The agency of Muslim mothers and those whom they mothered

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Several research projects have explored the identity of Muslim women in Britain.[1] Some of that research has studied how Muslim women practise Islam in 'secular spaces' and assert their religious identity in Britain.[2] However, there is hardly any research that focusses on exploring the intergenerational identities of British Muslim women. As Gilliat-Ray and others suggest, the heterogeneity of the British Muslim community warrants further study.[3] By focussing on women's agency, family, and education, we emphasise the diversity of British Muslim ethnicities, and the heterogeneity of our Muslim participants. Women's agency and the construction of their identities in an intergenerational context are presented in this paper to add substantially to our understanding of the

1 K. Knott and S. Khokher, "Religious and Ethnic Identity among Young Muslim Women in Bradford," *New Community* 19, No. 4 1993: pp. 593-610; D. Phillips, "Parallel Lives? Challenging Discourses of British Muslim Self-Segregation," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24, 2006; H. Begum, "Geographies of Inclusion/Exclusion: British Muslim Women in the East End of London," *Sociological Research Online* 13, No. 5 2008: pp. 1-11.

2 H. Afshar, *Women and Fluid Identities: Strategic and Practical Pathways Selected by Women* (London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); F. Bhimji, *British Asian Muslim Women, Multiple Spatialities and Cosmopolitanism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); E. Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010); C. Dwyer and B. Shah, "Rethinking the Identities of Young British Pakistani Muslim Women," in *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities.*, ed. Peter Hopkins and Richard Gale (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

3 S. Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Dwyer and Shah, "Rethinking the Identities of Young British Pakistani Muslim Women," in *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities.*

intergenerational identity of British Muslim women, and its connection to their agency regarding veiling and education. This has become immensely important in the light of the Brexit vote, since Muslim women are regularly represented in the media as being passive and lacking in agency.[4]

In this paper, we demonstrate that the fluidity of identity and agency are interlinked, and that both influence the construction and reconstruction of the intergenerational identity of British Muslim women. In this paper, we will also explore the influence of gender roles and relationships on the transmission of cultural beliefs and practices from one generation to the next. We analyse the debate about the British citizenship, identity, and a sense of belonging using what Ricoeur terms collective memory. Thus:

> Collective memory simply consists of the set of traces left by events that have shaped the course of history of those social groups that, in later times, have the capacity to stage these shared recollections through holidays, rituals, and public celebrations.[5]

What is interesting is that to a varying degree white groups, not only define their identity based on their collective memories, but also demand that minority groups share their values based on collective memories that they do not share.[6] This is important, because as Jelin *et al.* point out: "Identities and memories are not things we think about, but things we think with. As such they have no existence beyond our politics, our social

4 P. Baker, C. Gabrielatos, and T. McEnery, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: The Representation of Islam in the British Press* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013); L. de Rooij, "Believing and Belonging: The Aesthetics of Media Representations of Islam and Muslims in Britain and Its Relationship to British Civil Religion," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 10, No. 1-2, 2017: pp. 172-217.

5 P. Ricoeur, *La Lectura Del Tiempo Pasado: Memoria Y Olvido* (Madrid, Spain: Arrecife Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, 1999).

6 de Rooij, "Believing and Belonging: The Aesthetics of Media Representations of Islam and Muslims in Britain and Its Relationship to British Civil Religion," pp. 172-217. Believing and Belonging.

relations, and our histories."[7] Therefore if British culture shapes identity, experiences, and then in turn (collective) memories, then those resources will be used to constitute Muslims' interactions. For the purposes of this study it would be important to examine whether these experiences and interactions are constituted differently in the case of first- and second-generation Muslims. With this issue in mind, we explored the understanding of mothering and being mothered by Muslims in the North-East of England using Oral History (OH) interviews.[8]

"Mothers share, by definition and condition, a set of activities, even though they vary as individuals and across cultures."[9] Maternal practices can be understood to point towards the nurturing, protecting, and training of their children.[10] In turn, "Mothers are identified not by what they feel but by what they try to do."[11] These relationships, whilst often intimate, also require the passing on of skills through dynamic interactions between parents and children. In turn, they lay at the basis of many profound and affectional relationships, providing a deep meaningful connection between two human beings.[12] This relationship starts with the child's physical needs, and develops as the child places emotional and

7 E. Jelin, J. Rein, and M. Godoy-Anativia, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

8 L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, UK – New York, NY: Routledge, 2016); R. Perks and A. Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (London, UK – New York, NY: Routledge, 2015); S.B. Gluck and D. Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (London, UK – New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford university press, 2017); D.A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014); V.R. Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

9 T. Arendell, "Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade's Scholarship," *Journal of marriage and family* 62, No. 4, 2000: pp. 1192-1207.

10 M. Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press., 1994); V.W. Leonard, "Mothering as a Practice," in *Caregiving: Readings in Knowledge, Practice, Ethics, and Politics*, ed. S. Gordon, P. Benner, and N Noddings (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

11 S. Ruddick, "Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth," in *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. D. Bassin, M. Honey, and M.M. Kaplan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 34.

12 Y. Oberman and R. Josselson, "Matrix of Tensions: A Model of Mothering," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 20, 1996: pp. 341–359.

moral claims on the mother.[13] A woman's mothering approach and their beliefs about themselves and the nature of their role and the child's, is the process of an active interpretation of cultural messages about children and their previous life history.[14] Those experiences shape their parental roles.[15] Within this framework, the term 'agency' is located, referring to a dynamic, multi-layered action undertaken by mothers and daughters. Following McNay,[16] this paper will look at positive formulations of agency. Examples may include authority in decision-making, leadership in the family, community and society, and advocacy. The paper will highlight how these elements shift between generations in ways that are a powerful means of influence in the family context, and more than mere resistance. Because, "mothering is learned in the process of interaction with the individual[s] mothered."[17] The agency of British Muslim women is thus explored, in an intergenerational context, through mother-daughter attitudes towards, and practices of veiling and non-veiling.[18]

Possibly, the simplest view of the first, second and third generation would be as follows: a woman who immigrates to the UK from another country is first generation; her children, born in the UK, are second generation; their children, again born in the UK, are third generation. The term *intergenerational*, in this paper, offers a more complex understanding. For example, mother and daughter, arriving in the UK together, and living here for the same length of time, are also an example of first and second

13 Leonard, "Mothering as a Practice," in *Caregiving: Readings in Knowledge, Practice, Ethics, and Politics*.

14 J. Ribbens, *Mothers and Their Children: A Feminist Sociology of Childrearing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

15 C. Lightfoot and J. Valsiner, "Parental Belief Systems under the Influence: Social Guidance of the Construction of Personal Cultures.," in *Parental Belief Systems: The Psychological Consequences for Children*, ed. I.E. Sigel, A.V. McGillicuddy-DeLisi, and J.J. Goodnow (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992). ed. I.E. Sigel, A.V. McGillicuddy-DeLisi, and J.J. Goodnow (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1992.

16 L. McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley – Blackwell, 2013).

17 K.E. Barnard and L.K. Martell, "Mothering," in *Handbook of Parenting: Status and Social Conditions of Parenting*, ed. M.H. Bornstein (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1995).

18 For more on the role of men in the mothering process see: A. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?: Fathering, Care, and Domestic Responsibility* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

generation. Age is not the primary signifier: rather, it is the influence of, among other things, the social and educational environment. Therefore, what differentiates between generations is not their respective ages, but their exposure to British social institutions such as schools. This access to certain social institutions provides different collective memories that, we suggest, provide a different approach to, and understanding of, the role of a Muslim mother.

It is often assumed that second and third generations are younger than the first generation, but that is only true for one familial line. Some middle-aged participants in this study were born in the UK and are therefore considered to be second generation, but they may be older than first generation immigrants arriving in later years. This assumption also does not account for the fact that the circumstances of immigrants may differ too; this applies especially if the first generation was a refugee or asylum seeker. What is noticeable is that social, educational, and ethnic influences, as well as the era of immigration to the UK, provide the parameters for considering members as being either first, second, or third generation. These factors also illustrate the multi-layered complexity of this concept.[19]

Methodology

The initial qualitative research used Oral OH interviews,[20] discussion groups,[21] and participant observation as an ethnographic approach,[22]

19 P.E. Hopkins, "Youthful Muslim Masculinities: Gender and Generational Relations," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31, No. 3, 2006: pp. 337-352; H. Ashraf-Emami, "Gender and Generational Relations for Muslim Women in Scotland," in *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*, ed. P.E. Hopkins (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

20 Abrams, *Oral History Theory*; Perks and Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*; Gluck and Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*; Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*; Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*.

21 D.W. Stewart and P.N. Shamdasani, *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*, Vol. 20 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014); R.A. Krueger and M.A. Casey, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014); G. Kamberelis and G. Dimitriadis, *Focus Groups* (London, UK - New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); P. Liamputtong, *Focus Group Methodology: Principle and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011); J. Kitzinger, "Qualitative Research:

applying grounded theory.[23] The study adopted an inductive approach in order to allow the recognition of theories that emerged from the data.[24] By applying grounded theory, the research "aimed to develop rich conceptual analytics of lived experience."[25] Therefore, the coded categories were obtained from the participant data, simultaneously engaged with analysis,[26] to overcome the shortcomings of descriptive research.[27] Oral History (OH) interviews play a key role in collecting usable data, as these "[are] a special kind of intensive biography interview."[28] It is thought that OH interviews allow participants to speak about their lives more freely, while covering any issues related to their cultures and identities. All interviews were transcribed, and NVivo software was used to analyse

Introducing Focus Groups," *BMJ* 311 1995: pp. 299-315; J. Kitzinger, "The Methodology of Focus Groups: The Importance of Interaction between Research Participants," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 16, No. 1, 1994: pp. 103-121; J. Reed and V. Roskell Payton, "Focus Groups: Issues of Analysis and Interpretation," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 26, 1997: pp. 765-771.

22 D.L. Jorgensen, "Participant Observation," in *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*, ed. R.A. Scott and S.M. Kosslyn (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015); J.P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2016); K. Musante and B.R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010); E. Schatz, *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013); A. Watson and K.E. Till, "Ethnography and Participant Observation," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Geography* (London, UK: Sage, 2010); M. Gerard Forsey, "Ethnography as Participant Listening," *Ethnography* 11, No. 4, 2010: pp. 558-572.

23 A. Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London, UK – New York, NY: Routledge, 2003); B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (London, UK – New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

24 A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford, UK: Oxford university press, 2015).

25 K. Charmaz, "The Search for Meanings-Grounded Theory," in *Rethinking Methods in Psychology*, ed. J.A. Smith, R. Harre, and L. Van Langenhove (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 48.

26 K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014); K. Charmaz and L.L. Belgrave, "Grounded Theory," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007); Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*; Glaser and Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*.

27 Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.

28 A. Portelli, *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans* (Berlin, Germany: Springer, 2009) 151.

the data. Face-to-face recorded interviews took place at locations of the participants' choosing; as a consequence, interviews were conducted in various places. The differences indicate the importance of familiarity and practicality of place to the research participants.

The research presents a personalised and grassroots account of Muslim women's identities in the North-East of England in an intergenerational context. The project builds on the established literature of ethnic minority communities in the UK, and Muslim women's identities more generally. The use of oral history interviews was chosen specifically as "a feminist methodology, situated in women's experiences and perspectives."[29] Building on previous research,[30] participants from the Muslim communities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne were recruited using snowball sampling and a gatekeeper.[31] Participants were selected according to the following criteria: they were females over the age of eighteen, who had lived in the UK for over ten years, and who self-identified as Muslim. This opened the research up to engaging with a wide range of individuals, and to embrace Muslim women of any ethnicity, age, or educational background. In turn this allows us to present a detailed analysis of women in Muslim communities in the North-East of the UK.

Ashraf-Emami was previously employed as Project Coordinator for the "Islamic Heritage Project," which was conducted in the North-East of England, and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). She delivered three well-received exhibitions in that region (2009-2011). These exhibitions also included, in partnership with the Tyne & Wear Museum Service, three 'creative writing' workshops with Muslim women in Newcastle; here, the participants produced poems and prose exploring their cultural heritage, this acted as inspiration for further research that later became the subject of her PhD analysis. During this time,

29 K. Anderson *et al.*, "Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 15, No. 1, 1987: pp. 103-127.

30 Ashraf-Emami, "Gender and Generational Relations for Muslim Women in Scotland," in *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*; de Rooij, "Believing and Belonging: The Aesthetics of Media Representations of Islam and Muslims in Britain and Its Relationship to British Civil Religion," pp. 172-217.

31 Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.

initial oral history interviews were collected, and the transcribing and archive training was provided by the oral history society. Data collection continued up to the completion of fieldwork in 2017.

De Rooij collected his data as part of his field research in Durham and Newcastle in 2014. This research formed part of his doctoral research which examined the way in which Media representations of Islam were received by Muslims and non-Muslims.[32] In addition, data was collected by participating in a range of community settings, with Muslim women from diverse ethnic and age backgrounds. There were eventually thirty interviewees, who were of Iranian, Iraqi, Egyptian, Bengali, Pakistani, Afghani, Indian, and Syrian heritage. The youngest interviewee was nineteen and the oldest was seventy-three. Their educational background ranged from GCSE level to PhD; the interviewees included students, medical and academic professionals, business women, and housewives. The findings from this study are not only relevant to Newcastle-upon-Tyne but also make a significant contribution to the role of women in the UK's Muslim communities as a whole.

The participants' self-identification as Muslim was the key factor for inclusion, but the research participants' "Muslimness" was not defined in terms of mosque attendance, wearing a hijab, or the eating of only halal meat.[33] Therefore, the research was not limited by a specific definition of "Muslimness," and did not limit the participants to those who were perceived as practising or devout Muslim women. This strategy was intended to avoid skewing the research towards a specific understanding of "Muslimness" and remaining open to a heterogeneous group of female Muslims. Non-practising Muslim women were approached and encouraged to take part in the research; however, this approach was not always successful. Some mothers were asked if their daughters might be

32 L. de Rooij, "Non-Muslim Perceptions of Islam in the News" (Durham University, 2015).

33 Ashraf-Emami, "Gender and Generational Relations for Muslim Women in Scotland," in *Scotland's Muslims: Society, Politics and Identity*; N. Meer, "Misrecognising Muslim Consciousness in Europe," *Ethnicities* 12, No. 2, 2012: pp. 178-196; K. Bullock, *Muslim Women Activists in North America: Speaking for Ourselves* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005).

open to participating in the research, as a form of snowball sampling. In one instance, a request was made to an apparently devoutly religious mother to arrange an interview with her daughter, in the knowledge that the daughter was not a practising Muslim. The mother suggested that I did not interview her daughter, but only young women who visibly practised Islam: in other words, those who wore the hijab. It was evident that some women who did not wear a hijab were hesitant about being interviewed. For instance, one of the interviewees initially expressed her doubts by saying: "Sister, I do not wear the headscarf outside the Hussayneh,[34] will you still interview me?" (Zohreh 34 years, with Pakistani heritage, first generation). It was explained that veiling or not veiling was not a criterion for participation in the study, but due to the nature of the research it may have been assumed that it was limited to women who also wore a hijab or to some extent practice their religion visibly.

Oral history interviews provide a comprehensive reflection on life by the research participants; as a result, these interviews can be regarded as a reflective tool for the participants. For instance, Fatima, a young interviewee, said, "It [the interview] was good, I reflected on my life and noticed things that I did not think about it before" (Fatima, 19 years old, second generation, Malaysian heritage). Her quote emphasises the importance of the impact of the research on the participants, which may have provided opportunities for them to reflect on their lives and empower them by this reflection. In addition, it shows that oral history interviews not only enrich the research but also may have an effect on the interviewees and provide them with the opportunity to reflect on aspects of their lives while sharing their voices with others. It must be remembered, that as a consequence, the material in these Oral Histories provides an interpretation of an individual historical process. Tracing the present everyday experiences through a series of anecdotes provided by the participant enables a reflection upon both their practices and experiences. The method therefore acts as an archaeological approach for engaging with individualised knowledge discourses, as presented to the researcher in participant memories. These memories then provide

34 A term often used by Shia to refer to mosques.

the basis for further reflection in our research. In particular, our work considers how mother-daughter dynamics relate to how mothers transmit and instill cultural, religious, and educational values in family life.

Mother as daughter, daughter as mother

Sima[35] is a medical professional who was born and raised in the UK. Her parents, first generation Bengali, were economic migrants who travelled to Britain from Bangladesh in the 1960s. While she mentions being close to her sister, who is a legal professional, she also appreciates her parents, especially her mother, who, despite having received no formal education, encouraged Sima and her sisters to pursue their studies in various ways, such as confidence building as a powerful strategy. As Sima explains: "... although [my mother] was not educated to any level, she always encouraged us. ... even if I had cooked a bad cake she would say it was delicious." Hence, the encouraging or motivating dynamic, in the relationship between mother and daughter is evident in Sima's anecdote. Even though Sima's mother had died a few years earlier, she recalled observing her mother practising Islam. Sima discussed how she had conducted research into her religion, and connects her own religious identity to her mother, stating: "And obviously the Islam was instilled by my mum although it was never forced on us." This illustrates how her mother functioned within the family as a leader. She would motivate her children to pursue excellence, but the transmission of Islam and Islamic values were transmitted to her children by example, rather than by indoctrination.

Sima comments on her mother's level of English, explaining that her mother did not learn English beyond a very basic level, despite having lived much of her life in England. "She could barely speak English, and I don't think she improved much over the next forty years that she was alive." Sima's narrative clearly illustrates a dynamic between the first and second generations in the Bengali Muslim community: a mother who could barely speak English, but whose daughter was inspired to strive for more and was able to undertake a PhD at a British university.

35 All names have been changed to ensure the participants' anonymity.

Emile Durkheim and Friedrich Nietzsche have argued that religious observance has historically been stronger in periods and communities where education was limited.[36] On the contrary, Sima found that as her level of education advanced, she observed her religion more strictly; for example, she started to wear a hijab. Sima responded as follows when asked if she was transmitting her religious beliefs to her children:

> I do, I do, because from a very young age I wanted everything to be natural for them. So, although prayer becomes compulsory at the age of puberty, I didn't want to let them be free with no prayers, no religion in them and then at the age of 12, 13, say to them, right now you've got to pray five times a day. That's a very hard thing to explain to your children: 'Right from [this day forward] you're going to pray.' So, as they've grown up, from the age of seven I've introduced the prayers five times a day and God willing the first big four are now praying five times a day. And I've tried to make it more that we love doing it, we want to make God happy, rather than you have to do it (Sima, 45 years old, second-generation, Newcastle).

From Sima's account, we can see that not only has she been influenced by her mother's practice of religion, but also that she has transmitted her religious and cultural values to her children from an early age. Her choice of actions on how to motivate the children demonstrates her agency in transmitting her religious beliefs, and a continuity with her mother's motivational tactics, but a discontinuity with her methods for religious transmission. By instilling specifically Muslim practices in her children, such as praying five times a day, Sima demonstrates the parental power in the children's developing agency, subsequently influencing the construction of their own identities. From this example,

36 For example: E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J.S. Swain (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2008); F. Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life. Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

we can see that the influence of Muslim women within their families is not limited specifically to female issues such as veiling, but applies to general religious, family, and social values as well. This example gives a good illustration of the generational dynamics and potential variations.

Her decision, her strategy

Some people argue that decision-making is an initial step towards empowerment for any marginalised group, in this case women, and may also lead to an increase in women's power in other areas of life.[37] Jo Rowlands states that, "women's empowerment may be explored through personal, relational, and collective aspects."[38] The following interview illustrates how the participant explores her agency when deciding to wear the hijab and indicates the trajectory of constructing and reconstructing identity through veiling. Sima stated that her starting point for wearing the hijab occurred while she was at University studying for a PhD; during this time she felt that it was important to wear a veil. She articulates it as follows:

> But throughout my life in terms of, you know when you hit just before 18, there was always something that I just felt it wasn't enough and then I started thinking about covering my hair, but to be honest I didn't do that properly until I was about 29. No, 27, 27, 28. And I can actually – specifically, it's always been in my head, it's just getting the courage to look different, for your friends to see you not with your hair out, and just vanity, all those things. But deep down I knew it was the right thing to do. And then I did make a

37 A. Friedman *et al*., "The Shift in Power with Age: Changes in Perception of the Power of Women and Men over the Life Cycle," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 16, No. 4. 1992: pp. 513-525; A.R. Friedman, "Rape and Domestic Violence: The Experience of Refugee Women.," in *Refugee Women and Their Mental Health: Shattered Societies, Shattered Lives*, ed. E. Cole, O. Espin, and E.D. Rothblum (New York, NY: Harrington Park Press, 1992); N. Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment," *Development and Change* 30, 1999: pp. 435-464.

38 J. Rowlands, "Empowerment Examined," *Development in practice* 5, No. 2, 1995: pp. 101-107.

> decision in my head that, you know, if I was to marry I do not want a man to marry me purely for the way I look or anything like that. I want him to marry me for what I am, rather than [my appearance] ... and I put the headscarf on as well because I did not want in a later stage in my life, if I decided late, if I was about 35 and I put the headscarf on, I didn't want my husband to prevent me from doing that (Sima, 45 years old, second-generation, Newcastle).

Sima's remarks show that she chose to wear a hijab while she was single, so that her future husband could not dispute her right to wear it if she was a hijabi when they first met. This demonstrates that Sima's agency through self-actualisation was constructed deliberately and thoughtfully. She was conscious that patriarchal power might prevent her from wearing the hijab after marriage, and therefore chose to empower herself through veiling before marriage. The reaction towards the vanity of not wearing a hijab, is one of the many reasons that Muslims regularly give for wearing the hijab and shows her relationship with the religious tradition as one familiar with its norms and values. As Ansari puts it,

> Islam serves as a frame of reference – a pattern of thought and communication - and gives meaning to their condition and behaviour. These Muslims may also have very diverse attitudes towards Islam and its practice. But what they do have in common is knowledge of Islam, on which they draw while engaging in a discourse so that they can communicate meaningfully and with relevance.[39]

Self-esteem is central to the development of agency[40] and autonomy

39 H. Ansari, *The 'Infidel' Within: Muslims in Britain, 1800 to the Present* (London, UK: Hurst, 2004).

40 N.R. Branscombe and D.L. Wann, "Collective Self-Esteem Consequences of Outgroup Derogation When a Valued Social Identity Is on Trial," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 24, No. 6, 1994: pp. 641-657; H. Tajfel and J.C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Inter Group Behavior," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. S. Worchel and W. Austin (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1986).

is a core component of that.[41] Research participants demonstrated how they manage to negotiate their identities through their choice of wearing a veil. Consequently, making the decision to veil or unveil is one aspect of social and self-identification, through which women may exercise self-development.[42] For instance, Sima explains how she reached the decision to wear the hijab after she learned more about religious teachings and obligations. Her religious learning empowered her to make a conscious decision to wear the hijab; this attentiveness to religious teachings was sparked by attending seminars and discussions during her late twenties while she was studying for a PhD. This awakened her awareness of her identity as a Muslim woman, and she then realised that by not veiling, she was distancing herself from an important part of her identity. She explains how she embarked on this journey as follows:

> [referring to the sudden death of a relative] … made me realise I've got to start learning about my faith. And I think it was more through friends, and then obviously you learn about your religion, you love it more and you just want to be better. For me learning is lovely as well and obviously when you truly understand what your faith means and there is no other choice for me now (Sima, 45 years old, second-generation, Newcastle).

The death of a close friend or relative plays a key psychological role in identity processes[43], in this specific instance it sparks the quest for religious knowledge. In this interview, Sima empowered herself through gaining knowledge of her religion, which was acquired through her subsequent dedication in expressing her agency. It is also necessary to

41 P.H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London, UK – New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

42 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

43 B.L. Burke, A. Martens, and E.H. Faucher, "Two Decades of Terror Management Theory: A Meta-Analysis of Mortality Salience Research," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, No. 2, 2010: pp. 155-195.

recognise that agency and decision-making are interlinked.[44] Thus, Sima connected her agency with the decision to observe the religious practice of veil wearing.

Gender roles in Sima's own family are in contrast with those of her parents, as well as many traditional Bengali families. Having three sets of twins, Sima could not have pursued her profession if she were unable to convince her husband to leave his career for childcare and housework duties. This, she mentions, was certainly not an option for her mother. Consequently, a dynamic intergenerational identity is evident in terms of gender roles within the family. Sima used her agency to discuss with her husband their respective career and family roles and persuaded him that it would benefit both them and their children if she pursued her career, thereby maintaining her professional life alongside her family life. She exemplifies British Muslim women utilising their authority in family decision-making to act with agency, which she might have been denied if she had been subjected to the restrictions imposed by a religious systemic patriarchy.

Her choice as resistance

It was notable that, despite the general media narrative that the veil is a patriarchy-enforced custom, some of the research participants wear veils despite their husbands', fathers', and sons' objections to the practice. For example:

> I wear a hijab every day without fail, whether it is to University or to the shops, sport, whatever. It is a part of who I am, and I feel that in a modern society I should be able to be who I want to be and be respected. My mother doesn't wear a hijab, and my parents say I shouldn't wear it at times. In particular, my parents feel that it is not something a modern [meaning contemporary] British woman should wear. I remember my father saying once that it is out of

44 Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment," pp. 435-464.

> date, a remanence of a different time. Sometimes, they say that because of the Islamophobia in the UK they are worried for my safety. (Najma, 21, second-generation, Durham).

The preceding quote reveals how some of these women struggle for their right to wear the veil, and it also shows how this individual struggles for autonomy in a family environment. In this instance the respondent's parents argue that a veil should not be worn, and they suggest safety concerns (not necessarily illegitimate in the North-East) when out wearing a hijab. In addition, one may assume that Muslim men in the UK are conscious of the way that society views Muslim women in a hijab, and therefore may worry that society will believe that they or the community at large, are forcing their wives and daughters to wear the veil. They may wish to dissociate themselves from this negative perception. It is also possible that some Muslim men have come to see the veil as anti-modern: a cultural, rather than a religious tradition, about which they may be embarrassed, much like Najma's parents.

In turn, some of the participants explore their agency through the veil, challenging and resisting patriarchal power. A decision not to adopt the same relationship to the veil as their mother, highlights a self-emancipatory strategy, subversion of power through gender empowerment, that was explored by several participants in this research. British Muslim women who adopt this strategy illustrate the importance of lived 'authenticity,'[45] and highlighted their familial influences on their life history of veiling/unveiling to understand gender empowerment in this way. In turn, the veil symbolises multiple qualities, such as the sharing of values and practices, gender equality and freedom of choice.[46] For example, in a women's study circle, Firuzeh, a first-generation Iranian, relates that:

45 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

46 F. Anthias, "Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: Rethinking Translocations," in *The Situated Politics of Belonging*, ed. N. Yuval-Davis, K. Kannabiran, and U. Vieten (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 21.ed. N. Yuval-Davis, K. Kannabiran, and U. Vieten (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006

> I had a dream that meant a lot to me, and I felt I should start wearing a headscarf because that is what I understand that is advised in my religion. But my husband and my sons do not like it. They are scared that something bad will happen to me when I wear the scarf, you know. Wearing a headscarf is not really easy for me. I took advice from a couple of people to see what my duty [i.e. religious duty] is now (Firuzeh, 42, Newcastle).

The preceding quotes illustrate how Najma and Firuzeh use their autonomy and agency to disregard the patriarchal power in the family with regard to veiling. It is not completely clear, even in these particular instances, whether the objections to the visibility of religion are actually based on fears for women's safety, or whether they are based on some other reasons; in any case, the reasons for objection are not immediately important. Although much of the media presents the veil as a symbol that all Muslim women are oppressed by patriarchal attitudes, it is evident from the preceding quotes that it means different things to different people: a floating signifier[47], as it were. As a consequence, these quotes also symbolise the emancipatory drive by the women in question, in response to their own patriarchal relationships, as exhibited in their father's, husband's, or brothers' opinions. They also highlight the patronising media rhetoric about Muslim women's passivity.[48] In this instance the complex motivations for agency are in conflict with the binary understanding of Muslim women's passivity and freedom that can only be captured by veiling/unveiling.[49]

47 J. Mehlman, "The" Floating Signifier": From Lévi-Strauss to Lacan," *Yale French Studies*, No. 48, 1972: pp. 10-37.

48 For comparison see: A.M. Johnson and R. Miles, "Toward More Inclusive Public Spaces: Learning from the Everyday Experiences of Muslim Arab Women in New York City," *Environment and Planning A*46, No. 8, 2014: pp. 1892-1907.

49 For more see: S. Shaikh, "Transforming Feminisms: Islam, Women, and Gender Justice," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. O. Safi (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2003).

Solidarity and Democracy

Those Muslim women who do not provide any visual indication of Muslimness are often no less religious than those who wear the veil, and they frequently demonstrate their passion and knowledge of their religion in other ways.[50] Homa is a 38-year-old Muslim woman with Iranian heritage, married for fifteen years to a white British man from Newcastle-upon-Tyne; she explained that when she married, she was not particularly strict in the observance of Islamic practices. However, this changed recently, as she became more conscious of being a Muslim, and through extensive reading and attending religious courses increased her knowledge of Islam and its practices. Homa then discussed with her husband the possibility of wearing a headscarf. She explained that her husband strongly opposed veiling, by saying that this is his country, not hers, and that she would be on her own if she wore a headscarf; he even suggested that she might as well return to her homeland if she wanted to wear one.

Homa decided to base her argument upon the right of freedom to practise one's religion in a democratic society, saying, "So, what about democracy?" Significantly, she refers to democracy, as a basic British value, to defend her argument to wear the veil. The principle of democracy underpins much of the self-understanding of British society and its population. Homa's belief that she had the democratic right to wear the veil emphasises her sense of belonging to Britain and its ostensibly democratic society. It seems that she feels she should be allowed to wear the veil as her democratic right as a British citizen. Yet, in dialogue with her husband, Homa has decided, for now, to wear the veil when she attends religious gatherings but not to wear it on a daily basis. This narrative illustrates how, in some cases, religious practices in relation to identity have a dialogical and structural character.

The veil appears to signify multiple attachments and belongings,

50 C. Dwyer, "Veiled Meanings: British Muslim Women and the Negotiation of Differences," *Gender, Place and Culture* 6, No. 1, 1999: pp. 5–26; C. Dwyer, "Contradictions of Community: Questions of Identity for Young British Muslim Women," *Environment and Planning A* 31, No. 1, 1999: pp. 53-68.

such as sharing values and practices.[51] Some of the research participants explore both their agency in relationship to others in solidarity when making their decision to wear the veil. Jasmin is a 36-year-old nurse from Newcastle and unlike Homa, has a different relationship to others that motivates her choice for wearing a hijab.

> I wear the hijab in solidarity with my Muslim sisters back in the Middle East. They don't really have an option to take off the hijab like I do. If they do, then they will be disrespected, threatened with rape and assault, if they are allowed out at all. I am fortunately removed from all of that, but I want to show solidarity and support to those women who fight for the autonomy of women in places they don't really have it. It makes me proud to be called a Muslim feminist in that sense and I don't see it as a contradiction in terms (Jasmin, 36, third generation, Newcastle).

In the two preceding examples, both women highlighted the relational aspect of their decision to wear a hijab. Thus, the one chose to do so in discussion with her husband, and the other chose in order to stand by her fellow Muslim women. These examples show that whilst the hijab is often worn because of certain religious values, those religious values are part of a religious social reality that can be as influential or important for motivating certain practices.[52]

51 Anthias, "Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: Rethinking Translocations," in *The Situated Politics of Belonging*, 21.21.</DisplayText><record><rec-number>66</rec-number><foreign-keys><key app=”EN” db-id=”zsdzxtxzvxzz0hedvvhvaazqr2xrref5w25r” timestamp=”1542109652”>66</key></foreign-keys><ref-type name=”Book Section”>5</ref-type><contributors><authors><author>Anthias, F.</author></authors><secondary-authors><author>Yuval-Davis, N.</author><author>Kannabiran, K.</author><author>Vieten, U.</author></secondary-authors></contributors><titles><title>Belongings in a globalising and unequal world: rethinking translocations</title><secondary-title>The situated politics of belonging</secondary-title></titles><pages>17-31</pages><dates><year>2006</year></dates><pub-location>Thousand Oaks, CA</pub-location><publisher>Sage</publisher><urls></urls></record></Cite></EndNote>

52 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

Achievement and self-realisation

In some Muslim contexts the hijab provides access to public space that a non-hijabi woman would not be able to access, but in contemporary Britain the opposite could be true.[53] Therefore, self-emancipatory strategies and gender empowerment through decision-making by women should be viewed in that context. Some daughters acted against the wishes of their mothers in deciding whether or not to veil, and did so motivated by a desire for autonomy and freedom. Some of the maternal participants saw the hijab as a symbol of empowerment while simultaneously signifying an inner spiritual quality.[54] It is reasonable to assume that British Muslim women construct and reconstruct their identity through veiling/unveiling, and this identity is formed and influenced by the political, religious, and cultural identity created by their 'past and present experiences.'[55] Hence, self-consciousness and Muslim consciousness have also been heightened by some of the socio-political factors in the UK.

Education was regarded as a significant part of Muslim women's culture. It seems that education is deeply and widely "culturally embedded" in Muslim families, even though many women of the first generation lack formal education. Despite this, research participants often referred to a phrase from the Prophet Mohammad that advises: "*Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.*" This phrase was often referred to by Iranian women in the form of the poem *Shahnameh* by the Persian poet Firdowsi (*d. ca.* 1020)[56]. As one of the research participants pointed out, the Quran seems to promote gender equality in the pursuit of knowledge. Thus: "our religion, over 1400 years ago, advised seeking knowledge for both women and men, not only for men, you know" (Faezeh, 26 years old).

Faezeh's quote shows that many Muslim women refer to the Quran,

53 Shaikh, "Transforming Feminisms: Islam, Women, and Gender Justice," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*; J.R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

54 S.A. Crabtree and F. Husain, "Within, Without: Dialogical Perspectives on Feminism and Islam," *Religion & Gender* 2, No. 1, 2012: pp. 128-149.

55 P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London, UK: Hutchinson, 1987).

56 In Farsi: "Chenin goftpeyghambarrastgoy za gahvareh ta goordaneshbejoy".

which makes no distinction between the sexes regarding the importance of knowledge and education; those women feel that religious belief is instrumental in the construction of their identity. As their opportunities for education, both formal and informal, increase, this concept of gender equality in education, even in a religious context, empowers women to use their agency for interpreting their religion and practices.[57] In this regard education became a form of social capital.[58] A consequence is that many of the Muslims who arrived in the UK, at different stages, already had professional qualifications when they arrived; many of them were not from a South Asian background. For example, many first-generation Muslim women from Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, who arrived during the last two decades, had better access to further education and the labour market. They displayed an increased level of professionalisation, which may subsequently be demonstrated by a greater willingness to share cultural experiences with wider British society. This in turn, we argue, aids their meaningful integration through education and work.

It is this approach to education that the role of mothers and daughters is most evident. Mothers who were less educated wished for their daughters to aspire for more in life and to become better educated; this applied to motivational mothers such as Sima. The more educated mothers (holders of social capital) encouraged their daughters to carve out their own path. Thus, a transition from motivation for achievement to motivation for self-realisation took place. In the hijab/non-hijab discussion it was evident that the daughters who met family resistance were those with an emphasis on female achievement, rather than self-realisation. Nadia is a former student at Newcastle University who originated from South Africa. She states:

57 B. Subedi, ed. *Critical Global Perspectives: Rethinking Knowledge About Global Societies* (Charlotte, NC: IAP, 2010), Pages.

58 J.S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American journal of sociology* 94 1988: pp. S95-S120; J. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *Networks in the knowledge economy* 2003: pp. 57-81; P. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, ed. I. Szeman and T. Kaposy (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); S.L. Dika and K. Singh, "Applications of Social Capital in Educational Literature: A Critical Synthesis," *Review of educational research* 72, No. 1, 2002: pp. 31-60.

> My mother always encouraged me to be myself, I find myself wearing my hijab on and off, depending on my mood or my fashion feeling for the day. It was more the fact that I was accepted as a person becoming myself, especially when I was young, that gave me the courage to explore my identity and decide who I was. I guess that is why I don't really look like most Muslims, with tattoos and piercings and such, but my parents have now come to terms with that and are supportive. (Nadia, 28, first generation, Newcastle).

Sima's practices as a parent, as revealed in her discussions, differed from her mother's; nevertheless they were still driven by a mentality that motivated and gained satisfaction from high achievement. Similarly, Najma's resistance to her parents' comments was also based on a motivation to achieve. However, when Nadia moved to Newcastle to be a student it was her parents' wish that she should not be satisfied just by completing her degree, which led to her staying for a subsequent job opportunity. In addition her parents felt it was important for her to realise her potential outside of the classroom and become all that she could be. Sadia, aged 30, is a second-generation resident of Newcastle; she said the same about her wishes for her young daughter. Thus, "I want her to grow up and be a conscious Muslim, if that means she doesn't wear a hijab, then that doesn't matter, what is important is what is in your heart, Allah always knows what is inside you, so the outer appearance doesn't matter". This attitude does not display an authoritarian parent-child relationship, whereby the parents are expected to know better; instead it indicates a more horizontal relationship with complementary roles for parents and children. As such, the practice of wearing a hijab becomes more negotiable by the individual making the choice. Thus, unlike our participants it is not part of resistant ideology but rather a more positive form of agency borne out of what McNay[59] calls advocacy leadership and agency.

59 McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*.

Collective Memory and Motherhood

In this paper, we have highlighted the fluidity of identity and agency, and have shown that both influence the construction and reconstruction of the intergenerational identity of British Muslim women. The transmission of cultural beliefs and practices from one generation to the next is important as collective memories include shared recollections through holidays, rituals, and public celebrations.[60] The successful transmission of cultural beliefs and practices makes collective memory possible. Therefore it is worthwhile to remember that the celebration of Eid can be understood in this way, but the decision to veil or not to veil is one that rests, not on a different understanding of collective memory, but rather on a different identification of what constitutes the collective. This is the conflict that potentially arises with different native groups, as their identity based on their collective memories, is not shared. Thus, their understandings of what the collective is meant to be or represent is not identical. As a consequence, the identities and memories people think with or through, extend to their immediate political and social relations, and thus affect their everyday practices.[61]

Therefore the resources used to constitute the Muslims' interactions with each other, but in particular as mothers, all point towards the nurturing, protecting, and training of their children.[62] As Ruddick[63] points out: "Mothers are identified not by what they feel but by what they try to do," and that is the point at which the collective memory becomes salient. Mothering, as understood by each individual, requires the passing on of skills between parents and children, but the way they choose to do so, in particular when they differ, signals a shift from one 'mothering collective' to another. In turn, at the basis of many a profound affectional relationship, a woman's mothering approach reflects their beliefs about themselves and the nature of their role and the child's. This process is

60 Ricoeur, *La Lectura Del Tiempo Pasado: Memoria Y Olvido*.
61 Jelin, Rein, and Godoy-Anativia, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*.
62 Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930*; Leonard, "Mothering as a Practice," in *Caregiving: Readings in Knowledge, Practice, Ethics, and Politics*.
63 Ruddick, "Thinking Mothers/Conceiving Birth," in *Representations of Motherhood*, 34.

an active interpretation of cultural messages about children and life history.[64] A mother's (childhood) experiences shape their parental roles. Following on from what McNay[65] has stated, and what our examples have shown, these shifts can be seen in methods of decision-making, leadership roles within the family, understandings of community and society. Yet in contrast to what Barnard and Martell[66] suggest, mothering is developed in a variety of processes and the mothers in question, whether explicitly or implicitly, identify with whatever type of mother they wish to be. The agency of British Muslim women can be evaluated by their ability to act in accordance with the ideal-type they have defined for themselves. Thus in an intergenerational context, as mother-daughter attitudes to motherhood differ, their belonging to different 'collectives' may differ too, which results in different expressions of religion through holidays, rituals, and public practices.

Conclusion

In the examples discussed in this paper, the floating signifier[67] that the hijab has become, has brought out in our conversations a variety of issues, such as: authenticity and agency, female solidarity, democratic and civil engagement, examples of womanhood and motherhood. It was argued at the beginning of this paper that the dynamics of Muslim women's agency are affected by intergenerational relationships. The findings presented in this paper suggest that mothers in Muslim families play significant roles as motivators and exemplars rather than merely "transmitting mechanisms" when transmitting cultural and religious values to their children. Thus, Muslim women's agency has a dynamic relationship with the understanding of their intergenerational identity as British Muslim women.

The interview with Sima also shows that in developing her identity, and longing for a sense of belonging, she tapped into the Muslim collective

64 Ribbens, *Mothers and Their Children: A Feminist Sociology of Childrearing*.
65 McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*..
66 Barnard and Martell, "Mothering," in *Handbook of Parenting: Status and Social Conditions of Parenting*.
67 Mehlman, "The" Floating Signifier": From Lévi-Strauss to Lacan," pp. 10-37.

memory.[68] It is interesting to note that her journey differs significantly from her mother's journey, but resulted from being in a social state of flux; this arose from the questioning nature of her PhD research and a desire for religious knowledge, as well as her personal crisis following the death of a relative. As the interview progressed, Sima revealed how her identity changed over time. She indicated how the memories of her life before wearing the hijab actively influenced how she thinks about life after deciding to wear it. This shows how she uses her own memories as resources to constitute her understanding of Islam and her future interactions.

When Najma defies her family members to wear a hijab it is because she has access to a different collective memory than that of her parents. It is not a symbol of oppression or anti-modernism, but rather a symbol of liberation. It is the collective memory of solidarity that evokes such a strong response from Jasmin, when she is asked about her hijab. Islam acts as a collective memory for the research participants, whereby the tradition becomes a repository of symbols and practices that they in turn actualise in the practice of their faith. Islam serves as a lens through which to view the world and gives meaning to their lived experiences. These Muslims may have very diverse attitudes towards Islam, mothering, and society. But what they share is that they draw on the same tradition to communicate meaning to themselves and those around them.

68 Ricoeur, *La Lectura Del Tiempo Pasado: Memoria Y Olvido.*