birth/ Country of Origin	Foreign Born	Persons born in Sweden with two Foreign-born parents			Persons born in Sweden with one Foreign-born parent	
		Parents with	The Parents have different		Father's	Mother's
		the same	countries of Birth <sup>1</sup>		country of Birth	country of Birth
		Country of Birth	Father's country of Birth	Mother's country of Birth	The Mother is born in Sweden	The Father is born in Sweden
Pakistan	19 107	5 298	1 115	1 046	1 186	472

<sup>1</sup> Summaries of Countries of Origin to groups of countries cannot be made for these columns, since each person here is counted twice, once during the father's country of birth and once during the mother's.

## Appendix VI: Codes Guiding Narratives

1. Desi Offspring				
	(a) Being Immigrant			
		Desi home (Children-Parents)		
		Contact (Immigrant- Immigrant)		
		Moments (Immigrant-Native)		
	(b) Being Muslim			
		Shedding- Diffusion		
		Dormant- Active		
2. Desi Upbringing				
	(a) What we 'cannot' do			
	(b) What we 'should 'do			
3. Perceived Swedishness				
	(a) Qualities			
	(b) Barrier-Distance			
	(c) Family Values			
	(d )Prejudices			
	(e) Swedish Values			
4. Dynamics of Intimacy				
	(a) Love Marriage (Mixed)			
		Inter-ethnic and Intra-religious		
		Inter-ethnic and Secular		
	(b)Arranged Marriage (Cross-Border)			
		Intra-ethnic and Intra-religious		
5. Bargaining Strategies				
	(a) Ex-Muslim			
	(b) Hybrid			
	(c) Cosmopolitan			
	(d) Muslim			
6. Desi Parents				
	(a) Migration Story			
		Economic Narrative		
		Political Asylum		
		Religious Asylum		
		Adventure		
		Student		
	(b) Marriage Story			
		Arranged Marriage		
				Intra-ethnic Intra-religious
				Intra-ethnic inter-religious
	(c) Labour Market Experiences			
		Language		
		Education		
		Skills		
		Access to working class jobs		
	(d) Homing Strategies			
		Family Structure		
	Parenting			
	Trips to Pakistan			
	Mosque			
7. Emotions				
	Afraid			
	Angry			
	Annoyed			
	Frustrated			
	Disgusted			
	Embarrassed			
	Offended			
	Sad			
	Surprised			
	Fear			
	Awkward			
	Shame			
	Happy			

## Appendix VII: Description of Codes

### 1. Desi Offspring

Desi offspring refers to the children of Pakistanis raised in a diasporic context in Sweden.

- a) **Being Immigrant:** This code captures the overarching experience of living as an immigrant, focusing on how ethnic identity, home life, and interactions with many ‘others’ are shaped by the immigrant experience.
  - *Desi Home (Children-Parents):* This sub-code explores the dynamics between immigrant parents and their children, particularly the cultural, generational, and communication gaps that arise in desi families.
  - *Contact (Immigrant-Immigrant):* Focuses on how immigrants interact with others from similar backgrounds, forming community bonds that provide familiarity and support.
  - *Moments (Immigrant-Native):* This code looks at the encounters between immigrants and native-born populations, often highlighting moments of cultural exchange, misunderstanding, or adaptation.
- b) **Being Muslim:** This code reflects religious aspect of identity; particularly how Muslim immigrants and their children negotiate their faith.
  - *Shedding-Diffusion:* The process of letting go of or adapting certain religious practices due to the influence of the host culture or personal change over time.
  - *Dormant-Active:* Reflects periods of stronger or weaker religious observance, indicating how faith might fluctuate based on personal circumstances or external pressures.
  - *Evolving-Maintaining:* Captures the tension between evolving in one’s beliefs and practices while trying to maintain core religious values and identity.

## 2. Desi Upbringing

This code references children being raised with values, traditions, and cultural elements passed down from their parents' South Asian, particularly Pakistani heritage, that shapes their worldview, identity and belonging.

- a) **What we 'cannot' do:** Represents the restrictions and prohibitions that second-generation desi children face, often imposed by cultural or religious expectations.
- b) **What we 'should' do:** Covers understandings of obligations and duties placed on individuals by their family or community, often tied to religious, cultural, or familial expectations.

## 3. Perceived Swedishness

Codes how second-generation members of the Pakistani diaspora understand what it means to be Swedish. It encompasses their interpretation of Swedish cultural traits and values, and how they position themselves in relation to these standards or boundaries.

- a) **Qualities:** The attributes second-generation individuals associate with being Swedish, like punctuality, individualism, and modesty, shape their understanding of Swedishness and how they see themselves in relation to these traits
- b) **Barrier-Distance:** Refers to the social, emotional, and physical distance perceived in Swedish culture, like Swedes' reserved nature and preference for privacy. This barrier shapes how second-generation individuals position themselves—whether they embrace or challenge it.
- c) **Family Values:** perceptions of second-generation individuals, based on their experiences with peers, or a general discursive understanding of what a 'Swedish' family looks like and values it upholds.
- d) **Prejudices:** Stereotypes and biases second-generation individuals experience that shape assumptions about their authenticity or acceptance as Swedes. These prejudices influence how they view their identity and navigate their place within Swedish society.
- e) **Swedish Values:** The core principles, such as equality, fairness, environmentalism, and social welfare, that are seen as integral to Swedish identity. For second-generation individuals, these values provide a framework for understanding and experiencing Swedishness in different settings.

## 4. Dynamics of Intimacy

Coded for the various ways second-generation individuals form intimate relationships, emphasising the cultural, social, and religious factors that shape these connections within different contexts.

### a) **Love Marriage (Mixed)**

This code addresses the experiences of second-generation individuals navigating love marriages

- *Inter-ethnic and Intra-religious*: Marriages where individuals come from different ethnic backgrounds but share the same religion.
- *Inter-ethnic and Secular*: Marriages where couples may come from different ethnic backgrounds, and religion plays a minimal role in their relationship.

### b) **Arranged Marriage (Cross-Border)**

This code highlights the experience of second-generation desis navigating arranged marriages that align with traditional ethnic and religious expectations, often involving cross-border considerations.

- *Intra-ethnic and Intra-religious*: Marriages within the same ethnic and religious community, often facilitated by family or social networks.

## 5. Bargaining Strategies

This code tracks the different identity paths that second-generation individuals may take as they navigate their cultural, religious, and personal identities:

- a) **Ex-Muslim**: Represents individuals who have left the Muslim faith, focusing on the reasons and impacts of this decision.
- b) **Hybrid**: Reflects individuals who adopt a blended identity, combining aspects of both their desi and host country's cultures.
- c) **Cosmopolitan**: Identifies those who see themselves as part of a broader, global identity, moving beyond national, cultural, or religious boundaries.
- d) **Muslim**: Captures the experiences of those who maintain or strengthen their Muslim identity throughout their life.



## 6. Desi Parents

This code focuses on the first-generation immigrant parents and their migration stories, motivations, and experiences in their new country:

**a) Migration Narratives:** Captures the narratives around why and how desi parents migrated, including economic, political, religious, and personal reasons.

- *Economic Narrative:* Focuses on migration driven by the desire for better economic opportunities.
- *Political/Religious Asylum:* Reflects stories of parents fleeing persecution or seeking refuge due to political or religious reasons.
- *Adventure/Student:* Parents who migrated for personal reasons, such as a sense of adventure or educational opportunities.

**b) Marriage Narratives:** Captures the narratives around parents' marriage decisions and partner choice.

- *Arranged Marriage:* Stories of marriages arranged based on ethnic and religious lines, often pre-immigration.
- *Love Marriage:* Narratives around marriages based on love, which may or may not adhere to ethnic or religious expectations.

**c) Labour Market Experiences:** This code focuses on the professional experiences of desi immigrant parents, highlighting the challenges and opportunities they face in the labour market:

- *Language:* Examines how language proficiency impacts job opportunities and integration into the workforce.
- *Education:* Highlights the role of educational background and how it translates (or doesn't) in the host country.
- *Skills:* Focuses on the transferability of skills and how immigrants navigate this challenge in seeking employment.
- *Access to working-class jobs:* Looks at the types of jobs immigrants tend to get and how class structures affect their career trajectories.

**d) Homing Strategies:** This code tracks how immigrants maintain ties to their cultural, religious, and familial roots, often as a way of "homing" or creating a sense of belonging:

- *Family Structure:* Focuses on traditional family roles, including parenting styles that emphasise cultural and religious values.
- *Trips to Pakistan:* Explores how visits to Pakistan serve as a way to reconnect with heritage and maintain family ties.
- *Mosque:* Looks at the mosque as a central hub for community and religious life, playing a key role in sustaining Muslim identity.

## 7. Emotions

This code captures the complex emotional landscape of being an immigrant or second-generation desi, exploring a range of feelings tied to identity, family, and societal challenges:

- a) **Afraid, Angry, Annoyed, Frustrated, Disgusted:** Reflects negative emotions that often arise from discrimination, cultural clashes, or personal struggles with identity.
- b) **Embarrassed, Offended, Sad, Surprised:** Captures emotions related to moments of cultural dissonance or personal conflict.
- c) **Fear, Awkward, Shame:** Focuses on more intense emotional experiences linked to cultural expectations, religious obligations, or identity crises.
- d) **Happy:** Balances the emotional spectrum by reflecting moments of joy, belonging, and fulfilment within family, culture, or community.

## Appendix VIII: Diasporic Bargaining Strategies

Cultural Repertoire P= Pakistani (Pakistaniness)

Cultural Repertoire M=Muslim (Muslimness)

Cultural Repertoire S=Swedish (Swedishness)

(=) means commensurate with

(≠) means incommensurate with

(+) means confluence

- 1) **When (Pakistaniness=Muslimness) then both are rejected for S (Swedishness/Secular) as a standard for belonging**

Javed	'Hybrid', 'Mixed', 'citizen of the world'
Alina	'Pakistani and Indian and Swedish; person of the world'
Amin	'Mostly as Swedish also Pakistani/Asian'
Talal	'Atheist Pakistani'

- 2) **When Pakistaniness ≠ (Muslimness=Swedishness) or rather when Muslimness=Swedishness then it is Pakistaniness that is rejected as a standard for Swedish Muslim belonging**

Akbar	'Swedish-Pakistani Muslim'
Masooma	'Swedish-born Pakistani', Muslim is very deep, very private, feminism
Maleeha	'Swedish with Pakistani parents'
Marium	'Swedish'
Khizer	'Swedish Muslim' or a 'Muslim Swede' (will give up nationality for religion)
Arham	'Swedish Muslim'
Maira	'Swedish-Pakistani Muslim'
Atheel	Swedish Muslim
Eshaal	'Mix things' 'More Swedish, I don't show I am Muslim'
Yasir	'Swedish Muslim'
Zabir	'Swedish Muslim'
Nauphil	'I am Swedish-Pakistani Muslim'
Zarar	'Primarily Swedish'
Jawaria	'Swedish-Pakistani Muslim woman'

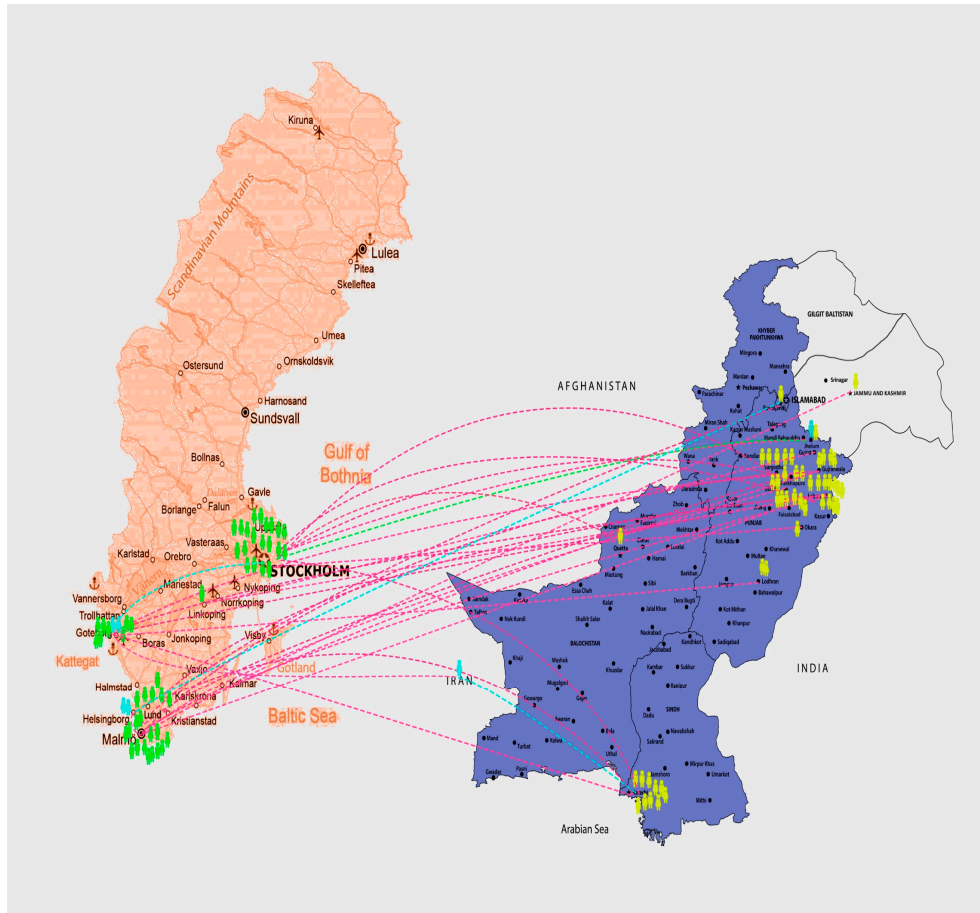
**3) When Pakistaniness + Swedishness + X (any other cultural experience/repertoire) is then mixed with Muslimness for a Cosmopolitan standard for belonging**

Arghan	'Mixed identity'
Zinal	'I have more faces than I can imagine' 'not religious I don't have that spark in me'
Sanaya	'Flexible person'
Ghazanfar	'I am trying to forget it all'
Mizhir	'I am human, curious, open' 'on a journey'
Muneeb	'Swede with a Pakistani heritage'
Zain	'Im Muslim, cannot say I identity 100% 'mind doesn't actively make the connection
Ilma	'Mixed-Person'
Maham	'Going somewhere'
Jamshaid	'Swedish-Pakistani'

**4) When Pakistaniness=Swedishness then Muslimness is the preferred standard for belonging**

Nazia	'I am Muslim' I am Pakistani
Khadeejah	'Muslim-Swedish Pakistani'
Subah	'Swedish Muslim then Pakistani-Muslim'
Shahzaib	'Swedish Muslim'
Haniya	'First Muslim' then Pakistani
Naima	'Pakistani-Muslim'
Effat	'Just Muslim' 'Pakistani-Muslim'
Seema	'Muslim' and both Swedish and Pakistani
Zareesh	'I am first Muslim'[..] 'I am Pakistani-Swedish'

## Appendix VIII: Migration Routes from Pakistan to Sweden



This illustration presents the migration routes of parents from Pakistan to Sweden. On the left is a map of Sweden, and on the right, a map of Pakistan. The yellow figures indicate the departure locations in Pakistan, while the green figures show their destinations in Sweden. The blue dotted line highlights any interruptions or transitions between the initial arrival point and the final long-term settlement. For instance, one parent traveled from Pakistan to Iran before eventually settling in Göteborg, Sweden. Another couple initially arrived in Göteborg from Pakistan but later relocated to Stockholm, where they currently reside.

Details about these routes are presented in table form on the following page.

Serial #	Participants	Parents	Migration from Pakistan to	Settlement in Sweden
1	Siblings	Father	Quetta	Stockholm
		Mother	Lahore	
2	Siblings	Father	Bihar, Karachi, Dhaka	Lund
		Mother	India, England, Pakistan	
3	Siblings	Father	Lahore	Stockholm
		Mother		
4	Siblings	Father	Sargodha	Stockholm
		Mother	Finland	
5	A	Father	Karachi	Stockholm
		Mother		
6	B	Father	Karachi	Stockholm
		Mother		
7	C	Father	Sargodha	Stockholm
		Mother		
8	Siblings	Father	Mardana, Sheikhpura close to Amritsar	Stockholm
		Mother		
9	D	Father	Sargodha	Malmö
		Mother		
10	Siblings	Father	Rawalpindi	Malmö
		Mother		
11	Siblings	Father	Lahore	Lund
		Mother	Sheikhpura	
12	Siblings	Father	Faisalabad	Göteborg-->Stockholm
		Mother		
13	E	Father	Nowshera Virkan	Göteborg
		Mother	Gujranwala	
14	F	Father	Stockholm	Jhelum, Pakistan
		Mother		
15	G	Father	Faisalabad	Göteborg
		Mother	Mishnabad	
16	Siblings	Father	Gujranwala	Malmö
		Mother		
17	H	Father	Lahore	Malmö
		Mother		
18	Siblings	Father	Rawalpindi	Helsinborg-->Malmö
		Mother	Islamabad	

Serial #	Participants	Parents	Migration from Pakistan to	Settlement in Sweden
19	Siblings	Father	Karachi	Göteborg
		Mother	Iran	
20	I	Father	Lodhran	Göteborg
		Mother	Multan	
21	J	Father	Lahore	Stockholm
		Mother		
22	K	Father	Faisalabad	Malmö
		Mother	Lahore	
23	L	Father	Karachi (immigrants from India)	Stockholm
		Mother		
24	M	Father	Rawalpindi	Malmö
		Mother	Kashmir	
25	N	Father	Karachi	Göteborg
		Mother	Lahore	
26	O	Father	Lahore	Linköping
		Mother	Jhelum	
27	P	Father	Faisalabad	Stockholm
		Mother	Okara	
28	Q	Father	Rabwa, Chinyot	Lund-->Malmö
		Mother		
29	R	Father	Lahore	Malmö
		Mother	Malmö	
30	Dropped Out			
31	Off the Record			

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# Swedish-(Par)Desi

The question of 'who belongs' and 'how to belong' from an intersectional perspective on diasporic generations is an insufficiently nuanced area of sociological research in Sweden.

*Swedish-(Par)Desi* departs from lived-life narratives of Pakistani Muslim participants in Sweden to interrogate the concept of belonging. It provides new insights into how diasporic identities are shaped, negotiated, and transformed across generations within the contours of Swedish-white normativity, ethnic ordering and racial othering. From the narratives of participants, it comes to the fore that they consider being immigrant and being Muslim 'spoiled' identities i.e. devalued and negatively perceived in Sweden.

This thesis thus conceives the term 'Diasporic Bargain' to understand ways in which second-generation Pakistani Muslims in Sweden negotiate their identities and agency – by balancing the joys of belonging and the pain of exclusion with bids for dignified existence and respect within both private and public spheres. This bargaining process is not merely a negotiation of cultural practices but also an exercise in navigating power dynamics across intersecting cultural repertoires – Pakistani, Muslim, and Swedish.

**UZMA KAZI** is a social researcher interested in ethnic and religious identity formation in migration contexts, post-colonial and decolonial feminist theory, development in the Global South and qualitative methods. She has a background in Sociology and Development Studies. She has experience of doing fieldwork both in Pakistan and Sweden.

