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NEGOTIATING DIASPORIC IDENTITIES: YOUNG BRITISH SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM WOMEN

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Synopsis — Recent work by cultural theorists has celebrated the “cultures of hybridity” associated with diasporic populations. This paper draws upon research undertaken with young British South Asian Muslim women to explore some of the everyday dilemmas of negotiating diasporic identities. I begin by emphasising the contextual and contingent ways in which diasporic identities are expressed. Diasporic identities are always configured through gender, and I illustrate how the respondents negotiate diasporic identities in relation to both changing familial gender ideals and gender relations and against racialised gender stereotypes. Finally, I consider how the young women are exploring possibilities for re-working gender identities by drawing on alternative diasporic identifications. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

This paper focuses on the negotiation of identity among young British South Asian Muslim women¹ drawing on interviews and in-depth group discussions conducted with young women in two schools in a suburban town northwest of London. Such young women might be defined as members of the “new diasporas” created by postcolonial migrations (Hall, 1992a). Avtar Brah (1996) characterises diasporic identities as those that cut across and displace national boundaries, creating new forms of belonging and challenging the fixing of identities in relation to place. For Hall (1992a, p. 310), diasporic identifications are about living “in translation.” He argues that individuals “must learn to inhabit two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them.”

Such “cultures of hybridity” (Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1992a) are often celebrated in cultural forms such as music, films or literature (Back, 1996; Rushdie, 1991; Sharma, Hutnyk, & Sharma, 1996). Yet it is also important to ground these ideas about new cultural identities within the everyday lives of individuals (Alexander, 1996; Eade, 1997; Gillespie, 1995). In this paper, I explore how young British South Asian Muslim women negotiate their identities within the social and local contexts of their everyday lives. In the first part of the

paper, I outline how the young women interviewed understand their cultural identities and how they articulate diasporic identities that cut across fixed notions of belonging. In the second part of the paper, I explore how these different, and sometimes competing, identifications are articulated in practice as individuals negotiate specific contexts. This section emphasises both how gendered assumptions shape the negotiation of diasporic identities and the possibilities that new cultural identities might offer individuals for constructing alternative gendered identities.

The approach taken in this paper is to see identity as a contextual and relational *positioning* rather than as a fixed essence (Hall, 1992b). Such an approach to identity as a process that is always in progress and that is being made within particular contexts contrasts with a much more fixed or static notion of identity suggested in earlier literature on young people, which emphasised a “cultural conflict” model (CRC, 1976; Watson, 1977) between “South Asian” and “British” ways of life, both as fixed and bounded categories. Instead, this approach draws on the work of recent studies of young Asian women (Bhachu, 1993; Brah, 1979; 1993; Knott & Khokher, 1993; Mirza, 1989; Rashid, 1981) which emphasise that young women are involved in negotiating be-

tween and transforming such fixed binaries. At the same time, it is recognised that the lives of young British Muslim women are inscribed by gender relations and class structures as well as racialised discourses. As Brah (1993, p. 443) argues such social differentiations are “contingent relationships with multiple determinations” so that the identities of young British Muslim women must be seen as being discursive formations, constituted within particular social, cultural, and economic relations.

The research involved interviews and group discussions with 49 participants in two schools in the town of Hertfield in suburban Hertfordshire.² All the participants were aged between 16 and 18. The two schools, Eastwood School and Foundation School, provided an effective contrast. Eastwood School is an ethnically diverse neighbourhood comprehensive with more than 50% of pupils from nonwhite ethnic groups, the majority from a Mirpuri Pakistani background. In contrast, Foundation School is a selective girls school that recruits girls from a wider area. Muslim pupils are a much smaller minority group within this school and also come from a wider national background including East Africa and India as well as Pakistan. Differences between the Muslim pupils at the two schools were also reflected in their socioeconomic status. In general, the parents of pupils at Eastwood School were employed in unskilled or semiskilled jobs, while the parents of pupils at Foundation School had professional or managerial occupations.

Although the research involved both interviews and group discussions as well as participant observation, in this paper I draw primarily on the group discussions. These were “indepth” group discussions (Burgess, Limb, & Harrison, 1988a, 1988b) with the same small groups of young women (including non-Muslim participants) conducted over six consecutive weeks. These sessions were structured to allow the participants to define and develop the discussions (see Dwyer, 1997a)³ The discussions were transcribed and analysis was undertaken of the group transcripts.

“BRITISH BUT NOT BRITISH”: ARTICULATING DIASPORIC IDENTITIES

In this first section, I briefly outline how the respondents articulated what might be termed

“diasporic identities.” These accounts suggest some of the ways in which respondents define identities that go beyond the dichotomous alternatives associated with dominant narratives of national identity. In their discussions about national belongings, all of the respondents affirmed their identities as simultaneously both British *and* Asian (or British *and* Pakistani).⁴ As one participant explains:

I identify not as a British or an Asian but as a British Asian. . .but people don't see you as British, they see you as Asian. And it's like “I'm British,” my ancestors are Asian, but I'm British. (Eram, age 16, Eastwood School)

As this quote suggests, such compound identities are affirmed both against exclusionary or racialised constructions of Britishness and in contrast to parental identities. To express a compound British/Asian identity is to produce a new and more complex form of belonging, as Sonia explains:

I'm a British citizen, I was born here, so I wouldn't really say that I was Pakistani. If I came from Pakistan to live here then I would be Pakistani, a Pakistani citizen. And I wouldn't call myself an English person because I'm not, I'm a Muslim. (Sonia, age 16, Eastwood School)

Sonia's response illustrates the ways in which a British/Asian identity challenges existing constructions of national belonging. By defining Britishness as citizenship, she challenges the imagined boundaries of a British identity. At the same time, her connections to Pakistan, her parents' place of birth, produce a compound British identity, inflected with a distinctive cultural heritage. By defining herself as both British and Muslim, Sonia highlights how Britishness is so often synonymous with an essentialised construction of “Englishness” with its implicit associations with both Christianity and “whiteness.” Diasporic identities effectively destabilise such markers, which are so often assumed to be fixed and coherent.

These quotes illustrate the ways in which diasporic identities cut across dominant narratives that fix cultural identities into place by emphasising connections across national boundaries. While many respondents drew upon connections with both Britain and Pakistan, some

individuals emphasised linkages that suggested other transnational narratives, for example, those whose parents had come to Britain as Ugandan Asian refugees. For one individual, her mixed parental heritage meant she traced her own diasporic identity through links with Trinidad and across a “Black Atlantic” (Gilroy, 1993) as well as to Pakistan. In addition, many of the respondents had begun to respond to globalised discourses about a supranational Muslim identity, which allowed them to make connections with other Muslims across a transnational Muslim community or *umma*. As discussed in greater detail below, these pan-Islamic discourses offered individuals new ways of configuring diasporic identities.

If these articulations of diasporic identities challenge the fixing of cultural identities in relation to one place, or “home,” participants acknowledged that in the practice of their everyday lives they were often called upon to prioritise one aspect of their compound identities. These calls were articulated in different ways. On the one hand, participants outlined the ways in which the everyday incidence of racism reinforced the message that they were not part of an imagined, homogeneous British national community.

People don't see you as British, they identify you as Asian, they just go by the colour, they don't know anything about you. They go “She's just a Paki.” You know, like that, full stop. (Eram, age 16, Eastwood School)

Yet while the young women contradicted these claims, they also negotiated expectations from their parents that they *should* maintain strong allegiances to Pakistan and that to identify as British was to ignore their cultural heritage. Other individuals considered whether an Islamic identification should be prioritised over other forms of belonging. While the “predicament” (Parekh, 1989, p. 31) of articulating such cross-cutting identifications may be familiar to both young men and women (cf., Eade, 1989), diasporic identifications are always configured through gender. Thus, in the next section I focus on some of the specific ways in which individuals find themselves negotiating diasporic identities within particular contexts, drawing out the ways in which these negotiations are also about gender identities and relations.

“BECAUSE YOU’RE A GIRL”: GENDERED IMPLICATIONS OF DIASPORIC IDENTIFICATIONS

In this section, I examine the gender implications of negotiating diasporic identifications, first by looking at how gender ideals and roles are often reinforced, rather than challenged, through the process of migration and resettlement. Many other studies have already highlighted both the ways in which migrant communities often seek to maintain their cultural integrity, particularly in the face of hostility from outsiders, and the role that women play both symbolically and materially in the maintenance and practice of cultural or ethnic values (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). While such expectations might be seen to be at odds with theories of diaspora that emphasise cultural “translation” (Hall, 1992a) and reject narratives of cultural purity, it is clear that such themes remain important within the everyday lives of individuals and are examples of what one might call the “predicament” of diaspora.

In my research, the gendered expectations of young women as the guardians of cultural and religious integrity were particularly strong for the young women who attended Eastwood School, most of whom had a Mirpuri Pakistani heritage and lived within a clustered pattern within one part of the town. Many of these participants recognised a gendered parental expectation that, as future mothers, they should reproduce the parental culture:

My mum says when you're at home we speak in our own language. Because we're a family and we're Muslims we speak our own language but, you know, we don't really bother we just speak in English[laughs] . . . My mum always does that, “You're going to have kids one day and what are they going to know about their religion?” [Sonia, age 16, Eastwood School]

Actually that's what I'm afraid of because I don't really want to lose my ties...What about our children and the children after? They'll totally forget, they'll totally forget that they're even Muslim. I mean if we're good mothers we'll obviously tell them. But still, if we're not good at it ourselves how are we going to teach children? [Robina, age 16, Eastwood School]

Such expectations reinforced gender roles and emphasised the ways in which young women were expected to uphold a family's religious and cultural integrity. As these quotes suggest, the respondents reacted in different ways to these expectations; while some were ambivalent, others, such as Robina, did express pride in some cultural competencies (such as a knowledge of Urdu) while also expressing concern about their lack of religious knowledge. Many of the respondents felt particularly strongly about their role in transmitting religious values as they pointed out that as young women they were often excluded from sites of religious knowledge (such as the mosque meetings), unlike their brothers (see Dwyer, 1999a). Debates about young women as reproducers of religious identity served to reconnect young women with Pakistan because Pakistan was evoked as the source of religious knowledge and authority:

If you really believe in your religion it shouldn't matter where you live. . . But I personally think, it does affect you living here. I tell you, if I lived in my own country, I would cover my head, I would pray five times a day. . . In the schools over there they teach you the religion and the history, in our history a lot of the religion comes into it. So that's why you've got more knowledge, and you're more confident, and you're more proud of your religion [because] it's your own country. [Eram, age 16, Eastwood School]

If many of the respondents acknowledged the expectation that as young women they should reproduce the parental culture, this role was reinforced through an emphasis on *izzat*, or family honour. Upholding *izzat* is particularly important for rural Mirpuris (Wilson, 1978), and it is young women who occupy a symbolic place as the guardian of family honour and integrity. This was manifest for particular respondents in the monitoring of their behaviour, and notably their attire, by others, particularly when they were in "public places":

If we go out you know someone always sees you and "Oh God, look at her, she's out there on the street, let's go and tell her parents." And you get home, before you get home, the gossip is around the whole town, you know. . . I mean even if you're not doing

anything wrong. (Robina, age 16, Eastwood School)

As this quote suggests, young women who lived within a particular area of the town found themselves subject to scrutiny by a wider extended "community." These neighbours or family relations assume the role of monitoring the behaviour of all young women within an extended family, or *biradari*,⁵ network. It was also evident that young men, the peers of the respondents, often took on this role as well, as the following quote reveals:

My brother started saying, "You'd better control this girl. She's getting out of hand. She's cut her hair, she might start wearing miniskirts tomorrow and going out with boys. (Zhora, age 17, Eastwood School)

As is clear from these comments, the primary marker of a young woman's assumed propriety was her dress. Many of the young women explained how a whole constellation of meanings was attached to the wearing of either "Asian" clothes or "English" clothes, such that "English clothes" were inevitably associated with rebelliousness and active sexuality and therefore a threat to ethnic or religious "purity" (Dwyer, 1999b). As one respondent explains:

If you just walk down the street and you've got trousers on, one lady says 'I saw so and so's daughter and she's started going out with boys'. . . just because you're wearing "English clothes." (Shamin, age 18, Eastwood School)

It was young women from Eastwood School who were most subject to scrutiny concerning their "appropriate" behaviour and attire. While pupils at Foundation School recognised such concerns, these more middle class girls, few of whom lived in Hertfield, were not subject to the same restrictions. One way of interpreting this vigilance is to see it as a particular response to the predicament of diaspora. Drawing on research among Pakistani Muslims in Northern England, Ali (1992) argues that the experience of racism as well as social marginalisation in the UK reinforces a defensive discourse of community, one manifestation of which is increased patriarchal control

over young women. In this way the patriarchal gender relations that are characteristic of rural Mirpuris (Saifullah-Khan, 1977; Shaw, 1988) are given new impetus within the diaspora as a racialised, working-class minority population experiences uncertainty and exclusion. What was particularly interesting in my own research was how these local patriarchal gender relations were reinforced by *young men*, as Zhora's earlier comment suggested. This policing by young men appeared to be a means by which their own adolescent masculine ethnic and religious identity could be maintained. In particular, young men mobilised religious discourses in order to legitimise their authority, as one respondent explains:

They [i.e., boys] always bring their religion into it as well. In Islam it is like all Muslims are supposed to be brothers and sisters, but not really, not literally. But you know, they say that they're our brothers so they've got to protect us. (Ghazala, age 18, Eastwood School)

There is also an important class element to this community policing. As Skeggs (1997) has highlighted, maintaining sexual "respectability" is an important concern for all working class girls. The concerns of Muslim girls at Eastwood School can be placed alongside the accounts of their non-Muslim peers about the importance of not being labelled as "cheap" or sexually available.

As is clear from the quotes given above, this community policing was concerned primarily with ensuring the sexual "purity" of young women. As one respondent suggests, the differences between the lives of young South Asian Muslim women in the UK and young women in rural Pakistan who are usually married soon after puberty explain much of the vigilance of parents:

For our mothers when they started their periods that meant that they had entered womanhood and they had to get married soon [agreement]. Whereas nowadays they know that girls aren't going to get married and it's just a big hassle, because what if they get mixed up with boys? . . . That's their first instinct: "What are they going to do? Are they going to get pregnant?" (Sameera, age 17, Eastwood School)

In contrast, most of the women interviewed expected to get married in their early twenties, after they had completed their education and had had some experience of the world of work. Individuals' expectations about marriage showed the most variation according to class and parental education. For pupils at Foundation School, marriage was a possibility in the future, but their primary concern was to go to university and establish themselves within a professional career, perhaps medicine or law. When asked about their attitudes to a marriage partner they expected to marry a Muslim, suggesting this would be important because they would have so much in common, but not necessarily someone from the same parental background as themselves. These expectations reflected their own experiences of family marriages, and indeed several cited their knowledge of "mixed marriages" within their extended family. All of these young women enjoyed strong parental support for such choices.

For pupils at Eastwood School, concerns about marriage were more immediate. First cousin marriages are particularly common amongst rural Mirpuris as a way of strengthening biradari reciprocal relationships (see endnote 5). Such marriages were well known within the Hertfield South Asian Muslim community. Participants were ambivalent about their success:

My auntie's had an arranged marriage and it didn't work out so I look at her and think "no way". . . her husband came from Pakistan. . . like my auntie is so different from him. . . (Sonia, age 16, Eastwood School)

It was clear from discussions with pupils at Eastwood School that attitudes towards marriage were under debate. While for some families biradari connections remained paramount, stereotypical "arranged marriages" with cousins in Pakistan were no longer so prevalent. Instead marriages between families or cousins within the UK were becoming increasingly important, reflecting young peoples' changed expectations and enabling participants to play an active role in the decision making. In this way biradari connections remained important but were given a new meaning in the diaspora context reflecting both the changing expectations of young people and broader social and struc-

tural processes such as immigration policies and greater economic opportunities for young women. Thus, many of the young women at Eastwood School talked about getting married later than their elder sisters or cousins and talked about working, or studying at college, first:

I want a career before I get married . . . I'd prefer to get married at a lot later age . . . than early . . . because most women . . . Muslim girls get married about 20 to 22, arranged marriage . . . I'd prefer to have a career . . . I'll probably go to university if I pass my [exams] . . . and have a career. [Thaira, age 17, Eastwood School]

Debates about marriage for young British Muslim women are shaped by competing discourses and representations. While marriage was a concern for many of the pupils from Eastwood School, their discussions about marriage revealed some of the contradictions they faced in the daily negotiation of their identities. On the one hand, individuals acknowledged the differences of opinion that they might have with their parents concerning their choice of a marriage partner. On the other, participants also wanted to challenge the assumption that all young British Muslim women are always the victims of oppressive parents and unhappy "arranged" marriages.

All the white girls think that all Asian girls have arranged marriages and all these Asians are sent to Pakistan. Like if an Asian girl goes to Pakistan, even for a holiday, they say, "Oh she's gone to get married." (Sonia, age 16, Eastwood School)

These comments reflect a concern highlighted by other writers (Brah & Minhas, 1985; Puar, 1994) that a focus on the "arranged" marriage, as the sign of the pathology of the Asian family, has become the dominant "culturalist" paradigm for understanding young British Muslim women. Sonia's comments were echoed by many of the participants from both schools. For young South Asian Muslim women their own complex identities are often foreclosed by stereotypical assumptions that are made about them by others. Gendered, classed, and racialised explanations reinforce a dominant representation of young Muslim

women as both oppressed and powerless. As Sara explains:

You know the stereotype, you've got the timid little Muslim girl with the headscarf on, and the strict father or grandfather who won't let her go out or who won't let her do anything. (Sara, age 17, Foundation School)

Such stereotypes impinged on the participants in many different ways in their everyday lives. One pupil at Foundation School recounts how, despite her obvious academic abilities, her university interviewer doubted her commitment to study for a medical degree:

When I had my interview the first thing the doctor asked me was "I know that a lot of Asian girls want to go to medical school, and they get into school and later on their parents give them hassle. What have you done about that?" And I, I don't know, I mean, I said that they are not all like that you know, I've got very understanding parents, I've talked to them about how, it's a six-year-long degree and at the end of it you have to work weekends and late nights, with me, you're treating men, and they've accepted that. I said we're not all like that you know. (Riffat, age 17, Foundation School)

This experience paralleled those of other participants who argued that people often made assumptions that "*we're all the same*." If dominant discourses construct Asian women as passive victims of oppressive cultures, these racialised and gendered discourses intersect with a reworking of Orientalist discourses that construct Islam as antithetical to "western culture" and Muslim women as the embodiment of a repressive and "fundamentalist" religion (Kabbani, 1986; Lutz, 1991). All of the respondents were familiar with these stereotypes and the ways in which they worked in their everyday lives. Individuals complained that they were often judged by others—by peers, teachers, colleagues at work—as being representative of a group rather than as diverse individuals. Such assumptions again worked to negate the articulation of a compound identity as British/Asian. Instead young women found themselves constantly judged or essentialised as "*a typical Muslim girl*." As Sameera explains:

I'm constantly thinking about what people will think of me. . . even when I haven't got a scarf on my head but I'm in Asian clothes. . . they must think that I'm really typical. . . you know that I'm from the dark ages and that. [Sameera, age 17, Foundation School]

In this section, I have sought to demonstrate the role that gender plays in the construction and negotiation of diasporic identities for young British South Asian Muslims. For many young women their identities are shaped by familial expectations of "appropriate femininities" (Dwyer, 1999c), which ensure that the behaviour and attire of young women are strictly monitored. These practices are upheld through patriarchal discourses, often given new emphasis within the diaspora context, which define young women as guardians of religious and cultural integrity. Such gendered discourses are shaped by class and family background and are therefore much more significant for working-class girls of rural Mirpuri background than for their more middle-class peers. At the same time, all individuals negotiate the racialised gendering of dominant discourses, which often work to essentialise differences and construct gendered stereotypes.

NEGOTIATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES: REWORKING GENDER IDENTITIES

Having outlined some of the ways in which gendered discourses structure the negotiation of identity for young Muslim women, I consider the possibilities the young women have for reworking their gender identities by drawing upon alternative diasporic identifications. First, I consider the possibilities for "hybrid" identities, which transcend binary oppositions. Second, I look at the ways in which "new" Muslim identifications, which draw upon links within a pan-Islamic diaspora, may offer ways of reworking gender identities. I conclude by illustrating the ways in which individuals are involved in combining strategies or possibilities in their daily lives.

As the earlier discussion suggested, dress was one of the most important means through which young Muslim women negotiated their gendered identities. While their attire was used by parents and others to monitor reli-

gious and ethnic "purity," it simultaneously functioned, as the quote from Sameera suggests, to position young women as "typical Muslim girls." In this way, dress has become an overdetermined signifier for the identity of young British Muslim women (Dwyer, 1999b). Yet by resisting the meanings attached to different forms of dress and by creating new styles, the young women were able to open up possibilities for challenging binary oppositions and creating alternative "hybrid" identities. One way in which the young women did this was to challenge the meanings associated with "Asian" and "English" clothes. Individuals argued that it was possible to wear a range of different clothes that conformed to Islamic strictures about appropriate dress rather than simply adopting the *shalwar kameez*⁶ worn by their mothers. Thus, trousers or long skirts were entirely appropriate forms of Islamic dress, as these participants argue:

It's like wearing a long skirt, wearing westernised clothes, which cover you up. We say we're right because we're covering ourselves and there's nothing wrong with wearing it. (Sameera, age 17, Eastwood School)

Like it doesn't say in the religion...you've got to wear Asian clothes or anything, it just says that you've got to be covered. (Ghazala, age 18, Eastwood School)

By wearing such clothes—and different individuals had different degrees of freedom in how they chose to dress—participants were able to construct an alternative identity through their dress, which challenged parental assumptions about appropriate attire but could also confound the expectations of others. Such dress styles challenged the supposed opposition between "English" and "Asian" clothes, creating a new, fused identity that was both "Western" and "Islamic."

For other pupils, creating a "hybrid" identity through dress was less about subverting parental assumptions and more about challenging the attitudes of their peers. Thus, pupils at Foundation School were involved in organising an "East meets West," fashion show which was intended, quite self-consciously, to demonstrate the possibilities of "hybrid" identities through the blending and crossing over of different styles. Pupils emphasised the ex-

tent to which contemporary “British” fashions were drawing on “Asian” influences (see Bha-chu, 1993) and used the catwalk to illustrate some of these possibilities:

We, and some others, are mixing. Like this sort of skirt [indicating a long silk skirt] . . . is sort of Asian colours and the material. And the top that goes with it is Asian, and the scarf. (Riffat, age 17, Foundation School)

These hybrid styles were thus used by pupils in different ways. For the working class pupils at Eastwood School they were important to challenge the restrictions of their parents and to rework acceptable gender identities in relation to dress. For pupils at Foundation School, who generally had much greater freedom in how they chose to dress, hybrid styles were a way of challenging stereotypes and emphasising cultural diversity.

The creation of a hybrid dress style that is both fashionably “western” and yet conforms to Islamic dress codes was particularly important for those young women who had begun to explore an alternative “new” Muslim identity. This identification draws on globalised imaginations of a worldwide, transnational Muslim community, or *umma* (McLoughlin, 1996), which connects Muslims in Britain with other Muslims throughout the world. Such connections were made by respondents, for example in relation to Bosnian Muslims in Yugoslavia (see Dwyer, 1999a), but had been given particular emphasis through the debates within the newly rejuvenated Muslim societies in each school. Speakers, often from University Islamic societies representing organisations such as Young Muslims UK (see Lewis, 1994, p. 104), emphasised a self-consciously Islamic identification that was often counterposed to the parental culture based upon Pakistani superstitions and traditions. This reasserted Islamic identity offered an alternative gender identity, which emphasised not restrictions but greater possibilities for women. As one respondent argues:

People say that women are oppressed by Islam. It is true, women are oppressed, but it's not Islam that oppresses them, it's the culture that oppresses Muslim women....If I was to go out there and, you know, take all the rights that I have, the rights given to me [in

Islam], I'd be the talk of the town... (Ruhi, age 17, Eastwood School)

By evoking this Islamic authority, individuals were able to argue that not only should they be able to dress in a style which was both “western” and “Islamic” but that they should also have greater freedoms to go out or go on to higher education and to be fully involved in the choice of marriage partner.

A self-consciously Islamic identity had only been embraced by a few participants. For these individuals Islam offered not only a personal religious identification but also a means by which they could construct an alternative gender identity. By adopting an orthodox Islamic identity, an individual like Ruhi, who came from a working-class Mirpuri background, was able to challenge parental prohibitions by drawing on religious authority to support her arguments about going on to further education. Not only could she cite the Koran in support of her ambitions, but her adoption of the *hijab* (a complete head-covering, as well as long skirt and coat) served to indicate a demure Muslim femininity which would allay parental concerns. As Ali (1992, p. 114) argues, such a strategy may enable girls, particularly from lowerclass backgrounds, to gain greater educational freedoms or professional employment. For the majority of the participants, such devotion to their faith was not attractive, and indeed they could also feel threatened by those who had chosen to adopt complete Islamic dress (for further discussion see Dwyer, 1999b). Yet it was clear that identification with a wider Muslim diaspora could offer possibilities for challenging parental strictures about gender roles, if not actively reworking gender identities. Thus, individuals were all able to cite “Islamic authority,” which supported freedom of choice with regard to marriage. The possibility of evoking Islamic authority within particular circumstances reveals how individuals negotiated their gendered diasporic identities on a daily basis, drawing on different discourses or opportunities. While a self-conscious Islamic identity was not adopted by many participants, connections with a wider Muslim diaspora could be drawn on within particular circumstances. Several participants reflected that a stronger religious identity might be a possibility in the future. For example, a pupil at Foundation School suggested that wearing a headscarf when she began at university might make her

feel “*more secure*” even though she chose not to wear one at school.

It is clear then that the negotiation of gendered diasporic identities occurs in different ways within specific contexts. Individuals were able to prioritise different aspects of their compound identities depending on particular circumstances—drawing on their British identity in some situations and in others drawing connections with Pakistan or with other Muslims. At the same time individuals attempted to negotiate “hybrid” identities, which emphasised a fusion of cultural influences and which challenged discourses that sought to essentialise difference. What possibilities individuals chose to rework their gender identities and how successful they were depended on a combination of different factors. Not only did parental and class backgrounds play an important role; broader social and economic processes were also factors. For example, changes in the local labour market had resulted in declining opportunities in manual work and an expansion of more female-orientated industries, such as clerical and service work, which presented more jobs for young women than for their brothers or fathers. This meant that the possibility of delaying marriage and developing a career was much more likely for these young women than it had been for their older sisters.

CONCLUSION: GENDERING THE DIASPORA

In conclusion, I want to return to the possibilities of diasporic identities celebrated in some of the most influential accounts of diaspora theory (Clifford, 1994; Hall, 1992a). As Floya Anthias (1998) has recently argued, this concept of diaspora seeks to go beyond existing “race” and “ethnicity” theoretical perspectives to provide new ways of theorising identity that recognise differences and avoid essentialism. Yet Anthias argues that the notion of diaspora requires greater theoretical and empirical scrutiny, particularly in relation to gender. In this paper, I have sought to consider how diasporic identities are articulated by young British South Asian Muslim women and how gender relations are integral to such articulations. Through these discussions, I have traced some of the ways in which consideration must be paid to the gendering of diaspora.

Clearly, individuals participate in diasporic identities in different ways. This paper has suggested that class and family social background remain significant in structuring how gender identities are negotiated within the diaspora. Indeed, social relations that produce gender disadvantages may be strengthened rather than weakened through the process of migration. Alternatively, new diasporic identifications may also work to reiterate existing patriarchal relations. Thus young working-class women in Hertfield may find that patriarchal social relations inherited from rural Mirpur are given renewed emphasis by young men who feel marginalised in a racialised Britain and are seeking a “new” Islamic identity. At the same time, young British Muslim women must negotiate the dominant discourses of racialised gendering, which work to produce powerful stereotypes that also reinforce gender roles. As I have suggested, individuals may face contradictions in negotiating these two competing gendered discourses as they seek both to retain their links with a parental cultural inheritance and resist being defined by culturalist and essentialised paradigms of passivity and victimhood.

Diaspora discourses celebrate migrancy and multiple homes, and yet, as Anthias (1998, p. 575) suggests, metaphors of home remain significant. Such metaphors of home are also particularly gendered, and thus young women are reconnected to Pakistan both symbolically, as guardians of familial cultural values, and, sometimes in practice, through ties of intermarriage. For young British Muslim women such connections provoke ambivalence as well as resistance. How Pakistan is experienced, through family visits, depends particularly on the social and class position of individuals. While some individuals enjoyed greater freedoms when visiting Pakistan, the majority found the expectations of normative gender roles in rural Mirpur more restrictive than their lives in Hertfield. While Pakistan continues to be evoked as “home” by many of the participants (Dwyer, 1997b), this is within a context of social exclusion where belonging to a British “home” is often denied them and yet where a fixing of identity to place is required. As Ang (1994, p. 18) argues: “It is this very problem which is constitutive of the idea of diaspora, and from which the idea of diaspora attempts to be a solution, where the adversity of

‘where you’re at’ produces the cultivation of a lost ‘where you’re from’.”

Diaspora discourses suggest new forms of cultural identity that transcend national boundaries. In this paper, I have considered some of the ways in which respondents articulated alternative identities that reworked gender identities. One approach is the creation of “new” Muslim identities that draw on an alternative Islamic diaspora. As I have suggested, such identities, which are shaped by wider globalised discourses as well as local experiences, might offer possibilities for individuals to negotiate greater opportunities for themselves. And yet such identities might not necessarily be celebrated as transgressive. While articulating a self-consciously Islamic identity may enable an individual to persuade her parents she can be trusted to go to university, the donning of full Islamic dress remains complicit with the dominant patriarchal “rhetoric of the veil” (Abu Odeh, 1993; see also Dwyer, 1999a). Islamic identities may offer the only opportunity some individuals have for gaining greater freedoms, yet the adoption of Islamic identities by other individuals may simultaneously limit their opportunities.

While cultural theories of diaspora celebrate “cultures of hybridity” found particularly in musical cultures or fashion, everyday negotiations of diasporic identities are both more complex and more mundane. All of the young women interviewed might be viewed as part of a South Asian Muslim diaspora. However, the position of individuals varied considerably depending on their social and class position. This meant that in the negotiation of their daily gendered identities, individuals drew upon diasporic identifications in different ways and in different circumstances. While to some degree alternative diasporic identifications might be viewed as a resource that individuals could utilise in different ways, such choices were made within social, economic, and cultural formations. For the young women represented here, negotiations of diasporic identities are part of an everyday active process of self-realisation and determination realised within specific social relations.

ENDNOTES

1. The term “British South Asian Muslim Women” defines the scope of the research, although I acknowledge the

difficulties of using such a term because it risks privileging a particular aspect of the young women’s identities (Lazreg, 1988). The research focused on British born young women, mainly of South Asian heritage, all of whom would define themselves as Muslim—although there were wide variations between respondents about what this term meant (Dwyer, 1999a)—and considered how Islam, alongside other identifications, was important for the young women (Dwyer, 1997a). The research was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (R00429 234082).

2. In 1991 the census recorded Hertfield’s “nonwhite” population as about 10% of the total (84,405). The majority of this group was defined as Asians of Pakistani origin, particularly from Azad Kashmir. Settlement by male migrants, many of whom moved from towns in the North of England, occurred in the early 1970s. Family reunification took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Hertfield’s Muslim population is therefore relatively recent compared with that in some other parts of the country. This more recent settlement may mean that Hertfield’s Asian community is more “old fashioned” and less “modern” than some other more longstanding communities (cf., Vertovec, 1993); however, Hertfield’s Asian community also shares many of the characteristics of the Asian community studies conducted elsewhere (see Joly, 1995; Lewis, 1994; Shaw, 1988).
3. In-depth group discussions offered a way of contextualising discussions about identity, allowing ideas to be analysed within the discursive contexts within which they were expressed (Burgess, Limb, & Harrison, 1988a,b; Longhurst, 1996). I also found that group discussions also opened up possibilities for the renegotiation of the role of the researcher in the research process (see Dwyer, 1997a).
4. While some accounts (Modood, Beishon, & Virdee, 1995, p. 95) have suggested different significances between the use of the identifiers “Pakistani” and “Asian,” I found that participants tended to use these terms interchangeably. The term “Asian” reflected participants’ understanding of this as the dominant code within discourses of antiracism and multiculturalism in the UK. None of the participants used more politicised constructions such as “Asian-British” (Sehgal, 1991).
5. *Biradari* is a large kinship group whose members are of the same caste; usually the *biradari* is identified by its caste or subcaste name (Shaw 1988, p. 51). There is preference for first-cousin marriages or at least marriages from within the *biradari*. Shaw (1988, p. 99) recognises the flexibility of the term in her study of Pakistanis in Oxford, “the *biradari* had a range of meanings. . . it denoted her closest relatives living locally; more generally, it included all other relatives in Britain and Pakistan, and most generally it referred to all caste members.” Anwar (1979) emphasised the primacy of kinship ties for the formation of extra-domestic networks among Pakistani migrants, while Werbner (1988) has illustrated the ways in which wider friends can be incorporated into social networks through gift giving. Vertovec (1993, p. 42) argued that the young people he interviewed never use the term *biradari*, referring instead to “families.” This was also true of my participants.
6. This is the loose trousers and tunic worn throughout the Punjab area of Pakistan and the East Punjab area of India, often also worn with a loose scarf, or *dupatta*.

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