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**Between Nation and faith – A Study of Intersectional
Identities of Young Muslim Women in Swansea**

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Abstract:

Over the past two decades, Muslim women have been seen as either oppressed or socially incompatible with wider Western society. The hijab has been a topic of political debate and a physical marker of the “other”, making the study of Muslim women’s identities vital in order to counter discrimination.

This is especially important when considering the second generation of Western Muslim young women. It is important to explore these identities not in isolation, but within the context of their multiple intersectional elements of race, ethnicity, gender, and faith. Identity has to be looked at within the wider spatial framework of how it is practiced in everyday life. In order to develop a better understanding of how these identities are formed, practised and understood within a social context and the broader framework of national identities, it has to be looked at within the wider spatial framework of how it is practised in everyday life.

This thesis examines how identities of second generation Muslim Welsh women are constructed and expressed within everyday spaces and places. By using a mixture of approaches in methodology, findings were gathered by questioning 30 participants through interviews as well as focus groups, and by asking participants to collect visual images. The thesis investigates three key themes: the construction and embodied experiences of national and religious identities; gendered identities and feminism; and finally the sense of belonging to a collective religious or/and national Welsh identity. Through this we can access contemporary experiences of how young Muslim women living in Wales balance their identities when faced with the wider political, and social challenges of the society.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed (candidate)

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The study of young Muslim women

As a Muslim woman who has lived in Wales for most of my life, I have grown up negotiating my identity within the context of faith, gender, ethnicity and nation. At times it was hard to balance the intersectionality and combat the discrimination and inequalities that result from being very visually a Muslim woman, wearing a hijab. Having an extremely supportive family gave me the strength to combat difficult situations. However, I was aware of others who did not have the same privileged background as myself, and their struggle against discrimination from mainstream society whilst simultaneously combating cultural oppression at home. This awareness was the catalyst for a career in this field. I worked for 20 years in the Black voluntary sector, supporting Muslim women and youths who were combating cultural issues, stemming from a crisis of identity. My work centred around supporting young women suffering from domestic abuse, forced marriages, honour based violence, and female genital mutilation as well as experiences of mental health issues, self-harm, depression and others. When they came to seek support and assistance from wider society, many of these women then faced racism and discrimination which made them question every aspect of their identity and their sense of belonging.

Through my professional capacity as a lecturer, I began researching these issues, as I was often asked by other professionals why it was so difficult for women to leave oppressive situations and how such a strong medium of control existed within the culture. There was always so much confusion over the cultural and religious boundaries for these women, leaving them feeling confused between their identities and not aware of their position. The confusion seemed to stem from a lack of clarity between culture and religion. In pursuit of answers I began researching, only to find that much of the existing literature on Islam and Muslim women had been written by Western feminists and Western white men. Very few Muslim women had contributed to these topics. I was inspired to conduct this research, which can go some way toward the production of academic work written about Muslim women, by a Muslim woman. This is a cause very close to my heart, as I am passionate about Islam and the position

of Muslim women and would like to ensure they are given an even platform from which to have their say and be represented fairly.

1.2 Placing the study

According to the 2011 UK census Islam is the second largest religion at 4.4 % of the total population (White, 2012). The majority of Muslims live in England with around 45,950 living in Wales (1.5%). Records from the 2011 census show that the non-white ethnic population in Swansea is 6.0% (14,300), with the largest minority religion in Swansea being reported as Muslims (5,415, or 2.3% of all people) (Swansea Profile, 2017). The focus of the study is in Swansea, the second largest city in Wales. This research is situated in Swansea and its significance partly stems from it being a smaller urban area with diverse landscapes and a Welsh focus. This contrasts to most of the research on this topic, which has been conducted in urban cities with large population of Muslims (Dwyer 2000, Hopkins 2004).

Choosing Swansea is geographically important as it allows the thesis to examine a small city which has significant number of Muslims instead of only focussing on experiences of larger cities with large Muslim populations (see also Whittaker, 2019). It is important to highlight the experiences of minority groups living in a less overtly racialized city as it helps us to understand the wider diversity of Wales and how the encounters of these participants are embodied and experienced in specific geographical spaces (Wilson, 2017). It is also significant to observe how Muslim communities can be 'hidden' in small cities like Swansea, making it important to recognise the diversity of urban places which are important in contributing to the imaginary landscape of Wales.

Swansea is also very significant as I grew up in this city and I am particularly aware of spatial practices enacted and experienced as a Muslim woman, hence I was able to relate to the participants when they shared their encounters. Having a personal connection with Swansea gave me a greater understating of the different geographical scales involved in this study as knowing the specific areas gave me the advantage of being able to relate and of being familiar with specific places referred to by the participants. Having contacts within the Muslim community through the mosques, alongside personal contacts and the youth organisation gave me an advantage of being able to access participants easily. As stated by Zempi (2016) being an insider makes it

easier to connect with the participants. Also stated by Ellis (2004) having good relationships with participants, especially of trust, allows them to be able to share their experiences with ease and comfort.

Swansea is a small urban city with three mosques situated very centrally with quick and easy access. The central mosque is situated on Saint Helen's road which is dominated by mainly Muslim shops and restaurants and is situated in an area (Sandfields) mainly occupied by Bangladeshi minorities who regularly attend this mosque. The youth organisation, EYST is also situated on this road, close to the mosque, making it within easy accessible distance for the young people living in the area. It was therefore straightforward to get participants for this study from this mosque and the local surrounding area. Whilst there is a large pocket of community residents in the Sandfields area, the Muslim community is spread across the city with some also living in Sketty and Uplands which are more mixed and middle class areas to the West of the city centre. Being a local resident of Sketty and a regular attendee of the university mosque (situated in this area) also gave me easy access to participants from this end of the city.

Muslims in Britain first became a matter of interest after the Rushdie affair in the mid 80's, and were identified as a group through the Muslim identity. Propelled by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 bombings discussions around Muslim identities increased. Over the years, Islam came to be portrayed in public and policy as being in opposition to Britishness. Initial research focused on young people of the second generation, seen as being caught between the two cultures. In the 2000's literature began to focus on Muslims being seen as a threat to national security. This impacted on the sense of belonging of second and third generation British Muslims (Parekh, 2006; Modood, 2007). Muslim identity and its relationship to national belonging is therefore one of the most contentious topics surrounding the integration and place of Muslims in the West. However, Muslims are not only a subject of academic debate, but also a constant target of media attacks being linked to terrorism and opposed to British values (Francois, 2017).

One of the most widely discussed topics when considering Muslim identities is the veil or Hijab (the covering) with many European countries moving towards banning it in public places (France). There has furthermore been much negative rhetoric questioning

on the position of Muslims women in Western societies. These debates imagine Muslims as the “other”, incompatible and always problematic (Phillips et al., 2009). The hijab has become one of the most critiqued topics in feminism, being seen as a symbol of oppression (Al Wazni, 2015). However, as more and more Muslim women turn to the hijab as a symbol of their Islamic identity, there has been an increase in the number of Muslim youth asserting their Islamic identities (Haddad, 2007; Modood, 2007). This has sparked an interest in the debate of feminism versus religious freedom, with the position of Muslims in a non-Muslim society seeming to be incompatible (Staeheli and Martin, 2000).

This research is therefore very pertinent in that it explores the identities of young Muslim women in the West, as they combat the stereotypes of being Muslims as well as addressing oppressive cultural practices and negative Islamophobic attitudes. As the formation of identities develops from self-identification which is then externally recognised (Jenkins, 1996), having this constantly negative representation affects the sense of belonging for these Muslims, who feel alienated from the wider public. This can also be framed in the decolonial research which takes into account the experience of black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. Modernity is seen to have co-emerged with colonial powers and is associated with a white supremacy view of racial categorisation (Radcliffe, 2017). Decolonisation attempts to remove the ongoing domination caused by colonialism by taking away social classification of the population via a racist lens (Esson et al., 2017) and by changing the perspective by showing the everyday experiences of racialised groups who face difficulties owing to racialised hierarchies (Mahtani (2014). Radcliffe (2017) states that decolonial scholars have built on postcolonial research by examining socio-spatial change, as well as the spatial dimensions of marginalisation and exclusion. This work takes political inspiration from anti-colonial writers, as well as black scholars to argue that modern understandings of racial and ethnic identity are influenced by coloniality and continue to have effects on the coexistence of all. Decolonisation reveals the influence of coloniality within the discipline and challenges white-patriarchal privileges established through this mode of thinking (Esson et al., 2017).

It has been argued in Geography that racialisation is produced mainly by white academics which has resulted in insufficient detailed examination of racialisation in geographical theory and practices (Kobayashi, 2002). To decolonise geographical theories, it is important to move away from Eurocentric viewpoints and look at knowledge that complements this disciplinary project. This thesis achieves this by having the voices of Muslim Youth represented through the research. It is therefore important to explore the formation, construction and experiences of Muslim identities. This research does this, in the context of a smaller Welsh city which gives an insight into the question of national belonging for these Muslims. It explores the connection between the national identity of being Welsh or British along with religious and gendered identities. This is done through looking at the interconnectedness of identity, politics and space from a geographical perspective. The discipline of geography allows connections to be made between people and places by the exploration of social and cultural interactions, as well as the physical experiences of landscapes.

The aim of this research therefore, is to explore the national and religious identities, encompassing ethnicity, race, and class, experienced by Muslim women in Wales. The focus is on second generation young Muslim women in Swansea, examining their Welsh Muslim identity in the development of their own sense of self.

Hence the aim and objectives of this research are to:

Aims

1. To explore the relation between self-identity and the factors that influence its formation.

The thesis examines how young Muslim women understand their identities and the ways in which such identities are constructed, particularly by looking at the intersectionality of multiple social aspects. It focuses on how self-identity as well as collective identity are formed and influenced by faith, culture, ethnicity, race, and gender while living in a multicultural society.

2. To see how women interpret their Muslim identity individually and collectively in specific places.

The study focuses on how young women apply Islam in the space of their everyday lives. It will explore the extent to which they internalise Muslim cultural traditions and see Islam as a frame of reference, giving meaning to their daily behavioural rituals and means of communication.

Objectives

- To identify the various factors that intersect with one another to formulate the religious identity of young Muslim women living in Wales
- To explore the embodied experiences of these women through various everyday settings
- To examine young women's sense of belonging, particularly with regard to nationality, through their feelings of attachment with specific spaces and places in their lives.
- To identify markers of exclusion and discrimination, and the impact these have on their religious gendered identities.

This thesis is framed in the discipline of Geography as it provides a platform to explore a range of fields, specifically the importance of geographies when constructing, forming and embodying the identities of Muslim women in Swansea. It investigates the influences of specific places when configuring identities and how these geographies signify particular performances in everyday lives. It explores geographies of religion and specifically Muslim geographies whilst taking into account race, gender and ethnicity as Muslim women express their own identities. The investigation will be also looking to understanding the relation between sense of self within the wider context of a specific location in order to gain membership to a national identity, particularly based on a sense of similarity rather than difference (Dwyer, 2000).

The interaction between places and social relations occurs at different geographic scales from local networks to global memberships (Massey, 1994). The research looks at the key factors that cause attachment to a group identity, to create sense of national unity particularly regarding Welshness. In this, the research will add to previous work done by Geographers looking at construction of Muslim identities whilst focusing on the significance of place and how different scales shape everyday experiences (Dwyer

2002 and Hopkins 2010). When mapping these identities, it will look at the influence of national, regional and local scales on their ever changing development and fluidity.

The thesis studies the experience of private and public spaces when exploring the self and the creation of belonging through examining the geographies of emotions. This allows the study of private spaces such as the home and how these play a role in shaping everyday embodied experiences (Phillips, 2009). There will also be the study of public spaces, particularly their accessibility by looking especially at questions of exclusion or inclusion by the wider majority for Muslim women (Ryan, 2012). This will focus on encounters within public places and creating relations with others through these spaces for Muslim women and their dressed bodies. The thesis particularly explores the intersectionality of gendered and faith-based identities and how these multiple components are embodied and experienced in different spaces (Valentine, 2007).

The thesis will be structured around four themes looking at: firstly, exploring the formation and construction of Muslim identities encompassing race, ethnicity, gender and class; secondly, the embodied experiences of these religious and gendered identities in specific spaces and places; thirdly, focussing on gendered identities, looking at the intersection of various elements that cause inequalities and discrimination through the lens of feminism; and fourthly, examining their sense of belonging to a national identity, being a Muslim in Wales. The structure of the thesis is outlined below.

1.3 The structure

There follows a summary of the following empirical chapters, giving a brief summation of each chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter looks at existing literature on identity formation and construction within a geographical context. A vast amount has been written about Muslim identities, especially post 9/11. For the purpose of this research, there was a focus on literature about Muslim identities, specifically within the geographies of religion. It seeks to provide information on the previously neglected area of how these identities are

formed, understood, contested and experienced in different spaces and places. Even though there has previously been a geographical focus on this (Dwyer, 1999; Hopkins, 2007; Phillips, 2009), this study will consider this from a Welsh perspective. Jones (2010) identified that there had been previously little focus on Muslims living in less urban, more rural places.

The research on literature around gendered identities of Muslim women has been explored (Lyons, 2018; Phillips, 2009; Dwyer, 1999). However, this research will seek to explore the less well documented experiences of Muslim women living in less urban areas. These will enhance the understanding around geographies of Muslim women's identity, as well as contributing to geographies of feminism. There will also be consideration of the secular versus religious understandings of feminism, by examination of the intersectional elements that cause gender discrimination.

The literature review also concentrates on identifying gaps that exist in current literature regarding the wider sense of belonging for Muslims. Drawing upon shared common bonds of creating national identities, material is explored from the perspective of a Muslim identity in Wales (Jones, 2010). The literature also reviews geographies of exclusion which is a growing field in academic studies, particularly that focussing on Islamophobia (Modood, 2001). It also discusses writings by Modood (2007) and Cattle (2001) who looked at addressing these issues through multiculturalism, in order to promote more integration and avoid segregation.

Chapter 3 methodology

This chapter outlines the data collection, which used qualitative methods of questionnaire surveys and focus groups as well as analysis of visual imagery that represented identity formation for the research participants. One significant factor in the methodology is the positionality of the researcher (Smith, 2003). The fact of my being a Muslim woman and well-known to the participants through the youth organisation, Ethnic Youth Support Team, gave me a very privileged position, with access to the participants of this research. Having a long-standing involvement in the Muslim community made me an "insider", able to gain the trust of the participants and obtain much informative material from their interviews, which was then used to formulate the findings of the empirical chapters.

The methods utilised for this research were questionnaire surveys, being the most appropriate manner of collating information about behaviours, attitudes and experiences of the selected participant group (McLafferty, 2003). These were conducted in a face-to-face, semi-structured manner, allowing for an informal, flexible setting which meant that the participants could feel at ease, something which was particularly important, as we were discussing some very sensitive and emotive topics. This also gave myself as interviewer, the opportunity to clarify any further questions which might have arisen from participants' answers.

The questionnaire used can be found in the appendix, along with the information sheet that was provided to participants outlining the research, as well as providing the contact details of the supervisors, should the participants require further information. There was also the option of a counsellor provided, should any of the participants feel distressed during the interview. This was arranged through the organisation that the researcher worked for.

Chapter 4 Muslim identities

This chapter explores the multiple factors that contribute to the identity formation of the participants of the research, in particular looking at the production of their Muslim identities. The identity formation process will be explored to see how individuals construct their self-image and self-reflect. It will delve into their religious identities, and how they position this in relation to other markers (Brown, 2006). The chapter will also focus on fixed and fluid identities and how these are negotiated in different contextual situations.

The chapter will examine the ways in which different dimensions of identity intersect and influence the construction of identities. The intersections of the various factors will be considered, particularly how gender is understood within the context of faith and how the factors are prioritised to highlight the fluidity of identities. The impact on women's identities will be looked at carefully, to investigate the complexities of race, religion, class, and ethnicity (McCall, 2005).

The chapter will also focus on the relational element of identity production and how individuals see themselves in relation to the wider society whilst looking for recognition (Cheek, et al., 2001). Building on this relational concept, the research will specifically discuss the ethnicity and culture of the parents and its influences on the

identity of these participants. The impact on the participants as second generation, born and brought up in Britain, will be studied, in order to investigate the effect these transnational connections and ties have, on their everyday understanding of self-hood (Archer, 2001).

Chapter 5 Embodied experiences of Muslim identities

Building on the discussion within chapter 4, this chapter goes further in examining the embodied experiences of identities, particularly looking at the geographies of Muslim identities and how they are performed in everyday spaces. Studying specific spaces, namely (mosques, schools, universities, streets and beaches) gives an insight into how these identities are understood and experienced by the participants and others around them. The chapter will look at the role of different places and their impact on the way participants practice their self-image building on their place based identities (Zhu Qian & Feng, 2011).

The chapter focuses on the way in which the participants use private and public spaces to build their identities, both religiously as well as spiritually. They talk about the significance of certain spaces creating a symbolic meaning and enhancing their national identity whilst being distanced from other spaces, such as their parental countries of origin.

The chapter also looks at the gendered identities of these Muslim women and how it is practiced in private spaces such as the home, as well as public places such as educational institutes, work, mosques and streets. Even though there already exists a vast amount of literature on the hijab, the participants share personal accounts of wearing a hijab in these public places, and the consequence of these visibly displayed bodies (Litchmore and Safdar, 2016). The participants also discuss dress in a more generic representation, not just focusing on hijab, the fusing of their traditional clothing along with their Western culture as representative of their hybrid identities.

Chapter 6 Islam and feminism

Seeking to further expand on their gendered identities, this chapter explores the various gender inequality issues faced by the participants and how they negotiate their identities within the wider context of feminism and Islam. The chapter discusses the two forms of feminist ideologies presented to the participants: wider secular feminism

and Islamic feminism. The content explores the roles of each movement, how it addresses inequalities and how it empowers women within the frame work of Islam (Cooke, 2000).

The participants consider the various oppressive gendered practices that find their roots in a patriarchal cultural interpretation of Islam, and how these ideologies could be used to rescue women from such situations (Al Wazni, 2015). As second generation, Western Muslim women, these women negotiate their position between the different ideologies to see which best suits their religious needs. The participants debate which approach would enable them to have access to equal opportunities and enrich their everyday experiences. They discuss very specific gendered related issues such as inheritance, polygamy, and divorce. Looking at the intersectional element of the identities of these women and addressing the multiple inequalities caused due to race, class and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 1990), the chapter also focuses on the hijab, once again seeing it as a marker of oppression by some, whilst others feel it is a symbolic representation of their self-identity.

Chapter 7 Belonging

Exploring the religious and gendered identities constructed in previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the sense of belonging through exploration of the geographies of “home”. The participants seek to define where they view their home to be, and the symbolic representation of what makes it their home. They discuss their geographical attachments to these specific places and to their wider surroundings, such as neighbourhoods and familiar landmarks (Astonsich, 2010).

The chapter also looks at the wider sense of belonging to nation, through emotional attachment to certain geographical boundaries and countries of origin. There is a particular focus on the Welsh national identity and how strongly the participants feel connected with it. It will discuss the various markers that participants link with their Welsh identity and how much affiliation they have developed with Wales, specifically Swansea, as their home.

The chapter discusses the implications of Islamophobic attacks experienced in public places and the impact on the sense of belonging of the participants. Wearing of the hijab makes them visibly stand out hence they are targets of hate crime, leaving them

feeling alienated and excluded. With Islamophobia on the increase, it is important to share these personal accounts and the suffering it causes for the victims (Allen, 2015).

The final part of the chapter looks at shared common bonds through the exploration of the value systems of the participants' religious identities and wider national identities. As Islam has been portrayed to be oppositional to British values, the participants were keen to delve into the similarities and differences between the two value systems, in order to highlight the commonalities which they can use to build their collective national identity.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This chapter sums up the findings from all the empirical chapters around three themes which cut across the whole research: firstly looking at place and space; secondly positioning and construction of identities; and thirdly looking at home and belonging.

When summarising the findings from the research, it showed that places and spaces play an important role in understanding geographies of Muslim identities, in particular showing how identities are practiced and understood as well as accepted or excluded. The information gathered from this research will contribute to geographies of religion, showing how religion is practiced in different spaces and places with the creation of sacred spaces. It also adds to geographies of Muslim identities by sharing very personal accounts from participants which serves to increase the knowledge around these identities. This section also reviewed the use of space and place when discussing the intersectional elements of race, class, gender, ethnicity and faith whilst considering inequalities or discrimination.

The second section within the conclusion looks at positionality in the construction of identities. As second-generation Muslim women, they have to navigate their way through Islamic teachings against oppressive cultural practices (Archer, 2001). The participants were fortunate in not having parents who enforced these traditional practices which result in discrimination or inequalities in treatment. These were unusual results, as previous studies have shown young females experiencing cultural clashes (Kandiyoti, 1988). This section therefore looked at the position of feminism in Islam, as a concept to fight gender inequalities and to combat patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings, which discriminate against Muslim women. The participants debated feminist ideologies and stated their standpoint, with specific

reference to Islamic feminism. These views contribute to geographies of feminism, giving voices to young Muslim women when they share their experiences of religious identities combating inequalities.

The last section summarised how these Muslim identities belong to the wider nation, based on symbolic connections to local places. The landmarks of Swansea have created a deep sense of attachment, creating a strong bond to a collective national identity (Banks, 1996). However, the section also looks at experiences of islamophobia which impact on these collective identities by creating a feeling of exclusion. Nevertheless, the participants also discussed ways of overcoming these boundaries of division, by sharing and building on values shared by both their religious teachings and wider society. They felt that focussing on commonalities would enable them to build cohesive societies based on collective national identities focussed around spaces and places.

The thesis will therefore contribute to understand the construction of the identity of Muslim women, in the broader context of using local geographical spaces in Wales. It will provide some insight into the embodied experiences of these religious identities, in both private and public spheres. This will add to the understanding of their links to a collective identity based on shared values. This will then give further insight into how they negotiate their identities between faith and nation.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will look at existing literature on identity and the importance of geographies in the construction, formation and experience of identity. This research considers the various complex factors which influence the social construction of the identities of young Welsh Muslim women. This will be done by exploring the collective identity of both Muslims in British society and globally. It will also explore the way in which these identities are practiced in specific places, by looking at the emotional bonds that create a sense of belonging to a certain place whilst recognising the deep sense of attachment that makes that place a part of the individual (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). The notion of home will be specifically referred to, as Lupton (1998) states, an idealised “territory of the self” that contrasts sharply with the chaos of the outside world. The study will observe how these places are experienced by these young Muslim women – places which are saturated with meaning and where individuals find comfort in asserting their identities. It will also focus on the social geographies of the relationships that these young women have within the society at large, and the spaces they share within their society. It will look at their social identities in their various forms in different places and times. As stated by Pain, et al. (2001), social identities are not infinitely mutable but strongly underpinned by the relations between power and resistance. Hence the rise in Islamophobia means that Muslims are now viewed as a threat to the Western world (Ansari 2004), leaving them feeling powerless and excluded.

The following review evaluates relevant strands of geographical works and identifies the gaps that this current study seeks to fill. The literature that will be examined is focussed around three central themes: firstly, it focusses on identity formation distinguishing the individual self in relation to possible factors that influence its formation. This section explores geographies of religion, along with ethnicity, race, class and gender.

This section will draw upon literature from cultural geographies and geographies of religion, as well as wider material on race, ethnicity, gender and social class in identity formation. Research on race, gender and religion in geography have been primarily concerned with the spatiality of unequal power relations when considering embodied

intersections (Mirza, 2012). However, Lily Kong (1990: 355) argues that the study of geography and religion is “a valuable focus of inquiry which has not always been immediately apparent” and that religion is absent from some cultural geography (Kong, 2001a). This research will explore the emphasis of religion in the construction of identities whilst also considering the influence of race, ethnicity, gender and social class in the creation of the concept of sameness or difference. These boundaries will be outlined in relation to the “self” and the location of one’s own identity. Kong (2001a) claims that religion should be fully acknowledged as a marker or catalyst for social categorization, identification and processes of inclusion and exclusion, in a manner similar to race, class, gender and age.

With regard to the construction of complex identities within specific places, markers of race, ethnicity, social class and gender are examined as they appear within existing literature. These are widely recognised categories in social construction and classifications ascribed to people by others (Bhaba, 1994). The social groups formed on these factors will be analysed through an understanding of how these identities are navigated and negotiated in order to feel sameness, or avoid being the other (Smith, 1999). Identities are fluid and multi-layered, not solitary. Hence, people seek to belong to groups which emphasise their collective identities with other people with shared common factors (Jenkins, 1996).

The second area to be considered will be geographies of Muslim women’s identities and how these have been created in a religious, gendered and spatial context in the West. The thesis will look to bring the literature of geographies of religion together with geographies of Muslim identities and examine how they are constructed and contested across different spaces and places. Even though a vast amount of research has been conducted on Muslim identities in the West (Hopkins, 2007, Dwyer, 1999, Phillips, 2009, Lyons, 2018, Siraj, 2011, etc. etc.), very little has been written about Muslim identities when negotiating and sharing their embodied every day experiences within the wider religious and national context, particularly in Wales (Dafydd Jones, 2010). This thesis therefore works towards filling this void, by looking at the experiences of Muslims in places where they are a “hidden minority”. This differs from previous research where they were considered to be the “dominant minority”.

The third and final section looks at belonging and national identities, analysing geographies of emotions, home and exclusion. This part will focus on the literature around the sense of belonging particularly the attachment to place, stressing the emotional bonds to specific places (Blunt, 2007). Membership of groups will be studied, considering national identity and ideas of nations as spaces of imagined communities. Drawing upon the strong bonds based upon a shared history, culture, values, religion, language or a connection due to a particular place, it explores the idea of national identity and how closely people living in particular places associate themselves with that national identity (Mustafa, 2015). It looks at the ideas born of common characteristics and shared moral values and the sense of belonging to a nation. It researches how unified and well bound the sense of nations really are and explores Hall's statement that (1995, 183) "nations are not really as solidly "placed" as we imagined them to be", and are subject to fluidity and changing culture" (Mitchell, 2000). Mitchell goes on to define how nations and national identity are produced within specific historical and geographical contexts to create a sense of loyalty, or belonging, between people of a certain identification. Hence nations can be both imaginary and all too real.

The experiences of second generation young Muslims will be explored by focussing on the interconnections between the Muslim identity, the British and Welsh national Identity as well the global identity of Ummah (an imagined global Muslim community). Geographers Gardner and Shukur (1994) have observed that Islam is a far stronger and more positive tool for young people than the racialized discourse which attempts to categorise them. Others like Archer (2001:87) have argued that religious identity has enabled many young Muslims to reject "whiteness" and British identity, while unifying as Muslim communities irrespective of ethnic differences. Even though there has been previous work examining religious national identities (Hopkins, 2007, Dwyer, 1999, Lyons, 2018), there has been little exploration of the embodied experiences of religious and national gendered identities in Wales. The current literature on second generation Muslim young people has identified that they have strong connections with their parents' countries of origin and less affiliation to a British or Welsh identity. As identified by Hall (2000), literature on the geographies of youth looks at relational identities which can coexist with wider cultures, this

creating a wider sense of belonging by combining their ethnicity with the culture of wider society.

Literature on belonging being constructed around an emotional connection to a place considered home and its subsequent emotional symbolic connections (Phillip, 2009) will also be explored. The existing literature considers home to be an everyday space, where national and religious identities are performed and reinforced by social markers such as race, gender, ethnicity within a cultural and social context (Lyons, 2018). The dominant narrative around emotionally embodied experiences simultaneously shapes identity through encounters with others within these specific spaces. It is important to consider how these religious identities intersect with others through these meaningful encounters (Ahmed, 2001) thereby either creating feelings of national identity or feelings of separateness. This will be looked at in the wider context of multiculturalism and its connections with self-identity. Modood (2007) describes multiculturalism as the politics of individual identity and being true to one's nature of heritage and seeking public recognition of one's self-image. A society that actively supports cultural differences actively discourages hostility against marginalised communities. The focus of this section will be on the study of how these cultural differences are practiced and accepted across space and places, within a multicultural Britain. Clifford (1988:11) states that "one is always caught between cultures" and must identify where individuals find those "conjectural spaces", how they balance where one culture begins and other ends, where there is an overlap and how it translates into their identity. However, geographies of exclusion can show how a society can encourage such strong sentiments and beliefs that there is little scope for differentiation or tolerance between individuals- diversity among members is not allowed to exist (Sibley, 1995).

The following section looks at the literature around the construction and formation of identities explored in a relational and social context.

2.2 *Social construction of Identity*

A vast amount of academic literature exists on the social construction of identity. Through the exploration of some of this literature, I draw out notions of actively constructing a concept that is socially acknowledged, and approved by others. The construction of identity is a developmental process of "being" or "becoming". Richard Jenkins (1996) talks about the establishment of identities through highlighting the

“self” as an ongoing (internal) self-definition created in dialogue with external definition. He defines “self” as an individual’s reflexive sense without which we would not know who we are. The traditional distinction between “self” and “person” is the notion that distinguishes the private interior, psychological self from the public external and social person (e.g. Harre 1983; Mauss 1985). The self is an individual’s private experience of herself or himself; the person is what appears publicly in the outside world. Self and person are however, both part of an individual’s identity, as they are internally and externally implicated with one another but are very closely entangled with one another (Mauss, 1985). As a result, identity is a commodity that distinguishes individuals from others, based on creating a self by establishing our primary identity from infancy. The self-hood is formed through early childhood interactions with parents, teachers, peers, friends and society around us, inspiring us to become who we are through the creation of emotional bonds and by engaging in formative relationships (Sibley, 1995). These formative relations established with others, assist in drawing down similarities and differences which allow the development of identity through primary socialisation (Jenkins, 1995). However, in some ways human agency is constrained by certain cultural factors when constructing identity, which limits one’s choices when shaping the way individuals distinguish between self and others (Moghadam, 1994).

Whilst the foundations of identity could be inherent, Hall (1992) states that identity production comprises of the forming of connections with others with whom we have shared characteristics, with the aim of being accepted. Erving Goffman (1969) also endorses these connections through interactions based on the idea of a performance, which is rather more about social aspects and social exchanges between people looking for acceptance. Goffman (1961) expanding on the validation by others, describes “the presentation of self” during interaction which allows us to have some control over the signals that are sent although we cannot ensure either their “correct” reception or interpretation. It is important however to ensure one’s identity is confirmed affirmatively by others by negotiating them at their boundaries (Barth, 1969). It is thus important to recognise that these identities are not static as they are undergoing a constant process of change through the experience and enactment of everyday practices, with the process of construction being both contextual and relational. These identities are influenced by external factors which make them more fluid (Bhaba,

1994) as they are experienced through different times and spaces. Hence identity formation as mentioned by Hall (1996) is about an ongoing process of finding one's position in relation to a sense of self, as well as of others around us, in places and social locations where these interactions take place (Dwyer, 2000). Hence identity formation is about looking at the relational positioning of oneself and recognising one's belonging to the societies we live in, through active engagement with others (Woodward, 2000). This is reinforced by Jenkins (1996) who recognises that all humans need this acknowledgement, which they achieve through the construction of relationships of similarity or differences, thereby creating social identities.

Social identities thus acknowledge the way people develop their self-hood through influences of ethnicity, gender, race, class and social space (Zhu Qian & Feng, 2011). One's identity is therefore positioned in relation to these factors and the consideration of how they perform, how they are conveyed and recognised by others (Hopkins, 2010). As one of the aims of this thesis is to examine the various factors that influence identity formation, the following sections will explore the way these factors shape one's identity in relational contexts. Concepts of ethnicity, social class, gender, religion and culture will be explored. These can construct complex multiple identities as people are socially categorised into these positions by others (Hall, 1992). These multiple factors intersect and are negotiated within specific contexts, to create fluid identities which cannot be seen through a singular lens.

2.2.1 Ethnicity and race

Along with gender of self-hood, ethnicity is one of the primary markers, and is sometimes resilient to transformation (Dunn 1988; Kaye 1982; Richards 1974). It is dependent on local and historical contexts forming emotional and psychological concepts of self-hood with Weber (1978) stating that ethnic grouping is based on shared common traits such as descent, traditions, language, and symbolic practices. Ethnicity links to one's sense of continuity with a real or imagined past, maintaining an essential part of one's self-definition. Ethnicity as mentioned by social geographers (Pain, et al., 2001) relates to the cultures of a particular group which is linked by birth and is recognised as being different from others. Hughes (1994) and Tajfel (1981) link it with a wider sense of belonging to a larger social group.

It is also crucial to look at the role “race” plays in identity formation alongside ethnicity. Looking at the relationship between race and ethnicity, academics consider race to be an extension of ethnicity where as in this study, race and ethnicity are not separated. This is explored and described by Sandra Wallman as a mere “quibble” (1978: 205) and elsewhere she argues that physical appearance is a potential ethnic boundary marker amongst many. A strikingly similar position is taken by Thomas Hyll and Eriksen in stating that ‘the “Idea of race” (1993a: 5) may or may not form part of ethnic ideology and its presence or absence does not seem to be a decisive factor in interethnic relations. Van den Berghe also states that “race” has become nothing more than a “special marker of ethnicity”, a visible folk test of likely common ancestry (1981: 240). As a central part of cultural geographies there has been an emphasis on the element of race when looking at creating differences (Blunt, Gruffudd, May, Ogborn, & Pinder, 2003).

Agreeing with the notion of race as a marker of creating differences, Anoop Nayak and Alex Jeffery (2011) state that race is a biological myth; Roland Barthes (1972) refers to a human invention used to divide social groups. While others like Gillborn (2015) argue that race is fixed and socially constructed, often to be contested as a socially constructed marker of inequality and oppression. The racial divide as generally linked to a particular social group was used to group all minority groups under the term “Black communities”. This was used politically for many years to encompass all non-white minorities but has since broken down. The idea of a universal black identity was described by Modood (1988: 399) as a “meaningless chimera” and he viewed Asian culture as separate and distinct, perhaps underpinned by religion as a powerful factor in identity. The idea of “Black” identity was a homogenisation, but served a political purpose for ethnic minorities and was not disputed by the white community, who seemed happy to regard all minorities as “non-white”, that is, as distinct and, for most part, inferior to themselves, coinciding with Nayak and Jeffrey’s (2011) definition of racism being an ideology inflected with power and giving way to an imaginary hierarchy of human “types” based on their perception of being civilised, superior, developed and clean. Hence for the purpose of this study race, as a marker of identity formation, will be considered as encompassed within ethnic identity, as the two concepts are closely linked.

Barth (1969) talks about ethnicity as a concept that is both produced and reproduced, a transformation of the “group-ness” of culturally differentiated collectives – a two-way process that takes place across the boundary between “us” and “them”. It is also important not to lose sight of Jenkins model (1996) of ethnicity which emphasises a degree of plasticity in ethnic identification and in the composition of ethnic groups: that people can shift their ethnic ascriptions in the light of circumstances and environment. The pursuit of political advantage and/or material self-interest is typically held to inform such behaviour. These ethnic identities are formed based on communal belonging of particular location creating a community (Begum, 2008). Putnam (2000) describes this membership of community to be a solidarity based on shared values which for many ethnic communities have been preserved from translational ties with the countries of origin of first generation migrants. The thesis will explore this membership with the participants to locate which collective identity these second generation Muslim women most associate with. Previously literature (Dwyer, 1999, Begum, 2008) has investigated young Muslim women who feel excluded from community identities and seek to form membership with the wider Muslim Ummah (global Muslim community based on connection through Islam). Dwyer’s work therefore provides the basis for this research to explore these findings further with the participants.

Geographers Gardner and Shukur (1994) noted that many young Muslims are moving away from their ethnic and racialized identity and focussing on their Muslim identities. This is based on the notion of Barth’s (1969) negotiating ethnic identities as a process of finding a sense of belonging and avoiding becoming excluded and being labelled as the “other”. The reasons for moving away from ethnic identities described earlier is due to the formation of connections, the building on a sense of belonging to wider society through national identity. Another reason for moving away from traditional ethnic identity are cultural clashes, resulting in the reproducing of an ethnic identity that does not reflect those conflicting values and tradition (Abu-Ali and Reisen, 1999). Dwyer’s (1999) research reflects similar sentiments, where young women look to reinterpret their religious identities in order to move away from their cultural identities which are reinforced by their ethnic parents’ transnational ethnic values. As mentioned by Moghadam (1994) and confirmed by Barth (1969), identities can be changed, their fluid natures forming new solidarities. Many young people seek to establish a wider

sense of belonging through geographies of emotions with the wider community, based more on established commonalities and less on differences from their parental generation (Gregory et al., 2011). Other reasons to reconstruct their ethnic identities and cross boundaries is to avoid a feeling of otherness and experience geographies of exclusion (Burkner, 2012).

Described in Dwyer's (1999) research, the young women construct hybrid identities, fusing ethnic traditions with Western values, negotiating their competing gendered discourses with their ethnic cultural identities. Claire Dwyer's (1998; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 2000) studies on young British Muslim women focus on identities being generated through racialized and gendered constructions, with these young Asian women negotiating their identities as victims of oppressive cultural practices. This is also affirmed by Anthias & Yuval Davies (1992) who argue that migrant communities, in particular the first generation, look to reinforce their cultural identity when faced by hostility from outsiders. The gendered role of women is very significant in such communities, as they play the symbolic role in maintaining these cultural and ethnic practices. Women are observed as the keepers of cultural values and identities through their roles as home-maker (Phillips, 2009). Because of an expectation that they will also assume such a role, many second generation Muslim women are looking to re-negotiate their ethnic identities. As stated by Phillips (2009), these women are negotiating their sense of self in specific places such as home, work etc., in order to challenge the view that they are submissive, passive objects. This will be explored further in this thesis, the prime subjects for this research being second generation young Muslim women.

For these reasons, ethnicity will be one of the main markers explored when looking at the identity formation of the participants of this research. Their experiences and interpretations of their ethnic identities will be fully explored. The next section will focus on gender as a marker of identity construction.

2.2.2 Gender

When considering markers of identity formation, gender plays a key role (Brah, 1996). Gender is understood as social and biological difference leading to different social roles (Yuval-Davies, 1997). Distinction between the male and female genders are

based on characteristics and behaviours denoted and predetermined by biological sex. These socio-biological accounts form the basis of gender identity which are seen to be fixed (Dibben, 2002). Geographies of New Femininities explain these differences further, stating that gender is a social construction structured around biological sex. Whether you are born male or female an understanding of what it means to be a man or woman will be constructed over time (Hopkins 2009). Hopkins (2009) similarly explains that the gendered concepts of masculinities and femininities are not particularly understood as fixed categories (see also Dibbens (2002) but are instead social constructed forms of classification, achieved through the process of socialisation, enacted by those in control and influenced through the reinforcement of everyday experiences and encounters. Social constructions of gender are a powerful influences in determining the spatial experiences of women and men in different spaces, whether private or public (Rose, 1993). When looking at gendered identities, it is important to note that these identities do not exist in isolation and therefore have to be seen in relation to race, ethnicity, class, and other markers, with gender being the main marker (Shields, 2008). A vast amount of literature has been written on the various intersectional elements of social construction of gendered identities and how the different components intersect with one another to influence identity formation (Yuval-Davies and Anthias, 1983).

Intersectional studies have looked at the specific disadvantages experienced by women when embodying their gendered identities. However, a consideration of faith is missing from many studies (Bastia, 2014). In contrast, one of the main focuses of this thesis is to focus on the intersectionality with regards to faith. The thesis will hence focus on identifying how the multiple components of gendered Muslim women's identity intersect with one another and the impact it has on their identities as experienced in different spaces. Intersectional identities specifically focus on the disadvantageous positions caused, due to the negotiation power of these multiple identities (Valentine, 2007). This will be looked at in detail, especially religiously gendered identities of specific ethnic backgrounds, with the participants of this research describing first hand their experiences in various public and private places. Intersectional studies originate from the black feminist movement, (Crenshaw, 1989) patterns of oppression are examined to understand how they result in particular inequalities. According to Davis & Zarkov (2017) experiences of women of colour

seem to be missing from the literature of intersectionality, hence the importance of this study in giving voice to women from various ethnic backgrounds who share their accounts of the disadvantages they experience when embodying their strong religious gendered identities in private or public spaces in Wales.

Post 9/11, Davis and Zarkov (2017) explained that the intersectionality literature expanded to look at the religious identities of Muslim feminist identities, but they noted that not a great amount of research was done to bridge the gap. This research will be looking at these religious identities and exploring the Islamic feminist approach to embodied experiences of Muslim women, specifically considering those discriminatory factors which result in oppression and a disadvantaged position. Dwyer (2000) when looking at negotiation of identities for young British South Asian Muslim women, found culture to be the main cause of oppression. Kandiyoti (1988) has also noted patriarchal culture to be one of the main causes of oppression causing discriminatory practices within the private spaces for Muslim women. These practices result in causing an inferior positioning for Muslim women, which has resulted in inequalities that occurred as a result of patriarchy, social class and race (Valentine, 2007). Hence Islamic feminism literature was examined to see how the role of genders is organised in societies (Cooke, 2001). Cooke defines feminism as the way to promote opportunities for women in public life and to claim justice against gender discrimination, whereas a generic definition of feminism is a movement to end sexism, exploitation and oppression of females (bell hooks, 2000).

The study of literature on the background of Islamic feminism established that it appeared in Muslim lands as a challenge to the attitudes and patriarchal oppression of Muslim women through social and political ideologies (Cooke 2001, Moghadam, 2002). Islamic feminism soon became a term that held controversial connotations for many Muslim women, due to its connections and roots with liberal feminism (Badran, 2009). Liberal feminism was always seen as a secular movement and hence will be explored in relation to this research, to investigate the position of the participants of this research as they negotiate their gendered identity as Western young women. This is an essential part of the research, as feminist geographers have argued that women's voices are not represented equally when looking at how women negotiate their gendered identities through every day spaces (Rose, 1993). The data gathered from this research will also contribute to this discipline, as there has been a lack of

representation from Muslim women when looking at the experiencing of religious gendered identities within a Western context, the majority of feminist studies conducted on Muslim women having been in Muslim lands (Cooke, 2000, 2001, 2008, Grech, 2014, Badran, 2009).

The thesis will investigate the position of Islamic feminism and its position as a platform for the young Muslim women born and brought up in the West, when it comes to challenging the intersectional elements of their identities which cause them to feel unequal. Gökarıksel (2018) states that Islamic feminism is an ideally placed position to challenge Islamic masculinist domination by challenging oppression within the frame work of Islam, that being the pivotal point for strong religious Muslims (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

When considering literature on Muslim women, one of the most talked about of subjects is the hijab, which is described as a covering/ clothing that can be either seen as religious attire or fashion statement (Grech, 2014). This literature will be examined in various contexts within this thesis and it will be studied as a marker of Muslim identity for these participants. It will also be observed as an embodied experience of religious gendered identity in various spaces and places, and the impact of that on the participants. The views gathered will also show how it is perceived by others who share this space with these Muslim women and whether they experience geographies of exclusion or inclusion as a result. The positions that are socially constructed in these spaces are studied by feminist geographers looking at specific locations, positioning and margins from a feminist perspective (Staeheli and Martin, 2000).

The hijab as a piece of clothing has been seen by some feminists as an oppressive practice and a symbol of marginalisation because of a patriarchal interpretation of religious teachings (Sreberny, 2002). However, for many Muslim women the hijab is a symbol of piety and empowerment (Ahmed, 1992; Dwyer, 1999; Moghadam, 1994; Secor, 2002). Hence Badran (2009) describes the hijab as one of the main controversial topics between Islamic feminism and secular feminism. The participants of this research will contribute to this debate by sharing their views on the hijab and their viewpoint on the topic. They will offer their opinions as to whether they agree with the secular feminists who view the veil as symbol of male domination or whether they side with the Islamic feminists, who see it as a symbol of empowerment that allows

Muslim women to participate in public life modestly or whether they identify a position completely unique to their own circumstances (Badran, 2009).

The social construction of gendered identities is therefore clearly a fundamental feature of this research, as social construction causes inequalities and exclusion from various aspects of social life (Burkner, 2012). This is of particular relevance to the current participants as it mainly effects women from certain cultures and ethnicities. The intersectional approach will seek to analyse the impact of overlapping factors that influence identity formation, including social class. The following section will consider social class as a marker for identity formation.

2.2.3 Class

Social class along with gender, ethnicity, and race are frequently identified as main markers of identity formation and a cause of social inequalities (Mirza, 2012). Social class is one of the main causes of disadvantages (Valentine, 2007). Class based identities have been excluded from main feminist agenda as it looked mainly at gendered inequalities from a white, middle class privileged perspective (Rose, 1993). This led the feminist movement to reconsider the interconnections of the different strands of race, gender, ethnicity and social class and how they feed into one another resulting in oppression (Bastia, 2014). The shift in the feminist agenda has allowed for the examining of identity formation from a socio- economic position - how this impacts on identity formation and embodied experiences in specific places.

There is very little literature looking at social class and the impact on identity formation of Muslim women in Britain (Archer, 2011) and yet it is important to note that social class combined with racial or ethnic background can result in unequal treatment and exclusion from mainstream places. The study will be positioned within the broader context of examining the impact of social class amongst the participants - the results may go some way in filling this void in existing literature.

The next section will look at one of the main markers of identity formation for this particular research, namely religion and its influence on the construction and implementation of these identities.

2.3 Muslim Identities

When looking at identity formation, religion is one of the main markers that will be studied in this research. In order to look at the formation of Muslim identities, it is important to base it within the literature on geographies of religion. Research into geographies of religion has shown that religion is forgotten about or subsumed within other disciplines when considering wider literature in geographies (Kong, 1990, 2001a, 2001b). The position of religion, particularly in identify formation, has had a very slow take up amongst the frame work of geographies of religion (Brace et al., 2006). Spatial practices and experiences in specific places have been explored primarily through political and economic disciplines, with far less contribution from the religious framework of literature (Braun and Castree, 2001). The debate about religion in geographies is weak compared with other disciplines, making it hard to create meaningful discussion around religious embodied experiences with spaces and places using this approach. Kong (2001a) acknowledges that while race, class, and gender are explored as the main factors of identity formation, religion is often overlooked. As religion is best placed to have spirituality, faith practices, and sacredness intersect with landscapes it can hence contribute in a meaningful way to how the body experiences all of these in specific spaces and places.

Therefore, one of the main aims of this study is to look at the religious experiences of the participants as they embody their religious gendered identity in various places in Wales, which will further contribute to literature around geographies of religion. As geographies are main places of understanding identities, lead geographers like Dwyer (1999, 2000) and Hopkins (2007) have focussed on the importance of place when considering the identities of young Muslim women and men, and how they are constructed through every day experiences. Hence Muslim geographies will form the basis of much of this research, considering the embodied experiences of Muslim women in various spaces and places, both public and private.

Current literature on daily encounters that take place in Muslim lives looks specifically at markers such as clothing that make them outwardly visible and can result in fear and experiences of exclusion (Ryan 2012). When looking at specific geographies of Muslims, it is important to note the position of Muslims in UK and the West in general. Events such as the Rushdie Affair and major terrorist incidents such as 9/11 and 7/7 have focused much of the academic debate around Muslims as a homogenous group viewed as oppositional to British values and seen as a threat to national security (Allen,

2016), with increased number of Muslim youth going to join Islamic State (IS). This narrative focuses on the increased hostility toward Muslim communities because of negative representation in the media, which in turn has led to a rise in far right movements (Allen, 2016).

With such contested background forcing Muslims to feel like the other and not compatible with being either British or Western (Phillip, 2009), it is the aim of this thesis to explore the religious identities of young Muslim women living in Swansea, Wales. The importance of choosing Swansea as a city, is because there has been a lack of research conducted on Muslim young women in less urban areas. Instead the focus has mainly been in England with some in Scotland, and primarily conducted in cities with large percentage of Muslims amongst the minority communities. Hence this research will contribute to findings which will enhance the literature in geographies of Muslim identities from a Welsh perspective. The focus of this study is on second generation Muslims living in Swansea, to try and understand their national sense of belonging and how connections with the region, language, landmarks and cultural factors of familiarity cause a sense of attachment through national symbolism. As the participants are from the second generation, these Muslim young people will provide a relatively new insight, as the majority of literature written on Muslim identities is about first generation Muslim migrants who have close transnational ties with their home land (Massey, 2005). The focus will be on contributing to existing literature around place based identities (Zhu Qian & Feng, 2011) as well as looking at the symbolic meanings of surroundings through specific places (Brace et al., 2006). Even though there exists a substantial amount of research on the hijab as a marker and recognisable symbol of visible identities (Zine, 2008, Ryan, 2013) it is also seen as a political and religious statement forming a social group identity. This research will further examine the sacred spaces created by the wearing of this religious attire. These sacred embodied encounters create a spiritual connection which is experienced through geographies of spirituality in public spaces which are shared with others (Holloway and Valins, 2002). There is also a new and expanding arm of literature as stated by Kong (2001, 2006) which discusses the role of technology in creating religious identities through spaces which cross borders. These connect with the wider global community to enhance imaginary communities, influence across national boundaries and help to form identities. This is something that will be explored with participants,

namely to see if and how they use technology to construct their religious identities along with developing their shared identity through connecting to the wider global community of Muslim, the Ummah.

The third and final section of this thesis will focus on belonging and forming connections with spaces, considering emotional attachments through geographies of emotions. It specifically looks at connecting emotional attachments with spaces through embodied experiences (Davidson and Milligan, 2004). The literature on emotional geographies has much to contribute by looking at everyday experiences that use emotional discourses about feelings and sentiments regarding particular places.

2.4 Belonging

There is wide range of literature on belonging. Antonsich (2010) describes it as membership to places or groups through geographies of emotions (Inalhan and Finch, 2004) through meaningful relations connecting people to specific places through attachment. Belonging directly connects identities to spaces such as home which are well-known places for people to practice their everyday identities (Lyons, 2018). There is considerable amount of literature around the home as a familiar place, but there also exists literature that looks at home as being a place where gendered identities are reproduced, and patriarchal relations are used to enforce domestic abuse (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). However, for the purposes of this thesis, home will be defined as a place where everyday practices are experienced, thereby re-creating it as a symbolic place (Blunt, 2005).

When looking at identity formation, it is essential to consider the importance of place, as well as religion, gender, race, ethnicity and social class as a marker, as it provides the space for identities to be embodied experiences as well as to be constructed, performed and understood (Ryan, 2012). In understanding the geographies of places around Muslim identities it will help us to appreciate how these religious identities are challenged and affected by certain places (Hopkins, Kwan & Aitchison, 2007). Through such places social relations are developed and interact with one another locally and nationally as well as globally. Muslim identities have been discussed in a considerable amount of literature, seen mostly as a threat and to be feared. This affected the sense of belonging felt by these young people, as the media constantly questions whether Islam and Muslims are compatible with the West (Philips et al.

2009). This results in exclusion from the wider society affecting the shared collective identity of a nation. Sibley (1995) describes these practices of exclusion in relation to places, making certain places accessible by privileged others, leaving Muslims to experience geographies of exclusion.

The sense of belonging is also developed through established relations with specific geographical spaces such as neighbourhoods or places of work as stated by Den Besten (2010). Hence belonging contributes to the overall connection with a wider group through a formal membership which Antonsich (2010) refers to as national identity, citizenship being established through emotional connections with people and places as well as forming stronger links with the wider national identity. The literature focusses on the sense of belonging which helps to create a shared connection through engagement with people in these places (Closs Stephens, 2016). These spaces and places form a deeper connection with the local geographies, creating a meaningful representation of nation (Jones and Merriman, 2009). This is done in order to experience the feeling of sameness by building on common values as well as looking for symbolic meaning within the surroundings they share with others (Brace, Bailey & Harvey, 2006).

National identities are historical culturally specific ideologies (Mooney and Williams, 2006). National identity is the coming together of political, cultural, artistic and academic discussions which are a reflection of social reality (Gruffudd, 1994). Geographers analyse national identity as being produced in and through specific places, demonstrating how they play a significant role in everyday lives of people (Brubaker 2004). Evans (2007) confirms this point by stating that national identity is experienced as people attach meanings to social spaces through embodied encounter to create national identity as a territorial and symbolic construction.

When considering Welsh identity in the context of national identity, it can be seen as a product of characteristics related to place of birth, upbringing, linguistic ability as well as other symbolisms such as the landscape (Evans, 2007). This study will examine how national identity is claimed by young Muslim women living in Wales and by exploring how the above characteristics are interpreted by them in understanding their sense of self. It will also explore what Welsh identity means to them when negotiating their everyday lives, particularly as an alternative to ethnicity or Britishness. As stated

by Hopkins (2010), place and social space play an essential role when looking at Muslim identities across regions, enabling the thesis to examine whether attachment to Wales creates a greater sense of belonging compared to a generic 'British' identity.

There is no particular agreement on what constitutes Welsh or British identity as they are all influenced by class, spatial, ethnic, and cultural and other differences with an exception being the language which gives some Welsh people a clear sense of culture, identity and belonging to a group. Identities are symbolised and characterised as the population transforms through becoming more diverse (Carter, 2010). Old myths and symbols that formulate Welsh identity such as the stereotypes of Welsh identity being directly related to the coal mining industry may be inappropriate as an identity marker as it may not be characteristic of the whole country. The symbols and cultures associated with Welsh national identity (and its racialisation as white?) change over time as the Welsh population becomes more diverse through the contributions made by ethnic and religious minority groups to social and cultural life .

When looking at the construction of national identities, there is a lack of academic work on Welsh identities as confirmed by Dayfydd Jones (2010) stating that Muslims in Wales have not been subjected to as much research as Muslims in England and even Scotland. The voices of young Muslim Welsh women are missing from the literature, something which can be rectified by the contribution from the participants of this research. The thesis will look at the national identity of these Welsh Muslim women exploring their Welsh identity through their everyday practices in the familiar landmarks of Swansea. It will also investigate their attachment to Wales, through their understanding of their national identity as second generation Muslim young people living in Wales whilst still maintaining their religious, ethnic, and cultural identities.

As briefly discussed in the previous section, the religious identity of Muslim women is experienced with the visible marker of the hijab, an evident outward symbol of the religion. Much of the research suggests that, within the wider spatial context, these veiled bodies are viewed as symbols of fear, oppression, racism and exclusion with Islamophobic attacks directed towards them (Garner and Selod, 2014, Ryan 2012). Even though there has been research on the Islamophobic experiences of Muslim women, this research will further investigate how these participants feel when targeted as the other and the effects on their national identity (Wagner et al., 2012). The

literature on Islamophobia talks about the creation of politics of other, which creates the feelings of otherness through symbols of oppression therefore causing isolation, stigmatisation and exclusion from national spaces and identities (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012). As more and more women embrace the hijab as a marker of their identity, questions have been raised about the religious freedom of these women and their position in a non – Muslim society (Staeheli and Martin, 2000). In some countries in Europe there has been a public ban on the hijab.

To combat this sense of exclusion, Modood and Ahmed (2001) state that multicultural societies support differences and Parekh (2000) affirms that these societies protect cultural differences. Modood (2007) describes multiculturalism as a space in a society that will allow individual identities to be recognised, with Hussain (2007) endorsing it by adding that it creates a culturally sensitive spatial community. Modood's definition of multiculturalism looks beyond tolerance, actively supporting cultural differences and discouraging hostility in public spaces. Multiculturalism has a tendency to identify all minority groups as black British but this has declined over time as young people have associated their identities more specifically with the minority sub-nations that better describes their affiliations and sense of belonging. Britishness was only a result of a cohesive national identity in the 2011 census but since then there has been a decline in the unity of British identity with the emergence of sub-national identities such as Welsh Muslims (Williams, et al., 2015) reason being linked to the devolution of the Welsh Government.

Multiculturalism recognises the existence of diversity which had been accommodated in Wales over a long period but there are widespread inequalities and a growing atmosphere of marginalisation and racism - even though Wales as a nation has been always seen as tolerant and welcoming in contrast to England which is often perceived as imperialist (Williams, et al., 2015). Regardless of these inequalities, a nation is where solidarity is conceived through deep bonds of imagined communities and a sense of togetherness (Anderson, 1991) and this research will look into how the participants identity with this Welshness aspect of their identity in relation to their sense of inclusion into this national imaginary.

However, Cante (2001) considers that multiculturalism has failed, based on the changing attitudes of wider society, where people from different societies, especially

those from Muslim communities, are seen to be feared particularly after terrorist incidents such as 7/7 bombings in London, murder of Lee Rigby and the Manchester Arena terrorist attack. Cattle (2001: 9) believes that multiculturalism encourages the separateness of communities leading to “parallel lives” with Phillips (2009) also displaying similar views, stating that multiculturalism drives ethnic groups to sleep walk into segregation.

When looking at literature on Muslim identities and multiculturalism, Begum (2008) states that it has failed young Muslims as they try to perform their religious identities in every day spaces, highlighting irreconcilable differences between their religious values and the wider civil culture. She goes on to say that multiculturalism has failed to address social injustices there by causing these religious gendered identities of young Muslim women to be excluded from mainstream societies. However, Modood (2007) talked about multiculturalism allowing second generation young Muslim fluidity in creating their hyphenated identities, allowing them to link their racial and ethnic descent whilst coming together to form a collective national identity.

In order to address the failure of multiculturalism, Cattle (2001) talks about the need for meaningful interaction in these multicultural societies, in order to build positive relations with those we occupy common geographical spaces with so as to combat the isolation and alienation of specific groups (Kibria, 2008). Cattle (2012) believes this will transition from multiculturalism into intraculturalism, protecting minority groups by building stronger societies and neighbourhoods based on organic encounters and commonalities.

2.5 *Conclusion*

In conclusion the literatures studied in order to create a frame work for this thesis highlight several gaps. This puts this study in an excellent position to contribute original information which will go some way in bridging those gaps.

Hopkins (2009) states that even though there has been an increased focus on religion being a significant marker in social construction of identities, there are still gaps remaining, specifically in relation to feminist geographies of religion. These gaps prove the need for further research into the experiences of women in different spaces and places as they challenge sexist and exclusionary societies. Feminist geographies have become well established, highlighting the inequalities and power relations that

influence their spatialities (Woodhead, 2007), but there is still little interaction with geographies of religion. This research will look to bring the two disciplines together and look to fill some of the voids identified by Kong (1990) namely, little interest in the geographies of religion. Even though there has been greater interest in recent times (Brace, Bailey and Harvey, 2006, Kong, 2001), there is still a lack of understanding from a feminist perspective (Dwyer, 2000, Hopkins, Kwan and Aitchison, 2007).

Kong (2001) states that human geographies need to consider the ways in which religion is experienced in places by different groups of men and women, a clear area of interest for feminist geographies of religion. This research will look to focus on the everyday gendered experiences of these Muslim women as constructed and contested within feminist geographies. As mentioned previously, Dwyer (2000) has done this to some extent and this current research will build on that contribution by examining gendered religious identities as practiced in private and public spaces, as they look to challenge their ethnic identities and form new national identities around Wales.

There is literature around positionalities of the researcher within feminist geographies as well as social sciences looked at in detail in Chapter 3, which was of particular relevance in this research. Hopkins (2009) however argues that the position of researcher should not be exclusively the same or entirely different. I regard myself to be from a similar background to the participants and found this to be an extremely privileged position as I was able to get an insight into their views which they only shared because of the strong connection they felt with myself.

Hopkins (2009) suggests that geographies of emotions have a lot to contribute to geographies of religion, which can also be examined whilst exploring the embodied experiences of participants in various spaces and places. With research (Hopkins, 2007) already having been conducted on young Muslim men, highlighting the emotional connections they felt in mosques, the feelings of comfort at home and feelings of fear on streets, this research will look to explore similar views from the perspective of Muslim women. The nature of this research focused in Wales, Swansea lends itself to exploring the emotional connection with wider landscapes contributing to original research done in Wales of embodied experiences of local young Muslim women (Dafydd Jones, 2010). This contributes to geographies of emotions through attachment to local spaces.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the data which has informed this research. Qualitative research methods were used, including interviews, focus groups and the collection of visual imagery from those participating. These images were used to explore the subjective meaning and emotional connections of items, objects and pictures that the participants engaged with when embodying their identities. All these methods supported the gathering of primary data, as they considered the participants' encounters with space and place and the sheer multiplicity of experiences further illustrated the embodied understanding of their faith-based identity. This chapter will also consider the selection of methods used as well as considering factors such as positionality and ethics, which also had a direct bearing on data collection.

The research began with a pilot study in Swansea, which took place over a period of four weeks in 2016. The success of this initial pilot then led to a full length research project. As a small city, Swansea was pivotal in shaping the experiences and identities of young Muslim women. The relatively small number of Muslims living in the city means that the community is not homogenous and can be more open to experimentation. Young Muslim women living in Swansea have more freedom to form their own multi-faceted identities. This research takes the unique approach of interviewing participants who, as second generation Muslims are more integrated in the wider community, but also remain informed regarding their Islamic identity. The fact that such a group of individuals realise the diversity of Islamic identities is highlighted in previous research (Brown, 2006) but this work has previously been conducted in larger urban cities with large population of Muslims, such as Nottingham and London (Dwyer 2000, Hopkins 2004). That research overlooked the impact on Muslim women living in smaller cities, so the significance of this current research cannot be over stated.

Within the current research, the concept of positionality was of great significance - the research focussed on looking at cross cultural emotional and embodied experiences of identity whilst simultaneously exploring connections with specific spaces and places. Being part of the same culture and community gave the researcher a very privileged

position – the participants did not feel “different” or “unequal” in any way (Clifford et al., 2016). Most participants did therefore find it easy to talk to the researcher, but it should be acknowledged that some might have felt under pressure to answer in a particular way.

3.2 Questionnaire surveys

The research will consider the formation of the identity of young Muslim women, with particular reference to and multiple dimensions. It was decided that the most suitable methodology to apply in order to obtain all relevant data would be that of questionnaire survey research, as this is the most appropriate method to use when collating information about the characteristics, behaviours and attitudes of a section of population (McLafferty, 2003). The questionnaire survey method is a key tool in human geography and most suitable for this purpose, which examines the complex behaviour of the participants in order to ascertain their opinions and attitudes and the embodiment of their identity through their social interaction in different places and spaces. Longhurst (2003) states that this is an important tool when collating information, as it gauges spatial interactions and this research considers the formation and experiences around the religious identity of the participants.

It was decided to conduct 30 face to face semi structured interviews in order to conduct the questionnaire surveys. These meant greater connectivity between researcher and interviewee and allowed participants the flexibility of choosing a location and time that best suited them. It also provided an opportunity for the clarification of complex or vague responses with open ended questions, which in turn resulted in a higher response rate (Longhurst, 2003). Both semi structured interviews and the focus group (which will be discussed later) allowed participants the freedom to express their experiences in their own words, in a relaxed conversational manner.

A simple semi -structured questionnaire (open ended) was designed, and passed through the research committee of the department to ensure that it covered all ethical grounds, as well as obtaining the data necessary to enable the researcher to answer the aims and objectives of the research. The ethical preview of the questionnaire will be discussed in section 3.6, taking into consideration informed consent as well as other ethical issues. A standardised questionnaire was administered, which was a valuable means of gathering information on the following areas (copy attached in the appendix):

1. Which identities do you associate most with (ethnicity/ religious/ gender/ national/ other)?
2. What are the contributing factors in your identity formation (friends/ family/ place/ community/ culture/ upbringing)?
3. How do you express your identity (physical/ spiritual acts/ specific places/ home/ work/school)?
4. What does the Hijab mean to you?
5. Connection with others through your identity
6. To what extent does the Media effect your identity or how you express it?
7. Negative incidents of experiencing your identity

The questions were designed to be simple, clear and easy to understand. The questionnaire also contained open ended questions which best serve the qualitative nature of this research. This in no way constrains the participants: they can express themselves using their own words to fully represent their views (Longhurst, 2003). Closed structured interviews were not used because this limits the responses that the participants can give and as such is mainly useful for quantitative research (Fink, 2013). As such types of questions are mainly used in order to obtain factual information with limited reply options (numerical or specific categories i.e. yes/ no), they would not be appropriate for this research. The particular themes within the questions were identified, as the researcher needed to focus on factors that influenced and played a key role in the formation of identity (Chapter 4) as well as considering how these identities are embodied and experienced in certain places and spaces (Chapter 5, 6 and 7) with follow up questions conducted to clarify information and gather additional details from the participants.

All the questionnaire surveys were audio recorded and transcribed in full directly after the interviews. These were then stored in a password protected computer, accessible only to the researcher. Hard copies were stored in lockable filing cabinets, again with the keys being only in the researcher's possession. All responses were anonymised (as discussed further in section 3.6 on sample selection as well as section 3.7 which

considers positionality) and participants were given alternative names to protect their confidentiality (also looked at more detail in section 3.6).

The interviews and focus group discussions lasted for approximately an hour, and, at the request of the participants took place in the University, local Youth organisation (Ethnic Youth Support team – EYST) and cafés and mosques. The Ethnic Youth Support Team was a gate keeper organisation where the researcher worked. The researcher held the privileged position of working with a bank of youth workers who acted as gatekeepers for the young women who accessed the youth centre – these young women felt active and outwardly engaged, and were willing to participate in the research. The participants always had the choice of whether to participate or not– if they ever did not want to participate they could speak freely to the youth workers, who they were already very comfortable with. Having worked within this organisation for over nine years, establishing relationships with both the young people accessing the centre and the youth workers, the researcher held a hugely advantageous position. However, it is also important to recognise that the relative status of adult researchers and younger participants, may have made it difficult for these young females to refuse involvement (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). This issue will be looked at more closely in the section 3.7 when considering the researcher’s positionality.

After conducting successful interviews, it was felt that certain themes emerged across most responses which needed further exploration. As a result, further focus groups were held with the original participants, which were more tailored to those specific themes.

3.3 Focus groups

Focus groups are a good way to explore links between certain themes within the wider research agenda (Longhurst, 2003). For the purpose of this research, focus groups were held to discuss the themes that fed into the wider question of the formation of identity. They were formed with participants from the original group who were willing to contribute further to the topics and when approached about taking part in the focus group were willing and available. Each group discussion lasted approximately two hours, as participants freely bounced ideas and views off each other in the manner of a successful focus group (Morgan, 1997). The role of the researcher was that of a

facilitator, ensuring that discussions remained generally around the specified themes, without too much digression.

The focus groups were held near the work place, so as to make access easier for the participants. Initial plans to hold the focus groups in the relaxed atmosphere of restaurants and cafes were unsuccessful, as they were generally too loud to allow for the necessary discussion. As the topics under discussion were not relevant to the organisation where the focus group eventually were held, the discussion was able to flow freely. The focus groups were semi structured around the three topics to be discussed in more depth. These topics were the ones that had emerged most strongly across most of the questionnaire survey responses:

Focus group 1 – Islam and Feminism (4 participants)

The main discussion points for this focus group were around:-

1. Definition of feminism
2. How do you associate with this concept?
3. Is there a need for feminism in Islam?
4. Is feminism in Islam promoting rights of women or promoting/ introducing Western concepts of feminism in Islam?
5. Do you believe Islam oppresses women and are Muslim women oppressed?
6. Does the Hijab oppress or limit Muslim women

• Focus Group 2 - Islamophobia (5 Participants)

The main discussion points for this focus group were around:-

1. How do you define Islamophobia?
2. In your view, is Islamophobia linked with the Media?
3. What are the other factors that play a role in creating Islamophobia?

• Focus group 3 - British values and Islamic values (6 Participants)

The main discussion points for this focus group were around:-

1. What are Islamic Values?
2. What are British Values?
3. Where do you think the two clash?
4. Where do you think the two accord?

Even though a substantial body of literature already exists on these topics, it was essential to explore the views of these participants from a Swansea perspective, and the relevance to their own lives and experiences. Findings from the first focus group were directly linked to Chapter 6 which considers feminism and Islam, whereas those from second and third focus group fed into chapters 5 and 7, which considers the issues around the embodied experiences of identities, their emotional feelings towards belonging and their sense of national identity with regard to their religious identity and values.

These focus groups provided a comfortable and fairly informal environment for participants to discuss and share their personal views and experiences of these topics, how they had influenced their own identities and impacted in general on the identities of young Muslim women in Swansea. All the participants knew each other well, as they were colleagues as well as friends and acquaintances from the local community. This helped the focus group discussion to flow easily (Clifford et al., 2016).

In each focus group, at least one activity was planned with the aim of stimulating discussion, as research on focus groups has shown that engaging participants in some sort of activity focused their discussion (Clifford et al., 2016). With the first focus group on Islam and feminism, one of the questions was whether wearing the hijab limits the individual's choices; a set of images were used as Discussion Prompts, prompting participants to share their personal experiences and their own opinions with the group at large. (Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository, 2019).

The following images were shown in order to generate discussion:

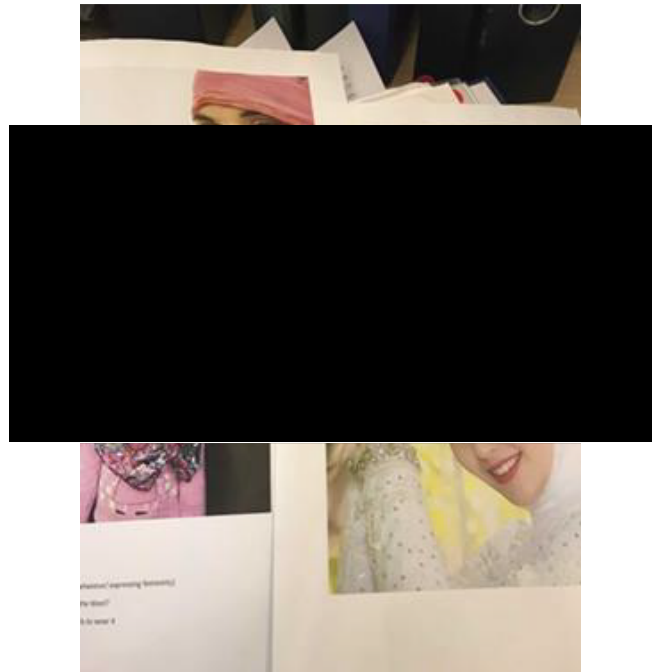


Figure 3.1 – Focus group 1 images of females wearing the hijab.

The purpose of showing such images is to encourage participants to think about their own experiences of the hijab, as well as the wider representation of the hijab. Some families encourage their younger daughters to start wearing the hijab from a very early age, others wear a full face cover, the Niqab, and some may even wear a hijab on their wedding day. These images were shown as part of question 6 in the first focus group.

Some of the responses in relation to these pictures led to lengthy discussions on each of the four scenarios, the limitations of using the pictures as prompts and how living in the West has altered these practices from the traditional setting of a Muslim only country. The respondents acknowledged that although younger girls wear the hijab from primary school age in their countries of origin, this would not be suitable in the West. Similarly, wearing a hijab during weddings is a necessity in the West, due to it being a mixed social gathering with a lack of segregation. Respondents also recognised that wearing all black or wearing the Niqab is an acceptable form of dressing in many Muslim countries, but is sometimes seen as a sign of oppression in the West.

For the second focus group on Islamophobia, participants were asked to write down examples of what they felt were incidents or definitions of islamophobia:

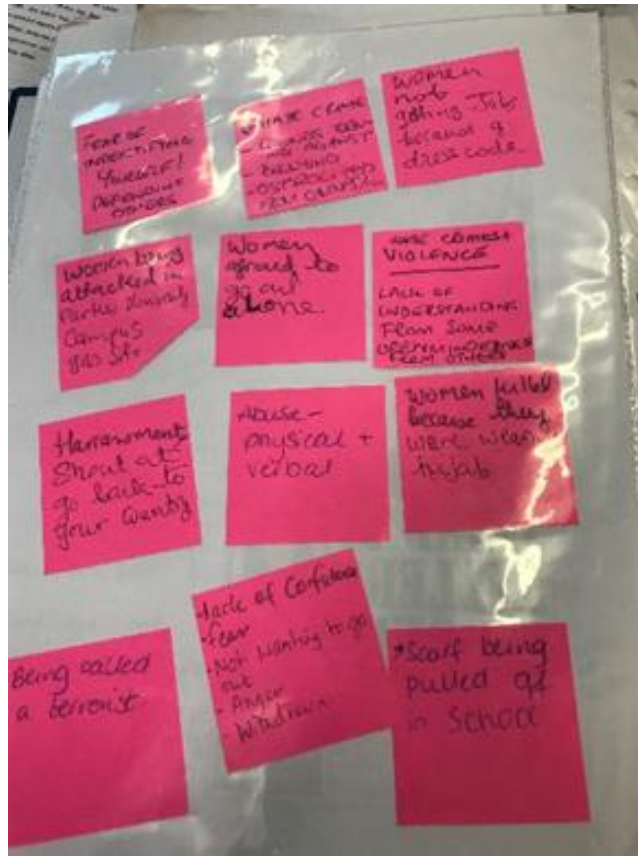


Figure 3.2 – Islamophobia definitions

The second question considered at this second focus group was around the Media’s role in advancing Islamophobia – clippings from various newspaper articles were presented to aid the discussion



Figure 3.3 – the Media’s coverage of Islam

Detailed discussion on these findings can be found in chapter 4, which specifically looks at experiences of Islamophobia. The group generally agreed that images such as these had contributed to making the public view Islam and Muslims in a negative way. The focus group also felt that newspapers, as well as other media outlets, had all played a role in creating and fuelling the misconception that Islam was a threat to wider British cultural values. The group also discussed how this could influence the way that some Muslims view their own religion, especially those who do not have a great deal of knowledge about Islam or feel secure with their own identity as Muslims.

In the third focus group, participants were initially asked to write down their Islamic and British values separately. They were then asked to connect any points of similarity between the two sets of values. One particular group member took the lead by drawing a spidergram detailing each particular set of values, and then recording all the responses from the rest of the group associated with that specific value system, as illustrated in the diagram below. This diagram, appearing as two-dimensional branches from the overriding concept (Reference, 2019) was considered to be a clear, visual way of collating and organising the responses. After comparing the two value systems, that of Islam and Britain, any commonalities between the two were highlighted in orange, as can be seen below:



Figure 3.4 – Islamic values identified by the focus group

All the interviews and focus groups that took place were recorded. This allowed for more focussed interactions with participants with the researcher occasionally writing down anything of major significance. These were then fully transcribed and analysed at the earliest possible opportunity, in order to identify the key themes and concepts. During this process it became clear that faith, along with the headscarf, were points of great significance. The combination of gender and ethnicity were crucial in the formation of national and religious identity.

3.4 Data Analysis

Once the responses from the questionnaires and focus groups were transcribed, the results were then coded based on the emerging themes. As the data is all qualitative, the method used to analyse is that of coding, a common method used in data analysis in much of social sciences and humanities (Cope & Kurtz, 2003). These themes were linked with the broader empirical findings of theoretical literature around identity formation.

Some of the themes were as a direct result of the way that the questions were structured, for example “Which identity do you most strongly associate with?” The questionnaire surveys were broadly based upon the previously conducted literature review, highlighting any omissions as well as trying to find empirical data which would answer the research aims and objectives. Other themes were identified from the way in which participants responded to open ended questions.

While the interviews were being transcribed, the identified topics were sectioned into general themes. The notes were then read through and further reread, and responses marked with colour coded patterns, thereby making it easier to analyse and organise the data. This was done using coloured highlighters on printed hard copies of the transcribed questionnaire surveys and focus group responses. With specific colours being assigned to particular themes, this enabled a comprehensive study of the emerging themes. See table 3.1 for a break down:

| Themes | Colour codes |
|---|--------------|
| Faith Identity | Yellow |
| Gender Identity | Pink |
| Contributing/ influencing factors: | |
| Family | Orange |
| Friends | Orange |
| Culture | Blue |
| Community | Blue |
| Ethnicity | Blue |
| Expressing identity | Purple |
| Dress (hijab) | |
| Visiting/ attending specific places | |
| Observing certain behaviours | |
| Experiences of identity | Green |
| Home/ Work/ University/ School/ Streets/ other places identified | |
| Negative experiences | |
| Islamophobia | |

Table 3.1 – Coding themes for data analysis

Once all the colour coding for the questionnaires and surveys was completed, the data was then considered as a whole, and thoroughly scrutinised for the themes that fed into specific chapters within the research project. Jackson (2001) states that this is the best approach to building themes, namely by considering all the information gathered as a whole, rather than studying aspects in isolation. As well as building upon any existing underlying themes, this process also highlighted the appearance of any additional themes which steered the direction of the research away from that which had been previously anticipated, having conducted earlier academic research. There had been previous research on the cultural identities of young Muslim women, but very little had been conducted around the theme of national identities. In addition, most of the previous research had been conducted in larger urban cities. This theme of the national identities of Muslim females in smaller cities came through very strongly in the questionnaire surveys and focus group responses in particular.

In general, this particular method of data analysis worked well for this research. However, on reflection more time and further coding techniques could have been applied as additional interpretative strategies. The further application of NVivo codes allowed for more vigorous data analysis.

3.5 Visual imagery

In order to capture the ongoing formation and embodied experiences of everyday identities, participants were asked to send in images that demonstrated these in their specific everyday places and spaces. These are the stories told through the visual culture of modernity and postmodernity as described by Rose (2012). Pinney (2004:8) states that it's 'not how these images "look", but what they can do' and it is vital to capture the statement conveyed by participants through these images. Rose (2012, p.55) states that visual images should not be seen in isolation or by just looking at 'what they are' as that ignores the way they are produced and interpreted through a specific social practice. Taylor (1957) derived the term "expressive content of an image" which describes the mood or the atmosphere of the image, the overall "feeling". For Bal (1996), the context of the display of an image is central to the meaning it adds to its viewers. Whilst there is no right or wrong way of interpreting an image, there is limitation on the way the images are interpreted by the researcher based on their own biases and understanding. When looking at spaces, Creswell (2003) states that Landscapes are 'not out there' but it also needs to be considered as to how it resides 'in the minds and eyes of the beholder' (Creswell, 2003: 249). The images of beaches and other natural places sent in by participants were clearly associated with a particular aspect of their identity and how they interpret it as part of their self.

Furthermore, images chosen by participants can reveal social relations by illustrating how various aspects of their identities are experienced or expressed. Rose (2012) also stressed how each image must be seen in a social context that mediates its meaning and impact in a particular location, a key element of this research. Many of the images were indeed of objects taken in personal spaces (e.g. bedrooms), places where respondents felt extremely comfortable with their own identity. Figure 3.5 is an image of a participant's henna painted hand on her bed, representing her cultural and religious identity in her own personal space:



Figure 3.5 – Henna painted hand of participant.

Participants were asked to send pictures of items that represented their identities (optional). 15 participants chose to send in pictures which are further discussed in detail in Chapter 5. The power of this imagery particularly lies in how the places, spaces and the landscapes can be interpreted from a geographical viewpoint. Casey (2001) states that spaces become part of the human identity and that they facilitate human existence and play a role in experiencing those constructed identities. They are practices of human actions and as they experience these places, they become emotionally attached through memories and feelings. For example, in Figure 3.6, one participant shares those memories which she connects with playing a role in the formation of her identity: the photo of her College friends on the iPad, the Hijab as commitment to her faith, pens to show she is a student, lipstick to highlight her female gender, and the nose ring to emphasise her ethnicity and culture all laid out on her bed.

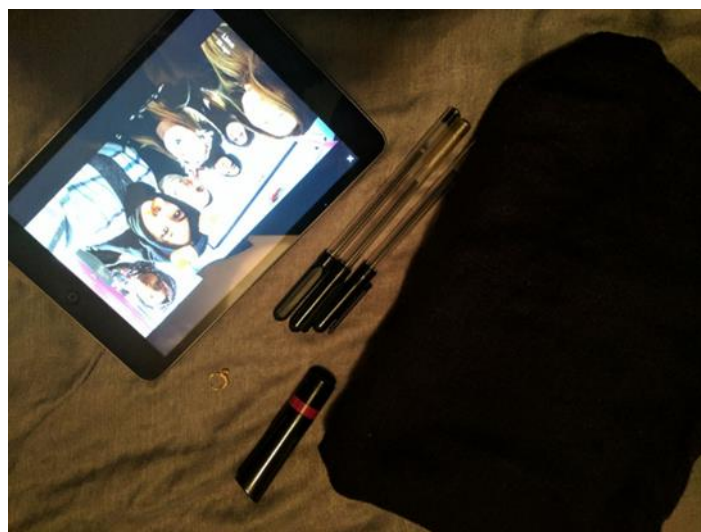


Figure 3.6 – Image of items relevant to identity of participant

Each image sent by the participant had a brief description attached, highlighting their significance for the individual. The images were then categorised under similar headings i.e. some of the participants sent images of prayer mats or hijabs under the experiences of faith identity as seen in Chapter 5. Similarly, participants sent images in of friends or family which they saw as being the main influencers in the formation of their identity. The broad headings appear in table 3.2 below:

| Image categories and description | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Religious objects | 5 Quran, 2 prayer time table, 5 prayer mats |
| Dress | 7 hijab, 1 cultural dress |
| Specific places/ spaces | 3 images of Mumbles, 1 image of Swansea Bay, 1 Swansea University, 2 Makkah (Saudi Arabia), 1 Map of Mauritius, 1 images of Wales, 1 Eid prayer held in the Vetch field Swansea, 2 Swansea University Mosque |
| Work/ education | 2 ID Badges, 1 image of Laboratory, 1 image of Medicine reference book |
| Gender specific (makeup/ perfumes) | 1 nose ring, 3 lipsticks, 1 perfume, 1 makeup brushes |
| Friends/ family | 7 images of selfies with friends and families 2 images of parent 1 image of grand parent |
| Other | 1 ipad, 1 ipod, 3 mobile phones, 2 hoodie, 1 birth certificate (British), 2 Passports (British), 1 Art book |

Table 3.2 – Image categories

The images are presented and discussed further in Chapter 5 under the various headings of embodied experiences of identity.

3.6 Sampling

The sample selected to represent the participating group for this research were 30 young women from a Muslim background, who were living in Swansea. This number of participants allowed a wide range of responses to be collated before the replies became repetitive and reached 'saturation'. It was also felt that this number of responses was sufficient to build a convincing analytical narrative, based on the richness of the detailed responses received. The fact that questionnaire surveys were completed by a smaller number of participants meant that there did not need to be endless data gathering, which was particularly useful given the time constraints of the project. Working with an average number of participants also enabled further investigation to be carried out when necessary, in the form of focus groups. 30 was deemed to be a good round number, particularly as interviews were further supplemented with focus groups and participants were also asked to send in their own images to contribute to research findings.

The participants were young females aged 18 – 30 years old. This age bracket was specifically chosen, as the particular focus of this research is to capture the views of second generation Muslim adult females. Anyone younger than 18 years of age would have required parental consent which might have been more time consuming and was therefore avoided. Working with a younger age category might also have required adaptation of the research methods, which would have been additionally time consuming. It was therefore decided to concentrate on those 18 plus young adult females. It was fairly easy to get enough participants in this age category as they were already attendees of the youth centre, as described previously.

As mentioned previously, some of the participants were recruited via familiar youth workers, from the youth organisation (EYST) where the researcher regularly worked. This recruitment strategy utilised the pre-existing relationship of trust between researcher and participants, as well as that between the researcher and the youth workers, which had been established over a period of time. The youth workers were able to act as gatekeeper, informing the participants about the research and passing on any relevant information, hence further strengthening the relationship of trust between participants and researcher. Gatekeepers are often employed when accessing a socially excluded or hard-to-reach vulnerable groups (Emmel et al., 2007). In this case it was

not difficult for the researcher to establish a relationship of trust with the participants, as they came from the same faith and cultural background group. However, as the researcher was the manager of the youth organisation (EYST) as well as being an older member of the community, the researcher could have been considered an ‘outsider’ at times, hence the need for gatekeepers in order to help establish the relationship of trust and friendship.

The participants lived mainly in the vicinity of the two mosques in Swansea - the University mosque and Central mosque. These locations were chosen because of the easy access to the youth centre that the young women attended on a regular basis. The location of the interviews plus the number of participants is shown in Figure 3.7 below.

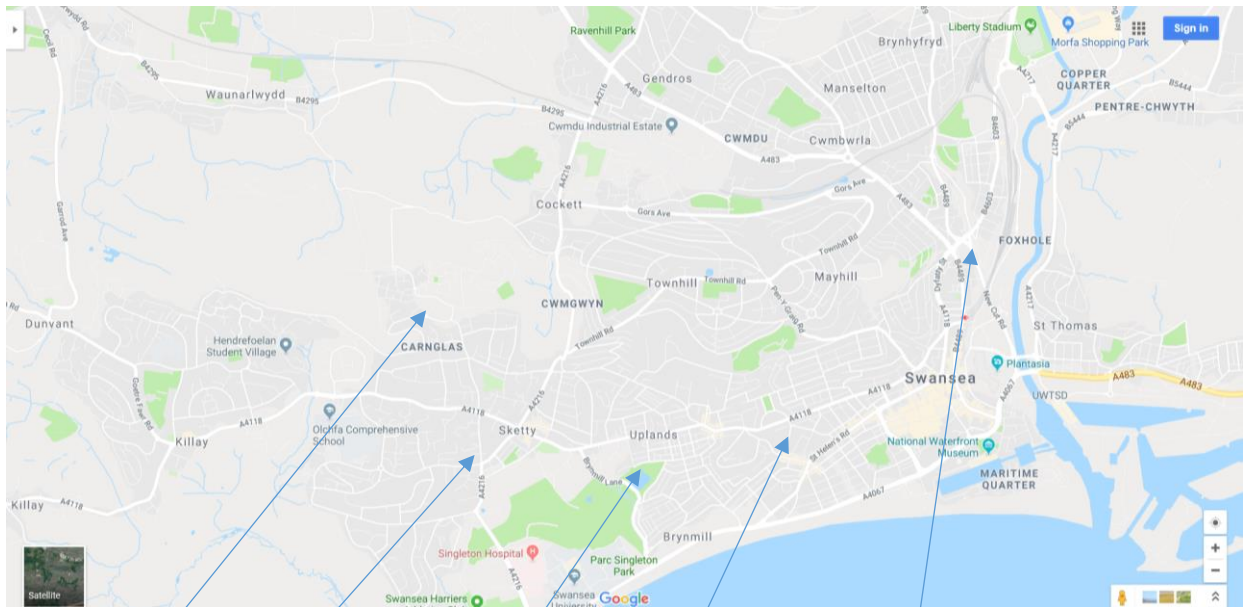


Figure 3.7 – Swansea Map

Tycoch(1) Sketty (13) Uplands (2) Sandfields (10) Hafod (4)

The breakdown of ethnic minorities in these specific areas, as demonstrated through the Ward population size is as follows (Swansea council, 2019):

Sandfields area (in Castle Ward) – with an ethnic minority of 3,202 which is 20.2% of the ward’s population. Due to it being in and around the town centre, this is one of the most diversely populated area of Swansea where large pockets of various communities

have settled. There is a large Bangladeshi community established in this area, as it is near the Central mosque as well as the local halal shops and other Asian shops which sell ethnic foods. 10 participants were from the Sandfields area, of whom 9 were of Bengali ethnicity and 1 was of Sudanese ethnicity.

Sketty area and Tycoch (in Sketty Ward) – has an ethnic minority population of 1,323 which comprises 9.3% of the population of Sketty. In comparison with other areas of Swansea it is quite substantial in size. This was one of the most prolific areas for interview recruits (13 participants), no doubt due to the fact that the Researcher was from the area and the University mosque was also situated there. As this area is near the university and one of the local hospitals, the spread of ethnicities amongst residents and interviewees is much wider, due to the variety of employment opportunities in the vicinity (4 Bengali, 4 Pakistani, 4 Arab, 1 mixed race).

Hafod area (in Landore Ward) – has an ethnic minority population of 565 which initially may seem quite small. However a large proportion of the Bangladeshi community has settled in this area. The 4 participants from this area are 3 Bengali and 1 Pakistani ethnicities.

Uplands Ward has an ethnic minority population of 2,091 – at 13.3% of the total population this is quite a significant number, but this is mainly comprised of the student population (48.9% - full time students) Uplands is geographically close to the university, therefore making it a desirable area for student housing. Only two participants came from here.

Of the 30 participants, 4 were married and 26 were single. Table 3.3 below illustrates their ethnic composition:

| Number | Ethnicity |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| 17 | Bengali |
| 5 | Pakistani |
| 4 | Arab (Libyan, Yemeni, Iraqi) |
| 2 | African (Sudanese, Gambian) |
| 2 | Other (mixed race, Mauritius) |

Table 3.3 – Ethnicity break down of respondents

All except three participants (marked with *in table 4) were born inside of the UK but had migrated to Wales when they were very young and spent the majority of their life in Swansea. In terms of social class, most participants were from middle class families who owned their own properties and either owned their own business or were in full-time employment. 9 of the families worked in the restaurant trade, 7 families owned businesses, 7 families worked for the University or hospital and 4 families were made up of single mothers and were on benefits, living in council housing. In terms of qualifications, 1 was a medical doctor, 14 had bachelor's degree, 5 were still in university studying undergraduate degrees, 7 were studying A Levels at school/college and 3 were educated to school level. See table 3.4 for a brief individual biography of the participants:

| No | Name & date of interview | Age | Ethnicity | Status | Education | Profession | Live with |
|----|--------------------------|-----|-----------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| 18 | Abida 29/1/17 | 18 | Bengali | Single | Studying A levels | Student | Mum and dad |
| 27 | Fadila 5/5/17 | 30 | Bengali | Married | BA | Makeup Artist | Husband and daughter |
| 20 | Faiza 3/2/17 | 18 | Bengali | Single | Studying A levels | Student | Mum, dad, brother and sister |
| 9 | Fariha* 15/10/16 | 19 | Libyan | Single | BA | Student | Mum, dad and 4 younger siblings |
| 15 | Fatiha 13/1/17 | 26 | Bengali | Married | GNVQ | Case worker | Father in law, three sister-in-laws and husband |
| 24 | Fatina 28/4/17 | 30 | Bengali | Single | Completed GSCE's | Case worker | Mum, dad, brother and sister-in-law |
| 12 | Hadil 22/11/16 | 24 | Bengali | Single | BA | Insurance Advisor | Mum and brother |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----|-------------------------|---------|-------------------------|-------------------|--|
| 14 | Hadiya 13/10/16 | 18 | Bengali | Single | Studying levels A | Student | Mum, dad |
| 10 | Hajar 18/10/16 | 18 | Yemeni | Single | Currently studying BEng | Student | Mum, dad and three siblings |
| 21 | Hala 10/2/17 | 26 | Bengali | Single | Completed GCSE's | Insurance Advisor | Mum, dad, two brothers |
| 28 | Hamida 21/11/16 | 22 | Bengali | Single | Completed GCSE's | Carer | Mum, brother, sister-in-law, four nephews |
| 29 | Hana 5/5/17 | 18 | Mixed (Welsh/Pakistani) | Single | Studying levels A- | Student | Mum, dad and sister |
| 2 | Maliha 1/9/16 | 18 | Bengali | Single | Currently studying BA | Student | Mum, dad and brother |
| 8 | Mona 13/10/16 | 23 | Pakistani | Single | BA | Case worker | Mum, dad and three brothers |
| 16 | Nada* 20/1/16 | 24 | Sudanese | Married | BSC | Medic | Husband |
| 19 | Rahima 1/2/17 | 18 | Iraqi | Single | Studying levels A | Student | Mum, dad, two sisters, husband and baby |
| 26 | Rana 3/5/17 | 30 | Bengali | Married | BA | Case worker | Husband and two sons |
| 13 | Saba 9/12/16 | 27 | Pakistani | Single | BA | Youth worker | Mum, dad, brother and sister |
| 17 | Sadaf 23/1/17 | 28 | Bengali | Single | Btec | Assistant Medic | Mum and brother |
| 23 | Safa 22/2/17 | 28 | Bengali | Single | BA | Administrator | Mum, sister and niece |
| 6 | Safia 6/9/16 | 28 | Pakistani | Single | BA | Accountant | Mum, dad, brother, sister-in-law, three nephews and nieces |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----|-----------|--------|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| 30 | Sakina 5/5/17 | 18 | Pakistani | Single | Studying levels | A | Student | Mum, dad and sister |
| 11 | Samira 22/11/16 | 23 | Bengali | Single | BA | | Case worker | Mum, four siblings |
| 1 | Sara 1/9/16 | 27 | Bengali | Single | BA | | Youth worker | Mum, dad and sister |
| 5 | Shaista 6/9/16 | 28 | Pakistani | Single | BSC | | Medic | Mum, dad and sister |
| 3 | Shakira 2/9/16 | 18 | Bengali | Single | Currently studying BA | | Student | Mum, dad and sister |
| 4 | Tasnim 5/9/16 | 18 | Bengali | Single | Studying levels | A | Student | Mum, dad, sister and brother |
| 7 | Zahra* 12/10/16 | 24 | Libyan | Single | BA | | Case worker | Mum, dad, brother and sister |
| 25 | Zeba 28/4/17 | 20 | Gambian | Single | Currently Studying BEng | | Student | Mum, two sister and brother |
| 22 | Zubeda 10/2/17 | 27 | Mauritius | Single | BEng | | Engineer | Mum, dad and sister |

Table 3.4 – Brief biographies of participants

The research utilised various methods in order to recruit participants, namely the previously mentioned gate keepers in the youth Centre, as well as through the personal contacts of the researcher, who had access to the majority of the Muslim community in Swansea. The snowball sampling technique was also utilised, where participants gave names of other family and friends who were also able to participate. The recruitment of participants was relatively easy through personal contacts, the youth organisation (EYST), mosques and university. Frequent and personal contact allowed for more meaningful answers and a very high rate of engagement with the researcher (Clifford et al., 2016).

3.7 Ethics and Positionality

Special attention had to be paid to ethical issues when conducting this research. The research topic was very sensitive, requiring participants to share their own personal experiences and emotions. This is particularly relevant when discussing the negative impacts of culturally oppressive practices within the home or community, or when recounting racist incidents suffered when on the streets. Application was submitted for Ethical approval through the ethics committee of the Geography Department within Swansea University, to ensure that the research was in line with the university's regulations.

An information sheet and consent form were given to each participant, highlighting the purpose of the study and seeking consent before the interviews began and also explaining the data collection and analysis procedure and how the results would ultimately be published. Each participant was given the option of not taking part in the research. Each participant was also offered details of a counsellor from the voluntary youth organisation that the researcher worked for, who was willing to support them should they feel distressed during or after the interview, as well as the contact details of supervisors should they wish to obtain further information or if they needed to complain about any of the processes during the interview (see information sheet in appendix).

Taking into consideration the issues around confidentiality, participants' real names were not used in order to protect their right to anonymity. Alternative names were given during the research (see table 4). Any photos with recognisable faces were blurred out in order to anonymize the individual, whilst still retaining the overall purpose of the photo. All the recording and transcribed interviews were kept in a password protected safe place with only the researcher having access to it.

With the overall ethical framework, it is essential to be mindful of one's own position when it comes to interviewing (McDowell, 1992). Zempi (2016) identifies that the positionality of the researcher as insider determines the whole process of the research from research design, to access, data collection and data interpretation. As researcher therefore, my positionality, race, gender, ethnicity and Muslim background allowed me to have direct understanding of the Muslim women's point of view, and religious and gender identity. This has been endorsed by Lee (2008) who states that when

researching oppressed or marginalised groups who are seen as the 'other', it benefits having researchers who are 'similar' to their participants.

Kobayashi (1994), states that the relationship between the interviewer and participant can become unequal when influenced by race, gender, ethnicity and power. This in turn can affect responses. Being from a similar background to the participants (race, gender, and faith) gave me a significant advantage, affecting how the participants viewed this research and influencing the responses they gave - I felt that they were at ease and felt comfortable. This commonality of faith, culture and gender, as well as being from the same community allowed a greater level of trust and understanding which in turn made the research easier to conduct. This resulted in a unique experience for the interviewees, as researchers are generally not from the same background as them, making the insider/ outsider boundaries very distinct. Dwyer (1999) recognises that the positionality of the research being an outsider can not only influence the production of responses but also the way that they are interpreted by the researcher. The fact that the researcher was not only from a similar background to the participants, but had also held various positions of trust within the community gives this research special significance. However, it has to be recognised that being an insider can also be a subjective and polarised position, which could be interpreted as being biased. The fact that I was a Muslim woman and had shared some similar experiences did mean that I could relate to the experiences of the participants, but I also had to be aware that my own experiences could steer the discussions in certain directions. This is a recognised limitation of the researcher's position and the fact that I was acutely aware of this, ensured that I was constantly conscious of my position.

Having recognised that a position such as the researcher's as an insider can be entirely impersonal, I decided to use the autoethnography method, as it recognises and adjusts the subjectivity and emotional connections of the researcher (Ellis et al. 2011). The adoption of this method, allowing for the positionality of the researcher, enabled a degree of reflection on the researcher's own identity and cultural setting; as well as the interactions and experiences through religious, social and cultural environment. This is a common approach when striving to understand cultural experiences and hence has added richness and texture to the results. The observation through experiences of a personal as well as a professional nature generates a narrative-based interpretation of the events that took place, and played a key role in the research. It builds upon the

principle of participation in cultural life, the idea of 'walking a mile in their shoes'. Having been brought up in the West, specifically Swansea in Wales, this further develops the researcher's understanding of cultural/symbolic meanings and 'local rules' (Hochschild, 1979) from the perspective of a Muslim woman. This auto-ethnographic approach enabled the researcher to give an empathetic representation to a group of young females who are seen as the disadvantaged other, hence forming a powerful relationship (Ellis et al. 2011).

As mentioned previously, the position of the researcher was unique for several reasons, one being that I worked as a Manager in the youth organisation, which therefore gave me a very privileged position. I knew all the young people who accessed the centre, and was aware of some of the specific issues that they were facing. When being interviewed, the young women always had the choice of whether they talked about certain topics or not. As an example of this, I was aware that one of the participants had been a victim of Female genital mutilation, but in the interview she chose not to speak about it. I was at pains to ensure that the participants were comfortable with what they were sharing, and at no point felt under any pressure. Some participants who came from slightly culturally oppressive homes were happy to share their views about culturally oppressive practises relating to gender. Ellis (2004) maintains that this produces a very spontaneous and intimate interview process which in turn empowers and enables the young women to feel comfortable enough to share their personal experiences. This creates an atmosphere that influences the way the story is narrated in the interview.

The researcher also occupied the position of a key female Muslim representative in local mosques, having delivered religious classes for over 15 years in the community. The researcher was well known as having publicly represented Muslim women in many forums, something which gave these young women a degree of comfort. My personal motivation for conducting this research was a desire to explore the factors and dimensions contributing to the identity of young Muslim females in the West, which enabled me to form an emotional relation with the participants (Ellis, 2004). Furthermore, although this research was not entirely conducted in the strictest ethnographic sense, namely ethnography being an autobiographical and personal account, the cultural connection of autoethnography highlights the positive relationship between researcher and participants, an emotional connection making it

easy for participants to share their intimate thoughts and experiences. Anderson (2003) maintains that research which has an essential element of emotional geographies attached needs emotional investment, or an attachment between the researcher and participants.

Ethnography in its broader sense, has given a comprehensive overview of the subject matter being studied and makes it a very relevant tool for research of this nature. As discussed by Burawoy (1998), ethnography is ‘an extended case method’ where by the research relies on the observations of the participants, by using the personal experiences of the researcher which are relatable to those of the participants. It provides an alternative interpretive practice, from the point of view of the researcher. The researcher’s own background as a Welsh Muslim woman will inevitably influence the views of the participants to some degree, while providing an in depth analysis based on this approach. This research relies more on the autoethnography approach as opposed to the ethnography approach, as in the context of this research, I am in many ways already an ‘insider’ (Duncan, 2004).

The way in which the researcher dressed also played a vital role in the process, as it marked her as being considered either as an insider or an outsider as discussed by Mohammad (2001) who states in her research that dressing in a certain style denotes her as being either an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’ within the Muslim community. Showing my commitment to my beliefs by wearing a hijab meant that I formed a bond with those participants who also wore a hijab (24 participants wore a hijab). However, I did feel that it might have marked me as an outsider for those 6 participants who did not wear a hijab, but in fact this turned out not to be the case. Those participants had known me for many years from my role within EYST, as well as from the community at large I have always played an active role in. This has resulted in a strong foundation of trust which meant that the participants felt comfortable to talk about issues relating to their identity and even openly discussed their views on the hijab.

Within the interviews, the participants also felt comfortable to use Arabic Islamic words, commonly used within a religious context as they knew I clearly understood the religious significance of each word without them having to explain it. For example, Zara used an Arabic word to explain her commitment to her faith through her spiritual connection with God:

Zara – *“there are situation in my life when you feel completely helpless and nothing is in your control and you can do anything but have full Tawaqul (complete reliance and trust) in Allah”*.

Similarly, Mona used an Arabic statement when explaining her relation with the wider Muslim Ummah (community) connecting all Muslims around the world as the first pillar of faith which all Muslims have to abide by:

Mona – *“being part of Ummah means we are all connected through Ash Hadu An La Ilaha Ilala (There is no God but Allah) as it shows through this that we are all committed to having the same values and goals”*.

There is however a criticism of using the ethnographic approach, suggesting that it cannot be an impartial view, being subjective and biased as well as one sided (Spano, 2006), Kitchin and Tate (2000) also state that there could be a failure to notice pertinent questions, due to the researcher’s inability to step back, being too absorbed in the subject and not always able to appreciate the point of view of an ‘outsider’. By way of a contrasting view, as a Muslim woman writing about Muslim women I identified a gap in previous academic research around intersectionality gendered studies, particularly when exploring the identity of second generation Welsh Muslim women. Participants in Dwyer’s (1999) study stated that ‘they might have responded differently to an Asian or a Muslim interviewer’ when she conducted research into young Muslim women in Britain living in Hertfordshire. Within the current research project, participants were able to speak openly and in detail on topics such as finding particular elements of their culture oppressive, one example being that of gender roles. They did not feel that they were being judged as victims of this culture themselves. They also spoke openly about factors that prevented them from being able to participate fully in their Western identity, such as socialising in pubs. Or the fact that it was difficult to express different values to Western people, such as opinions around taking care of the elderly, without sounding racist. These comments suggested they did not feel judged and they did not feel that they needed to hold themselves back. The unique and trusting relationship that had been built up with the researcher led to such open responses. With little encouragement the participants went on to describe very emotional, sometimes racist incidents that had had a great impact on them. As a Muslim woman having had similar experiences myself I was able to listen empathically. Studies in autoethnography further suggest that interactive interviews of this nature are built on intimate understanding, “allows people to share their

experiences with emotionally charged sensitive topics” (Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, p.121).

On reflection, there are clear limitations to the researcher’s positionality; even though the position of an insider is an advantageous one, it does not always guarantee that you will be able to fully understand the views of the participant. Bridges (2001) explains that certain characteristics such as social class, or other personal characteristics can outweigh the shared position on occasions, thereby rendering the insider viewpoint the same as the outsider viewpoint. The fact that certain participants were younger meant that they were less forthcoming with some of their responses. They would no doubt, have been more open with their peers, a fact recognised by Robinson & Kellett (2004) when looking at the relative status of adult researchers and younger participants. In any future research this issue could be overcome by including some youth workers to facilitate the interview group, thereby ensuring that the participants would feel a lot more comfortable and deliver a fuller response. Other limitations might also be the overlooking of some parts of the data because of a shared position with the participants, as well as certain issues maybe not being raised because it was assumed that the researcher was already familiar with them (Turnbull, 2000). In order to overcome this for example, when considering the impact of certain cultural practices, the researcher linked it to existing literature in the field thereby trying to maintain an overview of the responses by keeping an engaged approach encouraging explanations of observed experiences (Burawoy, 1998). The other limitation of such a method is to acknowledge that due to differences in characteristics, the researcher can become an outsider and not be able to engage with all the range of diverse Muslim females. Coming from the mainstream Sunni Sect of Islam, it was difficult to gain access to participants from Shia sect. There is considerable difference in the fundamental teaching of the two sects which has caused historical and political tensions and divides. Particularly in the West, Muslims avoid conversations around such topics with the opposite sects. I believe that one of the reasons why I was not able to engage effectively with this community was because I was seen as a suspicious outsider. Although efforts were made to recruit young Shia Muslim women through the Al Khoi Centre (Shia Mosque) and through contacts with prominent Shia members of the community, it was all in vain. One of the main reasons for this could be the fact that the researcher did not have any personal contacts within the Shia community. Furthermore, as a Sunni,

the researcher could have been placed as an outsider. One way to possibly overcome this in any future research, is to seek out interviewers from the community to facilitate the process or to attend the mosque for a period of time to build a positive relationship of trust and then enquire about recruiting research participants.

3.8 Conclusion and Limitations

In conclusion the data collection was a simple process overall, due to the privileged position of the researcher in many areas. Working for the Youth organisation EYST as a manager, gave access to a vast number of participants, already well known to the researcher. Youth workers who acted as gatekeepers played a vital role in creating a relationship of trust and familiarity amongst any young members who might have felt uncomfortable, due to the researcher being older than them as mentioned in Robinson & Kellett (2004). Teaching in mosques and other venues had made the researcher a well-known figure in the community and one that had gained the trust of the community. Therefore it was relatively easy to use personal contacts to identify participants for interviews, and participants were very willing to contribute to the research. As mentioned by Longhurst (2003) personal connections allow for very meaningful interaction during interviews, making participants feel comfortable enough to share their narratives.

Being a Muslim woman has been the key driver for this research. As previously identified, very little literature has been written by Muslim women for Muslim women. It was even identified by Dwyer (1999) who has conducted research in this same field that participants would respond differently to an Asian or a Muslim interviewer. This has been further emphasised by Zempi (2016) when looking at capturing the experiences of Muslim women facing Islamophobia, who states that research by an insider can have a huge impact on gaining access to participants, as well as making data collection and interpretation of responses easier. It allowed participants to connect emotionally with the researcher, as sharing a similar background of faith, race, and ethnicity enhances the experience for participants (Ellis et al. 2011). Researcher and participant were in an equal power relationship – the fact that participants did not feel different was vitally important when considering researching within underrepresented groups.

The methodology was acknowledged to have limitations, in that the researcher could present a biased, polarised view. Hence the use of an autoethnographic approach allowed for adjustment to the subjectivity and emotional connection and encouraged the richness of results to be interpreted through emotional shared connection (Ellis et al. 2011). Even though the researcher was viewed as an insider from many perspectives, there was a struggle to recruit representation from the wider Muslim community, and accessing the Shia community in particular was difficult. Recognising this limitation means that in future more contacts will be used to tap into the community, allowing more time to build a relationship of trust within this specific community before requesting interviews. It is vital to capture the views of the minority amongst minority groups.

Even though the interviews and focus group were good methods for obtaining relevant information for the research, in future other research methods could also be utilised such as daily diaries, and walking interviews which would connect the relevance of places with the identities of the participants.

Whilst visual imagery has been used and has contributed hugely to the visual representation of participants embodied experiences of their identities locally, with the ever growing trend for social media, in the future more visual methods of identity interpretation and influences in the lives of participants can be explored, such as vlogs or blogs.

Chapter 4. Muslim Identity in Relational Context

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the multiple factors that play a key role in the construction of the self-identity of those participants interviewed, with the focus being mainly on the connection with their religious identity. By the exploration of key factors such as gender, ethnicity and culture, this chapter will examine the intersectionality of factors which together contribute to the Muslim identity. The current research will also emphasise the importance of gender in the formation of identity.

Participants were asked to consider the various categories that would form part of, or otherwise influence the construction of their self-identified identity. The categories explored included faith, gender, ethnicity, and culture. Another element that was not specifically referred to in the interview question, but appeared in the answers, and was therefore examined, was the impact of social class. This chapter will go some way towards informing the increased interest in the geographies of Muslim identities. Geographers such as Claire Dwyer (1999, 2000) and Peter Hopkins (2001, 2010) have explored the construction of gendered Muslim identities by highlighting the construction and contestation of these through their everyday lives. By examining the important factors that intersect within their daily lives, this chapter will feed into the narrative of how these participants construct and formulate their identities.

In order to explore the impact that such factors have in the formation of the identity of these participants, it is crucial to consider the literature that currently exists on intersectionality and position this current research within it. The relevance of intersectionality literature in relation to the understanding of gender within the context of faith is of particular importance. Collins (2000) makes further examination of the power relations embedded in social identities. The feminist thinking of McCall (2005) suggests that intersectionality theory looks at the complexities of women's identities being multiple and fluid. Bastia (2014) has identified a lack of contribution to literature around the intersectionality element of disadvantages caused by race, gender, and class for women from diverse backgrounds. This research will further seek to highlight the key elements in the construction of their intersectional identities, as identified by the participants. It does this by ranking these elements in order of importance, and then considering how this impacts on other aspects of their identity.

This research will consider how, within intersectionality, different aspects of identities intersect with one another, with the element of faith playing a key part. Muslim identities have been seen as problematic both in academia and in public discourse. From the publication of the Satanic Verses and major political events such as 9/11 and the 7/7 bombing, the Muslim identity has increasingly been seen as aggressive and extremist in some sectors. There has furthermore been a particular desire to represent Muslim women as being oppressed. Several feminist theorists are particularly keen to label Muslim women as the oppressed “other”, in need of rescuing (Abu-Lughod, 2002). This chapter will focus on exploring the strong foundation that religion plays in the construction of the identities of the participants, moving away from the idea that Muslims are aggressive, extremist or even oppressed towards the idea of a more “normal” Muslim identity.

This chapter will also look to the notion of self and how it merges with others through common values and a shared group identity. This chapter will build further on the work done by previous researchers such as Gardner & Shakur (1994) by drawing upon the religious, cultural and ethnic connections which together make up a shared identity that can bring communities together. The concept of Ummah (global Muslim community) as a shared identity becomes increasingly important throughout this chapter. Indeed Archer (2001) states that many young Muslims have come together under their Muslim identity, irrespective of ethnic differences. As claimed by Kong (2001a) the interviews will demonstrate that religion needs to be fully acknowledged as a marker or a catalyst for the social categorisations and identification process chosen by these participants.

The chapter will also explore relational identities and look again at the relationship between individuals and the wider society, something which they have to continuously negotiate in order to reduce the ‘*us/them*’ classification. Relational identities can be seen as how individuals see themselves versus recognition from others (Cheek, et al., 2002). However, the participants in this current research have not identified themselves as being specifically Muslim. Instead, many have identified themselves as Muslim British whilst others have identified themselves as Muslim Welsh, something which is further explored in Chapter 7, which considers the premise of belonging to a nation. For most participants in this research, claiming the Muslim identity is more about positioning themselves and constructing their identities in relation to ‘gender’,

‘ethnicity’, ‘culture’, and ‘nationality,’ and shifting their identification away from Asian identities. Even though in the 90’s researchers like Back (1996) suggested that these new ethnicities were produced by local and global tensions, therefore giving rise to “Black and British” identities, the recent surge in global Islamophobia and general anti-Muslim sentiments has resulted in the rise of strong Muslim identities.

Further building upon ideas of relationality, this chapter will also consider the positioning of ethnicity in the formation of identity, particularly as some participants have shown rather less attachment to their ethnicity. This is mainly because they view it as being linked to the cultural past of their parents, and they prefer not to be caught up in any cultural and social tensions. Gardner & Shukur (1994) stated that Muslims are increasingly defining their identities by their religion, rather than by their ethnicity or parental country of origin. Other research by Archer (2001) shows that second and third generation Muslims face ‘culture clashes’, because of differences in the minority and majority cultures. The relationship these participants have developed with their parents has therefore had an impact on their identity formation. Their cultural and ethnic origin, founded as it is on their familial and community connections, also strongly connects them to their faith.

4.2 Muslim Identity

This section focuses on the formation of identity by considering the key elements influencing how the participants see themselves, and how they want others to see them. Shields (2008) considers identity to be a psychological understanding of the awareness of self, self-image, and self-reflection, namely, the way in which individuals express themselves. It is important to analyse the way in which identities are created, performed through social relations and then interpreted (Hopkins 2010).

When considering their identity, their faith was always the main marker identified by the participants. This is also affirmed by previous research conducted by Peach (2006: 353) who states that religion is the strongest part of one’s identity “*a more important variable for socio geographic investigation than race or ethnicity*”. When looking at the gendered identities of these Muslim women, Islam is not seen as a secondary element but rather the most important aspect, as described below:

Maliha - “*strongest identity is my religion*”.

Zahra – “*Being Muslim is what identifies me, I feel Muslim*”

Samira – *“Islam is most important to me, everything I do is based on Islam, my job, where I go, anything and everything is based on Islam”*

Hadil – *“I think religion is strongest identity because I link it to my day to day things I do, my image”*

Faiza – *“my faith is most important identity because that just shapes the entire person that I am”*

The participants were asked to choose which element of their identity they most identify with - faith, ethnicity, gender, culture or nationality. For most participants their faith was the most important marker, completely influencing their daily lives. Earlier research, such as that conducted by Katherine Brown (2006) shows similar findings where religion positions itself as a key element in identity formation in the same way as stated by the participants. Choosing their Muslim identity, the participants are positioning themselves firmly in their religious identity when ranking all the factors that contribute to their identity formation. When conducting studies of the identities of young Muslims, many geographers have found that they define their identities more in terms of their religion, than their parental country of origin or any other marker (Gardner and Shukur, 1994). That was further confirmed by Modood (2005) who also emphasises that religion is central to the British Asian ethnic identity. Safia below states that for her, faith takes precedence over culture and ethnicity, a similar point is raised during Zubeda’s interview:

Zubeda – *“The faith identity was a very conscious decision on my part as it’s the thing that affects my life the most. Being from Mauritius doesn’t affect my life at all being female affects my life to a certain degree, being Muslim affects every part of my life it affects the way I think the way I behave the way I am”*.

Safia - *“religion for me comes on top of culture or ethnicity and religion and culture are two separate things but people mix them up as one thing”*.

Even though religion is identified as the most important element, as Hall (1992) states, it should be presumed that identities are not fixed and complete, but rather that they are contextual and can change their position through interaction with others. The participants have stressed that the identity of their faith is by far most important for them, and the one that they want to be recognised by. The participants clearly state that their faith which makes them feel a sense of belonging and recognition. Cattle

(2005) describes personal identity as being a set of beliefs and values that are influenced by religion but chosen individually and practiced privately. Zahra and Mona illustrate this later in their interviews:

Zahra - "Generally, I feel like I relate to my religion more, so being a Muslim is what identifies me so when people say whether I like Britain more do I like Libya more I just say I feel Muslim".

Mona - "My faith, Islam comes first then my Britishness. I wouldn't say my ethnicity is strongest part of me as when I went to Pakistan I felt I don't fit in there so Islam would definitely be the first thing. But if you had asked me 6 year ago it would have been different as I wasn't taking faith too seriously but now I would definitely say it's Islam. Then my culture being British then the ethnic background would come into it".

Zahra and Mona clearly believe that their identity as a Muslim identity is dominant over their other identities. This is in line with study completed by Ahmad and Evergeti (2010) which also posits the view of Muslims as being grouped in different dominations of regions, ethnicities and backgrounds. The participants show a sense of belonging to a larger shared identity. This stated identity, described by Phinney (1989) as self-labelling, is a response to the question of what one considers oneself to be, and for these participants it is about self-identifying and being recognised by others. As Zahra articulates, when made to choose between nationalities, she would choose being a Muslim. However, there is the question of the identity that one projects and expects others to accept. As Hana states in her interview:

Hana - "People often ask me if I am an Arab, or Malay or Turkish. I am mixed race and hence I do look like a mix but I am obviously a Muslim (pointing to her headscarf) and that is the most important identity which I want to be known and recognised by".

Hana almost sounds irritated when explaining why she wants her Muslim identity to be seen as her main identity. According to Goffman (1969), individuals look for validation from others of signals they send out of self to see if they have been interpreted accurately by the response from the public. Hana insisted that her particular faith identity should be accepted as her official identity, with all other identities relegated as secondary.

The following section looks at the important markers of identity and how they intersect with one another in order to enable these participant to construct their self-image. Jenkins (1996) maintains that identities are constructed and experienced through social relations with others, by the identification of both similarities and differences. The

participants note that possessing things that they “have”, or “are” or “belong to” is important in the creation of their self -identity. Althusser (1971) also states that identities are positioned and recognised by others.

4.3 Intersectional Identities

This section of the chapter looks at the intersectionality of identity formation of the participants, including religion amongst other aspects. Even though intersectionality studies have mainly focussed on the significance on gender in relation to race, ethnicity and social class, the participants of this current research have cited their faith as being the main factor of their identity, although other aspects of identity are still relevant. Even though intersectionality studies mainly began by considering discrimination and oppression, this chapter will consider all the relevant factors which contribute equally to the lived experiences of women from different back grounds (Carastathis, 2014). As mentioned by Shields (2008) in reality there is not one clear, single identity. Identity is fluid, it changes with experiences over time, becoming more stable as it gives the individual a sense of continuity across time and space. It is also important to consider the hybridity of the participants; a concept that came out of post-colonial studies identifying hybridity as the mixing of two entities, thereby creating one unique and indistinguishable category (O’Hearn, 1998).

Applying these ideas to the research, many participants interviewed stated that they have established an identity that mixes their dominant Asian roots with their British or Welsh roots always taking their faith and gender into consideration. As stated in the following:

Hana - “Religion is my biggest identity but being Welsh is very important too being from a mixed heritage and having both Asian and Welsh influences forms who I am. But I do see myself as a mixture of Muslim, Welsh and Pakistani”.

Hamida - “I am a combination of all different factors of my identity, I am a Muslim girl, culturally Bengali and Welsh with British citizenship”.

Fadila - “I am Muslim first then Welsh Asian. Being a Muslim is my foundation and I base everything I do on top of that and make all my decisions from it. I am proud to be Welsh as I was born and brought up here and I have strong groundings of my mother’s cultural values, that’s who I am”.

These examples clearly illustrate that the respondents experience multiple forms of identity which all interact with one another, something defined by Gillborn (2015) as

intersectionality. For Hamida and Fadila it is clear that all the different factors of their identities interact with each other, thereby making it difficult for them to separate any one particular facet. By describing the different facets feeding into their cultural identity, they underline the fluidity of their identity, stating they are a mixture of Welsh and Bengali. Identity can be interchangeable and fluid in different contexts. Different spatial scales play a key role in the construction of these Muslim identities, in particular how these participants form the 'Welsh Muslim' sense of personhood and belonging (Hopkins, 2007). The formation of the identity of the participants is influenced by the fact that their parents have strong ties with their country of origin, which plays a part in creating the transnational culture that they cling to. Hana's identity however, seems to be more hybrid. Sakamoto (1996) maintains that it is possible to retain some tensions between individual cultures without one becoming dominant and then forming a new identity, something which aptly describes Hana. Self-reflective processes such as these, with the participants considering their self-image, highlight the influence of intercultural and intergenerational factors.

This section began by considering the important contribution of geographies of religion, as the participants explore the impact religion has had on their lives and how it has developed structures around their everyday practices. The section and chapters to follow will further illustrate how these deeply embedded religious practices permeate into their everyday experiences of life in Wales. The research will also explore geographies of Muslim identities, how these identities are connected to specific nations and ethnic regions and the way in which the cultural practices from these regions affect the way in which identity is formed.

4.4 Factors influencing Intersectional identity formation

This section will focus further on factors that play a key role in the formation of the identity of these young Muslim women. It will look at how they position themselves and construct their identities in relation to the influential factors which Valentine (2007) interprets as not separate identities but rather working together to be claimed and rejected. These identities will be constructed and contested through the influences of social networks established in the places where these participants live. The importance of self-identity being endorsed by others (Goffman, 1969) is affirmed through association with like-minded others. Goffman highlights the fact that identity

is based upon the idea of a performance – the acting out of roles which underline the social exchanges taking place between people.

In order to be socially accepted, participants highlighted factors they had in common with others with whom they shared their identity. Participants were asked to rank the factors that had most influenced the formation of their identity; family, place of birth, surroundings, community, culture, upbringing or other. Their responses appear in the following sections.

4.4.1 Friends and family

Family and friends have been identified as being one of the most influential and supportive factors in the construction of the participants identity:

Maliha – “When growing up, I was taught the basic of my faith from my parents and as I grew older I pursued further knowledge myself to fill the gaps and get a deeper understanding. But I guess they put the foundations of my faith in my life”.

Zahra – “my parents were my big influencing factor, they were not strict but they taught me the fundamentals of the religion and all the manners and morals, which I am so grateful for as I feel that gave me the discipline in life and I could distinguish between good and bad from an early age”.

Maliha and Zahra both highlight the fact that their families have always shared with them the fundamental teachings of their religion, thereby playing a key role in their moral development. This formed the basis of their initial identity. Most second generation Muslim young girls are the daughters of immigrants who practiced a minority religion at a time when the majority neither accommodated nor understood it. The fact that the families felt that there was a very real threat they might lose their religious and cultural identity, meant that they felt it was their duty to pass this identity on to the next generation. They therefore made very conscious efforts to do so (Williams and Vashi, 2007). The responses from participants suggest that during their childhood Islamic teachings were incorporated into the daily routine, thereby enabling their Islamic identity to form from an early age. Participants were therefore grounded with a strong, faith based identity.

Other participants also highlighted how friends had played a key role in establishing their faith based identity:

Sara - *“factors that contribute to my identity are the community I live in, my friends and definitely my family, specifically the Muslim community which helps me to emphasise my beliefs. I do associate myself more with my Muslim friends as I have a connection with them due to having same beliefs”*.

Shaista – *“when in primary I was friends with everyone, but as we grew older in secondary it was mainly Asian as we all had similar family values and similar restrictions and when I went to university I chose mainly Muslim friends to share my house with as they understood my religious practices, eating halal, praying, fasting. It was easy not having to explain and it helped me as we did these things together”*.

If you consider the similarities between them, it is easy to appreciate why the participants feel that friends play a key role in forming their collective identity. They have shared beliefs which influence the way in which they behave, hence the majority of their friends are Muslim. Similar values and family attitudes also shape how they experience their identities in their everyday lives. Choosing friends with similar values therefore reinforces and further strengthens religious identity, as they attend similar activities and the same places of worship. The support received by friends and other social networks can be described as membership of a social group which gives value and emotional significance attachment (Tajfel, 1978). Another comment by a participant further serves to illustrate this idea of group identity:

Hana – *“I am mainly friends with all Muslim girls and we hang out together in the prayer room in college, we attend same youth halaqa (Islamic classes) and go to university mosque for Ramadan prayer and Eid prayers. These activities have brought us very close and we enjoy this company as we all share the same interests based on our religious teachings. I feel very comfortable in their company and I feel they help me to stay strong in my faith”*.

Hana describes her relationship with her friends as a source of support and a way of reinforcing her own identity. It strengthens her positive social identity and protects her sense of belonging. However, Sakina, who has a mixture of different friends, finds it rather challenging to navigate her way through her religious identity into social acceptance:

Sakinah – *“I have a broad mix of friends, mainly not from Muslim faith and I often have to miss out on social events as they are mixed (both genders together) or going out late night which doesn't coincide with my parental rules. It can be hard at times as I feel left out. I guess it's hard for my wider circle of friend to constantly make exceptions for me and my faith so hence I get left behind at times”*.

Sakina's example is in direct contrast to that of the other participants, who use their wider social network to reinforce their Islamic identity, by choosing only Muslim

friends. Sakina however, has also chosen non-Muslim friends, and finds herself having to navigate through conflicting expectations. This contributes to the shaping of her narrative of the making and remaking of identities. The values and teaching she inherited from her parents are combined with her developing hybrid identity. Dwyer (2000) describes hybrid identities as the blending of two different backgrounds. The emphasis is on the fusion of cultural influences and how this is challenged and overcome. This participant's hybrid identities plays a part in her everyday life, a fact which allows her to be part of both cultures (Williams and Vashi, 2007), although she still feels constricted by certain limitations.

4.4.2 Gender

When considering other factors that play a key role in identify formation, participants clearly also considered their female gender as being highly relevant. Researchers including Brah (1996) have stressed the importance of gender as a marker for young Muslim women, as well as other markers of race, class, and ethnicity. By negotiating between these fixed binaries they are able to form their own identities. It is therefore important to understand their identity as Muslim women relationally articulating their Muslim identities:

Sara – “Mainly my faith is most important aspect of my identity as it comes from the fact that I am a female that’s a strong part of me and because as a woman in Islam you get to know your rights and your identity”.

Maliha - “Strongest identity is my religion. I feel responsible to represent myself as a Muslim Woman. As a woman in Islam it’s a good place to be. It’s our responsibility to show that we are not oppressed. In uni I am a student and a Muslim woman and in work I am a Primark worker and a Muslim woman”.

Shakira – “identifying as a woman and with my religion is as empowering as the two Islam and the position of women go really well together”.

Fatiha – “Gender and faith are equal to me because of the rights and position of women in Islam, they go hand in hand for me.”

Participants clearly recognise the strong correlation between their gender and Islam, and how their core identity stems from these two facets. They highlight how they feel empowered by the rights they enjoy as Muslim women. Abu-Ali and Reisen (1999) write about the positioning of women in Islam from a historical perspective, stating that the advent of Islam brought differing attitudes toward women. Before the introduction of Islam, the subservient position of women in the Middle East was obvious by the fact that practices such as easy divorces for men, female infanticide

and the sexual abuse of slave girls were common (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992). However, Islam very much opposed such practices, and the Prophet Mohammed Peace be upon him (PBUH) advocated the rights of women through the teachings of Islam (Quran). Amongst others, this included the right to own and inherit property, to consent to both marriage and divorce and to enter both education and employment (Minces, 1982).

As seen from responses, the participants in this research do not distinguish Islam from their gendered identities as they see the position of women in Islam as a privileged position with full rights given to them from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and teachings from Quran. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the parents and families of the participants have clearly taught them the strong moral code found in the foundations of Islam. As Elwood (1998) suggests, strong masculine or feminine attributes are developed from infancy, through interaction with parents, peers and at school. In the case of these participants, the more they learnt about their faith the more they appreciated their positions as women. Thus:

Samira - "And I have seen my mum as a strong woman in my life and she has brought me up in this way".

Shakira - "Gender is very important part for me, growing up my dad used to say to us fathers who have daughters are blessed and I know that in Asian culture and Arab culture it's all about the sons but my mum and dad have always been so proud of us daughters and my dad never showed our brother having more importance over us so knowing that and my dad showing us more love made us feel special and always said we can do anything we want".

Shakira understood that her parents lived their lives purely according to the teachings of Islam, which meant that she never personally experienced the cultural preference for males, something which is discussed later in the chapter. She always felt that she was loved and encouraged in all aspects of her life, particularly by her father. Within her house, she never witnessed men and women being treated differently, which she attributes to the teachings of Islam. Continuing this theme of parents as positive role models Hajar notes:

Hajar - "I think I am a strong Muslim woman because of my mum at home and my older sister so a dominant female household. Obviously mum taught us everything and she brought us up as strong women and there weren't any restrictions for us".

Hajar's upbringing had been particularly influenced by her mother, as she was a widower who brought her two daughters and son up on her own, always treating them

all equally. These responses clearly illustrate the fact that childhood experiences and family influences play a vital role in forming the strong and gender equal identities of these participants.

The intersectionality of these two aspects of their identities prove that for these participants, gender and faith make up of their identity in equal measure, as mentioned by Shields (2008). Furthermore, the process of categorising identity is a dynamic one, with the individual very much engaged in the formation of their own identity. The research shows that one aspect of identity informs the other. When considering the link between gender and faith, the power relations embedded in social identities can be very strong;

Shakira - "Islam is so empowering to women. Women and our faith go really well together".

Zubeda - "In Islam men and women are both equal but they are different. Gender has never been a problem in our family and we have been encouraged to do anything we want and I am very lucky because my dad is a nurse and so there are no gender stereotypes in my family only strong Muslims. When I chose to do engineering there were numerous people who told me engineering is a man's subject and when I told my dad and he said they are wrong and that helped me greatly because I had that support and confidence".

Hajar "I feel as a female on my course I represent the female gender, even though there are a lot of females in chemical engineering it's still a male dominated field. And this is why I took up this challenge of doing this because I wanted to show especially because people always get the image of Muslim women being quiet and not mixing with people not active and asking questions and not laughing with others but I am opposite to that I laugh with people, ask questions, work with other people comfortably".

The participants feel a strong sense of empowerment and this, along with a subversion of the patriarchal culture that they come from (Kandiyoti, 1988) leads to the creation of a strong religious female identity. Their gender ideology is based on the powerful influence of religious teachings within their lives and the resistance of any strong cultural patriarchal views. Samira and Hajar were brought up in single parent homes, and fully appreciate their position as Muslim women and the rights they enjoy. Hajar is also very aware that the fact that she is both a woman and a Muslim meant that she felt at a disadvantage. This led her to challenge established stereotypes and prove herself within her chosen field of study at University. These are the places Hajar felt that her sense of otherness became heightened, because of several intersectional

elements of her identity, namely gender, race, dress and religion. It was therefore important for her to assert her self-identity within these places.

Mona goes on to describe her feelings as a woman in more detail:

Mona - "I feel strongly as a woman but as a Muslim woman I feel very strong. I feel Islam gives you so much more as a woman and if you were to ask me before I came into Islam I would say I was only a woman but wouldn't necessarily have been proud to be one but now I know rights of women in Islam and how your level is raised as a woman, it's so beautiful and allhumdulilah (Praise be to Allah) it's so nice to have this. It's a very nice platform to be on."

Mona here echoes a similar sentiment to another participant, who referred to Islamic rights as a tool of empowerment to be used by Muslim women as a way of overcoming any discrimination faced because of their gender. The identity of gender is strong when compared to other social identities which could potentially weaken the position of women. Brown's (2006) research, which considers the rights of Muslim women, highlights the fact that Muslim women are negotiating and transforming the understanding of rights. In turn, this then affects the way in which these participants experience their public and private lives, as it forms the basis of their behavioural practices. The use of rights as a means of negotiating the identity of Muslim women is also mentioned by Dwyer (2000) as challenging parental pressure and demanding access to new opportunities. Even though most participants did not express that particular sentiment, they did mention that they viewed oppressive cultural practises as being distinct from the teachings of Islam. Nevertheless, one participant echoes the view expressed in Dwyer's and Brown's research, stating:

Saba - "Pakistani ethnicity is quite strong for me, and I always hoped my religious side is stronger than my Pakistani ethnicity and as I am getting older I am trying to learn more so I can overcome my ethnicity and culture practice more of my religious side and specifically move away from cultural gendered roles which were part of my Parents culture. I want to change that, I went to university, I have a job, I don't want to get married straight away, and moving forward I want to change the way we approach marriage and be able to openly talk about it in the family, not being told who to get married but to be given a choice and be open minded to proposals from different backgrounds".

This statement by Saba makes clear the compromise she feels she must make, as women are expected to uphold cultural values and therefore the inequalities of oppressive traditions. In this specific cultural context, this highlights the intersectional disadvantage that she feels, due to her gender. This is further exemplified in the comments below:

Zahra -*“The negative part of the culture would be how closed they are, like keeping Libyans to themselves and like keeping women in the house and only men go out to work”*.

Saba –*“My gender doesn’t really come into it much when I think of my identity, I don’t really think about it that too much, maybe because in culture it’s not always working in our favour as a woman I think there are challenges at times. I don’t think we (as daughters) have been brought up particularly as strong women, obviously we go to uni we get jobs and we get married but with my brother it’s been a bit different he is working but there isn’t an emphasis on him getting married straight away and bringing up a family and the usual of you know coming home at later times, going out as often as he likes, where as being women that’s been restricted due to the Pakistani culture”*.

Both participants also highlight the different ways in which women are traditionally treated, with the clear expectation that a woman will mainly stay at home. In this instance, home is clearly viewed as a geographical space where multiple relations are experienced, dependant on gender (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). The comments highlight the particular rules that exist in order to restrict women, and the way in which women are represented within the confined private space of these homes. This attitude is also extended to other parts of their lives. This is particularly the case for Saba, who comes from a less religious family and faces, as Dwyer (2000) puts it in her research, “cultural conflict” between the “South Asian” and “British” way of life. Both ways of life are intractable and unable to intertwine, which is a major disadvantage for women from these backgrounds. No doubt this is why Saba, in her earlier response, states that she wants to learn more about her religion, so that she can overcome such cultural restrictions, as Islam acknowledges that the position of a Muslim women in the home is not inferior but is an important facet of Islam (Brown, 2006). This can also be seen in the following response from another participant:

Fatiha: - *“My family is not that cultural because when culture conflicts with religion that’s when my dad puts a line through it and he says no we are not going to follow this but my mum well like chores was a difference for girls and boys, my mum was oh my boys my boys my Golden boys. She was harsh on us to do certain things. So she wouldn’t let them do any chores in the house and we would have to serve them. But we knew this is from our culture and nothing to do with our religion and because she encouraged us to read about our religion I would tell her the Prophet pbuh used to help out in the house hold chores she would say to us well make sure you make your husbands help you but leave my sons alone”*.

Fatiha’s comment clearly reinforces the important role played by parents in the formation of a person’s identity. The family are responsible for imparting fundamental

religious education which prepares both genders for their future responsibilities (Brown, 2006). Cultural gender roles should also not be reinforced (Dwyer, 1999). In the past, geographies of place played a key role in those communities that wanted to hold onto cultural values, with Anthias & Yuval Davies (1992) stating that these cultural identities are reinforced by migrant communities, as they face hostility from outsiders. This hostility can be viewed as a threat to their identity which can then lead to attitudes such as that displayed by Fatiha's mother, who feel it is their responsibility to preserve their cultural values by ensuring they continue to enforce gender differences. So when the second generation choose to engage more with their religious identity than their cultural identity, as they feel it gives them greater independence and empowerment in all spheres of their life, this can open up a debate between generations. The following section will now consider in greater detail, the role that ethnicity and culture play in the formation of the Muslim identity.

4.4.3 Ethnicity & Culture

Ethnicity plays a significant role in primary identity formation, as described by Jenkins (1996). The participants spoke about the importance of their ethnicity when identifying factors which have influenced the development of their identity. They highlighted a positive connection between the elements of faith, gender and their ethnicity. The following comments by participants emphasise the importance of culture:

Zara – “Being Libyan is important aspect of who I am, I have learnt Arabic and my parent’s culture and I am proud of that part of who I am”.

Sara – “In my head I am Bengali, even though I don’t like all the traditions and don’t eat all the typical foods particularly fish. But I can speak Bengali and even though haven’t visited Bangladesh much, I still feel my roots are from there”.

Maliha – “I have a strong sense of being Bengali Asian as my ethnic origins. My parents have instilled the Bengali language and traditions, with frequent trips to Bangladesh. Being born in Wales I like having our own language and specific things of St David day celebration, our unique Welsh accents, the Dragon so both ethnicities are key part of me. I speak my Bengali with a Welsh accent and that best describes me”.

The participants' responses prove that their ethnic origin is integral to the formation of their identity. Some participants clearly identified with the ethnic origin of their parents, while others considered themselves to be a fusion, combining hybrid identities of Asian or Bengali and Welsh. In the case of both Sara and Maliha, visits to their

parents' country of origin established both a stronger affiliation to and negotiation of their ethnicity. Zara's statement clearly states that her Libyan roots are fundamental to her Arabic ethnicity. Nash (2008) describes this process of intersectionality as the interpretation of identities within a social context, determining which identity is prominent at any one time or whether they can actually engage simultaneously, as is the case with Maliha. This is more obviously the case for other participants:

Fadila - "I feel very Welsh and definitely something I am proud of as I was born and raised here and I feel this is where I come. However my ethnicity of being Bangladeshi is something I feel is more linked to my parents as that their origin and I am more Welsh Asian"

Hana - "My ethnicity I would say is Welsh, being mixed race and feel that's this part of my identity is stronger than my Pakistani side. The Pakistani part of my ethnicity has been diluted over time with my family speaking less of the language, dressing more Western and their views are more Western instead of traditional it's not that strong in our home any more even though I love the Pakistani food".

Thus one can begin to see the merging and recreation of various ethnicities, as they make their way through identity construction. Nash (2008) describes these experiences as a potential means of connecting with the wider community through a shared group identity - in this case the participants want to be associated with the wider Welsh community. This is examined further by Jenkins (1996) who describes this process as an emotional and psychological composition of selfhood, linking the individuals to a wider group. Hence, ethnic grouping becomes a process of recruitment rather than a consequence of birth. This is clearly illustrated with the comments from Fadila and Hana, who have formed stronger links with their Welsh roots, as they begin to construct their identity away from their generational boundaries (Barth, 1969). All of the participants are associating their ethnicity with everyday routines as a means of looking for stability whilst embodying their identities, as referenced by Jenkins (1996). Expressing this further:

Safa - "When I am abroad I say I am British Pakistani, but when I am home I just say I am Welsh Pakistani because our parents brought us up with Pakistani culture but we learnt the Welsh culture through school and friends and slowly brought it home and then it just became a mix of both with Islam being overarching factor connecting all different parts".

Hajar – *“My Yemeni ethnicity is only 50% as there isn’t a large community here in Swansea so I don’t get to mix with many Yemenis. I see myself more Arab and Welsh really as I live a lifestyle which incorporate both”*.

The way in which participants negotiate their ethnicities can be seen as a process of self-perception. It is also clear that ethnic identities are not fixed (Jenkins, 1996) not immutable, and that individuals can change them over time. Safa explains that over time she moved from a Pakistani ethnicity to a broader mixed ethnicity. The participants undergo a process of understanding their self in specific places and times, and creating their own personal geographies. They establish their own selfhood which is different to that of their parents, and the fact that they are Welsh matters just as much as where their parents come from.

Recreation of ethnic identity can be a process both of exclusion and incorporation into different categories (Barth, 1969). The participants explain this further:

Rana – *“I used to think my ethnic roots were quite strong and I am Bengali but when I went to Bangladesh I was treated very differently, I found their ways very different to mine, I couldn’t eat a lot of the foods, I spoke differently to them, it made me realise how different I was. I didn’t have the same look on life like them, they were very cultural and I am not, I have adopted a lot of the Western ideas infused with my faith which are very different to theirs”*.

Samira *“I rule out being Bengali because of the culture, I hate the culture and don’t want to have anything to do with it”*.

It can be seen that these participants are experiencing a form of alienation from a group with whom they do not wish to share a collective identity. Linking it to Banks’ (1996) contrast between “ethnicity in the heart” and “ethnicity in the head”, this reminds us of the need to acknowledge effect and emotions when considering ethnicity and other ways in which people belong. A sense of belonging occurs when people experience and feel further included within the geographies of emotions, something which is clearly not the case for these participants. Instead, Muslims who live outside the Islamic world are taught about their religion and culture by their family. They have to position themselves within Western society by balancing these values, along with those learnt from the Western society in which they live. Although religion and cultural values are often consistent, some participants had been exposed to conflicting ideas about the roles of women from their culture and from their religion. As Samira further explains:

Samira - *“I don't like the way women are treated in Bengali culture, marriage is a huge issue having to get married to a certain person introduced to you by a certain age, maintaining unhappy relations because of fear of divorce and living a life of what others will think and being judged constantly. I have learnt to separate the culture from my religion and have let go of those practices”*.

Samira effectively sums up why she is disassociating herself from her Bengali roots, linking them to cultural values that she does not internally identify with. A key element of ethnic identity, as Barth (1969) explains it, is to be validated both internally and externally, both from within yourself as well as collectively by others. Samira is unable to accept being part of the ethnic culture internally and therefore feels excluded externally as a result. She highlights the element of gender discrimination, linking it to intersectional identities that prevent the co-existence of both her ethnic and gender identity. As Abu-Ali and Reisen (1999) emphasise, gender role and identity are influenced by cultural context. In this case there is a cultural clash which results in the attempt to reproduce ethnic identity. Similar responses can be seen from the following participants:

Rahima - *“I am an Arab and Welsh and at times they are contradictory to one another in their cultural expectancies especially around gender treatment and marriages, but I guess I am both at times and I chose Welsh more over the Arab”*.

Mona – *“Being an Asian you are always aware of cultural restriction that come with it specifically for women, like marriages with different people from different backgrounds is a big no no and my parents would never accept that even though my religion permits it and my Welsh Western upbringing encourages it but I feel restricted by my cultural roots at times”*.

Ethnicities are challenged by participants, based on the contradictory cultural values associated with them. The participants clearly specify that these cultural traits conflict with both their religious and Western beliefs, and hence negotiate their intersectional Muslim identities. In particular, they highlight the difficulties that arise because of a negative perception of women in their culture, which impacts on their everyday choices, as a Muslim woman living in the West. Dwyer (2000) observes that Muslim women can identify with their Islamic identity rather more as a means of asserting their rights as women. The teachings validate their independence and they can then abandon their cultural roots. She suggests that there are very complex ways in which gender, ethnicity and class are intertwined or “mutually constituted”. The comments from Mona and Rahima regarding roles of gender and marriage underline the fact that

at times these do not sit well together. Hence, they turn more towards their faith identity as opposed to their ethnic identity.

However, there were participants who felt that the cultural values passed down to them were positive and that this had had a positive impact in the formation of their self over time:

Zeba - "I would say now it's much more strong in who I am not before I kind of disliked being Gambian first mainly because the way Africa is portrayed negatively and also the misogynistic culture but then in Africa we are not really taught our history we are taught European history and we kind like internalise white supremacy and we think we are dumb and inferior but the more I took time to learn my own history I started to see the position of women and the concept of honour and nobility and started to appreciate that and I just started to appreciate my own culture because before that I used to think it was primitive culture because this is what they told us through the media and we didn't really learn the history but now I have started to appreciate my history my identity".

Zeba's comment clearly shows how her identity has changed over time, as she learnt more about her history and began to appreciate her cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Moghadam (1994) confirms that a change of circumstance can lead to a change in identity over time, identity being shaped by influences from external factors, which can force new solidarities and experiences as part of one's own growth. When considering the findings from the interviews there were certain factors and circumstances that brought about more solidarities and political alliances, leading people to embrace these experiences as part of the fluidity and growth of their identity. Hadil also echoes Zeba's sentiment:

Hadil - "I love the way Bengali culture and community look after each other, at times of death we all come together at funerals we support one another, at times of illness we visit the family and help them through hard time, we look after the elderly and respect them and care for them. It makes me proud to be part of this way of life, it does define who I am".

Although it was previously defined differently, participants here are expressing their positive association with their ethnic and cultural identity, emphasising a wider community with common shared values and familial intergenerational ties. Further stressing the fact that ethnic culture is not a singular concept are Hadil's comments, emphasising the fact that it is not all good, but neither is it all bad. As explained by Barth (1969), ethnicities are produced and reproduced based on a connection to a wider

collective sense of self, seeking validation and acceptance from others. This membership of an ethnic community forms a positive aspect of a support network, as explained by Hadil, linking it to geographies of emotions and forming a strong sense of belonging within this group of people. However, when this social process of acceptance by others is not validated, geographies of exclusion are experienced, where the social construction of otherness is based more on features of prejudice (Burkner, 2012). This was further explained by participants thus:

Rahima – *“My Iraqi identity is dying. People are adopting a more generic Arab identity as Iraqi identity is viewed by Gulf Arabs with a tainted light, I feel rejected.”*

Zeba- *“being black is what I consider myself, although we have been told that we are Muslim first but I feel when people look at me they see my blackness first so it’s quite important for me. I actually try to disassociate myself from the Muslim community because I don’t feel comfortable because of the anti-black sentiment in the community. I would say the experience with some Muslims have been much more overtly racist. You just know when you are not really accepted in a community because you go to the mosque and they exclude you.”*

Ethnic identity for both these participants became a means of exclusion from a wider group they felt they shared a collective identity with. Both experienced exclusion as described by Ryan & Webster (2008). They state that people who are thrown into fragmented social places face exclusion based on the intersectional effects of their gender and other axes, in these instances ethnicity and race respectively. This means that they ultimately experience exclusion. As Sibley (1995) emphasises, practices of exclusion are also clearly evident in the understanding of space and place and the predominance of the privileged over others. He calls this process geographies of exclusion. This can be clearly seen when Zeba felt marginalised when she was excluded from the mosque because of her intersecting identities. Such incidents force participants to renegotiate their identities within a wider context, drawing on those aspects they share with other groups in order to form a collective identity and reclaim their social positions. This can be seen from the following comments:

Mona – *“I connect more with Muslims as I am part of the Ummah, where we have same beliefs uniting us, same goals, so it’s not ethnicity that unites me with people but my connection through my religion to Muslims where ever they are, especially at times like Ramadan, Eid celebrations, Hajj (pilgrimage) and even praying five times doing same things and facing same direction, holding same places sacred Makkah, Madina and Jerusalem”.*

Fatiha – *“I am part of a Muslim ummah, my hijab makes me an obvious member and any Muslim anywhere in the world would recognise me as the member of this community, I pray for Muslims wherever they are suffering in the world like Syria or Palestine because we are connected through this bond of Ummah”*.

Fatiha – *“Ummah is my strong bond with community, whether globally or whether in Swansea. This sisterhood provides me with a support network whenever I need it, during my mother’s illness and after her death I felt so much comfort from all the sisters who came together only through this relation of ummah”*.

By moving away from cultures and customs that they consider to be constraining, participants of both this research and others (Ramadan, 2003) show that they are engaging more with the Islamic identity, as they find it offers more recognition of their rights and status. This is recognised by Archer (2001) as the distinguishing of Islamic identity as a means of resistance, rather than defining themselves through their country of origin or clinging to a culture to which they feel they do not belong. These responses show that the participants consider *Ummah* to be a wider global community that unites them through their religion, giving them a common and shared sense of belonging, experienced not only through physical actions but also with connections to specific geographical spaces and places. Other participants mention that this collective geographical membership helped them to overcome any isolation they might face. A collective membership helps them to perform their identities in public spheres and be recognised for it, as well as providing them with an ideological space in which to connect with one another globally.

Even though the majority of participants discovered this collective membership through their Islamic identity, Zeba and a few others negotiated the hybridity of their identities by connecting with other common characteristics. For example:

Zeba – *“I have re learnt to love my Black identity through learning our history, I connect with other strong African women and feel strength in the way this makes me feel. I feel good in my Black skin and my kinky hair and not feel pressured to straighten my hair or bleach my skin. I wear African prints and promote our beautiful history away from the Black American culture but back to our original roots”*.

Safia – *“only community I have ever known is the Pakistani community, it’s been a very positive experience for us, as moving to this area initially we were a little isolated but then very quickly all the other Pakistani families introduced themselves and we became one of them and I have most of my friends from this community. Even though I am member of the wider Swansea Muslim*

community, I do feel there is difference between the members based on our language and cultures and that comfort I find within my Pakistani community”.

Here, Zeba and Safia disassociate themselves from the wider Muslim community and look for other communities who they feel they have more in common with. Even though most participants felt that cultural or ethnic communities were places where they were judged on their behaviours through every day actions some, like Zeba and Safia felt a positive association with their ethnic or racial group. Whilst most felt a connection through the wider global community membership, those specific participants who experienced some form of exclusion, whether from the local Muslim community or the wider neighbourhood community, sought collective meaning with people they shared language, history and other cultural markers with. This gave them a greater sense of belonging, building on their geographies of emotions. This is explained by Dwyer (1999) as being important, everyday markers by which participants show attachment to their sense of belonging, linking it to specific communities, spaces and places where they want to belong to and impacting on the formation of their identity.

Community boundaries are produced and transformed as collectiveness changes over time, in order for participants to find where they can comfortably belong, becoming ‘us’ instead of ‘them’:

Sara - “Community means- Muslim/ Bengali/ Asian inter change comfortably as I belong in all three and to me all three represent me”.

Zahra - “my community is it Libyan and Muslim community? umm I guess my community is my friends. I have mainly links to Libyan community through my parents. But my friends’ community, they are all different but they are all Muslims and we all love Islam and part of the bigger Muslim community”

Saba - “Community is a mixture of everything in my head like the Pakistani community the Asian community, Muslim community but in some aspects, I think it’s the Muslim community which brings everyone together and it’s definitely a positive thing to have”.

This reinforces the clear distinction between the participants of this research and the first generation, who have stronger connections to their ethnic identities. The second and third generation are integrating far more and finding their own feelings of belonging to specific communities. These connections are based upon the rejection of restrictive values linked with specific ethnic or cultural communities and provide them with a wider sense of spatial belonging. As described by Tajfel (1981) an individual’s

self is derived from the membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership, whether that is through their religious identity or national identity (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 7).

4.4.4 Social Class

When considering the formation of identity, it has been clearly shown that religion has been the main marker in the construction of the identity of the participants, with factors such as gender, ethnicity, and race also frequently identified as secondary markers. However, (Mirza, 2012) also mentions social class as being an important factor, as it causes economic or social inequality, which need to be considered when examining the intersectional identities of Muslim women. Nonetheless, similar to previous research (e.g. Ismail, 2004) the present study did not find social class as being a main marker, with participants not appearing to consider this as a marker for their identity formation.

Although it has the potential to be an important marker, maybe the participants possibly did not identify class as being a key element, because they all came from quite similar socio-economic backgrounds. They all lived in close proximity to one another, attended similar schools and the same university, so their backgrounds were very similar. As highlighted in the chapter on methodology most of the participants owned the properties that they lived in, with their parents typically owning their own businesses. The participants therefore probably did not feel that any inequalities existed.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the main aspects that played a key role in the construction of the identities of the participants interviewed in this research. It also drew strongly on the intersectionality literature and the interactive interconnection of various axes, mainly faith and gender, within the identity process. This has been highlighted in previous research looking at the intersectionality and identity construction of Muslim women (e.g. Mirza, 2012) but this study has highlighted the importance of the faith element above all others. However, the chapter also stressed the intertwining of various other axes of identity in relation to faith, rather than focussing on inequalities caused by intersectionality of factors of identity formation.

This has gone some way toward building on work done by Geographers such as Dwyer and Hopkins (e.g. Dwyer, 1999, 2000, Hopkins, 2007) who have looked at the negotiation of identities of young British South Asian Muslim Women, mainly in a context of oppression due to cultural conflicts. This research found that these religiously empowered Muslim women face less of a cultural clash, as their religious identity is more grounded, having being taught by their parents, who have instilled these values by being positive role models themselves. Unlike the first generations (Anthias & Yuval Davies, 1992), these participants feel less threatened by wider society and hence are not so strongly attached to their cultural practices. This prompts more “authentic” religious knowledge and lifestyle practices, which empowers the participants of this study in a more comprehensive and grounded manner.

This research also went on to expand and contribute to the understanding of how young Muslim women negotiate their gendered identities, as well as looking at the potential intersections of ethnicity and class. Participants highlighted how they feel that their identity formation is very fluid and flexible and able to manage multiple dimensions. Particular focus was given to how these dimensions interweave an ethnic and cultural upbringing with their collective values and form a new hybrid identity strongly based on a religious, gendered and Welsh identity, thereby forming a common connection with wider society. In particular this is done through the communal attachment they feel when living in their differential spaces, connecting them to a sense of everyday grounded belonging instead of the distant countries of origin from which their parents migrated. A unique aspect of this research is that it focuses on the identity of Welsh

Muslim women and their sense of personhood and belonging to their specific place. It also looked at how these interactions with specific Welsh identities made them feel part of the wider collective identity.

Subsequent chapters expand upon some of these concepts, in particular that of belonging and the use of different spaces and places in the further creation of Welsh as national identity. Their gendered identity will also be further explored by comparing it to other literature about feminism and highlighting Islamic feminism in particular. Attention will also return to geographies of inclusion and exclusion, by considering literature on the failings of multiculturalism, exploring the everyday consequences of Islamophobia and extremism for these young Swansea women.

Chapter 5. The Embodied Experience of Islam in everyday lives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will look at the embodied experiences of the participants when assuming their identities in their everyday spaces. It will have a specific focus on how a spatial aspect of identity formation is experienced, in relation to geographies of Muslim identities (Kong, 2009). It will also be analysing the meaning of such places, when these participants practice their religious identity through shared group activities or individually. Furthermore, the specific social spaces where participants engage with shared groups as well as the wider community will be explored, in order to understand how these identities are developed and practiced. Geographers Peter Hopkins (2007) and Clare Dwyer (1999) have researched how geographies have played a role in the construction of Muslim identities. The current research further builds on this approach by focussing on the smaller city of Swansea, which is home to fewer Muslims, and how that impacts on the formation of the participants identities.

The research will seek to examine the Muslim identity of these participants, as they position themselves in relation to public spaces and other social settings. It will explore how often they are able to feel “sameness” in relation to wider groups within society and how often they experience the sense of ‘othernesses’. It is important to note that identity is not just about the individual, but how the individual is influenced by others (Zhu Qian & Feng, 2011). This is particularly pertinent when examining the participants experiences in schools, Universities, Mosques, work places, streets, beaches and when using social media.

Even though it is important to consider gender, race and ethnicity when looking at identity formation (as seen in the previous chapter), this chapter will also attempt to unpick how the identities of the participants are enacted, read and conveyed in various settings (Hopkins, 2010). This chapter will therefore consider how different places play a role in how these participants navigate the different elements of their identities whilst they construct their place based identity (Zhu Qian & Feng, 2011). Identity formation is fluid, and participants develop their identities by garnering symbolic meaning from their surroundings. Therefore individual self-identity is validated by such specific places (Brace, Bailey & Harvey 2006). Understanding these specific

places gives greater insight into the embodied experiences of these young Muslim women in Wales.

Participants also express themselves in private spaces such as their homes. Their experience of specific practices is influenced by social networks which operate on various geographical scales through transnational parental homeland ties (Massey, 2005). Participants negotiate different cultural influences whilst forming their own identity, which includes elements of their ethnic cultures as well as of their Welsh roots. They express their identities through every day symbols, practices and objects such as clothes, food and entertainment. The participants discuss the fact that they feel more Welsh because of their accents, language and cultural practice, which are more firmly embedded in their identity than their parental heritage (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

Research exists that considers the complexities of negotiating identities amongst Muslim women, particularly looking at “self” both at home and in public places like work, school and how it feels to experience this locally and nationally (Shaw, 2010). This chapter will specifically analyse how these young, Welsh Muslim women experience those places in which they live and work – this is not an area which has previously been studied extensively. The participants share their experiences of navigating their identities with the wider community, in the public places of a smaller city such as Swansea. A distinctive feature of this study is that it reflects the significantly different experience of these participants. The fact that there are far fewer numbers of Muslim women in Swansea makes them highly visible. Combined with the current political climate, this makes their identities highly contested, and at times they are made to feel excluded. This research will focus on how the participants interpret these experiences within a broader social context.

This chapter will focus on the way in which the participants embody their identity through their dress. The majority of participants spoke about the *hijab*, which means “covering” in Arabic, as being their most visible marker of identity. In this chapter the participants consider their choice in wearing this garment, a voluntary act to show their spiritual connection with their religion. The chapter focusses on how these participants, whilst living in an area which has a considerably smaller Muslim community, feel empowered and liberated by wearing their hijab, a marker against the common consensus of Muslim women as oppressed. Wearing the hijab is not just about

internal feelings but they also speak about how they navigate their way through the treatment they receive as a result of their dressing in Muslim attire (Litchmore and Safdar, 2016).

As described in the methodology chapter, the participants have chosen to visually express their identity by including a number of pictures which will be discussed throughout this chapter. Showing these images illustrates the way in which their identities are practised within different contexts. The participants have also chosen certain visual images, as a means of expressing how the various aspects of their identities are experienced or expressed. Rose (2012) also stresses that each image should be seen within a social context that mediates its meaning and impact, in particular the location, which is a key element for this research. The images chosen embody and represent their Muslim identities through sensory representation. This is interpreted within the context of this research, such as how they experience their identities within their homes through images of symbols that best represent their identities, i.e. prayer mats, hijabs, Qurans etc. There are also images of specific places that represent locations that contribute to their identity formation, as well as places such as beaches, where they can freely experience their identity.

The chapter is divided into 4 sections and examine the answers given when participants were asked how they express or experience their identities. The first and most obvious was through clothing, in particular the Islamic veil (*hijab*). Even though there has been a lot of research already carried out on the hijab, this research highlights the experiences of Muslim women who wear the hijabs in a smaller city, which complements the previous research. The second way in which these participants describe their unique Welsh identity was considered to be through the use of everyday symbols, thereby marking them out as different to their parents. This research is relatively unique in that it examines the national identity of Welsh Muslim women. Thirdly the participants recounted their experiences in public places such as workplaces, and educational establishments such as school or university, on the street and on beaches. Again this is something else which has not been explored in great detail. The fourth and final section considers the part played by social media and the internet, in influencing the formation of their identity. This is another area which has only just started to be explored, and Kong (2006) maintains that technology is being used to look at religious embodied experience across spaces. This research will

therefore go some way towards contributing to this idea, as the participants share images and information about how they use the various social media platforms, in order to enhance and embody their religious identities across borders.

5.2 Dress

When considering the embodiment of one's identity, the most common ways of representing oneself is through dress (Ryan, 2012). The participants of this research identified the hijab as the most common representation of their religious identity. This has been affirmed by Dwyer stating that hijab is an "over determined signifier against which women negotiate their own identities and interpret their own meanings" (1999, 8). As noted by a participant:

Sara – "Hijab was my conscious decision to wear, as I wanted to embrace my faithfully. It's not just an act and it's not just some fabric I shove on my head, it's a symbol. It's a big statement and it's something I feel so proud and blessed to have as it becomes part of me and I can't leave anywhere without it. It's more of an inner act not just an outer act. It's a physical thing and I get a massive spiritual connection through it".

Sara very clearly illustrates the importance of wearing a hijab as a marker of her identity. She highlights that wearing her hijab is a choice, as did many of the participants. For Sara, the wearing of the hijab is a physical manifestation of her spiritual connection to her faith. This proves that Sara's religious beliefs are an essential part of her identity formation and made obvious by her choice of clothing. This allies with Goffman's (1971b) idea, that self-presentation is a conscious and considered choice made by the individual in relation to the wider society. By emphasising the idea of a spiritual connection, Sara is embodying geographies of spirituality (Holloway and Valins, 2008) which are practiced through her choice of clothing when she chooses to wear the hijab. Hence Sara considers the hijab to be a symbolic representation of her identity. Similarly, the following quotes from other participants affirm Sara's notion as well as expanding upon it:

Rana – "I wear hijab publicly; it declares my Muslim identity. It empowers me and it's a sign of my modesty".

Zubeda – "I wear a hijab and it's a public statement that I am a Muslim and I adhere to its values. I want people to know I believe in Peace, Kindness, Respect and love for all. I want people to feel comfortable to talk to me and not be scared of me."

The participants clearly feel empowered by making such a public statement of their identities. They describe their wearing of the hijab as a physical descriptor of their values described above, a means of expressing a social, political and religious statement Zine (2008). Endelstein and Ryan (2013) specify that clothing is a marker of group identity, visually conveying the values, attitudes and behaviour of the wearer. These participants proudly claim their Muslim identity, their beliefs and their modesty differentiating them from others. The participants have chosen this as a visible means of expressing their identity. This clear choice to represent their religious identities in this way, is in contrast to the stereotypes that exist, which portray Muslim women as being oppressed:

Zahra – “Hijab is my connection to Allah (SWT) and everything I do in my life is for Sake of Allah and His pleasure hence the wearing of hijab is as well. Whether I am in public or at home I am reminded of this bond of Love of Allah and the things I do as result of this Love. It doesn’t constraint me, it liberates me.”

Mona – “When I started wearing Hijab it was like something was missing all that time before it and I suddenly felt complete and peace came in to my life. I have never looked back, it was like I had lost something very precious and now I found it. It’s given me a means of expressing myself in the most perfect way without taking anything away from me”.

Hana – “People always associate hijab with being forced, or not having freedom or being a victim. I am no victim, I am not oppressed. I am as free as anyone else. It gives me a way of expressing myself in the most perfect manner according in line with my religious beliefs”.

The participants, particularly Zahra and Mona, show that spirituality is key when enacting their Muslim identities which are built upon their everyday practices. A considerable amount of academic writing exists, which views the way in which Muslim women dress as being oppressive or restrictive (Al Wazni, 2015). However, the current research examines the hijab as it is worn by second generation women in Western countries. These women are a lot more confident about their identities than their parents, who were not so assertive when it came to expressing their religious identities, preferring to focus on preserving their ethnic identities and cultures (Dwyer, 1999). These participants state that wearing the hijab enables them to embody sacred experiences through spiritual connections, an interweaving of their private and public life. These participants are using these public spaces to present a view of the hijab which gives meaning to their clothing and challenges the perception of the wearing of the hijab as being an oppressive practice. Hana and Mona talk about attaining freedom

through the observation of this act, which mainstream society widely views as a restrictive image. Mona also adds to this sentiment by stating that for her, the act of wearing a hijab has completed the embodied experience of her Muslim identity, without depriving her of her freedom. This is in contrast to views expressed by contemporary feminists, who view the hijab as a symbol of oppression against Muslim women by Muslim men, as they exert patriarchal control by restrictions over their bodies (Al Wazni, 2015). The embodied experiences of these participants differ hugely from those views. Not only are they empowered women but they are also ambassadors of their faith:

Fatiha – *“I feel hijab is not just a garment for me it controls and influences my behaviour, I am constantly aware of it and how I should express myself. It’s a responsibility because my behaviour will affect the way Islam will be viewed.”*

Nada – *“I wear a hijab and everyone around me knows I am a Muslim and hence I try to do everything perfectly because people don’t know much about Islam, and they are judging Islam from my behaviour. They won’t necessarily see the Sudanese in me but they definitely see the Muslim in me through my Hijab. So I make sure I don’t lie, and be the best in my manners as I can be.”*

Participants describe hijabs as the most obvious marker of their identity, which visibly distinguishes them in public as a Muslim person. This influences how they conduct themselves in their everyday lives. As stated very clearly by Fatiha and Nada, it guides their behaviour, influencing how they embody their identities. They see themselves as ambassadors of Islam through this representation of the hijab which is an immediately recognisable symbol (van Es, 2017). Hence as Nada explains, she ensures that she acts according to the teachings of Islam, to order to always provide a good example. Fatiha similarly understands that her behaviour reflects upon the way in which Islam is viewed. The participants are very aware of how they are constructing a social norm of Islam that is different to the image constructed by the media. Participants are very conscious that these spaces where they interact with others from wider society are the very spaces where their clothing is going to be interpreted by others, the hijab being seen by most as a means of intense stigmatisation (Endelstein and Ryan, 2013). Hence the participants are trying to portray a positive image of Islam through their behaviours, in order to counter these views. Building further on this social interaction with others, the participants state:

Sara- *“I feel very comfortable in expressing my identity through my dress and my facial expressions especially through smiling as its part of my religious*

practice Sunnah (practices and ways of Prophet Mohammad peace be upon him) to smile. I try to interact in a respectful manner with people”.

Fadila- “Hijab is part of my soul, it’s my base for everything, I feel protected and safe. It’s makes me feel beautiful and proud. It’s a guard and people are very aware of it when they approach me. It builds a barrier and creates a standard of respect when interacting with men and generally with everyone Muslim or non-Muslim.”

Building on their public performance of the hijab, as described by Goffman (1969) is a deliberate choice of how the participants wish to present themselves to the wider society. As mentioned by previous participants and endorsed by Sara and Fadila, the participants are performing their identities within a highly suspicious and uneasy climate (Goffman, 1969). Sara speaks about her specific actions, such as smiling, which merge her behaviour with her religion’s identity. The two connect by her embodied experience of wearing a hijab along with her physical actions.

Arlie Hochschild (1983, p.7) referred to this as “an emotional labour” or “management of feeling” which creates a publicly observable facial and bodily display, allowing for a combining of Sara’s religious and emotional self. For Sara, even though the hijab is only an item of clothing, it represents a comprehensive behavioural code – her behaviour is always a means of representing her Muslim identity in the most positive manner.

This is also reflected in the response from Fadila for whom wearing the hijab is a means of connecting the sacredness of spaces, particularly public spaces which are open to both men and women (El Guindi, 1999). By wearing a veil these participants feel that they create a sacred space around them, and their body becomes specifically Muslim and sacred (Arthur, 1999). Fadila in particular talks about how the hijab contributes to spatial relationships between men and women, and how they enact their gendered identities by creating a moral screen between them and wider society. This is not a means of restricting their embodied experience, but a simple means of showing how they experience these engendered identities. These comments show that religious identities play a role in the creation of social relations. They are spatially produced as these participants experience their everyday spaces. On occasions however, as noted by the following comments from some of the participants, their clothing can be the cause of some apprehension:

Maliha - *“Hijab is very important to me, it’s the first thing you see when you see me it says I am Muslim woman. I think now when I go out I am always thinking of my hijab and hopefully nothing will happen to deter me from wearing it but I am a lot more cautious these days after all the events reported in media about Islamophobic attacks on Muslim women I am worried as I know it makes me stand out and the stares I get in public as a result of it. When I am alone I am very careful but we try not be alone and walk with someone else .But I haven’t had any bad experiences except the odd stares.”*

Maliha’s experiences of covering herself make her feel more obvious to the wider public. She talks about the apprehension she feels as a result of gendered violence against Muslim women. Her hijab, as an obvious marker of her identity, makes her feel more at risk of being targeted. As Endelstein and Ryan (2013) describe, the hijab is something that is meant to conceal women, and yet it actually amplifies their prominence in non-Muslim countries, making them prime targets for Islamophobic attacks. Hence this feeling of fear and alarm resonates with many Muslim women. One of the participants makes the following statement about wanting to be different:

Safia - *“I wouldn’t wear hijab or Asian clothes outside in public; I wouldn’t want to appear different to others. I don’t even put pictures on Facebook because I don’t want people to say oh look your wearing sari. I just want to appear like everyone else. I want them to think of me like them like ordinary like normal”.*

Safia is very reluctant to stand out from the crowd and is very concerned about her image. Hence she does not want to be associated with, or appear, different. She clearly states that because the hijab is a marker that distinguishes her from mainstream society (Endelstein and Ryan, 2013) she has chosen to not wear it. This is in line with Goffman’s (1971b) understanding of self-presentation, where the wish to appear normal arises from a desire to manage tarnished identities which are often linked to stereotypes. The way in which Safia describes not wanting to feel different, echoes Goffman’s metaphor of “performance”, the feeling of being observed by an audience, which Safia refers to as the outside public (1961, 43). She wants to feel at ease in public and believes that dressing differently would create an image which is contrary to the norm. The performance of her Muslim, or even her ethnic identity would be a source of worry for her. She feels that public opinion restrains her freedom of choice to be able to express herself according to her identity. Therefore, she feels unable to embody this religious ethnic identity because it is stigmatised in the spaces she shares with the wider public. However, there were other participants who also chose not to wear a hijab for other reasons, as expressed below:

Shaista - *“I feel people think if you wear a hijab then you are a better Muslim, but I don’t think so. I don’t wear a hijab and I know many girls who did wear a hijab and did so many actions that weren’t very Islamic but they get more freedom from their parents. I think wearing hijab is a step to show your commitment to your faith and I feel I am not quite there yet and in time I think I will start”*.

Fatina – *“I don’t feel any less Muslim for not wearing hijab as our individual commitment to our faith is in our hearts through our spiritually connection but I do feel people sometimes judge girls who don’t wear it as less religious, it’s a matter between me and my God”*.

The comments by Shaista and Fatina suggests that their interpretation of the hijab is ambiguous. They clearly do not agree that every women who wears a hijab is embodying Islam in its entirety, however Shaista wants to start wearing it once she has reached that level of commitment in her faith. Fatina refers to her spiritual connection, which she can express without having to use any physical markers to necessarily show her commitment. A study by Williams & Vashi (2007) suggests that Muslim women wearing the hijab are generally deemed more pious, with more moral authority and are therefore taken more seriously as representatives of Islam. Fatina and Shaista raise this point and the fact that others judge them as being less Muslim if they do not wear the hijab. Hence, wearing the hijab is an embodied symbol and Shaista claims that some Muslim girls are wearing it in order free themselves from a degree of parental control. However this was not a factor which arose from this research, as none of the participants stated that they faced pressures from parents to maintain traditional gender roles and restrict their movement. Instead they adopted the hijab as an identity marker to allow them more freedom, confirming findings from previous studies (Peek, 2005). Other participants who didn’t wear hijab explained their reasons as:

Shakira *“And I don’t want to wear hijab just yet as I am not ready inside because I have so much anger inside due to personnel circumstances but as soon I put the hijab people will judge 2 billion Muslims around the world by this one girl’s actions. Growing up I had a horrible temper and at school when I wore hijab and whenever I would get angry people used to say that little Muslim girl is a horrible child and I don’t want to give that impression of Islam as my anger issues are nothing to do with my religion. Once I feel I have bettered my character I will wear it again as hijab deserves the respect it stands for”*.

Sadaf – *“I feel not wearing hijab makes me not stand out, but that doesn’t mean I won’t be vocal about my views as a Muslim. I am trying to discover my Islam and in time I will be ready to commit to wearing one. I really feel the status of women in Islam is a lot higher than in any other society or culture and hence*

will commit myself to the faith but I need to learn more and make myself stronger as it's a big commitment".

The wearing of the hijab is viewed by Muslim women as a significant social, political and religious act of communication which some felt they needed to commit to. As the participants explain, there are reasons why they choose not to wear a hijab - sometimes they felt they were unjustly judged for it and on other occasions they felt they found it too big a commitment at this stage of their life. Nevertheless, dress was still viewed as an important way of displaying their religious commitment to their faith, which some felt they were not quite ready to commit to. They felt that they needed to increase their religious knowledge and behaviour accordingly, as the hijab is a representation of religious values. As can be seen from Shakira's comments, she feels that when Muslim women wear the hijab, they are viewed by the public at large as a body that has been mapped with the religious teachings of Islam. If their behaviour is in contrast to those teachings, then that will damage the image of Islam. The participants of this research are very aware of the social pressures they face as representatives of Islam, which has recently been portrayed in a very oppressive and aggressive light. Hence they are very careful as to how they embody its sacred symbols. They want to build upon this spiritual connection by practising various rituals and wearing the hijab in public spaces that they share with others, which will support them to embody their religious identity through geographies of spirituality (Holloway and Valins, 2002).

Whilst wearing the hijab is a main marker of Muslim women's embodied experience within the religious frame of reference, some participants spoke about traditional dressing as an indicator of their identity formation:

Shakira – "At weddings I love dressing in Asian clothes, even in normal days I sometimes put khusays (traditional Asian shoes) on with my Western clothes so mix and match I know some girls find it weird but I don't mind wearing shalwar kamees (Traditional Asian shirt and trouser) outside or wear it with my Western clothing it doesn't matter as it all expresses who I am, I am a comfortable mix of Asian and Western Fusion. But normally I like to express myself with speaking rather than what I am wearing. In life I am comfortable with both my identities my Asian and Western identities are both facets of who I am".

Fatina – "I don't wear a hijab, I am not a very strong Muslim, my identity has always been strong Bengali Welsh Woman and hence that's how I dress. I would wear more Asian clothing but due to my very large size it's very difficult to get nice clothes in my size so I resort to mainly Western clothes and whatever I can get in my size but I try to dress it up with Asian jewellery".

Zeba – “I wear very colourful, loud African prints that represent my African roots along with big African jewellery as I am proud to show my heritage and I feel I need to make a statement I am good enough”.

These participants express their feminine identities by visibly displaying their ethnic culture in the way they dress or the jewellery they choose. This wearing of a mix of Asian and Western clothing in public in the West illustrates Hall's (1988) conceptualisation of multiple identities which are not fixed and articulated in specific ways and in particular places. The cultural influences and transnational ties are embodied through their dress, in order to produce a new and fluid ethnic identity. In this way, the current research differs to others conducted previously, which were mainly about young Asian girls who believed that traditional Asian clothing and Western dress expressed opposite identities (Valentine and Chambers, 1998). Current participants, particularly Fatina and Shakira are very comfortable with the fusion of their Western and Asian identities. They are proud to display their ethnic identity, as when Zeba displays her African roots by wearing African prints, celebrating her ethnic heritage which represents connections with specific geographical places. Their ethnic identity is also endorsed in public places, they display it and want it to be accepted by others. Continuing with the same theme, some participants focussed more on the fashion statements made when dressing in these traditional ways:

Sara - “I dress in western clothes but always have a scarf around to be modest around. When I attend Asian weddings I like dressing up in cultural clothes as it takes a conscious decision to do that whereas wearing hijab is a natural thing for me to do”.

Saba – “I love dressing up in traditional clothes, I feel they are everything I am, colourful, glamorous, beautiful and ethnic yet in Britain representing many like me all over the UK and very fashionable”.

Even though previous research has been conducted into Muslim women and traditional dress, the participants are slightly different to those whose voices have been previously captured. Previous research was conducted in parts of the UK where there are larger number of ethnic minorities, so it was comparatively easy to embody their ethnic identities. Swansea however, has a considerably smaller percentage of minority communities, so when participants chose to dress in their ethnic dress, it was a way of making a pronounced statement about their religious and ethnic identities. These traditional cultures are becoming the primary marker tying their traditional identity to specific places. The sense of place is rooted through traditional clothing, which they

chose as representative of their cultural symbolism. This is a form of maintaining their collective identity which is sustained through practices from their countries of origin, such as dressing in a specific way at weddings and other associated customs. The constant connection to a wider collective identity is essential in order to be recognised and accepted as noted by following comment:

Focus group discussion – “I feel hijab fits perfectly in the Western society as a fashion item. There is even now a movement by retailers like H&M who have got Hijabi models. Dolce and Gabbana have also got Hijabi Models. They are implementing modesty into their clothing making their clothing lines more attractive to the hijabi market and suddenly it becomes more acceptable to be a hijabi in the West as you are not seen as a weirdo. We suddenly feel the fashion industry is taking our needs on board and catering for us and making us an equal and important part of this industry. I wear these brands proudly as they represent me and make me feel like an important member of the West by representing me”

The hijab and other traditional clothing has given rise to the Islamic fashion industry. Rahmawati (2016) states that the emergence of Muslim fashion media and celebrity endorsement has increased the popularity of the hijab and other Muslim clothing. The focus group discussion remarked that positive representation within the media contributes to the collective identity and enables the participants to feel accepted within the wider Western context. It makes it easy for them, as young Muslim women in Wales, to be able to wear their hijabs in a fashionable way. The retailers H & M have recruited their first Muslim model and have visual poster displays of their Muslim clothing line (Sowray, 2016). House of Fraser have launched their “Sporty Hijab” which is specifically designed as a modest clothing line. Other retailers such as Sports Direct stock Burkinis in their stores. All of this serves to publicly validate the Hijab. The hijab has been further popularised through the internet and online social media such as Instagram, bloggers, YouTubers, something which is discussed later in the chapter. This, along with the take up from large manufacturers, has given the Hijab a huge platform and made it easy and acceptable for Muslim women to embody their Muslim identity by wearing religious clothing in public.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, some participants chose to send in pictures or images that represented their identity. The majority of these images were dress related, with the hijab in particular being the most common visual religious symbol. Some examples are shown in figure 5.1



Figure 5.1 Religious and traditional clothes

The physical arrangement and composition underlines the importance of each image. Rose (2012) talks about the site of the image being crucial when examining the context, as that gives meaning and emotions to the objects in the image. Thus, the image of a group of friends in traditional dress shows that the people in the picture are confident in their attire, proudly expressing their identity and having it reinforced by their groups of friends around them. Pollock (1998) also talks about the organisation of the look in the photograph. How it is presented to the viewers is an important aspect of the effect, particularly with reference to the spatial and cultural context. In the first two pictures the way in which the hijabs are presented stresses how central these are

to the sender, as an expression of their core existence. Both pictures of the hijabs are actually taken on their beds, in their bedrooms, their most intimate private space in which they are happy to share their innermost core memory. These images express their identity in the most private spaces occupied by these participants.

5.3 Experiencing private spaces and places (home/ food /the entertainment)

This section considers how identities are experienced in private spaces and places (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2004). Place is defined as an outside space (Massey, 1994) allowing for interactions between identities. It is in these confined spaces that identities are constructed and reconstructed, never remaining static. These places are influenced by global, national, regional and local developments (Aitchison, Hopkins and Kwan, 2007) and can therefore become places which prevents these identities from being practiced – they can either oppress them or liberate them (Phillip, 2009), as will be shown by the research. Micro spaces, such as homes, are mainly discussed in this current section, with the next section considering Macro spaces such as beaches, natural landscapes and mosques. All of these places help to bring these participants closer to their religious principles or enhance their spiritual identity by the use of the sacred space to foster communal bonds.

One of the first ways in which the participants experienced private space was private space during prayers. The Muslim ritual of daily prayers infuses their everyday lives, reminding them of the core purpose of their existence, breaking up their daily routine by getting them to refocus on their spiritual connection with God by facing Makkah, whether that be in a mosque, home or even in a public place. They use prayer mats and special prayer rooms within their houses or a specific prayer area within their bedroom. Mazumdar and Mazumdar(2004) state that there are certain designs and symbolic patterns which help to create religious significance in places, such as use of specific prayer mats which are decorated with various patterns or calligraphy. These are then placed to face Makkah, using a special compass that all Muslims carry or by using a mobile app on their phones. Wherever these mats are placed they create a special religious space. These participants can easily verify the direction in which they must pray (Makkah in Saudi Arabia) and the times that they must do so. They can create a sacred space wherever they are, giving them the flexibility to embody their religious identities freely. This enhances their spatial mobility, as they do not have to be near a

mosque or a specific prayer facility. Most participants had a dedicated space within their bedrooms in which to conduct their daily prayers. They sent images of prayer mats (figure 5.2) illustrating the religious spaces they have marked out for this essential religious duty.

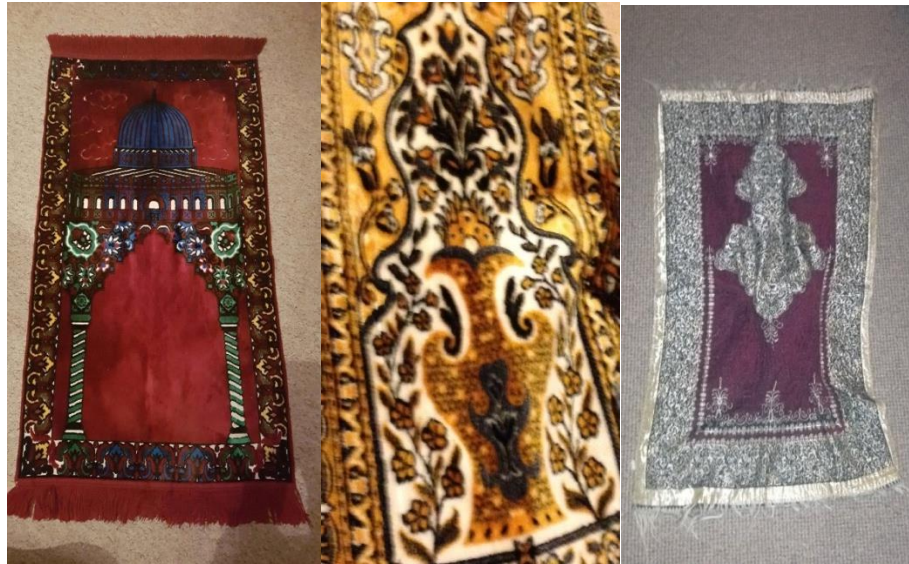


Figure 5.2 Prayer mats

Each of the images in figure 5.2 shows the significance of prayers in the everyday lives of the participants. These images are of prayer mats that are laid out in a specific place in their bedroom, facing the direction of Makkah, thereby marking this space as sacred. As mentioned by Rose (2012, p.55) visual images should not be seen in isolation or by just looking at “what they are” as that ignores the way in which they are produced and interpreted though a specific social practice. Hence, these images of prayer mats signify the importance of prayers - a marker of their religious identity being expressed in their private space. The use of such items in the privacy of their homes allows them to build this emotional and spiritual connection. These images of significant objects of prayer mats, hijabs and Holy Quran suggest the significance of their religious identity and their outward expression of them when performing their identities. These religious identities are produced through geographies of spirituality when developing specific religious spaces in which to carry out such rituals (Holloway and Valins, 2002).

Similarly, recitation of the Quran is a large part of the enhancement of spiritual identity and again, images of their personal Qurans were sent in by the participants as shown

in figure 5.3, each one next to their beds or placed on their beds. This is explained by Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983, p. 57): “the development of self-identity extends to objects and things and the very spaces and places in which they are found”. The position of the Quran in their private spaces proves the important role it plays within their religious identities. These places allow these participants to embody the structure of their self-identity. These religious rituals they can perform in privacy include physical aspects of their everyday lives. Although they are mobile and can be carried anywhere, the participants chose to position them in these specific places, so as to mark out these spaces as exclusively sacred. These were very personal images, which the participants felt comfortable to share with myself as the researcher, because I occupied the privileged position of sharing the same religious beliefs (as mentioned in Chapter 3 – methodology). The fact that I was a teacher in local Islamic classes myself, gave them the confidence to share these very private pictures, which they described as essential to their religious identity. They knew that I would understand the significance of these images being in the privacy of their bedroom. It highlights an element of isolation around very intimate spiritual rituals, such as prayers and recitation of the Quran.

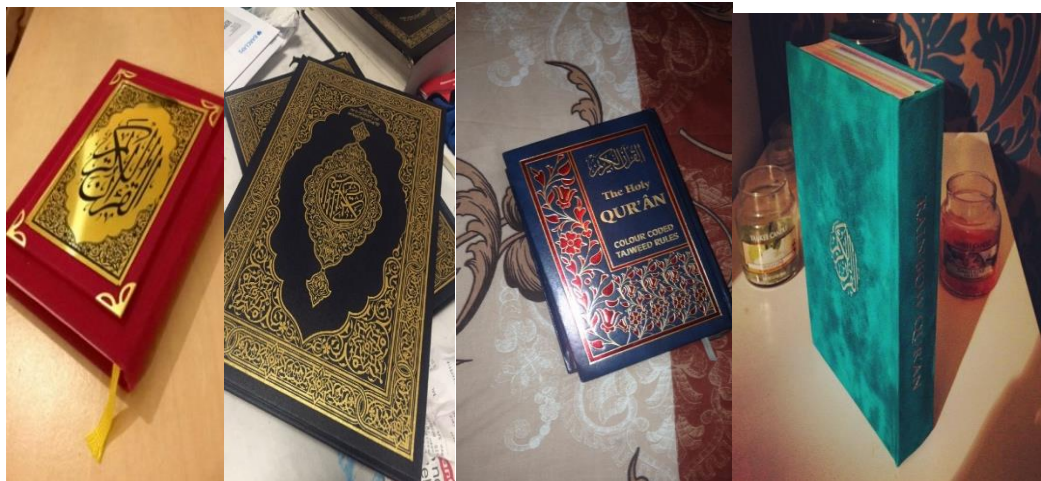


Figure 5.3 – Holy Quran

Quotations from participants reinforce these interpretations:

Hajar – *“as a Muslim I pray regularly and I recite Quran every day after Morning Prayer before I start the day. It’s an essential ritual I do as it brings blessings to my day and its practices that I follow as a devout Muslim.”*

Samira – *“things in my most private space that describe me the most are my prayer mat and my Quran. These are things I use on a daily basis, in the privacy of my own four walls. This is me, my private time with my God. I pray for whatever I want, it’s my conversation with Him and I recite the Quran to get guidance and closeness to Him”.*

This can be described as combining what Eade & Sallnow (2000, p.7) refer to as “place centred sacredness” with “person centred sacredness”. A sense of sacredness is created by these participants when they follow the rituals of their faith in the privacy of their own space. This confers their bedrooms with symbolic significance, infused with emotional meanings through the rituals that they perform. These spaces within their homes enable them to be themselves, connecting them to their identity with a sense of belonging. These participants are able to experience their identity in their homes through these symbolic physical rituals which enhance their spirituality.

Another aspect which relates to the identity of the participants is their use of different languages spoken at home. Most participants said that they mainly spoke English. This was an important factor for them as it – as second generation they have stronger connections to Britain than their parents, but because of their parents they have also kept a connection with their parents’ mother tongue. Most also recognised the presence of the Welsh language in their homes as an important aspect of their identity. This created a sense of them being firmly attached to specific place, forming an emotional attachment which connects them to their Welsh identity:

Sara – *“English is me, with Bengali I can’t read or write it and I speak with a Welsh accent. It’s not normal for me to speak Bengali but yet when at home I have to speak it to me parents. I know some basic Welsh but couldn’t hold a long conversation in Welsh. When my English family visits, I feel very Welsh and I try out my Welsh in front of them to highlight my Welsh identity, there is so much Welsh banter, although it’s a banter and a joke I feel I have to emphasise Wales is better”.*

Maliha- *“I mainly speak English with my siblings and my dad. But I have to speak Bengali with my mum. I did learn basic Welsh I wouldn’t have minded going to a Welsh school to be honest because it’s a good thing learning languages and it’s unique and I have family from other places always asking*

me if I know how to speak Welsh I am like I know bits but kinda wished I knew more and learnt more”.

Shakira - *“I mainly speak English at home and Bengali with my parents. I am learning Welsh in university because BBC are always looking for Welsh speakers and I want to pursue that path inshAllah (God Willing) so learning Welsh”.*

The participants consider the mother tongue of their parents to be a secondary marker of their main identity, something which has been passed down by their parents. They negotiate their way through their identity by showing preferences to the language which best describe their self, English and Welsh being the main ones identified. This distinguishes them from their parents as the first generation migrants had stronger roots with distant locations, whereas this second generation is more strongly rooted in Wales. They are weakening their transnational ties and focusing on their national identity by emphasising the importance of learning and speaking the Welsh language as well as having Welsh accents. Welsh banter and Welsh accents are seen by them as their everyday markers, reaffirming their sense of belonging to their specific places which connect them to their national identity.

The participants highlighted another important part of their identity practiced inside the confinement of their homes as being the food they ate and the entertainment they watched, whether it be on TV, or Netflix or YouTube. Most participants stated that programmes were watched with other members of their families in the main family room, to encourage the spending of social time with family:

Maliha - *“At home we have curry and rice but in the evening we would have something different we couldn’t do rice and curry twice a day so its combination of curry and Western food like fish fingers or burgers. I love watching great British Bake Off but soap wise I like watching Indian dramas and like watching Bollywood films with my mum as we discuss them afterwards and have a good laugh”.*

Hajar - *“We have traditional Yemini food in the house and I watch Yemeni news to keep in touch with what’s happening particularly if I want to spend any time with my parents as they are always watching the Yemeni news but I watch all British and American entertainment as that’s appeals to me more when I am in my own room”.*

Sara – *“at home my priority is my parents and my family, I try to cook Bengali food for them I watch Bengali programmes just to keep my bond strong with them as we discuss them in detail after. I also bake a lot of cakes for my siblings and we pretend to be on British bake off. My family is my huge part of my existence and after losing my sister to cancer a year ago I try to spend as much time as I can with them because you can’t take any of them for granted”.*

Considering the links established with both worlds, the ethnic and the Welsh, when it comes to everyday practices within their homes, most participants clearly identified as having a mixed identity. Food and entertainment are considered as a means of engaging with their parents and something which they want to continue. Eating food from their ethnic background feeds into the stability of their identity, and watching the same entertainment allows them to have commonalities with their parents. They feel that their homes in particular are a place where their hybrid identity can exist comfortably, with both cultures playing a key role in the formation of their identity. This is an identity which is experienced by most second generation Muslim youth across the West, as they negotiate their way through their everyday lives in those private spaces that they share with their first generation migrant parents. Hajer and Sara in particular emphasise the importance of maintaining their ethnic roots through their choice of food and watching news from their countries of origin, as this gives them a way of keeping a strong connection with their parents. The participants of this research felt that they had a very strong relationship with their families, as can be seen in chapter 4, which acknowledges families to be the main influencers in the formation of identity. The following images (figure 5.4) from the participants show that pictures with their families are the most relevant images when embodying their identities at home.



Figure 5.4 Images with family members

The black and white pictures come from participants who have lost significant members of their families, namely a mother and Grandmother.

The final picture was sent by a participant who had four sisters and two brothers, but she chose to send a picture of just the sisters as she felt that they have most reinforced her identity as a strong Muslim woman. The participants felt that these images illustrated the strong position of women in her home, as well as the influence that her sisters have had over her identity as a strong Muslim woman. She wanted to show that having strong women within the household as role models shapes identity in a positive manner.

This section highlighted the mix of identities and the embodied experiences of the participants within the confines of their private spaces. The choice of specific clothes, certain foods and certain entertainment exemplifies the mixed hybrid identities of these participants within the privacy of their own homes. There exists a comfortable fusion of Western and ethnic identities. Nobody highlighted any areas of conflict with their parents - they were able to manage the different intersectionality easily and they did not feel that their identities needed to be compromised as a result. This meant that their homes were a place of stability, safety and security where they felt they could express their mixed identities, rooted in their local place yet linked to transitional spaces across the globe by the ethnic ties of their parents (Bolognani, 2014).

5.4 Experiencing it in public spaces and through places

This part of the chapter considers the participants' views about experiencing their identity in public spaces and places. Previous research has considered geographies of religion and how they influence how identities are experienced. Park (2004) states that even though religion is deeply embedded in people's every day practices, leaving an imprint on spaces and lifestyles, it is still missing in its entirety from most geographical texts. As identified by Kong (2009) there has been an increasing interest in geographies of Muslim identities and its experience in specific places and social places. Brace, Bailey and Harvey (2006) have argued that when trying to understand the meaning of any society and space when considering religious practices, it is essential to look at the personal experiences of individuals. This section of the chapter will look at exactly how these Muslim women experience their spaces and places around them, whilst still observing their religious identity. As previously highlighted, the research that has previously been conducted in this field by Dwyer (1999) and Hopkins (2007) looks at Muslim identities as practiced in highly urban areas. This section will expand on this

work by considering how these identities are embodied in public settings, whilst living in a smaller city.

Five areas will be examined in this section namely mosques and religious classes attended by the participants; work places; educational institutes (i.e. school or university), as the majority of the participants were either in university or had just finished university; experiences of religious identity on streets and other public places; and beaches and green spaces around them. This is a new area of research, as there has been little examination of the embodied experiences of Muslim women in outdoor spaces such as beaches. This is mainly due to the fact that the research takes place in Swansea. Although it has a relatively small Muslim population, it is one of the most common religions practiced after Christianity (Swansea Profile, 2017). Swansea is a coastal city with many beaches and parks, something which has been referred to throughout this research. It is important to look at all of these spaces because, as Brace, Bailey and Harvey (2006) point out, it is no longer possible to consider only some places as sacred, and others as secular. The responses of the participants indicate that religion permeates into the geographies of their social world and is felt in all areas of their Swansea life, which offers them different spaces in which to explore the intersections of religion and space.

5.4.1 Attending mosques/ Halqas

A person's religious identity links them to places and spaces that are significant because of their sacredness, as well as being the places where they interact with religious others (such as teachers, Imams or even community members of that faith) (Mead, 1934). Religious significance can grant places a symbolic meaning (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2004) that distinguishes these places from all other ordinary spaces. Some religious places have an importance which is created by a congregational focus such as prayers, which creates a strong attachment. Places such as Makkah or Kaba (the large cube shaped structure covered in black cloth- the most sacred mosque in Islam) are prime examples of these religious places, which have significance for Muslims all around the world. However other places can also be marked as sacred because religious rituals take place in them, as follows:



Figure 5.5 Eid prayers in St Helen's Vetch field

Figure 5.5 is a picture from a participant, of a communal 'Eid prayer' which was held out of the central mosque in the former Swansea Vetch field, in order to celebrate with the wider community locally. This image shows the sacredness of space created by Muslims gathering together to engage in communal worship, transforming their local space, making it more inclusive by holding religious prayers, placing prayer mats, dressing in religious and traditional clothing and sharing food. Other places specifically referred to by participants are mosques, which hold great significance for those Muslims who attend and regularly experience their identity through communal prayers, as stated below:

Safia - "we like attending the mosque especially in Ramadan, there is such a spiritual experience being there together with all the other Muslims feeling and practicing the same as you."

Mona- "I love attending the mosque, attending Islamic lectures, arranging community events in Ramadan or charity events makes me come to life. I don't go to pubs or bars or anywhere there is alcohol and I only socialise through the platform of the mosque where everyone has same beliefs as me and nothing feels uncomfortable with my inner core self."

As mentioned by Mona, one way in which participants are able to experience their identity is by attending talks by Islamic speakers in the mosques. This is a similar experience to other second generation children of immigrants, who are helped to find

their own position in the West by influential Islamic speakers, who help them to better understand their faith. The research of Williams & Vashi (2007) which observed American Muslim women who attended lectures in mosques, bears a resemblance to participants of this current research. The research however, observed that most lectures were from a male perspective, as speakers on Islamic teachings are predominately males. These sheikhs' (Islamic scholars) would struggle to keep the women's perspective in mind especially when speaking about rights, choices and equality. The Muslim community, particularly the women, have identified a lack of Muslim women scholars who can speak in public on such topics.

In Swansea however, even though there might be a lack of female speakers locally, the participants overcome this by creating their own learning environment with their own local female Muslim teachers. Many of the participants have attended female only Islamic classes which address specific issues of gender faced by second and third generation British Muslim women. This is reinforced by Siraj (2011) who explores the use of mosques by Muslim women, as spaces that play an instrumental role in creating awareness of Islamic teachings, according to the customs of the religion. The participants in the current research attend halaqas (Islamic circles – classes on Islamic teachings), as well as prayers in mosques which give them an in-depth understanding of their religious practices. They have a positive affiliation with these spaces and feel that it enhances their identity as Muslim women, particularly the specific Islamic classes (halaqa) that take place in homes, thereby providing the participants with a more subjective and private space in which to enhance their religious identity and build sister hood through a shared group identity, as mentioned below:

Maliha “Spiritually I have always attended halaqas as an expression of my identity from a very young age. They have given me insight into being a Muslim women and how to live in the West while maintaining my own religious identity. I feel I have a strong connection with many of the teachers as they themselves are Muslim women who have been born and brought up in Britain and understand my issues. But since I have started working I don't get to go as the timings clash but being part of the ISOC (Islamic society in university) they always have talks and get different speakers I make sure I attend those just to boost Iman (faith) and have reminders to keep my Iman strong. During Ramadan most nights I will go to mosque to do traweeh (Special night prayers offered in Ramadan) and all my friends are there”.

Mona – “I wanted to learn more about my faith as I started to wear the hijab and started attending Arabic classes in the mosque. Soon I started loving the weekly classes by Sheikh Mohsin. He was an excellent teacher and really

inspirational role model. I then got involved in ISOC and got more and more involved in the mosque, so much that it became my life. I attended regularly classes, prayer, and arranged community events. It was a central part of our community”.

Attending Halaqas (Islamic classes), prayers at mosques and listening to inspirational speeches from speakers are the various ways in which these participants are strengthening their religious identity. Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) describe the role that peers, as well as teachers and parents play, in creating connections to a place through religious socialisation. This is experienced by personal experiences in places such as the university mosque, which is the main hub of the community for many of the participants interviewed as it's in their neighbourhood. They use this facility to socialise with other community members when attending prayers in Ramadan, fund raisers or family fun days during Eid celebrations. This is how they form their collective identity, through these social networks which create a deeper sense of selfhood (Brubaker, 2001):

Tasnim “I attend many Islamic events to feed into my identity. I used to attend many protest before such as when attacks would happen in Gaza or Syria but now I feel there are other ways of getting your point across so I get involved more in charities and fund raisers to help”.

Fariha “I enjoy Islamic social gatherings as they are segregated and I feel I can really relax and enjoy be myself particularly at the mosque as it empowers me to be Muslim women and I feel there is a specific space just for me and others like me”.

Figure 5.6. comprises of two pictures of the University mosque, the place where most participants felt that they were best able to experience their identity. One picture is of the main prayer room which is mainly used by male students, the females being positioned at the back of the room because of the segregation practices of the faith. The other picture is of the separate section in the mosque which is an area of prayer exclusively for women. Participants mentioned this in their interviews – Fariha mentions this as being a place she attends in order to socialise with other Muslim women and also attend Islamic classes on issues pertinent to them. This area exclusively for women has been previously mentioned by participants, because they were very grateful for having an area of the mosque that they could freely access, providing them with a space where they could perform their religious rituals and experience their religious identity. Unfortunately, there are several mosques around

the country which do not allow women access because of gender discrimination issues raised by culture, ethnicity and exclusion (Woodlock, 2010) Such is not the case in Swansea as the pictures and comments by participants prove. The mosque is very significant space for them in which to experience their identity, making it a geographical specificity of religious practice in Swansea.



Figure 5.6 University Mosque

5.4.2 Work and School/ university

Work places were considered to be an integral part of the lives of participants in this research as they spend a great deal of time there, interacting with the public and experiencing an essential element of their identity. For some of the participants their Islamic identity worked well with their professional identity, as it gave them an opportunity to show people a side of Islam they would not have been able to otherwise experience. Pictures shown in Figure 5.7, shared by two of the participants clearly illustrate that work is an important part of their identity. However, the badges shown in Figure 5.7 also demonstrate that the identity of a Muslim woman comprises more than the wearing of a hijab.



Figure 5.7 ID badges showing identity at work

The participants described how they experienced their identities in their work place. This is a very public space where one can demonstrate self-identity and hope that it will be interpreted by their colleagues in the same manner (Richard, 2011).

Zahra - “in work I feel I to have constantly wave the flag of Islam and explain to people as it’s my responsibility. I had a colleague once asked me what is ISIS?”

Hadil - “I love talking about Islam in my office, I am so passionate about it I bring it into every conversation with my colleagues and we have so many healthy debates”.

Zahra and Hadil have both expressed feeling comfortable with questions about their identity. They both feel that they are ambassadors (as mentioned previously in section 5.4) of their faith and that they are able to counter all of their colleague’s negative perceptions of Islam due to media representation. They have been confronted with questions about terrorism and other myths about Islam, but both their responses show that they are keen to build strong communication pathways in order to highlight similarities across identities. However, not all participants felt confident in speaking about their religious identity as mentioned below:

Safia- “in my work place I don’t want to talk about religion and just want to blend in without having to explain differences. I feel talking about differences doesn’t make us understand each other better so I avoid conversations around arrange marriages or extremism or whatever articles are in the news about Muslims. I feel there could be an elephant in the room and I would just ignore it. I feel when at work we are fundamentally the same, working together with same goals so why talk about things that differentiate us. I don’t want to be like

the Christian lady at work who is always talking about her faith and everyone treats her very alien and I don't want to be treated like that".

For Safia, work is a place where she feels she needs to negotiate her identity every day, suppressing certain parts of her identity, so as not to be alienated and judged by her colleagues. She wants to appear the same and not highlight differences between them, so unlike the previous two participants, she avoids discussions. As mentioned by Aziz (2014), female employees' could sometimes come under multiple pressures due to ethnicity, racial, or religious minority group status. This can be due to the colleagues having certain expectations of how minorities should behave in the workplace which could be seen as contradictory or not professional enough, often due to stereotyping. Aziz (2014) notes how women adopt certain strategies to avoid being socially isolated in the workplace, behaving and talking in tune with dominant cultural values. Hence, Safia, in her quote, feels that certain topics around extremism and forced marriages just amplify the differences of her identity. However, she clearly wants to build on similarities, as she mentions being in same company and working toward the same goals, thereby seeking inclusion and shared values. The fear of isolation that Safia wants to avoid was experienced by the following participants, who share their accounts:

Samira - "I try not to go to staff room and avoid contact with others because I feel they are judging me because of my hijab they go quite when I go in, they laugh behind my back. When there are social events they are always in pubs so I don't go as I don't want to be around alcohol. So I keep myself to myself".

Fatiha – "I don't mix with my colleagues much because they are very nasty to me, every time my dad picks me or drops me they call him Usama bin Laden because of his beard, they joke about me that I am married to an old man as that's what Muslims do. they always talk about being drunk and getting drunk on the weekends as it's such a Welsh thing to do and they think I am weird for not drinking alcohol so I don't really have much to talk to them about It makes me feel very uncomfortable but I feel they don't make much effort to include me either".

Fatiha and Samira are made to feel isolated due to their religious identities. They both talk about the discrimination they face based on their gender and their religion. Hicks (2003) talks about how the work place can make people feel like the "other" as they do not fit the social norm. These participants are made to feel isolated due to their religious beliefs as well as their physical appearance and are also not welcomed in social events which take place in pubs. Both Fatiha and Samira highlight the fact that social events taking place in pubs make them feel excluded, and unable to embody

their complete identity in the work place. Alcohol being a central part of workplace culture makes it difficult for participants to negotiate their religious identity. As a result, they feel excluded from their sense of belonging, not only to the organisation but also to their national identity, assuming drinking alcohol being an integral part of the social Welsh identity. When examining experiences at university, the drinking culture was emphasised far more, as noted in the following comments from the participants:

Shaista - *“in university I had friends from very diverse backgrounds but when it would come to going out I felt we drifted apart as they always wanted to go out for a ‘drink’ and that’s one thing I felt was difference between us”*.

Maliha - *“When I started uni and met new girls for the first time and they say to come out but I can’t go drinking and stuff so my identity of Muslim comes out and at work when they have their Christmas parties in clubs and I can’t go because I am a Muslim because it’s in a haram (not allowed or forbidden) environment so I feel limited in social aspects on times”*.

Tasnim - *“I wouldn’t go to a school ball because I am a Muslim and I feel huge pressure being one of the very few that can’t go and the whole school year just becomes about this one social event that I feel I can’t participate in any of their conversations, I would definitely not go to any bar or clubs with them either”*.

Similar to those experiences of the participants in the workplace, the University students also felt the same constraints when socialising, as alcohol is deemed to be an integral part of student life. As this was something most participants could not negotiate their identities around, they felt isolated from these spaces and experiences of student life. They identified a barrier when constructing their sense of belonging to this wider social group (Hicks, 2003) on account of their religious values which they were not willing to compromise. Their responses identify a feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’, making them feel segregated and inhibited. Maliha recognises these limitations that prevent them from embodying their social identity as Muslim women.

On the other hand, there were participants who shared very different accounts of their experiences at work:

Zubeda - *“I have a prayer area in my work place and I take a prayer mat and feel comfortable enough to be able to pray in peace as everyone is so understanding in my workplace, people around me at work won’t swear as they know I don’t and I might take offense to that, which I feel is very nice of them”*.

Fadila - *“I express my Islam through the way I am with people, the way I greet them, when I pray and I am in public places they see it’s a very integral part of my being. When I go to fashion shoots they are aware and they provide me*

with a room to pray and they respect that I have moral and values due to my faith. They tell me they like doing business with me because I don't lie or cheat and this is a reputation I have built based on my faith and the teachings I implement in my everyday life making me who I am".

The fact that aspects of their religion are accommodated by their work place made the participants feel comfortable. Both Zubeda and Fadila appreciated having prayer rooms, thereby underlining the importance of having micro spaces which exist within the larger spaces and allow these participants to experience their religious identity. Having culturally sensitive provision such as this creates a sense of inclusion, resulting in participants feeling comfortable, accepted and understood as they perform their religious gendered identities. Both Zubeda and Fadila highlight certain behavioural actions that result in the practising of their religious identities, such as their colleagues not swearing in their presence or Fadila's colleagues respecting the fact that her religions values mean that she does not lie or cheat. This establishes a common understanding as the identities of the participants are being perceived in a positive manner. This relates to geographies of encounter which looks at how people navigate difference in their everyday lives, where encounters refer to meeting of opposites. Wilson (2017) pursues the term further by saying that encounter entails examining differences which are negotiated through the experience of embodied interactions in social spaces, to create a deeper understanding of belonging. Bringing the narrative of encounters to a geographical imagination allows us to counteract unequal power relations that cause exclusion.

Participants who spoke about the educational institute had similar experiences to those of the participants in the workplace. They emphasised the positive in having space to pray, attend lectures and gain knowledge that enhances their religious and general outlook on life. Private and public spaces are interweaved with each other depending on the activities and who is present there. The participants work to balance sacred spaces and ordinary worldly spaces every day of their lives (El Guindi 1999, 48). Platt (2012) and Cattle (2015) reiterate the positives that result from social intercultural interaction between members of different communities. It leads to inclusive and cohesive communities affirmed by Wilson (2017) such encounters bring together different bodies and enable a reflection on their differences. Referring to these spaces as micro public spaces, where intercultural encounters take place and offer opportunities to reform their relations by giving meaning to their interactions.

Figure 5.8 is a picture from one of the participants, who felt that her university played a huge role in determining who she became as person. She gained spiritual identity at Swansea University as well as academic knowledge, which helped in the formation of her identity. She made friends who went on to be her companions even after university life, and she states that they all agree that religious identity is the basis of their friendship. It is Islam and Swansea University which unites them all.



Figure 5.8 University hoodie

5.4.3 Street

Experiencing their identities in public on the streets demonstrates the spiritual and gendered boundaries that are produced, as mentioned by Mirza (2013, p.6), and experientially “lived through” as a faith based Muslim female subjectivity. When considering their experiences, it shows how particular inequalities can influence experiences in different geographical places (McKittirick, 2006). By drawing on the intersectionality of their identities (discussed in chapter 4 and 7) they are subjected to not just one or two positions but various layers of their identities such as gender, race, ethnicity and religion.

Experiences of Islamophobia and feelings of exclusion are discussed in more detail in chapter 7; this section will only briefly look at how significant terrorist attacks have had an impact in directing considerable attention to embodied Muslim women in British public spaces (Meetoo & Mirza, 2007). The experiences and feelings of these participants when in public places are described as follows:

Tasnim- *“after any terrorist attack my parents become very protective of me and I feel very conscious on the streets when I am walking I feel everyone is looking at me. I make sure I go out with someone as I feel too scared to go by myself and I wouldn’t want to go on my own especially after I was spat at by some random guy walking by saying “you filthy Muslims”.*

Zahra - *“I feel very conscious when I walk on the street as I feel uncomfortable with the way people look at me for being a Muslim. I have been called Paki and terrorist and now I am very cautious when I walk in public”.*

The experiences of both Tasnim and Zahra highlight how streets can become a place of exclusion where they are made to feel alienated and fearful in their everyday lives. Creswell (2006) reinforces this and furthermore goes on to state that people can be made to stop experiencing their identities, as was the case for both Zahra and Tasnim, who are now fearful and cautious. This form of abuse forces Muslim women to negotiate their contested identities. They become wary of their physical appearance and their mobility becomes limited, as witness Tasnim not wanting to go out by herself. This encourages some participants to re-examine their physical appearance to make it less visible, as Hadiya mentions:

Hadiya *“on streets I feel it does matter what I wear, if I am wearing a burqa (long religious dress with hijab) then less people approach me and give me more uncomfortable stares but if I am wearing a skirt and hijab then I get smiles and people willing to talk to me”.*

As the way in which a Muslim woman dresses is one of her main markers, it is a very powerful symbol that can create contestation and threaten the freedom of these participants. Hadiya feels the need to compromise the way in which she dresses to a certain degree, in order to feel less excluded when navigating her way through these macro spaces on a daily basis. Streets are public places where the interface between physical bodies occurs (Creswell, 2006) and it is through this interaction that participants are socially accepted or challenged, based on social membership. While Hadiya feels she is accepted more in less traditional Islamic dressing, Tasnim and Zahra faced conflict in these public spaces. Others expressed their experiences as follows:

Fadila – *“There are days you could be walking same places and not even get looked at and then other days, same places you could face abuse. I don’t think I would do anything differently but it does make me angry when these incidents occur... especially when I am with my mum or my daughter. Why should we be treated differently, how can a piece of cloth make us so different that they need to shout abuse at us or how can the colour my skin cause so much hatred.”*

Fadila's comment highlights the social inequalities faced by these participants, layered with multiple factors based on their religion, gender, ethnicity and race. These intersectional dimensions cause more discrimination for Muslim women as they are visibly more prominent, experiencing more tension in public places and thus resulting in the loss of personal freedom. This place based victimisation (Zhu Qian & Feng, 2011) creates social barriers and imagined boundaries which Fadila questions. This in turn causes a social divide, denying these participants access to certain places and leading them to experience a sense of detachment from places they usually experience every day as they embody their identities.

Although the section on the embodied experiences of the participants on streets mainly illustrated feelings of exclusion, the identities of Muslims are constantly contested when living in predominantly non-Muslim societies and participants have to negotiate their religious identities when in public spaces. As demonstrated, these spaces can become places of conflict and tension from which they are made to feel excluded, based on the intersectional dimensions of their identities. Even though there already exists a large body of work done on the experiences of islamophobia faced by Muslim women (Zempi, 2016), this research shows the physical embodied experiences faced by these women in a smaller city. As a smaller minority community, these participants are more visible, hence more open to abuse in their everyday lives.

5.4.4 Beach

Participants shared their experiences of Swansea's beaches and surrounding areas. The fact that Swansea is a coastal city means that the beach is an integral part of their identity formation. From their comments, participants demonstrated that these beaches have been an essential part of their childhood memories and have a deep rooted impact on their identity. Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) state that significant places provide stability and security, nurturing attachment with deep sentiments and emotional attachments, yet they argue that "mundane" spaces have been neglected in research. Such spaces are shown here to be important for identity:

Hadil- "being able to live my identity in Swansea is so easy, I have the view of Swansea Bay from my bedroom window which reminds me of Allah's beautiful creation, I walk to the mosque which is five minutes from my house, I feel my house is in an area full of halal shops and so many Muslims. I walk to beach every day and praying Eid prayer in the fields is such a beautiful feeling for me it brings me close to the nature".

The sense of belonging and attachment is obvious from Hadil's comments. Local symbols such as the beach and fields helps her to embody her religious identity within familiar landmarks (Wise, 2010). The spiritual connection to nature she experiences whilst looking at the beach enhances Hadil's religious connection along with her emotional connection of belonging to the local neighbourhood. She talks about the ease of embodying her identity on the streets, where she can walk to the mosque and go to halal (Muslim shops that sell products especially prepared in a religious manner for Muslim) shops without any fear or risk. This is in contrast to the experiences shared by participants in the previous section. These feelings of safety enhance self-belonging. Hana's comments follow a similar theme:

Hana - "*I go to the beach all the time it's part of my childhood but each summer we spend a lot of time there, almost every evening we walk on the beach with mum. I attend the University library with my friends and we study together and then we walk over to the beach. I feel all these places are such I feel totally comfortable being me and I just feel Swansea is beautiful I love it*".

Building on similar sentiments to Hadil, Hana describes her childhood attachment to the local beaches. Antonsich (2010) describes places where a person is born or brought up, has positive experiences and establishes emotional connection with, as creating a true sense of belonging and a stable identity. The beach is a crucial place for Hana, as she has grown up around it. For her it has become a familiar symbol of her belonging to the City and particularly her neighbourhood. She feels a sense of safety and familiarity in these spaces as it enables her to embody her identity to the fullest degree. These macro spaces help to create a wider sense of connectedness for these participants through an embedded sense of belonging. Others add:

Zahra - "*the beach has been such an important place for me and my friends during our uni life, we used to just walk across from the campus and hang out on the sand and just be with the nature. We would barbecue halal burgers and pray on the beach and just enjoy the beauty of surroundings and the spiritual peace*".

Shakira - "*Spiritually is gained for me by doing dhikr (religious verbal prayer) anywhere I walk especially on the beach as it's so beautiful and clam and I can really connect to Allah through experiencing His creation. [...] Throughout my childhood my dad always took us to Mumbles beach so even now when we drive there it feels so great as it holds a very special place in my heart of my childhood. Just most of memories of my childhood is our dad playing with us there... Happy days*".

Zahra, along with other participants have recognised the link with nature and how that develops their spirituality, complementing geographies of spirituality. This is an area that has not been previously much explored. Lyons (2018) mentions this as an area that needs to be explored, namely the examination of how Muslim women experience spaces that have meaning and influence their identity formation. This research clearly shows how these landmarks have had a deep impact on religious identities as connected with natural landmarks. The spiritual connection of the creation of god and the beauty of Swansea's landmarks, enables participants like Shakira to perform acts of worship while in public, showing the influence these natural places have in the strengthening of religious identities. These experiences are rooted in their everyday lives at a local level, which blends their religious and national belonging (Philips, 2009).

Figure 5.9 illustrates a range of the beach photographs from the participants showing their attachment to local Welsh landmarks and revealing their infused religious and national identity.



Figure 5.9 Images of the beach

5.5 Cyber space and identity

Participants also identified the use of social media and the Internet as influential in building their identity on a wider scale. They also spoke about how cyberspace enhanced and fed into their religious identity through a virtual connection with Muslims around the world at all times, regardless of transnational boundaries. Kong (2001, 2006) discusses the fact that new media plays a key role in religious practices amongst groups and individuals over space and across boundaries, and talks about technology opening up new spaces for religious practices as it enlarges cross border

religious phenomena. Kong (2006) notes that the internet enhances religious communication by allowing access to online religious sermons, lectures and tutorials from anywhere in the world. Participants in this already noted all of that:

Maliha - "I think social media is such a big part of my life and I follow channels like al Jazeera and I find out what's happening to Muslims around the world and also through social media. My Muslim identity comes out a lot on social media".

Tasnim - "I try to listen to as many lectures as I can mainly of speakers in the West, UK and US as their talks have relevance to my everyday experience. They give me guidance of how to cope with changes I face living in the West. I get them, I get their humour. I can't make it to their talks as they are all over the work and in bigger cities so I listen to them on YouTube or podcast".

These accounts from Tasnim and Maliha clearly illustrate the fact that their online activities enhance their Islamic awareness, both from a religious viewpoint and the Muslim world in general. Both participants raise the point that when they are constructing and building their identities they are able to get so much more from across transnational borders through the use of technology. Maliha also spoke about connections with Muslims around the world that can bind people across national boundaries, resulting in the reconstruction of identity locally, creating a sense of homogeneity of religious practices within a 'global religious civil society' (Nagata, 1999). This is explained by Tasnim who says that even though she faces physical barriers in being able to access the Islamic speakers, social media and the ability to access their talks can help her increase her knowledge which enables her to enact her religious identity in the West. This can be further illustrated by the following:

Zahra - "I connect to Muslim across the world through my facebook and especially through the live transmission of prayers we get from Makkah and Medina. It feels like it doesn't matter where you are in the world you can join in the prayers in the holiest cities with all the Muslims who are at the time there performing those rituals. It's an exceptional spiritual feeling especially on occasions of Ramadan and hajj where I feel little me in Wales can connect with Muslim globally when performing these religious acts and experiences them communally".

Hadiya - "I think Social media is a huge platform that feeds into my identity and it shapes it reshapes it all the time. I connect to Muslims around the world through it. I hear of all the latest things that might be occurring around the world but have an impact on me in Swansea, such as Black Lives Matter and Trump and his banning Muslims from entering US. Cases on sexual harassment and sexual abuse and how it affects me as a woman, I watch a lot of You Tubers covering issues that us young Muslims have to deal with".

Zahra refers to being part of these imagined communities (Anderson, 1991), across national boundaries. Zahra, along with other participants consistently refer to Wales and Britain as their home country and connecting them with wider Muslim community globally. The participants highlight the importance of using technology to facilitate this global connection, which helps them to overcome national boundaries through the sharing of religious broadcasts and other materials which bind them together. Hadiya shares the fact that she is reminded of their shared identity through collective beliefs. For many people who follow Western Muslim You Tubers, they are able to see their identity in a specific social and political context, along with the specific religious practices which are experienced and practiced in those places. As mentioned below:

Fariha - "I follow Muslim girls who are YouTubers and bloggers as I feel a sense of connection and I just enjoy watching them as they travel around the world and talks about food and Muslim fashion from different places and talk about struggles with hijab and I feel I can relate to them".

Hajar - "I use a lot of social media, I watch Muslim bloggers and Muslim speakers. I really connect to my religion through Instagram looking at quotes from Quran or Islamic saying on twitter or Facebook. It's perfect way for me to have a constant stream of things coming through all day feeding my soul of things that matter to me and I connect with Muslims living in the West who I share similar experiences with so I don't feel alone."

Fariha and Hajar using social media as a means of following influential YouTubers who share similar experiences to those of these participants thereby giving them the means to strengthen their religious identities by following fashion relevant to their religious identities and individuals who also make similar life style choices. Rahmawati (2016) states that blogging offers a space for these participants to support their identities for example by following famous Muslim bloggers such as Dina Torkia, as this gives Muslim women a voice and representation through relevant fashion. Fariha and Hajar talk about the online presence of these bloggers as influencing their digital identity which then affects what they wear, thereby interweaving their real world with the online world. Hajar also talks about having readily available material which can constantly feed into her spirituality. Hajar furthermore refers to online discussion groups giving them space to form membership and a sense of belonging across geographical boundaries, as they discuss relevant issues faced by other Muslim women globally. It is a means of combating social isolation (Piela, 2011). This helps them to overcome any discrimination and feelings of alienation that they may have felt when experiencing their religious identities on the

streets, on account of Islamophobic attitudes. It gives them a safe place where they are reassured by self-help groups who understand their experiences. Building on their online representation:

Tasnim – “There is a feminist hijabi who does rap songs, it’s amazing it is called ‘Wrap my Hijab’ by Mona Haydor and she is an activist and I think she is showing Muslim women in a normal light, she even says in her lyrics that she is not a scholar she is just a normal hijabi. I think it’s so good for us to see her in these videos as she gives a good positive image of Muslim women, some say she is a bit too much but I think she is great.”

Rana – “I think Hijab has become such a fashion statement now, there are retailers like River Island, Gap, H&M and Dolce and Gabbana who all have hijabi models making it normal and yet fashionable. It’s great for us and it normalises and glamorises Hijab in the wider Western context”.

With such positive images of the Hijab and a string of Muslim representatives of the Hijab on social media, Tasnim and Rana, as young Muslim hijabis can feel empowered. They refer to these social media stars as positive ambassadors of Islam even though other Muslims might criticise their actions for not being entirely in line with Islam, Hajar felt it was very important to have a presence online for young people to see people like themselves being represented. Kavakci, and Kraeplin (2016) showed Muslim bloggers constructing a multiple formation of self by having an Islamic religio-cultural identity as well as a fashionable Western identity. This was very influential on the way these participants embody their identity.

Another way in which participants have utilised technology to enhance their religious identity is through mobile phone apps such as Masjid (Mosque) timetable, My Quran and Quran for all, as mentioned in some of the examples from some participants. Participants can use these specific applications for phones to create their own religious space in which to perform acts of worship at appropriate times at home, or school or work place. This not only assists in helping them to perform their religious identity, it also unites each participant with Muslims nationally and internationally who are praying at the same time in the same direction creating an “abstract communal Islamic space without violation of non-Islamic spaces” (Lee, 1999 p94) as this is all done through technology and does not infringe on any one specific physical space. Figure 5.10 is a timetable of prayers and a Quran app that participants have to hand all the time, informing them of their five daily prayer times and allowing them to recite the Holy Quran whenever they wish.

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| OCTOBER | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------|-------|------|
| DATE | FAJER | | | ZUHUR | | ASER | | MAGRIB | ISHA | | JUMA |
| | BEGINS | JAMAT | SUNR | BEGINS | JAMAT | BEGINS | JAMAT | | BEGINS | JAMAT | |
| 1-2 | 5:47-5:49 | 6:15 | 7:17-7:19 | 1:05 | 1:30 | 4:11-4:09 | 5:00 | 6:56-6:54 | 8:05-8:04 | 8:30 | 1:30 |
| 3-4 | 5:50-5:52 | 6:30 | 7:20-7:22 | 1:05 | 1:30 | 4:07-4:05 | 5:00 | 6:52-6:49 | 8:03-8:00 | 8:30 | 1:30 |
| 5-6 | 5:54-5:55 | 6:30 | 7:24-7:25 | 1:04 | 1:30 | 4:04-4:02 | 5:00 | 6:47-6:45 | 7:59-7:58 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 7-8 | 5:57-5:59 | 6:30 | 7:27-7:29 | 1:03 | 1:30 | 4:00-3:59 | 5:00 | 6:43-6:41 | 7:57-7:56 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 9-10 | 6:00-6:02 | 6:30 | 7:30-7:32 | 1:03 | 1:30 | 3:57-3:55 | 5:00 | 6:38-6:36 | 7:55-7:54 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 11-12 | 6:04-6:05 | 6:30 | 7:34-7:35 | 1:03 | 1:30 | 3:53-3:52 | 5:00 | 6:34-6:31 | 7:53-7:52 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 13-14 | 6:07-6:09 | 6:45 | 7:37-7:39 | 1:02 | 1:30 | 3:50-3:48 | 5:00 | 6:29-6:27 | 7:51-7:50 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 15-16 | 6:11-6:12 | 6:45 | 7:41-7:42 | 1:02 | 1:30 | 3:47-3:45 | 5:00 | 6:25-6:23 | 7:49-7:48 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 17-18 | 6:14-6:16 | 6:45 | 7:44-7:46 | 1:01 | 1:30 | 3:43-3:42 | 4:30 | 6:21-6:19 | 7:47-7:45 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 19-20 | 6:18-6:19 | 6:45 | 7:48-7:49 | 1:01 | 1:30 | 3:40-3:38 | 4:30 | 6:17-6:15 | 7:43-7:41 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 21-22 | 6:21-6:23 | 7:00 | 7:51-7:53 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:37-3:35 | 4:30 | 6:12-6:10 | 7:39-7:37 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 23-24 | 6:25-6:27 | 7:00 | 7:55-7:57 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:33-3:32 | 4:30 | 6:08-6:06 | 7:35-7:33 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 25-26 | 6:28-6:30 | 7:00 | 7:58-8:00 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:30-3:29 | 4:30 | 6:04-6:02 | 7:31-7:29 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 27-28 | 6:32-6:34 | 7:00 | 8:02-8:04 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:27-3:26 | 4:30 | 6:00-5:58 | 7:27-7:25 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 29-30 | 6:35-6:37 | 7:15 | 8:05-8:07 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:24-3:23 | 4:30 | 5:56-5:54 | 7:23-7:21 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 31 | 6:39 | 7:15 | 8:09 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:21 | 4:30 | 5:52 | 7:19 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| THE LAST SUNDAY OF OCTOBER WINTER TIME STARTS | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 25-26 | 5:28-5:30 | 6:00 | 6:58-7:00 | 12:00 | 1:15 | 2:30-2:29 | 3:30 | 5:04-5:02 | 6:31-6:29 | 7:00 | 1:15 |
| 27-28 | 5:32-5:34 | 6:00 | 7:02-7:04 | 12:00 | 1:15 | 2:27-2:26 | 3:30 | 5:00-4:58 | 6:27-6:25 | 7:00 | 1:15 |
| 29-30 | 5:35-5:37 | 6:15 | 7:05-7:07 | 12:00 | 1:15 | 2:24-2:23 | 3:30 | 4:56-4:54 | 6:23-6:21 | 7:00 | 1:15 |
| 31 | 5:39 | 6:15 | 7:09 | 12:00 | 1:15 | 2:21 | 3:30 | 4:52 | 6:19 | 7:00 | 1:15 |

| NOVEMBER | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------|-------|------|
| DATE | FAJER | | | ZUHUR | | ASER | | MAGRIB | ISHA | | JUMA |
| | BEGINS | JAMAT | SUNR | BEGINS | JAMAT | BEGINS | JAMAT | | BEGINS | JAMAT | |
| 1-2 | 5:47-5:49 | 6:15 | 7:17-7:19 | 1:05 | 1:30 | 4:11-4:09 | 5:00 | 6:56-6:54 | 8:05-8:04 | 8:30 | 1:30 |
| 3-4 | 5:50-5:52 | 6:30 | 7:20-7:22 | 1:05 | 1:30 | 4:07-4:05 | 5:00 | 6:52-6:49 | 8:03-8:00 | 8:30 | 1:30 |
| 5-6 | 5:54-5:55 | 6:30 | 7:24-7:25 | 1:04 | 1:30 | 4:04-4:02 | 5:00 | 6:47-6:45 | 7:59-7:58 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 7-8 | 5:57-5:59 | 6:30 | 7:27-7:29 | 1:03 | 1:30 | 4:00-3:59 | 5:00 | 6:43-6:41 | 7:57-7:56 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 9-10 | 6:00-6:02 | 6:30 | 7:30-7:32 | 1:03 | 1:30 | 3:57-3:55 | 5:00 | 6:38-6:36 | 7:55-7:54 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 11-12 | 6:04-6:05 | 6:30 | 7:34-7:35 | 1:03 | 1:30 | 3:53-3:52 | 5:00 | 6:34-6:31 | 7:53-7:52 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 13-14 | 6:07-6:09 | 6:45 | 7:37-7:39 | 1:02 | 1:30 | 3:50-3:48 | 5:00 | 6:29-6:27 | 7:51-7:50 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 15-16 | 6:11-6:12 | 6:45 | 7:41-7:42 | 1:02 | 1:30 | 3:47-3:45 | 5:00 | 6:25-6:23 | 7:49-7:48 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 17-18 | 6:14-6:16 | 6:45 | 7:44-7:46 | 1:01 | 1:30 | 3:43-3:42 | 4:30 | 6:21-6:19 | 7:47-7:45 | 8:15 | 1:30 |
| 19-20 | 6:18-6:19 | 6:45 | 7:48-7:49 | 1:01 | 1:30 | 3:40-3:38 | 4:30 | 6:17-6:15 | 7:43-7:41 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 21-22 | 6:21-6:23 | 7:00 | 7:51-7:53 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:37-3:35 | 4:30 | 6:12-6:10 | 7:39-7:37 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 23-24 | 6:25-6:27 | 7:00 | 7:55-7:57 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:33-3:32 | 4:30 | 6:08-6:06 | 7:35-7:33 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 25-26 | 6:28-6:30 | 7:00 | 7:58-8:00 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:30-3:29 | 4:30 | 6:04-6:02 | 7:31-7:29 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 27-28 | 6:32-6:34 | 7:00 | 8:02-8:04 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:27-3:26 | 4:30 | 6:00-5:58 | 7:27-7:25 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 29-30 | 6:35-6:37 | 7:15 | 8:05-8:07 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:24-3:23 | 4:30 | 5:56-5:54 | 7:23-7:21 | 8:00 | 1:30 |
| 31 | 6:39 | 7:15 | 8:09 | 1:00 | 1:30 | 3:21 | 4:30 | 5:52 | 7:19 | 8:00 | 1:30 |

Figure 5.10 Prayer timetable app and Quran app for phones

Another digital device used by participants was Instagram, where they displayed pictures relevant to their self-representation to the social media world. Some of the participants sent pictures from their personal accounts that best described their identities, as shown in Figure 5.11. These differ from that of their parents, who rather viewed themselves as ethnic first, followed by their religious self. The second generation participants have expressed themselves by their religious identity in the first instance, with a similarly strong affiliation to Wales or Britain. The pictures illustrate the fact that British national identity is a very important aspect of their identity. They felt it to be an important aspect that represented who they are, hence that formed a central part of the composition. One participant sent in a picture of Wales along with the Mauritian national flag, stating she has equal dual ethnicities which she felt made her the enriched and unique individual she is.



Figure 5.11 Picture of National identity portrayed on Social media

The most common way in which participants shared their identities was with pictures of themselves referred to as *Selfies*. Rocamora (2011) describes these as a means of identity construction through the merger of the photograph and self-image with social media and the ability to self-express. This construction is constantly being renewed, daily, and hourly (2011:411) which gives them a platform for a visual display of their personal diary, which is an influential process of identity construction. According to Rocamora (2011) the photographic self-portrait (“selfie”) is an expression of online identity with the internet offering unlimited opportunities for their identity formation. Figure 5.13 demonstrates a few of the selfies that participants wanted to share as representative of their identities amongst friends. They felt that this sharing of a collective shared identity reinforced their religious identity.

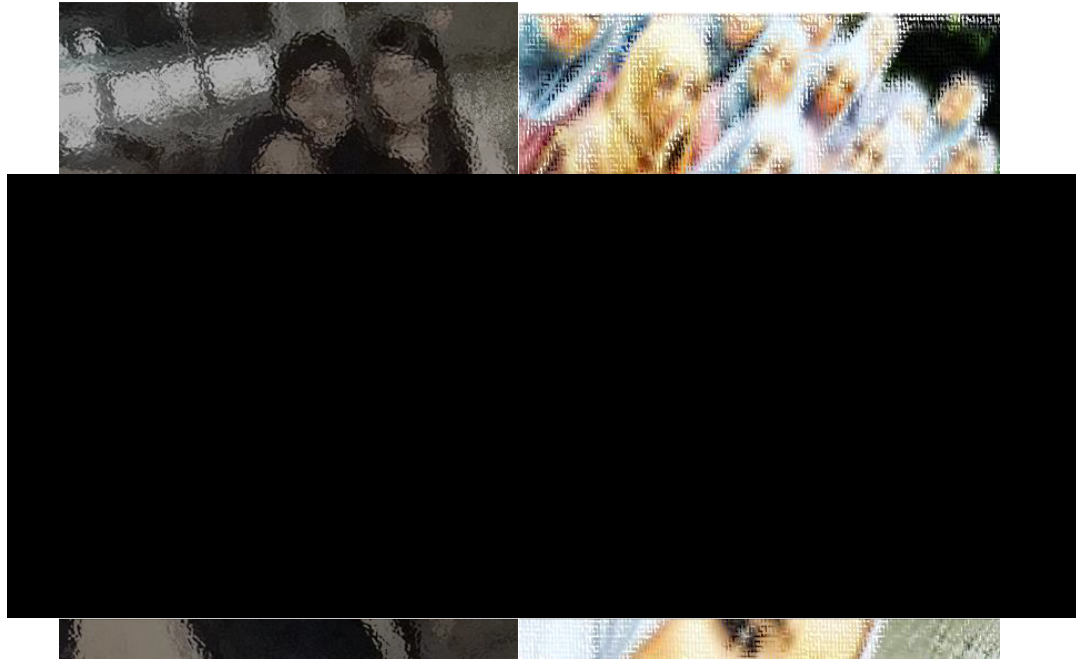


Figure 5.12: Selfie images

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter considered the embodied experiences of young Muslim women in different areas of their lives. The focus was on specific places, through the private and public lives of these participants living in Swansea, Wales. This differs from previous studies conducted in more urban areas, making the experiences of these participants very relevant. These participants have embodied their identities in an area where the visibility of Muslims is smaller than in larger urban cities. Hence they are more visible. However, they have negotiated their identities through these familiar landscapes (Wise, 2010), blending their religious identities with their national identities, emphasising their Welshness as an important marker, along with their Muslim faith (Philip, 2009).

The obvious means of expressing this identity was through the hijab, showing the empowerment they felt through embracing this physical element of their identity, despite not always being accepted for it. They have highlighted how they have embodied this religious identity on macro spaces, like the streets, beaches and other landmarks. This is a new contribution to geographies of spirituality and enhances existing research on the geographies of Muslim identities. Participants described their hijab as being an integral part of their identity which enables them to interweave both their public and private lives easily, without any restriction or barriers. This view runs

somewhat contrary to the view of much of the previous research conducted in this area (Dwyer, 1999).

The research has also examined how these participants have used dress in general to express their hybrid identities. These had previously been viewed as oppositional identities, with traditional ethnic identities versus the Western identities. The participants of this research have celebrated their mixed and fused identities. They have expressed the ways in which their identities differ to those of their parents' generation, which were constructed on ethnic identities rather more than their religious identity. For these second generation participants, their religious identity was more prominent in their embodied experiences than their mixed Welsh and ethnic identities.

This chapter contributed to the relatively small amount of previous research into the sacredness of secular places, by showing that participants practiced their religious duties through the various public and private spaces they occupy. They performed their religious duties by physical acts or through spiritual connections. A gap has been identified by Holloway and Valins (2008) who state that little has been done to consider geographies of spirituality. The participants have contributed to this by illustrating the connection they established through the performing of their religious rituals every day in these spaces. They have particularly contributed to this literature by commenting on their connection with the spaces of nature around them, and how this further enhances their spiritual connection with their religion.

Lastly, the chapter looked at religious identity as being created, enhanced and experienced through cyber-space. The digital construction of identity was expressed by participants emphasising how they used social media to connect with others who they feel share their religious identity, and how they use it to express these themes to the world beyond. Kong (2006) began to look at how technologies play a role in shaping religious identities, and the participants have expanded and added to this research. They have given practical examples of the use of various digital platforms which have been used to embody their identities and form shared identities with imagined communities across the geographical boundaries (Piela, 2011). They have also spoken about how these technologies have contributed to the formation of positive representation of Muslim identities which in turn has had an impact on their daily experiences.

Chapter 6. Feminism and Islam

6.1. Introduction

This chapter will look into the notion of feminism and the place it occupies within Islam, for the participants in this study. As gender plays a key role in the formation of identity construction for these participants, it is important to discuss the relational context in which these identities are formed and influenced. Therefore, it is crucial to look at the social context in which these identities are fashioned and performed, whilst still considering power relations and complex social inequalities. This is the context in which feminism and its intersectional approach will be examined throughout this chapter. Participants explore both their feminist beliefs and their female empowerment and also the relationship between the two. They will consider whether feminist theory offers them female empowerment and liberation from traditional oppressive gendered roles associated with Islam (Al Wazni, 2015).

Studies have been conducted in the past, on the place of feminism in Islam. Academics such as Miriam Cooke (2000) have clearly outlined that this ideology gives Muslim women a place to come together and position themselves as belonging to a strong faith identity whilst still actively campaigning for the rights of other women. Yet, she argues the point that feminism is a terminology that will be rejected by many Muslim women as a Western concept, and therefore not applicable to their identities. Cooke believes that their subservient and deeply patriarchal society prevents them from accepting this approach. This research will go some way toward exploring this theme with the participants, to understand where second generation Muslim women, born and brought up in the West, stand on these issues. The participants will explore gender equality in Islam and the gendered representation of Muslim women. One area that will be further studied is the representation of the hijab and its position within a feminist context. Muslim women's clothing is seen as delicate issue, which has often been interpreted by some feminists as an oppressive device (Grech, 2009).

When focusing on feminism in Islam it is important to consider the wider texts that exist on this topic. There have been volumes of literature written about this. Some of the definitions of this vast topic are around the desire for social change because of inequalities that occurred as a result of patriarchy, social class and race (Valentine, 2007). Feminism is defined as an attitude that outlines the role of genders in

understanding how societies are organised (Cooke, 2001). Cooke defines feminism as the claim for justice against gender discrimination and advocates the promotion of opportunities for women in public life, whereas it is described by De Lauretis (1986, p.12) as “very much a politics of everyday life, the struggle, the weight of oppression and contradiction” in the lives of women. As women negotiate their gendered identity through these everyday places, feminist geographers argue that the discipline fails to represent them equally (Rose, 1993). Even though the participants have already described their embodied experiences through every day spaces in Chapters 5, in this chapter they do discuss perceived gender inequalities within the Muslim communities when it comes to treatment of women in everyday matters such as inheritance, polygamy etc.

The findings of this chapter will contribute to the geographies of feminism, with particular attention being paid to women in public places. Gillian Rose (1993) goes on to say that geography as a subject had only been mastered by males because there was a lack of writers coming forward from other backgrounds. The findings from this section will go some way toward illustrating Muslim women’s perspective on feminism in geographies. This will also feed into the discipline regarding Islam and feminism, as relatively few Muslim feminists or Muslim women activists have come forward to write about their representation in this arena, especially within the Western context. The people that have primarily written on this topic have been in Muslim lands, such as Miriam Cooke (2000, 2001, 2008), Michael Grech (2014) and Badran (2009) who all write about feminist movements in Egypt and Turkey.

The present research highlights the fact that the views represented by the participants are those of a diverse group of young Muslim women. When discussing the treatment of women they express their religious, racial and gendered views. As Valentine (2007) suggests, the development of postmodern feminist literature exposed the fact that there was a lack of representation of race, and that it did not originate from women who were oppressed. Early feminist geographers failed to represent feminism as it appeared in the margins as they were blind to their own race, sexuality and class (Desbiens, 1999). Rose, herself, acknowledges this:

“The impact of black and lesbian feminism is evident in the recognition that everywhere all women are subject to constitution not only by gender but by sexuality

and by class and by race and by religion, and by a whole range of other social relations; and feminist of colour insist that these relations are always experienced simultaneously” (1993, p.151).

In short, it is vital to note the intersectional nature of the identities of these participants and how they address how multiple inequalities affect these women from different races and classes (Crenshaw, 1990). This will be an original contribution to existing literature, as it considers the views of young Muslim women living in Wales, and how they maintain balance within their everyday spaces, whilst still maintaining the various dimensions of their identity, intersecting at multiple levels. As the majority of literature on Islamic feminism is based around Turkey, Egypt and Iran, the current research will contribute by sharing the views of this second generation of Western Muslim young women in respect of their gendered religious position and their rights. The chapter will seek to discuss how these participants navigate their way through their own Western upbringing when it is impacted by liberal Western feminism, and how a strong, grounded teaching of Islam supports the development of an Islamic feminist persona. The chapter also discusses the difference between various forms of feminism and considers which variant the participants feel more comfortable with. It then goes on to cover the position of the hijab within the context of feminism. The participants briefly discuss other gender equality issues that exist in Islam that have been challenged previously such as inheritance, divorce, and polygamy.

The following section will focus on Islamic feminism and consider whether it is viable to balance the gendered identities of these Muslim women. It will explore whether Islamic feminism is able to address the gender discrimination and oppressive practices that affect Muslim women.

6.2 *Feminism in Islam*

When defining feminism in Islam, some scholars suggest that it is loosely based upon and influenced by Western secular feminism (Moghadam, 2002). bell hooks (2000) describes feminism as a movement to end sexism, exploitation and oppression of females. Whilst liberal feminists suggest that legal and political structures need to be changed in order to achieve gender equality, radical feminists believe that there needs to be a social and cultural change, focussing on gender and sex, as they are the central cause of women’s oppression (Tong, 2007). A central movement in the 1990’s,

feminism was led by white middle class women and therefore not representative of women from different classes or race (hooks, 2000). Translational feminism thus emerged from traditional feminism, recognising the intersection of race, gender, religion, nationhood and class (Woodhull, 2004). Whilst considering the origins of Islamic feminism, Moghadam (2002) states that it is based upon engaging with women's rights, liberation and gender equality. Even though there are variances within feminism, the majority of perspectives highlight female disadvantage and work towards the improvement of women's situations.

Islamic feminism emerged as a movement in Muslim lands, as a power struggle against political ideologies (Cooke 2001, Moghadam, 2002). Yet Cooke (2001) describes feminism as being more than just an organised political movement. It also consists of a change in attitudes regarding genders and the dealing with unjust behaviours against women. Badran (2009) claims that Islamic feminism is a term which is quite new in the Arabic language and its connotations are very controversial. Many women who are thought of as being feminist reject the statement due to its negative implications. For many Muslim women the connotations linked to feminism are secularist ideas, which see women of religion as oppressed victims who need rescuing, and they separate themselves from religious dialogue. However Cooke (2000) believes that the separatist option would change little, and that the two need to come together, as the Islamic feminist approach allows for multiple identities to coexist. This allows for the co-existence of two points of view, thereby creating a contingent subject position.

In order to find out the initial opinions of the participants of this research on the term feminism, they were asked to discuss their definitions of it and what the term meant to them. Some responses were as follows:

Sara - *"Feminism is about Equality of women"*

Zahra - *"Feminism is about Rights of women and Empowering women"*

Rana - *"Feminism is about Strong and independent women"*

Participants were very positive about their understanding of the term 'feminism' and associated it with equality, rights and independence of women. Being born and brought up in the West, their interpretation of the word was in line with the definition of Western feminism that had been described previously as empowerment and liberation

for women. The participants were then asked to look at the position of 'feminism in Islam' and their responses were as follows:

Zahra - "Islam gave us rights but Muslim women are still fighting to get them back from societies who deny them, but we are equal in sight of God we don't need feminist in Islam".

Sara - "We do need to fight for the rights that are given to us because Islamic teachings are not always understood accurately and women get treated differently".

Shakira - "Women need to be feminist in order to reclaim their rights Islam gives them."

Two of the participants confirm the position of feminism in Islam. Within an Islamic context Shakira and Sara deem it necessary to have the presence of feminist ideology in order to reclaim rights for Muslim women. Both acknowledged that Islam had given rights to Muslim women but felt there was a need for a feminist movement that would retrieve these rights for oppressed women. Badran (2009) feels that there exists a place for Islamic feminism which is based on two paradigms, the first one being the main secular paradigm which the above responses suggest needs to fight for the differential treatment of women and the second one being the Islamic one, which is mainly established by Islamic practices derived from the Quran and largely misunderstood Islamic traditions. These traditions that conflict with the rights of individuals therefore mean that they experience the intersectional discrimination of being victims of ethnic culture, gender and religion (Yuval- Davies, 2007). Badran (2009) states that Muslim feminists base their claims upon the teachings of the life of the prophet (Peace be upon him -pbuh) and criticise the patriarchy evident in the interpretation of Islam. The struggle for women's equality is therefore not separated from the Islamic platform.

Zahra in contrast, considers the position of feminism as being one that fights for gender equality where it does not already exist. She therefore feels that as such equality has already been granted to Muslim women in Islam, from a religious perspective at least, feminism is unnecessary. Grech (2014) describes this as the main reason why Muslim women such as Zahra dismiss feminism, as religion is absent from its main narratives. The separation of secular feminism from religious discourse whilst formulating gender equality does not resonate strongly with Muslim women like Zahra and others, who reject the notion of feminism in Islam.

The participants then went on to explain why they thought equal rights were not available to some Muslim women:

Rana - *“It’s about educating men, as they are the main culprits of oppressing women especially those cultural men who do it in name of religion”*.

Sara - *“I would say it’s reinforced by women so it’s about educating women more especially the older generation especially when they mix up culture and religion and treat their sons differently to their daughters”*.

From Sara’s response it can be clearly seen that intergenerational friction exists around cultural values, particularly when considering the positions of women and men. Rana believes that the behaviour of some men towards women is oppressive in nature, thereby separating culture from religion. She also acknowledges that this misinterpretation is due to a lack of understanding from men and a refusal to accept this lack of understanding. They therefore need to be educated in the true teachings of Islam (Badran, 2009). This second generation of Muslim women are drawing a clear distinction between religion and culture and showing a deep aversion to cultural differences in the treatment of men and women. This is one of the main reasons why many young Muslims are choosing Islam as their main identity, in order to disassociate themselves from these oppressive practices. Thus:

Rana - *“I think we can use certain parts of feminism and adopt it to suit our particular needs and some of it can be used to educate and empower women about Islamic teachings of their rights and their status”*.

Rana further explains that Islamic feminism is best placed to correct this patriarchal cultural interpretation. This is affirmed by Gökarıksel (2018) who states that Islamic feminism is uniquely positioned to stand up to Islamic masculinist hegemony, whilst also being able to open up opportunities for men to understand the rights of Muslim women, because of their position and activism. Rana talks about the importance of educating women in their Islamic rights and their need to claim their position, by highlighting their role and status within the religion.

In contrast, some participants felt adamant that Islam was incompatible with feminism as can be seen from the following responses:

Sara - *“I think feminism is literally about wanting women and men to be the same but we are not, we are different yet equal. The genders are here to complement one another. We have different needs and rights. I don’t think*

there is a place for feminism in Islam because it's not fighting for the same things that we need".

Hana – *"In Islam women and men have very clear distinct roles, we don't want to be like them and they should not be like us. We are all equal in sight of Allah so we don't need to fight anyone for it, we are all here for a purpose and that is to spread good and we should busy ourselves with that".*

Zahra – *"Equality is not a right humans can give, as you will see it's a battle on going for centuries whether it's based on race, gender, disability, religion etc. etc. We are happy to have this right from the Divine Creator God Almighty we don't need to fight for it. We do need to ensure justice is done with His creation and when someone's rights are oppressed then we need to stand up for it. We can call this whatever we want the message is the same".*

The participants are very firm in their belief that equality is rooted in Islam. With regard to the positioning of the genders, their religious identities are engrained with the teachings of their faith, hence they see no reason to join the fight of secular feminism, as this is predominantly about gender equality with specific regard to the position held by men in society. From Hana and Sara's responses it can be seen that they are referring to the teachings of Islam in relation to gender roles, based on women and men being allies together in doing good and forbidding evil (Quranic verses Chapter 9: verse 71). The teachings position the two genders in complementary roles to one another due to biological differences but as equal in spheres of activity (Rahman, 1980) something which is referred to by Sara. Hana and Zahra meanwhile refer to their larger roles in life, the need to fight on a larger scale. Zahra particularly mentions the intersectional dimensions of discrimination and is not really concerned about what the movement should be known, as long as it achieves its objectives.

Cooke's (200) definition of Islamic feminism states precisely what Zahra is implying, namely that this movement has a double commitment; one to the rights of women and the other to the faith itself. This celebrates the multiple belonging of this model by confirming its membership of the religious community while still acting on behalf of women who need representing. Faith is the most important element for these participants, as described by Abu-Lughod (2002) who makes clear that any movement to reform change and challenge oppression has to be done within the framework of Islam, Islam being the pivotal point for strong, religious Muslims. Most critically, the activism these participants are looking for is to be found rooted in the true essence of Islam, and not in the culture or traditions of the various regions of Muslim lands or in the secular ways of traditional feminism.

Participants also discussed their physical position when praying, and how for them, praying behind men was not seen as a discriminatory practice, although for some Muslim feminist this is a stand they have taken:

Sara - *“We can’t stand next to the men because Islam hasn’t allowed men and women to mix especially as when praying everyone (irrespective of gender) is there focussed in their spiritual connection with God regardless of where they are standing. It avoids having distraction, other thoughts”.*

Mona - *“Personally I wouldn’t want to stand in front of men; I am so conscious of my body even with women let alone stand in front of men to pray”.*

Rana - *“I don’t think it’s being a Muslim feminist demanding to pray in front of men or being imams or praying next to them. It’s changing the ways of Islam and that doesn’t mean equality. We are equal in the sight of God so I don’t need to necessary be next to a man or in front of him to prove that. I feel being content praying in mosque but if women were stopped from entering mosques which in some places they are, that I would have a problem with as again it’s against the teachings of Islam.”*

When discussing the equality of genders further, the participants consider physical acts of worship and their positioning, and the fact that this does not particularly drive any gender power debate for them. From their responses, Sara and Mona clearly demonstrate that they have never wanted to stand near to men. They are so individually engrossed when in prayer, that the physical position of their body is secondary. They therefore show little commonality with Islamic feminists who have taken a stand on this issue and started a movement toward mixed congregational prayers (Hoel, 2013). The participants would no doubt be of the opinion that an Islamic feminist like Amina Wadud has over emphasised her gender identity, by making a stance and positioning her female body in the front as lead imam (Hoel, 2013). It could be said that this distracted too much from the role, position and importance of praying itself¹.

Positions that are socially constructed in specific spaces are carefully studied by feminist geographers who look at specific location, positioning and margins from a feminist perspective (Staeheli and Martin, 2000). Yet the participants argued that such gendered boundaries do not exist for them. Even though they are positioned behind

¹ Wadud Prayer – Amina Wadud a Muslim feminist and American Muslim philosopher led a mixed congregational prayer on Friday 18 March 2005, without any gender separation, breaking Islamic laws, which allows only male imams (prayer leaders) to lead prayer in mixed-gender, whilst Muslim women can only lead other women in prayers.

men when it comes to praying, something which stems from their core teachings, they do not consider it necessary to challenge its origins or its implementation. The Wadud prayer however was recognised as challenging such construction of gender, as it specifically refers to space and position in a male religious authoritative manner (Staheli and Martin, 2000). Nonetheless when it comes to women being excluded from the mosques, Rana highlights that her boundaries around cultural construction of gendered identities have shifted, and that for her, the exclusion of women is not acceptable. Rana and other participants believe that these spaces provide them with spiritual connections and experiences which are encouraged through their religious rights but are lost in patriarchal communities and societies.

The other points participants readily made with regard to feminism in Islam were based around the following themes:

Rana - "It's down to lack of education and understanding in teachings of Islam especially on the part of women, which results in misinterpretations and leads to wrongful treatment of Muslim women".

Hana - "I think we don't need to copy Western Feminism to be able to claim our positions as Muslim women. Sometimes I think Muslim women try to imitate the Western feminist so much that they lose their religion, it's like you have taken the Islam out of Muslim women. Leaving them just women, they are no longer representative of Muslim women then. We listen to American Female speakers who are active Muslim scholars speaking about Muslim women's issues in our Western context without referring to feminism".

The responses from Hana and Rana refer to the basics of Islamic teachings and for the need to re-educate Muslims. Rana in particular talks about the interpretation of the sacred texts of the Quran and Hadith (teachings of prophet Mohammad (PBUH), Mersnissi (1991) which argue the point that the dominant teachings around female issues could be misinterpreted with a male-bias, as women were absent from the early production of these religious philosophies. Both participants recognise the need for female representatives who can provide inclusive female voices as a means of expanding these traditional interpretations of Quran from a women centred perspective. There have been several movements in the West involving speakers such as Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian-American Civil Rights Activist and Dalia Mogahed, an American scholar of Egyptian origin, to name but a few. Hana refers to such representatives as being more in tune with their perspectives as Western Muslim activist women.

Some participants clearly demonstrated that even though they acknowledged the existence of oppressive practices as supported through cultural understanding, which revoke the rights of Muslim women, they still felt largely reluctant to use the term feminist. Cooke (2000) believes that this can be overcome by adopting the description of Islamic Feminist, thereby illustrating that they will be representing Islam which is no more traditional, violent or patriarchal than any other religion, and that they are also strong women within the teachings and practices of this religion. She believes that Muslim women should embrace this title, as it links them to a unique religious, political and gendered identity, highlighting their role and linking them to Muslim women across the globe by surpassing boundaries of spaces and places. Even though they recognise that the term stands for equality and liberation, these participants did not feel that it sufficiently represented their religious gendered needs. Neither did they want to be associated with the label of feminism, due to its secular connotations. They object to Islamic Feminism or feminist ideology as they feel they are being reduced to a single identity which is more politically geared and not sufficiently driven by the teachings of their religion. They felt more comfortable being represented by Muslim women activists who challenge these traditional patriarchal inequalities, from the position of a deep understanding of their faith.

The following section moves from the general overview to look specifically at the hijab and Islamic clothing as markers of empowered Muslim identity, although at times seen as oppressive by some feminist movements. The section will consider the participant's perspective - how they interpret the different attitudes regarding their choice of Islamic clothing and how it is widely accepted in the West.

6.3 *Hijab*

The hijab is a covering/ clothing that can be either seen as religious attire or fashion statement (Grech, 2014). It is a piece of clothing that is seen by some feminists as oppressive and by others as an empowering accessory. There are many opinions and narratives around the hijab and whenever Muslim women are discussed, this topic usually arises. In the world of academia, the veil has been seen as a symbol to pity, to fear or to be educated by or respected (Ahmed, 1992; Dwyer, 1999; Moghadam, 1994; Secor, 2002). Cooke (2000) describes the veil as a diverse form of covering of body or face that can be modern or fashionable or political and so should not be reduced to

being just a symbol of women's oppression and marginalisation. There are many women who have exercised their freedom of choice and wear the veil. The participants immediately picked up this point:

Sara - *"Hijab doesn't oppress women it makes up our identity, it's a symbol of our beliefs it's a stand we make to the society of who we are"*.

Hana - *"It's our choice, and I don't like being judged by others for wearing it. I don't need rescuing from it, I am a strong Western Muslim woman"*.

Mona - *"Hijab is the symbol of our religion that we wear proudly, we chose to wear it just as we chose to do every other religious action to show our commitment to our faith. It's a privilege only Muslim women have and I am honoured to be one who wears it and represent the beauty of Islam through it"*.

It is clear from the above comments that the participants see the hijab as representative of their identity as Muslim women in Western society. They consider the hijab to be a public display of their belief, a marker for the wider society and they refute its origins as being oppressive. Hana describes enormously being viewed as a victim of oppression whilst Sara emphasises that the hijab is not a symbol of oppression, something which Hana also affirms by stating that it is their choice to wear it. This is in reference to the hijab being perceived as an oppressive practice from a feminist perspective, a patriarchal interpretation of religion and a contradictory practice in the West (Sreberny, 2002). Secularist feminists generally view the hijab as a challenging practice that controls the Muslim women's agency and hinders their representation. Within the continuing debate on the different forms of feminism, Badran (2009) contrasts the secular feminist view of the veil as a symbol of male domination, with the Islamic feminist view of it as a symbol of empowerment that allows the wearer to modestly participate in public life. For others, the wearing of a head scarf is embodying the practices of Islam and reinforcing their Islamic identity as devout Muslims and is furthermore crucial in order to counteract the gender injustices for Muslim women (Gökarıksel, 2018). Therefore, as can be seen from the accounts of participants, they feel pride and honour when wearing this symbol of their religious identity. They do not feel oppressed but view being it as a ritual practice of their faith. The participants further describe their observing the hijab as:

Sara - *"It's used a symbol of femininity and modesty"*.

Mona- *"I feel feminine wearing it. It's an act of worship, just like praying and fasting and I draw closer to Allah through it"*.

Zubeda- *“I do it for myself, not for anyone else. It’s who I am and it’s my religious commitment through which I increase in my faith”*.

Sara and Mona describe their hijab as a symbol that emphasises their femininity. This is a concept that has been much critiqued in feminist literature and has been interpreted as a symbol of powerlessness, control and passive behaviour (Friedan, 1983; and Bartky, 1990). Feminists have further described femininity as constructed around the image of romance, fashion and body image as defined by men (McRobbie, 1991) and they try to link the wearing of the hijab to this. This is in contrast to how the participants described themselves. They were more in tune with Islamic feminism which considers being modest in appearance as part of the social construct of gender.

The participants disagreed with one particular aspect of Islamic feminism, which is exemplified primarily through the views of Zubeda. She no longer concurs with Islamic feminists who might consider the hijab as a symbol of modesty and do not necessarily ascribe to it covering the body (Mernisi, 1991). There is a popular understanding of the hijab amongst Islamic feminists, namely that the hijab enables women to feel free from the gaze of men, whereas the authentic teachings of Islam state the wearing of the hijab to be an act of worship, something which is affirmed by Zubeda. There is a debate surrounding why the wearing of the hijab supposedly arose from men’s inability to control their desires (Read and Bartkowski, 2000). However, there is very little literature available on the religiosity of hijab, namely the highlighting of it as a marker of worship and the attainment of piety and rewards by the adoption of conservative dress.

The responses of these research participants go some way toward explaining why women do not feel that they must wear the hijab as a protection from men but rather, as expressed by Zubeda and other participants, more as an act of worship and obedience to the commands of God. There are also other points of difference from Islamic feminisms as noted by Siraj (2011) who states that the hijab was only ordained for the wives of the prophet to wear, and not for all Muslim women. Again this is not something which is adhered to by devout Muslim women including the participants, as they consider it to be a commandment from their God, which enables them to draw spiritually closer to him.

Participants discussed the limitations of wearing the hijab:

Sara – *“Hijab does come with some sacrifices as there are restrictions, it is an act of worship and will need to have some constraints to it. You can’t just go out with your hair done up and looking nice but that is where the reward is”*.

Zahra – *“Wearing hijab here in the West does need some adaptation such as not being able to go swimming whenever we want or at weddings the women including the brides often has to wear hijab because venues are not segregated. In Muslim countries all these are accommodated easily as most pools have women only areas and most wedding halls are segregated allowing separate areas for women to be able to dress up and dance and enjoy the ceremonies but living in the West, in a secular society we have to adopt our religious practices around the system here.*

Mona – *“Even though it’s harder at times to wear hijab at times of weddings or not being able to do certain things because of the hijab in West, I think we would all still much prefer to be living here as most Muslim countries might accommodate gender segregation but also are heavily controlled by cultural practices which we couldn’t cope with”*.

The participants describe the wearing of the hijab as an act of worship which would result in attaining reward (through pleasure of God). At times it is difficult and requires sacrifices from the participants. This could mean restrictions on their fashionable appearance or on other occasions, as stated by Siraj (2011) the hijab constrains the participation of women in public spaces. Some feminists argue that this hinders the activities of Muslim women and that these women need to be freed from any such restrictions. But although the hijab is a significant marker that allows Muslim women to negotiate their identity in public spaces (Droogsma, 2007) with the wearing of it is mainly considered as an empowering experience for the participants, there are occasions where they find themselves restricted. However, they then see this restriction as an opportunity to draw closer to God by this act of sacrifice. As mentioned by Secor (2002, 7) the hijab is “specialised understanding” which is an “embodied practice” restricting performance in certain spaces. Participants also tried to counter the claim of some feminists that the hijab is responsible for taking away their freedom of movement, by referring to the fact that Western spaces are not adapted to allow Muslim women to completely enjoy their embodied experiences. Muslim countries allow segregated spaces for Muslim women to embody their religious identities without any limitations. Mona however confirms that even though these Muslim countries are better suited to accommodate their needs, they would much rather live in Western countries, where they are able to practice a culture free Islam.

The participants also commented on the face veil known as the Niqab as follows:

Sara - *“Personally I wouldn’t wear a niqab but I wouldn’t stop someone from wearing one and I am happy for them that they wear it as I can’t or don’t, that’s their choice. The media making a big deal of women who wear it are oppressed or covering the face is about a security issue, there always ways around it”*.

Zahra - *“I agree whoever wants to cover their face, I wouldn’t wear it personally now and if you’re in Britain and the laws changed banning the niqab then I think it’s not a big problem to abide by the law because I don’t think its compulsory so no harm following the law of the country”*.

Rana - *“I think if a woman is allowed to wear as little as she wants and that ok under freedom of choice then if a woman wants to cover as much as she wants she should be left to do so. I think we make a big deal of Niqab in the West. The media portray all women who wear Niqab like the ones under Taliban’s forced rule. We are not forced, those who chose to do it are happy with their religious commitment”*.

From these responses it is clear that the participants feel strongly that it should be a matter of choice for individuals whether they wear the face covering or not. It is the understanding of most Muslims, with the exception of those who believe in Sharia (the Islamic jurisprudence) that women are not required to wear a burqa or face cover (BBC - Religions - Islam: Sharia, 2018). The participants, Sara and Rana, feel strongly that this should be part of the British values of freedom of choice and that the same freedom should be granted to these women nationally. Rana does state that the way in which the media has portrayed women wearing the Burqa as being oppressed, has possibly left the public under the impression that all Muslim women are forced to wear it. Afghanistan's blue burqa became a familiar marker of the oppression of the Muslim woman, that of a victim that needed rescuing by the West. These women were victims of the patriarchal culture of which the participants previously spoke. Most participants stated that the covering of the face is an act of choice, and one that they did not choose for themselves.

The Muslim women who took part in this research have debated the fact that they are caught up between the Islamic feminists who strive to control women’s bodies with their interpretation of Islam, which at times varies from that of the traditional teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) and those who have compassion for the “poor” Muslim woman, who Western feminism is determined to view as oppressed and in need of liberating. However, like many other Muslim women in Britain and beyond, the participants demanded equal rights to practice Islam freely, as they form a new cosmopolitan religious identity. This identity has roots in both their ethnic and geographical Western

locations whilst simultaneously connecting globally with others via electronic media, through the shared identity of religion and culture, thereby making them complete members of their religious and political communities.

6.4 *Equality between genders*

The focus group discussed various themes within the generic topic of gender equality in Islam and considered the feminist approach to it. The participants deliberate the physical differences between the genders and how these are addressed in Islam:

Rana - *“They are different but equal in some senses like in all acts of worship there is no difference but in physical actions they are different. Only women can be mothers hence certain roles associated with this and extra responsibilities on men to provide as a result even if the women go out to work.”*

Sara – *“Men are physically stronger than women and hence it’s their duty to go out and earn while for women its optional which makes it easy, even though some women can be strong as well; women are definitely a lot stronger emotionally”.*

The participants recognise from the outset that *Gender equality* is very much a fundamental value in Islam but the way in which equality is viewed is different to mainstream feminism. Badran (2009) acknowledges that Islamic feminism views gender equality as a fundamental Quranic value and that it is essential within the teachings of Islam that there should be equality between males and females and that the rights given to women by God as described in the Quran need to be recognised. This is a sentiment which is endorsed by Rana. This is different to the power struggles of liberal feminists who are continuously fighting to acquire gender equality in mainstream society, which still discriminates against women in several areas. However, both participants identify biological differences which give specific responsibilities to each gender which complement their roles within the frame work of Islam. Defined by Rahman (1980) as gender complementarity, this is explained as the recognition of gender differences that are both natural and socially constructed. These differences complement one another and relations between the sexes are harmonious because of the different skills and attributes each gender naturally possesses (Rahman, 1980).

In Brown’s (2006) interpretation, the acceptance of Islamic identity offers Muslim women equal values and respect through complementarity, without the need to insist

on equal treatment. This is not based on “sameness” but rather on the gendered division of family and community. Due to the unique nature of women, they have been allocated a specific role within society and this is how gender equality is promoted in an Islamic context and understood by the participants (Afkhami, 1999). As mentioned by Rana, women have the choice of becoming mothers and should they chose so or not, Islam provides them with rights of being taken care of by the men of the family. Similarly, Sara highlights the biological difference in physical strength as a marker which allows women the choice of whether to work or not, whereas men have to be financial providers for the family. Even though Sara also recognises that many women can be stronger than men, Islam still recognises these limitations and gives women more liberties. Sara, herself a black belt in karate, is very aware of the fact that some women are physically stronger than men, but accepts these gendered roles through her teachings. These sit comfortably with certain Islamic feminist views but are opposed by the liberal feminist philosophy which does not recognise any differences between genders. Discussing this topic further, the participants talk about balancing their Islamic roles and Western lifestyles:

Rana - “In Islam men are supposed to be the protectors which means they have to provide for the women and look after them, the Prophet PBUH worked to financially support his family as well as did household chores. Women don’t have that financial responsibility and so they have that choice to work more freely. But that’s not what happens in all households particularly those Asian houses where the men are used to having their mums do all the housework and they expect that from their wives, so while the women exercise their freedom of wanting to work, they still have to come and do all the household chores making it very strenuous”.

Sara – “Western Muslim women have fought the same battles as Western feminist and got onto the employment ladder and often faced more barriers being Muslim and having this work against them at times and of different race. But as the Islamic duties demand responsibility of children and house hold while husbands provide they are caught in between the two worlds making it harder for themselves”.

Both Rana and Sara acknowledged that Islam has given them the freedom of choosing to work should they want to. They also acknowledged that most Muslim women living in the West are unconsciously programmed with the Western feminist ideas of trying to climb the career ladder, to the extent that they forget to balance their gendered roles and hence end up taking too much upon themselves. Economic progress plays a large role in influencing value systems towards the direction of gender equality (Staeheli

and Martin, 2000) allowing more Muslim women to exercise their right to education and employment. Staeheli and Martin further explain that this cultural shift can be seen as a post modernization form of survival through self-expression, leading to improvements in women's position and increasing gender equality. Abu-Ali and Reisen (1999) attribute this to exposure to Western culture, where it is more acceptable for women to be empowered and assertive in their attitudes and question gender equality. This means that Muslim women must then balance their intersectional identities when facing gender discrimination based on cultural norms. As an example of this Rana has found that in her experience men do not help out in the house, something which is contrary to the teachings of Islam. Similarly, Sara believes that Muslim women face gendered discrimination as a result of the intersectionality of race and gender in work. More insights into gender inequalities included:

Rana - *"I think Muslim women are confused. Women are given education and empowerment from a young age. They go on to universities and get jobs and so on. They are so independent that can be a problem. When women become independent then sometimes it becomes overpowering in a relationship (between husband and wife)"*.

Sara - *"But I think these days' women do need to be independent because men are not being men. They are not taking their responsibilities right and maybe that's because women are not allowing them to do so, they take the back seat and enforce women to take the lead"*.

Zahra- *"Because women these days are working, looking after the children and homes and it's a lot of responsibility and the man is just working and that not seen as enough anymore"*.

Mona - *"I think that's where it clashes because both have to work and then have to divide all the responsibilities equally. But if there isn't that equal understanding, there is a problem especially for a woman mentally and physically as she balances her Islamic duties while maintaining a strong Western feminist identity"*.

All the participants discuss the challenges of being a strong religiously gendered woman within a Western context, which can cause confusion in their daily lives as the two systems clash. The Western feminist approach requires women to compete with men in every aspect of life, something which these women are doing, but their Islamic identities simultaneously reinforce the religious duties of maintaining the home and bearing responsibility for the family. The two appear to clash. Feminists argue that everyday routines for women are dull and trivial, and that they are bound by power structures that limit and confine them, which are created and recreated by patriarchy

(Rose, 1993). Rose also states that feminist geographers stress the fact that the involvement of women in public spaces is hindered by the claim that women should be restricted to the private, domestic arena. The group of participants clearly became confused, as they felt that “empowerment” led to a gender imbalance in relationships! As can be clearly seen from the previous accounts, the participants consider this to be something which is difficult to manage.

Elsewhere, Desbiens (1999) states that there has been much feminist concentration on analysing public spaces and domestic life and the segregation of these two spaces. This segregation emanates from the patriarchal environments which form these spaces and is maintained through various interpretations, based on the male and female subjectivities. Feminist geographers recognise that gender boundaries exist for women in fields such as employment, education and public life and are reinforced and policed through the patriarchal interpretation of values and culture. These place-bound structures construct segregated roles and networks which play a crucial role in the domestic life of childcare responsibilities and employment (Hanson and Pratt, 2003). Participants questioned such boundaries, as they grappled with gender roles in the margins of Islam and the West:

Sara- “Like the prophet’s wife Khadija (may God be pleased with her) never made prophet Mohammad (pbuh) feel less superior to him and he never made her feel he was stronger than her. They had a relationship of respect and she didn’t scratch his ego because men are very sensitive when it comes to their ego”.

Rana - “So it depends on how independent women make their husbands feel. As they could dent their ego by making them feel less important or inferior”.

This seemed to be a very conservative view held by the participants, arising from religious understanding as well as traditional values. As second-generation Muslims (Brinkerhoff and Mackie, 1985) these participants are changing the meaning of conservative gender roles. In search of their “true” Muslim identity, they draw a line between religious and traditional norms. As described by Dwyer (2000) in gendered expectations, women are seen to be the guardians of religious and cultural reliability. This can be seen as the participants express the views that they have to tread carefully between their Western independent feminist experiences whilst also upholding the traditional roles within marriage and families.

In the following sections, the participants explore the gender equality beliefs in specific areas of Islamic rituals which affect women because of their gendered identities. The first section to be explored is that of inheritance, followed by divorce and polygamy.

6.4.1 *Inheritance*

Mona - “The law of inheritance in Islam does give more to men than women on the understanding that men will always look after the needs of the women and that’s why they get more. A brother gets more than sisters because he will look after his sisters always and the sisters shouldn’t feel the need to work to provide for herself and if she is married and the marriage is in trouble then the brother will support her. The man will also support his mother entirely and that’s why the law is such”.

Zahra - “But when the men don’t hold up their duties then it’s an issue with practice of the law not the law itself. There are cases in Saudi courts where women are taking their brothers to court who have taken more share from them but have not provided for the sisters and the court has decided to divide the property in half instead of more share for the brothers”.

Rana- “If the rules are not being followed, then the problem is with implementation. Islam is fair and it recognises rights responsibilities and oppression. Like in Islam if a homeless person steals he is not meant to be punished as the state should provide for his needs but if another person that has no need to steal but does it then punishment is valid”.

Examining the comments made by participants regarding the inheritance laws, there do not seem to be any issues with the fundamentals of the laws. However, as in previous instances, the participants have highlighted the implementation of the law as being an issue. They reflect on the practices which women are challenging in order to attain their rights, even if it has to be achieved by such legal routes of taking family members to court to demand justice. Badran (2009, 215) clarifies that some Islamic feminists distinguish between sharia and the divine laws where the principles are derived from and limitations through the executions and interpretation based on men’s perspective. The participants felt that their religion reflected a fair representation of the laws around inheritance and that there is even room to challenge practices where these are not being implemented accurately. As stated by Rab and Mahmud (2018), Islam reformed the patriarchal systems around inheritance for women, in order to reflect modern realities. Due to the interpretations of the laws there has been recent reform in many countries which provides even more equality for women than previously (Rab and Mahmud, 2018). Rana clarified this point by stating that strong

Muslim women are well versed in their religious teachings and are able to raise challenges if their rights are not being respected.

The comments made by the participants align with Grech (2014) and the description of Islamic feminists as those who believe and promote the timeless meaning of the Quran and want to promote its true message. They also want to recover the true understanding of the text from the hadith and the Sunnah (practices and sayings of the prophet Mohammad Pbuh) hence the request to examine the ways in which the laws are being implemented for women, in order to ensure equality as ordained in the Shairah. Feminist geographers have examined the role of gender in relation to identity construction and implementation while considering the interaction of power relation with gender, race, ethnicity and, in the case of these participants, their religion (Massey, 1994). Participants identified that some Muslim women were oppressed because they were not being given their religious rights. They were therefore in favour of taking on the role of activist, claiming these rights back by a variety of means.

6.4.2 *Divorce and Polygamy*

Whilst considering gender equality issues, the participants discussed the two most challenging topics of divorce and polygamy in Islam:

Sara - "To be fair the way the cases are dealt with it is made easier for men but that's not because it's implemented correctly again coming down to the way we practice the rules. There are cases where women have applied for divorces and it's been made hard even though the men are abusive".

Zahra - "It all comes down to the understanding of Islam and lack of it".

Rana - It's a right Allah has given both men and women so the processes should be straight forward for both. Islam makes it easy but how it's applied nowadays just makes it really difficult for women.

When looking at matters of divorce, as with the previously mentioned issue of inheritance, the participants recognise that the implementations of Islamic rules leaves women feeling like secondary citizens. Because these practices are rooted in a patriarchal base, there is a need for Islamic feminism. Sara accepts that the rights of divorce are granted to women by Islam, yet in practice notes that it is not an easy process for the women. Zahra states that a lack of understanding about their faith may make it difficult for these women to firmly establish their positions. Research states that whilst most Muslims have read the Quran they have not understood it because it

is written in Arabic (Wagner et al., 2012). This might explain why participants felt that even though Islam gave rights to divorce, these rights were not properly implemented. The same research found that post 9/11 most Muslims wanted to make their religion more accessible, as it became a marker of Muslim identity. Women in particular feel they are unable to openly practice their complete identity because their rights, such as the right to divorce, are being taken away by a patriarchal interpretation of the faith. The participants recognise that such discriminatory practices do not correspond to the teachings of Islam, as divorce can be used as a way of discriminating against women in Muslim communities (Mashhour, 2005). Hence the need to look again at such practices and how these sacred texts are interpreted around such sensitive topics within a changing social context.

When discussing polygamy, the participants contributed the following:

Mona - "Like just thinking about polygamy, it's been around forever and back in Prophet's time and when it was limited to no more than four wives. I can see the context in which it was discussed and the purpose of it. The proper rules around it are very fair to all the women involved in it, but again the implementation we see today it when the rights of one are taken away to give to another and that's not how it's meant to be".

Zahra - "You have to be equal in your wealth, time, and affection. Can men really do that especially in such a materialistic world we live, can a man really be fair and fulfil the needs of one wife or more completely satisfying them? I think men struggle to keep one wife happy these days and that's the condition for it".

Sara - "Many men say they are helping women who are in unfortunate circumstances (i.e. widows or fleeing from poverty stricken circumstances) then why don't they give them charity but many women want more than just money, they want security and safety and protection. It comes back to that authority protective figure. We have made the concept harder these days but thinking of it differently. There are so many women who are unable to find suitable partners and are desperate for companionship and marriage. We have just become more selfish I guess".

Mona puts her understanding in context, by observing that a pre- Islamic practice limited the number of wives to four, with the one condition that each should be treated fairly. If that is not possible, then only one wife should be permitted (Mashhour, 2005). This is one of the issues that feminists often use to portray Islam as a "clash of civilisations" regarding the human rights of Muslims in marriage (Rehman, 2005). As polyandry is not permitted for Muslim women, it did not seem to be an issue for the

participants in the group. Most did not see it as a gender issue. As the participants acknowledged, polygamy was permitted in certain circumstances with specific conditions around equal treatment and is very strict in specifying that if men feel they are unable to adhere to these rules they should only marry one wife. Therefore, polygamy is an exception and monogamy is the norm in Islam. Zahra recognise the limitation of polygamy in the firm restrictions and sanctions associated with it (Rehman, 2007) but as in other areas, it can be interpreted to suit the whims and desires of men in society, whilst simultaneously infringing on the rights of women.

Sara refers to the economic stability that could be a motive for some polygamous marriages, as some women who are living in poverty might look for more than charitable handouts. Sara suggests that this is something that could work for women who are looking for more stability, but only if implemented within the rules of Islam. Muslim feminists identify the source of women's oppression as being the implementation of Islamic laws. Similarly, the participants uphold the rulings from the sacred texts, but disapprove of the male-controlled manner in which they are practiced, which is unjust and infringes upon women's rights.

6.5 Conclusion - Are You a Feminist?

This chapter began by exploring the position of feminism in Islam and analysed the position of participants who negotiate their identities based on the concepts of both their religious gendered identities and feminist ideologies. These following two contrasting comments contribute further to these findings:

Sara - "I believe I am a 100% Muslim feminist and I can see in many situations it comes out when the rights given by God are taken away from us. But I take a back seat when it comes to proving I am equal to men because there are aspects where in the eyes of God I am equal but physically we are different".

Zahra - "I would say I am not a feminist because I don't need that word to ask for my Rights that have been given already to me. I am a Muslim women and that is enough to qualify me for equality and justice".

The above views illustrate the religious and secularist divide of feminism and the interpretation of Islam. Badran (2009) believes that the two concepts of feminism and Islam are not diametrically opposed. Although they might be divided on some issues, there are numerous points where they cross over. Sara and Zahra clearly show that in some Muslim societies, Islamic feminism is both accepted and respected. Badran's

interpretation of Islamic feminism emphasises the points made by participants throughout the research. They uphold the traditional practices of Islam and reject all male interpretations and practices that oppose women.

Throughout the research the participants have not clearly identified with either liberal feminism or Islamic feminism. Grech (2014) points out that Islamic feminists claim that the Muslim Ummah is a space to be shared by both males and females, and that the latter should not be excluded from it. He believes that it promotes a women friendly understanding of Islam, which becomes diluted in a male dominant interpretation and portrayal of the religion. Due to the relatively privileged position of living in the West, participants generally felt that, as empowered young Western Muslim women, they are able to lead their lives as they wish, although they did at times describe some challenging attitudes at home and within their community. It seems to be women living in Muslim lands who feel generally disempowered and the participants did not feel the need to identify with a notion of feminism as radical as Cook's (2000).

From the various discussions, points raised and academic writing, one comes to question whether an empowered Western Muslim woman should have to position herself as either an Islamic feminist or a secular mainstream feminist. Can one be simply a Muslim? Participants do not want to explicitly align with Western feminism and rather feel that their strong identity as a Muslim woman is enough to describe them. They uphold their strong position within their communities, whilst always maintaining their common goals and purpose and enjoying full participation in every day spaces with men.

Within this chapter the participants of this research made a significant contribution to areas of research which had not previously received a great deal of attention from feminist geographers (Monk and Hanson, 1982). The participants have discussed how they negotiate their identities as strong Muslim women within patriarchal societies, in order to reclaim their place within the wider Western context. As second generation Muslim women living in the West, they feel sufficiently empowered to distinguish between culturally oppressive practices and true Islamic teachings. Because of their extensive knowledge of Islam, these participants feel that they are in a stronger position to question the gendered inequalities which stem from traditional cultural norms, in particular the much contested themes of inheritance, divorce and polygamy.

Chapter 7.0 Belonging

7.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the sense of belonging felt by each of the research participants, and their perception of where “home” is. It also examines the reasons why they think of these different places and spaces as “homes”. The concept of home is defined as a space of belonging for some, and yet it can also be a place where others may feel alienated. It is a place where human beings feel emotionally connected as well as being where they experience relationships and meanings (Blunt and Varley, 2004). Belonging also directly connects identity to space, linking the emotional connection of a person with a specific place (Inalhan and Finch, 2004). Research conducted by Lyons (2018) suggests that home is the key element that makes people practice their everyday identities in specific spaces. Blunt and Varley (2004) consider home in general to be a confined location, but at other times the geographies of home cross over into symbolic places. A key element in this research is that home should be viewed in its broader sense, in relation to places and landscapes. However, as argued by Blunt (2005) home is also a physical material space where everyday practices are experienced through social interactions and preserved with memories and emotions.

The current research connects home to a wider sense of belonging. Yuval-Davies (2006) states that belonging is a very personal feeling of being at home, connecting it to a place - belongingness also acknowledged by Antonsich (2010). This can be achieved by developing relationships within neighbourhoods, or any other geographical spaces where the participants may interact daily, thereby developing an emotional relationship that contributes to their overall sense of belonging (Den Besten, 2010).

Furthermore, this research goes on to look at how space impacts upon the emotional geographies of the participants, and how it contributes to their sense of belonging to a national identity. This connects their sense of belonging to one defined as a membership of a group or a place, identifying it as a method of establishing commonalities or differences with people around them (Gregory et al. 2011). In this chapter the participants explore their attachment to nation through places, people and cultural values, which are all encompassed in their sense of belonging, comprising citizenship, nationhood, gender and ethnicity (Bhimji, 2008).

The chapter will also explore how the participants form a wider connection with home through a formal membership structure of citizenship as outlined by Antonsich (2010). The following description of home indicates that home is not merely limited to a domestic space, a perception which has been criticised by feminist authors in the past as they view this as reproducing gendered and patriarchal relations (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Rather, home is here regarded as the wider symbolic belonging to a place of familiarity, comfort and security, with an emotional connection to the places and people surrounding it. Hence the description by Yuval-Davies (2006, 197) linking home to the wider sense of belonging to a national identity.

Even though there exists a large body of work, which examines both the national and religious identity of people who are both Muslim and British (Hopkins 2007), there has been little focus on how different spatialities have impacted upon the embodied experience, specifically in relation to feelings of a national or sense of belonging. Lyons' (2018) research in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, has gone some way towards redressing this balance, exploring as it does, how British Muslim women experienced and embodied their national and religious identities, through everyday emotional embodied identities. However, as noted in chapter 2, to date there has been very little research on young Muslim women and their Welsh identity in particular. The outcomes of this research also differs slightly from the results of Lyons' (2018) study, where the participants had strong connections with their country of origin. When examining the results later, it will be made apparent that the participants involved in this research are more strongly connected to both their religious and national Welsh or British identity. This is affirmed by Jones (2010), who has conducted research on Muslims living in rural West Wales, and states that Muslims in Wales have been the subject of far less research than those in living in Scotland or England. Hence this current research intends to go some way towards covering the minority national identity.

This chapter will consider the markers that participants identify as being Welsh, and their affiliation of home as being Wales or Swansea. Research done by Deborah Phillips (2009) considering homes as a space of belonging, has previously concentrated on the experiences of Muslim women living in England, whereas this present research focuses on Swansea's much smaller Muslim population. Hence, this research fills a void in existing research into the feelings of belonging experienced by

those participants living in this part of Wales, and the impact it has on their sense of national identity.

Lyons (2018) also notes the absence of the voices of young people in research on identity. She states that this is due to the assumption that young people are unable to understand or describe the embodied geopolitical narrative around national or religious identity. However, in the current and previous chapters of this thesis, it is clear that the young people involved are well able to convey their own experiences of how their religious identity intersects with both their gender and their ethnic and national identity. In this chapter, they will be sharing their own experiences of how events occurring around the world can impact upon their everyday experiences of national identity, in a geopolitical account. It will go some way toward exemplifying how these young participants explain the relationship between their religious identity and specific spaces, and how these particular places impact on their embodied experience of both their religious and national identity.

The chapter will also consider Islamophobia as being a marker for disrupting the participants' sense of belonging, and the factors that they have identified as causes of such Islamophobia. There are examples of shared experiences of Islamophobia. As explained by Allen (2015), for Muslim women being victims of Islamophobia is a far from new experience, and ongoing research looks at such victimisation as being a fact of life for many today. This particular chapter however, touches on some of the experiences that the participants shared as part of their daily lives, which impact on their sense of belonging in a broader Welsh context.

The final part of the chapter compares participants' values (religious and cultural) with wider British values, noting any differences and similarities and considering their sense of belonging accordingly. It explores the ethical framework by which participants choose to live their lives alongside the wider community, and how they feel a sense of belonging with these communities and spaces, through everyday practices and interactions (Billaud, 2016).

7.2 Home is Swansea and Wales

From the outset, the participants identified a number of key markers which helped them to create a sense of belonging, and identify with what they envisage as "home". Some of the responses are as follows:

Sara - *“When you see Wales in comparison to London, and bigger cities you realise the differences, the people, and the vibes. With Wales there is a vibe, because we have more green, there is more sheep and more nature, so I feel Welsh people are more in touch with nature and this is why I feel Welsh people are more real, more raw and we appreciate our nature, whereas Londoners are caught up in their congested cities so they forget nature and that’s why Welsh people are so special”*.

Maliha - *“People here are just known faces with known surroundings you know neighbours and your family. When visiting family in England my cousins pick up differences we have. I don’t feel much different but obviously some areas in England have more diverse people and you feel more comfortable but it’s obviously the busyness of London when compared to Swansea is a lot more quieter but more open and spacious. People always make a comment about how quiet Swansea is and that’s what feels normal to me”*.

Shakira - *“Welshness comes out more when travelling to England. Our accents are made of fun by our cousins. There is heavier air, there is more smog and you can feel it and remembering our country’s air is a lot fresher and has nicer landscapes. When you go to major cities and realise Wales is much nicer. I feel more proud to be from Swansea, even though Cardiff is nicer and is so much more diverse I love that but in Cardiff Uni there is sports competitions with Swansea Uni and they love to have banter that they are better than Swansea and there is chant from Cardiff Uni “your dad works for my dad” but I say no because I do get protective about Swansea but knowing that we have the beaches and Cardiff doesn’t have that comes out”*.

Participants clearly identified with Swansea in Wales as being a relatively distinctive space, not least when comparing Swansea to London and other cities. They cited several things which prevent them from feeling a sense of belonging in the larger cities, which serves to strengthen a deeper connection to Swansea and Wales as a whole. One common recurring theme is that of people, known faces and family, who exist within a broadly green neighbourhood of familiar surroundings. Language and accents also connect individuals to social group membership and impart a sense of belonging regionally (Hewstone, Hantzi and Johnston, 1991). The Welsh accent of the participants is often remarked upon, especially when they travel outside of Wales. The quietness and greenery of Wales provide markers for it being the chosen national identity. As emphasised by Jones and Merriman (2012), national identity is developed through connections with everyday geographical spaces. Each of the participants compare bigger cities with the unique spaces of home which has a mix of green landscapes, quiet, open spaces, and the familiarity and intimacy of small and quiet neighbourhoods. As three respondents put it:

Shakira *“I feel like people in Swansea are friendly, when I was younger people would smile at you when walking down the road. When travelling in Birmingham I found it strange that people wouldn’t do that and in London people are more private but I guess that’s how the British mentality is, is very private and proud. It’s like the British mentality to expect people to speak English and not making effort to learn other languages assuming English is a global language. When travelling abroad and asked about identity I always say British because that’s where we are from not Bangladeshi because I am not from there, I wasn’t born there and I didn’t grow up there. I wouldn’t know what it’s like everything I know about Bangladesh is from the news whether it be politics or anything else so I can’t speak like I am from there I can only speak from a British perspective or even more specific from a Welsh perspective”*.

Shaista- *“I am proud of being Welsh and when I am abroad and people ask me where I am from I say Wales then I know due to my appearance they dig deeper in which case I will say British Pakistani because many people don’t know where Wales is”*.

“Even though I have visited Pakistan several times, home is Swansea. I can’t get used to the systems there, the way people interact there and it’s very frustrating. Being born and brought up here we are very used to the systems here and can’t cope there”.

Maliha - *“I guess I like having our own language our own culture. When Wales is playing England I want Wales to win obviously and if it was playing Bangladesh I would still want Wales to win because I was born here, it’s my team”*.

In the above responses, the participants are not immediately accepted as British or Welsh by other people, and have to justify their national identity because of other people’s assumptions based on their ethnic or racial appearance. This is due to the fact that the participants belong to the second generation in Britain and Wales and have therefore less connection with their countries of origin, and identify more strongly with their national identity. In Lyons’ (2018) research there are some similar experiences - some of the participants link their national identity to a place of birth, which therefore makes them feel British whilst their culture at home means that they can simultaneously feel partly Bengali or Pakistani. For these current participants however, the fact that they were born in Swansea has created more of a sense of belonging to Wales than any other place. Even though the participants identified having connections to other places due to their ethnic origin, they still chose Wales and Swansea as their national and local identity. Closs Stephens (2016) mentions the feeling of belonging and how it manifests within their everyday lives, something which is further accentuated by Ahmed (2001). The emotional connection described by

participants below plays a crucial role in the attachment to a collective national identity. These emotional bonds attach individuals with communities, and bodily spaces with social spaces. Thus:

Hadil - *“home is Swansea and it’s because of the beach, I grew up looking at the beach playing on watching it every day. It’s a huge part of my life. Its serenity, it brings peace to me soul. I have so much Welsh banter with two of my colleagues who are from England especially when it comes to sports or stereotypes”*.

Samira- *“I feel a connection with Swansea, a deeper connection with its people. I feel safe and looked after”*.

Maliha- *“Home is Swansea, been brought up here. The surroundings, the people all feels like a familiar association and the norm. And the independence here because in Bangladesh it’s not very safe for women to travel late at night or go shopping, when you are in town its crazy busy its best to be with someone and not to be alone whereas here I feel safe and also the independence of having a car whereas there (Bangladesh) not many women drive but having my own car here is different. Like me just going to supermarket and getting my own food but there it was my dad he had to go get everything”*.

The participants described their experiences as emotional connections, with the emotional images of known spaces playing a huge role in connecting and reinforcing their personal identity with the communities of Swansea. It is described by Ahmed (2001) as an emotional bond that is developed through engagement with people from the communities around them, which enables the participants to form a strong sense of belonging through a shared connection. Lyons (2018) similarly describes this entanglement of emotions to spaces as contributing to shaping identity, linking ties with other people and strengthening their national identity in a shared space. Thus, participants quoted above, emphasise the feeling of safety and freedom which comes from living in Wales, which is absent in other places. Billig (1995) studies the importance of routine, day-to-day practises and symbols, and states that these play a key role in creating a sense of nationalism, hence the participant’s affirmation that they feel comfortable in Swansea and Wales generally. It should also be noted that the participants highlight their deeper connection to the city of Swansea and its landscapes, reflecting Jones and Merriman’s (2009) work that maintains that local places and landscapes play a key role in the representation of nations in meaningful ways.

In addition to positive emotional spaces, participants also relate to connections developed with family, friends, and neighbours and other people around us who make us feel that we belong. As described by Phillips (2009), interactions between self,

family and community are integral to the concept of home. And yet, the personalised concept of home is a very private, intimate and closed space which creates a very strong emotional attachment. These feelings are generated by every day experiences which in turn connect to create an inner identity. As described by Closs Stephens (2015), homes offer the space to negotiate national identities, by pulling apart the multiple facets of identity and achieving an understanding of identity that creates the most sense of belonging through embodied experiences. The quotes below prove the participants connection to home, because of their closeness to the people around them:

Maliha - "Because Swansea is home, when driving back to Swansea straight away it feels I am home as soon as I see Port Talbot industries, I miss the comforts the TV, mum's cooked food and all the other comforts like my room I miss when studying away from home. In Cardiff there is the responsibility of having to cook my own food and cooking curry is hard so my mum always gives me cooked curry to take with me and that's nice a taste of home. I like Cardiff because it's got everything but I miss my mum and on a nice day me and my friends always wish we could go to the beach. And wherever I see pictures of beaches it will always remind me of home and it will always be part of my childhood and growing up in Swansea".

Zahra - "I feel most sense of belonging in Swansea. I don't consider a house as home but more like cities where I feel a connection. Swansea is where I discovered myself through the university and the Muslim community and it contributed hugely to who I am now".

Zubeda - "Swansea is home, the people of Swansea are my people my community, whatever happens here effects not only wider community but me as well as this is my city".

Fatima - "I belong in Swansea, I have never faced any discrimination here, and I have ever only felt love from neighbours, from school. We still very close to our neighbours who celebrate all occasions with us and feel part of our wider family. In school everyone used to say what beautiful skin colour you have I felt so special".

The participants also related to links developed with the wider community which they still regarded as their own community. This was then part of the social identity enforced by group membership and further developed through association with others and the way in which they live, talk and relate (Wagner et al., 2012). The embodied experiences of discovering self -identity through specific spaces, such as university or the comforts of living at home, creates a strong sense of belonging, as stated by Maliha and Zahra. This is further affirmed by Jones and Merriman (2009) who maintain that the reality of everyday life, built as it is on activities and transactions, plays a key role in the creation of a sense of national belonging. This can also be seen by the emotional

connections within neighbourhoods and wider community, as experienced by Zubeda and Fatima. This sense of a shared connection has further enhanced their sense of belonging, affirming their acceptance into this specific place. This is described by Ahmed (2009) as the psychic and social connection between the individual and collective, the creation of an emotional bond through effective encounters which gives focus to their identity.

Nonetheless, outside this overall dominant narrative, there were still some participants who, even though born in Wales, rather more had mixed views on their sense of belonging:

Hajar - *“I see home as Yemen as I don’t associate home with where you were born or spent your childhood but where your roots are from and I have connection of blood with Yemen even though I haven’t been there much”*.

Saba - *“home is Pakistan as well as Swansea. I feel a sense of belonging in Pakistan because of my roots and wider family connections but Swansea is where I was born and live and grew up and have friends and everyone that matters to me so dearly”*.

Nada *“I think home is Swansea because I found myself here. But I think it’s hard to fit in entirely anywhere, when I am here I feel I don’t fit in totally and when I am in Sudan I feel I don’t fit in there either”*.

It can be seen that for some participants, home is a place where the complexities and contradictions of national belonging exist (Bruce, 2014) where nationalism is more closely connected to different spaces through embodied emotional association. The narratives told by these participants challenge the fixed diasporic identities. As Dwyer (2000) notes in her research, the connections that participants create across boundaries, suggests a new form of cultural identity that surpasses national boundaries. Lyons (2018) explains that a nationalism narrative always assumes that there will be a national identity, but it does not account for experiences like that of Nada, who at times feels no national identity at all. However, it is important to recognise the general fluidity of national identities, as can be clearly illustrated through the experiences of the participants. Overall though, as exemplified by both Saba and Nada, Swansea still occupies a central role in the identity of the participants. Lyons (2018, pp. 61) further supports this, stating that national belonging is not merely felt or experienced, but it is also about “being”, “feeling” and “encountering” through emotional nuances. It is this which is described in such an interesting way by the participants.

In summation, the participants demonstrated how the emotional connections of belonging are a major factor when creating the sense of belonging to any specific place. As McCormack (2013) states, it is only through affective encounters with bodies and spaces that such belonging takes life, even when there are strong connections rooted in other places, which keep them connected and create a mixed sense of belonging. The relationships developed through family heritage create emotional bonds that enable a multiplicity of national feeling. It is these feelings that influence the performance of national identity.

Whilst participants generally had a clear sense of national identity developed through links with family, friends, neighbours and familiar surroundings, such relational identities are fluid and are subject to constant change. As Bruce (2014) observes, this is due to being constantly subject to different emotions and feelings of belonging. The following section will explore some key negative factors that can cause such feelings to change.

7.3 Experiences of Islamophobia and Racism

Even though there is already a huge amount of interdisciplinary research on Islamophobia, the present research is unique in that it contributes from the point of view of Welsh and Muslim young women. Studies such as the one conducted by Ryan (2011) looks at the experiences of older, recently arrived migrant and refugee women living in London. Another study conducted by Zempi (2016) looks at experiences of veiled Muslim women who were victims of Islamophobic hate crime. Zempi also states that the field work for this study was conducted in 2011 and 2012, which places it slightly out of date. As is the case with a lot of previous research, there is also the question of the “outsider” positionality. As highlighted in Chapter 3 of the current research, the participants felt very comfortable when speaking to the researcher as they came from similar backgrounds. This research therefore goes some way towards reflecting the experiences of young Muslim women within the current hostile climate, from the perspective of an insider. Allen (2015) conducted research into the experiences of veiled Muslim women who were victims of Islamophobia, stating that most Muslim women chose not to report their experiences due to fear and mistrust. This was not the case with the current research, as the researcher in this case, was a Muslim and herself had first -hand experience of Islamophobia. Considering work

published since 9/11, the lived experiences of participants who have grown up through these turbulent times has been generally critical, since this disaster had a huge impact on how Muslims and Islam were viewed across the world. The effects of geopolitical events go beyond the spatio-temporal moment (Lyons, 2018) and touch the everyday lives of the participants in a rather more subtle way. This section of the chapter looks at how associated racism, and Islamophobia in particular, act as main markers of an emotional connection with national identities, and the loss of a sense of belonging. Furthermore, by considering gendered Islamophobia through the embodied experiences of the participants, this section can consider the parts played by race, gender and religion. The topics of both Islamophobia and racism came up in both the one-to-one interviews and the focus group discussions.

7.3.1 General Experiences of Islamophobia/ Racism

When narrating events, participants often used the two terms “racist” and “Islamophobic”. Garner and Selod (2014: 11) here note how religion is “raced” and Muslims are “racialized”, claiming explicitly that Islamophobia is a form of racism. “Racialisation” thus represents an acceptable way to probe the experiences of the young Muslim women participating in this research. Garner and Selod (2014) also described how racism is seen as dynamic and specific to historical, geographical and political contexts. For the purposes of this study, all the incidents considered to be racist, are placed within the wider context of Islamophobia, as they are incidents experienced by Muslim women (most of whom were clearly dressed in Islamic clothing) living in Wales, thereby giving it a different geographical context. Unlike the participants of Garner and Selod, the participants of my research don't feel foreigners or less British even though they have also been exposed to Islamophobia.

In the last decade there has been growing evidence that Muslims are increasingly being mistreated because of prejudice (Everett et al., 2015). This has been felt especially by Muslim women (Allen, 2013), because they wear clothing associated with Islam, which is illustrated by the wider experiences of the participants:

Sara- “A lot of racist comments were made especially when we were young, name calling in reference to our skin colour, it was quite hurtful at the time, I remember often going home very upset and angry at myself and why I was this way, this colour, I remember another friend of mine started to self-harm as she hated her skin colour but then with time you just learn to live with it and even

though it's not acceptable because it's unacceptable for anyone to be racist but it makes you thick skinned".

Hadil - "you get those odd looks when you walk down Sandfields, sometimes people shout out random words at you like terrorist, or bomb alert. But once I remember me and my sister were walking to the mosque and this guy looked at us and then he came over and shouted abuse and then spat at my sister's hijab. She felt so hurt and dirty she cried for days after. It really made me sad to think someone thought of us as so low only because of our religion it was such a degrading experience".

Hadiya- "I have had cars chasing me shouting abusive words like Pakis and another time I got chased along with my friends until we went into an office building and even then they kept banging on the door calling us refugees get out of here your only here taking our jobs and benefits. That's just hate speech and I don't want that to define my existence".

Focus group respondent - "My daughters have had racial abuse and were told by other children we don't want to be friends with Blacks or Muslims and they are both Black and Muslims, it really scarred them. My youngest daughter suffered from anxiety and depression as she was constantly being picked on in her junior school for being Muslim. They would even tell her to her face that they wouldn't invite her to their birthday parties because she was a dirty Muslim."

Hadiya described such events in a very matter of fact way. Such incidents are a common occurrence in her life and no longer anger her. Other participants also aired similar views, affirming that incidents such as this would never stop them from living their lives the way they wanted to. However, when the Focus group respondent was describing the experiences of her daughters, her body language, sitting back from the table, indicated her profound sadness. Having to deal with the lasting effect such incidents have had on her daughters had clearly hurt her greatly. These participants are left to negotiate their positions through the multiple layers of discrimination they incur, due to the intersectionality of their identities, with markers such as race, religion and gender playing a key role. This clearly shows the foundations of Crenshaws' (1991) studies of intersectionality and the multiple axes of oppression faced by women of race while they navigate their way through these spaces in their everyday lives. The bodies of these participants are religiously marked in a way that is different to the main stream, with elements of race, as well as their gender positioning them in a disadvantageous and unequal location within the places they move around in. They embody their intersectional identities through their skin, gender and religious attire, which are not accepted in some social spaces.

Distressing responses such as these make clear that even though the participants did not think of these incidents as having a huge impact, they clearly affected their wellbeing for a time: being made to feel alien, worthless, losing their feeling of self-worth and confidence. When the group identity of a minority is threatened, it redefines its membership through a clearly defined identity in order to regain feelings of worthiness in a hostile social or psychological environment (Wagner et al., 2012). Clearly incidents such as these have led to the participants becoming thick skinned whilst continuing to grow and develop as strong individual Muslim women living in Wales. A well-defined shared identity can strengthen feelings of worthiness in an environment that is not socially accepting (Wagner et al., 2012). This invokes the politics of otherness, constructed to make people from different racial backgrounds feel excluded from the wider national collective and therefore viewed as not being entitled.

Moreover, when such incidents occur in public places such as streets and parks, they usually have a short term effect but when incidents occur in the workplace or in schools or neighbourhoods, then the impact can be more lasting:

Fatiha - "when I worked in DVLA my colleagues treated me in a nasty manner, they would make fun of me because my dad used to come and pick me from work and they would call him Usama bin Laden due to his beard. They wouldn't talk to me much during work and would often make fun of my hijab. I found their treatment very hurtful as it went on for a while until I left that job. Even on our street two doors from our house we had a neighbour who was always nasty to us constantly telling us to go back to our country. My dad tried very hard to calm her down on many occasions taking food for her and gifts and being generally kind but she would always say really nasty things like in wars we killed people like you and that the neighbourhood was much nicer before you moved in. We didn't have any other problems it was just this one neighbour but it made it so awkward for us until we moved".

Focus Group respondent - "In this particular work place, my colleagues made me unwelcomed by just keeping their distance from me. Ensuring I wasn't part of any of the social activities as they would all take place in pubs and they often made inappropriate sexual jokes. Whenever I would get picked up by my dad they would always say things like is that your husband because isn't it in your religion to marry really old men and laugh about it."

Focus group respondent - "In school in Religious Education classes students are not being taught the right knowledge of Islam which leads to greater misunderstandings about Islam. The perception of Islam being taught in schools is inaccurate and is going on without being challenged".

Focus group respondent - *“Also when racist fights occur in schools or racist comments are made, they go unchallenged hence increasing the misunderstanding further”*.

The experiences mentioned above are echoed by Aziz (2014) stating that female employees or students often fall under the multiple intersections of identity, therefore facing pressure at work because the dominant group’s expectancies of how these women should behave professionally is based around stereotypes. Often Muslim women are associated with the stereotypes of “terrorist”, “disloyal”, and “foreign” or “oppressed”. The responses from both Fatiha and the focus group respondent show that they were both targets of stereotypical jokes, either about being oppressed or being linked to terrorism. Aziz (2014) also mentions that minority employees are often expected to dress or copy the values of the dominant group in order to be accepted. If they do not, then they risk being stigmatised or discriminated against and made to feel like an outsider. For the focus group participant, the fact that she did not take part in social activities like going to the pub, or enjoy inappropriate jokes meant that she felt very uncomfortable and had no sense of belonging in her work place. This relates to socio-spatial exclusion faced in these places by the participants linking it to politics of belonging (Astonsich, 2010). The fact that their colleagues did not recognise them as an integral part of the work community and that their employers did not address the diversity of their workforce, clearly led to feelings of alienation.

However, it can be seen from the above responses that stereotyping and discrimination against the participants only served to increase their stability in their collective group identity; coming together as a collective to compete with the outer group through a stronger social representation (Wagner et al., 2012). They have stated that they try not to let such comments or actions stop them focussing on their own positive social identity and strive to find ways to re-represent themselves, while still protecting their own self-worth and belonging.

7.3.2 Dress/ appearance (Hijab/ Veil and Gender)

As recognised in the literature (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012), negative experiences such as these are a result of the derogatory and even malicious representation of Muslims in the media. There has been a specific focus on the fact that Muslim women are oppressed and need to be liberated from the religion, and also that anyone dressed in Islamic clothing should be seen as an outsider and not trusted (Ahmed and Matthes,

2016). Many participants have confirmed similar instances of being made to feel as an outsider due to either their racial appearance or the fact that they observe their Islamic dress code. For example:

Maliha - *“It makes it harder to go out in a hijab, I smile at someone and get a dirty look so it does make it harder but it makes me feel stronger because I am not going to compromise my faith to please someone else”*.

Focus Group respondent – *“I have often been told to remove this tea towel off my head. Once in town a group of men asked me if I kept a bomb under that... I have also been called Usama Bin Laden’s wife! I have been told on numerous occasions I don’t belong here and that I should go back to where I came from!”*

Focus group respondent -*“My racist incident was having a group of boys peeing on me on a ride in Swansea Winter Wonderland and I only realised when I looked up (on Ferris wheel) that it’s not rain as I saw one of the boy’s private part exposed and he then started saying abusive stuff about my hijab, it scared me and my daughter and we haven’t been able to go on a Ferris wheel since, I reported it to the police but nothing came out of it”*.

Over the past couple of decades, the hijab and veil have become more prominent in the victimisation of Muslim women in public spaces in the West, being viewed as symbols of oppression and not socially, culturally, politically acceptable by Western society. It has been seen as the symbol of “otherness” (Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012), particularly when encounters happen on the streets or in the workplace, thereby making the women feel that they do not belong. The fact that Maliha’s smile at others was not acknowledged is a further example of this. Being told that they do not belong here further affirm these as symbols of “otherness”.

Focussing explicitly on gender, Hopkins (2016) states that racially motivated crimes in UK are strongly motivated by gender and that Muslim women are overwhelmingly targeted by white men. An obvious example of this was that of the participant who had been the victim of the horrific incident in Winter Wonderland; she further went on to state that this experience had left her shaken, feeling isolated and that she had to consciously fight not to let it get the better of her. This experience had emotionally disconnected her from her familiar surroundings and made her feel alienated. This resulted in her questioning her own self-identity and values. Goffman (1969) describes this as being a lens through which one sees themselves and presents themselves and their values to others.

“I came home and scrubbed myself over and over as I felt disgusted, I cried for days and stopped my daughter from going out. I was so scared, I reported

the case to the police because this could happen to anyone and I didn't want that, but later they informed me they released the guy as they couldn't do much. For a long time I feared all theme parks and wouldn't allow my daughter to go anywhere where there were crowds of young people gathered... but slowly I fought that for her sake... I began questioning myself that I don't belong here... But I do... I am proud to be Welsh and Bengali and I would never compromise my hijab”.

As revealed by Chakraborti and Zempi (2012), for certain individuals, Islamophobic attacks have become part of ongoing cycle of persecution. The participants in the current study were also made to feel like outsiders in spaces they previously felt to be theirs, because the public at large believed that they stubbornly refused to adopt the norms of, and engage with British society (Meer, Dwyer and Modood, 2010). The encounters highlighted below reflect the need for constant negotiation of their identities and how the participants continuously resist this stigmatisation:

Maliha - “Growing up you are not conscious of being a woman makes you more of a target for people's hate but as you grow you become very conscious of becoming the target of these attacks because you are an outsider to them making it really tough for Muslim women especially the ones who cover up have to be a lot more aware and be safe. I am seeing this now and have to be careful”.

Focus group respondent - “My sister had racial abuse in the middle of town while she was heavily pregnant because she was dressed in a hijab and jilbab, this happened in broad daylight a group of young men shouting and screaming Islamophobic comments at her and they followed her around for a bit”.

The participants describe such incidents as being a normal everyday occurrence. As mentioned by the previous participant, most do not even report the incidents as they do not believe that any action will be taken against the perpetrators. They simply continue to negotiate their identities in light of their appearance and how they are viewed by others. Dwyer (1999) states that the hijab is “an overdetermined signifier against which women must negotiate their own identities”. They just try to normalise their experiences and ensure that it does not impact upon their everyday lives. As stated previously (Wagner et al., 2012), these participants have a strong collective identity as Muslim women which is very clearly defined, and helps them to combat such hostile situations. Having their head scarf as an identity marker is a form of resistance to such oppression. By living through such incidents, they negotiate their national and religious identities in their everyday lives (Lyons, 2018). Mirza (2013) also reiterates this point of Muslim women negotiating their identities through race, class, and gender which they embody through language and culture. The participants

of this research however, were also able to form a strong sense of belonging through their embodied experiences of those spaces and places to which they felt strong connections, through childhood memories and local experiences.

7.3.3 Role of Media and Education

Both political statements made by world leaders and the way in which Islam is presented by various media outlets have influenced the masses which, as a result have had an impact on the everyday lives of Muslim women, making them feel isolated, threatened and alienated. The following section of this chapter will look at how negative representation of Islam through the news and other media has resulted in the discriminatory treatment of these participants living in Swansea, Wales. As stated by Bürkner (2011) feelings of discrimination arise when social construction of otherness is created and exclusion is practiced on the basis of attribution of social features. Their responses clearly show that the participants feel that the media has demonised Islam and played a key role in creating a social construction of otherness, as a result excluding its practising members from wider society. All the participants have noticed increased hostility from the general public towards the hijab and face veil. As they noted:

Zahra - "I feel at the moment the way media coverage is, it's like all eyes are on Muslims, everyone is judging us. It's a very negative vibe".

Shakira- "The media is responsible for everything like Malcom X says it's the most powerful entity on the earth and it is harder to be a Muslim because media is used to control people and to control masses the media has been used to create a common enemy - a Muslim and I am constantly aware of it and it spurs me to speak about it more, it makes me want to be more outspoken and hence I have chosen to study media studies in university and will go on to work in this industry as if you want to make a positive change you need to be the example".

Faiza - "it does hurt me when I hear influential people like Donald Trump banning Muslims from entering US, because it has an impact on people like me walking on the streets of Swansea as I heard a group of people on the street saying once "Trump is right he should ban more of them" and then they looked at me and started to laugh and walk towards me but I got very scared and ran into the clothes shop It really hurt my feelings, I know my niece in school had similar comments like Trump is right you should all be sent back to where you came from".

The participants also felt that the media is constantly constructing an image of Islam that is not based on facts but is rather more in line with opinions held by wider society. Programmes on the BBC debating Islam and modernity, emphasise how it opposes the

concepts of modernism (Hardy, 2002) whilst other media coverage created the politics of “us” and “them”, thereby reinforcing fear in the hearts of white audiences (Harb and Bessaiso, 2006). Having one sided portrayal from the media makes it a reality of its audiences as described by Wilson and Gutierrez (1995) stating the differences in value systems making between the minority communities and wider Western society. These differences in the Value systems between the two are made out to be the clear ‘other’. It heightens the concerns of the masses by stoking negative feelings towards Islam as the ‘other’ which obviously has an impact on the lives of every day Muslims, as witnessed by Faiza’s above statement. It creates a conflation of facts and fiction through the mix of religion and culture which goes unchallenged, thereby reinforcing a negative, one sided stereotypical portrayal which plays a role in creating racist views. This is highlighted by the following responses from the participants:

Focus group respondent - *“it’s an ideology being sold through social media and its very powerful concept and if you didn’t have the right knowledge about Islam your mind could be swayed into hating this religion”*.

Focus group respondent - *“Through poplar dramas the media also portrays a certain image of Islam mixing the culture with the religion, leaving people confused such as programmes like EastEnders and others which have a huge following showing mass numbers a distorted image of Islam”*.

Focus group respondent - *“In so many of the movies, the baddies are portrayed as Muslims or Arabs about to blow up the world”*.

The participants clearly felt that various media outlets influenced the attitudes of recipients and assisted in the formation of negative opinions towards Muslims, as for many, this is their only source of knowledge about Muslims and Islam. This also has a bearing on how Muslims view themselves and their own faith, which influences their self-identification. As can be seen in the examples below, representation by the media can raise doubt in the minds of Muslims who have limited knowledge about their own faith and do not feel able to defend their own practices:

Focus group respondent - *“Muslims are being made to hate their own religion because powerful people come out and propagate ideology which creates doubts in the hearts of their own faith which in effect starts to have an impact on their own practices”*.

Focus group respondent - *“another problem that feeds into islamophobia is Muslims not knowing their own faith, they were taught the cultural Islam from their parents and don’t know any different they either feed into misconceptions or behave so ignorantly like forced marriages, domestic abuse and all these things giving bad image of Islam.”*

Focus group respondent - *“We were taught to always listen to our elders and never question them, so when they would teach us cultural things under the heading of Islam we couldn’t question and just went along with it even though it didn’t make sense. It’s only now that we are learning about Islam ourselves we are finding out the truth of our faith”.*

These responses clearly show that Muslims having limited knowledge of their own beliefs and values, can be easily influenced by the negative material circulated by the media. As also mentioned by Goffman (1969) these Muslims are conscious of their self-image and in their pursuit to be “normal” they manage the stigma and the stereotypes, thereby conforming to the wider practices of the society by giving up their own. However, as can be seen by the focus group responses, some Muslims would continue authenticating the oppressive cultural practices because of the strength and security they feel from the shared identity (Smith, 1998). This is done so as to experience the concept of sameness amongst members of a collective identity, subjectively experiencing and feeling the shared collective understanding (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) even if it involves preserving oppressive cultural practices. They can then produce a socially acceptable identity, in order to create solidarity and capture the fundamental aspects of self which will resonate with others and reinforce their understanding of belonging. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) describe this as having a connection to a community clinging on to cultural practices that create a common bond of sameness whilst rejecting the wider societal values due to feeling the otherness.

7.3.4 Hijab, Niqab and Burkini in media

The negativity towards the Muslim veil and women who observe the hijab has been promoted through the largely critical political discourse on Islam expressed by the media. Examples include the former French President banning the face veil (Allen, 2009), as well as the prominent British MP Jack Straw using awkward language when speaking about communication being more difficult due to the veil (Straw, 2006) and Boris Johnson stating that Muslim women who wear the face veil "look like letterboxes" resembling "a bank robber", adding that the garment was "absolutely ridiculous" (Kentish & Cowburn, 2018). Even though there has already been discussion around the media’s role in creating a hostile environment for Muslims, the participants strongly felt that media portrayal of the Hijab and Niqab had played a vital role in amplifying Islamophobia. Some of the particular responses were as follows:

Sara - *“the coverage on Niqab and burkini has made me really upset and angry and to think we are in 21st century and they think they have the right to tell women what to wear. They think its ok for women to walk around wearing nothing if that’s what she chooses but if a woman chooses to cover up then that’s not acceptable. I just don’t understand the logic in that and it makes me so angry. Because of all this coverage you can feel the vibe and you feel the looks, the stares, the nudges, when you go out on trains especially and especially on the beach in summer with people looking at you making you feel super uncomfortable”*.

Hana – *“we have bought burkinis for swimming but after the negative coverage on the media of French ban, I was too scared to wear it on Swansea beaches even though I was desperately looking forward to it. I love the beaches and I don’t feel I should be deprived of it but even just going in my hijab to the beach I feel the uncomfortable stares, I am not sure what they would do if I actually wore the burkini into the water. I feel sad that I can only wear it to women only swimming on a special night in leisure centre... where only Muslim women come... its created an invisible divide I can’t enjoy the beach like everyone else, only in the privacy of the LC can I enjoy my rights and freedom”*.

The desperate need to feel accepted and part of the wider national shared group identity is clear, yet the political views of some, mean that the everyday experiences of these participants affect how their identity is practiced in public. This is due to the negative image created about veiled Muslim women as the “other”; and as described by Sibley (1995) humans have a tendency to exclude those who are unlike them from their surroundings, as an attempt to purify their own spaces, making them off –limits to certain groups of people. This purification can involve making others feel excluded from the public geographical spaces which they share, such as the beaches. Sibley also discusses the shaping of social space by the wider group, the decision as to who should belong to these shared spaces being based on differences constructed between them and others. These differences, created by various media outlets and political discourse have led to these geographies of exclusion for these participants. A statement in the research conducted by Hancock (2008) suggests that men in politics such as the Turkish prime minister and the French prime minister have used the hijab and the fact that it is banned from public places, as a way of using women’s bodies as a battlefield to make their political statement of secularisation. A political power fight across geographical borders can prevent those participants living in Wales from enjoying their local spaces.

This fight over geographical spaces is a result of the perception of minority groups, such as those that the participants belong to, as the “imperfect” people, threatening the

shared beliefs of the dominant group (Giddens, 1971). This results in people feeling possessive of shared spaces, reluctant to share the ownership with others who do not share the same cultural or national values- for example those who wear a burkini or hijab. As stated previously, these spaces are tied to media messages and statements from political leaders who propagate societal norm through these techniques of persuasion. For the participants of this research, dress is the marker of the “other” when accessing and embodying their identities in these public places.

Sara - “The media make it very difficult to practice your identity especially when it comes to exercising your freedom to wear whatever you want to. Before you could wear pretty much anything you wanted and people would say anything but now when you go out people are going to look at you and judge you. So it does make it difficult and it makes me more protective towards my mum more than anything I can’t let her go out on her own because she has practiced niqab always in living in Swansea but since the media has created such a negative image through all the stories around its ban in France and ignorant comments by British politicians I feel scared for her”.

The fact that the respondent fears for the safety of her mother because she chooses to wear a particular garment which is banned in France but not in the UK, underlines the impact this has had on their everyday lives. Terry (2004) cites the banning of the head scarf as a failure of the political parties to integrate communities. The French politicians who led the debate were white males, and chose instead to put the blame on a headscarf as an easy scapegoat. This decision resulted in Muslim women feeling more victimised than ever by having their clothing targeted, preventing them from being themselves whilst feeling part of a nation.

Shakira- “Portrayal of hijab in the media is unfairly prejudiced but in terms of what Islam says it’s all about empowering women and we know in the West it’s all about body image and having unexpected beauty standards only looking like European standards of being light skinned and that I feel is oppressive to women. Even though I don’t wear a hijab I believe it gives women the opportunity to express who they are and not what they look like. I got to speak about the burkini on BBC ‘Good Morning Wales’ programme and I did manage to say how hijab is empowering and it’s a feminist ideal if you want to call it that because people think it’s oppressive but it’s not, France is very hypocritical they call themselves secularist and they say they want to give women the voice by not covering up but they are quite oppressive by doing the opposite by taking away the women’s freedom and generally it’s quite silly because you can’t stop someone wearing a wet suit and that is literally a burkini. In my opinion they are doing exactly the same as what the Taliban are doing forcing their views on how women should dress or not dress taking away the choice of the women”.

Mona- *“I think the negative coverage in media has made people more curious about Islam and I love taking every opportunity to talk to people about Islam. I feel that Muslim women are portrayed very negatively and I think it’s time Muslim women stepped up and become more active and show what real Islam is”*.

Mona’s statement shows that these participants, as second generation Muslims, are actively making a decision to reclaim their home, assert their belonging and share their beliefs with wider society. Their definition of national identity is being expanded, and they are making others realise that Islam is part of the British nation. Hall (1995) states that nations are not always solidly placed in boundaries, and national identity can be fluid, modifying with the times and political climates. It is a renunciation of unequal power relations and the development of a sense of belonging for those traditionally weaker groups. As demonstrated by Mona, identity formation is not only about what you think of yourself, but about how you are accepted by others. This approach is built on differences and recognition of the multiple axis of identities, and how they can impact the shared identity which influences the national identity, which is itself constantly being made and remade (Ogborn et al., 2014).

There were, as noted above, very strong opinions on the media’s coverage and portrayal of Muslim women, but participants welcomed this opportunity to be more vocal with their opinions. Ramadan (2017), states that Islam is demonised by politics and the media at large, but it is still a Western religion, with Muslim citizens playing a crucial and positive role in their societies. Unfortunately, the ongoing spread of suspicion and fear is strengthening Islamophobic sentiments, but the participants recognised that Muslims can still actively take part in these debates, in an attempt to change the understanding of the general public.

7.3.5 Wider community/ society

Experiences of Islamophobia and racism were not an “individual matter” as is made clear by the influence of the media and education. Likewise, participants looked at their own experiences of living in the wider community and how that also impacted on their sense of belonging:

Sara - *“I connect with people regardless of their race whoever is suffering we are all human and we all feel each other’s pain and compassion regardless of being a Muslim or not. This is why I choose to work with vulnerable people suffering from mental health issues regardless of their race, religion, gender I want to be there for all one example was one of my dad’s close friend who*

passed away with cancer and her partner who isn't a Muslim and is quite strong about her views on niqab and hijab and has had many heated debates with us over it in the past but during this time of pain we came close as families as we can feel each other's pain and have compassion for each other regardless of religion or different views that you feel for people it's the bond of humanity that takes over".

Shakira - "When I was younger in my school there wasn't any racial segregation and we all played together and it was the same in secondary but in college I noticed most Asian girls would stick together and when I asked they said they were always like this in secondary school and all the whites stuck together but this is where I was different to them and also in uni I ensured there wasn't any segregation for me but there is this feeling that I have to work little bit more to seem normal as a Muslim or as an Asian, I have to try harder to come across as normal because either it's the perception that we are the "other" or its the things that makes me stand out as the "other" like not going clubbing or drinking I feel I have to make up for it by being extra social during the day time".

The responses of Sara and Shakira prove that the participants are finding common ways to connect and overcome segregation. One way suggested in previous research is mentioned by Cattle (2001) namely the fact of having "meaningful contact", developing mutual respect and bridging the divide in the community. The participants find opportunities where they can interact with the wider community on the same level thereby building on their shared identity and building bridges.

Safia - "this guy I work with said I know you are not all extremist, we are all educated and we look deeper than just the news that are reported we don't buy into this propaganda. That made me feel so good and on another occasion I overheard another colleague tell someone not all Muslims are terrorist and that their religion is very peaceful. It was very nice to hear that there is such support in the society".

Hajar - "I feel intelligent people can see past the negative propaganda and understand that not all Muslims are the way it's being portrayed. Every time something happens I don't feel I have to justify the actions of some silly Muslims and openly disassociate myself from them".

Mona - "I feel Wales is generally a lot friendlier than other places you go to, I really feel sad for women in France who can't express themselves and dress the way they want and don't have this simple act of freedom that we enjoy here. Women not allowed to wear burkinis at the beach is a sad state of our society in this day and age, what harm can extra clothing have on others publicly? But this is not a reflection of wider society I think as I had a client who is Polish and she said to me when I saw the news in France I thought that was horrible and you should have the choice to wear whatever you want, that made me feel so nice and supported".

With such support received from the wider public, the participants feel an emotional connection with these places and part of a wider group identity characterized by Islamophilia or “a generalised affection for Islam and Muslims” (Shryock, 2010:9). Reinforced by Nazia Kazi’s (2015: 116) work in looking at the “good Muslim” politics, press coverage can also be positive toward the wider group, as witness the positive actions of the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (Fifield, 2019) following the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand. All can leave a very positive image of Muslims and position them as core citizens, as noted here by some more optimistic respondents:

Zubeda – “at times its concerning and demoralising the way media can reach a lot of people especially when its misrepresentation but that’s not in my control, but what is in my control is the people that I come in contact with and how I give the proper representation of Islam and by large I find them very responsive and positive towards me”.

Focus group respondent – “having Muslim YouTubers using the media to show positive aspects of Islam like the feminist hijabi who has rap songs about hijab is showing Muslim women are normal and is a nice song that sums it up for me being a Western Muslim young hijabi. Also having visual images of hijabi models for big brands is a positive image of Muslims women in media, designers like Dolce and Gabbana and H&M. It’s great to see the fashion industry acknowledging us as an important part of their consumer industry making us valued members of the wider society”.

Comments such as these show how these participants and others are organising themselves into social groups, building positive relationships with others and thereby creating a meaningful society with those with whom they occupy specific common geographical spaces and places (Pain et al., 2014). Ahmed (2001) argues that by positively promoting Islam through their encounters with the general public, these participants are moving their emotional connections and space from that of an individual to a wider collective connection with a nation. This plays a key role when creating a more intimate relationship with wider society, overcoming the boundaries formed by misinformation.

7.4 Revisiting Home under the shadows of Islamophobia and racism

Up until this point, we have concentrated primarily on the sense of belonging that the participants feel, how various spaces and places made them feel confident in their identities, identifying strongly with Wales and Swansea as being “home.” However, there also exist markers such as racism and Islamophobia, which prevent full integration into their wider shared identity. Grabham (2009) considers this notion of

non-acceptance by the wider society, by examining every day encounters that serve to reinforce the differences between nations. For example, the use of language such as “us” and “you” only further underline the boundaries of national identity. The daily experiences of these participants challenge their national identities. As Antonsich (2010) explains, the denying of diversity means that not all groups are afforded equal rights and acceptance. The participants feel that they have to constantly justify the fact of their belonging to their national identity, as they are not always recognised as an integral part of the wider community. In order to satisfy this notion of belonging in its entirety, the participants feel that they would have to assimilate the values and culture of the dominant group (Yuval- Davies 2006).

One of the reasons for this is that in the West, Islam is viewed as being incompatible with “Western values” (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009). The participants compared their own personal values with the wider British values, to identify points where the two systems were in accord, or where they clashed. This chapter will look at how they combine the two value systems, in order to be able to exercise their full national identity, simultaneously being active within both the religious community and the wider Welsh community.

A relatively small amount of research exists on this specific field namely how the second generation integrates both value systems in order to form their own national identity. Research completed by Norris and Inglehart (2012) examined the integration of Muslim communities in the West, and states that when Muslim migrants come to Western countries they slowly absorb the values prevalent in the host society, linking the socialisation of the second and third generations with the wider society. Similar results were derived through this current research; although the participants came from wider social circles and mixed with people from a variety of backgrounds, their stronger grounding in their faith allowed for a strengthening of their religious identity which they felt did not conflict with their national identity. This was also no doubt due to the second generation giving up aspects of cultural identity which linked them more strongly to their ethnic identity, and not their national or religious identity.

Other studies of Muslim youth in the UK, suggest that these groups are turning to Islam as a reaction to their political and cultural alienation from wider society (Kibria, 2008) and that this growing Islamic identity can be linked to them potentially becoming

Islamic extremists. Kibria (2008) highlights the fear in wider Western societies, seemingly concerned at the fact that Muslims coming into their countries do not seem to want to adopt their national customs and way of life or otherwise integrate. However, such is not the finding of the current research. The participants highlighted the fact that they felt that the more they strengthened their religious identity, the more they realised their responsibilities to their wider society, thereby becoming better citizens.

7.4.1 British & Islamic Values

When comparing their values, the participants of this study felt that Islamic values are fundamental to their existence as Muslims. Agrama (2010) states that the knowledge of Islam provides Muslims with the tools for self-empowerment and self-betterment. This ethical living is further enforced by their religion and a general desire to improve the world around them. Billaud (2016) goes further, describing Islam as a “frame work” for Muslims to consider the self, their own identity, a way of promoting a “good ethical life” to be practised daily. The participants produced a list of the Islamic values they generally adhere to in their daily lives, to be seen in the following table 7.1:

| Participants Islamic Values | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Following the example of the Prophet Muhammad and believing in one God Allah and the Quran | 2. Being charitable with money and time and avoiding waste | 3. Kindness to all by sharing and caring and thinking of others |
| 4. Spreading goodness and forbidding evil | 5. Loving humanity, animals and plants | 6. Unity, and being an active member of the Community |
| 7. Spreading peace, and setting a good | 8. Living honourably and Respecting others | 9. Showing forgiveness and |

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| example through sincerity | | mercy towards others. |
| 10. Honesty and justice | 11. Be confident in following the rules set by the religion | 12. Integration by adaptability |

(Table 7.1 – Islamic Values)

The participants believed that these traditional values were relevant in every aspect of their lives, and the fact that they practised them made them better citizens locally, nationally and globally. As echoed by Taylor (1989) these participants link morality not only with actions but the living of a meaningful life through the performing of extraordinary deeds, as can be seen by their responses as follows:

Focus group respondent – *“Spreading goodness is a strong value and try to stop evil. I know you can’t stop that entirely but you can set a good example yourself by practicing peace”*.

Focus group respondent – *“through sharing and caring by being generous and charitable especially to those less fortunate than you and not just with money but also time and even to give just a smile. Also avoid wasting as everything we have is blessing that not everyone has”*.

Focus group respondent – *“being honest and just is so important and to be forgiving of others and showing mercy”. Honouring each other, being respectful by being kind and caring for each other. Loving animals, humans and plants”*.

Participants note that the practice of their religious values is core to their existence, a fact which is also reiterated by the findings of other researchers, such as Williams and Vashi (2007) who also state that an increasing number of second and third generation Muslims living in the West, such as the participants in the current study, can be seen visibly adopting the traditional values of the religion. This gives them confidence in their own religious identity and creates a shared collective sense of belonging.

Respondent from focus group – *“well to me following the Islamic rules set by the religion gives me the strong values to live my life; which are driven by the belief in One God and taught to us by his prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) through the Holy Quran”*.

Focus group respondent – *“following the Islamic teachings gives me confidence in myself in sharing my values with all as I know it only teaches to be good to others”*.

Most participants clearly felt that these values added to, rather than took away from their sense of national identity, because the values added to their sense of responsibility to the wider community around them. As highlighted by Lambek (2010) it is not simply a question of rules and regulations but is more the result of social interaction with all human beings, whilst still following the Islamic teachings. This is interpreted by Billaud (2016) as British Muslims combining their religious teachings with freedom and translating it into a distinct public performance, which combines their dominant cultural description and the modernity of the West within a clear geographic origin. As illustrated by the participants:

Focus group respondent – “a core value for me is promoting unity and actively participating in the community to create and maintain this spirit of unity, and community for me is the Muslim community, my neighbourhood and my wider community around me”.

Focus group respondent – “I feel adaptability is a big value driven out of Islam as you have to be able to adopt to your surroundings wherever you are making it easy to integrate into the wider society especially if you have migrated to a different place and not to isolate yourself”.

Antonsich (2009) claims that these comments should be considered within the context of the politics of belonging -through actively participating in their community as well as adapting to their surroundings and integrating fully, one group claims belonging. Antonsich states that the power to grant belonging lies with the larger host group. This is where the participants seek acceptance within the geographies of inclusion, the permission to participate in the wider society without being excluded by borders and territories. They are seeking to belong within an identifiable wider group.

A similar exercise was then completed in respect of so called “British values”. These are synthesised in table 7.2:

| Participants view of British values | | |
|--|--------------|--|
| 1. Tolerant society | 2. Patriotic | 3. Human rights - Protection of vulnerable and safety for all and safeguarding |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| 4. Equality and opportunities for all | 5. Monarchy | 6. Love for animals |
| 7. Freedom | 8. Kindness | 9. Welfare system and free education and health care for all |
| 10. Family values (even though there is a huge number of families that have broken down, often resulting in neglect of the elderly) | 11. Community (but only in rural parts, not seen in cities any more) | 12. Proud to be British (tea culture/ stiff upper lip), clubbing and drinking (alcohol) |

(Table 7.2 – British Values)

Overall as can be seen from table 7.2, participants considered Britain to be a tolerant country with emphasis on the word “tolerant” as a core British value. Mendus (1989) describes tolerance as something one dislikes but is made to accept; if one approves of it, or even if one is simply indifferent to it, its attributes or belief, then that is simply part of what is normal and one accepts it as normal practice. Hence participants weren't swayed by the British value of accepting diversity as something to be tolerated:

Focus group respondent – *“it’s a proud British value to be a tolerant society, I find it offensive to tolerate differences, if we change our mind-set to being more of a respectful and an accepting society it would filter through our everyday interactions as a nation”*.

Focus group respondent – *“I would say Britain has opened its doors to people from so many different backgrounds and so it’s a tolerant society, but I see the point about the word tolerant”*

When discussing the values around Equalities and opportunities for all, the participants’ comments underlined their belief that positives in the society give a level platform for all:

Focus group respondent – *“I appreciate the equalities framework which is in place and even though it’s not always implemented it still gives you a stand point if you want to challenge someone. In other countries there is no such law and nothing protecting you from any form of discrimination”*.

Focus group respondent – *“there is legislation around all different aspects of equality and a lot of change in practices has taken pace to ensure everyone can access all basic services, gender equality has come a long way especially when you compare it with other cultures even though there is still some way to go as far as the pay gap is concerned and equal representation in many places”*.

Participants recognise equality as being a core British and Western value .Williams and Vashi (2007) consider this in an American context, stating that Equality is a core American value similar to the British value of equal rights, fair treatment of all people and the existence of a framework to challenge inequalities.

Another central core value that participants were very appreciative of, was the way in which citizens are made to feel safe and protected within the country:

Focus group participants - *“I appreciate the law here as it makes you feel safe, I feel safe traveling to home even at 2am whereas I wouldn’t be able to do that in Bangladesh.*

Focus group respondent – *“I feel safe expressing myself here as I feel freedom of speech protects me which is not how it is in Libya”*.

Focus group participants - *“safe guarding and protection of children is a huge value that is practiced through law and even though it’s also a huge value in Islam, unfortunately in Muslim countries due to corruption you don’t see this being implemented so I take pride in having this in place here protecting the most vulnerable in our community”*.

Khan (2000: 39) states that a “fair and caring society” is a common value and objective shared by both the Islamic and British value system. The comments from the respondents of the focus group clearly recognise the commonality of these values, and also the fact that this is not yet implemented in Muslim countries. The respondent therefore feels especially proud of the fact that locally and nationally, she lives in a “fair and caring society.” Khan states that Muslims have become more aware, and are beginning to get more engaged in issues of British State and society and to feel more confident when representing both their British and Muslim values and beliefs. This can be illustrated by those participants who feel that they are valued and guarded members of society. Legislation around equality, freedom and protection empower them, entitling them to fully participate in wider society.

The focus group then went on to identify areas where Islam and British values clashed. When comparing table 7.1 and 7.2 some key points are listed in table 7.3 (below):

| Contrasting British and Islamic values | | |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Tolerant and not respect | 2. Clubbing and drinking | 3. Treatment of far right extremism against any other extremism |

(Table 7.3 – Contrasting values)

Focus group respondent - *“British society takes pride in being a tolerant society however tolerance doesn’t breed respect, trust, care and value of others. Islam promotes peace and love and respectful treatment for all regardless of any differences”*.

As previously mentioned, the participants identified the issue of the use of inappropriate language and that a more respectful tone should be adopted in order to encourage more acceptance within the society. As previously mentioned, Modood and Ahmad (2007) argue that in a multicultural society cultural differences should be supported and hostility and disapproval discouraged. The public sphere should be re-made in order to fully include marginalised identities. Parekh (2000) alludes to this by stating that the protection of cultural differences and diversity will allow each citizen to freely live their life. This in turn promotes the formation of successful bonds within the society. If these are held together strongly for long enough, people will become familiar with each other, common interests and trust will be established, and on this can be built respect. One way to achieve this is through celebrating diversity and social interaction through education:

Focus group respondent - *“British education system should include the wider historical facts about Britain and its colonial past that would help with understanding and widening tolerance of others especially when you put it in context”*.

As mentioned by the participants, this respect of people’s differences will work towards eliminating the discrimination which occurs when suspicion of the “other” is removed. As described by Lyons (2018) the introduction of the language of “us”, “we”

and “them” can distance the participants from the wider national identity. They were made to feel excluded, not “normal” and therefore felt less like they belonged. The participants spoke about the increase in extreme views against Muslims and the hatred that is being allowed to build up, which therefore results in segregation:

Focus group respondent - *“There is so much far right propaganda that is increasing and that it goes unchallenged that it’s almost giving it a green light for any old racist to say anything abusive and know nothing will happen”*.

Focus group respondent - *“People who often go on marches against Islam or Muslim are predominantly ignorant of its teachings and don’t even know why they are protesting”*.

Focus group respondent - *“Far right is not being treated similar to any other form of extremism and yet it is... its extreme hatred with disgusting ideology and is increasing at a very fast speed across the West, with many political parties basing their foundations on it and some in Europe have even won and are in power”*.

When a terrorist act occurs, the British Government takes the blanket approach of stating that in order to fight terrorism, people, namely Muslims, need to be better educated in British values. This is when the divide starts to appear. Headlines like “British values puts all Muslims under suspicion” feed into the wider social cohesion agenda, as society as a whole sees this as a Muslim problem which is not being tackled by the Muslims community. This creates a further “them” and “us” binary (François, 2017). Hopkins (2016) states that the increase of right wing groups can be attributed to the austerity caused by the Government when they use fear to divide communities. Through a strong social media presence and regular protests, these groups have spread religious and racial hatred towards specific groups, one being Muslims, the other immigrants, with the two often combined. Their anger is mainly shaped by the way in which Muslims are portrayed in the media, namely as extremists posing a risk to national security and values.

The other area where participants felt that a divide existed, was around the area of alcohol and clubbing, although participants felt that these differences could be overcome:

Focus group respondent - *“I think drinking can be sometimes a barrier when it comes to social aspect and it limits the amount of integration one can do with colleagues or friends as it’s a huge part of the Western culture it limits us I feel I cannot be 100% myself”*.

Focus group respondents - *“Even though certain acts like drinking, clubbing, and free mixing in genders might be practices that are acceptable in the West but clash with teachings of Islam, it doesn’t stop us integrating with wider community based on respect and love for all, you don’t have to part take in any of these activities you don’t wish to but it doesn’t stop us living in harmony with wider society”.*

Focus group respondent - *“I think it’s personal, what stops you from integrating is not values but your perception of others, there will always be common values if you chose those over ones that are different. I did go to pub - I didn’t drink but to mix with my colleagues I went along with them as I didn’t want this to be a barrier between us”.*

Even though the participants identified a few areas where they could see a potential clash between their core teachings in Islamic values and wider British values, they did not want this to be the reason for isolation within the larger community. They thought that they could still find a way of overcoming these differences. This is a relatively new insight, coming from second or third generation British Muslim young people. This group has a stronger bond with the wider British/ Welsh identity, and has more desire to make their national identity work. Other participants highlighted that even though there were differences, these could be overcome. Antonsich (2009) describes this as being more a method of community due to physical proximity rather than a community identity in itself. This is built on effective encounters described by Ahmed (2001) which create a sense of belonging in specific geographical places creating a cohesive society.

7.4.2 Revisiting home and identity

I will now consider the areas where the participants felt that Islam and Britain share values, thereby making for a shared sense of identity. The key points are given in table 7.4 below.

| Shared common values | | |
|--|--|--------------|
| 1. Kindness ,care and love for all humanity and living things- animals, plants environment | 2. Equality, specifically genders taking joint responsibility. | 3. Community |

(Table 7.4 – shared values)

Some of the discussion that resulted from these overlapped values were:

Focus group respondent - *“People are compassionate and loving and kind, in the Western context people give charities for various causes driven by love of humanity and in Islam people give charity to please God to all causes so bringing the two values together. We have done so many fundraisers as part of our common values of care such as marathons and walks for cancer research, feed the homeless, comic relief etc.”*

Focus group respondent - *“Community is of a huge importance in value in both, however in the West it depends where you live as its decreasing with time. People are moving away from each other breaking up communities, you still see it in the West Wales more but here in South Wales communities are being driven apart. In Islam however there will be a Muslim community where ever you go, uniting you based on the Islamic values and practices connecting you globally but living in Swansea you feel a sense of community as people are so friendly and growing up in same neighbourhoods gives you a strong affiliation to the people and place”.*

These responses suggest that love and compassion for humanity is a major value that is shared by both value systems. This is further emphasised by Jenkins (1996) who states that collective identities always emphasise similarities amongst people and the common ground that unites them. With such strong values in common, the participants feel a strong sense of belonging with the wider community and that they are able to contribute positively towards the society.

The comments below echo Parekh’s (2000) vision of Britain as “one Nation- but understood as a community of many communities... based on a commitment to core values both between communities and within them” (p.56) The respondents highlight how they feel totally integrated within the wider society, thereby becoming a community within the wider community:

Focus group respondent - *“Both British and Islamic values go hand in hand and where they don’t we can still adopt to be able to live and integrate in the wider society because there is so much more that is common”.*

Focus group respondent- *“Britain is a multicultural society and we all seem to learn from one another and adopt each other’s good values and we all have a lot more in common than what divides us”*

Focus group respondent - *“recently we have had far too many people try to divide us for their own personal agenda to gain power through divide and conquer, pitching one group of people against another, but when we interact with different members of community we meet so many people who want to just*

live together and get on with our everyday lives rather than blame each other and fight each other”.

This clearly shows that the participants feel a sense of a shared national identity, based on common experiences. As recognised by Putnam (2000) shared identity is created via the strength of common values, which enable members of the wider society to appreciate one another, thus making it easier to integrate and contribute towards the creation of a sense of belonging. For the participants, it is more important to stress the things that unite them with the wider society, rather than focussing on areas of potential conflict.

Finally, when considering revisiting their home and their sense of belonging to Wales and Britain, the respondents claim:

Focus group respondent - “being born and brought up in Wales we are a mixture of British/ Welsh and Muslim values, we live in a diverse community where we all work together to create a beautiful community and home. There is very little that divides and if we don’t let it divide us, it can’t because we have so much more in common, we share humanity”.

Focus group respondent “When we were growing up in Wales, we learnt so many different cultures in school, in college we used to have diversity days and I believed we were on our way of being a multicultural society that celebrated these differences. For most of the time it still feels like that but sometimes it feels like the other side gets the better of us as a society”.

As emphasised by Cohen (1982) the sense of sharing this common symbolic connection to a place and identity, is created by a consensus of common values, something which the majority of the participants state they have in common. It also requires the wider society to empathise and embrace the diversity. Again, most of the participants believe this to be the case. This also illustrates how the participants are able to find comfort in their Welsh identity. This was also shown to be the case in previous research conducted (Hopkins, 2007) which involved Scottish Muslims. Both Welsh and Scottish identities are seen as an alternatives to the British identity. By taking a more active role in their communities, these current participants have already developed and strengthened common social networks, which will further merge their personal identities with place. (Cantle, 2001)

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the sense of belonging felt by the participants, through their embodied experiences with their landscapes around them, and their emotional

connections with people. These experiences link them to specific places and spaces, which in turn connect them to a larger shared national identity and a sense of belonging to home.

At times, participants have felt isolated, in particular due to their appearance, by the very real threat of Islamophobia and general racism that they have encountered in the spaces and places they identify as home. Yet, they have fought against such alienation and isolation, which has become part of their everyday life. Being Muslim women and therefore visibly different, it is all too common for them to experience abuse.

The chapter also looked at the role the media has played in creating a generally negative sentiment towards Islam and Muslims, thereby giving rise to Islamophobia, which the participants have experienced as discrimination and stigmatisation. As stated by Garner and Selod (2014) racism is often dynamic and linked to a specific political and geographical context. This is further endorsed by the horrendous experiences of some participants, which took place in the spaces and places where they usually felt most comfortable.

The participants then go on to explain how they overcame these experiences of isolation by focussing on the common values that unite them with the wider community. Kabir (2010) stresses the vital importance of integrating the Muslim identity with broader British values. As second and third generation Welsh and British Muslims, the participants have managed to align their religious and broader cultural values, thus living in harmony within the wider society.

By creating a shared identity with the wider society, establishing common ground with people and places which are emotionally important to them, the participants have been able to create a deeper sense of belonging. They have not been able to establish a similar bond with other places in UK or elsewhere in the world, but they do feel a strong connection to their home, which they see as Swansea, Wales.

This research has also gone some way in trying to fill a gap highlighted by Dafydd Jones (2010) stating that geographers need to explore marginalised Muslim communities, specifically in the context of Wales. Even though there has been research conducted into both the religious and national identity of British Muslims (Hopkins 2007) there has been very little research involving those Muslims living in Wales. This research highlights how the religious identities of the participants is intertwined with

their national identity, whilst also considering the intersectional nature of national and religious identity on an emotional and experiential level (Kong, 2001). It comes from the fresh perspective of considering how the embodied experiences of Muslims in Wales connects them to their national identity. Furthermore it builds upon previous research on the themes of belonging and national identity. The participants are strongly attached to the landscapes and people of Wales, and clearly view Wales as their home, and feel strongly affiliated to “Welshness.” Their solid sense of belonging to the wider Welsh community through their association with the language, culture and values reinforces their plural Welsh Muslim identity.

This study also differs from previous research on Muslim youth, which has suggested that these groups are turning to Islam because clashes at a political and cultural level mean they feel alienated by wider society (Kibria, 2008). This in turn can be seen as a step towards potential Islamic extremism. However, such was not the finding of the current research. This chapter demonstrates that the participants felt that as their religious identity grew, so too did their national identity – the two blended harmoniously together. Being stronger Muslims means being better citizens of Wales.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how identities are formed, constructed and experienced by young Muslim women in Swansea in different spaces and places, particularly considering the intersectionality of faith, culture, ethnicity, race, with the focus mainly coming from a strong gendered perspective. The thesis also considered how the second generation of Muslim young women negotiated their identities in relation to the ethnic and cultural heritage of their parents and the wider society around them. It explored how they internalise their Muslim cultural traditions and see Islam as a frame of reference, giving meaning to their daily behavioural rituals and means of communication. The thesis then examined their sense of belonging to a collective identity of nationality, in particular exploring Welsh Muslim identity in the public sphere by observing how these young women enacted their Muslim identities in their everyday lives, highlighting places of inclusion and exclusion.

This final chapter will bring together the common themes developed around the embodied experiences of the religiously gendered identities of young Muslim women, by summarising each of the empirical chapters into three themes. The first theme is based around places and spaces and the embodied experiences of these Muslim women. The second theme looks at the positioning of these participants whilst preserving their ethnic and cultural identities, and the final theme looks at their belonging to the wider community, through their national identities. This thesis provided a unique and very personal insight into the everyday experiences of Muslim women. This was due to the position of the researcher. As a Muslim woman myself, and a trusted member of their community, I was able to gain a deep insight into the responses of the participants. The information I was able to obtain was therefore very privileged. They shared detailed accounts of how they practiced their identities in private spaces (i.e. their bedrooms and houses) as well as in public on the streets and in the mosque etc. Details of this nature have not been gathered in previous studies of Muslim women. The results hence contributed considerably to the understanding of geographies of Muslim identities. The research also explored issues around gendered inequalities and how they apply to second generation empowered Western Muslim women. They expressed how they were able to tackle culturally oppressive practices, because they had the confidence of a strong religious identity and the backing of their family. The thesis also details their strong sense of the emotional bonds that exist with

the spaces and places around them, thereby creating a strong sense of belonging to the national identity.

8.1 Place and space

When analysing identity, the relationship between people and places play a key role. In order to understand the identity of an individual, it is essential to recognise the spatial context in which it is set. Places are a salient marker when considering geographies of inclusion and exclusion and how they impact on the experience of identity. The places enable these participants to experience the multiple layers of their identities, as they prioritise each element as and when necessary. This study looked at how different elements of identity intersect with one another in different places (Hopkins, 2001). Hence it contributed to existing literature around intersectionality, but with specific attention paid to how these categories are prioritised in the daily lives of the participants (Collins, 2001). Bastia (2014) also identified that there has been little evidence from women of colour around the wider subject of intersectionality, something which this study seeks to address.

As identities are not singular, places and spaces give opportunities to experience the fluid movement of faith and gender, which were the strongest identities experienced by the participants (Shields, 2008). Participants described the inconsistencies they experienced in their everyday, as they navigated multiple identities within specific places frequented on a regular basis such as educational institutes, work place settings, or the streets. These experiences produced boundaries of exclusion in some places because of the reactions of people they interacted with, which affected their national identity. In other places they would experience inclusion, which served to further enhance their Muslim identities. These place based identities (Zhu Qian & Feng, 2011) foster fluidity in identity formation by using symbolic meanings to connect with surroundings.

The study examines the embodied experiences of young Muslims in smaller cities, where they are more visible. This in turn, has a specific impact on their everyday encounters with the wider community. In order to explore this further, specific research questions were asked which enabled them to think through how they negotiated their religious identity, along with other elements and how they decided which element should be given priority and when. Even though the participants decided that their

religion should be the main marker of their identity, they recognised how it could not be discussed in isolation from other factors, hence creating plural identities. The ethnic identity was one aspect that the participants did link with their parent's heritage and one which they almost felt slightly distant from. They preferred to construct their identities around their faith first and then their Welsh national identities, because of the links with the symbolic spaces they most associate with.

The thesis also looked at the experience of how being out in the countryside or coast in particular contributes to religious and national identities. Participants discussed the ways in which they embody their veil, while interacting with members of the public in various different settings, thereby contributing to the existing literature on Muslim women's Hijab (Ryan, 2011; Dwyer, 1999, 2000; Zine, 2008). The hijab appears throughout most empirical chapters, albeit studied from different angles. In the first instance the Hijab is examined as a main marker of Muslim identity, and secondly consideration is given as to how it is worn in various spaces. Insight was gained into the negative experiences of the participants whilst on the streets and how they negotiate their position in order to manage their religious gendered identity whilst continuing to wear their hijabs. Thirdly, the hijab is studied from the point of view of many feminists, who see the wearing of it as an oppressive practice. The participants discuss their religious understanding and their commitment to wearing it as a symbol of their faith. Fourth and finally, the hijab is scrutinised as a marker of belonging to a wider social political identity. The embodied hijab is an expression of social, political and religious identity. The research illustrated the embodied experienced of veiled Muslim women who create a sacred space around them by their dress, thereby creating a moral screen between themselves and wider society (Arthur, 1999). This research also contributed something different to that of previous research, namely that participants of this research have found that the mixing of the two cultures by combining the Eastern traditional dress along with Western items of clothing, expresses their fused identities more accurately. Previous researchers have found these two forms of cultural dressing to be oppositional identities (Valentine and Chambers, 1998), but this new research highlights the fact that these second generation Muslim women are forming new identities by balancing their religious and national identity.

This research also visually presented objects and images that participants wanted to share, in order to more fully represent how their identities are practiced. Such images

illustrated the construction and embodiment of the religious identities of the participants in both private and public settings. They highlight the things that are most important to them when they are practising their self-image in the private spaces of their homes and bedrooms, or in public, on the beaches or with friends and family. These images also illustrate how they created sacred spaces, by positioning religious items in specific location to be used for distinctive purposes, for example prayer mats facing in the direction of Makkah in Saudi Arabia, and placing copies of the Quran next to their bed side tables. These religious objects illustrate an understanding of the embodied experiences of spirituality and hence contribute to geographies of spirituality (Holloway and Valins, 2002). It has also been recognised that there is a lack of research into the creating of sacred places within daily life. (Eade & Sallnow, 2000).

With the growing use of technology within everyday lives, the participants talked about how they used digital spaces to construct, experience and connect with their identity and that of others. Thus they were able to express their identities across geographical boundaries (Piela, 2011). The research also identified the fact that there was a positive representation on social media by bloggers who wear the hijab. This enhanced the religious identity of participants, as it gave them a positive representation to look up to. The fact that large retailers such as H&M also employed hijab wearing models gave the participants a sense of inclusivity, making the hijab more acceptable in public spaces.

These embodied experiences in public and private places have contributed to literature on geographies of Muslim identities by looking specifically at how religion plays a key role in their experiences in specific places (Parekh, 2004). Although there have been advances made in research on the geographies of religion and their experience through embodied public spaces (Hopkins 2001; Dwyer, 1999, 2000), certain landmarks in Swansea like the beaches and large parks which are secular in nature yet used by participants to embody their religious identities, add further to this literature. It shows how their religious identities permeate into the geographies of their social world, integrating their religion with the wider social spaces around them.

8.2 Positioning when constructing identities

When it came to looking at the main factors that contribute to the identity formation of young Muslim women, this study found that religion played a key part. This was also the case with previous studies on Muslim identities (Dwyer, 1999, 2000; Hopkins, 2007, Mirza, 2012) but the current research went further, in that it explored its intersectionality with other factors and the impacts on the everyday lives of the participants. Whilst considering the strong gendered element of their identities, this research also highlighted the upbringing of the participants, and the masculine and feminine attributes that their parents had taught them. This did not enforce gender discrimination for the participants (Elwood, 1998) but rather allowed the participants to become strong Muslim women. They were not seeking to escape cultural practices through the identity of their faith, but they clearly felt supported by their strong faith and did not feel the need to resist any patriarchal culture (Kandiyoti, 1988). Unlike previous research, these participants showed that there was no need to challenge those practices which confined women within the spaces of home. These participants were able to enjoy their religiously strong gendered identities and participate fully in public life, attending educational institutes, working and travelling (Blunt and Dowling, 2006).

The fact that there were differences in the findings was attributed to the positive influence of their parents. The parents of participants were very encouraging and empowered their young daughters who as a result became much more grounded, confident Muslim women. This is in contrast to other studies of parents who were first generation migrants. As they feared the loss of their culture, they chose to enforce their cultural values on to their second generation children (Anthias and Yuval- Davies, 1992). The participants' parents were less strict regarding traditional values, so the young women were able to focus more closely on establishing their religious identity. As a result, they were more easily able to experience their Muslim identities, whilst managing their multiple dimensions of being. This was due to the fact that they were not forced to choose their religious identity as a means of escaping a patriarchal culture (Dwyer, 1998). These participants were therefore able to enjoy their hybrid identities of a Welsh Muslim, whilst contributing to their collective wider sense of belonging.

Previous studies such as Archer (2001) have shown how second generation Muslims face culture clashes between the minority heritage culture and the wider majority culture. As a result, they strongly connected to their religious identities and distanced themselves from their parents' cultural ties. However, this research found that the participants had successfully fused the two cultures, the dominant heritage culture and their British culture, and negotiated their fluid identities to reflect a better representation of themselves. For the most part they felt that there was no hierarchy in the performance of these cultures which meant that they recognised a stronger connection with their national Welsh identity (Sakamoto, 1996).

This study also contributed to the much debated topic of feminism in Islam, from the perspective of young Western Muslim women. It considered the two strands of feminism- the liberal and secular feminism versus the Islamic feminism. In trying to negotiate their position between these two feminist ideologies, participants discussed the various themes around the gender discrimination of Muslim women and shared how these had impacted on their own lives. Many Islamic feminists have highlighted the fact that gender inequality is rooted within the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teachings. As part of the construction of their religious identity, these participants studied at special classes (Halaqas) taught by Muslim women, where they discussed such pertinent issues as Muslim women's rights and the Hijab, and studied the lives of strong Muslim women. This contributes to existing work on geographies of feminism, highlighting the fact that the use of specific spaces for religious teachings can enhance gendered religious identity and that effect radiates out to other spaces.

When creating strong gendered identities, Muslim women in the past have felt both the need to position themselves as having a strong faith identity and also the need to actively champion the rights of women, in order to be recognised as equals. This reinforced the need for the ideology of Islamic feminism. However, the participants of this research balanced the needs of feminism by acknowledging their strong religious identity with the understanding that they are different to men. Through their faith they understand and appreciate their different gendered roles, which are not competitive but complementary. Hence they do not require the label of feminism in order to be strong Muslim women. These findings therefore contribute to both geographies of feminism and geographies of religion as it illustrates the way in which these strong Muslim women understand and experience their religious gendered identities.

When discussing the various gender inequality issues, the participants sought to distance themselves from their cultural and ethnic identities. This was done in order to manage the conflicting views of their religious identities with that which is not part of the teachings of Islam. Even though there were relatively few which were a source of tension, the participants still debated gendered specific issues such as inheritance, polygamy and divorce. They shared their perspective of Western Muslim women and contributed to geographies of feminism by showing that they do not have to be a feminist in order to experience their gendered identities. The patriarchal interpretation of religious views result in gender inequalities which were dismissed by the participants. They chose to adopt a stronger Muslim identity along with their Welsh national identity. As strong Muslim women in Wales they have full rights and space in which to be able to fully practice their religious identities. The roots of feminism lie in the secular domain, and this is the main reason why the participants of this research distance themselves from this particular ideology. Instead they were able to establish solid foundations within their religious teachings.

8.3 Home and Belonging

Finally, this thesis contributed to the growing literature on Muslims in Wales (Dafydd Jones, 2010) and how these participants negotiated their sense of belonging to their national identity. The participants identified their self-identity with Wales by exploring the symbols that specifically relate to being Welsh i.e. Welsh language or Welsh accents. Muslims born in Wales therefore express their belonging to a Welsh identity in a symbolic manner. As well as religion being a key marker, the participants showed a deep connection with their national identity.

When considering national identities, the findings illustrate the experiences of young Muslim women in the context of geographies of inclusion within friendly neighbourhoods. Others were made to feel excluded by being called names, or excluded from work place activities or experienced Islamophobia on the streets. Feelings of exclusion alienated these participants from the collective identity (Banks, 1996) affecting the emotional connection that they had formed with the wider national identity. The participants sought acceptance from the wider society (Barth, 1969), and when faced with Islamophobic attacks they began to lose their sense of belonging. Their experiences contributed to previous studies on Islamophobia (Ryan, 2011;

Hopkins, 2016; Chakraborti and Zempi, 2012) by describing the feelings of isolation and confusion caused by such incidents. The feelings of being the “other” left these participants feeling detached. These participants concentrated on building the sense of “sameness” by focussing on shared values and common practices in order to overcome these negative experiences. They shared their experiences of incidents which made them feel excluded from society in public places (Hicks, 2003) in order to increase awareness around these issues.

The participants further contributed by sharing the inequalities that they experienced every day in public places such as streets, due to the intersection of their religious and gendered identities along with race and ethnicity (McKittircli, 2006). Such incidents created imagined boundaries and resulted in exclusion. These places which are accessible to all the participants, become a privileged place for some and a space of discrimination for others (Sibley, 1995). They speak about negotiating their identities in order to reclaim their social position and association with the wider national identity.

However, the fact of being Welsh was important in their everyday lives and strengthened their feelings of belonging to Wales. It gave them a sense of wider shared community identity based on common values such as equality, kindness, care and love for humanity and environment and community. At other times the participants spoke of familiar values and a shared collective identity through geographies of inclusion. They referenced their Welsh national identity and shared pictures of their British passport to show that they identify with the British nationality as well as their everyday religious identity. This negates the aggression often shown towards Muslims for not integrating and being seen as opposed to British common values – a case of “us” and “them”. Participants also used spatial experiences across geographical boundaries. For example, visiting England makes them express their sense of belonging to Wales based on their experiences with local Welsh people. When visiting these other locations, it prompted the participants to feel a sense of familiarity with Wales because they were born and brought up there - their roots are there. They also felt an emotional attachment with these geographical spaces because they were familiar with them (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Other emotional bonds developed within both the Muslim community and the wider community (Ahmed, 2001) through meaningful interactions which gave the participants a sense of security and safety in their daily routines. The participants shared their embodied experiences when practicing their religious

identities, with particular reference to the landscapes of Wales. These were also key to the practice of the participants' religious identity, as they discussed their sense of belonging to Swansea and the concept of it as home, in relation to geographies of emotion. These strong emotional bonds help in creating a strong sense of national identity. They linked this space with their symbolic belonging because of emotional connections with their families. There was no such link with their parents' homelands because they had no sentimental attachment to them. The participants made relatively few trips to their country of origin, and when they did go they did not feel like they belonged there. There were no transitional ties to the countries of their parents' origin.

Some of the aforementioned experiences of geographies of exclusion, are due to the negative representation of Muslim in politics or media. These experiences left participants feeling like the "other" and impacted on their strong sense of belonging to a particular place, a place where they lived their daily lives. They spoke about their experiences of identity which were further strengthened by interaction with people around them, such as family, colleagues, friends and the wider public. They looked at belonging in the same way as Astonsich (2010) embedding their experiences in the landscapes and making these spaces sacred by connecting them to acts of worship, hence they become geographies of spirituality. Their experiences show that identity is not fixed as Bhaba (1994) describes it, cross cultural interaction developed new ethnicities and hybrid identities.

The research also found that the participants examined their value system and compared themselves with wider society in order to find commonalities and manage clashes. By building on common values, the participants wanted to show that even though Islam is often portrayed as a religion in conflict with wider Western values, there existed more in common than that which divides them. They wanted to build on their common values, uniting on the basis of a shared identity with a symbolic connection to place in common (Putnam, 2000). The participants highlighted the common values of their religious identities with wider society. Love, care and equality form the basis for building a cohesive society. They want to build an inclusive community based on shared national interests.

This thesis therefore seeks to fill the gaps identified in the literature review, by adding to the geographies of religion and geographies of Muslim identity by the examination

of the formation of identity and the embodied experiences of young Muslim women. The research also contributed to geographies of spirituality by showing how the participants used certain spaces and places to establish a deeper connection to their religious identity by enacting their Islamic practices. The research has also demonstrated a strong connection with Welsh landmarks and spaces, connecting the participants firmly to their national identity through the emotional associations of home and deep rooted connections of familiarity. The research also presented the experiences of Muslim women with a strong gendered identity, and how their everyday practices as women combated intersectional inequalities through the teachings of their religious identity. Sharing these views of strong gendered Muslim women has gone some way towards contributing to geographies of feminism.

The thesis has effectively contribute to enhancing the understanding of Muslim women's identities in the broader context of local spaces and places in Wales. It provided an insight into the embodied experiences of these religious identities in private and public spheres adding to the literature already in existence by giving a more detailed and personal account. This then added to advancing the comprehension of their links to their collective identity based on shared values whilst negotiate their national and religious identities. It gave a strong Muslim woman's perspective due to the positionality of the researcher and gave a powerful voice to the participants due to having a strong relation of trust. This resulted in them sharing very personal accounts of their religious gendered experiences, not commonly found in the academic literature so far.

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Appendices

Student Dissertation Research, Department of Geography, Swansea University

Participant Consent Form

Identity – Between Faith and Culture: a study of multiple identities of young Muslim Women]

Student Researcher: Ms Shehla Khan

Supervising Academic: Dr Amanda Rogers & Dr Halfacree

Please **Initial**

Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

3. I understand that the information I provide will be looked at and analysed by the student researcher and the supervising academic.

4. I understand that the information collected from me will be kept strictly confidential, stored securely, and that any information that appears in my Dissertation will be anonymized so that I cannot be recognised from it.

5. I agree to take part in this study.

| Name of Participant | Date | Signature |
|---------------------|------|-----------|
| | | |

Contact details

Student Researcher: [MS Shehla Khan] [1 [REDACTED]]

Academic Supervisor: Dr Amanda Rogers [ROGERS A. [REDACTED]]
[University telephone number: [REDACTED]]

Geography Department, College of Science, Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea
SA2 8PP

Complete in duplicate: 1 copy for the participant; 1 copy for the researcher

Information Sheet

Identity – Between Faith and Culture: a study of multiple identities of young Muslim Women

Student Researcher: Ms Shehla Khan

Supervising Academic: Dr Amanda Rogers & Dr Keith Halfacree

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project, which I am undertaking as part of my postgraduate research programme in Geography at Swansea University. Please read the following information about the project carefully. If anything is unclear or you have any questions or concerns about the project, then please let me know and I will try to address them.

1. What is the purpose of this project? The project aims to:

- 1. To explore the relation between self-identity and the factors that influences its formation. Focussing on how self-identity as well as collective identity is formed and influenced by faith, culture, ethnicity, race, class, gender while living in a multicultural society.**
- 2. To see how Muslim identity is interpreted individually and collectively in specific places. The study will focus on how Muslim Identity is applied in the space of everyday lives. It will explore the extent to which Muslim cultural traditions are practically implemented in daily lives and see how Islam gives meaning to daily behaviour rituals and means of communication.**

2. Why have I been chosen to participate? The target audience for this research is “Young Muslim women between the ages of 18 –30years”; you have been chosen because you fit this age range.

3. Do I have to take part in the project? No. Participation is entirely voluntary.

4. What will happen to me if I take part? If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will then be asked to participate in an interview or a focus group.

5. What will happen if I don't want to carry on taking part in the project? You are free to withdraw from the project at any time, and any information that has been collected from you will be withdrawn from the project.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part in this project? I hope that the project will contribute towards your personal development and give you experience of enhancing your interview and communication skills as well as enhancing your confidence to talk about issues that you hold a strong view on.

7. What are the possible negative effects of participating in this project? I cannot foresee any negative effects from participating in this project.

Should any discussion around any sensitive issues cause any upset and require further support; the participants will be able to access the support from EYST's Counsellor who can provide them with counselling around any sensitive issues.

8. What happens if there is a problem? If you have a concern about any aspect of the project, then you can contact either me or my supervisor using the contact details below.

9. Will my participation in this project be kept confidential? Yes. All information collected from you will be kept strictly confidential. Any information included in my Dissertation will be aggregated and/or anonymized so that you cannot be recognised from it.

10. What will happen to the results of the project? The results will be presented in the form of a Dissertation, which will be submitted to Swansea University as part of my Postgraduate degree programme. The Dissertation may be circulated outside the University, for example if it is submitted for a prize to the Royal Geographical Society / Institute of British Geographers or if findings are presented at a conference.

Contact details

Student Researcher: [Shehla Khan] [REDACTED]

Academic Supervisor: [Dr Amanda Rogers] [ROGERS A. [REDACTED]k]
[REDACTED]

Geography Department, College of Science, Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea
SA2 8PP

Complete in duplicate: 1 copy for the participant; 1 copy for the researcher

Transcription of an Interview

Participant 13 Saba

1. What to associate with identity

I think it's definitely a mixture, with my ethnicity and religion being the main ones. I think for myself it's about getting the balance of both that I have the culture side of it and I have the religious side of it. And I think as you get older you get labelled sometimes to a particular community. I see myself as British Welsh as well. British and Welsh at the same level really and definitely ethnicity and religion are the big ones. But I think at football matches that's when my Welshness comes out more or rugby that's when I really feel the Welsh pride but other than that I don't really feel it. And my accent that definitely shows my Welshness especially when I go somewhere; like my cousins will say I have strong accent especially when I go to England. And this year I went to Pakistan and everyone was saying oh you from England and I said No, I am from Wales so yeah that did come out.

Welsh identity I associate random things like Rugby, Swans, Welsh cake, St David's day, daffodillies and things like that and for example in work answering the phone bilingually things like that. And like on St David day I join in with my Welsh colleagues and wear red and wear daffodils and we are all on a similar level. Even growing up I always wore my Welsh costume to school and because my brother and sister had been through school as well and I had been influenced by them and because of them I grew up with more of a Welsh identity. When I travel abroad I would say I am British but when it comes to the point when they say I am English then I would say NO I am Welsh. But I only refer to my ethnicity when I for example when I worked in Debenhams and the customer would say where you from I would say I am Welsh and they would say no where you really from then I would say I am Pakistani. But if I was traveling abroad and say not Pakistan like Middle East and they would say where you from I would probably say Pakistan. I would say I am a Pakistani but British as well I am both because I am born in Britain. But I think I see myself Pakistani more than British.

Home is Pakistan as well as Swansea. I feel a sense of belonging in Pakistan because of my roots and wider family connections but Swansea is where I was born and live and grew up and have friends and everyone that matters to me so dearly.

Pakistani ethnicity is quite strong for me, and I always hoped my religious side is stronger than my Pakistani ethnicity and as I am getting older I am trying to learn more so I can overcome my ethnicity and culture practice and move more towards religious side. I specifically want to move away from cultural gendered roles which were part of my Parents culture. I want to change that, I went to university, I have a job, I don't want to get married straight away, and moving forward I want to change the way we approach marriage and be able to openly talk about it in the family, not being told who to get married but to be given a choice and be open minded to proposals from different backgrounds.

My gender doesn't really come into it much when I think of my identity, I don't really think about it that too much, maybe because in culture it's not always working

in our favour as a woman I think there are challenges at times. I don't think we (as daughters) have been brought up particularly as strong women, obviously we go to uni we get jobs and we get married but with my brother it's been a bit different he is working but there isn't an emphasis on him getting married straight away and bringing up a family and the usual of you know coming home at later times, going out as often as he likes, where as being women that's been restricted due to the Pakistani culture.

2. What influences

Family is a big one for me as their goals and aspirations for me are important and I have to live up to them. My dad is the most influential member of my family. Friends can be very influential as I was growing up and I have had the same friends from a very young age. It developed itself as I was growing up and when you are making friends with Pakistanis or Bangladeshis it feels familiar ground like they know sort of where you are like for example I can't come to town this week my mum says I think they would be more understanding just chose Asian friends and they are all Muslims.

As a place Swansea has played a big part in who I am and as I grew up I did feel it's a bit boring but then I couldn't move away because everything is so close and familiar. Everything is five minutes away where as in Cardiff everything is half an hour; the people are friendly here and it feels more of a community and if you were walking on the street and something happened there is always someone to help you, so it's a nice tight knit community. And because I work in Port Talbot I find Swansea being a bigger city has a nice mix of all ages but Port Talbot has mainly older age and Swansea is busier with more going on. When I travel to other cities in UK like Manchester I do think they are better as there is more to do but then I think Swansea is because its home.

Community is a mixture of everything in my head like the Pakistani community the Asian community, Muslim community but in some aspects, I think it's the Muslim community which brings everyone together and it's definitely a positive thing to have.

Culture – I think growing up culture was a big part for my parents' life so culture is a big part of mine too and there are things I don't like. I don't like the gender roles like there are certain expectation in the Pakistani culture about women, it is changing slowly as there is an expectation for woman to go to uni, get a job and get married and have children straight away but whereas it's not the same for my brother and now that I have been to uni and got a job I feel it's expected for me to get married straight away and it's not the norm.

Some of the attitudes towards marriage are restrictive like if you like someone you can't really speak to parents about it as it's still a huge no no. For myself going forward I would like to change this and be more open minded with my future children, I am not saying I would say its ok to go out on a date but I would like them to talk about it openly and feel comfortable enough to talk about these things with me.

The things I love about my culture are family the relationships and how they work together. Family is the closest thing we have if something goes wrong then we are all there for each other like if someone is ill or if someone passes away or if you need someone, you just pick up the phone and someone will be there. And there is a wider family network in Asian culture which is different to the wider Welsh culture as I don't feel it's there as much and definitely something I would like to keep and take forward.

3. Expressing identity

I love dressing up in traditional clothes, I feel they are everything I am, colourful, glamorous, beautiful and ethnic yet in Britain representing many like me all over the UK and very fashionable.

Ramadan time I was fasting and someone said to me let go for lunch so I would say no I am fasting. Also praying in work and we would also have conversations about hijab about praying. And I don't shy away from these discussions. And sometimes I do feel I have the responsibility to speak up and tell my colleagues that its individuals when it comes to terrorist attacked and not the whole Muslim community and they are not representing Islam.

But at times I have shied away from having discussions especially when I think I am not going to help in changing attitudes.

And in home as we were growing up we knew we were Muslims and you see mum fasting she would read nemaz (prayers) but there wasn't an emphasis on that and it was more of culture I think and they are still a bit like that they will do Ramadan and celebrate Eid. I have taken it a bit more on myself and learning more about my religion and I think I try to identify more with the religious side of things now.

4. What does hijab mean to you?

Hijab is very important to me but because I didn't grow up with it, I don't wear hijab but want to wear it when I am ready for it.

5. Connection with others through your identity

I mainly connect with my friends as I said before, its familiar ground they understand my cultural and religious background.

6. 7. Media's effect on your identity/ Negative attitude images of hijab/Islam

I think you tend to defend it if anyone says anything negative about it. You do experience it on the roads when people say go back to your country and at the end of the day you say I was born here and you emphasise that. These I think are related to negative things that are said on media bout Muslims which result in these action.

This does make me feel annoyed, and angry because I have balanced identity of being Pakistani and British so I feel I am British and I was born here. And at work I

