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*Sustainable integration: an ethnographic study  
of a British Muslim community in Birmingham*

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## **Abstract**

Drawing upon ethnographic research undertaken in an area of Birmingham, this thesis investigates meanings and understandings of integration in a community deemed non-integrated, namely the Muslim community. Exploring real-world stories and mundane experiences, this study set out to answer its main question which is: what does integration mean to Muslims in the UK? While mainstream integration discourse calls for dialogue to achieve social cohesion, integration debates are mainly led by mainstream views, and are seldomly representative of non-mainstream perspectives, of Muslims in particular. Here, I problematise the way British integration discourse is presented and ask: are British Muslims really segregated; to what extent and why? This thesis is centred on the premise that an inclusive society builds on inclusive social structures and discourses. An integration discourse that mostly echoes the majority's perspective cannot reflect any genuine representation of minority ethnic communities. I argue that non-mainstream narratives of integration should be a fundamental part in establishing a sustainably successful integration. In accordance with this central argument, the study analysed narratives and experiences of British Muslims gathered from 29 interviews and field observations during 12 months of fieldwork in a Muslim concentrated neighbourhood. The findings of this study do not only dispel misconceptions and stereotypes, but they also provide a novel understanding of how integration policies and agendas should be established.

Shedding light on the complex narratives and experiences of British Muslims in relation to the concept of integration, the findings of this thesis reveal that British Muslims share the major pillars of the mainstream account of integration. In line with the government's two-way understanding of integration, my participants argued that integration is not *only* about efforts of Muslims to belong and to get along with other communities; but it is *also* about their acceptance, recognition, and the efforts of the wider society. Integration, according to British Muslims, is not only associated with addressing inequalities but most importantly with being able to experience full citizenship through which social acceptance is promoted and socio-economic inequalities and discrimination are addressed. Legal rights such as equal access to employment, housing, and educational opportunities do not inevitably denote social integration. Integration is equally associated with mundane feelings of equality and belonging; of acceptance and welcoming; and of freedom and ability to *be, say, and live* as who you are.

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**Dedicated to Mum, Khalid, and Faris.**

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# **Chapter One: British Integration Paradox**

## 1.1 Setting the Scene

I feel British and people can label me whatever they choose to. You can never have control over that. At the end, it is how you feel, and I know I am British and I feel British. Especially when you go abroad then you really feel British because you really say: hang on a second that is not right, or you cannot speak to people like that, or you can not treat people like that. The Britishness comes out from inside us then. For example, when the Olympics were held in London, we really felt patriotic. I never felt like that before, but it really made me feel this is my country and this is who I am (Uzmah, second generation 47-year-old Pakistani).

In this quote, Uzmah brought up the complexity of belonging for British Muslims in the UK. Whereas she feels that she is British and that she belongs nowhere except to this county, she is simultaneously aware that this Britishness she feels may not be accepted or recognized enough in the wider society. This complexity resonates with wider discourses on British Muslim integration. Muslims in Britain are often parts of two narratives that could not be more different; one portrays Muslims as insufficiently integrated (Home Office 2001; Klausen 2005; Blair 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Joppke 2009; Cameron 2011, 2015; Blair 2016; Casey 2016), and another finds them not only integrated but also willing and working to integrate (Eade 1998; Ansari 2004; Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005; Reed 2005; Ameli et al. 2006; Masood 2006; Maxwell 2006; Phillips 2006; Uberoi and Modood 2009; UKREN 2009; Ahmad and Evergeti 2010; Sobolewska 2012; O'Toole and Gale 2013; McAndrew and Sobolewska 2015; Mustafa 2015; MCB 2018; Shazhadi et al. 2018; Ahmed 2019; Hoque 2019; Phoenix 2019).

Over the years, immigrant integration in British society has been a source of heated debate as the UK has struggled to reach an agreement about creating a diverse yet cohesive society (Jenkins 1967; Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011, 2015; HM Government 2018; Home Office 2019). With growing diversity, Britain is increasingly being portrayed as 'divided', 'fractured', 'disunited' more than ever before, with communities coming apart and in crisis over community relations (The Social Integration Commission 2014, 2015; Lee 2019; Yates 2021). British integration has been puzzled over by different proposals, ideas, and scholarships, and has been a point of social and political divisions (Parekh 2000; Castles et al. 2002; Phillips 2006; Modood 2007; Peach 2009; Bouchard 2011; Cantle 2012, 2016; Cantle and Kaufmann

2016; Meer et al. 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2016, 2017); and in recent years Muslim immigrants and their British born descendants have been at the centre of those controversies with a general perception that they are non-integrated.

Despite the existence of other flows of immigration to the UK (e.g. Eastern Europeans immigrants and Middle Eastern refugees), Muslims remain at the centre of contemporary immigration/integration debates (Home Office 2001; Electoral Commission 2003, 2005; Home Office 2005; Blair 2006; Kelly 2006; Cameron 2011, Cattle 2012; Cameron 2015; Casey 2016). The presence of Muslims as a ‘problematized’ faith community began in the 1980s in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* --known as the ‘Rushdie affair’-- in 1988 resulting in heated controversies about Islam and the religious identity of British Muslims (Masood 2006; O’Toole and Gale 2013; Mustafa 2015). However, discourse on a Muslim integration ‘problem’ was triggered after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 2001 riots in northern cities of England, the widely perceived reaction of British Muslims against the war in Afghanistan and Iraq and followed by the 2005 terrorist attacks in London (Home Office 2001; Briggs et al. 2006; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016).

Following the 2001 riots in Oldham, Bradford, Burnley, the Home Secretary commissioned a team chaired by Ted Cattle to investigate the roots of the disturbances. Building on the recommendations of Cattle’s review, which found the negative impacts of residential segregation in Bradford ‘striking’ (Home Office 2001: 9), the new Labour government set out a community cohesion agenda to build a society where all communities feel they belong and are comfortable mixing and interacting with others (LGA 2004: p.7). Emerging as a political response to the 2001 riots, the agenda aimed at breaking down barriers and tackling the way Muslim communities were leading parallel lives, in which they were considered to live separately from white communities (Home Office 2001). Both the Cattle report and the community cohesion agenda framed segregation and the 2001 disturbances as an ‘Asian’ problem, with Muslim South Asians (Pakistani communities and young Pakistanis in particular) portrayed as ungrateful, disloyal, and culturally separatist (Amin 2002: 964).

The racialised concept of ‘parallel lives’ was soon securitized after the 7/7 bombings in London, as public and political debates became largely framed by fears of Muslim practices and beliefs (Briggs et al. 2006; Blair 2006 b; Spalek and McDonald 2009; Spalek 2010; Cameron 2011, 2015); leading to a range of counter-terrorism legislations and policies such as Prevent (see section 2.4.3). According to Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, it was Muslims’

prime responsibility to root out extremism (Blair 2006 b). This portrayal of Muslim communities as a source of the ‘scourge’ of radicalisation (Cameron 2015) surged during the Coalition government (2010-2015) and the successive Conservative governments (2015 to date) amid rising numbers of young British Muslims joining ISIS and the occurrence of high profile terrorist attacks (e.g. the 2017 attacks on Westminster, London Bridge, and the Manchester Arena).

Portraying Muslim communities as a source of threat was accentuated in the wake of Cameron’s announcement of the EU referendum of June 2016. Despite Muslims not being overtly mentioned in the debates following the referendum, they have indeed been present at the heart of Brexit discourses. The increase in Muslim immigration to European countries following the wars in Syria, Libya and Yemen was projected as the main cause for Britain’s structural problems in the healthcare, housing, and education sectors (Kavanagh 2016). This was particularly manifested through ‘Leave’ campaign narratives which warned of higher crime rates if Turkey would join the EU and ‘Turkish criminals’ would be allowed to move freely to the UK (Boffey and Helm 2016). However, this narrative was not far from that of ‘Remain’ campaigners. In his attempt to address public and Leave campaigners’ concerns over new waves of Muslim immigration, Cameron confirmed that ‘Turkey is not going to join the EU anytime soon’ (Cameron 2016).

Brexit debates connoted clear signs of the retreat of multicultural Britain, giving more weight to anti-immigration and anti-Muslim attitudes. It is important, though, to note here that Brexit debates in this case were part of a whole discourse that had already been taking place since the early 2000s, one which portrays Muslims as non-fitting with British society (Burnett 2016; Virdee and McGeever 2017). The referendum and its following debates intersect with discourses on British national identity, with which Muslims are portrayed as incompatible (Straw 2006; Blair 2016). Policy agendas such as Prevent have already laid the foundation for a heated prejudice against Muslims in the context of Brexit. This was evidenced by the Tell MAMA 2016 report, where it was found that perpetrators of anti-Muslim crimes following the EU referendum often ‘reference mainstream discourse concerning immigration and terrorism alongside broader Islamophobic and dehumanising language in order to abuse their victims’ (Tell MAMA 2016: 7). The heated and polarising context of the EU referendum represented a fertile environment for increased hostility and prejudice towards Muslims (Tell MAMA 2016,

2018). The impact of Brexit narratives will be further elaborated as part of the discussion of fear among Muslims in Chapter Six.

The heated polarisation of the Brexit debates were echoed in the Casey report which, along with other measures, was set by the government to investigate opportunity and integration in Britain's most isolated communities (Cameron 2015). Not so far from the findings and the recommendations of the Cattle report of 2001, which put the major blame on ethnic minorities, the Casey review, published in 2016 with a specific focus on Muslim communities, warned that 'people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds and people of Muslim faith live in increasing and greater concentrations' (Casey 2016: 23). The report sparked serious reactions and criticisms for its focus on and undue blame on Muslim communities (Cattle 2016 (a); Institute of Race Relations 2016; MWNUK 2016; Taylor 2016). In 2018, the Government responded to the Casey review with the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, in which Muslims remained a key focus in terms of the Government's integration initiatives (HM Government 2018). Muslim communities here are portrayed as holding cultures or practices that restrict not only integration but also individual rights in ways that do not fit with the life in modern Britain (e.g. forced marriage and women's rights) (HM Government 2018: 56).

Discourses on the Muslim 'problem' have led to a large body of academic research investigating different aspects of British Muslim realities in the UK (Modood 1992; Eade 1998; Kershen 1998; Ansari 2004; Reed 2005; Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005; Ameli et al. 2006; Masood 2006; Maxwell 2006, 2008; Phillips 2006; Joppke 2009; Uberoi and Modood 2009; UKREN 2009; Ahmad and Evergeti 2010; Sobolewska 2012; O'Toole and Gale 2013; McAndrew and Voas 2014; Mustafa 2015; Shazhadi et al. 2018; Ahmed 2019; Hoque 2019). Despite this growing body of research on Muslim integration, we have yet to fully grasp the meaning of integration in the UK, neither for Muslims nor in mainstream discourses (Archer and Stevens 2018). In fact, there is no political agreement on what integration does mean, could mean or even should mean. British integration discourse has been ambivalent, veering between particularistic and groupist multiculturalism on one hand, and universalistic and individualistic interculturalism on the other hand. It is in fact not known what it means to 'integrate'. Is it to acculturate or to assimilate? The problem is that both strategies have failed to deliver sustainable harmonious community relations. Neither multiculturalism nor interculturalism successfully provides a solution to potential social segregation. On the one hand,

multiculturalism enhances groupism and underlines boundaries among communities- not only between the majority and the minority but also within and in-between minority groups *per se* (see section 2.2.2.2). On the other hand, interculturalism's essentialisation of identity as a principle for successful integration overlooks difference (see section 2.2.2.4). Both approaches have failed to achieve a balance between the right to difference and the duty to integrate.

This thesis was written in a context in which Muslims are increasingly viewed as apathetic, non-integrated and religiously and culturally distant from the British way of life (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how meanings and practices of integration are framed in a (problematized) faith community, namely, the Muslim community in the UK, with the aim of finding out what can possibly lead to a *sustainably* successful integration. While most academic and policy research on integration has so far been concerned about how to achieve *successful* integration (Gordon 1964; Portes and Zhou 1993; Dörr and Faist 1997; Kearns and Forrest 2000; Home Office 2001; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Home Office 2005b; Penninx 2005; Atfield et al. 2007; Ager and Strang 2008; Phillimore and Goodson 2008; Bloemraad et al. 2008; Sales and D'Angelo 2008; Fokkema and Haas 2011; Phillimore 2011, 2012; Casey 2016; Pace and Simsek 2019; Klarenbeek 2019), no attention has yet been paid to the sustainability of integration. Here, I put forward a thesis that argues for *sustainable integration*, which I identify as one which is resilient to the everchanging make-up of society and socio-political climate. The aim of sustainable integration is to create strong social norms and bonds based on mutual understanding of differences, and to allow an equal opportunity for everyone to live, to contribute equally to society, and to continue doing so without any discriminative cost.

The research presented in this thesis informs my argument that sustainable integration must be based on in-depth understanding of both mainstream and ethno-religious identities. While British integration discourse is primarily targeted at Muslim communities, it rarely reflects the views and opinions of British Muslims. Therefore, this research investigates the views of British Muslims, whose social and cultural engagement is largely underscored by current integration discourse. I argue here that the official rhetoric and political practice of integration in the UK are constitutive parts of the problem, rather than solutions. The main premise of this research is that if British Muslims' integration is truly problematic, it is the result of the top-down approach to constructing the concept and practice of integration. Top-



down approaches to integration fail to incorporate and represent the unheard voices of citizens at local levels, leaving them unable to belong.

Hence, the aim of this study is to get beyond theoretical debates and political reflections on integration, and to move towards more in-depth understanding based on systematic engagement with real-world stories and everyday experiences. From this broad aim, two specific objectives are defined: 1) to explore meanings of integration as perceived by British Muslims, along with exploring their understandings of what enhances/hinders integration and what makes it sustainable; and 2) to explore how this perception is associated with their religious and cultural identity. This study is an attempt to ethnographically investigate the meanings of integration as constructed by a local Muslim community in Birmingham. It aims to provide insights on the unvoiced perspectives and understandings of integration in British Muslim communities, which can in turn set out the case for an effective integration policy. The significance of Birmingham as a field site will be discussed in section 3.4.1.

## **1.2 Research Problem and Research Questions**

A key problem of British integration relates to the way it is defined and debated. Debating integration is mainly handled by politicians, scholars, and/or the majority population. This thesis seeks to provide a new perspective on integration derived from the grassroots, and mainly from minority groups themselves. In the UK, as it is in other European countries, diversity discourses are paradoxical. While diversity is celebrated, it is rarely inclusive. This study problematises the concept of diversity. The multicultural make-up of society is in itself not sufficient for the celebration of diversity. It is indeed important to reflect this diversity in defining, shaping, and setting the scene for integration.

The recurring discourses on the non-integration of Muslim minorities in the UK denote a persistent failure to provide a functional policy agenda on integration. British Muslim communities have been at the centre of British integration debates since the controversy surrounding the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, and have since then continued to be publicly and politically problematised. Recent high profile acts of terrorism committed by British-born Muslims (e.g. the 2017 attacks on Westminster, London Bridge, and the Manchester Arena), and the Islamophobic terrorism against Muslims (e.g. the 2017 attack on

the Finsbury Park Mosque and other hate crimes) indicate a society in crisis over its community relations. Such a crisis raises serious questions about the validity of existing official integration approaches. Moreover, it provokes increasingly controversial debates around British Muslims' religious identity and its link to slow-paced integration. Despite being under academic, public and political spot lights; very little research has been done to investigate what Muslims themselves think of 'integration' and what being integrated means for them (Ameli and Merali 2004; Ameli et al. 2006; Anjum 2014; Ahmed 2019). Building upon that, this study seeks to answer the main question: what does integration mean to Muslims in the UK?

Investigating Muslims' understandings of integration is complex and multidimensional. However, wider political and academic debates on Muslim integration have informed the sub-questions of this study. Two main aspects emerge from the debate on Muslim non-integration: the first relates to their religious identity and the second relates to their patterns of settlement. The perceived failure of Muslims to integrate is mainly blamed on their religious identity and is normally indicated by their residential segregation. As for the first aspect, mainstream discourses portray Muslim communities as willingly segregating in order to preserve their religious and cultural heritage which are largely perceived as incompatible with the British values and as hostile to peaceful coexistence (Cameron 2015; Blair 2015, 2016). The religious identity of Muslims is, according to Blair (2015), taught to young generations in a narrow-minded, prejudicial and dangerous way. The religious identity of Muslims is in this way often stereotyped as being linked to extremism and radicalisation on one side, and oppression of women on the other (Cameron 2015; Blair 2015, 2016). As will be discussed in section 2.4.1, the incompatibility thesis has been challenged in a wide range of academic research, research which in fact suggests that the religious identity of British Muslims aligns closely to British values (Kundnani 2008; Ahmad and Evergeti 2010; Hopkins 2011; Shazhadi et al. 2018; Phoenix 2019). Nevertheless, little academic attention has been paid to the mundane reality of Muslim religious identity, how Muslims understand, negotiate and practice their religious identity in their daily lives; and how this impacts their ability to integrate (Kundnani 2008; Yilmaz 2010; Hopkins 2011; Ali 2013; Hoque 2019). Existing research provides inconclusive accounts of the role of Muslim faith in Muslim integration. Therefore, it is of paramount importance while scrutinising Muslims' understandings of integration to provide more nuanced accounts of how they make sense and negotiate their religious identity in their day-to-day realities, and what role, if any, this identity plays in a context of otherness and stigmatisation. This lays the foundation of the first sub-research question of this study.

The residential patterns of Muslims is presented as evidence of their ‘parallel lives’, as Muslims in concentrated areas are thought to live, work, and socialise only within their own communities with potentially very limited contact with the white majority (Home Office 2001), providing fewer chances for creating shared understandings and social bonds (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2015; Casey 2016). In 2007, a 2-day stay with a Muslim family in Balsall Heath- had motivated David Cameron to think of integration as a two-way process. During his stay, he realized that British Asian Muslims cherish British values. In a thank-you note to the family who hosted him, he said: ‘Asian families and communities are incredibly strong and cohesive and have a sense of civic responsibility which puts the rest of us to shame. Not for the first time, I found myself thinking that it is mainstream Britain that needs to integrate more with the British Asian way of life, not the other way around’ (Cameron 2007). In line with that, the commission on integration and cohesion report found that discourses of segregation are oversimplified and overstated leaving Britain sleep walking to ‘simplification’ other than segregation (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007: 3). However, almost a decade later, the official discourse turned again to portray Muslims’ residential patterns (and integration records in general) as alarming (Casey 2016). According to the Casey report, the increasing percentage of Muslim concentration since 2001 (more than 40% and 70% of the population in 69 and 9 wards accordingly)- is deemed alarming (Casey 2016: 44).

Residential segregation is associated with lower social trust, cross group contact, and lower opportunities for employment and social mobility (Casey 2016; HM Government 2018). These concerns have been commonly shared by successive British governments since the early 2000s (Electoral Commission 2003, 2005; Home Office 2005; Kelly 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). At the heart of the debate about Muslim integration is the presumption that communities living separately do not share the same values (Finney and Simpson 2009: 7). However, as will be elaborated in the literature review chapter (section 2.3.2.1.), many scholars have questioned this presumption, arguing that the government overlooks, among other things, evidence that Muslim communities are in fact more likely to identify themselves as British compared to other ethnic groups (Maxwell 2006; Phillips 2006; Karlsen and Nazroo 2015; Mustafa 2015). Although research on neighbourhood effects on integration has been on the rise (Clark and Drinkwater 2002; Friedrichs et al. 2003; Drever 2004; Phillips 2006, 2007, 2010; Fieldhouse and Cutts 2008; Finney and Simpson 2009; Ham et al. 2012; Sampson 2019), subjective accounts of space and place of residence have so far been understudied. This sets the foundation for the second sub-research question of this study,

examining how Muslims make their residential choices and how they understand and make sense of their residential patterns.

The third aspect of my investigation into the integration of Muslims relates to the conditions and barriers that might promote/hinder the success and sustainability of integration. Conditions of successful integration are often demonstrated by either policy makers, Government-sponsored research and/or academic research and scholars (Home Office 2001; Straw 2006; Blair 2006; Bisin et al. 2007; Ager and Strang 2008; Anjum 2014; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016; Lee 2019; Pace and Simsek 2019; Yates 2021). Promoting English language skills and equal opportunities are often seen as key conditions of successful integration (Casey 2016; HM Government 2018). However, evidence shows that lack of integration is not necessarily associated with lack of English language skills and/or social mobility (Frampton et al. 2016). For instance, the 2005 London bombings were carried out by British-born Muslims who spoke English and were integrated into British society (Home Office 2006: 26). Furthermore, the perceived segregation of Muslims in Britain is mostly a generalised one, where no line is drawn between Muslims who speak English and those who do not, or Muslims who have higher opportunities for social mobility and those who do not. The discourse on Muslim integration objectifies Muslim communities in general and portrays them as non-integrated (Cantle 2011; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016). This sparks difficult questions on what other factors (other than English language skills and opportunities for social mobility) may hinder the integration process. The third sub-question therefore examines what, in Muslims' views and from their daily experiences, works as a barrier to integration.

In the light of this background, this study posits three sub-questions to guide the research in answering the main question above:

- a) What role does religious identity play in defining Muslims' understandings and experiences of integration? How do British Muslims negotiate their religious identity alongside their British identity?
- b) How do British Muslims understand residential segregation? How do they make their residential choices? What are the mundane consequences of residential segregation?
- c) In Muslims' views, what are the barriers to successful and sustainable integration?

Answering these questions will set out the case for a greater understanding of how Muslims think of integration. In order to unpack these questions I undertook ethnographic fieldwork in

a Muslim concentrated neighbourhood in Birmingham (see section 3.4), seeking a detailed account of relevant meanings and experiences of local Muslims. Conducting an ethnographic investigation enabled me to find answers to the questions above, through the lens of a local Muslim community living what seems to be segregated lives. My ethnographic immersion provided me with enriched data on what it means and feels like to live in a Muslim-dense area, and on what Muslims living in such areas think of themselves, their ethnic and religious communities and the world beyond.

The importance of this study lies in the following points. First, the presence of Muslims has been manifested not only at individual and group levels but also at institutional and organisational levels. Muslims represent a significant minority population in Britain whose integration is commonly perceived as problematic in diversity debates (Home Office 2001, Blair 2006; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016). As the second largest religious group in Britain, it can be significantly alarming if British Muslims are truly segregated as it would mean that 3,372,966 people or around 6% of the British population (ONS 2018) is living segregated lives. No doubt that, *if true*, the segregation of 6% of the population would bring challenges at social, economic, and political levels for both current and future times. In addition to its potential socio-political and security risks, lack of integration is evidenced to bring negative economic consequences in areas of employment and community health and wellbeing, costing the UK economy approximately £6 billion each year, which equals approximately 0.5% of the total British GDP (The Social Integration Commission 2014: 12, Social Integration Commission 2015). Second, Muslims are vulnerable to stigmatisation, underrepresentation and marginalisation (Stevenson et al. 2017; Acik and Pilkington 2018; Tell MAMA 2020). The study sheds light on a vulnerable community whose voices of integration are ignored, unrecognized and/or suppressed (Ahmed 2009). Third, this study contributes to the public dialogue on living with difference and diversity management. Despite focussing on one local community, the significance of its findings goes well beyond the boundaries of this study's field site. Empirical studies --such as the one at hand-- and their contextual reflections are of paramount importance as points of reference in integration debates and policies. Fourth, taking the foreseeable growing multi-ethnic nature of British society into consideration, greater challenges are expected to arise. Hence, empirical exploration of ways to sustain integration and social harmony among different communities is particularly important for future generations. Finally, this study is a timely attempt, as fieldwork for this research was conducted in the wake of two major incidents impacting on Muslims in the UK: the EU referendum and

the publication of the Casey report. Both the referendum and the following Brexit controversies not only polarised the nation across 'Leave' and 'Remain' lines but also across racial and religious lines, putting community relations at stake (Burnett 2016; MAB 2016; Bowler 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2017; Mintchev 2021). The publication of the Casey review indicated a society in a crisis over its community cohesion. This atmosphere offers a unique and rich opportunity to study the perceptions of Muslim communities. Thus, this timing and context provided this research with enriched perspectives and accounts on the drivers and barriers to integration.

### **1.3 Thesis Outline**

In order to respond to the research questions furnished above this thesis is made up of seven chapters. The next chapter presents an extensive review of existing research related to integration and Muslims. It entails critical engagement with relevant aspects of the topic of this study. It begins by investigating theories of citizenship with particular reference to concepts of 'right' and 'identity'. In doing this, the chapter explores liberal, communitarian, post-national, multicultural, and intercultural theories of citizenship. In this I demonstrate that existing citizenship theories offer either universalistic and assimilatory accounts or particularistic and groupist ones. Neither, I argue, creates a welcoming environment for a shared belonging between minority and majority groups in society. The chapter reviews the scholarship on integration in general and British Muslims' social integration in particular, including research on spatial dispersion and social mixedness. In this section I bring together academic and Government-sponsored research on integration, with particular reference to the position of Muslims in relevant debates. The chapter outlines the controversies on Muslim integration, showing different sides of the debate. Later in the chapter, I engage with concepts of identity and cultural hybridity as they link to concepts of integration and radicalisation. The chapter shows how debates on national identity, ethnic identities and cultural recognition intersect with debates on cultural hybridity and mixedness, elaborating on the space and position of those belonging to two distinctive cultures. The chapter later investigates research that explains acts of terrorism and radicalisation and the potential role played by Muslim religious identity. Throughout, the chapter highlights gaps in the existing literature which this thesis aims to bridge.

Chapter Three defines the methodological approach and methods which guided the data collection process of this research. The chapter begins with an explanation of how I started my fieldwork journey, with reference to the challenges I encountered during the data collection phase. It then describes the ontological and epistemological stance of this study. It elaborates the constructivist perspective adopted in this study, where reality is constructed through people's everyday interactions and negotiations of meanings of the social world. The chapter next explains the principles of ethnography and the purpose of using ethnography in this study. How access to the field site was secured is explained later in the chapter, and I elaborate on the dynamics of my ethnographic fieldwork and the difficulties I came across towards the completion of my field investigation. Ethnographic data collection techniques, namely interviews and participant observation, are explained. Following that, the chapter describes my participants (the sample) and discusses issues of reflexivity and the researcher's role, ethical considerations, data analysis, validity, credibility, and generalisability, including a detailed discussion of my position in the field setting and how it impacted on research activities and the data collected. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the approach followed for data analysis. It outlines the inductive approach used for data analysis and how I systematically generated knowledge from field data. In addition, it explains the process of coding followed in this research and the themes that emerged out of this process.

Chapter Four is the first analysis chapter, and here I address the first aspect of my field findings related to British Muslims' understandings of faith and religious identity. I am not concerned in this chapter with Muslims' devoutness or religiosity in its narrow theological sense (e.g. religious practice such as offering prayers and/or fasting the month of Ramadan). Rather, I am concerned with the social role of religion which exceeds its theological boundaries. The chapter challenges existing perceptions of Muslims as a 'religiously' homogeneous community. This chapter presents in-depth insights into the dynamics of religious identity among Muslims in Birmingham. It provides empirical answers to why Muslim integration might fail in Western societies with reference to the religious aspect of life. In doing so, the chapter highlights the differences between practising and non-practising Muslims in the field setting, and also the divergences between each of these groups *per se*. Later, the chapter extends the discussion on how the everyday experience of Muslim religious identity might develop into radicalisation and extremism.

Chapter Five focuses on the residential concentration of British Muslims, with a particular interest in answering the question ‘how alarming is the residential concentration of Muslims in Britain?’. The chapter draws a nuanced picture of segregation as a life experience of many Muslims in the fieldwork site in three main aspects: the reasons for Muslim residential concentration; the consequences of Muslim residential concentration; and Muslim potential ghettoisation. The chapter discusses the ethno-religious, economic and social reasons for Muslim residential concentration. Later, the chapter discusses the day-to-day consequences of residential concentration at the social and economic levels. The chapter concludes by debating whether or not residentially segregated Muslims are ghettoised and differentiates between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ segregation, arguing that only in certain circumstances should segregation be perceived as alarming.

Chapter Six highlights the third finding of this study which relates to one of the central impediments to integration, namely fear. The chapter illustrates how Muslims live with and manage fear. It then analyses fear as it existed in the field setting, through a macroscopic approach where this local finding is understood within the wider context. Later in the chapter, I show how British integration discourse is part of the context which constructs and intensifies fears, anxieties, and uncertainties in Muslim communities. In this, I illustrate how in the field, fear over integration came in two forms: fear of being non-integrated on the one side; and fear of being integrated, on the other. The chapter concludes by arguing that citizenship corrosion is a significant source of fear among Muslims. Significant to the explanation and analysis of fear among my participants was their incomplete sense of equal citizenship. This chapter, therefore, argues that flaws of citizenship is a major contributor to existing uncertainties, anxieties, inequalities and fears among Muslims.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter, where I revisit my research questions and extend the discussion of what makes integration sustainable. The chapter presents my final argument for how to move towards sustainable integration. Revisiting my research questions, I suggest that British Muslims share the major pillars of the mainstream account of integration. However, there is certainly a pressing need for more inclusion and not only recognition for Muslims identities in the UK. The central argument in this chapter is that the success and sustainability of integration should go well beyond the conditions of living, working, and socialising with other communities. Most importantly, a sustainably successful integration should be indicated and promoted by a genuine sense of belonging and equal citizenry. This



genuine sense of belonging and citizenry calls necessarily for a change to how integration is defined and planned for. This chapter suggests that the top-down approach to constructing British integration is indeed part of the problem rather than the solution. Successful and sustainable integration is only possible if both mainstream and ethnic communities are allowed an equal opportunity not only to live and contribute to the society, but also to take part in shaping integration. Building on the ethnographic evidence of this research, the chapter argues for a capability-based approach for sustainable integration, as opposed to the governmental rights-based approach. In addition, this final chapter problematises the mainstream perspective of cultural hybridity and hyphenation. In so doing, it builds on my argument that hyphenated identities should not be driven with the target of cultural assimilation. Following that, the chapter concludes with an elaboration of the contributions of this study, the challenges it has encountered, its suggestions for future research and finally, with an outline of a set of recommendations for integration policies.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

After contextualising this research and outlining its research problem and research questions, I now turn to Chapter Two, where I engage with existing literature on integration and British Muslims. The chapter will highlight the contributions of and gaps in previous research and the role of this study in bridging these gaps.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

## **2.1 Introduction**

Integration has been the focus of a growing body of research. Due to the multidimensional nature of the concept, conducting a literature review requires looking through interlinked areas of research. This chapter engages with relevant literature and debates in the field of integration through three main sections. The first section (2.2) critically reviews different citizenship theories. The second section (2.3) involves a review of existing literature on British Muslims' integration. This is followed by the third section (2.4), which offers a review of existing scholarship on identity as it relates to integration and radicalisation.

## **2.2 Citizenship Between Rights and Identity**

Citizenship profoundly associates with and impacts on integration in both theory and practice. I start this review with discussing citizenship theories because the way citizenship is framed often defines the rationale for and approach to integration (Lewicki 2017; Bartram 2019). It is, therefore, of paramount importance to investigate different schools and perspectives of citizenship as I approach the concept of integration. In this part of the study, I review liberal, communitarian, civic-national, multicultural and intercultural theories of citizenship. Following that, the study moves on to review a range of theoretical perspectives on integration and the existing scholarship on Muslim integration.

### **2.2.1 Citizenship Theories and the Concept of 'Rights'**

Different schools approach citizenship in different ways focusing on one or more of its aspects (e.g. territorial, legal, cultural, and/or participatory). The scope of legal rights adopted in any school impacts profoundly on the scope remaining to other aspects, such as identity and participation. Therefore, I take the legal aspect of citizenship as the main criterion by which I classify different schools of thought in this regard. In terms of rights, citizenship is often identified as a legal status that binds individuals to a certain state through certain rights and responsibilities (Turner 1997; Bloemraad 2000; Jones and Gaventia 2002). The limit and scope of rights and responsibilities have widely varied amongst theories and perspectives. The central controversy around rights as will be shown in the following discussion relates to the scope of

rights guaranteed by citizenship/citizenship status for citizens. While liberals focus mainly on civil and political individual rights, communitarians focus on community rights; and cultural pluralists focus on cultural particularistic rights. These perspectives map onto UK politics relating to the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities. British politics has witnessed recurrent changes in the rationale framing citizenship, and this has influenced the way social problems are interpreted and policy agendas are set out. As I will show in more detail later in this chapter, while multicultural citizenship in the UK meant more inclusion of group rights in the national narrative in order to end social divisions, the move to a mixed version of civic and intercultural citizenship in the 2000s meant less focus on group rights in favour of a perception of group rights as a threat to national unity and social cohesion. Implied in this shift is that citizenship and belonging came to reflect more what mainstream society and majority populations think of as 'British' (Lewicki 2017; McGhee 2008).

### **2.2.1.1 Liberal Theories of Citizenship**

A traditional liberal perspective focuses on rights as the central component of citizenship. In this perspective, legal rights form citizenship and achieve belonging (Marshall 1950; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Rawls 1999; Lister and Pia 2008) but the scope of rights and responsibilities varies according to different scholars. In his renowned work to integrate the segregated working class in the UK after the Second World War, Marshall defined three main rights of citizenship, that is civil, political and social. Marshall was mainly concerned with the right to freedom, political participation, and economic welfare. Social inequality and class division in the early stages of the industrial revolution motivated Marshall to argue for social citizenship rights to create strong community ties and solidarity (Marshall 1950). Rawls too is concerned with addressing the gaps between the better off and the worse off (Rawls 1999), but compared to Marshall, who is mainly concerned with economic and social rights, Rawls is more concerned with political rights and particularly the right to participation as an essential route to maximising citizens' interests (Rawls 1999). As rational actors, individuals should have equal political rights that enable them to achieve maximum interests. In his argument, individuals should, in principle and without obligation, have 'equal rights to engage in public affairs' (Rawls 1999: 200). In a different account, Kymlicka and Norman specify legal, civic, and identity-related rights as the main components of citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman 1994).

Despite variations in the scope of rights, liberal theorists share a commitment to the universalist and individualist nature of rights, that is to say, similar rights to all citizens as individuals and not groups (Kymlicka and Norman 1994, Bloemraad 2000, Lister and Pia 2008). Liberal rights are seen as difference-blind, where citizens, no matter what differentiates them, should be allocated universal citizenship status before the law (Barry 2001). However, liberal citizenship has been criticized by several scholars as homogeneous, assimilative, essentialist and exclusive to the other who differs from the national identity (Young 1989). The official accordance to religious and cultural difference in liberal states does not provide any genuine support for the survival of ethnic minority cultures compared to the full support to majority cultures (Young 1989; Walzer 1994). Arguing that state neutrality is in practice ‘hypocritical’ and often ‘incomplete’ (1994: 102); Walzer indicates that most liberal states do not exhibit neutrality when it relates to the majority culture. For the sake of securing the cultural survival of the state, unneutral public recognition and support are always offered to things like ‘the language history, literature, calendar, or even the minor mores of the majority’ (Walzer 1994: 100). I do not think liberals intend in their range of contributions and revisions the exclusion and/or discrimination against the other. In my view, the main problem with liberalism is that its difference-blind claim cannot be taken for granted. In practice, the capacity to claim ‘blind’ rights differs widely according to who claims them. For instance, majority cultures are more privileged (compared to ethnic cultures) as they are represented by the overall long-settled cultural institutions of society. This privileged cultural and institutional representation favours and supports the majority culture.

I began this research believing in the political concept of ‘right’ as a sufficient guarantor of equality among all citizens (including ethnic minorities). I believed that equal entitlement to civil, political and social rights is sufficient to protect freedom of choice and belief. I started off by believing in the pivotal role of rights in creating a sense of sameness before the law in the political community. However, as will be shown through my analysis, my field findings revealed that formal citizenship rights as stated in constitutions and laws do not necessarily provide practical protection for the interests of all individuals regardless of their backgrounds and communities. The existence of official rights *per se* are not sufficient to provide equal citizenship status for non-majority groups (McGhee 2008). As will be shown, equal legal rights did not guarantee equal citizenship status for many Muslims in my field site. Equal liberal rights were evidenced not to provide my participants with adequate protection against disadvantage whether economic, political, social and/or cultural. In the UK, the practice of

citizenship, in the context of a war on terror, is subject to serious limitations and violations, particularly for racialised Muslim communities whose citizenship has become 'conditional' (McGhee 2008: 37; Choudhury 2017; Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019; O'Toole 2021). Entitlement to citizenship rights in this context is dependent on whether or not Muslim citizens adhere to certain conditions, such as abiding by British values (McGhee 2008). Drawing a line between acts and the practices of citizenship suggests that citizenship 'goes well beyond legal ascriptions of nationality' (Lewicki and O'Toole 2017: 153). Exploring cases of Muslim women activism, Lewicki and O'Toole show that the liberal citizenship regime in the UK facilitated the political activism of Muslim women, yet this regime does not necessarily reflect the scales of mobilisation and the forms of contestation for excluded groups in society, providing limited inclusive mechanisms at national levels (2017: 167-168).

Blind and equal entitlement to political, civic, and legal rights has been persuasively criticised for its failure to guarantee the right to difference. Universalist liberal rights do not offer an adequately fair ground to ethnic differences. In their criticism of liberal theories of justice, Kymlicka and Norman (2000: 5) argue that people's self-respect and sense of agency can be seriously damaged if state institutions do not offer recognition of and respect to people's culture and identity. An essentialist account of rights has been strongly challenged by the makeup of contemporary multicultural societies (Young 1989; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Kymlicka 1996, 2004; Joppke 1996; Kaya 2012; Gagnon and Lacovino 2016). The liberal rights-based theory of citizenship proved insufficient in protecting people of difference from feeling excluded due to its reliance on an essentialist notion of right and identity (Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Kaya 2012). Not only that, but it has also contributed to the identification of ethnic minorities as a discrete 'illiberal' other because acceptance is primarily associated with citizens accepting liberalism first hand (Young 1989; Bloemraad 2000; Kaya 2012). Restricting the right of difference is as illiberal as pursuing the 'benign neglect' approach towards cultural difference as both fail to sufficiently represent ethnic minorities and their cultural interests (Kymlicka 1996: 49-50). Gagnon and Lacovino persuasively argue that the individualistic nature of traditional liberal philosophy 'fails to account for the salience of cultural identity in an individual's exercise of autonomy' (2016: 106).

Liberal perspectives were criticized by a revisionist form of liberalism represented in the works of Yael Tamir, David Miller, and Will Kymlicka (Kymlicka 1996). In his book *Multicultural Citizenship*, Kymlicka argues that contemporary ethnic and national diversities

require a response from liberal theorists. His main argument is that individual-based human rights should be supplemented with group-differentiated rights which assign 'special status' to distinctive communities and cultures (Kymlicka 1996: 6). He asserts that individual rights are strongly linked to cultural community rights. Protecting cultural rights entails securing individual rights and integration. Inspired by Kymlicka's account (1996), I argue that the standard meaning of 'rights' does not secure feelings of inclusion for minority communities as it is not representative enough of what people of difference actually need. Ethnic groups should have the right to 'express their distinctive characteristics' (Kymlicka 1996: 61). As Kymlicka and Norman persuasively argue, citizenship rights are 'originally defined by and for white men' (1994: 370). I therefore agree with Kymlicka's view that the scope of rights and the decision over what needs to be included in/excluded from the framework of state laws should rather be defined through an inclusive process shared by all citizens of different backgrounds (Kymlicka 1996, 2003, 2004).

In highlighting the liberal response to the cultural diversity, I shall focus on the work of Brian Barry as one of the renowned responses to liberal culturalists and cultural pluralists in general. In his answer and critique to Young's concept of diversity (Young 1989), Barry opposes particularistic group rights and denies claims of majority favouritism in liberal states, considering this form of favouritism to be the opposite of liberal just institutions. Categorising people along lines of race and identity is rather implicitly discriminatory and divisive, according to Barry (2001). Liberals find calls for differentiated citizenship a threat to stability and cohesion in liberal welfare states (Barry 2001). Barry refers to the historic dispute between Protestants and Catholics, where conflicts were successfully settled only when a single religion was imposed on each single state, and equally when the state showed less inclination towards religion. According to Barry (2001: 12), multiculturalism imposes particular identities on individuals who might not necessarily identify with those identities and it also divides societies across ethnic and racial lines, making it in fact the antidote to 'the values of liberty and equality'. Differentiated rights, as Barry (2001: 12) puts it, diminishes equality; and the solution in his view is to supplement 'civil and political rights' with 'universalistic social and economic rights'.

In this, Barry ignores the already privileged position of majority groups that maintains their privileged status while also claiming those supplementary 'universalistic' social and economic rights. Supporting culture, according to his point of view, creates room for social

division and conflicts between mainstream and ethnic communities (Barry 2001). The equal and uniform treatment of liberal policies is believed by liberals to show tolerance and equal respect to all citizens within a framework of liberal, just and free choice (including for ethnic minorities) (Barry 2001). The liberal commitment to civic equality guarantees, as Barry puts equal treatment for non-mainstream religions and cultures (2001: 24). Assuming that this uniform separation implies equal treatment to all citizens, liberal citizenship theories do not take into account the already privileged position of a majority culture in determining the laws and institutions in a particular state (Walzer 1994). Ethnic minorities are often institutionally and culturally less privileged than the majority population, and in this context, uniform and equal rights turn out to be unrealistic entitlements. Theoretically, the liberal separation between the state and culture rules out any potential support from the state to ethnic cultures.

### ***2.2.1.2 Communitarian Theories of Citizenship***

In contrast to liberal theories of citizenship, communitarians stress shared community values and belief in the common good as a route for social solidarity (Walzer 1982; Sandel 1984; Taylor 1992; Sandel et al. 1998; Loobuyck 2016). For communitarians, the individual does not exist prior to the community. They argue that the liberal thin understanding of rights and responsibilities fails to pay attention to the importance of community and cultural belonging. While emphasising individualistic rights, the liberal theory ignores the social nature of individuals and fails to consider loyalty, responsibilities and duties owed to the community (Walzer 1982; Sandel 1984; Taylor 1992; Sandel et al. 1998). Criticising the liberal right-based approach, Sandel (1984: 5) argues that ‘we cannot conceive ourselves as independent in this way, as bearers of selves wholly detached from our aims and attachments...certain of our roles are partly constitutive of the persons we are-- as citizens of a country, or members of a movement, or partisans of a cause’. According to this view, a person is shaped through being part of a family, society, community, and/or culture (Walzer 1982; Sandel 1984; Sandel et al. 1998). Taylor takes the argument further to defend diversity not only as a matter of belonging but also as ways of belonging. According to Taylor, diversity should not only encompass different cultures and identities but also different ways of belonging. Belonging to the larger polity could be obtained through membership in a group that works as a mediator between the state and citizens (Taylor 1992).



In his critique of liberal theory, Sandel et al. argues that Rawls' individualistic approach 'rules out the possibility of any attachment (or obsession) able to reach beyond our values and sentiments to engage our identity itself' (1998: 62). In the communitarian approach, the coercive role of the state in defining the scope of rights in liberal theory is replaced by community interrelations in forming and maintaining a sense of national community/identity (Walzer 1982). Communitarians argue that liberal states should support 'intersubjective' or 'intrasubjective' forms of self-understanding, where no bounds are pre-imposed by the state (Sandel et al. 1998: 62). Communitarians convincingly argue that a liberal society is one which defends liberty and freedom without predefined normative limits (Sandel 1984; Sandel et al. 1998). Intersubjectivity, in this view, encourages the self to embrace a wide sense of moral responsibility towards relevant aspects of the self, the family, the community, class and/or the nation as a whole (Sandel et al. 1998: 63).

Despite agreeing with the communitarian emphasis on the importance of freely self-formed belonging and identity, I suggest that the concept of free self-identity formation is problematic and cannot be taken for granted. For example, the formation of some aspects of self-identity (e.g. ethnicity) might be restricted by the existence of other already settled identities (e.g. nationality) and this situation would hamper genuine liberty and intrasubjective contact. Instead, I argue that for liberty and freedom to be realised, theorists should focus not only on what citizens can do but also what they are restricted from doing and why and by whom. Restricted aspects of the self should gain further attention in citizenship and integration studies, and is of central attention in this thesis.

While liberal citizenship does not focus on the duty of the state to support culturally less privileged communities due to its *benign neglect*; I argue that the call of communitarians to respect the cultural role of the community in maintaining the belonging of individual citizens does not provide enough protection for vulnerable and less privileged communities. I value the communitarians' respect for family, society, community and/or culture, however, the thin focus on the community's role overlooks the already advantageous position of certain communities compared to others. In fact, the communitarians' recognition of community role does not counterbalance liberal universalism and benign neglect. Changing the unit of analysis does not indeed address the central pitfall of the liberal citizenship theory as it is an inadequate guarantee for the oppressed and the less privileged (Young 1989). I argue that there are no significant contradictions between these two schools of thought in terms of the theoretical stance towards

respect for difference, where neither calls for the suppression of the other. The actual difference lies, however, in the application of each and the level of commitment by each of them to embrace the defence of freedom of cultural difference. Communitarians show a greater, yet still insufficient, commitment to cultural difference and group-specific rights. The focus on community rights as separate from individual rights does not necessarily promote the ability of non-mainstream groups to freely form, express and maintain self-identity.

### **2.2.2 Citizenship and the Concept of Identity**

Citizenship theories have developed in response to contextual challenges. While in early theoretical attempts, major attention was devoted to the foundations of national membership and political rights, subsequent citizenship theorization was mainly focused on economic/class disparities by including social rights to alleviate economic inequalities (Turner 1997). However, as ethnic and cultural diversity became more of a mundane daily reality, citizenship scholarship has focused more on accommodating cultural rights (Turner 1997). This section is particularly designed to engage with multiculturalism-interculturalism debates relating closely to the British context of integration.

As liberal and communitarian perspectives were deemed by a growing body of scholarship to be incompatible with contemporary cultural diversities, identity, group identities and cultural rights emerged at the centre of a bulk of studies (Young 1989; Turner 1993; Habermas 1994, 1995, 2001; Soysal 1994; Modood et al. 1997; Bauböck 1999; Modood et al. 2006; and Loobuyck 2012, 2016). Three groups of literature can be found in this regard. The first group underestimates the importance of identity in forming citizenship represented, in the work of civic and/or post-nationalists (Turner 1993; Habermas 1994, 1995, 2001; Soysal 1994; Bauböck 1999; and Loobuyck 2012, 2016), whereas the second group supports identity, cultural rights and the incorporation of group identities in citizenship theories, as manifest by multiculturalists (Young 1989; Modood et al. 1997; Parekh 2000; Modood et al. 2006; Meer and Modood 2016). The third group of research is reflected in the work of interculturalists emphasising the role of nationally shared cultural values (Cantle 2012, 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2016, 2017).

### 2.2.2.1 Civic Nationalism and Post-nationalism

In a globalised world where immigration is more observed and post-national membership forms more evident; the applicability of traditional notions of citizenship has become questionable. Scholars arguing that shared national identity is no more a constitutive component of citizenship (Bloemraad 2000; Loobuyck 2012, 2016; Mason 1999, 2000; Moore 2001). Though it is perceived as possibly important for nation building, it is not considered a *sine qua non* (Loobuyck 2012, 2016; Mason 1999, 2000; Moore 2001). In this context, post-nationalists argue that cultural assimilation should not be a condition for belonging to happen and citizenship is attached to loyalty rather than ethnocultural conditions (Loobuyck 2016: 227-228; Laborde 2002). In other words, a shared national identity is not a condition for building a cohesive nation. According to this point of view, social cohesion and solidarity are generated through shared civic norms and practices (Turner 1994; Laborde 2002; Loobuyck 2012). According to Turner, adjusting to a national culture may marginalise certain classes or cultures (Turner 1994). As he puts it, 'formal participation in the national culture may simply disguise major *de facto* forms of exclusion' (Turner 1994: 160).

Post-nationalists and civic nationalists claim that justice and democratic values are sufficient to maintain social trust and solidarity (Habermas 1992, 2001). According to Habermas (1988), cultural homogeneity is indeed a fiction. The 'nation' was created as an oppressive tool by the state to achieve autonomy and dominance over struggling national minorities aspiring for self-determination (Habermas 1988: 6). In a multicultural society people are no longer in need to fit in a single national identity (Habermas 1988: 10). Habermas (1994b: 23) suggests that 'the nation of citizens does not derive its identity from common ethnic and cultural properties but rather from the praxis of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights'.

This civic-based perspective tallies with the British approach to integration. Discourses on Britishness reveal the political commitment to civic nationalism based on shared values (Billig et al. 2006). As will be further elaborated later (section 2.4.1), the community cohesion agenda and discourses on Britishness and British values advocate civic nationalism by stressing that belonging to British society can be achieved if British communities adhere to British values (McGhee 2008). In line with civic nationalist ideas, discourses of the nation and nationhood since the start of the 2000s have been built on the association not only between belonging and adherence to British values but also on the association between adherence to British values and citizenship. Adhering to British values is a condition for citizenship naturalization; and

opposing these values could be a reason for citizenship revocation (Billig et al. 2006; McGhee 2008).

This political approach to constructing British national identity is argued to help achieve more inclusivity for those who feel a lesser sense of belonging for reasons of ethnicity, religion or race (Blair 2006; Cameron 2011). As Cameron said, disaffection and radicalisation among young British Muslims is centrally associated with not sufficiently being ‘British’ (Cameron 2011). British values, as politically advocated, are argued to provide a baseline understanding of Britishness and what being a British citizen actually means in terms social behaviour and interaction (House of Lords 2018: 15). Section 2.4.1 discusses in further detail how depicting the nation as based on common values is problematic and could form a basis for alienation, not inclusivity. As a form of nationalism, these discourses imply a prioritisation to ‘us’ and ‘our’ values over those of others (Billig et al. 2006: 95).

Civic political culture is the most suitable way to manage multicultural societies, according to civic nationalists. In light of Habermas’s account, one such culture serves as ‘the common denominator for a constitutional patriotism which simultaneously sharpens an awareness of the multiplicity and integrity of the different forms of life which coexist in a multicultural society’ (Habermas 1994b: 27). For civic nationalists, constitutional traditions, civic and political participation are enough to maintain a sense of belonging through a collective civic identity that is based on feelings of collective authorship, determination and thus ownership (Loobuyck 2016: 228; Habermas 1994; 2001). Democratic citizenship, equal rights and responsibilities and collective participation in making laws and institutions together make up a sense of authorship and ownership of a nationally shared civic identity (Gutmann 1994). Hence, citizenship and nationality according to this perspective is a civic-based rather than identity-based notion (Gutmann 1994; Habermas 1994, 2001). In his answer to the multicultural proposal of Taylor (1992), Habermas (1994) argues that recognition of difference can be sufficiently secured through a shared civic culture where the state has no obligation to support cultural particularistic policies. Habermas opposes dealing with identity/culture as a political project where its preservation is a target, arguing that this comes at the expense of individuals’ freedoms to choose and decide over their own individual identities regardless of what community they belong to. In this, he combines the philosophical assumptions of both liberalism and communitarianism, sketching a proposal of a liberal public sphere, one where individuals in the pursuit of their free interests are bound by a collective civic culture that

guarantees respect to cultural difference (Habermas 1995). Recognition of difference, according to Habermas, should be achieved without limitation on the legitimate and fair distribution of individual rights which should be conceived in intersubjective terms. Everybody, as Habermas puts it, should be guaranteed to have the right to ‘develop and maintain her identity in just those intersubjectively shared forms of life and traditions from which she first emerged and has been formed during the course of childhood and adolescence’ (1995: 850-851).

The state has to support only the political civic culture but must remain to recognise and respect ‘pre-political’ forms of self-identification and belonging (Habermas 1995: 852). The state, according to Habermas, should keep the shared political and civic culture, but also it should accord equal membership and coexistence within the polity to subcultures and collective identities (1995: 851). All the immunities, protections, subsidies, and policies demanded by multiculturalists would, according to Habermas, come up with membership and association rights (1995: 851). Political culture (not culture in general) is enough to secure mutual respect, cultural accommodation and coexistence, allowing ethnic communities to decide what relates to equal treatment and the system of rights (Habermas 1994, 1995). In line with this argument, Turner (1997) finds that civic virtues are the central pillar of any pluralistic democracy, as they allow ethnic minority groups access to a free and culturally diverse space. Civic-based citizenship works as ‘a form of civic religion’, one which holds divided societies together (Turner 1997: 10).

From my point of view, commonly composed civic and political culture could play a major role in creating a sense of solidarity and common ownership amongst different communities. However, abiding by the civic culture and constitutional law does not necessarily guarantee social recognition and freedom for ethnic minorities. Habermas is liberal in his accentuation of individual rights (e.g. freedom of expression, association and belief), which I consider replay of liberal pitfalls in this regard. As I will show later in this thesis, there is a significant difference between being *allowed* to participate and being *able* to participate. Equal treatment is not a matter of abstract rights. Rather, it is a matter of the actual day-to-day ability to practise those rights. In practical terms, Habermas (1995: 851) argues that ‘it must be up to the citizens themselves to debate and deliberate in public, and to have parliaments democratically decide, on the kinds of rights they regard as necessary for the protection of both private liberties and public participation’. What Habermas omits is that the majority

populations are often more represented in parliaments as well as in the public space generally, a matter which limits the *ability* of minority groups to genuinely decide what they find representative of their needs and interests. In Habermas's account, immigrants are responsible for their political integration as they have to adhere to the constitutional, ethical, civic and political culture of the state. Simultaneously, he unrealistically argues that once immigrants become citizens, 'they in turn get a voice in public debates, which may then shift the established interpretation of the constitutional principles' (Habermas 1995: 853). In this, Habermas ignores the asymmetric foundation of citizenship for both majority and minority groups, assuming that the latter can change the constitution (Walzer 1994).

Furthermore, Habermas comes in for self-contradiction as he argues on one side that 'the constitutional state is committed to grant equally the private and civic autonomy of every citizen [...] Citizens can make adequate use of their public autonomy only if, on the basis of their equally protected private autonomy, they are sufficiently independent' (1995: 851). Yet, on the other side, he argues for the state not to offer support for 'pre-political forms of life and traditions' (Habermas 1995: 852). I argue that political socialisation of immigrants, shared civil culture and collective authorship of the law in the public space are more likely to favour the majority population and privileged communities compared to the less privileged communities. The role of the state in Habermas's theory is limited to the political and civic socialisation of citizens. The collective identity of immigrants does not represent a point of interest in his theoretical account. Understanding and detecting inequalities should, I argue, be pursued through the voices of those who suffer it. Habermas (1995) suggests that the protection of the 'public autonomy' of citizens is enough to protect their private liberties and rights, including their 'ethnic rights'. The problem here is that Habermas, as with civic nationalists in general, does not problematise identity. It is implied in their accounts that identity is a passive component which does not impact on other aspects of the human's personality. Unrealistically, civic nationalists separate private identity from civic and political public culture, aspects which I consider as strongly connected. Chapter Four will engage with this argument, showing that suppression of the self was profoundly linked to local Muslims' decreased sense and behaviours of citizenry and belonging.

In line with my point of view, Soysal challenges Habermas's argument by stressing that 'the existence of a complex of legal rights and privileges may not dissolve discrimination and empirical inequalities. There is always an "implementation deficit", a discrepancy between

formal rights and their praxis' (Soysal 1994: 134). In order to avoid otherness and discrimination, Soysal suggests the removal of nationally based citizenship rights along with the transformation of 'national rights' into more universalistic entitlements to include non-citizens. This universalistic approach is expected in her point of view to overcome the categorical dichotomies patterned by the national citizenship model (Soysal 1994: 135; Turner 1993, 1994; Bauböck 1999).

Through her critical inquiry into the case of guest-workers' membership in Europe, Soysal challenges the traditional logic of citizenship theories that link citizenship and cultural belonging. According to her, obtaining human rights does not require the pre-existence of national membership. Post-national citizenship, she argues, is a universal model of citizenship which is based on the principle of personhood, therefore every person should gain 'the right and duty of participation in the authority structures and public life of a polity, regardless of their historical or cultural ties to that community' (Soysal 1994: 3). Soysal (1994: 137) introduces a new form of membership, one whose basis is fluid and centrally built on universalistic personhood instead of particularistic nationhood. Formal citizenship status is not a prerequisite for individuals to have their rights recognised and protected in the national polity (Soysal 1994: 132). A foreign citizen living and working in a host country could, as Soysal claims, be a member of the latter's polity without obtaining its citizenship (1994: 141). Unlike Habermas, who puts the main responsibility of political integration on immigrants, Soysal argues that 'the organizing principles and incorporation styles of host polity are crucial variables in accounting for the organizational patterns of migrants' (1994: 85-86). While dissociating citizenship and identity, she asserts the legal aspect as a basic bond between citizens and the state, without any normative connotations. The legal bond between the state and the individual does not necessarily, according to this point of view, require sharing the normative side of the nation-state. In her argument, the rights and duties of participation cannot be achieved in a void. There are social, cultural, and community conditions that contribute and facilitate participation (Soysal 1994).

In order to avoid sociological relativism in the application of citizenship rights, Turner, similarly to Soysal, proposes human rights as a universal reference point. Because of the drawbacks of citizenship and its insufficient protection for individuals, Turner argues that 'human rights, in so far as they are extrapolitical or supersocietal rights which have their legitimacy beyond the state, are crucial in protecting individuals...' (1993: 182). National

membership does not require national cultural attachment (Turner 1993, 1994). In Turner's view, the global account of human rights provides the best formula for the postmodern cultural complexities and fluidities (1994: 166). The corrosion of the political and cultural sovereignty of the state in postmodern times challenges the traditional language of nation-state citizenship, replacing it with a discourse of human rights and humanity as an alternative paradigm of political loyalty (Turner 1994: 157). Failing to share the cultural and political identity of the state does not mean losing the rights created by the legal status of citizenship (Bauböck 1999). Imposing national identities, as Bauböck argues, is not the most effective cure for social divisions, and it could rather create worse social problems and ills because of this engendering illiberal and non-pluralistic practices that suspend civil liberties and override minority cultures (2002: 12).

Although this group of research takes citizens' rights as the main focus, it overlooks cultural rights. It also ignores the importance of cultural identity that increases not only individuals' political and social engagement, but also overall wellbeing, as will be shown in the data analysis later in this thesis. It also overlooks the social nature of individuals and ignores the responsibilities of and duties owed to the community (Walzer 1982; Taylor 1992; Sandel et al. 1998). The central position of identity and the way it contributes to and strengthens the possibilities for integration has been empirically confirmed throughout my fieldwork (see Chapter Four).

#### ***2.2.2.2 Cultural Pluralists and Multiculturalism***

In contrast to the above school of thought, there is extensive work that asserts the centrality of identity in forming citizenship. In order to achieve an inclusive and just citizenship, cultural pluralists argue that cultures must be accommodated by and not separated from states (Young 1989; Joppke 1996). Joppke argues that denying particularistic group identities and appealing for Western universalism is 'falsely homogenizing and a smokescreen for power' (1996: 449). Propositions such as 'differentiated citizenship', 'inclusive citizenship', and/or multicultural citizenship began to dominate citizenship debates during the 1990s for the sake of group representation (Young 1989; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Joppke 1996; Lister 2007). Hence, citizenship scholarship became more concerned to incorporate difference in its sociocultural sense and identity, cultural rights and difference started to occupy central



positions in citizenship theories (Pakulski 1997; Turner 1997). Rights in this perspective are not only perceived in political, economic and legal terms but, most importantly, in sociocultural terms (Pakulski 1997; Turner 1997; Lister 2007).

Multiculturalism was introduced as a challenge to the nationalist homogenous views of the nation state, and it was introduced in the 1960s to assure the recognition of minority cultures (Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1996; Meer and Modood 2016). Multiculturalists argue that what distinguishes multiculturalism from liberalism is not the emphasis on equality and justice but, rather it is multiculturalism's anti- Eurocentric positions together with its focus on cultural interaction and cultural hybridity (Meer and Modood 2016: 30). Multiculturalists claim that liberals' uniform understanding of rights fails to account for the complexities of diverse societies. While I started this research believing in the liberal concept of rights as a sufficient guarantor of diversity, my fieldwork, as will be shown in due course, brings me closer to the multicultural critique of liberal citizenship. The field evidence of this research raises serious questions about the blind concept of rights in diverse societies. The liberal conception of universal civil and political rights needs to be revisited to convey the particularities of minority cultures. Entitlement to rights is sometimes socially misused in a way that in fact enhances marginalisation, vulnerability and exclusion. Entitlement to rights may turn into an excuse to overlook certain social ills such as discrimination and exclusion. Citizens' entitlement to 'rights' could lead to a misleading sense of liberty and justice. I, therefore, argue that the reality of how rights are actually applied suggests that minority rights must be located at the core of our understanding of citizenship and rights.

In general, multiculturalism advocates the recognition of cultural diversity not only in laws, social and political institutions, but also in the overall national identity (Meer and Modood 2016: 29-30). However, it is important to draw a line between the different ways the term multiculturalism is used. On one side, multiculturalism could be used to describe the state of a society as multicultural, diverse or hybrid. On the other side, it could be perceived as a moral objective for any given society to support diversity and protect cultural pluralism (Meer and Modood 2016: 31). It is also important to differentiate between the way multiculturalism has been applied in Europe and elsewhere, such as in Canada and Quebec. The Canadian version of multiculturalism is described rather as liberal multiculturalism and more represented in the work of Taylor and Kymlicka. Although both Canadian and European versions share the same views on cultural difference and equality, both differ in the scope of rights they assign to

different minority groups (Meer and Modood 2016: 31; Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1996; Kymlicka and Norman 2000). According to Kymlicka and Norman, different groups (e.g. national minorities, immigrant minorities, religious groups, *sui generis* groups) need distinct group rights parallel to their unique challenges, needs and aspirations (2000: 18-19; Levy 2000). While indigenous minorities, for instance, have the right of autonomy in terms of territory and political representation, ethnic and religious groups are entitled to polyethnic rights that enable them to express their 'cultural particularity' (Kymlicka 1996: 31). The protection of indigenous minority groups in broader Canada means simultaneously the protection of the majority group of the Quebec province. This way of interpreting multiculturalism has paved the move to interculturalism. This also explains how early proponents of multiculturalism such as Taylor are indeed concurrent advocates of interculturalism (Taylor 1992). In fact, the Canadian version of multiculturalism is a form of 'multinationalism', specifically in the work of Kymlicka, while the European version of multiculturalism is mainly an attempt to protect minority immigrant groups (Meer and Modood 2016: 34; Parekh 2000).

Furthermore, it is paramount to distinguish between the theoretical framework of multiculturalism and its political use. Multiculturalism has been used instrumentally by politicians in ways that are indeed far from and sometimes opposed to what multiculturalists call for (Meer and Modood 2016). While multiculturalism in Britain, as well as elsewhere in Europe, was initiated as a general theoretical framework for diversity management, since the 2000s it has centred on the integration of 'Muslims'. As shown earlier in the introductory chapter, British multiculturalism was initially founded on racial terms, with the aim to involve 'black immigrants', however, identity has supplanted race to position 'British Muslims' at the centre of British multicultural politics (Modood et al. 2006).

It is also vital to understand that there is not one single account of multiculturalism. Rather, the multicultural framework has offered a range of positions and commitments, including orthodox multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism and revisionist multiculturalism. Orthodox multiculturalism follows a group-based approach to manage diversity, arguing for equality and cultural recognition for those who are culturally different (Taylor 1992). Recognition, non-recognition, and misrecognition would lead to different forms of self-consciousness. Therefore, the way the self is recognised not only a result of the intrinsic core of the identity itself but also a result of the way this identity is formed, bargained over, and

recognised by the wider world (Taylor 1992; Meer and Modood 2016). According to Taylor, non-recognition or misrecognition of minority cultures is a form of suppression, which can damage communities (1992: 25-26). In other words, multiculturalism advocates the rights of ethnic minorities to equally practise and maintain their cultural identities without being exposed to discrimination (Taylor 1992, 2016; Meer and Modood 2016; Meer et al. 2016). The importance of cultural diversity is central to orthodox multiculturalism (Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1996; Parekh 2000). According to Parekh (2000: 167), 'different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each other's horizon of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfilment'. The concept of integration in this approach is based on allowing different cultures, races and languages to be equally recognised (Zapata-Barrero 2016: 53; Taylor 1992, 2016; Meer and Modood 2016). Parekh argues that 'the dialogically constituted society privileges no particular cultural perspective, be it liberal or otherwise. It sees itself both as a community of citizens and a community of communities, and hence as a community of communally embedded and attached individuals' (2000: 340).

Liberal multiculturalism, represented mainly in the work of Kymlicka, Norman and Levy, depends on the premise that 'the adoption of certain minority rights, it is argued, helps to remedy the disadvantages that minorities suffer within difference-blind institutions, and in doing so promotes fairness' (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 4). Citizenship in liberal multiculturalism involves not only a legal status for citizens, but also an advocacy for identity, civic virtues and social cohesion (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 30-31). Corrosion of any of these aspects (identity, civic virtues, social cohesion) is considered to be an erosion and fragmentation of citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman 2000). In his liberal account of multiculturalism, Levy argues that cultural difference should not be a moral or political goal for the state and should not be celebrated. Celebrating neither ethnic cultural identities nor cosmopolitanism, Levy (2000: 5) accords a special weight to ethnic cultural identities, stressing 'the enduring power of group loyalty and attachment, and the durability of ethnic and cultural groups'. In his argument, cultural rights can be classified into eight categories: 1) exemptions from laws which penalise or burden cultural practices; 2) assistance to do things the majority can do unassisted; 3) self-governance for ethnic and indigenous minorities; 4) external rules restricting non-members' liberty; 5) internal rules for members' conduct that are enforced by ostracism and excommunication; 6) enforcement of traditional legal codes within the dominant legal system; 7) representation of ethnic minorities in national and local institutions; and 8) equal acknowledgement of existence, worth, and status (Levy 2000: 127). Despite not

endorsing Levy's denial of the moral responsibility of the state to celebrate diversity, I argue that his insightful categorisation of cultural rights is a noteworthy contribution to not only the theorisation of minority rights but also to the way policy agendas in multicultural states should be planned.

The revisionist version on multiculturalism puts the case for a multidimensional definition of cultural recognition that includes not only the thin concept of culture but also the other aspects that shape the way culture works such as power relations (Parekh 2000: 343). The central contribution of multiculturalism in its three versions is, in my opinion, that it has addressed liberal fears of diversity by raising theoretical, political and public awareness of ethnic minorities' cultural recognition. Multiculturalism has positioned racial and cultural diversity within contemporary social and political theory. It has successfully created a space for ethnic minorities to maintain their cultural particularities, to build their own communities and to preserve their own cultures. However, a central pitfall of multiculturalism is its conception of minority/majority culture as unified wholes despite its supposedly anti-essentialist position. For instance, multiculturalists (e.g. Modood et al. 2006) criticise the political positioning of Muslims in Britain as 'other', yet they tend to frequently use the term Muslim/British as a referral to a homogeneous culture. In Chapter Four I will show how an apparent Muslim *culture* in my field site was rather evidenced to be *cultures*. Taking this into account, I argue, there are multiple ways of recognising cultural differences and maintaining the relation between mainstream and non-mainstream identities. To be genuinely inclusive, recognition of difference should be, I argue, perceived as flexible and accommodating to a range of differences and sub-differences that are defined by the people of difference themselves.

Despite my support for minority rights, I suggest that multiculturalism, particularly in its orthodox form, fails to pay attention to the complexities of how to prevent these group-based rights from turning into othering, social positioning and isolation, and how to prevent minority rights from turning into an erosion of national bonds. These pitfalls have set a foundation for extended debates on national identity in the UK context. Later in this chapter I will discuss how successive UK governments have attempted to establish parameters for what makes Britishness and what it means to *be* British. Minority rights could in fact restrict ethnic minorities from acting as equal citizens and it could limit them to the position of being a

‘different’ minority. It could hold them back from practising other social and political commitments that exceed their own group-based rights.

In its search for differentiated rights, multiculturalism could create a state of celebrated inequality. It could be a hindrance for members of minority groups to develop and practise a civic self. As will be highlighted in my analysis chapters, recognition of difference, for some participants, could slip into enduring the social othering of ethnic minorities despite their struggle to keep the civic self as active as the ethnic self. For others it developed into a preference for staying in a comfort zone due to the inability to keep that balance between the different aspects of the self, the ethnic/religious, the civic and the national. Differentiated citizenship not only failed to position some groups in the wider communities but also to position certain sub-groups within ethnic minorities who might feel discriminated against. In due course I will show how certain sub-groups within the Muslim community fail to claim group-based rights despite the legal existence of these rights.

The possibility of differentiated rights developing into second-class citizenship has been recognized not only by anti-pluralist critics but also by multiculturalists themselves (Kymlicka and Norman 2000). To avoid this multicultural pitfall, I argue for a capability-based approach to frame citizenship because rights, even if group-based, do not necessarily secure the ability of citizens to fulfil their needs and aspirations (see Chapter Seven). According to my criticism of the liberal account of citizenship, entitlement to rights is not enough in securing a genuine sense of that right. Indeed, capability denotes the existence of rights which are secure, applicable, freely accessible and enjoyable. There is a range of capabilities in this sense: to fulfil a sense of the self in its ethno-religious/national, civic, social, economic and political meanings in order to guarantee the right to cultural recognition along with a wide range of other assured rights. In this, I find myself positioned not so far from a revisionist form of multiculturalism, which recognises the multidimensional nature of cultural recognition as mentioned above. However, I differ from revisionist multiculturalism and multiculturalism in general in that I argue for a replacement of rights with capabilities (Sen 1983, 1985, 2005).

### ***2.2.2.3 A Capabilities Approach to Citizenship***

This thesis puts into perspective why it is particularly important not to only ask whether British Muslims are willing to integrate, but equally important to investigate whether they are able to integrate. As such, the concept of right is problematic because it assumes that the theoretical entitlement in the law is sufficient for a guaranteed application in reality. I argue for a semi-individual capability-based approach, one which recognises individual as well as group capabilities, together with the recognition of a wide range of capabilities including not only cultural but also social, political and economic capabilities. A semi-individual capability approach, as I suggest here, not only represents my theoretical position but also represents the view of the majority of Muslims I came across in the field, who called for a reconciled recognition of and clear distinction between their individual and group identities. The idea here is not only to have the right, but to be able to claim that right. What hinders ethnic minorities/Muslims from using certain formal rights should be part of our contemporary social and political thinking. I argue that self-chosen individual capabilities will avoid the groupist pitfalls of multiculturalism while not overlooking culture, identity and community roles. I will show in the following chapters that Muslims in my fieldwork setting often called for a recognition of their civic selves as citizens apart from their religious affiliation. Though not impossible, this is a challenging goal for any multicultural society because of ever-changing and variant capabilities. Establishing a balance between minority rights and civic duties can be a complicated task for modern European societies, but is indeed possible.

My understanding of capabilities benefits from Sen's and Nussbaum's accounts of 'capabilities'. While Sen focuses on education, health, and gender equality as focal human requirements, Nussbaum pays more attention to cultural and religious values to form her understanding of capabilities (Sen 1985; Sen 1993; Nussbaum 2011). Based on my fieldwork in a Muslim neighbourhood in Birmingham I argue that Muslims demonstrate concerns over both the cultural and non-cultural aspects of capabilities. As Sen argues, the approach is concerned with people's 'actual ability to achieve various valuable functioning as a part of living' (Sen 1993: 30). The right to capability is a right to freedom, autonomy, agency, and well-being (Sen 1985; Sen 1993).

In principle, the capability approach aims at maximizing a person's well-being through enriching his/her ability and freedom to maintain what he/she understands as meaningful or valuable (Sen 1985; Sen 1993). The concept of well-being here goes together with the concepts

of freedom and agency. The ability to achieve one's goals including those that relate to one's value system—is a source of well-being (Sen 1985). The crux of the capabilities approach is to support 'people's capacity for choice in areas of central meaning in their lives' (Nussbaum 2011: 107). This decisive action to achieve different types of life is the core of freedom (Sen 1993: 33).

A capable citizen is one who is able to do, be and to lead a *functioning* meaningful life through free choices and decisions. What seems as valuable for some communities or for a group of citizens might not hold the same value for others (Sen 1993). Meaningful citizenship agendas should, I argue, accommodate these differences allowing every community to freely choose among available functions/options as soon as it is legitimate and legal. The promotion of capabilities-based citizenship entails the creation of what Sen calls 'an evaluative space' which enables citizens to include/exclude and to make combinations of citizenry entitlements that are deemed important by citizens themselves (Sen 1985; Sen 1993). Compared to other approaches of citizenship, the approach of citizenship in this study does not impose a particular view of life on citizens, rather, it calls for citizenship rights that are openly accessible and freely chosen by every citizen.

The practice of citizenship rights as it exists in liberal and multicultural accounts—does not in fact secure a free environment for complete agency because citizens are asked to choose from options predefined by majority society. In this regard, citizens may be penalised for choosing not to opt into certain choices (or rights) or for choosing to pursue a different path from the majority population. Citizens from minority groups are therefore subject to an undermined sense of citizenry. The search for what supports human capability, freedom and autonomy is, according to advocates of the capability approach, expected to raise citizens above divisive matters, and to bring them together to consider what may enhance their sense of autonomy and improve their control over what they see as a meaningful living (Sen 1985a, b; 1993; 2003; Nussbaum 2011).

Sen (1985) argues that the capability approach sets out to evaluate social structures and the quality of human life in terms of wellbeing and advantage. His thesis draws attention to the parameters that may hinder a persons' capabilities, seen not only in terms of the 'doings' but also the 'beings' (Sen 2003: 4; Sen 1985a). Advocating a capability-based approach supports a context where cultural and non-cultural rights not only accessible but most importantly 'lived'. It is important to investigate the reality and applicability of legal rights and whether

every citizen, Muslims in this case, are *able* to avail themselves of all citizenship rights and opportunities of integration.

Capabilities are fluid and can therefore generate a range of changing entitlements responding to different contexts. In the presence of a capability-based agenda, citizens are free to self-identify and to use (or not) the freedoms and entitlements given by legal rights (Nussbaum 2011). Unlike the top-bottom predefined rights, the list of capabilities required in a particular context is to be determined ‘on the ground’, to use Nussbaum’s phrase (2011: 109). In principle, the capabilities are not formalised in order to accommodate people’s different notions of well-being and what is seen as a good life (Sen 1985a, b; Sen 1993; Nussbaum 2011). In this context, Nussbaum suggests that ‘the [capabilities] list is open-ended and subject to ongoing revisions and rethinking’ (Nussbaum 2011: 108). The understanding of what capabilities are required in a particular time and place is, unlike the ‘rights’ rationale, open for change, revisiting, rebutting, and most importantly is always subject to people’s engagement and final decision over what capabilities to include/exclude (Nussbaum 2011: 108).

Unlike the thin and pre-fixed top-bottom understanding of rights as presented in liberal and multicultural accounts, the fluidity of capabilities fits my investigation of ‘sustainable’ integration which relates to future conditions and requirements for integration. In diverse societies, these conditions are highly unprecedented and therefore needs a flexible way to identify entitlements that make people capable of pursuing harmonious relations with others. The fluidity of this concept also allows ethnic minorities, as well as other minorities or vulnerable communities, to be heard and represented. The search for capabilities will make more inclusive policy agendas through representing minority communities which are more likely to be less represented in an understanding of rights put by the majority and the most powerful. Putting capabilities at the centre of citizenship would enable policies to accommodate people’s different choices and the rationales which make up these choices. It would also enable communities to adapt to future changes, making it the best component for citizenship and integration agendas.

#### ***2.2.2.4 Interculturalism and Fear of National Fragmentation***

Interculturalism, as an attempt to incorporate ethnic minorities (Muslims in particular) into the national mainstream, has been founded on fears and anxieties over national



fragmentation. Inherent in the intercultural turn is a portrayal of Muslim identities as deviant from what is desirable and what is understood to be normal in British society (Ryan 2011; Khan 2014). In the context of advocating one mainstream account of Britishness, the religious identity of British Muslims has been increasingly depicted as a discrediting attribute. Since the 2000s, as mentioned earlier, British Muslims have been branded as criminals and as a potential threat for society. Stigma and prejudice founded on media and political discourses project negative stereotypes of Muslims as a source of menace, as willingly segregating, and as culturally unfit with the British culture (Shazhadi et al. 2018; Harris and Karimshah 2019). This identity-related labelling and stereotyping provide an important base for understanding the stigma that shapes how Muslim communities are perceived in today's Britain (Link and Phelan 2001). Stigma, as Herek suggests, refers to 'the negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category' (2009: 441).

This stereotypical construction of Muslim communities has played a role in stigmatising them as a source of fear for the wider society. Associating Islam with terror, violence and extremism has played a crucial role not only in spreading a deep and sustained fear of Muslims in majority populations (Peucker and Akbarzadeh 2014: 81-82), but also has spread fear *amongst* Muslims of being perceived or associated with radical or non-integrated Muslims (MCB 2016). In intercultural studies, the concept of fear is often used to describe the worries of native populations over increasing diversity, which is seen as a threat to the cultural purity of the society (Home Office 2001; Cantle 2016). As Foner and Simon argue, 'worries about the loss of cultural hegemony in the face of massive immigration, and the dangers that immigration and new diversity pose to core national cultural beliefs and practices, underpin concerns about those of immigrant origin held by some politicians, public intellectuals, and opinion leaders as well as by many in the general public in both Europe and North America' (Foner and Simon 2015: 4). Nevertheless, little research has been done to investigate fear as experienced by minority groups and its reasons and consequences.

Stigma is an exclusionary tool through which the powerful majority abnormalises the stigmatised group. While discrediting, dehumanising and abnormalising the members of the stigmatised group, stigma keeps them under constant pressure to prove their 'normalness' through everyday practices (Goffman 1963). In a context of political hegemony of the majority, stigmatised minorities experience uncertainties as they constantly fear how they will be judged

or categorised. This uncertainty, according to Goffman (1963: 14), ‘arises not merely from the stigmatized individual’s not knowing which of several categories he will be placed in, but also, where the placement is favourable, from his knowing that in their hearts the others may be defining him in terms of his stigma’. Stigma in this case is not only associated with fear but also with mistrust, as stigmatised groups anticipate the worst in terms of how they are perceived in the wider society, and this endangers their sense of agency, wellbeing and belonging, as stigmatised groups know they cannot fix how ‘normals’ perceive them (Goffman 1963). According to Link and Phelan (2001: 363), ‘for stigmatization to occur, power must be exercised’. Social stigma, as a repressive form of power, results in a range of discriminatory mechanisms which engender powerlessness and vulnerability for members of stigmatised groups (Link and Phelan 2001). This context of uncertainties, powerlessness and discrimination serves to amplify fears amongst members of stigmatised groups, who in this context are constantly unsure of how mainstream society may perceive and categorise them (Goffman 1963; Link and Phelan 2001; Nelson 2016).

In this research I am not concerned with investigating how and why this stigmatisation of Muslims is being produced, according to the classical research on stigma (Goffman 1963), I am, rather, interested in scrutinising one of its serious consequences, namely fear, which was widespread amongst Muslims during my fieldwork (see Chapter Six). The negative consequences of stigma has been the subject of an extended body of research, in which stigma is argued to negatively impact on the wellbeing and self-esteem of the stigmatised communities or groups (Goffman 1963; Crocker et al. 1991; Wolfe and Spencer 1996; Meyer 2003; Major and O’Brien 2005; Meyer et al. 2008; Frost 2011; Khan 2014; Nelson 2016). Fear, as one of the consequences, is argued to be at the heart of stigma, and works as a threat to the stigmatised and underprivileged groups (Nelson 2016).

Therefore, before investigating the core differences between interculturalism and multiculturalism, it is worth engaging with ‘fear’ as a central concept in the upcoming data analysis. Fear is a response to an external threat the threatened person has no control over (Castells 2015: 14; Stephan et al. 2008). In another definition, fear is defined as ‘a state triggered by an immediate threat whose function is to mobilize the person to defend against the threat by freezing, fleeing, or fighting’ (McNally 2012: 17). In his analysis of the parameters of fear, Tudor (2003: 247) defined six social and personal parameters that contribute to the formation of fear: ‘the first set (environments, cultures, and social structures) macroscopic and

structuring in their emphasis, the second set (bodies, personalities, and social subjects) more focused upon the contribution of individual agents. Any concrete situation of fearfulness will involve all six in a variety of possible permutations and combinations'. In the academic literature, despite an increasing understanding of the sociological dimension of emotions, fear is normally perceived as a psychological term (Tudor 2003).

Existing research often focuses on fear amongst native communities deriving from their concern over whether Muslims can be an integrated part of British society (Foner and Simon 2015). Chapter Six will rather focus on fear amongst Muslims. Focusing on the concept of fear in Chapter Six is important both at the empirical level, with its highly potential impact on social policy, and the theoretical level as fear compared to other societal phenomena remains relatively under-theorised (Tudor 2003: 239). In this chapter I do not use 'fear' as mere a human emotion and psychological term. Rather I see it as a sociological term that is constituted by certain attributes and triggering points in the social world (Tudor 2003; Bourke 2015; Bericat 2016). I agree with Tudor that as we think of fear we do need to recognise the sociological dimension of this emotion despite it being an individual feeling *par excellence* (Tudor 2003: 243; Barbalet 2001; Bourke 2015; Bericat 2016). Establishing a sociological understanding of fear in the context of this study provides a nuanced understanding of the social processes and structures that create a collective form of fear among Muslims. A macroscopic and sociological understanding of fear is expected 'to view particular social formations as conducive to, and reflective of, specific forms of emotionality' (Tudor 2003: 243). A collective form of fear indicates the existence of vulnerability and power disparities, and its consequences and impacts do not relate only to the past and present times but also to the future, which is often framed by uncertainty (Barbalet 2001; Bericat 2016; Furedi 2018).

Rising fears and anxieties of cultural fragmentation have contributed to the shifts in citizenship theory. Whereas multicultural citizenship is mainly concerned with group-based identity rights, intercultural citizenship is concerned with individual-based identity rights along with national identity but both multiculturalism and interculturalism register their advocacy of cultural pluralism and both are concerned with the role of identity and culture and highlight their opposition to assimilationist approaches to integration. The majorities/minorities duality shapes both approaches yet with different starting points. While multiculturalism starts from its concern with minority rights, interculturalism finds that the multiculturalist ultimate focus on minority rights is a central cause of social division and conflict. Interculturalism rather takes

as its starting point the anxieties and concerns of the majority population over national identity. Interculturalism is built on the ‘threat hypothesis’, where minority identities are perceived as a threat to national unity and social solidarity (Bouchard 2011). In explaining this hypothesis, Bouchard (2011) describes how cultural minorities represent a source of anxiety for the majority culture. He confirms that minority cultures can ‘create a more or less acute sense of threat within the majority culture not only in terms of its rights, but also in terms of its values, traditions, language, memory and identity (not to mention its security)’ (Bouchard 2011: 445).

Theoretically, multiculturalism’s focus on the rights to cultural freedom and identity preservation is feared to erode civic commonalities and shared national values (Home Office 2001). The promotion of multiculturalism has been paralleled to officially perceived social ills that are linked mainly to Muslim communities (Home Office 2001; Blair 2006; Kelly 2006; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). The 2000s, encompassing the northern England riots and Muslim-led terrorist attacks, have appeared as a turning point in the relationship between ethnic/religious minority identities on one side and national identity on the other. Since early this century, Britain’s cultural diversity has been perceived as a threat to social solidarity and cultural sameness (O’Donnell 2007). Multiculturalism has been believed to create culturally unified ghettos (Muslim ghettos in particular), which have always been depicted as a source of nationally rootless generations (Kelly 2006; Cameron 2011). The assumed social separateness of British Muslims in particular has been, in official accounts of integration, linked to them not embracing the British way of life and British values (Blair 2006; Kelly 2006; Cameron 2011).

At the launch of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2006, Ruth Kelly, the then Community and Local Government Secretary, said that ‘in our attempt to avoid imposing a single British identity and culture, have we ended up with some communities living in isolation of each other, with no common bonds between them?’. In agreement with that, Cameron’s speech in the Munich Security Conference of 2011 emphasised that ‘under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong’ (Cameron 2011). Thus, cultural dialogue and hybridity were argued to be the way out of social fragmentation and fragility towards more integrated and cohesive society. This context laid the foundation for the community cohesion agenda, urging ethnic communities (Muslims in particular) to integrate and redefine their

belonging to the British national identity, according to what is officially perceived as British values (Pilkington 2008: 7).

Encouraging Muslims to identify with mainstream culture together with departing from their traditional un-British values has been argued as a way to secure belonging for rootless ethnic minorities in general and Muslims in particular (Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). In the British context as well as elsewhere in Europe, the failure of multiculturalism has been linked to the fragmentation of society. Increasing social and economic inequalities, ignoring the worries of majority populations and breeding the seeds of the so called 'Islamic' terrorism are examples of what multiculturalism has been linked to in Britain (Joppke 2009; Cameron 2011; Cante 2012; Maxwell et al. 2012; Cante 2016). Unlike multicultural accounts from the 1960s and 1970s, where difference was mainly drawn along majority-minority lines, interculturalism highlights the multi-faceted forms of difference in contemporary super-diverse societies, including differences within minority communities (Cante 2012).

Furthermore, interculturalists emphasise the role of contact and communication in enhancing social bonds, mutual understanding and inter-dependence between communities (Cante 2012). Interculturalists argue that multiculturalism overlooks the value of dialogue and interaction amongst people of different cultures, which has led to fragmented societies (Cante 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2016). Therefore, interculturalism aims to enhance social unity and community relations by emphasising interaction between different communities (Wood et al. 2006, Cante 2016, Zapata-Barrero 2016). In Barrero's words, interculturalism is 'a strategy to manage a dynamic process of interaction between individuals or even between groups' (2016: 56). Interculturalists argue that interculturalism presents more than just an emphasis on tolerance, respect and equality. The key feature of interculturalism is its stress on openness, reciprocal dialogues and intra-group communication (Wood et Al. 2006: 9). According to interculturalists, interaction will highlight the humanistic common core of different communities. The public sphere, from the intercultural lens, is a 'contact zone' where interaction, collaboration and exchange happens amongst different cultural, ethnic and religious communities (Zapata-Barrero 2016: 56).

Promoting dialogue comes through policies that enhance opportunities for interaction and for encountering any possible cognitive, structural, institutional or personal barriers (Zapata-Barrero 2016). In addition, intercultural politics help to maintain social trust and social cohesion because, as interculturalists argue, contact is expected to promote mutual

understanding between different cultures and communities (Oliver and Wong 2003, Uslaner 2010). Promoting interpersonal and intercultural contact is believed to successfully decrease stigmatisation, prejudices and social conflicts as well as discrimination and inequalities. In response to the intercultural criticism that they overlook contact, multiculturalists confirm that dialogue is already a part of a multicultural approach. In Taylor's account, identity formation is a dialogical process where constant dialogues with the other help us identify the way we see ourselves (1992: 33). In his revisionist account, Parekh argues that 'all cultures are born out of interaction with others and shaped by the wider economic, political, and other forces' (2000: 338). Emphasising the importance of contact and dialogue, Parekh illustrates that multiculturalism is constantly concerned to 'keep the dialogue going and nurture a climate in which it can proceed effectively' (2000: 340).

The intercultural link between social contact and decreased inequalities is indirect and difficult to be taken for granted. As will be shown in due course, in my field setting I found that many of my participants expressed their understanding of the mainstream culture and society, but in most cases it did not have a genuine impact on their sense of discrimination and inequality. In my view, contact neither exists nor happens in a vacuum. A range of factors play multi-faceted roles in defining whether contact leads to a cohesive society or not. The intercultural focus on contact implies the misleading and simplified assumption that issues of non-integration are driven mainly by the lack of contact between different communities. Interculturalism argues that real-life connectedness, shared experiences and participation are supposed to stimulate a sense of inclusion through creating a political We. In this regard, I suggest that a We-identity cannot necessarily be achieved through contact. Contact in itself is not a sufficient condition for social solidarity to happen (Hewstone and Brown 1986). In order to gain social solidarity, I argue that different groups should be reflected into the citizenship rule book if not the social contract. Doing things together and sharing a common place are not sufficient to maintain cohesion. The civic self generates when we share the writing and the definition of a social contract, one which represents both native and non-native stakeholders. In the next section (2.2.2.2) I will further engage with the academic controversies over the contact hypothesis and its role in building social cohesion.

Interculturalism comes as part of an anti-multicultural debate where 'cultural excess' and recognition of 'illiberal' cultures are perceived as a social problem (Zapata-Barrero 2017: 5). However, I suggest that this logic is a move against liberty and freedom of choice.

Ironically, interculturalists adopt the assumptions they actually criticise. While interculturalism criticises the essentialist and groupist nature of multiculturalism, it implies the same 'majority-minority' dualism in a similar essentialist and groupist way. According to Zapata-Barrero, being post-multiculturalism means being aware that 'not everything coming from *other cultures* can be accepted without a critical mindset' (2017: 5 *Italics added*). In principle, this is a persuasive argument; but the realisation of this argument is indeed risky for freedom, liberty and social cohesion. While calling for unity, communication, and contact, interculturalists suggest an implicit assessment of the 'other'. I consider that post-multicultural debates on regulating 'excessive' recognition to certain cultures and limiting illiberal practices (Zapata-Barrero 2017: 6) is illiberal practice *per se*. This can open unlimited possibilities to tyranny and oppression. It is against the core meaning of contact and communication. Contact and communication should start freely and without pre-judgment. Who is it to judge that certain practices and/or norms are illiberal? Who is it to judge that recognition of a certain culture is excessive or not? Realistically, the majority culture and majority populations would take the lead in making these judgements. Therefore, such forms of contact and communication may rather increase social division and minimise the chances of community cohesion.

### **2.3 Integration and British Muslims**

Having engaged with different perspectives and schools of citizenship, I now turn to engage with the existing literature on integration. In the first sub-section, 2.3.1, I review both the academic research and governmental reviews and reports, with the aim of highlighting how each defines integration. The second sub-section, 2.3.2, explores the literature on Muslims' social integration. This comes through two further sub-sections, the first, 2.3.2.1, engages with how the literature outlines the role of spatial dispersion in integration and the second, 2.3.2.2, scrutinises the position of social mixedness and out-group contact in integration studies.

#### **2.3.1 Theorising Integration**

For decades, integration has been at the centre of policy and academic research. Successful integration is a controversial topic in integration studies. In terms of responsibility for integration, two main strands of literature can be found. The first strand perceives integration as a one-way process where responsibility for integration is carried out by

immigrants (Penninx 2005). For Penninx, integration is ‘the process of becoming an accepted part of society’ (2005: 141). According to this understanding, integration is the prime responsibility of immigrants, and immigrants choose either to assimilate or separate (Berry 1997; Penninx 2005). This body of scholarship provides an expert-based analysis of integration, its key dimensions, related theoretical debates, methodological problems and ways of measuring and operationalising the concept (Gordon 1964; Dörr and Faist 1997; Kearns and Forrest 2000; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Sales and D’Angelo 2008). The second strand of research identifies integration as a two-way process, where responsibility for integration is shared by immigrants and the host society (Atfield et al. 2007; Ager and Strang 2008; Phillimore and Goodson 2008; Phillimore 2011, 2012; Klarenbeek 2019; Pace and Simsek 2019).

Although policy research has often identified integration as a one-way process (Home Office 2001; Home Office 2002, 2005a; Electoral Commission 2003, 2005; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016), the latest official reports demonstrate a change in the way integration is officially perceived (HM Government 2018; House of Lords 2018; Home Office 2019). Recent reports register the change in the official perspective, where integration is now perceived as multidimensional and multidirectional process and the collective responsibility of ‘all participants in the process of integration’ (Home Office 2019: 21). Integration, according to this point of view, is founded on rights and responsibilities and facilitated by culture and language together with safety and stability; it is indicated and supported by access to work, housing, education, health and social care and leisure; moreover, it is instigated by social bonds, bridges and links (Home Office 2019: 15). Though not assuming a homogeneous society, the Home Office report is hesitant to further specify the position of ethnic and religious identities versus national identity. I will further unpack the debate on cultural competence and British national identity in the final section 2.4 of this chapter.

Integration in this latest official account entails ‘adaptation and change by all those involved without undermining their original identity’ (Home Office 2019: 20). The report, however, fails to specify the definition and scope of adaptation and change. It also does not answer questions such as: how far this adaptation or change is expected to promote the process of integration; and what limitations or exemptions are there to this process of adaptation. The report starts from the premise that adaptation and change necessarily lead to integration, which is, I argue, a misleading simplification as neither adaptation nor change can happen through



immigrant-unfriendly approaches where immigrants are forced to adapt/change to avoid discrimination and racism. Moreover, while the report defines integration as a collective responsibility, local communities did not participate in building the meanings, arguments and recommendations of the report. As Castles et al. persuasively argue, if integration is argued to be a two-way process and a shared responsibility, all stakeholders should be given 'the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of determinants that constitute successful integration' (2002: 129).

This discussion of who defines and who is responsible for integration reveals another group of research which advocates the incorporation of 'those compelled to encounter, live with and make sense of state-mandated processes of integration' (Pace and Simsek 2019: 4). Lack of (or limited) information on stakeholders of integration results in ill-informed services and deficient national strategies and creates cultures of 'ignorance, disbelief and denial' (Robinson 1998 a, b). Several studies have shed light on the perceptions and understandings of those who experience the reality of integration, yet most of these studies are focused on refugees and asylum seekers who, as would be expected, express different views and needs compared to long-settled immigrants and/or established ethnic minorities (Atfield et al. 2007; Dwyer 2008; Phillimore 2012; Craig 2015; Platts-Fowler and Robinson 2015; Pace and Simsek 2019). Less attention has been paid to exploring the integration of groups in society other than refugees and asylum seekers. In comparison to the scholarship on the majority population's views on integration (Home Office 2001; Saggar and Drean 2001; Phillips (T.) 2006; Crawley 2009; Blinder et al. 2011; Casey 2016; Murray et al. 2016), little work has been done on the way citizens of immigrant backgrounds, and particularly British Muslims, understand and perceive the concept of integration (Ahmed 2005; Phillips 2006; Finney and Simpson 2009; Awan 2012; Heath et al 2013; O'Toole et al. 2013; Mustafa 2015; Oskooii and Dana 2018; Ahmed 2019). As will be shown in the next chapter, to overcome this gap in the existing literature, the fieldwork of this study is based on recruiting citizens and/or long-term residents in the UK.

The conditions necessary for successful integration is another controversial theme in integration studies (Gordon 1964; Portes and Zhou 1993; Bloemraad et al. 2008; Fokkema and Haas 2011; Rutter 2013). In these terms, the literature can be classified into two main categories. The first encompasses mainstream research, which presents integration in terms of its outcomes, mainly the sociocultural outcomes (Gordon 1964; Ager and Strang 2008; Rutter

2013). According to this body of research, conditions such as equal education and employment should be ensured to maintain integration. This classic understanding perceives integration as an end of a causal relationship that begins with certain conditions, mainly socio-economic, and ends with certain outcomes, mainly socio-cultural (Gordon 1964; Rutter 2013).

The second category challenges the outcome-based definition of integration. According to this group of research, feelings of belonging are conditionally attached to the pre-existence of equality, respect, freedom and ability to get a decent life. Integration, according to this group of research, which I endorse, is not a simple personal choice. Rather it is defined by other variables in the surrounding environment that can enhance/restrict that choice (Parekh 2009: 33-34). In the outcome-based scholarship, conditions such as fluency in language, access to employment and mutual respect between different communities are frequently recommended for successful integration (Ager and Strang 2008). Yet, these studies omit to provide a vision of how these conditions can lead to integration and why they do not prove successful in particular contexts. As shown in the introduction, British Muslims (including second and third generations) are officially portrayed as segregated despite their long settlement in the UK and I argue that such claims relate to the existence of a politicised definition of Britishness (see section 2.4), one which is limited in application to particular subjects on the British soil and excludes others on racial and/or cultural grounds. It also relates to integration policies that fail to pay adequate attention to the socio-cultural aspects of minorities' understandings of integration and belonging (Parekh 2009). Integration is not necessarily realised through securing the above-mentioned socio-economic conditions. I argue that socio-cultural hurdles play a significant role in defining the pace and direction of integration, and will be highlighted in the analysis chapters.

The nature of harmonious contact and the make-up of a cohesive society are contested topics not only in academic literature and policy agendas but also within local communities (Kalra and Kapoor 2009). There is an extensive body of academic research which addresses the challenges and hurdles of achieving a cohesive multicultural society (Vertovec 2007; Philips 2006; Karla and Kapoor 2009) and this scholarship mainly focuses on the causes of self-segregation, social isolation and spatial concentrations of ethnic minorities (Peach 1996a, 1997), such as poverty, social hostility towards migrants and housing policies of post-war Britain (Smith 1989; Peach 1996a, 1997; Phillips 1998; Heath et al. 2013; Heath and Demireva 2014) as well as cultural and social considerations (Phillips 1998). Other research argues that

feelings of frustration and disappointment leave British Muslims feeling rootless (Maxwell 2006). Recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted the importance of the spatial and social aspects of integration (see section 2.3.2). In political accounts, the defining aspect of integration is based on assessment of whether contact between communities is promoted and whether neighbourhoods are in interaction and cohesion (Finney and Simpson 2009).

As mentioned previously, British integration has, over the years, been predominantly framed by government perspectives and rationales. In the 1950s and early 1960s, ‘melting pot’ politics were perceived as the best way to achieve a cohesive society. Integration was, therefore, perceived in an assimilative way; that is, for newcomers to conform to British cultural norms as well as British values (Weedon 2011: 213). Starting in the mid-1960s, a multicultural definition of integration was given to mean ‘cultural diversity’, ‘equal opportunity’ and ‘mutual tolerance’ rather than ‘stereotyped Englishness’ (Jenkins 1967: 267). In the 2000s, integration has been redefined as the promotion of ‘intercultural interaction’ and positive communication amongst members of society (Home Office 2001, 2016). Government reports play a big part in integration debates in the UK. The main contribution of these reports is that they present the UK’s official integration discourse, yet they have also complicated the reality and practices of integration by increasing uncertainties, fear and mistrust within and between communities due to the racialisation of the integration discourse (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Mustafa 2015). While these discursive shifts have succeeded in enriching diversity debates in the UK, they have also created a slippery understanding of what integration means and entails. They have evoked seemingly endless controversies, discrepancies and repetitions (Robinson 1998 a, b). The recurring contemplation and reproduction of diversity discourses serves to intensify socio-political uncertainties, politicise diversity, and produce more diversity challenges (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). None of these discursive and policy shifts have succeeded in overcoming the integration challenges, mainly the social, residential and labour market segregation (Phillips 1998; Home Office 2001; Electoral Commission 2003, 2005; Home Office 2005a; Cameron 2011; Rutter 2013; Casey 2016).

The main drawbacks of integration policy research can be summarised thus: 1) they usually come in the wake up of social disturbances such as that of Brixton (1981) and Bradford (2001). Such reports are important in exceptional times when urgent policies need to be passed, yet they fail to provide enough evidence on the reality of social ties and bonds in and between communities because of not investigating the naturally occurring mundane realities and

because of not being conducted in ordinary times; 2) as these reports come in the aftermath of social disturbances, they might entail a high risk of having the possible response that ‘we are all victims’; 3) in times of unrest, local views and opinions might not be a replica of the inner perceptions and understandings of the social world, rather they could be instigated by anger and frustration; and 4) official reports have shown a blurry vision of what successful integration is and what makes it successful. For example, in Cattle-chaired report, the parallel lives of Muslim communities did not allow ‘meaningful’ social interchanges to happen (2001: 9). However, the report did not reflect on the meaning of ‘meaningful interchanges’, neither from the author’s viewpoint nor from the interviewees’. The report also did not demonstrate what makes social interactions meaningful and what otherwise might hinder its meaningfulness and how local communities perceive the ‘meaningfulness’ of social interactions. In due course, these gaps will be addressed in the upcoming analysis of British Muslims’ understandings of integration.

Based on my review of academic and policy research, this study argues that sluggish integration outcomes are potentially caused by top-down integration policies. Grand strategies and programmes of integration overlook day-to-day details which actually make integration. Despite increasing calls for rethinking integration amid increasing cultural diversities and integration complexities (Castles et al. 2002; Robinson 1998 b; Rutter 2013; Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018; Pace and Simsek 2019), little research has been conducted to qualitatively explore perceptions and understandings of integration in the daily lives of communities other than those of refugees and asylum seekers (Jamal and Chapman 2000; Schneider and Crul 2010; Cherti and McNeil 2012; Ahmed 2019). Research to date provides important insights into ‘everyday integration’ through investigating the construction of group identities in everyday settings (Cherti and McNeil 2012: 4-5). However, focussing on integration with reference to group identities has not provided a detailed understanding of why particular practices and understandings of integration and identity are formed in a particular context. There is limited attention to how context impacts self-identification and shapes the relation between the self and the other. Inclusiveness is needed not only in integration policies but also in integration research (Castles et al. 2002). I argue that it is of paramount importance to have all communities to participate in defining integration. The study at hand adds to a small but growing body of work on meanings of integration as perceived in everyday, mundane experiences. The main contribution of this study is that it presents local understandings of integration. The complexities of integration not only appear at the conceptual and definitional

levels, but also at practical and empirical levels where the concept evokes other complex debates that play a major role in enhancing/hindering integration. In addition, though providing important empirical insights that enrich debates on integration, none of the above-mentioned studies provides a retrospective and/or futuristic analysis of how their recommendations for successful integration could be upheld in the future and how integration's success could be sustained. The study at hand fills this gap in previous policy and academic research by providing empirical insights into what should be maintained/avoided for successful and sustainable integration.

### ***2.3.1.1 Towards a Sustainable Integration***

This thesis problematises traditional integration discourses and the language developed to explain them, and presents a new non-mainstream way of understanding this concept. In so doing, the study at hand adds to a small but growing body of work on meanings of integration as perceived in everyday, mundane experiences. The main contribution of this study is that it presents local understandings of integration. The complexities of integration not only appear at the conceptual and definitional levels, but also at practical and empirical levels where the concept evokes other complex debates that play a major role in enhancing/hindering integration. In addition, though providing important empirical insights that enrich debates on integration, none of the above-mentioned studies provides a retrospective and/or futuristic analysis of how their recommendations for successful integration could be upheld in the future and how integration's success could be sustained. The study at hand fills this gap in previous policy and academic research by providing empirical insights into what should be maintained/avoided for successful and sustainable integration.

A sustainable integration can be understood as a bottom-up community-led integration process. A majority-led discourse, as in most existing integration discourses, does not present sufficient representation for ethnic minorities. Sustainable integration is ensured by the presence of equal citizenship that is not only guaranteed legally but most importantly in day-to-day lives. Linking to my previous discussion on capability-based citizenship, sustainable integration is one where people are *capable* of fulfilling opportunities of integration in a context where they have a full freedom and agency to achieve what they understand as good and valuable. A sustainable integration as understood in this study requires a move beyond the

concept of rights towards a theorisation of capabilities. Capability-based citizenship enables agent citizens to make free (and comfortable) decisions about their level of integration. Unlike existing accounts of citizenship, a capability-based integration is based on a set of capabilities defined through inclusive bottom-up mechanisms. This bottom-up mechanism is set to build inclusive integration policies that accommodate the diverse meanings and needs of different communities in diverse societies.

As a bottom-up process, integration enables communities of different backgrounds to engage in meaningful conversations about aspects of citizenship that impact their everyday life. Having the freedom to negotiate what they see as meaningful in terms of their ability to integrate—is a source of empowerment and autonomy—both come at the heart of sustainable integration. Existing literature and policy agendas are built on the traditional concept of successful integration where success is measured by pre-defined goals, mostly relating to language, inter-community relations and socio-political participation (Home Office 2001; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Home Office 2005b; Ager and Strang 2008; Phillimore 2011, 2012; Casey 2016; Pace and Simsek 2019; Klarenbeek 2019). This understanding overlooks that success fluctuates, and that integration's success could come to an end if the pillars of sustainability are not secured.

This thesis argues that integration is not only about meeting certain milestones relating to getting people together, but also about enabling people to get together and to build sustainable intercultural relations. In other words, successful integration -according to official and most existing integration accounts- is indicated by the presence of communities where difference is celebrated; and is underpinned by a set of shared British Values. Sustainable integration, as suggested here, is an inclusive process indicated by an ensured sense of equal citizenship as it exists in mundane and every-day practices of social life. Unlike the mainstream understanding of successful integration, my concept of sustainable integration is underpinned and facilitated by a set of capabilities that enable communities to get together and build resilient community relations. Sustainable integration is one which is resilient to the everchanging make up of society and socio-political climate. It is based on mutual understanding of difference, equal opportunities to live, to contribute to society, and to continue to do so. Therefore, it is not only about today's experiences, but also about expectations for tomorrow.

### **2.3.2 British Muslims' Social Integration**

In reviewing theoretical debates on British Muslims' social integration this section engages with existing scholarship on two central aspects of integration: spatial dispersion and social mixedness. Both aspects are chosen here based on wider mainstream debates which portray Muslims as residentially segregated and socially isolated.

#### ***2.3.2.1 Spatial Dispersion and Integration***

Residential segregation refers to a multidimensional and complex phenomenon with interlinked aspects and a plethora of definitions. However, it often refers to 'the degree to which two or more [ethnic] groups live separately from one another in different parts of the urban environment' (Massey and Denton 1988: 282). By this, it refers to the spatial aspect of human co-existence. Although residential segregation refers to the geographic distribution of a population group compared to another, it is often associated with a multitude of consequent social ills (Bolt et al. 2010: 171). In official accounts (and some academic scholarship) spatial dispersion associates with social interaction and mixedness (Duncan and Lieberman 1959; Peach 1996a; Johnston et al. 2002 (a, b), 2005; Gijsberts and Dagevos 2007; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). According to this group of research, residentially segregated groups are socially and culturally unassimilated and are therefore leading parallel lives, while spatially dispersed groups are socially and culturally assimilated (Peach 1996a: 380).

Residential segregation is thought to negatively impact social behaviour towards inter-group relations and to consequently intensify social distances and conflicts (Duncan and Lieberman 1959; Peach 1996a; Johnston et al. 2005; Gijsberts and Dagevos 2007). In an early study on ethnic residential patterns in Chicago, Duncan and Lieberman emphasised that inter-social relations are inevitably interlinked to how communities are spatially dispersed (Duncan and Lieberman 1959). This early thesis on ethnic segregation in the US has informed subsequent debates demonstrating the inverse relationship between residential segregation and ethnic assimilation. According to its leading hypothesis, residential segregation is strongly associated with fewer socio-economic opportunities, less assimilation and less social contact with the majority population (Duncan and Lieberman 1959: 364; Peach 1996a). Highly segregated communities are perceived, according to this view, to have less social contact and fewer opportunities for inter-group marriage (Duncan and Lieberman 1959; Peach 1980, 1996).

Higher levels of segregation, according to Peach, lead to deep and significant social divisions (1996: 396); more spatial dispersion is therefore needed for integration to happen (Peach 1996a: 380). By retesting the hypothesis of Duncan and Lieberson, Peach (1980: 381) concludes that ‘spatial allocation of housing may be one of the most fundamental variables in determining the outcome of ethnic assimilation’. In 2005, Johnston et al. developed their argument against ethnic residential concentration and criticised the distant way of life of South Asians in Bradford, where their chances of meeting and interacting with citizens other than those of their own backgrounds was minimal. According to the authors, the likelihood of meeting members of same ethnic group in South Asian communities had increased in 2001 compared to a decade earlier (Johnston et al. 2005: 1225). Consistent with these findings and through a quantitative investigation of neighbourhood effects on the socio-cultural integration of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, Gijsberts and Dagevos emphasised that ‘social contacts between majority and minority groups are less frequent in ethnically concentrated neighbourhoods’ (2007: 805).

Residential segregation, according to this point of view, undermines economic opportunities. In response to Muslims’ reality of socio-economic deprivation (Wood et al. 2009; Stevenson et al. 2017; Acik and Pilkington 2018), the official discourse and some academic discourse suggest that socio-economic deprivations among Muslims in Britain can only be combated if Muslims desegregate themselves socially and residentially. According to this argument, if British Muslims desegregate residentially, their economic opportunities will increase and deprivation will consequently decrease (Massey and Denton 1988; Galster et al. 1999; Kearns and Parkinson 2001; Clark and Drinkwater 2002; Friedrichs et al. 2003; Musterd et al. 2008). Ethnically concentrated areas, according to this viewpoint, are associated with higher levels of unemployment and poverty because of the limited contact with the majority population (Massey and Denton 1988; Galster et al. 1999; Kearns and Parkinson 2001; Clark and Drinkwater 2002; Friedrichs et al. 2003; Musterd et al. 2008; Casey 2016).

A greater exposure to one’s own ethnic group brings, according to Galster et al. (1999), more economic negatives than positives. Ethnic concentration casts negative impacts on the quality of public education, access to employment and wealth, which when combined ‘retard the educational, occupational, and employment achievements of immigrants residing there’ (Galster et al. 1999: 123). Similarly, Clark and Drinkwater found that ethnically concentrated areas restrict economic opportunities. They refute possibilities of ethnic entrepreneurship,



which is often argued by pro-ethnic concentrations to be a positive aspect of ethnic spatial proximity. They rather argue that ethnic enclaves add limits to the extent and patterns of economic activity (Clark and Drinkwater 2002). Musterd et al. found that ethnic concentration might bring economic privilege in the short run, but they argue that ‘these benefits quickly turn into net disadvantages over time’ (2008: 799).

Theoretically, residential segregation is not always seen as in opposition to integration. Deborah Phillips, in her study on South-Asians in the UK, challenged the mainstream discourse about Muslim isolationism (Phillips 2006, 2007, 2010). In her study, she asserted that British Muslims do not wish to disengage from British society (Phillips 2006). In fact, Muslim communities are more likely to identify themselves as British compared to other ethnic groups (Phillips 2006; Maxwell 2006; Karlsen and Nazroo 2015; Mustafa 2015). Research shows that one’s place of residence is often a combined by-product of both choice and structural constraints: it is often a choice made within ‘a system of constraints’ (Sarre 2007: 73; Phillips 2010; Borch 2019). These constraints could be economic, religious/cultural and/or just naturally relating to the ease of life amongst similar communities. A person might be residentially segregated but socially integrated in the wider society (Peach 1996a; Amin 2002; Phillips 2006), a view that was echoed by Frampton et al., who found a close association between attachment to locality and belonging to the UK as those who feel attached to their local areas are more likely to demonstrate higher sense of belonging to the UK (Frampton et al. 2016: 41).

Residential segregation could be both good and bad (Peach 1996a). Policy interventions should not be required if residential decisions of both ethnic minorities and the majority population do not result in ‘the development of static worlds apart, place-bound ghettos of poor households or ethnic minorities from which it is hard to escape’ (Musterd 2003: 639). I agree with Peach and Musterd in arguing that governments and decision makers should have more tolerance towards ethnically concentrated areas as long as they do not turn into ghettos (Peach 1996a; Musterd 2003). Furthermore, at the economic level, some argue that ethnically concentrated areas can be a potential source of economic opportunities and advantage to ethnic groups (Borjas 1992; Zhou 2005; Charsley et al. 2016). According to this view, co-ethnic relationships improve labour market opportunities for ethnic minorities and hence their economic contributions and integration (Charsley et al. 2016). This argument builds on the

concept of 'ethnic capital' which is argued to increase social and economic mobility of subsequent ethnic generations (Borjas 1992).

British mainstream discourses on integration often associate residential segregation with a range of negative outcomes, namely, parallel lives, polarisation, divisions and/or ghettoisation. In the aftermath of the 2001 riots, the Home Office team chaired by Ted Cante was established to investigate community cohesion at the local level, where they observed 'striking' negative and divisive impacts of residential segregation (Home Office 2001: 9). Since then, British Muslims are commonly seen as residentially, socially, culturally and politically leading 'parallel lives', which is depicted as a catalyst to divisions and fragmentation and hence a threat to the existence of a cohesive community (Johnston et al. 2005; Phillips 2010; Cameron 2011; HM Government 2018; Borch 2019; LGA 2019).

In the community cohesion debates which followed the 2001 riots, the concept of desegregation is, either implicitly or explicitly, limited to contacting and mixing with other communities (the native white majority in particular). In the contact hypothesis --the leading hypothesis of the interculturalist approach -- residential and social mixedness is considered to promote contact (Home Office 2001; Cante 2012). However, research has found that even with greater residential and social mixedness, contact might not be taken for granted as minority groups might have little exposure to members of the majority population, even if they are not residentially concentrated, due to the extra spread and density of the majority population compared to ethnic minorities (Massey and Denton 1988: 287). Assumptions of parallel lives and segregation have been challenged by a large body of research using an extended range of evidence (Heath et al., 2013; Heath and Demireva, 2014; Mustafa 2015).

Nevertheless, the latest governmental report on British Muslims' integration (Casey 2016) is sceptical about the integration score of British Muslims. In official accounts, Muslims (especially since the 2000s) are presumed to be responsible for social segregation (Home Office 2001). Although there have been exceptional cases in which government reports have criticised the performance of government in handling racism, discrimination and/or equality (Scarman 1981; Macpherson 1999), the overall official record shows that Muslims hold the responsibility for being segregated (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). In line with the rationale of this study, however, I argue that a major problem in understanding British integration is the expert-based and majority-led definitions of integration. Just as the concept of 'race' was an arbitrary way of classifying different British communities, the pre-defined top-

down concepts of national identity and community cohesion play the same arbitrary role in today's Britain, creating a new form of racism (Gilroy 2012). Commenting on Cameron's speech in 2011, Gilroy described his political position as "the logic of civilisationism" where safety and security arguments were used to justify an assimilationist integration approach (2012: 387). Top-down definitions of what is nationally acceptable and what is considered to be 'British' narrow the boundaries of belonging and negate a wide range of possibilities of what being British can mean (Gilroy 2012; Kaya 2012). A further discussion of British national identity and Britishness will be furnished later in section 2.4.

Although research on neighbourhood effects and spatial dispersion of ethnic communities has been on the rise in recent years (Clark and Drinkwater 2002; Friedrichs et al. 2003; Drever 2004; Gijssberts and Dagevos 2007; Fieldhouse and Cutts 2008), subjective accounts of space and place of residence have as yet been understudied. In Chapter Five, I will highlight British Muslims' narratives and understandings of the concept of segregation in relation to their surrounding contexts along with their sense of belonging and identity. This chapter contributes to a growing body of research on British Muslims' segregation and its impact on the social and cultural dimensions of integration. It highlights the dynamics and realities of Muslim-concentrated areas to provide answers to questions of whether residential segregation matters, how, when and for whom, and to explain the factors and reasons that increase/decrease the potential shortcomings of residential segregation.

### ***2.3.2.2 Social Mixedness and Integration***

Social mixedness and out-group contact have been the source of heated controversies in integration studies. For some, ethnic in-group relations might prevent the successful accomplishment of integration (Portes and Zhou 1993; Home Office 2001; Putnam 2002, 2007; Bloemraad et al. 2008; Cameron 2011; Fokkema and Haas 2011). According to Putnam, ethnic in-group bonds make integration problematic and can be a source of isolation (Putnam 2002, 2007). Social integration, according to this point of view, refers to the processes by which a migrant engages with the host society (Charsley et al. 2016; Home Office 2001; Putnam 2002, 2007; Bloemraad et.al 2008; Cameron 2011; Fokkema and Haas 2011). In opposition to this group of research, there exists another group which argues that strong ethnic ties are preconditions for well-integrated citizens (Atfield et. al 2007, Cheung and Phillimore 2013).

In a survey-based study on refugees, Cheung and Phillimore distinguish between two types of contact: bonding contact (within communities) and bridging contact (between communities). Both (2013: 11) argue that ‘contact with religious groups is also significantly correlated with contact with other-groups and organisations’. Cheung and Phillimore find no evidence that ‘bonding capital’ restricts the existence and maintenance of ‘bridging capital’ (2013: 11).

Consistent with that, research is increasingly recognising the positive impact of co-ethnic ties for the sake of overall integration (Charsley et al. 2016). Describing the significance of co-ethnic relations in building up social relations, Charsley et al. argue that ‘inter-ethnic networks have been found to be one significant means through which broader networks are secured’ (2016: 28). That being said, Charsley et al. (2016: 28) argue that lack of social integration should rather refer to a situation where migrants do not develop *any* interaction with the majority society. Co-ethnic ties assist new immigrants in familiarising themselves with the social system in the host country and hence play an intermediate role towards integration (Zhou 2005; Chavez et al. 2008). Studying the Chinese immigrant enclave ‘Chinatown’ in New York, Zhou (2005: 155) found that Chinatown is a tangible source of help for the disadvantaged Chinese immigrants and their families in coping with settlement hardships and adjustment difficulties. As will be shown in Chapter Five, ethno-religious ties amongst British Muslims in my field setting were evidenced as important in providing local communities with a system of support and a starting point for greater stable interaction with the wider society. In addition, ethnic ties provide a sense of satisfaction and wellbeing, particularly for new immigrants who often need assurance in their own language until adaptability happens.

Contact theory has been proved effective in fostering social integration (Shelton 2003; Tropp and Pettigrew 2005; Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins 2006). Having a native friend and/or spouse is a route to better social integration outcomes (Meng and Meurs 2006; Kanas et al. 2011). Diverse social networks and ties (whether based on friendship and/or marriage) could bring broader opportunities. Extending contact with the host society facilitates social and cultural familiarisation and provides information about job market and economic opportunities (Muttarak 2014: 72). However, critics (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Drever 2004; Gijsberts and Dagevos 2007) found that classic views of contact as a physical phenomenon (Duncan and Lieberman 1959; Peach 1996a; Johnston et al. 2005; Gijsberts and Dagevos 2007, Cameron 2011; Cantle 2012; Casey 2016) overlook the increase in non-traditional forms of contact and

the changing nature of communication in a globalised world (Drever 2004, Gijssberts and Dagevos 2007).

Amid the increase of virtual communications, the nature of contact and social interaction has changed, and its fluidity has increased (Forrest and Kearns 2001: 2126). Contact can be direct and/or indirect (extended). Extended contact refers to ‘knowing about, or observing, at least one, and preferably more than one, in-group member who has an out-group friend’ (Hewstone and Swart 2011: 377). Moreover, official calls for Muslim desegregation hold unrealistic presumptions that Muslims have been in no contact with the majority culture/population for more than 60 years, since early waves of immigration in the late 1950s. My argument resonates with the findings of Duncan and Lieberson (1959) on ethnic minorities in the US. Despite my disagreement with Duncan and Lieberson regarding the impact of spatial dispersion on inter-group relations, I do share their empirically sound view of the positive association between integration and the length of time an immigrant group has had in the hosting country (Duncan and Lieberson 1959: 364). Kanas et al. (2011: 27) similarly emphasise the significance of time for inter-group social relations as more time spent in the host-country increases the chances for forming more resourceful relations not only with co-ethnics but also with the majority populations. Immigrants may be socially isolated in their early days of settlement in the host society when fear, discrimination and racism are dominant (Pratsinakis et al. 2017), however, it is misleading to argue that present-day citizens of immigrant backgrounds have been living in isolation ever since their arrival in host societies (Kanas et al. 2011, Pratsinakis et al. 2017).

The contact hypothesis presumes that contact helps promoting social harmony but this presumption overlooks the necessary preconditions of successful contact. Though plausible and possible, the contact hypothesis is quite abstract as it overlooks key practical and empirical issues. For instance, what guarantees that prejudice is not produced even after contact and dialogue? As Pettigrew et al. observed, contact does not necessarily guarantee decreased prejudices (2011: 277). Cultural and social mixing policies could become simply tick box practices (Hewstone and Brown 1986; Pettigrew 1998 Dovidio et al. 2003; Hewstone and Swart 2011). How can it be assured that contact will enhance genuine inter-group harmony and not conflicts? And, how are power relations expected to impact on it? If technology and advanced communication have not been able to achieve mutual understanding amongst nations,

what difference can the intercultural contact hypothesis offer? And, what type of *new* ‘contact mechanisms’ do interculturalists suggest?

Furthermore, as will be illustrated later in the analysis, the conceptions and views held by ethnic communities indeed impact on their willingness and readiness to maintain contact with others (whether within or outside the same group). Ethnic minorities’ intergroup attitudes are strongly impacted by their perceptions of prejudice from the majority group (Tropp and Pettigrew 2005: 956). Thus, despite the importance of contact, it is not a guarantor for achieving integration. For instance, in Chapter Six insights will be offered on how fear among Muslims in my field site was evidenced to inhibit their intra-group contact. Fear is one of the parameters that apparently contribute in shaping the out-group ties of British Muslims. As Kassimeris and Jackson (2012: 179) argue, discursive representations of Muslim communities since the 2000s ‘worked to exclude Muslims while simultaneously reprimanding them for failing to integrate into a national and local culture that regarded them as inherently “other”. Not only the anti-terrorism discourse is undermining positive social relations but also the discourse on community cohesion is negatively impacting inter-group attitudes through isolating and marginalising British Muslims (Ahmed 2019). According to Maxwell’s persuasive argument, young British Muslims develop high expectations of inclusion like every other British citizen. However, if discriminated against, they develop feelings of disengagement and apathy which lead to other ways of belonging, such as developing ethno-religious in-group ties (Maxwell 2006).

To date, there has been a wide range of studies which explored Muslims’ views and understandings about identity, belonging, Britishness, citizenship and political engagement (Saggar 1998, 2000; Anwar 2001; Reed 2005; Maxwell 2006; UKREN 2009; Sobolewska 2013; Ahmed 2019). Methodologies varied between quantitative methods, which are primarily concerned with ethnic electoral participation (Saggar 1998, 2000; Anwar 2001; Bisin et al 2007; Sobolewska 2013) and qualitative methods (Eade 1994; Eade and Garbin 2006, Mustafa 2015; Ahmed 2019). The existing literature suffers several gaps in covering aspects of integration, and specifically British Muslims’ integration. On the one hand, many studies tend to give more attention to what the majority population thinks of integration-related issues (Saggar and Drean 2001; Crawley 2009; Blinder et al. 2011). On the other hand, many studies focusing on ethnic minorities and British Muslims are quantitative and largely analyse electoral behaviour rather than integration in general (Saggar 1998, 2000, 2015; Anwar, 2001,

Sobolewska 2015). For instance, Sobolewska found that less contact with political parties resulted in religion being an alternative route to the political mobilisation of ethnic minorities (Sobolewska 2015). Despite the credibility of her argument in this case, quantitative studies, such as Sobolewska's, lack an in-depth understanding of why certain phenomena occur as perceived by respondents rather than the researcher, who sets indicators and tries to find correlations amongst them. These objective correlations fail to clarify the inner meanings of the research findings.

A major contribution of the existing research is that it challenges essentialist constructions of Muslim religious identity and forms of belonging. Existing research importantly reveals the complex formation of Muslim hybrid identities and their forms of integration; and it highlights the concerns and the challenges Muslim communities encounter in negotiating their status in British society (Dwyer 2000; Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins 2006; Hopkins et al. 2007; Dwyer et al. 2008; Siraj 2011; Heath et al. 2013; O'Toole and Gale 2013; Mustafa 2015). Existing research has provided important contributions in understanding different aspects of Muslims' lives, including the religious, the economic, and the political (Dwyer 1999, 2000; O'Toole and Gale 2013; Heath et al. 2013; Stevenson et al. 2017). There is, however, more need for a detailed image of how non-essentialist understandings of Muslim integration are reflected and negotiated in their mundane realities. My study aims to extend the discussion of integration by providing a more complex understanding of the reality of integration in Muslim communities. This extended discussion problematises the mainstream discourse of integration and provides an opportunity to highlight areas of agreement and disagreements between Muslims and the mainstream discourses of integration, elaborating how both may compare.

Although there is extensive qualitative research on integration-related issues (Ameli et al. 2006; Heath et al. 2013; O'Toole and Gale 2013; Mustafa 2015; Ahmed 2019), little has been done to explore the inner meanings and perceptions of British Muslims in general (including the older generations) towards the concept of integration. Although these studies represent important contributions, none could present an overarching understanding of what integration means for Muslims as compared to the official accounts. In addition, much of this research focuses primarily on younger generations, and so fails to provide an account of how different generations interact with issues of belonging (Heath et al. 2013; O'Toole and Gale 2013; Mustafa 2015). In the context of growing tendencies to radicalisation, it is certainly of

paramount importance to find research that specifically focuses on younger generations *per se*, but it is surprising, though, to find little consideration of the experiences and orientations of other generations. The older generations can be expected to impact the way younger generations think and behave through the socialization process. Exploring the experiences of the older generations is just as salient because they had the opportunity to experience different discursive debates: from assimilation to multiculturalism to moving to community cohesion and ending with Prevent. They could, as a result, provide a comparative and comprehensive understanding of the shifts in ethnic relations and integration.

As will be shown in the next chapter, this study addresses this gap by adopting ethnography as a methodological approach, as ethnographic research such as the one at hand not only enables the researcher to explore what the community under observation says but also helps to elucidate what they actually do, through being at close quarters for an extended period of time (Murchison 2010). Taking the previous literature review into account, I argue that providing an ethnographic account of integration enriches our understanding and fills a gap in the literature, in which qualitative methodological approaches to investigating British Muslims' perspectives of integration are limited largely to interviews. Ethnographic immersion provides new and more complex insights on aspects of integration which have been overlooked or underestimated in previous studies (Acik and Pilkington 2018; Hoque 2019).

## **2.4 Identification and Dis-identification**

This section engages with concepts of identity and cultural hybridity as major aspects of integration discourses. The first sub-section (2.4.1) reviews debates on British national identity and Britishness. The second section (2.4.2) engages with the scholarship on identity and cultural hybridity as it links with integration. As for the third sub-section (2.4.3), it engages with the role of Muslim religious identity in explaining radicalisation.

### **2.4.1 British National Identity and Britishness**

Following the shift of focus from race to identity in late 1980s, the concept of identity appeared as a key aspect in integration studies. Concepts, meanings and politics of identity



have been the focus of diverse scholarships (Rutherford 1990; Keith and Pile 1993; Burnham and Harris 1996; Song 1997; Kershen 1998; Eade 1998; Philips 2006; Bean et al. 2012; Mustafa 2015; Smith 2015; Oskooii and Dana 2018). Some of these contributions have highlighted the hybridity of British identity, elaborating its problematic identification among different ethnic groups (Eade 1998; Kershen 1998; Phillips 2006; Smith 2015;). Others have focussed on ethnic identities and their relation to the wider mainstream society (Bean et al. 2012; Mustafa 2015; Oskooii and Dana 2018).

Controversies over British national identity have been sparked by social, political and historical events including but not limited to the loss of empire, the devolution of power to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and the post-war Commonwealth migration (Parekh 2000: 251; Gamble and Wright 2009). Over many years, British national identity has been at the core of extended public, political and academic debates (LGA 2004; House of Lords 2008; HM Government 2011; House of Lords 2018). Given the focus of this study, I will centre my attention on how debates on national identity link to questions of integration. Controversies over Muslim integration in the UK spark difficult questions on what it is that Muslims are meant to be integrating into.

In the aftermaths of the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks along with the 2001 community disturbances in north England, Muslims have been at the centre of discourses of community cohesion, with the particular perspective of their religious identity as incompatible with the British way of life (Klausen 2005; Straw 2006, 2007; Joppke 2009; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). More than two decades later, the integration of British Muslims remains a source of heated controversies amid more recent terrorist attacks (e.g. Manchester 2017 and Westminster 2019) and with rising numbers of young Muslims joining terrorist organisations such as ISIS.

Integration, according to the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (2018:10), is indicated by the presence of 'communities where many religions, cultures and opinions are celebrated, underpinned by a shared set of British values that champion tolerance, freedom and equality of opportunity'. At the core of debates on community cohesion and integration is the call for Muslims to adhere to British values and to show their Britishness (LGA 2004; Blair 2006; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016; House of Lords 2018; HM Government 2018; LGA 2019). Debates on British national identity as it links to integration are complex and multidimensional, with historical, political, cultural and social aspects, giving rise to a wide range of positions and perspectives on what makes Britishness. For some, adhering to a set of

common values is a way to unity and cohesion (Brown 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Asari et al. 2008; Cameron 2011; HM Government 2018; House of Lords 2018; LGA 2019). For others, reducing national identity to a list of values is exclusive and in fact a way to create a sense of otherness and divisiveness, as it presents a culturally exclusive and narrow perspective on Britishness (O'Toole et al. 2013: 36; Parekh 2000 a, b; Modood 2007).

Reflecting on the summer disturbances in northern English cities, David Blunkett, the then Home Secretary, highlighted the duty of ethnic minorities to promote integration by 'adopting the norms of British life and learning to speak English' (Grice 2001). A decade later, the then prime minister, in his analysis of extremism and belonging, stated that 'we've even tolerated *these* segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values' (Cameron 2011; *Italic added*). In addition to implied otherness and social positioning in Cameron's speech, his statement implies misleading assumptions. Research has found that young British Muslims' increasing religious affiliation, which might be officially and publicly seen as fundamentalist, does not come into contradiction with British values (Kundnani 2008; Frampton et al. 2016; Shazhadi et al. 2018). As Kundnani elaborates in his remarkable analysis of Islamism, young Muslims use their readings of the Qur'an and Sunna to oppose coercion in marriage and domestic violence against women (2008: 58). This raises difficult questions about the official understanding of Islamic identity and Muslim communities. While Muslims are urged to depart from their 'traditional religious practices' to become integrated (Cameron 2011), the day-to-day reality of religious identity proves to be closely aligned to British values (Kundnani 2008; Hopkins 2011). Nevertheless, little academic attention has been paid to the role ethnic/religious identities could play to enhance the willingness and ability of ethnic communities to integrate (Kundnani 2008; Ahmad and Evergeti 2010; Yilmaz 2010; Hopkins 2011; Hoque 2019). Chapter Four addresses this gap in the literature by highlighting mundane differences between practising and non-practising Muslims in approaching both their personal and national identity(ies) and integration issues. This will be based on my observations and field findings of how acculturated both groups are in terms of their self-identification, 'e.g. strength of cultural identifications and degree of conflict the individual feels between different cultural orientations' (Repke and Benet-Martínez 2017: 2).

Political discourse and a trend of academic research on British values suggest that failure to demonstrate Britishness and to associate with British values form the basis for segregation and social divisiveness (Asari et al. 2008; Joppke 2009; Cameron 2011; Casey

2016; HM Government 2018). According to Asari et al., respect for difference alone cannot achieve cohesion in a multicultural society. A cohesive society in Asari et al.'s account 'requires a positive articulation of the values underpinning such a society to which we should all aspire' (2008: 24). Following the 7/7 terrorist attacks in 2005, the Community Cohesion Agenda was developed to maintain a 'national story' and to emphasise the role of British values of 'freedom, fairness, tolerance and plurality' in promoting unity and combating intolerance (Straw 2006, 2007). The core values of the UK national identity were summarized by Gordon Brown, as 'values of liberty, responsibility, and fairness' (Brown 2006). Encouraging integration, challenging separatism and battling terrorism came to be associated with a set of values that are officially believed to bring people together and to lessen segregation in a multicultural society. In a different account, David Cameron (2014) argued that Britishness is not only to live by British values, but also to value the history and the institutions which formed those values. In the latest report from the House of Lords (2018: 16), the government definition of fundamental British values (FBV) was set out as 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'.

In response to these political accounts of what being British means, a growing body of research has criticised this fixed conception of national identity, calling for a multicultural way of understanding Britain as a nation (Parekh 2000; Parekh 2000(a); Modood 2007; O'Toole et al. 2013). Critics have highlighted the contested meanings of Britishness amongst nationalists and British values advocates. Looking at political discourses and policy practices, it is difficult to clearly identify if these British values are the ones identified by Gordon Brown, Tony Blair, Jack Straw, David Cameron, and/or other nationalists opposing multiculturalism (Alexander 2007: 116). Promoting integration and/or cohesion through lines of core values is not a guaranteed successful approach as it permits more cultural sameness than difference (McGhee 2003; Alexander 2007). An indefinite framework of sameness enhances the possibilities for exclusion by disallowing a particular level of difference which is often defined by mainstream society in the name of belonging (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005: 527). Therefore, building community cohesion on the basis of common 'British values' has triggered criticism from several quarters (Bonnett 1997; Khan 2000; McGhee 2003; Lewis and Neal 2005; Worley 2005: 488; Yuval-Davis et Al. 2005; Alexander 2007).

Critics have found the notion of community cohesion as an end to the celebration and cherishing of multicultural Britain, and the start of 'a reinvigorated and assimilative national

project' (Alexander 2007: 106; Bonnett 1997; Khan 2000; Lewis and Neal 2005). Mason (2018: 39) takes this argument further by stating that for the sake of creating and maintaining 'a reasonably just society' ethnic communities should not be 'directed towards "British values" or told that they do not belong unless they endorse these values'. Challenging essentialist conceptions of Britishness there exists an extended body of research which belies cultural dichotomies and fixed notions of identity, highlighting the inevitability of cultural hyphenation in diverse societies (Gilroy 1987; Hall 1992; Brah 1996; Modood 1998a). Researchers have in response highlighted the importance of respecting and valuing the cultural practices and values that have become part of the British landscape following the arrival of immigrant communities since World War II (Hall 1992; Brah 1996; Modood 1998; Ansari 2002; Alexander 2007; Meer and Modood 2019). The changing nature of identity in a multicultural society makes it difficult to reduce national identity to a set of non-negotiable features or propositions (Brah 1996; Parekh 2000b; Modood 2007). In a diverse society, even the majority culture is never a homogeneous structure, and there cannot be one single definition of it (Brah 1996: 18-19). In addition, reducing British values to a list does not in fact contribute to the real challenges British society faces with regard to its ethnic relations. For instance, emphasising equality as a core British value does not answer questions of how to handle continuing issues of stigma and discrimination (Shadid and Van Koningsveld 2005: 43; Modood 2007; O'Toole et al. 2013).

In addition to criticisms of the concept of 'tolerance', which implies unease and discomfort with difference (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998), critics have suggested that a uniform conception of the nation or its national identity is a form of oppression which has been used to justify a range of punitive interventions and agendas, such as Prevent (Parekh 2000a: 56; McGhee 2008; O'Toole 2021). Essentialist discourses of 'us' can also give rise to fixed understandings of the terms and conditions of acceptability for the *homogeneous* 'other' (Alexander 2007: 116; Billig et al. 2006), and while de-prioritising economic and political parameters, official narratives often perceive socio-cultural segregation as a key cause of social disorder and economic deprivation (Pilkington 2008: 3). In this view, gaining acceptance in society is strongly associated with the acceptance of British values and the denouncement of whatever seen (by the mainstream) as un-British (Robins 1996; Pilkington 2008). Discourses on Britishness may indicate a commitment to set an 'inclusive' identity but, indeed, with an implicit *exclusive* and nostalgic nationalism (Alexander 2007: 116). Those who do not fit with or share this list of values are outsiders (Billig et al. 2006; McGhee 2008). There is therefore a pressing need for a type of Britishness that is both welcoming to cultural hybridity and

hyphenation and at the same time engaging with and inclusive of ethnic and religious difference (Modood 1998a: 39). Multicultural Britishness, as Modood describes, is a hyphenated form of Britishness where belonging is not polarised and is not formed in an either-or fashion (Modood 1998a: 39).

Being built on the duality of ‘us’ and ‘them’, the current use of the concept of national identity offers little help building a cohesive and well-mixed society. The implied meanings attached to this concept drive it away from the presumed target of building bonds and removing barriers (Hall 1992; Meer and Modood 2019). With multiculturalism no longer a political commitment, the significance of cultural difference could be lost to the notion of equality, leading to the assimilation of ethnic minorities (McGhee 2008; Alexander 2007; O’Toole et al. 2013). Treating all communities as if they were the same would inevitably mean treating ethnic communities according to the norms and the convenience of the majority populations (Modood 1992: 273). These criticisms do not, however, de-emphasise the vital role played by shared values in and between communities, however, this trend is essentially concerned with holding a dynamic dialogue before setting a definition of national identity (Parekh 2000 a, b; Modood 2007).

After engaging with the wider framework of British values and national identity, the following section is set to review debates on identity formation, cultural hybridity and integration, and different possibilities of identity construction in the context of British integration.

#### **2.4.2 Identity Construction and Integration**

In line with the anti-essentialist rationale of this study, identity is understood as a social construction that is *developed* through ongoing social variables. Identity is a relational incomplete process to develop narratives of the self in its individual and collective sense (Isin and Wood 1999: 16; Hall 1990; Eade 1998). However, as Isin and Wood argue, there is always ‘some intrinsic and essential content to any identity which is defined by either a common origin or a common structure of experience or both’ (Isin and Wood 1999: 16). In this sense, identity is a continuously reflexive process (Davis and Wells 2016). It is understood to be what people understand, tell about and construct the self and what they have reason to value (Davis and

Wells 2016). Despite the fluid nature of identity and its likelihood to change, the ability of a person to categorise him/herself and to belong to certain groups in society is an essential parameter of what freedom and agency is all about (Comim and Teschl 2006: 296). The ability to freely sustain a self-made view of the self amid increasing social interactions is a central human capability (Davis 2004: 26). Identity is, as Davis and Wells argue, ‘a meta-capability for self-governance that is an aspect of individuals’ agency freedom’ (2016: 12). As will be further discussed in both Chapter Four and Seven, considering identity as a capability does not only refer to the ability to practise certain cultural/religious symbols and practices but also refers to being ‘able to take up a reflective stance towards themselves as a person persisting and yet developing over time, and to make plans and choices accordingly’ (Davis and Wells 2016: 3).

In culturally diverse societies, debates on national identity, ethnic identities and cultural recognition intersect with debates on cultural hybridity and mixedness which describe the space and position of those belonging to two distinctive cultures. Hybridity refers to a state of combined self-identifications which could come in different combinations and with various implications for the relation between the self and the other. The elasticity and the open nature of the concept leave unlimited opportunities for including/excluding people of difference (Kraidy 2002: 321-322; Young 1995). Hybrid self-making is often considered a sign of adaptability and a reflection of the liberal understanding of difference (Mahmood 2017). In principle, hybridity in its cultural form is made to preserve cultural difference (Young 1995; Mahmood 2017). Hybridisation is linked to the moment in which ‘dominant representations of certain group are contested and in which ‘diaspora experiences’ are recognized and welcomed/tolerated’ (Young 1995: 22- 23). It is also considered to be a manifestation of an equality-based civic integration of ethnic minorities (Mahmood 2017: 247).

Principally, proponents of hybridity advocate ‘the impossibility of essentialism’ (Young 1995: 25). Hybridity suggests an anti-essential stance for both mainstream and non-mainstream identities. It has been recognised by British anti-essentialists as not only a counter to essentialist, unified and homogeneous meanings of identity; but also as a counter to fundamentalism and political Islamism (Modood 1998: 379). In an interview with Rutherford, Bhabha argues that hybridity is ‘the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge. The third space displaces the histories that constitute it’ (Rutherford 1990: 211). The third space in Bhabha’s account is an in-between space where new blends of cultures are formed, ones which

resist the hegemonic colonial discourse. In this anti-essentialist account, hybridity is celebrated as a space where recognition of difference takes place and where essentialist notions of identity are challenged (Rutherford 1990). Furthermore, Bhabha argues that ‘the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’ (Rutherford 1990: 211). In Bhabha's account, the third space is a place that carries productivity and new possibilities. It is a place of opposition to cultural domination by the colonial power and hegemonic interpretations of culture. It is also a space of adaptation, negotiation, representation, inclusion and collaboration. It is a place where transcultural communities can negotiate their cultural properties and differences.

The political practice of hybridity does not however replicate these theoretical accounts. Hybridity in practice carries an authoritative, generalised and hegemonic description of mainstream culture (Bhabha 1996: 58). As mentioned above, pro-hybridity (essentialist) official discourses conceive the assumed Muslims’ ethnic/religious assertiveness as threatening and thus urge Muslims to go mainstream under the logo of British values. These discourses criticise the essentialist and groupist meanings of Muslim religious identity, however, they fall in the trap of essentialising mainstream identities (Kelly 2006). In fact, such anti-essentialist discourses ironically assume that cultural mixedness occurs between two or more different cultures that are regarded as given, predefined and essential (Modood 1998). Therefore, I argue that essentialism is certainly a constitutive part of how hybridity exists in practice. As convincingly stated by Modood (1998: 380), ‘for some the power of cultural essentialism is such that it is implicit in even these attempts to oppose it’.

The political practice of hybridity is in fact a mimicry, where the alien other is set to follow particular cultural guidelines set by the dominant culture (Gershenson 2003: 108). In the lead up to the Rushdie affair following publication of *The Satanic Verses*, a conversation between Bhabha and Parekh (1989: 27) was held where the first argued that multiculturalism is only possible if ethnic communities get enough public space which makes them confident enough to dialogue and interact with the majority culture. Inspired by his argument, I argue that hybridity is only possible if it is empowering to all parties involved in the cultural dialogue and interaction. Shallow negotiations of cultural difference violate the core right of cultural difference as a liberal choice (Bhabha 1996). The inherent essentialism in the practice of hybridity leaves limited room for those who choose to observe their difference or distinctiveness from the mainstream. Recalling Gordon’s remarkable analysis of assimilation

in America, hybridity might take the form of behavioural and structural assimilation of immigrants. Behavioural assimilation refers to a form of action where immigrants/ethnic minorities are called to absorb ‘the cultural behaviour patterns of the “host” society’ (Gordon 1961: 279). This restrictive essentialism in the name of celebrated hybridity leaves communities with a form of behavioural assimilation that in fact allows ‘no politics, no society, not even a coherent self’ (Modood 1998: 381).

I agree with Bhabha that cultures formed in-between distinct identities would indeed involve some sort of newness. In my opinion, the new cultural blend can hardly be identical to the two historically formed identities. However, based on my field evidence, I disagree with the implied sense of essentialism in Bhabha’s account in which he suggests that there is necessarily a fresh cultural blend to be formed out of interaction between two distinct identities. In other words, Bhabha argues for the existence of a third space; but can there be some possibility of the existence of *no space*? A culturally hyphenated citizen could maintain a marginal relationship with her religious/ethnic identity while at the same time having a limited integration score. This observation is endorsed by Bélanger and Verkuyten (2010: 143), who argued that acculturation may take the form of: a) full integration where the person both sustains cultural relevance to ethnic minority culture(s) and at the same time achieves a high score of social contact with the majority population; or b) full marginalisation where the person might fall short of both milestones, with neither cultural maintenance nor successful contact with the wider society. In the second case, citizens experience a cultural void as they embrace ‘no clear identity’ (Bélanger and Verkuyten 2010: 143). The danger of such a scenario will be further discussed in the next section (2.4.3), which will further discuss how Muslims in Europe encounter challenging identity dynamics that might leave them in cultural vacuums. Chapter Four will also illustrate the possibility of a situation of cultural void with no/blurry sense of the self, which is instigated by contexts of otherness and inequality. The chapter will provide insights on the dynamics and possibilities of being in-between cultures.

Muslims in today’s Britain are left in unprivileged positions for identity formation processes, and this often leaves them with the feeling that their identity is not welcomed and/or respected (Hopkins et al. 2007). In this context, Mason convincingly argues that ethnic/religious minorities should be allowed to ‘separate to some degree if they so choose’ as this might positively promote ‘their confident sense of their own identity’ (2018: 39). A sense of freedom and autonomy is closely attached to one’s capacity to shape a view of the self as



both ‘an individual and as a member of her community’ (Comim and Teschl 2006: 294). Autonomy does not mean only the ability to decide and choose from available options but also to be able to maintain a commitment to the value system that shaped the choice in the first place (Livet 2006: 327). This freedom enables the person to enhance his/her wellbeing independently and reflexively within the values he/she has reason to and/or choose freely/autonomously to value (Davis and Wells 2016: 12). As Sen persuasively argues ‘agency freedom must, in fact, include the freedom to think freely, without being severely restrained by pressured conformism or by the ignorance of how the prevailing practices in the rest of the world differ from what can be observed locally’ (Sen 2005: 240). Therefore, understanding identity formation promotes our understanding of social agency (Somers 1994: 605).

The formation of Muslim religious identity in today’s Britain is indeed context-based and is undeniably impacted by the imbalance in power relations, social injustices and discrimination (Werbner 1997a). Power relations often frame and interfere with the social process of identity construction (Castells 2010: 7; Hall 1996; Kraidy 2002). Therefore, the collective bond amongst today’s Muslims does not only depend on religious beliefs and revelations but is enhanced by a collective sense of victimisation (whether at the political, social, economic and internal and/or international levels). Therefore, any analysis of identity formation requires a consideration of the social context where the formation process occurs (Hopkins 2011: 535). Linking the timely debates on community cohesion to the academic scholarship on hybridity, it can be argued here that cultural hybridity in official accounts is in fact a search for sameness built on otherness.

It is worth emphasising that hybridity is a natural human phenomenon. It has existed over the years and even centuries. In principle, hybridity is an enrichment of a person’s subjectivity (Modood 1997). According to Castells’s persuasive argument, ‘all identities are constructed. The real issue is how, from what, by whom, and for what’ (Castells 2010: 7). In the British context, the social and political scrutiny around British Muslims is not only framed by their racial and ethnic backgrounds but also by their faith, which is often ‘portrayed very negatively and often depicted to be at odds with Western ethos, beliefs, and democratic principles’ (Oskooii and Dana 2018: 1481). Moreover, the religious identity of British Muslims is more likely to be recognised as an impediment to cohesive community relations and intra-group contact. As discussed in the previous section, adherence to British values has often been confirmed as a non-negotiable sign not only of willingness to integrate but also as a sign of

loyalty and belonging (Miah 2015: 31). Moreover, a hybrid identity construction, in times of uncertainty, otherness and exclusion, could essentialise in an attempt to resist negative representations of the self or certain aspects of the self. In the case of negative cultural and social portrayals, developing self-identification could take the form of challenging negative social positioning, where the identity construction process aims not only at challenging negative representations of the self but also at discovering the original and fundamental origins of the identity (Isin and Wood 1999: 16).

The positives of hybridity, I argue, therefore, should not be overstated. Hybridity might not necessarily be anti-colonial and anti-essentialist. Rather, it could be an attempt to intensify the colonial discourse by dissolving dominated ('other') discourses. Therefore, not all forms of hybridity, I argue, to be celebrated. Hybridity is a contextually and socially constructed meaning, and understanding its connotation should not be decoupled from those social contexts (O'Donnell 2007). In its inquiry into the integration of immigrants, the final report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration argued that it is unavoidably important for British policy makers to recognise that 'the traditional, laissez-faire British model of multiculturalism has too often encouraged communities to live separate lives – reinforcing distinct cultural identities to the detriment of efforts to draw attention to what we have in common – and is defunct' (Bell et al. 2017: 14). Rising doubts on multiculturalism were simultaneously associated with urging Muslims to integrate according to a set of values that are mainly defined through majority-led and top-down approaches. Promoting integration in Britain's multi-ethnic/cultural society has increasingly been framed within a mono-cultural framework deemed as the ultimate solution for sorting out potential conflicts between national identity on the one side, and ethno-religious identities on the other (O'Donnell 2007).

The official framework of integration (2019) builds on the premise that mutual understanding of cultural values, expectations, and practices promotes interaction between diverse communities (Home Office 2019: 46). However, the report's indicators of cultural competence as requirements for integration do not in fact refer to the meanings of '*mutual*' understanding. The indicators are rather restricted to tasks that are expectedly performed by minority communities, such as understanding British institutional cultures and rights, understanding and abiding by law and adherence to law in relation to practices that are not legal in the UK (e.g. female genital mutilation [FGM]) (Home Office 2019: 46). On the other side, however, no such expectations were stated for mainstream society to perform. I agree

with Lewis and Neal (2005: 433) in arguing that the advocacy of British values is set to protect the culture of those who are deemed “indigenous” from the negative impacts of the failed assimilation of those perceived as ‘national outsiders’.

While community cohesion ranges between hard and soft versions in different governmental policies, hard versions appear to take the lead, making the concept of integration closer to assimilation (Wetherell 2007: 17). A monocultural shift has been gradually occurring as part of the Community Cohesion agenda, which holds an objective and static account of white British identity, portraying it as ‘a fixed social category rather than a mutable social construction’ (Bonnett 1997: 177). Despite officially depicted as anti-essentialist, in practice the community cohesion agenda portrays white British identity as essentially unproblematic, unchallenged and unchanged, putting the majority population in a privileged position in integration debates (Bonnett 1997: 177). Alongside that essentialist portrayal of British values, the community cohesion discourse likewise generalises an essentialist portrayal of Muslims’ religious identity and behaviours. The presumed high-level religious devotion of British Muslims has repeatedly been considered as a lack in British Muslims’ adherence to British values and British identity (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011; Bell et al. 2017). Current accounts of community cohesion are considered distinct from British multiculturalism, and an endorsement of ‘older notions of assimilationism within a newer, de-racialized, language of social cohesion’ (Lewis and Neal 2005: 437). A national value system defined in non-inclusive ways intensifies social distances and enhances a sense of injustice, discrimination and exclusion for those who are less represented in it. A hard version of community cohesion does indeed contradict equality and anti-discrimination initiatives and pronouncements. In line with my view in this regard, Robins argues that when the other is stigmatised by an insurmountable particularity deemed as unfit for ‘our’ culture, then we have founded a strong base for racism (Robins 1996: 66).

British integration discourse (particularly in its hard versions) implies an exhortation to minorities in general and Muslims in particular to ‘go mainstream by adopting the language and culture of dominant white people’ (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005: 529). Essentialising the British national identity through a refined set of ‘British values’ leaves limited room for free identity construction and hence enhanced identity-based fears within minority communities in general and Muslims, as the most scrutinised minority identity, in particular (Bonnett 1997; Khan 2000; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005; Alexander 2007). Yuval-Davis et al. (2005: 529) argue that ignoring

socio-economic inequalities and calling upon the ‘other’ to integrate by adhering to mainstream cultural symbols- put the foundation for deep-rooted exclusion and alienation. Community cohesion has produced a restrictive notion of cultural difference that, as Alexander convincingly argues, ‘really makes no difference’ (2007: 108). The national aim of guarding borders and national identity does not have to be in conflict with the aim of safeguarding difference. Perceiving difference as a challenge to social solidarity and portraying its restriction as a way forward towards cohesive community relations creates simultaneously cultural boundaries and limited belonging (Yuval-Davis et al. 2005: 527). In a culturally hybrid (multicultural) society, having the right to practise one’s ethnic/religious identity does not mean that one’s agency over self-identity is protected. The politics of identity is not only about recognition of difference but also about supporting that difference as a key pillar of citizenship rights (Bhabha 1996: 186). As explained earlier, citizenship is not only a legal, civic and/or political concept. Religious, domestic or intimate aspects of life should all to be covered by citizenship (Predelli 2008: 242).

Being able to fulfil the self is a prerequisite for both authentic citizenship and a non-conflictual society (Donald 1996). The mundane practices of citizenship are more likely to be representative of native and indigenous populations compared to non-native minorities, who are often portrayed as ‘intrusive’ and ‘exploitative’ and found to be ‘pushing their luck’ (Gale 2005: 1168). Citizenship, belonging and social harmony closely associate with stable and sustainable societal recognition of a citizen’s differences. The theory of hybridity often has greater prominence in scholarly research than its empirical reality, its day-to-day processes and its mundane dynamics (Young 1995). Chapter Four provides in-depth insights into hybridity as a daily experience of many Muslims in the fieldsetting. The chapter provides details on diverse representations of hybridity in local contexts where it takes shape. It is of paramount importance to investigate the dynamics of identity and self-construction in Muslim communities and how it relates to their integration-related understandings and behaviours.

### **2.4.3 Identity- Radicalisation Nexus**

Islam is one key parameter that defines how Muslims are portrayed in public and political debates. In general, Muslims in Britain regard Islam as a point of reference that frames their thoughts and behaviours (Modood et al. 1997; Ansari 2004; Mustafa 2015). There is no

doubt that the Muslim faith highlights British Muslims as a community of difference (Modood et al. 1997), and this has been increasingly recognized with young British Muslims compared to older generations (Kibria 2008; Mustafa 2015). The religious identity of Muslims in Britain (as in most European countries) is a matter of official and public concern (Blair 2006; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). Although Muslims in the UK are more likely to identify themselves as British compared to other ethnic groups (Karlsen and Nazroo 2015; Mustafa 2015), mainstream fears over radicalisation contribute to Muslims' religious identity being shaped as a threat to the security of Britain (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). Official pronouncements together with racial and religious acts (e.g. the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act) often emphasise the contributions of Muslims, the importance of equality and the significance of battling racism and discrimination (Pilkington 2008: 9) and successive governmental discourses often make the distinction between Islam/Muslims and terrorism (Cameron 2011). Nonetheless, Muslims by and large remain at the core of anti-multicultural and community cohesion debates, with a central urge for them to go mainstream in order to put an end to radicalisation and extremism.

In 2003, Contest --the British counterterrorism strategy-- was launched and it was published to the public in 2006 following the 2005 bombings in London (The Henry Jackson Society 2017: 1-2). The aim of Contest was to reduce the risk of terrorism through four main sub-strategies: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare (HM Gov 2018). The most controversial stream in the contest strategy is Prevent which aims to 'preventing people becoming terrorists' through countering extremism and radicalisation (HM Gov 2011: 24). The strategy's definition of radicalisation is not only limited to violent forms of extremism but also to non-violent forms which could be identified by a range of possibilities (McGhee 2008; O'Toole 2015; Choudhury 2017). Radicalised or extremist citizens are identified by their 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (HM Government 2011: 107). The lack of specificity in this definition allows potential excessive and/or irrational use of investigation powers against suspects. According to Mythen et al. 'counter-terrorism policies have succeeded in reproducing a *state of partial securities* in and through which certain groups are protected and 'others' exposed to scrutiny and hostility' (2012: 383 *Italic in original*).

Counterterrorism measures include stop and search, search and examine at ports and airports, and pre-charge detention which could reach up to 28 days according to the terrorism

act 2006 (Choudhury and Fenwick 2011: 13). The measures could also be extended to include citizenship revocation which despite that it has been applied only on a few from the Muslim communities, it extends the scope of the sanctions that can potentially be widely applied indiscriminately on the Muslim community (Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019). Interviewing a group of Muslims whose passports were cancelled, Kapoor and Narkowicz (2019) suggest that the use of state powers in this regards has gone beyond terrorism-related issues; and it carries an implied message that the Muslim community is entitled for sanctions as soon as it does not fulfil the mainstream terms of what being British should mean. Those measures have been criticized by a growing body of research (Hickman et al. 2011; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Mythen et al. 2012; Moosavi 2015; Ahmed 2019) due to its disproportionate exercise of powers against particular communities. Surveillance and counterterrorism interventions are not limited to be applied on ‘suspect’ individuals only, but also they are extended to apply at a wider spectrum as in areas with high Muslim concentration which became subject, since the 2000s, to overt and covert surveillance and punitive practices; turning the whole Muslims community into a ‘suspect’ community (O’Toole 2021: 2506).

In the context of radicalisation among young British Muslims, beginning with the home-born London bombers (2005) up to the bomber of the Manchester Arena (2017) and the home-grown jihadists who joined jihadi organizations in Syria and elsewhere (e.g. Shamima Begum and her friends), research has extensively investigated the link between British Muslims’ religious identity and such acts of terrorism and radicalism in an attempt to answer questions on what leads young British Muslims to extremism and radicalisation. An extended body of government-led and academic research has been increasingly looking for explanations and for catalyst factors that trigger radicalisation among young British Muslims (Choudhury 2007; Ceric 2008; Neumann 2008; Veldhuis and Staun 2009; Simon et al. 2013; Allan et al. 2015; Lyons-Padilla et al. 2015; Harper 2017; Repke and Benet-Martínez 2017; Robinson et al. 2017; Schlegel 2017; Gruening 2018; Rousseau et al. 2019).

Defined as ‘what goes on before the bomb goes off’ (Neumann 2008: 4), radicalisation is described as a multi-dimensional process with a wide range of micro and macro variables contributing to its construction. Radicalisation can be driven by either personal motives and/or collective motives (Kruglanski et al. 2009; Veldhuis and Staun 2009). Existing research has found that reasons that trigger a radicalised change in one’s life range from demographic factors such as age and gender (Wadgy 2007); social and political factors such as social and

political marginalization, oppression and economic deprivation (Briggs et al. 2006; Veldhuis and Staun 2009; Lyons-Padilla et al. 2015; Lobato et al. 2018) and identity-related factors e.g. socio-cultural socialisation and identity crisis/loss (Kruglanski et al. 2009; King and Mohamed 2011; Pels and Ruyter 2012; Provines 2017; Schlegel 2017).

The role of ethno-religious identity in Western ethno-religious communities has been widely contested in academic research on radicalisation. In terms of cultural factors, research can be categorised into two groups. One group starts from the premise that cultural fusion, hybridisation, and/or integration of Muslim immigrants can prevent the potential radicalisation of young British Muslims (Home Office 2006; House of Commons 2010; Cameron 2011; Gruening 2018). The other group highlights the challenges British Muslims face when it comes to identity-formation as culturally hybrid. Despite most existing research asserting that Muslims find no contradiction between Islam and British values (Christmann 2012), cultural fusion might create cultural confusions and uncertainties that might pave pathways to radicalisation as an attempt to achieve significance (Provines 2017; Rousseau et al. 2019). In a survey-based study, Rousseau et al. found that identity uncertainty and identity hyphenation are closely tied to quests for meaning and certainty, which may get reassuring answers in radical discourses (2019: 1). Falling in-between cultures could carry dangers if no cultural harmony is obtained within the self. According to Ahmed (2005: 39), both the alienation from Western culture and ethno-religious cultures may lead young Muslims to support culture-free alternatives such as global Islamic militancy. Choudhury (2007:21) explains further how the search for identity certainty can turn into radicalisation by arguing persuasively that ‘whilst defining oneself is part of the normal process of identity formation among young people, for those who are at risk of violent radicalisation, this process creates a “cognitive opening”, a moment when previous explanations and belief systems are found to be inadequate in explaining an individual’s experience’.

In the search for cognitive closure that is mixed with uncertainty, ignorance and frustration (Webber et al. 2018), young Muslims might be recruited by radical groups who make use of their vulnerability and keen passion for religious literacy (Choudhury 2007; Yilmaz 2010; Frampton et al. 2016). Although this is unusual for the majority, there are a few who might fall into the grip of what Yilmaz has named ‘self-declared spiritual leaders’ who are trained in exploiting identity crises and addressing the void and uncertainty often instigated by already existing feelings of socio-political alienation (2010: 104). Identity crisis involves

complex feelings of failure to gain social acceptance, to belong or to nurture a sense of confidence in your country's political system amid growing stigmatisation, racism and constrained social mobility (Choudhury 2007: 21). All these feelings together work as triggering mechanisms towards a sense of otherness and detachment which are often misused by leaders of radical groups (Ahmed 2005; Choudhury 2007; Yilmaz 2010; Khan 2015).

Post-multicultural debates, as mentioned above, indicate that the British multicultural approach has left British Muslims leading separate lives and hence feeling rootless (Home Office 2001; Electoral Commission 2003, 2005; Home Office 2005; Cameron 2011; Allan et al. 2015). Heightened ethno-religious identity is often associated with alienation, disaffection, segregation, and possible radicalisation with no significant difference related to age, gender, and/or class (Allan et al. 2015). Enhancing cultural integration and promoting connectivity to mainstream culture are therefore described as a credible way to avoid radicalisation (Cameron 2011; Casey 2016).

In line with the political mainstream discourse, most acculturation and psychological studies emphasise the relationship between different ways of acculturation and levels of integration amongst ethnic minorities (Berry 1997; Berry et al 2006; Sam and Berry 2010). According to this group of research, highly acculturated ethnic minorities are less vulnerable and less inclined to radicalisation. The higher the compatibility between immigrants' identities and the mainstream culture, the stronger the integration and the lower the chances for identity disidentification and radicalisation (Lyons-Padilla et al. 2015; Repke and Benet-Martínez 2017). This, however, has been criticised by a growing body of research, where focus is directed not only on how compatible minorities' self-identification with national mainstream identity is, but with their level of belonging to ethnic identities. Being culturally mainstream does not necessarily guarantee a sense of national belonging amongst ethnic minorities (Simon et al. 2013).

A diminished adherence to minorities' cultural heritage together with a lack of national belonging and a sense of discrimination would lead to a scenario where immigrant communities belong 'nowhere' (Lyons-Padilla et al. 2015; Harper 2017). Research has underlined the importance of ethnic/religious identities in maintaining a sense of belonging for ethnic minorities, particularly in case of existing alienation, discrimination and/or exclusion. In one such case, ethnic belonging prevents ethnic minorities from being in an 'ideological vacuum', particularly for young adults and adolescents whose identity orientations could be in a phase



of continuous negotiation and instability (Robinson et al. 2017: 268). According to Berry et al., ‘youth should be encouraged to retain both a sense of their own heritage cultural identity, while establishing close ties with the larger national society’ (2006: 304). The dangers of exclusion from mainstream society could be magnified if individuals fail to achieve a sense of belonging to their ethnic and/or religious communities (Harper 2017). In such circumstances, second and third generations in particular might not find a space where they belong (Lyons-Padilla et al. 2015: 1). In a context of rising discrimination and hatred against Muslim minorities in the UK, adhering to an ethno-religious heritage may decrease the risk of being marginalised and may increase their sense of belonging and inclusion (Berry et al. 2006; Padilla et al., 2015). Being marginalised, fitting nowhere or being culturally homeless, as Padilla et al. argue, increases susceptibility to a radicalisation which provides clear ideologies against a prevailing sense of uncertainty among these culturally homeless groups (2015: 3).

Political discourses on the rising religious assertiveness of young Muslims and the correlation between failed cultural integration and radicalisation not only overlook other stimulators of radicalisation, such as poverty, political and economic inequalities, a sense of victimisation and socio-political alienation (ICSR 2008), but also oversimplify the correlation between identity and radicalisation (Rahimi and Graumans 2016). Existing evidence indicates that integration does not necessarily decrease susceptibility to radicalisation (Frampton et al. 2016; Home Office 2006). Integration in general, and embracing mainstream culture in particular, are not *per se* sufficient protectors against the radicalisation of young Western Muslims. Integration (or an inclination towards integration) is not a guarantee of non-violent acts or sympathetic attitudes towards radicalisation (Home Office 2006). According to the Home Office report following the 2005 London bombings, three of the bombers were ‘apparently well integrated into British society’ (2006: 26), and indeed, according to Frampton et al., being born in the UK and being in favour of full integration is more likely to increase sympathy towards violent actions (2016: 71). In a striking finding, Frampton et al. have shown that ‘sympathy for political violence is not something to which the second generation are immune; nor is it the preserve of the “isolated”, or disaffected. [...] those who adhere to such views are, on several indices, more engaged at a social and political level’ (2016: 71).

Therefore, critics argue that radicalisation of young Muslims in the UK (and Europe) is not linked to their rising religious assertiveness, but rather to other factors that construct pathways to radicalisation (Kruglanski et al. 2009; Yilmaz 2010; Webber et al. 2018; Rousseau

et al. 2019). According to Kruglanski et al. (2009: 353), radicalisation can be a search for significance or what they name a 'significance quest' which aims at 'restoring the lost significance' caused by 'personal traumas and frustrations, ideological reasons, and social pressures to which they may be subjected'. Lost significance can be caused by a sense of inferiority and/or inequality amongst minority communities in comparison to the mainstream majority (Kruglanski et al. 2009; Webber et al. 2018). Such demeaning conditions are in contradiction to one's positive wishes and images of the self; one such discrepancy 'is experienced as an aversive uncertainty, which one is motivated to eliminate by seeking out closure' (Webber et al. 2018: 282). The powerlessness caused by this sense of lost significance can be compensated for by a 'collectivistic shift' where individuals restore their power by sharing their sense of victimisation with others (Kruglanski et al. 2009: 348). A collective sense of victimisation, together with perceived or actual threats to one's group may construct pathways to radicalisation and terrorism (Kruglanski et al. 2009).

Despite my agreement with Kruglanski et al. and Webber et al. regarding a significance quest, I argue that this significance quest takes a radical turn in the context of cultural/religious deprivation and the lack of support systems (e.g. family, school and community) (Pels and de Ruyter 2012). In my view, triggering this quest requires the conditions mentioned by Kruglanski et al., where the individual is triggered to fulfil and/or restore a certain loss. However, taking violent action to fulfil that gap requires some incubating preconditions. Lobato et al. (2018: 2-3) offer a persuasive view in this regard, arguing that oppressive conditions (e.g. power asymmetry) can be important predecessors for radicalisation but are not necessarily sufficient cause. The impact of demeaning experiences can be nullified if other routes are available to absorb feelings of anger and to boost one's sense of value and significance. This can be related to how deradicalisation programmes aim to boost one's sense of worth and significance (Webber et al. 2018). Using the same logic, having channels that counteract humiliating experiences, uncertainties, and/or challenges and identity incompatibilities may be of great importance. In a study on immigrant Turks and Russians in Germany, Simon et al. found that even in cases of 'high perceived identity incompatibilities' which may increase susceptibility to marginalisation, strong religious identification amongst Turks and strong ethnocultural identification amongst Russians decreased their sympathy with radicalism (2013: 255). Opting for radical pathways can also relate to a lack of support systems which are able to absorb feelings of anger, loss, marginalisation and uncertainty (Choudhury 2007).

While official accounts find that increased religious observance can be linked to radicalisation (Home Office 2006), academic research rather argues that radicalisation is an outcome of restricted religiosity both in the form of knowledge and in (freedom of) practice (Yilmaz 2010: 99). According to Ceric (2008: 29), ‘religion as a guidance system of moral behaviour can stop people from reacting to violence with more violence’. Even in case of significance loss, a religiously knowledgeable Muslim would not, I argue, pursue violence. In line with that, Lyons-Padilla et al. argue that ‘religion is not the primary motivator for joining violent extremists like ISIS’ (2015: 2). Despite my agreement with Ceric that violence cannot be associated with one single religion as it happens between and within religious communities (2008: 30), I disagree with his analysis that ‘the radicalisation process appears to require a backdrop of political grievances, which are often unconnected to religion’ (2008: 30). Political grievances cannot play a negative role unless religious factors are equally present. Identity can play a dual role, positive and negative, based on the context (Phinney 1990; Rousseau et al. 2019). The extent to which religion impacts one’s social behaviour (in its wide sense) depends on the initial motivation of religious assertiveness, one’s citizenry experiences and one’s sense of belonging and attachment (Choudhury 2007; Castells 2010).

Despite the fact that Muslims’ religious identity is the core focus of much of the contemporary official and academic debates on radicalisation and integration, far less research has been dedicated to the value of religious identity attachment *per se* in the lives of Muslim minorities in general and in the *prevention* of radicalism in particular (Ceric 2008; Yilmaz 2010; Oskooii and Dana 2018; Rousseau et al. 2019). Limited attention has been given to identity formation, negotiations and the challenges which could indicate why some young Muslims tend to radical pathways (Yilmaz 2010). In his comparison between the activities of radical organisations in Britain, Uzbekistan and Egypt, Yilmaz (2010) importantly argues that religious ignorance amongst Muslims is more likely to be higher in Britain than in Muslim countries. This might explain why the likelihood of radicalisation in Britain (and Europe in general) is higher than it is in many Muslim countries where access to proper religious education is often available (Yilmaz 2010). Religious practices such as mosque attendance together with a deeper understanding of religious instruction decreases the likelihood of an endorsement of violence and radicalised views (Oskooii and Dana 2018: 1493). The continuous struggle to express and practise one’s religious identity nurtures feelings of exclusion; and the monocultural official approach along with increasing identity-related restraints on Muslims in

Britain consolidate feelings of alienation and intensify fears over identity loss (Yilmaz 2010; Hoque 2019).

Fear over identity loss, if combined with a heightened restriction over religious practice and/or exaggerated sense of otherness and disaffection, is likely to turn into a radical revivalist version of religious assertiveness (Yilmaz 2010). Research has extensively underlined the importance of ethnic identity in ‘the psychological functioning of members of ethnic and racial minority groups’ (Phinney 1990: 499). A sense of oppression, identified by perceptions of subjugation and power inequality, hostility and perceived and/or actual threats- together make a fertile environment for radicalisation (Lobato et al. 2018: 2-3). Recruiters for radical organisations (such as Hizbutahrir HT) often target these members of the young generations who feel that their aspirations are unjustly and let down and discriminated against. According to Yilmaz (2010: 102), radical organisations such as HT often ‘target frustrated youth who have lost faith in their home country’s “system”. This supports the findings of the survey-based study done by Frampton et al. which found that ‘55% of Muslim respondents believed “political beliefs, including that the government oppresses Muslims” to be an important cause of radicalisation’ (Frampton et al. 2016: 57).

Existing research on Muslims’ religious identity as it links either to integration and/or radicalisation suffers several gaps. While an extended body of research has been devoted to investigating variations (and their relevant consequences) in how ethnic identity relates to national identity in ethno-religious communities, little research (Berry et al. 2006; Yilmaz 2010; Robinson et al. 2017) has been carried out to investigate questions such as: What difference does ethnic attachment *per se* provide in terms of ethnic minorities’ integration? Does loosening ethnic attachment mean higher national belonging? Such questions are especially important in a context of rising chances of alienation, disidentification and radicalisation. In most cases answering such questions is the focus of mainly psychological studies (Phinney 1990; Berry et al. 2006). Furthermore, existing research often deals with issues of ethnic and religious affiliations from a theoretical perspective; little attention is paid, however, to empirically explore the mundane aspects of ethnic and religious identities. Furthermore, the existing research on radicalisation lacks empirical insights into what might cause radicalisation with reference to people’s day to day lives (Rahimi and Graumans 2016). Chapter Four will fill this gap by providing an in-depth account of what role Muslims’ religious identity can play in reducing the chances of British Muslims’ identity divergences.

Due to the heterogeneity of Muslim communities, it can be challenging to identify one single definition of how Muslims link to their religious identity as well as their national identity. I argue that one of the main pitfalls of the existing research is that it often offers generalisations regarding British Muslims' religious orientations. Previous research has highlighted the diversity amongst British Muslim communities in terms of racial, sectarian, linguistic, socioeconomic conditions and political affiliations (Robinson et al. 2017). However, differences in religious assertiveness and practices are rarely highlighted in research. It is never explicitly highlighted how Muslims differ in their religious understandings and attachment and in what ways such differences may impact on Muslims' integration. Chapter Four provides an attempt to fill this gap by highlighting how British Muslims differ in their relationships to their religious identity and how different forms of religiosity might impact on the possibilities for integration for individual Muslims. In this context, religiosity is not only identified by adherence (affiliation) and commitment (practice) (Mathur 2012; Austin et al. 2018), but also by other indicators such as religious certainty, religious development and religious experience, all of which are integral parts of religiosity and its relevant pathways (Hill and Hood 1999).

## **2.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the existing scholarship and debates on integration and British Muslims, identifying major assumptions, arguments and gaps, and illustrating the way this study will fill these gaps and address the existing pitfalls. Reviewing the existing literature on integration and Muslims has been a pivotal step before undertaking my fieldwork and my data analysis later on. Following this review of literature on citizenship, integration and identity, I now turn to discuss the methodology followed to carry out this research.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the ethnographic research methods used in conducting this study and answering its research questions. It will provide details into the steps and dynamics of the field immersion in Birmingham. The chapter will consist of six main sections which explain the philosophical reasoning of the research, the ontological and epistemological stances, and the research techniques chosen to address the research problem and questions. Alongside this, the chapter provides an extended discussion on different aspects of my fieldwork such as access, site and sampling, as well as the researcher's role in the field setting, ethical considerations and issues of validity, credibility and generalisability. Finally, the chapter concludes with an elaboration of the data analysis techniques used and the themes that emerged from the analysis process.

### **3.2 Finding My Way through the Field**

Linking to the research topic and research questions mentioned earlier, I chose Birmingham, as a city with large Muslim population and with long-standing diversity, as the site in which to perform the fieldwork activities for this study (see section 3.4). After I decided to do my fieldwork in Birmingham, I booked my train ticket to the city known as an historical destination for immigrants after World War II. That first visit to Birmingham was planned particularly to secure accommodation for my stay during my fieldwork. The minute I stepped into Birmingham New Street train station, the mixedness of the population drew my attention. As a non-UK citizen and a short-term resident in Britain at that time, it was indeed my first visit to such a multicultural city.

I hired a taxi and set off to my appointments with letting agents. I had two viewings on that day, and both were situated in Muslim concentrated areas. I could not sign up with any of those as the viewed properties did not meet my family requirements. Heading back to the train station, I had several questions in my mind about ethnic concentrated areas and the people living there. In my first short visit I decided that is 'yes, residentially concentrated Muslims are living a segregated life'. My initial observations suggested that Birmingham was the right choice for me to conduct my fieldwork. I looked forward to meeting my participants and asking them 'why are Muslims in Birmingham living segregated lives?'.

I carried on my search for a residential property until I was able to secure a rental flat two minutes' walk from the local mosque where my fieldwork was initially supposed to take place<sup>(1)</sup>. Both the flat and the mosque were located in Balsall Heath, an area of Birmingham with a large Muslim community. I still recall my first moments after moving into my new home. I observed that dress codes, ethnic languages and religious activities were all close to what I might expect to see in Pakistan, Yemen or other Muslim and/or Arabic countries. I also observed that residents of the area seemed to be comfortable, not alienated or behaving as strangers. To put it differently, people there did not exert an extra effort to present themselves or to explain their ethno-religious attitudes and behaviour to their fellow locals. At first impression, the mutual acceptance and respect amongst residents of the area helped to create strong community ties, observable neighbourhood links and social harmony. Nevertheless, living there for almost a year helped me uncover many hidden and unspoken tensions, fears, worries, difficulties and constraints, which will be presented in the analysis chapters.

Essential to the early stages of my fieldwork were my regular unplanned strolls around the neighbourhood. As I started to wander around Balsall Heath, I observed that the area is mostly populated by families of Pakistani and Arabic (mostly Yemeni) backgrounds. I also observed that the area was noticeably deprived (see section 3.4). With deprivations and lack of leisure amenities, youths were often left with limited options for social activities except to gather on street corners or parks. Being new to the area and having young children, I was initially concerned for my safety.

After settling in, I made a call to my gatekeeper in the local mosque and booked a time to meet. As I arrived, I found my gatekeeper waiting for me. He warmly welcomed me and introduced me to some of the staff there. He also gave me a briefing on the activities and the initiatives run by the mosque. It was a good start for my fieldwork because the gatekeeper was supportive and ready to help me with the research activities mutually agreed and signed for in the consent form. During that first meeting, I asked him to introduce me to the visitors to the mosque to facilitate building trust between the community and myself and to ease the recruitment process of my interviewees. This was obviously not as easy as I was thinking. He

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<sup>1</sup> Initially, my fieldwork was intended to take place in one of the local mosques in Balsall Heath. Due to field-related circumstances, I took the decision to focus my field work on the neighbourhood of Balsall Heath. Those circumstances will be discussed in detail later.



could not do much in this regard. Yet I agreed a time with him to conduct the first interview. I also asked his permission to attend the seminars and lectures organised by the mosque. He agreed and provided me with an events schedule that I noted down and followed accordingly.

After my first interview with this third generation 23-year old Pakistani gatekeeper, others did not always go to plan. As the process evolved, I began to understand that potential participants were wary of my presence, where I was from, who I represented and how the information I gathered may be used. There was an obvious fear among participants which linked to wider discourses on radicalisation and terrorism in Muslim communities (see Chapter Six). This context was challenging for the accomplishment of my fieldwork. As time passed, my gatekeeper was becoming less passionate about providing further support for my research activities. Alongside this change in attitude from my gatekeeper, I started to realise that broadening the scope of my field investigation by focussing on the whole neighbourhood of Balsall Heath would provide richer mundane insights. Thereafter, I gained ethical approval to change the location of my ethnography. This change in focus to the wider community allowed me to capture the lived experiences of Muslims in Balsall Heath. This change was very useful as not only it eased my interview recruitment process by avoiding the bureaucratic procedures I had to follow in the mosque, but it also gave me access to the Muslim community on a wider scale.

### **3.3 Philosophical Reasoning: Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology**

Given the aim of this thesis, which is centred around investigating British Muslims' understandings of integration, this study follows a constructivist ontological perspective where reality is seen as the by-product of people negotiating and constructing meanings in their own particular contexts (Erlandson et al. 1993; Schwandt 2000; Bryman 2016). According to this philosophical stance, in order to 'understand a particular social action [...], the inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute that action' (Schwandt 2000: 191). During my fieldwork, I was committed to revealing the meanings British Muslims assign to the self, the other, the space and the place, social relations and diversity and the surrounding context. Understanding these meanings contributed to answering my research question of how British Muslims understand integration as a multidimensional concept comprised of individual, social and contextual aspects. In my field setting, variations in understanding the self, the other and the

context were reflected in how Muslims approached integration, which will be shown later as part of my findings (see Chapters Four, Five and Six).

According to this perspective, the social world is constructed through the interaction of its social actors' views and understandings (Bryman 2016: 26-27). The social world is not an objective reality. Rather, it is the interrelationships, perceptions and understandings of this reality which make it whole (Erlandson et al. 1993). According to this paradigm, knowledge of a particular phenomenon is constructed through the concepts, meanings and experiences surrounding it within its particular context (Schwandt 2000). Constructionists argue that social reality and its meanings are 'constructed' through an ongoing process of everyday interactions and negotiations (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Crotty 1998). Knowledge is a question of theory-based and expert-oriented conceptions, understandings and assumptions of reality. It is the outcome of inductively making sense of the inner meanings and understandings of the surrounding settings (Creswell 2009). Knowledge is constructed (and not discovered) through the effort of engaging with the realities in our world (Crotty 1998: 8). In other words, knowledge is 'knowing from within' (Cunliffe 2004: 410). The moment which alters our ways of perceiving reality, the way we describe it and the way we behave is the moment of understanding it and learning about it (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Crotty 1998). In the context of this study, being immersed in a local Muslim community at close quarters for a prolonged duration ensured a greater understanding of existing meaning systems with regard to multiple aspects of day to day lives, something of which I was unaware before my immersion.

Constructivists find that an objective understanding of reality provides partial and timeless thoughts as it essentially draws on abstract theories, and constructivist approaches are committed to offering a much fuller and contextualized account of reality (Denzin and Lincoln: 2000). Hence, positivist scholars behave as outside observers of the single objective reality they study, where they use an outside-in approach which hands over the responsibility for experimenting, testing, and making sense of actions, actors and phenomena to the expert (Cunliffe 2004: 413- 414). Reflexive (as opposed to reflective) constructivist scholars are rather concerned with reality as a subjective body that varies according to different contexts and surroundings. Knowledge is a responsive understanding of reality in its multiple meanings and shapes (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Crotty 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Cunliffe 2004; Creswell 2009). Hence, these multiple realities require an inside-out approach to investigate how each is 'constructed' and negotiated, and to uncover the unsaid and the unspoken (Cunliffe

2004: 413- 414; Crotty 1998). It is with this in mind that I offer a contextualised account of how and why British Muslims construct and negotiate their understandings of integration. It was important for me to allow the findings to instruct my analysis at the same time as reflecting on my own perceptions and assumptions, which were challenged at every stage of the research process.

In terms of the aim of this study, uncovering the implicit meanings of integration, identity and inter-community relations are pivotal in promoting our understanding of the multiple aspects that can maintain the sustainability of integration. Field data, represented in transcripts of my interviews, interactions with and observations of the local community, provide a significant challenge to mainstream discourse on integration, as the analysis will elaborate later. After spending a year in a Muslim community in Birmingham, I found that what is really missing in the field of ethnic relations and integration in the UK are well-informed policy making processes. An inside-out approach pays due attention to the other and to the different possibilities that can bind communities together based on mutual and shared understanding. Using the constructivist lens enables researchers to realise that the reality of integration is shaped through everyday community relations that in themselves are shaped through day-to-day structures, settings and experiences (Cunliffe 2004; Shotter 2006). As will be elaborated later in section 3.3.1, using ethnography as a constructivist research method allowed me to experience and reflect on the daily experiences of British Muslims. Immersing myself in the daily mundane lives of the Muslim community in my field site revealed nuanced insights into how Muslims negotiated their meanings of the self, the other and the wider world (Crotty 1998). Local communities' understanding/s of the surrounding context throws its shadow on how they might approach not only their link to the other but also to the self.

The data generated by my fieldwork proved to challenge the essentialist and expert-driven interpretations of Muslims in the UK. As mentioned in the literature review, Muslims are stereotypically perceived as reluctant to integrate. What I found was so complex and versatile that I can indeed argue that these presumptions of Muslims' non-integration in the UK are homogeneously oversimplified and misleading. Having started with this ontological reasoning, the other (the observed community in this case) was understood once it came into a relationship with the self (the observer/researcher). As part of my close and frequent interactions with Muslims in Birmingham, I gained more understanding of experiences and feelings through both listening and observing them, as well as through living the experience

myself. As Vidich and Lyman illustrate, while qualitative social research is made to understand the other, it is committed at the same time to understand the self as part of a particular context and time (Vidich and Lyman 2000). Living as a Muslim in Birmingham changed different aspects of my presumptions with which I approached the field. As a non-UK citizen, being there was essential to understanding what it exactly means to be a Muslim in a ‘segregated’ area of a multicultural city. The close and prolonged contact with the local Muslim community, with the aim of interpreting inner meanings and perspectives, provided me with a continuous comparison with the self (my thoughts and assumptions at that time). It is important to emphasise that the shift in my views after my prolonged stay in Balsall Heath did not mean I turned into a ‘native’, a matter contradictory to how qualitative research should be done subjectively. I had always to keep that balance between being an insider and outsider. I had to follow the required and recommended research precautions in order not to lose that required distance between myself and the community under observation as this guarantees maintaining critical accounts of what is observed and heard in the field. This will be further explained in section 3.5.3 on the researcher’s role and reflexivity.

Having started from this ontological assumption, the study follows an interpretive account of the social world, that is, subjects, subjective interpretations and meanings assigned to different parts of this world should be taken into consideration in academic accounts. According to this view, research methods are expected to explore these different interpretations by studying people’s views and understandings of the social world (Bryman 2016: 26-29). A subjective philosophical stance requires a careful investigation to the context which impacts the way reality is interpreted. This requires an interpretive epistemological approach to interpret the reality and gain knowledge about it, which consequently impacts on methodological choices and the way analysis unfolds. A qualitative research methodology is the best way to answer what and how questions, such as the one of this study. The suitability of a qualitative methodology for this research is based on what it is expected to offer in order to meet its aim. Qualitative research methods offer a set of interpretive techniques that enable researchers to interpret or present a meaningful interpretation of the world through the meanings people assign to it (Kirk and Miller 1986; Denzin and Lincoln 2000). This was explained by Kirk and Miller as they wrote ‘qualitative research is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms’ (1986: 9). To meet this aim of ‘watching’ and ‘interacting’, I have chosen ethnography to help carry out the enquiry of this

study to establish a close account of British Muslims' meanings of integration (see section 3.3.1).

### **3.3.1 Ethnography: Theoretical Underpinnings**

As the study aims to explore meanings and understandings of integration with the belief that politics is what happens at the local level through the negotiation and renegotiation of social meanings, ethnography acts as a suitable qualitative method to address its research questions (Kubik 2009; Gobo 2011). Ethnography is 'the study of people in naturally occurring settings or "fields" by means of methods which capture their social meanings...' (Brewer 2000: 10). The suitability of ethnography for the aim of this study can be manifested by the explanation of Schwandt (2000), arguing that understanding a social action requires an understanding of the meanings assigned to it. He takes this argument further by arguing that understanding the meaning requires 'getting inside the head of an actor to understand what he or she is up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and so on' (Schwandt 2000: 192). Taking this into consideration, I argue that ethnographic research inquiry offers an in-depth understanding through long-term immersion within the community under observation.

Ethnographic research methods were selected to meet the aim and objectives of this study based on the fact that ethnography allows the researcher to immerse herself for a prolonged span of time in, and to have sustained contact with, the community under observation, which provides a rich opportunity to understand and explain how people see themselves and others in a particular context (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Willis and Trondman 2000). This was empirically demonstrated during my field immersion, where my long term and close interaction with the local community provided me with a deeper scrutiny of the inner meanings and perceptions. My immersion in the field was not only helpful in revealing insider meanings, but also in revealing broader social discourses and structures. Throughout my fieldwork, I realised that self-understandings are the by-product of a process of negotiating day to day experiences, not least because I too was subject to the same conditions as the participants in my study. To 'construct' and make sense of experiences, 'there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction' (Schwandt 2000:197). It was hence of paramount importance to investigate the impact of everyday surroundings on the way British Muslims constructed and negotiated their understandings of the self and the other.

I will demonstrate later how analysing the local context of my field site cannot be detached from a broader analysis of social and structural mechanisms. The intersection between microscopic field-based findings and macroscopic discourses and structures will be a central pillar of data analysis chapters.

The ethnographic approach of this thesis comes as an attempt to overcome ill-defined concepts and unsettled social problems in the field of integration. This derives from my argument that addressing issues of social segregation cannot be done effectively while the concept and policies of integration are expert-based. Similarly, it cannot be adequately addressed amidst vague and uncertain understandings of concepts of integration, minority cultures, national identity and engagement. Vagueness about communities of migrant backgrounds contributes to the overall vagueness of integration discourse, and leads to rhetorical uses, generalised, unquestioned and presumed assumptions and stereotypes (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998: 93). Ethnography is not only concerned with opinion. Rather, it aims to unmask the interpretive framework that validates/invalidates opinions and actions of certain groups or cultures. An in-depth understanding of how British Muslims in the field site perceived the self, the other and diversity helped to uncover how they negotiated broader meanings of integration. As will be elaborated in the analysis chapters, ethnographic research methods provided rich insights that went beyond stereotypical generalisations and presumptions about British Muslim communities.

The purpose of using ethnography in this study is to uncover the underlying meanings and understandings of integration. My aim in the field was to investigate different meanings attributed to integration by British Muslims. This came through analysing British Muslims' integration-related stories for what understandings and perspectives they might reveal. Being there, taking part in and observing British Muslims' natural settings over an extended period of time helped reveal the underlying meanings Muslim communities assign to integration. Integration as it appeared in the field was strongly interlinked with identity, safety, equal citizenship and freedom. Adopting ethnography in this research not only suits the research questions of the study but also suits the overarching aim of building 'sustainable integration'. Sustainability of integration centres, I argue, on favouring the role of stakeholders. My field findings evidenced that having local Muslim communities on board while making and taking national and local integration-related decisions would facilitate their involvement and support as well as avoid fears and uncertainties. As evidenced by my field findings, local Muslims often find themselves imposed upon by policies,

views and strategies of which they had no knowledge and took no part in forming. Unawareness of policies and/or awareness with a sense of suppression cannot, in my view, be expected to promote harmonious reactions and behaviours. As will be elaborated in the coming chapters, a sense of suppression has contributed to different forms of resistance, one of which is self-segregation. Hence, revealing local communities' voices (as central stakeholders) is pivotal for ensuring sustainability. Throughout my ethnographic work, I was keen not only to explore local Muslims' voices and understandings, but also to explore how they felt in different aspects of their lives. During my immersion, I had the field target of knowing not only what it meant but also what it felt like to be a Muslim in Britain. Ethnographic methods highlight the voice of community/ies under observation, which is the fundamental aim of this research. It also guarantees getting natural insights into everyday mundane settings and contexts, which it is not possible to capture through short-term research techniques (O'Reilly 2012).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the existing literature and scholarship have provided intensive contributions in elucidating British Muslims' views on a range of relevant topics such as identity, residential segregation and community cohesion, however, what makes this thesis different is that it uses ethnography as a method to capture more observations of the daily lives of British Muslims, ones which are needed to capture detailed meanings that underpin Muslims' day-to-day lives. This thesis is one of a limited number of pieces of ethnographic research on British Muslims (McGee 2011; Liberatore 2013; Hussain 2016; Mahmood 2017; Zempi 2017; Hoque 2019). While existing ethnographies have covered aspects of the Muslim question, namely civic engagement, identity negotiation and belonging and most existing ethnographies take Muslim identity construction as the centre for their research investigation, no ethnography has been done to explore the way Muslims perceive and *live* the concept of integration in everyday life. This study extends previous research by highlighting the interplay between wider discourses and daily individual practices and experiences, not only in terms of identity formation but also in terms of other aspects that relate to the concept of integration.

### **3.4 Field Site and Access**

This part of the study sheds light on the place where I conducted this research. It highlights the underpinnings of the choice of Birmingham as a wider field site. Later, it

provides details on the dynamics of field access. Following this, it provides facts and details on the neighbourhood where the fieldwork took place.

### **3.4.1 Birmingham as a Field Site**

It was not only for practical reasons (securing access) that I decided to carry out my fieldwork in Birmingham, but also for a number of other considerations. First, the long history of Birmingham as one of the main local destinations for immigrant settlement has resulted in a long coexistence of multiple cultures, ethnicities and faiths (Spencer 2002), and so, based on its multi-ethnic and multicultural nature, Birmingham appeared as a unique case study in community relations scholarship (Rex and Moore 1967; Solomos and Back 1995). Second, according to the 2011 census, the ratio of Muslims in Birmingham is the largest in the UK, after London (Ali 2015: 26).

The significance of Birmingham as a field site for this research relates to the city having one of the largest Muslim populations in Britain, accounting for about 21.8% of the city's population according to the 2011 census (Birmingham City Council 2018). The city is home to 162 mosques, which represent a range of Islamic sects and schools of thought, manifesting the diversity and the heterogeneity of Muslims in the city and demonstrating the growing presence and visibility of Muslims (Knott 2018: 21). The city is considered to be a major centre for Salafi groups, which are deemed as strict (and sometimes extreme) in their practice and understanding of Islam (Knott 2018: 58; Kenney 2019).

Birmingham is one of the main cities that is described as highly segregated (Casey 2016). In terms of Muslim residential patterns, the city includes wards with more than 70% Muslim populations, a matter which is highlighted as alarming in government-sponsored research and official integration accounts (Casey 2016: 11; Cameron 2015). Birmingham has the largest number of ethnic minorities (particularly among women) who do not speak English well or at all, with the percentage of women who are non-proficient in English reaching 5.8% (Casey 2016: 96). In addition, the city is feared to be at a high risk of extremism and to be a home for radicals and jihadists to the extent of being branded the 'jihadi capital of Britain', where one in ten British-born terrorists is produced (Bracchi 2017; Sengupta 2017). That said, the city gets one of the largest shares of funding as part of the Prevent agenda to counter



radicalisation and terrorism (Kundnani 2009; Safer Birmingham Partnership 2009). As a priority area for counter-terrorism policies, it also became the centre of Project Champion, a police initiative aimed at installing CCTV cameras in Muslim concentrated neighbourhoods in Birmingham, with the aim of detecting possibly radicalised activities (Awan 2018; O'Toole 2021).

Birmingham witnessed one of the most controversial Muslim-related incidents in this decade, namely the Trojan Horse affair in March 2014, where extreme Islamists were claimed to take over and Islamise some schools in the city (Clarke 2014). This incident sparked local and national debates on British values, Britishness and Muslim integration. The city represents an interesting case that fits with the integration puzzle under scrutiny in this study. The city, once considered as 'a leading authority in the field of race equality' (Warren and Gillborn 2003: 3), is in recent times claimed as one of the most segregated cities in the UK (Casey 2016). Alongside the growing diversity in the city, there is also a rising concern over the lack of integration amongst its diverse communities (Muslim communities in particular), which makes it an interesting field site for this study.

### **3.4.2 Securing Access**

Securing access to organisations or community groups is always a difficult task when conducting ethnography. In my case, I had contacted several Islamic organisations and mosques before securing access to one mosque in Birmingham. The mosque offered me a written consent to conduct my research activities on its premises. This mosque was a dynamic venue where diverse activities and events of the Muslim community in Birmingham took place. My gatekeeper, who was a member of the mosque's administration, pointed out that the mosque participates in inter-faith alliances as well as in different political and human rights campaigns at the national and international levels. In addition, it offers services to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Most importantly, the mosque was not restricted to a specific Muslim sect (e.g. Shi'a or Sunni), and this would enable me to enrich my study with a range of Muslim perspectives, schools of thought and backgrounds.

After securing the access to the mosque, I faced the challenge of maintaining that access. Maintaining access and performing my fieldwork activities (e.g. visits and interviews)

were relatively easier at the start of my fieldwork, yet began to get more complex as time passed on. I started observing less cooperation from my gatekeeper and more restrictions from the mosque's administration regarding my presence as a researcher. These restrictions and limitations limited my access not only to the events but also to potential participants. As mentioned earlier in section 3.2, that experience at the mosque provoked me to broaden my research field to cover the neighbourhood of Balsall Heath. Although this change in my gatekeeper's attitude and restrictions from the mosque were disappointing, it was indeed a blessing in disguise as I subsequently got consent from my university to widen the spectrum of my field investigation, and to include a much larger community. Through my readings on research methods, I understood that access is never to be taken for granted. In her interesting explanation of ethnography, Karen O'Reilly notes that: 'access is not something achieved once and for all. It has to be negotiated and renegotiated all along...' (O'Reilly 2012: 6). After adding Balsall Heath, the neighbourhood of the mosque, to my field investigation, I got two benefits. First, it provided me with new sources of knowledge in the field, as opposed to the mosque where access restrictions would certainly limit the scope and depth of data I would obtain. Second, I was able to meet people from different schools of thought and backgrounds compared to those I would meet in the mosque, such as non-practicing Muslims who were not originally part of my sample (see Chapter Four). This shift opened other possibilities for me as, for example, I got involved with everyday places of interaction such as in neighbourhoods, streets, markets, shops, schools, libraries and community centres. What I obtained since then was much mundane and closer to the day-to-day lives of local Muslims and this uncovered social problems and aspects of integration that would be nearly impossible to comprehend while staying only within the premises of one single organisation.

### **3.4.3 Field Premises and Locations**

Balsall Heath is an inner city area. Historically, it was established as part of an expanding Birmingham during the Industrial Revolution to accommodate new residents of the white working-class who moved to the area as part of the expansion of Birmingham during that time (Balsall Heath Forum 2015: 14). By the 1960s and 1970s, newly arriving immigrants from Pakistan, Africa and the Caribbean replaced white working-class residents who relocated in other areas (Balsall Heath Forum 2015: 14). According to the 2011 census, the South Asian

community made up around half of the population in the neighbourhood (Balsall Heath Forum 2015: 14; Paginton 2012).

The neighbourhood is made up of two wards, Balsall Heath West and Balsall Heath East, which are considered the most deprived wards in the city of Birmingham, with some pockets falling within top 5% of the most deprived areas nationally (Paginton 2012: 66) and with almost 30% of the neighbourhood adults earning less than £7000 annually (Balsall Heath Forum 2015: 14). Some of the indicators of deprivation in the area are recorded in education and housing, with some areas in the neighbourhood falling within the top 25% of the most deprived in terms of education, housing and services (Paginton 2012: 35). This returns in one part to the young profile of the neighbourhood, which adds pressure on these services and increases the demand for local development (Paginton 2012: 66). The following maps show the composition of the 69 new wards in Birmingham, where the two parts of Balsall Heath are highlighted.



Figure 3.1: Birmingham City Map (Source: Birmingham City Council 2018)

On the one hand, the West part of the neighbourhood has, according to the 2011 census data, a population of 11,165, of which 3,355 (30.0%) are under the age of 18 and 1,080 (9.7%) are over the age of 65. The area is home to diverse ethnicities. For example, in addition to other ethnicities, 17.4% of the population are white British, 27.9% are Pakistani, 7.7% Black Caribbean and 15.2% other ethnicities (Birmingham City Council 2016: 2). Table 3.1 below provides details on the distribution of ethnicity in the ward.

| Balsall Heath West Ethnicity |                                   |                      | Source: 2011 Census |           |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Ethnic Group                 | Balsall Heath West N <sup>o</sup> | Balsall Heath West % | Birmingham %        | England % |
| White Total                  | 2,368                             | 21.2%                | 57.9%               | 85.4%     |
| British                      | 1,945                             | 17.4%                | 53.1%               | 79.8%     |
| Irish                        | 135                               | 1.2%                 | 2.1%                | 1.0%      |
| Other White                  | 288                               | 2.6%                 | 2.7%                | 4.7%      |
| Mixed or Multiple Ethnicity  | 597                               | 5.3%                 | 4.4%                | 2.3%      |
| Asian Total                  | 4,819                             | 43.2%                | 26.6%               | 7.8%      |
| Indian                       | 538                               | 4.8%                 | 6.0%                | 2.6%      |
| Pakistani                    | 3,117                             | 27.9%                | 13.5%               | 2.1%      |
| Bangladeshi                  | 334                               | 3.0%                 | 3.0%                | 0.8%      |
| Chinese                      | 271                               | 2.4%                 | 1.2%                | 0.7%      |
| Other Asian                  | 559                               | 5.0%                 | 2.9%                | 1.5%      |
| Black Total                  | 1,683                             | 15.1%                | 9.0%                | 3.5%      |
| Black African                | 519                               | 4.6%                 | 2.8%                | 1.8%      |
| Black Caribbean              | 861                               | 7.7%                 | 4.4%                | 1.1%      |
| Black Other                  | 303                               | 2.7%                 | 1.7%                | 0.5%      |
| Other Ethnic Group           | 1,698                             | 15.2%                | 2.0%                | 1.0%      |

*Table 3.1: Ethnicity in Balsall Heath West (Source: Birmingham City Council fact sheet 2016)*

The ward is considered one of Birmingham's most deprived wards, with an average income of £13,088 for individuals (16+) compared to £18,788 at the national level (Birmingham City Council 2016: 6). Occupations in the ward are segmented as follows: 31.1% are in higher skilled occupations (e.g. managers, directors and senior officials and professional occupations); 18.0% are in intermediate occupations (e.g. administrative and secretarial occupations); and 50.9% are in lower skilled occupations (e.g. sales and customer service occupations; caring, leisure and elementary occupations) (Birmingham City Council 2016: 3). In terms of qualifications, 41.2% of the population have no or low qualifications compared to 35.9% in the whole city. Higher qualifications (NVQ levels 3 and 4) scored a percentage of 36.5% compared to 40.3% for the whole city of Birmingham (Birmingham City Council 2016: 4). Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of qualifications in the ward according to the 2011 census.

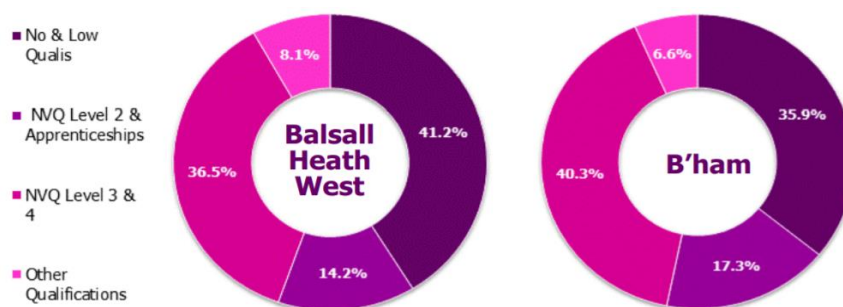


Figure 3.2: Qualifications in Balsall Heath West (Source: Birmingham City Council fact sheet 2016)

The East side of Balsall Heath is home to a population of 25,211, out of which 9,029 (35.8%) are under the age of 18, and 1,858 (7.4%) are over the age of 65. The area is also home to diverse ethnicities, with 9.2% white British, 46.3% Pakistani, 3.1% Black Caribbean, and 8.5% other ethnicities (Birmingham City Council 2016: 2). Table 3.2 elaborates the distribution of ethnicities in the ward according to the 2011 census.

| Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East Ethnicity |  |                                   |              | Source: 2011 Census |  |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--|
| Ethnic Group                              | Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East N <sup>o</sup> | Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East % | Birmingham % | England %           |  |
| White Total                               | 3,059  | 12.1%                             | 57.9%        | 85.4%               |  |
| British                                   | 2,322  | 9.2%                              | 53.1%        | 79.8%               |  |
| Irish                                     | 263  | 1.0%                              | 2.1%         | 1.0%                |  |
| Other White                               | 474  | 1.9%                              | 2.7%         | 4.7%                |  |
| Mixed or Multiple Ethnicity               | 861  | 3.4%                              | 4.4%         | 2.3%                |  |
| Asian Total                               | 16,823   | 66.7%                             | 26.6%        | 7.8%                |  |
| Indian                                    | 1,300  | 5.2%                              | 6.0%         | 2.6%                |  |
| Pakistani                                 | 11,668   | 46.3%                             | 13.5%        | 2.1%                |  |
| Bangladeshi                               | 2,590  | 10.3%                             | 3.0%         | 0.8%                |  |
| Chinese                                   | 128  | 0.5%                              | 1.2%         | 0.7%                |  |
| Other Asian                               | 1,137  | 4.5%                              | 2.9%         | 1.5%                |  |
| Black Total                               | 2,317  | 9.2%                              | 9.0%         | 3.5%                |  |
| Black African                             | 851  | 3.4%                              | 2.8%         | 1.8%                |  |
| Black Caribbean                           | 788  | 3.1%                              | 4.4%         | 1.1%                |  |
| Black Other                               | 678  | 2.7%                              | 1.7%         | 0.5%                |  |
| Other Ethnic Group                        | 2,151  | 8.5%                              | 2.0%         | 1.0%                |  |

Table 3.2: Ethnicity in Balsall Heath East (Source: Birmingham City Council fact sheet 2016)

This ward too is considered one of Birmingham’s most deprived wards, with average income of £11,869 for individuals (16+), compared to £18,788 at the national level (Birmingham City Council 2016: 6). Occupations in the ward are distributed as follows: 24.6% are in higher skilled occupations (e.g. managers, directors and senior officials and professional occupations); 20.0% are in intermediate occupations (e.g. administrative and secretarial occupations); and 55.4% are in lower skilled occupations (e.g. sales and customer service occupations; caring, leisure and elementary occupations) (Birmingham City Council 2016: 3). During my immersion in Balsall Heath, I observed that educational attainment played a major role in forming my participants’ willingness and ability to integrate with the wider British society. In terms of qualifications, in this ward 49.6% of the population have no or low qualifications compared to 35.9% in the whole city. Higher qualifications (NVQ levels 3 and 4) recorded a percentage of 25.5% compared to 40.3% for the whole city of Birmingham (Birmingham City Council 2016: 4). Figure 3.3 shows the distribution of qualifications in the ward according to the 2011 census.

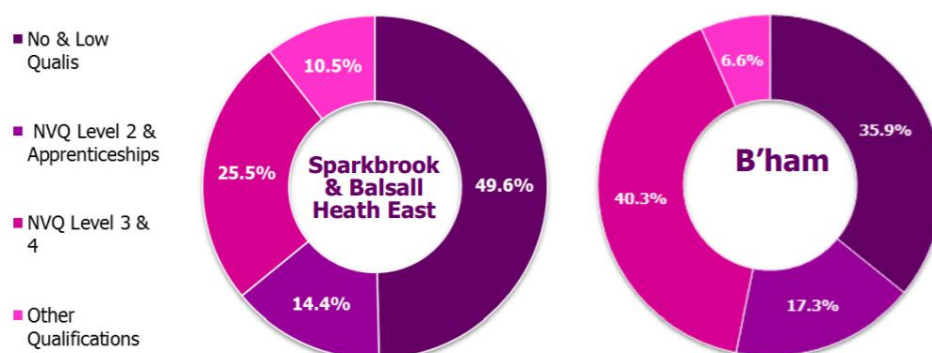


Figure 3.3: Qualifications in Balsall Heath East (Source: Birmingham City Council fact sheet 2016)

This study presents contextualised insights on how Muslims live integration in a particular neighbourhood. However, these detailed descriptions of the everyday dynamics in this area of Birmingham raise questions about the possibilities of generalisation. The choice for Balsall Heath was based on it being an ‘average’ typical Muslim area, one which exhibits a strong resemblance to other Muslim areas in the UK. Indeed, the historical, economic, and cultural features of this neighbourhood are not distinctive from other Muslim areas in the city and beyond (Rex and Moore 1967; Eade 1989; Begum and Eade 2005; Alam and Husband 2006; Barrow Cadbury Trust 2011; DeHanas 2016; Hoque 2019).

Comparable to other migrant areas such as Bradford, Tower Hamlets, Luton, and Brixton (Eade 1989; Begum and Eade 2005; Barrow Cadbury Trust 2011; DeHanas 2016; Hoque 2019), the socio-demographic features of Balsall Heath indicate high levels of deprivation. Low educational attainment, the prevalence of low-paid jobs, and the high levels of unemployment—together feed into noticeable signs of urban poverty manifested by low-quality and over-crowded terraced houses in addition to a noticeable decline in the quality of local amenities, facilities and public space (Balsall Heath Forum 2015; Birmingham City Council 2016). Compared to Bradford, one of the important Muslim centres in the UK, I argue that the socio-demographic features of Balsall Heath echo those of the Muslim neighbourhoods in Bradford where the educational and employment rates together with the housing patterns—all indicate high levels of deprivation (Samad 2010). Low educational attainments and high unemployment rates feed into challenging housing and residential conditions for Muslims in Bradford too. For instance, overcrowded terraced houses are common in Muslim neighbourhoods in Bradford accounting for over half of the houses in these areas (Samad 2010: 17).

However, unlike Bradford in 2001, the signs of marginality, socio-economic inequalities and ethnic diversity in Balsall Heath have not yet resulted in social unrest. This returns, I argue, to the existence of committed community organisers, teamed-up faith groups and the establishment of local structures such as Balsall Heath Forum. These local structures and groups helped building forms of civic and political activism—one which played a key role in solving local problems (e.g. anti-social behaviour and crime), tackling inter-group conflicts, and maintaining cohesion (Atkinson 2012). This form of civic and political activism echoes what, for instance, Tower Hamlets witnessed—a place where civic efforts together with diversity worked as powerful tools in mitigating social exclusion and challenging the negative impacts of the securitised discourses and policies following the War on Terror in the 2000s (Begum and Eade 2005). Despite being ranked as the third most deprived borough in England (DeHanas 2016: 15), the collaborative efforts between the Muslim and the Christian communities in Tower Hamlets were, according to Begum and Eade, powerful in bringing people together and in providing important lessons about ‘how to create socially cohesive neighbourhoods’ (2005: 187).

The Muslim community in Balsall Heath is typical, with no distinctive features in terms of religious practices and/or beliefs, socio-economic opportunities, and their exposure and awareness of scrutiny and security-related discourses that surround British Muslims (Safer

Birmingham Partnership 2009; HM Government 2011; Cameron 2015; Casey 2016). The community displays a heterogeneity that is observed by other researchers in Muslim areas across the country such as Bradford, Tower Hamlet and Luton (Begum and Eade 2005; Valentine 2008; Samad 2010; Mustafa 2016; Hoque 2019). In terms of religious practices, the neighbourhood is home for practicing and non-practicing Muslims, and for orthodox and non-orthodox Muslims.

The non-distinctiveness of this research site highlights the usefulness of the findings of this study in understanding the challenges Muslim communities encounter with issues of integration. Several lessons can be learned from Balsall Heath's experience—particularly in terms of the factors that help enrich Muslims' sense of citizenship and ability to integrate. These lessons can be potentially informative for future policy agendas and policy decisions related to Muslim integration. However, future policy agendas need to pay attention to the challenging multi-faceted contexts in which social meanings are negotiated. Though Balsall Heath resembles other areas of Muslim concentrations in the UK, the different aspects of the social life whether ethnic, religious, and/or socio-economic—could be manifested in many distinctive forms. Available services, facilities, and the overall local context of immigration and integration—together make up the shape and the extent of each of the experiences and the dynamics in a particular area or neighbourhood. Integration-related experiences can be influenced differently by broader contexts of local facilities and structures. The inferences drawn here are therefore helpful in understanding Muslim communities elsewhere in the UK, but further attention should be paid for each individual community on its own in order to secure more nuanced policies and agendas.

Having elaborated site and access details, it is now important to discuss the data collection process, including details on research methods and sampling, data analysis techniques and ethical considerations.

### **3.5 Doing Ethnography**

This section discusses the data collection phase of this research. It outlines the practical aspects of doing my ethnographic fieldwork, including the approach followed in designing and conducting the interviews and field observations. This section also outlines the make-up and



size of my sample and provides details on my role and position in the field site along with reflections on issues of validity, credibility and generalisability.

### **3.5.1 Research Methods**

Arguing that narratives, views, and understandings are essential part of studying any social phenomenon- impacts on the methods of investigation. An extensive bulk of work has been done on qualitative methods that answer questions of what and how (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). In this study, I followed ethnographic research techniques in order to provide a closer and contextualised account of British Muslims' understandings and behaviours regarding the concept of integration. A prolonged immersion in the field-setting allows researchers to grasp a nuanced account of how local meanings and understandings are constructed (Agar 1980; Van Maanen 2011). Taking my cue from the ethnographic traditions, this study employed two of its data collection techniques, namely interviews and participant observation (Agar 1980; Van Maanen 2011).

Interviews aimed at exploring the identity and integration understandings and experiences of my participants. Participants were approached through the 'snowballing' method, which began with my gatekeeper at the local mosque where I first started my fieldwork. Following this, local acquaintances helped me further in the field. Mostly, I secured my participants by directly approaching them in local amenities where I would introduce myself first and then explain my research objectives in person. This approach proved very useful and helped me in recruiting a significant percentage of my interviewees. My existence in the field provided prospective interviewees with more confidence and clarity about me and my research goals. In contrast, snowballing or indirect referrals could have left a partial and ambiguous image about the purpose of the interview, myself and the interview process, particularly amid a significant level of uncertainty and scepticism among local Muslims towards the research topic.

Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour, except for only one interview which lasted only 30 minutes due to data saturation. I always let interviewees decide where and when the interview should take place, but interviews always took place in public places during the day, except two interviews where I met the interviewees after the working hours. The purpose of the interviews was to develop an understanding of British Muslims' conceptions of integration, with a particular reference to their religious identity. Hence, interview questions were divided

into two central themes, one to uncover their self-understandings of their identities and their position in British society and the other to provide details on their understandings and conceptions of integration. In addition, there was a set of questions to gain more information about participants' demographic data (e.g. age, gender, education, employment status and immigration history). Interviewees were asked about their lives in the UK, with specific reference to their religious identity (see Appendix 1).

In line with my ontological stance, this study is data-oriented rather than theory-oriented. However, it was important to consult certain theories and previous scholarship before initiating my fieldwork in order to structure my interview outline (Vidich and Lyman 2000). I started my fieldwork having already thoroughly reviewed the available literature on integration and British Muslims. This no doubt informed the structure of my interviews and the way I initially approached the field. An interview guide outlining the main themes and aspects of identity and integration was used (see Appendix 1). Interview questions were divided into four groups. The first group included descriptive questions where the interviewee was asked about demographic details and general introductory information. The second group aimed to explore social and political participation of the interviewee in addition to information about his/her experience of migration to the UK. The third group of questions revolved around identity and what it entailed for participants. The last group of questions revolved around meanings and experiences of integration and community relations in the UK.

As elaborated in the previous chapter, the wide use of the term "integration" across the borders and over the years has resulted in the development of a plethora of definitions. While some definitions focus on the input side of integration, others take output as a major criterion. Similarly, some definitions focus on rights, while others focus on participation. Integration according to some definitions is a one-way process where the immigrant seeks the acceptance of the host society (Cameron 2011; Casey 2016), while other definitions consider integration a two-way process where both immigrants and the host society are deemed responsible for making a successful integration (Castles et al. 2002; Penninx 2005; Ager and Strang 2008; Rutter 2013).

Linked to the inductive approach of this research (see section 3.3), building interview questions on a confined definition of integration would indirectly impose a certain implied image of integration on my participants. The objective of this research is to present community-based meanings of integration as opposed to the traditional expert-based and/or policy-driven

definitions. Thus, to start my fieldwork and build my interview outline, I consulted the literature for definitions, aspects, conditions and indicators of integration. I found that an open definition of integration rather than fixed definitions would better suit the interpretivist nature of this research. An open definition of integration meets the bottom-up theoretical stance of this research as it allowed me greater capacity to explore the community under observation without a pre-defined sense of the meaning (or purpose) of integration. The open definition of Phillimore suited this rationale. She argues that integration ‘implies the development of a sense of belonging in the host community, with some renegotiation of identity...’ (Phillimore 2012: 3). Based on this definition, I aimed to explore British Muslims’ sense of belonging and the way they perceived and experienced it. What contributes to the development of their sense of belonging and what might hinder it? Belonging is an emotional attachment that relates to not only feeling ‘at home’ but being confident about the right to share the home (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018: 230). The literature reveals that political, economic, social and cultural factors influence the sense of belonging and the process of integration (Castles et Al. 2002; Ager and Strang 2008). During the data collection phase, details were sought on citizenship, rights, political participation, social mobility, employment, housing, intergroup and intra group relations and barriers to cohesive community relations (Ager and Strang 2008). In discussing identity, interview questions drew upon the perspective of social identity theory, namely, understandings of and behaviours towards the self and others (Ellemers et al. 1999). Guided by social identity theory, I explored meanings of integration and identity through key variables relating to the context, the level of commitment and the content of each dimension (Ellemers et al. 1999; Turner 1999).

I followed a dynamic interview approach, where revision of my interview themes and questions was done continuously, and the interview outline was also constantly revised during my presence in the field as the prolonged immersion and interaction with the community under observation highlighted particular themes or ideas which deserved more investigation. This was consequently reflected in the way subsequent interviews were pursued and resulted in adjustments, accentuations and/or changes within the broad themes of the interview outline.

It is worth noting here that recruiting 29 interviewees was not an easy task. Rather, it was a complicated and gruelling one. Firstly, seeking the consent of participants and recruiting suitable candidates was difficult because not all community members fulfilled my interview criteria, which will be explained in the upcoming sampling section. Secondly, my interview

requests were initially met with several rejections. A major cause of refusals was the sensitivity of the research topic, about which the potential participants were sceptical. Initially these rejections seemed to hinder my fieldwork completion. I realised that the interview recruitment process would not be a seamless process but rather it would pose more and more complexities and challenges.

However, the more refusals I had, the more interest I developed in my research. Those reactions along with my sensitivity towards the field had created a growing perception inside me that there was a lot to explore in this context <sup>(2)</sup>. At that point I started to feel that there was much to reveal and much ‘untold’. I had then to approach the field setting differently. I had first to build my relationships with people in order to gain their trust and win their confidence. It was consequently important for me to first immerse myself and engage in natural daily activities within the local setting, such as attending community events (e.g. sports days arranged by the Council), hanging out with neighbours in a local park, going shopping with a group of neighbours, attending local parties and ceremonies if invited and making frequent visits to local mosques, community centres and the local library.

I worked persistently to make sure I appeared in the local community as ‘a socially accepted’ and ‘native’ local. I created familiar routine activities such as taking my children to local schools and nurseries, going to local parks and playgrounds and attending mother and toddler meetings and coffee mornings with the aim of gaining the recognition of the community as a familiar local. I would initiate interactions with the locals, aiming to get as close and familiar as possible to the community. I wanted to overcome that hurdle of being perceived as a complete stranger who they were sceptical of, a hurdle which was overcome to a great extent

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here that sensitivity was a pivotal criterion to be maintained during the field work as this increased the sensibility to what was observed and what was heard. During my immersion in the above-mentioned local mosque, I consulted its website and Facebook page, looking for announcements of relevant events and related official press releases. Moreover, observing the comments of visitors to these pages was helpful in understanding the site where I conducted the early stages of fieldwork and the way different communities perceived it. This understanding, prior to my visits, was important as it increased my sensibility to the context surrounding my research. Later on, when I changed the base site of fieldwork to Balsall Heath, I was more focussed on local magazines and newspapers, both in paper and online. These preparations before my everyday fieldwork activities increased my sensibility and sensitivity to the field setting.

after my persistent attempts. This was necessary for building a base of trust and familiarity between the surrounding context and myself. It was not until I started to be a familiar figure in the local context that I was able to recruit potential participants for my interviews. The process of field familiarisation will be further discussed later in the chapter as part of my discussion of reflexivity and the researcher's role.

The second research technique, participant observation, was used to investigate how integration practices and behaviours were maintained during normal day-to-day interactions. Interpretive ethnography, while focusing on peoples' meaningful real actions, requires the researcher's observation through disciplined participation in community's social life to study the meaning systems (Kubik 2009). During my fieldwork in the local mosque, I attended selected events such as prayers, lectures and seminars to make my first observations. Being in a religious venue enabled me mainly to gain insights into the religious side of Muslims' day-to-day lives, which was helpful to understand how Muslims understood and linked to their faith. Attending lectures (including the Friday weekly sermon) and having access to the library and available literature, I was able to understand the role of religious amenities in promoting the integration of British Muslims (e.g. promoting Muslims' sense of loyalty, encouraging law-abiding behaviours and encouraging socio-political participation). As mentioned earlier, learning about the fieldsetting under observation contributed to several changes in my presumptions and conceptions as I started my fieldwork. It also is in contrast with much of the existing discourse (official in particular) about the role of religious identity in Muslims' integration. This will be further debated in Chapter Four.

After altering my fieldwork's site, my observation activities took place in different venues. I developed a broader engagement with the local Muslim community at closer quarters, where I was able to grasp in-depth insights into their understandings and behaviours regarding mundane integration. Participant observation can be performed at different levels based on the research aim and can take the form of complete participation, where the researcher becomes a full participant in chosen activities (Kumar 2005: 120) but can also take the form of complete observation, where the ethnographer becomes just a passive observer without taking part in any of the human affairs or everyday activities and it could also be a mixture of both (Kumar 2005: 120; Davies 1999). In the field setting, I attempted to be both a participant and observer. As participant, I took part in attending workshops, conferences, coffee mornings and meetings in local organisations and with community groups, and as observer, I made observations during

my daily routine activities, such as going to a market, shop, school, and/or park where several casual and informal conversations enhanced my understanding of the context and the experiences I passed through. These observations contributed to the richness of the interview data. On daily basis I was directly or indirectly observing the human affairs and interactions to better understand the community's actual behaviours in terms of integration, and to compare it with what I got through my interviews and my casual conversations with the people (Fetterman 1998).

Noting down my observations was a difficult aspect of my fieldwork as I did not want to shake the trust that I was finally able to gain. Maintaining that trust required at that time avoiding using a pencil and diary for noting down my observations or notes after a conversation or a talk with community members. I had to avoid doing that as it might have been daunting to members of the community, taking into consideration the sceptical atmosphere which was already there. Doing this would be bound to limit my capacity to capture valid and natural field insights. Also, it would distort the naturalistic aspect of the action observed, which contradicts the rules of ethnographic research as well as moral and ethical commitments and requirements (Kumar 2005: 120). I, therefore, used to write brief notes on my mobile's memo application and then write down my observations in detail once I was home in order to maintain the quality of the data.

### **3.5.2 Sampling**

My interview participant sample included only Muslims who are citizens and/or permanent residents, with the aim of speaking to participants who had more understanding of British society, culture and laws, and who were expected to have a clearer understanding of their rights and duties compared to short term residents. The sample was drawn with attention to the variables of age, gender, employment status and ethnic origin in order to achieve a representative image of British Muslims. Variations in the sample were considered to include different ethnicities, age groups, gender categories, careers, religious orientations and level of educational qualifications, with the objective of interviewing a diverse sample of British Muslims.

Twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were conducted. All interviewees were British citizens except three, who possessed permanent settlement status. Interviewees were all of immigrant backgrounds, which were Pakistani, Yemeni, Moroccan, Malaysian, Saudi, Afghani, Egyptian, Sudanese, Afro-Caribbean and Lithuanian. The sample included 15 females and 14 males; 13 were first generation immigrants, 12 were second generation, and 4 were third generation. All participants had working employment status except for 9 participants; 6 were homemakers, 2 were university students, and 1 was pensioner. In terms of age, the sample included 3 groups, the first was made up of 18 participants and included those who were at the time of interview between 20 and 39 years old; the second was made up of 9 participants and included those who were between 40 and 59 years old, and the third group included 2 participants who were 60 years old or more at the time of interview. In terms of education, 8 participants held master's degrees, 11 held bachelor's degree, 8 held GCSE (or less) qualifications, and 2 were university students. Below is a table of my participants illustrating multiple facts about each. The names have been changed.

Table 3.3: A list of participants and demographic facts

| No | Name    | Age | Gender | Marital Status | Ethnicity/ Background | Generation      | Education          | Employment |
|----|---------|-----|--------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1  | Ruqaya  | 67  | Female | Married        | Malaysian             | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Master             | Pensioner  |
| 2  | Tufail  | 60  | Male   | Married        | Pakistani             | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 3  | Hadyia  | 49  | Female | Divorced       | Afro-Caribbean        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Master             | Unemployed |
| 4  | Ijaz    | 48  | Male   | Married        | Pakistani             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 5  | Uzmah   | 47  | Female | Married        | Pakistani             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Master             | Employed   |
| 6  | Sarmad  | 45  | Male   | Married        | Pakistani             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Master             | Employed   |
| 7  | Adam    | 44  | Male   | Married        | Egyptian              | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Master             | Employed   |
| 8  | Kareem  | 39  | Male   | Single         | Pakistani             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Master             | Employed   |
| 9  | Hamza   | 43  | Male   | Married        | Pakistani             | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 10 | Sally   | 41  | Female | Married        | Egyptian              | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Master             | Unemployed |
| 11 | Suraiya | 41  | Female | Married        | Sudanese              | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Bachelor           | Unemployed |
| 12 | Rania   | 40  | Female | Divorced       | Pakistani             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | GCSE               | Employed   |
| 13 | Hassan  | 39  | Male   | Married        | Yemeni                | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 14 | Hamid   | 38  | Male   | Single         | Yemeni                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 15 | Husam   | 38  | Male   | Married        | Sudanese              | 1 <sup>st</sup> | GCSE/Less          | Employed   |
| 16 | Sadiq   | 35  | Male   | Single         | Afghani               | 1 <sup>st</sup> | GCSE/Less          | Employed   |
| 17 | Wania   | 35  | Female | Married        | Pakistani             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 18 | Laila   | 34  | Female | Married        | Yemeni                | 1 <sup>st</sup> | GCSE               | Unemployed |
| 19 | Ahmed   | 31  | Male   | Married        | Saudi                 | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Master             | Employed   |
| 20 | Rajaa   | 31  | Female | Married        | Yemeni                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | GCSE               | Employed   |
| 21 | Anas    | 31  | Male   | Married        | Pakistani             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | GCSE               | Employed   |
| 22 | Iman    | 29  | Female | Single         | Arab-White            | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 23 | Hasnaa  | 29  | Female | Married        | Yemeni                | 1 <sup>st</sup> | GCSE/Less          | Unemployed |
| 24 | Hania   | 27  | Female | Married        | Yemeni                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | GCSE               | Unemployed |
| 25 | Aminah  | 25  | Female | Single         | Pakistani             | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 26 | Ayman   | 23  | Male   | Single         | Pakistani             | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |
| 27 | Sabrina | 22  | Female | Single         | Pakistani             | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | University Student | Unemployed |
| 28 | Shakir  | 20  | Male   | Single         | Pakistani             | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | University Student | Unemployed |
| 29 | Harita  | 21  | Female | Single         | Lithuanian            | 1 <sup>st</sup> | Bachelor           | Employed   |

Two conditions were applied while selecting my participants for interviews. The first criterion was that participants must be British citizens and/or long-term residents in the UK. The second criterion was about participant's ability to speak English and/or Arabic as this was the only way for the researcher to communicate with the interviewees about their experiences and understandings. Getting the services of a language interpreter could compromise the



privacy of my participants, which I had to assure was maximally protected for ethical reasons. In this context, 25 interviews were conducted in English, and four in Arabic.

### **3.5.3 Reflexivity and the Researcher's Role**

This section discusses the impact the researcher might have on the research process. It elaborates the role and the position of the researcher in two important phases of ethnographic research, the first refers to the fieldwork and data collection phase and the second refers to the data analysis phase.

#### ***3.5.3 Reflexivity in the Field***

Drawing upon interpretative ethnographic traditions entails understanding that my position in the field setting impacts on my research activities and the data collected. The way I am perceived in the field defines the reaction of the community towards the researcher and consequently her access to and recruitment for fieldwork-related activities (Murchison 2010; O'Reilly 2012). Doubts are usually raised about the capacity of interpretative approaches in general and ethnography in particular to avoid the impact of the researcher's preconceptions and views. The ability of ethnographic research methods to present the insider voices and views is questioned, as the researcher's presumptions would potentially affect the empirical process of investigation (Hammersley 1992). Being insufficiently 'reflexive' about the impact the ethnographer's existence in the field might have on the research is a frequently stated criticism amongst scholars (Hammersley 1992; Brewer 1994, 2000; Davies 1999).

However, scholars have suggested different strategies for ethnographers to avoid bias in the field and in the later research phases. Consulting the research methods literature and employing their recommendations for conducting ethical research enabled me to maintain a level of reflexivity towards what I listened to and observed in the field. In this regard, Willis and Trondman suggest that reflexive ethnography should entail 'direct and sustained social contact with agents and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms the irreducibility of human experience' (Willis and Trondman 2000: 394).

Reflexivity is considered an essential tool to overcome the subjectivity of interpretive studies and a tool to enhance the quality and validity of data (Davies 1999; Cunliffe 2004; Murchison 2010). My personal characteristics and my position in the field were part of the context that shaped the responses I received during my ethnographic research activities. During my fieldwork, I was perceptive to the implications of my presence in the field setting. In the field, I appeared as a middle-class educated immigrant woman. I was also recognized as a non-UK citizen and as a liberal Muslim. This personal identification placed me in between being an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. While this position got me closer to some residents in the community, it also worked as a barrier between me and others who felt distanced from who I am, how I looked and how I behaved. In other words, some aspects of my identity position defined me as a clear outsider to the local community. For instance, indeed, not being a British citizen defined me as an outsider. Also, I was at a distance from how the majority of local residents dressed (e.g. in ethnic and traditional garments). In addition, as a woman I appeared in the field as a liberal and/or non-practising Muslim, given that I did not wear the headscarf which was a widely spread practice among women in the field.

However, I shared certain elements with the community under observation which imbued me with some characteristics of an insider too. For example, being Muslim enabled me to closely understand the experiences and the stories of interviewees as they shared the same faith. My experience as a European citizen of immigrant background aligned me with many of my participants, who were also of immigrant origins. Keeping this in mind, I was able to appreciate and understand what I listened and/or observed during my ethnographic research. Being an outsider at the same time helped me to remain critical during the data collection process. The mix of being both an insider and outsider enabled me to obtain a closer and fuller research experience, where I was able to achieve a useful level of engagement between the community and myself.

Adopting a reflexive approach in both fieldwork and data analysis phases entailed a reflection on my basic assumptions and how they constructed others' voices and responses (Cunliffe 2004: 418). It also promoted my sensitivity towards how my presence could have potentially stopped others from speaking up (Cunliffe 2004: 418; Nadin and Cassell 2006; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2011). My image in the field setting as a researcher might have impacted the responses I received from my participants and it might have stopped them from showing up/expressing certain aspects of their lives or feelings. For instance, this was

noticeably clear from the large number of refusals to take part in the research. Also, a large percentage of those who did agree to participate refused to mention their annual salaries as part of the demographic questions on the interview sheet. It was also obvious from the attitude change at the above-mentioned local mosque, where my presence as a researcher prevented the mosque's administration from offering me sustained cooperation with my research activities.

In addition, my presence in the field would have, as might be expected, impacted on how my participants expressed their views. For some, my asking about Muslims' integration/segregation appeared as a sort of accusation, which they would rush to deny. I was aware that my participants may have reacted to my presence as a researcher by trying to emphasise the compatibility between Islam and British culture. Nevertheless, my prolonged immersion in the field enabled me to juxtapose what my participants said they do, and what they actually did as well as to assess how their narratives and behaviours fit into the wider discourse around Muslims. I also overcame this expected impact of my role in the field by engaging in discussions with my participants and ethically arguing with them on their points of view. One-hour long interviews served me adequate opportunities to carry out informative and meaningful discussions with my interviewees. Although I was a researcher for my interviewees, my identity was not disclosed for a significant many in the field. These naturalistic observations and unplanned experiences were of pivotal importance as I used them to compare with my interview data. This helped me to critically analyse the received narratives and the observed behaviours and realities.

Spending 12 months in the field entailed two stages. During the first stage, I held to my original presumptions. As I entered the second stage, I began to change many of my preconceptions which I possessed in the first stage. This thesis is not only a critical follow-up to previous literature but also to my initial ideas, expectations and presumptions when I first started this work. The process of this ethnographic research, with 29 interviews and 12 months of participant observation, revealed to me several confrontations with what I --at the start-- thought to be 'correct' and 'absolute' beliefs. I initiated this research through reviewing available literature which led me to develop an assumption that British Muslims are willingly segregated. This was my first experience of living in an immigrant (mostly Muslim) area. And when I arrived at my field setting for the first time, I had a mix of feelings. On one side, I felt affiliated as a person of immigrant background, but at the same time I felt distanced as I was

convinced that the life style of the community I observed was a form of freely-chosen segregation.

After two months of fieldwork I had my first catch-up meeting with my supervisor. I remember that throughout my discussion with her I was relentlessly questioning how Muslims could ever live in such a segregated way such as the one I had observed during those two months. At that meeting, it was with shock that I expressed my remarks on Muslims' segregation at different levels and in different walks of life. At that point of my fieldwork I was absolutely convinced that British Muslims were willingly non-integrated. However, three months of immersion in the field put me in a different position. Many of my views and feelings continued to change with the passage of time. Twelve months of close contact with British Muslim communities revealed to me that many of the existing views about British Muslims are judgmental and impressionistic. Some of these are also autocratic in nature as they deliver what the majority population expects to see from minority groups. Also, my initial intellectual and theoretical stance, in which I support local politics in the belief that local politics is the only remedy for central arbitrary politics, was empirically challenged. Although I have not fully abandoned this idea, I now refine it by arguing that national and local politics should be complementary in certain polity areas, such as that of integration.

These changes in my initial perceptions were not, though, as Vidich and Lyman might claim, a 'recreation' of my self-identity due to being interlinked to the other/the observed (Vidich and Lyman 2000: 38). Though my experience in the field challenged a number of my presumptions, I had to keep a distance between being open to challenging my early presumptions and 'going native' losing my ability to critically perceive the community under observation. During the second phase I kept a level of detachment or 'professional distance' between myself and the community under observation, and this guaranteed a level of reflexivity, minimising the chances of commitment towards the group or community under observation (Fetterman 1998: 34-35; Vidich and Lyman 2000).

As mentioned earlier, maintaining good relations with the neighbourhood and making friends was important for accomplishing my ethnographic fieldwork. Not only did it help me to discuss, chat and gain deeper insights into the community but also it eased the recruitment process of some of my interviewees. In his explanation of participant observation, Tedlock (2000: 465) mentions that ethnographic observation involves both emotional involvement and objective detachment. During my field immersion, it was necessary to ensure that my

evaluations and interpretations did not get biased by those close relationships. A balance between engagement and subjective detachment was particularly required during my ethnographic immersion in order to present a rigorously accurate reflection of the observed community.

Building healthy relationships and/or friendships is indeed important for easing ethnographic research, particularly when it relates to taking part in community affairs and conducting interviews. This is often recommended by ethnographers, as those ‘friends’ turn out to be facilitators in the fieldsetting in a way that enhances mutual understanding and trust between the researcher and the group/community under observation (Agar 1980; Emerson et al. 1995; Davies 1999; Van Maanen 2011). The accomplishment of my fieldwork required winning the trust of people, and in this regard I often opened channels of communication first before initiating any activity related to my research (Fetterman 1998; Funder 2005; Reeves 2010). I was able to maintain ‘normal’ relations with neighbours and made a few friendships and many acquaintances, all of whom made my involvement in the community and my interview recruitment much smoother. I began this by initiating ordinary mundane conversations and interactions with members of the local community, with the aim of presenting myself and facilitating my social acceptance in an acceptable and comforting way (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Despite a growing positive relationship with the local community there, I had always to ensure that I stayed reflexive and critical about what I saw and what I heard.

Despite being emotionally touched by certain comments and behaviours of Muslims in the field (such as their sense of fear and their relentless attempts to show their integration) I did not dwell on those emotions. I kept my researcher’s instinct alert throughout the fieldwork and after, questioning and requestioning the validity and reliability of each aspect of my findings. I also made sure to thoroughly go through critiques and different/opposite points of views/discourses, persistently juxtaposing them against what I observed and experienced in the field. I also ensured that I continually remembered that what I observe today is contextual and the meanings of today are likely to change with changing experiences. I hence kept any evolving feeling of a commitment towards what I listened to/ witnessed under question and under continuous control (Schwandt 2000; Vidich and Lyman 2000).

My approach to field observations was based on minimizing my influence on the naturalistic aspect of my ethnography. This strongly links to the aim and the rationale of this

study which seeks to highlight local voices and experiences of integration, and to explore a way forward to a capability-based and sustainable integration. I was therefore committed not to willingly cause a change in the naturally occurring activities of the community under observation. Seeking this detachment might imply a sense of objectivity—that acting in the field site as an ultimate detached observer. Nevertheless, reflexive research calls for an understanding of the difficulty (and maybe impossibility) of detachment or objectivity in dealing with qualitative research. Part of being reflexive is to recognise that experiencing the daily lives of the community under observation necessarily requires ‘crossing the line of objectivity’ (Tresch 2001: 303). In doing this, the community under observation has not been seen ‘objectively’ as my interpretations and understanding of what is taking place in the field is understandably not value-free.

Building my research on constructivist underpinnings rules out a simplistic view of the social world as a set of ‘social facts’ and accepts the specificity of the context that makes up how the research is presented and interpreted (Holmes 2020). Researcher’s identity (including the ontological and epistemological beliefs) is as much an important part of the fieldwork as the community that one observes and studies (Holmes 2020). This constructivist perspective entails an acknowledgment of my positionality in this research, throughout its stages; and also an acknowledgment that the community under observation and I were together engaged in making and interpreting the social meanings in that particular context (Dreyer 1998).

Learning about the Muslim community in my field site took place by living and being part of the context experienced by this community. The data that evolved from the field site is intertwined with my role as a researcher and as part of the local context I was observing. It is therefore genuinely important in the context of this study to realize and be conscious of the combined impact of my personal and professional attributes on the process of research and field investigation. While the ethnographic account presented here includes a detailed description of the narratives and experiences of the community under observation, it also presents my own experience of the field and what it was like to be part of this local context.

Prolonged ethnographic immersion is admired amongst scholars as it enables researchers to closely observe people in their own settings which, in turn, enables them to juxtapose what people say they do against what they actually do (Burawoy et al. 1991: 2). Yet, it is also criticised on account of the danger of losing objectivity and hence validity and generalisability (for more details see section 3.5.3.3). In explaining the uncertainty principle of

sociology, Burawoy et al. argue that ‘the closer you get to measurement on some dimensions- intensity and depth- the further you recede on others- objectivity and validity’ (1991: 2). Although this research is mainly concerned with uncovering the voices of British Muslims while trying to be value neutral, it is necessary to assert that neutrality and objectivity cannot always be achieved.

Needless to say, I have had my theoretical convictions, readings and overviews of the context, which no doubt have directed me to ask some certain questions and drop some others. Being a Muslim migrant might raise questions on the neutrality of the research. Yet, engaging with existing literature provided a rigorous measure of control over possible bias as the existing research has provided me with the opportunity for comparison and questioning of my findings. Moreover, my neutrality and sense of non-commitment was enhanced by my own experience among Muslim communities in Birmingham where I, to my surprise, came to realise that religious identity *per se* did not play a significant role in maintaining social acceptance or strong social ties among Muslims. Being a Muslim myself did not make it easier for me to gain social acceptance and/or to gain access and support for my research activities. Therefore, I base my analysis in the coming chapters not on being a Muslim myself but rather on what I believe, based on my field observations and interactions, should be achieved to facilitate and sustain the integration of Muslim communities into the UK.

### ***3.5.3.2 Reflexivity and Data Analysis***

Reflexivity was not limited only to the data collection phase, but also extended to the next phases, namely, data analysis and interpretation. Part of my strategy to achieve a level of detachment between myself and the observed community related to my withdrawal from the field both physically and emotionally (Brewer 2000). In order to minimise the possibility of emotional attachment with the community under observation which might negatively impact my analysis I decided to leave the field site after 12 months of fieldwork. At that stage, I moved out of Birmingham to achieve the degree of detachment that I find necessary for reflexive writing.

Keeping my constructivist account in perspective in the course of my data analysis, I gave significant attention to minimising my own preconceptions and their potential interference

with my field findings. At several points I have shown the contrast between what I originally thought and expected on one side, and what the field (including my participants' accounts) revealed on the other side. My field findings are no doubt the combined result of my presence as a researcher, the participants and the overall context. Therefore, as I proceeded with my analysis I was keen to highlight not only my participants' views but also my role in constructing those views together with the contextual parameters surrounding this construction.

The following analysis chapters will combine confessional and realist tales of ethnography (Maanen 2011). In its confessional form, the analysis mainly stems from my own field experience and observation. In doing this I respond to field hardships and achievements. In its confessional aspect, my analysis provides details of fieldwork practices, how it was started and accomplished as well as reflections on my personal biases and initial understanding (Maanen 2011: 75). The analysis highlights field occurrences that sparked my attention and enabled me to better understand the community under observation. As mentioned earlier, immersing myself in the field has to a great extent altered the way I initially perceived British Muslims and the surrounding integration discourse. However, in order to avoid 'going native' and because this study was originally founded as a response to wider debates on Muslim integration, I inevitably found it important to complement the confessional tales of my ethnographic account with realist ones. The realist side of my analysis involves extensive engagement with existing debates and discourses, for two reasons. The first is to decrease the chances of "going native" and thus losing my critical ability to see local occurrences through a different perspective. The second is to position local meanings and perspectives within the broad debate, and so provide a novel contribution to the existing literature and add to the comprehensive map of distinctive perspectives in the wider debate. In these instances, my interpretations of field data will be tied to existing debates and discourses. In other words, the field data will be woven into the fabric of wider debates for what they might indicate (Maanen 2011: 51). This is strongly linked to the traditions of ethnographic methodology, where it is argued that researchers/ethnographers must place what occurs in the field in the broader context in order to produce elaborative ethnographic descriptions (Hammersley 1992: 23).

Part of researcher's reflexivity is to discuss the broader sociocultural and political contexts that shape the collected data and field findings (Davies 1999: 5). While writing my realist interpretations, I have included fewer of my own field observations and experiences and rather focussed my attention on how to explain and link these findings to the wider contexts



and discourses. Reflexivity does not only relate to self-reference, which is the impact and the personal experience of the researcher in the field, but rather, also implies ‘locating ethnographies historically, spatially, and structurally in relations of politics and power, time, global political and technological developments, and by including unbounded, fragmented, and mobile communities’ (O’Reilly 2012: 189). Locating both my observations and interview accounts within the wider discourses and relating them to existing power relations- are crucial in providing better explanations of different dynamics in the field site.

### ***3.5.3.3 Validity, Credibility and Generalisability***

The findings of an ethnographic study such as the one at hand raise questions on its validity, reliability and generalisability. In general terms, ethnographic research is deemed incapable of producing reliable and generalisable data and yet capable of producing valid knowledge if certain criteria are met (Davies 1999). Doubts about ethnographic validity are associated with the overall epistemological concerns over qualitative research methods, which basically relates to whether or not they are able to avoid the biased impact of researchers’ views and presumptions (Davies 1999). This, I argue, relates to the overall nature of social sciences which basically depends on observing and understanding the human actor.

Validity, reliability and generalisability are distinct yet related concepts. Validity can be defined in multiple ways, however in general terms it refers to the correctness and truthful use of the research method to produce findings and conclusions (Davies 1999; Kumar 2005). Multiple research methods or triangulation are considered alternatives to validation, as they are expected to add ‘rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 5). The multimethod nature of ethnography is deemed to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings. As Davies states, ‘validity is more likely if a variety of methods are used’ (1999: 85). Furthermore, ethnography is believed to produce high levels of validity due to the close and prolonged interaction/participation of the researcher in the community under observation. The close understanding and the detailed insights that are achieved by prolonged, sustained and direct contact are deemed to enhance the credibility and validity of the research (Fetterman 1998; Creswell and Miller 2000).

Credibility is enhanced too by outlining research procedures and the underlying assumptions, convictions, and biases of the researcher, and by rigorously recording and writing up research field notes and providing detailed presentations of the obtained data (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Silverman 2005). In addition to a commitment to the validity and credibility of the procedures during the fieldwork phase, these criteria will be rigorously followed as required in the analysis chapters. On the other side, reliability refers to the repeatability of the research findings if procedures and circumstances are replicated. Doubts on reliability usually revolve around interpretive research methods in general, and not only around ethnography. This is due to the potential impossibility of repeating the same research and getting same results, taking into consideration the changing nature of views and ideas according to social and personal circumstances (Davies 1999; Kumar 2005). Though some overlap or level of agreement might exist, Davies argues that 'no ethnographic study is repeatable' (1999: 87). In this regard, Davies suggests focusing on the reliability within one's own research by checking and rechecking the obtained data with different respondents, and juxtaposing it with their observations (1999: 86).

The discussion of reliability leads to a discussion of generalisability. Understanding that no ethnographic study can be strictly repeated may entail an acknowledgement that interpretive methods in general and ethnographic methods in particular produce relativistic data, and so cannot help improve our knowledge on a particular subject. The relativist nature of social research is still considered, however, to achieve generalisations. Ethnography is often criticised for its incapability of reaching generalisation, but in line with the interpretivist epistemological stance of this study, it is important to emphasise that the social subject is not spontaneous and cannot be experimented on. Hence, the nature of generalisation in social research is explanatory rather than predictive (Davies 1999: 90). While generalising, however, it is important to avoid bias and jumping to easy conclusions, such as extending the findings of this study to all British Muslims who were not actually included in the study. These sorts of conclusions would imply an invalid approach to analysis as well as the possibility of creating or reinforcing deterministic stereotypes (Davies 1999: 91). Building upon the previous discussion of the whys and wherefores, Davies argues for a form of generalisation that can be reached in the context of an overall theoretical debate, rather than on its own or within the boundaries of any particular research. The insider and reflexive data produced by ethnography can refine and improve existing knowledge by either supporting or negating existing arguments and generalisations (Davies 1999: 90- 92). Interpretive perspectives assume that there are multiple realities that vary according to each individual context, and this raises questions about

the possibilities for generalising subjective data. However, scholars have provided different suggestions which could enhance the quality of data and the possibilities for generalising it (Kumar 2005; Silverman 2005). The quality of research in general and the data in particular are associated with a number of issues, such as a commitment to contributing to the existing literature and presenting new forms of knowledge, rigorously explaining the processes and research techniques used in the research and explaining how they may have impacted on the research findings (Silverman 2005: 209).

Ethnographic studies such as the one at hand can provide rich insights into the observed social setting, however, these insights could turn into a simple description of particular situations, actions and behaviours. In this case, a critical engagement with data along with previous research in the same field are of paramount importance. Critical engagement with data requires self-refuting in order to avoid easy conclusions (Silverman 2005: 211-213). In this regard, I have been extensively involved in critically discussing the data emerging during my fieldwork. I did not take answers for granted from my participants. In addition, I kept a detailed account of how and why certain choices were made during the fieldwork and the data analysis phase (Silverman 2005: 210-211).

The ability of ethnography to produce theory is highly debated in social science. However, I do not claim --and I do not intend-- that the findings of this research alone could be representative of other Muslim communities in the UK, or that generalisations could be drawn out of these findings. I argue rather that generalising the findings needs critical involvement with similar cases and previous studies in the same field. In this study, I do not offer one single account of how Muslims think of integration. I, rather, offer different multiple accounts in a particular context and time, to be compared with other research findings.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical commitments in social research should be followed not only during conducting a field investigation but also while transforming it into a meaningful transcript. After seeking the ethical approval of my university (see Appendix 2)<sup>(3)</sup>, I revised the ethical guidelines and

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<sup>3</sup> Ethical approval was sought and approved on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

considerations before starting my fieldwork. I made sure that my presence at any of the events, gatherings and/or meetings in the above mentioned mosque or elsewhere was declared. My observations were overt, and no deception was involved. Observations were limited only to public events and no private interactions were noted.

Before starting my interviews, the purpose and the nature of my research and the interview process were verbally explained to participants before conducting interviews. Participants were allowed sufficient time to read the information sheet and raise questions if they had any. Answers and clarifications were always provided. Informed consent was obtained when my participants signed the consent forms after reading the information sheet. Two copies of the consent form were signed, one of which was kept with me and the other was held by the participant. Participants were also informed that their names were kept anonymised and that none of the details mentioned by them would be used in any way that may disclose their identities. In this regard, I made sure that participants' names were changed in the analysis wherever applicable.

Before starting the interviews participants were clearly informed that they had the right not to answer any question they considered uncomfortable and/or distressing. I was also mindful of the possibility that participants might have felt discomfort in answering some specific questions related to, for example, their jobs, incomes or names. In such case, the researcher, upon the request of the participant, did not ask such questions. Also, I explained to my participants that they had the right to withdraw from the study within six months of the interview date, and that in that case their interview data would not be included in my analysis. This did not happen, though, with any of my participants.

Interviews were conducted only with adults over 18 years who did not have any cognitive impairment. In case of attending events where children and/or vulnerable groups were present, I made sure not to mention any details, either in my diaries or in my interview transcripts, that might expose their identity. Interviews were audio recorded and recordings were subjected to participants' consent. If any participant did not want to be voice recorded during the interview the voice recorder was stopped, and this happened with three of my participants. Recorded interviews were transferred to a password-protected laptop and deleted from the voice recorder.

During transcription, which was done manually, I followed verbatim transcription in order to provide a closer account of what my participants said and also to indicate what they felt. Verbatim transcription provides a closer account not only of the perspectives and experiences of participants, but also their feelings and emotions (Eldh et al. 2020: 3). However, some slight editing and filtering was done during the data analysis phase in order to provide a clear flow of what was said by participants. No major changes were done to existing narratives. Editing was mainly done to avoid grammar mistakes, pauses and gaps in the speech in order to provide a smoother flow of what was said. Having conducted four interviews in the Arabic language, I had then to translate them into English. During the translation process, I ensured that the translated transcript accurately reflected what participants said.

As stated above, recordings of interviews and transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer. It is also worth stating here that interview data will also be stored on a password-protected computer for future research purposes. The possibility of using the data for future research was explained to participants and consent to do so was sought through the information and consent sheets. Ethnographic research sometimes involves staying in touch with participants for years after conducting the research and I explained this possibility to my participants, and the majority of them agreed to this through ticking the relevant box in the consent form.

I ensured that participants were happily willing to participate in my study, because their free willingness was a guarantee of the quality of data collected. Signing the consent form was not the only parameter I recognised as a sign of willingness. I ensured additionally that the potential participant was motivated and happy to answer the interview questions. As mentioned earlier, I left the decision of time and place of the interview completely to the interviewee. These measures were all taken to ensure that the quality of interaction between the interviewee and myself was kept smooth and comfortable for the sake of both fulfilling the ethical requirements and the quality of data I obtained (Kumar 2005: 131).

### 3.7 Data Analysis

In correspondence with the constructivist stance of this study, a non-essentialist understanding of integration and an inductive approach to data analysis are required. The aim of using ethnography in this study and the inductive approach to analysis is not to build a theory. Rather, I aim to systematically and rigorously generate knowledge from a novel perspective that could be --in comparison with other sources of knowledge-- used to build generalisations, theories and public policies (Brewer 2000). Following this approach entails that data occupy a central position compared to theory, unlike positivist approaches to research where the research is tested against existing theory (Emerson et al. 1995; Van Maanen 2011).

Despite the variations in how analysis can be carried out, ethnographic research, such as the one at hand, is often based on ‘the process of bringing order to the data [...], organizing what is there into patterns, categories and descriptive units, and looking for relationships between them’ (Brewer 2000: 108). Ethnographic research is equally committed to ‘analytic induction’, where the aim is to build generalisations and inferences from insiders’ perspectives, behaviours, acts, activities and relationships (Brewer 2000: 108-109). Inductive analyses can be identified as ‘approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher’ (Thomas 2006: 238).

Being data-based, ethnographic inductive analysis is often described as ‘grounded’, in the sense that it generates from the ground-up based on a description of particular cases, rather than being generated from existing theoretical constructs (Lofland et al. 2005: 165). However, the place of theory in ethnographic research is a matter of heated debate (Brewer 2000). While some argue that a good ethnography can be judged only according to whether or not it develops theories (Lofland 1974; Athens 1984; Woods 1985), others suggest that theoretical or empirical inferences from fieldwork findings are indeed preceded by researchers’ familiarity with already existing work (Hammersley 1992; Lofland et al. 2005). According to Hammersley (1992: 13), ethnographic descriptions are not theories in themselves, however, they are theoretical because they originally rely on existing concepts and theories. Lofland et al. (2005: 165) convincingly argue that ‘fieldwork findings of some theoretical or conceptual significance are not so much novel discoveries as they are "extensions" or "refinements" of existing work’.

Before interpreting the responses and observations obtained during my fieldwork, it was necessary for me to choose an approach for data analysis. A systematic approach to make sense of what I learned in the field is a prime requirement at the stage of analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen as an approach following the fieldwork stage (Tuckett 2005; Braun and Clarke 2006; Guest et al. 2012). During the course of analysis I scrutinised the data, looking for relevant themes that could answer my research questions. In my search for themes, I passed through a number of phases. Firstly, I familiarised myself with my field and interview transcripts by reading and rereading them thoroughly. Out of each interview, certain themes were popping up. I, thereafter, began to compare these themes together in an attempt to find resemblances and differences. I was then able to identify common and overarching themes, taking into consideration the concepts that could answer the research questions. After visiting and revisiting the retrieved themes, I categorised and sub-divided them and then I defined, reviewed and named themes.

After carefully reading, understanding and internalising my data (Boyatzis 1998: 69; Lofland et al. 2005; Thomas 2006), I followed two levels of coding. At the first level, I assigned code labels that describe the meaning implied in each participant's narrative. Coding at this level, according to Corbin and Strauss, includes 'breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for interpreted meaning of raw data' (Corbin and Strauss 2015: 239). At this phase, my aim was to look for patterns that cut across different situations and with different participants (Fetterman 1998; Thomas 2006). The process of coding was done manually. In the outline of the data I collected from the field, I was looking for acts, behaviours, narratives, emotions and thoughts that may identify as themes. Emergent codes from all my interview manuscripts were compared and juxtaposed. Two criteria have been used in deciding the themes and sub-themes of this study: 1) the recurrence of the theme, 2) the relevance of the theme to answer my research questions. In addition, while developing my themes, I was cautious not to rely merely on the insights of certain participants or a group/category of participants (such as all Pakistanis, Yemenis, and/or men/women). I rather ensured that I look for overarching themes and common and shared ideas amongst participants. Once a range of themes was identified, I carried out the second level of coding where I performed a further reading of the manuscripts with the aim of identifying sub-themes, categories, connections, similarities and differences that may explain the main themes (Boyatzis 1998; Corbin and Strauss 2015). During this coding process, I compared the codes that emerged from the interview data with my field observations. This was important because it enabled me to revisit

the patterns that emerged from coding interview data. This also enabled me to judge the reliability of the patterns that emerged from interviews (Fetterman 1998). Following that, I structured my data in a meaningful way to present my observations and tales of the field to the reader. I retrieved the most frequently recurring themes which could help make meaning of and construct an account of what British Muslims think of integration. Below is a table of the master themes and subthemes of my field data.

*Table 3.4: Themes and Subthemes of Field Data*

| Master Theme              | Subtheme  |
|---------------------------|---|
| The self and the other    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diversity as a social asset</li> <li>- Variations in perceptions of the self</li> <li>- The other as a harmonious friend/partner</li> <li>- Freedom of expressing the self as a way to integrating with the other</li> </ul> |
| Radicalisation            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deficiency and bias of official discourses</li> <li>- Freedom of religious practice</li> <li>- Lack of religious education</li> <li>- Political alienation</li> </ul>  |
| Residential concentration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Variations in perceptions of residential concentration</li> <li>- Reasons for residential concentration</li> <li>- Consequences of residential concentration</li> </ul>  |
| Barriers to integration   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hidden and spoken fears</li> <li>- Reasons for fear</li> <li>- Lack of equal citizenship</li> <li>- Integration as a source of fear</li> </ul>   |



In the course of my thematic analysis, I have used quotes from interviews that capture my participants' views and illustrate the different aspects of my findings. I have used two types of interview quotations. At some points of my analysis, I use brief quotations to signify the wide range of views and perceptions amongst my participants (Eldh et al. 2020: 2). At other points longer quotations are used to present a greater understanding of my participants' perspectives (Eldh et al. 2020: 2). Longer quotations presented an extended opportunity to understand how and why my participants held particular views related to a particular theme.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this research. Starting with the research question of this study of what integration means to Muslims in the UK, this chapter has outlined the ethnographic methods used to capture Muslims' understandings and experiences of integration. Concluding with the discussion on themes that emerged from field data, the study now moves on to the first analysis chapter, which will unpack the complex aspects and experiences of British Muslims' identity, reflecting the heterogeneity of British Muslims in how they understand and link to their religious identity. The following analysis chapters will explain the complexities of how British Muslims understand and experience the reality of integration in the UK.

## **Chapter Four: Being a Muslim in Birmingham: Beyond Essentialising Muslims' Religious Identity**

#### 4.1. Introduction

As part of this research's inquiry into how British Muslims understand integration, this chapter scrutinises the complex processes and experiences of identity construction for British Muslims in Birmingham. Building on the ethnographic research of this study, this chapter explores the meanings and experiences of three groups of British Muslims in order to understand how each of them creates their sense of the self and how this sense impacts on their understanding of and attitudes towards integration. The analysis of the three forms of identity construction is placed within wider discourses, inequalities and power relations. This chapter presents in-depth insights into the dynamics of religious identity among Muslims in my field site. Given that Muslims are presented as a 'problem', I want to unpack the relationship between Islam and what is understood to be successful integration. The chapter provides empirical answers to why 'Muslim' integration might fail in Western societies.

Having an outsider's eye at the start of my fieldwork, I was able only to see the commonalities amongst the Muslims in my field setting. My participants shared a lot in common that to a great extent concealed significant divergences. Those commonalities might appear to an outsider as a constructed religious boundary. In my field, I found that religion was an observable element in the everyday lives of many British Muslims. It was obvious in their outfits, speech, interactions, behaviours and daily practices. However, there was equally a significant heterogeneity within the Muslim 'community/ies'. The heterogeneity of British Muslims in my field site was not limited to lines of ethnicity, race, cultural heritage or socio-economic status. Divergences were also observed regarding Muslims' attachment to and practice of their religious identity. I observed differences not only between practising and non-practising Muslims in the field, but also divergences among each of these groups. Practising Muslims, for instance, varied in positioning their religious identity in relation to their national identity. For this group of my participants, the strength and connotation of what being a Muslim means varied greatly despite sharing a common identification as 'practising Muslims'.

In terms of identity, Muslims cannot be categorically classified in *either/or* categories. A person might be practising Muslim at some time of his being, and non-practising at other times. Also, being practising or non-practising has variations and changing levels. In my field site, levels of practice/non-practice varied in accordance with educational attainment, professional career, socio-economic status and other demographic factors such as age, gender

and marital status. It also varied according to Muslims' feelings of socio-political inclusiveness, equality and freedom. Despite this very heterogeneous make-up of Muslims in my field site, I will, for the sake of analysis, categorise them in terms of religious identity into two main groups: practising and non-practising Muslims. Practising Muslims, as will be shown in the next section, includes those who expressed and exhibited their attachment and identification with their Muslim religious identity through their narratives, behaviours and lifestyles. Non-practising Muslims, in the light of this research, include those who do not identify with or exhibit an Islamic way of life.

## **4.2. Identifying as a Practising Muslim**

In this section, I first explore the different manifestations of religious identity among practising Muslims, elaborating what being a practising Muslim means. I then explore the different ways in which practising Muslims locate their religious identity and relate to their national identity. In so doing, the chapter scrutinises reasons for religious assertiveness amongst British Muslims and the possible impacts of this assertiveness on their ability to integrate.

### **4.2.1 Islam as a Way of Life for Practising Muslims**

A common theme amongst practising Muslims in the field setting was their consideration of Islam as a way of life, that is, it was a central source of guidance to which they were committed in all spheres of life. For this group of my participants, Islam informed their behaviours and perceptions of how they led their day-to-day lives. For them, Islam impacted on their life styles, particularly in its social aspects. In general, practising Muslims differed from non-practising Muslims by their practice of Islamic rituals such as offering regular prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan and giving charity. Practising Muslims were also known by the way they appeared in public (e.g. modesty and the hijab for women and beards for men). It is important though to mention that some Muslims identified themselves as practising while not adhering to a particular dress code or appearance. For instance, some of my practising participants did not have beards or did not wear the hijab either due to a personal

choice or due to their anticipation/experiences of social othering and stigma. Aside from their dress, as commonly known, practising Muslims were different from the wider public in their dietary habits (e.g. eating only Halal meat and no consumption of alcohol). Practising Muslims often shared specific practices such as offering prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan. It was a daily observation to see locals heading to local mosques at prayer times. This small journey to mosques was a good chance for locals to meet, talk, and socialise. Locals often addressed each other with religious blessings ‘*Alsalam Alikum*’<sup>4</sup>. In the month of Ramadan, a spirit of celebration and spirituality was spread across the local community where most people observed fasting from dawn to sunset. In the local area where I lived, neighbours celebrated Ramadan by exchanging sweets, religious blessings and good wishes to each other. Celebrating Ramadan, for this group of my participants, was paralleled with longer prayers and more intensive rituals at local mosques, which were open and packed with worshipers throughout the day and the night during this month.

Moreover, for many of my practising participants, ‘family’ occupied a central position in their day-to-day lives. I came across many Muslim women in the field who surrendered their careers for the sake of family/children care. Also, practising Muslims showed higher interest in issues relating the international Muslim community. For instance, it was common to hear discussions from the Yemeni community about the war in Yemen, and from Libyans about the war in Libya. Likewise, Pakistanis often expressed their concern over the situation in Kashmir. There was an overwhelming concern from many practising Muslims in the field about the civil war in Syria and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. During my time in the field, I came across different occasions where local practising Muslims arranged donations for Syria and Yemen. Also, practising Muslims shared that keen tendency to exhibit and prove that Muslims are a peaceful and integrated part of society. Given the wider discourses and portrayals of Muslims, local Muslims often made a point of expressing that they abided by the law and that they cooperated with different institutions (e.g the police and the city council) to help local communities. Practising Muslims often felt pressure on them not only to contribute but also to display their contributions to the wider society in order to counterbalance negative representations of Muslims. In different walks of life local Muslims appeared to have this constant attitude to show that they cherish the British culture. This was largely obvious in schools, mosques and in places and on occasions where different communities used to come

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<sup>4</sup> An Islamic expression means ‘peace be upon you’.

together. For example, this was often manifest in the arranged events of ‘visit my mosque’<sup>5</sup>, where there was always this emphasis on Muslim loyalty to Britain. In most of the events I attended as part of this initiative, the majority of narratives were mainly planned to display and emphasise the integration of Muslims into Britain and the compatibility between the Muslim culture and the British culture. This was demonstrated by one of the imams who said that ‘the aim of these sorts of seminars is to emphasise that Muslim communities are parts of British society’.

As time drew on, I found that, despite these commonalities, Muslims in Birmingham could not be regarded as a single unified religious group. While the collective religious appearance of practising Muslims might give the impression of an Islamic homogeneity, the reality denoted an utterly heterogeneous community in the way it perceived, constructed and linked to its religious and national identities. For my practising participants, self-identification as Muslim or British Muslim was not a categorical indication of one single form of religious attachment and belief. While noticeably sharing what seems to be common grounds (e.g. prayer times, rituals and celebrations), my practising participants were noticeably differing in the way they understood Islam and the way they practiced religious rituals. For instance, for some practicing Muslims, their devoutness was necessarily paralleled by obvious signs of religious assertiveness (e.g. head and face covering for women). Others identified themselves as practising while not fully abiding by certain aspects, such as modesty and Halal dietary restrictions.

This analysis comes in obvious contrast to most existing research, where the heterogeneity of Muslims is limited to aspects such as socio-economic status, ethnicity and religious sects. In most public, political and academic debates, British Muslim communities are perceived as religious (Hutnik 1985; Jacobson 1997; Maxwell 2006; Kibria 2008; Cameron 2011; Mustafa 2015; Casey 2016) and the religiosity of British Muslims is often seen as straightforward and unquestionable (Gans 1979; Jacobson 1997; Fuad 2012; Ahmad and Evergeti 2010; Frampton et al. 2016; Jeraj 2017; Hoque 2019). According to this perspective, for many Muslims, Islam is a key identifier of what they feel and think of themselves and of

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Visit my mosque’ day is a national initiative developed by the Muslim Council of Britain, allowing different communities to visit mosques across the country with the aim of dispelling misconceptions and building mutual understanding amongst communities.

who they are (Jacobson 1997: 239). During my field immersion, I found that Islam was indeed a key identifier for many Muslims, but in a number of different ways and at a variety of levels.

Through my interactions in the field site, I observed that each sub-community amongst Muslims (e.g. Pakistani Muslims, Somali Muslims, Arab Muslims, and convert Muslims) held a considerably different understanding of what being a Muslim involved and required. For instance, Muslims in the field site diverged regarding issues such as mortgages, bank benefits, head covering and Halal meat. What might have been considered as religious for some was not true for others, and what might have been considered as a core Islamic value for some was a minor issue for others. In line with this observation, Ahmad and Evergeti argue that ‘the notion of being a “Muslim” presents itself as a complex and contested construction’ (2010: 1715). The understanding of what being a Muslim means is often presented in a range of forms and in several different ways.

#### **4.2.2 Motivations for Religious Assertiveness**

For many Muslims in the field, religiosity was a personal choice for the attainment of spirituality and wellbeing. Despite the centrality of religion to most Muslims in the field setting, their identification seemed to change according to the context and the situation. A sense of religious attachment was amplified in times of fear, discrimination and/or racism (see Chapters Five and Six). From my interactions with the local community I found that the extent and the scope of religious attachment was determined by a range of considerations which shaped the consequences of religious attachment in terms of integration. One of these considerations related to the stigmatising and sceptical milieu towards Muslims since the 2000s. This was reflected by Aminah, a third generation 25-year-old Pakistani woman, who made it clear that her experience at school in the time following the London bombings (2005) was a turning point not only in her relationship with her faith but also in her perceptions of her Britishness. According to Aminah, the then increasing scepticism towards her as a Muslim moved her to become a persistent practising Muslim. Recalling her experience in secondary school following the 7/7 terrorist attacks, Aminah said:

It was just after the London bombings that happened in 2005 that things suddenly changed. It was like everything was fine until that happened. For some reason we were

then targeted. People were asking us questions that we did not have answers to but I was in a different place, I was young. It is *those* Muslims [the bombers] or whatever they claim to be. It is not *us*. For that we have no responsibility. We do not have responsibility for what they did. I knew it was a change happening at my sixth form at that time. In the year below us two pupils who were Muslims left the school. Their parents took them out simply because they were attacked. I am quite a strong headed person so to me it was like 'I need to answer their questions'. I would go to the internet, researching and reading on Islam to know what Islam says about these things. I actually became closer to my religion than ever before. It took the opposite effect for me because when people are asking you questions and you do not have the answer you get confused, so, you want to know more. I am still a Muslim but I need to be able to defend myself. So I felt like that was the first time in my life ever that I noticed what being British was or what it was being Asian British.

For some (such as the above-mentioned case of Aminah), attachment to faith surged from their experiences of discrimination, racism and sense of exclusion. For those, religion and religious community relations provided a sense of support and security against social and political uncertainties and frustrations. Echoing my field findings in this regard, McKenna and Francis found that the challenges to Muslims' religious identity have pushed some towards more open practice of culture and religion (2019: 389). Similarly, Ansari (2002) argues that the context of prejudice beginning in the 2000s has increased the attachment of many Muslims to their faith. In such cases, attachment to religion, particularly for younger generations, was a form of resistance to stigma and discrimination. Compared to the second and third generations, my first generation participants were less reactive to stigma in terms of their religious behaviours and practices. Having had their religious socialisation back in their Muslim-dominant home countries meant that first generation Muslims would not have passed through the challenges second and third generations found in building a stable and uncontested image of the self. This behavioural difference can also be explained with reference to the high expectations by British-born generations in terms of their equal treatment in society regardless of their faith.

In addition to being a personal choice often opted for reasons of spirituality, religious assertiveness plays a much wider role where religiously assertive Muslims intend to provide a peaceful alternative to the violent representations of Islam which are widely represented in



media. Religious assertiveness for many practising Muslims is an attempt to spread and exhibit the right message of Islam amongst Muslims and to clarify to the wider society that religious practice and obvious Muslimness are not a sign of terror and/or source of threat. Religious assertiveness, amongst my practising participants, was not only a matter of abiding by certain religious-related practices such as the hijab for women and the beard for men, but also involved a higher sense of distinctiveness from the ‘other’ in two different aspects. First, the obvious Muslimness represented in Islamic outfits or appearance is used by some practicing Muslims to challenge the wider image of Muslims as a ‘potential’ terror threat. Religious assertiveness is a tool to contest the ‘other’ who holds racist/discriminatory attitudes and/or denies Muslims’ practices of difference. It is a route to contest widespread portrayals of religious assertiveness as equal to violence and segregation. In the above-mentioned quote by Aminah, she clearly drew a line between ‘those’ terrorists and ‘us’, the majority of Muslims. The growing religious assertiveness of Aminah was paralleled with her effort to exclude those who commit acts of violence in the name of Islam. This was expressed also by Nadia, one of my participants, a veiled woman working as a teacher in a Muslim school in Birmingham. Nadia, a first generation 39-year-old Moroccan, said that ‘when the society sees me as a veiled woman and at the same time successful, they will change their view about it and they won’t be scared of it’.

Failure to overcome stigma, to gain social acceptance and to maintain a freely formed self-image can lead to the formation of what Castells named ‘resistance identity’, which is ‘generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination’ (2010: 8). As a form of challenge to stigmatisation, a proportion of my practising participants (the young in particular) chose to show more assertiveness in their religious identity. This sense of distinctiveness was often driven by anger over social othering which shaped how many Muslims in the field setting identified themselves. The persistent struggle to secure social acceptance turned for some participants into a defensive form of religious attachment which highlighted boundaries and differences with others, reinforced self-affirmation and concealed common bridges with the wider society. As Hall persuasively argues, social identities are the by-product of the process of making ‘difference and exclusion’ (1996: 4). In a context of wider scepticism on Muslims, it was inevitable for many of my participants to adhere to their positions as others, which in turn implied heightened self-assertiveness against diminished national affirmation. According to Castells, defensive identity is ‘*the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded*’ (2010: 9 *Italic in original*). Such a form of

reactionary identity formation lessens the social pressure of stigma and discrimination and plays an emancipatory role against the overall restrictive environment because, not only is it a form of resistance, but is also a source of belonging and empowerment. The ability to ‘exclude the excluder’ provides the vulnerable among my participants with a sense of agency over a dominant sense of powerlessness and victimisation (Castells 2010: 9). The contextual and discursive positioning of a particular community or group determines the content and shape of its identity (Hall 1996; Castells 2010; Hoque 2019).

In addition, religious assertiveness is a route to challenge the spread of extreme interpretations of Islam amongst young Muslims through providing a doable version of British Islam. Religiously assertive Muslims in my field often perceived themselves as holding a ‘safe’ model for young Muslims who opt to practice their religious identity in Britain. This model, according to them, is a good mix of how to be both Muslim and British. Religious assertiveness makes them able to draw a clear line between themselves and those deviant violent ‘others’ who they deem as not part of the Muslim community. In an extended conversation with the above-mentioned Nadia on her reasons for wearing the face veil, she said:

Wearing the face veil is my choice and my freedom. I did not wear it before, but now I feel it makes me closer to God so I do it. I do not wear it to contest the wider society. It is, rather, not acceptable in Islam to practice our rituals to contest others. I practice this because this is how I understand my religious identity and because this is how the first generation of Muslims in the times of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did. Women who choose to wear the face veil and men who choose to have beards, both are important parts of the wider society. I know a bearded man here and he is a known personnel in the mosque. This man is integrated in the society. He cooperates with the council in helping young youth to learn computer skills, to do sports and to engage in healthy activities. This man is working in the mosque and at the same time engaging and volunteering for the sake of the bigger society. For me, I’m having a face veil but I am not staying at home. I am integrated in the society. I work and I have built relationships with the society. I have a role in the society not only in the religious sphere. I help the Muslim and the non-Muslim community. My model provides a balance for many youth who want to live as successful Muslims and successful citizens at the same time, otherwise when they find no available model at home they find other available models across the borders, like ISIS and such groups.

Heightened religious assertiveness related not only to social othering and Muslims' efforts to provide an alternative for younger generation to belong to, but also to other dynamics within the community under observation. Another explanation for increased religious assertiveness related to the mix between religion and ethnicity. Young participants (Pakistanis in particular) shared a common rejection of this interplay between religious identity and ethnic cultural traditions. Second and third generation participants perceived certain cultural traditions presented by the older generations as 'religious truths' to be, to them, 'non-religious'. This was particularly observed in issues of marriage and women's rights. Ali, a second generation 35-year-old Pakistani man, and Somaiya, a second generation 28-year-old Yemeni woman, were one of the cases I came across during my fieldwork who justified their marriage with religious arguments. According to both, their parents believed in the 'old' cultural understandings that both should have married within their respective ethnic groups. Both confronted their parents and argued that Islam allows marriage outside one's ethnic community, which, according to them was a sufficient justification for being permitted to marry each other. The dissatisfaction with certain ethnic traditions (such as arranged marriage and/or same-family marriage) also motivated younger generations to look for alternatives founded on religion which increased their chances of breaking the locks of widely accepted cultural traditions amongst older generations. In such cases, religion worked as a source of emancipation from what might be seen as 'unacceptable' and/or 'oppressive' to young Muslims. This comes in close agreement with a growing body of research, such as that of Knott and Khokher (1993), Jacobson (1997), Glynn (2002), Samad (2004), Choudhury (2007) and Kundnani (2008), which come in agreement that young Muslims' refusal of ethnic interpretations of Islam motivated a significant proportion of them to follow more orthodox interpretations of Islam.

Religiosity and/or increased religious assertiveness, particularly amongst young Muslims, has been highly emphasised amongst scholars, with the central argument that young British Muslims are becoming more religiously assertive (Hutnik 1985; Jacobson 1997; Maxwell 2006; Kibria 2008; Mustafa 2015). As mentioned above, it is empirically sound to argue that many Muslims (the young in particular) in the field setting showed obvious signs of religiosity and spirituality. Nevertheless, based on my prolonged field interactions I argue that this apparent assertiveness in many cases was nominal and blurry even amongst those who assertively identified themselves as Muslims. In the field setting, I came across women who opted to wear the head scarf due to the social pressure of the community and/or due to being driven to do so by an overall community momentum. Yemeni and Somali women in the field

would not be able to change their cultural (modest) outfits without being cut off by their ethnic communities. Committing to certain religious and/or ethnic symbols was not only a route to identity display but also to ethno-religious belonging. Adhering to certain religious practices was also sometimes a tool for social survival in a diasporic community.

What might resemble an Islamic practice or way of being in Muslims' mundane lives might not necessarily denote religious practice and/or assertiveness. I am therefore inclined to agree with Gans in arguing that what seems to be an 'ethnic revival' may in fact be a form of acculturation and assimilation (1979: 1). Many British Muslims (the younger generations in particular) experienced difficulties in negotiating and perceiving their identity despite clearly self-identifying with it. While Jessica Jacobson found in 1997 that the Muslim faith represents a pervasive and clear-cut religious boundary for young Muslims, it does not seem the same more than 20 years later based on my extended observations. The way many young Muslims understand and portray Islam is often blurry and limited. In the field site, many young Muslims were not receiving sufficient religious education and therefore their religious understandings were largely dependent on what they received from their parents as 'religious truth'. Therefore, it was very common to meet Muslims (British born in particular) who, in terms of belief, identified with Islam, but this identification was not reflected in practice or in observing certain rituals or norms (e.g. offering prayers or fasting during Ramadan). This observation was supported by the overwhelming agreement of my older (mostly first and second generation) participants, who commonly shared the view that young Muslims are losing their connection to Islam. Working with young children and youths, Nadia, a first generation 39-year-old Moroccan, said:

Many young Muslims I work with do not have enough understanding of Islamic norms of tolerance, forgiveness and mercy. For instance, I do not meet racism with racism. I do not blame my racist neighbour because what he knows about me leads him to think I am a danger. Muslims have to know that part of our religiosity is to forgive and to have mercy not only with Muslims but with everybody else. To be pious we do not have to live only for ourselves and what we need. We have to serve others and we have to engage with the society we are living in. This understanding of Islam is not delivered to many Muslims in Britain. Only few of us understand that; and voices of hate are being magnified and used for political reasons which actually divides this society and puts it at risk.

Nadia's explanation echoes what I realised from my observations and interactions in the field. During my field immersion I found that a considerable portion of British born Muslims were experiencing a gap between the act of worship and the meaning of worship. For instance, lacking the understanding of the basics of Islamic norms of tolerance, forgiveness and unity could mean, for some Muslims, that Islam is used rather to create intolerance, division and hate, not only between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, but also within Muslim communities. Young Muslims might perform acts of religiosity, but without commitment and without a sufficient understanding of why and how they do it, and sometimes without adhering to the ethical connotations of these acts (see section 4.3). An insufficient understanding of Islam could lead to Islam being used or put it in danger of being used in an un-Islamic way (Abdul Bari 2011).

Having now discussed the reasons and motivations for religious assertiveness by my practising Muslims, I will move on to scrutinise how religiously assertive Muslims understand the meaning of integration.

### **4.2.3 Religious Assertiveness and Integration**

In this context of the heterogeneity of Muslims in general and of practising Muslims in particular, it is noteworthy that practising Muslims ranged between being orthodox and non-orthodox. Orthodox Muslims had stricter views on how they should lead their lives as Muslims. For instance, orthodox Muslims mostly believed in adopting a face covering for women and the obligation of beards for men, and strict segregation between men and women. It is of paramount importance to emphasise that in discussing 'practising Muslims' (orthodox and non-orthodox), this study does not include cases of far-right, radical and extremist Muslim groups such as Al-Muhajiroon and Hizbul-Tahrir (e.g. Anjem Choudhary and/or ISIS supporters), whose claims of being religious or practising were predominantly denied and denounced by a significant majority of my participants. According to my practising participants, the radical and violent acts of extremist groups do not denote religiosity, but rather non-religiosity, as Islamic teachings teach compassion and kindness, and not hate and violence.

Overall, practising Muslims shared the perception that their understandings of Islamic values come in close agreement with the concept of integration in terms of cooperation, mutual

respect, abidance to law and social harmony. They equally believed that the decreased religiosity of some Muslims in Britain leads to different forms of segregation. Tufail, a first generation 60-year-old Pakistani, found that the problem with British Muslims lies in their lack of understanding of the teachings of Islam. He said:

We do not have proper Islamic teaching. The Muslim five times prayers mean discipline. For example, in the prayer, you need to make a line, accept one leader and wait in a queue. But come and see this car parking [of the local mosque] here; it is always blocked and people are parking on the entrance box and double yellow lines; so where is Islam? Islam is teaching you discipline, to abide by the law and to respect the rules. That is our problem, we do not have proper Islamic teaching and we do not understand the actual message of Quran. And, mosques are not performing their true jobs because they do not teach people about the rationale of Islamic teachings. As Muslims we need to learn and understand through our Quran, religion and what our prophet is saying, only then will we be good citizens and good humans.

As mentioned in chapter two, the role of religious identity in integration has been a highly debated topic amongst scholars (Candland 2000; Maxwell 2006; Pettersson 2007; Kibria 2008; Ali 2013; Mustafa 2015; Frampton et al. 2016; Ipsos MORI 2018) as well as amongst politicians and government-led reports (Home Office 2001; Blair 2006; Kelly 2006; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). While the political mainstream discourse finds Islamic values incompatible with the British way of life, most academic research argues that religious Muslims show strong inclination towards integration in the wider British society, that they cherish British culture (e.g. in terms of democracy, rule of law and equality) and that they are no different from other communities in the UK in terms of their sense of belonging to the UK (Maxwell 2006; Pettersson 2007; Kibria 2008; Kundnani 2008; Dana et al. 2011; Hopkins 2011; Mustafa 2015; Ipsos MORI 2018; Oskooii and Dana 2018). My field findings not only refute the mainstream discourses in this regard but also question the generalisability of these academic arguments.

For local Muslims in my field site, religious identity *per se* was not a sufficient indicator of positive perceptions towards integration. Throughout my field immersion I found that religious attachment could be a route to integration and could equally be a route to segregation, depending upon whether religious assertiveness was voluntary or reactionary. Furthermore, the impact of religious attachment was associated with the freedom of religious practice. The sense

of national belonging among my practising participants was often associated with and reinforced by one's freedom to practise their religious and/or ethnic difference. For instance, religious Muslims who had a sense of freedom towards their religious practice often showed more inclination towards integrating in the wider society. In contrast, those who were feeling restricted were more likely to show hesitation and limited willingness towards integration. Restrictions over Muslims' religious practices were often associated with an accentuated sense of alienation and inequality, leading to anger and a willingly chosen segregation from a society they perceived as 'discriminatory'.

Integration for practising Muslims has become a politicised concept which is instrumentally used to exclude those who might not agree with the mainstream understanding of what being British means. It is also deemed a more exclusionary than inclusionary concept because it implicitly aims to integrate those who are not integrated, and those whose difference cannot be tolerated. Integration for this group of my participants was seen as a mutual responsibility for both Muslims and non-Muslim communities. Their understanding of the concept was based on a clear differentiation between integration and assimilation. There was an overwhelming consensus among my practising participants that integration should not aim to dissolve the religious particularity of Muslims. Integration is a conditional process, which should be founded on values of equality, mutual respect and freedom of difference. The central position of equality and freedom of difference in Muslims' understanding of integration was demonstrated by Hamza, a first generation 43-year-old Pakistani, when he said:

When you ask about integration of Muslims, you should look first for how to assess their integration. What you mean by integration? Do you want me to dissolve in your culture so that I become integrated? Or, do you mean that I give the best I can for this society, and you also give the best you can for this society? Do not use the integration card. If you look at the indicators of Muslims' numbers in politics, medicine, science, engineering, you will see Muslims are integrated. This word can be used in many wrong ways. It can be like: if you do not follow my life style, you are not integrated. If you do not follow me, you are not integrated. If you do not eat what I eat, then you are not integrated. Integration does not mean that I lose my right to practice my identity. If I do not dissolve in your culture, this does not mean that I am in contestation with you. I should have the right to identify myself without fear. I am Jewish, I am Muslim, or I am Christian. I do not have to dissolve in what politicians want to be named integrated.

So, I prefer the concept of equality of rights instead of integration. You respect my rights and I respect your rights.

In the field I observed that there was an obvious difference between Muslims who felt able to practise their religious difference freely and openly and those who were restricted by their fears of stigma and discrimination. For those who were *freely* practicing and displaying their religious identity, practicing and adhering to Islam was not perceived as confrontational and/or depicted as a source of divisiveness. Ayman, a third generation 23-year-old Pakistani, one of my religiously observant participants, emphasised the coexistence between his religious as well as national identity by stating that:

Islam is a way of life. Nothing changes in us as citizens. We are under one umbrella in terms of citizenship. We are all together as citizens. We all have differences, and we should accept them. We should have a level of tolerance.

In line with that, the third generation 22-year-old Pakistani Sabrina, said that:

Being Muslims, we are being brought up in a different way. Exactly, I guess, as Christians are brought up in a different way. But it is never really a way that will clash or cause any dispute. I mean we might think different things about religion, but I do not think it would ever be relevant in our daily life activities or our dealings or education.

The difference between *freely*-practising participants (whether orthodox or non-orthodox) and the wider society did not extend to the public sphere (e.g. the belief in public laws and democratic institutions, respect and equality). The difference with the wider society primarily related to religious and family-related issues. I often observed that religion is mostly restricted to the private life of practising Muslims. In the public sphere, most practising Muslims were engaged as other communities were in education, involvement in the job market and businesses, and in social and political engagement. The public behaviour and attitudes of orthodox Muslims did not significantly differ from non-orthodox Muslims, if able to pursue their religious practices *freely* without being subjected to social othering. The way either orthodox or non-orthodox Muslim interacted with the wider society was strongly associated with their anticipation of social stigmatisation, othering and positioning.



*Freely*-practising Muslims did not hold confrontational concepts of cultural/religious difference. Their sense of religious difference was rather based on concepts of harmony and coexistence. It was widely acknowledged amongst my participants and the people I spoke with that fusing diverse identities in one's self-identification is increasingly possible even if the religious aspect takes the lead over other aspects of identity. For this group of Muslims, commonalities with the wider society were being emphasised. Their sense of religious difference was complemented with an equal sense of national identity. Integration in the wider society was for this cluster of practising Muslims a religious duty. Along with emphasising the central position of his religious identity in making up his being, the above-mentioned Hamza, the first generation 43-year-old Pakistani, described his affiliation and belonging to Britain as a civic and religious duty. He not only found it as a duty but also perceived himself as fortunate being in a British citizen. He said:

Pakistan is my birth country but my loyalty is to the UK. Religion says, wherever you reside you have to be loyal. I do not believe in boundaries. We are born free.... In the UK we are lucky. We have everything and our role is to repay it back to save it from any external or internal threats.

During my visits to local mosques, imams and religious instructors often emphasised that Muslims' religious belief is based on respecting, knowing, understanding and supporting others who do not share the same faith. The dynamics of practising Muslims' daily lives showed in most cases close agreement with the British values of respect, equality, belief in democracy and rule of the law. Faith-based attitudes could denote social conservatism and not a lack of integration. For many practising Muslims in the field, social conservatism (being illiberal in certain social aspects, such avoiding relationships outside marriage) did not denote less inclination towards integration in the wider society. In agreement with that, Frampton et al. argued that 'more religious character and general social conservatism of British Muslim communities, does not detract from the essentially secular character of most Muslim lifestyles' (Frampton et al. 2016: 7-8). My findings revealed that there was no conflict between cherishing and preserving religious values on the one hand and valuing national belonging and integration on the other hand. Adam, a first generation 44-year-old Egyptian man, was interested in religious education for his children and therefore enrolled them in a Muslim school. He was, however, one of those participants who showed a strong attitude towards integration with the wider society regardless of his commitment to and display of his religious identity. He

expressed his aspiration of a future role in the party he was affiliated to. In a question about the grounds of his political activism and whether his religious identity played a role in that, Adam, who worked as a senior doctor in the NHS, answered:

I think it has nothing to do with Islam at all. When I struggle as a doctor in the NHS with the economics and its effect on the NHS fund, it has nothing to do with religion. Nothing to do with Islam. When I struggle with the problem of Council management of our services for example in Birmingham, and the problem of recycling waste, this has nothing to do with being Muslim or not. When I struggle with the strikes of the train workers or the other companies' workers again that is an economic problem of the country. None of these have been about religion at all or related to me as a Muslim. I am just a Muslim living in this country. It is my right to see this country running in the way that I like so I think 'What's next?' and 'How can I improve that?' and voting is one of these ways to do so.

Adam expressed that he felt privileged by living in the UK, a country which, he argued, respects the right of difference. Having this sense of recognition and significance in society enabled him to find a balance between being British and being Muslim. In this context, Adam's religious identity was not an obsession that diverted his attention and concerns away from his civic duties. Feeling free to practice his belief left Adam able to think beyond his personal issues and to then engage with the civic and political aspects of his being.

While the sense of difference was harmonious for *freely*-practising Muslims, it was more confrontational for *restrictedly*-practising Muslims, who found the practice of their religious difference challenging and sometimes hampered. Practising Muslims whose sense of prejudice and racism was high were often loaded with an anger and disaffection which undermined their faith in the whole concept of integration. Answering my questions on Muslims' social segregation, Uzmah, a second generation 47-year-old Pakistani woman, said that:

When you talk about young people and you are constantly pointing your finger at them, they are going to stand up; and that is going to create tensions. They will say I am not like that; why you are constantly blaming me; why you are saying my family or my community is like this... Then they start getting aggressive and then you start thinking they are being radicalised.... I always say if you keep poking someone he is going to

turn around and he is going to poke you back... Young Muslims have grown up with that mindset, that the people are against us; and now with constant negativity about Islam, the divisions have been created in their minds.

Religious prejudice makes Muslims feel less British compared to other communities whose religious practices are not only unquestioned but also valued and encouraged (Oskooii and Dana 2018). Elaborating her view on religious prejudice as a reason for segregation, Uzmah narrated an incident with her son, who studied in an Islamic school, saying that:

My son is 16 now. He was in a Muslim school and I used to pick him up from school. One day I had some heart problems so I had a monitor on, with some wires and things. So, I picked him from school and drove to a supermarket. He was in his uniform and I was in my Niqab [face veil] with wires coming out because of the heart machine... And he said 'Mum, I am not going there with you because you got these wires on and I am in this uniform [Muslim school uniform], they [the public] are going to think we are terrorists.' He did not get out of the car... And I had to explain to him, 'Look if somebody in the street says to me "Who are you, Paki? Go back home" Hang on a second, my family died for this country did yours? Just because of my colour or the way I dress you say I do not belong here, my family gave their blood for this country, so do not tell me I do not belong'. I said to my son that you need to be proud, and you never need to think that you do not belong. You do belong.

Freedom of religious/ethnic difference among my practising participants was a constitutive part of their sense of inclusion and willingness to integrate. This is echoed by the findings of Oskooii and Dana, who suggest that when Muslims are able to practise their religion they become more keen to affirm integration into western societies (2018: 1493). Having the freedom to observe their faith not only triggered my participants' sense of gratitude, but it was also a source of wellbeing, pride and belonging. Kareem, a second generation 39-year-old British Pakistani man, compared the very privileged position British Muslims have with that of Muslims living in other European countries. He argued that British Muslims are at greater advantage than their European counterparts with regard to the practice of religious identity:

I do not think [Muslims] appreciate what they have. If you look around in Birmingham you will find a mosque within a mile from here anywhere. I touched on this point when I said I had to get a train to get the nearest mosque in Germany. In France, it was even

worse and in Munich again it was not something that just I could pop in and find the next one. If I am late for Gommaa [Friday prayer], I just cross the road and I go to the next one [mosque] which is ten minutes later. I think a lot of people because they had not had the exposure to how Muslims live abroad in Europe they are not really able to appreciate what they have already got here as a society. It is global. My sister visited me when I was living in Switzerland and she would ask me, “where is this and that?”; I would say “hey, hang on. This is not England. You are in Switzerland now to find halal meat or a mosque”.

There is a research trend that explains the alienation and segregation of British Muslims with reference to their religious difference (Ali 2013; Frampton et al. 2016). As Candland (2000: 355-356) argues religious conviction is often perceived as an ‘eclipse’ of reason and as a constraint on the possibilities of enlightenment and civilisation. According to this school of thought, political and national disaffection is positively associated with religious activity. Therefore, a decline in religiosity is supposed to produce better integration outcomes, and as Frampton et al. (2016: 42) found that religiously devout Muslims were less likely to support ‘full integration’ and were rather inclined to support integration “on most things” but with separation in certain areas (e.g. schooling and laws). In line with Frampton et al.’s argument, Ali found that ethnic and religious-based networks could significantly contribute to Muslims’ sense of alienation and disaffection. As she argued, religious activity may have a negative impact on the belonging of Muslims to Britain (Ali 2013: 340).

Based on my field observations on the difference between *freely*-practising Muslims and *restrictedly*-practising Muslims, I argue that any negative consequences of religiosity as Frampton et al. indicate could actually be associated with the existence of and/or the anticipation of restrictions on religious practice and/or expression. Ali’s account was based on analysing political affiliation with Islamic political parties, and so cannot be generalised, in my view, because this affiliation is political rather than religious. As she notes, ‘Muslims who belonged to an Islamic political party, a religious based network operating with its own ideology, were in fact more practicing in their religion, and also felt less British’ (Ali 2013: 340). Feeling ‘less British’ in this case does not relate to the increased practice of the religion, rather it is a politically motivated reaction against a restricted sense of freedom and security over religious identity as well as against restricted image and control over the self. As she highlights, those whose religious activity associated with less Britishness were actually

motivated by their search for a sense of belonging (Ali 2013: 344). Therefore, in such cases the political search for belonging is driven by a sense of suppression, alienation and exclusion and is thus, as would be expected, prone to association with a feeling of being ‘less British’. The support for an Islamic political party in these cases meets the need for a sense of belonging and empowerment.

In addition to freedom of religious practice, I found that the impact (positive or negative) of religious assertiveness on integration was strongly associated with other variables such as religious literacy (which will be explored in the next section) and the source of religious literacy. These two variables impacted on how Muslims viewed the world, the self and the other (whether a Muslim or non-Muslim) and how he/she interpreted faith and the link with God. For instance, the abovementioned Uzmah was a visitor to one of Birmingham’s known orthodox mosques, therefore, her tone of the faith was conservative (e.g. strict hijab including face covering, no mortgage, no bank benefits, no secular education, etc.) compared to others who were, for example, visitors to other mosques known as moderate mosques, where most of the above restrictions were largely unenforced.

Despite the significance of religious literacy and the source of religious literacy, the anticipation of (mainstream) restrictions over religious beliefs/practices seemed to be undeniably an ultimate factor in determining whether or not even orthodox teachings might take an integrationist or isolationist direction. For instance, the expectation of sex education for primary school children forced a number of non-orthodox Muslims to join religious schools. Knowing that their concerns over sex education would not be addressed restricted the scope of integration-related attitudes even amongst *non-orthodox* Muslims.

#### **4.2.4 Radicalisation as the Only Available Truth**

Acts of terrorism are officially recognised as a serious challenge to community cohesion (HM Government 2018; LGA 2019). Being interested in integration, I have come to understand radicalisation and terrorism not only as a challenge but also as acute signs of non-integration. Therefore, investigating Muslims’ views of radicalisation and terrorism was a relevant theme of my field investigation. Doing my field work in the context of rising numbers of young British Muslims joining ISIS and of terrorist acts such as that at the Manchester Arena (2017) it was, in relation to my first research question, one of my field objectives to investigate what might lead young British Muslims to such extreme level of disorientation and non-

integration and to examine what role, if any, religious identity plays in this. A significant majority of my participants condemned extremist and radicalised Muslims. Traditionally, heightened religiosity among young British Muslims is feared due to concerns over radicalisation. However, empirically, practising Muslims seemed to be stricter in their abhorrence of radicalism as they considered radicalism to be a total violation of Islamic values. In line with this, Oskooii and Dana found that ‘Muslims who held more authoritative views towards the Qur’an were actually much more likely than their counterparts to believe that suicide bombings are never justified’ (2018: 1493; Frampton et al. 2016).

Despite the fact that I did not encounter radical Muslims in the field setting, given the wider context, radicalisation as a theme was present in its absence. It was present in the awareness, talks and stories of many of my participants. Most of the responses often depicted extremist and terrorist acts as non-religious and even as not Islamic. Violent and radical Muslims were disowned by the majority of my participants and there was an obvious outrage against radicalised Muslims, not only because they harm peace and coexistence amongst communities but also because they stigmatise the image of every peaceful and law-biding Muslim. The responses of my participants denoted two key reasons for why young Muslims might become radicalised: religious illiteracy combined with a feeling of not being equal citizens in the mainstream society. Promoting integration alone without equal promotion of religious literacy could carry alarming consequences. A proper understanding of the religion is a paramount factor in defining how integrated the person can become. Most of my participants expressed that a lack of religious understanding, even if associated with full socio-political integration, is likely to increase the extreme versions of religious assertiveness, which in the end may put integration at risk. As mentioned in the literature review, the Home Office report following the 2005 London bombings stated that three of the bombers were ‘apparently well integrated into British society’ (2006: 26). In accordance with that, Frampton et al. argue that being born in the UK and being in favour of full integration do not stop sympathy towards violent actions (2016: 71).

Religious knowledge was often sketchy amongst the second and third generations in my field site compared to those of the first generation, the second and third generations were, as mentioned earlier, largely less clear and less knowledgeable about their faith. They were also more impacted by the socio-political challenges and scepticism over their religious identity and national belonging, and this was due to their higher levels of expectations compared to

their non-British-born parents. This generational divide provides insights into why radicalisation is more likely to develop amongst the younger generations of British Muslims and not among the first generation. In the field setting, I came across several young Muslims who identified themselves as Muslims but mentioned that they did not know much about Islam, and that they did not do much in the way of religious practice. Such a generation, to me, held a position in which they belonged, but did not actually belong, to the Muslim religious community. Answering my question about reasons that potentially lead to the potential radicalisation of young Muslims in Britain, Laila, a first generation 34-year-old Yemeni woman explained her experience with her four children, who suffered the paradox several young Muslims face. She said:

Parents come from a different country while they [young Muslims] live in another country. The language is different and religion is different. He [a young Muslim] did not learn who he is, is he white or black? They [young Muslims] are put in the middle somewhere so they [young Muslims] develop a hesitant personality. They do not know where to go, to the left or to the right. So, when something serious happens such as social, economic and/or emotional trouble and when there is somebody willing to misuse and exploit this by empowering him and showing him tenderness...this could be being involved in drug addiction, prostitution, suicide, extremism...whatever. Most importantly is that they take them from a state of hesitation to a sense of stability, whatever it is... I certainly do not support this. I wish each family would teach their children what is right and what is wrong and not leave them in the grey area that is always marginalised.

Theological deprivation not only relates to the scope and nature of knowledge young Muslims have about Islam, but also to the way young Muslims link to theological hubs such as mosques. From my own experience in the field, I found that mosques remained largely distanced from the community (and from the younger generations in particular). Mosques were only places to offer prayers, merely opening their doors at times of prayers and then closing back shortly after. In most of the mosques, the administrative posts were always held by older representatives, who often stayed at a distance from the community. In the field, I observed that mosques provided Quran and Arabic lessons for children, along with other charity-related activities, yet the narrow and reserved role of the mosque was a reality felt and criticised by many Muslims. For instance, local mosques were indeed involved with other institutions such

as the police to overcome potential radicalisation in Muslim communities and it was a common observation to find free posters and booklets within local mosques to explain that terrorism and extremism is un-Islamic. Yet, in most mosques there was no genuine engagement with youth through community-based activities or initiatives to ensure young British Muslims understand the right message of Islam. The needs of local communities failed to get represented in the decisions or initiatives of most of the mosques I visited because decision-making and planning of mosques activities were not open for local communities to take part in. Rather, the services provided by the mosque were often planned within a narrow circle of selected trustees. In line with my observations, my participants often commented that if they had any comments or reservations on certain theological matters (e.g. on the timing of congregation or on the approach or the knowledge of imams), their views would not be welcomed and/or heard, leaving these Muslims' theological needs and concerns unattended. This left many local Muslims confused and without reference points in terms of faith. The majority of my participants were in agreement over the minimal role played by mosques in terms of religious education and communication with the young generations.

Many of my interviewees highlighted this limited role of mosques and the inadequate religious services local Muslims received. Despite her close proximity to one of the largest mosques in Birmingham, Sally, a first generation 41-year-old Egyptian woman, had a very low level of satisfaction with the religious services provided by her mosque in terms of both quantity and quality. I asked Sally about the role of the mosque with radicalised young Muslims. I wanted to find out her view on the extent to which the mosque is responsible in this regard. Her answer was as follows:

No, those radicalised youth do not relate to the mosque. Most of them are actually involved in activities that are outside mosques. The mosque here, which I do not agree with, does not have enough activities except religious celebrations and prayers. There are no community supportive activities. If they had, they would be able to protect several youths. If you look back to the Manchester or London terrorists, everybody around them said that they were not coming to the mosque. The Manchester bomber, his father was the mosque's imam, but he himself left the mosque...he departed the mosque and stopped attending it and even left Britain and joined ISIS. If the mosque played a real role, and also the church, if both spread awareness, this would be the only source of correct information. But they get their information from outside the mosque.



An additional concern was that Muslims of Arabic origin felt that British Mosques were dominated by one version of Islam that did not correspond to their interpretation. Many first generation Arabs argued that most imams were not properly educated about religion, potentially educating teachings that were unrelated to Islam. In this context, Arab Muslims felt unable to fully engage into the wider Muslim community, leaving them and their younger generations with limited trusted reference points. This, many Muslims in the field were not only marginalised in terms of their outsider status, but also further marginalised within Muslim communities, which could make it difficult to find a place to belong. The risk of this is that it can potentially push young Muslims either completely away from their faith or to seek solace in more extreme interpretations of Islam. Hasnaa, the first generation 29-year-old Yemeni woman, found that mosques and Madrasas needed significant reforms regarding the content of the religious services they provide. She expressed her dissatisfaction with South Asian-led mosques, where she felt she did not belong. She said:

I got my daughter to study Arabic at the local mosque here. She came back saying TV is Haram [religiously wrong]. I said to her, look there are rules of watching TV but it is not Haram. I never took her again to the mosque. They teach them wrong things. Islam is not like this. Now I teach her at home... Generally in mosques, whether Arabic and/or South Asian, there is no supervision. They [mosques] are not even educated and not aware of what they do.

This comes in close agreement with previous research such as by Hoque (2019), who provided in-depth insights into how and why certain mosques in the UK fail to meet the needs of local Muslims. In addition to complaints about communication and contact between mosques and young worshippers, strong reservations have been expressed about how religious practices occur in certain South Asian mosques (Hoque 2019). This resonates with Yilmaz's argument that most mosques' clerics and ulama in the UK are imported from Pakistan, but few could be judged "sophisticated scholars of Islamic law and exegetes of the Qur'an" (2010: 105). In this context of dissatisfaction about the practice and performance of local mosques, second and third generation Muslims were left to self-educate through the web and/or through self-built study groups. During my stay in the field, I attended several study circles organised mainly by young youth who were largely self-educating themselves about religion. The meetings were arranged to discuss religious and spiritually related issues. While attending these study circles, I missed the presence of qualified imams or religious leaders as trusted sources

of religious knowledge, to lead the process of religious education. The Saudi first generation 31-year-old Ahmed highlighted the danger of religious self-education amongst Muslims, saying:

Now we have people who read [theological] books and interpret the books and verses according to their own understanding. It was never like this. Reading 10,000 books related to medicine will not make you a doctor unless you accompany a doctor, so this is the reason and the root of the problems. We are facing a minority of Muslims who have been educating themselves wrongly

Young Muslims who found very little religious support from their local mosques or from their perceived 'traditional' parents were often left with only one option, which was to lead their own religious learning journey. Several participants argued that in an atmosphere with limited religious clarity and literacy there is room to develop and/or gain misinformation about Islam. In this view, the limited theological guidance of many Muslims, particularly the British born, created a religious vacuum which could potentially be filled with extreme ideas in their search for religious certainty. In a comparative analysis of Britain, Uzbekistan and Egypt, Yilmaz, in agreement with my findings, found that 'theological deprivation is the major factor that paves the way for radicalization of the Muslim youth when socio-economic and political deprivations already exist' (2010: 99). Compared to Muslims elsewhere in Muslim countries, Muslims in the UK are largely theologically deprived (Yilmaz 2010: 100; Frampton et al. 2016). In support of this, Hoque, in his study on young Muslims in Luton, found that a significant proportion of young Muslims lack a basic knowledge of Islam (2019: 84). Radical groups often benefit from such a theological vacuum. In Arab Muslim countries, for instance, the absence of such a vacuum and the higher likelihood of theological knowledge and literacy have made it challenging for the radical discourse of Hizbul-Tahrir to gain the support of Arab Muslims, despite its presence in the Middle East for over half a century (Yilmaz 2010: 110-112). In Muslim countries (particularly Arab Muslim countries), there is a greater potential for Muslims to gain an understanding of what Islam is all about due to the availability and easy access to religious institutions, along with the availability of high profile theologians and ulama.

Muslims in the field often longed for theological sources whom they could trust to provide religious guidance. Lacking this in the UK context made many Muslims refer instead to high-profile religious figures and/or instructions in Muslim countries (e.g. Tariq Jameel and Taqi Uthmani in Pakistan and Al-Azhar in Egypt). In my meetings and interactions with local

Muslims, I often heard how they depend on foreign figures for their religious literacy and guidance, finding no such figures in their British local mosques. Guided by my field immersion, I concluded that part of the identity crisis amongst young British Muslims (as well as in the older generations) is that they lack the theological guidance of high-profile Muslim imams and/or ulama who particularly understand their situation in the British context. Even religious organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain fail to represent the majority of British Muslims. British Muslims felt less represented both in political terms, and in faith-related terms. This representation issue was reflected in the survey-based study by Frampton et al. who highlighted that only 2% to 4% of British Muslims support the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and that outside London, support turned out to be ‘vanishingly small’ (Frampton et al. 2016: 8). This was also emphasised by Mirza et al., who strikingly emphasized that only 6% of their respondents felt represented by the MCB (2007: 80).

Remarkably, the official discourse puts the responsibility for fighting extremism and radicalisation on Muslims themselves. Muslims do indeed carry a responsibility for fighting radicalisation, however, their capability to do so is limited by economic, social and identity restraints (such as religious illiteracy). My field observations made it clear that Muslims, particularly the younger generation, were not even prepared for this fight as significant numbers of them did not know much about their faith. The majority of young Muslims I came across in the field were limited in their awareness of Islamic guidance and instructions. In the field, I often discussed with my participants the case of the Manchester Arena bomber and ISIS brides (e.g. Shamima Begum). The majority of them typically mentioned that those cases were mainly cases of ‘brainwashing’. The possibility of brainwashing is more likely in a context such as the British one, where second and third generation Muslims find it difficult to comprehend and differentiate between what is Islamic and what is non-Islamic, as they are mostly uneducated about their faith. Many young Muslims would not be capable of properly responding if offered extreme interpretations of Islam. In such a theological vacuum, extreme interpretations of Islam could appear as the only side of the story for many young Muslims. The likelihood of believing in this side only is particularly high when it is the only available side in a context of theological deprivation. In such a context, any offered solution, amid a loss of significance in the wider society, could be taken as a ‘truth’.

### **4.3 Declining Religiosity: Better Integration?**

Governmental and academic concerns have soared over the apparent religious assertiveness of British Muslims (the young in particular) and the likelihood of radicalisation. Comparatively, less concern has been given to ‘Muslims going in the opposite direction – those who not only turn away from radicalisation but from Islam itself’ (Anthony 2015). Although I have met and interviewed young Muslims who have been clear about their religious identity and its construction, I met others who were reluctant to practise their faith due to personal choice, fear of stigma, and/or the inability to sufficiently grasp what their religious heritage required. This section sheds light on this group of Muslims in my field site, elaborating the reasons for declining religiosity amongst Muslims, and the potential risks of this decline.

#### **4.3.1 Reasons for Declining Religiosity**

Non-practising Muslims in my field site were divided into two main groups. The first group developed an independent choice to be non-practising. This group seemed to have easier routes to acceptance in the wider community due to them being largely assimilated. For this group there was hardly a distinction between them and the mainstream culture except in racial aspects. Despite identifying as Muslims, participants of this group, unlike the case of practising Muslims, did not practice the Muslim faith in terms of worship, religious rituals, dress and/or dietary habits. Compared to first generation, a significant proportion of my participants of young British-born Muslims experienced religious uncertainty and vagueness. Uncertainties and ambiguities were also more likely for the third generation than it was for the second generation. As generations went further from the first generation, identity (religious and ethnic) began to be symbolic. Previous research by Gans (1979: 6) also found that the decline in religious affiliation in younger Muslim generations increases as the link with and the function of their parents’ home country and culture fades with the passage of years.

In a context of wider secularisation and religious de-emphasis (Cheesman 2007; Tatari 2014), growing cultural hybridity can increase the distance between Muslims (the young in particular) and their religious identity. In the field, it was clearly notable how hybrid young British Muslims in particular were, with many of them more dominated by the British aspect of identity than ethno-religious aspects: many were much further from their religious heritage

than they were from the British culture. Second and third generation Muslims' world views were more individualistic and rational, keeping them at a distance from their families and the religious community, which were often deemed restrictive by them. For instance, it was very common despite being in a Muslim dominant area to see many young women who did not wear the headscarf, and who opted for Western-style outfits. It was common to hear families' complaints about young Muslims not visiting the mosque and not being committed to their prayers and the fasting of Ramadan. I came across many families in the field who had concerns about their children losing the moral code of Islamic behaviour and hence being inclined to gang activities, smoking, taking drugs, etc.

A much 'freer' lifestyle such as socialising on Saturday and Sunday nights was more fascinating for this group of Muslims than being in a religious milieu. While Islam informed the lifestyle of practising Muslims, non-practising Muslims absorbed Western world views, attitudes and life styles (e.g. relationships, night life, dietary habits). This echoes the findings of Bhabha and Parekh (1989: 72) that 'Muslims are being increasingly de-Islamified and gradually sucked into the dominant culture'. Similarly, Jacobson argues that, 'young British Muslims are more tuned into British wave lengths than their migrant elders' (1997: 241). Second and third generations in particular are more inclined to pass through identity reformulation leading to full assimilation into the culture of the host society (Anjum et al. 2019: 44; Pettersson 2007; Hoque 2019).

On the other hand, there also existed a second group of non-practising Muslims who identified themselves as Muslims but felt coerced by a context of prejudice and stigma to limit their involvement with and practice of the faith in order to secure a more stable position in the wider society. During my field immersion I observed that a great proportion of Muslims in the field site were adopting pragmatic and non-confrontational approaches regarding their religious practices when they came into contact with other communities. This was to achieve a form of cultural reconciliation that helped them navigate the sceptical environment towards Muslims. For instance, many young Muslims presented their inherited religious identity as a symbolic affiliation, a compromise expected to secure them a position between the two cultures. This group would identify themselves as Muslims but would not commit to religious-based views and/or behaviours.

Many Muslims in the field had to compromise on practising certain Islamic rituals such as prayers in the workplace, fearing what non-Muslims might think. As McAndrew and Voas

highlighted, study and work commitments might move young Muslims to adopt a pragmatic approach towards their religious practices (2014: 110). This was also apparent for the younger generations, including Muslim children. Muslim children in practising families were often raised on the obligation of daily five prayers, of fasting during Ramadan and of modesty, but these teachings created serious difficulties in application in their day-to-day lives. A number of families in the field setting complained that their children were restricted in offering prayers at schools and that they found difficulty in observing fasting during the month of Ramadan. Others (particularly secondary school girls) found it difficult to follow Islamic instructions of modesty with certain school uniforms. These day-to-day dynamics increased the blurriness of understanding the self among many young Muslims, putting them in a position where they were unable to define exactly where they fit in.

It was undeniably common to hear positive comments from my respondents on how they valued the acknowledgement of their religious difference in the UK. Nonetheless, this optimistic outlook does not deny the difficulties many Muslims experience which impact on how they actually think of and experience their religious identity and thereby integration. A conversation with Sophia, a white English Muslim convert woman in her late 50s, led me to question my own initial assumptions about integration in the UK. She whispered to me ‘I am a Muslim but I do not disclose it. But the mosque and many Muslims know that I am a Muslim. I am a Muslim, I believe in God, I fast during Ramadan, and I offer prayers’. Her comment stunned me because Sophia was not a traditional-looking Muslim (e.g. no head covering or Muslim dress code). Sophia confirmed to me that she practised her religion secretly at home, but she did not want to disclose her identity in public following her experience with white neighbours and friends, explaining that she had been harassed, intimidated and threatened by her neighbours in her largely white neighbourhood. Sophia’s story reveals the complexities of hybrid identities in the UK. Married to a Tunisian Muslim, she continued that she had been attacked in her local area because of her son’s more visible difference. As a result she had decided to disguise her affiliation to gain acceptance within the community. Sophia mentioned that if asked, she would say that she was Christian to ease the social pressure she might face. Other participants of Pakistani and Arabic backgrounds explained how they were discouraged from, for example, sending their children to Muslim schools and/or overtly exposing their religious identity because this might impact on their later on opportunities in the labour market.

In this regard I would argue that despite some positive aspects to living in the UK, Islamophobia as a lived reality for many Muslims plays a role in discouraging a genuine feeling of religious freedom. Obvious Muslimness (such as wearing a head covering) would add to the complexities a Muslim might experience when interacting in their environment. Here, I recall a meeting with Carrie, a first generation 33-year-old Estonian white convert, who confirmed that she wore the hijab only within the confines of predominantly Muslim populated neighbourhoods because she did not feel safe enough to do so elsewhere. Facing this challenge, Carrie expressed her difficulty feeling home in and belonging to the UK. This story was echoed by Iman, a 29-year-old English-Moroccan woman, whose mother would not visit her home, located in a predominantly white area, fearing religious-based harassment because of having a face covering/veil. Shedding additional light on the difficulty of displaying Muslimness for Muslim women, Harita, a first generation 21-year-old Lithuanian woman, narrated how she was threatened when she converted to Islam and when she wore the head covering and how this pushed her to move to Birmingham where she expected to have a safer environment for her religious practice. Such life stories reveal the (self-imposed) restrictions placed on the lives of Muslims: leading Sophia to disguise her religious identity in public, driving Harita to move out of the town she used to live in to a city with higher proportion of Muslims and preventing Carrie and Iman's mother from displaying their Muslimness outside the confines of Muslim neighbourhoods.

#### **4.3.2 Potential Risks of Declining Religiosity**

Non-practising Muslims, according to secular official perceptions, are supposedly more likely to be successfully integrated (Candland 2000). While official and public debates often link non-mainstream religions (Islam in particular) to separatism (Blair 2006; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016), would non-religious Muslims in fact be more prone to be successfully integrated in the wider society? In the case of Muslims in non-Muslim societies, losing the attachment to the diasporic community (whether religious and/or ethnic) could raise serious risks for integration.

#### ***4.3.2.1 Belonging Nowhere***

British Muslims (the young in particular) fall into a paradox where they feel akin to their ethno-religious communities but not precisely the same, and they feel different from the wider society but not entirely different (Young 1995). Once they feel that they belong to the UK, they often get forced by wider stigma and otherness to bounce back to their ethnic/religious boundaries. It is, therefore, of paramount importance here to draw a line between self-identifying with Britain and being able to gain the recognition of one's Britishness from the wider society. Despite being of the second generation, Uzmah, a 47-year-old Pakistani woman, distinguished between her feelings of being British and being able to gain the recognition for this from the mainstream society. According to her:

I think I am British Pakistani and my daughter, my youngest daughter, she says, she is English okay but the English will never accept her as English. She will never be English. We may be classified as British but we will never be classified as English just because our colour and ethnicity is different.

In the case of British Muslims, the decline in religious and ethnic identity is not compensated for by national inclusion. Rather, it is paralleled with socio-political uncertainties, stigmatisation and exclusion. The fading link to their parents' ethnic and religious communities is simultaneously paralleled with a weak sense of inclusion in the wider community. In this context, Muslims (particularly the younger generations) are likely to be left in a vacuum with a doubled sense of alienation. The inability to belong anywhere left many young Muslims in the field with no direction, no purpose in life, no ability to contribute to society, no sense of significance and no points of reference. Many young Muslim youths with no Islamic reference point are potentially left with no available options except to get involved in drugs, gangs and other antisocial behaviours. With economic deprivation (see Chapter Five) and socio-political alienation, losing a moral code of behaviour and lacking belonging to one's ethno-religious community could potentially carry acute consequences. As belonging is associated with wellbeing and sense of significance (Hagerty et al. 1992; Correa-Velez et al. 2010; Fletcher 2015), a weakened or lost sense of belonging, as it was for many young Muslims in the field setting, is unsurprisingly linked to a loss of sense of significance and wellbeing. In a context of prejudice and social exclusion, loss of wellbeing and significance are both the indicators and the outcomes of failed integration.



While a restricted experience of living as a Muslim was a source of disaffection for a portion of my (restrictedly) practising participants, it was a source of other potential risks for non-practising participants (particularly the younger generations) because the possibility of belonging nowhere and feeling completely ‘rootless’ was higher in the latter group, particularly considering weak national inclusion mechanisms. Religion is an essential arena of socialisation for British Muslims. Fear over identity loss puts the upcoming generations under intensive pressures from their families against the perceived assimilative mechanisms in the wider society. While the first pulls them to ethnic and religious identity fearing identity loss, the second pulls them to national cultural sameness. This battle over identity creates generations not only with unsettled senses of belonging and conflicted feelings but also with sceptical and hateful attitudes. The young generations grow up in families that were fully socialised into their faith by virtue of being embedded in a Muslim country. Dealing with the pressures of their families (with a set of expectations) versus those of the broader society (with different expectations) makes growing generations of British Muslims either affiliate with one side against the other or to enter into a rejection of both sides, with a possible consequence of being left either with no identity and/or with a deformed subjectivities. Such mounting pressure was also observed by Hoque as he investigated the case of young Muslims in Luton. In his account of how hybrid Muslims negotiate their hyphenated identity, he argued that ‘the syncretic experiences within the habitus of the South Asian Muslim “home”, coupled with influential interactions with “mainstream British society”, has led to the rejection of both points of reference’ (Hoque 2019: 2).

Ahmed (2005) presented an important analysis in this regard as he brought attention to the reality of many Muslims who face identity reconciliation difficulties and its expected negative consequences. As he argued, Muslim children face a situation in which ‘their parents, on one hand, tend to teach collectivism, religious commitment and gender role differentiation. On the other hand, school and wider society espouse individualism, secularism and gender equality’ (Ahmed 2005: 36). Furthermore, being placed between family socialisation as a Muslim and the outer increasing stigmatisation creates a ‘schizophrenic contradiction’ for many Muslims (Modood 1997: 158). Through my field interactions, I found that this ‘schizophrenia’ puts a range of limits on Muslims’ abilities to integrate because it created inner conflicts for many (particularly the bicultural generations), who in fact became victims of cultural contestations. Formed through a primary source of socialisation, a diasporic sense, even if fading, is expected to remain for generations. As Pettersson soundly argues, values

engrained through primary socialization are less likely to fade away or vanish (2007: 95). In his observation of the attitudes and behaviours of third generation ethnic minorities, Gans emphasised that ethnic ties may decline for the third generation, but ‘people of this generation continue to perceive themselves as ethnics’ (1979: 7). The complete dissolution of values learnt through primary sources of socialisation is less likely to happen and there will always remain a distinctive line in the inner self of a person. In this way, the younger generations remain somehow connected and related to their cultural heritage, though it is a connection that does not guarantee a genuine sense of belonging. Amid weak national inclusion, such groups of Muslims face the risk of finding no place to belong.

In a context of limited national inclusion, restricted religious (along with ethnic) identity in the case of my field setting contributed to creating a significant vacuum for many participants. In addition to illbeing and loss of significance, the problem of unsettled belonging left many young Muslims in a cultural void. A significant majority amongst my young participants stated that they did not feel at home in their parents’ homeland but they also had not fulfilled their aspirations of belonging and equal citizenship in the UK (see Chapter Six). This was echoed by Maxwell, who found that the ‘second generation will feel lost and not fully accepted in their country of birth, yet also without ties to the parents’ culture’ (2006: 748). This confusion was expressed by Sabrina, a third generation 22-year-old Pakistani woman:

When we go to Pakistan, they are like, ‘they are British’, ‘they are not really Pakistani’, ‘they are British’. So, where do we fit? The British say we are not British, and Pakistanis are saying we are not Pakistani. Well who are we?!

No doubt, for many, not abiding by certain Islamic rituals could ease the process of broader social acceptance and thereby integration, as many of my participants argued. By not restricting themselves with Islamic instructions, this group found a much smoother way to integrate and to gain acceptance by the wider (non-Muslim) society. Adhering to no religious-based considerations, it was much easier for this group to have inter-relations, inter-group marriages, socialise in bars and share the same dress codes and dietary habits of the wider population. However, for many, that declining religiosity did not necessarily involve certainty and attachment to British values. Even for those who willingly abandoned Islamic rituals, it was quite interesting to find them identifying themselves as Muslims. Therefore, the mere symbolic existence of religious identity does not necessarily imply its death and does not necessarily mean better integration/assimilation. Even if symbolic, a sense of religious heritage

is most probably expected to remain; a matter which keeps the sense of being ‘in-between’ always alive together with confusion over where to belong.

Despite value adaptation and the declining link to ethnic and religious communities, the feeling of being part of a diasporic culture and a transnational community remained present amongst most non-practising Muslims. The intensity of ethnic identity lessens as generations go further, though it could in its simplest forms remain for generations ahead. Despite that ethno-religious identities may become ‘symbolic’ in terms of practice and sense of belonging, it could, however, remain for generations (Gans 1979: 1). The younger generations (even with a nominal attachment to and practice of their faith) inherit some attitudes throughout their socialisation within the family system (Hamid 2011: 249). Certain values might dissolve and others might persist based on the source and intensity of these value teachings during the socialisation process (Pettersson 2007: 93), but these fading cultural symbols neither guarantee a strong affiliation to an ethnic/religious community nor do they represent any significance for a promoted integration into mainstream society. Amid feelings of an undefined image of the self (religious decline) together with an unsettled sense of belonging (weak national inclusion), less (non) practising Muslims show no better record of integration compared to practising Muslims. The negative impact of this unsettled dilemma could have the effect of passive and non-integrated citizens. Yet, it might also lead to an alarming outcome in the search for the self and for significance (see section 4.2.4).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has answered my first research question through exploring the role of religious identity in shaping British Muslims’ understandings and experiences of integration. The chapter has elaborated how practising Muslims understand the concept of integration and those refuted mainstream arguments which link Muslim religiosity with non-integration. The chapter concluded by investigating how understanding Muslims’ integration into the UK requires, not painting British Muslims with a single brush, even in terms of their religious identity. Though it might look otherwise, British Muslims vary in their views and understandings of Islam. This chapter also showed how different ways of understanding and practising religious identity plays a role in shaping British Muslims’ sense of belonging and integration. In light of these divergences, it is important to emphasise that Muslims’

religiosity/non-religiosity can be a route both to integration and to segregation. The route to either destination is determined by a complex set of factors that go beyond Islamic values. The following chapter moves to answer the second research question on the meanings Muslims attach to their places of settlement and their perceptions of Muslim-concentrated areas, and then explores the day-to-day impacts of these areas on integration.

## **Chapter Five: Understanding Muslim Residential Concentrations**

## 5.1 Introduction

In his speech on race relations following the 2005 London bombings, the then chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips, stated that ‘the images of strangers of different races and religions comforting each other as they emerged from the London bombings showed a city united in the face of terror’ (CRE 2005: 4). In the same speech Phillips asserted that ‘the fact is we are a society which, almost without noticing it, is becoming more divided by race and religion’ (CRE 2005: 10). Phillips’s words sparked intensive debates and heated controversies in the aftermath of these 7/7 bombings. His self-contradictory statements underline the dilemmatic understanding of segregation/integration in British official discourses. Both statements, which came in opposite directions, raise questions about whether the UK is truly sleep-walking into segregation and whether all segregation is worrying. And most importantly, it raises the question of what segregation in fact refers to. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, at the initial stages of my fieldwork I was more inclined to agree with mainstream discourses regarding Muslims’ ‘*self-segregation*’. I, then, perceived the scale of ethnic concentrations in Birmingham as striking and I was loaded with questions on how and why such residential patterns were formed in the Muslim community there.

After twelve months of ethnographic immersion in one densely concentrated Muslim neighbourhood in the city of Birmingham, I noticed a change in my preconceptions and assumptions about the reality of residential ethnic concentrations. This chapter argues that residential segregation is not ultimately negative or wrong and challenges the way political mainstream discourses (and some academic discourse) perceive ‘segregation’ (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016). The chapter is comprised of three main sections. The first section explains, through the mundane realities of Muslims, the reasons for these residential concentrations and elaborates the ethno-religious, economic and safety-related aspects of British Muslims’ choice of residence. The second outlines the impacts and consequences of residential concentration on opportunities for social and economic mobility and on chances for social mixedness. The third section then engages with the debate on Muslim ghettoisation, outlining whether or not Muslims residential segregation is cause for alarm.

## **5.2 A Choice or a Constraint? Reasons for Muslim Residential Concentration**

This section offers a nuanced picture of the reasons and perceptions that shape British Muslims' choice of residence. In my field setting, choosing a place of residence was often a complex decision where multiple factors contributed to the final decision. It is therefore not possible to draw definite conclusions about or identify any single unified assessment of the causes and consequences of Muslim residential concentrations. However, for the sake of analysis I will discuss all the reasons mentioned by my participants in order to shed light on these residential choices.

### **5.2.1 Ethno-Religious Motives for Residential Concentration**

The role of ethno-religious considerations in British Muslims' residential choices has been widely contested. Official discourses find that Muslims' distinctiveness from the majority society leads them to self-segregate (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016; HM Government 2018). Others find that Muslims' religious identity does not play any significant role in forming their residential choices and sense of belonging (Sarre 2007; Peach 1996a; Heath and Roberts 2008). In the field, I found that both underestimating and overestimating the role of ethno-religious factors in residential choices were empirically falsified. For example, I came across a considerable number of Muslims whose residential choices were driven largely by their religious needs and interests. As mentioned in the previous chapter, practising Muslims would generally prefer to live in proximity to mosques and other religious community members for the sake of their spiritual practice as well as to preserve their/their children's religious identity. I observed that ethnicity also played a major role for many others, particularly South Asian Muslims, who generally preferred to stay in an ethnic-concentrated area in order to be closer to their families and friends, as well as to have easy access to ethnic facilities such as traditional food and clothes shops.

However, I equally criticise the oversimplification and overestimation of official discourses, where the Muslim community is portrayed as a unified against the wider society, and where the Muslim faith is falsely presented as the only criterion forming Muslims' sense of belonging to Britain. In this view, Muslims are perceived as a unified 'other' versus a unified 'us', which is empirically and politically false and misleading (Heath and Roberts 2008; Kaya

2012). As explored in the previous chapter, Muslims link both to their faith and to the Muslim community in general in multiple different ways. My being a Muslim in a Muslim concentrated area did not, as explained in the methodology chapter, make me an automatic part of the community there. I was rather considered an ‘other’ for a variety of reasons, such as ethnic background, nationality and religious practice as well as economic status. I was not automatically accepted and welcomed in the community just because of my faith. Gaining social acceptance was a complicated field challenge. This is not to deny the role of ethno-religious considerations in informing the behaviors and choices of British Muslims, but the stereotypical assumption in official desegregation discourse according to which Muslims’ religious difference accounts for their autonomous choice to self-segregate is indeed invalid. I argue here that this stereotypical assumption ignores not only their *in-group* ethno-religious differences but also overlooks a number of empirical facts such as the heterogeneity of residential choices amongst British Muslims.

During my time in the field for a duration of twelve months I found that overall, British Muslims do not have a common perception with regard to their choice of residential existence. In a conversation with a group of seminar attendees at one of the local mosques, I discovered that they were living in affluent areas of Birmingham, which were mostly mixed/dominantly white. I perceived that group of Muslim men and women as being practising and affluent, not only from the way they spoke but also from their appearance. Despite being religiously practising Muslims, for them, the practice and preservation of identity did not relate to being close to the same religious community and/or living in Muslim concreted area. I similarly came across parents who chose their places of residence based on proximity to schools with high Ofsted ratings, understanding that they could instead drive to mosques for religious practice. In these cases, they valued being able to send their children to a school with a high Ofsted rating above proximity to a mosque. Through my visits to local mosques I also got to know a number of Muslims (South Asians in particular) who were conscious of their ethnic identities, yet not living in Balsall Heath or ethnic-concentrated areas in general, believing that they could meet their needs (e.g. shopping and/or family visits) over the weekends. During my immersion in the field, I witnessed a number of first generation Muslims who moved out of Balsall Heath once they improved their socio-economic circumstances and once they developed a confident sense of adaptation and familiarity with British culture. While ethno-religious motives of residential segregation might be perceived as a source of separatism, for first generation



Muslims and new Muslim immigrants in the field, ethnic links not only eased the process of adaptation and fitting in but also decreased the pressures of immigration.

Furthermore, the racialised official discourse overlooks generational divides. My younger participants generally had greater aspirations to live in better areas and to have higher standards of life; while their parents/grandparents preferred to live in areas to which they were used and where they had long-time social contacts and friends. Residential choices were also based on the consequences of historic migration. In the early days of immigration, immigrants had low-paid jobs and were therefore consequently obliged to settle in the most deprived city areas (Peach 1996a; Phillips 2006; Kaur-Stubbs 2008). The inclination of the second generation to move out of Balsall Heath was reflected on by Hamid, a second generation 38-year-old self-employed Yemeni man. His parents' generation was, as he described, keen to live closer to other co-ethnics to provide moral and if possible financial support for each other. As he said, 'if one is not well or sick or something [like that], they can actually go and visit them easily and just come back'. The more recent generations, however, according to Hamid, as soon as they get better off:

They buy houses somewhere like Solihull, Shirley, Hall Green wherever they can afford somewhere within a distance from Balsall Heath. They believe 'Why shouldn't we?' They speak the language. They are more moderate. They get jobs and they get income, where before [there was] a language barrier. Language barrier such as if somebody knocks on your door, the wives sometimes were hesitant to open the door because they would not even know what the person was saying, so they stick together. But now I think things have changed.

During my field immersion, I observed that many of those who were living in Balsall Heath were first generation immigrants, whereas the second and third generations often moved out of these ethnically concentrated areas, largely as a result of them being born and/or raised in Britain. The second and third generations had/have more social, educational, linguistic and economic privileges than their first-generation parents/grandparents, which gave them an extended freedom of choice regarding their place of residence. In my field setting, I observed that the British-born generations did not bother a lot about issues of fitting in and social acceptance as much as their non-British-born parents. The linguistic and educational skills of the later generations were enough to enable them to easily build bridges and maintain coexistence with the majority population. As I wandered around the city, it was common to

find mixed friendships in the younger generations in particular. The positive impact of language was certainly noticeable through my experience in the field. Due to my fluency in the Arabic language, it was much easier for me to make contact with the Arabic community in the area, compared to other Muslim ethnicities. This helped me realise how first-generation immigrants would have felt in terms of their need to have easy and familiar styles of contact amid their new diasporic experiences as they migrated to the UK.

These observations do not override the presence of ethno-religious parameters in the lives of many Muslims. I came across other Muslims such as my neighbour Hamda, whose ethno-religious considerations played a major role in defining her place of residence. Hamda was a Yemeni woman in her thirties, and she found it irrational that I took my children to a relatively far away school just because of its Ofsted ratings. In her view, the local school was not only geographically closer, but also had the advantage of ethnic proximity, where the whole community was, as she said, in support of each other. For Hamda and many others, residential segregation was a voluntary choice to stay close to family and friends and/or to have easy access to ethnic and/or religious facilities such as mosques, halal shops and ethnic clothes shops. This logic was naturally plausible for some of my participants as, in their viewpoints, it gave them the comfort of getting their day to day needs easily. This was also perceived beneficial not only for Muslims but also for other communities whose needs would be better served with residential separation. The third generation 20-year-old university student Shakir, who lived in an affluent mixed-ethnic area of Birmingham stated that:

I think they [Muslims] are quite content with how things are. So, if a Muslim family is arriving from Pakistan then naturally they may settle in an area like this, you know, Small Heath, something like that. And I do not feel that if they go to another area they will be rejected. It's just that they feel more at home here. It is natural... They got more stuff around them, people who have the same interest and speak the same language. I do not think there's rejection but I just think people are more comfortable doing that.

I challenged Shakir on his viewpoint and asked him to take the perspective of the white British population on segregated areas into account, asking: 'You find an excuse for residential segregation because you are a Muslim yourself. What about the perspective of white majority population? Do you think they see these areas the same as you see it?' Shakir felt that both white and Muslim communities are satisfied with the way housing was managed in

Birmingham because each community has easy access to the facilities that matter most for its members. He responded:

If everybody, Asian Muslims, black people and white people, all lived in the same area, then a white person may have a Masjid [a Mosque] at the bottom of his road for example. Or they may not have a pub and things like that and they would probably prefer more people around them similar to them, things around them that they like. As long as it does not disturb neighbouring areas, I think they would prefer a white area or, for me, an Asian area as long as it does not cause disturbances.

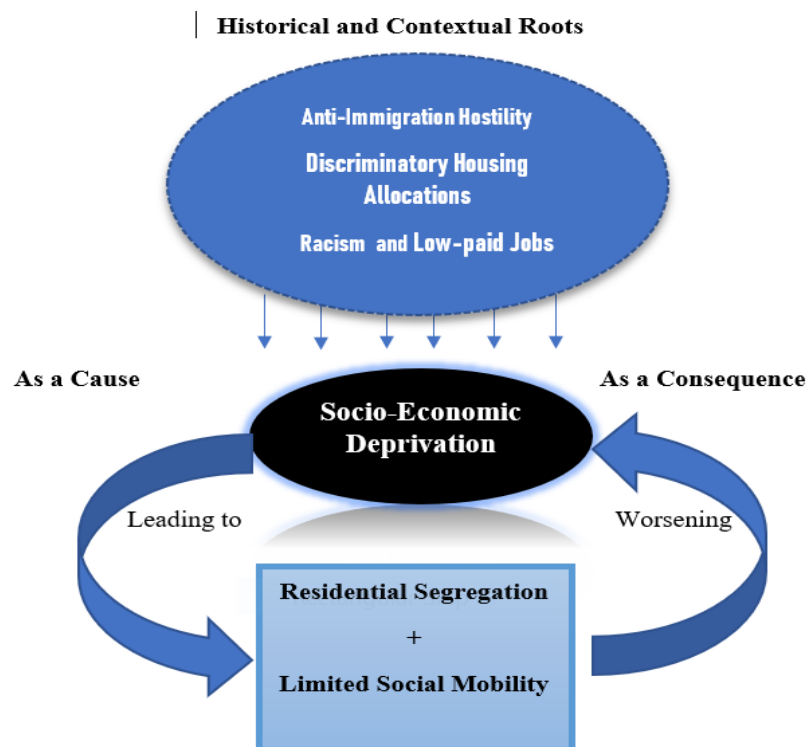
Shakir travelled from an affluent area of Birmingham to a mosque in Balsall Heath in order to maintain his social ethnic links and perform religious activities (e.g. offering prayers and engaging with local charities). Despite finding a justification for ethnic concentrations, he clearly drew a line between himself and the ‘they’ who opted to stay in such areas. This was a common attitude amongst Muslims with higher socio-economic status, who would often criticise concentrated communities, closely echoing the official narratives. As will be shown in the next section, people with economic hardships preferred these concentrated areas due to the low cost of living (e.g. house rents and council taxes) and due to the possibility of benefiting from close ethnic links in finding job opportunities.

Before meeting Shakir and others with similar opinions, I had that same initial negative perception of Muslim concentrated areas. I personally felt this implied distinction, the same as Shakir, between ‘us’, the integrated Muslims, and ‘them’, the segregated/concentrated Muslims. Nevertheless, as I began to experience the dynamics of life in Muslim concentrated areas, my perspective on the good and the bad sides of these areas changed. I experienced for myself the ease of being close to mosques and ethno-religious facilities. As will be detailed in the next section, a significant number of the residents in Balsall Heath were economically deprived, which made their proximity to services and facilities crucial as it saved them the cost of getting there if living away. These communities were naturally founded within the proximity of mosques and local ethnic and Halal shops. Living in Balsall Heath, I could see how straightforward and comfortable it was to have access to a mosque just two minutes away from home. This not only saved time, but also money. For instance, a middle-class family could afford to rent a house in a predominantly white area in Birmingham such as Erdington, but having access to a grand mosque (e.g. Birmingham Central Mosque) would require transportation and hence an impact on the budget which could be challenging for many in the

field setting. The mundane experiences of such economic restraints amongst Muslims in Balsall Heath will be discussed in detail in the following section.

### **5.2.2 Economic Constraints as a Barrier to Residential Dispersion**

Determining the link between residential segregation and signs of socio-economic deprivation (shown in the methodology chapter) was a pressing question during my fieldwork. During my field immersion I would repeatedly come back to two questions: Was economic deprivation among Muslims in Balsall Heath an outcome of their residential segregation? Or was their residential segregation a by-product of being already socio-economically deprived? During my stay in the field setting, I found that residential segregation was both an outcome of economic deprivation and, simultaneously, a cause of worsening economic deprivation. Empirically, many Muslims I came across in Balsall Heath were driven by their financial constraints to opt for ethnic-concentrated areas as places of residence due to the lower cost of living there (Goodchild and Cole 2001; Musterd 2003; Maloutas 2004; Kaur-Stubbs 2008). However, living there was more likely to worsen their already deprived circumstances due to the hard-to-break cycle of deprivation. Figure 5.4 shows my model of the two sides of socio-economic deprivation, as both a consequence and a cause of residential segregation.



*Figure 5.4: Socio-Economic Deprivation as a Cause and a Consequence*

Although non-economic explanations of British Muslims' residential concentration are empirically valid, economic considerations appeared to be the more substantial ones in shaping my participants' housing choices. For a significant number of my participants living in Balsall Heath was strongly associated with their economic circumstances. Locals' experiences showed this in different situations. One of my neighbours in the field setting, Laila, a first generation 34-year-old Yemeni woman, was concerned about religious identity, and was satisfied with being in a convenient location close to all ethnic and religious amenities. Nonetheless, she had a deep desire to move from her council house in Balsall Heath to one in a better area of Birmingham, regardless of its ethnic composition. After lengthy process, this mother of four with low socio-economic resources failed to swap her house due to high exchange fees. Several others during my fieldwork similarly revealed that their decisions over housing in Balsall Heath were linked to their inability to afford higher rents in what they perceived to be better areas.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, Balsall Heath is considered one of the most deprived areas in Birmingham. With many families at/near the poverty line (Balsall Heath

Forum 2015:19), moving out of Balsall Heath could not be a realistic choice for a significant portion of the Muslim community there. The marginalisation of Muslims in the city's governing structures and local policies means that little has been done to address economic disadvantage in areas of Muslim concentration (O'Toole 2021: 2502). High rates of unemployment and low annual incomes (Balsall Heath Forum 2015: 19) have restricted residents' ability to afford better housing, and have also limited their opportunities for relocation.

It was not uncommon to hear locals expressing their desire to move out of Balsall Heath due to their dissatisfaction with the services and opportunities in the neighbourhood, such as lack of secondary schools, densely packed primary schools, overwhelmed healthcare facilities and low public hygiene and cleanliness levels (bin days were sometimes missed for weeks, leaving garbage and litter accumulated on the roads). These local concerns were supported by my lived experience in the field, where I came to understand how areas such as Balsall Heath seemed to be forgotten areas in terms of services and opportunities compared to affluent areas. My financially overwhelmed participants maintained their social survival by being closer to fellow ethnics. Those close community links provided them with a sense of support against the powerlessness represented in a range of socio-economic deprivations. From my formal and informal conversations and interactions with the locals, I am convinced that improving socio-economic conditions of many of those I met in Balsall Heath would encourage them to relocate to better areas, and not necessarily predominantly Muslim ones. Asking her about the reason behind British Muslims' residential concentration, Uzmah, the second generation 47-year-old Pakistani woman who was living in another nearby Muslim-dense area but working in Balsall Heath, argued that:

It is not just the Muslim community that are in their pockets [segregated neighbourhoods]. The white communities are just as much in their pockets and they choose not to come to [ethnic-concentrated areas]; and I think it is more of an economic divide than possibly a faith-based divide because when they get the money and the finances people do move out. People do choose to move out... So if you have got somebody in Solihull who has got half a million pound house and they are looking to move, they are not going to look to move to Birmingham city where the house is £100,000. They are going to look for something that's £600,000 or £700,000. It is an economic divide as well.

The impact of poor economic circumstances on residential choices was not restricted to Muslims only. Other communities in Balsall Heath-- Afro-Caribbean, Romanian and the white population-- were also sharing the deprived conditions of the area. However, the racialised discourses single out British Muslims against other communities, and against the native population in particular. This was further elaborated by Hamid, the second generation 38-year-old Yemeni man, who added that:

Like you say it [Balsall Heath] has become like 80% of it Muslims. I will not take that as negative. I certainly would not because I see the English still here --few-- but I see them. Romanians are here. I see the Jamaicans are still about. And I bet you...if any of these Arabs, Pakistanis or Bangladeshi... If they got the money to buy a house in Solihull they would do that. It is not about harmony with English people. Sometimes it is the means... It is the financial means because that is how it is in Hall Green. I myself, I have got a house here....I have been looking for a house in Hall Green [or] Shirley. I would go even further if my budget was bigger because I worked in Solihull and I could see how they are. They are a lot higher. They are more affluent than in Balsall Heath. And I would love to live there if I got the financial capacity. Obviously if I won the lottery I will buy the house there but it is sometimes the financial means that determines where you live.

The perspectives of Uzmah and Hamid were frequently echoed in the local community. For a significant portion of my participants, the decision to take housing in Balsall Heath was more an economic decision rather than a religious and/or ethnic-based decision. This resonates with the analysis of Maloutas who, taking the Athenian context as a case study, highlighted the significance of social mobility on residential patterns, stating that ‘the socially mobile will inevitably relocate’ (2004: 196).

I found that affluent Muslims, however, behaved differently with regard to their residential choices. It was my frequent habit to wander around in Balsall Heath and several other areas in the city. I would buy a day bus ticket and move from one area to another. For the sake of comparison, I wandered around in affluent areas of Birmingham and was also invited for tea in some Muslim households in those areas, where I observed the noticeable differences in the living standard of the people in privileged and non-privileged areas. Those with better social mobility manifested liberal attitudes towards their housing choices than the less privileged. The benefits of living in better areas with better amenities outweighed for them the

benefits of living close to other co-ethnics. Unlike my deprived participants, my privileged participants had the support of their socio-economic power, which reduced their need to opt pure ethno-religious choices. They commonly expressed their criticism of the housing choices of British Muslims in Balsall Heath and similar areas. It was striking that these socio-economically privileged participants often underestimated the role of economic restrictions for the less privileged, largely adopting the governmental discourse on Muslim segregation. In seeing residential segregation as relating only to Muslim religious identity, Kareem, a second generation 39-year-old Pakistani man, described Muslims in concentrated areas as ‘the ghetto people’. Kareem was a businessman and owner of a medium-size company and a house in an affluent area of Birmingham. He explained that he was a frequent business traveller, working in different European countries. He perceived Muslims in ethnic-concentrated areas as willingly segregating. He said:

They are doing this willingly and this is the biggest problem... I think that is very wrong because for example Small Heath is, you know, 90% Muslim people, which is really good, I like it... I like going there. But, because I have been brought up here in Britain, I understand how a person --an English person, a non-Muslim person-- would feel if he went to Small Heath... That is why Muslims have a responsibility also. They cannot get away from this responsibility. They should learn from history that this is not the way Islam works.

As he stereotypically drew a line between himself, ‘the good integrated citizen’, and ‘those ghetto others’, he, as many other affluent Muslims, associated residential concentration with what they found as Muslims’ wrong interpretation of Islam. Economically privileged Muslims, just as the official discourses often overlooked, the income factor as a central determinant of their privileged housing choices, taking that easy and stereotypical route of associating concentrated residential choices and ethno-religious cultures. The viewpoint of Kareem and many others (such as the above-mentioned Shakir) showed, however, the heterogeneous nature of British Muslim communities which not only relates to their understandings of religious identity as I showed in the previous chapter, but also to their understandings of how they should relate to the wider society.

It is not argued here that improving the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in Balsall Heath would lead them all to relocate to mixed/white areas of Birmingham. As mentioned earlier, I came across many Muslims who opted to live in Balsall Heath based on



purely ethno-religious considerations. However, I argue that battling economic deprivation should increase the potential for residential dispersion for many. Socio-economic inequalities have led some scholars to consider poverty as a significantly important parameter in handling integration/segregation and to consider poverty and not racism as the central concern for ethnic minorities (Kaur-Stubbs 2008: 36). According to this viewpoint, the solution to divisiveness and segregation relies on an economic solution rather than a cultural one (Kaur-Stubbs 2008). Social and residential mixedness should not be demarcated along racial and ethnic lines; rather it needs to cover other parameters such as class, income and employment status (Goodchild and Cole 2001: 103). As Kaur-Stubbs argues, 'a focus on economics over culture, on class over race, is the key to Britain's solidarity and social harmony' (Kaur-Stubbs 2008: 34). Stubbs builds this argument on her view that Britain's multiculturalism has largely achieved its target in terms of fighting discrimination and racism. I will contest this dimension of Stubbs's argument at several points in this thesis, including the next two sections, however, Stubbs's call for an extra focus on the economic side of integration remains empirically sound and significantly needed, as supported by my ethnographic findings. Although I disagree with Stubbs for being overoptimistic about the success of state multiculturalism regarding racism and discrimination, her concerns over economic inequalities are largely persuasive and empirically echoed throughout my fieldwork. It is necessary to ensure that British Muslims (as every other ethnic minority and any less privileged community) are not left behind in terms of their socio-economic opportunities in order to enhance, not only their residential dispersion, but also their feelings of belonging and inclusion (Kaur-Stubbs 2008). In the field, I found that feeling economically vulnerable is likely to work against potential social mixedness, as will be further explained section (5.3).

### **5.2.3 Togetherness: A Collective Counterpower against Racism**

Despite not generalising feeling racism from the whole of British society, my participants did express their fear of being victims of racism. Because I would encounter local Muslims practising their daily lives as normal, I often perceived their anticipation of racism as magnified. However, an examination of the facts and statistics on racism justifies Muslims' concerns in this regard. Based on Tell MAMA's (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) report of 2014/2015, Littler and Feldman noted the existence of 153 offline anti-Muslim attacks, where 48 incidents were against women who were in most cases in obvious Muslim dress. Attacks

came in different forms, such as abuse, property damage, threats, assault and extreme violence (7% of the cases) (Littler and Feldman 2015: 3). As stated in the introductory chapter, with anti-immigrant sentiments inflamed following the EU referendum, Muslims have been among the most targeted for abuse (and European immigrants as the second-most targeted) (Burnett 2016: 23). Following the referendum, there was a sharp increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes, increasing from 12 incidents in the week before the referendum to 69 incidents the week after (Tell MAMA 2017: 7). In comparison, while 2016 witnessed a spike in offline anti-Muslim incidents (642 reported incidents), the 2017 (the year of my fieldwork) witnessed even further increase, to reach 839 incidents (Tell MAMA 2019: 27).

Not only do official discourses overlook the reality of racism in determining housing choices, but they also underestimate the historical and contextual roots of today's residential segregation. In the early days of post-World War II immigration, immigrants (today's citizens) found no way but to stick to each other to counter the then growing anti-immigration hostility (Kaur-Stubbs 2008). As Kaur-Stubbs states, 'in this hostile climate, immigrants were expected to know their place at the bottom of society. For those that failed to understand, notices in lodging houses and factories reminded them: "Blacks need not apply"' (2008: 34). Sarmad, a second generation 45-year-old Pakistani man, narrated the experience of his father and many others in the early days of immigration:

You would see the signs 'no Irish, no blacks, no dogs'. I think it was on the windows when you wanted to rent houses out. But the community stuck to themselves, so they helped each other very well in those days. So, in one house there will be 10 guys living in that house. One will sleep, one will get up, and the other one will sleep until the night shift begins.

Until the Race Relations Act of 1965, the 'no coloureds' signs were pervasive across the UK, restricting the housing opportunities and the residential dispersion of ethnic minorities (Peach 1996a: 388-389). Recalling history provides a profoundly meaningful explanation of my field findings, as I gathered from my first generation participants that Balsall Heath was in large part the original settlement area into which first generation Muslims were forced in the early days of immigration. Balsall Heath is consequently the place where many second generation participants were born and raised. During my field immersion, I often heard from second generation residents that they were born and had grown up in the area, and they had carried on living there since then. This context denotes the historical connotations of Muslim

residential concentration in my field site. Muslim residential concentrations emerged as a consequence of hostile early responses to immigration in the UK, where new immigrants were forced to live in marginalised areas not only because of their low incomes and restricted access to public housing but also to provide themselves with support against anticipated racist attacks (Peach 1996a; Phillips 2006; Kalra and Kapoor 2009).

Discriminatory housing allocation did not end after the 1965 Act, as private letting agencies continued to put additional conditions on ethnic minority tenants and councils continued to assign ethnic minorities to certain housing estates (Peach 1996a; Goodchild and Cole 2001; Phillips 2006; Bolt et al. 2010). Phillips (2006) and Borch (2019) argue that institutional racism has also hindered fair access to the housing market, which has minimised the freedom of residential choice and consolidated ethnic proximity and residential concentration. With reference to European academic discourse on the concept of ‘parallel societies’, Anita Borch argues that housing policies should be blamed for where immigrants end up living. Integration discourse, she argues, is biased as it ignores the impact of the housing market and policies (Borch 2019).

Fear over discrimination, racial harassment and lack of social acceptance constrained the housing choices of many participants, who stressed in particular their fears over racism. The highly demanding environment for Muslims to show their integration put the vast majority of them under a continuous social pressure to prove they are ‘good’ integrated citizens. This will be further explored in Chapter Six. However, for now it is important to unpack the dynamics of living in Muslim concentrated areas. Within my field setting it was strongly noticeable that ethnic-concentrated areas are places of social relief for many Muslims (and for immigrants in general). In such areas, Muslims/immigrants face less intense social pressures from the integration/segregation discourses. My participants often expressed that in dominantly Muslim areas they were not obligated to provide explanations for their religious behaviours, way of dress or life styles. This search for mutual understanding and social acceptance shaped how many of my participants chose homes.

In Balsall Heath, as in most predominantly Muslim/ethnic areas, Muslims could exert less effort to explain and express themselves. There was an obvious atmosphere of smooth social acceptance and coexistence amongst residents of all backgrounds. In Muslim-dense areas such as Balsall Heath, I observed and experienced that sense of freedom in expressing the self; a matter which enhances one’s feeling of being at home. In these areas, I often found

it was easier to find and create bridges between different communities (including the majority communities) due to the overall dominant multicultural atmosphere and due to the long presence of and co-existence between communities. Therefore, my participants often felt less pressure on them to show off their integration. I could see that in these areas no one is made accountable for how integrated/non-integrated he/she is in terms of outfits, religious practices, beliefs and/or behaviours. Despite the number of socio-economic challenges, from my own experience and from my social interactions in the field, I often found that ethnic/Muslim areas incubated and promoted a sense of freedom for its residents which they might not be able to enjoy in non-immigrant areas. Freedom from possible racism, stigmatisation, and prejudice enabled them to maintain overall sense of wellbeing and cohesion. Ethnic proximity represented a refuge for many Muslims against problems of social acceptance and social isolation. Their togetherness, consequently, enhanced their wellbeing and sense of community and increased their sense of belonging.

To evaluate the level of attachment between my participants and the UK, I often asked them about the likelihood of returning to their parents' homeland if for example they were offered a well-paid job. In her response to this question, Hania, a second generation 27-year-old Yemeni woman, emphasised her bond with Britain and firmly rejected the option of returning to her parent's homeland, saying:

I could not live in Yemen. I do not see myself living there because everything is different. Different lifestyle. The surrounding is different. Everything is just different. The culture is different. I think you have got freedom here plus the women have got more freedom here definitely.

Hania's comment relates to the problems of unsettled belonging, illbeing and loss of significance mentioned in the previous chapter, which have left many young Muslims in a cultural void. However, it also relates to the paradoxical position many Muslims experience as loyal British citizens. In Hania's case, her sense of commitment and attachment to the UK was not enough to enable her to move out of Balsall Heath despite her wish to do so. Her fears of anticipated racism and/or social rejection played a major role in this regard, and a detailed account of fear among Muslims will be further elaborated in the next chapter. The sense of comfort Hania had in Balsall Heath was strongly associated with her anticipation of social rejection, racial harassment and racism were she to live outside the area. She continued by saying:

I have lived in Balsall Heath my whole life. I never moved out of the area. I stayed within my comfort zone...I am worried if I move to a different area that probably I will get errrm,, like in some areas. Like when I used to go to school I used to get harassed on the bus by English people...it was a really racist area. When I used to go to school we used to get harassed by big boys and women.

During my time in the field, I did not personally experience racism. However, according to Hadyia, a second generation 49-year-old Afro-Caribbean woman, racism could take the form of hidden/implicit stigmatisation and/or prejudice, where one feels the other's implicit social rejection. She said:

I sometimes feel there is a difference in the way I am treated if I am wearing an abaya or if I am just wearing my hijab with my jeans and a long top. I sometimes see a bit of frustration and a bit of coldness. ...And definitely with my friends who wear the niqab, when I am with them they definitely get a different kind of reaction or response and so I do.

To my surprise, my participants did not consider minor acts of stigmatisation, prejudice or discrimination as something serious and/or something to be remembered or recalled. Many participants would initially deny any experience of racism. Later in the interview they would clarify that indeed they had experienced it. This happened for instance with the above-mentioned Hania, who negated her experience of racism at the start of the interview but then admitted that she had been racially harassed on the bus coming back from her school. Similarly Shakir negated his experience of racism and followed up by saying:

As long as you are in Britain I do not think there's racism. I feel that racism that happens in Britain is more *softer* racism, I do not think people will go and say X Y Z; whereas people may *just* treat you different or act in a certain way.

Muslims' acceptance of being treated in a racist way, as long as it is implicit or soft, represents a striking finding. Being in a position to accept/manage (soft) racism raises serious questions on the nature of citizenry rights Muslims have in Britain, in which many are pushed to accept and manage inequalities and social othering. Throughout my field immersion, I found that Muslims in Balsall Heath developed techniques to overcome their anticipation of racism, stigmatisation and/or prejudice. One technique was to stick together. This togetherness worked

as a collective counterpower against racism as it consolidated their sense of security. Perceived/actual racism and/or prejudice increased their psychological and emotional need for close ethnic links to promote their sense of safety. As Castells (2015: 10) argues in this regard, ‘togetherness is a fundamental psychological mechanism to overcome fear’. Ethnic togetherness decreased my participants’ sense of vulnerability when they anticipated/faced racism, and needed easier and safer practice of their ethno-religious identities.

### **5.3 Realities of Residentially Concentrated Areas: Potential and Limitations**

In the section above I have discussed the reasons behind the reality of Muslim residential concentration as a constrained choice, providing details of how Muslims make their choices of place of residence. Now, in this section I provide details on the lived realities of Muslims in Balsall Heath as a Muslim concentrated area. This section moves us forward and explores the day-to-day lived impacts of residential segregation. It does so in two parts: the first part explains the impact of residential segregation in consolidating already existing inequalities, and the second part scrutinises the impact of residential segregation on Muslims’ chances to have contact with and socially mix with other communities.

#### **5.3.1 Intersection of Socio-economic Inequalities and Residential Segregation**

As discussed earlier, economic deprivation acts as a stimulus for residential segregation. In this section, I explore the other side of the relationship between residential segregation and economic deprivation through examining the day-to-day, mundane local socio-economic conditions (see figure 5.4 above). This section argues that while many Muslims make a constrained decision for their place of residence, the ability to change the course of this decision might remain further constrained by the realities of these areas and as a result of wider inequalities.

During my immersion in the field, I observed that the younger generations had the advantage of ‘ethnic capital’ mainly as a result of their parents’ co-ethnic links, and this would facilitate their access to financial and social support as well as accumulated ethnic skills and experiences. On multiple occasions I observed how different families would exchange advice

and support to find job/business opportunities for each other's children. Furthermore, Balsall Heath as an ethnic-concentrated area provided a strong base for local ethnic businesses to grow as it served the pressing needs of local communities in terms of halal food shops and ethnic clothes shops (Balsall Heath Forum 2015: 4). However, I observed that this economic advantage was largely individualised. Positive economic impacts applied to only some parts of the community (mainly business owners and their families). Ethnic capital was not necessarily available throughout to benefit every member of the community. Rather, the economic success gained from ethnic capital provided its beneficiaries with an increased opportunity for upward social mobility. Ethnic concentration seemed to work positively only for some, leading to high economic dividends. For the majority of Muslims in the area, the availability of ethnic capital did not provide any obvious support; leaving a major portion of the community in/at the poverty line. As shown in the methodology chapter, high rates of unemployment and poverty in the area demonstrate that the positive impacts of ethnic capital were beneficial only for the few in the local community.

During my observations in the field, I realised that poverty not only shaped the economic choices of the local community (e.g. choice of dwellings), but it also shaped the social behaviours of its members, defining the scale of their social mixing with others, whether from the same community or from other communities. Financial restrictions limited the extent to which local community members were able to socialise in terms of activities and locations. For instance, going on vacations, joining a gym and/or having dinner with friends in a restaurant outside Balsall Heath were unaffordable activities for many I came across in the area. The social effects of poverty have been the focus of an extended body of research, which finds that being poor is not only about lack of economic resources but also about lack of social opportunities (Sen 1983; Musterd 2003; Griggs and Walker 2008; Ridge 2009; Ridge and Millar 2011; Mood and Jonsson 2015). Poverty and economic restraints reproduce and consolidate other forms of inequalities and social ills, two of which are residential segregation and social alienation. Poverty defines not only the economic aspects of life but also social behaviours and attitudes, locking people into their troubles, conditions and constrained ways of life. Recalling my field experience, I agree with Musterd's empirically based argument that a concentration of poverty and deprivation leads to other forms of deprivations and socio-economic challenges, particularly for those who are less privileged in ethnically concentrated areas (2003: 624). In Balsall Heath, the concentration of deprivation focussed my participants' concern on their day-to-day lives, locking them into their own personal and local issues. It also

limited the scope of their future aspirations. Amid deprived conditions, my participants often had no interest in and even no time to think about the bigger or wider issues such as integration/segregation and social mixedness.

What is perceived as social segregation in many aspects was not a by-product of local Muslims' desire to self-segregate, but rather a consequence of the socio-economic inequalities that created these ethnic concentrations in the first place. Existing inequalities and poor conditions made it difficult for many to escape these segregated areas. Many members of the Muslim community in Balsall Heath were not socially distant due to their physical residential distance from other communities, but because of being distant along socio-economic lines. Yet, socio-economically privileged residents were not bound by the conditions of their area. They, rather, were able to break the chains of disadvantage in their area. The effect of living in a concentrated neighbourhood such as Balsall Heath was not, as mentioned earlier, the same for everyone in the local community. This effect varied according to lines of generation, ethnicity/ethnic links, the existence of extended families and length of time in the UK. Socio-economic impacts were not indiscriminately negative. For instance, second and third generation residents were more likely to get along more successfully with the majority communities due to their better English language skills. Locals with ethnic links and extended families were more likely to improve their employment opportunities and earnings. Also, settled immigrants were more likely to be aware of how to access opportunities and to improve their standard of living.

The negative socio-economic impacts of the neighbourhood was intensive for those who faced multiple sources of powerlessness such as lower educational attainment, short immigration history and less access to available ethnic capital. In reference to ethnic minorities in Amsterdam, Musterd echoes my finding when he argues that 'concentration is also felt to hamper the social mobility of those with a weak social position and/or low skills, particularly immigrants of non-Western origin' (2003: 623). I therefore argue here that social integration should be defined not only with reference to the willingness to mix with other communities including the members of majority population, but also with the *ability* to do so in the context of increasing social and economic inequalities. This will be further discussed as part of my conclusion in Chapter Seven.

The difference of attitudes towards integration between the privileged and non-privileged Muslims in the field setting encourages me to argue that without addressing socio-



economic inequalities, mixing people at neighbourhood levels will not lead to successful and/or sustainable outcomes for integration (Pratsinakis et al. 2017). As elaborated in the literature review, the official discourses and some academic discourses respond to this deprivation by suggesting that this reality can only be combated if Muslims desegregate themselves socially and residentially (Massey and Denton 1988; Galster et al. 1999; Kearns and Parkinson 2001; Clark and Drinkwater 2002; Friedrichs et al. 2003; Musterd et al. 2008; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016).

Based on my field findings, I argue that limiting the solution to socio-economic deprivation to desegregation is based on an oversimplification of the realities which impede British Muslims from breaking the chains of both poverty and residential segregation. In the field setting, I observed how inequalities led to local residents becoming entrapped and disempowered, putting them in a position where they often could not plan a new life beyond the boundaries of Balsall Heath. Some of my participants, for example, mentioned that while applying for jobs they did not specify their place of residence as Balsall Heath, knowing the negative impact of this location on their job applications. Furthermore, the reality of discrimination which minimised Muslims chances in the labour market, making their hope for social mobility just a dream. Statistics show a significant rise of 111.76% in discrimination between 2015 and 2017 as reports spiked from 34 to 72, and in 2018 there were 87 reported and verified cases of discrimination (Tell MAMA 2019: 27-28). Muslims experience the greatest economic disadvantages and penalties in UK society (Stevenson et al. 2017; Acik and Pilkington 2018; Di Stasio 2021).

Ruqaya, first generation 67-year-old Malaysian, recalled her husband's experience of facing discrimination despite his qualifications, saying that:

He did his PhD in chemistry at Birmingham university, and on top of that he did a PCGE for teaching in secondary school. He did 1,000 applications...maybe he got just 4 or 5 interviews because of his name, it sounds foreign

Having a name linked to ethnic minority groups is likely to result in candidates being denied access to a range of jobs in a variety of sectors in the UK labour market (Wood et al. 2009: 47; Di Stasio 2021; Zwysen et al. 2021). On her recent experiences, Ruqaya said:

I told you about my husband's story. It is the same now. It is still the same. Even my son, he said to me... He used the same expression as my husband, I apply, I send, because now it is easy to apply... you apply online for a job... He said 'I sent out 1,000 applications' and he said 'I got 3 interviews. My friends who are non-Muslim and non-Arabic, they send 10, 20, 30 and they get interviews and they are employed straight away'. So, that means the story has not changed, maybe it is worse now because Muslims are under the spotlight. Before, in my time, it was all about where you come from or you are Malaysian, you are Pakistani, you are Bangladeshi. But now we are all just Muslims. Everybody, wherever you come from, you are just Muslim: you are a foreigner, and you are here, you are taking our jobs, and you are taking our resources, this is what I hear. I think it has not changed for the better, I think. Society has not changed for the better.

Employment disparities between whites and minorities could, however, be linked to the set of skills the first group provides to the market which might be missing by the second (Heckman 1998), but recent research on hiring and employment in the UK labour market has contested this view, showing that their higher educational attainment, native or near-native English language skills and relative work experience were not sufficient for minority job applicants to receive a positive response from employers (Heath and Di Stasio 2019; Di Stasio 2021; Zwysen et al. 2021). In line with Ruqaya's narrative, research has found that Pakistani and Nigerian applicants may send twice as many applications as applicants from the majority populations (Heath 2019: 2; Di Stasio 2019).

Although it is a fact that a large number of Muslims in Balsall Heath were not highly skilled, this, I argue, can be linked to an environment that hampers aspirations and skills. This concentration of lower skills and poverty is an outcome of long and deep-rooted disparities and inequalities. In the field, I observed that experience of discrimination and racism might start at early age but its true impacts are often felt much later in one's life. What Heckman (1998) found as a lower skill set is in fact an outcome of the reality many Muslims experience in terms of unequal educational opportunities, residential inequalities, employment discrimination and/or racial/religious inequalities. This lower skill set is, I argue, the outcome for a citizen who is or is made incapable of matching the job market requirements. Exposure to racism in a school, a market, a sports club and/or in a street/park could significantly curb the potential and ambitions of a community. It could limit its capabilities and willingness to participate beyond

the community boundaries. It builds a community fearful of going beyond the 'normal' and the 'safe', as I often observed in Balsall Heath. This was supported by my observations and the narratives I heard in the field, which unveiled a community living in fear and uncertainty, leaving it less capable of integrating into the wider society (see Chapter Six).

A careful reading of the overall atmosphere surrounding Muslims in Balsall Heath demonstrated that their lower economic opportunities were an outcome of long-lived constraining factors that challenged not only their sense of the self, but also their skills and potential for leading a prosperous life. Throughout my interactions in the field I found that the reality of economic disadvantage which many families encountered left many children and youths in a unprivileged position in terms of living standards, housing conditions and the opportunities available to them. In a context of densely populated areas, small and overcrowded houses sometimes with extended families and densely packed schools, children and youths often encountered an environment that very likely restricted their aspirations and skills. During my immersion in the field I often observed that children growing up in low-income families had limited chances to improve their skills and opportunities in terms of education, nutrition, health, leisure, sports and in terms of well-being in general. Many parents I came across were frustrated at not being able to provide their children with what they perceived as a decent life. Many families experienced long unemployment gaps which left them struggling to pay for school meals, for educational tuition and/or for any leisure expenses for their children. These complex rooted inequalities, demonstrated in multiple spheres of everyday life, impacted on the development and progress of these growing generations. It created frustrated and uncertain generations who may be not be well prepared for the demands of the labour market. These rooted inequalities seemed for many as inevitable reality, one which they had very limited ambitions/abilities to change. Thus, the economic difficulties encountered by most first generation residents in Balsall Heath were largely still impacting on and being transmitted to their second generation offspring. Children growing up in poverty suffer negative long-term consequences relating to lower educational attainment and ill health, which combined not only reduces their productivity and aspirations but also their future life chances and contributions to their families and the wider society (Griggs and Walker 2008; Walker et al. 2008; Ridge 2009).

Socio-economic inequalities hinder social mobility and hence lead to lower levels of spatial and residential dispersion. Ethnic-concentrated areas could, however, be places of support and economic achievement if socio-economic opportunities are guaranteed. Based on

my fieldwork investigation, residential segregation *per se* cannot be deemed responsible for producing inequalities and deprivations, rather, it is an outcome of historically persistent disparities whose impacts touch not only the present but also the future. Government policies should indeed be held accountable for the lower quality of schools, limited jobs opportunities and lack of information in ethnic concentrated areas that undermine the possibilities and potential not only for social mobility but also for intergroup contact and social mixedness. As would be expected, ethnic residential proximity impacts not only on the economic aspect of life but also on the social interaction between ethnic minorities and the wider society. What follows is a discussion of how residential segregation impacts on the social integration of British Muslims.

### **5.3.2 Intergroup Contact and Ethnic Dispersion**

Social integration is defined as ‘the extent to which strong social ties, maintained through a web of relationships and interactions, inspire bonds of trust, reciprocity and solidarity between Britons from all backgrounds’ (Bell et al. 2017: 8). In classic and official accounts, minimised socio-cultural distance between ethnic minorities and the majority population lies at the core of successful social integration (Gijsberts and Dagevos 2007; Duncan and Lieberman 1959; Peach 1996a; Johnston et al. 2005; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016). In this section, I present an empirical account of British Muslims’ everyday experiences of social integration as linked to their spatial concentration. The assessment of social integration in this case will be based on engaging with British Muslims’ conceptions and attitudes towards diversity, their contact with the majority population and their interest in British culture.

During my field immersion, it was observable that daily inter-social relations were inevitably interlinked to place of residence. The neighbourhood was the place where most of daily activities such as schooling, shopping and/or exercising happened. As most of these activities were generally carried out within the local area, it was more likely that residents would meet only those who lived in the same neighbourhood, rather than others. Observing the social dynamics of day-to-day life, I often noticed that local parks and leisure and community centres were places for local residents to socialise and meet, providing an opportunity for contact with those of largely the same ethnic-religious communities. The same was applicable

to local schools, where most pupils were Muslims, leaving limited opportunities for contact with children of different ethnicities or religious groups.

Because of the Muslim concentration in the neighbourhood, the frequency of meeting Muslims within the premises of Balsall Heath was much higher than the frequency of meeting members of other religious groups or communities. The place of residence therefore played a major role in defining friendships and close social ties, particularly for residents with low incomes, as mentioned in the previous section. As a consequence of residential proximity and similar socio-economic status it was more usual to find co-ethnic friendships in Balsall Heath. Across a variety of settings (e.g. schools, shops, parks, leisure and community centres), opportunities for intergroup contact were relatively limited. However, limited contact with other communities was, for the majority of my participants, not an exclusionary deliberate choice, as most of those I came across in the field valued the diversity and multicultural nature of British society. Most of my participants found that the social and psychological preference of associating along lines of similar race, ethnicity and/or religion- was a natural attitude which would apply to all ethnicities and communities. Living in a Muslim dense area and working in Balsall Heath, Uzmah, the second generation 47-year-old Pakistani woman, described ethnic concentration as a naturally evolving phenomenon for all communities when she said:

If you look to places like Spain or Dubai, you will find these residential concentrations existing too. British immigrants there also concentrate together. You will have a small area where all the British people live. You know, a lot of British people are settled in Spain. Now, they are not sprinkled out between the Spanish communities. They are concentrated in one area where all the British expats live, and I think that's a natural phenomenon.

Likewise, Iman, a second generation 29-year-old English-Arab woman, shared the same point of view, despite living in a predominantly white area in Birmingham. As she said:

I think much of this is just natural. When I was in Germany I once saw a British person in a coffee shop and I went and said hello and we kept in contact. We used to meet and this just kept me comfortable as it was easier interaction and contact for me. I think it is a matter of easier interaction. We know more about each other. It is a matter of convenience. Here there are facilities for the Muslims. For example, where I live I can't buy Halal meat so I have to buy it from here [Balsall Heath] after work.

Local views were divided on the social impact of residential concentration. Some of my participants did not perceive British Muslim residential concentration as an obstacle to integration. Others perceived it as a form of segregation. Yet, both groups came into an agreement on the importance of social mixedness between different communities. For those who found it a form of segregation, residential concentration was criticised due to the hurdles it added to contact between different communities. This strand of my participants registered their concern over residential segregation and expressed their wish for more social bridges and areas with greater diversity. Despite being a practising Muslim, Uzmah, the second generation 47-year-old Pakistani woman, expressed her dissatisfaction over the attendance of her son at a predominantly Pakistani school. She said:

I do not like it. Yes, it is my community but this is not the reality. This is not the world. When you step outside, the world is made of lots of backgrounds and it is really, really important for children to have this understanding and to have the opportunity to develop relationships with people from all kinds of backgrounds; but because he has to go to school in this area he has to college in this area, you have to go to this. Everybody is sticking to their little spots, which is a shame, and that causes a bigger divide where the children themselves do not have the opportunity to learn about the differences. Yeah, you do lessons in school and you learn about Islam and you learn about Christianity and you learn about Judaism, but that is just in a textbook. You get no experience of the person, the only experience you have or the only mindset you have is what the TV has taught you.

Uzmah's comments on the insufficiency of learning about the other through books and/or TV/computer screens were indeed persuasive and reflected my own experience when starting my fieldwork. Being a short-term immigrant in the UK, I had learnt about British Muslims through media coverage and the available literature. But I encountered a different picture as I stepped into the field, living among British Muslims on day-to-day basis. In the field setting, Uzmah's was not the only voice that denounced residential segregation. In general terms, the Muslims in Balsall Heath showed a willingness towards socio-cultural mixedness with the wider society not only in their opinions but in their behaviours too. Listening to local voices and observing my participants in multiple daily mundane activities, I noticed that British Muslims (particularly those more recently arrived in the UK) were often fascinated and motivated to speaking to other communities including the white community. As a Muslim of

immigrant background, I know from my own experience that new immigrants and ethnic minorities in general are always keen to form a new home including making family, friends, and social links that replace/fill the gap created by leaving their homelands, families and friends. Therefore, having links and contacting with the majority population were things much hoped for among many of my participants.

Other participants, such as Shakir and Sabrina, felt that residential segregation did not necessarily hinder social mixing with different communities, and that Muslims in concentrated areas still meet with other communities in many mundane places of daily life, such as workplaces and schools. Shakir, a third generation 20-year-old Pakistani university student, found that one's place of residence is not a barrier to contact with other communities. He argued that Britain is not divided by its residential and housing patterns and that inter-group contact is not hindered despite residential distances.

It [society] is not divided so that you do not ever find white people in Asian areas or you do not ever find Asian people in white areas. You do. I do not feel there's such a hard line that you cannot live there, you cannot go here and things like that. I think it is divided, yes, but I think on the whole people are pretty content with how things are so I do not think society is fragmented because of that. I mean, there's a divide between the home and work, and in the workplace generally I do not think there is segregation at all. I think white people and Asian people work together fine, there is no real need for us to segregate... We have work, education, just things like that.

The same view was shared by the third generation university student 22-year-old Sabrina who said:

Together we can still get on and work together because most of the time people are working outside their neighbourhoods. For my mum, for example, I guess we live maybe in more of a Muslim area but when my mum goes to work for example she is in a completely different area and she completely works with completely different people from all backgrounds. Even though we may live more in a Muslim environment when she comes back home, we kind of have to work all together anyway, so I feel like it will really not make much of any difference.

My field experience showed that sometimes my participants, aware of the anti-Muslim environment, would rush to assert their integration and mixedness with British society. The comments of Shakir and Sabrina do not echo my field observations, which showed that social mixedness between Muslims and other communities was in fact centred on multiple parameters, such as socio-economic background, age, generation, fluency in the English language, place of work and education. Not everyone in the field could achieve strong social ties and interaction with the majority population. Third generation Shakir and Sabrina, who were in their early twenties and students at Cardiff and Sussex universities respectively, saw integration-related issues through this lens, as they were genuinely able to mix with other communities. However, observing the majority of residentially concentrated Muslims, it was noticeable that a considerable portion of the community lived, worked and educated their children in the same area, with a very limited likelihood of sustained contact with other communities.

Demographic facts played a major role in defining how a place of residence impacted on people's social mixedness. I found these factors interlinked in multiple different ways amongst my participants. For instance, a participant with higher educational attainment and with a shorter stay/immigration history in the UK could still have difficulties getting on with the wider society despite their higher educational attainment. At the same time, participants who had a longer immigration history, irrespective of their educational attainment, showed greater ability to navigate the wider society and a better ability to adapt to British culture. Economic deprivation was also, as mentioned in the previous section, a hinderance to social mixedness as it limited the extent and the range of activities a person could engage in in their day-to-day life. For instance, the economic privilege of some of my participants enabled them to cross the boundary of Balsall Heath to other areas, where they could receive piano lessons, do horseback riding or arrange extra-curricular activities for their children and where they were able to develop relationships with other communities, including the white community. Deprived citizens, on the other hand, were largely trapped in local and small-scale activities that remained for the most part in their own communities.

Despite the limited likelihood of sustained social interaction between residentially concentrated Muslims and the majority population, I realised that length of time of residence in the UK was a major factor in shaping one's inter-group behaviours and attitudes. The level of familiarity with the social atmosphere and the ability to socially interact with others was



higher amongst those with longer periods of settlement in the UK. Although the neighbourhood is the place where everyday mundane activities take place (e.g. shopping, exercising and/or school pick-up and drop-off), which minimises the frequency of meeting fellow citizens of different communities, it is indeed misleading to argue (as it is in the official discourse) that an immigrant who came to the UK in the 1960s has remained socially isolated since then. It is also misleading to argue that a man who migrated to Britain 50 years ago is the same in terms of his social mixedness as his grandchildren, who were born and brought up in the UK. Adam, a first generation 44-year-old Egyptian man, shared his experience and opinion of this by saying:

From my experience when I came here my target in my first two years was different from my target later on. So, in my first two months in a foreign society and a foreign culture I had to focus on my higher studies and get back home quickly. I might not be very interested in being a brilliant British citizen at that time, but when I opened my eyes and looked around and started to live in this country, I started to do what I need to do. I started to live my life that I want to live and at that time I had to participate and tried to be an effective positive member of the community.

In the field, I found there to be a clear cultural overlap between Muslims' ethno-religious identities and their British identity. Despite many Muslims showing strict attachment to their ethno-religious heritage, there was less adherence to some old traditions (such as forced marriage), which had been questioned and then abandoned as part of their co-existence with British culture. This was more observable in younger generations, who often questioned the validity of certain cultural concepts of Islam, as discussed in the previous chapter. The younger generation in many instances were able to urge their parents to adjust and accept new forms of coexistence. First generation parents may have been keen to stay in Muslim-majority areas and to remain there as the years passed; however, as their children grew up, as a result of their education and deeper understanding of British culture, these children introduced a dialogue and offered hybrid compromises between the two cultures. Due to the strong family systems amongst Muslims, cross-learning between generations was possible. Acculturation in the form of hybrid identities went through not only the second and third generations but also back through the first generation, who had gone through their own process of adapting while educating and raising their children in the UK. This acculturation process is highlighted by Rania, a second generation 40-year-old Pakistani woman. When I asked her 'do you think

today's British Muslims are less integrated?', she highlighted the cultural change to immigrant communities over the years, answering:

No, people have changed. They like to mix with other people. People who came to this country maybe at the start felt alienated due to language. Maybe one person knew English so all the others surround him because they depend on him, but now with the new generations things are changing and it will continue to change.

In principle, limiting the concept of mixedness to the amount of direct contact with the native population is, I argue, a normative and political fallacy. Linking ethnic minorities' degree of integration to their contact with the native population ignores the reality that contact and mixedness is a mutual responsibility of all communities together. Furthermore, increasing residential and social mixedness does not guarantee that contact will happen, as minority groups might have little exposure to members of majority population even if they are not residentially segregated. The examples of Sophia, Harita and Iman in the previous chapter (section 4.3.1) show that their residence in white-dominant areas did not sustain inter-ethnic social ties. My participants often questioned why the majority population is never blamed on not mixing with ethnic minority groups by relocating to ethnic-concentrated areas. Ayman, a third generation 23-year-old Pakistani man, questioned this, saying, 'I would say to the white community, "Come on here, integrate with us. We are not saying no. Come to Alum Rock, Small Heath, Balsall Heath," but they choose not to'.

Putting the responsibility for segregation on the 'alien others' against the 'homogeneous tolerant' society is a discriminatory bias that works against the expected outcomes of integration (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). An equal representation of all communities in the integration/segregation discourse reflects the soundness of equal citizenship in a particular country. This argument will be further discussed in terms of my empirical findings in Chapter Six. Criticising this one-sided focus of the integration discourse has been significantly echoed amongst my interviewees. For instance, Sarmad, a second generation 45-year-old interviewee stated: 'it is true that a considerable portion of British Muslims prefer to stay near their families, however, it is equally true that the white community has left these Muslim concentrated areas'. Sarmad continued: 'I think people choose to live here because their mothers and fathers and their brothers and sisters live here. They do not want to go further away. You should be interviewing the non-Asian people about why they are moving out of these areas'. Many of my participants stressed that they had white neighbours

as they were growing up, but as immigrants increased in number, those areas became less desirable to white populations. The tendency of the native population to leave ethnic-concentrated areas has been highlighted in multiple studies (Bra°ma° 2006; Bolt et al. 2008; Bolt et al. 2010), yet, desegregation policies often ignore the impact of ‘white flight’ and more often focus on the lack of social mixedness as an ethnic ‘problem’ (Phillips 2010). Essential to an assessment of Muslims’ self-segregation assumptions is a comparison between them and white majority population. While most British Muslims (particularly the younger generations) live (and prefer to live) in ethnically mixed areas (Simpson 2004; Phillips 2006; Ipsos MORI 2018), the white British population mostly tend to avoid living in mixed areas, while ironically their white-concentrated areas are not called white ghettos (Simpson 2012). Parallel societies are equally the outcome of a willingly self-segregating majority, and segregation needs to be equally explored from the side of the majority in order for policies to be developed and implemented without furthering social divisions (Bolt et al. 2010; Borch 2019). Experiences of integration are shaped through the combined collaborations of ethnic minorities, political institutions and the majority population (Bolt et al. 2010: 169).

#### **5.4 Are Residentially Segregated Muslims Ghettoised?**

With rising concerns over the extent and the impacts of ethnic segregation in British cities, urban geographers and sociologists have recurrently debated whether or not Britain is home to a US model of ghettoization for its ethnic communities and Muslim communities in particular (Phillips 2006; Peach 2009, 2010; Finney and Simpson, 2009; Peach 2009, 2010; Simpson 2012; Catney 2017; Zuccotti 2021). The significance of this debate comes from social and spatial segregation being important indicators for community cohesion, social trust, marginality and urban inequality (Duncan and Lieberman, 1959; Marcuse 2001, 2008; Phillips 2006; Peach 2009, 2010; Finney and Simpson, 2009; Catney 2017).

In general, the definition of the ghetto centres on the distribution of ethnic minorities in particular areas. As Finney and Simpson (2009: 120) put it, the term refers to areas where one ethnic group forms 90-100% of the population. According to Marcuse, a ghetto is ‘an area of spatial concentration used by forces within the dominant society to separate and to limit a particular population group, externally defined as racial or ethnic or foreign, held to be, and treated as, inferior by the dominant society’ (Marcuse 2001: 4). In these terms, the ghetto is not

defined only in spatial terms. The spatial characteristics of a ghetto are contributing and reinforcing factors but not defining. In other words, the space must be related to the underlying non-spatial issues of marginality and inequality when the ghetto is studied (Marcuse 2007). Peach suggests a dual definition of the term which is indicated by the percentage of one single minority group in a particular area and also by the percentage of this minority group in the whole city as a total. For instance, 70% of the population in some wards in a city like Leicester are Indian; however, these wards cannot be called a ghetto because those 70% represent only a small percentage of Indians in the whole city (Peach 2010: 1524). Therefore, a ghetto is founded when most members of a particular ethnic group choose to live only in a certain geographical area (Peach 1996b).

In line with this definition, Peach, supported by other scholars, disputes allegations of ghettoised British ethnic minorities (Peach 1996b, 2009, 2010; Phillips 2006; Finney and Simpson 2009; 2010, Simpson 2012; Gale 2013, Catney 2015, 2017). While some minority groups tend to cluster in areas with high representation of the same ethnic group, British cities demonstrate no evidence of hyper-segregation or an American model of ghettoization. Despite high concentrations of ethnic minorities mostly in inner city areas, the percentage of these concentrations rarely achieve the majority of the population in those areas (Peach 1996b). Recurrent concerns over ethnic enclaves in Britain has similarly been disputed by Ludi Simpson who argues that claims of ghettoisation in UK cities are misleading and that evidence on ethnic dispersion builds a promising picture of the dispersion of ethnic minorities in the UK (Simpson 2004, 2007a, b; Simpson 2012).

Residentially segregated areas are often perceived as parallel to the mainstream society, as a threat and as an enemy from within and are often perceived as sources for extreme and dangerous cultures (Borch 2019). In Balsall Heath there was indeed no single Muslim community, and no single voice as to why Muslims may opt to live in concentrated areas. There were variations in why local Muslims segregate/integrate, taking into account differences in age, generation, gender, class and immigration history. However, generally speaking, the majority of my participants were not keen to self-segregate. Rather, they had the willingness to engage and mix with fellow citizens of all backgrounds, but because of their socio-economic circumstances they had no choice but to live close to their own co-ethnic/religious communities. In a lengthy discussion with Adam, a first generation 44-year-old Egyptian man, on the reality of Muslim residential segregation, Adam explained that he felt residential

segregation does not necessarily indicate social segregation. Discussing this issue occurred as follows:

**Me:** *How do you see Muslim concentrated areas like Balsall Heath? Do you think it shows a form of segregation?*

**Adam:** People tend to like people who are like them, to like similar identities. When I was working in Saudi Arabia, which is a Muslim country, I am Egyptian and Egyptians used to love to sit together and to entertain together. We had colleagues from Greece, Romania, the Netherlands and the Philippines. They used to have their social events together and they used to stay together. That is not segregation or compartmentalising; because when we are in a professional environment or in the workplace we cooperate with each other and we get along with each other. But in our own time we need to enjoy ourselves and do what we like. And I do not think British people like all people who are white British 100%. They have people who they like and people who they do not like, even though they are all white. They will like to sit with people who they are like them. If I have a friend who is like me it does not mean we are segregated community, because some Muslims I do not like. Some Muslims I do not like to sit with. I do not like, by default, those who are Muslims. Those who are bad I do not like to sit with them.

**Me:** *But the fact is that many Muslims are living apart from other communities and doesn't this mean less contact, less interaction, and isolation?*

**Adam:** That is not true. Luckily, I worked in eight places in this Kingdom. I'll give you an example: here in Birmingham areas like Balsall Heath and Small Heath yes, a lot of Muslims are there, but in London (areas like Hackney) there are lots of Jews. This does not mean that the Jewish population are isolated. Human beings like to be with each other. That is what Muslims like to do too. In Birmingham, there are areas for Pakistanis and some areas are Chinese. We have here the Chinese quarter in Birmingham and, as I said, areas like Hackney in London. And we have areas like Balsall Heath or Moseley where there is a Muslim population. We have also some areas in Birmingham which are not populated by Muslims. In the area around the city centre, East and North Birmingham, very few Muslims are there. Balsall Heath, Moseley and Small Heath have more Muslims, but they are not segregated.

**Me:** *In your opinion, they are integrated?*

**Adam:** They are not segregated people. They are trying to integrate and I can see a big difference between generations.

**Me:** *In residentially segregated communities, do you feel is it the case that Muslims will not know about other communities because they live, shop, pray and school their children in Muslim dominant areas? So, they only see Muslims?*

**Adam:** First of all I think this is not segregation. It is the trend of human feelings. Being that you like to be with people who understand you, and you feel happy with those who share your social life. If I live in a place, I sleep eight hours, work eight hours and am awake eight hours (four hours with my family and four hours having contact with others). Statistically, the time I will spend in my geographical area of residence where I have interaction with others than my family will be three or four hours at maximum, but I have eight hours in my work environment, which is a diverse environment. But having an address in a Muslim area will mean that when I need certain food that I like, it will be easy for me to find. When I want to do my prayers, it is easy too. But my 24 hours is very distributed between different interests, places and activities.

Believe me, if you go to any of the big cities in the world you will find them all the same. In America you will see Mexican areas, Afro-Caribbean areas and different cultures having their social life together. It does not mean that they are segregated. It is not only about Muslims. Some areas in London and some areas in the big cities of the world have a flavour of certain cultures, which is a normal human thing. But the problem is that Islam is under the microscope, so people see small things as very big things because we are unfortunate in seeing some events that are linked to Islam, although I disagree with it. People see things that are very small as very big. They see Muslims gathering together but they do not see Afro-Caribbeans, Mexicans or Asians [doing the same]. Muslims behave like any other culture. It does not mean they are segregated from the community. They are effective parts of the community. And it is not a closed community, because Muslims did not stop white British people from coming to live with them. Muslims are very open and very welcoming but the others, whether white or not white, they do not like to come and live here. In contrast, I can see some Muslims who go to live in white areas. Personally I have been living in Wales in

an area where we were the only Muslim family in a square mile and we did not mind, so we were happy to do this and we were happy to live and work [there]. But if others do not like to live in areas which are heavily populated by Muslims, it is up to them.

Although research, in line with my field findings, argues that British Muslims are not in fact ghettoised (Johnston et al. 2002a; Johnston et al. 2002b; Simpson 2004; Phillips 2006; Bolt et al. 2010), it remains to be determined how far their residential concentration may be divisive to national unity and how far today's level of segregation in the UK may be fragmenting. Building on my findings on British Muslim residential concentration in Balsall Heath, I would extend my argument to put forward a model of residential segregation inspired by Peach's discussion on 'good' segregation and 'bad' segregation, as he argues that 'segregation is of two types: the good and the bad; the voluntary and the imposed; the ethnic village and the ghetto' (Peach 1996a: 380). According to this model, residential segregation in ethnic-concentrated areas should not, I argue, be seen as a threat if the following conditions are met: 1) commonalities, solidarity, and respect for difference are guaranteed and fostered through a standard education system; 2) segregation is not forced but voluntary; 3) communities are open and interdependent; 4) inter-group interaction is promoted; 5) inequalities, discrimination and fear are combated and socio-economic mobility is equally guaranteed for all communities.

Inspired by my empirical findings, I emphasise that if the above-mentioned five conditions of 'good' segregation are in decline, the 'bad' version of segregation will take over. In today's Britain, residential concentrations might develop into ghettoisation if stimulators of 'bad' segregation are not controlled. Segregation is not always bad as long as segregated communities are not locked in because of anticipated/real fears of discrimination, identity loss or socio-economic challenges (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Conditions of Good and Bad Segregation

| 'Good' Segregation                   | 'Bad' Segregation                           |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Respect for difference               | Stigma and social othering                  |
| Segregation is voluntary             | Segregation is forced                       |
| Open and interdependent communities  | Locked communities with no-go areas         |
| Inter-group interaction              | Escalated isolation and lack of interaction |
| Socio-economic mobility and equality | Inequalities, discrimination and fear       |

In light of the above conditions and building on my immersion in Balsall Heath, I argue that this specific area at the time of research was not a religious ghetto or enclave despite the challenges to inter-ethnic social interactions. Local Muslims were determined to, though not at full capacity to, integrate. Nonetheless, this determination to integrate may decline amidst the increasing stimulators of 'bad' segregation (e.g. socio-economic deprivation, anticipated/actual racism and/or discrimination). If ethnic minorities are socio-economically trapped in their residentially concentrated areas, these areas will consequently turn into bubbles of frustration and alienation. In accordance with this analysis is Taylor's argument as part of his criticism of European anti-multiculturalism narratives. In line with my field findings, he argues that immigration is commonly motivated by immigrants' high anticipation of freedom, equality, democracy and economic opportunities. Obtaining these opportunities makes it easier for immigrants to integrate smoothly into the host society (Taylor 2012). However, as Taylor argues, 'it is only if this hope is frustrated, if the path to more rewarding work and education is blocked, that a sense of alienation and hostility to the receiving society can grow, and may even generate a rejection of the mainstream and its ethic' (2012: 414).

Segregation can exist at different levels: residential, social, cultural, economic and political. I argue that residential segregation *per se* cannot divide a nation unless combined with other levels of segregation. Inspired by my field immersion, I can emphasise that ethnic residential concentration is not a static objective fact. Rather, it is a dynamic phenomenon that can produce positive integration through its intermediary mechanisms (e.g. co-ethnic friends/ties), which proved in my field setting to be good sources of information about laws, rights and opportunities. The next expected step after gaining this knowledge is often to step



out of the boundaries of the ethnic/religious community to advance one's own opportunities. When the boundaries around these ethnic communities are racism and discrimination-free, possibilities for social, economic and residential mobility (and hence integration) are higher, and vice-versa.

This intersection between social, economic, political and institutional factors of integration/desegregation was highlighted by Sarmad, the second generation 45-year-old Pakistani man. Sarmad highlighted his improved socio-economic conditions compared to the community he grew up in. He also highlighted how this socio-economic upward mobility has helped him in forming more liberal views on integration and social mixedness. Yet, despite his liberal views and his privileged socio-economic circumstances, Sarmad explained that his anticipation of racial assault might shape his moves within the city of Birmingham. As he said:

If I wander into a very kind of council-white area, I will get probably-- some kids or whatever-- abusing, shouting or something. But you just kind of avoid those areas. I do not have reason to be in those areas so I do not go. There are probably pockets of areas within the UK and Birmingham possibly that you will experience it [racism]. And maybe that is because they are not used to seeing Asian faces.

Based on the previously mentioned empirical dynamics of Muslim concentrated areas, I would therefore be reluctant to describe Muslim dense neighbourhoods as definitely segregated. Measuring segregation should not be exclusively centred around where ethnic communities residentially live, rather, it should be measured by the *ability* of the residents to take part in different spheres of public life, whether social, cultural, economic and/or political. The ability and willingness of British Muslims (and ethnic communities in general) to integrate into and to take part in society is largely shaped by a set of variables that either stimulate or impede both their will and ability. Social mobility, institutional support, and social acceptance by the majority population together define how capable Muslims/ethnic minorities are of integrating in these different domains of life.

Although mainstream discourses tend to recognise that residential segregation is a consequence of range of factors, of which sluggish social mobility is one (Casey 2016), residential segregation persists in being portrayed as a choice rather than a constraint. It is also portrayed as the main stimulator of a range of social ills, rather than an outcome (amongst others) of initially faulty socio-economic contexts. Integrating ethnic minorities cannot be

limited to religious and cultural lines. Rather, integration is the outcome of a package of economic, social, political and institutional conditions. Muslims housing choices do not reflect a choice to self-segregate but a choice within a system of constraints that forces them into a particular route (Phillips 2010). Therefore, the current official approach to dealing with segregation along ethnic lines is in fact counterproductive, despite the ethno-cultural conceptions of residence amongst a cluster of British Muslims (see section 5.2.1). Ethnic and racial analyses of segregation carry misleading stereotypes that reinforce 'racial thinking' and consequently hinders social cohesion (Simpson 2004: 663).

Based on my ethnographic immersion and the above analysis, I argue that the persistent discourse of British Muslims' self-segregation is of more damage than benefit. The recurring depiction of Muslims as self-segregating serves rather to intensify segregation than combat it. The contradictory nature of the concept appears when it calls upon the others within (aliens-cum-citizens) to integrate (Phillips 2010: 210; Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). Depicting British Muslims as non-integrated and portraying them as a problem in the integration discourse carries exclusionary messages and undermines feelings of equal citizenship, and hence the ability and willingness to integrate.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has answered the second research question of this study, drawing a nuanced picture of segregation as the lived experience of many Muslims in my fieldwork site in three main respects: the reasons for Muslim residential concentration; the consequences of Muslim residential concentration; and Muslim potential ghettoisation. The previous analysis has outlined why British Muslim residential concentrations should not be taken as threatening. Building upon my everyday ethnographic observations and interviews with 29 Muslims in Birmingham, I argue that residential segregation can be useful if certain conditions are met, but that the phenomenon turns destructive and threatening in certain cases and under specific conditions, as elaborated above. Having answered the second research question in this chapter, the study moves on to engage with the third research question on the barriers to integration. The following chapter discusses and explains fear as a common and shared feeling amongst Muslims in the field, a feeling which hinders the successful outcomes of integration.

## **Chapter Six: Barriers to Successful Integration**

## 6.1 Introduction

Despite their struggle for neutrality, researchers approach their fieldwork with some expectations and preconceptions. As I approached my research field, I was expecting to have narratives related to religious identity, ethnic relations, residential proximity and/or prejudice and racism. Based on my review of previous literature, I did not anticipate hearing so many personal stories that reflected what I refer to as fear narratives. Doing my ethnographic fieldwork for 12 months in Birmingham, I heard fear-related narratives more frequently than any other kind of narrative. The level of fear I observed was striking, and that fear was spread across different segments of the community across lines of age, wealth, education and religiosity. I found this shocking at first, but as time drew on a picture began to emerge of what I came to understand as ‘structured fear’. That is, fear based on an implicit understanding by the Muslim community that they are perceived as an unequal ‘other’ within British society. Being/feeling unequal promotes that sense of fear amongst British Muslims due to the likelihood of them being misunderstood in the context where these ‘alien’ Muslims are seen as a threat.

After addressing the first and second research questions in Chapters Four and Five, this chapter examines the third research question, concentrating on barriers to successful (and sustainable) integration. As one of my main field findings, fear-related narratives provided a significant and noteworthy answer to the questions of this study. The chapter characterises, describes, and explains this fear in a particular social context and shows the multiple ways of negotiating it. I found that fear as existed in the field setting was/is indeed a form of suppression which, I argue, acts as a barrier to integration. My findings revealed that fear (in the social sense) is in fact a form of social subordination/inequality, by which a group of people are pushed by a set of factors to feel afraid and/or anxious of actual and/or anticipated circumstances. That said, the fear that developed within this Muslim community impacted not only on their emotions and attitudes, but also on their willingness to engage with the wider society.

I will analyse fear as a field finding using a micro perspective through my own lived experience in the field, my observations and participants’ comments, together with a macro level analysis where wider discourses and social processes are taken into account to explain and provide a context for the micro/field mechanisms and views. This is done through four

main sections. The first examines Muslim experiences of living with and managing fear. The second, through a macroscopic analysis, unpacks the concept of fear, highlighting the main wider discourses that can help explain its formation. The third part engages with Muslims' paradoxical feelings of wanting to integrate but simultaneously fearing to. Finally, the chapter concludes by linking fear, as a widespread feeling amongst Muslims, to the concept of citizenship.

## **6.2 Living with and Negotiating Fear**

At the beginnings of my field inquiry, I would randomly wander around Balsall Heath and other Muslim dense areas of Birmingham. At that time, I was completely unaware of the existence of fear amongst those Muslims going about their normal daily activities such as shopping, school runs and/or just having fun with their children in the parks. However, as I started to immerse myself into the community at different levels, I found that these Muslims' lives were clearly not as smooth as they seemed to be. They lived quite continuously making calculations, taking precautions and struggling with worries and anxieties that became largely the normal for them. Fear in its different forms (and levels) was to a great extent internalised but also normalised.

Fear in the local community came at different levels and in different shapes. Sometimes, fear took the form of a slight sense of insecurity, uncertainty, low confidence in being equal citizens and/or anxiety over future citizenry rights. However, at other times it was a severe state of fear that impacted on the daily natural habits (see section 6.3.2). Fear was not only verbally articulated during interviews and during my different interactions with the local community but it was also implicitly articulated through the attitudes and behaviours of community members who were doubtful, uncertain and/or highly alert. This was reflected in their often reluctant or sceptical reactions to my requests for interviews, as mentioned in the methodology chapter. It was a complicated challenge to get through to what I found to be an insecure local community. Recruiting interviewees is often a challenging process for researchers for reasons such as the lack of familiarity of participants with scientific research and/or for that natural mistrust of participants in the interviewer as a stranger. However, my extended ethnographic experience in Birmingham revealed that many of the rejections I received for my interview requests were based on socially structured fear.

After getting familiar with and earning the trust of the local community in Balsall Heath, I began to disclose my identity as a researcher in order to recruit a number of local women with whom I was in a frequent daily contact, assuming that our daily friendly talks would have built a good base of trust between us. I was surprisingly met with completely uncourteous reactions. I remember how the reactions of those women changed completely. With very sceptical looks and decisive 'NO's they rejected my interview requests; only one local woman, named Laila, was a true source of help in the field. Later, this group of local women did not show me the same level of friendliness as before my interview request. When I asked Laila about this change, she said, 'They got scared of you. You might get them into lots of complications. They have to draw a line'. I then asked her, 'Are not you scared too?' and she answered, 'I trust you. It is obvious you are honest'. The anticipation of harm amongst my participants if they got misinterpreted amidst rising social and political scrutiny was a tough barrier to overcome in the field. Suspicions towards my interview requests were related not only to a possible lack of knowledge about scientific research in general, but also to their anticipation of negative consequences participation in my research might bring them. According to them, particularly with the current racialisation of the Muslim community, I could be an eye of the government and/or a potential source of disturbance if their narratives were wrongly interpreted or taken out of context.

I once went to recruit a local shopkeeper for interviews. When I first introduced myself and requested his participation in my research, he happily agreed. Yet, on the agreed date when I headed out to conduct the interview with him I found that he was not willing to participate in the interview anymore. With the increasing number of rejections, I disappointedly had a pressing question in my mind and therefore asked him, 'May I know why have you changed your mind?' He apologetically responded, 'I am sorry, sister, I do not want to get into trouble'. What I understood at that time was that he discussed the matter with his family and/or friends and was warned not to take part in such a project due to potential risk. For me, this was shocking and very disappointing at this early stage of my fieldwork. As time drew on, however, I came to consider this as 'normal'.

In November 2017, I interviewed 39-year-old Hassan, a first-generation Yemeni man. After introducing myself and my research, Hassan cautiously accepted my interview request with the condition of not using a voice recorder. Therefore, I had to note down the content of the interview in my field diary; to which he agreed. Hassan was remarkably hesitant to

participate in the study, particularly when he got to know more about the subject and I had to reassure him multiple times that his identity would be kept confidential. He had me take an oath that the data collected would not be leaked to any authority. He said ‘I do not want to get into a trouble’. From his manner of dress and overall style, I perceived Hassan as a practising orthodox Muslim. I must admit that I, regrettably, perceived Hassan with some sort of a stereotypical lens. Deep in my thoughts, while in the interview setting, I linked his obvious sense and expressions of fear to his outfit, assuming that he might have been so insecure because he must have been about to express racist, violent and/or generally unacceptable views.

By the end of the interview, I found none of my stereotypical expectations to have been correct, except that Hassan was strongly attached to his religious belief and identity. Before leaving the interview setting, he repeatedly reminded me of my oath to keep his identity confidential. Hassan had clear profound sense of insecurity, but on the spot, I was unable to comprehend why he should be this insecure about merely expressing his peaceful concerns about British politics. After the interview, I initially linked his sense of insecurity to his clear religiosity amidst rising stereotypical othering and judgmental social positioning. This was shown to be a false link, as later on I found that even Muslims who were less practicing also showed other forms of fear.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, in addition to fears over actual and/or anticipated racism and social stereotypes, I had other participants who had anxieties over social mobility, both for themselves and the coming generations, amidst their economic difficulties. Practising Muslims, as mentioned in Chapter Four, often had fears for the preservation of their religious identity, fears which were driven by both the lack of religious education as well as the rising assimilatory tone of British integration discourses. In addition, freedom of religious practice (such as putting on a head covering for women and/or having a beard for men) was a source of worry, such that some fearful Muslims I came across chose to abandon them due to their anticipation that these practices could reduce their job opportunities and/or increase the chances of racist incidents. In addition to all this, there was that common fear of political scrutiny as a politically racialised community in the context of wider stigma and prejudice.

Both the level and the form of fear as well as individual privileges defined how manageable was the sense of fear among my participants. For instance, first generation participants and women were more likely to feel insecure and showed more sceptical attitudes towards my interview requests. Also, participants with lower incomes and educational

attainment were more likely to perceive my research topic and interview requests with scepticism. However, these sceptical attitudes were not limited to these groups of participants. Rather, this was replicated by others with higher socio-economic status and longer immigration histories. The third generation 25-year-old British Pakistani Aminah was non-hijab-wearing woman, with a university degree, and a running successful business in Balsall Heath. Despite her agreement to the interview, she was clear and definite about her fear of what might happen to either of us due to such a discussion/interview. She said, 'If they [the authorities] get to know about this, we will be in a big trouble'. I followed her comment by asking, 'Why? I am only a student doing her doctoral research work. I have all the proof, so do not worry'. She replied, 'You know what's going on'. Aminah had a clear mistrust of how authorities might deal with her as a Muslim. It was because of this ontological insecurity that my participants spent a great deal of time and effort ensuring that they were not misunderstood or misinterpreted, as they felt a simple misunderstanding on my part could mean a lot of trouble for them. So Aminah, Hassan and many others had to emphasise once and again during the interviews their peaceful nature and their willingness to integrate into British society.

Fear demonstrated in the field site comes at the heart of the stigma that surrounds Muslim communities in Britain (Nelson 2016). A sense of stigma and discrimination was often voiced amongst my fearful participants. Stigmatising British Muslims as non-integrated and as responsible for segregation was criticised by my participants rendering them feeling under pressure to prove that they are good British citizens. These attempts implied a sense of inequality for Muslims, as the only community repeatedly encouraged to prove its integration. According to the 67-year-old Malaysian woman, Ruqaya:

They always say 'Why don't Muslims integrate into our society?' For example, we have a Chinese community, but they do not say 'Why don't the Chinese integrate?' The Chinese still eat noodles. The Chinese still speak their language but they do not demand them to integrate...just Muslims? They are not demanding the Sikh people to integrate or other religions.... They do not demand the Jewish people to integrate.... They are just talking about Muslims 'Why don't Muslims integrate?'

Stigma and fear along with enduring socio-economic inequalities rendered many of my participants unable to feel their equal citizenry and sense of agency and unable to integrate. This context has shaped their behaviours and attitudes towards integration, leaving many participants fearful of speaking up, voicing their disagreements and showing their difference



in a context where, for example, criticising policy agendas such as Prevent brands dissenters not only as non-integrated but also as being on the side of extremists (Hymas 2018). My participants' fear over how they were perceived and interpreted was associated with their sense and awareness of being part of a stigmatised community that is 'constantly surveilled, scrutinised and silenced' (Acik and Pilkington 2018: 152). This fearful reality was reluctantly hinted at by the House of Commons report on Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK (2016), which articulated that 'in the course of this inquiry we came across individual Muslims who were reluctant to engage with us for fear that our inquiry was part of the Prevent programme' (HC 2016: 11).

My participants' fear-- in a context of widespread stigma and the intrusive measures of counter-extremism strategies-- originated from them being unsure how mainstream society would perceive and categorise them. For a community already struggling with difficulties of identity construction and socio-economic inequalities (see Chapters Four and Five), these stereotypical portrayals of Muslims amplified fear, mistrust, uncertainty and frustration in the local community. The stigmatising construction of British Muslims kept my participants under constant pressure to prove their 'normalness' according to what mainstream society perceives as the 'moral' and the 'normal' (Goffman 1963; Ryan 2011; Harris and Karimshah 2019). As Goffman (1963: 14) suggests, as part of a stigmatised community, my participants were always self-conscious and in a state of continuous calculation about the impression they were making on others, and on others from the mainstream in particular.

Despite these forms of fear, fear did not exist as a collective social phobia. I do not argue here that Muslims in my field site lived in fear 24/7. Despite its existence, their fear was controllable and manageable. Muslims in the field site were pursuing their various life activities just as any other community. I attended wedding ceremonies, parties, community celebrations, religious family-organised circles, funerals etc. But I felt that a hidden fear was often present in their daily lives, impacting on their choices such as in housing, schooling and even their clothing. This sense of fear might have not been terribly destructive to their day-to day-lives, but it was certainly destructive to their sense of wellbeing, equality, trust and willingness to participate. I can still recall what I observed as indicators of low confidence amongst my participants (including those who were British born) around their position in society as equal citizens. This was, for instance, manifested by many who often avoided to speak up, express their disagreement with the mainstream society, show up their religious difference, and/or stand

up against incidents of racism or discrimination. Most of my participants would rather prefer to stay silent. They were in fact not silent but silenced by their underlying sense of inequality and thereby fear of being unjustly treated or at minimum not being heard or taken seriously.

While at the start of my fieldwork I found that state of fear unrealistically magnified I later came to find those fears and uncertainties justifiable when understood within the overall context. As mentioned earlier, following the EU referendum there has been a spike in anti-Muslim sentiment. The impact of Brexit narratives went beyond the confines of the Brexit debates and led to a spike in anti-Muslim attitudes and hate crimes. The rise in xenophobic and anti-Muslim attitudes has been followed by an increase in fears and uncertainties amongst British Muslims, a community which is already being questioned over its belonging and Britishness (MAB 2016). The most worrying aspect of the Brexit narrative relates to it creating a ‘climate of fear’ which could shape the entire future of Muslims in the UK with the rise in anti-immigration attitudes (MAB 2016: 7). This feeds into long-standing portrayals of Muslims as non-integrated, as the Brexit discourse (the ‘Leave’ campaign specifically) instrumentally used the portrayal of Muslim immigrants as non-integrated as a card to win the ‘No’ vote (Virdee and McGeever 2017). Muslim fears can be better understood in the context where 31% of Brexit voters believed that ‘Muslim immigration is part of a plot to Islamicise Britain’ (Waal 2018). Anti-immigrant sentiments inflamed following the EU referendum and Muslims were amongst the most targeted for hate crimes (European immigrants were the second-most targeted) (Burnett 2016: 23; Tell MAMA 2018). Following the referendum, reported anti-Muslim hate crimes increased from 12 incidents in the week before the referendum to 69 incidents the week after (Tell MAMA 2016: 7).

British Muslims are not assured of their social and political status in society. Changes at the national and/or international level could genuinely impact their daily lives. As shown in Figure 6.5, the infamous Christchurch incident of March 2019 in New Zealand preceded a spike in hate crimes against Muslims in Britain in the week following the incident (Tell MAMA 2020: 5). As argued by the Director of Tell MAMA, this spike following the Christchurch incident showed ‘the latency of anti-Muslim hate in some sections of communities in the country which were triggered by an attack against Muslims thousands of miles away’ (Tell MAMA 2020: 2).

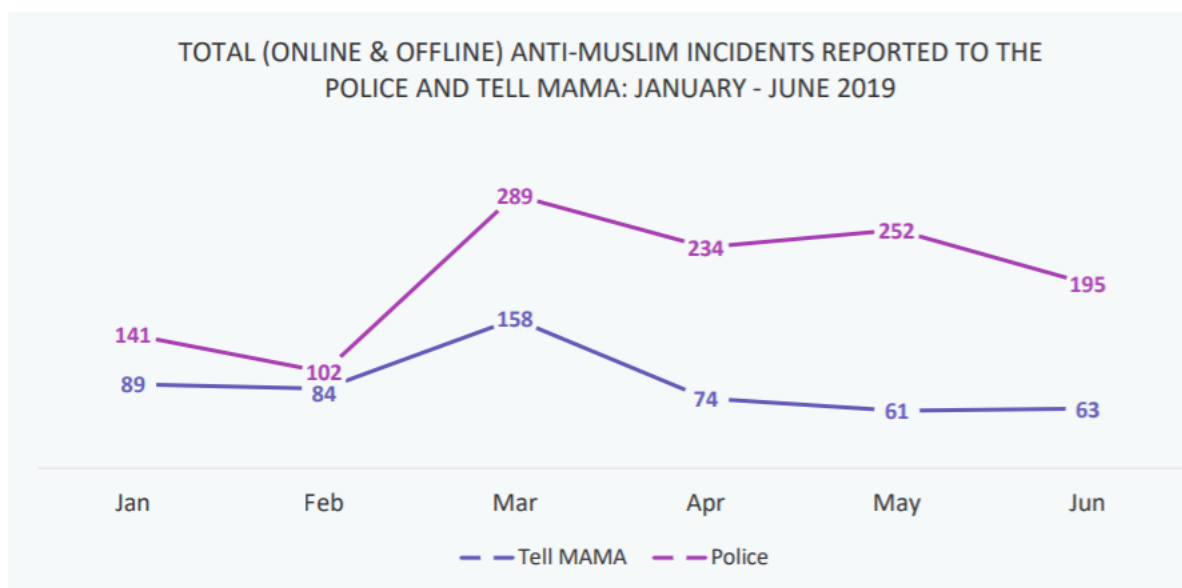


Figure 6.5: Increase in anti-Muslim incidents following the Christchurch, New Zealand's incident of March 15th, 2019. (Source: Tell MAMA 2020: 6)

In response to this state of fear, some participants chose to fight; others choose to flight (Tudor 2003). My experience in the field setting made it clear to me that the decision whether to fight or to flight was based on the extent to which the person was able to take either course. Fear, as mentioned in the literature review, is constituted by structural factors and negotiated by individual and personal factors (Tudor 2003: 248), and so is the decision over the fight or flight was based on social and personal circumstances of my participants. For some participants, fear leads to segregation, a flight into their comfort 'safe' zones, in which they stay locked and prevented from thriving in life. Fear for this group of my participants played a crucial role in forming frustrated and recklessly-alienated citizens who saw nothing negative about avoiding participation in the wider society and who had no or limited willingness to fight against and change this fear-inducing and repressive reality. As negative stereotypes internalise, as Crocker argues, feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem are expected to arise in stigmatised and underprivileged groups (1999: 90). For some, fear of stigma led them, as discussed in Chapter Four, to down-play their religious difference in order to secure social acceptance in the wider society. However, this burden to conceal the stigmatised attributes and to show conformity to the wider society works as a chronic stressor that in fact amplifies the fear of their difference being exposed (Frost 2011; Nelson 2016).

Other participants chose not to retreat into ‘safety’ but were instead determined to fight and overcome their fear by crossing out of their comfort zones and facing potential difficulties. Ijaz, a first generation 48-year-old Pakistani, commented on David Cameron’s political discourse on radicalisation, saying:

I criticised him a lot and my wife said ‘Do not criticise him please because you will get in trouble...and you will not be happy then’...I said ‘Look I have a responsibility towards my community... I have responsibility to speak out....what he is saying is wrong’...I have lots of issues with his speech when he said erm... some Muslims have extremist views. When you say some, we all become the suspects then.

Ijaz was a member of the second generation, employed and an affluent resident of Balsall Heath with an extended family and ethnic ties. This social status enabled him to feel more *able* to express his dissent with the political discourse on Muslims. The intensity of fear (and the course of action to deal with it) not only depends on the outer environment but also relates to other factors at the individual level. The amplitude of fear for skilled and/or socially mobile Muslims was relatively less compared to those who were less privileged in these regards. When skills, affluence and ethnic or non-ethnic social ties existed, fear was more likely to be less vocalised and less obvious in my participants’ behaviours and life choices. For this group, education, wealth and social (and sometimes political) links provided a sense of assurance that outweighed fear. However, fear for the more privileged took other forms. It could revolve around issues of identity preservation and children’s religious education. This was more often observed amongst practising Muslims, as discussed in Chapter Four. For privileged and less/non practising participants, fear would be instigated largely over issues of equality and/or citizenry rights.

### **6.3 Unpacking Fear: A Macroscopic Analysis**

I reflected upon the above narratives and observations of fear very carefully and critically. I did not rush to describe what I had heard and what I observed as fear. During my presence in the field and after, I had recurring questions in my mind: Was that sense of fear amongst Muslims in Birmingham a self-made product due to their *own* sense of religious and/or ethnic difference? Were my participants victimising themselves? Were they magnifying their

challenges? I decided to try to answer these questions by both revisiting my field experiences and observations in order to judge whether or not my participants had genuine feelings of fear; and through unpacking the social and political context around British Muslims. In this section I explain Muslims' fears in light of the wider social structures that play a significant role in forming their collective sense of fear. As discussed in the literature review, despite the fact that fear is an individual emotion and experience, it is crucial to investigate its social drivers. It is essential, as Tudor argues to 'think macroscopically, to view particular social formations as conducive to, and reflective of, specific forms of emotionality' (2003: 243).

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is of paramount importance to revisit the concept of fear: what it is and how it links to belonging. As discussed in the literature review, fear is a response to an actual and/or anticipated threat where a person chooses either to fight, to flight, or a combination of both (Stephan et al. 2008; Castells 2015). So, what kind of threat were my participants exposed to that expressed itself in multiple behaviours and narratives of fearfulness? And, what were they afraid of? Below is a macroscopic account of fear, in which I discuss those macro-processes that, I argue, can explain local fears as they appeared in my field setting.

### **6.3.1 Counter-Terrorism and Citizenship-Stripping Laws**

In the context of anti-radicalisation policy agendas such as Prevent, which came with a range of intrusive policy measures that centred largely on Muslim communities (Parekh 2000a; McGhee 2008; O'Toole 2021), my participants were made hesitant to voice out their fears or concerns, and rather were more inclined to stay in their comfort and 'safe' zones. This provides an explanation for the several refusals I received as I was recruiting my interviewees. Fears as expressed by my participants were similarly reported by Hickman et al whose respondents preferred not to speak on politics at work, to be cautious while surfing on the internet and not to use terms such as Al-Qaeda even in jokes (2011: 20- 21). Linking to the nexus of integration and radicalisation discussed in section 2.4.3; I regularly asked my participants their views on what might lead young Muslims to perform acts of terrorism such as the one in Manchester Arena in 2017. I clearly recall the reactions of the vast majority, who showed a sense of discomfort and suspicion at this question and would in response rush to deny any sympathy with and express in very clear words their denouncement of terrorism and violence.

Counter-terrorism measures such as stop and search and pre-charge detention have contributed to increasing fear and mistrust within Muslim communities (Spalek 2010; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011). In this context, Choudhury and Fenwick argue that compared to any other community, British Muslims are more likely to ‘believe that the police will treat them worse than people from other racial groups’ (2011: 15). That said, I came to understand the forms and expressions of fear among my participants. Both fearfulness and mistrust were voiced by Ijaz, a second generation 48-year-old Pakistani man, when he stated that:

People are afraid that things will get taken out of context. The Muslim community does feel under scrutiny now. They do feel under attack. The mistrust, I think, comes from projects like Prevent...there is a lot of mistrust in communities about Prevent

The ‘attack’, as expressed by Ijaz, could extend to a revocation of citizenship rights. In relation to counter-terrorism and anti-radicalisation acts and strategies the UK, in 2002, revived the Home Secretary’s power (which had been suspended since 1914) to strip the nationality of not only naturalised citizens but also those who are British born, as long as they are not rendered stateless after revocation (this was later changed by the Immigration Act 2014, which allowed revocation even in cases of statelessness) (Gibney 2013a; Choudhury 2017; Fargues 2017). Although none of my participants was exposed to or had direct knowledge of cases of citizenship revocation, awareness of citizenship laws and counter-terrorism measures was a constant presence and their enforcement was widely perceived as reserved largely for Muslim communities.

Muslims in the field setting had a good awareness of how Muslims are under the political spotlight, and that the wider stigma surrounding Muslims has put every Muslim at risk of becoming the victim of a range of intrusive practices, whether by measures such as stop and search or deportation and citizenship revocation. On a number of occasions I was part of community gatherings where I heard hesitant discussions and stories about certain Muslims who had been deported for being linked to terrorism (such as the cases of Abdullah Al-Faisal in 2007 and Abu Qatada in 2014). Despite their support for the prosecution and deportation of such harmful citizens, who put the safety of the society at risk, my participants were often uncertain about how far these policies could go and feared how indiscriminately dangerous it could be for any Muslim if their words or actions were misinterpreted or misconceived. This anticipation of potential harm made many participants mindful of how they spoke on issues such as terrorism and radicalisation, and also gave them a sense of urgency to take up certain

responsibilities (such as learning English), without which, they felt, they could be subject to deportation (Moghul 2016). Because I often spoke in Arabic with my Arabic neighbours, they did not know that I was able to speak English and as a result, many Arabic women warned me that I had to learn English or I would not get my immigration status settled. Muslims were aware that their citizenship status could be affected not only because of issues such as terrorism and radicalisation but also because of issues of integration into and engagement with the wider society. It is essential, therefore, to any explanation of the fear in the Muslim community, to take these citizenship laws into account, as they form the backdrop to Muslims' uncertainties and fears because of the way these laws and policies are framed and how they are understood by local communities.

The criteria for revoking British citizenship are security-related. The concept of a security threat as the basis for citizenship revocation was changed from one endangering 'the vital interests of the nation' in 2002 to one endangering 'the public good' in 2006 (Gibney 2013a: 650). In addition to acts of violence and terrorism, child sex abuse, female genital mutilation and forced marriage have come to be considered as not only un-British but also as forms of extremism to which citizenship revocation laws could be applied (Cameron 2015). In this sense, citizenship deprivation became a preventive strategy based on 'anticipated' threats (Choudhury 2017; Fargues 2017; Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019). In such a context, a simple misstatement could get Muslims not only handcuffed on an extremism/terrorism basis but could also get them stripped of their British citizenship. The widespread fear amongst my participants was therefore justified, taking into consideration the fact of being part of a 'suspect community' along with the existence of anti-terrorism strategies and citizenship-stripping laws whose major focus is on British citizens with immigrant backgrounds, and on Muslims in particular (Spalek 2010; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Hickman et al. 2011; Choudhury 2017; Fargues 2017; Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019).

In addition to making citizenship conditional rather than universal (Eisenberg and Lenard 2018: 2), citizenship revocation represents a restriction on equality and the civic rights of equal treatment before the law (Gibney 2013a, b, 2015; Choudhury 2017; Fargues 2017). Extending state powers, combined with creating different categories and hierarchies amongst British citizens, endangers the notion of equal citizenship for the sake of security (Choudhury 2017: 225). Their awareness of these hierarchies rendered my participants feeling discriminated against and disowned by British politics. By creating different categories of

citizens (nationals and dual-nationals), citizenship deprivation laws increase the risk of ‘social divisiveness’ as they increase suspicions about immigrant communities and particularly Muslims who are according to these laws easy targets for citizenship revocation (Choudhury 2017; Fargues 2017). At the community level, the vast majority of my participants were not aware of the names and numbers of immigration-related laws but there was an overall awareness of political surveillance and scrutiny of the Muslim community. I could observe that sense from my participants that they were less privileged compared to British-born white citizens. They had this feeling of being perceived as ‘half citizens’. Taking the above context into account, formal citizenship for the majority of British Muslims is in fact conditional, as they remain citizens according to citizenship laws different from native or indigenous citizens whose citizenship is unquestioned (McGhee 2008).

In theory, granting citizenship not only defines the rights and responsibilities of citizens, but also the commitment of the state to consider naturalised citizens as equals to natives, and to disown the arbitrary use of the citizenship card in which Muslims’ citizenship status is kept up for review because of their immigrant background (Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer 2002). In practice, citizenship revocation is reserved to dual nationals and particularly to those in Muslim communities. This raises genuine questions about the kind of citizenship granted to naturalised citizens, where the possibility of revocation creates feelings of inferiority in terms of citizenship rights. As Gibney argues, ‘turning a citizen into an alien still requires that the individual in question be part of a group already viewed as less than full citizens’ (Gibney 2019: 16). While responding to my question on diversity and multicultural education, Aminah recalled her experience in secondary school after the 2005 London bombings saying that ‘from that point, a lot of things have changed in schools’. Being targeted or suspected initiated in her a feeling of being lesser, compared to a white fellow citizen, and it also divided society in her perspective along lines of religion and ethnicity. She explained this when she said:

Imagine living in a time when constantly you have to prove yourself. You go to work, you have to speak to everyone, you have to prove yourself that you are a good Muslim. You go outside, you have to prove that you are a good Muslim. It is becoming a headache, you know: you constantly have to prove. When people are asking you questions and you do not have the answer you do get confused. So, you know, okay, I am still a Muslim but I need to be able to defend myself. So, I felt like that was the first



time in my life ever that I noticed what being British was or what it was being Asian British-- what all these different communities to white British are like.

Aminah, as many others in the field, felt that continuous pressure to show conformity to what is perceived as 'normal' by mainstream society and to prove belonging and loyalty to this country. Counter-terrorism policies combined with citizenship revocation laws put Muslims in a position of continuous justification that 'they are all right' (Mythen et al. 2012) and they are not terrorists (Mythen et al. 2009). This was a common narrative amongst my participants, who always felt the need to assert that they were peaceful and not terrorists. The above policies also put the Muslim community under pressure to continuously keep proving that they are fully compatible with society, and that they fit within the government's perception of 'the public good' and British values. When asking her about British values and how far she shared these values, Aminah went on a relentless attempt to prove she was British:

I am British, do you think I am not British? I had fish fingers for lunch today. I am British. I love hot chocolate; so I do not know...I personally think I am British.

Similarly, Ayman, a third generation 23-year-old Pakistani man, argued that

We go to school. We go to colleges. We go to universities. We go to cinemas. We go to restaurants. We do all activities....Islam is a way of life; nothing changes in us as citizens. We all have differences, and we should accept them and should have a level of tolerance.

Whether they are first or third generation British Muslims are painted with the migrant brush. Today's third generation remain labelled as immigrants, being the descendants of those first-generation 'aliens' who arrived in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. My participant Suraiya, a first generation 41-year-old Sudanese woman, emphasised the potential for second generation migrants to integrate, but at the same time thought that: 'They will, anyway, remain foreigners'. This is an important field observation relating to British Muslims' sense that they are not perceived as equal citizens. The position of a migrant in this case is a continuous reminder of being an 'other, consolidating feelings of exclusion and creating a state of second-class, deprived citizenship.

This social and political pressure on Muslim communities in Britain diminishes their *de facto* rights despite the formal assurance of universal citizenship rights. These kinds of policies that categorise and rank communities one above the other erode the actual essence of citizenship, which is universal equality, feeding the idea that citizens with immigrant descent are not genuine citizens to be qualified for assured national belonging (Sharma 2015; Fargues 2017). Restrictive state measures are justified by some scholars based on the changing nature of today's terrorism (Laqueur 1998; Neumann, 2009; Joppke 2015; Schuck 2015; Miller 2016). In Joppke's analysis, terrorists are culprits in attacking the nation, and therefore they strip themselves of their own citizenship by their own hands. In response to Macklin's rejection of revocation laws due to its several fatal defects (Macklin 2015), Schuck argues 'I see no reason in logic or justice why a state should be powerless to protect itself and its people from imminent, existential threats' (2015: 9). Similarly, Miller argues that revocation is necessary to safeguard 'democratic values and national loyalty' (2016: 270).

Replying to these perspectives, it is important to emphasise my normative stance here, according to which I believe that the punishment of criminals or those who expose society's security to danger is not only legitimate but also a moral duty of governments. The vast majority of my participants shared the same point of view when they denounced violent, terrorist and extremist acts and criticised the government's failure to tackle these threats. The problem in the above-mentioned policies does not relate to the true, legitimate and necessary punishment of a terrorist. Rather, the problem lies in its racialising nature, where a particular and entire community becomes a suspect community (Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Awan 2012). These policies create social hierarchies, divisions, uncertainties, fears and mistrust that restrict and restrain any potential for equal citizenship (Gibney 2015). In accordance with my view, Macklin (2015) has strongly rejected revocation laws on account of their many fatal defects. She argues that 'there is certainly no evidence that stripping citizenship will deter a potential terrorist any more or better than the prospect of a criminal conviction' (Macklin 2014: 40). British policies in this regard are utterly deficient. The issuance of citizenship revocation laws did not provide complete protection to the British public, rather, the UK suffered high-profile terrorist attacks such as the 2005 London bombings and the 2017 Manchester Arena attack and these put the validity of these policies into question. This sends a clear message to British policy makers to reinvestigate and deal with the actual reasons for radicalisation and terrorism (see Chapter Four).

Substantively, the above-mentioned laws and strategies deprive citizenship of its real meaning and turn it into an empty concept. I, in this context, argue that these policies should be applicable only on those few who are proven as a threat to the national security and who then deserve legal punishment. However, the way those policies are framed exceeds the boundaries of the ‘few’ and negatively impacts and stigmatises immigrant communities in general, and Muslims in particular (Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Awan 2012; Harris and Karimshah 2019). The vast majority of Muslims as I observed in the field site denounced violence and radical acts and thoughts. In this they resonated with the wider society regarding the ultimate importance of keeping society safe. Violent and radical Muslims were disowned by the majority of my participants and there was an obvious outrage against radicalised Muslims, not only because they harm peace and coexistence amongst communities but also because they stigmatise the image of every peaceful and law-biding Muslim. Therefore, I argue that immigration and citizenship policies as mentioned above should be revised and reframed in a way that transparently decouples Muslims and terrorism and that genuinely assures peaceful Muslim citizens.

### **6.3.2 Racism and Social Stigmatisation as Sources of Fear**

In the previous chapter I highlighted the impact of racism on the residential choices of British Muslims. In this section I focus on fear of not only anticipated racism but also of racism as a lived reality. The securitisation of integration discourses along with the spike in anti-Muslim discourse have contributed to the construction of British Muslims as ‘suspect communities’ (Acik and Pilkington 2018: 152). In general, British Muslims are portrayed as a source of social ills that include terrorism, radicalisation and/or grooming (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009; Hickman et al. 2011; Acik and Pilkington 2018). This was experienced by and rejected by the majority of my participants. The biased coverage by the media and anti-Muslim sentiments were central instigators of feelings of inequality. In response to the way she sees British Muslims being portrayed, Aminah, the third generation 25-year-old Pakistani woman, commented that:

If a Muslim does it, they are doing jihad. If an English person does it, they have got mental health issues...You cannot treat us so unfairly. We are getting treated so unfairly.

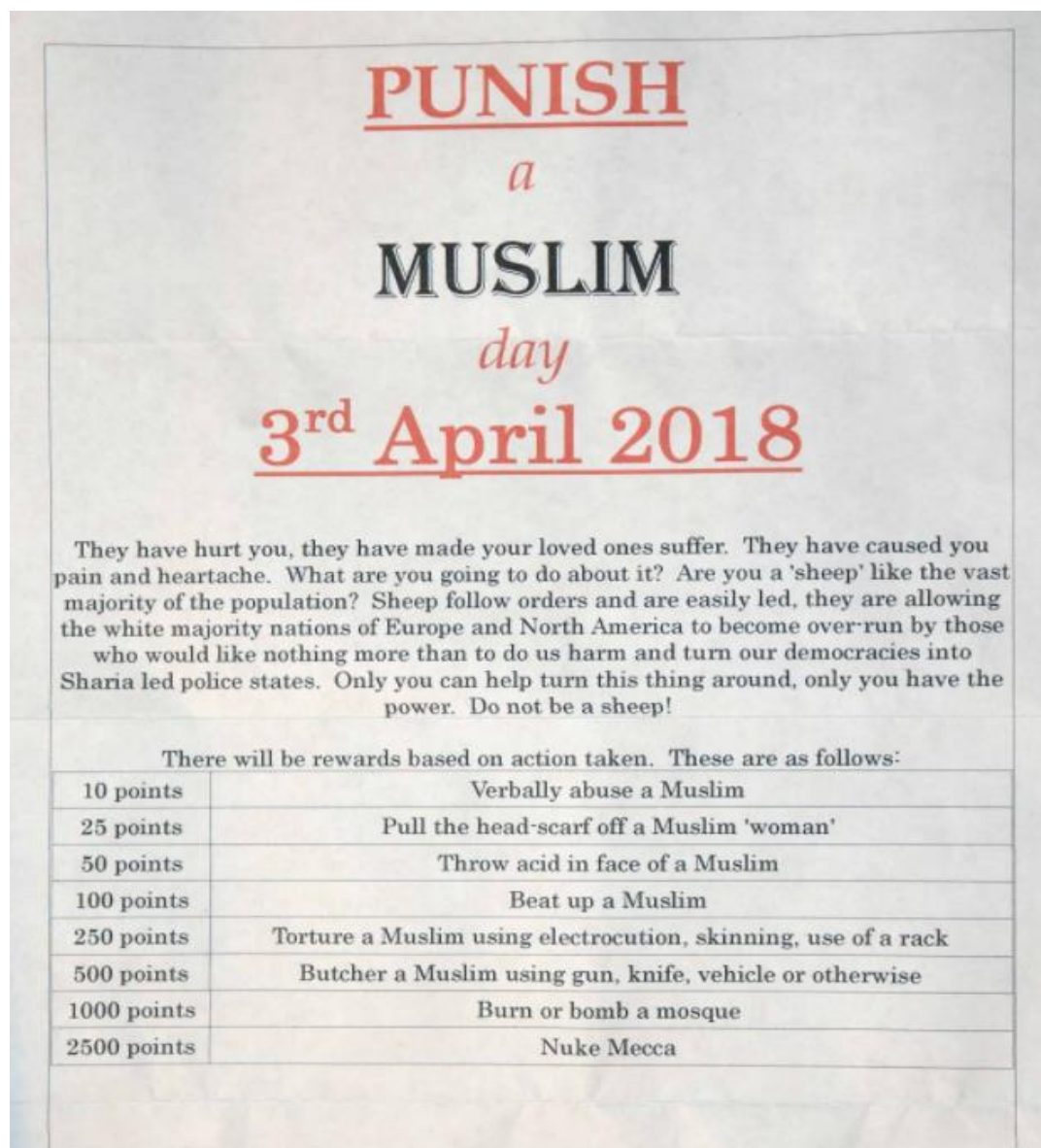
The rising scrutiny of Muslims in the media (Awan 2014) and political discourse (Cameron 2011) has increased racism and prejudice against Muslim communities in the UK, and this increases social divisiveness and misconceptions. This scrutiny contributes to growing perceptions, among the majority population, of British Muslims as a source of threat not only to British culture but also to the safety of society in general. As Breen-Smyth (2014) argues, counterterrorism strategies as well as the subsequent security practices have constructed British Muslims as a ‘suspect community’ in the public imagination. Based on the analysis of 64 opinion polls (2007-2010), Acik and Pilkington (2018: 154) argued that ‘Islamophobia is by far the most pervasive form of religious prejudice in Britain’, adding to the intensive social pressures on Muslims and leading them to feel insecure themselves. This social pressure and sense of insecurity can be better grasped if we learn that ‘between one fifth and three quarters of the UK population hold anti-Muslim or anti-Islam attitudes’ (Acik and Pilkington 2018: 154). This was remarked on by many of my participants such as, Iman, a 29-year-old woman of mixed (English-Arab) background, who said:

Among the white population there is racism not against my hair, or my colour, but against Muslims and I would be clear that it is against Muslims...In their views we are nothing than barbaric terrorists. On the other side, there are white people who just do not care about what others believe and I think it is just a small majority. I would say 51% are not racist.

British Muslims did not generalise racist views on the whole of British society. However, as shown in Chapter Five, rising Islamophobia impacts negatively on the social, economic, as well as religious aspects of Muslims lives. Internalised fear of racism amongst my participants has developed in a context where anti-Muslim hate crimes and far right threats are on rise while at the same time being less seriously handled by the police, compared with cases of anticipated or actual threats by Muslims, which are pursued more vigorously (Awan 2012; Copsey et al. 2013; Littler and Feldman 2015; Tahir and Awan 2015). Ijaz, the second generation 48-year-old Pakistani man, worked in a national anti-discrimination agency, and reported that he witnessed a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes in Birmingham, yet Muslims did not normally want to report racist incidents. He recalled a situation where a young Muslim man was exposed to racism from a customer in his workplace, but he refused Ijaz’s advice to report the incident to the police saying that ‘they will not take it seriously anyway, me being a Muslim’.

Amid rising anti-Muslim attitudes, I recall one of the critical moments during my stay in Birmingham when a threatening letter was circulated in Muslim communities. The letter defined 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018 as 'Punish a Muslim Day', and was meant to trigger violent attacks against Muslims in the UK. The letter included eight forms of violent attack, to which each was assigned a number of award points. For example: 10 points for verbally abusing a Muslim; 25 points for pulling a head scarf off a Muslim woman; and 1000 points for burning or bombing a mosque. After the circulation of this letter, there was an atmosphere of fear and threat in the local community. Many of my neighbours said they would not go outside that day despite the reassuring messages received from the police and from leading members in the Muslim community. As that day was approaching, discussing safety measures was a hot topic amongst members of the community. Videos and messages on safety precautions were heavily shared on social media and local community social media groups. In casual discussions with neighbours, it was clear that people had shopped and got provisions in beforehand, and on the expected day the streets were quiet and people mostly remained at home.

I can recall that Balsall Heath, the very dynamic neighbourhood, where it was a familiar sight to see lots of Muslim children playing in local parks and playgrounds with their mums, was covered with silence and despair. When this letter was circulated in the community I was concerned about my own safety due to the cruelty of the threats spelled out in the letter (see Figure 6.6). However, I reassured myself with the fact that my outfit was not typically Muslim-looking. I was feeling more shielded compared to my neighbours who wore head coverings. As I had no head covering I was hoping that I would not be a direct target for any criminal act that day.



*Figure 6.6: The letter distributed for 'Punish a Muslim Day'*

My own feelings of insecurity on that day together with my observations of the response of the local community are reflected by anti-discrimination organisations such as Tell MAMA. In her introduction to the 2018 report, Iman Atta, the director of tell MAMA, noted that Punish a Muslim Day letters 'caused significant fear and distress for many Muslims, particularly Muslim women, who contacted Tell MAMA to find out whether they should stay at home and work from home on the date set for the "Punish a Muslim Day"' (Tell MAMA 2018: 4).

An important incident that needs to be noted in this regard happened two weeks after that distressing and fearful day. In a playground near my place of residence, I met a 9-year-old girl of Libyan origins named Maria (not her actual name). Maria was quite a talkative and

intelligent girl, so we had an interesting chat together, initiated by her. As part of our casual and childish conversation, I asked her ‘do you play every day in this playground?’ Maria replied ‘Yes I come here every day after school’, and then she whispered to me, ‘Do you remember that day when they wanted to punish Muslims? My mother was afraid, and she told me not to come to the playground so I had to play at home’. At that time, I realised how complex seeking integration would be in such a context. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how integration could be possible while Maria and her fellow Muslim children have lived an experience in their childhood where they could be punished because of their faith, compared to their young peers of English white origins, who could safely play in the playground that same day.

While not all community members were impacted by or reacted to racism in the same way, I found that the negative reality of racism impacted many of my participants’ lives and behaviours. Many of my participants changed the way they chose to lead their lives because of fear of being exposed to racism or racial harassment. Racism, as explained in Chapter Five, led several of these British Muslims to live in areas with more Muslims, in order to be less different compared to others. This enhanced their feelings of safety and belonging because social acceptance was more likely to happen in these ethnic-concentrated areas. Not everyone felt this way, though. I came across some Muslims who opted not to stay silent but to resist racism. In one of the local community gatherings I had the chance to meet Sahar, a first generation 43-year-old Qatari woman who worked as a medical professional. When told about my research, she said ‘Oh, that is a hot topic...it needs to be picked up’. She then shared her experience of living in a predominately white town near London, with limited numbers of Muslims. She spoke about an incident that happened to her while having her daily walk, in which a white man shouted at her, ‘Go back to your country’. Sahar said that she shouted him back saying that Britain is her country and that she is a tax-payer like him.

However, in the field I found that not everyone was capable of showing/acting upon their resistance to racism. With challenging socio-economic conditions, many Muslims opted to stay silent to avoid adding extra complications to their lives. Age, gender and socio-economic status played a major role in forming Muslims’ comments and behaviours of resistance towards racism. For instance, younger, female, less privileged participants were less likely to strike back at incidents of racism and more likely to take measures to reduce their chances of being a victim of racist attacks through decreasing their visits to places outside Muslim concentrated areas.

Although the Equality Act 2006 (and the subsequent establishment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007) is argued to indicate an official commitment to diversity and equality (Squires 2014: 130), I disagree with Squires as with scholars of differentiated citizenship (Kymlicka 1996, Taylor 1992, Modood 2007, Meer et al. 2016) in their suggestion that recognition of difference and embracing diversity and equality is a guarantee of equal citizenship. My field evidence shows that recognition of difference is not sufficient to make fully recognised citizens, but rather only half citizens or second-class citizens. My observations of and interactions with many members of the Muslim communities in Birmingham revealed that knowing their citizenry position and citizenship powers in fact prevented them from taking action against racism. Despite formally asserted citizenship and minority rights for Muslims, the reality of racism, discrimination and stigmatisation together denotes an unequal distribution of power and actual citizenry rights, and this enables the more privileged to stigmatise the less privileged. This takes us back to principles of citizenship, asking: to what extent are British Muslims are equal with regard to ‘citizenship powers’? (Link and Phelan 2001). Racism and prejudice are exclusionary: they deem ‘different citizens’ as ‘less others’ or ‘others within’ who deserve to be prejudiced against and less privileged (Reiter 2012: 1069).

## **6.4 Fear over Integration**

British integration discourse is part of the context which constructs and intensifies fears, anxieties and uncertainties in Muslim communities. As explained earlier, British Muslims have been at the centre of the government’s integration agendas since the 2001 riots in northern England. If Muslim communities are not stigmatized as a terrorist and/or as an ‘other’ in terms of their religion and/or ethnicity, they are stigmatised as per their integration record. In the field, fear over integration had two levels: fear of being non-integrated, on the one side, and fear of being integrated, on the other.

### **6.4.1 Fear of Being Non-integrated**

My participants had a fear of being considered non-integrated and as a result being deemed ‘bad citizens’. Across lines of age, gender, education and socio-economic status,



British Muslims in the field were in a continuous struggle to show their willingness towards integration. In schools, for instance, I observed how most Muslim parents allowed their children to participate in Christmas nativities as well as Easter celebrations. Muslim children exchanged Christmas and Easter cards with their Muslim and non-Muslim friends. At Christmas time, local charities collaborated with local mosques to provide hot meals in order for the homeless to feel warm and happy in the festive season.

Part of my ethnographic experience included frequent visits to local mosques. It became apparent to me how mosques are often filled with documents and publications focussing on the tolerance of Islam and clarifying its position with regard to terrorism. As part of the 'Visit My Mosque' initiative, local mosques would host visits from schools and universities to introduce Islam to the students and dispel misconceptions. In the field site I attended a number of these visits, in which the speaker (who usually was an Imam) would explain to the visitors not only the principles of Islam but also why Muslims behave, think and dress as they do. I recall in one of the lectures the speaker said, 'Today I have a white Jilbab on so that when you see someone in the city centre in a Jilbab, you will not be scared or feel he is strange. In front of you, you see I am a normal human being and this is just an Arabic style of dress'. This strive to dispel misconceptions and stereotypes was also replicated by the majority of local Muslims in the field setting who often attempted in many day-to-day settings to show their compatibility with the British culture and that they were 'good' and integrated citizens. However, I found these attempts were in fact routes to exclusion and non-integration.

Being pushed to express themselves in these ways was actually a representation of othering and prejudice. These attempts were often an expression of existing inequalities, prejudice and negative social positioning. Uzmah, the second generation 47-year-old Pakistani woman, criticised the way Muslims were being singled out in integration and anti-terrorism debates. In her view, being singled out in that way undermined her position as an equal citizen. In answer to my questions 'What role must Muslims play to narrow the social distances between them and the British communities? Do they have any responsibility in enhancing integration?', Uzmah said:

I do not think we have to be taking any special responsibility because we are British and we are Muslim. I do not think so. I think we all need to take the responsibility because we are humans and citizens, you know. If we all take our responsibility as citizens then I think that is when the change begins to happen. If we start to look at it

that, because we are Muslim, we need to behave in this way or we have to make an impact or we have to.... For example, a bomb blows up, Muslims have to stand up and say 'Oh we are so sorry, this should not have happened'. Any human should be standing up and saying this is really bad. I should not have to stand up because I am a Muslim, which is what is expected of us. There is a dead body next to me: Yes of course I feel bad. I do not feel bad because I am Muslim or I am Christian or I am Jewish or I am whatever or I am atheist. I feel bad because that is a human life that has been lost. The automatic mindset is if you do not say anything, that means that you indirectly agree, and we have to prove that we disagree. No other community has to do that, you know. For example, when the Palestinian and Israeli conflict flares up-- and it flares up every couple of years-- you know and you've got clear proof that chemical weapons have been used and things like that. The Jewish community are not expected to stand up and say 'Oh my God, Israel have done this wrong', or the Palestinians do not have to stand up and say 'Oh no, Hamas should not have fired the rocket. Nobody is expected to do that but British Muslims collectively-- anything happens anywhere, they have to be seen. You need to stand up and you need to say you are against it. Why do I need to say I am against it? Why would I be *for* it? A child has been killed at a concert, how on Earth as a human can I accept that? But you are making me stand up on a platform and say I do not accept it just because I am a Muslim.

Such forms of forced self-expression, as described by Uzmah, could be helpful in narrowing social distances and dispelling misconceptions and, as argued by Acik and Pilkington, they are important attempts because they could stimulate civic and political engagement (2018: 152). However, based on my fieldwork, I found that this sort of engagement, produced by marginality, is not always positive for integration and true engagement. It comes in most cases as a sort of angry/painful reaction to counter the dominant racialised perspective on Muslim integration. Such a reactive form of mobilisation is, I argue, less productive in terms of the sustainability of integration as it might be only a short-term response in an attempt to prove that they are good citizens.

My participants found that categorising people into groups as being 'integrated' or 'non-integrated' is counterproductive, and in fact works against how integration should work as they considered it to be against the norm of integration. In this regard, contemporary discourse on integration is exclusionary and stigmatising, and is indeed a threat to integration.

Being exclusionary erodes the potential for social cohesion. Uzmah, the second generation 47-year-old Pakistani woman, shared this point of view. As she put it:

When we say integration, I think again that is categorising, and we subconsciously categorise everything. Okay, to me integration is having no boundaries between people, no labels, so we are a community as a whole. Like when we were growing up we never looked at the fact that our neighbours were black or white or Indian or Chinese. They were our neighbours. And we have created labels which now have segregated us; and this issue of integration has become really an issue.

Those observations and narratives denote that the way integration is empirically understood in local communities is that it works in fact as an instrument of power, whereby the more powerful exert their power to integrate the less powerful. The official discourse often joins in this presumption that British Muslims are responsible for integration/segregation (HM Government 2011; Casey 2016), while the terms and assumptions of integration are set out by the ‘tolerant majority’, who are privileged politically and economically. Hence, this works as a tool of control over those who are less privileged (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). While the majority community is responsible for setting out integration policies and its ends, ethnic minorities (particularly Muslims) are presumed responsible for delivering those set ends. When integration refers to the terms of social acceptance defined by the majority, it becomes a manipulative tool in the hands of the majority to decide whether someone might be granted the label of ‘being integrated’ and hence deemed a good citizen (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). This way of framing integration undermines any feelings of equal citizenship, as it makes it clear that some citizens (mainly the citizens of the majority communities) enjoy a higher status, while others of the minority communities are inferior (Klarenbeek 2019).

Integration in the formal discourse is recognised as a one-way process where the less integrated are required to integrate to be deemed ‘good citizens’ (Phillimore 2012). This proposed picture of an ‘integrated citizen’ is exclusionary and divisive as it applies only to people of immigrant backgrounds, and particularly Muslims. It is hard to imagine that governmental discourse on integration refers to a white British or European citizen. If a white British citizen does not believe in British values, such as democracy, will he/she be viewed as non-integrated? Similarly, is the concept used equally for all ethnic communities? For example, is integration equally required from a white Scandinavian as it is required from a British

Muslim of Pakistani background? Based on this framework, the present integration discourse does not heal social divisions, rather, it reinforces distances and emphasises differences.

#### 6.4.2 Fear of Being Integrated

Muslims in the field setting had concerns over being integrated according to restrictive assimilatory policies which they considered a threat to diversity and identity-related gains (including recognition of difference). During my fieldwork, I observed that British Muslims had some points of difference with the wider mainstream community, which related largely to them as a faith community. I gathered from my participants that those religious differences did not represent a barrier between Muslims and non-Muslims, and that their religious practices did not undermine their Britishness. However, it was clear from my local interactions that assimilative forms of integration did not get a welcome amongst Muslims due to their fears of identity loss. These Muslims had a fear of the possibility of them or the coming generations being forced to pass through a coercive cultural change through new official integration agendas. For Wania, the second generation London-raised 33-year-old Pakistani woman, residential concentration as a sign of non-integration is driven by a number of parameters such as fear over social acceptance, fear of identity loss and the lack of assurance and support to integrate. Although critical of ethnic-concentrated areas in Birmingham, she explained that:

In places like Birmingham for example you find a lot of people who stay in one area all together....and they do that not because they want to be far from the white people or that they do not want to integrate.... but because they are fearful of not being accepted and fearful of *losing their culture* as well....What happened is that...those people have not really needed to integrate because they find themselves in their own circle where very very limited integration effort is required, and they have not found any kind of support system which could help them.

But as mentioned in the previous chapter, critical views on ethnic-concentrated areas were often voiced by those participants who were able to integrate into the wider society. Participants with higher educational attainment and with privileged socio-economic status were often more likely to echo mainstream accounts demonising ethnic concentrated areas. Therefore, Wania, being born and brought up in Britain and educated, middle-class and self-

employed, was more able to both successfully integrate into the wider society without losing her ethno-religious culture and find it unnecessary to live in an ethnic-concentrated area such as Balsall Heath. The ability to achieve this balance between integration and ethno-religious cultural preservation was not a possibility for many others, who were first generation immigrants and/or had lower socio-economic status and educational attainment. However, for many in the field, a lesser ability to integrate did not relate only to their socio-economic status but also to their sense of equal citizenship. The assimilative turn in integration debates was a main source of fear and anxiety for many participants, who considered the current mainstream account of integration as a corrosion of their citizenship rights, as it does not deal with Muslims as equal to their peers in the native communities.

Equality for my participants was the central pillar to their understanding of integration. Ijaz, the second generation 48-year-old Pakistani man, emphasised the role of equality in promoting integration and enhancing sense of belonging for Muslims. According to him:

I think what really encourages integration is when everyone feels equal to one another. I think that is the catalyst. When each citizen feels equal to the other citizen. When you have a feeling of inequality, like one group feels that they are being treated less than the other group or they do not have the same opportunities, here you get a feeling of inequality and here you start getting conflicts. Wherever you see conflict in the world there is always one group who feels that they are being treated less, or being given less opportunities than the other group. And that creates conflict. So, I think the foundation of integration has to be a feeling of equality where all groups feel equal to one another. The people who came in the 1950s and 1960s, I don't think they did feel that equality. I think they were given the worst jobs, and they were treated unfairly. And they did not also know the language. So, because of that feeling of inequality, they did not really integrate. The big rock of integration is the feeling of equality, and the feeling of being on the same level as your brothers and sisters of white communities, or of Afro-Caribbean communities and so on. Then you can feel part of that society.

The commitment to universal citizenship rights in a context of assimilatory integration discourses does not guarantee the protection of equality (Young 1989; Eisenberg and Lenard 2018) because favouring 'the cultural values of the dominant group in practice creates a group of second-class citizens' (Squires 2014: 133; Cole 2000). The latest version of official integration agenda, as explained in the literature review, is based on the concept of intercultural

contact. Interculturalists argue that contact is expected to play a positive role in reducing fear and scepticism among communities and in enhancing social harmony and cohesion (Home Office 2001; Zapata-Barrero 2016). However, my fieldwork findings clarified that the key argument of interculturalism does not deal with the actual cause of fear as it exists amongst British Muslims. Fear in Muslim communities is not in fact caused by lack of contact with the majority population. Based on my ethnographic experience, I can confirm here that British Muslims' fear in this case is not fear of the unknown 'other' with whom they lack contact, but rather, the fear is of the other (whether it is the state or a socially and politically privileged majority population) who uses his privileges against the powerlessness of Muslims in ways that disturb and unsettle them. In general, my Muslim participants feared the suppressive and restrictive other (mainly the state) and feared the racist preconceptions of the other (mainly from the majority population). Once the 'other' is welcoming and genuinely accommodating to their religious difference, I found that no challenges hindered contact between Muslims and non-Muslims in the local community. Observing the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim (white) locals in the area, I often found them to have very warm and friendly relationships, where both sides would support each other in times of need and where moments of happiness and sadness were shared. Those cohesive relationships were catered for by mutual respect and understanding of each other's differences.

British official discourse explicitly expresses positive views of 'the other' and diversity (Home Office 2002). Nevertheless, there is always a threshold to this tolerance. Despite advocating cultural diversity, official accounts of integration simultaneously consider particular cultural differences as threatening (Spoonley et al. 2005). Integration in this sense is more of an essentialist concept in that it insists upon conformity to national identities, paving the way to a new phase of racism (Gilroy 2012). When it comes to the majority British culture, it unrealistically considers it as well-defined and homogeneous (McGhee 2008). Presumptions of homogeneity open endless possibilities for the abnormalisation of the 'other', while the 'normal' becomes the majority behaviour, attitudes and values (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Acik and Pilkington 2018).

Although integration is the topic of the day in many public and political spheres, it is hardly clear what exactly it entails and refers to. There is no clear definition of integration or whether it applies to individuals, groups and/or communities (Atfield et al. 2007). The vagueness of the concept and its changing nature in British politics intensify the uncertainties,

anxieties and hence my participants' fears over the thresholds and boundaries of integration policies and whether they could undermine their already earned citizenship and diversity privileges, particularly in regard to freedom of difference. Adam, the first generation 44-year-old Egyptian man, criticised the way recent integration debates are framed, saying:

If people understand integration as a replacement of foreign [non-mainstream] identities, that is a wrong understanding of integration; and that is worrying. That is not integration. Integration means cooperation, doing your duties and respecting rights, respecting the law, helping the community; being a helpful part in the community; being loyal to this country. This is integration, and that is not to do with my feelings with my identity or my religious thoughts.

In addition, part of my participants' implicit anxiety and dissatisfaction with integration was the official management of integration from the perspective of counter-terrorism, which implied that Muslims (being at the centre of the discourse) need to integrate to avoid them getting radicalised. This invalid link between integration and radicalisation has added pressure on Muslim communities, leading to their isolation and marginalisation as they attempt to remain in a safer zone (Ahmed 2019).

The absence of a clear definition of and criteria for integration, mixedness and social interaction as well as the underestimation of its two way nature heightens British Muslims' fears and confusion over their ethnic and religious identities, particularly as policies of desegregation have proved to be less supportive to minority cultures (Kalra and Kapoor 2009; Phillips 2010). Although economic and social disparities might be alleviated by assimilatory social practices, normative and cultural aspects have been shown to consolidate the dominance of majority groups and compromise the right to difference, making a strong case for eradicating minority cultures (Kalra and Kapoor 2009: 1405). Furthermore, discourses about segregation in the UK have been reduced to debates around 'cultural differences and conflicting value systems', which is misleading and counterproductive (Kalra and Kapoor 2009: 1398; Finney and Simpson 2009). Advocating desegregation as it exists in today's Britain implies a denial of cultural differences rather than a defence of equality; particularly when it relates to British Muslims (Kalra and Kapoor 2009).

### **6.5 Citizenship Corrosion as a Source of Fear**

What has been discussed above with regard to counterterrorism and citizenship-stripping laws, racism, stigmatisation and the biased integration discourse denotes that my participants' fears were in fact derived from the unequal distribution of citizenship rights. Fear as expressed by my interviewees was relational. It was a social construct in relation to a second party, whether this party is the state (represented in its laws and institutions) or another community (basically the majority community). Fear in this sense indicates fewer social rights and a reduced citizenship status for the less privileged (British Muslims in this case). Substantive (or what I call 'lived') citizenship is relational as well (Reiter 2012: 1070). Unequal distribution of citizenship privileges divides the citizenry for the sake of enabling the more privileged to claim and secure both tangible and intangible advantages based on their higher citizenship status (Reiter 2012: 1071). Taking this relational nature of fear and citizenship into account, are British Muslims in fact in the position of second-class citizens?

As discussed in the literature review, citizenship is not only a legal status but also a political relationship/contract between the citizen and the state, where the former is considered as a stakeholder and the latter is bound to guarantee equality and freedom (Anderson 2013: 94). Based on my ethnographic experience in Muslim communities in Birmingham, the notions and understandings of citizenship are not shaped only by governmental narratives, laws and policies. Rather, they are equally shaped by the reality of citizenship and how it empirically plays out. Most of my participants were officially British citizens, but their lived experiences of this citizenship was restricted by fears and anxieties over multiple aspects of life. Socially structured fear in its different forms, as explained earlier, denotes an implicit understanding amongst British Muslims that they are not perceived as equals. The formal rights guaranteed to them by British laws proved to be empirically inadequate to make them feel secure about their present and future. During my stay in Balsall Heath, I would not find my English neighbours to be as anxious and/or fearful as my Muslim neighbours were. I observed that members of the white community had a boldness in expressing themselves and behaving accordingly. Compared to my participants, they did not seem to behave with that subconscious pressure to prove that 'we are good citizens', which Muslims often strived to prove. Local Muslims as I observed them were extremely cautious about how they spoke and/or behaved, fearing that they might be misunderstood or misinterpreted.



The above analysis has focussed on the importance of the concept of citizenship. Significant to the explanation and analysis of fear amongst my participants was their incomplete sense of equal citizenship. I, therefore, argue that lack of clarity about citizenship and/or unequal application of citizenship rights are to be blamed for the instigation and persistence of existing uncertainties, anxieties and fears amongst the community under observation. The concept of citizenship provides a starting point for explaining, diagnosing and finding solutions to fear amongst Muslims in the UK. Building upon the case of Soviet successor states, his paper on citizenship struggles Brubaker concluded by arguing that both accepting immigrants as citizens and engendering immigrants with a sense of belonging depend in large part on ‘the terms of membership for national minorities’ (1992: 289). Despite equal ‘formal’ citizenry rights, the reality of British citizenship today creates a category of second-class citizens whose feelings of belonging consequently are at stake.

Building on my ethnographic experience and findings I argue that meaningful citizenship rights should not be limited to the recognition of difference, equality, and to tackling racism and discrimination. As mentioned earlier, most of my participants emphasised their appreciation of their freedom to exercise their religious difference. However, this was not accompanied by a genuine sense of comfort over their social, political and legal positions. As elaborated earlier in the literature review, a common perception amongst advocates of ‘differentiated citizenship’ is that the recognition of difference is intended to achieve equality for minority groups (Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1996; Modood 2007). The results of my ethnographic field work, however, casts doubt on this argument. Many of my participants were not enjoying the core rights guaranteed to them as British citizens. My field findings showed that recognition and practice of difference were, in the field setting, not identical to equality. For instance, in formal terms, religious difference was secured for the English Muslim convert, the 56-year-old Sophia (section 4.3.1). However, in real terms, she could not declare her faith in her white community. Similarly, citizenship was not enough to prevent the multiple forms, causes and consequences of fear. The 25-year-old Pakistani woman, Aminah, a third generation non-hijab wearing young entrepreneur who was born, raised, and educated in the UK, and holds British citizenship (and ‘formal’ citizenship rights) did not feel protected from fear, as she warned me ‘If they [authorities] get to know [about my interview with her], we will be in a big trouble’. Having access to formal citizenry rights did not shield her from feeling that Muslims are treated ‘so unfairly’, as she put it.

British Muslims' fears over social acceptance relates to notions of Britishness and belonging. A limited framework and definition of Britishness and who is considered British allows more room for the exclusion and isolation of many who carry immigrant backgrounds. Racialising identity and religion is a significant barrier to achieving full citizenship in law and in practice. As Sharma argues, 'racist definitions of national belonging results not only in the refusal to admit certain non-citizens but also in the social refusal to accept many *co-citizens* in the political community' (2015: 99). On empirical grounds, I argue that the UK has developed a differentiated form of citizenship that does not necessarily protect what I call 'equality of belonging', that is, the opportunity for every citizen to feel they belong and that this belonging cannot be denied based on his/her cultural or ethnic difference.

Instead of promoting equality and freedom of difference, recognition of difference in practice became apparent in my field site a focal point of minorities' otherness and marginalisation. Measures to protect equality could become just a symbolic 'tick box' rather than promoting a real and genuine feeling of equal citizenship. In a question on whether she feels equal to her white British peers, Iman, a 29-year-old woman of Arab-English background said:

No, I think sometimes I have to work harder. Sometimes you have to work harder and you might get the opportunity to just fill a box not because you will add something, but because they need to fill some quota.

Similarly, Ayman, the 23-year-old third generation Pakistani man who strongly valued his religious identity and Islam as a way of life, defended his right (and that of every other community) to have his own beliefs. He at the same time, called for not turning that respect of difference and the right of religious and ethnic minorities to practise and preserve their identities into othering. He said:

We need to stop saying white people, black people. Just people. Stop saying Muslims...Pakistanis. Just people. Citizens. Once this becomes universal and nobody tells you who you are ethnic-wise and nobody mentions you by a certain label, then that is it, everyone is sorted, no problem.

In the field setting, there was agreement amongst my participants that preserving cultural differences should not shake the fundamental principle of citizenship, which is to treat

citizens as *equals*. Minority rights do not have to work as stigmatic markers of minority groups as un-equals. That is, treating ethnic minorities as equals not only entails securing their right to the preservation of their cultural identity, but should also protect them from being stigmatised (Siim and Squires 2014). The promise of inclusive and/or differentiated citizenship was to recognise difference, but this recognition has developed into othering. Traditional criticisms of group-based concepts of citizenship either falsify the concept and the possibility of ‘unified group(s)’ or focus on the dangerous outcomes of considering groups as unified (Cantle 2012, 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2016, 2017). Little attention, nevertheless, has been directed at the danger of continually being recognised as ‘different’ and the potential for this to turning into continual othering. Respect for difference should be guaranteed in a way that does not highlight, intensify and/or deepen differences and cleavages in society. Citizens might not be treated *equally* (as some might be granted more privileges to protect their ethnic or religious identities) but they have to be treated as *equals*. A reconciliation between ‘the universal and the particular’ in today’s citizenship is therefore a pressing requirement (Lister 1998: 71). This reconciliation requires that cultural recognition, respect for difference and differentiated citizenship policies should indeed incorporate an investigation of the structures that violate the universal nature of equality and produce inequalities, and not only confirm the validity of and necessity for equality (Siim and Squires 2014: 5).

Fear amongst British Muslims is not limited to the present. Today’s fear is accompanied by fear of the future. Fear of the future is instigated by uncertainties about what coming generations might face in terms of their citizenry rights, socio-political position in the wider society and/or preserved religious identity. My participants’ fear over the future was constructed by their present challenging experiences, which drew their attention to the failure of the state to provide British Muslims with assurances over their present and future social and political position. As Lake and Rothchild (1996: 43) state, ‘collective fears of the future arise when states lose their ability to arbitrate between groups or provide credible guarantees of protection for groups’. Based on their uncertain present, my participants had anxiety over what the future might bring them. For instance, they had anxiety over elections and what they might bring in terms of policies that might impact their minority rights and/or their exposure to scrutiny, surveillance and discrimination. Fears of the future are constructed through experiences of today or yesterday, whether they are personally experienced or experienced by others (Arfi 1998: 165).

## 6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with the barriers to integration, and particularly with fear as a key barrier and widespread feeling amongst my participants. What I found striking at the beginning of my field work I came to understand as structured fear, where racialised discourses and structures contributed to its formation. Empirically I found that fear as an outcome of deficient citizenship plays a negative role in return, in increasing social mistrust and dividedness. As a result, I found that this relationship between fear and citizenship is circular, where one impacts the other through intermediate factors. British Muslims' realities engendered their fear over the present and the future, which I argue comes as a consequence of a British framework and policies of citizenship that fail to treat them as equals. Equal citizenship cannot be achieved unless sources and sorts of oppression such as 'fear' are eliminated. In addition, it particularly requires the promotion of unity without overlooking difference, and a recognition of difference that does not promote othering.

The overarching argument in this chapter is that a fearful citizen is one with deficient citizenship. The sustainability of ethnic minorities' integration (including that of Muslims) is critically associated with securing a form of citizenship politics that guarantees a socially *fearless* present and future. To conclude, fear is the main barrier to achieving sustainable integration as it destroys today's and most probably tomorrow's sense of equal citizenship. Fear has been continually deemed lethal for civilisation, human liberty and freedoms (Robin 2006: 3). Therefore, fear (whether today's or tomorrow's) is socially toxic, particularly when it arises out of ethnicity and/or religion. Ethnicity and social uncertainty, together with a record of conflict and fear of today and tomorrow represent 'one of the major fault lines along which societies fracture' (Lake and Rothchild 1996: 43).

Now that Chapter Six has addressed the third research question of this study, I turn in the next chapter to what I have found, based on this ethnographic research, as the keys to ensuring the sustainability of integration.

## **Chapter Seven: Thresholds of Sustainable Integration: Conclusion**

## 7.1 Introduction

This thesis is a response to decades of heightened public and political debate demonising Muslim communities for their lack of integration into British society. The thesis is a timely attempt to explore the lived reality of ‘non-mainstream’ integration at a time when British society is increasingly being depicted as more divided than ever before (Social Integration Commission 2014, 2015; Lee 2019; Yates 2021). It presents insightful accounts that unpack the stereotypes and explore the lived realities of what is officially perceived as Muslim ‘segregation’, and gives voice to a community often unheard in integration debates. The thesis set out to go beyond the theoretical debates and political reflections on Muslim integration to provide an in-depth understanding of how Muslims themselves understand the concept of integration. The preceding discussion challenges the dominant understandings of Muslims as self-segregating and calls for the engagement of Muslim voices in national dialogues and debates on integration.

This thesis is a critical follow-up not only to the previous literature but also of my own initial ideas, expectations and presumptions when I began my research. Twenty-nine interviews and 12 months of ethnographic participant observation revealed a number of areas of conflict with what I, at the start, thought to be ‘correct’ and ‘absolute’ beliefs. I began this research with a thorough review of the available literature, which led me to develop an assumption that British Muslims are willingly segregated. Yet, 12 months of close contact with British Muslim communities revealed to me that many of these existing views about British Muslims are judgmental and impressionistic.

Integral to achieving inclusive integration is a better understanding of how different communities not only perceive but also ‘live’ the reality of integration through everyday practices, and this search for understanding defined the aim of this study, to elicit and explore the meanings attributed to integration in a particular context. Taking on this aim, the main question to be addressed by this thesis has been: what does integration mean to British Muslims? The answers offered in this study not only dissolve misconceptions and stereotypes, but also provide a novel understanding of how future integration policies and agendas should be established.

This final chapter draws together the conclusions of this thesis and offers a set of field-based recommendations for how to move towards not only successful integration but also

sustainably successful integration. Following this introductory section the chapter is comprised of five further sections. The next, second section provides an opportunity to revisit my research questions and the central findings and arguments that help me answer them. The third section presents my view of the way forward towards sustainable integration and sheds light on how this may be achieved. In the fourth section I highlight the contributions of this thesis, and the following section outlines the challenges faced in conducting this research and suggests some new prospects for future research. The final section concludes with some final remarks and recommendations for the way forward.

## **7.2 Revisiting my Research Questions**

To address my overarching research question, ‘What does integration mean to Muslims in the UK?’, I conducted 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a predominantly Muslim area in Birmingham. My aim was to uncover the inner meanings and perceptions of integration held by this local Muslim population. This section will sum up the preceding discussion of findings and draw some final conclusions that juxtapose my field observations and my participants’ views with the wider discourses and debates. In this section I start by revisiting my three sub-research questions before moving on to elaborate how the findings of these sub-research questions contribute to answering the main question of this study.

### **7.2.1 What Role Does Religious Identity Play in Defining Muslims’ Understandings and Experiences of Integration? And, How Do British Muslims Negotiate Their Religious Identity Alongside Their British Identity?**

This is the first set of sub-questions of this study; which responds to wider portrayals of Muslim religious identity as incompatible with the British culture. In addressing this research question, Chapter Four has presented important insights into the role of religious identity in defining British Muslims’ understandings of and attitudes towards integration. The role of religious identity in promoting Muslim integration has been a source of heated debate. For some, it can be understood to act to promote integration through stimulating group identity, social reciprocity, community bonds and social trust (Maxwell 2006; Pettersson 2007; Kibria

2008; Kundnani 2008; Dana et al. 2011; Hopkins 2011; Mustafa 2015; Ipsos MORI 2018; Oskooii and Dana 2018). For others, it is seen as hampering integration by encouraging isolationist and groupist attitudes (Home Office 2001, Klausen 2005; Blair 2006; Brown 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Joppke 2009; Cameron 2011, 2015; Blair 2016; Casey 2016). For this latter group, British Muslims' lack of integration is linked to their defining themselves solely in terms of their religion (Cameron 2011). For this group, Muslims' lack of integration is a problem of faith; that is, a problem related largely to their religious identity (Blair 2006 (c); Kelly 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Cameron 2011, 2015; Blair 2015; Casey 2016; HM Government 2018). In this context it is, therefore, important to understand how Muslims make sense of their religious identity and how their own sense of religious identity impacts on their ability to integrate.

In the pursuit of answers, my field findings served to challenge two key aspects of mainstream discourse on Muslim integration. The first relates to how Muslims perceive their religious identity. The second relates to the role of religious identity in shaping Muslim integration. During my immersion in the field I found that Muslims cannot be painted with one single brush either in terms of how they relate to or identify with their religious identity or how they understand or engage with the concept of 'integration'.

The first aspect in which my findings came to challenge the mainstream discourse relates to portrayals of Muslims as a single homogeneous faith group in terms of their Muslim identity constructions (Blair 2006 (c); Kelly 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Cameron 2011, 2015; Blair 2015; Casey 2016). My field investigation unveiled Muslims' heterogeneity across not only lines of ethnicity, race, cultural heritage and socio-economic status, but also across religious lines. In terms of religious identity, my participants differed in the ways they understood, were attached to and practised their faith. Muslims in my field site could, however be categorised across lines of religious identity into two main groups: practising and non-practising. My practicing participants included those whose narratives, behaviours and lifestyles were guided largely by Islamic instruction and values. Non-practising participants were those who did not identify with or exhibit an Islamic way of life. In addition, however, variations in identity constructions were observed not only amongst these two groups but also within each of them. Amongst these two categories and within each, the strength and connotations of what it means to be a Muslim varied considerably, despite all sharing a common identification as 'Muslims'.



Generational differences were also important in understanding how British Muslims understood their national identity in particular. While first generation respondents expressed a more accentuated sense of belonging to the countries that were once home, the younger generations showed less inclination to identify with their parents' countries of origin. Rather, they defined themselves only as British and found any challenging or questioning of their belonging or attachment to Britain to be frustrating and alienating. While most of these younger participants recognised their ethnic and religious heritage as part of their identity (e.g. British Muslim, British Pakistani, British Yemeni, British Malaysian, etc.); they were not by this expressing a sense of belonging to their parents' homelands, but rather in recognition of their heritage and background in terms of ethnicity and religion. As for religious identity, the first generation often showed more confidence in and clarity about how they belonged to, understood, and practised Islam; the younger generations in contrast often showed hesitancy and blurriness about how they were attached to and understood their religious heritage. Indeed, in contrast to mainstream perceptions and although it might not appear evidently as so, younger generations were largely more tuned into British culture than to Islamic culture.

Differences in religious identity construction and understandings impacted on how Muslims built their meanings of integration, and this is the second aspect in which my findings contrast with mainstream discourses on the role of religiosity or religious identity in Muslim lack of integration. Specifically, they challenge mainstream discourses on Muslim religious identity which present them as not fitting with the British way of life. My findings also refute mainstream arguments claiming that religiosity amongst Muslims promotes segregation and inter-community conflicts. My research findings uncovered that in fact it is a lack of religiosity that could bring serious risks, particularly in a context of weak national inclusiveness. Amongst my participants, less (non) practising Muslims showed no better record of integration compared to practising Muslims. With nominal attachment to diasporic (ethnic and religious) communities, my non-practising participants, in a context of weak national inclusion, were left with greater possibilities of belonging nowhere. This context of unsettled national belonging and an undefined image of the (ethnic and religious) self could lead to a search for certainty and significance which, in a context of religious illiteracy and misinterpretation, could extend to acts of violence and extremism (Kruglanski et al. 2009; Yilmaz 2010; Simon et al. 2013; Webber et al. 2018; Hoque 2019; Rousseau et al. 2019).

My practising participants (including those who had orthodox interpretations of Islam) did not show conflictual views or attitudes to how they related to British society. A considerable majority of these participants found no contradiction between British culture and Islam. Rather, they often commented on the commonalities between the two cultures. Furthermore, my practising participants often expressed a sense of pride in being part of British society, with its values and democratic institutions and found it a religious duty to integrate and contribute to this society. British Muslims saw themselves as being British as the white indigenous citizens. They (second and third generations in particular) not only identified as British, but also found themselves attached to nowhere other than Britain. Being loyal and contributing to British society was considered by many as not only a civic duty but also a religious duty. This finding is in agreement with existing literature, which often finds no difference in attitudes between practising Muslims and other communities in terms of their sense of belonging (Maxwell 2006; Pettersson 2007; Kibria 2008; Kundnani 2008; Dana et al. 2011; Hopkins 2011; Mustafa 2015; Ipsos MORI 2018; Oskooii and Dana 2018). However, my field data also made it clear that practising Muslims could incline towards segregation in particular situations. Adherence to religious identity can be positive force for integration only when issues of stigma and restrictions over freedom of difference are addressed. When freedom of difference and religious practice were restricted, an accentuated sense of othering was dominant amongst my practising participants, engendering cultural incompatibility views and leaving them with limited faith in and willingness towards integration. Having their religious freedom restricted was evidenced to undermine my participants' feelings of being equal British citizens and their feeling of Britain as their home. The existence/non-existence of harmonious perceptions, attitudes and behaviours was based on the pre-existence of particular conditions relating largely to freedom of religious practice and respect for difference. Muslims who fearfully and/or restrictedly exhibited their faith were more likely to have a reduced willingness to integrate with the wider society than Muslims who practiced their religious duties and related life choices without such fears.

Religion for British Muslims can be a route to both segregation and integration. The route to either destination is determined by a set of factors that define how identity formation occurs. My fieldwork revealed several considerations (theological, social as well as political) that contributed to the make-up of Muslims' religious identity. Macro variables (e.g. stigma and restricted possibilities of religious practice) and micro ones (e.g. religious literacy) played a part in shaping the connotations, breadth and depth of Muslims' religious identity. The role

of religion for my participants went beyond the theological meanings of the faith, and the role of religious identity in integration was associated with contextual factors shaping the interpretation of its theological aspects. The make-up of religious identity for my participants was closely associated with freedom of religious observance, freedom of expression/exposure of one's faith, clarity and confidence about the self, and religious literacy. Identity here is not only about *being*, but also *knowing, feeling* and unrestrictedly *doing/acting* according to one's own conception of the self. In the field site, however, there was a clear sense of restriction on these Muslims' abilities to construct unfettered meanings of the self. A significant many of my participants struggled to construct a meaning of the self in the context in which they found themselves: a context of uncertainties, othering, stigmatisation, scrutiny and religious illiteracy.

A significant factor affecting Muslims' ability to integrate is their sense of 'safety' about their religious beliefs. Having no worries over the acceptability of the beliefs and practices of their religious identity would save much of the time and energy they currently expend over how to preserve their religious heritage and how to secure their social acceptance and position in the wider society. It would also reassure them of their equal status to other faith communities in the UK, whose beliefs generally go unchallenged and unquestioned, and are indeed regularly encouraged and celebrated. A profound belief in the credibility of their status as equal citizens is strongly associated with their ability to *freely* express and practice their religious needs and beliefs.

### **7.2.2 How Do British Muslims Understand Residential Segregation? How Do They Make Their Residential Choices? What are the Mundane Consequences of Residential Segregation?**

In response to wider discourses on Muslim residential segregation, I have set this second group of sub-research questions to explore the meanings of residential segregation amongst British Muslims. In mainstream accounts of integration, the residential patterns of Muslims are argued to increase distances between communities, setting the foundations for social divisions and lack of integration (Electoral Commission 2003, 2005; Home Office 2005; Kelly 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016). Muslims in Muslim concentrated areas are seen as leading 'parallel lives', in which they live, work and socialise only within their own communities and where possibilities for interacting with the majority

populations are at a minimum (Home Office 2001). These residential patterns are argued to undermine chances of shared understandings between communities and are said to be associated with a range of negative consequences such as lower social trust, fewer economic opportunities and increased radicalisation (Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016). It is, therefore, of pressing need to investigate how Muslims understand and make sense of their residential patterns.

Immersed in a Muslim concentrated neighbourhood and investigating Muslims' stories and experiences, I became aware of a set of interlinked parameters that shape their choices of place of residence. For some of my participants, living in an ethnic-concentrated area was a conscious choice for reasons of maintaining ethnic ties and easy access to ethnic and religious amenities and services such as mosques, Halal shops and traditional clothing shops. These ethno-religious motives were more likely to take precedence in the context of increasing anti-Muslim hate crimes (Littler and Feldman 2015; Tell MAMA 2018), which sparked fear in my participants of becoming victims of racism or a racist attack. The power of togetherness enhanced my participants' feelings of security against these anxieties and fears of perceived or actual racism and/or prejudice. As a refuge from racism, Muslim concentrated areas represented places of assurance and relief, as residents faced less pressure here to prove their belongingness or demonstrate their Britishness. These are places where no one feels culturally privileged, as all are from immigrant backgrounds. That sense of being in an equal position amongst local residents increased their chances for social harmony, coexistence and positive community relations.

For a significant majority of my participants, including the practising Muslims, ethnic and religious considerations were not the only criteria that formed meanings of place, settlement and belonging. Despite, for example, practising Muslims often preferring to live in proximity to mosques, socio-economic parameters would define whether or not those ethno-religious motives could take precedence in their residential choices. Socio-economic factors were evidenced to cut across lines of age, generation, gender and religiosity. Overall, most Muslims I came across made their residential choices within a system of constraints including, but not limited to, economic factors.

Homogenising British Muslims in terms of their residential choices is an oversimplification of a heterogeneous community whose perceptions, attitudes and behaviours are shaped in differing contexts of socio-economic status, educational attainment, length of

stay in the UK generation, and religiosity. Despite the importance of religious and cultural parameters in shaping residential choices, I found that ethno-religious factors were often downplayed in particular contexts. For instance, in keeping with the findings of the previous research question, generational differences were apparent. While first generation participants were more likely to prefer ethnic-concentrated areas for reasons of cultural familiarity and ethnic ties, the younger generations were more likely to prefer mixed areas as, having been born in Britain, they had no language or cultural barriers in interacting with white communities. However, the decision over residential settlement was more complex than just a matter of generation (with its implications for English language skills and cultural competence). Economic restraints were often the most dominant factor in defining where most of my participants lived. Many Muslims in the field lived in a context of socio-economic inequality, unemployment, deprivation and poverty (Balsall Heath Forum 2015), factors which kept them entrapped in trying survive their day-to day challenges (e.g. paying for their immediate needs, their bills, etc.) and rendered them little time and ability to consider broad intellectual issues such as integration. Moving out of their ethnic-concentrated areas was, therefore, not an immediate option for many in the field.

Overall, my field site was a place of accumulating deprivation and disadvantage for the majority of my participants, and also a place where contact and social mixedness with other communities were unlikely to happen. Yet, I found that my participants at the time of my field work were not ghettoised, a conclusion echoed by a plethora of studies which have found that British Muslims' residential patterns are not forms of ghettoisation (Johnston et al. 2002a; Johnston et al. 2002b; Simpson 2004; Phillips 2006; Bolt et al. 2010; Mogra 2018). Residential segregation of Muslims is not necessarily a sign of non-integration and should not be considered a threat to inter-community relations. Even amongst those who opted to live in ethnic-concentrated areas for ethno-religious reasons, areas of ethnic concentration were not synonymous with separatist and isolationist views. Despite their socio-economic challenges, my participants often showed positive non-conflictual attitudes in terms of how they perceived other communities and cultures and in terms of their willingness and determination to integrate into the wider society. Nonetheless, this determination to integrate can easily diminish amidst the increasing stimulators of 'bad' segregation (e.g. socio-economic deprivation, anticipated/actual racism and/or discrimination) (Peach 1996a). I argue that if these hard-to-break cycles of deprivation and poverty in a context of socio-economic inequalities and discrimination continue to build, forms of separatism are indeed likely to develop. Such forms

of economic-based separatism, driven by inequality and deprivation, will most certainly consolidate a sense of ethnic and religious penalty in the local community and will extend a separatist attitude to the broader socio-cultural spheres (Taylor 2012).

Residential segregation is a contested topic in academic research and discussions of it do not follow a straightforward trajectory (Johnston et al. 2002a; Johnston et al. 2002b; Musterd 2003; Maloutas 2004; Simpson 2004; Phillips 2006; Bolt et al. 2010; Borch 2019). Residential segregation can be positive for certain communities in certain times while negative for others in different times. The current discourse on Muslim self-segregation was initiated in the UK following the 2001 riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley (Home Office 2001) and the Cantle report of that same year was based on studies of ethnic concentrations in Bradford at that particular point in time. The perception that Muslims communities were alarmingly ‘dangerous’ to national unity and community cohesion is not a conclusion that can be necessarily drawn in other local contexts or at other times. It might have been true at the time, but it is very likely that it is the opposite in today’s Britain, and indeed my research findings in a different context and at a different time challenge these assumptions about Muslim self-segregation. The dynamics and day-to-day mechanisms of life in Muslim concentrated neighbourhoods in my field site did not pose danger to community cohesion. When their non-confrontational perspectives on integration, diversity and the other are taken into consideration, Muslims’ residential decisions would not be seen as a threat. Ethnic-concentrated areas such as my field site may have dangerous implications not because they are areas of ethnic and religious concentration, but rather because they are areas of concentrated poverty, vulnerability, deprivation and thwarted aspirations, and these are the factors restricting the ability of local residents to integrate. Therefore, governmental agendas dealing with segregation along cultural lines are in fact counterproductive, despite the fact that there are cultural-based considerations in decisions of residence amongst a cluster of British Muslims.

British Muslims are not unique amongst all other communities in the UK. Their residential choices and preferences are more or less similar to those of other communities (Simpson 2004; Bolt et al. 2010; Phillips 2010; Simpson 2012; Ipsos MORI 2018). It therefore clear that the focus of British integration discourses and policies on specifically Muslim places of residence, mixedness and contact is indeed a politicised and political sleight of hand. As a two-way process, integration requires the efforts of both minority and majority populations. Also, at the state level it clearly needs to be recognised as a gradual process. Starting off with

the familiarisation phase, it may be initiated among co-ethnics but renders fully functional and sustainable integration outcomes provided only that conditions of equal citizenship and social mobility are fulfilled. This is not a call for segregation in any way. However, it is to argue that any danger to British community cohesion and sustainable integration does not lie in its residentially segregated communities, but rather it lies in the inequalities and discrimination that separate these communities from others.

### **7.2.3 In Muslims' Views, What are the Barriers to Successful and Sustainable Integration?**

British society is increasingly being depicted as divided and disunited (Social Integration Commission 2014, 2015; Lee 2019; Yates 2021). Lack of adherence to British values and heightened religiosity of Muslims are considered to be the major barriers to integration in the mainstream perspective (Home Office 2001; Klausen 2005; Blair 2006; Brown 2006; Straw 2006, 2007; Joppke 2009; Cameron 2011, 2015; Blair 2016; Casey 2016; HM Government 2018). With public and political discourses on integration and community cohesion depicting Muslim communities as the main holders of responsibility for segregation and social divisions (Home Office 2001 Kelly 2006; Blair 2006; Cameron 2011, 2015; Casey 2016), it is of paramount importance to get Muslims' views on what may be undermining their integration and on what works as a barrier to successful --and sustainable-- integration.

This third sub-question brings to light one serious barrier to integration as perceived by local Muslims in my field site. Fear, as a barrier to successful integration, was a recurring theme with most of my participants. Fear was not only expressed and/or implied by my participants but it also controlled and instigated certain of their choices and behaviours. For most of my participants, fear was a key factor both towards and away from particular life choices. Fear had different forms, including fear of legal scrutiny, fear of racism and discrimination and fear of integration/non-integration. It was also experienced in different degrees. At times, fear was experienced as a slight sense of insecurity, uncertainty or low confidence in being equal citizens, and/or an anxiety over future citizenry rights. At other times, it expressed itself as a severe state of fear that impacted on daily natural activities and routines. In the field setting, Muslims' fears were not limited to the present; they also had fears over what the future might bring for them. Their today's fear was instigated by a context of racism, discrimination and

stigma, whereas their fear of the future was instigated by uncertainties about what the coming generations might face in terms of their citizenry rights, socio-political position in the wider society and/or the preservation of their religious identity. This multi-faceted state of fear indicates a structural failure to provide British Muslims with assurance of their social and political position and citizenry rights.

While citizenry rights have for several decades been depicted in accordance with the liberal school of thought (Marshall 1950; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Rawls 1999; Bloemraad 2000; Lister and Pia 2008), my empirical evidence strongly indicates that the mundane reality of rights is far more important than its constitutional and legal connotations. Liberal commitment to the universalist and individualist nature of rights (including the right to difference)-- that is to say, similar rights to all citizens as individuals and not groups (Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Bloemraad 2000; Lister and Pia 2008)-- does not provide genuine support to the survival of ethnic minority cultures compared to the full support it provides to majority cultures (Young 1989; Walzer 1994). The practice of citizenship, in the context of a war on terror, is subject to serious limitations and violations, particularly for racialised Muslim communities whose citizenship has become 'conditional' (McGhee 2008: 37; Choudhury 2017; Kapoor and Narkowicz 2017; O'Toole 2019). As Macklin (2014: 32) argues, 'when citizenship becomes precarious, or subject to discrimination in the allocation of rights and privileges as between citizens, the integrity of the status travelling under rubric of citizenship is cast into doubt'.

Multi-faceted fears, uncertainties and deep cleavages in power relations (social, economic and political), coupled with the restricted view of the (religious as well as national self) have together meant an increased struggle for many of my participants to feel themselves to be equal citizens. Fear as expressed by my interviewees was relational. It was a social construct in relation to a second party, whether this party is the state (represented in its laws and institutions) or another community (the majority community). Fear in this sense indicates fewer social rights and a reduced citizenry for the less privileged, who are, in this case, British Muslims (Goffman 1963; Barbalet 2001; Link and Phelan 2001; Nelson 2016; Furedi 2018).

The intensity of fear did not depend only on the external environment; but was also related to many factors at the individual level. The amplitude of fear for skilled and/or socially mobile Muslims was relatively lower compared to the less privileged ones in these regards. When skills, affluence and ethnic or non-ethnic social ties existed, fear was more likely to be



less vocalised by and less apparent in my participants' behaviours and life choices. For this sector of the community, education, wealth and social (and sometimes political) links provided a sense of assurance and agency that outweighed fear. Socio-economic status shaped both the amplitude of fear amongst Muslims and their decision to either fight or flight in response to fear.

In general, whenever fear existed, it was likely to lead to a stronger inclination towards segregation. Segregation in this case was instigated by feelings of uncertainty, inequality and alienation. Fear not only locked many of my participants into what they perceived as 'safe' areas but also increased their mistrust of the outer society as being accepting and welcoming to Muslims. Consequently, it led to an inner sense of being second-class citizens. The social and political pressure on Muslim communities in Britain diminishes their *de facto* rights, despite the formal assurance of universal citizenship rights. Ranking communities one above the other represents a denial of their right to equal treatment under law (Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer 2002; McGhee 2008; Gibney 2013a, b, 2015; Choudhury 2017; Fargues 2017). In reality, the daily challenges of Muslims deprive their citizenship of its real meaning and turn it into a hollow concept, leaving many Muslims sceptical over their ability and willingness to integrate in society as second class citizens. Traditionally, in Britain as in other Western democracies, equality is sought through citizenship rights. Securing citizenship rights is presumed to promote and sustain equality and inclusion. However, as Barbalet argues, 'a political system of equal citizenship is in reality less than equal if it is part of a society divided by unequal conditions' (1988: 1).

#### **7.2.4 What Does Integration Mean to Muslims in the UK?**

The above discussion of the three sub-questions contributes to answering the main question of this study by building an account on what British Muslims understand and mean by the concept of integration. The main question of this study is drawn in a paradoxical context, where mainstream integration discourses call for dialogue to achieve social cohesion yet seldom represent views other than mainstream ones. There is therefore a pressing need to problematise the British integration discourse through investigating non-mainstream discourses. This is crucial because vagueness about ethnic communities' understandings could

lead to misconceptions and misinformed policies which will not necessarily meet the *actual* needs of local communities.

Muslims, as mentioned above, differ in their definitions of integration based on factors such as religious attachment, freedom of religious expression and belief, socio-economic status, the existence of fears and uncertainties and also the strength of feeling as equal citizens. However, my account of Muslims' meanings of integration draws on the commonalities amongst my participants and the community under observation. In the discussion below, I will draw together an account of how Muslims understand integration, elaborating those areas in which there is agreement or disagreement with mainstream discourses of integration.

Drawing on the discussion on religious identity above (see section 7.2.1), my participants saw no conflict between their religious and national identities. This was reflected on their civic behaviours, where they were not singled out compared to other ethnic and religious communities in Birmingham. Despite their keen interest in practising their faith, which might seem collectivist, Muslims often held an individualist understanding of how they went about their duties and responsibilities as citizens. This appears to be an area of disagreement with mainstream discourses, which often advocate the incompatibility thesis, according to which Muslims' religious identity is incompatible with British culture and the British way of life. Unlike mainstream accounts, most of my participants emphasised the salience of their religious identity in exercising their agency, autonomy and citizenry rights. Freedom of constructing and expressing meanings of religious identity was often joined with a sense of belonging and willingness to integrate. An essentialist notion of rights and identity and restricting the right to religious difference, however, meant an accentuated feeling of exclusion and inequality for these Muslims.

The second area of disagreement between Muslim and mainstream understandings of integration relates to the role of residential segregation in community cohesion (see section 7.2.2). Unlike mainstream discourses, which find Muslims' residential patterns to be a sign a willing desire to self-segregate, British Muslims found their residential choices to be a largely non-religious and constrained choice done largely in a context of socio-economic inequality. Residential segregation, to these Muslims, is also an outcome, not a cause, of inequalities and limited opportunities. Residential segregation for many Muslims is not synonymous with a lack of integration as long as residentially concentrated Muslims are *able* to take part in different spheres of public life, whether social, cultural, economic and/or political.

The third area of disagreement between the two discourses relates to the role of citizenship in integration accounts (see section 7.2.3). Mainstream discourses perceive integration as the only guarantor of full citizenry rights, thereby making citizenship a reward rather than a right and making it ‘conditional’ (McGhee 2008). In contrast, British Muslims perceive equal citizenship as the only feasible approach to successful and sustainable integration. For many in the field site, the incomplete sense of equal citizenship is the central barrier to integration. Citizenship here is not about rights but rather the application of rights. A distinction should be drawn between *having access to* and *being able to utilise* citizenship rights. Without fear, without discrimination or racism, without religious stigma and without poverty or economic inequalities—only then can integration occur and be sustained.

Against these three areas of disagreement, there were three areas in which British Muslims were in agreement with mainstream discourses on integration. The first relates to the role of ‘contact’ in dissolving misconceptions, closing gaps and building integration. Overall, my participants showed greater inclination towards intercultural accounts of integration (Home Office 2001; Oliver and Wong 2003; Wood et al. 2006; Uslaner 2010; Cantle 2012, 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2016), particularly as they were in support of intercultural dialogue, contact, hybrid self-identification and a rejection of social stereotypes and homogeneous groupist social categorisations. Muslims shared the intercultural (mainstream) assumption that promoting intercultural contact will successfully promote integration and community cohesion through decreasing stigmatisation, prejudice and social conflict. The second area of agreement relates to the civic and individualistic nature of citizenship rights. Citizenship, according to this perspective, is civic-based and not identity-based (Gutmann 1994; Habermas 1994, 2001). Despite their unhesitating support for the right to difference for religious and ethnic groups, which might situate them closer to multicultural accounts of integration (Young 1989; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Joppke 1996; Lister 2007; Meer and Modood 2016), many participants expressed their wish to be perceived first as citizens, situating them in close agreement with mainstream integration accounts (Asari et al. 2008; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016; HM Government 2018). Respect for difference, they felt, should be guaranteed in a way that does not highlight, intensify, and/or deepen differences and cleavages in society. Despite realising that citizens might not be treated *equally* (due to cultural and religious needs), they insisted that they have to be treated as *equals*.

The third area of agreement between Muslim and mainstream understandings of integration relates to the perceptions of and attitudes towards the official rationale for integration. At the heart of the political debate about Muslim integration is the presumption that ethnic communities living separately do not share the same values as the mainstream community (Finney and Simpson 2009: 7). According to the latest Home Office Report, integration is officially defined as ‘communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities’ (2019: 11). In addition, British values are argued to include ‘belief in democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, equal treatment for all, respect for this country and its shared heritage’ (Blair 2006). Taking these definitions of integration and British values into consideration, I argue, based on my field findings, that British Muslims have to a great extent successfully met these official milestones of integration. In my field setting, a significant majority of those I came across were ready to live, work, learn and socialise with other British communities; they assumed their responsibilities and availed themselves of opportunities; and they believed in the values of democracy, the rule of law, tolerance and equality. However, I argue that understanding integration must go beyond the above-mentioned definitions because these milestones are not sufficient to shape a genuine sense of belonging and equal citizenry. Accepting these values is only one condition of *successful* integration. The *sustainability* of this success can only be guaranteed if a true sense of citizenship and belonging is achieved. Failure to make Muslims feel at home would not carry with it any possible sustainability of integration.

Putting my findings together, drawing on the commonalities that cut across the different accounts of my participants, and building on my participants’ reactions to and attitudes towards restrictions on religious freedom and socio-economic inequalities, together with their fears and uncertainties, reveals the Muslim understanding of integration as a conditional and multidimensional two-way process that does not happen in a vacuum. Integration is not *only* about the efforts of Muslims to belong and to get along with other communities; it is *also* about the acceptance, recognition, and efforts made by the society in which they reside. My findings suggest that positive attitudes towards integration from the Muslim communities alone do not necessarily guarantee the success and sustainability of social interaction and interconnectedness with the mainstream community.

### **7.3 Conclusion: Moving Towards Sustainable Integration**

Sustainable integration is understood here as one which is resilient to the everchanging make-up of society and the socio-political climate. The aim of sustainable integration is to create strong social norms and bonds based on mutual understanding and acceptance of differences, and to allow an equal opportunity for everyone to live, contribute to society and to continue doing so with no discriminative costs. This thesis is built on the key notion that the sustainability of integration centres, I argue, on favouring the role of stakeholders. My field findings evidenced that having local Muslim communities on board while making and taking national and local integration-related decisions would facilitate their involvement and support as well as dispel their fears and uncertainties.

Being able to integrate according to the mainstream indicators of integration (e.g. speaking English, working, living, and socialising with other communities) may signify successful integration but does not necessarily provide a base for sustainable integration. A genuine sense of belonging is the central pillar for sustainable integration. The deep-rooted inequalities faced by Muslim communities in Britain are constant reminders of their position as second class citizens. Sustainability can be achieved only if and when a genuine sense of belonging and equal citizenry is guaranteed and sensed at first hand. Guided by my ethnographic immersion in a Muslim community for 12 months, I argue that a genuine sense of belonging and equal citizenship for Muslims in the UK is closely linked to the way integration and cultural hybridity is constructed (Sen 1983, 1985, 2005; Rutherford 1990; Young 1995; Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Modood 1998).

#### **7.3.1 Capability-based Integration**

Integration so far, has been perceived as either right-based, as represented in liberal and intercultural integration approaches (Marshall 1950; Rawls 1999; Kymlicka and Norman 1994; Bloemraad 2000; Lister and Pia 2008; Home Office 2001; Oliver and Wong 2003; Wood et al. 2006; Uslander 2010; Cattle 2012, 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2016), or need-based, as represented in multicultural integration approaches (Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 1996; Kymlicka and Norman 2000; Levy 2000; Meer and Modood 2016). Building upon both the review of existing literature and the findings of my fieldwork, it is evident that previously adopted integration approaches have proved unsuccessful in promoting inclusion for ethno-religious communities and in

building strong and resilient bridges between different communities. The fieldwork of this study has shown empirically that formal ‘rights’ and ‘freedoms’ are not enough to secure a representative and inclusive integration policy. Muslims in the field had their rights, which they practiced wherever applicable, but significant issues hindered the full potential and full applicability of these rights. Based on these empirical and theoretical observations, I argue for a capability-based approach to integration, as opposed to the current government’s rights-based approach.

Amartya Sen’s capability approach (Sen 1983, 1985, 2005) highlights how the lived experiences of integration in less advantaged minority communities is blighted. The approach provides a promising framework for areas of concern such as social exclusion, segregation and integration. The suitability of the capability approach to understanding and promoting integration is evident not only from my field findings but also from the reality of right-based and need-based approaches, which have failed to build contexts in which ethnic minorities are *able* to belong and integrate. The problem, as became apparent throughout my field work, is not what people do, but rather, what people are able/unable to do. I report that, in general, my participants did formally have their rights as any other fellow citizen. Yet, there were, as detailed in the preceding discussion, factors that thwarted and undermined their potential to practise those rights. For instance, having the right to participate while being less empowered and less privileged undermines the value of participation (Young 1989). Therefore, social, political and economic privileges can bring positive outcomes only if coupled with capabilities that enable citizens to avail themselves of these privileges (Sen 2009). Unlike governmental approaches to integration, the approach I suggest does not judge the success of integration based on the scope of rights given to ethnic minorities. Rather, the success of integration is assessed based on the degree to which ethnic minorities, and in this case, specifically British Muslims, are actually *able* to genuinely practice their rights.

As previously discussed, integration is traditionally defined in reference to immigrants’ acceptance of, involvement in and belonging to a receiving society. This perspective views integration as a one-way process where the migrant is responsible for meeting certain ends predefined by the host society. At the same time, it disregards the reality that integration is much more than just gaining acceptance of and getting involved in the host society (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). Such understandings of integration focus on the output side of the integration process and overlook the input side of it (Rutter 2013). Building upon this, I suggest

that the input side of integration should be evaluated not in terms of rights (as in traditional approaches to integration), but in terms of capabilities. Based on this proposal, integration should be identified as *the ability to belong, take part, and interact without fear in the society which you choose to live permanently*. Based on my fieldwork observations, I emphasise that *integration is not just to belong, rather, it is the ability to belong*. In contrast, segregation refers here to a situation in which ethnic minorities lack the *ability* to belong and hence to integrate. That said, integration is not only a political, social or economic matter, as traditionally defined. Rather, integration is about everything that relates to person's capability to feel a sense of belonging. The sustainability of integration also requires the participation of '*capable*' citizens in forming policies and strategies.

The choice of the capability approach here is entirely led by my field immersion, where the aim was to provide an account of integration centred on British Muslims' perspectives. Throughout my fieldwork, it became increasingly clear that any real lack of integration could be understood as a capability problem. It was clear that British Muslims suffered capability-related challenges and that their integration was strongly linked to minimising those challenges and maximising their capabilities and opportunities.

In this study, I propose an alternative approach to understanding and portraying integration through the lens of the people concerned, and based on an assessment of their capabilities. The capability-based approach provides a promising alternative to policy makers who are concerned about groupism within ethnic minorities. As the capability approach is concerned with *individuals'* capabilities, it avoids the frequently stated criticisms and concerns over groupism and ghettoisation that shaped previous integration approaches. However, using the capability approach does not necessitate ignoring the importance of communal values and community ties. This approach provides a good opportunity to bridge individual-based and group-based approaches to integration, highlighting what it is that makes people capable/incapable of integrating. In this study, British Muslims' capability to integrate was hindered by fear, structural restraints and unsettled identity.

As for the role of religious identity in promoting Muslims' sense of belonging and integration, I argue that the current British context reflects an increasing need for change with regard to the way the state deals with minority religions compared to mainstream religions. Based on my field responses and observations, it is clear that religious identity *per se* is not what shapes Muslims' attitudes towards integration. However, if religious and cultural

disadvantages are not addressed, lack of cross-community cohesion will remain on the political agenda with a minimum likelihood of resolution. Non-mainstream cultures and religions are integral parts of the life experience of ethnic minorities, including Muslims. While the thesis at hand focuses primarily on the provision of equal social and economic capabilities as the basis for integration, it also emphasises that capabilities here must include equality of religious belief, practice and expression. In other words, citizens must feel equally welcomed and protected if they choose to live as Muslims. Religious identity cannot be grounds for othering, discrimination, racism, alienation and/or exclusion.

Only when rights and capabilities are equally secured will it be possible to maintain societal harmony. Maintaining a cultural approach to social solidarity must be empowering in the sense that it must sustain free and equal opportunity and promote the capability for cultural expression and the practice of religious/ethnic differences. Ethnic and religious minorities must be able to pursue their freely made understandings of what a good life entails for them. The decision over which religious-based capabilities are most needed by British Muslims should be led primarily by Muslims themselves in order to avoid risk of political coercion and/or paternalism (Davis and Wells 2016: 14). In practical policy-development terms, approaching each and every Muslim could be of great difficulty; however, conducting ongoing consultations with British Muslims (not just Muslim representatives) in their everyday lives and settings and at local levels could be of real value. Below I present recommendations that not only reflect voices and needs of my participants in the field site but also reflect what needs to be done to building inclusive and representative policy agendas.

### **7.3.2 Empowering Hybridity**

The stated aim of official policies and programmes with regard to integration is to enhance solidarity and cohesion among different communities in the British society. Following the 2001 riots and the 2005 terrorist attacks in London, celebrating difference was off the table (Home Office 2001; Cameron 2011) and, after years of celebrating and promoting difference as part of state multiculturalism, difference became increasingly problematised in official accounts of integration which have come to put cultural hybridity as the way forward for successful integration (Asari et al. 2008; Joppke 2009; Cameron 2011; Casey 2016; HM Government 2018). After scrutinising the context and multiple ways in which Muslims have



negotiated their differences, their hybrid subjectivities and hyphenated identities, it is crucial to discuss the extent to which hybridity is important for integration. Is cultural hybridity a necessary precondition for a successful integration? And, do hybrids necessarily belong to mainstream society? In other words, do hybrids necessarily have a place in an integrated society? An assessment of the potential of hybridity requires an investigation into how, why, and by whom a hybrid identity is produced.

My field observations made it clear to me that those with hyphenated identities, as they exist in the case of today's British Muslims, are more likely to favour their national identity against their ethnic and religious identities. Despite a partial identification with the ethno-religious identity, the national aspect of the subjective Muslim self often takes the lead. However, this is not necessarily an indicator of integration (e.g. the case of London bombers 2005). As discussed previously, in terms of integration, a compromised (blurry) religious/ethnic sense of self can in fact be counterproductive. Hyphenated identities should not be encouraged with the target of cultural assimilation (Bhabha and Parekh 1989; Rutherford 1990; Bhabha 1996; Modood 1998; Gershenson 2003; Kelly 2006; Mason 2018). Rather, for successful and sustainable integration, what is needed is to secure particular protection for the religious/ethnic survival of religious/ethnic minorities. Assimilationist versions of hybridity could contribute to the marginalisation of ethnic minorities, a condition where they neither belong to the national mainstream culture nor to the diasporic culture (Bélanger and Verkuyten 2010). In a context of religious illiteracy, such a marginalised position could lead young Muslims to fall prey to radicalisation in their search for certainty, belonging and significance (Choudhury 2007; Yilmaz 2010; Frampton et al. 2016) (see section 2.4.3).

That said, I here differentiate between what I call *empowering* hybridity versus *forced* hybridity. In the first case, citizens freely take the decision of how to form their own cultural mixedness. This freedom of choice allows citizens maximum clarity about the self. The second form of hybridity, which is greatly evident in the British context, occurs when one is under external pressures and takes no lead in deciding how the self should be identified and framed. In this case, the cultural outcome is not purely self-made. As might be expected, in such circumstances an ambivalent and blurry image of the self emerges, one that might not have a clear sense of where exactly it is positioned in relation to others. This uncertainty about the self can lead either to self-isolation and/or to extreme self-assertiveness, an assertiveness that might turn to violence at some point (Webber et al. 2018).

It is therefore of paramount importance for British Muslims (as for other ethnic and religious minorities) to be *able* to self-identify without any expectation of retribution. This self-identification creates a healthy level of clarity and agency that arguably protects growing generations from what Modood would term, ‘schizophrenic’ contradictions (Modood 1997; Ahmed 2015). Hybridity needs to secure a fair and free cultural exchange where one’s own choice of available cultural options should be welcomed and supported (Mason 2018).

Muslims in Britain (mainly the younger generations) experience intensive external pressures from both their families and the wider mainstream society. A Muslim in today’s Britain is required to fulfil the expectations of their family, their ethnic/religious community and the wider society. It is not uncommon for these external pressures, which often come from opposite directions, to lead to internal turbulence and psychological stress (Ahmed 2005; Modood 1997; Hoque 2019). The intensive struggle with two distinctive cultural systems could lead to significant anxieties and mental health challenges (Ahmed 2005). Despite the fact that many (including the majority of my respondents) are able to reconcile and manoeuvre their hybridity, others may be faced with what they find to be overwhelming external expectations and pressures.

Falling into such a conundrum, where one has to achieve both personal certainty and stability together with social acceptance and opportunity is a daily experience for many Muslims. The success or failure of either side of the hybrid self decides the level of satisfaction/anxiety one might have in daily life, but the major problem of hybridity in today’s Britain is that it does not allow enough room for Muslims to culturally negotiate. Muslims are left in an unprivileged position in self-identity formation, which often leaves them with that frustrating feeling that their identity is not welcomed and/or respected (Hopkins et al. 2007). A just construction of identity has to guarantee the ability of citizens to negotiate for themselves and have a genuine vision of the self and self-identification.

Hybridity *per se*, as discussed earlier, is not a guarantee of enhanced belonging and promoted integration. Belonging is a fluid socially constructed process through which citizens are enabled to freely identify themselves (Anjum et al. 2019). Freedom to identify and express the self, together with freedom to express one’s identity are key practices for a consolidated sense of equal citizenry. Freedom of identity formation is, I argue, one of the key indicators of citizenship not only as a concept but also as a practice.

Highlighting the above challenges of hybridity must not be taken as advocacy of the cultural incompatibility thesis. Rather, I aim to highlight the significance of reconceptualising cultural hybridity in an inclusive and diverse way that would promote personal agency and freedom of self-identification. Being forced to conform to the mainstream without due attention to an autonomous interpretation of one's self-identity will result in a deformation and alienation of the self (Donald 1996). Hybridity is not only about cultural mixing and/or fusion but is also a reflection of inequalities and power relations (Khan 2015: 57). Thus, an exclusive focus on cultural hybridity as a route to integration overlooks problems of domination, racism, and socio-economic inequalities (Werbner 1997a). Integration should not be pursued under any conditional requirements of cultural fitting. I argue that forced hybridity cannot generate a genuine and sustainable sense of national belonging and attachment. The decision over identity-- including national identity-- should be ultimately free. When identity is freely constructed and internalised, it can be a source of meaning for citizens (Castells 2010: 7). It is important to note that hybridity should be driven neither by a political agenda nor a political negotiation. Rather, it should come through *cultural* negotiation where all parties are equally empowered and capable of running a dialogue that ensures the cultural survival of minority groups, and below I suggest a number of recommendations which can help in promoting this cultural dialogue and interaction.

Building upon the above understanding of hybridity, it is now clear that due attention must be paid to freedom of identity expression in the daily lives of British Muslims. Many of my interviewees based their recommendations regarding integration on the concept of 'religious freedom' or the freedom of belief. What I found in the field confirms that free self-identification is a central constitutive component to forming the agency of the citizen. As mentioned in the literature review, mutual understanding of others' cultural norms and expectations as a condition of integration (Home Office 2019) does not necessarily imply cultural understanding of the *self*. It is important not only to encourage understanding of others but also to develop an understanding of the self. Living with a blurred understanding of the self is counterproductive in terms of integration as it hinders citizens' full capacity to interact and communicate with the other.

#### **7.4 Thesis Contributions**

In addition to the important timing of this research, during which controversies regarding Muslim integration are rising, the central contribution of this thesis is perhaps that it sheds light on a ‘perceived’ segregated community. This study provides a grassroots exploration of how Muslims understand the meaning of integration. The study fills a central gap in the existing scholarship, as limited attention has previously been paid to the meanings of integration at the grass-root levels. The study has also made a number of theoretical and methodological contributions. The subtle ethnographic insights presented in this thesis provide a well-informed account of how integration agendas should be structured in multicultural societies such as Britain, not only by attending to the rights and needs of diasporic communities, but also to their capabilities. Investigating Muslims’ definitions of integration is of key importance for what it indicates about how they actually integrate. The work presented in this thesis not only presents how Muslims think of integration, but has also and throughout, defined where Muslim perceptions of integration can be positioned compared to official and public perceptions of integration and what this might indicate for the possibility of achieving sustainable integration.

Methodologically, this is one of relatively few ethnographic research studies conducted on British Muslims, and it is the first ethnographic study on Muslims’ integration that provides a rigorous in-depth account of what integration actually means to this community through the everyday realities of local Muslims. Importantly, this study conducted its empirical investigation in what is widely perceived as a site of segregation, namely, Muslim concentrated areas. The ethnographic investigation of this study has yielded a better understanding of British Muslims, as my field immersion has enabled me to uncover hidden voices at the individual and collective levels. The resulting ethnographic account provided here challenges stereotypical constructions of Muslim communities as non-integrated. In-depth insights into relevant social, structural and institutional aspects have been rigorously unpacked through the accounts of local Muslims. Such local accounts are perhaps one of the central contributions of this research, particularly in juxtaposition to mainstream perceptions, agendas and policies.

This study contributes not only at the theoretical and methodological levels, but also represents an important contribution for existing and future integration policy agendas. Terms such as integration, inclusion and social cohesion are linked to other democratic notions, such as the social engagement of minorities. Such notions have always been addressed through the

eyes of politicians, members of Parliament, law makers, academics or researchers. But, what is integration from the lens of non-mainstream communities? What does it mean to be an inclusive society? What should it look like? If Muslims are perceived as self-segregating, it is crucial to investigate how and why they (arguably) segregate. The findings of this thesis provide meaningful insights which can advance our theoretical and empirical understandings of this topic and can better inform policy-making processes.

The outcomes of my research work not only fill gaps in the existing literature about how a problematised community perceives integration, but also provide empirically founded reflections into how integration can be made sustainable. This is the first study that touches upon the theoretical aspects of the sustainability of integration. Previous academic literature has focussed exclusively on successful integration rather than sustainable integration, a notion meant to underline the necessity of reaching a robust and flexible mechanism that reflects interests of different stakeholders. Success in the process of integration is important, but preserving this success for future generations is particularly important.

Moreover, this is the first study that focuses on Muslim communities in general, including those of different backgrounds, lengths of stay in the UK, ethnicities, age groups, genders and degrees of religious attachment. The study takes academic research a step further by focusing on Muslims from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and not only (young) Asians, who have already been extensively highlighted in previous research. Muslims' perspectives on integration have not been explored through such comprehensive and in-depth approach.

My fieldwork, in this regard, also highlights the heterogeneity of Muslims regarding their religious identity. Muslims are often defined simply as 'religiously practising'. This study has gone beyond the conventional approach to examining Muslims' integration where their religious identity is largely perceived as the single determinant of their sense of belonging and attitudes towards integration. Being Muslim carries unlimited connotations and meanings for diverse Muslim communities in Britain, with multiple consequences in terms of integration. This thesis is one of the rare academic contributions which highlights how Muslims view their faith in many ways and how this reflects on how they perceive their integration in Western societies. This study challenges most of the existing research in arguing that less (non) practising Muslims are not necessarily more integrated, and that in fact these less and non-practising members of the community may become more prone to develop a significant sense of loss and alienation, both from their own communities and from the wider mainstream

community. Vice-versa, practising Muslims are not necessarily segregated, although it might seem otherwise. This study provides one important message with potentially significant policy implications, which is that, despite being a secular state, the UK needs to revisit the way it engages with Muslims and their religious identity, and it needs to do so in a way that nurtures the upcoming generations with a better understanding of their religious heritage. Preserving and maintaining Muslim religious identity is as important as integrating Muslims into mainstream society.

### **7.5 Challenges and Future Research**

Despite its contributions, this study, in common with other social research, has its limitations. These challenges and limitations, however, open routes for future research. In terms of theory, although the study has concluded with some empirically founded insights into the sustainability of integration, further research at both the theoretical and empirical levels is needed to further unpack the novel concept arising from its findings. This will enable debates to now go beyond the concept of successful integration to examine, in particular, how sustainable integration can be made possible.

Categorisation and generalisation issues add to the complexity of investigating identity-related issues, but in the context of Muslim heterogeneity, it is additionally challenging to even define the meaning(s) of religiosity. Each sub-community (e.g. Pakistani Muslims, Somali Muslims, Arab Muslims) would have a considerably different understanding of what being a religious Muslim involves and requires. It is this heterogeneity and diversity of British Muslims that add to the difficulty of defining criteria of religiosity and what different subgroups may consider as religious identity. Theoretically (as well as empirically), defining Muslim religiosity is a controversial and complicated issue. Estimating/measuring one's level of religiosity/devotion based on his/her religious observance can indeed be flawed either because of being underestimated and/or overestimated. Investigating the concept of devotion and/or religiosity triggers difficult questions. For instance, is a religious Muslim the one who performs his/her theological duties such as offering prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan and/or making charitable donations? Can a Muslim perform such theological duties and at the same time be categorised as not religious? And, which behaviours and attitudes can be said to denote the extent of one's religiosity and/or attachment to religious identity? Some behaviours and

attitudes might seem religious and/or faith-related but they are in fact not so. Therefore, Muslim identity is indeed a complex topic. Further theorisation is needed to identify how to define and empirically use religious identity and religiosity in social research.

This thesis has emphasised the key role religious identity can play in better integrating the Muslim communities in Britain. Yet, more nuanced research is now required to provide a better understanding of what Muslims in Britain are in need of in terms of their religious beliefs. While my findings have indicated the importance of religious literacy in preventing radicalisation, further in-depth research is needed amongst already radicalised Muslims to investigate their motivations for radicalisation, including faith-related factors. Future research should also provide more insights into the role of stigmatisation, suppression and identity loss in radicalisation and why and how radical interpretations of Islam emerge in immigrant and diasporic communities despite the wider secular context.

Methodologically, focusing my field immersion in a Muslim concentrated area meant that my study does not represent Muslims who live in mixed and/or predominately white areas. Despite interviewing participants who live in white areas in Birmingham but worked in Balsall Heath, this group of Muslims did not get equal representation in my study. It can be of significant value for future research to be conducted focussing on Muslims living in areas with a limited Muslim population. Conducting a comparison between both groups of Muslims with equal sampling representation would have added important aspects to my study, but due to the restriction of resources, I was able to focus only on one Muslim-dominant area.

Having an inclusive approach, I involved participants from different backgrounds, but this may have cost me the opportunity to gain insights into how each particular ethnicity may develop its own meanings of integration and identity. Future research can expand on this by investigating whether or not each Muslim ethnic group has its own particular needs and capabilities that distinguish it from other ethnic groups. And, if different, how this difference be explained, whether historically, sociologically, demographically and/or politically.

## 7.6 Final Conclusions and Recommendations

For much of the twenty-first century, Britain has repeatedly been perceived as sleepwalking to segregation. Muslim communities have been at the heart of the debate on integration, with a general perception that they are leading parallel lives, distant from the British way of life. In this context, integration has been puzzled over through different proposals, ideas and scholarship, and has been the nexus of social and political controversies. This thesis explores the meanings and understandings of integration in a community deemed to be non-integrated, namely the Muslim community, with the aim of finding out what can lead to successful --and more importantly, *sustainably* successful-- integration.

To address the main research question of this thesis --What does integration mean to Muslims in the UK?-- I conducted 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a Muslim concentrated neighbourhood. This enabled me to immerse myself amongst British Muslims and to get a closer account of their understandings of integration. In doing so, not only was I able to make sense of these local Muslims' understandings of integration, but I was also able to experience myself what it means and feels like to be a Muslim in Britain. Incorporating Muslims' understandings into integration debates is a necessary step for making integration 'inclusive'. This inclusiveness *per se* builds a sense of self-agency, empowerment, ownership and equal citizenship that makes them *able* to belong. Integration, therefore, is not just about belonging, interaction with and taking part in the host society; but rather the *ability* to do so. Building integration policies only on the views of the majority is a source of othering, alienation and disempowerment for minority groups, who by default in such discourse will always be seen as 'non-integrated'.

Exploring ways to build sustainable integration and social harmony amongst different communities is particularly important for future generations given the growing multi-ethnic nature of Britain. The findings of this thesis present major contributions to understanding what impacts on Muslims' sense of belonging and their willingness to integrate. This study has listened to the voices of a community often unheard, and its findings are striking. In contrast to what might be expected, I found that British Muslims in fact share the major pillars of mainstream accounts of integration despite the existence of certain areas of disagreement that relate largely to their religious identity, their reasons for residential segregation and the reality of the assurances offered by citizenship.



Guided by my interviewees' comments and recommendations as well as my own experience through immersion in the field, this thesis suggests a number of recommendations which reflect local needs and that are required to build and maintain sustainably successful integration. *First*, increased opportunities for open dialogue and community-led integration. Integration agendas should facilitate contact and interaction amongst different communities through community-based initiatives and facilities (e.g. community centres, parades, school exchange days, mechanisms for eliciting lived experiences of integration etc.). *Second*, the promotion of social mobility (e.g. increased local economic opportunities, upgraded educational services, skills building needed for the labour market, etc.). *Third*, the promotion of minority representation in policies and in the state apparatus (e.g. the establishment of a Ministry for Muslim Religious Affairs, representation for minority religions in the House of Lords). *Fourth*, the promotion of capabilities and inclusive citizenship (e.g. teaching ethnic minority history and contributions in school curricula, provision of Islamic religious education for Muslim pupils in public schools, free English language and British culture courses for new immigrants, battling racism and discrimination). *Fifth*, diversifying the integration discourse (e.g. emphasising diversity as an asset, decoupling integration and radicalisation, decoupling Muslims from terrorism in public discourse; emphasising integration as the responsibility of all).

Muslim integration problems in the UK are often reduced to what is perceived as incompatible value systems between different communities. This study challenges this incompatibility thesis, arguing that the problems of Muslim integration in the UK are rather outcomes of socio-economic inequalities and, most importantly, the deficient reality of citizenship, which fails to provide British Muslims with a genuine sense of equality with the majority population. Legal rights such as equal access to employment, housing, and educational opportunities do not inevitably and in themselves enable Muslims to integrate. The possibility of Muslim integration is equally associated with the day-to-day feelings of equality and belonging, of acceptance, welcome and of the freedom and ability to *be*, *say*, and *live* as who they want to be. That said, I find it a matter of urgency for government to revisit existing policies (e.g. community cohesion) with the participation of its communities with immigrant backgrounds, particularly the Muslim communities.

This study calls for a revision both to how integration is being defined and how it is being pursued. Integration is a problem in British society, but this problem is the overall

outcome of the way the concept of integration itself has been constructed in political and public debates. My thesis suggests that the top-down approach to the problems of British integration is indeed part of the problem rather than the solution. Promoting integration cannot be achieved in a context where the rationales for integration policies are expert-based and majority-led. Successful and sustainable integration is possible only if both mainstream and ethnic communities are allowed equal opportunities not only to live and contribute to their society, but also to take part in shaping and solving the integration puzzle. Making integration and the formation of integration policy 'inclusive' is the most effective way to integration, and to an integration that will be sustainable for the generations ahead.

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# Appendices

## Appendix (1): Interview Questions

### Section 1: Introductory Questions

- Would you mind answering a number of demographic questions before starting our interview?  
Please don't answer in case of unease.

Citizenship:

Age/Generation:

Gender:

Marital status:

Employment status:

Income per year:

- Could you describe how you spend your day? What happens on a typical day?
- How often do you visit BCM? And how do you use it? What activities attract you the most here?
- What activities do you consider more enjoyable for you?
- What are the places of interest you like to visit frequently, in Birmingham or anywhere else?
- if you assess your level of religiosity between 1 and 10. How will you put it?

### Section 2: Thematic Questions

#### 1. Participation/Awareness

- For first generation, Could you tell me the experience of your migration to the UK? What differences did you perceive between your country of origin and the UK? How has this changed since your arrival to the UK?
- For second/third generations, what your family told you about their experience of migration if you have an idea about that?

- Have you ever participated in social or political events happening out of BCM? For example, community or national celebrations, parades, demonstrations?
- How far do you think it is important for you to participate in such events?
- Would you mind telling me about your party affiliation? To which party do you vote? Are you a member of that party? May I ask you to explain why did you choose that party?

## **2. Identity**

- If you are requested to identify yourself, how would you do so? British? Muslim? British Muslim? Or something else?
- Do you think the way you identified yourself is permanent or subject to changes in specific situations?
- What do you think the British society thinks of you as a British Muslim?
- Why people are afraid of Muslims?
- Do you ever feel that your religious identity is a problem? Have you ever faced racism?

Do you think you will have same identity Affiliation if there was no racism at all? Do you think, being proudly a Muslim comes as a reactionary way of fighting racism?

- Do you think that you freely identify yourself or you are being pushed to identify in the way you mentioned? In other words, if people don't call you Muslim/Pakistani, would you still identify yourself as a Muslim? We identify ourselves or people identify us?

If you act as British, will you be allowed to do that? Or will you be pushed towards the 'British Muslim' title?

- In your opinion, what it means to be British? What is Britishness? Do you think this has changes from the time when your parents arrived to UK?
- Could you tell me about your positive experiences as a British Muslim? And what about your challenging experiences?
- In your opinion, what is the contribution of British Muslims in the UK? Do you think that British Muslims make any difference? Economically, culturally, and politically?

### **3. Integration**

- In your opinion, what does integration mean?
- If you are asked to define integration, how would you put it? What makes you feeling integrated? And what stops you feel integrated?
- Do you think British Muslims are segregated? Why?
- Do you think they are segregated or excluded? Why Muslims are residentially gathering in this way? Where are the white?
- In your opinion, why some people fail to integrate, not feel British?
- To what extent you feel UK accepts you as a Muslim, wants you, and needs you?
- How far you think diversity is helpful in enhancing feelings of belonging? Do you think this diversity is enough? What is missing?
- Do you think that British Muslims carry part of the responsibility?
- In your opinion, what are the drawbacks of integration policies in UK?
- what makes integration difficult in the UK?
- If you could advise the government about integration of ethnic minorities, what would you say?



## Appendix (2): Ethical Approval

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21/12/2017

Dear Sara

PI: Sara Elsayed

Title: Sustainable integration: An ethnographic study of a British Muslim community in Birmingham

Ref: ERP2336

Thank you for your request to amend your study.

I am pleased to inform you that your request has been approved by the Ethical Review Panel.

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated or there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator at [research.governance@keele.ac.uk](mailto:research.governance@keele.ac.uk) stating ERP2336 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

PP.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "C. Rigby", written over a horizontal line.

Dr Colin Rigby

Chair – Ethical Review Panel