

**Contemporary Sufi-Sunni Revivalism and Sufi-Sunni Mosques in Manchester:
Rethinking British Muslim Identities as Discursive and Affective Processes**

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Abstract

British Muslim identity has often been conceptualised as a complex of multiple distinct sectarian, ethnic and familial associations discursively informed by authoritative individuals and institutions operating within Muslim communities and in wider society. As such, taxonomies reflecting this have predominantly divided British Muslim identity according to sect and institution, with Sufi-Sunni revival movements figuring most prominently. Yet, emergent literature on everyday and lived religion demonstrates how such associations prove to be particularly fluid in how they are lived and done situationally. The unstable category of the “Barelvi” movement, often taken to be an umbrella term for South Asian Sufi-Sunni Islam in Britain, is one such case in point. This applies to predominantly discursive conceptualisations of community identity but becomes even further apparent with a consideration of affective associations, which variously imbue, contest, and confound seemingly stable discursive formations. These permutations attest to the processual nature of British Muslim identity, and to the brittleness of categories that have been constructed to describe it. Building further upon contemporary, processual approaches to Muslim community identity in Britain, I explore how the trend of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is manifest within, between and beyond Muslim communities. This way of doing Islam is characterised by an informed and affectively felt grounding in the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* devotionally actualised in service to wider society. Drawing on field work in and around five mosques in Manchester, I advance a conceptualisation of British Muslim identity comprised not of boxes, but of lines of movement and process. These lines which I trace here reflect the coalescence of discursive and affective processes in the shape and ongoing constitution of Muslim community identity. They are thoroughly enmeshed in the wider societal context of Manchester itself to the extent that Islam is lived in Manchester and Manchester is lived in Islam.

Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgements

Having initially intended to pursue postgraduate research from my beginnings in Manchester in 2012, what I am finally presenting here is the culmination of my academic life, towards which I have been working these past nine years. While at times the ways I have taken over this period have been driven by a clear sense of direction, when I was certain of where I was going, what I was doing and why, my paths have more often than not been laid through tentatively feeling forward, rather than forging ahead. Throughout my phases of conviction and confusion, I am most grateful to everyone who has guided and supported me through them. It is because of them that I am in a position to write this now, at the close of this particular story.

I am grateful for the support and guidance of my supervisors, Dr John Zavos, Dr Kamran Karimullah and Dr Katherine Smith. Prior to my undertaking this thesis, John has supervised both my undergraduate and MA dissertations and as such, has been a continuous guide throughout my academic life thus far. From the classes taken with him throughout my undergraduate and postgraduate study, through to the many discussions we have had over the years, he has encouraged me to attend to how religion is lived and to be sceptical of the boxes we place around it. He has been my academic *Murshid*. On Sufism and all else Islamic, I have been indebted to Kamran and I have benefitted from his *ṣuḥba*. His advice and support throughout the most difficult phases of the thesis were grounding, and helped reorient me towards my immediate priorities. Katherine's advice and suggestions have been particularly formative, especially in the development of my authorial style in ethnographic writing, and her recommendations really helped me find my own voice in this process. I am grateful for the support and advice of Dr Jacqueline

Suthren Hirst too, both prior to the thesis and especially through my field work year. On this point, I thank all of my respondents who gave their time to take part in my research. They, too, have opened new ways of seeing religion as it is lived and done for me, and in turn shaped how I live my own Islam in Manchester.

I am especially grateful to my family, most of all to my father, to whom this work is dedicated. He would always be concerned to know how I was getting on with it, and even though in his words he “couldn’t pretend to understand it,” he was always interested to listen, and wanted me to do well. His support and his constant concern for me to do my best has carried me throughout my life both in and out of academia, and he has been my highest example. His quiet encouragement and belief in my work has sufficed for me when I have struggled to find it myself. At such times when I have, especially in more recent times, my mother has always made a point to remind me of what he would say. Her always being there to listen and to encourage, after every formative phase in the research process, has taken me back to myself and reminded me of what is important. I am also thankful to Janet, my wife, who for as long as we have known each other has shared this thesis with me. She has been a constant source of consolation, encouragement, and at times much needed respite. In all of this, she has shared this journey with me and has carried me to where I am now. I certainly would not have reached this point without her, and I look forward to the new trails we tread beyond it. As I will explore in the coming pages, upon reaching a destination ever newer horizons come into view, and in this our journeys are ongoing without end. Yet, I am relieved and happy to have finally arrived here, and am indebted to everyone who has helped me along the way.

Dedication

This thesis is for my father, Hugh Peter Rawlinson. A craftsman in every sense, he built me up with his own hands, and this work is his work too. I look forward to hearing what he might have to say about it in time, beyond another horizon.

Chapter One: Introduction

During my second year of undergraduate study, a friend and I were discussing what we mean when we say that we are “Sunni”. We felt it was rather vague, a catch-all term that can denote anyone from the Salafī to the Sufi, the modernist to the traditionalist, the liberal reformer to the strict legalist, and the practicing to the non-practicing, among an almost innumerable plethora of appellations. We considered whether negative definitions such as “not Shi’a” or “not Wahhabi” were potentially more encompassing for many, but given the ambivalence surrounding these terms too, we agreed that this was not sufficiently descriptive either. These are no more precise, nor less contested in meaning, evocation and application than the category of “Sunni” to which they (arguably) belong, thus rendering the question of what this term means ever more impenetrable. Though acknowledging this complexity, my friend said simply, “if you’re a Barelvī then you’re Sunni, and if you’re not a Barelvī then you’re not Sunni.” This seemed to hearken back to the polemical disputes of preceding decades among South Asian Muslims over mosque (*masjid*, *masājid* pl.) ownership in Britain, over the permissibility of celebrating the Prophet’s birthday (*Mawlid*), and of sending peace and blessings (*Ṣalawāt*) upon him after Friday Prayer (*Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah*). It stretched back even further to India in the late-19th and early-20th century, where scholars (*‘Ulemā*, *‘Ālim* sing.) such as Rashīd Ahmad Gangohī (1826-1905 C.E.) and Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī (1856-1921 C.E.) drew out and contested the parameters of Sunni Islam as the sun began to set on the British Empire.

That we were discussing it as we walked along Manchester’s Oxford Road in 2013 attested to the potency of these terms, the continued vitality of these movements, and their pertinence in the ongoing question of Muslim identity in Britain. However, this statement

seemed to exclude all who were not aware of, or did not belong to, this discursive milieu. Accounting for this, my friend explained that whether one recognises oneself as “Barelvi” or not, if they are specifically *Sufi*-Sunni Muslims then Barelvi is what they are. This, he argued, was especially applicable to South Asians but also broadly extended to every Muslim, including myself. Yet, as Muzamil Khan effectively demonstrated in his doctoral thesis on Mirpuri Sunni Muslims in Lancashire, many South Asian Sufi-Sunni Muslims would often be indifferent to, or contest this attribution.¹ I concurred with this in my MA,² and explored how much like “Sunni”, “Barelvi” also evoked a vast multitude of meanings and associations, none of which were fixed, and all of which were belied in its blanket application. Once more, this answer raised further questions than it seemed to resolve, as these categories and labels could not encompass the diverse ways in which they were situationally utilised in the lived doing of Muslim identity. It also illustrated what I later observed in much of the literature surveyed in Chapter Three where in the work of Ron Geaves,³ Pnina Werbner,⁴ and Sadek Hamid,⁵ among others, the taxonomies devised to describe Muslim community identity could not wholly reflect its lived fluidity and heterogeneity. I wanted to develop a taxonomy of Muslim community identity which *could* reflect this, and I began my research with this intention.

¹ Muzamil Khan, “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora: the Transmission of Popular Religion from Mirpur to Lancashire” (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 2006).

² George Rawlinson, “Modern Traditions and Movements of Reform in 19th Century South Asian Islam and the Communities that Followed,” (MA diss., University of Manchester, 2016).

³ Ron Geaves, *Sectarian Influences Within Islam in Britain: With Reference to the Concepts of ‘Ummah’ and ‘Community’* (Leeds: Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, 1996).

⁴ Pnina Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30:5 (2004), pp. 895-911. Accessed 3rd March, 2017.

⁵ Sadek Hamid, “British Muslim Young People: Facts, Features and Religious Trends,” *Religion, State and Society*, 39:2-3 (2011) pp. 247-261.

Almost as soon as I embarked upon field work in five *masājid* in Manchester, this priority changed. Although I was still concerned to explore the diversity of Sufi-Sunni Islam as it is lived and done in community, I gradually realised through observation that the situational, malleable, fluid and multiple ways in which this became manifest confounded attempts at classification. This contention with classification has been raised broadly in social anthropological work, exemplified in the work of Tim Ingold to whom I return throughout the thesis.⁶ It is also discernible in works attending to living religion, such as those of Malory Nye,⁷ John Zavos,⁸ and Graham Harvey,⁹ among others which I outline further in Chapter Two. More specifically, it has been applied to the study of Muslim communities in Britain and Europe, notably in the work of Zavos and Seán McLoughlin,¹⁰ Daniel Nilsson DeHanas,¹¹ Nadia Jeldtoft,¹² and Jeanette Jouili,¹³ among others explored in Chapters Two and Three in particular. Confronted with community in process and drawing on this literature, I instead sought to follow the movements and paths both discursive *and* affective which informed its constitution. I discerned how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism¹⁴

⁶ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

⁷ Malory Nye, *Multiculturalism and Minority Religions in Britain: Krishna Consciousness, Religious Freedom, and the Politics of Location* (Oxfordshire: Curzon Press, 2001).

⁸ John Zavos, "The Aura of Chips: Material Engagements and the Production of Everyday Religious Difference in British Asian Street Kitchens," *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, 81:1 (2019), pp. 93-115. Accessed 7th August, 2020.

⁹ Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex & Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁰ Seán McLoughlin and John Zavos, "Writing religion in British Asian diasporas," in *Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas*, Seán McLoughlin et al. eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 158-178.

¹¹ Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, "Elastic Orthodoxy: The Tactics of Young Muslim Identity in the East End of London," in *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead eds. (Taylor and Francis, 2016). Accessed 10th December, 2020.

¹² Nadia Jeldtoft, "Lived Islam: religious identity with 'non-organized' Muslim minorities," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34:7 (2011), pp. 1134-1151. Accessed 8th December, 2020.

¹³ Jeanette S. Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ This is a rationalised, reflexive way of being Muslim and of doing Islam, grounded in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, as the basis for ethical self-cultivation, communal solidarity, and civic engagement. A more extensive definition is provided on pages 40-41.

This is to be distinguished from forms of revivalism long-established in Britain, such as Islamism and Salafism, which may otherwise be broadly characterised as anti-Sufi. It is also further distinct from both

was a particularly pervasive current, coursing throughout and beyond all field sites, and tracing this trend formed the basis of subsequent enquiry. I asked myself: “to what extent and how is contemporary British Muslim identity shaped by Sufi-Sunni revivalism?” From this I developed the following research questions, which I will address throughout this thesis.

Research questions

- 1. To what extent has contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism informed and displaced sectarian affiliation, and in turn reconfigured how Islam is affectively and discursively done in Britain?**
- 2. How has wider societal discourse concerning civic religion, community cohesion, and Islam as a problem space informed and reconfigured how Islam is affectively and discursively done in Britain?**
- 3. How are notions of self and community affectively and discursively reconfigured in this contemporary context?**

I begin with contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism because it is a prevalent way of doing Islam, an orientation that has in turn variously reoriented, reinforced, reinscribed and replaced formerly established forms of sectarian affiliation. As such, it must be accounted for and explored to develop a fuller account of Muslim identity in contemporary Britain.

earlier forms of revivalism, both Sufi and anti-Sufi, in its aversion to sectarianism and its commitment to civic engagement as opposed to more transnational concerns. Consult pages 75-77 and 137-142 for a fuller discussion on different forms of Islamic revivalism, both established and emergent.

Jouili has explored a similar trend amongst Muslim women in France and Germany, yet characterises it broadly as revivalism,¹⁵ and this has hitherto been accorded little attention in past literature on British Muslim communities. Though it has been addressed in the work of Geaves and Hamid as the “Traditional Islam Network,”¹⁶ comprised of specific scholars and organisations, this does not wholly account for how it manifests beyond institutions. Confining Muslim communities within corresponding institutions belies the relational dynamics which constitute and shape them. Jeldtoft, DeHanas and Linda Woodhead, among others, have similarly argued for examining “everyday Islam” beyond institutions,¹⁷ but in these works revivalist trends are referred to primarily within an institutional context. Attending to this, I investigate how diverse ways of doing Islam relate in their mutual constitution within *and beyond* institutions, and how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism informs this process. An institutional focus also remains thoroughly discursive, and while the relational fluidity of Muslim communities in Britain has been in part addressed in the work of Werbner,¹⁸ the affective processes informing and extending beyond the discursive have not yet been explored. The work of Donovan Schaefer,¹⁹ and Zavos most notably among others,²⁰ affirms that religion is born not only of creed and confessions, but of compulsions too. Building upon this, I couple considerations of the

¹⁵ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*.

¹⁶ Sadek Hamid, “The Rise of the ‘Traditional Islam’ Network(s): Neo-Sufism and British Muslim Youth,” in *Sufism in Britain*, Theodore Gabriel and Ron Geaves eds. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 177-196.

¹⁷ Linda Woodhead, “Tactical and Strategic Religion,” in *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead eds. (Taylor and Francis, 2016). Accessed 10th December, 2020.

¹⁸ Pnina Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims: The Public Performance of Pakistani Transnational Identity Politics* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

¹⁹ Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (London: Duke University Press, 2015).

²⁰ Zavos, “The Aura of Chips”.

discursive with an exploration of how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is affectively cultivated, and how this in turn informs how Islam is lived and done in Britain.

This study of Islam in Britain is necessarily a study of Islam *in* Britain, because just as the multiple ways of doing Islam are not neatly enclosed and demarcated in their *masājid*, neither do they exist in isolation from their wider societal contexts. I turn to this in my second question, situating contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism within wider societal discourse. Past literature has long acknowledged that it was Muslims' recognition of their position as religious minorities, and the perceived need to preserve and transmit Islam to subsequent generations, that informed both sectarian contestation and early *masjid* establishment in Britain. In this contemporary context the minority position of Muslims remains, and due to events ranging from the Rushdie Affair²¹ through to the Manchester Arena Bombing,²² Islam has come to be defined as a hypervisible problem space, a potentially subversive challenge to community cohesion.²³ In the wary gaze of the non-Muslim "Other", Muslims too have felt compelled to address perceived misconceptions and convey "real" Islam, particularly in devotional service through civic engagement. In this, the positioning and objectification of Islam and Muslim communities in Britain has significantly informed how Islam is discursively and affectively done, and must be examined further. Taxonomic approaches previously employed in the work of Geaves and

²¹ The publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in 1988 provoked widespread opposition from many Muslim communities in Britain and abroad, resulting in protests and demonstrations calling for the book to be banned and for the author to be held accountable.

²² On the 22nd May, 2017, an Islamist extremist detonated a bomb during a music concert at the Manchester Arena as concert-goers were leaving. Twenty-three people died and more than eight hundred were wounded.

²³ The civic potential of "faith communities" to affirm common values and to cultivate community cohesion was characteristic of New Labour's communitarian approach, first articulated in 2001. Successive governments have broadly retained this sentiment, with the "Big Society" of Cameron's Conservative government of 2010 being an emblematic case. See pages 209-210 for further detail.

Hamid among others have not wholly illustrated the embeddedness of Muslim communities within their wider societal contexts. Although this has been acknowledged in part by other anthropological approaches to Muslim communities in Britain and Europe, particularly those focusing on the “everyday”, the affective has remained largely unexamined. Both McLoughlin’s²⁴ and Werbner’s²⁵ work has gone further in demonstrating how multiple arenas beyond the *masjid* overlap discursively in the mobilisation of Muslim community identity, although contemporary developments in Manchester have not been accounted for. In posing this question I aim to explore the extent of these entanglements here, providing a contemporary account of how lived Islam in community affectively and discursively entwines with and is born from its wider societal context.

In the gaze of the “Other” where the Muslim is regarded as a spokesperson for both Islam and their fellow believers, the question of “real” Islam comes with a concern to self-consciously live and embody it in oneself, so as to positively represent the Muslim community. In this, notions of self and community are related in their mutual constitution, and bound together in the question of how to live Islam in Britain. It is for this that I present my third question, of how notions of the Muslim self and Muslim community are discursively and affectively reconfigured through lived Islam in this contemporary context. Muslim selfhood and society has been addressed in relation to Islamic revivalism most notably in Saba Mahmood’s study with Muslim women engaged with revivalism in

²⁴ Seán McLoughlin, “The State, New Muslim Leaderships and Islam as a Resource for Public Engagement in Britain,” in *European Muslims and the Secular State*, Jocelyne Cesari and Seán McLoughlin eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 55-69

²⁵ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*.

Egypt,²⁶ and Jouili has similarly explored this in France and Germany.²⁷ Building upon this work, I explore how this has developed in a specifically British context among Sufi-Sunni Muslim men. Alongside Werbner's earlier work on the processual dynamics informing the shape of diasporic Muslim publics in Manchester can be counted McLoughlin's work on the mobilisation and representation of Muslim communities in Bradford.²⁸ Where in past literature Muslims have been argued to look to the subcontinent, the Hijaz, or the global *Ummah* in answer to the question of "who "we" are," it is being increasingly acknowledged that Muslims here are increasingly attending to their own selves, their neighbourhoods, their cities, and broadly to Britain too. I explore such contemporary reorientations in a Mancunian context here.

The field

In addressing the above research questions, I will provide a contemporary picture of how Islam is diversely and dynamically done *in* Manchester, providing further insight into how it is lived and done in contemporary Britain. In this, I also explore how British Muslim community identities are affectively and discursively cultivated in this correspondence. I have chosen Manchester as the site of research because I live my own Islam here, and it is predominantly here that I have reflected upon my identity and belonging as a Sufi-Sunni Muslim in Britain. It was on Manchester's Oxford Road that my friend and I discussed what it meant to be "Sunni", and attending to the multiple established and emergent ways

²⁶ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival Movement and the Feminist Subject* (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁷ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*.

²⁸ Seán McLoughlin, "Mosques and the Public Space: Conflict and Cooperation in Bradford," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31:6 (2005), pp. 1045-1066. Accessed 8th December, 2020.

in which Islam is done in Manchester does not yield a straightforward answer to this question. Due to its history as an industrial centre, Manchester has long been regarded as a cosmopolitan city exemplifying religious and cultural diversity, with Muslims being sojourners from the early 19th century before settling in earnest from the 1960s onwards. This settlement has been marked by the question of parameters, both of Islam and of the Muslim community, and the question of how both can be effectively preserved in Britain. Among Sunnis, the South Asian Barelvī and Deobandī movements (*masālik*, *maslak* sing.) have led the debate in this through possessing the most predominant institutional presence in their *masājīd* and madrasas (*madāris*, *madrasa* sing.). Yet within, between and beyond the *masālik* there exists a plethora of associations and ways of doing Islam that attests to its heterogeneity in Manchester, which is itself very much expressive of the diversity of Islam in Britain.

Such plurality is not confined to conventional *masājīd* and *madāris*, these being only the most institutionally visible spaces among other more fluid and informal settings, such as a private residence or a street corner, where Islam is also diversely done. While acknowledging this, in selecting field sites I have chosen to focus primarily on *masājīd*, excepting one “Street Iftar” organised by students and not affiliated with any *masjid*. I have done so because *masājīd* remain focal points of Islam as lived and done in community, in which the widest range of devotional activity takes place- from sermons and *Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah* to classes and the collective recitation of litanies in remembrance of God (*dhikr*). I have also contended in accord with Nye that, while these institutions can create

the appearance of “ordered boundedness,”²⁹ this belies the diversity within them. In fully exploring the extent of such heterogeneity in these apparently static spaces, I sought to problematise the notion of their cohesion- and by extension- the cohesiveness of any sub-denominational category employed to encompass Sufi-Sunni Islam. In particular, I was concerned to scrutinise both the boundedness of the Barelvī *maslak* and its applicability to all varieties of Sufi-Sunni Islam among predominantly South Asian Muslim communities in Manchester. That the Barelvī *maslak* is highly differentiated has long been acknowledged by Geaves³⁰ and Werbner,³¹ and more recently by Khan³² and Sophie Gilliat-Ray.³³ However, excepting Khan’s study of Sufi-Sunni Islam among Mirpuri Muslims in Lancashire, the extent of this differentiation has rarely been investigated and ethnographically substantiated. My concern to further account for this, and to explore the shifting, amorphous parameters of Sufi-Sunni Islam within and between spaces, lent itself to multi-sited ethnography.

Ulf Hannerz notes how multi-sited ethnography often attests to the interconnections between places, demonstrating how they are not simply multiple localities existing in isolation, but are bound by *translocal* linkages not confined to single spaces.³⁴ This considered, I approached five Sufi-Sunni *masājid*, three of which I regarded as both distinctly and differently “Barelvī”. The choice of five sites allowed for both a more

²⁹ Nye, *Multiculturalism and Minority Religions in Britain*, p. 276.

³⁰ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 102.

³¹ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, p. 32.

³² Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora”.

³³ Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 92-95.

³⁴ Ulf Hannerz, “Being there... and there... and there! Reflections on multi-site ethnography,” *Ethnography*, 4:2 (2003), pp. 201-216, p. 206. Accessed 3rd December, 2020.

comprehensive account of heterogeneity, with which I was particularly concerned at the time, and focused, sustained participant observation which would yield rich qualitative data over my field work year. That said, I did not seek to account for diversity in its entirety. My selection was not exhaustive, and my intention was not to acquire a sample that was holistically “representative” of all Sufi-Sunni Muslims in Manchester. As George Marcus argues, multi-sited ethnography is antithetical to such an endeavour given that it focuses attention upon the local, the everyday, and that no local ethnography can portray any “global” system as a totality.³⁵ As such, I could have selected other sites which would have also presented fruitful avenues for research. Yet, as is often characteristic of multi-sited ethnography,³⁶ my choice of field sites was as much the result of gradual familiarity as it was directed by research design. Indeed, being acquainted with each *masjid* over the years as both a student and congregant prior to conducting research informed my initial choice of field sites, and the inclusion of the “Street Iftar” as a site was a cumulative development in the process of field work itself. I also count my anecdotal reflections cited here among such chance encounters, though they are not counted among field sites or field notes specifically. I provide an outline of each field site below.

North Manchester Mosque³⁷:

North Manchester Mosque was officially established in 1979, and has been offering the five daily prayers, *Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah*, talks, devotional gatherings (*majlis*, *majālis* pl.), and

³⁵ George E. Marcus, “Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), pp. 95-117, p. 99. Accessed 3rd December 2020.

³⁶ Hannerz, “Being there...” p. 207.

³⁷ To maintain the anonymity of data as assured in my ethical documentation, I have provided pseudonyms here for all respondents and institutions.

classes in the fundamentals of faith ever since. Its services primarily cater for the local, predominantly Pakistani Muslim community of Cheetham Hill and surrounding areas of North Manchester. Beginning, as a converted house *masjid* in 1979, a plot of land was later built in 1982 for a purpose-built *masjid* with a main prayer hall for twelve hundred congregants, which was completed in 1984. Over the 1990s the *masjid* gradually expanded to include a College and additional prayer facilities, accommodating a further twelve hundred people. Both building and service expansion is still underway, with a view to develop an extensive complex consisting of prayer facilities accommodating up to five thousand, a community hall, an imam's residence, a mortuary, an office, a library, and guest rooms for students on residential courses. Through regular open days and school visits, non-Muslims have also been encouraged to attend the *masjid* and learn about Islam. In this, the leadership of North Manchester Mosque are concerned to establish the *masjid* as a genuine *centre* of devotional, educational and recreational activity for both Muslims and other local residents of North Manchester.

The founder is a prominent '*Ālim* and *Qādirī Shaykh*, connected to Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī through his son, Mustafā Razā Khān (1892-1981 C.E.). *Allāma* (honorific for '*Ulemā*'), one of the teachers at the *masjid* and my main respondent here, is also connected to Mustafā Razā Khān through his own teachers in India. As such, this *masjid* is firmly established within the Barelvī *maslak* through its '*Ulemā*. Having occasionally attended talks as a student prior to conducting research, I observed how the sole orthodoxy of the Barelvī *maslak* was championed here. In exploring contemporary manifestations of the *maslak*, I approached North Manchester Mosque as characteristically representative of this established trend. My acquaintance with the '*Ulemā*, both generally as a Muslim and as a

Sufi-Sunni, accorded relative ease in accessing the *masjid* as a field site and conducting research. As an undergraduate I had co-founded a Sufi-Sunni society on campus, and had invited *Allāma* to deliver a talk. It was through this particular association that I was understood to be a Barelvī and a “proper Sunni”- though I never described myself in these terms. My agreement on this point was not a condition for entry to the *masjid* nor for field work, and my own position thus presented no ethical dilemma. However, this tension between ascription and self-ascription spoke to my initial motivations for undertaking research, and to my contention that “Barelvī” is not synonymous with Sufi-Sunni Islam, yet for the *‘Ulemā* at North Manchester Mosque it *is*. This was precisely why I selected North Manchester Mosque as a field site, exploring this sentiment further in a contemporary context in congregation, in classes, and in conversations with *Allāma*.

South Manchester Madrasa:

South Manchester Madrasa was converted from a bank and established in 2000 by a prominent *Naqshbandī ‘Ālim* from Lahore, where the founding Madrasa had been set up by his father. It consists of two relatively small prayer halls, one upstairs and one downstairs, where those among the predominantly Pakistani Muslim community of Whalley Range and Chorlton congregate for prayers and classes. This service provision is in common with other *masājid*, yet South Manchester Madrasa is distinct in its particular emphasis upon education through the full *Dars e-Nizāmī* Islamic studies program, as traditionally taught in the subcontinent. While it is not a “central” *masjid* akin to other field sites in this study, the leadership of South Manchester Madrasa perceive their role to be cultivating imams, teachers and community leaders through education. I focused on this educational aspect in

my field work, occasionally attending classes and speaking with the imam, who I call *Ustādh* (teacher).

As with North Manchester Mosque, South Manchester Madrasa is aligned with the Barelvī *maslak* through its *‘Ulemā*, though in a different way. I approached both *masājid* together to further explore the nuance of Barelvī alignment. I was aware that the *Naqshbandī ‘Ālim* who founded South Manchester Madrasa would uphold the Barelvī *maslak* in debate and in often televised and recorded talks alongside other recognised Barelvī *‘Ulemā*. This, coupled with the confirmation of friends who would attend the *masjid*, informed my initial impressions upon beginning research that the Barelvī *maslak* would be self-consciously affirmed here as *the* standard of orthodoxy, akin to my experience at North Manchester Mosque. Prior to research, my partial acquaintance with his son, *Ustādh*, facilitated my access to South Manchester Madrasa as a field site. A second-generation Pakistani born and raised in Manchester, I met *Ustādh* in passing at a society event, and subsequently through occasional visits to the *masjid*. This lent a degree of familiarity to our conversations over the course of field work.

Central Mosque One:

Central Mosque One, established in Rusholme in 1971, is regarded as one of Manchester’s foremost central (*jāmi’*) Sufi-Sunni *masājid*. Beginning in 1948 as two semi-detached houses in Victoria Park, the first belonging to the South Asian Muslims of Rusholme and Longsight and the second belonging to Syrian textile merchants, the *masjid* has from its inception been a centre for the Muslims of Manchester. In 1971 the project expanded into

its current form of a purpose-built *masjid*, with a main prayer hall along with side and upper prayer halls with a capacity for fifteen hundred congregants. With the imam's English and Urdu speeches, the various *majālis* hosted here, and the predominantly Pakistani congregants who attend weekly, the *masjid* caters primarily to the Pakistani Muslims of Rusholme and Longsight. However, the *masjid's* proximity to the bustling and ethnically diverse "Curry Mile" of Wilmslow Road has resulted in Somalis, Arabs, Kurds and Malaysians being counted amongst the congregants who attend the weekly *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah*. Through occasionally hosting open days for schools and local residents, and maintaining a consistent relationship with local council authorities, the *masjid* is presented as "a very Mancunian mosque," with Manchester being central to Central Mosque One.

Much like the city itself, Central Mosque One has been a site of contestation over the parameters of "real" Islam and the question of who speaks for the Muslim community. It is currently broadly affiliated with the Barelvī *maslak*, particularly evidenced by the recitation of devotional poetry composed by Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī by older generations of the predominantly Pakistani congregation after *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah*. This was not always taken for granted, as over the course of its history Central Mosque One has also been aligned with the Deobandī *maslak*. However, such contestations cannot be reduced to the intra-sectarian polemics of South Asian revival movements, and even now the diversity of the congregation and the centrality of the *masjid* has made it expressive of a broadly Sufi-Sunni Islam not explicitly reducible to a single *maslak*. Indeed, the question of "who are we?" still persists here, and it is this ambivalence which I sought to explore further during field work- particularly in the context of Central Mosque One as central to and expressive of "Manchester" itself. The *masjid* had certainly been a focal point in

Manchester for me throughout my years of study at the University of Manchester. I would go there for *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah* every week, especially as an undergraduate, and over the years since then I would occasionally attend talks by visiting *Sheyūkh* (pl. of *Shaykh*) and *Ulemā*. As with North Manchester Mosque, I was also acquainted with the imam, Imam Bilal, through the work of the Sufi-Sunni society that my friends and I had established on campus. In common with *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa, he is a second-generation Pakistani raised in Manchester and instructed in the Islamic sciences by his scholarly father. In this, I approached Central Mosque One as a familiar field site and I was an equally familiar face to Imam Bilal with whom I conducted an interview as field work drew to a close.

Central Mosque Two:

Central Mosque Two, formally established in 1975, is also regarded as one of the prominent *jāmi'* Sufi-Sunni *masājid* in Manchester. Its foundations were laid in 1967, with a plot of land and properties secured in Eileen Grove through the collective donations of predominantly Bengali Muslims in Manchester. In its current form, Central Mosque Two has a capacity of approximately fifteen hundred, with a main prayer hall consisting of two stories alongside adjacent rooms utilised for classes, *majālis*, weddings and for the communal breaking of the fast (*iftār*) during Ramadan. Here the *masjid* is perceived to cater to Bengalis predominantly, both in its committee and in its events, which are conducted in a combination of English, Bengali and Arabic. However, as with Central Mosque One, Central Mosque Two is in Rusholme and serves an equally diverse congregation- to the extent that every Friday for *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah* and during Ramadan the *masjid* could be said to reflect Rusholme in microcosm. Through the provision of classes,

iftār facilities and weekly *majālis*, alongside annual interfaith events and open mosque days, the *masjid* leadership has endeavoured to make the *masjid* a centre for Muslims and other local residents.

Reflecting both its Bengali and Mancunian situatedness, Central Mosque Two is not explicitly affiliated with either the Barelvi or Deobandi *masālik*, rather expressing most institutional identification with the Sylheti *Fultoli* Sufi order (*ṭarīqa*, *ṭuruq* pl.). While clearly Sufi-Sunni, this seemed to confound binaries of Barelvi and Deobandi, and I approached it as a case of established Sufi-Sunni Islam beyond the *masālik* in Manchester. Here, too, I was acquainted with the *masjid* as a congregant for *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah* as this gradually became my local *masjid* prior to conducting research. In this case, I was not as familiar with Central Mosque Two as with Central Mosque One or North Manchester Mosque, though friends of mine had regularly attended the *masjid* since childhood and I had occasionally spoken with the imam of the *masjid* on Fridays. This familiarity mixed with “strangeness” both facilitated access to the *masjid* and accorded a newness which was unique and particular to this field site among the others that I attended over the course of research. Imam Ejaz, a first-generation Sylheti both belonging to the *Fultoli ṭarīqa* and keenly hosting other Sufi-Sunni *Sheyūkh*, was also concerned to convey this newness and familiarity in his own person, and the various *majālis* that he hosted proved especially fruitful in my field work.

The Institute:

I also examine more emergent expressions of Sufi-Sunni Islam as manifest at the Institute in Oldham. Located in a business centre and officially converted into a *masjid* on the eve of 2016, this is a truly contemporary space reflective of emergent religious trends. It was formally established as the United Kingdom “campus” of the Institute based in the United States, and is headed by a prominent Syrian *‘Ālim* and *Shaykh*, *Shaykh* Husayn. Reflecting the ethos of the Institute internationally, it is a self-consciously contemporary “community hub”, with an “outward facing” ground-floor comprised of a “Youth Zone” and a nursery, and an “inward facing” top floor for “academic” and devotional activity. Through offering multiple services and workshops ranging from youth clubs, open days and sports clubs through to Islamic studies classes and weekly *majālis*, the Institute endeavours to meet society’s academic, social and spiritual needs. Being situated in Oldham, its regular attendees are primarily local residents of Bengali and Kashmiri ethnicity, with others travelling regularly from nearby Rochdale and central Manchester too. These congregants are, for the most part, younger generations of British-born Muslims and this is also reflected in the Institute’s committee. It is the self-consciously contemporary approach of the Institute, endeavouring to bring the Prophetic past into the present, which initially attracted me to the Institute prior to conducting research.

In affirming adherence to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* with an emphasis upon education and civic engagement, this *masjid* and “community hub” seemed to encapsulate the novel trend of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism which I sought to investigate further. While I go on to examine how this way of doing Islam came to pervade all other field sites, I found the Institute to be an emblematic case and approached it as a field site because of this. In

common with Central Mosque One and Two, it was another *masjid* with a predominantly South Asian congregation that did not explicitly align with either the Barelvī or Deobandī *masālik*. Institutionally, it was most affiliated with *Shaykh* Husayn- his *ṭarīqa* and his ethos. Yet, here too there remained an overarching emphasis upon a “back-to-basics” approach to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* actualised in service to others, which was so characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. While this was the most newly built of the field sites included in this study, reflecting the novel way of doing Islam that it most epitomised, it was the site with which I was most familiar. I had attended the Institute’s official opening in 2016, but for years prior to this I had regularly listened to the *Shaykh*’s talks, and I had collaborated with the Institute’s Chairman in the delivery of talks and classes through the Sufi-Sunni Society at the University of Manchester. Since its opening, I would often commute to Oldham from South Manchester to attend the *majālis* and classes held at the Institute, being among the few who were not local to Oldham itself. Before beginning field work, too, I had related my intention to conduct research to the *Shaykh* and he gave his blessing for the work. In this, I was well acquainted with many at the Institute, especially the Chairman, a second-generation Kashmiri, who formally gave his consent to be interviewed and for me to conduct field work.

Ramadan Community Project:

Pursuing contemporary expressions of Islam through civic engagement further, and examining Muslim community identity outside of the *masājid*, I also attended a “Street Iftar” organised by the Ramadan Community Project on Manchester’s Oxford Road. This initiative began with a group of students in London in 2011 with a mission to “bring communities together,” and has since expanded across multiple university campuses

internationally. Each year, tents are erected by the cylindrical building of Manchester's "University Place" and long sheets of paper are rolled out, laid with lanterns and food packages for the students and general public, who gather to break fast, share food, listen to talks, meet each other, and pray. Most were Muslims, but many non-Muslims were also in attendance and no single ethnicity predominated here either, with a broad mix of South Asians, Arabs, Somalis, Indonesians, Malaysians, Chinese, and White British attendees among others. It was this representation of diversity, of "community cohesion" *encompassed* by Islam and not subverted by it, which initially attracted me to the "Street Iftar" as a field site.

I approached the "Street Iftar" as an example of the lived doing of Islam in the gaze of the "Other", hoping to discern how it had been shaped within wider societal discourse concerning civic religion, community cohesion, and Islam as a problem space. I decided to include this site later in the field work process. This was informed by the practical concern that the "Street Iftar" and its organisation only took place during Ramadan in the Summer when field work was coming to an end. Theoretically, it was a later development arising out of the field work process itself to discern the trend of Sufi-Sunni revivalism beyond the *masājid*. I had visited my first "Street Iftar" in London in 2013, and had been an infrequent tent-goer ever since, attending Manchester's "Street Iftar" in 2017 before conducting field work there in 2018. While familiar with the "Street Iftar" myself, the organisers were not familiar with me as they changed every year, but this did not pose an obstacle to securing formal permission to conduct research. Beyond this, my relative "strangeness" in this site, as a stranger among hundreds of other strangers, was not at all remarkable.

Qualifications

While I have sought to further account for the diversity of Islam as it is lived and done through my observations of these field sites as outlined above, my study is not all-inclusive in this regard. I do not include the Deobandīs as they have already been the subject of much research on Muslims in Britain while comparatively little has been undertaken on the Barelvī *maslak*, which I otherwise examine here. I do not include Salafism, another prominent form of Islamic revivalism, in this study either. This is in part due to my initial focus on South Asian Muslim communities as a progression from my MA dissertation, focusing on South Asian revival movements specifically. The Salafi movement, while certainly predominant among many Muslims in the UK and increasingly among younger South Asian Muslims, is not as prominent among South Asian Muslim communities as it is among Arab and Somali communities, for example. Furthermore, I was initially concerned to explore specifically Sufi-Sunni ways of doing Islam that above all nuanced past approaches to dividing South Asian Sufi-Sunni Muslims according to *maslak*, and this did not include non-Sufi movements. In my focus on Sufi-Sunni revivalism I have not sought to exhaustively outline all expressions of it, but rather to demonstrate how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as a pervasive current problematises reductive categorisations of Muslims within sect and institution. However, Salafism has certainly informed the context in which Sufi-Sunni Muslims assert their adherence to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, largely in response to the Salafi contention that they do not. Therefore, I have referred to Salafism where pertinent, but it does not comprise the data acquired in this study.

I have conducted this field work exclusively with Muslim men, and I understand that the lack of Muslim women in my study is a notable omission. The inclusion of women would

certainly enrich the data acquired and lead to a fuller comprehension of Muslim communities in Britain. While Jouili undertook a similar study in France and Germany,³⁸ this remains to be done here due to rules of gender segregation which maintain that men and women conduct their devotional activities separately. This extends further to social interactions between men and women who are not closely related in general. There are certainly exceptions to this, such as in one's working life where a degree of interaction between men and women is unavoidable, and the question of what is and is not permitted is a contested subject, particularly in a British context where Muslims are a minority. However, in the context of the Sufi-Sunni *masājid* which comprised the bulk of my study, men and women pray, gather for *dhikr*, and study separately, each in their own space. In this, it would have been unethical for me both as a Muslim and as a male researcher to transgress these parameters in field work. A further limitation, which has in large part arisen due to predominantly working in *masājid*, is that it has also excluded ways of doing Islam involving alternative sexual and gender identities that are perceived to be “unorthodox”, and hence unwelcome in conventional *masjid* space. Other “unorthodoxies”, such as liberal reformist ways of doing Islam, are similarly absent due to my focus on Sufi-Sunni Muslims.

Considering these limitations, I acknowledge in accord with Jeldtoft and others that approaching Muslim identity with a focus on Islam and its more visible expressions such as dress and devotional activities does not include less visible ways of being Muslim.³⁹ This is further compounded by examining these ways of being Muslim in primarily

³⁸ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*.

³⁹ Jeldtoft, “Lived Islam,” p. 1135.

institutional settings, potentially demonstrating an “institutional bias.”⁴⁰ My study, along with others focusing on Islamic revivalism, may therefore “run the risk of reifying ‘Islam’ as the principal identity for Muslims.”⁴¹ However, I argue in Chapter Two that Islam and religion broadly should not be reduced to text and institution, but should rather be conceptualised in a processual way which further accounts for how it is diversely and dynamically done. Furthermore, I consistently affirm throughout the thesis that Islam as it is lived and done defies containment within institutional parameters, and that these too are not static but fluid. The data that I have acquired *within* institutions attests to their malleability and to their thorough enmeshment in wider society *beyond* them. In this, I reify neither Islam nor Muslims in my study. While I have sought to more fully account for the heterogeneity of Islam as it is lived and done in Britain, I am not providing an exhaustive account of Islam or Muslims and this is not practical for the scope of this work. My priority has been to alternatively conceptualise this diversity beyond taxonomies thus far employed, and to suggest new ways of seeing how Islam is done in community. In the following, I describe the particularly formative events in my observations which informed this way of seeing, and how I gradually turned from taxonomies of Muslim identity towards a concern for the processes, both affective and discursive, which shape it.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 1137.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 1135.

Dwelling in gardens

“When you pass by the Gardens of Paradise, then dwell therein.” They said, “what are the Gardens of Paradise?” He replied, “the circles of remembrance.”

Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muḥammad, related by Anas ibn Mālik in *At-Tirmidhī*.

Living *Sunnah*, living spaces:

Attending a late-night *majlis* at Central Mosque Two, it was this *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet which most came to mind. It speaks of a sanctified space, a Garden of Paradise, evoked through the devotional act of bodies gathered together, circled in the remembrance of God. I had often prayed *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah* here. Located down a street just off of the Curry Mile, it was a bustling hub of activity at such times with predominantly Bengalis, but also Pakistanis, Somalis, Arabs and Kurds in attendance. However, on this particular evening the lights were dimmed in the main hall and the *Qur'ān* was being recited, followed by devotional poems (*qaṣāed*, *qaṣīda* sing.) in praise of the Prophet. I was greeted at the door by a friend who was circumambulating the room, burning *Sunnah* incense (*bakhūr*) as he went. A young Bengali, he was wearing a thobe and a Yemeni shawl, also according to the *Sunnah*, like many of the other Bengalis, Pakistanis and Somalis who also comprised this intimate gathering. I felt slightly out of place in my jacket, jumper and jeans, but nevertheless it was as though I had entered into a sacred enclave. It was enclosed not so much by walls but by the self-conscious *Sunnah* which was embodied and smelt, seen and felt, inseparable from the bodies who inscribed the space with sanctity, who cultivated this Garden of Paradise.

All of this preceded the arrival of *Shaykh* Danyal, an English convert born and raised in Manchester, donning the turban, cloak and shawl in accordance with the *Sunnah* and particularly characteristic of the *Bā-‘Alawī ṭarīqa* to which he belonged. In a hushed tone, he reminded us to reflect upon our intentions for attending, that we had gathered for the sake of Divine remembrance, and that this was a *majlis* of seclusion (*i’tikāf*) from the world. Just like the space itself, the litanies and the talk which followed were pervaded with reference to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*. These were to be the sole foundations of connection, of brotherhood between the believers not only attending this *majlis*, but the entire global community of Muslims, the *Ummah*. It was this sacred foundation that accorded them their distinction and the firmness of their bond, but also their gift, embodied and enacted in service. Rationalised, reflexive religiosity, felt fraternal bonds, and a civic commitment both to the *Ummah* and to wider society, all framed with reference to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*: this was a story I had begun to discern throughout my field work, and I wrote as much as I could until I was interrupted. “Not to be prescriptive,” the *Shaykh* said, “don’t disrupt the connection.” At this point I realised that I was also part of this circle, this Garden, this story that was enacted, embodied, evoked and inscribed within this space. Its continued existence depended not only upon my awareness of what I had entered in to, but also upon my own positioning in relation to it, and observing the etiquettes required.

Living *Sunnah* for “our times”:

While this *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* community was very much encircled and contained within Central Mosque Two on that particular evening, it was a story that I had been, and would continue to be, acquainted with in each *masjid* I attended, in each Garden I passed by. This

was most exemplified by Oldham's Institute. Entering the building for a *majlis* one evening, I read the *Hadīth* in the entrance, "And Madina is better for them, if only they knew." Professionally designed posters and pamphlets detailing the services the Institute offers, from children's *Qur'ān* classes and after school clubs to adults' classes in the religious sciences, line the walls replete with supplications and reminders from the *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth*. To my right is the children's nursery, with the *Qur'ānic* verse, "Allah only wishes to purify you, O family of the Prophet, and to purify you completely," artistically rendered on the wall. Going upstairs, to the devotional and academic floor of the building, I would enter a more familiar *masjid* space, with a blue patterned carpet, Moroccan arabesque dividers, and the names of Allah painted along the walls. However, this evening I go left from the entrance to the "Youth Zone," and "Rumi Café," where food is served and children can watch television, play video games, and have a game of pool or football, but not tonight, because the brothers have gathered here for *dhikr*.

Just as the building itself both implicitly and explicitly conveys commitment to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, the *dhikr* too is permeated with references to it. Those attending were predominantly young Kashmiris and Bengalis, there were a few Syrians among them too, and clothing ranged from casual everyday wear to shalwar kameez, from pure white thobes with green shawls to heavy Moroccan *jubbas* (also a thobe). This *majlis* was as eclectic as the building in which it was held, both in those who attended and in the *dhikr* too. Yet, it was framed in all its plurality and particularity by the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah*, and the way of *Shaykh* Husayn. This was even more apparent in the talk that followed, by a young Bengali wearing a white thobe and green shawl according to the *Sunnah*, who began with the verse, "hold onto the rope of Allah and be not divided," and proceeded to explain it. The rope is

the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, he said, and it is only through directly connecting to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, reflecting upon and internalising it, and consulting the scholars and saints who embody it, that the *Ummah* can be united and community established. People are flawed and make mistakes, he explained, and if we cannot go to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* then we are left to the people of our times, the debates and the sectarianism. The *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* are the foundations from which we establish a united community that can positively contribute to wider society. “Don’t let this be a sound bite,” he exhorted us, “we are relevant, we have a role to play.” I observed once again a familiar story, one of rationalised, reflexive religiosity, felt fraternal bonds, and a civic commitment both to the *Ummah* and to wider society, all framed with reference to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. This way (*manhaj*) was understood to be a corrective to the sectarianism and disunity that characterise “our times.”

Preserving *Sunnah*, then and now:

Hearing this expressed aversion to debates and sectarianism I recalled the history of *masjid* establishment in Britain, with the Barelvī and the Deobandī *masālik* engaged in much contestation and debate concerning *masjid* ownership and the parameters of Sunni Islam. North Manchester Mosque remained committed to this campaign in affirming the exclusive orthodoxy of their *maslak*. *Allāma* would tell me that Ahmad Razā Khān, as a reviver (*mujaddid*), “has become the symbol, he has become the sign, he has become the *identity* of the true Sunni Creed and beliefs.” Indeed, to deviate from his *maslak* in any degree was to be “out of the fold,” as these differences are not minor, and the duty of the ‘*Ulemā* is to educate their communities in this through debates, rulings (*fatāwa* pl. *fatwā* sing.) and classes. Here, it was expressed that the community’s ailments would not be

resolved through avoiding these contestations, but by championing the cause of “true” Sunni Islam through embracing the Barelvī *maslak*, without which correct adherence to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* could not be assured.

The story presented at North Manchester Mosque was characteristic of the Barelvī *maslak* as I understood it, and I expected this sensibility to be echoed at South Manchester Madrasa too. Like many *masājid* it is modestly furnished inside with the conventional *masjid* carpet, and copies of the *Qur’ān* with English and Urdu translations lining the left side of the hall. On the far right wall there is a panorama of *Masjid an-Nabawī*, the Prophet’s *Masjid* in Medina, while on the left there is a poster outlining key facts about “Ala Hazrat: Imam Ahmed Rida Khan al-Baraylawi”, his works, his *fatāwa*, and his teachers. Visiting this *masjid* for the first time, I felt that my initial presumptions were confirmed, that it was particularly aligned with the Barelvī *maslak*. Speaking with *Ustādh*, I was surprised to learn that this old-school approach of earlier generations, debating and sectarian polemic, was in his view no longer applicable. “Now let’s suppose Manchester Council has organised a meeting between all the *masājid*, so then they exchange views, they exchange numbers,” and as such, *Ustādh* said, opinions necessarily changed. This community does not need further sectarianism, he explained, but rather it needs genuine education in the Islamic sciences and adherence to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* on this basis, to positively contribute and civically engage with wider society. It was a familiar story once more, one that I had heard in multiple places and have outlined here, yet through that conversation I realised that it is not specific to a particular movement, *ṭarīqa* or organisation, nor can it be examined apart from the wider society of which Muslims are a part.

Mancunian mosques, *Sunnah* in society:

That the discursive arena of the *masjid* is significantly informed by and reflective of the wider societal “Mancunian” discourse on civic religion was most clearly demonstrated when I attended a mosque open day at Central Mosque One. Entering the foyer, a noticeboard details the *masjid*’s positive connections with Manchester city council, documents of health and safety approval, and the committee’s stated condemnation of terrorism, persecution, and war. As I entered the main hall and joined the circle of attendees for the open day, Imam Bilal described how this was “a very Mancunian mosque,” characterised by openness, diversity, and an active concern for the local community, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Indeed, he described it as a community hub, just as the Prophet’s *masjid* was a community hub, not just a place of prayer but of civic activity. He described it as a loving and caring environment for children, just as the Prophet loved and cared for his grandchildren during a sermon. In response to one visitor’s critical remark concerning the extravagant chandelier in the main hall, he explained how he felt that it was a very British adornment, and that Islam embraces all cultural forms.

Imam Bilal tells a story here, with reference to the biography and traditions of the Prophet, of an Islam that is civic, community focused, all-embracing and tolerant of difference. The *masjid* itself demonstrates this, the current contemporary manifestation of a continuous chain back to the Prophet’s time. However, this is coupled with a “reassurance message,” where the imam and committee members continually reiterate that they are “decent, law-abiding citizens,” who condemn terrorism and extremism of all kinds. One older committee member, with evident frustration, complains to those gathered how Islam and Muslims are under attack both from the media and from terrorism, and how “you people in

the West,” do not understand this point. This was a rupture, an assertion of difference and distance, in an otherwise convivial space, yet it revealed the primary impetus of this event, and indeed the story told through it. This story of civic Islam, of very Mancunian mosques and community centres, of peace and tolerance, certainly hearkens back to an established precedent in Prophetic tradition. However, it is a story articulated and enacted in the context of media pressure to explain “real” Islam, and to affirm the capacity for Islam and Muslims to positively contribute to wider society. While I had observed this elsewhere in my other field sites, it was in this instance, encountering the perceived “Other”, that this exhortation was most pronounced.

Contemporary *Sunnah* in a storied world:

The preceding instances outlined here tell of a rationalised, reflexive way of being Muslim and of doing Islam which is grounded in adherence to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* as the basis of both affectively felt community between Muslims, and for civic engagement with the wider society to which Muslims belong, I have called this emergent trend contemporary Sufi-Sunni Revivalism. Akin to the revivalism outlined by Jouili in her *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, it is not reducible to any single organisation or movement but is rather a way of being Muslim and of doing Islam which pervades all field sites examined. It is rooted in the wider societal context of policy discourse on civic religion and community cohesion, and of Islam as a problem space.⁴² I have called this a story, and the instances thus far outlined are variant tellings of it. Following Ingold’s description of storied

⁴² Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 13.

knowledge in *Being Alive*, “the things of the world *are* their stories,”⁴³ as they are all constituted of paths of movement, and to speak of this unfolding meshwork of paths is not to describe fixed attributes but rather to tell a story. One may also relate a story, drawing past occurrences into current experiences which in turn inform the ongoing stories of the present.⁴⁴ Contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, both as a way of *doing* Islam and of drawing past stories meaningfully into the present, as a path of movement and as a reflexive recounting of past movements, is in every sense a story. These stories build a picture of how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism has informed the lived doing of Islam in Britain, and in the following I explain how I discerned these stories in my field work before broadly outlining the narrative shape of the thesis itself.

Methodology

Ingold begins his work, *Making*, with the assertion that “to know things you have to grow in them, and let them grow in you, so that they become a part of who you are.”⁴⁵ Prior to beginning my field work it had often been my contention, as a Muslim convert living within and feeling belonging to “the Muslim community” in Manchester, that the labels so often applied to *my* community in the literature (and by extension, to me) did not sufficiently reflect the heterogeneity that I had experienced. Undertaking participant observation in *masājid* among general congregants with whom I had already become acquainted over a number of years, my initial purpose was to develop a more comprehensive taxonomy of community identity which included those who frequented

⁴³ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 160.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴⁵ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 1.

these spaces. Coupling this with interviewing the institutional representatives of the *masājid*, the imams, I also intended to provide a more contemporary account of both established and emergent institutionally represented community identities.⁴⁶ In this, my initial research purpose was very much born of who I was and who I had become as a Muslim in Manchester. This is not to say that I was an insider, because I was still approaching my research as a convert from Surrey, neither raised as a Muslim nor as a Mancunian, and most significantly as a researcher. Furthermore, even in endeavouring to describe and to an extent systematise my experiences and those of others there is a constant move between emic insider and etic outsider positions,⁴⁷ to the extent that there is no clear demarcation between the two. Yet, my position as a practitioner and researcher has both shaped my contentions that comprise the impetus for my research, and the experiences and reflections that have been born of it which, though ultimately my own, provide insight into how Muslim community identity is done in Britain.

In conducting field work in the *masājid* of focus my primary ethical concerns were securing informed consent to conduct research, ensuring the continued informed consent of respondents, preserving their anonymity, and avoiding any harm or distress. As I have described previously, the working relationships, acquaintances and friendships that had developed prior to research ultimately facilitated access to each field site in that I was understood by imams and committee members to be a familiar Sufi-Sunni Muslim. Where possible, I emailed each imam and committee member in turn re-introducing myself where necessary, describing my research, and formally requesting permission to conduct field

⁴⁷ Russel T. McCutcheon, ed. *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 17.

work. I requested each respondent to take at least a day to consider their response, reminding them that consent could be withdrawn at any time should they wish, and that all data would be anonymised. To these emails I attached one information sheet for interviewing, one general information sheet for participant observation, and one consent form.⁴⁸ For those respondents who I could only contact in person, I formally met them at their *masjid* instead to present my research and request consent. I invited each respondent to discuss the research for further clarification if they needed it by email correspondence, in the *masjid* or wherever else was most convenient to them, and politely requested hard copies of signed consent forms in accord with the requirements of ethical review.

To ensure the informed consent of congregants frequenting each field site, I made the general information sheet publicly available and clearly pinned to a visible noticeboard either within the *masjid* or in an entranceway. Where this was not possible due to the transitory and open nature of the event, as in the “Street Iftar” at the University of Manchester, I approached the organisers of the event in person with my general information sheet and consent form to secure their permission. This similarly applied to sites of anecdotal reflection such as occasional house gatherings. These were not field sites themselves as they were not formal institutions with recognisable organisational representatives, and formal consent could not be formally secured because of this. On such occasions, while a general information sheet was placed clearly on a table and made publicly available to those present, no data was formally collected. In each field site, anonymity has been preserved through pseudonyms for both individuals and institutions. I recognised that, given the gender-segregated nature of *masjid* space, my presence as a male

⁴⁸ Consult Appendix Two, pages 320-324 for copies of these documents.

researcher in the female sections of the *masājid* would be a potential cause of distress, and my field work was limited to the male sections for this reason. However, I also understood that in doing so I was potentially reinforcing hegemonic notions of Islam “proper” and ways of being Muslim men in an already masculinised Muslim world. In advancing a processual conceptualisation of Islam and contesting its reification I have sought to mitigate this, acknowledging that Islam observed among my respondents does not account for the entirety of Islam itself.

Methodologically, I concentrated on predominantly Sufi-Sunni *masājid* in Manchester specifically because I was already acquainted with these *masājid* and I identified as a Sufi-Sunni Muslim myself. It also served to compensate for a comparative lack of ethnographic research on Sufi-Sunni and Barelvī institutions in Britain. With the notable exception of Khan’s study of Mirpuri Muslims in Lancashire, there has been more extensive literature on Deobandī and Salafī institutions undertaken by Jonathan Birt,⁴⁹ Geaves,⁵⁰ Gilliat-Ray,⁵¹ and Hamid,⁵² among others. My own positioning allowed for further insight in this, and accorded me relative ease of access, widening opportunities for participant observation,⁵³ as I was able to completely participate in the devotional activities, classes and talks in a “natural way.”⁵⁴ While my familiarity was beneficial in this, James Spradley cautions that

⁴⁹ Jonathan Birt, “Locating the British *Imam*: The Deobandī ‘*Ulama* between Contested Authority and Public Policy Post-9/11,” in *European Muslims and the Secular State*, Jocelyne Cesari and Seán McLoughlin eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 183-196.

⁵⁰ Ron Geaves, “The Contested Milieu of Deoband: ‘Salafis’ or ‘Sufis’?” in *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, Lloyd Ridgeon ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 191-216.

⁵¹ Sophie Gilliat-Ray, “From “closed worlds” to “open doors”: (now) accessing Deobandī Darul Uloom in Britain,” *Fieldwork in Religion*, 13:2 (2018), pp. 127-150. Accessed 31st July, 2021.

⁵² Sadek Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2016).

⁵³ James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1980), p. 48.

⁵⁴ Spradley, *Participant Observation*, p. 52.

“the *less* familiar you are with a social situation, the *more* you are able to see the tacit cultural rules at work.”⁵⁵ Acknowledging this, I sought to be both comprehensive in my note-taking so as to partially mitigate omissions of tacit knowledge,⁵⁶ and reflexively aware of my own positioning which informed what was omitted and what was included. Again, this entailed an alternation between “insider” and “outsider” experience,⁵⁷ encouraging me to critically discern tacit knowledge which I myself, as a partial “insider”, might have otherwise been unaware of.

Although my position as a Sufi-Sunni Muslim accorded me a wider degree of access and participation, the nature of the *masājid* in question as gender-segregated spaces limited my observations to an extent in that they were confined to the men’s sections. The slight exception to this was my participation in the “Street Iftar” at the University of Manchester, but even here there was the tacit expectation of gender-segregation for the most part. I acknowledge that my study also concerns predominantly South Asian Sufi-Sunni Muslims, given that South Asian Muslims are the most institutionally established in Manchester and in Britain in general, but it does not exclude those of other ethnicities who also frequented the *masājid*. For example, while Central Mosque One and Central Mosque Two have been characterised as “the Pakistani mosque” and “the Bengali mosque” respectively, Muslims of other ethnicities regularly attend, and this also applies in varying degrees to my other field sites too. In this, while the full extent of diversity of Muslims in Britain is not wholly

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁶ Nicholas H. Wolfinger, “On writing fieldnotes: collection strategies and background expectancies,” *Qualitative Research*, 2:85 (2002), pp. 85-95, p. 90. Accessed 14th June, 2017.

⁵⁷ McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider Problem*, p. 17.

accounted for here, I still chose my field sites because of how they, in their heterogeneity, scrutinised extant categories and modes of classification.

Both North Manchester Mosque and South Manchester Madrasa, though perceived to be “Barelvi” in their events and in their *‘Ulemā*, differ over the application and meaning of this term, scrutinising the coherence of the category itself. Central Mosque One, described by Werbner as “Barelwi,”⁵⁸ often hosted a wide variety of *Sheyūkh* and *‘Ulemā* with no affiliation to South Asia or to Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvi, and could be perceived as a broadly Sufi-Sunni *masjid*. This was equally applicable to Central Mosque Two which seemed most aligned with the *Fultolī ṭarīqa*, regularly holding the *ṭarīqa’s dhikr* gatherings there, yet it too hosted *Sheyūkh* from outside of this milieu, to the extent that it could not be reduced to it. The Institute was particularly noteworthy in this regard given that it was both aligned with the *Shādhilī-Qādirī-Rifā’ī ṭarīqa* of *Shaykh* Husayn, and it sought to affirm a traditional Islam beyond sectarian polemics, grounded in the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*. Attending *Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah*, talks by visiting *Sheyūkh* and *‘Ulemā*, and classes at these *masājid*, and compiling field notes over the course of my field work year, it was my intention to discern and account for this heterogeneity in Muslim community identity that I initially observed.

I found this diversity articulated and enacted in *dhikr* gatherings, sermons, speeches and lessons by the *‘Ulemā* and in conversation with attendees, which I would paraphrase and code with particular emphasis on terms denoting sectarian affiliation or alignment with a specific *ṭarīqa*. I noted the age-range and ethnicities of attendees, their attire and the

⁵⁸ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, pp. 31-32.

languages spoken, both in general conversation and in speeches, to explore what particular forms of community identity looked and sounded like, and how they were diversely expressed by the young and the old. I also explored how the buildings themselves visually manifest institutionally represented community identity, considering their layout, their facilities, and the books on their shelves. Perhaps most significantly, I began to observe how these spaces *felt*, how community identity was affectively cultivated through the activities undertaken in congregation, and how this was diversely done between and across field sites. In this, I endeavoured to be comprehensive in my note-taking, generally following Spradley's list of space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal and feeling.⁵⁹ I initially intended to visit all field sites weekly and assigned a day to each depending on the activities taking place, be they Islamic studies classes, *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah* or *dhikr* gatherings. However, as field work progressed some classes were discontinued, some events had already been sufficiently covered in one *masjid* and it became more fruitful to move on to another, and as such it was not possible to consistently observe each *masjid* every week. I visited each field site more often than I conducted observations for this reason, but in each instance I would return home to fully write up, code and analyse the field notes that I had acquired.⁶⁰ I subsequently stored these notes on the University's private encrypted drive, accessible only to myself on campus and remotely through my account, ensuring that data remained secure and confidential.

In addition to my consideration of each *masjid* in isolation, I examined how the diverse forms of Muslim community identity I observed mutually informed each other across field

⁵⁹ Spradley, *Participant Observation*, p. 78.

⁶⁰ Consult the table in Appendix One, page 319, outlining the number of observations at each field site.

sites, and how these were themselves configured within a wider societal context of Islamophobia and the civic potential of “faith communities”. Over the course of my observations in all field sites I discerned a pervasive pattern of a rationalised, reflexive way of being Muslim and of doing Islam, grounded in adherence to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*. Harkening back to the earlier generations of Muslims and affirming the contemporary authority of the *‘Ulemā* and the *Sheyūkh* as the carriers of this tradition, this was consistently appealed to as the affective basis of community between Muslims and for civic engagement with wider society. This trend of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism informed and reconfigured the shape of community identity everywhere expressed, and was itself born of both an aversion to sectarian polemic among Muslims themselves and the wider societal context of Islamophobia and civic religiosity. It could not be boxed in at all, much less incorporated into a taxonomy, given its fundamental enmeshment in the very constitution of Muslim community identity both within the field sites observed and in wider society. This observation preceded a transition away from describing isolated expressions of Muslim community identity in all its diversity towards a wider consideration of the dynamics of community identity formation itself.

Ingold describes anthropology, and by extension participant observation, as a study *with*, a learning *from* and a moving *forward*, which is itself a personally transformative process.⁶¹ The purpose of participant observation is not to account for, classify and document heterogeneity, as is otherwise the purpose of ethnography,⁶² but it is rather to learn by

⁶¹ Ingold, *Making*, p. 2.

⁶² *Ibid.*

doing, growing in knowledge through engagement with the beings and things around us of which we are fundamentally a part.⁶³ This is what it is to truly *participate* in observation, and it is this insight in particular which encouraged me to definitively move away from my initial intention to produce a taxonomy which represented and accounted for the heterogeneity I observed. I am not entirely convinced by Ingold's antithetical portrayal of ethnography, though, as Gillian Evans also describes ethnography as fundamentally about *learning in practice* what it means to be incorporated into a specific human collective.⁶⁴ This also entails the openness to transformation and the acknowledgement of one's enmeshment within their field, with no illusions of occupying an outside vantage point from which they learn about their informants. In this, ethnography as Evans describes it is not at all dissimilar to Ingold's description of participant observation, and the purposes of both seem to accord here.

While the characterisations of ethnography differ, Evans emphasises the need for a theory of learning which is properly instructive and enables one to ask appropriate questions,⁶⁵ which no doubt opens up perception and is conducive to the art of critical enquiry which Ingold describes.⁶⁶ This exhortation to be reflexive and to cultivate a sophisticated means of critical enquiry through the process of participant observation is echoed by Spradley too,⁶⁷ who also describes participant observation as an ethnographic method. Therefore, it is *ongoing* reflexive, critical enquiry which seems to distinguish "good" ethnography from

⁶³ Ibid, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Gillian Evans, "Practicing Participant Observation: An Anthropologists Account," *Journal of Organisational Ethnography*, 1:1 (2012), pp. 1-15, p. 5. Accessed 3rd August, 2020.

⁶⁵ Evans, "Practicing Participant Observation," p. 5.

⁶⁶ Ingold, *Making*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Spradley, *Participant Observation*, pp. 28-29.

“bad” ethnography, or in Ingold’s case, participant observation from ethnography in general. Whether participant observation belongs to anthropology or ethnography, it is this constant openness and attentiveness to oneself and the field in which one is enmeshed that constitutes the fruitful and transformative learning process that Ingold and others have described. Approaching my research reflexively, as a cyclical process whereby my questions were continually informed by my findings,⁶⁸ I revised my initial intention of developing a taxonomy of Muslim community identity. I instead focused on how this was both affectively and discursively constituted, and how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism has pervasively informed this process.

In spite of this reorientation in emphasis as a result of participant observation, the purpose and process of my interviewing remained the same. I conducted five unstructured interviews with the imams of each *masjid* to better discern the shape of institutionally represented community identity articulated at each field site, and to explore how this informed and contextualised the manifestations of community identity that I observed. I argue in common with Robert Atkinson that an interview should be “informal and loose, like a conversation,”⁶⁹ though focussed on the interviewee. Nigel Fielding and Hilary Thomas argue that such an interview is less inhibited by the tendency for the interviewee to provide socially acceptable answers or rehearsed responses, and is more likely to encourage the spontaneous expression of personally held attitudes, beliefs and values.⁷⁰

My familiarity with the imams, both prior to and developing over the course of field work,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview* (SAGE Publications, Inc, 2011), p. 32.

⁷⁰ Nigel Fielding and Hilary Thomas, “Qualitative Interviewing,” in *Researching Social Life*, ed. Nigel G. Gilbert (Sage, 2008), pp. 245-265, p. 249.

was conducive to this conversational approach, and this itself supplemented the overall purpose of my observations to be further immersed in the lifeworld/s of the Muslims I was learning from. To an extent I shared this lifeworld as a Muslim in Manchester, moving in similar social circles, sharing a similar vocabulary and common concerns. This also provided access to technical terms which, according to Beatrice Webb, “are so many levers to lift into consciousness and expression the more abstruse and out-of-the-way facts or series of facts,”⁷¹ and much fruitful discussion resulted from the discussion of such terms and topics.

Despite being conversational, my interviews were nonetheless conversations with purpose,⁷² guided by a broad sequence of questions pertaining to the *masājid* themselves, their histories, their positioning in wider society and their ethos. This distinguished my interviewing from ordinary conversations that I would otherwise often have with my interviewees, particularly in that it was “*nonroutine conversation*,” with a predetermined purpose and design.⁷³ Furthermore, in contrast to ordinary conversation these interviews were set apart and marked out with interviewees being given time to prepare, to sign the necessary consent forms, and were initiated with the switching on of the dictaphone. Both the purpose and format of the interview process itself cultivated the awareness that “here is an interview,”⁷⁴ and although two of my interviews were almost entirely informal and free-flowing, this awareness informed much of my interviewing experience. This experience

⁷¹ Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (London: Longmans, Green, 1926), p. 363.

⁷² Colin Robson, *Real World Research* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 28.

⁷³ Nigel Rapport, “The Interview as a Form of Talking-partnership: Dialectical, Focussed, Ambiguous, Special,” in *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach*, Jonathan Skinner ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), pp. 53-68, p. 55.

⁷⁴ Rapport, “The Interview as a Form of Talking-partnership,” p. 58.

was configured not only by what I presented the interview *as*, as a conversation, but most significantly by the interviewees' expectations of what an interview is *supposed to be*, a series of semi-structured questions and answers. In such instances my "outsider" position as a researcher became most marked in the context of the interview, which transfigured not only my position as an otherwise friendly acquaintance into an interviewer, but also my interviewees' positions as representatives of their institutions.

This tension between informality and formality, between friendly conversation and purposeful research enquiry, was ultimately implicit in the purpose of the interview itself. Through the interview, I was interested in sharing reflections gleaned in observation and discussing these with my interviewees to better analyse and contextualise these observations. The interview context constructed a space of reflection, encouraging the interviewees to "engage with aspects of life which may not surface elsewhere."⁷⁵ For example, in asking them how they understood certain labels of community identity, how they understood the sanctity of space and what they meant when they talked about the Muslim "public", the interviews accorded a degree of analytical depth which would not have been explored to the same extent in general conversation. Although such discussions were most fruitful when interviews were free-flowing and conversational, it was the particularity of the interview itself *as distinct* from ordinary conversation which made it "a process by which individuals perform in-depth analysis of their own realities."⁷⁶ It was

⁷⁵ Jenny Hockey, "Interviews as Ethnography? Disembodied Social Interaction in Britain," in *British Subjects: An Anthropological Britain*, Nigel Rapport ed. (Oxford: Berg, 2002), pp. 209-222, p. 214.

⁷⁶ Ana Lopes, "Talking and Acting for our Rights: the Interview in an Action-Research Setting," in *Extraordinary Encounters: Authenticity and the Interview*, Nigel Rapport, Katherine Smith and James Staples eds. (Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 157-174, p. 164. Accessed 7th August, 2020.

these interviews which nuanced my observations, often revealing information that would have remained otherwise implicit.⁷⁷

Alongside this analytical objective, I was also concerned with discerning an outline of institutionally represented community identity, articulated by the imams *as representatives*. This dual-purpose constituted a tension at times, with the pressures exerted on the interview context by both its uniqueness and my own position as a researcher being compounded further by my interviewees' roles as spokespeople for their institutions, concerned with saying something "wrong". For example, while a critical examination of local sectarian polemics would often provide useful insight into the politics of community identity formation, this could be inhibited by the story of the *masjid*, devoid of sectarian contention, that the interviewee may otherwise relate. While existing in tension, both responses reveal something of the dynamics of community identity formation, and I mitigated potential omissions through a comparative analysis of my observations and attentiveness to moments of silence, considering the significance of what was left unsaid. Though in part conversational, the interview context as both a space for reflection and for expression supplemented my observations in providing essential insight into both the shape of community identity and the dynamics of its formation.

As a Sufi-Sunni Muslim in Manchester, living my Islam in common with my respondents and already being familiar as a congregant with the *masājid* which comprised my field, I experienced no difficulties being received as a participant observer. For the imams and

⁷⁷ Katherine Smith and James Staples, "Introduction: The Interview as Analytical Category," in *Extraordinary Encounters: Authenticity and the Interview*, Nigel Rapport, Katherine Smith and James Staples eds. (Berghahn Books, 2015), pp. 1-18, p. 9. Accessed 7th August, 2020.

committee members who granted their consent, I was understood to be a Sufi-Sunni Muslim with whom they were acquainted who, through my research, would provide further insight into how they lived their Islam. Believing this work to be beneficial, they supported it, and I was met with the same encouragement and interest by other respondents who would enquire about my research over the course of field work. Such instances of enquiry, where my presence as a participant observer would come to the fore, were both infrequent and transient. Occasionally respondents would ask in passing about my progress and what insights I had acquired, yet above all they would commend me for what I was doing and would invariably say how they looked forward to the finished work. As I described previously, it was only in the context of the interview that my position as a researcher predominated over that of the familiar face, and free-flowing discussion outside of the interview context became a series of questions and answers within it.

Beyond the position of researcher and interviewer, I undertook no roles aside from those with which I was already accustomed prior to research. I was a congregant among congregants and a student among students, and in this I operated in these *masājid* as I had always done. During my research, as before and since, it was my being a White British convert to Islam that distinguished me most from my respondents. Though familiar with the dynamics of South Asian Muslim community identity formation, of kin networks (*birādarī*) and politics “back home”, my not being raised in this and possessing only a limited comprehension of Urdu meant that I was not privy to these conversations. Yet, even in this my relative “strangeness” was mitigated by the contemporary aversion of younger generations of Muslims born and raised in Britain to earlier markers of community identity belonging to an older generation. While my relative unfamiliarity as a White British convert to Islam potentially informed my respondents’ presentation of Islam,

this did not obstruct or obscure my study of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, with which I was chiefly concerned.

Both participant observation and unstructured interviewing accorded me insight into how Muslim community identity was done in Manchester, discursively, affectively, and ever in process. I had begun my field work with the intention of purely accounting for the heterogeneity of Muslim community identity, comparing its institutional representations as articulated by the imams with how it manifested among congregants frequenting the *masājid*. Yet, just as I had observed how forms of Muslim community identity were not isolable, but rather enmeshed and mutually constituted, occurring situationally in a way that defied categorisation, this was equally applicable to articulations of Muslim community identity as expressed by the imams I interviewed. I could not separate the institutionally represented manifestations of community identity as expressed by the imams from other forms of community identity discernible among other *masjid* congregants any more than I could incorporate the heterogeneity that I observed into a taxonomy. Furthermore, it became apparent through the recognition of pervasive trends that I could not entirely consider any single field site in isolation from any other as these themselves were enmeshed, not simply as *masājid* within the broader Muslim community of Manchester but also with wider society as a whole. In the following I explain what I have discerned through this research process, providing a Chapter by Chapter outline of what this has entailed.

Roadmap

The question of what Islam is, of what is “properly” Islamic, and of how to coherently conceptualise Islam in the face of its sheer diversity, is the question to which I turn in

Chapter Two. I begin by examining how Islam has been understood as “religion” proper, specifically textualized religion, comprised of the *Qur’ān*, the *Ḥadīth* and the interpretative authority of the *‘Ulemā*, while what Muslims do is relegated to the separate and secondary sphere of culture. I argue here that defining Islam in such a way belies its diversity in privileging certain forms of Islam as more properly Islamic, and further abstracts Islam apart from how it is lived and done by Muslims themselves. In this, I advance an oft-stated contention common to literature on lived and everyday religion, that it is necessary to look beyond reified conceptualisations of religion and attend to how religion is lived. I argue in accord with Shahab Ahmed that Islam need not collapse into a multiplicity of “islams” in this, its singularity retained as hermeneutic engagement with Revelation, and I supplement this with Talal Asad’s approach to Islam as a discursive tradition. I demonstrate the applicability of this alternative conceptualisation in my outline and definition of Islamic revivalism and the process whereby Islam becomes objectified in relation to perceived external threats, before turning to how parameters of Muslim communities have also been variously drawn.

I begin with the notion of the *Ummah* as an imagined community, and moving beyond the imaginal in accord with Vered Amit I question the extent to which community is genuinely cultivated in the absence of actual sociation. While admitting to the existence of a plethora of imagined cultural categories which may be situationally evoked in the mobilisation of social relations, I contend that community exists not merely in the head but is rather both discursively and affectively cultivated. It is born not only of institutional representations, ideological articulations, expressions, and ascriptions, but crucially of affective compulsions towards and against others born of ongoing sociation. As with Islam, so too with Muslim community, it is actualised in process as it is lived and done in

correspondence with others. As such, its parameters are ever in flux, ever ongoing, and evading categorisation. Reflecting on the heterogeneity and processual malleability of both Islam and Muslim community, I close this Chapter through introducing Ingold's line theory. Here, phenomena are characterised not as boxes, abstracted from the discursive and affective processes which comprise and shape them, but are rather lines of movement entangled in a vast meshwork of lines, engaged in and mutually constituted through ongoing correspondence. I advance this as an alternative to more taxonomic approaches to Muslim community identity in Britain, which I proceed to review and outline in Chapter Three alongside more processual approaches.

I contend in Chapter Three that a taxonomic approach to Muslim community identity in Britain does not wholly reflect its diversity as it is lived and done, as attested by contemporary literature on everyday Islam. Building upon this, I argue that a meshworked approach to Muslim community identity is a useful means to conceptualise it as lived and done beyond taxonomies. I affirm in common with Jeldtoft, Woodhead and DeHanas among others that an emphasis on movements, organisations and authoritative individuals does not sufficiently describe how community is done. Furthermore, it does not account for expressions of Muslim community identity which exist outside of, conflate and confound, these institutional labels. Just as labels dividing Muslim community identity neatly into institutional and denominational spheres do not easily persist in the lived doing of Muslim community, so too are demarcations of strictly religious and cultural communities also problematic.

I outline how in spite of this conceptual limitation, past literature has often maintained this dichotomous conceptualisation, and from Geaves and Werbner through to Nasar Meer I

explore attempts in past literature to theorise the relationship between religion, culture and ethnicity in the constitution of community identity. Ultimately, I argue that the literature surveyed acknowledges to varying degrees that Muslim community identity is ever in process, multiple and situational, yet the taxonomic models subsequently developed cannot reflect this. I contend in accord with Jeldtoft, Jouili, Schaefer and Sara Ahmed that more affective considerations are required to describe the processes whereby community is both discursively and affectively done, again asserting that a meshworked approach comprehensively accounts for this. Having argued for the enmeshment of British Muslim communities within Britain and its cities, I subsequently provide a brief history of Muslims in Manchester before describing the currently pervasive trend of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as a precursor to Chapter Four.

I proceed to address my first research question in Chapter Four, discerning how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism has informed and displaced sectarian affiliation and in turn reconfigured how Islam is discursively and affectively done in Britain. Having previously defined contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as reflexive engagement with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, mediated through the *'Ulemā*, and actualised in service to wider society, I explore how this trend permeates my field sites. While this way is exemplified at the Institute in talks, classes and *majālis*, I observe too how it has informed contemporary manifestations of the Barelvī *maslak* in its renewed emphasis upon the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, and in the exhortation to embody it in daily life and in service to wider society. Extending beyond the discursive, I explore too how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism manifests affectively in the context of the *majlis*, bringing devotional bodies together in worship and service, and in turn sacralising space.

I describe this as being akin to a sacred chain of transmission (*sanad*, *asanīd* pl.), a correspondence of discursive and affective flows bringing the Prophetic past into the present. This is effected through the *‘Ulemā* who express and embody it, the collective devotions of those gathered, and the cultivated consecration of the space itself. I examine, too, how this *sanad* constructs the bonds between and the boundaries around my respondents which inform the shape of Muslim community identity. As this *sanad* surges through the *majlis* parameters are drawn, separating sanctity from profanity and belief from unbelief. Loci of felt fraternity are situationally evoked too, shifting between the congregants gathered and extending beyond to their wider locality and to the *Ummah* itself. I also observe how this affirmation of brotherhood is often coupled with an awareness of felt distance from the non-Muslim “Other”, and of the need to proudly represent and convey Islam through service to effectively traverse it. From this I argue that, objectified in the gaze of the “Other”, contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is situated as much in Manchester as it is in the *majlis*, and I proceed to explore this enmeshment further in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Five I address the second research question through situating contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism within wider societal discourse concerning civic religion, community cohesion, and Islam as a problem space. I observe how it echoes the wider discursive tradition of liberal secularism in its division of “religious” private and “neutral” public spheres, manifest both spatially and discursively in the distinction between prayer spaces and community hubs. I discern this further in the positioning of concern for the *Ummah* within a broader emphasis upon “humanity”, and how this Islam characterised by compassion, inclusivity and civic engagement comes to be represented as “good religion” as advocated in policy discourse.

Yet, this “good religion” is no less “real” Islam. It is rather the product of a convergence between both liberal secular and Islamic discursive traditions, stories of Medina and of Manchester, which mutually inform each other in the telling. Looming over this correspondence of worlds is the definition of Islam as a problem space, in which Muslims have drawn on the Prophetic past to address contemporary misconceptions with a view to both convey Islam and to effect community cohesion. Concluding with reflections upon the “Street Iftar” I argue that the story of Islam in Manchester becomes the story of Manchester itself, with breaking fast in this context being at once a devotional act and expressive of cosmopolitan conviviality. In this, I argue further that as Islam is done in Manchester, so too is Manchester done in Islam, with both enmeshed in their ongoing mutual constitution.

In Chapter Six I address the third research question and examine the fruits of this enmeshment, manifest in the Muslim Public and Muslim Self, and how both are born of the same processes which have configured and comprised contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. I recount how this notion of “the public” surfaced through my conversations with *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa, and how I subsequently observed this to be a Public in process. I outline how this attests to a dynamic, fluid and deliberative Public that is in dialogue with yet not defined by the *masājid*, the *masālik* or the *‘Ulemā*, at times aligned with them and at times aligned against them. As such, it is not isolable to fixed parameters defined by institutions, but rather situationally spills over into the wider Mancunian public, through which it too is reconfigured. In the shared experience of affectively felt otherness in the gaze of the “Other” these primarily discursive concerns

take on an affective dimension, and I ultimately argue that it is through these processes both discursive and affective that the Muslim Public becomes objectified.

I argue that just as Muslims become collectively objectified as the Muslim Public, so too do these same processes inform the individual objectification of the Muslim Self, in the teacher-student relationship, in correspondence between Muslims and Non-Muslims, and in the felt experience of otherness. I conclude that the Muslim Self and Muslim Public are intimately bound together, born of their mutual entanglements and of their thorough enmeshment in Manchester, I argue that they are both Mancunian and Muhammadan. Having addressed my three research questions, I proceed to my conclusion in Chapter Seven, wherein I expand upon the implications of a meshworked approach to Muslim community identity for the study of Muslims in Britain.

Chapter Two: Islam and Muslims in Process

The question of “what is Islam?” has over the centuries yielded a vast multitude of responses to the point of contradiction from *‘Ulemā* and *Sheyūkh* through to the mother teaching her child and beyond. Even in the absence of this question the many ways of living and doing Islam have flowered and proliferated, variously converging and conflating, contrasting and colliding, across time and space almost since the beginnings of Revelation. This has only become more pronounced in a multicultural context where Muslims themselves have sought to discern the parameters of “real” Islam and effectively preserve and transmit it. The increasing scrutiny under which Islam and Muslims have been placed in more recent times in Britain and elsewhere has also accorded this question a greater degree of urgency for many, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and has been met with ever more variegated answers. Nevertheless, in the midst of such multiplicity Muslims have affirmed that, to quote my first *Qur’ān* teacher, “Islam is Islam!” Echoing this sentiment, in exploring Islam as it is lived and done in Britain I have been concerned to conceptualise it as a singularity, while not belying, suppressing or excluding its diversity. To this end I examine various approaches to conceptualising Islam here, ultimately arguing that Islam is fundamentally done in process.

The question of what the Muslim community entails and who belongs to it has received equally varied and divergent responses. The concept of the *Ummah* is as old as Islam itself, inaugurated with its inception and acceptance by those who became the earliest community of believers. Since then, its parameters have been drawn and redrawn by *‘Ulemā* on the theological basis of what constitutes a “believer”, encompassing and excluding Muslims of various sectarian persuasions. Beyond this, from the 19th century onwards the *Ummah*

came to denote the global *community* of Muslims to which all belonged. This has only escalated further in Britain and beyond in more recent times with the scrutiny of individual Muslims pressured to speak on behalf of others, and with wider exposure to instances of persecution and oppression of Muslims internationally. Upon entering Islam in the summer of 2011, I was welcomed as a “brother” and told that by virtue of being Muslim I had become part of this *Ummah*. Over the course of field work, too, the *Ummah* has been frequently evoked. I examine how it has been conceptualised here, and how it has travelled across time and space from the 7th century Hijaz to the contemporary world. Beyond this, I also explore what community entails, and question what it is to belong. In my own case I accepted my belonging to the *Ummah* in theory, but it was only over time through living Islam with other Muslims that I came to genuinely *feel* part of a “community” as such. In this, I explore both how Muslim community as the *Ummah* has been variously defined and how community itself is affectively cultivated in process.

Religion and culture, the world-religions paradigm, and lived religion

For some such as Olivier Roy, Ron Geaves and Pnina Werbner, Islam has often been conceptualised as religion proper, comprised of the *Qur’ān*, the *Hadīth* and the interpretative authority of the *‘Ulemā* while what Muslims do entails all else besides, collectively regarded as Muslim culture. In *Globalised Islam* Roy encapsulates this understanding, arguing that “Islam as a religion comprises the Koran, Sunnah and the commentaries of the *ulama*. Muslim or Islamic culture includes literature, traditions, sciences, social relationships, cuisine, historical and political paradigms, urban life, and so

on.”⁷⁸ This is a clearly demarcated conceptualisation of religion and culture, defining religion as not only essentially textual, but grounded in *authentic* texts, abstracted from all particularities. Religion is universal, not addressing a particular culture or ethnic group, while culture is particular.⁷⁹ Roy argues that through modernity and globalisation religion has been delinked from culture,⁸⁰ and this strict objectification of religion and culture is certainly reflective of a sentiment expressed by some Muslims. Informed by her respondents, Werbner distinguishes between pure and impure discursive spheres,⁸¹ and Geaves also observes a distinction between religion and culture through interviewing British South Asian ‘*Ulemā*’.⁸² In this, it is a position that must be acknowledged, and a conceptual means to analyse and understand Muslims’ self-perceptions of their own identities.

This self-perception is in great part due to the hypervisibility of Islam in the West post-9/11 particularly as a problem space, and this is a recurrent theme to which I return throughout the thesis. Nadia Jeldtoft and others contend that the study of Islam and Muslims has been configured in this contemporary context with more visible, “properly” religious features of dress, devotional activity and activism being regarded as markers of “authentic religious identity.”⁸³ The privileging of religion as dogma, praxis and interpretative authority is characteristic of the Christianised world-religions paradigm,

⁷⁸ Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 10.

⁷⁹ Roy, *Globalised Islam*, p. 120.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁸¹ Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas,” pp. 898-899.

⁸² Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 123.

⁸³ Nadia Jeldtoft, “The Hypervisibility of Islam,” in *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead eds. (Taylor and Francis, 2016). Accessed 10th December, 2020.

which essentialises religious traditions as systems of ideas to be classified and compared.⁸⁴ This approach serves to abstract religious traditions into distinct species of the genus of “Religion”, transcending the processes by which they are constituted and which continually inform their shape. As such, it cannot account for the diversity of Islam as it is lived, practiced and understood by the vast majority of Muslims themselves and Islam as a historical phenomenon. Looking beyond texts and institutions to everyday, lived religion prompts the question, as articulated by Linda Woodhead, of “what more there is to religion,”⁸⁵ and is a useful, necessary corrective to the world-religions paradigm.

To study religion as everyday life, as Graham Harvey describes, is to move away from an exclusively textual emphasis when exploring religion and to instead concentrate on “what people actually do,”⁸⁶ attending to how it is observed and lived in process. Malory Nye’s concept of “religioning”, focusing on how “religious identities, manifestations and power relations are produced through practice and through performance,”⁸⁷ effectively encapsulates this reorientation towards processual religion. This approach does not reduce religion to scriptures, creeds and the beliefs that they affirm, but neither does it dismiss their significance. Rather it examines “belief in motion”⁸⁸ as articulated by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, denoting experience and relationship expressed in action as opposed to a

⁸⁴ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Perceived in the Language of Pluralism* (London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd. 2005), p. 49.

⁸⁵ Woodhead, “Tactical and Strategic Religion”.

⁸⁶ Harvey, *Food, Sex & Strangers*, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Malory Nye, “Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning: Religious Studies and Contemporary Cultural Debates,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 12 (2000), pp. 447-476, p. 468. Accessed 11th November, 2020.

⁸⁸ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, “Religion as Memory. Reverence to Tradition and the Constitution of a Heritage of Belief in Modern Societies,” in *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion. Contexts, Concepts and Contestations*, Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 73-92, p. 84.

confessional tenet that one accepts or rejects. This further attests to the oftentimes hybrid and syncretic instances of living religion, emerging from “a lived engagement with a multitude of ideas, expectations, pressures and possibilities.”⁸⁹ Beyond “belief”, everyday religion pertains to everyday life and all that this entails, encouraging a broader perspective that encompasses the less visible ways in which religion is done- even instances of “religion-without-religion”, beyond the explicitly or “properly” religious.⁹⁰ Rather than conceiving of religion as transcending the world, its people and its processes, the everyday lived religions approach affirms that “religion has everything to do with the relationships that constitute, form and enliven people in everyday activities in this material world.”⁹¹ In this, approaching Islam through the prism of everyday lived religion can more comprehensively encompass the plethora of ways in which Islam is lived and done, both established and emergent, apparent and concealed. I outline and explore ethnographic studies of “everyday Islam” in Chapter Three, but what remains is to conceptualise Islam in a manner which further encompasses this vast multitude of ways whilst still retaining its coherence.

Islam as civilizational project, Islam, Islamdom and Islamicate

The question not only of what Islam is but what is Islamic has been more comprehensively addressed in an earlier formulation posited by Marshall Hodgson of Islam, Islamicate and Islamdom. Hodgson restricts Islam to “the *religion* of the Muslims,”⁹² with religion being

⁸⁹ Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec eds. “Introduction,” in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion* (Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 1-16, p. 5. Accessed 11th November, 2020.

⁹⁰ McLoughlin and Zavos, “Writing religion,” p. 172.

⁹¹ Harvey, *Food, Sex & Strangers*, p. 2.

⁹² Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Volume One, The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 58.

an orientation toward the spiritual,⁹³ and the core of this orientation is personal piety.⁹⁴ This is restrictive and exclusionary taken in and of itself, but Hodgson also employs the term “Islamicate” to account for “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims.”⁹⁵ While for Hodgson this is not Islam “*in the proper, in the religious sense*,”⁹⁶ there is nevertheless a relation of Islam here, encompassed not by the term “Islam” but by Islamdom, the wider society in which Islam is hegemonic.⁹⁷ That said, it is only Islam in the religious sense, that is, textually-grounded personal piety, and phenomena most closely aligned with this that can be called “Islamic” in Hodgson’s view.⁹⁸ All else is relegated to the secular, the cultural, the not-properly-religious, to the Islamicate. In this, although there does not appear to be a strict demarcation between religion and culture in Hodgson’s Islamdom and all that this entails, there is certainly a spectrum with gradients of proximity to or distance from “real” Islam. Therefore, at base this formulation may be reduced to Islam as textual religiosity excluding all else besides as culture, as in any case for Hodgson only this is truly Islamic.

Ahmet Karamustafa attempts to avoid both the use of religion and culture and the positing of hierarchy through conceiving of Islam as “a civilizational project in progress,”⁹⁹ a nucleus of ideas “constantly churning different cultures in its crucible to generate innumerable, alternative social and cultural blueprints for the conduct of human life on

⁹³ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, p. 80.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁹ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress,” in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, Omid Safi ed. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), pp. 98-110, p. 109.

earth.”¹⁰⁰ He dismisses the term religion because “it can give rise to the false impression that Islam is a distinct entity with clearly delineated borders,”¹⁰¹ and given that this is not the case, cultures “cannot be hierarchically organized as being more or less Islamic.”¹⁰² Islam is not culture, nor is it a culture, rather it is a civilization which *produces* cultures. Karamustafa endeavours to avoid the essentialising implications of conceptualising Islam in terms of culture and religion here,¹⁰³ and attempts to reconcile unity with diversity. Yet, his definition of civilization as a “combination of ideas and practices that groups of human actors... affirm as their own”¹⁰⁴ is not substantively distinct from how one may define culture, though Karamustafa does not define culture here. Furthermore, this concept is no less essentialising as he posits an Islamic core nucleus of ideas at the root of all Islamic civilizational traditions, comprising “a set of beliefs... that underwrite a set of values... in turn reflected in a set of concrete human acts,” rooted in the *Qur’ān* and *Hadīth*.¹⁰⁵ Again, religion is defined as dogma and praxis grounded in an authentic sacred canon, albeit more cautiously, by Karamustafa. There is also no clear relation between the core, the civilizational traditions, or the cultures they produce in terms of what renders them Islamic.

Islams, Islam as Mass-Signifier

The question of unicity and the potentially essentialising implications of Islam as a singularity has been noted and evaded in part by the positing of multiple Islams. Abdul Hamid el-Zein argues that the presupposition of religion as a single and universal category,

¹⁰⁰ Karamustafa, “Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress”, p. 109.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

and by extension of Islam the religion, dissolves in the diversity of experience and understanding of what Islam means.¹⁰⁶ It would follow from this, as Aziz al-Azmeh later argues, that “there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it.”¹⁰⁷ However, Shahab Ahmed contends that this does not provide any indication as to what makes these Islams “Islamic”. If they are all manifestations of an obscure “Islam” then the question remains as to what this is,¹⁰⁸ while if this single concept is dispensed with entirely as an analytical category then it runs counter to the experience of arguably the vast majority of Muslims who invoke Islam in all its diversity as being one.¹⁰⁹

Bobby Sayyid also criticises this formulation of “little Islams,” arguing that in this case “Islam” is displaced to the terrain of surface effects while the connection between these phenomena and their Islamic marker remains unclear.¹¹⁰ He affirms that despite Islam’s polysemy it retains its singularity, precisely because Muslims invoke it as such. It is this which unites the diverse phenomena called “Islamic” within this one category. As to what renders a thing Islamic and what Islam means exactly, it is through articulating and in turn contesting this that “there is the trace of Islam’s inauguration.”¹¹¹ This transcends talk of what constitutes authentic Islam, or what is cultural and what is religious, in positing that Islam is whatever Muslims affirm it to be. It evades an essentialising discourse which

¹⁰⁶ Abdul Hamid el-Zein, “Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 6 (1977), pp. 227-254, p. 227. Accessed 17th March, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 130.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 56.

¹¹⁰ Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1997), p. 39.

¹¹¹ Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, p. 43.

locates Islam in textually sanctioned dogma and praxis, yet equally avoids an argument for multiple Islams which generally opposes the sentiment of most Muslims that Islam is only one.

However, Sayyid states that “Islam is the thinnest of phrases in the Muslim’s vocabulary” because of this,¹¹² and I argue that such a conceptualisation is too thin. This is because, as Talal Asad also argues, “there are everywhere Muslims who say that what other people take to be Islam is not really Islam at all.”¹¹³ While Sayyid is correct in affirming that all phenomena described as “Islamic” invoke Islam as a singularity, even acknowledging contestation over what this means as carrying traces of Islam’s inauguration and perpetual construction, the fact of fundamental disagreement ultimately renders the term incoherent. Expanding on Asad’s critique further, Ahmed explains that in this instance one is left with “a congeries of mutually-incoherent statements,”¹¹⁴ with no single Islam in which these phenomena cohere as meaningfully and substantively Islamic. This returns once again to the problem of multiple Islams, precisely what Sayyid endeavours to avoid.

Islam as discursive tradition, Islam as hermeneutical engagement

Asad rightly critiques the multiple Islams argument as failing to address Islam as an analytical category, and he also rejects essentialising Islam as a homogeneous social totality given the characteristic diversity of Islam as a human and historical

¹¹² Ibid., p. 48.

¹¹³ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, (Washington: Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986), pp. 1-2.

¹¹⁴ Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 269.

phenomenon.¹¹⁵ As a corrective to this, he argues that one must begin “as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith.”¹¹⁶ For Asad, all traditions are discursive in that they are comprised of prescriptive discourses which “instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history.”¹¹⁷ While these discourses are related to the past their ongoing maintenance into the future is also of concern, and this is mediated through the practices, institutions and social conditions of the present.¹¹⁸ In sum, Islam as discursive tradition is a “historically evolving set of discourses, embodied in the practices and institutions of Islamic societies,”¹¹⁹ embedded socially and materially in these societies and grounded in reference to the foundational texts of the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*.

What Asad is arguing here is *not* that a particular exclusionary textual religiosity mediated by the *‘Ulemā* is to be privileged as more authentically Islamic, as Ahmed would otherwise argue.¹²⁰ Rather, it is a tradition comprised of ongoing argument and discussion concerning orthodoxy and authenticity emanating from engagement with the foundational texts and in turn, the wider interpretative conventions which have been authoritatively established through this engagement. It is this *relationship* with the foundational texts, bound up with the power to uphold and regulate or suppress and exclude practices and interpretations,

¹¹⁵ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, p. 14.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Charles Hirschkind, “Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 12:4 (1995), pp. 463-477, p. 464. Accessed 10th August, 2017.

¹²⁰ Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 274.

which constitutes Orthodoxy in Asad's view.¹²¹ It is a way of telling stories. He does not conflate this use of Orthodoxy with local orthodoxies such as those of the *'Ulemā*, in spite of Ahmed's misunderstanding to the contrary,¹²² as he does not explicitly theorise the relationship between the two. In this, Asad affirms a foundational body of texts and the historical, ongoing and socially embedded relationship with them *as Islam* without essentialising any single orthodoxy or allowing the category to be dissolved in the multiplicity of orthodoxies produced through this relationship.

While Asad comprehensively accounts for Islam as a singular discursive tradition which accommodates plurality, he does not theorise exactly how Orthodoxy as the overarching relation of power with the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth* relates to the local orthodoxies produced by it. I argue that Ahmed's conceptualisation of Islam as hermeneutical engagement can be complementarily utilised in this regard. Ahmed affirms that Islam is "the varied product of that engagement of the human with the Divine; it is the apprehension, elaboration and articulation by Muslims in their individual and collective lives of *the meaning(s) of the Truth of the Divine Revelation.*"¹²³ In engaging with the *object* of Islam one *does* Islam, and in doing Islam one *produces* Islam. In this, Islam is simultaneously the source of meaning, the idiom through which meaning is produced, and the meaning itself.¹²⁴ Revelation, the source of Islam, accords it its singularity because Islam is the full sum of Muslim engagement with it, yet the sheer diversity of Islam is chiefly predicated upon what Revelation is understood to be and the range of hermeneutical engagements with it.

¹²¹ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, p. 15.

¹²² Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 274.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

Ahmed endeavours to encompass the full spectrum of engagement with Revelation through asserting that “*the act of Revelation to Muhammad does not encompass and is not co-extensive or consubstantial with the full idea or phenomenon or reality of Revelation to Muhammad,*”¹²⁵ but rather that it also entails the premise and truth of an Unseen Reality of which the Text of Revelation is a product, this being the Pre-Text. Beyond this, Revelation also entails the full hermeneutical range of engagements with Revelation as Pre-Text and Text, collectively comprising what Ahmed calls Con-Text, “the human and historical baggage and-baggage of Revelation.”¹²⁶ As to the relation between these three aspects of Revelation, Con-Text is ultimately traceable to Pre-Text and Text as it is an elaboration of it, yet Pre-Text and Text are inseparable from Con-Text as they are semantically embedded in it and constantly informed by it.¹²⁷ Therefore, “*Con-Text is itself a source of Revelation along with Pre-Text and Text: it is the Con-Text of Revelation.*”¹²⁸ Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text are inseparably enmeshed together in the Revelatory matrix of Islam.

Although Ahmed disagrees with Asad, based on a misreading of Asad’s notion of Orthodoxy and power as privileging a prescriptive textual religiosity mediated by the *‘Ulemā*, both formulations can be effectively integrated into a complementary whole. Both Ahmed and Asad locate the singularity of Islam in the fundamental relationship of human agents and institutions to Revelation, though Ahmed accords this wider scope through his tripartite schema of Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text. Furthermore, while Ahmed concurs with

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 346.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 357.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 358-359.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 358-359.

the need to acknowledge how power relations inform and constitute Islamic phenomena,¹²⁹ the consideration of power is largely absent from his thesis and Asad provides a corrective to this. Ahmed's intention to "*locate and explain... the logic of internal contradiction that allows contradictory statements and actions to cohere meaningfully to their putative object,*"¹³⁰ also broadly addresses Asad's need to theorise the relationship between the Islamic discursive tradition and the local orthodoxies it produces.¹³¹

Indeed, Ahmed provides a potential answer to Asad's question through arguing that the multi-dimensionality of Revelation renders diversity not merely externally contingent, but structurally inherent *and* fundamentally coherent in terms of Islam.¹³² Attempting to structure this further he describes how the different sources of truth, the different means by which it is produced, its different meanings, the different social locations for its operation, and its different expressive registers are all hierarchically and spatially differentiated.¹³³ As such, what is expressed as Islam in one spatial and hierarchical context may be denounced in another, yet both cohere as Islam without it being dissolved as an analytical category. While Ahmed endeavours to explain the logic of simultaneous unicity and diversity here, a consideration of power is lacking. I argue in common with Ahmed that Islam is the full sum of hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text of Revelation. However, I am supplementing this with Asad's consideration of how relations of power inform and configure the form and process of these engagements.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 302.

¹³¹ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, p. 16.

¹³² Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 366.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 366.

Islamic revivalism

Exploring Islamic revivalism as an Islamic discursive tradition and as entailing a particular form of hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, Text and Con-Text of Revelation, I will demonstrate the applicability of this conceptualisation of Islam outlined thus far. The earliest references to revival are derived from the *Ḥadīth*, wherein the Prophet describes how a *mujaddid* will emerge every century to restore the religion to its purity and remove corrupt accretions.¹³⁴ This has typically been the preserve of '*Ulemā*,¹³⁵ who refer to a set of texts, arguments and practices in the pursuit of the ongoing coherence and relevance of the discursive tradition as it extends through time, though it is not in principle limited to them. Simply to engage with this discursive body is to participate in the relationship of Orthodoxy which Asad describes, and just as the '*Ulemā* draw on this tradition so too does the unlettered parent who teaches their child.¹³⁶ The question of who has authority to contribute to this ongoing discourse has never been conclusively agreed upon by consensus, and this is intimately bound up with disagreement concerning exactly what constitutes revival and reform.¹³⁷

Revival, up until the mid-19th century, entailed a return to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* in both spirit and practice, and an elimination of perceived external accretions. Shireen Hunter in

¹³⁴ Shireen T. Hunter ed., *Reformist Voices of Islam: Mediating Islam and Modernity* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), p. 4.

¹³⁵ Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 5. Accessed 11th August, 2016.

¹³⁶ Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, p. 5.

¹³⁷ Hunter, *Reformist Voices of Islam*, p. 4.

Reformist Voices of Islam argues that such approaches were characteristically literalist, opposed to contextual interpretations, and that they employed only conditional independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) in addressing the foundational texts.¹³⁸ While this is arguably the case with regards to such figures as Ibn Taymīyya (1263-1328 C.E.) and Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703-1791) to whom Hunter refers,¹³⁹ this is simply not so when one considers a figure such as Shāh Walī’ullāh Dehlavī (1703-1762 C.E.), who advocated *ijtihād* to a much greater extent. Indeed, as Samira Haj argues in *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, the return to authoritative texts, and by extension the ongoing maintenance of a discursive tradition, requires innovative and creative interpretation through which existing interpretations are challenged and supplemented with new ones.¹⁴⁰ Life is ever changing and in constant movement, and even the perceived reassertion of established tenets necessarily takes place in a novel context which demands a degree of creative improvisation.¹⁴¹

While revivalism and reform have often been utilised interchangeably, the terms *tajdīd* and *iṣlāḥ*, both taken to refer to revival, came to acquire the meaning of reform in the mid-19th century, which entailed reconciling Islam with discourses of European modernity and reconfiguring educational and socio-political institutions of the Muslim world in light of this.¹⁴² However, it would be erroneous to characterise revivalism as a retreat from modernity and reform as adoption of and engagement with it, as from the 19th century

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴⁰ Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 179.

¹⁴² Hunter, *Reformist Voices of Islam*, p. 5.

onwards both broadly share the same goals and both necessarily engage with modernity. Both advocate a return to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, restoration of faith and morality, revitalization of the Muslim world, strengthening the Islamic community and defending it from enemies, and ensuring Islam's continued relevance to Muslims' lives.¹⁴³

This impetus for revival and reform can only arise in a context where Islam and the Muslim community is perceived to be under threat, such that the parameters of Islam and of the Muslim community must be outlined and in turn objectified, othered in response to the "Other". While in the 19th century movements of revival were responses to European powers' imperial expansion, Sufi-Sunni revivalism arises out of a felt need to explain and defend Islam in light of Islamophobia and media pressure, where Islam exists as a problem space.¹⁴⁴ These movements and trends do not demonstrate a lack of continuity with the ongoing Islamic discursive tradition, they are continually referring back to it, yet their process of hermeneutical engagement with it has been reconfigured by a Con-Text wherein Islam is perceived as "other", and must be defined. Bound up with the parameters of Islam are the parameters of Muslim community, particularly those of the *Ummah*, the global Muslim community, which I will explore here.

The *Ummah* and the imagined community

The emergent revivalist trend of the 19th century, through the work of pan-Islamist reformers such as Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897 C.E.) led to a more globalised

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 13.

conceptualisation of the *Ummah*. In affirming the spiritual and political solidarity of the global *Ummah* revivalists affirmed their civic identity in spite of limited state influence in the face of colonial power, and endeavoured to safeguard against the perceived morally and spiritually detrimental potential of nationalism.¹⁴⁵ This was part of the revivalist project, motivated both by the perceived internal threat of nationalism and by the external threat of Western Imperialism. Just as the parameters of Islam itself became relativised in the context of the global hegemony of the Western “Other”, so too were the parameters of the *Ummah* itself.¹⁴⁶ This is not to say that the *Ummah* arose in the 19th century. Indeed, the initial *Ummah* to which the revivalist hearkened back was the Medinan *Ummah*, being a cluster of visions of community,¹⁴⁷ “a conglomerate of various communities- tribal, confessional, and confederal.”¹⁴⁸

However, the *idea* of the *Ummah* as a single, global political community gained currency only in the 19th century in the encounter with the global Western “Other”. It was only in this acknowledgement of the *boundary*, in Anthony Cohen’s terms, of opposition in relation to other communities,¹⁴⁹ that the *Ummah* as the global Muslim community was affirmed. Of course, Muslims globally had shared many similarities prior to this in terms of belief and practice and from the beginnings of Islam there have been transnational people flows. These have been most notably through the *Hajj*, but also through the travel of ‘*Ulemā*’ for study, patronage and pilgrimage, and through the transnational expansion of the

¹⁴⁵ Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics*, p. 75.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁷ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Community,” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, Jamal J. Elias ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), pp. 93-103, p. 95.

¹⁴⁸ Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁹ Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport, *The Trouble with Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, Identity and Collectivity* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 45.

Sufi *turuq* through the travels of the Sufi *Sheyūkh*. In this one could argue, as Ahmed does, that Islam and the *Ummah* “has been globally-oriented and cosmopolitan from the outset.”¹⁵⁰ However, the idea of the *Ummah* as a global political community to which all Muslims belong and express solidarity with was certainly premised upon exclusion and the construction of otherness in the encounter with the perceived Western “Other”.

Yet, what does it mean to speak of the *Ummah* as a community? Ahmed calls it an imagined community, following Benedict Anderson, and argues that it is no less real because of this as an idea, as Islam itself is an idea.¹⁵¹ That said, Anderson’s imagined communities were a 19th century development, arising through print-capitalism and the emergent hegemony of new vernaculars which allowed “for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”¹⁵² The *Ummah* as a global political community, akin to the idea of the national community, could only have developed in the 19th century, while the Medinan *Ummah* of the 7th century certainly served as an object of yearning and a reimagined ideal around which to mobilise in this context. Arjun Appadurai calls this a community of sentiment, whereby people who have never met can imagine themselves as belonging to a single collective, feeling things together, by virtue of holding shared ideals and ideas in common.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 144.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁵² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1991), p. 36.

¹⁵³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 8.

However, it is questionable whether one can call this a community as such, being absent of actual interaction and sociation between members. In this sense Appadurai clarifies that such communities *are* communities in themselves but always potentially able to move from shared imagination to collective action.¹⁵⁴ I argue in common with Vered Amit that it is more appropriate to regard these imagined communities as cultural categories, which must be distinguished from actual social groups. This is because any single entity, whether one speaks of a collective or an individual, can belong to multiple cultural categories, and whether this is self or other-ascribed it does not tell us in and of itself which categories will be drawn upon to mobilise social relations.¹⁵⁵ In this, to conceive of oneself as belonging to the *Ummah* does not necessarily translate into actual sociation, this itself requires effort in the mobilisation of social relations and their maintenance, and is not brought about through the “mere act of imagining.”¹⁵⁶

The travelling *Ummah*

Categories do not remain static through space and time either, they travel, and in the process of travel they acquire new meanings in novel contexts. “That which ‘is’ in one place elsewhere becomes undone, translated, reinscribed; this is the nature of translocality: a cultural politics of becoming.”¹⁵⁷ Peter Mandaville describes here how when categories

¹⁵⁴ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁵ Amit and Rapport, *The Trouble with Community*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁶ Fredrik Barth, “Enduring and Emerging Issues in the Analysis of Ethnicity,” in *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond ‘Ethnic Groups and Boundaries’*, Hans Vermeulen and Cora Grovers eds. (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis Publishers, 1994), p. 13.

¹⁵⁷ Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics*, p. 84.

and theories travel they enter into translocality, whereby they become processually deconstructed and reconstructed over distance and across time in culturally complex, translocal spaces where meanings easily move, shift and slip. This is particularly applicable to the *Ummah*, and indeed to Islam in general, which Mandaville analyses through the prism of Edward Said's travelling theory, comprised of four phases.

The first phase is a point of origin, this being the local sociocultural context in which a theory originates which Mandaville identifies, in the case of the *Ummah*, to the *Ummah* of 7th century Medina in that nearly all forms of travelling Islam refer to this point.¹⁵⁸ The second phase of travelling theory is the distance traversed, where the theory moves from the local to the translocal, into a different time and space. In the case of the *Ummah* for example, this theory has travelled through migrant communities, exiled intellectuals, transnational publishing houses and electronic media.¹⁵⁹ The third phase is the conditions within the new time and place which mediate the acceptance, rejection or modification of the theory. Applied to the *Ummah* and travelling Muslims, these conditions are often comprised of European and North American societies, but alternative interpretations encapsulated by the "Muslim other" are also a part of this.¹⁶⁰ What emerges in the fourth phase is a theory which has been altered under these conditions, albeit a new, well-travelled theory. Through travel into the translocal comes relativization and objectification,¹⁶¹ resulting in pluralisation of the theory itself and in contestation with

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 114.

other theories.¹⁶² Meanings also become deterritorialised, transfigured as they are mapped onto objects within the novel cultural context.¹⁶³ In this, the travelling *Ummah*, and by extension travelling Islam, entails “a constant process of breaks, interruptions, and reorganizations,”¹⁶⁴ providing new languages, practices and meanings configured within the new sociocultural context.

Travelling theory provides insight into how cultural categories undergo transformation and pluralisation through travel, yet it is precisely the translocal, processual nature of these categories which renders the positing of points of origination and destination problematic. For example, while Mandaville states that the point of origin for the *Ummah* and Islam broadly is 7th century Medina, Ahmed would certainly contest this. He argues that such a focus ignores the vast swathe of Muslim history encompassed in what he calls the Balkans-to-Bengal complex wherein Muslims did *not* feel the need to hearken back to the *Salaf*, the *Ummah* of the 7th century Hijaz.¹⁶⁵ While Mandaville’s statement is arguably applicable to Sufi-Sunni revivalism, where Muslims do refer back to this time as an ideal to be emulated, this could at best be understood only as one point of origin among a plethora of others, as varied as the meanings evoked by the *Ummah* itself. In this, origins and destinations are not fixed but fluid, undergoing change through the process of travel itself.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁶⁴ Stuart Hall, “Religious Ideologies and Social Movements in Jamaica,” in *Religion and Ideology*, Robert Boccock and Ken Thompson eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 269-297, p. 272.

¹⁶⁵ Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 81.

It follows that there is never truly a point at which a theory or category becomes translocal, *because it never ceases to be so*. Mandaville acknowledges in the case of Islam how meanings travel back and forth,¹⁶⁶ affirming too in accord with Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori that in translocality travel and place constitute one process.¹⁶⁷ However, rather than positing fixed points of origin and destination, in this context it is more appropriate to attend to the processes whereby origin and destination itself are travelling, where according to Tim Ingold “every ‘somewhere’ is on the way to somewhere else.”¹⁶⁸ With these considerations in mind, travelling theory is still particularly useful here as it allows us to conceptualise how the pluralisation and subsequent discursive contestation of cultural categories and their meanings occurs through translocal processes.

Community in practice, community in process

Given the multiple categories and their diverse meanings that may be drawn upon in the mobilisation of social relations, they cannot in themselves be indicators of community identity. I argue in common with Amit that it is incumbent upon us to investigate how such categories are situationally invoked, by whom, and how community is constructed and affirmed through them.¹⁶⁹ This entails a move from a categorical understanding of community to community as process. Gerard Delanty touches upon this in his treatment of what he calls contemporary communication communities, stating that they are created rather than reproduced, being “a set of practices that constitute belonging.”¹⁷⁰ He restricts

¹⁶⁶ Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics*, p. 86.

¹⁶⁷ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori eds., *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. xiii.

¹⁶⁸ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 149.

¹⁶⁹ Amit and Rapport, *The Trouble with Community*, p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ Gerard Delanty, *Community: Second edition*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 102.

this definition solely to contemporary communication communities, but this is broadly applicable to all forms of community in general. All are processually constructed, all community is done.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, coupled with Asad's apt performance of authoritatively prescribed practice, provides insight into how community is effected discursively. Habitus is essentially comprised of dispositions, "embodied aptitudes,"¹⁷¹ which in turn produce practices and beliefs in accordance with its inherent structure.¹⁷² This is fundamentally social and communal, because practice arises out of the relation between both the habitus and the wider societal context in which one operates, the field. Describing this relationship, Bourdieu states that "it is a relation of *conditioning*: the field structures the habitus,"¹⁷³ and the habitus in turn contributes to the ongoing maintenance and shape of the field. This is akin to Asad's apt performance, prescribed and regulated through authoritative institutions, constituting the field, with the continuity and maintenance of which being ensured through such performance. It is through these discursive processes that collective norms, practices and beliefs are sustained, which in turn form a basis of community. However, while the discursive construction and regulation of shared practices forms a necessary basis of how community is done, it does not explain how such practices constitute belonging, how community is affectively cultivated.

¹⁷¹ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 75.

¹⁷² Karl Maton, "Habitus," *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts (Second Edition)*, Michael Grenfell ed. (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p. 51.

¹⁷³ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant trans., *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p. 127.

Affect is defined by Donovan Schaefer in his *Religious Affects* as being “the propulsive elements of experience, thought, sensation, feeling, and action that are not necessarily captured or capturable by language or self-sovereign “consciousness.”¹⁷⁴ As such it cannot be wholly accounted for through discourse theory alone. Yet, it is inseparable from it in that “affect saturates experience, cognition, and behaviour at every level,”¹⁷⁵ and in this it is necessary to examine how both discursive and affective processes interact, particularly in the cultivation of community. Asad accounts for affect in part by referring to embodied practices and experiences as “a mutually constituting relationship between body sense and body learning,”¹⁷⁶ with habitus and apt performance being informed by both discursive and affective processes. They are the product of the “ongoing simultaneity of biological and cultural processes,” shaped by these interwoven systems of force.¹⁷⁷ While bodies are configured in part by powerful discursive currents they are also, importantly, conditioned by innate, intransigent affects, developed over the course of their evolutionary history. Though susceptible to reconfiguration they precede, and subsist below, the level of discourse.¹⁷⁸

Taken together, I argue in common with Schaefer that religious practices “tap embodied histories,”¹⁷⁹ drawing on both the intransigent affects of our animal bodies whilst also

¹⁷⁴ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁶ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, p. 77. Saba Mahmood, a student of Asad, argues in her influential study, *Politics of Piety*, that embodied ethical practices born of discursive traditions in turn cultivate the subject. Consult Chapter Six, pages 289-290 regarding this.

¹⁷⁷ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 49.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

being discursively “spun and maneuvered by systems of signification.”¹⁸⁰ This perspective allows us to alternatively conceptualise the pedagogical process, outlined discursively thus far, as “a dynamic of bodies and worlds,”¹⁸¹ informed just as much by intransigent affects as prescriptive discourse. This affective turn can also provide insight into how practices done by bodies in proximity constitute belonging through the term *entrainment*. Schaefer defines this as the transmission of affect from one body to another,¹⁸² affirming through collectively embodied histories what it feels like to be *us*.¹⁸³ However, what *us* feels like also entails a demarcation from *them*, and in this the relational, oppositional nature of community as constituted on the boundary must also be explored.

The affective politics of community

Anthony Cohen and Fredrik Barth’s study on ethnic boundaries emphasised the significance of the relational, oppositional nature of community, with shared culture and all that this entails being insufficient in isolation.¹⁸⁴ Schaefer also suggests that embodied religious practices themselves often proliferate at social boundaries, “whether through the thrilling disdain or the compassionate embrace of bodies felt to be other.”¹⁸⁵ A purely discursive examination of the boundary is not sufficient, I argue in common with Sara Ahmed in her *Cultural Politics of Emotion* that boundaries and surfaces are affectively constituted through contact with other bodies.¹⁸⁶ Ahmed clarifies that this is not to say that

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁸⁴ Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985), p. 12.

¹⁸⁵ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p. 8.

affects inhere within bodies as objects, but rather that the surface or boundary is affectively formed through the circulation of affect *between* bodies and objects, through affective economies.¹⁸⁷ It is precisely because such affects do not statically inhere within bodies that they accumulate greater potency, sliding along and sticking to other objects in their circulation,¹⁸⁸ continually affecting the surface differentiating one from the other. This is effectively outlined through Ahmed's exploration of fear.

In the case of fear between two bodies, circulating between the body and the object feared, affect secures the relationship between them in drawing them towards and away from each other. In establishing objects from which the subject can flee and turn away,¹⁸⁹ fear forms the boundary by which bodies brought into proximity are propelled apart. Yet a turning away from the object of fear also entails a turning towards the object of love, safety and security,¹⁹⁰ and in this the boundary which affirms the distance from "them" also informs what it feels like to be "us" in turn. It aligns bodies with and against others,¹⁹¹ and explains how community is affectively constituted on the boundary. While Schaefer has effectively argued through an examination of chimpanzees' aversion to and compulsion towards each other that such affective impulses are intransigent, part of our animal evolutionary history,¹⁹² affective economies are still very much discursively configurable. Affect is

¹⁸⁷ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 45.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁹² Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 129.

carried along by multiple histories and stories,¹⁹³ which inform the potency and direction of its currents as it circulates unevenly between bodies and objects.

The affective and discursive politics of boundary formation, of inclusion and exclusion, in the constitution of community is a necessary consideration alongside the potential for shared practices to cultivate belonging. It certainly informs how community is manifest in the observations outlined in this thesis and is essential particularly in my analysis of community configurations in the context of Islam as a problem space. Ahmed's model allows for affect to bring bodies together and apart in multiple ways through diverse affective economies, which in turn are discursively configured in highly differentiated ways through histories and stories. However, her argument that communal solidarity is based upon insecurity and the shared perception of external threat,¹⁹⁴ does not wholly account for how community is cultivated outside of oppositional or extraordinary situations. Both Amit and Ahmed argue that multiple affects cultivate communality,¹⁹⁵ and Amit posits "a notion of *distributed* affect/belonging,"¹⁹⁶ much akin to Ahmed's affective economies, where affect is unevenly distributed between interacting bodies.

Yet, Amit differs from Ahmed in suggesting that such a perspective "pushes us to move beyond us/them distinctions," towards a more complex understanding of how belonging

¹⁹³ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁹⁵ Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport, *Community, Cosmopolitanism and the Problem of Human Commonality* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), p. 11.

¹⁹⁶ Amit and Rapport, *Community, Cosmopolitanism*, p. 10.

may or may not be recognised, interpreted, responded to and felt.¹⁹⁷ Being open to multiple forms of belonging encourages us to explore how it manifests affectively and discursively in situations outside the oppositional, in the ordinary situations of quotidian life. Utilising Noel Dyck's term *consociation*, Amit describes how consociate relationships emerge through "putting names to known faces and telling stories about mutually shared experiences in the world."¹⁹⁸ Consociation is a form of belonging shaped through ongoing everyday interaction, affectively charged with shared experience and discursively bound by the circulation of stories. In this, a consideration of consociation usefully supplements my examination of other more oppositional instances in which community is cultivated. It affirms that while life can be lived along boundaries, lines which categorise and contain, such lines only comprise a temporal part of a wider complex of correspondences between affect and discourse, bodies and worlds, which we ourselves inhabit in the everyday living of life.

Living life, doing Islam

In outlining and exploring this complex and how it relates to Islam I begin with two fundamental assertions. First, that life and Islam as a way of living is ever in process, ongoing and becoming. Second, that life is not isolable to enclosed Cartesian subjects but rather pervades the worlds in which we are inseparably entwined. I am indebted to Ingold in this, who argues in accord with Maurice Merleau-Ponty that to be sentient "is to open up to a world, to yield to its embrace, and to resonate in one's inner being to its illuminations

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

and reverberations.”¹⁹⁹ This is not a world of objects “out there” that we as subjects see, hear and feel, it is a world that reaches inside, affects and moves us, where our perception of things is to simultaneously be perceived by them. It is because this world impresses itself upon us that we experience it in turn, and in this sense we perceive *with* what is perceived. While this world is not wholly sentient it is sensible, “*immersed in sentience*,”²⁰⁰ and as such the world “coils over” to perceive itself in and through the perceiver, becoming one in the process of perception, as Ingold usefully illustrates in figure 1.

Gathering in the world in this way enables us to forge our way through it. This is not a back and forth movement, but a coiling over and spiralling forth, just as in breathing inhalation is followed by exhalation, and in the living of life this is an ongoing open-ended process. Ingold thus characterises the movement of animate life, and indeed life itself, as “held in the alternation between pushing out and pulling up,”²⁰¹ where the sentient body is at once perceiver and producer tracing “the paths of the world’s becoming in the very course of contributing to its ongoing renewal.”²⁰² Here life is not something one has or an isolable instant, but rather it is a path, a movement, a process. In this, “wayfaring is the fundamental mode by which living beings inhabit the earth,”²⁰³ by which they themselves are cultivated and through which the world is constituted. Yet, such movement in and

¹⁹⁹ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 12.

²⁰⁰ Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), p. 86.

²⁰¹ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, p. 87.

²⁰² Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 12.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

through the world necessarily arises from our being *of* it. As such, we knit ourselves into the world by which we are made.

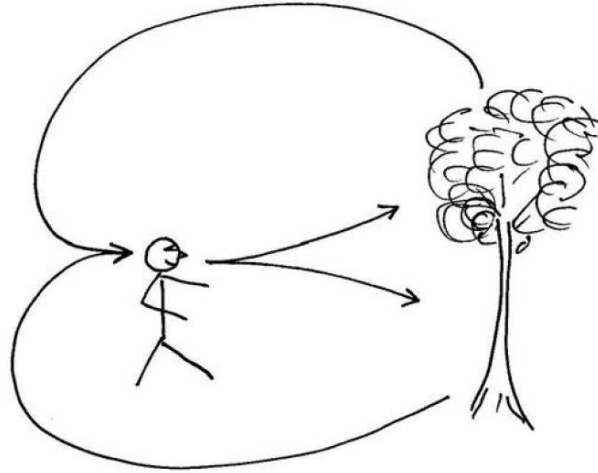


Figure 17.1 My being with the tree and the tree's being with me. In this sketch, I observe the tree with eyes that have already absorbed its presence into their ways of looking. By way of these eyes of mine, the tree coils over and sees itself.

Figure 1. Coiling over.²⁰⁴

I argue further in accord with Ingold that, as life can be conceptualised as paths of movement, so too can every living being and expression of life be imagined as a line, or bundle of lines, of its own movement.²⁰⁵ Beginning with Alfred North Whitehead and Henri Bergson, Ingold argues that the world is continually surpassing itself, and that life too is forever ongoing. “For the same reason that horizons cannot be crossed, it is impossible to reach the ends of life,”²⁰⁶ as in the doing of life, be it in any task, activity or journey, one never finds definitive ends but instead always new horizons. Extending the analogy further, for the same reason that one cannot pass between two fixed horizons, so

²⁰⁴ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, p. 86.

²⁰⁵ Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 13.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

too is the line not merely an arbitrary relation between two fixed points, but rather it is along these lines that life itself is lived, whereby points themselves are surpassed and formed anew. In this, conceptualising life as lines reflects both the primacy of movement and its open-endedness in that it carries on. More than this it allows for openness to relationship and correspondence, with the world and with others, which is so essential to sentience itself.

The alternative to this is what Ingold calls inversion,²⁰⁷ where beings originally open to the world are closed in on themselves by way of perimeters distinguishing the inner from the outer, objects from other objects, and the sentient subject from their insentient environment. Recalling the coil, of drawing inward and pushing outward, if I were to draw this from the top-down it could appear to come full-circle and I would be presented with an enclosed shape, the illusion of a fixed object belying the trace of an open-ended process. While such an object can interface with other objects along its surface, it cannot genuinely affect, move or correspond with anything outside of itself. It cannot be open to the world. In contrast, the living being that gathers up the threads of the world as it stitches itself into its fabric is fundamentally constituted by and constitutive of its relations with it. Conceptualising life as lines is further illustrative of this point that “things *are* their relations,”²⁰⁸ and further, that these lines do not exist in isolation from each other but are rather inseparably enmeshed. We lay trails as we progress through life, and in going along our lives become entwined with others.²⁰⁹ The living world Ingold describes is a

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 148.

meshwork, comprised of myriad entanglements, affective and discursive, embodied and imagined, which bind organisms and worlds together in their very constitution.

Just as the movement of life can be understood as an alternation between drawing in and pushing out, so too are the memories and impressions of past trails *recalled* in understanding, describing and *narrating* both where we are, where we have been, and where we are going. Attending to how life is lived and done in myriad ways along a plethora of paths, to trace these lines in motion is to tell and to be told stories. Contrary to the logic of inversion, whereby living paths become enclosed and isolated from each other with distinct properties readily classifiable into a taxonomy, understanding life as lines necessitates telling stories, attending to the relationships and contexts through which these lines course. In this, stories, rather than abstract categories, admit to the fluidity and fundamental *situatedness* of the ways we understand the world, our lives and the lives of others. It follows from this, too, that stories do not mean the same for different people, as how and to whom they are related is situational with the meaning, form and content of a single tale told shifting in its entanglement with the lives of listeners. How we relate, or *grow into* these stories,²¹⁰ will be shaped by our own life histories, and in this both our lives and the stories we tell of them are thoroughly “meshworked.”²¹¹ Ingold argues that if we were to understand persons and places in a storied way, as “loci of ongoing activity without beginning or end,”²¹² they cease to be nouns with fixed properties, abstracted from

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 162.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 163.

²¹² Ibid., p. 168.

their contexts and the relationships that birthed them, and instead become verbs, enfoldments of lives and experiences in the meshwork.

Conclusion

In advancing a meshworked and storied approach, comprised not of enclosed categories with constituent properties but of lines both discursive and affective, imagined and embodied, I endeavour to conceptualise how Islam and Muslim community identity is lived and done. This requires an understanding of Islam in process, as a verb rather than a noun, its shape and the meanings it evokes being situationally constituted, cultivated, contested and reconfigured in the living engagement with Revelation that lies at its heart. These ways of doing Islam do not progress through flat, open terrain. Their courses converge and diverge under the sway of powerful discursive and affective currents, arising from discursive traditions with long-established histories, and tapping into embodied intransigent affects of even greater antiquity. Therefore, tracing these paths necessarily entails an understanding of these currents, and of these wider worlds which they comprise and by which they are formed. As with Islam, so too with Muslim communities, my meshworked approach attends to how community manifests both situationally and persists through the ongoing communal doing of Islam. This too is not fixed, comprised of isolable properties and categories, but more comprehensively allows for a fluid and multiple understanding of Muslim community identity as it is lived and done. Again, this too requires an examination of the wider worlds in which Muslim community manifests and as a study of Islam and Muslims in Manchester, I explore how *Islam is done into Manchester and how Manchester is done into Islam*. In the following Chapter, I begin by reviewing

how Muslim community in Britain has been variously conceptualised in past literature, before providing a brief history of Muslims and Islam in Manchester.

Chapter Three: Islam in Britain, Islam in Manchester

Building upon contemporary ethnographic studies of “everyday Islam” undertaken in Britain and Europe,²¹³ I advance a processual understanding of Islam and community which effectively conceptualises Muslim community identity in Britain as it is lived and done. This is an alternative to conceiving community identity in a categorical, taxonomic sense discernible in some existing literature, which can be particularly brittle when applied to the fluid, dynamic process of lived religion in community. While the taxonomic approach has certainly accounted for discursively expressed markers of community identity which are no doubt situationally evoked, it does not describe the process whereby such markers are affirmed nor their context. What remains are questions of who identifies with these labels, whether they are indeed universally accepted as comprehensive descriptors by those to whom they are applied, from what positions and at what times are they evoked, and most significantly, how they come to be generated. As I initially discerned in conversation with my friend on Oxford Road in 2013, a taxonomic approach is not particularly descriptive. Abstracted from their lived contexts, such labels require constant re-evaluation, with updated taxonomies reflecting ongoing developments as new terms emerge and older terms fall out of parlance in the living of religion in community. Furthermore, only discursive community is accounted for here, while a consideration of affect would provide a more comprehensive understanding. A more processual conceptualisation of community, not as category but as the interweaving of affective and discursive flows made intelligible through stories, allows for a move beyond taxonomies

²¹³ For an earlier outline of and reference to these studies, consult pages 13-18.

and behind abstracted labels towards a more comprehensive description of how community is lived and done.

This proposed conceptualisation also allows for the simultaneously and situationally held community bonds of *ṭarīqa*, *maslak*, *birādarī* and locality that are not wholly captured or indeed capturable in a taxonomic approach to community identity. Through the processes of migration and settlement in Britain, with the subsequent establishment of *masājid* and the inter-sectarian contestations which accompanied this, Muslims in Britain have held such aforementioned bonds both simultaneously and situationally. Therefore, the application of single labels cannot serve as comprehensive descriptors here, lacking sufficient nuance and insight into the heterogeneity of community identity. I have explored this in brief in my MA dissertation but I expand upon this further here. I outline specifically the processes of migration and settlement of Muslims in Manchester, and the significance of *birādarī* and *ṭarīqa* affiliation alongside that of *maslak*, which has been more represented in some literature to which I referred previously. The malleable multiplicity of Muslim identity has been further investigated in studies of “everyday Islam” undertaken by Nadia Jeldtoft, Linda Woodhead, Daniel Nilsson DeHanas and others, and I explore these works here. They present a useful alternative to more taxonomic approaches employed by particularly Ron Geaves, Sadek Hamid, and Pnina Werbner among others, which I also relate here. These earlier classificatory models provide insight into predominantly established, in part emergent, and largely “organised” forms of discursively expressed community identity, while contemporary studies of “everyday Islam” examine the myriad ways of doing Islam and being Muslim beyond such boxes. Through a meshworked, processual approach to Islam and Muslim identity in primarily institutional

spaces, I aim to demonstrate in this work how ways of doing Islam and being Muslim, both “organised” and “everyday”, cannot be boxed in as they are lived and done.

Revival and reform movements have also been explored extensively in the literature, particularly the Salafi and Wahhabi movements. They are rightly contrasted with Sufi-Sunni Muslims, being largely opposed to Sufism and comprising an overall rejection of perceived un-Islamic practices and the sectarian polemics which result from them, subsequently fuelling further sectarian dispute between Sufis and anti-Sufis. While my study focuses on Sufi-Sunni Muslims in Manchester, contemporary forms both established and emergent must be considered in light of this contestation. The formative influence of Salafism on the shape of contemporary Sufi-Sunni Islam has been acknowledged in part by both Geaves and Hamid, with novel terms such as “Neo-Sufi” and “Neo-Traditionalist” being utilised to account for these developments. However, it is my contention that this continuous application of terms to an ever-growing taxonomy of Muslim community identity does not describe the processes whereby emergent forms of Sufi-Sunni Islam have arisen in dialogue and debate with the anti-Sufi movements. Furthermore, this approach does not sufficiently situate contemporary British Sufi-Sunni Islam within the wider context of revivalism, of which it is certainly a product, and one is presented once more with a dichotomised portrayal of traditionalist Sufis and revivalist Salafis. As a corrective to this, I begin to explore Sufi-Sunni revivalism here as an emergent form of Islamic revivalism which differs with, but is not wholly divorced from, the earlier revivalist trends established by the Salafi and Wahhabi movements. Applying my processual approach to community identity, with lines and entanglements as opposed to enclosed boxes of

classification, provides a means of accounting for these mutually constitutive developments between Sufis and Salafis.

Approaches to Muslim community identity in Britain

Conceiving of religious traditions and communities in process speaks to how attempts to understand, classify and contain religion within the confines of canon, clergy and clerical establishment ultimately fall short and tend to ignore religion beyond such parameters. I accord with an everyday, lived religions approach in this, and have sought to apply this to the study of Islam and Muslim identity in Britain. More contemporary studies of Muslims in Europe have also analysed Muslim identity through the prism of everyday lived religion. Jeldtoft and Jørgen Nielsen's focus on 'non-organised' Muslims is a useful corrective to an otherwise institutional emphasis,²¹⁴ analysing how Muslims make sense of their Islam "on their own terms,"²¹⁵ living it in their everyday lives in less visible ways.²¹⁶ Jeldtoft's study, comprised of life story interviews with 'non-organised' Muslims of immigrant background in Germany and Denmark, explores such alternative ways of being Muslim. For some, this entailed "reconfigured religious practices," reshaping practices and imbuing them with new meanings in highly pragmatic and individualistic ways,²¹⁷ such as employing meditation as prayer or connecting to God through Reiki healing.²¹⁸ For others, their Islam was not defined by active practice but "non-practice", characterised most by self-identifying as Muslim through feeling belonging to a community that is understood to be

²¹⁴ Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen, "Introduction: methods in the study of 'non-organized' Muslim minorities," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34:7 (2011), pp. 1113-1119, p. 1116. Accessed 7th December, 2020.

²¹⁵ Jeldtoft, "Lived Islam," p. 1138.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1135.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1141.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1142.

Muslim.²¹⁹ In both cases, Islam is understood to be pragmatic and individualised, with “loose boundaries” which even encompass other religious traditions alongside familial, cultural, ethnic and national ties.²²⁰ Jeldtoft’s study demonstrates how attending to “the everyday”, comprised of many different aspects of life that are not necessarily “Islamic” nor even “properly” religious,²²¹ attests to the plurality of Muslim identity and how such identities intersect with others. Crucially, it asserts the significance of self-definition where lives are lived Islamically through being understood as such by those who live them, regardless of their visibility or their sanction by dogma, authority or tradition.

Most notably, this study and others like it demonstrate not only the multiplicity of identity, but also its dynamic and processual nature. Jeldtoft focuses on Islam lived outside of institutions to explore this, but this is discernible within and between institutions too, as I will demonstrate throughout the thesis. The seeming fixity of *masjid* walls only thinly veils the fluidity of the Islam that is lived and done within and beyond them, and institutional affiliation can be tactically and situationally employed by Muslims to subvert and contest fixed categories. DeHanas observes this particularly in his interviews with second-generation British Bengali young adults in London’s East End, where interviewees were requested to rank identity cards in order of the strength of self-identification.²²² While almost all interviewees invariably ranked themselves as Muslim first and frequently regarded this as an almost immutable core,²²³ this self-identification meant different things

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 1144.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 1147.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 1135.

²²² DeHanas, “Elastic Orthodoxy”.

²²³ Ibid.

to different people. Some would identify as Muslim first due to their family and upbringing, while others would do so due to “its truth as a spiritual doctrine,”²²⁴ and each would tactically prioritise their Islam in different ways for diverse purposes. Following Michel de Certeau’s distinction between strategic and tactical religion, DeHanas identifies the first-generation, the media, the state, and numerous rival *masājid* as strategic institutions vying for influence over the second-generation.²²⁵ Amidst this competition, DeHanas’ respondents tactically draw on the “deculturated” Salafi Islam propagated by East London Mosque variously as a means of empowerment to subvert the perceived “cultural” constraints and pressures of their parents’ generation. In this, both Jeldtoft and DeHanas demonstrate the dynamically processual and plural nature of Muslim identity among Muslims in Britain and in Europe as they live their Islam day to day within, between and beyond institutions.

Though these studies pertain predominantly to the discursive and focus upon what is self-consciously said and done in relation to authoritative strategic institutions competing to exercise hegemony, affective processes are also considered too. Expanding further on her life story interviews of ‘non-organised’ Muslims, Jeldtoft describes how her respondents “appropriate emotions tactically in order to make religious rooms of their own... which in turn makes emotional and religious experiences possible.”²²⁶ For these Muslims, the *feeling* of a personal relationship with God is emphasised as the basis for an individualised

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Nadia Jeldtoft, “Spirituality and Emotions: Making a Room of One’s Own,” in *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead eds. (Taylor and Francis, 2016). Accessed 10th December, 2020.

religiosity that tactically subverts the “strategic” pressures to conform exercised by authoritative institutions.²²⁷ Through reconfigured religious practices, legitimised by personal feeling, Jeldtoft argued that interviewees would cultivate particular emotions in turn which “construct religious spaces,” transporting them to “another world,” or granting further control in “this world”.²²⁸ Jeldtoft accounts for how religious spaces are affectively cultivated here, and how such affects are tactically produced and employed through religious practice. However, this could be further supplemented by a consideration of how these tactics of place-making are informed by affect themselves. Jeldtoft contends that emotions are socially constructed, acquiring significance through social interactions and configured by the power relations which govern these interactions.²²⁹ In this, they are discursively “used” by her respondents who consciously undertake religious practices to produce particular emotions, yet the affective processes which lie beneath and before discourse are not accounted for. I argue in accord with Donovan Schaefer that there is an “ongoing simultaneity of biological and cultural processes.”²³⁰ Discourse and affect are ever entwined in the ongoing constitution of the world, and of the ways we inhabit it. While affects are certainly highly configurable by discourse, as previously outlined, they subtly course through the currents of discourse at every level too.

Analysing Muslim communities in process within an everyday lived religions framework is an emergent development which looks beyond the taxonomic approach that has been one of the more predominant means of outlining Muslim community identity in Britain. This is

²²⁷ Jeldtoft, “Spirituality and Emotions”.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

the case from earlier works, such as that of Geaves' *Sectarian Influences Within Islam in Britain* and Philip Lewis' *Islamic Britain* through to more contemporary studies such as Sophie Gilliat-Ray's *Muslims in Britain* and Theodore Gabriel and Geaves' edited volume, *Sufism in Britain*. Institutionally represented markers and labels comprise the loci of distinction between different expressions of Muslim community identity here, with the focus being on movements, their affiliated organisations, *masājīd* and scholarly associations, and the authoritative individuals who are perceived to speak for them. For example, Lewis' study of Muslims in Bradford concentrates particularly on Ma'rūf Hussain Shāh, an 'Ālim, Pīr (Farsi term for *Shaykh*), and founder of Jami'at-i Tablīgh al-Islam, an educational association broadly aligned with the Barelvī *maslak*.²³¹ Examining both the Deobandī and Jama'at-i Islamī *masālik* too, alongside affirming the significance of *birādarī* in community formation, Lewis' work here is certainly not reductive. He also acknowledges that Muslims belong to multiple religious, political and cultural associations, contributing to "a distinctive multi-layered cultural and religious tradition."²³² Yet here, still, community is understood to be discerned, distinguished and represented through institutions. Geaves also acknowledged in the mid-nineties that earlier frameworks of community identity founded upon *maslak* are being rejected, revised and redefined by second and subsequent generations,²³³ although he, too, concentrates on such movements and their institutional representations throughout his study. This can be potentially confusing when even the *masājīd* in question can only be perceived to exhibit symbols denoting a particular sectarian label, while not affirming this themselves.²³⁴

²³¹ Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims: Bradford in the 1990s* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1994), p. 58.

²³² Lewis, *Islamic Britain*, p. 73.

²³³ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 56.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

What follows is the development of taxonomies that are not only reductive in describing community identity, but are also comprised of labels that bear little relevance to those to whom they are applied. This is particularly exemplified in Jonathan Birt and Lewis' "pattern of Islamic Reform in Britain", wherein terms such as "Azhari," and "Nadwi" were applied to *masājid* as comprehensive descriptors of sectarian affiliation.²³⁵ An examination of institutions is certainly necessary, as it is through them that values, memories and stories are transmitted, authoritatively prescribed and affirmed. They serve as centres of religio-cultural awareness,²³⁶ and have often been established to represent (yet no less assert) ethnic and sectarian differentiation. In this, the extent to which community is constituted and configured through institutional representation cannot be underestimated. That said, my concern is not to label, incorporating these *masājid* and associations into a taxonomy of Muslim community identity, but rather to describe these loci in which lines of discourse, narrative and affect are entangled.

This taxonomic approach to Muslim community identity in Britain has been further nuanced with a greater understanding of the extent of heterogeneity, and in this such models have been more reflective of actually expressed and affirmed identities. While Birt and Lewis' aforementioned article applies some labels that are not entirely descriptive or indicative of this, the acknowledgement of multiple types of Deobandī reflects this

²³⁵ Jonathan Birt and Philip Lewis, "The pattern of Islamic reform in Britain: The Deobandis between intra-Muslim sectarianism and engagement with wider society," in *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and dissemination in Western Europe*, Martin Van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 91-120, pp. 94-95.

²³⁶ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 64.

development toward heterogeneity,²³⁷ and Geaves later revises his understanding of the Deobandīs as anti-Sufi with a more qualitative account of intra-Deobandī variants.²³⁸ The diversity of the Barelvī *maslak* has long been acknowledged in the literature, from Geaves' *Sectarian Influences* and Usha Sanyal's *Devotional Islam* through to Gilliat-Ray's *Muslims in Britain*. While described as being comprised of a multiplicity of *ṭarīqa* associations and organisations, as I mentioned previously it is questionable whether the term "Barelvī" is sufficiently comprehensive. Geaves himself reflects that a "Barelvī consciousness" has never been effectively cultivated,²³⁹ and Gilliat-Ray acknowledges that many would reject this label in favour of *Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamā'ah*.²⁴⁰ Although this latter attribution is certainly affirmed by "Barelvīs" in a polemical context to assert orthodoxy and normativity, simply meaning the "People of the *Sunnah* and the Community,"²⁴¹ it is not synonymous with nor exclusive to the Barelvī *maslak*.

To effectively conflate the Barelvī *maslak* with the widely employed term of *Ahl as-Sunnah* is to presuppose as my friend had done, that all South Asian Sufi-Sunni Muslims are necessarily "Barelvī", regardless of whether and to what degree they identify as such. This has been qualified to an extent with the inclusion of a further category by Geaves and Hamid, that of "traditionalist" or the "Traditional Islam Network",²⁴² to include more contemporary institutional expressions of Sufi-Sunni Islam that arise in response to anti-

²³⁷ Birt and Lewis, "The pattern of Islamic reform in Britain," pp. 94-95.

²³⁸ Geaves, "The Contested Milieu of Deoband," p. 195.

²³⁹ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 102.

²⁴⁰ Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain*, p. 92.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Sadek Hamid, "The Rise of the 'Traditional Islam' Network(s): Neo-Sufism and British Muslim Youth," in *Sufism in Britain*, Theodore Gabriel and Ron Geaves eds. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 177-196, p. 178.

Sufi polemics and do not align with either the Barelvī or Deobandī *masālik*. However, the focus for the Traditional Islam Network remains on perceived institutional representations of this trend and authoritative individuals understood by Geaves and Hamid to be its initiators and prime movers. While a network of ‘*Ulemā* and organisations is certainly discernible,²⁴³ this examination of community identity exclusively through the prism of institutional expression does not sufficiently describe how community is done both discursively and affectively beyond *and in dialogue with* institutions.

In spite of the increasing proliferation of labels to classify and account for the heterogeneity of Muslim community identity in Britain, conceptualising community as category and as primarily institutionally constituted is an abstraction. It literally boxes community in, inverting the affective and discursive lines of movement along and through which community is lived and done. Hamid’s diagram outlining religious trends among young South Asian Muslims in Britain is most illustrative of this.

²⁴³ Hamid, “The Rise of the ‘Traditional Islam’ Network(s),” p. 179.

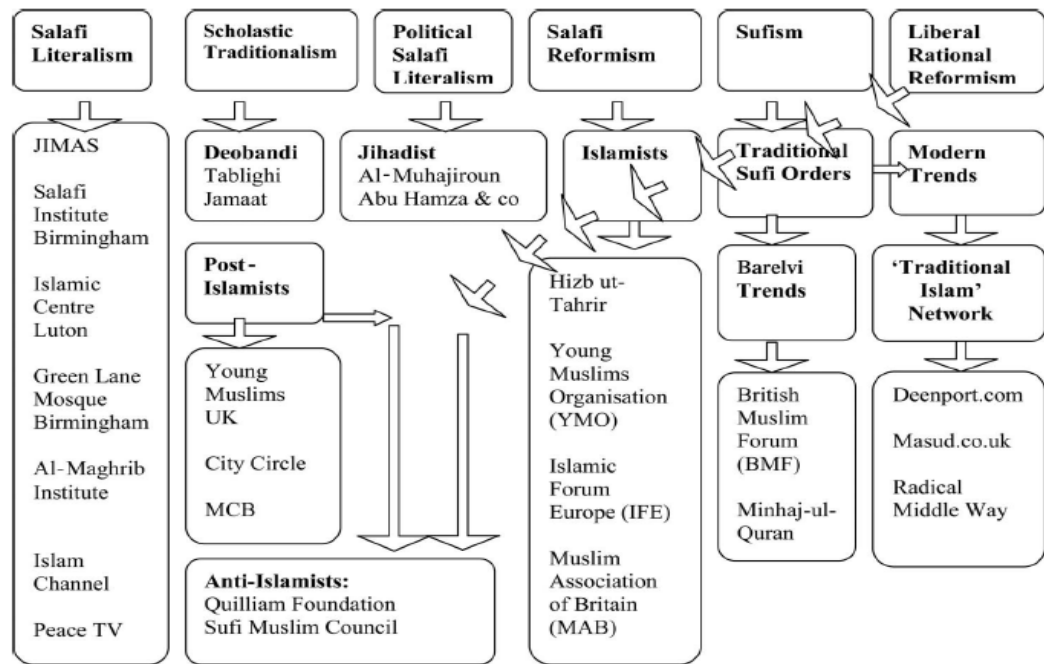


Figure 2. Hamid's application of Ramadan's six major Islamic tendencies to the British Muslim context.²⁴⁴

Surveying the literature prior to this outline, Hamid acknowledges how Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley argue that identities are held together in multiple identifications, coming to the fore and receding into the background depending upon circumstance.²⁴⁵ He also observes in accord with Werbner how British Muslims alternate between local and transnational cultural worlds creatively, not being bound to specific identifications.²⁴⁶ He briefly lists the sheer diversity of young Muslim subcultures, affirming that the heterogeneity of Muslims' attitudes towards their faith cannot be overstated.²⁴⁷ As such, Hamid acknowledges that Muslim identity in Britain is characterised by multiplicity and fluidity, and that Muslims situationally affirm multiple identifications in different contexts.

²⁴⁴ Hamid, "British Muslim Young People," p. 253.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

He qualifies his usage of this diagram as specifically illustrating tendencies and connections among organisations and as a means of sketching current trends rather than a rigid compartmentalisation, being aware of overlap and cross-fertilisation.²⁴⁸

Coupled with a commentary describing these trends, their characteristics and their affiliated organisations, the above is certainly an effective outline of institutions that inform the shape of community identity among British Muslims. However, even these institutional classifications seem to not only cross-fertilise and overlap but wholly dissolve and merge into each other. For example, while the diagram demarcates scholastic traditionalism, with which the Deobandī *maslak* is aligned, from Sufism, with which the Barelvī *maslak* and Traditional Islam Network are related, Hamid describes all three movements as scholastic traditionalist.²⁴⁹ While acknowledging that scholastic traditionalism is a broad trend that overlaps with Sufism, it is questionable whether the two categories need be separated at all given that scholastic traditionalism encompasses Sufism and the same inversely applies. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the “Barelvī” term can be contested in that many Muslims are either unfamiliar with it or reject its attribution to them outright, preferring instead to be regarded as traditional Sunni Muslims. This in turn conflates with the “Traditional Islam” term, which has also been claimed by Muslims of diverse sectarian associations to assert orthodoxy and normativity. Even the Traditional Islam Network specifically is no less isolatable to the box to which it is confined, as Hamid describes it as having a “major impact upon all groups across the British Islamic

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 256.

spectrum.”²⁵⁰ In this, the taxonomic approach utilised by Hamid here broadly sketches institutional trends and their interrelations, but it cannot be easily mapped onto lived community identity even as it is institutionally expressed.

This classificatory approach to community as outlined above belies the processual dynamics and the politics of institutionally represented community identity to the extent that even the admission of cross-fertilisation and overlap does not sufficiently account for it. Werbner’s *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims* provides significant insight into the processual and political dynamics of community formation, and demonstrates how apparently distinct discursive arenas intersect and conflate. Werbner identifies three different political arenas defining three forms of community: Central Mosque defining the religious community, the Pakistani Community Centre defining the national community, and the Race Sub-Committee defining the ethnic minority community.²⁵¹ Each arena invoked its own discourse, which encompassed within it diverse ideological and political orientations. Identifying the heterogeneity of these arenas, and locating all discourses within a wider discourse of *izzat* (honour), Werbner demonstrates that these communities are not simply divided according to their representation. Rather, the image of these communities is also constructed, comprised of multiple complex affiliations and identities, at times conflated and at times conflicting. Therefore, the extent to which we can meaningfully talk of “the community” at all apart from how it is represented is questionable. No one belongs to any one community, and the notion of one overarching

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 257.

²⁵¹ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, p. 31.

community which encompasses all belies the complexity and heterogeneity of such formations.

Werbner illustrates this complexity through describing the ideological and political contestations within Central Mosque, arguing that although the primary theological dispute was between Barelvīs and Deobandīs, the factional division was between the “anti-*maulvi*” group and the “pro-*maulvi*” group.²⁵² This is indicative of the multiple affiliations underlying such contestations, between Barelvī and Deobandī and pro-*maulvi* and anti-*maulvi*. This is not to say that communal solidarity is impossible, that one cannot speak meaningfully of single communities. One can, though only as ephemeral entities, “fleeting achievements” that are mobilised situationally,²⁵³ and are themselves the product of complex internal negotiations.²⁵⁴ I contest the liminality of community as otherwise argued by Victor Turner and Werbner, in that community is not solely manifest in extraordinary moments of collective performance but is also cultivated through lasting consociate relationships in quotidian life. However, Werbner’s observations certainly demonstrate that even institutionally represented community defies strict demarcation, to the extent that a classificatory boxed-in approach to community identity is ultimately confounded by the question of how such lines are to be drawn. The taxonomic approach provides an insight, though in doing so it crystallises a process which is otherwise in dynamic flux.

²⁵² Ibid., pp. 31-32.

²⁵³ Ibid., pp. 35-37.

²⁵⁴ Pnina Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love: the Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult* (London: Hurst and Co. 2003), p. 18.

With Werbner's study in mind the separation of strictly religious and cultural community also becomes problematic, given that in the processual dynamics of community formation no such distinction exists, being instead a discursive construction configured through institutional representation. Yet, much existing literature operates according to such a dichotomous conceptualisation, not excluding Werbner herself. Geaves' work is emblematic of this approach, discernible in his earlier work in *Sectarian Influences* where he distinguishes local, cultural and ethnic religiosity as manifest in South Asian Sufi *turuq* from more properly "religious" scriptural and transnational traditions such as the Salafi movement.²⁵⁵ While in his later work in *Sufism in Britain* and elsewhere he includes the neo-Sufi and Traditional Islam Network within this latter sphere,²⁵⁶ the distinction between traditional, local, ethnic identity and modern, transnational, scriptural religious identity remains.²⁵⁷ To clarify, this is not wholly conceptualised as a rigid compartmentalisation of ethnic and religious spheres. Although Geaves distinguishes between ethnicity, religion and adopted cultures, he endeavours to explore the converging dynamics between these influences, as illustrated in figure 3, so in this they may be described as distinct but not entirely separate.

²⁵⁵ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, pp. 65-66.

²⁵⁶ Ron Geaves, "Transformation and Trends among British Sufis," in *Sufism in Britain*, Theodore Gabriel and Ron Geaves eds. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 35-52, pp. 48-49.

²⁵⁷ Geaves, "Transformation and Trends among British Sufis," p. 46.

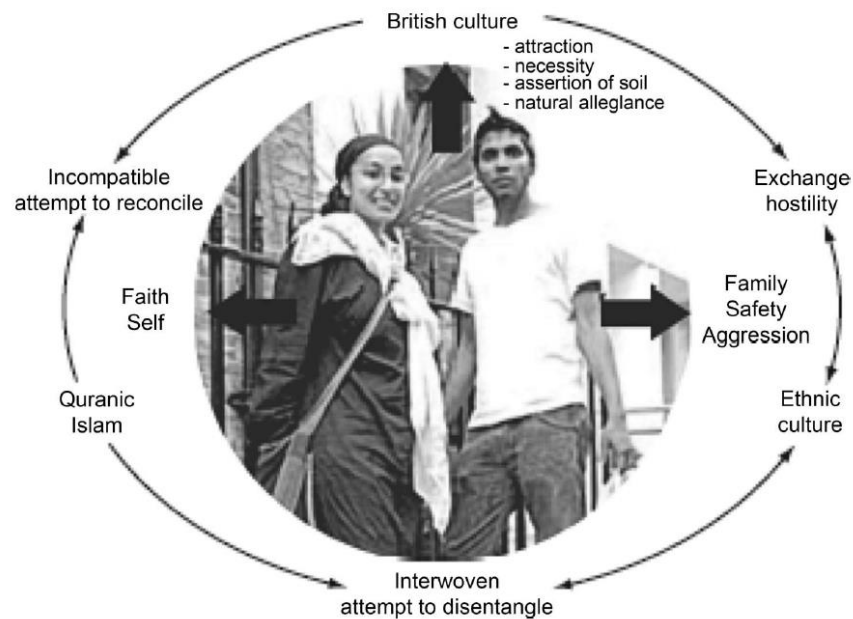


Figure 3. Converging dynamics between ethnicity, religion and adopted cultures.²⁵⁸

However, while this more processual model does not strictly demarcate religion, culture and ethnicity it does seem to distinguish ethnic culture from more properly religious, scriptural *Qur'ānic* Islam. Although they do not reside on two polar ends of a linear spectrum they are clearly demarcated on the two opposite sides of the circle!

Werbner similarly acknowledges the convergences and conflations of religion and culture, describing diasporas as “full of division and dissent,”²⁵⁹ yet posits a pure Islamic sphere and an impure South Asian sphere in her conceptualisation of British Muslim diasporas.²⁶⁰ Werbner describes South Asian diasporas as segmented, wherein members’ identities are situationally determined,²⁶¹ yet the two diasporic spheres are presented as radically

²⁵⁸ Geaves in Hamid, “British Muslim Young People,” p. 249.

²⁵⁹ Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas,” p. 896.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 898-899.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 900.

opposed with the Islamic described as “exclusive, highly conservative and strictly orthodox,” and the South Asian as “hybrid, impure and socially inclusive.”²⁶² Herein again can be discerned a pure, scriptural and orthodox religious sphere juxtaposed with an impure, hybrid cultural sphere. Although the two engage in contestation and convergence, with the resulting tensions constituting the segmented diasporas that Werbner outlines, they are nonetheless entirely reified as distinct and essentially opposed. Seán McLoughlin and John Zavos contend that this portrayal “does not seem to imagine the possibility of a non-institutionalized guise for religion,”²⁶³ arguing further that religion is lived situationally in hybrid ways which confound neat distinctions of religion and culture.²⁶⁴ While the processual dynamics of community identity formation are acknowledged in Geaves, Hamid and Werbner, the classificatory approach employed in all instances remains confined to abstract labels and dichotomies that cannot sufficiently conceptualise process itself.

The increasingly emergent trend of objectified Muslim identity existing in contrast and opposition to a perceived cultural identity justifies conceptualising community identity in a manner reflective of this to an extent. This objectification of a certain scriptural religiosity separate from cultural accretions has been noted in the literature surveyed here, and this increasing identification with “faith” remains ongoing as evidenced in the contemporary work of Geaves,²⁶⁵ Hamid,²⁶⁶ and Jeanette Jouili,²⁶⁷ among others. As such, in conceptualising contemporary Muslim community identity in Britain it is necessary to

²⁶² Ibid., pp. 898-899.

²⁶³ McLoughlin and Zavos, “Writing religion,” p. 174.

²⁶⁴ McLoughlin and Zavos, op. cit., p. 66.

²⁶⁵ Geaves, “Transformation and Trends among British Sufis,” p. 46.

²⁶⁶ Hamid, “The Rise of the ‘Traditional Islam’ Network(s),” p. 178.

²⁶⁷ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 28.

account for dichotomous portrayals of religion and culture given that many Muslims would concur that both spheres can and should be neatly demarcated. This accords with a difference multiculturalist approach to identity as outlined by Gerd Baumann in which cultures are essentialised, objectified products that one has, categories that one belongs to.²⁶⁸ Given the pervasiveness of such a position whether for the sake of cultural continuity, stable identity, community activism or social stability, it “partly shapes the realities we need to understand,”²⁶⁹ and cannot be dismissed entirely. However, echoing Baumann I argue that the essentialisation and objectification of culture and religion is itself a process, that “all “having” of culture is a making of culture,”²⁷⁰ and as such, conceptualisations of community identity would be enriched through encompassing this processual dynamic.

Nasar Meer advances a less dichotomous understanding of Muslim community identity in *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism* wherein he describes Muslim identity as ethno-religious or, “a quasi-ethnic sociological formation.”²⁷¹ Although a distinction is made between ethnicity and religion here, Meer’s approach allows for a Muslim identity characterised by multiplicity and simultaneity, where markers of ethnicity and religion situationally overlap.²⁷² Meer also considers how enunciation and ascription of Muslim identity in a British context is a development of cultural, ethnic identity, an ethnicization of religiosity, rather than affirming a religious as opposed to cultural identity. Even the development of universalist Islamic identities are informed by culture and

²⁶⁸ Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 83.

²⁶⁹ Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle*, p. 91.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁷¹ Nasar Meer, *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 62.

²⁷² Meer, *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, p. 63.

ethnicity according to Meer, being a means of resisting both parental pressures and the pressures of racism and exclusion in wider society.²⁷³ In this, the emergent trend towards a universalist, scriptural religiosity can itself be understood not as a retreat from culture, but rather “a transformation of ethnic identity within the context of British society,”²⁷⁴ blurring the lines of religion and culture further.

Much of this ethnicisation of religiosity revolves around Meer’s argument that Barthian accounts of boundary maintenance pertaining to ethnicity can be utilised to understand Muslim collectives.²⁷⁵ This can be discerned in Meer’s treatment of universalist Islam, arising from pressures of assimilation and exclusion, and Werbner observes this same sentiment when interviewing an *‘Ālim* at a *Mawlid* procession who argues that mixing with the English makes one a part-time Muslim.²⁷⁶ It must be noted that Meer doesn’t entirely transcend the demarcation of religion and culture as he continues to distinguish between one’s identity as a Muslim and one’s religiosity as Islamic.²⁷⁷ That said, he emphasises that “the expressions of identity remain situational and can become more pronounced at some points and less at others,”²⁷⁸ and in this affirms a more processual approach to Muslim community identity as something one does rather than something one has or simply is.

All of the literature surveyed thus far acknowledges to varying degrees that Muslim community identity is done, that it is multiple and situational, yet the models built upon the

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

²⁷⁶ Pnina Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah: Zikr and the Sacralizing of Space among British Muslims,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 11:3 (1996), pp. 309-338, p. 332. Accessed 30th November, 2016.

²⁷⁷ Meer, *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism*, pp. 59-60.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

taxonomic approach cannot entirely reflect this. This is compounded by an emphasis on the discursive constitution and expression of community identity which does not account for how community is affectively done. I discerned in Meer a move towards affect in his consideration of pressure, and how universalist Islam among younger generations is born of both resistance to the perceived parochial “village Islam” of their parents and the pressures of racist exclusion from wider society. Modood also recalls how in his childhood affirming one’s Muslim identity belonged to a wider affirmation of ethnic identity in response to marginalisation,²⁷⁹ and Werbner describes a *Mawlid* participant affirming their pride as a Muslim, “willing to parade our Muslimness openly in the streets.”²⁸⁰ Understood affectively, the circulation of fear between bodies constitutes a surface,²⁸¹ a boundary demarcating the Muslim from wider society and cultivating a reflexive awareness of otherness, which is in turn embraced as a source of pride. Acutely aware of the performativity of their bodies, rituals and conduct in wider society,²⁸² the *Mawlid* becomes a means of reterritorialization,²⁸³ of claiming space and asserting belonging therein through sacralising it in ritual procession.

While Werbner concentrates on the discursive elements which inform this event, situating it within the context of transnational Sufi-Sunni Islam and the regional Sufi *turuq* which reinscribe spaces morally, cognitively and aesthetically, the affective inscription is also evident here and could be examined further. Jouili explores this affective dimension in part through her consideration of how the marginalisation and exclusion of Muslims in France

²⁷⁹ Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 4.

²⁸⁰ *Mawlid* participant in Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah”, p. 332.

²⁸¹ Ahmed, op. cit., p. 87.

²⁸² Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 12.

²⁸³ Werbner, “Stamping the Earth with the Name of Allah”, p. 333.

and Germany informs an objectification and embrace of their Islam as “other” and the felt need to convey this to the non-Muslim “Other” of wider-society.²⁸⁴ Later observing contemporary Muslim pedagogy within this context, Jouili investigates how learning Islam in congregation under a pious teacher *feels*, and how belonging and community is cultivated through the pedagogical process.²⁸⁵ Jouili’s contemporary study effectively attests to how Muslim community identity is both discursively and affectively constituted, and I return to this work in greater depth in the analysis of my own findings.

While the literature thus far has explored the discursive construction of institutionally represented community, alongside non-organised “everyday” expressions too, further consideration of affect would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim community identity in Britain. The taxonomic approach in particular belies the situational, plural and processual nature of community identity which is otherwise generally acknowledged to varying degrees in the literature surveyed. Building on the current literature on lived Islam and in accord with Ingold, I argue alternatively that everything is process, in constant flux and motion. This can be illustrated as lines of movement entangled in a vast meshwork of ongoing correspondence, which collectively comprises the world and its inhabitants. Employing this meshworked approach, I conceptualise community as constituted of narrative, flows of emotion and the confluence of bodies altogether enmeshed in the world and configured by the dynamics of power which processually inform and shape their course. Conceived as such, community is not a category of identity or a means of classification. According to Ingold this would be blob-

²⁸⁴ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 30.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

logic, where both individuals and the collectives they comprise are closed off from other collectives which interface along their exterior surfaces but do not entwine or interpenetrate.²⁸⁶ In contrast, community in process is not closed in but is ever ongoing, a constant entwining and interpenetrating of lines,²⁸⁷ confounding attempts at categorisation in the continual doing of community. In the following I trace the trails laid by Muslim communities in Manchester from the 19th century to the present, foregrounding my exploration of Muslim community identity as it is lived and done in my field work.

Muslims in Manchester

Manchester has had a long history of migrant communities, of which Muslim communities are a part, largely due to its industry. In the 19th century, it was known as “Cottonopolis”, perceived to be the first factory town.²⁸⁸ Contrary to this representation, cultivated through the image of the factory itself,²⁸⁹ Manchester was primarily a commercial centre of warehouses, with cotton manufacture predominating in the surrounding mill towns of Ashton, Oldham and Blackburn.²⁹⁰ It was these commercial roots, in Manchester’s dominance of the export market, which accorded it the status as the first industrial city. Irish immigrants comprised 15% of the city’s population in the mid-19th century, and remained an identifiable community working as day-labourers, street sellers and domestic servants.²⁹¹ At this time the city was also home to a well-established Jewish community, accepted as part of the local business and professional class, followed by the mass

²⁸⁶ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, p. 7.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁸⁸ Alan Kidd, *Town and City Histories: Manchester*, (Keele: Keele University Press, 1993), p. 23.

²⁸⁹ Kidd, *Manchester*, p. 25.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

immigration of largely poor, Eastern European Jews in the late 19th century.²⁹² German, Greek and Armenian merchants also informed the heterogeneous composition of Manchester's migrant communities,²⁹³ cultivating a cosmopolitan character distinct from that of other major centres like London.

Muslims were early arrivals in the city during this period, with the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Treaty of 1838 resulting in a production boom that attracted impoverished South Asian, Turkish and Arab Lascars from surrounding dockland settlements and wealthier merchants from further afield.²⁹⁴ The completion of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 also transformed the Manchester docklands into a cosmopolitan centre. Known as the "Barbary Coast," Trafford Park became home to both an emergent Yemeni community and Muslims of other ethnicities, among other migrant communities in the area.²⁹⁵ While the most significant process of migration and settlement of predominantly South Asian Muslims to Manchester began around half a century later, these earlier migrants already informed the constitution of Manchester as a cosmopolitan, multicultural city. As my study concerns primarily South Asian Muslims of Punjabi, Mirpuri and Sylheti ethnicity, it is this 20th century process of migration and settlement that I focus on here.

It was the Lascars, ex-servicemen of predominantly Punjabi, Mirpuri and Sylheti ethnicity, who were the principal pioneers of the 20th century migration and settlement of South Asian Muslims in Manchester. Werbner describes the prominence of specifically Punjabi

²⁹² Ibid., p. 124.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 162.

²⁹⁴ Mohammed Siddique Seddon, *The Last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain, 1836-2012* (Leicestershire: Kube Publishing Ltd, 2014), p. 80.

²⁹⁵ Seddon, *The Last of the Lascars*, p. 83.

Muslims of the *Arain* caste in Manchester,²⁹⁶ relating the common belief of many of her respondents that the first Punjabi Muslim arrived in 1927, followed by the second in 1937.²⁹⁷ These early pioneers began as peddlers, wholesalers and market traders, establishing enterprises that would prove successful into the 1950s.²⁹⁸ Roger Ballard also notes how Punjabi ex-servicemen were promptly recruited in the labour-starved munitions factories,²⁹⁹ and this applied equally to Mirpuri ex-seamen who were employed in Britain's heavy industries to compensate for this labour shortage. Stephen Barton explains how Sylhetis, former chefs in the merchant Navy, were also directed to work in munitions factories and other wartime industries during this period, with others simply jumping ship and finding work for themselves.³⁰⁰ The British Nationality Act of 1948 accorded South Asians newfound status as commonwealth citizens, and also served to actively encourage this process.³⁰¹

Alongside these “pull” factors outlined by Ballard and Barton, agricultural pressures also informed the migration of Sylhetis and Mirpuris in particular. Barton notes how “pressure on the soil” in Sylhet was one of the initial forces stimulating migration, firstly to Bengal in the 19th century and later to Britain.³⁰² Virinder Kalra also outlines how the minimal infrastructure of the Mirpur region and the geographical hindrances to agriculture left

²⁹⁶ Pnina Werbner, *The Migration Process* (London: Berg Publishers, 1990), p. 20.

²⁹⁷ Werbner, *The Migration Process*, p. 17.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Roger Ballard, “Popular Islam in northern Pakistan and its reconstruction in urban Britain,” in *Sufism and the West*, Jamal Malik and John Hinnells eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 160-186, p. 175. Accessed 22nd March, 2016.

³⁰⁰ Stephen William Barton, *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford: A Study of their Observance of Islam with Special Reference to the Function of the Mosque and the Work of the Imam* (University of Leeds: Community Religions Project, 1986), pp. 49-50.

³⁰¹ Roger Ballard, “The Political Economy of Migration: Pakistan, Britain, and the Middle East,” in *Pakistani Diasporas: Culture, Conflict and Change*, Virinder S. Kalra ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 19-42, p. 26.

³⁰² Barton, *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford*, p. 49.

Mirpuris at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century little option but to seek employment elsewhere,³⁰³ with military service being the most fruitful prospect. These early migrants did not generally remain in Britain, instead being sojourners who would work to support their families and return. Yet, through this process they initiated the formation of a permanent overseas channel between Britain and the subcontinent, with communication and kin networks between Sylhet, Mirpur, Punjab and Britain facilitating further migration and, in the 1960's in particular, settlement.

The transition of South Asian migrants from sojourners to settlers began in earnest in the 1960s. The communication networks established by the movement of the early migrants facilitated further migration as they began to actively call kinsmen and villagers to join them,³⁰⁴ becoming increasingly able to sponsor their migration and employment with the savings that they had accrued.³⁰⁵ This constituted a process of chain migration, which in turn gradually resulted in the development in Britain of social structures revolving around kin and village networks as they existed in Sylhet, Mirpur and Punjab. Ballard emphasises the monetary incentive of migration to Britain for both Punjabis and Mirpuris,³⁰⁶ and Barton also notes how in Sylhet the influx of wealth from migrant workers has increased the prosperity and prestige of many families.³⁰⁷ Werbner describes too how during the 1950s, increased economic prosperity for the early Punjabi Muslims in Manchester led to their bringing sons and other relatives over to help run their businesses.³⁰⁸ Many settled

³⁰³ Virinder S. Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour, and Social Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), p. 55.

³⁰⁴ Ballard, "The Political Economy of Migration," p. 26.

³⁰⁵ Alison Shaw, "The Pakistani Community in Oxford," in *Desh Pardesh: the South Asian Presence in Britain*, Roger Ballard ed. (London: Hurst and Company, 1994), pp. 35-57, p. 39.

³⁰⁶ Ballard, "The Political Economy of Migration," p. 31.

³⁰⁷ Barton, *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford*, p. 53.

³⁰⁸ Werbner, *The Migration Process*, p. 17.

near to the University, on Oxford Road where terraced housing was cheap, and would move gradually further south with the influx of migrants.³⁰⁹ Legislative pressures escalated the rate of migration further with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which sought to regulate migration through the issuance of employment vouchers. Yet, rather than curb migration these vouchers both stimulated the rate of migration and consolidated a tendency towards settlement as they were perceived, by South Asian ex-servicemen in particular, as direct invitations for employment on the part of the British government.³¹⁰ Following the cessation of these vouchers in 1964, the easiest way for migrants to augment their families' wage-earning capacity was to bring over their sons,³¹¹ and the later Immigration Act of 1971 ensured that whole families had to come together.³¹² Again, this latter act of legislation intended to limit migration instead served to effect the definitive transition towards settlement.

While these economic and legislative factors certainly informed the rate and reasons for migration, political and environmental upheaval were also significant factors too, and the Mirpuris in particular are a case in point. Kalra describes how the displacement of Mirpuris over the contested region of Azad Kashmir, and the devastating impact of the Mangla Dam on the regions' agriculture,³¹³ significantly fuelled the process of mass migration. In this, migration was not solely motivated by the "pull" factors of monetary incentive, bolstered through government legislation abroad, but was also driven by impoverishing geo-political factors in the region itself.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

³¹⁰ Barton, *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford*, p. 51.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 52.

³¹² Ballard, "The Political Economy of Migration," p. 27.

³¹³ Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks*, p. 62.

In Manchester, the second wave of migration precipitated the move from Oxford Road to the more affluent area of Victoria Park for the earlier predominantly Punjabi settlers, with others moving to the adjacent neighbourhoods of Moss Side, Rusholme and Longsight.³¹⁴ The early Punjabi entrepreneurs, who had formerly established wholesale businesses on Oxford Road prior to their demolition, also maintained their prominence here as the shopping centre moved southward.³¹⁵ By the mid-1970s the area of Rusholme, specifically that of Wilmslow Road, developed into *the* shopping centre for neighbouring Muslim communities in South Manchester, with numerous services and shops from travel agencies to delicatessens and supermarkets to sweet shops.³¹⁶ Werbner describes how it was during the 1980s that it was fast becoming a centre for Indian restaurants too, attracting Mancunians of all backgrounds.³¹⁷ This development lent Wilmslow Road its lasting name of the “Curry Mile”, which has in turn served as an iconic representation of Manchester’s cosmopolitanism, keenly promoted by the local state.³¹⁸ This area has come to signify Manchester’s Asian presence,³¹⁹ central to Manchester’s projected self-image and, with both Central Mosques One and Two located here, central for the Muslims of South Manchester. However, at the time of writing there are hardly any Indian restaurants on the strip, with more Arab, Turkish and Afghan eateries to be found alongside more conventional fast-food chains. Above all it is the Shisha Cafés, scattered from one end of Wilmslow Road to the other, that most characterise this former “Curry Mile”. Indeed, as

³¹⁴ Werbner, *The Migration Process*, p. 27.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ Virinder S. Kalra, “Writing British Asian Manchester: Vernacular cosmopolitanism on the ‘Curry Mile’,” in *Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas*, Seán McLoughlin et al eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 70-88, p. 76.

³¹⁹ Kalra, “Writing British Asian Manchester,” p. 73.

Kalra argues, Wilmslow Road is “just one of the many ‘Curry Miles’.”³²⁰ Longsight’s Stockport Road further to the south and Cheetham Hill’s Cheetham Hill Road to the north, both long-established centres of South Asian Muslim migration, may also be counted among the “Curry Miles” of Manchester.

Although this description as I have outlined it accounts for particularly formative causes of migration and its escalation through to settlement, what is lacking is a consideration of the families themselves and the affective ties which bind them. *Birādarī* and *izzat* were central throughout the process of migration and settlement and continue to be so for Muslims in Britain. The *birādarī* has often been otherwise referred to as a South Asian kin network, or more comprehensively as a summation of kin and village networks by Ballard and Barton. Yet Alison Shaw describes how in its widest sense beyond this it may constitute a transnational network comprised of not only relatives and villagers but also neighbours and close friends, who become gradually incorporated into it through strong and lasting relationships.³²¹ In this *birādarī* is a context-dependent idea,³²² which in all its forms serves to regulate and structure the lives and relationships of its members and their relationships with others. Muhammad Anwar argues that it is so pervasive that “the whole way of life of Pakistanis is directly or indirectly related to this institution,”³²³ and the same applies to Sylhetis who similarly maintain its significance. It is the *birādarī* which sanctions and sponsors its members to work abroad and its values inform how they relate to each other, to their work, and to wider society.³²⁴ Central to the shape and operation of

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

³²¹ Shaw, “The Pakistani Community in Oxford,” p. 45.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1979), p. 64.

³²⁴ Barton, *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford*, p. 48.

the *birādarī* is *izzat*, or *sanman*,³²⁵ which may be broadly translated as family honour, pride and prestige. Members would facilitate the settlement of their migrant kin through pooling together their own resources,³²⁶ aiding in their occupational advancement and bolstering the prosperity and prestige of the *birādarī*.³²⁷

Through the exchange of support, both financial and otherwise,³²⁸ inter-family visiting, and mutual dependence, *izzat* is maintained as the bonds of kinship and obligation are preserved and strengthened. The *birādarī* was to be trusted and relied upon, and any major relationships with those outside it had to be exercised with caution for fear of potential association with “bad” people and the tarnishing of *izzat* as a whole.³²⁹ In this, the accumulation and preservation of *izzat* served, in the context of migration and settlement in Britain, to solidify *birādarī* unity, maintain its distinctiveness, and sheltered its members from the potentially harmful effects of “Western influence.”³³⁰ This informed both the support of migrant workers and the shape of their sociation in Britain, and it is chiefly due to this that South Asian Muslim communities, both in Britain in general and in Manchester specifically, tended to form along *birādarī* lines. Shaw argues that the arrival of women and children was also motivated by *birādarī* expectations to preserve *izzat*, with the need for wives to place a check on their husband’s activities.³³¹ This is too reductive as the maintenance of family ties and the fulfilment of familial obligations is itself part of *izzat*, and the affective desire to be with one’s family, *izzat* aside, should also be acknowledged.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Shaw, “The Pakistani Community in Oxford,” p. 39.

³²⁷ Anwar, *The Myth of Return*, p. 66.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

³³⁰ Shaw, “The Pakistani Community in Oxford,” p. 48.

³³¹ Ibid., p. 42.

Essential to the maintenance and cultivation of *izzat* was the preservation of one's Islam. The general sentiment was, "if you can keep your distance and avoid personal relationships, and if you are a good Muslim in a foreign land, it is appreciated greatly."³³² Ballard suggests that religious observance was "virtually non-existent" among early migrants given the intense labour to which they were subjected,³³³ yet this is contradicted by Muzamil Khan's interviewing a number of first generation Mirpuris in Manchester who recited litanies, made up prayers, and celebrated festivals.³³⁴ The extensive accounts of the early migrants' devotional lives provided by Khan here demonstrate that memories comprising the "collective mythology of migration" were not solely of "flirting with local girls and illicit drinking."³³⁵ Congregational prayer and *dhikr* also characterised the camaraderie of these times too. Although according to Ballard the early migrants' priority to work in Britain and return to the subcontinent left little room for the "niceties of civilized life,"³³⁶ migrants were still reminded by their *birādarī* elders of their responsibilities as Muslims in a non-Muslim country.³³⁷ The "myth of return", the expectation that migrants would return home, which was so prevalent in the sojourner phase, still served to maintain *birādarī* structures and the expectations of conduct that these carried, which included one's proper conduct as a Muslim.

With the arrival of women and children and the transition towards settlement, this individual obligation extended to the family and to subsequent generations living in

³³² Anwar, *The Myth of Return*, p. 169.

³³³ Ballard, "Popular Islam in northern Pakistan," p. 176.

³³⁴ Khan, "Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora," pp. 134-135.

³³⁵ Werbner, *The Migration Process*, p. 22.

³³⁶ Ballard, "Popular Islam in northern Pakistan," p. 176.

³³⁷ Anwar, *The Myth of Return*, p. 159.

Britain. Modood recounts how he was expected to “eschew the emergent 1960s morality of “swinging London”,³³⁸ and that this expectation belonged to an identity which was simultaneously Asian, Pakistani and Muslim.³³⁹ Andrew Thompson and Rumana Begum, in their interviewing first generation Asian migrants in Manchester, also observed that “the core values of the people we interviewed revolved around religion and commitment to the extended family as the main unit of social organisation.”³⁴⁰ In this, the need to preserve and transmit Islam should be understood in this context as belonging to the wider maintenance of *birādarī* structures and the cultivation of *izzat*.

The establishment of *masājīd* was instrumental in this process, being centres of religio-cultural awareness wherein *birādarī* members could congregate, where Urdu, Mirpuri, Punjabi and Sylheti could be transmitted to younger generations, and where the imam himself embodied this connection between the *birādarī* and Islam.³⁴¹ One imam, interviewed by Anwar, explains that the teaching of both Islam *and* Urdu is a priority so as to ensure that younger generations are not “misfits in Pakistani society,”³⁴² and although the *masājīd* ensured the preservation of Islam in Britain, the connection to the home country was never lost. As well as serving to transmit *birādarī* expectations to younger generations, the *masājīd* bolstered *birādarī* structures for the older generations too. The major industrial recession in the 1980s led to many migrants, no longer working in factories, to more actively engage in *masjid* activities, with the management committees

³³⁸ Modood, *Multicultural Politics*, p. 4.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁴⁰ Andrew Thompson and Rumana Begum, “Asian ‘Britishness’: A study of first generation Asian migrants in Greater Manchester” (Manchester: Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Centre, Manchester Central Library, 2005), p. 20.

³⁴¹ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 64.

³⁴² Imam in Anwar, *The Myth of Return*, p. 160.

that they came to comprise largely replicating the informal *birādarī* structures from “back home.”³⁴³

In this, as I have consistently argued here, the enmeshment of “religion” and “culture” is such that it cannot be neatly demarcated. In all phases of migration and settlement, in the constitution of South Asian Muslim communities in Britain and the configuration of its parameters, *birādarī* structures have exerted an all-pervasive influence. Yet, with the establishment of *masājid* and the need for religious education came the question of not only how to preserve Islam but further the question of what Islam is. The replication of *birādarī* structures was in turn followed by the gradual establishment of sectarian formations as they had existed in the subcontinent. This would also come to substantially shape Muslim community identity in Britain, and in the following section I outline how it has informed the landscape of Muslim community identity in Manchester.

Sectarian Contestations

The arrival of women and children and the definitive transition from the sojourner to settler phase of migration contributed towards the development of communal religious observance beyond the private litanies and house gatherings characteristic of the sojourner phase. This allowed for the emergence of familial Sufi-Sunni religious observances and women’s gatherings in which religious poetry and *Qur’ān* would be recited, hitherto not possible in exclusively male households.³⁴⁴ The proliferation of *masājid* across Britain from the early 1970s onwards marks this trend towards more communal, institutional

³⁴³ Ballard, “Popular Islam in northern Pakistan,” p. 178.

³⁴⁴ Kim Knott, “The Religions of South Asian Communities in Britain,” in *A New Handbook of Living Religions* John R. Hinnells ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997), pp. 756-774, p. 760.

expressions of Muslim community identity. This is evidenced in Birmingham, for example, where Richard Gale observes that the number of registered *masājid* rose from 2 in 1970 to 73 by 1998.³⁴⁵ The earliest *masājid* in Manchester, some of which comprise my study, are also indicative of this, with Central Mosque One having been established in 1971, Central Mosque Two established in 1975, and North Manchester Mosque established in 1979. As mentioned previously, the institution of *birādarī* and the initial establishment of *masājid* in Britain retained and reinforced strong connections to the subcontinent.

Both Ballard and Khan effectively demonstrate how the broadly Sufi-Sunni devotional Islam of the subcontinent predominated with the *Pīrs*, upon whom early migrants would depend for advice and litanies in the subcontinent, taking up this pastoral role for newly settled families in Britain.³⁴⁶ In this new phase of settlement and the development of communal devotional activity *Pīrs* could organise and preside over congregational *dhikr* gatherings, events in commemoration of saints, and *Mawlid* processions. The Mirpuri *Naqshbandī Shaykh*, Sufi ‘Abdullah Khan (1923-2015 C.E.), who held regular *dhikr* gatherings and established the first *Mawlid* procession in Birmingham,³⁴⁷ exemplifies this role, as described by Khan. The same can also be observed in Bradford with *Pīr* Ma’rūf, to whom I previously referred, who would regularly organise *Ghiyārwīn Sharīf*,³⁴⁸ gatherings commemorating the founder of the *Qādirī tarīqa*. Ballard observes the predominance of *Pīr*-focussed Sufi-Sunni religiosity among Punjabis too,³⁴⁹ and Barton observes the same

³⁴⁵ Richard Gale, “Representing the City: Mosques and the Planning Process in Birmingham,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 31:6 (2005), pp. 1161-1179, p. 1163. Accessed 31st July, 2016.

³⁴⁶ Ballard, “Popular Islam in northern Pakistan,” p. 179.

³⁴⁷ Khan, “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” pp. 141-142.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁴⁹ Ballard, “Popular Islam in northern Pakistan,” pp. 179-180.

among Sylhetis in Bradford.³⁵⁰ In Manchester the prime case in point is Central Mosque Two, named after the Yemeni Saint who spread Islam in Sylhet, and established by followers of Fultolī Saheb (1913-2008 C.E.), the *Shaykh* of the *Fultolī ṭarīqa* and a popular Sylheti *Pīr*.³⁵¹

It followed that the *masājid* also came to reflect the various sectarian formations and movements from the subcontinent too,³⁵² with the migration of ‘*Ulemā*’ who had been educated in subcontinental *madāris* aligned with one movement or another. This has been the case in Britain in general, with ‘*Ulemā*’ such as *Pīr* Ma’rūf and *Pīr* Alā’uddīn Siddīqī (1938-2017 C.E.) according their *masājid* in Bradford and Birmingham respectively a distinctly Barelvī sectarian character.³⁵³ In Manchester, too, the initial imam of Central Mosque was Deobandī, followed later by the more Barelvī-inclined *Allāma* Nisār Baig.³⁵⁴ As mentioned previously, the founder of North Manchester Mosque is also situated firmly within the Barelvī tradition as a *Khalīfa* of Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī’s son, Mustafā Razā Khān.³⁵⁵

It must be stated that this sectarian consciousness, or affiliation with a specific *maslak*, is not all-pervasive. Sher Azam remarks how, prior to the appointment of a Deobandī imam at Bradford’s Howard Street mosque, “there were no *Deobandis*, no *Barelwis*, no *Ahl-i Hadith*, nobody.”³⁵⁶ Even though Lewis remarks that sectarian fission in Bradford was

³⁵⁰ Barton, *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford*, p. 102.

³⁵¹ Imam Ejaz, interview by George Rawlinson, Central Mosque Two, 20th July, 2018.

³⁵² Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 52.

³⁵³ Lewis, *Islamic Britain*, p. 58.

³⁵⁴ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, pp. 31-32.

³⁵⁵ *Allāma*, interview by George Rawlinson, North Manchester Mosque, 20th March, 2018.

³⁵⁶ Sher Azam in Geaves, *Sectarian Influences Within Islam*, p. 159.

initiated with the appointment of a Deobandī imam and *Pīr* Ma'rūf's establishment of a Barelvī *masjid* in 1966,³⁵⁷ Khan relates that *Pīr* Ma'rūf himself describes how the Mirpuri congregants were *sāday banday*, “simple people.”³⁵⁸ They were not educated in sectarian distinctions, and simply required an imam who could recite *Saif al-Mulūk*,³⁵⁹ a popular Mirpuri Sufi-Sunni devotional poem. *Pīr* Siddīqī, also concerned with educating his congregations about the “heresies” of non-Barelvī movements such as the Deobandīs,³⁶⁰ recounted how Mirpuris were neither aware nor convinced of any substantial sectarian distinctions.³⁶¹

The same is also discernible in Manchester, where *Allāma* at North Manchester Mosque informed me that such “*was* an issue for the earlier generations of Muslims who came and settled in the UK and there’s a greater awareness today,” especially among the youth.³⁶² Khan also observes that although ‘*Ulemā* such as *Pīr* Ma'rūf and *Pīr* Siddīqī were concerned with educating Muslims in these *maslaki* distinctions, others such as Sufi ‘Abdullah regarded this as “matters for the *maulvis*,”³⁶³ the scholars, perceiving no substantial differences. Imam Ejaz at Central Mosque Two even described to me how Fultolī Saheb fitted into neither category, being regarded as a Barelvī by the Deobandīs and a Deobandī by the Barelvīs.³⁶⁴ In this, *maslak* differences have been carried by some ‘*Ulemā* “from back home,” according to *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa.³⁶⁵ They

³⁵⁷ Lewis, *Islamic Britain*, p. 58.

³⁵⁸ Ma'ruf in Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 137.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ Siddiqi in Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 139.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁶² *Allāma*, interview, North Manchester Mosque.

³⁶³ Siddiqi in Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 141.

³⁶⁴ Imam Ejaz, interview, Central Mosque Two.

³⁶⁵ *Ustādh*, interview by George Rawlinson, South Manchester Madrasa, 30th January, 2018.

have been received with varying degrees of acceptance and rejection among earlier generations of Muslims here, and this has in turn informed the contemporary composition of Muslim community identity. Overall, these accounts coupled with those of Khan demonstrate that among earlier generations of Sufi-Sunni Muslims one was often more likely to identify themselves as a follower of their respective *Pīr* or *ṭarīqa* than with any particular *maslak*.

Nevertheless, these “*maulvis*” fulfilled an important function in establishing *masājid*, associations, and in educating younger generations in Islam. Through scholarly associations such as *Pīr* Ma’rūf’s Jami’at-i Tablīgh al-Islam in Bradford, Barelvī ‘*Ulemā* gradually established this presence through sponsoring *masjid* establishment, organising communal events, and educating their local communities. As well as organising conferences affirming the Barelvī *maslak*, such as the Hijaz Conference in Wembley in 1985,³⁶⁶ *Mawlid* processions also became utilised as a means for Barelvī ‘*Ulemā* to assert a common Barelvī identity, being accompanied by the devotional recitation of Ahmad Razā’s poetry.³⁶⁷ The *masājid* themselves became platforms for sectarian contestation where ‘*Ulemā* of opposing *masālik* would debate each other in an attempt to win over their committees and claim ownership. Werbner describes how this was notably the case at Central Mosque, where following a debate with the then Deobandī imam of the *masjid* the Barelvī *Allāma* Nisār Baig secured ownership,³⁶⁸ and it has been loosely aligned with the Barelvī *maslak* ever since.

³⁶⁶ Lewis, *Islamic Britain*, pp. 84-85.

³⁶⁷ Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love*, p. 245.

³⁶⁸ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, pp. 31-32.

Such contestations extended beyond the *'Ulemā* too with sometimes violent confrontation between imams and their congregations over permission to hold Sufi-Sunni *majālis*, as recounted by Khan through his interviewing followers of *Pīr Siddīqī* in Bury.³⁶⁹ *Ustādh* also relates that such disputes served to divide families and that some among the younger generations have, through being educated in these *masālik*, adopted this same “mentality.”³⁷⁰ Indeed, it is perhaps among these younger generations, educated by Barelvī *'Ulemā*, that their influence is most markedly felt. *Allāma* observes that “there’s more awareness today to those who *understand* the differences- in depth... Those youth are more connected today to a certain *jama'at* or group,”³⁷¹ and this is due to the education that they have received within the context of visible sectarian contestation. Geaves rightly observes that *masjid* pedagogy was hampered through a lack of educated, English-speaking imams.³⁷² Yet, Khan explains that through the publication of Barelvī texts in English such as *Islamic Beliefs*, magazines such as the *Islamic Times*,³⁷³ and with the gradual inclusion of English-speaking imams, the Barelvī *maslak* has, where prevalent, been effectively transmitted to younger generations.

The Barelvī *maslak*, through the establishment of *masājid*, associations, and through religious education has certainly informed the shape of South Asian Sufi-Sunni Islam in Manchester and of Muslim community identity. Given this significant institutional presence, it is understandable that this movement has often been taken to encompass South

³⁶⁹ Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 147.

³⁷⁰ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

³⁷¹ *Allāma*, interview, North Manchester Mosque.

³⁷² Geaves, *Sectarian Influences*, p. 68.

³⁷³ Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 172.

Asian Sufi-Sunni Islam as “a *single* very loose organization,” as Werbner argues,³⁷⁴ and that Geaves mistakes broadly Sufi-Sunni customs to be “Barelwi symbols.”³⁷⁵ Indeed, the Barelvī *maslak* is not separable from Sufi-Sunni Islam as it generally affirmed its orthodoxy in response to anti-Sufi critique in the subcontinent, and could be regarded as a “counter-reformation.”³⁷⁶ That said, as I have observed previously, Sufi-Sunni Islam is not reducible to the Barelvī *maslak*.

Rather than regard the two as synonymous, it could be more appropriate to characterise the relationship between Sufi-Sunni Islam and the Barelvī *maslak* as one of “strategic partnership,” as Khan describes it.³⁷⁷ Sufi-Sunni Muslims practiced the Islam upon which the Barelvī *maslak* was founded, and could be a means of devotionally expressing and reinforcing this *maslak* identity for the ‘*Ulemā*. For the *Pīrs*, the participation of these ‘*Ulemā* in such devotional activities affirmed that they were sanctioned by *Shari’a*, and their presence served to legitimise these practices.³⁷⁸ However, Barelvī ‘*Ulemā* have been considered “too strict,” and “too harsh” by some of my respondents,³⁷⁹ and even “radical” by Werbner,³⁸⁰ in their perceived excessive criticism of non- Barelvī Muslims.

The distinction seems to be one of approach, a way of doing, a *maslak*, rather than substantial differences in belief and practice. Although the Barelvī *maslak* could not

³⁷⁴ Pnina Werbner, “The making of Muslim dissent: hybridized discourses, lay preachers, and radical rhetoric among British Pakistanis,” *American Ethnologist*, 23:1 (1996), pp. 102-122, pp. 110-111. Accessed 26th September, 2016.

³⁷⁵ Geaves *Sectarian Influences*, p. 102.

³⁷⁶ Werbner, “The making of Muslim dissent,” p. 110.

³⁷⁷ Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 145.

³⁷⁸ Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love*, p. 242.

³⁷⁹ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

³⁸⁰ Werbner, “The making of Muslim dissent,” p. 110.

encompass the mass of South Asian Sufi-Sunni Islam, in reflexively reifying the parameters of what constituted “orthodox” Sufi-Sunni Islam it at least cultivated awareness in Sufi-Sunni Muslims of what they were *not*.³⁸¹ It is due to this heterogeneity, and the fundamental differences in approach, that the Barelvī *maslak* has been unable to constitute a comprehensive, unified front which encompasses all South Asian Sufi-Sunni Muslims. Reflecting upon this, Werbner argues that the *Pīrs* “disdain the ulama while relying heavily on their services,”³⁸² and although such a firm demarcation is not applicable in all cases, the relationship between the two has constituted an uneasy tension at times. Reconciling this tension, Khan relates how one Mirpuri *Pīr* advises his son to “learn about Islam from the *maulvis* but follow the way of the *faqirs*.”³⁸³

What the foregoing demonstrates is that *birādarī*, *ṭarīqa* and *maslak* are inseparably enmeshed in their collective constitution of Muslim community identity in Manchester. Just as *birādarī* networks facilitated the migration and settlement of Muslims in Britain, the devotional customs of Sufi-Sunni Islam so central to communal life in the subcontinent, was also transmitted by the *Pīrs* and their followers. In following the *Pīrs* and Sufi-Sunni Islam, *izzat* was maintained. While many *Pīrs* simply aligned with their *ṭuruq*, some coupled this with the proselytization of the Barelvī *maslak* to establish and preserve the parameters of “orthodoxy”, and the institutional presence of this movement served to legitimise and promote Sufi-Sunni Islam. Werbner characterises the Sufi *Pīrs* and Barelvī *‘Ulemā* as occupying two distinct spheres that, though occasionally joining in partnership, are ultimately separate and exist in tension with each other.

³⁸¹ Rawlinson, “Modern Traditions and Movements of Reform,” p. 42.

³⁸² Werbner, “The making of Muslim dissent,” p. 111.

³⁸³ Ishtiaq in Khan “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 150.

However, Khan's work with Barelvī *Pīrs* such as *Pīr Siddīqī* and *Pīr Ma'rūf* attests to how this relationship is not one of enclosed spheres but of open-ended lines which entwine situationally in diverse configurations. For example, Khan observes that *Pīr Siddīqī*'s followers were primarily followers of his father,³⁸⁴ with *birādarī* networks sustaining this connection, and that in his *masjid* tours he fulfilled the roles of both a visiting *Pīr* and exponent of the Barelvī *maslak*.³⁸⁵ In visiting his followers he was obeying his father, who was both his *birādarī* elder and *Shaykh* in *ṭarīqa*, and in leading *dhikr* gatherings he was a Sufi-Sunni *Pīr*, while in opposition to Deobandīs and “Wahhabis” he was a Barelvī *‘Ālim*, all lines situationally enmeshed in multiple entanglements.

Interviewing Imam Ejaz, I discerned for myself how such entanglements evade or confound these distinctions too, exemplified in the person of Fultolī Saheb. Imam Ejaz described how he was neither Barelvī nor Deobandī, and that his *ṭarīqa* drew from five different *ṭuruq*.³⁸⁶ His following was predominantly Sylheti too, maintained and reinforced through *birādarī*. As with people, so with places, the *masājid* themselves are constituted of entanglements which extend beyond their walls. As I referred to previously, Werbner observes how the discursive spheres of religion, culture and ethnicity overlapped and spilled over into each other in the space of Central Mosque.³⁸⁷ Contestations entailing sectarian dispute, *birādarī* politics, and power plays between the imam and the committee took place in the *masjid*, yet beyond this it had implications for the representation of

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁸⁶ Imam Ejaz, interview, Central Mosque Two.

³⁸⁷ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, p. 31.

Pakistanis in the local council.³⁸⁸ In this, from *birādarī* through to Barelvī and beyond, Muslim community identity has been fundamentally constituted of such lines which entwine together and expand outward into the wider society of which they are a part, and in their movement birth new formations. The emergent entanglement of focus here is contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, which has come to pervade the meshwork of Muslim community identity in Manchester.

Contemporary Sufi-Sunni Revivalism in Manchester

The sectarian contestation outlined above configured the parameters of Islam and of “the Muslim community,” reinforcing them within a heterogeneous, multi-religious and multicultural context. Furthermore, through both the hypervisibility of Islam and the experience of Islamophobia, Muslims have not only come to be perceived as “Other” but Islam has been externalised as an entity to be rejected or embraced.³⁸⁹ This has entailed a process of objectification of Islam and a reflexive engagement with what it means to be a Muslim, particularly for younger generations of Muslims in Britain. As I observed previously, both Talal Asad and Shahab Ahmed broadly agree that answering this question involves some form of engagement with the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth*, producing myriad responses. Islamic Revivalism, as a return to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* to define and affirm the parameters of “real” Islam, constitutes one such approach. The *masālik* themselves were Islamic revivalist movements arising in the colonial milieu of the subcontinent in the 19th century, and for some Sufi-Sunni South Asian Muslims in contemporary Britain a firm grounding in the Barelvī or Deobandī *maslak* is essential.

³⁸⁸ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, p. 37.

³⁸⁹ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 30.

Others have rejected Sufism entirely, believing that “pure” Islam is revived through direct consultation of the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth* and a rejection of the perceived irrational and nominal pseudo-Islam of their parents, including Sufi-Sunni devotions which so centrally inform it. This broadly characterises the approach of Salafi-Wahhabi Islam, being particularly emergent in the 1980s and 1990s and remaining so. I will not be focussing on this movement here as there have been multiple studies on the history and contemporary picture of anti-Sufi Islam in Britain, particularly Hamid’s work on *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, and Lloyd Ridgeon’s edited volume, *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*. An alternative to both the South Asian *masālik* and the Salafi-Wahhabi movements is what Hamid has called the “Traditional Islam Network”. Though I have expressed my contention with Hamid’s use of this term, I concur with his broad characterisation of it. In common with other “scholastic” approaches, this way promotes classical theological creed (*‘aqīda*, *‘aqā’id* pl.) qualified adherence to a single school of law (*madhab*), and the significance of *sanad* in teaching. More contemporary elements include an emphasis on active civic engagement as a corrective to Islamophobia, and the affirmation of Sufism in response to anti-Sufi critique.³⁹⁰ In this, it is a way of doing Sufi-Sunni Islam that is both classical and contemporary. When I refer to contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, it is this trend to which I am referring.

A defining characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism in common with all forms of Islamic revivalism, the *masālik* included, is a trend towards rationalisation and objectification. Jouili outlines this as “text-based, discursive, consciously reflected upon-

³⁹⁰ Hamid, “The Rise of the ‘Traditional Islam’ Network(s),” p. 178.

and therefore “understood”- and put into practice by adopting a comprehensive and visible Islamic lifestyle in all domains of life.”³⁹¹ This is in contrast to an implicit, not rationalised religiosity as practiced by earlier generations.³⁹² *Allāma* observes this to be the case among younger generations in comparison to earlier generations of Muslim migrants in their comprehension of the Barelvī *maslak*, expanding further that “‘*Ulemā* have always stressed the importance of having the right ‘*aqā’id* and beliefs and to deeply and truly understand the major differences.’”³⁹³ Jessica Jacobson observes the same in the case of Salafism when interviewing young British Pakistanis, “the need to distinguish, as a framework within which to live one’s life, Islamic teachings from what was described as ‘culture’, ‘traditions’ or ‘customs’.”³⁹⁴

In each instance, the priority is to discern “real” Islam for oneself,³⁹⁵ with each revivalist approach differing in the preferred means to access this “real Islam” and in the understanding of what this entails. *Allāma* describes Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī to be “the *identity* of the true Sunni Creed and beliefs,”³⁹⁶ thus constituting “real Islam”. Jacobson also describes how her Salafī respondents perceived “real Islam” to be accessed through the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth* and “purifying Islam of its cultural accretions.”³⁹⁷ Contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism accords with Salafism to an extent in insisting on the importance of direct access to the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth* as a source of “direct, uncorrupted knowledge.”³⁹⁸ I

³⁹¹ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 28

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ *Allāma*, interview, North Manchester Mosque.

³⁹⁴ Jessica Jacobson “Religion and ethnicity: Dual and alternative sources of identity among young British Pakistanis,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20:2 (1997), pp. 238-256, p. 241. Accessed 5th March, 2017.

³⁹⁵ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 29.

³⁹⁶ *Allāma*, interview, North Manchester Mosque.

³⁹⁷ Jacobson “Religion and ethnicity.” p. 243.

³⁹⁸ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 34.

observed this sentiment expressed throughout my field work, with one young speaker at Oldham's Institute stating that we cannot be left to the weaknesses, debates and sectarianism of our times, but must hold onto the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* directly.³⁹⁹ In contrast to both the Salafī movement and the Barelvī *maslak*, direct access to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* is not only the surest means of knowing “real Islam”, the “*Dīn* of authenticity,”⁴⁰⁰ but is also the corrective to sectarian contestation which has come before.

This direct access to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* is qualified in contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism by insistence upon correct interpretation in accordance with classical Islamic scholarship,⁴⁰¹ with an emphasis upon acquiring “sacred knowledge” through courses and classes.⁴⁰² While Jouili regards this way of doing Islam as primarily discursive, there is a fundamentally affective element too. In the transmission of “sacred knowledge” through reception of the seemingly timeless language of classical Arabic, students and teachers are affectively connected to a lineage reaching back to the classical authors. This informed affirmation of institutional orthodoxy here, on both the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* and the ‘*Ulemā* who embody and transmit it,⁴⁰³ distinguishes contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism from Salafism.

This need for “real knowledge”⁴⁰⁴ is another central characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, in that through acquiring authentic knowledge one can live Islam for oneself *and convey it to others* without reliance upon external authority. This latter point is

³⁹⁹ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

⁴⁰⁰ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/ 03/18.

⁴⁰¹ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 34.

⁴⁰² Hamid, “The Rise of the ‘Traditional Islam’ Network(s),” p. 179.

⁴⁰³ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute 10/11/17.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

particularly significant, as it is in the context of predominantly non-Muslim society, and the proximity of the “Other” who has the capacity to critique one’s faith, that the pursuit of knowledge is driven by the need to be convinced.⁴⁰⁵ Islam is also cast as the “Other” in this context, and the acquisition of “real knowledge” serves as a “counter knowledge” to both combat Islamophobia,⁴⁰⁶ and to convince non-Muslims of the truth of Islam.⁴⁰⁷ Beyond this, the proximity of the non-Muslim “Other” constitutes a potential threat to community. One of Jouili’s respondents in Germany explains that “we have to meet in groups and do something. How else can they get to know Islam? Otherwise they will become Germanized... and we will lose our community.”⁴⁰⁸ Here Islamic knowledge *in community* is imperative, not just for the maintenance of one’s own faith and the capacity to convey it to others, but to maintain the parameters of community in a context wherein Islam is perceived to be under threat.

It is this awareness of the non-Muslim “Other” which one young speaker at the Institute brings to mind in his exhortation that “we need to build a “cave” in the community where dwells purity and loyalty,”⁴⁰⁹ a protective enclave in a potentially hostile environment. This need to affirm community against potential assimilation into non-Muslim British society is not at all new, as I previously mentioned how the initial establishment of *masājīd* and the preservation of *birādarī* structures was informed by this perceived necessity too. What *is* a novel development is the awareness, described *Ustādh*, that Muslims as a minority are gradually acknowledging the need to focus on what is common rather than

⁴⁰⁵ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 38.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁰⁹ *Mawlid* Celebration and *Burdah* Recitation, The Institute, 02/12/17.

what divides.⁴¹⁰ Informing this increasingly widespread sentiment is not only the felt need to represent Islam correctly in wider society wherein Islam is a problem space, but also public policy discourse on the civic potential of faith communities. This wider societal context, comprised of both Islamophobia and the need to combat it through civic engagement and community cohesion, has pervasively informed all manifestations of Islam and Muslim community identity in Manchester. As such, contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism cannot be reduced to a single movement or organisation.

Conclusion

As a pervasive orientation that courses through Muslim communities in Manchester, Sufi-Sunni revivalism is a way that confounds and conflates former categories by which Muslim community identity was predominantly conceptualised in past literature. In the following Chapter, I examine how Sufi-Sunni revivalism has informed and displaced emergent and established forms of Muslim community identity in Manchester. In this, the meshworked approach which I have outlined in the previous Chapter and which I go on to apply in the Chapters to come can more comprehensively explore and account for this emergent way of doing Islam. Building on past literature that has observed and identified the processual nature of Muslim community identity, the meshworked approach allows for a conceptualisation which more comprehensively reflects this. In this contemporary study of Muslims in Manchester I am not providing an updated taxonomy of Muslim community identity and the institutions or denominations which comprise it. Rather, I have sought through my observations to trace the entwining discursive and affective lines along which

⁴¹⁰ *Dars e-Nizāmī* Class One, South Manchester Madrasa, 23/11/17.

Islam is lived and done and of which the wider meshwork of Islam *in* Manchester is constituted.

Chapter Four: Contemporary Sufi-Sunni Revivalism, Beyond *Maslak*

Towards the end of the previous Chapter I introduced the trend of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. This trend is most comprehensively defined as objectified, reflexive and rationalised Islam, grounded in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* as transmitted and embodied by the *'Ulemā*, and actualised in service to wider society through civic engagement. It is both a continuation of a process of objectification which began with the establishment of the *masālik* in Britain and subsequent anti-Sufi polemic among the Salafis, yet itself arises out of the experience of and aversion towards this sectarian contention. Acquiring “real knowledge” of Islam through a comprehension of the Islamic sciences as transmitted by the *'Ulemā*, one can transcend the divisive currents of sectarian contestation and establish a firm, encompassing foundation for community grounded in an informed approach to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. This approach affirms Sufi-Sunni orthodoxy in its provisional reliance upon the *'Ulemā* as those who facilitate access to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, both as the means of its transmission from the Prophet to the present and as its living embodiment. Both *sanad* and science are particularly significant here in ensuring the authenticity of what the *'Ulemā* transmit and its fidelity to the *Sunnah*, and in this, what constitutes “real Islam” is bound up with the institutional orthodoxy of the *'Ulemā*. In common with the *masālik* this constitutes an opposition to anti-Sufi polemic as articulated by the Salafi-Wahhabi movements, yet it does so on the basis that such an approach does not possess consistent *asanīd* to the Prophet and rejects this scholastic approach to Islam through the Islamic sciences, Sufism included.

It is this professed adherence to principles, not personalities, which also distinguishes contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism from the *masālik* in that the latter would focus on the

statements of their particular imams, rather than the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* which these imams transmit. Though distinct, this approach does not constitute a new *maslak* in itself, nor is it isolable to an institution, or a single node in a wider network of organisations. Rather, as a way of doing Islam it weaves and courses through existing ways of doing, riding on their histories stretching back through Britain, the subcontinent, and beyond to 7th century Medina, according them novel emphases and modes of expression in contemporary contexts. Indeed, more contemporary manifestations of the Barelvī *maslak* that I observed in Manchester have been informed by this alternative emphasis, framing their adherence to the *maslak* within the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* or omitting explicit reference to Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī entirely. Taken together, whether through the *masālik* or their displacement, Sufi-Sunni Islam is asserted as fundamentally grounded in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, approached reflexively and crucially embodied in practice as a way of living and doing community.

While contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is not wholly isolable to places or persons it is certainly situated and embodied, and can be traced as a line, a *sanad*, affectively pervading space and enlivening bodies bound in devotion. I explore *sanad* here not simply as one's scholarly pedigree, a discursive means of bringing the Prophetic past into the present, but as a tangibly felt, affectively cultivated flow which both connects devotional bodies in congregation and sacralises space. This is most markedly felt in the *majālis*, in *dhikr* and in the recitation of *qaṣā'ed*, and it is these observations which I draw upon most in my explorations. Through dimmed lights, the burning of *bakhūr*, hushed tones, rhythmic recitation and the proximity of bodies dressed according to the Prophetic *Sunnah*, a

“connected” gathering is cultivated, affectively imbued with and born of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*.

This is also discernible in talks by visiting *Sheyūkh* and in classes of ‘*Ulūm* (pl. of Islamic science, ‘*Ilm* sing.) with the *Sheyūkh* embodying the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* in their appearance, mannerisms and teaching, sacralising space by their very presence. The students and general congregants, in their expression of reverence and in their etiquette (*adab*) towards the *Shaykh* and the gathering itself, also crucially inform the sacralisation of space and the cultivation of this affective *sanad*. This consideration of affect cannot be regarded in isolation from discourse, as both constitute lines which knot and entwine in the doing of Islam, requiring collective effort and dependent upon the apt performance of all involved. In this, the affective *sanad* is not divorced from discourse but is fundamentally configured by a certain Orthodoxy, the discursive *sanad* of the ‘*Ulemā*, comprised of stories which impress the Prophetic past upon the present. Without this correspondence of affect and discourse such sanctity could not be felt nor sustained, and I explore here how these entangled affective and discursive flows inform and constitute the meshwork of the *majālis in process*.

I examine, too, how these confluences in such gatherings construct the bonds between and the boundaries around brothers which inform the shape of Muslim community identity. Through the interplay of discursive and affective *asanīd* brotherhood is cultivated, and the boundaries demarcating sanctity from profanity, belief from unbelief and Muslims from non-Muslims, are established. Through this dual process community is situationally constituted, both encompassing Muslims in the *majlis* and bringing them into identification

with the *Ummah* in its entirety, all sharing common adherence to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. While situated in the *majlis*, I will explore here the affirmations of brotherhood in such contexts where community did not solely pertain to the Muslims gathered but extended to Muslims in Manchester, and more widely to the *Ummah* itself. This expression of commonality was also often coupled with awareness of otherness, of the non-Muslim “Other” of wider society, and to not only be firm in one’s Islam in this context but crucially to convey it and to proudly represent it.

Through both an informed approach to one’s Islam and actualising this in service (*khidma*) in wider society this boundary between the Muslim and the non-Muslim “Other”, though certainly felt, can be effectively bridged. The emphasis upon *khidma* as the foremost expression of one’s Islam is an established precedent, yet in this contemporary context it is informed by the felt need to present “true” Islam as a corrective to Islamophobia. It is not simply through talking about Islam but through *doing* Islam, physically and affectively meeting the “Other” in service, that the perceived boundaries of enmity and ignorance can be dissolved. This sentiment also informs the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist emphasis upon embodying Islam. In this, contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is thoroughly configured through both a felt otherness and the gaze of the perceived non-Muslim “Other”. It is as much situated within Manchester as in the *majlis*, its entwining discursive and affective strands coalescing in the *masjid* yet stretching beyond it. Examining exhortations to embody Islam in service, I begin to trace these entanglements before considering them further in the following Chapter, exploring the wider societal context out of which they have arisen.

“It was all *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*”

I had initially approached the Institute because of its notable emphasis upon the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* as related through *Ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) *Ḥadīth* and upon the family of the Prophet, the *Ahl al-Bayt*, in their *manhaj*. This was in accordance with the approach of *Shaykh* Husayn himself. Yet beyond this, it was particularly emblematic of the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist approach, and I examine here how the Institute most exemplifies this way before further consideration of how it manifests elsewhere. I begin with the centrality of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, how reference to it pervades all talks, *majālis* and classes I attended at the Institute, and how a felt, tasted and reflexive engagement with it, embodied in practice, constitutes “real” Islam for my respondents. This exhortation to cultivate a knowing relationship with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* draws on a long-established Prophetic precedent, according it both authenticity and authority in turn.

The need to know is also configured in light of sectarian contestation and anti-Sufi polemic in a multicultural context wherein the parameters of Islam are objectified, and the need to live self-consciously and *authentically* as a Muslim is perceived to be an imperative. In this, I examine further how reflexive, critical engagement thus becomes a means through which students at the Institute are encouraged to relate to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, and how this contemporary need is consistently justified by their teachers with recourse to the Prophetic past. This call to critical enquiry is nonetheless qualified by adherence to Sufi-Sunni Orthodoxy in the essential function of the teacher or the *Shaykh*. In their person, they constitute a living, unbroken connection to the Prophet, transmitting “real” Islam and facilitating their students’ engagement with it. I trace these entwining strands of the classical and contemporary at the Institute as they coalesce through talks, classes, and

culminate in the person of the *Shaykh* himself, exploring how they enmesh in a *manhaj* both Mancunian and Muhammadan.

Qur'ān and Sunnah as “authentic”, unmediated Islam

Attending my first event at the Institute, wherein the *Shaykh*'s brother, Hasan, delivered a talk entitled “Purification of the Heart”, the centrality of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* was immediately apparent, and conformed to what I had come to expect of the Institute.

Reference to it framed the talk itself, beginning and ending with *Qur'ānic* recitation and supplications (*du'ā* sing. and pl.) permeated by the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*. There were only two references to other sources, one to a saying of ‘Alī and another to Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah al-Sikandarī (1260-1309 C.E.), an authority in the *Shādhilī ṭarīqa* to which the *Shaykh* also belonged. Yet these sayings did not detract from the predominance of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* as they were understood to be fundamentally informed by and expressive of it.

This was so pervasive that one attendee remarked to me upon reflection, amazed, that “it was all *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*.” This sentiment was continually expressed as I attended events at the Institute, with both the structure and the content of events consistently framed by and permeating with reference to the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah*, the *Ahl al-Bayt* and the *ṭarīqa* of *Shaykh* Husayn.

Attending one of the weekly *dhikr* gatherings, we began and concluded with *Qur'ān* recitation and the litanies themselves were comprised of the testimony of faith (*Shahāda*) the Names of Allah, *Ṣalawāt*, and *du'ā* all derived from the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*. These were recited in a North African rhythmic style in keeping with the *ṭarīqa*. In the

concluding sermon, the young Bengali speaker enjoined us to “hold onto the rope of Allah,” reflecting upon this *Qur’ānic* verse that true faith must be based on the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*.⁴¹¹ This emphasis was most pronounced by *Shaykh* Husayn himself in a class on the principles of *Ḥadīth* science where he stated that “*Dīn* is *Qur’ān* and authentic *Sunnah*,” with all else besides being merely entertainment, “edutainment,” and even cultish.⁴¹² In this class and throughout such observations I observed not only the predominance of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* as authentic, “real” Islam, but most crucially a distinction from what Islam is *not*. It is not “just stories”, to return to the attendee at my first event,⁴¹³ nor is it “a sound bite,” as the speaker at *dhikr* reminded us,⁴¹⁴ and it is most certainly not cultish “edutainment.”

This distinction between “real” Islam as the *Qur’ān* and the “clean, pristine, authentic *Sunnah*”⁴¹⁵ and “edutainment” accords with the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist distinction between objectified, reflexive, textual Islam and irrational, nominal tradition as outlined by Jeanette Jouili. Islam as the clean, “pure” *Qur’ān* and authentic *Sunnah* is reminiscent of the Salafi-Wahhabi approach, hearkening back to the pure Islam of the first three generations of Muslims (*Salaf*) to revive Islam and purify it of cultural accretions. Yet contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism in Britain has arisen in light of anti-Sufi polemic, and the Institute is a Sufi-Sunni institution which shares ‘*aqīda*, law (*fiqh*) and Sufism broadly in common with other Sufi-Sunni Muslims. Unlike the Salafi-Wahhabi movement

⁴¹¹ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

⁴¹² *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

⁴¹³ “Purification of the Heart” Talk, The Institute, 23/10/17.

⁴¹⁴ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

⁴¹⁵ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

which affirms adherence to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* in opposition to Sufi-Sunni Islam, this difference is not one of sect. What really characterises the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist trend as it is manifest at the Institute and elsewhere is reflexivity, and the valorisation of personal understanding.⁴¹⁶ It is the emphasis upon understanding the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, and practically applying one's knowledge through *living it* in practice.

The delivery of events in English and classical Arabic is reflective of this, as Geaves predicted of the inter-generational transmission of Islam,⁴¹⁷ with Arabic evoking the Prophetic tradition and English intelligibly bringing it forward to the present for contemporary comprehension. *Shaykh* Husayn reiterates that understanding is essential but amassing information is pointless unless applied in practice, and “what takes you closer is knowledge of the Book and the authentic *Sunnah* and the practice thereof.”⁴¹⁸ The frequent Q&A sessions throughout such events were further demonstrative not only of the exhortation to understand and embody on the part of the *Sheyūkh* but also the attendees' desire to know and apply this instruction in their daily lives. At the “Purification of the Heart” talk one of the younger brothers asked how to keep his gazed lowered constantly, another asked how to remove jealousy, and the consistent answers *Shaykh* Hasan gave revolved around informed adherence to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* grounded in love of Allah and His Prophet.⁴¹⁹ This endeavour to know, to be convinced, and the “underlying concern to do the *right* thing,”⁴²⁰ as Jouili also observes among her respondents, is evident here and

⁴¹⁶ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 29.

⁴¹⁷ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences Within Islam in Britain*, p. 68.

⁴¹⁸ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

⁴¹⁹ “Purification of the Heart” Talk, The Institute, 23/10/17.

⁴²⁰ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 3.

throughout even more technical classes pertaining to the principles (*Usūl*) of *Ḥadīth* and *fiqh*. In contrast to the more conventional format where the *Shaykh* dictates from a text and the students are simply required to listen, students at the Institute were consistently encouraged to ask questions and did so, both for clarification and practical application.

This informed and reflexive engagement with one's Islam, objectified as authentically grounded in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, accords with the modern idea of the knowing subject who refuses blind submission, reflects intelligently, and takes self-responsibility.⁴²¹ This notion was most evident at *Shaykh* Husayn's class where, leaning forward and scanning the room he exhorted us, "you need to go and see what Allah is telling you in the *Qur'ān*, He's speaking to *you*. You don't need me, you don't need anybody else."⁴²² This, coupled with his distinction between a personality cult and religion, his rejection of intermediaries and "priesthoods", and his affirmation that the religion (*Dīn*) provides all with "hope, growth and opportunity,"⁴²³ presents a picture of a secular liberal Islam. Hearing this, it sounded like this *Dīn* of hope, growth and opportunity had been coloured as such in "the land of opportunity" itself, in America where the *Shaykh* is based. In this, it is a self-consciously "Western" form of Islamic revivalism, rooted as much in the European Enlightenment as in the 7th century Hijaz. It is also, as mentioned previously, born out of the contemporary context in which Islam is defined as a problem space in predominantly non-Muslim society, its otherness magnified, with Muslims concerned to both live and convey "real"

⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴²² *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

⁴²³ Ibid.

Islam in a tactful and relatable way. I will be returning to this point in further detail throughout this work.

Although all of this comprises the “contemporary” aspect of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, the approach of reflexive engagement with Islam as *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* draws upon an established pre-modern, arguably Prophetic, precedent. As explained previously, Talal Asad defines an Islamic discursive tradition precisely as one that ultimately affirms orthodoxy chiefly with appeal to the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth*.⁴²⁴ Shahab Ahmed also argues that Islam is the sum of hermeneutical engagement with the Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text of Revelation which entails the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth*, though is not limited to them.⁴²⁵ Islamic revivalism too, even in its 19th and 20th century manifestations including the Barelvī, Deobandī and Salafī-Wahhabi movements, draws on a much earlier precedent of centennial revival through the figure of the *Mujaddid*, which itself relates back to a *Ḥadīth*. This form of Sufi-Sunni revivalism is certainly reconfigured in the contemporary context outlined, yet its *sanad* is traced back to the Prophet and his Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*) through a long succession of *‘Ulemā* and *Sheyūkh* who have carried it forward. It is through holding on to this past in the present, and onto these *‘Ulemā* and *Sheyūkh* who traverse time as the means and facilitators of Prophetic transmission, that “real” Islam can be preserved as the firm foundation upon which the Muslim community is established.

⁴²⁴ Asad, op. cit., p. 71.

⁴²⁵ Ahmed, op. cit., p. 73.

Qur'ān and Sunnah as affirmation of Sufi-Sunni Orthodoxy

I have outlined above how the Institute affirms a “back to basics” approach to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*,⁴²⁶ and *Shaykh* Husayn insists that he does not have a *manhaj* distinct from this. However, *all* Islamic discursive traditions are positioned in relation to the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*, and the mediation of these foundational texts by practices, institutions, and social conditions is a constantly evolving process producing much heterogeneity in how Islam is done. As I outlined previously, this diversity to the point of contradiction that Ahmed surveys pertains not only to the means of approaching Revelation, but also to what Revelation is understood to be, which is simultaneously configured by one’s engagement with it.⁴²⁷ Therefore, any approach, no matter how “direct”, is ultimately mediated, and a crucial element of the Institute’s means of engagement, acquiring *‘Ilm* as the “catalyst” for closeness to Allah,⁴²⁸ is the *‘Ālim* who transmits and embodies it. Through an informed engagement with the Word of God, the *Qur'ān*, and the fullest embodiment of His Word, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet as conveyed through the *Ḥadīth*, Muslims need not be dependent upon more fallible human authorities, nor be swayed by their divisive sectarian polemics.

Yet, the *Sheyūkh* and *‘Ulemā* are essential here as “people who are like the earlier generations, people with the potential to be like the *Ṣaḥāba*.”⁴²⁹ Such people push one towards the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* by acting according to it, as opposed to standing in front

⁴²⁶ Chairman, interview by George Rawlinson, The Institute, 8th March, 2018.

⁴²⁷ Ahmed, op. cit., p. 73.

⁴²⁸ *Usul ul-Ḥadīth* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

⁴²⁹ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

of it by acting to the contrary.⁴³⁰ What distinguishes such Prophetic *Shaykh* and *'Ulemā* is their knowledge and practical implementation of the *'Ulūm* in accordance with the classical scholastic approach to the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth* through which the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* can be directly comprehended. Furthermore, these people can ultimately derive their authority from the earlier generations through possessing *asanīd*, chains of transmission from student to teacher, tracing back to the Prophet himself. It is by the *sanad* the *'Ālim* carries and the science he transmits that his human fallibility is mitigated, as he becomes a vessel through which the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* can be known. In this, contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as exemplified at the Institute does not reject scholarly authority outright as an obstacle to comprehension of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, yet such authority is only recognised inasmuch as one can effectively transmit and embody it.

The significance of *sanad* was made apparent at the first event I attended, the “Purification of the Heart” talk, where the Institute’s Chairman introduced *Shaykh* Hasan. He outlined his qualifications as an *'Ālim*, his place of study in Syria, the predominantly Syrian *'Ulemā* whom he studied under, and the sciences in which he specialised. His relationship to the *Shaykh* was emphasised, by both blood and scholarly lineage, and by extension mention was also made of his being a descendent of the Prophet (*Sayyid*) through Imam Husayn.⁴³¹ This affirmed his authority to relate and reflect upon the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* in that through the *asanīd* he possessed, both as a qualified *'Ālim* and a *Sayyid*, he was in his very person a channel, a link in the chain back to the Prophet. While his lineage accorded him respect, it was his positioning within the discursive tradition of the *'Ulemā*, of *sanad*-based

⁴³⁰ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

⁴³¹ “Purification of the Heart” Talk, The Institute, 23/10/17.

Sufi-Sunni orthodoxy, that accorded him authority to teach. This draws on a widely established pre-modern precedent, common throughout the Muslim world.⁴³² Central to this discursive tradition has always been, and for the most part remains, the personal authority of the teacher, recognised not on the basis of institutional position but rather “on the basis of the shaykh’s learning, age, and character.”⁴³³

In this, a list of one’s teachers, *not* their institution, serves as a kind of curriculum vitae.⁴³⁴ Students would derive their authority from the reputation of their teachers with whom they had kept company (*ṣuḥba*), and from whom they had received permission (*ijāza*) to teach. An emphasis is certainly placed upon the textual sources of the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth* themselves, along with the books of *‘Ilm* from which they are derived and upon which the *Shari’a* is based, but these are received through the authoritative *person* who has received this authority directly through other such persons, back to the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba*.⁴³⁵ The *‘Ālim* may be said to *become* the text, in that one cannot be situated in a *sanad* simply by reading but must ultimately *receive* this text through the medium of their teacher. Mystical charismatic and textual religiosities have often been characterised as occupying two distinct and opposed worlds, that of the Sufi and the Scholar,⁴³⁶ with the Deobandī movement presenting the only exception in the form of the *Pīr-Murshid-Muḥtāb* who encompasses them both, as described by Werbner.⁴³⁷ However, the very operation of *sanad* and the centrality of personal authority attests to the entanglement of the teacher and the

⁴³² Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 21.

⁴³³ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, p. 23.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴³⁶ Werbner, “The making of Muslim dissent,” p. 111.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

text. If the *sanad* can be likened to a line of movement as I have referred to previously in accord with Ingold, then just as a person *is* a line of movement the *‘Ālim is the sanad*, the embodied *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* in process.

In the previous Chapter I briefly referred to how Jouili also observed the centrality of personal transmission of “sacred knowledge” in the classes and courses undertaken by her European respondents. She describes how the affective, heart to heart transmission from teacher to student is regarded as essential, as spiritual as opposed to mechanical.⁴³⁸ This represents an observable continuum of pre-modern Islamic pedagogy common to both Europe and, as I have observed, Britain too. I explore the affective dimensions of *sanad* and *ṣuḥba* later in this Chapter, but for now it suffices to say that the centrality of the teacher in the discursive transmission of knowledge and authority in pre-modern Islamic pedagogy throughout the Muslim world remains so in contemporary Muslim communities in Britain. In response to questions on how to better implement Islam in one’s daily life, *Shaykh* Hasan reiterated to us how it was “very important” to keep *ṣuḥba* with the *‘Ulemā*,⁴³⁹ along with engaging in frequent *dhikr*, worship (*‘ibāda*), and adherence to the *Sunnah*. The regular classes with visiting *‘Ulemā* that the Institute organised were a means for such *ṣuḥba*, and though in both classes of *Usūl ul-Fiqh* and *Ḥadīth* the *‘Ālim* related from a particular text, these were digested gradually and classes would extend over long periods of time.

⁴³⁸ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 42.

⁴³⁹ “Purification of the Heart” Talk, The Institute, 23/10/17.

The focus in these classes was the *Shaykh* as transmitter of the text, who related not only the words of the text itself but the meaning, conveyed through reflections, anecdotes and jokes. This was most evident in our classes with *Shaykh* Jamal, a British-Yemeni *‘Ālim* born and raised in Nottingham, on the forty *Ḥadīth* of Imam Nawawi (1233-1277 C.E.). *Shaykh* Jamal would spend much of the lesson describing the primary narrator of the *Ḥadīth*, explaining that such *Ṣahāba* are “a living transmission of the Prophet to us.”⁴⁴⁰ Being situated within the *sanad* himself, the *Shaykh* also belonged to this living transmission, and drawing on his expertise as a primary school teacher he sought to effectively convey this to us in turn. The emphasis on both the narrator and the narration itself in these classes is reflective of this dual significance of teacher and text. *Shaykh* Jamal would reflect upon their lives and what we could learn from them in contemporary times, drawing from his own personal anecdotes to affirm these points. As a means of transmission, a certain *adab* was maintained between *Shaykh* Jamal and the students. The students were silent for the most part, listening attentively as he spoke. Although he endeavoured to better relate to the students through jokes and stories, the “psychological gulf” that Berkey describes between *Shaykh* and student in pre-modern Islamic pedagogy remains.⁴⁴¹ Indeed, even when the *Shaykh* himself reflexively criticises his own exclusive authority to teach in the context of the class, as I often observed in my *Usūl ul-Fiqh* classes with *Shaykh* Jalal, a first-generation Uzbek *‘Ālim*,⁴⁴² the students still maintained deference to his opinions out of *adab*.

⁴⁴⁰ Forty *Hadith* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 24/02/18.

⁴⁴¹ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, p. 35.

⁴⁴² *Usul ul-Fiqh* Class, The Institute, 28/10/17.

The *Shaykh* remains essential, constituting the link in the *sanad* back to the Prophet, with the *adab* required of this process being for the most part maintained by both teacher and student in contemporary times. However, the rationalised reflexivity of the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist approach has certainly informed the format through which the *sanad* flows. Though the classes took place in the *masjid* section of the centre, desks and chairs were set up for students, and a whiteboard for the teacher at the front of the room. As with all events at the Institute, a partial divider was placed across the middle to maintain segregation between men and women, yet the *Shaykh* sitting at the front was equally accessible for both sides. All of these features in the format of the class itself draw on contemporary Western pedagogical approaches, and the Institute’s description of the sum of these classes as a “one-year diploma course” evidently draws upon Western academic conventions, although these courses are as of yet not formally accredited. *Shaykh* Jamal was particularly representative of this bridge between pre-modern and contemporary pedagogical methods. As an *‘Ālim* he carried the tradition as outlined above yet his qualifications as a primary school teacher were also conducive to this mode of transmission, where he would encourage questions and develop interactive activities to better engage students.⁴⁴³

Shaykh Jalal would also actively encourage a more “academic” approach to the Islamic sciences, not relying excessively on “emotion” or on the authority of one’s teachers,⁴⁴⁴ and would often ask students to express their own opinions. This was usually met with

⁴⁴³ Forty *Hadith* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 24/02/18.

⁴⁴⁴ *Usul ul-Fiqh* Class, The Institute, 28/10/17.

hesitation with students responding, “you know best, *Shaykh*”⁴⁴⁵ out of *adab*, yet the *Shaykh*’s remark is no less demonstrative of a particularly contemporary development which even exists in tension with the sentiment of younger generations of Muslims to reverentially defer to the teacher. *Shaykh* Jalal was aware of this, joking once “when you’re sitting there, you have to take it! You can’t joke with me but I’m allowed,”⁴⁴⁶ both caricaturing and acknowledging the authority of his position as the teacher and the *adab* this accords. That said, when discussing with other students about the classes and what they most liked about them one Pakistani student in his mid-twenties remarked how the *Shaykh* made them “think outside the box,” and this is what he most valued. The content of the classes was secondary here, what mattered most was that “we’re encouraged to think for ourselves and consider things individually.” Interestingly, he contrasts this approach with that of “our *Dar ul-Ulooms*” which are “too harsh and prescriptive.”⁴⁴⁷ Whilst the *sanad*-based pedagogy and the centrality of the *Shaykh* is a pre-modern continuation, this democratisation of learning and critical reflexivity in a self-consciously “academic” format is a particularly novel development.

Embodying this contemporary reconfiguration of Sufi-Sunni Orthodoxy is *Shaykh* Husayn himself. In spite of his insistence that we did not need him, his position as both an *‘Ālim* and *Shaykh* of *ṭarīqa*, and as founder of the Institute, has had a pervasively formative influence on how Islam is done there. I observed throughout my time there how access to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* was guided through his methodology, comprised of both the

⁴⁴⁵ *Usul ul-Fiqh* Class, The Institute, 28/10/17.

⁴⁴⁶ *Usul ul-Fiqh* Class, The Institute, 20/01/18.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

sanad-based system of learning thus far outlined and what he has previously called “Junaydi” Sufism. This was particularly evident in the *majlis*, where the gathering itself begins with a dedication to the Prophet, his *Ṣahāba*, his family and the *Shaykh* of the *Shādhilī-Qādirī-Rifāʿī* *ṭarīqa*, including the *Shaykh* himself. Just as the *asanīd* one possesses constitute a qualification for and means of knowledge and authority in the doctrinal and legal fields, the *ṭarīqa* also constitutes a *sanad* which affirms one’s authority and knowledge in the science of spirituality (*taṣawwuf*). The litanies too, in their arrangement and in their North African rhythm at particular intervals, were recited according to *ṭarīqa* guidelines and configured by the instruction of the *Shaykh*.⁴⁴⁸

Later attending a *Mawlid* at the Institute I observed how the speaker, a young Canadian convert and disciple (*murīd*) of *Shaykh* Husayn, supplemented frequent reference to the *Qurʾān* and *Sunnah* with the *Shaykh*’s sayings to further elucidate the *Qurʾānic* verses and the *Ḥadīth*.⁴⁴⁹ This all accords with what I have outlined thus far of pre-modern Sufi-Sunni orthodoxy, and is further demonstrative of its continuation in contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. Yet as I have also observed, *Shaykh* Husayn asserts the primacy of methodological principles over personalities, stating that “our *Dīn* is based on scientific methodology, not emotion.”⁴⁵⁰ His advocacy of a critical, open-minded “academic” approach to these sciences is also certainly a contemporary development.⁴⁵¹ In sum, *Shaykh* Husayn and his Institute exemplify the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist way of doing Islam, preserving fidelity to pre-modern Sufi-Sunni orthodoxy yet doing so

⁴⁴⁸ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

⁴⁴⁹ *Mawlid* Celebration and *Burdah* Recitation, The Institute, 02/12/17.

⁴⁵⁰ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

⁴⁵¹ Chairman, interview, The Institute.

reflexively and critically to know, convey and implement “real” Islam in contemporary society.

Our’ān, Sunnah and ‘Alā Hazrat

I began my field work with the presumption that this contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist *manhaj* was unique to the Institute and other such contemporary organisations. This accorded with Hamid’s description of the Traditional Islam Network as an emergent trend, comprised of a “transnational coalescence of peoples and institutions... that agree on a consensus of priorities rather than a single formal organizational entity.”⁴⁵² In spite of its heterogeneity, sharing a broad consensus of priorities, it is nevertheless understood to be an identifiable trend with which particular people and institutions are associated, with Hamid marking its beginning in 1995 and listing a number of *‘Ulemā* recognisably associated with it.⁴⁵³ I concur with Hamid that this is certainly an identifiable trend and I have outlined its characteristics.

However, I have discerned the pervasiveness of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism throughout my observations at other *masājid* otherwise perceived to be aligned with the Barelvī *maslak*, to the extent that even the notion of a distinct network is problematic. Furthermore, it must be remembered that contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism in Britain has itself arisen in light of the experience of sectarian contestation and more parochial pedagogies perceived to be characteristic of the Barelvī *maslak* by younger generations of

⁴⁵² Hamid, “The Rise of the ‘Traditional Islam’ Network(s),” p. 178.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Muslims. As such, while contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism possesses certain identifiable characteristics it cannot be considered apart from the wider discursive traditions which have informed its shape, and which it has shaped in turn. It may be better characterised as a current, reorienting, reconfiguring and informing discursive and affective lines in the meshwork of Muslim community identity, of which the Barelvī *maslak* is also a part. I will be examining here how the Barelvī *maslak* has been variously informed, compartmentalised and displaced by this current in other *masājid* I attended, focusing particularly upon South Manchester Madrasa, Central Mosque One, and North Manchester Mosque.

Reconfigurations of the Barelvī *maslak*

As I outlined in Chapters One and Four, the Barelvī *maslak* is most explicitly affirmed and embraced at North Manchester Mosque. The founder and chief imam is a *Khalīfa* of Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī's son, Mustāfa Razā Khān. *Allāma* also emphatically states that Ahmad Razā Khān is the *identity* of true Sunni Islam. Following the *Eid* prayer he put his arm around me and introduced me as “a proper Sunni, of the ‘Alā Hazrat variety,”⁴⁵⁴ further affirming this point. It was immediately apparent throughout each event I attended too, in that along with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī was frequently evoked, occupying a central place in the way Islam was done, defined and conveyed here. Every event, be it *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah*, a *Qur'ān* reflection circle, or a speech from a visiting speaker, would be concluded with the recitation of the Imam's poetry in praise of the Prophet, the *Ṣalāt o Salām*, and peppered with references to other poetic verses throughout.

⁴⁵⁴ *Eid* prayer, North Manchester Mosque, 15/06/18.

While this was certainly coupled with the *Qur'ān*, *Sunnah* and the stories of the saints, this was all framed *within* the Barelvī *maslak*.

This was most evident at the *Mawlid* I attended there, taking place shortly after the *Mawlid* at the Institute. In common with the Institute, and indeed most *Mawlid* gatherings, the primary theme of the talks here was love of the Prophet and attachment to him, most conveyed in the English speech of *Shaykh* Sardar, a British-Pakistani 'Ālim and regular speaker at the *masjid*. Yet in contrast to the Institute, where love of the Prophet was emphasised as being chiefly manifest through following his *Sunnah* and reciting *Ṣalawāt*,⁴⁵⁵ *Shaykh* Sardar argued that such love and attachment is conditional on one's acceptance of essential 'aqīda points, without which one is neither a true lover nor a true Muslim.⁴⁵⁶ He began by reciting Ahmad Razā's verses, remarking that the poetry of the Imam is often recited at *Mawlid* gatherings, before proceeding to analyse these verses as the focus for contemplating the significance of the *Mawlid* for the remainder of his talk.⁴⁵⁷ While he included references to the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth* in justification of total dependence upon and love for the Prophet, these were related in the context of Ahmad Razā's poetry as this remained the focus, and he states himself that these verses are grounded in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*.⁴⁵⁸ The message was clear: one cannot be a true believer unless they truly love and depend upon the Prophet, and Ahmad Razā best encapsulates such loving devotion, therefore one must be aligned with the Barelvī *maslak* to be a true lover of the Prophet and a true believer. The *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* affirm the same, according to the *Shaykh*, yet their

⁴⁵⁵ *Mawlid* Celebration and *Burdah* Recitation, The Institute, 02/12/17.

⁴⁵⁶ Annual Three Day *Mawlid*, North Manchester Mosque, 30/11/17.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

most recent embodiment is the Imam. In this, to be a Barelvī is to truly follow the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*.

While *Shaykh* Sardar was rather more implicit in his asserting the exclusive orthodoxy of the Barelvī *maslak* here, this was more explicitly stated by *Allāma* at one of his *Qur'ān* circles that I attended. “It’s not enough to have 99%,” he explained in reference to the “essentials of faith” (*Darrūriyāt e Dīn*), “you need 100% or you’re out of the fold.”⁴⁵⁹ This could be perceived as a continuation, indeed an intensification, of the sectarian polemics which are perceived to be characteristic of the earlier South Asian *masālik*, an older way of doing Islam in Britain advanced by the older generation. However, as I mentioned in the previous Chapter regarding my interview with *Allāma*, it seems to be the younger generations who are more aware of these sectarian distinctions and their significance than their elders. *Shaykh* Sardar’s talks on the “essentials of faith” were particularly demonstrative of this, wherein he outlined the *Darrūriyāt e Dīn* pertaining to the Prophet to a predominantly Pakistani audience of mixed age. These talks were concluded with Ahmad Razā’s *Ṣalāt o Salām*, and the entire congregation would recite together.⁴⁶⁰ I observed here that the younger generations of Pakistanis were no less attached to the Barelvī *maslak* than their elders, and perhaps they were even more so, given their more informed comprehension of what this entails. Through the “essentials of faith” talks, *Shaykh* Sardar would justify belief in the Prophet’s infallibility, his encompassing

⁴⁵⁹ *Qur'an Dars*, North Manchester Mosque, 20/03/18.

⁴⁶⁰ Essentials of Faith Class Two, North Manchester Mosque, 15/11/17.

knowledge, and his dominion over the world, among other attributes, with reference to the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*, supplemented with the poetry of Ahmad Razā.⁴⁶¹

In this, younger generations of Muslims here not only devotionally affirm their alignment with the Barelvī *maslak* through the *Ṣalāt o Salām* along with elder generations, but also approach it in a rationalised and objectified manner, justifying it with appeal to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Those who approach the Barelvī *maslak* in this way do not differ substantially in belief and practice from their elders, rather it is in their rationalised, objectified approach to the *maslak* that they are distinguished. Having established the permissibility of these 'aqīda points, the question arises how to implement this *maslak* in practice, how to *live* this way. At the *Mawlid*, *Shaykh* Sardar asks us all to question ourselves individually why we are here, encouraging us to reflect on not only the permissibility of what we were celebrating but *why*, to really appreciate and grow in the love of the Prophet.⁴⁶² Through being informed about and reflexively engaging with the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah* and the stories of the saints, encompassed by and conveyed through the Barelvī *maslak*, Muslims could implement this as “a way of life,”⁴⁶³ and as a means of addressing contemporary societal issues. Reflecting on the life of the prominent saint, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlanī (1077-166 C.E.), *Shaykh* Sardar considers how best to adopt his virtues in “our society” and “the times in which we’re living.”⁴⁶⁴ This informed, rationalised and reflexive engagement with the Barelvī *maslak* as a self-conscious way of doing Islam in the context of Islam as a

⁴⁶¹ Essentials of Faith Class Two, North Manchester Mosque, 15/11/17.

⁴⁶² Annual Three Day *Mawlid*, North Manchester Mosque, 30/11/17.

⁴⁶³ *Allāma*, Interview, North Manchester Mosque.

⁴⁶⁴ Class Three on *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, North Manchester Mosque, 18/11/17.

problem space is characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, attesting to its pervasive influence.

Observing situational manifestations of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism at North Manchester Mosque, reconfiguring and reinforcing the *maslak* itself rather than displacing it, I realised that it did not constitute an isolable sect aligned with any institution. This broadened my conceptualisation of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, but it also fundamentally caused me to re-evaluate the homogenous fixity of the Barelvī *maslak*. I had observed how even in its most overt institutional expressions, it possessed the capacity to be informed by this current. The heterogeneity of the Barelvī *maslak* has long been acknowledged in the literature as I surveyed previously, yet this could be no more confined to a single category than contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. Just as one's alignment with the *maslak* could be overtly polemical and exclusivist, as I observed at North Manchester Mosque, it could also be more implicit, seen but not heard, with a certain ambivalence around, even aversion to, the term "Barelvī" itself. This was my impression of South Manchester Madrasa which I developed gradually over the course of a few months, attending *Dars e-Nizāmī* classes in the evenings, and speaking with *Ustādh*.

I had initially selected South Manchester Madrasa because I presumed it to be overtly Barelvī, akin to my observations at North Manchester Mosque. Attending for the first time my presumption seemed to be confirmed, with an English poster outlining Ahmad Razā's

life, the teachers with whom he studied, and the works he produced.⁴⁶⁵ Books published by the prominent Barelvī proselytising (*da'wa*) organisation, *Dāwat e-Islamī* also lined the shelves.⁴⁶⁶ These were some of the few books in English with one, entitled *Fundamental Teachings of Islam*, outlining the perceived fundamentals of Sunni belief and practice framed within the Barelvī *maslak*, as illustrated in figure 4. Scanning the books further, I found a book on the permissibility of *Mawlid* authored by the founder and presiding *‘Ālim* of the *masjid*, translated from Urdu into English by one of their young students.⁴⁶⁷ The dispute over the permissibility of the *Mawlid* is framed in the translator’s introduction as being between the orthodox *Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l Jamā’ah* and heterodox “*Ghair Muqallidīn*”,⁴⁶⁸ with the Deobandī and Aḥl e-Hadīs *masālik* among them. It is at least implied in this that this debate concerning the *Mawlid*, related in a polemical context, is a dispute between the Barelvī *maslak* and other *masālik*. Though no *explicit* mention is made of identification with a recognised Barelvī *maslak*, neither in this book nor in the *masjid* layout itself, Ahmad Razā and his way are certainly implicitly understood to be synonymous with orthodox Sufi-Sunni Islam here. This was my initial impression. However, speaking with *Ustādh* at my first *Dars e-Nizāmī* class caused me to re-evaluate this initial assumption and informed my general conceptualisation of the Barelvī *maslak*.

⁴⁶⁵ A digital version of this poster is available here: Ridawi Press, “Alahazrat Infographic”. Ridawipress. October, 2018. < <http://www.ridawipress.org/wp-content/uploads/alahazrat-infographic-hires.pdf> >.

⁴⁶⁶ Mosque Layout Observation Two, South Manchester Madrasa, 14/11/17.

⁴⁶⁷ Mosque Layout Observation One, South Manchester Madrasa, 26/10/17.

⁴⁶⁸ Groups that do not follow an “orthodox” school of law, or follow incorrectly.

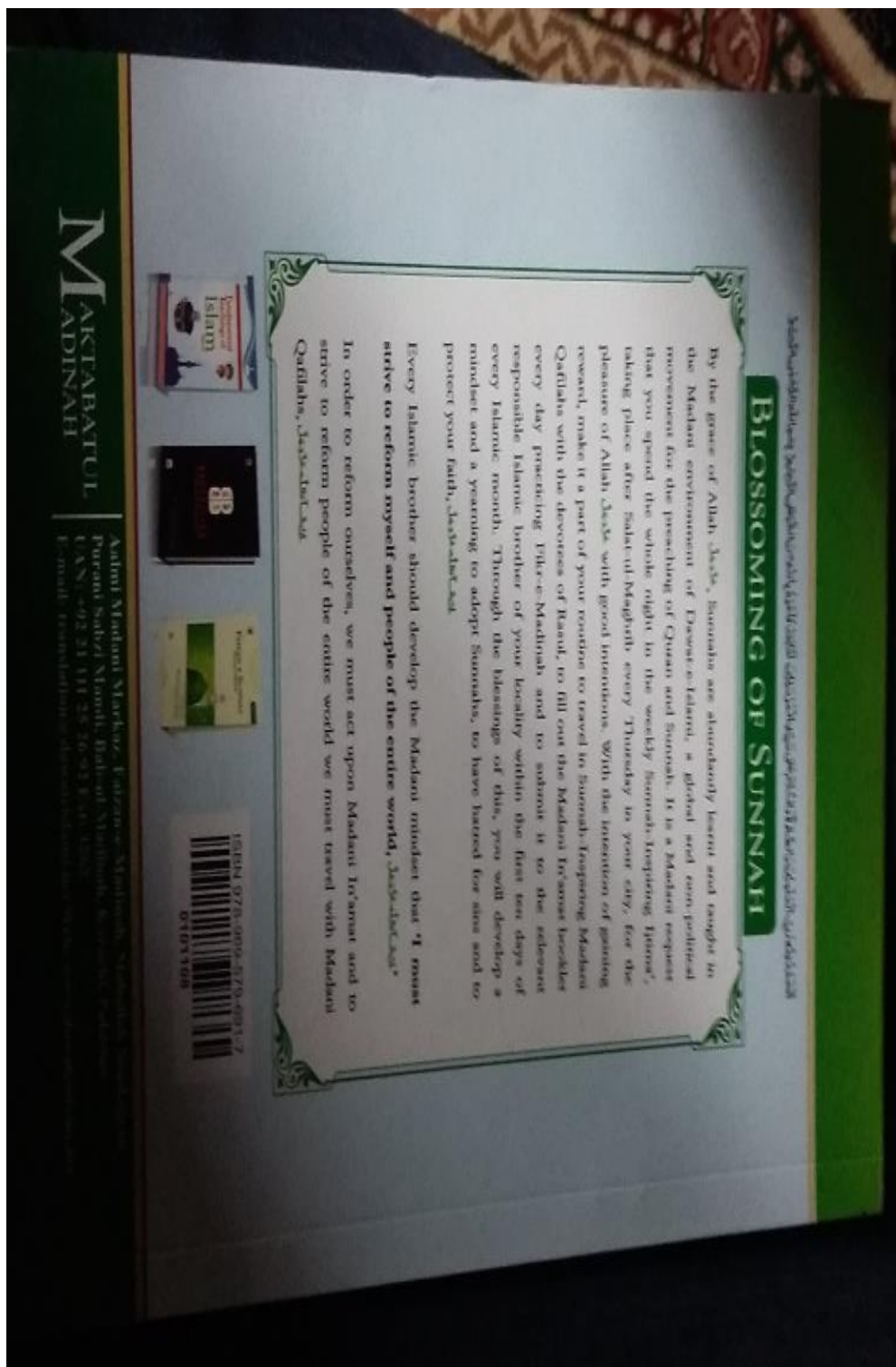


Figure 4. South Manchester Madrasa, Fundamentals of Islam.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁹ Mosque Layout Observation Two, South Manchester Madrasa, 14/11/17.

Although South Manchester Madrasa provides the services of a conventional *masjid*, *Ustādh* told me that it is primarily a *madrasa* teaching the ‘*Ulūm* according to the *Dars e-Nizāmī* curriculum, with classes running for four years. When I attended for my first evening class, he explained that his class was slightly unstable due to work commitments at other *masājīd*. However, he explained that his father also taught a class of five advanced students where they consulted classical Arabic texts, motioning to these texts on the shelves. He explained further that his initial class had to be discontinued as the students expected “just stories about the Prophets,” and could not fully commit to the more in-depth study of the sciences themselves, according to the curriculum.⁴⁷⁰ This emphasis on serious study entailing long-term commitment through the traditional *Dars e-Nizāmī* curriculum was not a novel observation for me given that this is how *Dars e-Nizāmī* has always been taught since its inception in the subcontinent, undergoing little change. Yet, the distinction between “just stories” and “real knowledge” reminded me of my observations at the Institute, and of the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist engagement with Islam as rationalised, objectified and discerned through the sciences. This also represented a stark contrast with North Manchester Mosque too, in that all the classes and talks I attended there related “just” stories in affirmation of creedal points and for the devotional purpose of increasing love for the Prophet and the saints.⁴⁷¹ I asked *Ustādh* about the book on the *Mawlid*, expecting a more explicit exposition and affirmation of the Barelvī *maslak*. I was surprised when he explained that such issues pertain to *fiqh* and not ‘*aqīda*, that they are minor, and that the focus should be on what is obligatory and common to everyone.

⁴⁷⁰ *Dars e-Nizāmī* Class One, South Manchester Madrasa, 23/11/17.

⁴⁷¹ Essentials of Faith Class Two, North Manchester Mosque, 15/11/17.

There was also very little reference to Ahmad Razā and the Barelvī *maslak*, which *Ustādh* regarded as “too strict,” and “hardline.” He also called it “old-school”, and while there was no criticism of the beliefs and practices of the Barelvī *maslak* it was certainly implied that its characteristic overtly polemical approach was not appropriate or applicable to the contemporary situation or “public opinion.”⁴⁷² Expanding upon this further in our interview later, he explained that this sectarian approach changed just by Barelvī ‘*Ulemā*’ coming to Britain, conversing with ‘*Ulemā*’ from different *masālik* and realising that there is a “bigger picture” which they had to adapt to, that they had to move on.⁴⁷³ This acknowledgement largely arose out of “the community’s” own perception of itself as a minority, according to *Ustādh*,⁴⁷⁴ of being “other” in a contemporary “Western” context, and the need to unite. Although in the past the debates of the ‘*Ulemā*’ would divide communities, he stated that “the ‘*Ulemā*’ have lost control, now the public is affecting the ‘*Ulemā*.’”⁴⁷⁵ He regarded this development towards “peace and harmony” as a positive influence of “Western culture,” firstly upon “the community” itself, and the ‘*Ulemā*’ who have had to adapt in turn.⁴⁷⁶ This remark on the authority of “the public” was particularly noteworthy, and I return to this notion of the Muslim public later. *Ustādh* still used the term Barelvī and Sunni synonymously, perceiving the founding ‘*Ulemā*’ of other *masālik* to be heterodox in their ‘*aqīda*’. However, he believed that this term increasingly denoted sectarianism and communal division, which he perceived to be outdated in a contemporary context.

⁴⁷² *Dars e-Nizāmī* Class One, South Manchester Madrasa, 23/11/17.

⁴⁷³ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

⁴⁷⁴ *Dars e-Nizāmī* Class One, South Manchester Madrasa, 23/11/17.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

I could not entirely discount the implicit association with the Barelvī *maslak* that I observed at South Manchester Madrasa due to the reverence they maintained for Ahmad Razā and his works as encapsulations of genuine Sufi-Sunni orthodoxy, in contrast to other *masālik*. However, their disavowal of the term itself as denoting a sectarian approach, no longer suitable in contemporary Western society, was in stark contrast to my observations at North Manchester Mosque where the *maslak* was presented as the salvation of Sunni Islam for Muslims in the West. Both accorded deep respect to the Imam but differed fundamentally on what that meant in a contemporary context, and on how it should be expressed in the way Islam is done. Not only were these entirely different approaches to the Barelvī *maslak*, they constituted completely divergent perceptions of what this entailed while nevertheless maintaining the same beliefs and practices. In this, it becomes questionable whether the *maslak* can be understood in a categorical sense at all, and it is more appropriate to consider how it is evoked situationally, with a contextual examination of what this means in each instance. At South Manchester Madrasa, in common with the Institute, there was aversion towards the *maslak* because of its sectarian connotations, yet in contrast to the Institute implicit association was still maintained.

At Central Mosque One too, its self-perception as *the* central Sunni *masjid* of Manchester coupled with Imam Bilal’s awareness of the diversity of Sunni Islam has decentred the Imam as the “identity” of Sunni orthodoxy. Instead, the *maslak* is understood to be one of many ways in which Sufi-Sunni Islam is done.⁴⁷⁷ That said, the *Ṣalāt o Salām* is recited after every *Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah* and support for the Barelvī *maslak* is expressed through talks

⁴⁷⁷ Imam Bilal, interview by George Rawlinson, Central Mosque One, 27th July, 2018.

asserting the orthodoxy of Ahmad Razā,⁴⁷⁸ so implicit affirmation of the Barelvī *maslak* cannot be discounted entirely. According to Imam Bilal there is an understanding among congregants of what they're *not*, "they *do* know that they're not Wahhabi."⁴⁷⁹ Yet, it is perhaps due to this partial ambiguity concerning what Sufi-Sunni Islam positively *means* here that a question remains of "are we Sunni first, are we Barelvī, are we Sufi?"⁴⁸⁰ In answer to this question the *masjid* had organised a series of lectures, a highlight being "Breaking the Myths around *Shaykh* Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī", which situated the Imam firmly within the parameters of orthodox Sufi-Sunni Islam.⁴⁸¹ The reflexive turn towards objectification, characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, is evident here.

In all the *masājid* I have outlined here the reflexive engagement with, or aversion towards, the Barelvī *maslak* is not characterised by any substantial alteration of beliefs and practices. As explained earlier, what distinguishes contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism here is its reflexive and rationalised approach, concerned with the question of how to embody and convey "real" Islam in this contemporary context wherein Islam is defined as a problem space. For some the answer is to embrace the Barelvī *maslak* as "the identity" of Sufi-Sunni Islam. For others, it is to maintain reverence for Ahmad Razā himself and to affirm the orthodoxy of his way as one prominent Imam within *Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamā'ah* whilst distancing themselves from sectarianism. Yet for others little to no mention is made of Ahmad Razā or his *maslak*, with their locus of Sufi-Sunni Islam

⁴⁷⁸ Imam Bilal, Interview, Central Mosque One.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

emerging out of but *away from* the debates of the 19th century subcontinent, instead gravitating towards the Hijaz or the Maghreb.

Qur'ān and Sunnah as reflexive, embodied Islam in community

In outlining how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is discursively manifest, most prominently through the Institute and pervasively in the other *masājid* I attended, I have sought to illustrate how this is not a novel category or sect but rather a distinct orientation towards Sufi-Sunni Islam. It is born of the contemporary context wherein Islam is defined as a problem space within wider non-Muslim society, and is informed by a series of questions regarding how to address this issue. The question of what constitutes “real” Islam and how to engage with it is chiefly answered with appeal to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* as transmitted and embodied by the *Sheyūkh* and *'Ulemā* through the Islamic sciences, collectively comprising the framework of Sufi-Sunni orthodoxy. For some Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī and his *maslak* is a perfect encapsulation of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* for contemporary times, while for others he is one Imam among many others, transmitting the sciences and belonging to a *sanad* back to the Prophet himself. In any case it is essential to know “real” Islam so that one can best implement it in their lives, and whether one faces Bareilly, Fes or Tarim for inspiration and guidance, it is ultimately motivated by a felt need *here*, in Manchester, to *live* Islam in the correct way. Through living Islamically, communal solidarity can be maintained despite the challenges of sectarian contestation (or confusion) amongst Muslims, and of Islamophobia from wider non-Muslim society. Through this, Muslims endeavour to effectively and collectively engage with wider society to affirm their place as Muslims within it and to convey Islam to others. It is this affective,

embodied and communal aspect of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, both demarcated from yet oriented towards wider society in outreach, that I will now explore here.

Qur'ān, Sunnah and Sanad: connected majālis

I have thus far concentrated predominantly on the discursive expressions of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism and upon how it has discursively informed, reconfigured and displaced manifestations of the Barelvī *maslak*. As I began visiting the *masājīd* this was my primary focus. However, as I began to attend the gatherings of *dhikr* in particular, I was made increasingly aware of not only how the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, transmitted through *asanīd*, outlined and affirmed a way of being Muslim but also how this Islam *felt*, and how brothers were bound both discursively and affectively in the *majlis*. The initial realisation of this aspect, of the affective *sanad*, was quite abrupt. As I touched upon in Chapter One, I was attending a *majlis* of *i'tikāf* at Central Mosque Two. It was evening, and the main hall was dimly lit. One of my friends greeted me at the door whilst in the process of circumambulating the hall with a *bakhūr* burner. Much like many of the men comprising this gathering he was wearing a white thobe, a *kufi* (a brimless, rounded cap), and a Yemeni shawl according to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and the dress of the *Bā-'Alawī tarīqa*, to which the visiting *Sheyūkh* belonged. He dabbed some *Sunnah* perfume (*'attar*) on the back of my hand and continued his rounds. Waiting for the two *Sheyūkh* to arrive, Imam Ejaz requested a few students to take turns in reciting the *Qur'ān* and *qaṣāed* in praise of the Prophet.

Apart from this, the hall was silent. It is considered bad *adab* to talk whilst the *Qur'ān* is being recited, yet even prior to this as people gathered to sit down there was little if any conversation. This was a *majlis* of seclusion and the remembrance of God, and the brothers had arrived with this intention. In this, the contemplative silence and stillness that pervaded the *masjid*, along with the billowing incense and fragrant musk, coalesced situationally in the cultivation of a sacred enclosure, consecrated by the *Sunnah* which literally clothed and enveloped us. It was in recollection of this particular instance that, when speaking with an attendee at North Manchester Mosque who would often attend Central Mosque Two, I could relate to his being “hit by the spirituality” of the place, simply walking in for the first time.⁴⁸² However, this was not a disembodied or acontextual numinosity,⁴⁸³ rather it was devotionally cultivated, “the remnants of people frequenting,”⁴⁸⁴ affectively sanctifying the space through worship. I explore here how both *sanad* and sacred spaces are cultivated as the affective basis of community, and how these processes are discursively informed by contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism.

The *Shaykh* speaking that evening were teachers in the *Bā-‘Alawī ṭarīqa*, based in the Yemeni town of Tarim with a truly transnational following extending from Indonesia to America. They reflected their *ṭarīqa*’s transnational character in their own persons, *Shaykh* Danyal a young White British convert from Eccles, and *Shaykh* Farhan a second-generation British Pakistani from Oldham, both wearing *kufis*, thobes and Yemeni shawls. The convert *Shaykh* was distinguished by his turban according to the style of his teachers

⁴⁸² Central Mosque Two Discussion, North Manchester Mosque, 03/04/18.

⁴⁸³ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁴ *Iftār* Discussion, Central Mosque Two, 22/05/18.

among the *Habāib*⁴⁸⁵ and a Maghrebi cloak. This itself denoted an unspoken *sanad*, to which I have referred before, in the literal embodiment of a tradition passed from teacher to student back to the Prophet himself. After the *Sheyūkh* and their attendants prayed, the talk began, with the host encouraging us all to reflect on why we were there, in the “house of Allah” on a Friday night, where others outside were doing entirely different things (I will return to this point). The mixed congregation of Pakistanis, black and white converts, Somalis and Sylhetis at this event equally reflected the transnationality of the *ṭarīqa* as the *Sheyūkh*, and I understood this to be particularly characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism too.

I began noting these points on my phone, to be formally typed later whilst endeavouring, albeit distractedly, to maintain full focus on the *dhikr*, *qaṣāed*, and the talk that followed. Much of this was typical of what I had also come to observe at the Institute, emphasising the *Qur’ān*, *Sunnah*, and *sanad*, framed within the *manhaj* of the *ṭarīqa*. There was a greater emphasis upon *sanad* here, though, as *Shaykh* Danyal explained that “the *nūr* comes through this chain,” and that the Prophet was sent to *connect* our hearts to Allah.⁴⁸⁶ I understood this discursively in terms of Asad’s apt performance in the maintenance of a discursive tradition,⁴⁸⁷ in this case being “moving to Allah on the coordinates of the Prophet,” by reflexively engaging with and following his *Sunnah* with *adab*.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ A tribe of predominantly ‘*Ulemā*’ from Yemen descended from the Prophet.

⁴⁸⁶ Evening Sanctuary: Sacred Knowledge, Spirituality, Prophetic Invitation, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

⁴⁸⁷ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, p. 75.

⁴⁸⁸ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

I was still exclusively within the realms of the discursive, yet as I was writing all of this down over the course of *Shaykh* Danyal’s talk he told us (me), “don’t disrupt the connection,” and that we should not be using our phones.⁴⁸⁹ This *nūr* (light) to which *Shaykh* Danyal referred was not simply a representation of authority or knowledge, it was most importantly understood to be affectively tangible in connecting “hearts” and inscribing the space with a genuinely felt sanctity. In this, it is the discursive and affective framework within which places and believing bodies are enmeshed. Entrance into this sacred *sanad* is not entirely open, and despite *Shaykh* Danyal’s qualifying his request with “not to be prescriptive,”⁴⁹⁰ it certainly has conditions. As I mentioned previously, it is through this *sanad* that the Prophetic transmission flows, and therefore admittance into this meshwork required *adab* befitting the Prophet himself. Following this realisation, I continued to observe in other *majālis* how this sacred *sanad* was constituted and maintained through the interweaving forces of discourse and affect.

Returning to the classes at the Institute, where the discursive emphasis upon *sanad* had initially become apparent to me, I observed how this *sanad* was also affectively cultivated through the pedagogical process, most notable in *Shaykh* Jamal’s classes on the Forty *Ḥadīth*. In these classes, what most left an impression on me and other students was not the literal text of the *aḥādīth* (pl. of *ḥadīth*) we studied in isolation, but rather how these *aḥādīth* were transmitted through the pedagogical style that *Shaykh* Jamal employed. As he smiles and looks at each of us in the room, relating stories in a soft and amicable tone from the Prophet, the *Ṣaḥāba*, the saints, and his own personal anecdotes, punctuated with

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

laughter and jokes, an affectively felt intimacy between us is cultivated.⁴⁹¹ The learning process also became more democratised in that *Shaykh* Jamal endeavoured to be on a level with his students, and his reflections were supposed to be our reflections too. As I touched upon earlier, this reflexivity and democratised pedagogy is characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, and Jouili also notes how this is a contemporary development in stark contrast to more traditional Islamic pedagogy.⁴⁹²

However, what I found most significant here was how this approach, informed as it was by contemporary Western education, was conducive to the “heart to heart” transmission that has always been the central means through which *sanad* is carried. Utilising his experience as a primary school teacher, telling stories and including interactive group learning activities, the *Shaykh* conveyed this “living transmission of the Prophet” to us in a way that affectively felt very much alive.⁴⁹³ The centrality of *affective* transmission in Islamic learning was also affirmed by *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa, which in contrast to the Institute adhered to the *Dars e-Nizāmī* curriculum, yet in common maintained the centrality of “love” and democratised pedagogy informed by Western education. *Ustādh* explained to me that “I always till now call them my brothers... I always say to them, look I’m not teaching, I’m sharing knowledge,” and that he received this way from his father, who’s teaching was “all about love and compassion.”⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ Forty *Hadith* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 24/02/18.

⁴⁹² Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 45.

⁴⁹³ Forty *Hadith* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 24/02/18.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

It is this coupling of shared knowledge, transmitted through “love and compassion,” that constitutes the interplay between the discursive and the affective in the cultivation of the sacred *sanad* in a pedagogical context. Transitioning between Prophetic past and our present, the lessons at the Institute exhibited an almost transcendent and timeless quality. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this connection depended on the *Shaykh*’s ability to incite “spiritual growth”, as Jouili also observes,⁴⁹⁵ and the students’ *adab* not merely discursively, but also affectively by being “open to certain affections and closed to certain others.”⁴⁹⁶ It was the essential function of the student as well as the teacher in this that made it possible for me to “disrupt the connection” at Central Mosque Two, and the transmission would only be maintained if we were all open to receive it.

In the classes and in the *i'tikāf* with the *Bā-'Alawī Sheyūkh*, the cultivation and maintenance of the sacred *sanad* depended largely upon the teachers’ ability to transmit and the attendees’ ability to receive. Yet at other *majālis*, the wider congregation itself was more actively engaged in this process. This was most markedly encapsulated in a *Mawlid* gathering I attended above a chicken shop on the 27th night of Ramadan, the supposed Night of Power (*Laylat ul-Qadr*). Its discreteness, that to all outside observers it was hidden, gave me the sense of entering an enclave and crossing from one world into another. There was little remarkable about the space itself, it could have been any home *masjid*, but its multi-patterned cloths and carpets, pictures of *Sheyūkh* and holy sites, cobbled together in such a way gave it a very personalised, organic and intimate quality. This was heightened by the dimmed lighting, the burning incense, the cosiness of the space

⁴⁹⁵ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 41.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

itself, and the small congregation, sat in a circle which filled the room. In the middle of this circle was a Yemeni reciter (*Munshid*), who was a *Shaykh* of the *Sammaniyya ṭarīqa* and descendent of the Prophet. Next to him was an elderly Pakistani *Shaykh*, dressed in the colourful Dervish coat and turban of the *Naqshbandī-Ḥaqqānī ṭarīqa* to which he belonged. As my friend and I entered, struggling to find a space to sit down, the *Munshid* was in the process of making *du'ā* in a rhythmic, hushed tone which pervaded the space, and we were offered blessed food by the *Naqshbandī Shaykh*.

After the opening *du'ā* the *majlis* began in earnest, with the *Munshid* reciting Arabic *qaṣā'ed* in praise of the Prophet for the duration of the gathering, his sons playing accompanying instruments, with all of us singing along to what we knew. When we were not able to sing along, we would listen and recite *Ṣalawāt* silently to ourselves. This concluded with a congregational standing *dhikr* (*ḥadhra*) and *du'ā*, after which the men stayed behind to talk. Much like the *i'tikāf majlis* I had attended at Central Mosque Two, this gathering felt “connected”, charged and alive. Reflecting on this with another friend who attended the *majlis* afterwards, he explained that “we could relate to it, we were actively engaged and we did a lot,” in contrast to simply “going through the motions” and leaving unchanged, and as such it was living, connected, where “you felt part of it and you wanted to be part of it.”⁴⁹⁷ This distinction between “dead” *majālis* and “living” *majālis* is particularly reminiscent of the distinction Donovan Schaefer outlines between dead churches and churches in motion, distinguished “not by doctrines, but by exclamation points,”⁴⁹⁸ by what bodies affectively *do*. Here I observed how the *Munshid's qaṣā'ed* and

⁴⁹⁷ The 27th Night *Majlis*, Anecdotal reflection, 12/06/18.

⁴⁹⁸ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 74.

dhikr, coupled with reflexive engagement and *active* participation among congregants, most of whom knew each other, coalesced in the cultivation of a sacred *sanad*, situationally transfiguring the space and enlivening us within it.

In most of the *majālis* and classes I attended, this sacred *sanad*, though conditional and negotiated, was very rarely broken. Yet, the instances where ruptures *did* occur were illustrative of the fragility of such a connection, and were particularly telling of the discursive currents which informed such tensions. This initially became apparent to me at a house *Mawlid* I attended, at a friend's house where many in the community would often congregate for events with visiting speakers and reciters. These events had generally always drawn a mixed crowd of predominantly South Asians, with some Arabs, Somalis and converts occasionally, of mixed age with a sizeable number of young adults in attendance. Those they came to see most reflected this contemporary, transnational diversity, often being Arab *Sheyūkh* from Yemen or Mauritania, and at times their younger British students, some of whom had become teachers. The past *majālis* I had attended here were particularly illustrative of the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist trend that I have outlined, emphasising loving devotion to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* implemented in action for the benefit of the Muslims in wider society, and this *Mawlid* gathering was no different. As in other *majālis*, prior to the talk, the *qaṣā'ed* or even the *dhikr* itself, an affective ambience was cultivated through dimmed lighting, the burning of *bakhūr* passed around the room, and the silent, contemplative reverence of the attendees present.

This atmosphere persisted after the devotions too, until it was ruptured when an elder Pakistani reciter at the front of the gathering was unintentionally interrupted by another

elder Pakistani *‘Ālim* at the back of the room who had been making *du’ā* in Urdu at the request of other elder attendees. Those of us caught in the middle were not sure whether to say “amīn” to the *du’ā* or to continue listening to the reciter who endeavoured, albeit hesitantly, to continue his recitation. While this was not intentionally subversive, it was perceived by confused attendees, the *Sheyūkh* among them, to be an unanticipated interjection into the order of the night. This was crowned spectacularly by another elder who rushed in to loudly inform us in Urdu that the *roti* were getting cold!⁴⁹⁹ I perceived a generational tension here which reminded me of the provisional, situational nature of the sacred *sanad*, and the centrality of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism in its maintenance. A certain *adab* among attendees was essential for the preservation of this *sanad*, yet this entailed a degree of reflexivity, and a subjectivity towards *what was going on*, that had to be shared. Without this *intentioned* and self-conscious participation in the *majlis* the connection could break, as I observed here as we approached the close of the *Mawlid*.

It is the collective, congregational construction of and entanglement in the meshwork of the sacred *sanad* in these *majālis* which makes them fundamentally communal. The affective bonds of brotherhood and familiarity which permeate these *majālis* are a tangible actualisation of “what it feels like to be *us*.”⁵⁰⁰ Indeed, the *us* is essential in the affective cultivation of the *sanad* as it is fundamentally through the proximity of bodies that such an affective state is *transmitted*, through a process which Schaefer calls “entrainment”, to which I referred earlier.⁵⁰¹ Discursively too, the *majlis* taps into and draws upon discursive

⁴⁹⁹ A House *Mawlid* in Manchester, Anecdotal reflection, 10/01/18.

⁵⁰⁰ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 88.

⁵⁰¹ Schaefer, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

traditions held in common by attendees, be it a common *ṭarīqa*, language, or broad consensus of objectives, which serves to affirm and reinforce these traditions as foundations of communal solidarity. The way community is done here can be understood in two ways, existing simultaneously and situationally within the *majālis* and classes themselves. Community may be liminal and transient, cultivated in the congregational act of devotion itself before dissipating, as Victor Turner has argued of *communitas*.⁵⁰² Certainly, this was observable in events where people who would otherwise never meet had come together for a specific class or talk. In the Forty *Ḥadīth* classes, for example, I considered that although this sacred *sanad* was discernible in the class itself it would not extend outside it, for me, on the basis of the class alone. Yet for others, who would not only regularly attend classes and other events at the Institute but also lived as neighbours and relatives in Oldham, this *sanad* was a punctuated peak in community affirmation of a pre-existing consociation otherwise formed through more quotidian relationships over time. In this, the more liminal sacred *sanad* of the *majlis* cannot be considered in isolation from the wider, day-to-day relationships which inform and sustain it.

Considering classes specifically, Jouili, referring to Anna Gade and her work on *Qur'ān* classes in Indonesia, mentions how “communities of learning” develop through the collective learning practice of students engaged in the same activity.⁵⁰³ In this, intra-student relationships are just as significant as those between teacher and student. I observed this to be the case in the *Usūl ul-Fiqh* classes at the Institute, where students who

⁵⁰² Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 96-97. Accessed 31st March, 2021.

⁵⁰³ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 45.

attended these weekly classes would also be found during other events discussing points of *fiqh*,⁵⁰⁴ or exchanging notes and revising after a *dhikr* gathering for an upcoming test.⁵⁰⁵

This was also apparent at South Manchester Madrasa with the small circle of students who attended the *Dars e-Nizāmī* classes daily, who would spend their breaks discussing the technicalities of Arabic grammar,⁵⁰⁶ and who I would often see together over the course of my observations at other events. This notion of “communities of learning” can also be extended to “communities of devotion”, encompassing those who similarly meet regularly for *majālis*.

As I attended *dhikr* gatherings at both the Institute and Central Mosque Two a number of times, I observed how these *majālis* were usually comprised of the same people, and that everyone knew each other. This was particularly apparent in the meals following the *dhikr* itself. At the Institute, where I had more regularly attended *majālis* in the past, I was known and recognised by most in attendance, and at times asked after when I was not present.⁵⁰⁷ In contrast, at Central Mosque Two the parameters of their Thursday *dhikr* community were established, and apart from my association with Imam Ejaz I was evidently a newcomer.⁵⁰⁸ It is on this latter point of parameters which I would like to focus for the remainder of this Chapter. The feeling of “us” and the discursive conditions upon which this is predicated necessarily entails a felt separation from “them,” from people “out there.”⁵⁰⁹ This demarcation is made more acute in the context of contemporary Sufi-Sunni

⁵⁰⁴ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute, 25/03/18.

⁵⁰⁵ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

⁵⁰⁶ *Dars e-Nizāmī* Class One, South Manchester Madrasa, 23/11/17.

⁵⁰⁷ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

⁵⁰⁸ *Khatam ul-Khwajagan*, Central Mosque Two, 15/02/18.

⁵⁰⁹ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

revivalism, where the hypervisible otherness of Islam is accentuated and reflexively acknowledged by Muslims themselves. Yet, I found that the felt distance was also coupled with a desire, indeed a felt obligation, to reach out.

Affective bonds and boundaries

I have outlined here how community is both affectively and discursively affirmed in the context of the *majlis*. I have examined how it is constituted not only of common discursive traditions which inform and regulate the shape of its articulation, but also sights, sounds, smells and the proximity of devotional bodies which collectively comprise how community feels. Taken together, these elements form the basis upon which both commonality and difference are reflexively acknowledged, and just as a sacred enclosure is formed within the *masjid* the profanity of the world outside becomes more marked. Over the course of my field work I observed how Muslims' perception of being a minority and the need to unite was coupled with a felt encroachment of materialism and Islamophobia. Along with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, this acknowledgement of both the otherness of society itself and the reflexive awareness of one's own otherness as a Muslim framed most of the gatherings that I attended. Everywhere, to varying degrees, it was expressed what we were, what we were not, and what we needed to be in "the times in which we're living." I found that this was entirely in accord with Jouili's observations, of how community is affirmed in the reflexive acknowledgement of otherness in the context of Islam as a problem space.

As with many of the observations I have made here, this awareness of "us" and "them" in the context of otherness was most demonstrated at the *majlis* of *i'tikāf* I attended at Central

Mosque Two. I have described the space on that evening as a sacred enclosure, and the event itself was advertised as an “evening sanctuary”. While this was likely a translation of *i'tikāf*, more commonly translated as seclusion, the choice of sanctuary in particular emphasised that this was a place of safety, a refuge from danger outside. The demarcation between the sanctuary and that which we all sought sanctuary from was made apparent from the beginning by the host of the event. We were in the house of Allah on a Friday night, the host explained, while others were doing entirely different things.⁵¹⁰ The sanctity of the space itself was reinforced with this reminder, and with it the awareness of profanity outside. *Shaykh* Danyal also echoed this reminder when I was told to switch off my phone, reflecting how people outside are doing work that is “worthless to God,” and that in contrast “we’re blessed to be in a gathering to remember Him, blessed to be part of a perfect religion.”⁵¹¹

Sanctuary and society were once again juxtaposed on the basis of not only Islam, but this particularly reflexive engagement with and way of doing Islam which characterises contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. *Shaykh* Danyal develops this distinction further, distinguishing between “people of *lā ilāha ilallāh*,” people of the *Shahāda*, and those “bereft” of it.⁵¹² This is not purely understood to be a difference in creed, but fundamentally a difference in community. *Shaykh* Farhan remarks that people who do not have this blessing of the *Shahāda* “have no brotherhood,” and conversely that brotherhood based upon the *Shahāda* is the strongest.⁵¹³ In self-consciously distancing from and

⁵¹⁰ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

secluding ourselves from wider society and all of its perceived ills together in this congregational act of devotion we simultaneously affirmed our fraternity as Muslims.

A turning *away* also entailed a turning *towards*. I outlined earlier how Sara Ahmed describes this as a dual operation of affective flows of love and fear, and while this seclusion is not motivated by fear it is certainly informed by a need for relief and an aversion to the perceived hardships of living in a non-Muslim society. This need for relief from the difficulties of living in a predominantly non-Muslim society was particularly accentuated when one *Shaykh* exclaimed, in another house gathering I attended, “it’s *hard* living here isn’t it?”⁵¹⁴ the attendees laughed and nodded in agreement. There was no enmity towards non-Muslims here, or even non-Muslim society, there was rather an almost cheerful resignation to the perceived fact that “the West” is simply not a hospitable environment for Islam.⁵¹⁵ While this was related in the context of contemporary British society, the *Shaykh* made no reference to Islamophobia here. Instead, he referred to how difficult it is to simply live one’s day-to-day life according to the *Sunnah*, to avoid interest, and even to adjust to the erratic, “unbalanced” day and night cycles in the Northern Hemisphere which were simply not accommodating of prayer times.⁵¹⁶ All of this he framed with reference to the earlier generations of Muslims, speculating that there was a certain wisdom behind their not bringing Islam here. Again, the contemporary situation of the Muslims here is related back to the earlier generations of Muslims with the past being

⁵¹⁴ Question and Answer Session, Anecdotal reflection, 21/02/18.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

brought into the present and making it intelligible, as is characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism.

I have noted in common with Jouili how many I observed were concerned with how to live Islamically in their daily lives, yet this perception of hardship, of occupying an alien environment, informs the impetus behind this need. Returning to the Institute, where the concern to live Islamically in an informed way was most often evident among attendees, there was the exhortation to create “caves” of loyalty and purity. These too were sanctuaries where one may be safe from materialism, secularism and Islamophobia, and where Islam might be cultivated in an otherwise hostile climate.⁵¹⁷ While this was clearly related in the context of contemporary difficulties Muslims in Britain face, the use of the term “cave” carried resonances of the Prophet’s life, the cave of Hira where he first received Revelation, and the cave of Thawr where he and his Companion, Abu Bakr, sheltered on the way to Medina. From these two examples I observed the affirmation of community in the acknowledgement of otherness and hardship, made intelligible through reflection upon a Prophetic past.

Although the distinction between the “people of *lā ilāha ilallāh*” and those “bereft” of the *Shahāda* presents a significant gap, constituting a veritable chasm between two worlds, one alien and inhospitable and the other a sacred safe haven, this is not entirely unbridgeable. This acknowledgement of difference was always coupled with the question of outreach.

⁵¹⁷ *Mawlid* Celebration and *Burdah* Recitation, The Institute, 02/12/17.

This outreach certainly pertained to the wider *Ummah*, with *Shaykh* Danyal at Central Mosque Two asking us, “how many times do we think about and act for the *Ummah* of the Prophet?”⁵¹⁸ However, unlike an earlier transnational focus which Peter Mandaville outlines among the Salafi movement in particular,⁵¹⁹ the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist commitment to the *Ummah* extends primarily to and outward from one’s locality into wider non-Muslim society. As with everything in contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, this fundamentally begins with the self. *Shaykh* Danyal explains how “our righteousness should affect the community around us,”⁵²⁰ and ultimately one’s living Islamically pertains not only to oneself but to the affirmation and preservation of community. This is essential, he argues, not solely for the preservation of a seemingly embattled community, but rather for the sake of wider society.

“Value the gift that you have *so that you can give it to others*,”⁵²¹ *Shaykh* Danyal advises us, both acknowledging and being proud of one’s otherness but effectively embracing it so as to convey it to wider society. I observed here this tension between the affective turn *away* from wider non-Muslim society and its tribulations, and the affective compulsion, arising from perceived distance itself, *towards* it in compassionate outreach. This dual potential for both distance and embrace is discerned by Schaefer as the dual potential of religion itself for both division and solidarity,⁵²² all informed by affective compulsions of both love and fear. These affective flows of belonging among brothers, of sanctity in

⁵¹⁸ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

⁵¹⁹ Peter Mandaville, “Muslim Transnational Identity and State Responses in Europe and the UK after 9/11: Political Community, Ideology and Authority,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35:3 (2009) pp. 491-506, p. 500. Accessed 8th February, 2017.

⁵²⁰ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²² Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 142.

seclusion, and of both aversion *and* empathy towards wider non-Muslim society were entangled in, configured by, and channelled through discursive notions of the self, of civic responsibility, of the Muslim *Ummah*, and stories from the Prophetic past. Altogether they constituted an affective-discursive meshwork which situationally informed the shape of community identity in the context of the *majlis*.

In spite of the relative disdain expressed towards stories that I often observed, their formative and ultimately constitutive role in the shape of Muslim community identity, and its situation within wider society, cannot be underestimated. In the *majlis* of *i'tikāf*, the need to connect to the Prophet as a foundation of community and as a guide for relating to others is consistently substantiated and illustrated through instances of the Prophet's life, the lives of his *Ṣahāba* and the pious people who followed.⁵²³ These stories allowed attendees to reflect upon their own contemporary situation, to better understand what it meant, to relate back to the generations that had come before, and to know how to address the difficulties they faced in a Prophetic manner. The constituent elements of the affective *sanad* which I have outlined here were woven together, given shape, and situated within a wider history that extended into a Prophetic past through such stories.

Using the term as Tim Ingold does, describing something that is done, the *majlis* itself tells a story. Beginning with the recitation of the *Qur'ān*, with the *Sunnah* literally permeating the atmosphere throughout, and ending with the reminder that “the Prophet is the best

⁵²³ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

example to follow,”⁵²⁴ the event told a story of contemporary Islam grounded in the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, transmitted through the *Bā-‘Alawī ṭarīqa*. It told a story of Muslim community, a brotherhood founded upon these pillars, protected within this sacred enclosure and raised for the service of wider society. This arose situationally, born of the *majlis* itself, and it could not be applied as a taxonomic category to this *masjid* or even to the sum of people who attended the *majlis* that evening. In other *dhikr majālis* at Central Mosque Two, with the recitation of Arabic litanies derived from the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, interspersed with supplications and sermons in Bengali by the presiding *Shaykh* of the *Fultolī ṭarīqa*, and attended by predominantly Sylhetis, a different story of community is told. None of these stories are mutually exclusive; they cross over and flow into each other situationally, and sometimes simultaneously, yet they all constitute different open-ended strands of the meshwork of Muslim community identity.

Even in the classes at the Institute, where stories were not readily received as a means of genuine knowledge, the teachers would consistently relate stories not purely as a teaching aid but also to contextualise and understand the contemporary difficulties Muslim communities in Britain face. This was most succinctly and emotively expressed by *Shaykh* Jalal in one of our classes on jurisprudence where he poetically reflected that, “Imam ‘Alī has written the destiny of Muslims,”⁵²⁵ explaining that those who are with him and with truth will ultimately face hardship in this world. In this, these stories are not “just stories.” Rather, they are the expression and crystallisation of Muslim community identity, and the

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ *Usul ud-Dīn* Class, The Institute, 04/11/17.

means by which Muslims relate to and understand themselves, their communities and their relations with the wider society of which they are a part.

Conclusion

The stories that I have outlined here over the course of this Chapter of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, of the Barelvī *maslak* and of different *ṭuruq*, cannot be confined to one *masjid* or another and are neither static nor existing in isolation from one another. They mutually inform each other, crossing, conflating, constructing and re-constructing the parameters of Muslim community identity situationally. These, too, are situated within the wider context of the predominantly non-Muslim contemporary Mancunian society and the stories which comprise it and continue to reconfigure it. Stories of the sovereign individual, of civic responsibility to one's local community, of multiculturalism, of "faith communities", and of the potentially subversive Muslim other, have all configured how Muslim community identity is done in Manchester. I have briefly touched upon how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is born of the contemporary wider societal context in which Islam is defined as a problem space. In the following Chapter I will explore in further detail exactly how this is manifest in Manchester and how Muslims have variously responded to these stories and produced their own, reconfiguring Manchester in their own reconstruction of Muslim community identity.

Chapter Five: Reviving Islam, Renewing Society

In the previous Chapter I outlined how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism pervasively manifests both affectively and discursively within *masājid* in Manchester. These become sacred enclosures, “caves” conducive to both spiritual cultivation for the individual Muslim and communal fraternity for all Muslims gathered, bonded in the context of the *majlis* or the study circle through sacralising acts of devotion and the sanctity of the spaces themselves. Central to this, too, is the dual demarcation of the Muslim as the free individual agent with a direct personal relationship to God, and of “the community” as the struggling “other” within wider non-Muslim society. Self-consciously positioned within the wider transnational *Ummah* and hearkening back to the Prophetic past, these stories serve to situationally articulate and affirm community identity in novel contexts whilst drawing on established pre-modern precedents. However, just as the *masājid* themselves are built within Manchester, with Mancunian bricks and mortar and with the permission of the local council, Muslim community identity is fundamentally enmeshed within the wider societal context of Manchester itself and the discursive currents which inform its shape.

In this Chapter I trace these entanglements, observing how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as outlined in the previous Chapter is also fundamentally informed by policy discourse on the civic potential of “faith communities”, multiculturalism and inclusivity. I will situate this development within the wider discursive tradition of liberal secularism and its demarcation of a private religious sphere from a neutral public sphere, exploring how this distinction is manifest both spatially and discursively within the *masājid* as both places of prayer and “community hubs”. I examine, too, how concern for the *Ummah* is decentred and repositioned within a wider emphasis upon “humanity” as a whole, this being further

illustrative of how liberal secularism has informed contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. This new religiosity, characterised by compassion, tolerance, inclusivity and civic engagement, comes to be represented as “good religion”, in contrast to “bad religion” perceived to be insular, divisive and exclusive. This too has informed contemporary representations of the “good” and “bad” Muslim.

I outline how expressions of “real” Islam have come to reflect this discursive context, marked by a convergence of liberal secular and Islamic discursive traditions. It is a product of this convergence of multiple stories, not least the story of Manchester itself as the archetypal multicultural, cosmopolitan and inclusive city, touched upon in Chapter Three, which has impressed itself upon and been informed by these “very Mancunian mosques.”⁵²⁶ An ever-looming spectre amidst these entanglements is the definition of Islam as a problem space within wider non-Muslim society, and the perceived need for explanation, accommodation and integration that this presents. Though Muslims have certainly drawn on established pre-modern precedents within the Islamic discursive tradition to address this need, it is how they have translated this into a contemporary Mancunian context with a view towards community cohesion that roots this tradition grounded in the Prophetic past firmly within the discursive framework of present policy discourse.

⁵²⁶ Mosque Open Day, Central Mosque One, 26/01/18.

I begin my exploration of this dual-discursive relationship with an examination of how the Institute, in its self-conscious identification as both a *masjid* and community hub with strict discursive and spatial demarcation of these functions, is particularly informed by the liberal secular separation of public and private spheres. While I was most acquainted with its “private” role as a *masjid* wherein classes and *majālis* were held, it was often stated by the Chairman and other volunteers that this was a community hub, a centre of the local community in Oldham for not only Muslim families but also non-Muslims, with established relations with local authorities. Excepting the *dhikr* gatherings, all expressly “religious” activity took place upstairs in the *masjid* section of the centre, where *masjid* etiquette was observed. In contrast, wider community activities such as family fun-days and open day initiatives with non-Muslims and local authorities were chiefly held in the “Youth Zone” on the ground floor where the same etiquette was not required, to the extent that visitors could wear shoes. Reflecting upon this initial observation further here, I expand upon how the secular division between a religious private sphere and a neutral public sphere is discursively and aesthetically manifest at the Institute.

Of particular significance in the centre’s “Youth Zone” is the emphasis upon “serving humanity”. Here, service to the wider *Ummah* is de-centred and situated within this self-consciously secular and inclusive engagement with wider society beyond the local Muslim community. This service, both undertaken with and expressive of love, compassion and mercy, most notably parallels central characteristics of “faith communities” and their potential for civic engagement as outlined in contemporary policy discourse, which I will outline here. This same discursive underpinning is discernible in the other *masājid* I visited and is by no means unique to the Institute. However, the degree to which the Institute

exhibits this influence pertains as much to local council endeavours toward community cohesion in light of the Oldham riots of 2001 as it does to the ethos of the Institute itself.⁵²⁷

I consider my observations here in light of this local context.

The prevalent distinction in policy discourse between “faith communities” and “religion” that informs the expression of civic religiosity at the Institute is no less present in the other *masājid* I visited, and it parallels the equally prominent distinction between “good” and “bad” Islam. This characterisation informs in turn Muslims’ approach to Islam as a problem space, as the problematic “Other” requiring explanation and integration into wider society, and has shaped the articulation of “real” Islam. Whilst in the previous Chapter I observed how “real” Islam was fundamentally grounded in reflexive engagement with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, in this context “real” Islam means love, peace, openness and service. Just as I observed previously how reflexive and rationalised engagement with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* was perceived to be the corrective to sectarianism and “personality cults”, I observe here how an emphasis on peace, love and tolerance is utilised as the corrective to erroneous caricatures of Islam in wider society.

This was most evident at Central Mosque One’s open day, both in its initial preparation and on the day itself, where positive affirmation of “real” Islam was coupled with an implicitly tense acknowledgement of Islam’s definition as a problem space. At the “Street Iftar” too, where Muslims and non-Muslims gathered on Oxford Road to break fast, an

⁵²⁷ A series of ethnically-motivated riots between white and South Asian groups in Oldham in May 2001.

emphasis on love, tolerance and inclusivity *as* Islam is set against the subtle backdrop of its perceived otherness. Here I trace the discursive currents which inform representations of true, moderate and civic Islam in this context, rooted in policy discourse on “moderate Islam” and “faith communities”, and existing in tension with the definition of Islam as a problem space. I examine here how this discursive tension manifested affectively in the instances of interfaith engagement at both Central Mosque One and the “Street Iftar”, and how affectively felt boundaries were both situationally reified and overcome.

This acknowledgement and transcendence of boundaries is particularly motivated by a concern for “unity” which permeates both the emphasis upon civic engagement with wider society and the expression of “true Islam” to non-Muslims. In the previous Chapter I described how the call for communal solidarity amongst the Muslims I observed was motivated in part by the more acutely felt sense of being a minority, and the need to combat both Islamophobia and sectarian division through conveying “real” Islam. As outlined previously, this exhortation was firmly rooted within the Islamic discursive tradition in both its substantiation with reference to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, and its actualisation through *majālis* and classes. I will explore here how this too is situated within wider societal discourse on community cohesion and initiatives undertaken by local councils in Manchester to this end, extending from intracommunal unity both within and between *masājid* themselves, to intercommunal solidarity between Muslims and wider society. I will examine how Muslims in Manchester situationally conceive of themselves as belonging both to the “bigger family” of the *Ummah* as Muslims, and to the family of Manchester as Mancunians.

I also consider here how this positioning inscribes and informs not only what it means to be Muslim and Mancunian, but also the *idea* of Manchester itself as a city which affirms unity in diversity through the embrace of the “Other”. In this, I examine how diverse discursive and affective flows are situationally configured and crystallised through entwining stories of both Islam and Manchester in the communal *doing* of Islam in Manchester, and how this is in turn inscribed upon the shape of Islam and Manchester itself. The following outline of Islam *in* Manchester and, as will be expounded upon, Manchester *in* Islam, taken together with the previous Chapter, will serve as a comprehensive outline of the discursive and affective lines which collectively comprise the shape of Muslim community identity in Manchester.

“Serving Humanity with Love, Mercy and Compassion”: the sanctification of civic service

Attending my first event at the Institute on “Purification of the Heart”, love and attachment to the *Qur’ān*, the *Sunnah* and the *‘Ulemā* who embody it was emphasised as the discursive and affective foundation of “real” Islam. Following the talk, held upstairs in the academic, devotional space of the *masjid* itself, I walked downstairs to the ground floor, comprised of the “Youth Zone” with “Rumi Café”, and the Children’s Nursery. Here too references to love were most prominent in the aesthetics and layout of the ground floor itself, yet this was a love for “humanity” in general. On the counter of Rumi Café were printed the words: “Serving Humanity with Love, Mercy and Compassion”, and it was this message which pervaded the space, giving the impression of a religiously neutral, civic communal centre at the service of and open to all. While loving attachment to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* was the mark of “real” Islam among Muslims, loving service to humanity was

affirmed as its defining characteristic in wider society, the fruit of such attachment and its means of expression.

This demarcation in the building between a devotional and “academic” *masjid* space and a civic, religiously neutral communal space, reflected the dual function of the Institute as both a *masjid* and community hub. This was expressed further through their institutional distinction between the “inward facing” Institute with its focus on devotional and academic activity, based on the top floor, and its “outward facing” charitable wing, oriented towards civic engagement, as expressed on the ground floor. This distinction between the inside and the outside, between Islam and the world, the Islamic *Ummah* and wider “humanity”, and between internal devotion manifest in outward service, is entirely in accordance with the way of *Shaykh* Husayn and the ethos of the Institute as expressed by the *Shaykh*.⁵²⁸ However, it also significantly parallels a liberal secular distinction between a religious private and a neutral, civically oriented public sphere, which in turn has informed government approaches to “faith communities” and their civic potential in wider society. Here I describe how this secular separation is expressed at the Institute and trace the discursive currents which underly and inform it.

The demarcation of the religious and the civic at the Institute is most immediately apparent in the building itself. As the Institute is not a purpose-built *masjid*, but rather a converted building in a business centre, this accords it a publicly observable, religiously neutral

⁵²⁸ I discerned this from an earlier conversation with the *Shaykh* prior to conducting field work, when the Institute was officially opened in December, 2016.

aesthetic that is discernible even prior to entry. A panel across the building displays the Institute UK logo, “The Institute & Masjid”, and details the services that the Institute offers. Confronted with signage as one approaches the car park, it is made clear that the *masjid* is also a “Centre for Non-Violence and Peace Studies”, affirming its civic focus specifically in the context of Islam as a problem space, to which I will return later. It is sufficient to say here that a religiously neutral civic ethic should, according to Jürgen Habermas, be reasonably held in common by all citizens,⁵²⁹ and in this the Institute’s preemptive expression of Islam’s peace and tolerance asserts its solidarity with and inclusion in civil society. Shoe racks line the entrance to the building, as with other *masājid*, yet on the ground floor this is not a requirement. Indeed the ground floor, comprised of a café, a nursery and a recreational zone, is not strictly *masjid* space.

Entering the ground floor, written above the doorway in Arabic is the *Ḥadīth*, “And Madina is better for them, if only they knew,” with English translation provided.⁵³⁰ As is also customary in *masjid* foyers, there is a poster outlining various *Sunnahs* of the *masjid* concerning how one should enter the *masjid*, what one should wear and acts of worship to be performed, all described in English with *du’ā* in Arabic and their English translation. This implicitly refers to the Institute’s *Ḥadīth* focus, and their preferred dual-linguistic media of religious transmission, Arabic and English, both of which broadly accord with its contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist orientation that I have outlined previously. Beyond these features, the ground floor exhibits no explicitly Islamic, devotional aesthetic. As the

⁵²⁹ Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1 (2006), pp. 1-25, p. 13. Accessed 30th October, 2016.

⁵³⁰ “Purification of the Heart” Talk, The Institute, 23/10/17.

primary space of the Institute's "outward facing" branch, the emphasis here is upon civic engagement. To the right of the entrance is the Nursery, and to the left is the "Youth Zone" and "Rumi Café". Apart from the reference to Rumi (1207-1273 C.E.) as a Sufi *Shaykh*, a nod to the Institute's Sufi influence, "religious" references are kept to a minimum. Rather, what *is* emphasised is the message of service to humanity in general, with quotes from influential Muslims like Malcolm X and Muhammad 'Ali who, along with Rumi, are widely known to non-Muslims too.⁵³¹

This is in stark contrast to the top floor of the Institute, which functions as a *masjid* space. As the "inward facing" academic and devotional space of both the Institute and the *Zāwiyya*, the Sufi lodge, it is for the most part here that prayers are led, classes are run, *majālis* are held, and where visiting *Sheyūkh* sit in-between talks and classes. One is required to take off their shoes here, and other forms of *masjid* etiquette such as partial gender segregation are maintained. During classes and *majālis*, a wooden arabesque divider extends down the middle of the room, with men on the left and women on the right, and the *Shaykh* sitting at the front visible to all in attendance. Across the floor is extended an arabesque carpet with contemporary design for the purpose of prayer, with blue, purple and cream colours in keeping with the Institute's aesthetic, and along the walls are written the Names of God in Arabic with English translation. On another wall is printed an artistic calligraphic presentation of a *Qur'ānic* verse pertaining to the family of the Prophet, again

⁵³¹ Ibid.

accompanied by English translation. Along the shelves, too, are a few copies of the *Qur'ān*, prayer beads and perfume available for use.⁵³²

In sum, this is a self-consciously contemporary Islamic aesthetic, where North African and “Western” influences converge and are framed by the colours and ethos of the Institute itself, expressing the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist trend which it most exemplifies. While this devotional *masjid* function is most obvious in the activities undertaken here and the etiquettes observed, with the appearance and layout of the top floor being minimalist in comparison to other *masājid*, it is no less explicit. This is evidently a “religious” space, in contrast to the more civic focus of the ground floor. What distinguishes it most from the ground floor is the consideration for non-Muslims in the layout of the latter. This is a specifically Islamic devotional space intended chiefly for Muslims, and although the Names of God and *Qur'ānic* verses here are translated into English, this speaks more to both English and Arabic as a vehicle for Islam than it does to the need to educate non-Muslims.

This consideration of non-Muslims is most significant here, as I discerned in the aesthetic of the ground floor itself a clear effort to *translate*, to implicitly convey Islam in a manner both understandable and acceptable to non-Muslim attendees. Even the name “Rumi Café” was suggested by *Shaykh* Husayn with this precise intention,⁵³³ though clearly not devoid of its Islamic content. Such translation serves a dual purpose of affirming inclusion in

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Anecdotal, discussion with *Shaykh*.

wider civil society, and inviting non-Muslims to better understanding of the faith, and even conversion. In conveying Islam implicitly with reference to influential Muslims who are widely accepted by non-Muslims, emphasising principles of tolerance, love and humanity, with explicitly scriptural references omitted, the Institute fulfils the “duty of civility” described by John Rawls. That is, the requirement in a liberal society to articulate arguments pertaining to the public good that are justified solely through public reason, equally acceptable to both religious and non-religious citizens.⁵³⁴ The separation that I have outlined which seems apparent at the Institute, of the civic outward facing space and the devotional inward facing space with their respective corresponding functions, would appear to attest to this secularising process as outlined by Rawls.

In my interview with the Institute’s Chairman too, he describes the model that the Institute has established, comprised of distinct charitable and devotional wings.⁵³⁵ I observed previously in Chapter Four how the distinction between an inward devotional and outward civic life is discursively and affectively cultivated in the *majālis* too. However, upon closer examination these spheres are never wholly demarcated. Rawls’ requirement that the religious can provide reasonably acceptable explanations for their civic convictions *independently* of their faith is rightly critiqued by Habermas, who argues that such a cognitive separation is not necessarily possible and should not be expected.⁵³⁶ Indeed, just as the ground floor of the Institute cannot be stripped of its Islamic content, reserved solely for the top floor of the *masjid* proper, the religious person cannot necessarily undertake

⁵³⁴ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 217.

⁵³⁵ Chairman, interview, The Institute.

⁵³⁶ Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” p. 8.

such an artificial division given that their life is itself lived religiously.⁵³⁷ Therefore, the Institute fulfils this “duty of civility” through instead connecting both the egalitarian individualism and universalism of mainstream liberalism to their doctrinal premises,⁵³⁸ through their emphasis on tolerance, love and humanity with implicit reference to scriptural precedent and Muslim figures.

This lived Islam which pervades the Institute, even in its dual function of *masjid* and community hub, is evident in my observations too. I previously referred to how *majālis* of *dhikr* are held on the ground floor every Friday with *masjid* carpets laid out for the duration of the *dhikr* itself, then followed by blessed food, *langar*.⁵³⁹ This is in part due to the fact that the female *dhikr* gathering takes place on the top floor,⁵⁴⁰ yet it nevertheless demonstrates how self-consciously devotional and civic spheres are only situationally so, at times conflated and at times contrasted, in the lived activity within space itself. Doreen Massey’s distinction between space and place is pertinent here. *Space* is heterogeneous, fluid, sheer “multiplicity and chance,”⁵⁴¹ and through activity and relationship between bodies within it, *place* is constituted in process as an “event.”⁵⁴² The space of the hall can be understood as such, becoming variously a *place* of worship and/or of service through what bodies do and how they relate. This lived, processual formation of the Institute is pertinent to its civic sphere too, where the chairman describes how the various charitable initiatives undertaken by the Institute such as food kitchens and fun days were shaped by

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵³⁹ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 151.

⁵⁴² Massey, *For Space*, p. 151.

“the challenges at the time,” particularly the Syrian refugee crisis.⁵⁴³ Therefore, the movements and relations between these bodies within this space, and by extension the construction of place, is necessarily informed by and entangled in the worlds they traverse through beyond it.

In this, the Institute’s model is not ready-made and imposed like a stamp.⁵⁴⁴ Returning to Tim Ingold, it is akin to a path,⁵⁴⁵ traced by the collective movement of its members *as they go along* through this environment. They carry with them the Islamic discursive tradition, arguing that their model is derived from the Prophetic example, where “at that time the *masjid* was a community hub,”⁵⁴⁶ and that this civic and devotional orientation is simply a contemporary revival of the Prophetic way. Though they undertake this process of translation this is for devotional purposes, for *da’wa* and for conveying Islam with wisdom, once again grounded in the Prophetic example. Jeanette Jouili observed how for women living Islam within a web of human relationships, both Muslim and non-Muslim, respondents emphasised the need for *hikma*, wisdom, to both convey and convince.⁵⁴⁷ Here, as there, this approach is thoroughly grounded in the Islamic discursive tradition. That said, in going through this secular environment the Institute necessarily draws it in as it also impresses itself upon it, engaged in a process of “hermeneutic self-reflection,”⁵⁴⁸ undergoing its own translation in the process of translating Islam to others. In this, even in

⁵⁴³ Chairman, interview, The Institute.

⁵⁴⁴ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, p. 62.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁴⁶ Chairman, interview, The Institute.

⁵⁴⁷ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 3.

⁵⁴⁸ Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” p. 14.

their apparent division, both Islamic and liberal secular discursive traditions become necessarily entwined.

This relationship between Islamic and liberal secular discursive traditions, characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism and observed most markedly at the Institute, is best conceptualised as a correspondence. Ingold outlines this as a fluid engagement of lines, moving and developing not along mutually distinct trajectories but fundamentally in relation to one another and in relation to the wider meshwork which they comprise.⁵⁴⁹

Comparing this to a rope Ingold describes how this is always in process, comprised not of enclosed components but extending lines with the shape and character of each informed by how they coil around each other and are coiled around in turn.⁵⁵⁰ In this formulation it is not possible to speak of the Islamic as separate from the secular, as operating as a distinct, foreign agent within a secular environment as Habermas otherwise implies.⁵⁵¹ In Habermas' treatment of religious traditions in secular society he certainly acknowledges a relational element on the cognitive level as I have outlined. Religious citizens necessarily undergo a process of reflection in their addressing the challenges of modernity within a secular environment, and developing novel epistemic attitudes informed by this process, and secular citizens also undergo this reflection in dialogue with the religious.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁹ Ingold, *Making*, p. 101.

⁵⁵⁰ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, p. 11.

⁵⁵¹ Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," p. 14.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

However, in Habermas' formulation the religious and secular spheres remain inverted, in spite of their potential for interaction. Processes of hermeneutic self-reflection are undertaken *within* religious communities as they occupy a secular environment,⁵⁵³ and although they interface along their surfaces they do not correspond or interpenetrate, being mutually enclosed.⁵⁵⁴ This conceptualisation belies the very processes whereby notions of the religious and the secular are constituted and indeed re-constituted, as if these two spheres were ever truly externally bounded entities no translation or adoption would be possible. As I have argued previously here self-reflection, whether individual or collective, does not entail an introspective withdrawal inward to an enclosed enclave, but rather necessarily involves reaching out too. It is in drawing in and reaching out,⁵⁵⁵ in correspondence with our environment of which we are comprised and which we comprise in turn, that life is lived and where change becomes conceivable.

An exemplary demonstration of this notion of inter-discursive correspondence is the Institute's emphasis upon service, *khidma*, and how this is informed by both the Islamic discursive tradition and liberal secular discourse on the civic potential of faith communities. This was first most markedly expressed at the Institute when I attended my first *dhikr* gathering there. Not only was the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* evoked here as the means of both personal transformation and communal affirmation, as I outlined in the previous Chapter, it was also the foundation of and justification for civic engagement in wider society. Reflecting upon the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* and the example of the *Ṣaḥāba* of the

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁵⁴ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, p. 10.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 146.

Prophet, the speaker reminds us that “we are relevant, we have a role to play,”⁵⁵⁶ and that Muslims must practically implement the lessons they derive from the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* for the betterment of society. The concern for the *Ummah*, noted previously, extends further to wider society as the speaker describes the Prophet’s concern for “humanity”, referring to a *Ḥadīth*, and a *Qur’ānic* verse where the Prophet is called “a mercy to all the worlds.” Concluding his talk, he tells us that we must be extensions of this mercy.⁵⁵⁷

This parallels policy discourse on the civic potential of faith communities, with a long established precedent in the UK broadly from 2001 onwards articulated firstly in New Labour’s communitarian approach to “faith communities” as vehicles for civic activity and community cohesion. It echoes both Tony Blair and David Blunkett’s communitarian vision of faith communities as being “central to the renewal of civil society” in promoting tolerance, civic responsibility, and community cohesion,⁵⁵⁸ this being “a prime expression” of beliefs and values of “faith traditions” themselves.⁵⁵⁹ This is particularly pertinent to the local context of Oldham too, as these speeches were made in light of the “Oldham riots” in May and other such disturbances in Bradford and Burnley in the summer of 2001, with the Cante and Ritchie Reports on community cohesion being commissioned in response. Both reports, along with the later Review in 2006, variously argued for community cohesion cultivated through communication between perceived segregated communities,⁵⁶⁰ and in

⁵⁵⁶ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute 10/11/17.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ David Blunkett in Greg Smith, “Faith in community and communities of faith? Government rhetoric and religious identity in Urban Britain,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 19:2 (2004), pp. 185-204, p. 194. Accessed 2nd November, 2015.

⁵⁵⁹ Tony Blair in Smith, “Faith in community and communities of faith?” p. 193.

⁵⁶⁰ *The Ritchie Report*, “Chapter Nine: Leisure, Culture and Community Interaction: “Including the needs of young people and the role of faith communities: Role of the Faith Communities,” in *Oldham Chronicle* (11/12/2001), pp. 23-25, p. 23.

turn the development of a “common vision and values” as a foundation for civic activity.⁵⁶¹ This sentiment has remained largely unchanged through successive governments, where this emphasis upon the civic potential of faith communities for advancing a community cohesion agenda has been maintained.

The Sufi-Sunni revivalism as lived and done at the Institute is clearly configured by the local context of Oldham itself, and it may reasonably be argued that “Oldham today has to a significant extent been defined by the disturbances of 2001.”⁵⁶² It is evident that government approaches to community cohesion have sought to utilise religious organisations to this end, and the Institute cannot be divorced from this discursive milieu. Indeed, as previously mentioned, the Chairman describes how the Institute’s model was largely developed in response to the challenges that they have faced in Oldham itself. However, while such government approaches have operated according to a functionalist view of religion as “the glue that binds society together” into a whole greater than (and belying) the sum of its parts,⁵⁶³ the nature of the reconfiguration I am exploring here is not one of fusion. The Institute does not lose its grounding within the Islamic discursive tradition upon its invocation of civic engagement, nor is such an exhortation entirely intelligible without consideration of the discursive milieu informed by community cohesion policy. Rather, both discursive lines interpenetrate as with two hands clasping.⁵⁶⁴ They are conjoined yet not conflated, and in their mutual correspondence they extend ever

⁵⁶¹ Institute of Community Cohesion, *Review of Community Cohesion in Oldham: Challenging Local Communities to Change Oldham*, (Coventry: Oldham MBC, 2006), p. 14.

⁵⁶² Institute of Community Cohesion, *Review*, p. 7.

⁵⁶³ Smith, “Faith in community and communities of faith?” p. 201.

⁵⁶⁴ Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, p. 10.

in relation to each other along their respective paths of movement, out of which new paths emerge in turn.

Contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as lived and done at the Institute constitutes one such path, drawing stories of the Prophetic past into the present as an alternative ethical basis for civic engagement which is partially configured by, yet not conflated with, the community cohesion agenda. In such a context, Muslims at the Institute are not compelled to accord with a polarised conceptualisation of religion as either stubbornly resistant to or absorbed into dominant notions of liberal secular society. Rather, the Institute occupies what Andrew Williams, Paul Cloke and Samuel Thomas describe as a “theo-ethical” position, constituting through “beliefs-in-action” and narrative novel ways of doing Islam civically.⁵⁶⁵ This can be understood as “a different way of “being-in-common”,” drawing on the work of both Jouili,⁵⁶⁶ and John Zavos,⁵⁶⁷ in which both communal solidarity and civic responsibility are affirmed devotionally apart from yet in dialogue with dominant liberal secular discourse.

Born of the inter-discursive correspondence that I have outlined, these stories, at once Islamic *and* civically oriented toward the contemporary context of Oldham itself, sanctify service as a means of devotional expression. The *Qur’ān* itself calls to civic engagement,

⁵⁶⁵ Andrew Williams, Paul Cloke, and Samuel Thomas, “Co-constituting Neoliberalism: Faith-based Organisations, Co-option, and Resistance in the UK,” *Environmental Planning A*, 44:6 (2012), pp. 1479-1501, p. 1496. Accessed 7th July, 2020.

⁵⁶⁶ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 199.

⁵⁶⁷ John Zavos, “Ethical narratives, street kitchens and doing religious difference amongst post-migrant communities in contemporary Britain,” *Culture and Religion*, 20:1 (2019), pp. 39-64, p. 45. Accessed 7th August, 2020.

the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba* were civically active, and thus engagement with the Islamic discursive tradition is civic engagement. As the speaker at the *dhikr* gathering tells us, to contribute to society is “to make a difference for Islam.”⁵⁶⁸ This position is also consistent with the approach of *Shaykh* Husayn himself, who often encourages his students and listeners to “be civically active,” and to affirm Muslims’ position in society through “positive contribution.”⁵⁶⁹ In this civic engagement is a mark of Islamic devotion, actualising the *Qur’ān*, the *Sunnah* and the way of the *Shaykh*. While this story is uniquely framed by the ethos of the Institute and its *ṭarīqa*, its emphasis upon service to all encompasses the wider *Ummah* and indeed wider society, being both a means of intercommunal solidarity among Muslims in Oldham, and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

This former emphasis upon strengthening ties between Muslims in Oldham specifically was a central priority at the Institute, as attested by the Chairman who described the need to build the community through service as a means to serve wider society too.⁵⁷⁰ A primary and frequent expression of this sanctified service is the provision of *langar*, food served in a *majlis* that has been blessed through the gathering itself and the supplications of those who have prepared it. That food is a central means of civic service at the Institute is evident from the counter from which food is served in the Institute’s “civic” space, across which is written “Serving Humanity with Love, Mercy and Compassion,” and that this

⁵⁶⁸ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute 10/11/17.

⁵⁶⁹ MuhammadTheMerciful, “Importance of being Socially Active.” *YouTube* video, 7:47, 15th December, 2016.

⁵⁷⁰ Chairman, interview, The Institute.

space is a café.⁵⁷¹ Yet this is crucially Rumi's Café, imbued with the sanctity that this name implies, and in the context of the *dhikr* gathering in particular the provision of food becomes at once a civic and sacred, devotional act. In this, the sacred and the civic are entangled in a way that both discursively and affectively affirms community identity among Muslims in Oldham.

Like the Institute and the trend of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism that it most exemplifies, *langar* is the site of multiple discursive and affective entanglements. As noted by Pnina Werbner in her observations at a Sufi lodge in Kohat, it is an expression of humanistic and altruistic service characteristic of Sufism,⁵⁷² yet here this also becomes entwined with the emphasis upon civic engagement very much situated within the discursive milieu of Oldham. That after *dhikr* this *langar* is served to congregants sitting in rows facing each other on the floor affirms this notion of common humanity and equality further, akin to the non-discriminatory sharing known as *pangat* in Sikh tradition.⁵⁷³ As noted previously, the attribution of the name "Rumi" to the café is a self-conscious expression of Sufism as a vehicle for civic engagement, with service to non-Muslims in mind. In this, *langar* is the site of entangled discursive histories drawing together South Asian Sufism, local discourse on civic community building, and even in the provision of mint tea,⁵⁷⁴ a common practice in North African Sufi lodges, the Maghrebi Sufi tradition to

⁵⁷¹ "Purification of the Heart" Talk, The Institute, 23/10/17.

⁵⁷² Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love*, p. 103.

⁵⁷³ Tavleen Kaur, "Architecture (Sikhism)," in *Sikhism*, Arvind Pal Singh Mandair ed. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), pp. 27-44, pp. 27-28. Accessed 7th August, 2020.

⁵⁷⁴ *Dhikr* Gathering, The Institute, 10/11/17.

which the Institute belongs too. As these discursive lines meet in correspondence, so too do people, and community arises out of this civic, devotional place.

This was not a coalescence or a fusion into a single whole. Attending an *iftār* at Central Mosque Two, I was told by one attendee “everyone just does their thing... you get a real diverse feeling here at *iftār*.”⁵⁷⁵ Though a different *masjid*, I observed the same at the Institute, where Mirpuris, Bengalis, Syrian refugees (and one white convert), youth and elders, all comprised this gathering “doing their thing.” Facing each other, sitting next to each other and sharing food that has been blessed through the *dhikr* in which they have all taken part, *langar* becomes for Muslims here the focus for “a resilient web of diasporic associations,”⁵⁷⁶ which serves to affectively affirm community. As Zavos similarly observed at a mobile street kitchen in Bradford, “the smell of the food is accompanied by the pleasure of eating,”⁵⁷⁷ and this too informs the tangible qualities of the sanctity (*baraka*) that permeates the space and brings bodies together. The provision of *langar* itself is made possible through local community support, with individuals donating both food and money for this purpose, and this flow of resources enables and facilitates the affective flows of conviviality among attendees which bolster community further. In “serving *Humanity* with love, mercy and compassion,”⁵⁷⁸ resonating as it is with all the inter-discursive correspondences I have outlined, the local Muslim community of Oldham is affectively cultivated.

⁵⁷⁵ *Iftār* Discussion, Central Mosque Two, 22/05/18.

⁵⁷⁶ Zavos, “The Aura of Chips,” p. 106.

⁵⁷⁷ John Zavos, “Placing Religious Social Action in the Multicultural City,” *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 11 (2018), pp. 248-273, p. 264. Accessed 7th July, 2020.

⁵⁷⁸ My emphasis.

“We need to show people the true Islam”: good Muslims as good citizens

I have thus far outlined, through my observation of the Institute, how “real” Islam is grounded in a reflexive engagement with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* and actualised in civic engagement, with non-Muslims in mind. Over the course of my observations here there was not an opportunity to examine this interaction, however this was possible at other field sites, particularly at Central Mosque One. Attending a meeting to discuss their upcoming open mosque event, comprised predominantly of younger volunteers and presided over by Imam Bilal himself, I observed one attendee remark that “we need to show people the true Islam,”⁵⁷⁹ and the concern at this meeting was how to both convey and convince. The Imam, a second-generation Pakistani himself, began the meeting with a reflection upon the *Qur’ānic* verse, “invite them to Allah in the best way.” He perceived this event to be an opportunity both for *da’wa*, which he reminded us was an obligation upon every Muslim, and as a means to dispel misconceptions about the faith.⁵⁸⁰ This accords with the intentions of Jouili’s participants that I have noted previously, of the obligation to convey Islam as *da’wa*, very much rooted within the Islamic discursive tradition, and to educate non-Muslims about Islam in the contemporary context of Islam as a problem space.

The question of how to approach this “in the best way” received divergent responses. Some leaned towards active proselytization in that “we have something really good and we should want to tell people about it,” while others cautioned that “in this society” people are

⁵⁷⁹ Friday *Halaqa*, Central Mosque One, 19/01/18.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

not as receptive to conversion, so “just being nice” and friendly conversation was sufficient.⁵⁸¹ This consideration over both the purpose and delivery of this open day was very much telling of how Muslims’ living and fulfilling their obligations as Muslims is entangled in considerations of Islam’s representation, as was also the case for Jouili’s participants.⁵⁸² These tactful negotiations draw together multiple discursive lines from the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, from policy discourse on faith communities and “moderate Islam”, and from polarised representations of the “good” and “bad” Muslim, informing the shape of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. These deliberations are affectively charged, both in discussing these interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims and in the interactions themselves. Undertaken with the implicit recognition of Islamophobia and Islam’s perceived otherness, there exists a tension between separateness and outreach that is affectively palpable. Yet, it is through these tactful, tentative and oftentimes tense correspondences that emergent forms of doing and conveying Islam are constituted, in ways that escape the polarised portrayals in policy discourse yet creatively engage with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* in dialogue with them.

The imperative to do *da’wa*, to “invite them to Allah in the best way,” to show the good of Islam and to want to convey this in wider society, is a sentiment I found expressed consistently in my field sites. In the previous Chapter I noted the perceived distance, discursively articulated and affectively felt, between the “people of *lā ilāha ilallāh*” and those “bereft of the *Shahāda*,” and how this distance constitutes an affective tension between both a turn *away from* and *towards* non-Muslims in compassionate outreach.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 154.

Expanding further, this outreach is discursively underpinned with reference to the Prophetic example, born of an established precedent within Islamic discursive tradition where *da'wa* is an obligation upon every Muslim. This acquires renewed significance in the context of living in a predominantly non-Muslim country. At one house gathering I attended in which a *Shaykh* was holding a question and answer session, he stated that Muslims' primary purpose of living in any predominantly non-Muslim country should be to give *da'wa*.⁵⁸³ After describing the many difficulties for Muslims living in "the West", one questioner inquired about a *Hadith* which stated that the sun would rise from the West, and whether this pertained to conversion. The *Shaykh* responded that there is hope in that, but that this would come at the end of times. "Religion is being taken *out* of people's hearts," he said, "for now we have to struggle."⁵⁸⁴

This argument in part draws on the juristic designation of non-Muslim lands as *Dar ul-Harb*, abode of war,⁵⁸⁵ and although this is not meant literally the fact of living in a perceived alien and hostile non-Muslim environment entails struggle, only legitimised through *da'wa*. The *Shaykh's* sentiment evokes Werbner's notion of a "community of suffering,"⁵⁸⁶ constituted in this instance through the collective experience of Islamophobia and negative misconception about Islam and Muslims. Jonathan Birt describes how this not only results in an objectification of Islam in its perceived otherness,

⁵⁸³ Question and Answer Session, Anecdotal reflection, 21/02/18.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Tariq Ramadan, "Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery" in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad ed. *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 158-165, p. 161. Accessed 19th November, 2016.

⁵⁸⁶ Pnina Werbner, "Rich Man Poor Man- Or a Community of Suffering: Heroic Motifs in Manchester Pakistani Life Histories," *Oral History*, 8:1 (1980), pp. 43-48, p. 47. Accessed 29th September, 2016.

but also fuels an assertion of Muslim identity,⁵⁸⁷ in which this embattled community must actively affirm and convey Islam to carve out a place in the hegemonic public sphere. Indeed, *da'wa* is an expression of this as a means to “represent Islam in the best way possible,”⁵⁸⁸ particularly in this contemporary context wherein Muslims cannot help but be positioned in relation to the definition of Islam as a problem space. This consideration is never absent from Muslims’ discussion of *da'wa*, as it both necessitates such outreach and shapes its articulation.

Muslims’ inevitable positioning in relation to the hypervisibility of Islam and its definition as a problem space constitutes both an objectification of Islam itself, and of their identities as Muslims. According to Olivier Roy Muslims are almost required to publicly state their self-identity as spokespeople for Islam as a civic duty.⁵⁸⁹ In the process of interrogation, their identity as “Muslims” first and foremost is oftentimes thrust upon them by wider non-Muslim society. While the tales of personal journeys told by Jouili’s respondents affirms individual choice and the self-conscious assertion of one’s Islam, these are often born of Muslims’ ascribed designation as Muslims, and the duty imposed upon them to speak for Islam as “experts”.⁵⁹⁰ This subsequently informs their intention to learn their *Dīn* to the extent that they can effectively convey it to others. This hearkens back to the exhortation of *Shaykh* Danyal at Central Mosque Two referred to previously, to “value the gift that you

⁵⁸⁷ Jonathan Birt, “Islamophobia in the Construction of British Muslim Identity Politics,” in Peter Hopkins and Richard Gale (eds.), *Muslims in Britain: Race, Place and Identities* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 210-227, p. 217. Accessed 22nd February, 2017.

⁵⁸⁸ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁹ Roy, *Globalised Islam*, p. 24.

⁵⁹⁰ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 30.

have so that you can give it to others,” where an acknowledgement of what one *is* and has is coupled with the need to effectively represent this to others.

Recalling a conversation with Imam Ejaz of Central Mosque Two, he reiterated the need to do *da'wa* in the best way, according to the character of the Prophet, so as to correct negative misconceptions.⁵⁹¹ This involves both an identification with the Prophetic character, through engagement with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, and a tactful engagement with others, attentive to one's societal context. Yet, this objectification and representation does not require extensive formal religious education nor acquaintance with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Indeed, it does not necessarily require one to be practicing or to even believe in the faith. As Nasar Meer describes, the ascribed identity of “Muslim” has come to denote a “quasi-ethnic sociological formation” for Muslims both born into Muslim families and those who are labelled as such by others.⁵⁹² To be a Muslim or to be identified as such, whatever this entails for the individual, carries in itself the onus to explain.

Younger interviewees from *the Gift Giving Project* conducted at Manchester Metropolitan University, all of them British South Asian Muslims in Manchester, exhibited this dual acknowledgement of their identities as Muslims and the obligation to represent. One third-generation respondent most demonstrated this quasi-ethnic character of Muslim identity by initially describing his ethnicity as “Muslim.”⁵⁹³ He proceeds to emphasise the voluntary,

⁵⁹¹ *Halaqa*, Central Mosque Two, 06/06/18.

⁵⁹² Meer, op. cit., p. 114.

⁵⁹³ Mateen Arif Hanif in Amna Khan, *The Gift Giving Project* (Manchester Metropolitan University: Heritage Lottery, 2014).

confessional and “religious” aspect of his identity too, in how he can teach people about his religion, noting in particular how “Islam first thing is peace, Islam is not a violent religion.”⁵⁹⁴ The prioritisation of Islam and Muslim identity attests to its hypervisibility, and is further substantiated by similar studies undertaken by Daniel Nilsson DeHanas among Bengali Muslims in London’s East End, to which I referred earlier.⁵⁹⁵ This self-enunciation of Muslim identity alongside implicit acknowledgement of negative misconceptions was echoed at the open day at Central Mosque One, where Imam Bilal and committee members continually reiterate to the non-Muslim attendees that Muslims are “decent people”, “law-abiding”, and that Islam is a peaceful religion.⁵⁹⁶ This emphasis on abiding by the law and peace is especially telling of how Muslims’ approach to conveying Islam “in the best way” is configured within a wider societal context informed by policy discourse pertaining to multi-faith communities and community cohesion.

It was consistently affirmed throughout my field work that Muslims are peaceful, law-abiding citizens. In my interview with *Allāma* at North Manchester Mosque, he described how the *masjid* endeavours to provide for younger generations so that “they not only become good Muslims but that they’re also law-abiding *citizens* of Great Britain.”⁵⁹⁷ This, coupled with the oft-repeated statements of Muslims at Central Mosque One’s open day and the statements of other participants, speaks of how being a good Muslim entails being a good British citizen in “following the law of the land.”⁵⁹⁸ It pre-emptively addresses the

⁵⁹⁴ Hanif in Khan, *Gift Giving Project*.

⁵⁹⁵ DeHanas, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

⁵⁹⁶ Mosque Open Day, Central Mosque One, 26/01/18.

⁵⁹⁷ *Allāma*, interview, North Manchester Mosque.

⁵⁹⁸ Hanif in Khan, *Gift Giving Project*.

contention that religion in general and Islam in particular is politically subversive, violent and divisive, which echoes policy descriptions of the “bad” Muslim.

The image of the “bad” Muslim has been cultivated since the Rushdie affair in 1988-1989, and was exacerbated with the Gulf war in 1990-1991,⁵⁹⁹ where in both cases Muslims were perceived by government authorities to be potentially subversive and “disloyal” to the nation.⁶⁰⁰ This has only heightened since both 9/11 and 7/7.⁶⁰¹ In such a context, it has been argued that some Muslims feel an acute tension between being Muslim and being British, indeed that the two are perceived to be mutually opposed. When Blunkett was Home Secretary, he remarked how “it is a worrying trend that young second generation British Muslims are more likely than their parents to feel that they have to *choose* between feeling part of the UK and feeling part of their faith.”⁶⁰² Such concerns have often been qualified with statements such as “most Muslims are proud to be British and Muslim,”⁶⁰³ yet this implies that there are nevertheless *some* who do not, and that this is a threat which must be addressed.⁶⁰⁴

The disproportionate emphasis upon Muslims in the earliest formulation of the *Prevent Strategy* in 2006 attests to this further, developed for the purpose of “tackling the

⁵⁹⁹ War waged by coalition forces against Iraq following Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. There was open support for Saddam Hussein among Muslims in Britain during this time.

⁶⁰⁰ Pnina Werbner, “Divided Loyalties, Empowered Citizenship? Muslims in Britain,” *Citizenship Studies*, 4:3 (2000), pp. 307-324, p. 311. Accessed 26th September, 2016.

⁶⁰¹ A series of coordinated terrorist attacks in London on the 7th July, 2005.

⁶⁰² David Blunkett in Varun Uberoi and Tariq Modood, “Who Doesn’t Feel British? Divisions over Muslims,” *Parliamentary Affairs*, 63:2 (2010), pp. 302-320, p. 306. Accessed 21st November, 2015.

⁶⁰³ Tony Blair in Uberoi and Modood, “Who Doesn’t Feel British?” p. 307.

⁶⁰⁴ Uberoi and Modood, “Who Doesn’t Feel British?” p. 307.

radicalisation of individuals, both in the UK and elsewhere, which sustains the international terrorist threat.”⁶⁰⁵ Repeated assertions that local communities must be “empowered to tackle extremist ideologies,”⁶⁰⁶ further holds Muslim communities to account for their apparent failure to address issues of radicalisation. It is implied that Islam has the inherent potential to radicalise, that the Muslims are vulnerable to radicalisation, and that the conditions which contribute to radicalisation arise within these communities, and not outside of them. As such, an affirmation of “Britishness” defined as “the values of democracy, rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind,”⁶⁰⁷ is presented as the necessary corrective in more recent *Prevent* formulations. My respondents’ qualification of their Muslim identity with the assertion of being peaceful and law-abiding arises in light of this discursively hegemonic narrative as articulated in policy, the media, and in politicians’ speeches that while *most* Muslims are, *some* are not.

This image of the “bad” Muslim, coinciding as it did with negative policy portrayals of religion as “divisive” and Muslims as segregated from wider “British” society,⁶⁰⁸ is contrasted with that of the “good”, “moderate” Muslim, informed by positive reifications of “faith” in multi-faith discourse. This discourse asserts the positivity of religion as “faith”, to the extent that it promotes values of peace, non-violence, respect for difference, and civic engagement, to which I referred earlier. The “good” Muslim must accord with

⁶⁰⁵ HM Government, *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom’s Strategy*, (July, 2006), p. 9.

⁶⁰⁶ HM Government, *Countering International Terrorism*, p. 11.

⁶⁰⁷ HM Government, *Prevent Strategy*, (June, 2011), p. 44.

⁶⁰⁸ Jonathan Birt, “Good Imam, Bad Imam: Civic Religion and National Integration in Britain post-9/11,” *The Muslim World*, 96 (2006) pp. 687-705, pp. 692-693. Accessed 22nd February, 2017.

the “common good” of civic religion,⁶⁰⁹ oriented towards community cohesion, which belies the significant differences within and between religious traditions. This equally informs my respondents’ affirmation that Muslims are peaceful, and there were instances over the course of my observations where parallels with multi-faith discourse were immediately apparent.

At a *Ḥadīth* class at the Institute, *Shaykh* Jamal suggested that it is often better to talk about “issues” rather than religion when engaging in an interfaith context with non-Muslims, that “it has to be a dialogue, you need to open doors.”⁶¹⁰ This parallels the conversations in preparation for the open day at Central Mosque One where explicit emphasis on Islam itself was regarded as problematic, with attendees instead preferring to “just be nice,” and this being a prerequisite for open dialogue.⁶¹¹ “Just being nice,” talking about “issues” as opposed to religion, and implicitly embodying one’s faith instead of explicitly proselytising it, were all understood as necessary conditions for the establishment of genuine dialogue. Indeed, to talk about “Muslims this, Muslims that,” as *Shaykh* Jamal describes, is “to shut people down.”⁶¹² To talk solely of one’s own faith in an interfaith context is to cut off communication, unless one does so through emphasising common values.

⁶⁰⁹ Birt, “Good Imam, Bad Imam,” p. 692.

⁶¹⁰ Forty *Ḥadīth* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 31/03/18.

⁶¹¹ Friday *Halaqa*, Central Mosque One, 19/01/18.

⁶¹² Forty *Ḥadīth* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 31/03/18.

This was an ever-present consideration during Imam Bilal’s speech at Central Mosque One’s open day. He explained that the core purpose of the *masjid* is worship. It is a *masjid*, a place of prostration. Yet this was qualified, in the description of prayer itself, as a personal, internal and private act.⁶¹³ This explanation accords with a secularised notion of religion as being a private affair with which individuals are internally engaged, and neither doctrine nor devotion enters the public sphere. This tentative, tactful reference to worship is followed by the reassurance that the *masjid* is a community centre, a space of civic activity, and as a central, *jāmi’ masjid* it literally gathers people together as a “community hub”.⁶¹⁴ This is where religion enters the public sphere, as a vehicle for civic engagement and community cohesion, and this is emphasised to a comparatively greater extent than worship here. As previously outlined, in policy discourse the fruits of successful community cohesion initiatives in a Muslim community context are the cultivation of a firm and vocal stance against extremism, and the provision of facilities for younger generations. In his talk Imam Bilal concentrates on both, explaining how the *masjid* issued a “reassurance message” following the Manchester Arena Bombing of 2017, and how the *masjid* should be a loving and caring environment for children.⁶¹⁵ In this, Imam Bilal’s speech is broadly consistent with the representation of “good” civic Islam as articulated in policy discourse.

However, it would be a significant oversight to conclude from these observations that Muslims have simply been discursively assimilated, fused, into this hegemonic narrative of

⁶¹³ Mosque Open Day, Central Mosque One, 26/01/18.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

civic religion and community cohesion. As I observed with regards to civic activity at the Institute, while it must certainly be acknowledged that Muslims tactfully operate alongside and in dialogue with these narratives, they nevertheless creatively constitute alternative forms of interfaith outreach. Returning to the open day preparation meeting at Central Mosque One, the primary intention here was not “community cohesion” but conversion. It arose from reflection upon a *Qur’ānic* verse, and the consideration for tact and *hikma* was related to the example of the Prophet, who would speak with people according to their capacity. While I attended this talk as a researcher, I was consulted as both a local attendee and most crucially as a convert. I was asked how best to convey Islam to others, and how to speak according to peoples’ capacity. In response, I suggested from my own experience that Islam is a process, it is something one grows into, and to that extent one should not impress Islam too heavily upon an interested inquirer. From this the agreement on open dialogue came, not through the top-down consultation of policy documents but from an open attentiveness to the lives and experiences of others to discern how best to convey the truth of Islam,⁶¹⁶ in keeping with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.

At the *Ḥadīth* class too, *Shaykh* Jamal interspersed his commentary on how the Prophet was towards new Muslims with anecdotes from his own experience of working in end of life care. The importance of open dialogue, of respect and appreciation of difference, and speaking with people according to their capacity, was all affirmed in this context. It was framed by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, and lived through his own experiences with others, through which he was better able to transmit the *Ḥadīth* to us. In reflecting upon *this* he

⁶¹⁶ Friday *Halaqa*, Central Mosque One, 19/01/18.

suggested that open dialogue in an interfaith context was preferable to active proselytisation. “It’s about people,” he says, “and you need to support people through their death.”⁶¹⁷ While as a primary school teacher and a chaplain he has received training informed by policy discourse on civic religion, this recommendation is born of his intimate attentiveness to and experience of the real lives of others. It is certainly informed by policy but not defined by it as it draws on the *Sunnah* of the Prophet too, and in its enaction through lived experience it constitutes new stories whereby these older stories are recast for novel purposes.

Outreach is certainly informed by these entangled tales, directed variously towards objectives of conversion and cohesion, but it is also crucially born of affective compulsions and aversions towards the “Other” that are pursued for their own sake. Rather than beginning with a rational objective that is subsequently pursued through affective means, the desire for outreach can be understood as an end in itself, coursing through and charging stories that are subsequently articulated in their wake.⁶¹⁸ This is precisely what outreach entails, a bodily reaching out from oneself to another across a distance that is fundamentally felt. In the previous Chapter I referred to how such a perceived distance is cultivated and felt in the *majālis*, with these sacred enclaves of brotherhood constituting at times a sanctuary from the perceived darkness, enmity and struggles of wider society. Yet just as this distance is felt so too is the impulse towards contact. In this, the endeavour towards outreach is not only a means to discursively address misconceptions, it is the affective outcome of and response to distance. Schaefer, referring to Frans De Waal,

⁶¹⁷ Forty *Hadith* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 31/03/18.

⁶¹⁸ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 126.

relates this intransigent urge towards sociality back to primates who, after being starved of contact with others, yearn for joyful contact upon release.⁶¹⁹ Upon reflection, he argues that we reach out because “we are hardwired to connect with those around us,”⁶²⁰ not solely due to a sense of religious obligation or civic duty.

Understood as such, I was aware that during the initial preparatory meeting at Central Mosque One I was consulted not only as a researcher or as a convert but also as a *White British* Muslim, my difference and distance embodied, and this constituted a form of outreach in itself. This desire for encounter was expressed at the open day where I along with the other attendees, both Muslim and non-Muslim, sat in a circle facing each other. One of the volunteers at the event, a second-generation Pakistani, described to all of us gathered how this event was “a long time coming” and he was glad that he could finally be a part of it,⁶²¹ seeming almost relieved that this encounter could take place. The example of the Prophet was evoked alongside the needs of the time to articulate and justify this event, yet it was imbued with the *desire* for exchange, for meaningful dialogue and, as I will explore, for defence. In this, the lived dialogue with others is itself informed by how multiple lines of discourse and affect are engaged in conversation within and between people, forming a correspondence whereby compulsions towards contact enliven concerns for conversion and cohesion.

⁶¹⁹ Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 132.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁶²¹ Mosque Open Day, Central Mosque One, 26/01/18.

This lived engagement, informed as it was by multiple lines of discourse and affect, was not the neat top-down imposition of a framework whereby either “community cohesion” or conversion was effectively attained. It was rather an open and uneasy learning process, marked not only by the cultivation of conviviality but also of tension, ruptures which brought to the surface conflicting interests, experiences and narratives which the “common good” community cohesion narrative would otherwise belie. While Imam Bilal’s speech at Central Mosque One’s open day was evidently configured by his acquaintance with such a narrative, he qualified his reference to the Arena Bombing with the assertion that “we have nothing to apologise for, it is nothing to do with our faith. We never apologise for this.”⁶²² Though his speech in many ways echoes policy discourse, this is a subtle critique of the charge that Muslims are responsible for violent extremism, and in distancing “we” the community and “our faith” from such acts the Imam establishes the parameters of Muslim community identity both informed by yet ultimately subverting policy discourse. Furthermore, in describing the *masjid* as a “beautiful community hub” he hearkens back to the example of the Prophet’s *masjid* in Medina. While this is no doubt informed by policy discourse, it is ultimately framed by the example of the Prophet. His *masjid* was a community hub, and in this the Muslims may authentically lay claim to civic religion as a fundamental aspect of the way Islam has always been lived and done.

Beyond the speech of the Imam, discussions between attendees themselves attested to further subversions and the uneasy imposition of this “community cohesion” model of interfaith engagement. Following the speech, attendees were invited to ask questions and to

⁶²² Mosque Open Day, Central Mosque One, 26/01/18.

express their opinions. One committee member (with evident frustration) expressed that Islam and Muslims are under attack by both terrorism and the media, “yet, we still get the blame.” Addressing the non-Muslims gathered, he defensively tells them that “you people in the West” do not understand this predicament that Muslims face.⁶²³ This is fundamentally expressive of “painful, deeply felt injury,” coupled with public defiance, which according to Werbner is born of the progressive alienation that Muslims have faced in Britain.⁶²⁴ In spite of being gathered together in a circle, representing the open, equal and civic forum so characteristic of normative interfaith discourse, the gulf between the lived experience of the Muslim *Ummah*, both locally and transnationally, and the non-Muslim “West” could not be more marked.

This spoke of both an affective and discursive solidarity that extended beyond the physicality of the *masjid* itself, beyond even the country, to encompass Muslims across the globe. It also asserted a fundamental distance from those who sat only across from us, encapsulated as they were by this narrative of “the West” which even served to situationally separate us from the very space we occupied *as Muslims in the West*. Indeed, Werbner has noted that of all the transnational cultural spaces South Asian Muslims occupy, the Islamic, the South Asian and the Inter-national, none coincided with the British nation-state.⁶²⁵ However, it must also be acknowledged that this event was intended to affirm just how *central* Manchester was to Central Mosque One, and in turn how central the *masjid* was to Manchester. While such crises of alienation and injury have seemed to

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Pnina Werbner, “The translocation of culture: ‘community cohesion’ and the force of multiculturalism in history,” *The Sociological Review*, 53:4 (2005), pp. 745-768, p. 763. Accessed 26th September, 2016.

⁶²⁵ Werbner, “The translocation of culture,” p. 757.

accentuate distance, they have also been “crucibles through which new multicultural arrangements come to be forged,”⁶²⁶ contributing to the formation of communities that are thoroughly Muslim and Mancunian.

“A bigger family”: cultivating the Mancunian Muslim community on Oxford Road

The discursive milieu in which Muslims are enmeshed, as I have thus far outlined it, is comprised of a coalescence and correspondence of lines, variously situated within and arising from the Islamic discursive tradition, and from policy discourse on civic, multi-faith engagement oriented towards community cohesion. These are not rigid frameworks, designed in isolation from and grafted onto living communities, but are rather processually constituted in the doing of community itself, lines interweaving and developing in ongoing correspondence. Through such a conceptualisation civic Sufi-Sunni revivalism becomes intelligible, at once hearkening back to the time of the Prophet *and* affirming contemporary notions of civic religion. This is not a linear relationship, nor an amalgamation or a fusion, both are mutually constituted and configured in their correspondence. In this, stories from the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* become both the foundation for and expression of civic religion, and in turn civic religion becomes a foundation for and expression of Islam. Civic engagement, grounded in tales of the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba* and oriented towards wider contemporary society, becomes a source of new stories simultaneously and situationally evoked as expressing both Islam *and* a communitarian ethic. As to how these stories are told and exactly what they are expressive of, this depends upon who tells the story and the

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p. 763.

context in which it is told. In either case, however, both are fundamentally constituted and configured in their mutual correspondence.

It is no coincidence that contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as lived and done in Manchester, a city which affirms diversity, cosmopolitanism and social action, should also express and affirm these same ideals as intrinsic to Islam itself as attested to in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Through the doing of Islam in Manchester, Manchester is done in Islam, and in this both are engaged in ongoing creative correspondence. Here I will explore how the story of Manchester becomes entangled in the story of Islam and vice versa, and subsequently how this interdiscursive relationship affectively cultivates community that is at once Mancunian and Islamic. While this interplay was discernible over the course of my observations in *masājid* in Manchester, these very Mancunian mosques, it was particularly evident at the Ramadan Community Project's "Street Iftar". Being a public event held outside University Place on Oxford Road, it cut across and conflated conventional liberal secular demarcations of public and private spheres, even as the lines between Manchester and Islam, Manchester and Muslims, became entwined. In the public doing of Islam the public sphere itself is reconfigured, raising implications for the constitution of a "Muslim Public" alongside the cultivation of a "Muslim Self", which I have briefly referred to, and will explore further in the following Chapter.

For three consecutive days during the month of Ramadan, 2018, the Ramadan Community Project was holding its annual "Street Iftar", situated at the end of the University of Manchester's Oxford Road Campus, next to the cylindrical building of University Place. Tents were erected and white paper sheets were rolled out by volunteers to accommodate

the hundreds who would be attending for this third “Street Iftar” at the University, at least half of whom would, like every year, be attending for the first time.⁶²⁷ This initiative was not unique to Manchester, nor even the UK. While established in London in 2011, over the past seven years the project had expanded internationally, serving over sixty thousand people in seven cities across four continents,⁶²⁸ with the purpose of “bringing communities together.”⁶²⁹ I have touched upon the communal aspect of both food and *iftār* previously in the context of the *masjid*, and the “Street Iftar” parallels these.

At the “Street Iftar”, as with most *masjid iftārs*, everyone sits on the floor in rows facing each other along the white sheets, on which are placed dates and bottles of water as per the *Sunnah* of breaking the fast with dates and water. Arabesque lanterns also lined these sheets and the tents themselves were strung with fairy lights which together illumined this open space, creating an aura of light which enveloped it and accorded an affective quality of intimacy and enclosure. The exchange of food in this context of fast-breaking also cultivated its own aura, which Zavos similarly observes through his work with street kitchens in Birmingham and Bradford. This was a “loose aura” comprised of the affective qualities of the food itself, the environment in which it is prepared and exchanged, and the hunger of attendees.⁶³⁰ In this, while this “Street Iftar” was open, being held outside on Oxford Road, the same affective quality of sanctity which I discerned at Central Mosque Two and elsewhere whereby the consecrated *masjid* space was demarcated from the world “out there”, was in part sustained here. Yet here it was at once “*a part of* as well as *apart*

⁶²⁷ Street Iftar, Ramadan Community Project, 04/06/18.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Zavos, “The Aura of Chips,” p. 105.

from the city,” a distinctively and differently religious space,⁶³¹ characterised not by its boundedness within *masjid* walls but by its situational, fleeting and temporal enclosure within the auras that permeated and enveloped it. These auras, comprised of light, the scent, exchange and consumption of food, and the proximity of bodies, all served to cultivate a form of cosmopolitan conviviality as affects flowed between human bodies and non-human substances, situationally establishing and affirming this “bigger family”.⁶³²

This “bigger family” that the Ramadan Community Project sought to both cultivate and affirm was comprised of both Muslims and non-Muslims, both among volunteers and attendees. While most were Muslims, and this was evidently a Muslim space, non-Muslim students and staff from the University and passers-by also participated and formed a sizeable portion of those in attendance. No single ethnicity seemed to predominate here either, with a broad mix of South Asians, Arabs, Somalis, Indonesians, Malaysians, Chinese, and White British attendees among others. This was typical of the university, boasting one of the largest student populations in general and international students in particular, which is not wholly reflective of the city itself. However, it was presented as a picture of the multicultural and multi-faith society, which in this very act of representation and performance of this story served to situationally construct it as a reality. It was a representation of society in microcosm, a vignette of one society and one “family” united in their difference and in their embrace of otherness,⁶³³ hearkening back to the “Big

⁶³¹ Ibid., p. 106.

⁶³² Street Iftar, Ramadan Community Project, 04/06/18.

⁶³³ Ibid.

Society” of Cameron’s Conservative government,⁶³⁴ and the communitarian approach of New Labour.

Multi-faith discourse previously outlined was echoed in the speech of the University’s diversity officer, who in her reflections distinguished between the “problem” of religion and the uniqueness of “faith”.⁶³⁵ Religion was articulated alongside intolerance and judgement, a vehicle for the suppression of individuality and the homogenisation of difference.⁶³⁶ In contrast, “faith is as unique to one as one’s fingerprint,” it is individualised, reflexive, and expressed through rational enquiry. Faith liberates, allowing one to express their individual relationship with “the Ultimate,” while religion coerces. In conclusion she exclaims, “it’s time we make it our responsibility to interpret religion for ourselves.”⁶³⁷ This speech echoes the liberal secular treatment of religion thus far outlined, and expressed in policy discourse, which conceives of faith as open, inclusive and diverse, paralleling the openness, inclusivity and diversity of society as projected in community cohesion discourse.

Interestingly, this exhortation to “interpret religion for ourselves” was met with cheers and applause by most in attendance. I was surprised at this, given that most of the young Muslims I had interacted with in the context of *masjid* classes and *majālis* would not wholly accept this statement. While religion is to be intellectually engaged with and

⁶³⁴ Cabinet Office, *Building the Big Society*, (May, 2010), p. 1.

⁶³⁵ Street Iftar, Ramadan Community Project, 04/06/18.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

internalised, particularly through critical enquiry, this was to be mediated through the guidance and consultation of the *'Ulemā*. At most, the Muslims I observed outside of this specific context would only accept the diversity officer's speech conditionally, yet here it was met with emphatic approval. However, whether the applause denoted unconditional acceptance from all attending or simply adherence to the convention for the sake of politeness would have differed among all in attendance. While I could not discern exactly how this speech was received among all attendees, this instance nevertheless attests to how the doing and expression of one's Islam is highly situational, tactfully conveyed and configured through the multiple stories in which it is entangled.

Beyond this nationwide, macrocosmic story as articulated in policy discourse, this was a representation of Manchester itself as an “inclusive, open and diverse city,” in the words of one coordinator.⁶³⁸ As I previously outlined, this has an established historical precedent from the 19th century onward. Virinder Kalra remarks how Manchester's long established migrant communities, belonging simultaneously to the “big places” of their respective “homelands” as well as to their homes, streets, and the city itself, are constituted of an interpenetration of at times contradictory worlds.⁶³⁹ The city of Manchester, reputed to be “the most cosmopolitan northern provincial city,”⁶⁴⁰ encapsulates such a complex, conflicting and at times conflating interpenetration of worlds, with its long tradition of liberalism alongside its multiple migrant communities. This image of Manchester is embraced and promoted in local state representations, with its “rich mixture of origins,

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Kalra, “Writing British Asian Manchester,” p. 71.

⁶⁴⁰ Werbner, *The Migration Process*, p. 12.

cultures, religions, languages and customs,” encompassed within “a fair and just society, without racial discrimination, harassment and violence.”⁶⁴¹ It is this image which both speakers and coordinators at the “Street Iftar” sought to affirm, both embracing “the other” and asserting that “we are one community, we are together.”⁶⁴² This must be considered in light of the Arena Bombing of 2017 too, after which there was a concerted affirmation of the city’s unity, with “love not hate” being a popular slogan among others, accompanied with Manchester’s emblematic worker bee.

To be united through diversity and in spite of intolerance is the story of Manchester, and this “one community” of Manchester itself, with the “Street Iftar” being an illustration of this. However, this is the story of Manchester made manifest not in the more conventionally civic space of St. Ann’s Square, for example, but rather in a public *iftār*, a Muslim space that is differently religious yet religious nonetheless. It is a Manchester defined by and encapsulated within the Muslim community, and the story of Muslims in Manchester becomes the story of Manchester in Islam. Reflecting on the coordinator’s speech again, who describes the Ramadan Community Project as exemplifying the openness, inclusivity and diversity of Manchester, Muslims are also described collectively here as open, inclusive and loving.⁶⁴³ In this, the relationship between the story of Manchester and the story of Mancunian Muslims is not one of linear assimilation, whereby the Muslims are absorbed into a picture of “diversity” expressing community cohesion, rather both narratives are engaged in creative correspondence wherein both are relationally

⁶⁴¹ Manchester *Agenda 2010* in Kalra, “Writing British Asian Manchester,” p. 76.

⁶⁴² Street Iftar, Ramadan Community Project, 04/06/18.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

constituted and defined. The Project is, therefore, a locus for the processual construction of community, comprised of an intricate weave of narrative and affective flows. A spokesperson for the National Zakat Foundation, the primary sponsor of Manchester's "Street Iftar", addressed us all saying, "you've all come here to be part of the community,"⁶⁴⁴ attesting to how community is situationally cultivated in the space itself. To live and affirm community is to make community, and this is a process in which all participate simply through entering the place.

I have thus far explored how the story of Manchester is informed by multiple lines of discourse from policy, from the history of Manchester itself, and from the public representation of "Manchester" in a Muslim space. The Ramadan Community Project illustrates this story and the constitutive role that Muslims undertake within its processual telling. Yet as I briefly touched upon, this is a story which configures the doing of Islam in Manchester too. Beginning with the "Street Iftar", the founder described how Ramadan is a "state of mind", characterised by social, civic engagement which is subsequently built upon throughout the year.⁶⁴⁵ The notion of inculcating pious habits through Ramadan is an established precedent within the Islamic discursive tradition. As the month of fasting, of depriving the stomach which is considered to be the seat of base desires, one is better placed to concentrate on their relationship with God, through prayer and in particular through the recitation of the *Qur'ān*. At the Institute's "fruits of Ramadan" talk, delivered by *Shaykh* Jamal, the emphasis as oft-expressed here is upon connecting with the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet through embodying it in one's daily life. There is certainly a

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

social element here, in that *Shaykh* Jamal describes how the fruit of one's connection with the *Qur'ān* is the betterment of their character and their behaviour towards others.⁶⁴⁶

However, the emphasis at the "Street Iftar" upon Ramadan as a month of civic activity is certainly configured by the story of Manchester, its socially responsible faith communities, and the civic religion that they all espouse. This is not divorced from the Islamic discursive tradition, but emerges in dialogue with it, as the fruits of engaging with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* manifest as civic engagement in wider society. Ramadan as the month of social engagement does not cease to be the month of the *Qur'ān* in this context, but rather civic activity becomes the vehicle through which the *Qur'ān* is embodied and conveyed.

Ramadan is also a month of charity, and it is during Ramadan in particular that many Muslims choose to pay their *Zakāt*, an obligatory portion of their earnings, for charitable causes. As articulated by the National Zakat Foundation spokesperson, the purpose of *Zakāt* is worship, to develop one's relationship with God.⁶⁴⁷ It also possesses a strongly social aspect pertaining to societal order and justice. The Prophet's closest Companion and the first *Khalīfa*, Abu-Bakr as-Siddīq, fought those who left Islam and rebelled against his rule following the Prophet's passing on the basis that they were obstructing both the establishment of prayer and of *Zakāt*. In this, as it was explained to us by *Shaykh* Jamal at the Institute, the establishment of *Zakāt* pertained to the establishment of societal order and the assurance of justice.⁶⁴⁸ This extends beyond simple payment, with even early '*Ulemā*' such as Imam Ṭabarī (839-923 C.E.) describing how *Zakāt* entails both fulfilling the needs

⁶⁴⁶ "Fruits of Ramadan," The Institute, 31/03/18.

⁶⁴⁷ Street Iftar, Ramadan Community Project, 04/06/18.

⁶⁴⁸ Forty *Hadith* of Imam Nawawi Class, The Institute, 31/03/18.

of the Muslims and assisting and strengthening Islam.⁶⁴⁹ The social, and arguably civic, function of *Zakāt* is therefore an established precedent within the Islamic discursive tradition from the inception of Islam itself. However, this becomes recast in the contemporary Mancunian context as a vehicle to “empower communities” and to “reverse hate” through civic action.⁶⁵⁰ This itself becomes an act of worship, strengthening Islam through strengthening Muslims and affirming their belonging in Manchester as “one community.”⁶⁵¹ In dialogue with the story of Manchester, *Zakāt* becomes an expression of civic religiosity whereby the communal spirit of Manchester is conveyed. This is no less Islamic, because it is through affirming community that the needs of Muslims are met and Islam is strengthened.

The notion of “one community” extends beyond its public performance at the “Street Iftar” and has gradually informed the inter-sectarian relationships among Manchester’s *masājīd* too. When I asked *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa why he believed fewer and fewer Muslims were actively identifying with the Barelvī or Deobandī *masālik* in a sectarian way, he explained that mosque councils, facilitated by local government, have encouraged dialogue and collaboration.⁶⁵² This was crucially necessitated in the context of Islam defined as a problem space, configured by policy discourse on community cohesion and the need for *masājīd* to collaborate in addressing the community issues arising from this. Previously confined to their own discursive spheres, *‘Ulemā* and *Sheyūkh* of differing sectarian affiliation only became further entrenched in their difference, he argues.

⁶⁴⁹ Street Iftar, Ramadan Community Project, 04/06/18.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

However, through dialogue facilitated in the context of Manchester itself, he predicts that this *maslaki* identity will eventually dissipate.⁶⁵³ Expanding upon this further, Imam Bilal at Central Mosque One reflects that “there are issues that are affecting *all* of us, where we *do* need to come together.”⁶⁵⁴ In this, I found that long-held loci of Muslim community identity focused chiefly on *maslak* were becoming effectively displaced through engagement with the wider society of Manchester itself and the discursive milieu which comprises it. However, Imam Bilal qualifies this acknowledgement by saying that these discussions are taking place “not just because the council need us there, it’s because *we*’ve got issues that that are communal,”⁶⁵⁵ and in this Manchester does not initiate such dialogue but rather facilitates it.

The fruit of such dialogue, and the representative quality that the *masājid* acquire as exhibiting Mancunian Muslim identity, is a tactful accommodation of difference alongside the maintenance and preservation of Sufi-Sunni Islam. I observed the same at Central Mosque Two, where Imam Ejaz described how “we try to be as open as we can.”⁶⁵⁶ He affirmed their position as a Sufi-Sunni *masjid*, related very much to the Sylheti *Fultolī tarīqa*, yet this also entailed being as accommodating as possible to the many Muslims of differing ethnicities and sectarian affiliations who attend. This emphasis upon openness and inclusivity, on representing the Mancunian Muslim community, was most exemplified at Central Mosque One, which Imam Bilal described during the open day as a “very Mancunian mosque.” Being central, Imam Bilal explains, “we do have various different

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Imam Bilal, interview, Central Mosque One.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Imam Ejaz, interview, Central Mosque Two.

colours out there, and it's only fair that the *masjid* respects those different colours," yet this was qualified once again by the reminder that "*digressions* from what is universally *Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamā'ah*" would not be compromised on.⁶⁵⁷ This openness and inclusivity, this "love and respect for all and disrespect for none,"⁶⁵⁸ is once again *not* to be understood as simply an internalisation of policy discourse, or even of the story of Manchester which encompasses it. When I remarked on this seeming discursive parallel, Imam Bilal reminded me that this was the ethos instilled in him by his teachers,⁶⁵⁹ and in this I discerned how multiple discursive strands with diverse histories coalesced in the cultivation of a common story.

Conclusion

This common story as I have recounted it here cuts across conventional distinctions between secular and religious spheres, between the *masājid* of Manchester and the city of Manchester, and between the Prophetic past and policy discourse of the present. Through reflexively acknowledging their positioning within wider society and endeavouring to engage, Muslims in Manchester have both appropriated and subverted hegemonic liberal secular discursive tradition to effectively affirm theo-ethical alternatives for being-in-common. Actualised in lived, embodied service that is at once civic and devotional, narrative discourse is bolstered and made affectively tangible through the meeting of bodies, both familiar and unfamiliar, and the circulation of sacred substances which sensorially envelope those gathered. Through these correspondences community is

⁶⁵⁷ Imam Bilal, interview, Central Mosque One.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

cultivated in process, arising out of places that are continuously being *made* through the *doing* of Islam in service and devotion, both within and outside of *masājid* themselves. Yet, whether within the *masjid* or outside the University, the entangled strands out of which community is produced are at once Muhammadan and Mancunian, drawing in both situationally and simultaneously. Alongside creating new ways of being-in-common, this ongoing correspondence has also informed the development of what I have called the Muslim Public and the Muslim Self, which I explore in the following Chapter.

Chapter Six: Self and Community in Contemporary British Islam

Attending my regular evening class at South Manchester Madrasa, *Ustādh* and I discuss the celebration of the *Mawlid* and how this has at times been a contentious issue, with some Muslims celebrating and others not according to the *maslak* they follow. I expected an outline of sectarian contestations, the kind of which I had become accustomed to reading in the literature on Muslims in Britain, or reference to the annual social media and YouTube debates that surface as *Mawlid* season approaches. However, *Ustādh* explained to me that while *Mawlid* and *maslak* were particularly divisive for communities in the *past*, “public opinion has changed,” and “the public” are increasingly focusing on that which they hold in common over that which divides.⁶⁶⁰ This emphasis on commonality for the sake of solidarity was not a novel observation, I had heard the same exhortation at the Institute and had regarded this as characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. What was striking was its situation in this entity called “the public”, which was not only distinguished from the *masājid* and the *masālik*, but also crucially informed the opinions of the ‘*Ulemā*.⁶⁶¹ Past literature examining Muslims communities through the prism of institutions had differentiated Muslims according to *masjid* and *maslak*, and it followed that the ‘*Ulemā* had a particularly formative influence on the shape and representation of Muslim community identity too. What my conversation with *Ustādh* alluded to, on the contrary, was a more dynamic, fluid, and fundamentally *deliberative* Muslim community, an encompassing “public” which is in dialogue with yet not defined by the ‘*Ulemā*, the *masālik* and the *masājid*. In subsequent observations and interviews I sought to understand

⁶⁶⁰ *Dars e-Nizāmī* Class, South Manchester Madrasa, 23/11/2017.

⁶⁶¹ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

exactly what this “Muslim Public” was, what comprises it, where it is situated, and its relationship with both Muslim institutional authority and wider society.

Ultimately, I argue here that this public is Muslim *and* Mancunian, not isolable in fixed parameters defined by institutional authorities but rather situationally spilling into (and at times spilled on by) the wider Mancunian public. While these concerns pertain primarily to the discursive development and representation of the Muslim Public, I supplemented this with a consideration of how it is affectively cultivated through the shared experience of otherness. Understood affectively, I argue that the Muslim Public is the injured community which is demonised by the media and local government policy discourse, it is the entity towards which the Muslim, objectified as “other”, turns in the face of anxiety, fear and confusion. It is both the collective “Other” as perceived by non-Muslims and the enclave of familiarity, solidarity and security for Muslims. This objectification of the Muslim Public should be understood as part of a dual process, of both society and self, and I explore the notion of the Muslim Self here too.

This Islamic affirmation of the self is most emphatically expressed in *Shaykh* Husayn’s statement, “you need to go and see what Allah is telling you in the *Qur’ān*, He’s speaking to you,”⁶⁶² to which I referred earlier, and the assertion of selfhood is voiced most at the Institute. From *Shaykh* Husayn’s appeal to the sovereign individual, through to *Shaykh* Jalal’s encouragement to students to exercise independent judgement in jurisprudential

⁶⁶² *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, op. cit., p. 152.

quandaries,⁶⁶³ at the Institute the reflexive Muslim self is encouraged and expressed. This is certainly characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, and I have already sought to demonstrate how this is not isolated to specific institutions. Yet, the constitution of the Muslim Self extends beyond Sufi-Sunni revivalism and is situated within the processes of wider society too. Just as the Muslim Public is not isolable to *masjid* or *maslak*, so too the Muslim Self must be understood to be constituted by both discursive and affective processes that pervade not only Muslim communities but also wider society.

In this Chapter I provide a more thorough examination of exactly how the Muslim Self is both discursively and affectively cultivated as evidenced through my observations within and beyond the Institute. I will argue that the Muslim Self is established through multiple forms of engagement with both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is born of the pedagogical teacher-student engagement so common at the Institute and elsewhere, where bodies are discursively inscribed *as individual bodies*, encouraged to reflect on *their own* Islam as part of being Muslim. It is also affectively constituted in its objectification as “other” in relation to non-Muslims, a sentiment which pervades all field sites. Crucially, this Self arises out of the very reflexive deliberation which both cultivates the Muslim Public and is the means through which Muslims affirm membership within it. In this, the development of the Muslim Self is intimately bound up with the Muslim Public to the extent that both Self and Society are entwined in the very processes which shape them. I will examine these mutually constitutive processes here as I have discerned them through my observations.

⁶⁶³ *Fiqh* Class, The Institute, 28/10/17.

The conceptualisation of both Muslim Public and Self as I am outlining them defy neat categorisation. The Public is not situated in any one movement or organisation, nor can it be divided into an absolute taxonomy of multiple associations. This is because, as I have demonstrated in the preceding Chapters, labels do not possess any absolute meaning commonly held by all who evoke them. The “Barelvi” can be embraced as a badge of honour, affirming belonging to “the saved sect” or it can be rejected as a signifier of intolerant sectarianism, equally it may hold no significance at all. The acceptance of or aversion to such markers depends not only on who I am speaking to, but also *when* and *where*, making them fundamentally situational. This is applicable to what comprises the Public, but this situationality also extends to the Public as an entity in its entirety. It is not a given, but is rather *done*, born of its discursive evocation, and of felt affinity *with* or opposition *to*.

Where the Public is evoked, by whom and when, will alter its character and its parameters. The Muslim Public at Manchester’s Ramadan Community Project was inclusive, convivial, and encompassed both Muslims and non-Muslims as an expression of Manchester in microcosm. In some seclusions and *majālis* I attended, it was an embattled safe haven in a hostile environment. During *Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah* it was the *masjid*, while at other times it was at odds with it. Taxonomies cannot easily account for this, instead providing insight into a single instantiation of a fluid and dynamic process which is changing moment to moment, person to person and place to place. As this is so for discursive expressions of identity, it is even more so the case for affective processes, which are not captured nor indeed *capturable* by any classificatory or taxonomic system. Yet, while the Public cannot be

isolated and identified by any intrinsic attributes or fixed characteristics, it can be narrated and recounted. It is in the narration of the Public, of telling a story about it, about what it has done, about one's part in relation to it, that it comes into being, and crucially it is *through* such narration that its *continuity* is retained.

This conceptualisation of the Public as I have discerned it through my observations accords with a meshworked understanding of the world, comprised of lines of movement rather than fixed entities with identifiable attributes. It is articulated, enacted, and felt into being, with all such processes constituting paths which inform and extend along each other, configuring their ongoing open-ended course. The Self too, affectively and discursively cultivated in process in relation to this fluid Public, is also not isolable nor fixed. What figures most prominently as the characteristics of the Muslim Self differ depending on what it is constituted, what it is defined, in relation to. As such, it cannot be understood in isolation from the affective and discursive entanglements which comprise it. In my exploration of the processual manifestations of the Muslim Public and Muslim Self here, I will be outlining this meshworked, processual conceptualisation of Muslim community identity too.

All that I have outlined thus far of the Self and the Public, their mutual constitution through affective and discursive processes, and the stories by which they are named and shaped are all ongoing processes that are enmeshed in their development and configuration. Employing a meshworked approach in accord with Tim Ingold, conceptualising such processes as lines reflects the ongoing movements of both discourse and affect. These lines are themselves enmeshed, as described in the foregoing, but they

also effect processes which are mutually constitutive, of Self and Society, self and other, Muslim and non-Muslim, and so on. These processes are open-ended, unfinished and spilling over into each other. They are entangled to the extent that concepts such as “Mancunian” and “Muslim” cannot be separated definitively in two, yet are situationally separated to the extent that they cannot be decisively joined in one encompassing category. Therefore, they cannot be conceptualised as lines running parallel to each other on their own separate trajectories, nor can they be contained in inverted and enclosed parameters of classification, rather the meshwork best exemplifies their constitution and configuration. Ultimately, I argue here that the Muslim Public and the Muslim Self as I have discerned them through my observations can be more comprehensively conceptualised in a meshworked, *storied* manner which does not belie or neglect their dynamic processual fluidity and heterogeneity.

The Public: contested authorities

Following on from my initial conversation on the Public with *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa, I was concerned to understand exactly where this Public was located and precisely what comprised it. I had at first discerned that it was not synonymous nor necessarily aligned with the *masājid*, the *‘Ulemā*, and the *masālik*, and further that it was at times at odds with them. This was not in itself a novel observation, as there have been numerous occasions where Muslims have contested the representative legitimacy of their *masājid* and *‘Ulemā* both locally and nationally. Seán McLoughlin describes how the professed “community leaders” of the *masājid* among the first generation of South Asian Muslims were chiefly concerned to preserve their own life-worlds, preserving ethnic

boundaries and reinforcing South Asian cultural norms.⁶⁶⁴ It was for this that Asian Youth Movements in Manchester (AYM) in the 1980s were particularly critical of such “community leaders”, who they perceived to be using the felt insecurities of racism and hostility to re-establish their own value systems.⁶⁶⁵ Anandi Ramamurthy relates how the AYM felt that such “conservative elements” hearkened back to the divisive use of religion in anti-colonial struggles through their emphasis on religious difference, undermining more effective mobilisation through “unity-in-diversity.”⁶⁶⁶ Although such “grassroots” leadership have enjoyed prominence establishing *masājid* and occasionally mobilising Muslims on key issues, exemplified by Bradford’s Council for Mosques (BCM),⁶⁶⁷ their influence has declined and they exercise no recognised authority.⁶⁶⁸ Regarding the BCM McLoughlin relates that, despite it being “a ‘reasonable’ and ‘moderate’ public face for Muslims,” it is no longer influential at the grassroots even among its member *masājid*, all of which act independently.⁶⁶⁹ Comparatively recently during the Oldham riots in 2001, pleas from “community leaders” for “racial calm” were reportedly ignored,⁶⁷⁰ and the subsequent Ritchie Report was issued in light of the riots to address the perceived dissonance and disconnect between *masjid* committees and Muslims in Oldham.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁴ McLoughlin, “The State, New Muslim Leaderships and Islam as a Resource for Public Engagement,” p. 59.

⁶⁶⁵ Asian Youth and Community Worker’s Association, *Asian Youth in Manchester* (Manchester: Tandana Collection, 1983).

⁶⁶⁶ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain’s Asian Youth Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), p. 71.

⁶⁶⁷ McLoughlin, “The State, New Muslim Leaderships and Islam as a Resource for Public Engagement,” p. 59.

⁶⁶⁸ McLoughlin, “Mosques and the Public Space,” p. 1059.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁰ Clare Fletcher and Richard Toms, “Race attacks: 3 more in a day,” *Oldham Chronicle*, 01/02/2001, p. 1.

⁶⁷¹ *The Ritchie Report*, “Chapter Nine: Leisure, Culture and Community Interaction: “Including the needs of young people and the role of faith communities: Role of the Faith Communities,” in *Oldham Chronicle* (11/12/2001), pp. 23-25, p. 23.

This demonstrates that while such religious institutional authorities are certainly engaged in dialogue with Muslim communities, it is simply not the case that they can be conflated with them as one and the same. It would therefore be incorrect to assume, as one commenter during the riots does, that “their much-respected elders” can actively control and police their “close-knit communities.”⁶⁷² Indeed, there can exist such disparity between religious institutional authority and other Muslims in Manchester that one could conceptualise them as *two* “radically opposed” public spheres, the British Islamic and the British South Asian,⁶⁷³ as Pnina Werbner has done. The former is characterised by conservatism, orthodoxy and exclusivity, situated in the *masājid*, while in contrast the latter is described as hybrid, impure and socially inclusive,⁶⁷⁴ precisely *outside* of the *masājid* in clubs, discos, and the artistic products of a “new wave” of South Asian intellectuals.⁶⁷⁵ The homogeneity of these spheres and their dichotomous portrayal has been contested by McLoughlin and John Zavos, affirming the dynamic and situational hybridity of lived religion.⁶⁷⁶ Ron Geaves,⁶⁷⁷ Sadek Hamid,⁶⁷⁸ and Muzamil Khan⁶⁷⁹ have also variously noted how younger generations of Muslims have felt excluded by the *masājid*, yet are committed to their Islam. This is not limited to Muslims, with Jasjit Singh observing the same of British Sikhs in their gurdwaras.⁶⁸⁰ However, it nevertheless

⁶⁷² Anonymous commenter in Chief Supt Eric Hewitt, “Unite to beat race thugs,” *Oldham Chronicle*, 01/02/2001, p. 4.

⁶⁷³ Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas,” p. 889.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 898-899.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 898.

⁶⁷⁶ McLoughlin and Zavos, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁶⁷⁷ Geaves, *Sectarian Influences Within Islam in Britain*, p. 68.

⁶⁷⁸ Hamid, “British Muslim Young People: Facts, Features and Religious Trends,” p. 257.

⁶⁷⁹ Khan, “Devotional Islam in Kashmir and the British Diaspora,” p. 163.

⁶⁸⁰ Jasjit Singh, “Keeping the faith: reflections on religious nurture among young British Sikhs,” *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 33:3 (2012), pp. 369-383, pp. 380-381. Accessed 7th August, 2020.

demonstrates that Muslims in Britain are not encompassed by *masjid* or *maslak*, and can at times be positioned in radical opposition to them.

Ustādh's statement, that "the '*Ulemā* have lost control, now the public is affecting the '*Ulemā*,'"⁶⁸¹ spoke of more than opposition or indifference. On the contrary, it suggested hegemonic contestations with the displacement of the '*Ulemā*, and their subsequent adaptation to the collective will of "the public", whatever this was meant to entail. Considering what I have outlined, it is questionable whether the '*Ulemā* ever maintained control in Manchester. While the singular "essence" of community is evoked by leaders to mobilise their constituencies,⁶⁸² this is a "fictive unity" in answer to the administrative demands of local authorities for communities to be represented as a corporate unity by select authoritative individuals and institutions.⁶⁸³ It belies the frequent contestations for hegemony which inform the shape of Muslim communities in Manchester. Werbner identifies three political arenas, each with their own discursively constituted communities of which the religious community, comprised of multiple contesting Islamic religious approaches and represented by the *masjid*, is only one. Alongside this was the secular national community, represented by the Pakistani Community Centre, and the ethnic minority community represented by the Race Sub-Committee, all with their own authoritative representatives, ideological and political orientations.⁶⁸⁴ In this, no single

⁶⁸¹ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

⁶⁸² Seán McLoughlin, "'A-part of the community'? The Politics of Representation and a Muslim School's Application for State Funding," *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science and Research*, 11:4 (1998), pp. 451-470, p. 456. Accessed 7th December, 2020.

⁶⁸³ Pnina Werbner, "The Fiction of Unity in Ethnic Politics: Aspects of representation and the state among British Pakistanis," in *Black and Ethnic Leaderships in Britain: The cultural dimensions of political action*, Pnina Werbner and Muhammad Anwar eds. (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 77-101, p. 79.

⁶⁸⁴ Werbner, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

institutional body, political arena or discursive sphere can possess absolute hegemony, nor can they each be regarded as representative of even their own “communities” in isolation because they are themselves comprised of multiple, complex and overlapping affiliations.

Werbner’s description of *masjid* elections attests to these entanglements, where “territorial divisions, ascriptive links, individual animosities and ideological orientations all converged in a single unifying arena, that of the ‘community’ as an embodied, multiple and complex reality.”⁶⁸⁵ Therefore, even within the arena of the *masjid* the ‘*Ulemā* do not possess complete hegemony, where they must instead navigate their own positions amidst a convoluted mesh of political, ideological, territorial and familial associations. At times, the ‘*Ulemā* have even been the object of denigration in factional disputes,⁶⁸⁶ as in those between the “pro-*maulvi*” and “anti-*maulvi*” groups at Central Mosque from the 1970s onwards.⁶⁸⁷ This considered, *Ustādh*’s observation in this context can be understood not as a novel development for the ‘*Ulemā*, but rather a more recent demonstration of the precarity of their situation which has a precedent stretching across half a century.

It follows from Werbner’s illustration that the ‘*Ulemā* do not occupy the religious arena alone, that these spheres inevitably converge even in apparent conflict, and that the ‘*Ulemā* are necessarily informed and shaped by the diverse strands of community in which they are entangled. The question of exactly how the ‘*Ulemā* are affected by what *Ustādh* called “the public” was comprehensively addressed in our interview. He described how the ‘*Ulemā*

⁶⁸⁵ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, p. 31.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

have had to soften their sectarian approach, coming to realise that “we have to live in peace and harmony, we have to move on,”⁶⁸⁸ in response to the public who want to be together.⁶⁸⁹ This has in part arisen from an aversion to the divisive implications of sectarianism for families and wider communities, with the idea that “I can only pray behind *this* imam” being increasingly perceived as belonging to an earlier, “very traditional” generation.⁶⁹⁰ As outlined previously, I have discerned this same opposition to sectarian conflict at the Institute, and according to *Ustādh* even ‘*Ulemā*’ who had previously participated in such polemics regarded what they had done to be “very wrong” in retrospect.⁶⁹¹

With ‘*Ulemā*’ of earlier generations debating for the sake of their respective *maslak*, *masājid* proliferated on the basis of sectarian lines, and families in turn confined themselves to particular places, forbidding their children to go elsewhere.⁶⁹² This was by no means a universally held sentiment, however, as the call to unity most often expressed by younger generations now can be seen as an echo of earlier sentiments. Those of Central Mosque’s anti-*maulvi* faction who argued for the openness of the *masjid* as a central *masjid*, irrespective of specific traditions,⁶⁹³ is one such case in point. *Allāma* also alludes to earlier generations being less aware of *maslak* differences thirty to forty years ago too,⁶⁹⁴ suggesting that the sectarian contestations of the ‘*Ulemā*’ did not in every instance bring their communities along. What followed this period of conflict and proselytization

⁶⁸⁸ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*

⁶⁹³ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁹⁴ *Allāma*, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

for the *'Ulemā*, *Ustādh* explained, was a process of reflection, accommodation and adaptation to “the outside world,” the “Western world,” and the pressures of the public,⁶⁹⁵ comprised (and constitutive) of so many worlds itself.

Ustādh argued that this process of re-evaluation was facilitated by the transition of the *'Ulemā* into multicultural, multi-religious British society which in turn forced them to engage with each other beyond *maslak* differences which had otherwise kept them apart. “Back home they could dictate who to meet, who not to meet, who to visit, who not to visit... Over here they didn't have that authority, therefore they had to mingle,”⁶⁹⁶ *Ustādh* told me, explaining that their hegemonic displacement outside of the subcontinent necessitated dialogue with each other. This has been in large part facilitated by the need to mobilise civically as *masjid* and community leaders, perceived by local government authorities to represent the interests of their congregants. “Now let's suppose Manchester Council has organised a meeting between all the *masājīd*, so then they exchange views, they exchange numbers,” and in this way, “they *had* to meet, they *had* to move on.”⁶⁹⁷ This statement that local government had effectively enabled a form of lasting cross-*maslak* cohesion, and more, that this had led to a process of reflection and reconstruction for the *'Ulemā* who participated in these local government processes, was surprising to me. It attested to the extent of entanglement which I had up until then not entirely considered.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

State engagement with Muslim organisations in Britain stretches back to 1970 with various bodies emerging since, all asserting representative legitimacy, and although New Labour's communitarian approach to "civic renewal" encapsulated this engagement, it drew on a long established precedent.⁶⁹⁸ Yet most of these initiatives have been divided according to sectarian affiliation, from Saudi-linked Wahhabi organisations such as the Council of Mosques in the UK and Eire to the Sufi Muslim Council.⁶⁹⁹ With the exception of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) no national body has been able to transcend their sectarian particularities, and even with the MCB there has been limited success in representing Barelvi and other Sufi-Sunni Muslims, who have critiqued it regarding this.⁷⁰⁰ Philip Lewis⁷⁰¹ and McLoughlin⁷⁰² have referred to the BCM and its stated concern to move beyond sectarianism as a notable exception, yet this is crucially *not* led by the '*Ulema*. While such organisations are generally comprised of 'lay' and "reformist Islamist" leaderships,⁷⁰³ the '*Ulema* have been described by McLoughlin,⁷⁰⁴ Lewis,⁷⁰⁵ and Jonathan Birt⁷⁰⁶ as historically tending towards "isolationism" in their relationship to wider society and the State. What my correspondence with *Ustādh* demonstrates, however, is that at least on the *local* level '*Ulemā* are endeavouring to bridge these divisions in Manchester. While this has not effected any amendments to the *fatāwa* pertaining to other *masālik*, *Ustādh* says, positions prohibiting associating with or praying behind imams belonging to

⁶⁹⁸ McLoughlin, "The State, New Muslim Leaderships and Islam as a Resource for Public Engagement," p. 58.

⁶⁹⁹ Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain*, pp. 109-110.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷⁰¹ Lewis, *Islamic Britain*, pp. 143-172.

⁷⁰² McLoughlin, "Mosques and the Public Space," p. 1048.

⁷⁰³ McLoughlin, "The State, New Muslim Leaderships and Islam as a Resource for Public Engagement," pp. 58-60.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷⁰⁵ Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity Among British Muslims: Second Edition* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2002), p. 219.

⁷⁰⁶ Birt, "Locating the British *Imam*," p. 184.

alternative groups have been de-emphasised for the sake of unity.⁷⁰⁷ This has been in response to a convergence of pressures felt by these *'Ulemā*, from members of this “public” who have too often believed them to be “in their little bubble,”⁷⁰⁸ and from local government initiatives towards civic engagement and community cohesion.

The event which most exemplified this overarching tendency towards unity was, according to *Ustādh*, the debate held at another nearby *masjid* over the moon-sighting, which would signal *Eid* and the end of Ramadan that year, in 2017. Disputes over which moon-sighting is valid and exactly when Ramadan is due to end is an annual occurrence, usually subject to the deliberations of the *'Ulemā*. Different *masājid* instruct their communities to celebrate *Eid* on different days depending upon the lunar calculations employed and upon which countries' sightings they consider to be valid. What made 2017 exceptional was that “the public” was accorded the authority to decide when *Eid* was to be celebrated, having listened to both sides of the debate, and subjected the decision to a vote.⁷⁰⁹ *Ustādh* reflected that “strictly speaking it's not *jā'iz* (valid) but they [the *'Ulemā*] had to because there was no result,”⁷¹⁰ explaining that the questionable legitimacy of the decision was made *secondary* to the collective will of “the public” who had voted to the contrary. Here, in this “Western” context, the traditional means of resolving scholarly disputes through debate had not been wholly substituted, but it had been subordinated to the now more authoritative democratic process, a voting “public” exercising their civic powers.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

This process is informed not only by reasoned engagement with both sides of the scholarly debate, but also by more practical concerns such as pre-booked *Eid* festivities,⁷¹¹ and even Muslim business owners setting the times themselves. *Ustādh* recounts a conversation with a number of such business owners who, in his words, promised that if ‘*Ulemā* could not come to a decision then “we will make the decisions, and we will make the *sehri* times, and we will publish it and hand it to every person. The ‘*Ulemā* can stay in their little bubble and keep their strict opinions to themselves, we aint having none of it.”⁷¹² This “bubble” is perceived to be far removed from the practical realities of work commitments and holiday arrangements, excluding the voices of many, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who demand consensus. It is further reflective of a sentiment shared by Bradford’s younger Muslim businessmen, as reported by McLoughlin, many of whom perceive *masjid* committees to be “introverted and unproductive.”⁷¹³ Here, as with the discursive arenas outlined by Werbner, the voices of the ‘*Ulemā* are one among many and do not constitute the sole authority on religious matters pertaining to the community as a whole, with business owners asserting their authority too. However, what distinguishes this instance from the Central Mosque elections in Werbner’s study is that this moon-sighting debate was described as a dispute between the ‘*Ulemā* and “the public” as a whole, an entity not isolable to any arena, faction, or authoritative body.

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

⁷¹² Ibid.

⁷¹³ McLoughlin, “Mosques and the Public Space,” p. 1059.

What is the public?

From my conversations with *Ustādh* “the public” seemed almost intangible. It was not synonymous with the *‘Ulemā*, indeed the *‘Ulemā* had to adapt to it, but neither was it to be conflated with any other authoritative figures, like business owners. As with Werbner’s definition of diaspora, there is no centralised command structure, and the question of who owns “the public” is, as with diaspora, internally contested with a multiplicity of opinions, institutions and ways of being regarded as more or less representative of the whole.⁷¹⁴ Furthermore, even parameters demarcating internal from external are situationally drawn. The *‘Ulemā* in dialogue at a Manchester Council meeting belong to “the public” in that instance, while in moon-sighting disputes at a *masjid* they are at odds with it. This is again reminiscent of Werbner’s description of diaspora, where multiple identities are situationally subsumed under single collective identities or kept apart,⁷¹⁵ with “the public” here being as numerous as the contexts in which it is evoked.

It was following my conversation with *Ustādh* and through subsequent observations elsewhere that I became gradually aware of the heterogeneity of “the public”, and that it is a public in process. This public nevertheless retains its singularity, and does not dissolve into a multiplicity of “publics”. As Werbner describes diaspora, it is characterised less by a set of particular characteristics, located in specific places and given voice by certain authoritative individuals, and more by an orientation and a sense of co-responsibility.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁴ Pnina Werbner, “The place which is diaspora: Citizenship, religion and gender in the making of chaotic transnationalism,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28:1 (2002), pp. 119-133, p. 123. Accessed 26th September, 2016.

⁷¹⁵ Werbner, “The place which is diaspora,” p. 123.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

This is applicable to the Muslim Public that I am describing here too, though the orientation which I observed was chiefly towards the UK, more specifically Manchester, and concerned with the immediate needs of this contemporary, local context. This contrasts with Werbner's diasporic public, oriented more towards an idealised place and past, whether in the subcontinent or the Hijaz, rather than one's immediate locality.⁷¹⁷ This orientation, characterised by community cohesion and civic engagement, is certainly undergirded by references to the lives of the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba*, but this hearkening back is utilised as a means of going forward, of making sense of and laying claim to where Muslims are now. This orientation is not only coupled with a sense of co-responsibility, but it is fundamentally informed and shaped by it too. As *Ustādh* explained, Muslims have become increasingly aware that they are a minority, and with this has come a felt need, a felt responsibility, to “focus on what's common rather than what divides.”⁷¹⁸ Only through this, it is argued, can Muslims affirm “real” Islam in Manchester, and thus assert their belonging to it. To describe the Muslim Public in the various ways it manifests throughout the city is to tell a story of how a Medina is made out of Manchester.

Given the heterogeneity of the Muslim Public, the question of exactly *how* this story is told, where it is told, and to an extent who is telling it *best*, is in part a matter of deliberation. The plurality of discursive arenas and of national Muslim organisations as previously outlined attests to this, along with the moon-sighting disputes as described by *Ustādh*. In this, the contemporary call for cohesion was necessarily preceded by collective expressions of difference. As *Ustādh* recounts the beginnings of this process from its

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

⁷¹⁸ *Ustādh*, interview, South Manchester Madrasa.

earliest phases in the formation of the Barelvī and Deobandī *masālik*, “information was getting into every man’s hand..., then grouping systems happened.”⁷¹⁹ It follows here, according to a deliberative understanding of the public, that it is a space of argument and contestation between individuals,⁷²⁰ comprised of a multiplicity of associations, traditions and ways of being, with only fleeting and ephemeral solidarities.⁷²¹

However, my conversation with *Ustādh* and subsequent observations suggests that the orientation towards unity, imbued with a sense of co-responsibility and expressed through a commitment to civic engagement, directs and regulates this deliberative process towards solidarity. As Charles Hirschkind argues in his outline of the counterpublic, deliberation and discipline are thoroughly interdependent,⁷²² with both processes informing the constitution of a single public, albeit unstable and ongoing. In this, the notion of the public retains its singularity here because it is through such deliberation, not despite it, that the Muslim Public is made situationally manifest. These divergent deliberative strands, coalescing through a common orientation, are brought into uneasy alignment through regulating discursive and affective processes which configure the parameters of the Muslim Public, situationally informing its shape and direction. The contemporary situation, “where we are today,”⁷²³ understood to be one of both division and a collective yearning for unity, is therefore the outcome of a process of objectification and subsequent deliberation, carrying with it the potential for both contestation and cohesion.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 92.

⁷²¹ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, p. 63.

⁷²² Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape*, p. 93.

⁷²³ *Fiqh* Class, South Manchester Madrasa, 21/02/2018.

The Public in the *masjid*

Throughout my observations the *masājid* were sites of both deliberation and discipline, contestation and cohesion, in which the Muslim Public became situationally manifest in divergent ways, at times in alignment with the *masājid* and at times in opposition. Central Mosque One and Central Mosque Two, both self-consciously central, *jāmi' masājid* in Rusholme, were exemplary cases in this regard. Interviewing Imam Bilal of Central Mosque One, he told me that “people have seen this place as being a central hub for Sunni Islam in the North West.”⁷²⁴ This has been largely due to the aesthetic of the *masjid* itself and its physical size which has accorded it an air of authority, of centrality and representativeness, of being “the *markaz*, the centre of Sunni-ism in the North West.”⁷²⁵

Outside the *masjid* is well adorned, with one big minaret for aesthetic purposes, a green dome, and a green arabesque railing lining the wall which encloses both the *masjid* and its large car park. Inside, it has a large main hall with an intricately patterned carpet, a chandelier, a purpose-built prayer niche (*mehrāb*) and pulpit (*minbar*), and inscriptions lining the walls detailing verses from the *Qur'ān* and the names of the Prophet's *Ṣaḥāba*. This main hall is the focal point of the *masjid*, being primarily utilised for congregational prayers, and catering for *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah* in particular, with adjoining smaller halls being used for classes at other times during the week when they are not otherwise filled on Fridays.⁷²⁶ During the mosque open day it was the main hall in which all visitors gathered,

⁷²⁴ Imam Bilal, interview, Central Mosque One.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Field Entry One, Central Mosque One, 30/10/17.

and Imam Bilal remarked with pride that “we take care of the *masjid*,” responding to one critique on the perceived extravagance of the chandelier that it is a mark of this “very Mancunian mosque” and a means of beautifying it.⁷²⁷ In this, this “very Mancunian mosque” serves as a physical, material representation of the Muslim community in Manchester. It is a visible expression of “the community”, its physical establishment being the result of continuous material investment, corporately owned by the community and therefore corporately expressive of it. The representative hegemony which it enjoys as *the* central religious arena, noted by Werbner in 2002,⁷²⁸ arguably remains the case at the time of writing, although this representativeness is the result of concerted effort, not as lasting nor as tangible as the physical makeup of the *masjid* itself.

Some *masājid* in Britain have variously become multi-functional community centres, as observed by McLoughlin in Bradford,⁷²⁹ and others have been formally established as such, with Oldham’s Institute being a case in point.⁷³⁰ However, upon my initial observation the predominant impression I received of Central Mosque One was one of both spaciousness and emptiness. It is adjacent to Wilmslow road, which is a hub of constant activity for the diverse South Asian, Kurdish, Somali and Arab Muslims who live in and pass through this area. Yet in spite of its centrality, the *masjid* itself is typically not reflective of this diverse activity throughout the week. As Imam Bilal himself notes during our interview, “you can’t just rely on it to be a *markaz* in the physical form,”⁷³¹ there must

⁷²⁷ Mosque Open Day, Central Mosque One, 26/01/18.

⁷²⁸ Werbner, *Imagined Diasporas Among Manchester Muslims*, p. 29.

⁷²⁹ McLoughlin, “Mosques and the Public Space,” p. 1048.

⁷³⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

⁷³¹ Imam Bilal, interview, Central Mosque One.

be output too, and this was an oft-repeated sentiment throughout my observations. I first observed this concerted effort to affirm the centrality of the *masjid* beyond bricks and mortar at their initial open day meeting, where the focus here was on the *masjid* as the centre for “love based outreach,” for correcting people’s perceptions, and for inviting people to Islam.⁷³² The need to really capitalise on the space was raised again, and there was a shared sentiment expressed by all in attendance that the *masjid could* actualise its potential as the centre of the community if only the space could be effectively utilised.

On the open day itself the imam described the *masjid* as “a beautiful community hub,” the *jāmi’ masjid* which gathers the community together.⁷³³ On this occasion predominantly non-Muslims were in attendance, exceeding no more than twenty people, along with half as many Muslims including myself, a handful of *masjid* volunteers and committee members, and a local Muslim councillor. As we all gathered in a circle around him in the main hall as he said this I considered how and whether the community was truly gathered together here. Imam Bilal went on to speak about the Manchester Arena bombing, how “we” put out a “reassurance message,” and other committee members reiterated that Muslims are decent, law-abiding citizens.⁷³⁴ The Muslim councillor present also acknowledged a need to deal with “contemporary issues,” whether they be environmentalism or terrorism, and reassured attendees that “we’re dealing with it.”⁷³⁵ In this instance, the *masjid* became a platform expressing the voice of “the community” in microcosm, where Imam Bilal, the committee members and the councillor constituted the

⁷³² Friday *Halaqa*, Central Mosque One, 19/01/18.

⁷³³ Mosque Open Day, Central Mosque One, 26/01/18.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

Muslim Public engaging with wider society, gathered in a circle in the *jāmi'*, that which gathers. Yet, again here it was the spaciousness and relative emptiness of the main hall, otherwise densely packed on Fridays, which predominated for me. Inasmuch as this story of the community was being told, I could not help but feel that those to whom it pertained were largely absent, that it was a story told on our behalf. The Muslim Public as a physical, tangible entity was not present here, though during *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah* the *masjid* would become a locus for it every week, situationally filling the space and according the *masjid* the authority to speak for it.

The *masjid* is not only linguistically the place of *sujūd*, prostration, it is also practically speaking the place of *jamā'ah*, variously defined as the group, the collective, the congregation, and even broadly as the community. Just as the *jamā'ah* is related to *jāmi'*, with the former being the gathering and the latter being that which gathers, the congregation or community of Muslims is intimately bound up with the *masjid* as the site of gathering. This relationship is most apparent specifically on the day of *Jum'ah*, literally the day of congregation, where Muslims gather in the *masjid* for *Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah*. In stark contrast to my experience of Central Mosque One on any other day of the week, with silence reverberating louder than sound, on Fridays it *becomes* the *jāmi' masjid*, situationally gathering the Muslims, and from the Arabic sermon (*khutba*) through to the last *salām* all act in unison behind the imam. To me it was on these days specifically that the *masjid* seemed to manifest the Muslim Public, to articulate its voice and speak on its behalf.

One noteworthy instance of this was when Imam Bilal devoted his sermon to addressing proposed government legislation to introduce sex education to children as young as four, expressing his disapproval and encouraging congregants to be civically engaged and to oppose this legislation. As with the open day, Imam Bilal spoke on behalf of the *jamā'ah*, talking about “our” Islamic tradition, with “our” and “we” being juxtaposed with what “they,” the government, wanted to implement.⁷³⁶ Yet here, in contrast, Imam Bilal was addressing a full hall. His words carried with them the weight of the congregation, and in this he was making a statement not merely about who “we” are at Central Mosque One, but more about who “we” the Muslim community are, with the presence of the *jamā'ah* bearing visible testament to this. In this instance, the story of the Muslim Public was articulated by Imam Bilal as an embattled minority, comprised of Muslims but crucially citizens too who could, facilitated by *their masjid*, exercise their civic responsibilities in combatting harmful government legislation.⁷³⁷ The *masjid*, with Imam Bilal as its spokesman, became situationally the narrator of the Muslim Public, mobilising them under one voice, facilitating their civic engagement, and containing them within the parameters of their walls. To be part of “the community” here was not only to civically combat this legislation, it was to do so *through* the *masjid* as intermediary. To be part of the Muslim Public on that day was to be part of the *masjid*, and both spoke with one and the same voice.

Throughout my interview with Imam Bilal, when describing the *jamā'ah* in attendance every Friday we kept returning to the word, “plethora”, a plethora of cultures, of

⁷³⁶ *Jum'ah*, Central Mosque One, 09/02/18.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*

ethnicities, of opinions and colours.⁷³⁸ Imam Bilal described this ability to speak with one voice, or at least to appear to speak, amidst and on behalf of this “plethora”, as “a real skill,”⁷³⁹ and this conscious effort to manage diversity was more apparent at some times than at others. During a *Jum’ah* that coincided with the death anniversary (*‘Urs*) of Abu-Bakr as-Siddīq, Imam Bilal addressed the Urdu part of his *khutba* to the issue of *afzalīyyat*, the superiority of Abu-Bakr over other *Ṣaḥāba*. This had in the past proven to be a slightly divisive point of contention among some from the older predominantly Urdu-speaking generations in attendance,⁷⁴⁰ and was therefore a point to which they could relate. In contrast, whilst speaking in English Imam Bilal related the *‘Urs* to the precautionary, pre-emptive sacrifice that Abu-Bakr made in service to the Prophet in the Cave of Thawr. He explained that Muslims should learn from this example now in times of difficulty, actively serving their communities. At the time, the “punish a Muslim day” leaflet was in circulation, with leaflets advocating extreme violence against Muslims on the 3rd of April being put through people’s doors. Imam Bilal emphasised that Muslims should take precautions in protecting the community, as Abu-Bakr took precautions in serving the Prophet.⁷⁴¹

Again, this *khutba* was concerned with mobilisation, encouraging active civic engagement with the *masjid* as the focal point and mediating agent between “the community” and local authorities.⁷⁴² Yet, this was primarily directed at the wider congregation, speaking of a

⁷³⁸ Imam Bilal, interview, Central Mosque One.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Anecdotal point. This is a point of distinction between attendees at another local *masjid* and Central Mosque One, though not as contentious as it was from the late 20th-early 21st century.

⁷⁴¹ *Jum’ah*, Central Mosque One, 16/03/18.

⁷⁴² Ibid.

common matter affecting the whole, in the common language that most Mancunian Muslims could understand. Diversity was acknowledged and catered for in part with the nod in Urdu towards past contentions deemed significant to some, but this was not for the wider body of Muslims, it was not for the Muslim Public and did not pertain to the Public good, which was otherwise addressed in English. A common story was being articulated once more here, of a pre-cautious Muslim Public actively defending their community together and exercising their civic responsibilities, with the *masjid* as the platform of and channel for their collective voice. As a second-generation Pakistani both born and raised in Manchester and schooled in the Islamic sciences, firstly under his father and subsequently in multiple *madāris* in the UK and Egypt, Imam Bilal became a representative voice born both of Manchester and Medina.

Imam Bilal occupies the central role in this story, indeed in each of the cases I have outlined here he has been the narrator. Our interview largely concerned what he had done as the imam of the *masjid*, how he had drawn on his own expertise to effect change, and how his contributions had been variously received by committee members, by *‘Ulemā*, by general congregants, and even by the media.⁷⁴³ The story of the *masjid* which I had attempted to discern in approaching this interview was essentially the story of the imam. However, this was entangled in multiple narratives stretching beyond his person, granting insight into the various facets which comprised “the community” as a whole. He attributed his approach to his sermons, endeavouring to accommodate a diverse audience, to his teachers first and foremost. He explained, “our *tarbīyat* as such has been that we have love

⁷⁴³ Imam Bilal, interview, Central Mosque One.

and respect for all and disrespect for none,” and this scholarly transmission is ultimately related back to the Prophet who would “speak to people at their level.”⁷⁴⁴ Even here, the influence of his teachers is coupled with his felt accountability to the people, and embedded in the wider discursive context of Manchester itself in which he was raised.

I reflected that this “respect for all and disrespect for none” seemed to echo similar policy statements on community cohesion and interfaith dialogue. Of course, this approach must be attributed to Imam Bilal’s teachers, but it is crucially articulated in this wider societal context in which Islam occupies a problem space. While he qualified that this was not a political statement, Imam Bilal acknowledged the need to counter a perceived “hatred culture” amidst worries expressed by government and wider society, “ensuring that we don’t do wrong by our communities.”⁷⁴⁵ Again, the exhortations of his teachers are bound up with and configured by accountability to “the people” and the wider society they occupy, shot through with multiple concerns and myriad stories beyond the *madrasa* itself. His consideration of the people extended beyond the instructions of his teachers to “really, really think long and hard about your every single word, and every single statement.”⁷⁴⁶ It was also born of his attachment to Manchester itself, of growing up as a student there, and of his wider professional experience.⁷⁴⁷ In drawing on his teachers and in being accountable to “the people” of Manchester, Imam Bilal drew on numerous narrative lines that spanned the *masjid* and the city to which it belonged, in turn entailing an approach that was as much of Manchester as it was of the *masjid*.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

Imam Bilal's story as I have outlined it thus far is comprised of various others, of his teachers stretching back to the Prophet, and of "the people", embedded in the contemporary context of Manchester itself. Imam Bilal certainly does not speak for all Mancunian Muslims here, and indeed cannot, though he has been *perceived* to do so. This constituted a tension regarding representation, in which Imam Bilal dismissed any claim to representation whilst being aware of his perceived role as spokesperson, which he occasionally felt called to fulfil. This was most markedly felt after the Arena Bombing of 2017, where he recounted how "people commended how well I've *represented* the community." He reflected that he has always intended to "use whatever opportunity we have in the media to put a positive, strong and reasonable sounding voice for the Muslims," and in our interview he did not shy away from this positive appraisal he received. I have outlined here, too, how during my observations he occupied the place of spokesman at times, endeavouring to speak on behalf of the *jamā'ah*. However, as often as he admitted to this perceived representative role he equally reiterated throughout the interview that "you can never claim to speak for "the community" if there is such a homogeneous thing."⁷⁴⁸ Indeed, he considered this to be "a really dangerous thing to do," and regarded "the spokesperson" to be a "misconstruct", a "misnomer", "a deliberate agent that the media has produced because for them that's how it works."⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

This scepticism towards such a notion, of settled religious identities and recognised figures who speak for them, speaks to the fragmentation of religious identities in the context of late modernity, prompting the question of whether representation is even possible.⁷⁵⁰ Yet, in spite of the misleading simplicity of such a story, in being available and speaking on behalf of the community to which he felt accountable Imam Bilal could make a statement about what Islam *is*, who Muslims *are*, in a way that could be seen beyond the confines of the *masjid*. This latter point, to be *seen*, was most important. Nearing the end of our interview the imam said “I don’t get wound up about the media coverage anymore like I used to because I know they have their set frames... and that the only way we can break those frames is by being seen to be doing good, not just do good but we’ve got to be visually, *seen* to be doing that.”⁷⁵¹ In effectively fulfilling the role of spokesman, Imam Bilal became an entanglement of numerous narrative lines which, in being seen, crucially reflected back into what “the community” entailed, birthing the Muslim Public from which these stories were born.

The Muslim Public as I have outlined it here is not only situationally narrated into being through the imam, but also made affectively tangible through the act of congregation itself, to the extent that both affect and discourse entwine in the constitution of a felt, storied Public. This congregation is situationally manifest in the *masjid* in the *jamā’ah*, but it is applicable to any congregation anywhere, both in the *masjid* and outside of it. Imam Bilal’s *khutba* on sex education and civic engagement certainly told a story about who “we” are,

⁷⁵⁰ John Zavos, “Bin Laden is one of us! Representations of religious identity at the Parliament of the World’s Religions,” *Culture and Religion*, 9:1 (2008), pp. 45-61, p. 57. Accessed 19th April, 2016.

⁷⁵¹ Imam Bilal, interview, Central Mosque One.

but even prior to this, upon simply entering the main hall and sitting amidst the congregants, I *felt* part of the *jamā'ah* before even the call to prayer. As I experienced at both Central Mosque Two and the Institute, Central Mosque One was also a sanctified enclave set apart demarcating “us”, those in attendance, from “people out there” outside of the *masjid*, outside of the community. In this we were enclosed in what we were, separated from what we were not by the enclosure of the *masjid* itself and the discursive-affective flows which inscribed the space and enveloped “us” inside from “them” outside. I have described the cultivation of such flows at the Institute, Central Mosque Two and elsewhere in the context of the *majlis*, and this process is applicable to my *Jum'ah* observations at Central Mosque One too. However, as the inside is set apart from the outside so too are both entangled even in the act of separation, to the extent that Manchester is ever spilling into the *masjid*.

I take my shoes off as I enter the *masjid* and by this embodied act I draw a map of the world.⁷⁵² This is first and foremost a map distinguishing the sacred and the profane, in that one is not permitted to enter the *masjid* wearing shoes due to the sanctity of the space as the *masjid*, literally a place of prostration. Beyond this, it is also differentiating a place of comfort from a place of discomfort, as one walks from concrete necessitating footwear to a carpeted hall in which shoes are not only prohibited but physically unnecessary. For me, this would also often resonate with the same homeliness that I would feel as I entered my own front door, taking my shoes off as I enter as is common in many Muslim households. I felt at home in the *masjid* in this way, entering into a space both special, marked out and

⁷⁵² Schaefer, *Religious Affects*, p. 5.

sacralised, but simultaneously familiar too. Yet this was not a step in isolation, it was a process that I had repeated numerous times over many weeks for many years, and was especially more frequent during my research. It was a cultivated familiarity, the gradual culmination of multiple footprints over the same threshold by which a *masjid* became *the masjid*, and the *masjid* became *my masjid*. This step could also be traced back along a well-trodden path beyond to Rusholme, where in the past I and my friends would often eat, through to Oxford Road where I studied. In this, the step into the *masjid* was part of multiple interwoven trails denoting the sacred, the homely and the everyday, all of which extend into the *masjid* even in this very act of demarcation. These entwining threads constituted a single entanglement, itself bound up with numerous others in the act of congregation, all of which encompassed both *masjid* and Manchester.

Ṣalāt al-Jum'ah begins after the formal Arabic *khutba*, and before it commences everyone ensures that they are standing straight in their prayer rows, aligned and shoulder-to-shoulder with those next to them. The story of solidarity that Imam Bilal impressed upon us during his sermon is further affectively affirmed here through the proximity of bodies and the subsequent process of entrainment resulting from this, broadly disseminating these affective bonds person to person throughout the *jamā'ah*. Here as in the *majlis* this transmission is effected on the condition that one behaves accordingly, following the imam in the actions of standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting. Discourse and affect entwine again as bodies are brought into proximity and affirm affective bonds of brotherhood through stories held in common and impressed upon us by those with the authority to narrate on our behalf. At Central Mosque One most are South Asians and therefore pray according to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, with other congregants praying according

to different ways depending on their school and their respective upbringings. Further variation could be discernible if one were to enquire what supplications congregants recited during the prayer, and even greater heterogeneity might be uncovered in the supplications made after it. As such, this solidarity does not entail complete devotional uniformity.

Everyone has taken different paths to the *masjid*, all comprised of diverse trails, yet what situationally entangles them all here is not just the day of *Jum'ah* itself, nor even the acts of prayer and the particular forms these take. Crucially it is also the point of *orientation*, gathered in common behind the imam, facing the *Qibla*, the Ka'aba in Mecca, and collectively subscribing to a common story. This collective orientation also entails a collective responsibility, to follow the imam through the stations of the prayer, which in turn affectively affirms and makes tangible the singular solidarity of our community. In this, the story of the Muslim Public that Imam Bilal outlines in his sermon, characterised by cohesion, civic engagement, and collective mobilisation facilitated by the *masjid*, is supplemented by the *jamā'ah*, gathered in prayer and facing a common direction behind the imam. Both the sermon and the prayer to follow bring the Prophetic past into correspondence with the contemporary context of Manchester itself, expressing both discursively and affectively a Muslim Public that is at once self-consciously Muslim and Mancunian.

I have described the discursive-affective expression of the Muslim Public at Central Mosque One as a common story of cohesion and civic engagement, oriented both towards the Prophet and to Manchester, articulated by the imam and expressed in the *jamā'ah*. A

different facet of this Public is also manifest at the daily *ifṭār* at Central Mosque Two, framed less by sermons and more by the individual reflections of attendees, made affectively tangible through material flows of food, gestures of giving and service. Central Mosque Two has at times been perceived to be “the Bengali mosque”, with the committee comprised at least predominantly of Sylhetis,⁷⁵³ and its founders belonging to the predominantly Sylheti *Fultolī ṭarīqa*. Central Mosque Two became officially established in 1975 in part due to disagreement between committee members of Central Mosque One over tensions and the subsequent war between what was then East and West Pakistan, with Bangladeshi members leaving to form their own *masjid*.⁷⁵⁴ Devotionally too, in the *majālis* held every Monday and Thursday Arabic litanies were interspersed with Sylheti supplications, led by Sylheti *Sheyūkh* and comprised largely of Sylheti attendees. While many regular attenders could be described broadly as Sufi-Sunni Muslims, Imam Ejaz explained how the *masjid* is open to everyone,⁷⁵⁵ and I was reminded how here, “everyone just does their thing.” In this, I discerned over the course of my observations how Sylhetis and Bengalis, regardless of *manhaj*, felt that Central Mosque Two was “their” *masjid*, a *masjid* belonging to the Bangladeshi Muslim community of Manchester. However, through attending *ifṭār* here and in my conversations with Imam Ejaz I observed how this openness and diversity extended beyond the Bangladeshi community and came to encompass the wider demographic of Rusholme too. It was not just “the Bengali mosque”, rather it became a “multicultural centre” and an expression of the Muslim Public in microcosm, encapsulated in the *masjid*.

⁷⁵³ Imam Ejaz, interview, Central Mosque Two.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

It was perhaps in light of their being perceived to be “the Bengali mosque” that Imam Ejaz endeavoured to emphasise the openness of Central Mosque Two, particularly at *Jum’āh* and during Ramadan. He described how the *masjid* often organised events with *Sheyūkh* of multiple ethnicities, from White British converts, to West Africans, through to Yemenis among others. He attributed this international focus both to Fultolī Saheb, who had encouraged his *murīds* to take the good from different *masālik* and to not regard any Muslim as a disbeliever, and to the *Sheyūkh* of the *Bā-‘Alawī ṭarīqa* who argued the same.⁷⁵⁶ This realisation of commonality between the *Sheyūkh* of Yemen and Sylhet crucially came from Imam Ejaz’s own migration to Britain, and it reminded me again of how old associations are reconfigured in novel contexts as they become translocal. This acknowledgement of both plurality and commonality led to its expression in the *masjid* itself through the hosting of multiple *Sheyūkh* from different *ṭuruq*, which in turn attracted more diverse congregations outside of *Jum’āh* and *iftār* beyond regular Sylheti attendees. This was not an entirely novel development, Imam Ejaz described how the *masjid* has always been open. Yet, it did frame this plurality and inclusivity within a new narrative context, of unity within diversity and the universality of *Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l Jamā’ah*, extending beyond the imaginary to the *majālis* themselves. As I outlined in Chapter Four, both stories of community, the *Fultolī* Sylheti and the *Bā-‘Alawī* contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist, were affectively and discursively narrated situationally and at times simultaneously at the Central Mosque Two *majālis*. In my conversation with Imam Ejaz, both entwining strands are accounted for. Consistent with this approach, and in response to

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

the contention that Central Mosque Two is the Bengali *masjid* he responds, “this is a *masjid* of Allah... we treat them all as brothers, and this is how it should be.”⁷⁵⁷

This *masjid* of Allah, universal and all-encompassing, becomes in the context of community outreach a “multicultural centre” too,⁷⁵⁸ as Imam Ejaz described it in a preparatory meeting for the upcoming community *iftār*. As at Central Mosque One, I observed that the purpose of this community *iftār* was to display diversity, to affirm and establish the *masjid* as a focal point for and representation of the local community, comprised not just of Bengalis nor even of Muslims, but of non-Muslims too. Its official representativeness is bolstered further through the attendance of local councillors and inter-faith representatives, which Imam Ejaz positively recounts from previous years.⁷⁵⁹ Yet this is contested when, after the meeting, one of the attendees remarks that this cannot really be called a community *iftār* given that most people do not know about it, with most of the congregation unaware of it and absent from any discussion pertaining to it.⁷⁶⁰ This contention spoke of a similar observation at Central Mosque One where this story of the *masjid* as a “community hub”, reflective of Mancunian cultural diversity and interfaith harmony, is situationally employed for a predominantly non-Muslim audience. It was a story of community that did not seem to carry “the community” along with it and in spite of representatives of “the Public” in attendance, it seemed absent of the Public itself.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ Community *Iftār* Meeting, Central Mosque Two, 16/05/18.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

I found this story to be more tangibly expressed during the daily *iftārs*. Here, as soon as I entered the *masjid* I was confronted with rows of attendees gathered to open the fast, extending out from the side hall through to the entrance lobby, with Kurds, Arabs, Pakistanis, Somalis, Sudanese and Sylhetis among many others comprising what was, in this instance, a multicultural centre. Sitting amidst what felt like Rusholme in microcosm, bearing witness to this plurality and, more potently, audibly enveloped by the plethora of languages proliferating the soundscape, I understood when my friend remarked, “you get a real diverse feeling here at *iftār*, even more than at *Jum 'āh*.”⁷⁶¹ The food provided by the *masjid* is Bengali, and the supplications framing the opening and ending of *iftār* are a mixture of Sylheti and Arabic, in common with the weekly *dhikr* gatherings. The story of the Bangladeshi community is therefore not subsumed here by the collective mass of voices, rather it frames them. It becomes in this instance the locus of the Muslim Public, situationally articulating its own focal point in the story in the process. This is a story of diversity as I have outlined but also unity, affectively affirmed in the proximity of bodies, in the exchange of food and in the collective act of opening fast together.

The Public in Manchester

The three cases that I have presented thus far, whilst illustrating certain characteristics of the Muslim Public both in its cultivation and its content, are predominantly centred in the *masjid*. While the diverse and divergent trails which comprise this Public ultimately extend beyond into Manchester, the *masjid* has nevertheless been the point of situational convergence. Considered in isolation, this would render it akin to Werbner’s invisible

⁷⁶¹ *Iftār* Discussion, op. cit., p. 214.

diasporic public sphere,⁷⁶² situationally demarcated from wider society and contained within the *masjid*, only venturing beyond these confines in the concerted effort to be seen to be doing so. This accords with the stories narrated in Central Mosque One in particular, of the *masjid* as representative of the Muslim community and its intermediary, facilitating civic mobilisation and engagement with wider society. It maintains the division between religious and secular spheres, with the *masjid* constituting the surface differentiating the two.

However, this focus does not wholly account for what *Ustādh* told me of the Muslim Public which is born of wider society, apart from the *masjid*, sometimes in accord and sometimes at odds, and fundamentally *disrupting* the conventional divide between religious and secular space. This too was a crucial element of the Muslim Public, and I observed this more concretely at the “Street Iftar” on Oxford Road. In the previous Chapter I explored how the *iftār* cultivated a distinctively, differently religious space that was both a part of and apart from the city, expressive of the “bigger family” that the organisers sought to express and represent. Beyond this, the public doing of *Ṣalāh* also served to sacralise the otherwise secular space, devotionally affirming the presence of the Muslim Public in the public doing of Islam. Crucially this Public was visible, expressing a story familiar to that which I had heard in the *masājid*, yet doing so openly in the gaze of the non-Muslim “Other” whilst being self-consciously aware of their own otherness. The Muslim Public was objectified here in its public performance, in a way that drew in and transfigured what “the Public” conventionally entailed.

⁷⁶² Werbner, “Theorising Complex Diasporas,” p. 898.

The transition from stories of civic engagement and cohesion articulated discursively by local councillors, imams, and various other “community representatives”, to the culmination of affective auras described in the previous Chapter, was marked and punctuated by the *adhān*. The call to prayer is of course commonplace at the *masjid*, recited through loudspeakers to mark the beginning of each prayer time. However, at *ifṭār* the *adhān* for the *maghrib* prayer, designating the setting of the sun and the opening of the fast, takes on renewed significance. The relatively hushed, reflective and patient pause permeating the gathering is burst open upon its call, with abundant food and conversation to follow. This served to sanctify the food too, framed not only by the call to prayer but also by various other supplications recited both by the imam, and individually by attendees, further cultivating this aura around the food that was both discursively articulated and affectively felt.

My experience at the Ramadan Community Project was similar in this regard, although the affective intimacy was heightened here by the dimmed lighting as the sun set, in contrast to the artificial light at the *masjid* where the sunset was made less apparent. Furthermore, that the call to prayer was made more openly and publicly here rendered it an audible expression of difference, a mark of cultural identity that cut across conventional boundaries between the secular public and religious private. In being preceded by talks exhorting attendees to “encounter the other” and celebrate diversity, the *adhān* in this context became an expression of such diversity and an opportunity for encounter, a statement of what “the other” sounds like. Together with the flows of food and conversation that follow, the *adhān* here could be seen to mark a “sacred exchange across

boundaries,”⁷⁶³ boundaries between ethnicity, between Muslim and non-Muslim, and crucially between the secular public and religious private. Yet this is not intended as a situational transgression of the secular public sphere, rather it is an assertion of what the Mancunian public is meant to be. It is a statement that, in common with its close neighbour Bradford and in contrast to other European and British cities,⁷⁶⁴ there is no longer significant resistance to the public establishment of Muslim identity in Manchester, whether in landscapes or in soundscapes. Indeed, Manchester is a city in which the *adhān* is called openly.

It was equally commonplace in the *masjid* that upon initially opening the fast the *jamā’ah* would gather for *Ṣalāh* in the main hall. This was unremarkable, as the *masjid* was the place of prayer after all. However, at the Ramadan Community Project when most of the Muslim attendees walked to the side of the tent and gathered in rows on the grass to pray in *jamā’ah* shortly after the *adhān* this constituted both an affirmation of difference, and a further contestation of secular boundaries. As congregants took off their shoes and gathered behind the imam they devotionally designated and cultivated a sacred space in public. In the act of prostration this open space became sacralised, a place of prostration, a *masjid* outside of the *masjid*. In this consecrating, fundamentally *constitutive* act, the otherwise secular public sphere was transformed as the presence of the Mancunian Muslim Public was devotionally asserted.

⁷⁶³ Werbner, *Pilgrims of Love*, p. 127.

⁷⁶⁴ Charles Husband et al., *Lived Diversities: Space, Place, and Identities in the Multi-ethnic City* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2014), p. 48.

There was no intention here make an overtly political statement or to contest and lay claim to the public sphere. Most, including myself, joined the *jamā'ah* outside by the tent simply because of convenience, because they needed to pray *Ṣalāh* and that was where the prayer was being led. University buildings were closed at this time so there was little or no option but to pray outside. However, as Jeanette Jouili observes, “when Muslims visibly pray in a non-Muslim social environment, the ritual gets invested with meanings not related to the practice as such,”⁷⁶⁵ and the prayer when performed openly here becomes a public performance and signifier of otherness. Again, as with the *adhān*, this prayer is framed within an event that is about encountering the other and celebrating the diversity so characteristic of what Manchester *is*, and in this it comes to be representative of that. In this while it certainly contests and transforms dominant definitions of the public sphere,⁷⁶⁶ *Ṣalāh* at the Ramadan Community Project also becomes visibly illustrative of an alternative story of what the Mancunian public sphere looks like. It is a sphere both encompassing and informed by the Muslim Public.

Since my discussion with *Ustādh* on “the public” I had observed how it was not an isolable entity, located in any single place or synonymous with any single institution, but rather it was done situationally, in process, and was characterised by orientation. Broadly speaking this is a dual orientation, facing both the Prophetic past and the immediate needs of the present and drawing on both so as to live in a way that is at once Muhammadan and Mancunian. This turning is situationally informed by the stories which mobilise and express it, narrated by authoritative individuals who come to speak for “the community”,

⁷⁶⁵ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 157.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

with these stories themselves being comprised of diverse narrative threads arising both from “the community” and wider society. At times this turning is in common with and facilitated by the *masjid*, and just as the *jamā’ah* faces the *Qibla* and follows the imam in prayer the Muslim Public can be situationally mobilised by the imam, contained within the *masjid*. At other times the Muslim Public is opposed to the *masjid*, frustrated by the “bubble” of the *‘Ulemā* and eager to simply live practically as Muslims, attending to current realities of which the scholars seem unaware. In both instances of agreement and opposition, the orientation of the Muslim Public is crucially *towards* Manchester, and concerned with how best to live as Muslims *in* Manchester.

The Muslim Public is collectively mobilised and expressed primarily through civic engagement, and the impetus towards it. This is born of a collective sense of co-responsibility, itself arising from the objectification of Muslims as a hypervisible collective in the gaze of the non-Muslim “Other”. This in turn has prompted the need to “stick together,” and to address misconceptions through visible civic engagement. These aspects form the discursive milieu out of which the Muslim Public is constituted. This Public is also made affectively tangible through collective acts of communal affirmation, whether it be a debate forum presided over by the *‘Ulemā*, *Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah* or a community *iftār*. The proximity of bodies, the exchange of food, and the provision of service all serve to affectively affirm what this Muslim Public feels like, with these material and affective flows being configured by the stories describing what this Public entails. These discursive-affective currents converge in *masājid* but extend beyond them, and in the open affirmation of the Muslim Public *outside* these spaces the otherwise secular public sphere comes to be sacralised and transformed too. In this, the public affirmation of who Muslims *are* makes a

transformative statement about what Manchester *is*, with Islam and Manchester fundamentally entwined in the expression of the Muslim Public.

Self and society

The Muslim Public as I have described it is certainly not an isolable entity, but nor is it all encompassing. It is expressed in process situationally, and it is entered into through participation. When I attended the open *ifṭār* with the Ramadan Community Project not every Muslim stood to join the *jamā'ah*, it required a certain degree of self-confidence to “confront the Other’s gaze,”⁷⁶⁷ and to open oneself to this encounter. The open performance of *Ṣalāh* in this context could thus not only be perceived as an affirmation of collective identity, but also a self-confident affirmation of individual identity, of Muslim Selfhood. Indeed, the public affirmation of “who we are” here was fundamentally predicated upon “who *I* am”. Here I focus on what this Muslim Selfhood entails and how it is done. It is a Self objectified in the gaze of the “Other”, arising in part out of a wider societal context in which Islam and Muslims occupy a problem space. It is also a Self built through a pedagogical emphasis on self-cultivation, introspection and individual enquiry. In common with the Public sense of co-responsibility the Muslim Self is also self-responsible, and the completion of self-cultivation is in its implementation through actions that benefit others, both Muslim and non-Muslim. In this, self-responsibility informs co-responsibility and in its practical implementation, self-cultivation is understood to actualise a common good.

⁷⁶⁷ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 156.

The stories informing this process of self-making are, as I have touched upon previously, thoroughly grounded in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Yet, in bringing the Prophetic past into the present these stories become entangled in contemporary liberal secular stories too, about the sovereign individual and the socially conscious citizen, invested in both Self and Society. At times I observed how this narrative correspondence is consciously encouraged and impressed upon Muslims by *Sheykh* and *'Ulemā*, while at other times devotional acts that are otherwise commonplace undergo a process of re-signification in novel contexts marked by the “Other’s” gaze. As with the Muslim Public that is both Muslim and Mancunian, the Muslim Self too constitutes an entanglement of stories that draw on both Islamic and liberal secular discursive traditions in a manner that evades attempts at demarcation. This interwoven process binds Self and Society together in their very composition, and I explore here too how they are both fundamentally enmeshed.

Throughout my observations exhortations to self-cultivation were commonplace, and events were often framed by this encouragement to look inwards. This was an encouragement to align ourselves with the Prophetic example, and was itself drawing on the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. At the Central Mosque Two *majlis*, *Shaykh* Danyal’s talk begins with a question, “what intentions are we showing? Intentions of change? Intentions of moving towards him?”⁷⁶⁸ This was echoed in a later talk at Central Mosque Two where the visiting *Shaykh* again asks, “what are your intentions? Actions are according to

⁷⁶⁸ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

intentions!”⁷⁶⁹ This exhortation to introspection is not a novel phenomenon for Muslims, it is founded upon the Prophetic reminder to which the *Shaykh* refers that “actions are according to intentions.” It manifests in the oft-quoted saying, “whoever knows himself knows his Lord,” and the *Qur’ān* repeatedly encourages us to reflect upon the signs within our own selves.⁷⁷⁰ Indeed, Shahab Ahmed effectively demonstrates how the way Islam is *done*, how one engages with the Revelation and the sum of all it contains, is and has always been fundamentally bound up with processes of self-interrogation, contemplation, affirmation, articulation and action.⁷⁷¹ This is discernible from the lofty heights of philosophical speculation, where both Ibn Sīna (980-1037 C.E.) and Suhrawārdī (1154-1191 C.E.) essentially argue that self-awareness *is* existence,⁷⁷² through to the more pervasive vernacular discourses of Sufi poets like Bulleh Shāh (1680-1757 C.E.) and Rumi, who all encourage self-examination.⁷⁷³

These processes are not marginal nor confined to a particular discursive sphere that only Sufis and Scholars occupy, either presently or historically. As Ahmed affirms, they are widely disseminated “in the ears and mouths and hearts and minds of Muslims,” carried by writings both widely circulated and highly esteemed.⁷⁷⁴ Exploring closer to home the importance of self-awareness and cultivation is emphasised again, where the *Fultolī Shaykh* who presides over this later *majlis* at Central Mosque Two also tells us in Bengali to purify our hearts, to “wake up while we’re sleeping,” so as to become complete human

⁷⁶⁹ *Khatm* for Mawlana, Central Mosque Two, 26/02/18.

⁷⁷⁰ *Qur’an*, 51:20,21; 59:19.

⁷⁷¹ Ahmed, *What is Islam?* p. 330.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 331-332.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

beings.⁷⁷⁵ This applies to even more quotidian actions in the life of a Muslim such as the prayer, where its very validity is incumbent upon one's expressing their intention to pray either verbally or silently. In this, the Self as an objectified entity of which one is aware and to which one relates is not confined to modernity nor to younger generations of British-born Muslims. Rather, it is firmly grounded within Islamic discursive traditions common to all generations which stretch back through the centuries to an ultimately Prophetic precedent.

However, this Muslim orientation towards the Self was frequently framed within the "Other's" orientation towards the Muslim, as self-expression was coupled with an awareness of people "out there" and a pre-emptive counter to misconceptions that the non-Muslim might hold. During my first *majlis* at Central Mosque Two *Shaykh* Danyal approached the end of his talk, telling us that we should not be shy to be "unapologetically Muslim" in a predominantly non-Muslim society.⁷⁷⁶ As Jouili observes of her interlocutors in France and Germany, this self-awareness is not specifically modern or connected to Islamic discursive tradition, but is "simply part and parcel of the existential condition of any stigmatized minority to view itself through the gaze of the dominant Other."⁷⁷⁷ Yet in confronting the "Other" the Muslim Self is reconfigured, drawing on both Islamic discursive traditions and European civilizational discourse in its affirmation, which renders it unique and distinct from the Self of the Sufis and the Philosophers that has pervaded previously. I have referred previously to how in interfaith contexts criticisms of Islam and

⁷⁷⁵ *Khatm* for Mawlana, Central Mosque Two, 26/02/18.

⁷⁷⁶ Evening Sanctuary, Central Mosque Two, 11/17.

⁷⁷⁷ Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*, p. 195.

Muslims are pre-emptively addressed, and Imam Bilal also qualifies his mention of the Manchester Arena bombing with, “we have nothing to apologise for.”⁷⁷⁸ Expression of the Muslim Self as “decent” and civil is here unapologetically affirmed in the physical encounter with the “Other”, marked by consideration of their possible reservations and reactions.

As a White British convert, and particularly as a researcher, I also comprised this “Other” to some extent. In response to my questions on the *masjid* as a community hub and its engagements with wider society, *Allāma* at North Manchester Mosque emphasised the importance of ensuring that the youth are not only good Muslims, “but that they’re also law-abiding *citizens* of Great Britain.⁷⁷⁹ To be a good Muslim is to be a good citizen, in pre-emptive response to the contention that Muslims are not. This felt gaze of the “Other” extends beyond the actual physical encounter too, being part of the very air that Muslims breathe and informing their processes of self-articulation. “The Muslims weren’t barbaric,” explains the visiting *Shaykh* at Central Mosque Two, rather they were pioneers in every field of knowledge, who served their communities.⁷⁸⁰ Here, in response to charges of barbarity levelled by absent accusers, Muslims are described as refined, well-rounded individuals. This is not in spite of or even parallel to Islam, but because of it. As both *Shaykh* Danyal and the visiting *Shaykh* at Central Mosque Two hearken back to the spread of Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia, a process effected through trade and service, they express what it is to be a civil Muslim subject in predominantly non-Muslim society. This

⁷⁷⁸ Mosque Open Day, op. cit., p. 228.

⁷⁷⁹ *Allāma*, op. cit., p. 220.

⁷⁸⁰ *Khatm* for Mawlana, Central Mosque Two, 26/02/18.

is a story drawing on Islamic discursive traditions, transfigured in the “Other’s” gaze, describing a Muslim Self that is both Muhammadan and modern.

The visiting *Shaykh*’s description of the well-rounded Muslim Self situates both education and civic engagement at the heart of self-cultivation. This aligns with contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as I have outlined it previously, acquiring “authentic”, objectified knowledge of “real” Islam for the sake of connecting with Allah and the Prophet, and implementing this Islam in service to others. While Islam is objectified here the Muslim Self is also crystallised through this pedagogical process, drawing on Islamic discursive traditions that are, again, entangled in modern, liberal secular discourse and resignified in the context of otherness. *Shaykh* Husayn’s encouragement for us to “go and see what Allah is telling you in the *Qur’ān*” is illustrative of Ahmed’s argument, that self-examination is an essential part of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation, which Muslims have been doing for centuries. However, “what Allah is telling you” is followed by a rejection of “priesthoods” and intermediaries, to the extent that this engagement with the *Qur’ān* entails not only self-examination but also self-assertion, affirming the sovereignty of the individual. It appeals to a dominant liberal secular narrative of a citizen who keeps a critical distance from their received traditions, and in their critical emancipation from religious authority they become more autonomous agents. Of course, *Shaykh* Husayn does not argue for freedom from religion. Rather, he believes that true religion, true *Dīn*, is emancipatory, enabling people “to grow and know their Creator directly without any

intermediaries, priesthoods, veils and means to go through,”⁷⁸¹ and to safeguard against what he calls “religious tyranny.”⁷⁸²

I must reiterate that *Shaykh* Husayn’s criticism of religious authority is not a rejection of it nor a call to indifference. As I described in Chapter Four, *‘Ilm* is understood to be the “catalyst” by which one develops a genuine relationship with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, free from complete dependence upon religious authority,⁷⁸³ yet the *‘Ālim* is central as the one who transmits it. This qualified acceptance of authority as a means of self-cultivation distinguishes the Muslim Self as I have described it from other more “individualised” approaches to Islam, such as those identified by Nadia Jeldtoft among “non-organized” Muslims. Jeldtoft relates how her European respondents emphasised their own individual relationship to God, often founded upon self-formulated principles rather than authority or tradition, which they regarded as less important.⁷⁸⁴ While these respondents might evoke “ideas ‘from Islam’,” she argues, they reappropriate these ideas to match their self-understanding as an “authentic person,” with the focus being upon their own emotions and sentiments.⁷⁸⁵ In contrast, my respondents were exhorted to move “towards Allah upon the coordinates of the Prophet,”⁷⁸⁶ where the extent to which one’s relationship with God was genuine and authentic was predicated upon their actualisation of the Prophetic example. As Saba Mahmood observed among women in the Egyptian mosque movement, self-realisation was directed towards “honing one’s rational and emotional capacities so as to

⁷⁸¹ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, The Institute 25/03/18.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*

⁷⁸³ *Usul ul-Hadith* Class with *Shaykh*, op. cit., p. 154.

⁷⁸⁴ Jeldtoft, “Lived Islam,” pp. 1145-1146.

⁷⁸⁵ Jeldtoft, “Spirituality and Emotions”.

⁷⁸⁶ Evening Sanctuary, op. cit., p. 177.

approximate the exemplary model of the pious self.”⁷⁸⁷ In the cultivation of this Muslim Self, realised through yet critically independent of religious authority, my respondents sought both to establish an authentic personal relationship with God and to authentically convey Islam to others.

This approach to religion is in agreement with Jürgen Habermas who, as I explored in the previous Chapter, argues for a critical distance between oneself and one’s religion tradition to effectively engage in dialogue with those of other traditions on the common good. This process of hermeneutic self-reflection, previously outlined,⁷⁸⁸ pertains in this context not only to “what does the *Qur’ān* say,” but rather “what do *I* understand the *Qur’ān* to say,” and further, “how can I convey this in a relatable way to *others* in a way that is of wider societal benefit.” Once again, I observed how self-affirmation was bound up with consideration of the “Other”. The *Shaykh*’s emphasis on direct, unmediated engagement with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* was certainly drawn from these sources, but it was marked by a suspicion towards uncritical received tradition and a concern for the flourishing of the sovereign individual characteristic of liberal secularism. *Shaykh* Husayn is not championing the selfhood of liberal secularism in spite of Islam. Rather, Islam grounded in the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* effectively cultivates selfhood in a manner that other religious traditions do *not*, in its focus on the relationship between the individual and Allah and its rejection of intermediaries. Again, I observed here how both Islamic discursive traditions and liberal secular discourse were entwined in the constitution of the Muslim Self.

⁷⁸⁷ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 31.

⁷⁸⁸ Habermas, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

This Muslim Self is constituted both in consideration of the non-Muslim “Other” and out of concern for other Muslims, for the Muslim Public. This Self is distanced and distinguished from the “Other” through discursive-affective processes of stigmatisation and is compelled towards the Muslim Public in turn, the Public which is itself born of collective awareness of its minority status. It is this sentiment which is echoed when the Muslims “in here”, whether in seclusion or in *jamā’ah*, are distinguished from those “out there”. As I have outlined previously, this is in part a process undergone, whereby one *feels* part of the community, compelled towards other Muslims through affectively cultivated fraternal bonds. However, it is also a Public into which one enters self-consciously through both deliberation and service, investing in the Self through investing in the Public. While the purpose of self-cultivation through knowledge is ultimately proximity to Allah and to the Prophet, it also facilitates one’s tactful practice of their Islam in consideration of others and the “Other”. In this, the good of the Self is bound up with the common good, extending both to Muslims and to wider non-Muslim society too.

Furthermore, it is through civic engagement and service, in the sacred exchange across boundaries that makes tangible “who we are” to the “Other”, that the Self also becomes fully actualised. This entangled constitution of both the Muslim Self and Muslim Public through the intention towards, and act of, service, is expressed by the visiting *Shaykh* at Central Mosque Two who asks, “what’s your legacy? What have you done for Allah? What have you sacrificed?” where he relates sacrifice to service for the wider

community.⁷⁸⁹ Here service is shown to be not only a response either to community cohesion and outreach initiatives organised by *masājid*, charities and local councils, or the instruction of one's *Shaykh*, although the stories informing it may be articulated through these authorities. It is most significantly an act of self-exploration as well as self-expression. Here it is argued that part of benefitting society entails *knowing* how one wants to benefit society, that one must at least begin to know themselves *before* they can fully give of themselves. Therefore self-knowledge, necessarily cultivated through engagement with “real” Islam as I have previously outlined it, becomes the pre-requisite for participation in the Muslim Public, whereby through service both Self and Public are affirmed and actualised.

Conclusion

Both the Muslim Self and the Muslim Public as I have described them here are characterised by a series of dual orientations, to Islamic discursive traditions and European civilizational discourse, to Muslim communities and to wider society, and to the Self and the Other. Through my observations I have demonstrated how the Muslim Self and Muslim Public are born of a situational and at times simultaneous interweaving of all such turnings, where expression and affirmation are always coupled with and configured by an awareness of the “Other”. The Muslim Public arises out of the affective awareness of collective stigmatisation by and distancing from the “Other”, coupled with the compulsion of bodies towards proximity both in devotion and deliberation, with these affects both shaping and being shaped by the discursive narration of who “we” are by authoritative figures and

⁷⁸⁹ *Khatm* for Mawlana, Central Mosque Two, 26/02/18.

institutions. In turn, such stories effect the visible assertion of the Muslim Public in service and in open devotion, transgressing conventional liberal secular boundaries whilst simultaneously affirming an alternative story of the Public that is at once Muhammadan and Mancunian.

The cultivation of the Muslim Self is a crucial pre-requisite for this collective civic engagement, as it is through one's knowing *how* to serve, specifically how *they* can serve as an individual, that one can then participate in the Muslim Public through the act of service. Like the Public, this Self in the context of Manchester is at once Mancunian and Muhammadan, drawing on both Islamic discursive traditions and European civilizational discourse in the process of self-cultivation, yet doing so in a way that resignifies the latter as more properly Islamic. Whilst effectively drawing on an evidently Prophetic precedent, those I observed did so self-consciously aware that they were situated in the gaze of the "Other" and in this the Muslim Self was uniquely born within this context of otherness. In self-expression through service, Self and Public are actualised and affirmed in common, while this outreach also serves to reconfigure what this "Other" entails in the transformative process of exchange. In sum, both the constitution of the Muslim Self and Muslim Public, and their entanglement, are illustrative of the making and enmeshment of multiple worlds in process. Here and in the preceding Chapters, I have sought to trace the movements of these worlds in their ongoing becoming within the meshwork of Muslim community identity in Manchester. In the closing Chapter to come, I recount these movements and consider the broader implications of this meshworked approach.

Chapter Seven: Towards a New Understanding of Muslim Community Identity

I began this thesis by recalling the conversation I had with a friend in 2013 on Oxford Road over the term “Sunni” and what this meant. The question itself spoke both to the potency of labels in identity, and to their limitations in wholly encompassing how identity is lived and done in all its diversity. People are called and distinguished by their names, and it is by names that they come to know themselves, others, and the worlds they inhabit. In identifying myself as “Sunni” and knowing what this means, I tell a story about what I believe, what I do, how I live, the people with whom I live in common, and I distinguish myself from what I am not. However, these names are not static stories, they grow into an ever-expanding corpus of tellings, retellings, and glosses in the living of life, in correspondence with the world and with others. Though I have carried the name “Sunni” with me, in living my Islam in community it has acquired new meanings, situationally evoked in different ways, and differentially perceived by others. This is a process that is still ongoing, but such is not discernible from the name itself, abstracted from how it is lived. My friend and I were both Sunni but we differed over what this meant, and our discussion attested to the fluid, dynamic complexity of the term. This name mattered to us too, it was affectively charged and evoked feeling, but by itself it said little of belonging, of how being a Sunni Muslim in community felt. In this thesis I have endeavoured to provide an alternative conceptualisation of Muslim community identity which attends to how Sufi-Sunni Islam is diversely lived and done in contemporary Britain. In this, I have approached Islam and Muslim community identity as meshworked, comprised of myriad entwining paths of movement both affective and discursive, of stories, people and places, both constituted by and constitutive of the lived doing of Islam in community.

In developing a more processual conceptualisation of Muslim community identity, my supervisor John Zavos' recommendation of Tim Ingold's work exercised the most formative influence on my theoretical framework, as I outlined it in Chapter Two. Conceiving of instantiations of life not as abstracted and enclosed objects with properties, but rather as knotted convergences of paths in movement, more comprehensively accounted for the diversity, dynamic fluidity and indeterminacy of living Muslim identity in Britain. This, coupled with Shahab Ahmed's conceptualisation of Islam as constituted through *doing*, could acknowledge and further encompass myriad ways of living, defining and describing Islam and Muslim identity without privileging a single "core" meaning or definition. I have consistently referred to Ingold throughout this work, and while Ahmed ceased to figure prominently beyond his processual definition of Islam this has sufficed for my research. Past studies of everyday, lived Islam undertaken by Nadia Jeldtoft in particular, alongside the work of Daniel Nilsson DeHanas and others, demonstrated how Islam is lived in "non-organised" ways, presenting an alternative to more taxonomic approaches focusing on institutions. Drawing on Ingold and Ahmed, I could effectively conceptualise this lived Islam that encompassed these non-organised ways of being whilst retaining its singularity. However, in accord with Talal Asad I also acknowledged that authoritative institutions and individuals are no less significant in the constitution and ongoing formation of lived Islam, as authoritative and prescriptive discourses necessarily inform the shape and trajectory of such processes. Jeanette Jouili's work on Muslim women in France and Germany attested to this, as the conditions and constraints within these "secular" societies configured how her respondents lived and transmitted their Islam.

These conditions were not only discursive, but affective too, and through Jouili's study I was introduced to how Islam and Muslim identity is moulded through the coursing currents of both discourse and affect. While I explored affect further through the works of Sara Ahmed and Donovan Schaefer, it was only upon undertaking field work that I fully appreciated the need to incorporate it into my own theory. Prior to this I was still chiefly concerned with the discursive, endeavouring to envisage a more narrative taxonomy of Muslim identity, building on Ingold's concept of storied naming. Beyond Jouili's Islamic revivalism, which described a broad orientation and way of doing Islam among her respondents that I had also discerned among Sufi-Sunni Muslims in Manchester, I was initially unsure of how to build such a system. Despite my emphasis upon process, this objective still seemed too close to "classifying people," as Ingold described it, still too abstracted from identity as it is lived and done. Storied naming would certainly prove to be useful in how Muslim identity is constituted and expressed, but it could not simply serve as an alternative form of labelling as storied knowledge is precisely contrary to classificatory knowledge. A processual approach forced me to attend to what was going on, and as my field work progressed I abandoned the prospect of a taxonomy and instead focused on how entwining lines of discourse and affect informed how identity was articulated, expressed, embodied and felt.

The particularly pervasive entanglement which I have traced throughout my field work has been that of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism. In exploring the extent to which and how contemporary British Muslim identity is shaped by this orientation and way of doing Islam I have discerned, and described in the foregoing, how it cannot be confined to a single *masjid* or *maslak*, nor does it exist apart from wider society. Rather, it courses through

Muslim communities, cultivating emergent ways of doing Islam and reorienting more established sectarian sensibilities swept up in its wake. It is comprised of dual strands of discourse and affect, of sacred stories both spoken in sanctified spaces and actualised in civic service, of consecrated caves carved out through worship, and of blessed associations both bridging and bolstering boundaries. It is characterised by dual orientations, to the Prophetic past and the Mancunian present, to the local *masjid* and the global *Ummah*, to the Muslims of Manchester and the city of Manchester, and to the individual self and wider society. As such, it is in this manner that contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is situated within wider societal discourse, being at once Muhammadan and Mancunian, born of the thorough enmeshment of Muslims and *masājid* in Manchester. Addressing how notions of self and community are reconfigured, I have argued that it is through such ongoing correspondence that the Muslim Self and Muslim Public have been constituted, expressive of the mutual configuration of Islam in Manchester, and of Manchester in Islam. Conceptualising Muslim community identity as such provides further insight into not only the shape of contemporary Islam in Manchester, but also demonstrates how this is ever ongoing, and inseparably bound up within the wider society of which it is a part. I recount the process that has led to this conclusion here, considering its implications for the study of Muslim communities in Britain, and reflecting on further avenues to pursue in this going forward.

Over the course of my field work I have consistently observed how Muslim community identity evades neat classification in how it is lived and done. My respondents were by and large British South Asian Sufi-Sunni Muslims, yet most did not self-consciously align with either the Barelvī or Deobandī *masālik* which have often been attributed to them, and

according to which they have been divided. They described themselves as Sunni Muslims, belonging to *Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamā'ah*, and though many belonged to particular *turuq* they could not be reduced to these labels, and would certainly not presume to award themselves the title of “Sufi” (except in jest). I have called them *Sufi-Sunnis* for the sake of practicality to distinguish them from the more recent anti-Sufi sentiment most prevalent amongst the Wahhabi and Salafi movements, which may also arguably be described as Sunni. They were aware of this distinction, but this was a quiet acknowledgement which for the most part did not find expression in sectarian polemic, nor did it become a vocal rallying cry for my respondents in affirming what they were through opposition to what they were not. Rather, I discerned in my observations a general aversion to sectarianism of any kind, with an emphasis instead upon knowledge and application of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* as a corrective to this, positively affirming identity and belonging through living “real Islam” in community.

This way of doing Islam is not confined to a *masjid* or institution, *maslak* or *ṭarīqa*. It pervaded all the *masājid* I attended, extending between and beyond them in a way that could not be boxed in. Ethnic markers of community identity were also not absolute, with one's identity as Pakistani, as Bengali, or as British situationally advancing to the forefront and receding into the background depending upon the languages spoken, the feelings felt and the stories told. Although the imams would intersperse Urdu and Sylheti into their sermons and supplications, no place could be reduced to “the Pakistani mosque” or “the Bengali mosque”, being also “*masājid* of Allah” and “very Mancunian mosques” depending once again on the story told. Taxonomies produced to account for and explain British Muslim identity provide insight into the significance of these stories, their

prominence and their potency, but can be supplemented with further exploration of the processual dynamics underlying their constitution. What I have discerned throughout my field work, and what I have gradually endeavoured to describe in the preceding Chapters, is that British Muslim identity is ever in process, and while it cannot be fully integrated into a taxonomy its movements of doing and becoming can be traced. In this, it is not contained by boxes but comprised of lines.

These lines may be descriptive and discursive, stories delineating right action from wrong action, orthodox creed from heterodoxy, narratives about who we are differentiating us from who we are not, articulated and advanced by authoritative individuals and institutions. In Chapters Two and Three I referred to how past literature has largely privileged this discursive aspect of Muslim identity, focusing on what is said, from where and by whom, and how this in turn informs what Muslims do. This, coupled with a taxonomic approach to Muslim identity, reduces Muslim communities not only to what Muslims say they are, but to what *certain* Muslims say they are, thus presenting Muslim community identity as divided according to institution and representative spokesperson. Studies of lived, everyday Islam beyond institutional frameworks are a corrective to this, examining how Islam is lived in a plethora of less visible ways, entangled with other strands of ethnicity, family and nationality which comprise Muslim identity. In accord with this approach, I have demonstrated how Muslim identity within such frameworks is equally malleable, processual and situational, collapsing the boxes which purportedly contain it. This unravelling attests to the open-endedness of these stories within, beyond and between institutions, how they reach out and entwine with others in their mutual constitution, and how this is an ongoing process.

These lines also crucially denote movement, force, flows and currents, which are shaped in part by discourse but are also inseparable from the compulsions and configurations of affect. Throughout my observations I have attended to how both discursive and affective processes mutually inform the articulation and felt impression of Muslim community identity, exploring what is said about British Muslim identity and how this feels. As I explored in Chapter Four, this broader consideration of affectively felt bonds and boundaries, could better account for and explain how my respondents would feel “hit by the spirituality” of a place and how a gathering could feel “connected”. It supplemented the question of what it meant to be “us” with how it felt, and conversely what it meant and felt to be “not them”, making community tangible beyond imagined representations whilst discerning the affective underlying the imaginal. In this, I have endeavoured to both unravel the boxes and demonstrate how they are not only entangled in multiple other strands, but also how they envelope and impress upon bodies and spaces.

I have chiefly traced these lines through my observations in *masājid*, these being focal points of activity where British Muslim identity is expressed, undergone, embodied and felt both individually and communally. It was primarily here that talks and classes took place, where prayers were led in congregation, and where *majālis* of *dhikr* were held. Yet these crucially were *not* centres of containment, and just as Muslim identity evades the categories assigned to it, so too does it extend beyond the parameters of specific *masājid* and institutions. In Chapter Four I observed how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, in its emphasis upon a knowing engagement with the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah* as the foundation for ethical self-cultivation and civic engagement, pervaded all of my field sites. I began

with the Institute as the most exemplary case with *Shaykh* Husayn's call to "go direct" to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* and to establish a personal relationship with it as the basis of "real" Islam, reflected in talks, classes and *dhikr* gatherings held there. This way of doing Islam was a *maslak* in the literal sense as a way of going along, much like the term *manhaj*, yet it was not a *maslak* in the sense that this word is often colloquially applied, as denoting a sect or school of thought such as the Barelvī or Deobandī. Rather than existing distinctly alongside other *masālik*, with its own institutions and teachers, contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism pervaded and informed all field sites regardless of sectarian affiliation.

At North Manchester Mosque, where assertion of the Barelvī *maslak* was more explicitly stated, the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist concern for reflexive engagement with and embodiment of "real" Islam was expressed in the exhortation to hold fast to Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī as the "identity" of Sunni Islam. At South Manchester Madrasa the Barelvī *maslak* was still synonymous with Sunni Islam yet here *Ustādh* was averse to the label and its sectarian connotations, emphasising the importance of acquiring "real knowledge" of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* through the Islamic sciences under a qualified teacher. In all cases the concern, characteristic of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, was to live in accordance with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* in a manner both personally transformative and communally affirmative, affirming Islam in service to other Muslims and wider society. This concern was informed variously by a desire for unity and communal solidarity, by the felt need to convey "true" Islam and address misconceptions, and to safeguard Muslims from the trials of living in a predominantly non-Muslim society. In this I found that the roots of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism stretched not only between the *masājid* but

also beyond them deep into wider society, entangled in the various lines both affective and discursive that coalesced to define Islam as a problem space.

Situating contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism within societal discourse on civic religion, community cohesion and Islam as a problem space in Chapter Five, I sought to demonstrate and explore how Islam is done in Manchester and in turn how Manchester is done in Islam. In its treatment of religion and religious communities past literature has often reproduced a liberal secular division between a neutral public sphere and various religious spheres, demarcated both from each other according to denomination and from this wider public by virtue of being properly religious spaces. As Jürgen Habermas has argued, to gain admission to this neutral public religious communities must undergo a process of hermeneutic self-reflection in which they translate their values and truth claims to make them discernible within a liberal secular discursive framework. While Habermas extends the onus of translation to the non-religious too, arguing for processes of mutual translation through the interaction of religious and non-religious spheres, the parameters demarcating the two remain bound. Upon closer examination of Muslim communities in particular past taxonomies have depicted them as confined to their *masājid* and community centres, with organisations and community leaders engaged in this translation process and acting as mediators between them and wider society.

As I outlined in Chapters Two and Three, this is most notably so in the work of Ron Geaves and Sadek Hamid, exemplified by Hamid's diagram of religious trends. Certainly, the complexity and heterogeneity of these communities is attested to, especially in Pnina Werbner's study of Muslims in Manchester to which I have often referred. This is most

elaborated upon in her *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims*, with communities being comprised of diverse institutions, diasporas, and diasporic religious, political and ethnic spheres, all of which overlap and separate situationally in instances of mobilisation. Yet, here too, Muslim communities abuzz with life remain closed off from wider non-Muslim society, and the liberal secular division between religious communities and the wider neutral public sphere persists. Throughout my field work on contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism I have discerned the contrary, that this pervasive current within Muslim communities in Manchester is only fully comprehensible when acknowledging them as Muslim communities *in Manchester*. That is, Muslim communities and the doing of Islam informed by the story of Manchester, of diversity and tolerance, unity and service, itself shaped by local policy discourse on community cohesion, civic religion and Islam as a problem space.

As I described further in Chapter Five, this very Mancunian Islam is articulated in the showcasing of very Mancunian mosques during open days and community *iftārs*, particularly at Central Mosque One, and in the Institute's "outward facing" Youth Zone. It is expressed in the stated objective of the Ramadan Community Project to encounter the other and to be part of the community. It is also expressed in calls for unity that I often heard, and in the exhortation to apply our knowledge of Islam in service to Muslims and wider society throughout my field sites. Yet in all such instances this appeal was not made with reference to Manchester City Council, but rather to the *Qur'ān*, the *Sunnah* and the life of the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba*. For my respondents, Islam best exemplified the civic commitment and unity amidst diversity that the story of Manchester espoused. It was the gift that they offered to wider society, drawing on a precedent stretching back 1400 years

to meet a 21st century need. In this I observed how both stories in this contemporary context, of Islam and Manchester, were mutually constituted. This was only possible because they are precisely *not* divided, but fundamentally enmeshed.

These entanglements became gradually apparent over the course of my field work, and I have touched upon this throughout the preceding Chapters. I further explored the extent of this enmeshment in Chapter Six, examining how an emergent Muslim Public and Self, at once Mancunian *and* Muslim, became the fruits of these mutually constituting processes. My conversation with *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa was especially formative in this regard. Alongside calls for unity in policy discourse and with reference to the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, the felt need among Muslims to be together arises through the affective awareness of collective stigmatisation by and distancing from the non-Muslim “Other” in Manchester. These affective sentiments, stretching well beyond the *masjid*, reach in and entwine with the discursive narration of who “we” are by imams and other authoritative institutions, in dialogue and deliberation with numerous other voices situationally articulating the shape of a Muslim Public. As I discerned through my conversation with *Ustādh* and in subsequent observations, this Public does not speak with a single voice and is not represented by any one institution. Yet, it retains its singularity through the act of deliberation itself directed towards a common orientation both to the Prophetic past and the Mancunian present.

This is a tangible, embodied Public too, manifest both in collective acts of devotion and in the act of service both to Muslims and wider non-Muslim society. In describing the Muslim Public I have referred to the act of prayer in *jamā'ah* behind the imam, where

“who we are” becomes discursively and affectively manifest in the collective act of devotion, acting in unison and facing in common. At this time, the imam becomes the leader of the *jamā’ah* and its representative, just as the *masjid* becomes the locus of its collective mobilisation. At other times this Public is manifest elsewhere behind other figures telling different stories, as I observed at the Ramadan Community Project operating *outside* of the *masjid*. Yet, in each instance it is born of collective deliberation and devotion towards a common orientation. It is crucially in such spaces outside of the *masjid* that these stories effect the visible assertion of the Muslim Public in civic engagement and open devotion. In this, conventional liberal secular boundaries are transgressed and an alternative story of the Public that is at once Muhammadan and Mancunian is affirmed.

The cultivation of the Muslim Self is a crucial pre-requisite for this collective civic engagement, as it is through one’s knowing *how* to serve, specifically how *they* can serve as an individual, that one can then participate in the Muslim Public through the act of service. Whether at the Institute, Central Mosque Two, or the Ramadan Community Project, I and my respondents were often reminded that, “*you* have come to be a part of the community,” and were encouraged to reflect upon “how can *I* contribute?” In self-expression through service, Self and Public are actualised and affirmed in common, while this outreach also serves to reconfigure what the “Other” entails in the transformative process of exchange. Upon reflection on the affective and discursive constitution of the Muslim Public and Self in contexts throughout my field work that are both Mancunian and Muhammadan, Muslim communities cannot be boxed in and apart from their wider societal contexts. Rather, they comprise and constitute a meshwork that is continually in process in the lived doing of Islam in Manchester.

The current of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism

I began my field work with the initial research question of how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism had informed and displaced sectarian affiliation, and how this in turn reconfigured how Islam is affectively and discursively done in Britain. At first approaching this as an emergent denomination, akin to other more established movements such as the Barelvi and Deobandi, I sought to discern how it had gained in prominence and subsequently reconfigured these older ways of doing Islam. Although in this I retained a more taxonomic approach to Muslim community identity in the beginnings of field work, I questioned the boundedness of these sectarian groupings, contending that they were constituted and reconfigured in relation to each other and could not be addressed in isolation. I argued further that attempts to categorise and reduce these movements to representative institutions and authoritative figures belied both their heterogeneity and their fluidity, though at the time I lacked a conceptual alternative which could capture this processual nature of Muslim community identity.

Taxonomies produced by Geaves, Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Hamid among others provided a broad outline of movements, their distinguishing beliefs and practices and their representative institutions. These map out the formative institutional dynamics informing the shape of Muslim community, and in agreement with Gerd Baumann I acknowledged in Chapter Three that this must be accounted for in that it shapes realities that we need to understand. However, I have contended that the heterogeneity and fluidity of these categories is not wholly reflected in such classificatory systems, and that these can be supplemented further through a consideration of this more processual dynamic. The label

of “Barelvī”, for example, is not a static label with a single meaning even among those to whom the label is applied. In Chapter Four I outlined how to *Ustādh* at South Manchester Madrasa it possesses divisive, sectarian connotations, while to *Allāma* at North Manchester Mosque it is a badge of honour professing belonging to the “saved sect”. While differing broadly over this term I observed how both would describe themselves as such at times, given that the application of this label is situational, brought to the fore in some instances and receding to the background in others. The varied articulation and at times felt affiliation or aversion to these categories among my respondents was too fluid to be boxed in, and I questioned the extent to which this category could retain its coherence and cohesion in the face of diversity to the point of contradiction. Hamid’s more taxonomic and institutional treatment of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism as the Traditional Islam Network was also unable to extend beyond the institutions alleged to exemplify it, least of all when the representative authority of these organisations was either contested by others, or wholly denied by their supposed figureheads.

Consistently, I observed how contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism was not only irreducible to any particular organisation or scholarly association, but also how those most exemplifying this trend did not at any point envisage that they belonged to or espoused a new movement. Instead, I observed in Chapter Four how they upheld what they considered to be a “back to basics” approach, grounding their Islam in knowledge of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, acquired through study under and association with those qualified in the transmission of the Islamic sciences. This was most exemplified at the Institute, but I heard it often expressed in other field sites too. Of course, this contemporary claim to return is characteristic of revivalism in general, but it was a claim that pervaded my field sites and

cut across parameters of sectarian affiliation to the extent that the taxonomic approaches formerly applied could not explain it. These considerations pertained to the more discursive expressions of Muslim community identity, both established and emergent, yet affective processes were also unaccounted for with no mention of how community is felt into being in existing taxonomies. Contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism's emphasis upon a felt and tasted relationship with the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* results in the cultivation of tangible sentiments of belonging and brotherhood, existing alongside, cutting through, and entwining with discursive parameters of sect and institution. As such, a meshworked approach could more comprehensively account for this in a way that former conceptualisations could not.

Applying this meshwork analysis in my observations, I have discerned that contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is a way of doing Islam, broadly characterised by a series of dual orientations both to the Prophetic past and the immediate present, and to Self and Society. These turnings are motivated by both a concern to live and experience "real" Islam individually and communally, and to positively represent and convey Islam in the gaze of the "Other", variously perceived to be in need, inquisitive, suspicious, or potentially hostile to it. The doing of Islam, situationally oriented towards these ends, can be traced as lines that draw inward, from the *Qur'ān*, *Sunnah*, and wider society just as they advance outward, entwining with diverse other ways of doing Islam and feeding back into wider society itself. These lines comprise stories of what it is to be Muslim, what "real" Islam entails, and how to effectively live it in contemporary British society wherein Muslims are a minority. Beginning with my experience of the affectively felt *sanad* at Central Mosque Two as related in Chapter Four, I have observed how these narrative lines are also

emotionally charged, laced with affective flows which tangibly affirm what living Islam and being Muslim feels like. I explored further in Chapter Four how this is not confined to the *masjid*, but is informed and accentuated by the felt distance from and compulsion towards the non-Muslim “Other” in wider society beyond it, who neither knows nor feels Islam.

These lines of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism pervade all field sites, yet rather than displacing sectarian affiliation they have reoriented it, framing it within a wider concern for the lived embodiment and actualisation of “real” Islam within contemporary society. This accords contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism its singularity as a discernible trend whilst also encompassing, pervading and entwining with diverse ways of doing Islam. I have observed how these stories have been told by the *Sheyūkh*, *‘Ulemā* and imams in the *masājid*, and how they have been situationally actualised and felt into being through learning, devotion and service in classes, talks and *majālis*, yet they also emerge from and stretch forth beyond them. In both Chapters Four and Five I explored how these stories situationally draw on yet more stories of the trials the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba* faced, of past sectarianism, and of islamophobia, among others. In turn, these novel tales and retellings go on to inform the constitution and shape of Muslim community identity as understood by Muslims and as perceived by non-Muslims too. In following these trails in accordance with a meshworked approach to contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism, I was able to explore not only how it pervaded the *masājid* but how it emerged from and fed into wider society beyond them.

Islam in Manchester and Manchester in Islam

In Chapter Five I addressed the second research question of exploring how Muslim identity in general and contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism is bound up with its wider societal context, particularly situated within discourse on civic religion, community cohesion, and Islam as a problem space. This at first seemed to be a straightforward question, noting discursive parallels between the calls for unity and service in the community from imams and *Sheyūkh*, and statements on cohesion and the civic value of religious communities as outlined in policy discourse. The looming spectre of islamophobia was often alluded to by respondents throughout my field work, and actualising “real” Islam through coming together in service for their communities and wider society was understood by many to be a solution. These parallels became most pronounced during community *iftārs* and mosque open days where local council officials and other “community leaders” would attend. In this, the contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalist orientation could be argued to be a synthesis of Sufi-Sunni Islam and policy discourse to effectively translate and convey Islam in a wider societal context in which Islam has been otherwise defined as a problem space. This would be akin to Habermas’ hermeneutic self-reflection, through which Muslims self-consciously objectify and translate Islam in terms discernible by a wider liberal secular non-Muslim public.

However, in their appeals to unity and service my respondents consistently drew on the *Qur’ān*, the *Sunnah*, and the stories of the *Ṣaḥāba*, rejecting the notion that this call is a response to policy discourse and insisting that this is *and has always been* real Islam.

Recalling what Imam Bilal at Central Mosque One told me, “we don’t do this because the council has told us to.” As such, contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism cannot be said to

solely arise out of engagement with policy discourse in wider society. Yet at the same time, the events which for my respondents most exemplified “real” Islam were also described by others as emblematic of Manchester itself, united in its affirmation and embrace of diversity, particularly at the Ramadan Community Project. Indeed, in these instances the story of Islam became integrated into the story of Manchester, expressing what Manchester is. Again, I observed how Muslim community identity could not be boxed in, and how the stories of Manchester and Islam were mutually constituted through their being enmeshed together, with neither being subsumed in the other.

There are numerous examples in past literature where Muslims’ wider societal context is considered, even specifically pertaining to Manchester as in Werbner’s work, yet in these studies the Muslim communities in question remain thinly veiled from the city. They touch along their surfaces, but not to the extent that Islam is truly in Manchester *and* Manchester is in Islam. Jouili’s study of Muslim women in France and Germany presents a notable exception in exploring these interpenetrations, particularly exemplified in the “pious citizen” who, through their Islam, contests and reconfigures hegemonic liberal secular notions of citizenship. Her consideration of both discourse and affect is also exceptional, observing how the *felt gaze* of the “Other” has informed the objectification of Islam and Muslim identity alongside more discursive demands for Muslims to speak for their faith. Applying a meshworked approach here encourages further exploration of this relationship between Muslim communities and wider society as genuine entanglement. In this, it allows for a conceptualisation of Muslim community identity in Manchester that is at once Mancunian and Muhammadan.

Addressing the final research question of how notions of self and community are discursively and affectively reconfigured in this contemporary context, I examined and expounded upon the Muslim Public and Muslim Self as fruits of this enmeshment between Islam and Manchester. Oftentimes in past conceptualisations of Muslim communities and publics and their relations, specifically in predominantly non-Muslim societies, the two remain separate. This is most apparent in Habermas' argument that the religious must develop a secular language by which they can effectively speak and represent their interests in a wider liberal secular public sphere. He argues the same for the non-religious, yet they are effectively admitted by default while the burden of translation weighs heavier on the religious as a condition for participation. Although the possibility of interaction and participation is acknowledged here this is ephemeral and only extends as far as correspondence, with the religious *going out* to engage with the public and *going back* to their communities, and the parameters remain fixed. This process of translation is also thoroughly institutional, effected by those deemed to be community leaders and representatives who serve as mediators between their communities and wider society, bridging boundaries whilst nevertheless maintaining them.

Werbner's threefold conceptualisation of South Asian Muslim communities in Manchester retain this institutional focus, with the *masjid*, Pakistani community centre, and race-relations sub-committee representing religious, secular and ethnic spheres. However, this is qualified by an emphasis on their heterogeneity and how they overlap, though collective mobilisation is fleeting. As political arenas they are loci of deliberation comprising a multitude of voices, at times divergent and at times in accord, and cannot be reduced to any one voice or faction claiming to represent the whole. Werbner's notion of diasporic publics

are also highly internally differentiated, and while they too cannot be reduced to any single institution or faction, they can be collectively distinguished by a common orientation to the home country and a sense of co-responsibility. Werbner's discursive arenas and diasporic publics are a corrective to homogenised conceptualisations of both the public sphere and Muslim communities.

However, in common with Habermas, Werbner's diasporic publics are demarcated from wider non-Muslim society and a liberal secular public sphere. The orientation which both unites them all and accords them their diasporic character is a turning inward to "their own" communities and a looking backward to a home country, not grounded in nor looking towards *where they are*. Where engagement and exchange are admitted beyond this, it is once again a going out and return to, with the act of service situationally affirming who Muslims are without leaving a lasting impression. Utilising a meshworked approach has allowed for an examination of these impressions, exploring Muslim communities' engagement in wider society as interpenetration, entanglement and enmeshment, to the extent that normative parameters are problematised and talk of a Muslim Public becomes possible. Beyond this, it accounts for the affective process informing these engagements that have been largely absent in past studies.

Building on Werbner and in accord with Charles Hirschkind, I argue in Chapter Six that the Muslim Public as I have discerned it is comprised of divergent deliberative strands, and that this deliberation is crucial to not only participation within it but also its very constitution. Rather than dissolving into a multitude of contesting publics, the process of deliberation directed towards a common orientation and imbued with a sense of co-

responsibility ensures that the Muslim Public retains its singularity, with this orientation being a point through which these strands entwine. These entanglements are bound not only in deliberation but also in discipline, their paths of situational contestation and coalescence shaped by regulating discursive and affective processes pervading the *masājid* and stretching beyond them into wider society. In this, the *masājid* situationally manifest the Muslim Public in the collective devotional body of the *jamā'ah*, given authoritative representative voice in the person of the imam who leads it, while at other times this Public is expressed outside of and even at odds with them. The orientations binding the Muslim Public together remain the same yet its site of mobilisation will change depending upon the stories told. This Muslim Public can be situated but not contained, and parameters which demarcate it from wider society are ever in flux.

At the Ramadan Community Project I observed in common with Jouili that through the open doing of Islam in both devotion and service, whether through a public congregational prayer or opening the fast, normative notions of the liberal secular public are contested and reconfigured. In this, just as affective and discursive processes arising from Manchester reach into, envelope and entwine with Muslim communities to the extent that Manchester is done in Islam, so too is Islam done in Manchester, and the Muslim Public emerges through this enmeshment. The Muslim Self is also a product of these entanglements, expressive of both an informed and reflexive engagement with “real” Islam and the liberal sovereign individual, and affectively objectified through the gaze of the “Other”. It is also bound up with the Muslim Public in its actualisation through open civic engagement, as it is through such religiously informed service that “real” Islam is applied in practice as an expression both of collective and individual identity. In this, the collective actualisation of

the Muslim Public through devotion and service is an extension of the cultivation of the Muslim Self, which is its prerequisite, with neither being subsumed into the other, but rather being intertwined in their ongoing constitution. It is in this way that notions of self and community are reconfigured in this contemporary context.

Towards a new understanding of Muslim community identity

Building upon earlier studies of everyday, lived Islam, I have sought to trace the complexity and fluidity of Muslim community identity that more taxonomic approaches cannot wholly account for, and have employed the meshworked approach for this purpose. This allows for an understanding of Muslim identity as it is lived and done, tracing the stories which comprise and constitute it beyond solely *masjid* and *maslak*, and discerning how these stories become affectively felt and embodied through deliberation, devotion and service. My meshworked approach begins with the lines that comprise lived Islam in community, and follows them along their open-ended trajectories and entanglements. Considering both discourse and affect, it widens the scope for examining how Muslim community identity is felt and embodied as well as articulated and represented, and accounts for situational expressions of Muslim community identity that seem to cut across institutional parameters. Utilising this approach has therefore enabled me to explore the multi-faceted and pervasive currents of contemporary Sufi-Sunni revivalism and how it has reconfigured the discursive and affective doing of Islam, whilst also situating this within the wider context of Manchester.

In common with past literature, much of the data through which I have developed these conclusions has come through my interviews with imams, teachers and committee members, and their contributions have proven invaluable in this regard. However, it has been through participant observation predominantly that I have been able to more comprehensively trace the lines which comprise this meshwork, supplemented by and substantiated through the insights of my respondents. In this, my study affirms the need for more observable engagement with Muslim communities in the study of Islam in Britain to be effectively grounded in how Islam is observed to be lived and done, and this is broadly applicable to community in general. Indeed, as I explained with reference to Ingold in Chapter One, a meshworked approach requires the researcher to attend to what is going on, to be open and attentive to their environment, and to acknowledge how they themselves are transformed by this process in which they are enmeshed. This describes participant observation, in which the researcher is truly a participant, and this study attests to its need in the exploration of community identity broadly, and Muslim community identity specifically, in Britain.

Rather than examining Muslim communities in isolation a meshworked approach acknowledges that isolation in any sense is simply not possible, given that the very constitution of Muslim communities is thoroughly bound up with lines that stretch beyond them into wider non-Muslim society. Beyond Muslim identity specifically, it reminds us that no sphere can be wholly neutral or secular, as all are not only comprised of religious communities, but are also reconfigured through them. In this, the implications of enmeshment affirm the pervasiveness of religion itself, militating against hegemonic notions of a “neutral” liberal secular public. This mutual reconfiguration of converging

discursive spheres has been explored and outlined in Werbner's study of Muslims in Manchester, but following Victor Turner their impressions are liminal and ephemeral. I contend here that the paths which comprise community do not spectrally glide through hollow discursive arenas, howling momentarily and leaving without a trace. Rather, these paths grow out of and creatively course through them, entangled in transformative correspondence. In the open-ended entwining lines of lived community no sphere remains untouched, and acknowledging this allows for further exploration into how wider society is dynamically shaped through the communities which comprise it. It follows from this that the communities comprising multi-ethnic and multi-religious urban environments, such as Manchester, are neither demarcated from wider society nor from each other, but are also crucially relationally constituted in correspondence.

This transformative enmeshment could be demonstrated further through considering how spheres are both affectively *and* discursively configured through ongoing correspondence, in tangible ways which leave lasting impressions upon spaces and the bodies frequenting them. Whilst still affirming the dynamic fluidity and heterogeneity of these communities in process, I contend that these associations are not liminal, with well-trodden trails acquiring a feel of intransigence and continuity. I observed these consociate relationships among my respondents at the Institute in Chapter Four, their community arising out of day-to-day interactions as neighbours, friends and family outside of classes and talks. Tracing the repeated paths taken from my home to Central Mosque One, I noted this same cultivated familiarity for myself in Chapter Six. In this, a meshworked approach to community identity in process acknowledges both its fluidity and plurality without relinquishing the potency of the impressions it leaves on the bodies which converge and diverge in its

currents. Spaces too become gradually weathered and reshaped in the lived doing of community. As I described in Chapter Six, I discerned this especially at the Ramadan Community Project, where the street became a site for an alternative, theo-ethical Public which was not only imaginal, but made affectively tangible too through devotion and service. In this, my observations here follow previous studies undertaken by Zavos on street kitchens in Birmingham and Bradford, exploring how hegemonic liberal secular publics are contested and consecrated through service both civic and sacred. These observations, both on the street and in the *masājid*, also attest to the value of spatial analysis in the exploration of Muslim community identity, given its enmeshment in space and place, and this is an avenue which should be pursued further.

Studying religion as it is lived and done through the prism of the everyday serves to broaden the scope of what religion entails, encompassing ways of being that are otherwise unseen, unheard and unknown. In asking “what more is there to Sufi-Sunni Islam?” I have been able to reflect upon whether there is indeed space for me as a Sufi-Sunni Muslim, and in following these converging, conflicting and conflating currents I continue to find my own way. While I have done this in the *masājid*, unravelling their parameters in turn, it remains to explore the less visible ways of doing Islam and being Muslim in Britain that Jeldtoft and others have otherwise explored among non-organised Muslims in Europe. In attending to what Islam is and who Muslims are, this study and others of this kind continue to pose the question of *what Islam can be, and who can be Muslim*. This is, and must be, an ongoing discussion, as open-ended as the myriad paths which comprise the meshwork of lived Islam in Britain and beyond. It is a perpetually unfinished story, enriched through its variant tellings, and with voices yet to be heard.

Appendix One: Table of Observations

Field Site	Observation period	Observations
North Manchester Mosque	6 months	12
South Manchester Madrasa	6 months	6
Central Mosque One	6 months	11
Central Mosque Two	6 months	16
The Institute	6 months	15
Ramadan Community Project	2 days	2
Anecdotal	6 months	4

Appendix Two: Ethical Approval Documentation



Arts, Languages and Cultures School Panel

School of Arts, Languages and Cultures
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M13 9PL

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Ref: 2017-0787-3965

23/10/2017

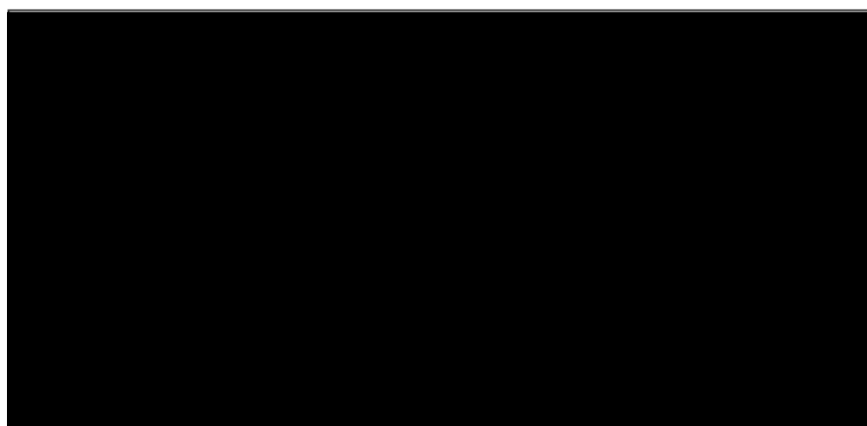
Dear Mr George Rawlinson, , Dr John Zavos

Study Title: UK Muslim Communities and Reform and Revival Movements RELTPGR 8611462

Arts, Languages and Cultures School Panel

I write to thank you for submitting the final version of your documents for your project to the Committee on 04/10/2017 15:56 . I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the application form and supporting documentation as submitted and approved by the Committee.

Please see below for a table of the titles, version numbers and dates of all the final approved documents for your project:



This approval is effective for a period of five years and is on delegated authority of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) however please note that it is only valid for the specifications of the research project as outlined in the approved documentation set. If the project continues beyond the 5 year period or if you wish to propose any changes to the methodology or any other specifics within the project an application to seek an amendment must be submitted for review. Failure to do so could invalidate the insurance and constitute research misconduct.

You are reminded that, in accordance with University policy, any data carrying personal identifiers must be encrypted when not held on a secure university computer or kept securely as a hard copy in a location which is accessible only to those involved with the research.

For those undertaking research requiring a DBS Certificate: As you have now completed your ethical application if required a colleague at the University of Manchester will be in touch for you to undertake a DBS check. Please note that you do not have DBS approval until you have received a DBS Certificate completed by the University of Manchester, or you are an MA Teach First student who holds a DBS certificate for your current teaching role.



The University of Manchester

UK Muslim Communities and Reform and Revival Movements

Consent Form

If you are happy to participate, please read the consent form and initial it.

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service.	
3. I understand that my data will remain confidential.	
4. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.	
5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.	
6. I agree to my data being retained indefinitely for further research related to Muslim communities and religious identities in Britain. If you wish your data to be used only for the current project, please leave this box blank.	

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant Date Signature

Name of person taking consent Date Signature

This project has been approved by the University of Manchester's Research Ethics Committee



UK Muslim Communities and Reform and Revival Movements

General Information Sheet

The research

This research concerns community identity amongst British Muslim communities in and around Greater Manchester, exploring how these identities are constructed, expressed and represented. It considers how prominent traditions and their institutions have informed British Muslims' sense of identity, both as individuals and as part of a community, and the researcher seeks to observe how this is manifest in practice. Through examining the many ways in which Muslims understand and define themselves individually and collectively as Muslims, the researcher seeks to account for these multiple forms of identity in ongoing academic discourse. This research, therefore, explores the diversity of Muslim identity, critiquing reductive categorisations, and inquires as to how such identities are formed.

All information acquired through this research will be anonymised, and acquired with the full consent of all participants. Participants can withdraw consent to take part at any stage of the research process.

The researcher

Name: George Rawlinson

Occupation: Post-Graduate Researcher in Religions and Theology

Institution: The University of Manchester, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

Email: George.rawlinson@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about this research project or the conduct of the researcher, please contact:

Dr John ~~Zavos~~, University of Manchester, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures.

Email: John.zavos@manchester.ac.uk

This project has been approved by the School of Arts Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester.



UK Muslim Communities and Reform and Revival Movements

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This research concerns community identity amongst British Muslim communities in and around Greater Manchester, exploring how these identities are constructed, expressed and represented. It considers how prominent traditions and their institutions have informed British Muslims' sense of identity, both as individuals and as part of a community, and the researcher seeks to observe how this is manifest in practice. Through examining the many ways in which Muslims understand and define themselves individually and collectively as Muslims, the researcher seeks to account for these multiple forms of identity in ongoing academic discourse. This research, therefore, explores the diversity of Muslim identity, critiquing reductive categorisations, and inquires as to how such identities are formed. The researcher will be regularly attending this mosque, participating in congregational prayers, in classes, and in devotional gatherings.

All information acquired through this research will be anonymised, and acquired with the full consent of all participants. Participants can withdraw consent to take part at any stage of the research process.

The researcher

Name: George Rawlinson

Occupation: Post-Graduate Researcher in Religions and Theology

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If you have any concerns about this research project or the conduct of the researcher, please contact:

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This project has been approved by the University of Manchester's Research Ethics Committee



UK Muslim Communities and Reform and Revival Movements

Participant Information Sheet

The research

This research concerns community identity amongst British Muslim communities in and around Greater Manchester, exploring how these identities are constructed, expressed and represented. It considers how prominent traditions and their institutions have informed British Muslims' sense of identity, both as individuals and as part of a community, and the researcher seeks to observe how this is manifest in practice. Through examining the many ways in which Muslims understand and define themselves individually and collectively as Muslims, the researcher seeks to account for these multiple forms of identity in ongoing academic discourse. This research, therefore, explores the diversity of Muslim identity, critiquing reductive categorisations, and inquires as to how such identities are formed. The researcher will be regularly attending this mosque, participating in congregational prayers, in classes, and in devotional gatherings.

Interviews will be undertaken as part of this research to explore the role of religious institutions and the traditions they carry in the formation of Muslim community identity. Interviewees may be asked to reflect upon:

- The ethos of their institution.
- The history of their institution and its position within wider religious traditions.
- The objectives of the institution for the future.
- The successes of the institution and perceived obstacles encountered.

All information acquired through this research will be anonymised, and acquired with the full consent of all participants. Participants can withdraw consent to take part at any stage of the research process. All interviews will last no more than 45 minutes.

The researcher

Name: George Rawlinson

Occupation: Post-Graduate Researcher in Religions and Theology

Institution: The University of Manchester, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

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If you have any concerns about this research project or the conduct of the researcher, please contact:

Dr John Zavos, University of Manchester, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures.

Email: John.zavos@manchester.ac.uk

This project has been approved by the University of Manchester's Research Ethics Committee

Appendix Three: Glossary

I have restricted myself to Arabic terms here for the most part, with exceptions of Urdu, Hindi and Farsi specified in individual entries. For all entries I have employed have the transcription method employed in Mohammad Kasim Dalvi and David Matthews, *Complete Urdu* (London: Teach Yourself, 1999), with the exception of using “Kh” for “X” for the letter “خ”, consistent with the usual phonetic transliteration for names such as Khan.

Adab: Various defined as manners, good character, broadly denotes etiquette.

Adhān: The call to prayer.

Ahl al-Bayt: The family of the Prophet.

Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l Jamā'ah: The people of the *Sunnah* and the majority. Broadly denotes all Sunnis, utilised to affirm orthodoxy.

‘Ālim: Islamic scholar. *‘Ulemā* plural.

Allāma: Alternative term for an esteemed Islamic scholar.

‘Attar: *Sunnah* perfume.

‘Aqīda: Theological creed, doctrine. *‘Aqā'id* plural.

Baraka: Sanctity, blessing.

Birādarī: Kin network, Urdu term.

Bakhūr: *Sunnah* incense.

Dars e-Nizāmī: Traditional Sunni Muslim curriculum in the subcontinent.

Dar ul-‘Ulūm: An alternative term for *madrasa*.

Darrūriyāt e Dīn: Essentials of faith, Urdu pronunciation of the Arabic equivalent.

Da'wa: Conveying Islam.

Dīn: Religion.

Dhikr: Remembrance of God, often comprised of devotional litanies.

Du'ā: Supplication.

Fiqh: Jurisprudence.

Ghair Muqallidīn: Groups who do not follow a school of law, or follow incorrectly.

Ghiyārwīn Sharīf: Gathering commemorating 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, Hindi term.

Habāib: tribe of predominantly 'Ulemā from Yemen descended from the Prophet.

Ibāda: Broadly encompasses all worship.

Iftār: The time and act of breaking fast.

Ijāza: Permission broadly, though specifically pertaining to teaching.

Ijtihād: The exercise of independent reasoning in deducing legal rulings.

Ilm: Knowledge, specifically pertaining to Islamic science here. 'Ulūm plural.

I'tikāf: Seclusion.

Izzat: Honour.

Jāmi': Central, a central *masjid*.

Jamā'ah: Congregation, the community assembled.

Jum'ah: Friday, the day of *Jum'ah* prayers.

Junaydi: Term denoting “sober” Sufism in reference to Imam Junayd al-Baghdadi.

Khalīfa: Variously translated as successor, or representative.

Khidma: Devotional service.

Khutba: Arabic sermon recited on *Jum 'ah* in the *masjid*.

Kufi: A brimless, rounded cap.

Langar: Blessed food.

Laylat ul-Qadr: The Night of Power, when the *Qur'an* was sent down during Ramadan.

Madhab: School of Islamic jurisprudence.

Madrasa: Islamic studies school. *Madāris* plural.

Majlis: Devotional gathering. *Majālis* plural.

Manhaj: Broadly denotes a way of doing or methodology similar to *maslak*, but lacks sectarian connotations.

Masjid: Mosque. *Masājid* plural.

Maslak: Broadly denotes a way of doing or a methodology, but has acquired sectarian connotations and refers specifically to South Asian movements here. *Masālik* plural.

Maslaki, pertaining to a *maslak*.

Mawlid: Celebration of the Prophet's birthday.

Mehrāb: Prayer Niche.

Minbar: Pulpit.

Mujaddid: A reviver of the religion, usually an Islamic scholar, who establishes orthodoxy.

Munshid: Reciter of poetry.

Murīd: The disciple of a *Shaykh*.

Nūr: Literally “light”, related especially to sanctity.

Pīr: Sage, an alternative Farsi term for *Shaykh*.

Qaṣīda: Devotional poetry. *Qaṣāed* plural.

Qibla: The direction of prayer.

Ṣaḥāba: Companions of the Prophet.

Salaf: The pious predecessors, the first three generations of Muslims considered to be among the most rightly guided.

Ṣalāh: Prayer, specifically the five daily prayers.

Ṣalāt al-Jum’ah: Friday congregational prayer.

Ṣalāt o Salām: Devotional poetry in praise of the Prophet, composed by Ahmad Razā Khān Barelvī.

Ṣalawāt: Peace and blessings upon the Prophet.

Sanad: A chain of transmission, most often denoting a lineage of scholarship. *Asaneed* plural.

Sayyid: Descendent of the Prophet through his grandsons Hasan and Husayn.

Shahāda: The testimony of faith.

Shaykh: Alternative term for Islamic scholar, denoting a spiritual guide in a specifically Sufi context. *Sheyūkh* plural.

Şuĥba: Variously translated as association or companionship.

Tarbīyat: Education, upbringing.

Ṭarīqa: Sufi Order. *Ṭuruq* plural.

Taşawwuf: Sufism, the science of spiritual purification.

Ummah: The entire Muslim world, the global Muslim community.

Ustādh: Teacher.

Usūl: Principles, the foundational principles of a branch of Islamic science.

Zakāt: A portion of one's earnings that they are obliged to give in charity if they are able.

Zāwiyya: A Sufi Lodge.

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