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Muslim Identity Formation in Contemporary Societies

Edited by
Salih Yucel and Shaheen Whyte

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About the Editors

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Muslim Identity Formation in Contemporary Societies

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Identity is shaped and cultivated through a myriad of human, individual, and collective experiences, encompassing a broad range of racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, regional, historical, and socio-political realities. As one of the world's largest and most diverse religious populations, Muslims routinely preserve, negotiate, and develop their identities in accordance with their everyday contexts. This Special Issue of *Religions*, "Muslim Identity Formation in Contemporary Societies", seeks to explore new themes and trends emerging in Muslim majority, minority, and diaspora communities. It critically analyses the intellectual efforts to advance diverse understandings of Muslim identity formation in the wake of new social, cultural, political, intellectual, and technological developments.

Key works on Muslim religious identity include Cara Aitchison, Peter E. Hopkins, and Mei-po Kwan, eds. *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging* (Aitchison et al. 2007); Aaron W Hughes, *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam* (Hughes 2013); Derya Iner and Salih Yucel, eds. *Muslim Identity Formation in Religiously Diverse Societies* (Iner and Yucel 2015); and a range of interdisciplinary works on Muslim identities in the West. The field has since grown to engage in debates about Islamophobia, state politics and Muslim identity construction, trans-locality and imagined communities, Muslim cosmopolitanism, hybrid identities, Muslim youth cultures, the securitisation of Muslims, intersectionality, and digital Islam, to name a select few.

This Special Issue presents a global and multidisciplinary approach towards the cultivation of Muslim identities in various socio-political, cultural, and geographical cartographies. It draws on empirical case studies and research conducted on Muslim communities in Britain, France, Pakistan, Turkey, and Australia. The topics covered in this Special Issue include the identity of Deobandi ulama in contemporary Britain; Muslim perceptions of loyalty in France; the cultural identity of Jafari Shi'is in Eastern Turkey; religious attire among male Tablighi adherents in Pakistan; and the status of intra-Muslim dialogue among Australian Muslims. The authors provide a range of methodological and social scientific approaches to the study of Muslim identity through ethnographic, qualitative, phenomenological, and conceptual analysis.

The role of governments, transnational movements, and globalisation feature prominently given the global rise in Islamophobia and securitisation policies employed by many Western and Muslim-majority governments in the post-9–11 era. The authors provide profound insights into how Muslims navigate socio-political pressures and instances of Islamophobia to break stereotypes and assert their religiosity in diverse political settings. The contributions underscore and challenge important questions regarding Muslim loyalty to non-Muslim states, the treatment of Muslim minority groups by governments, the status of intra-Muslim relations, and non-discursive expressions of identity through religious attire.

The edition begins with Ahmed and Elton-Chalcraft's article on the identity of Deobandi ulama (scholars) in Britain. Using an interpretive phenomenological analysis, the authors explore the role Deobandi ulama play in challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about British Muslim identity through their religious seminaries (*dar-ul-uloom*). As the authors note, Deobandis represent the largest Islamic movement in Britain, encompassing 41% of the country's mosques. Despite their large presence, Deobandi madrasas

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and its ulama have become under suspicion as breeding grounds for religious extremism following 9/11 and the 2005 London bombings. The authors challenge such assumptions, arguing that divisive politics and securitisation policies "... fabricate a polarisation of the participant's *dar-ul-uloom* identity and national identity". *Dar-ul-uloom* identity and British identity, they find, are compatible, and complications regarding their supposed conflict emanate from Britain's colonial legacy in India. Ahmed and Elton-Chalcraft conclude that "... researching and understanding the identity of ulama requires sensitivity to shared values and familiarity with the community which can perhaps only be achieved effectively through insider positionality".

Since 9/11, the loyalty of Muslims in the West, particularly in France, has been questioned. Abdessamad Belhaj examines the conception of loyalty between Muslim religious identity and French national identity. For Belhaj, loyalty/disloyalty is "essential to social structuring" regarding family, nation, community, political processes, and in-group vs. out-group belonging. Belhaj contends that little is known about reformist perceptions of loyalty. He notes that Muslim attitudes of loyalty are often viewed through the Salafi doctrine of alliance and disavowal (*al-walā' wa-l-barā'*). He provides case studies of three Muslim reformist leaders in France, Tariq Ramadan, Abdelali Mamoun, and Moncef Zenati, in how they incorporate loyalty in shaping French Muslim identities. Belhaj identifies that there is a need for reconciliation between Muslim religious identity and Frenchness. He argues that through reconciliation, the possible tension between Islam and Frenchness can be resolved by adopting the notion of "critical loyalty". While Belhaj is critical of French state policy toward Muslims, he notes that Muslim loyalties are grounded in "mutual recognition, diversity, gratitude and human brotherhood".

Mehmet Ali Sevgi examines various aspects of the lives of Turkish Ja'fari Shi'is in the city of Iğdir, the eastern province of Turkey. He discusses the community dynamics to gain an in-depth understanding of the Turkish Ja'fari Shi'i identity. He explores the ways in which Turkish Shi'is negotiate their religious and cultural identity within a larger Sunni Muslim context, as well as the challenges and opportunities they face in expressing and preserving their distinctiveness. Sevgi notes that the Shi'i culture is reflected in the daily life of the city. He asserts that Ja'fari identification is multiplied and constructed across Turkish identity and Shi'i identity. Sevgi writes: "This duality in their identities (outsider as Ja'fari, insider as Turkish) and having an ambiguous meta-narrative causes the cultural identity of the Ja'faris to be one that is constantly played, moved, and constructed". The author provides important insights into the Turkish Ja'fari perception of Turkey's founder, Atatürk, and Turkey's central Sunni institution, the Diyanet.

Non-discursive attributes such as Islamic symbolism and clothing form an important aspect of religious identity. While many studies focus on the identity relationship between Muslim women and dress style, particularly the hijab, Ateeq Abdul Rauf examines the formation of identity through the religious attire of Muslim men in the Tablighi Jamaat movement in Pakistan. Following Belk's thesis on the extended self, Rauf asserts that the dressing style of Tablighi men reflects a conduit to extend oneself in religious and social contexts. Tablighi men integrate their beliefs into daily life by wearing a specific garment and turban. Their appearance forms part of their religious piety, embodying religious values and reinforcing a collective identity among adherents of Tablighi Jamaat. Rauf alludes to the movement's preaching ability and "aim to revive and relive a utopian historical past by following the sunnah style". In his words, "consumers are aided in their vision to reenact traditional Islam via clothing consumption".

The last article focuses on the question of intra-Muslim dialogue between Australian Muslims from different sects, sub-sects, and faith-based groups of Islam. Whyte and Yucel argue that intra-Muslim dialogue is gaining more noticeability among Australian Muslims working to build civic and inclusive identities. While acknowledging the diverse and vibrant nature of Australian Muslim communities, the article highlights the socio-political, organisational, and sectarian issues challenging intra-religious unity between Muslim groups. To achieve genuine and long-lasting intra-faith relations, we argue for a need to

develop organic, theologically inclusive, and contextually grounded articulations of intra-Muslim dialogue in Australia. The article proposes a mutual, holistic, and ethical dialogue through Qur'anic principals and norms emphasising unity, pluralism, and difference. We argue that greater communal, grassroots, and bottom-up mobilisation is required to promote sustained and genuine dialogue as part of a civil and tolerant Islam. The article concludes that diverse experiences of identity formation in Australia serve as an impetus for strengthening intra-Muslim relations based on previous success with inter-faith initiatives, as well as intergroup contact with non-Muslims.

The edition provides valuable observations and findings about the challenges, prospects, and unique formation of Muslim identities in contemporary societies.

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Article

(De)constructing a Dar-ul-Uloom Aalim's Identity in Contemporary Britain: Overcoming Barriers of Access

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Abstract: The controversial events of 2001 (9/11) and 2005 (7/7) have led Britain's media and policy makers to view the proliferation of orthodox Islamic seminaries, Dar-ul-Ulooms (DUs), and their graduates (Ulamaa) with suspicion, further exacerbating the marginalisation of an already marginalised Muslim minority within mainstream British society. Due to ethnic, sociocultural, and religious differences, the identity of Ulamaa in modern-day Britain has become increasingly complex and supposedly contradictory due to the perceived differences between orthodox Islamic values proselytised in DUs and 'liberal' British values. Using an interpretive phenomenological analysis, this paper reports on data collected in 2020 through three in-depth interviews with an Aalim who graduated from a DU in England after 2005. It explores how he constructs and negotiates his religious and national identities. The interviews were undertaken by one of the authors, himself an Aalim, and the paper also provides reflection on the barriers of access to this under-researched group. Data suggest that although DU identity might not contradict British identity, and Islam is not seen as incompatible with British values, the perceived contradictions between DU orthodoxy and British values appear to be conflated with cultural resistances emanating from Britain's colonial legacy in India; the birthplace of DUs. Thus, analysis of the data reveals, through an Aalim's personal voice, issues of identity involving culture, religion, and community.

Keywords: Dar-ul-Uloom; Deoband; ulamaa; Muslim identity; interpretive phenomenological analysis

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1. Introduction

The term *Dar-ul-Uloom* (DU) can be translated as “house of knowledge” or “house of sciences.” It is often interchangeably used with the more generic term *Madrasah*. According to Sidat (2018), within the British Deobandi nomenclature, the DU refers to teaching institutions which focus on higher learning. DUs in Britain historically and geographically originate from the Indian subcontinent in Deoband, India, where the first DU was established in 1866 as a nonviolent resistance to the early British colonial rule (Ahmad et al. 2012; P. Lewis 2002; Metcalf 1982). During this period, the British introduced a new education system which was perceived as threatening Islamic orthodoxy and the identity of Muslims in India (Haddad and Balz 2008). As a result, the initial impetus for DU seminaries was to protect Islam from the cultural influences and educational hegemony of the British. The Deobandi institutions eventually expanded and spread globally. Its establishment in Britain began after World War Two when primary settlers from South Asia began to establish roots (D. Lewis 2011). Deobandis have now become the largest Islamic group in Britain, overseeing no less than 41% of the country's *Masjids* (mosques) (Muslims in Britain 2017). There are also now over 30 educational institutions in Britain that are linked to Deoband, serve as educators of Muslims in Britain, and subsequently produce the new generations of British *Ulamaa* (Islamic scholars) (Geaves 2012).

Educational provision in DUs and its *Ulamaa* however, have become a matter of concern to policy makers and the media, in recent years (Al-Alawi 2016; Geaves 2012; O. B.

Jones 2016; Taher 2019). Moreover, in the current geopolitical climate, the government's counterterrorism strategies for Britain's engagement with Muslims have raised questions of security and integration focused on DU education in Britain (Ali 2019). Although these seminars and their graduates require comprehensive scholarly analysis, researchers have failed to gain access to DU institutions (Geaves 2007; Gilliat-Ray 2005) due to their status as 'outsiders'. There is also a gap in the literature which explores in depth the identities of *Ulamaa* who have graduated from DUs.

This paper reports on the first stage of data collection acquired for a PhD thesis. By virtue of one of the author's statuses as a DU graduate (*Aalim*), the author was able to gain intimate access to an *Aalim's* views and experiences to provide a unique and thorough analysis of his identity construction through an insider's perspective (Ryan et al. 2011). The research sought to provide a platform for this marginalised and often misrepresented group of the British community, and in this case, empower the participant to tell his own story of life in Britain, thus making a unique contribution to the study of Muslims in Britain. The study contributes to understanding the complex identities of British *Ulamaa* by providing initial nuanced insight into life in Britain for a DU graduate and explores, through an *Aalim's* self-narrative, how he constructs, navigates and negotiates aspects of his identity.

2. Literature Review

The Muslim community in Britain numbers approximately 3.5 million, or around 5.1% of the total British population (Muslim Census 2021). In recent years, although the fear of the 'other' (Daghigh and Rahim 2020) may be historically variable, it has been focused particularly on this minority community (Rahman 2020), and more specifically on second-generation Muslims (Hoque 2015; Seddon 2010; Shannahan 2011). Such Muslims have become the subject of questioning and intense debate since the Bradford riots (2001), Britain's wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), and the 7/7 bombings in London (2005). The latter, in which British-born Muslims were said to have carried out attacks against their fellow citizens, brought Islam to the forefront of counter-terrorism policy (Alam and Husband 2013; Busher et al. 2019; Heath-Kelly 2013; O'Toole et al. 2016). Furthermore, these troubling events have formed public debates focused on contradictions, conflicts, and contrasting value systems (Berglund 2015; Singh and Cowden 2011), particularly vis-à-vis British values (Elton-Chalcraft et al. 2017; O'Toole 2019; Panjwani 2016).

One side of the debate maintains a concern for British Muslims being segregated and radicalised, which leads to disloyalty (Najib and Hopkins 2020; Peucker and Ceylan 2017). As a result, there are suggestions to increase surveillance and regulate this minority community (Britton 2019; Busher et al. 2019). Others (Abbas 2011; Kundnani 2015; Modood 2011) contend that Muslims in Britain have unjustly suffered from increasing intolerance and suspicion because of terrorist attacks committed by a small number of radicals who, essentially, marginalise and scapegoat Muslim communities (Berglund 2015; Dobbernack and Modood 2015; Najib and Hopkins 2020).

This discussion has deep and lasting visible impacts on almost every political, cultural, educational, economic, and social aspect of Britain. Cantle (2001, 2008) famously portrayed Muslims as self-segregated and intent on maintaining religious values which are supposedly in conflict with British values, despite there being no consensus about what are meant by British values (Farrell and Lander 2019; O'Toole 2019). As a result, the West, in particular Britain, has become increasingly interested in learning about the origin and propagation of these values (Kurzman and Ernst 2009; Suleiman and Shihadeh 2007). Such questions have focused the debate on Islamic schools, *Madrasahs*, and DUs (Hicham 2020); and their place within the British education system has come under intense scrutiny from government officials, the media, and the general public (Geaves 2012; Lahmar 2011; Thobani 2010). It is claimed that such institutions are to blame for fostering anti-Britishness by segregating their students and communities from the wider mainstream, leading to "parallel lives" (Cantle 2014; McAndrew and Sobolewska 2015). The Casey Review (Casey 2016) on integration and the Conservative government's Integrated Communities Strategy green paper (Ministry of

Housing, Communities and Local Government 2018) further exacerbated the issue, echoing the contention of former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, about the alleged ties between these seminaries and extremist organisations (Malnick and Paton 2014), whereas others claim that they promote Islamic extremism (Al-Alawi 2016; O. B. Jones 2016; Taher 2019).

Muslims, however, maintain that Islam is an inextinguishable part of their identity; Islamic seminaries are an essential part of their culture, and its education is unique (Soni 2010). They play a pivotal role within society by imparting religious education (Ahmad et al. 2012). They also add to the cultural heterogeneity of Britain, as they form an integral part of diverse British socio-ethnic traditions and values (Ali 2019). Claims about parallel lives and a lack of integration are unfounded as demonstrated by Holmwood and Aitlhadj's (2022) research which found that the integration of British Muslim communities was in fact, not problematic and there was no basis for regarding them with suspicion. This side of the debate maintains that there is an underlying conscious effort to try and foster the terrorist image of Islam and Islamic seminaries, as this suits the wider agenda of producing a version of Islam that is attuned to European policies and values (Haddad and Balz 2008; Halstead 2009; Hicham 2020). Modood (2013) asserts that such agendas are "being developed into an ideology in the context of a geo-political strategy to dominate Muslims" (p. 5). Webber (2022) in his report for the Institute of Race Relations revealed that the infamous 'Clause 9' (now Section 10) of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which extended government powers to strip people of their citizenship without prior notice, almost exclusively targets Muslims, mostly of South Asian heritage.

Similarly, the Trojan Horse affair in 2014, which played a major role in introducing and legitimising the Prevent Duty in 2015 (Holmwood and O'Toole 2018), and viewed as another example of security and integration policy aimed at increasing state regulation of Muslims, was found to reinforce negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims (Scott-Baumann et al. 2020). Additionally, Holmwood and Aitlhadj (2022) who carried out the People's Review of Prevent ultimately concluded that Prevent is "Islamophobic, discriminatory and relies on profiling which targets Muslim communities and poor communities disproportionately" (p. 5). Yet, despite these findings as well as the evidence which sparked the Trojan Horse controversy being discredited and exposed as a hoax (Walker 2022), the Prevent Duty continues to operate nationally with Islam as its implied focus (Scott-Baumann et al. 2020). O'Toole et al. (2016) describe these problematic and discriminatory state approaches to engaging Muslims as "a policy exchange of fears and beliefs across governance domains [which] entrench further a politics of unease about Muslims in British society" (p. 174). Furthermore, Warsi points out that Muslims are not a monolithic block, despite suffering from attacks and Islamophobia—which she terms anti-Muslim sentiment (Warsi 2017, p. 271).

Ingram (2018) and Birt (2006), however, suggest that the roots of speculation surrounding DUs may be due to Deoband's connections with the Taliban, with most operatives of the Taliban government in Afghanistan being educated in *Madrasahs*, in particular DUs. This has further polarised the debate on Islam and has essentially directed the focus towards these seminaries (Hicham 2020; Kashyap 2012; Thobani 2010). On the other hand, Edward Said's (1997, 1993, 1978) seminal work demonstrated how the opinion of Islam has historically been discoloured based on speculation as opposed to facts. He concluded that knowledge of Islam is produced through the Orientalist bias of Western thinking and critiqued how the Western media covers Islam through misinformation, misconceptions, and misunderstandings.

Thus, the image of DUs, like most other representations of Islam, is constructed through the controversial way in which it is depicted in the media and public discourse (Berglund 2015; Kundnani 2015). This leads to the (erroneous) generalisation that these seminaries foster extremism (Al-Alawi 2016; Dobbernack and Modood 2015; O. B. Jones 2016; Taher 2019) and, as a result, a sensationalistic portrayal of Muslims, in particular DU graduates as potentially threatening radicals has emerged (Ingram 2018; Moj 2015; Salam and Parvaiz 2020).

With the current debate seemingly perpetuated by speculation reliant on investigative media coverage ([Muslim Council of Britain: Centre for Media Monitoring 2019](#)), it is evident that relatively little in-depth information is available about the vast majority of DUs and their graduates ([Gilliat-Ray 2005](#)). What happens in these institutions, and perhaps more significantly the graduates they produce, becomes important to understand in order to offer a counter narrative to the dominant misinformed discourse. The literature suggests there is a paucity of research which has documented the origins, curriculum, or culture of DUs, let alone attempted to understand its complex social and religious processes ([Ahmed 2012](#); [Gilliat-Ray 2006](#)). [Birt and Lewis \(2011\)](#) provide valuable insight into the first generation of British-educated *Ulamaa* and explore some of the social roles these *Ulamaa* began to assume when engaging with wider society, but these accounts focus on the professionalisation of the *Ulamaa* and not on the role DUs play in constructing their identities. [Sidat \(2018\)](#), using his insider privilege and status as a DU graduate, provides a detailed account of the religious training which occurs at a DU in the North West. However, although [Sidat's \(2018\)](#) detailed work provides useful insight into that particular DU, and in his words “captures the everyday lived reality inside a traditional *Dar al-Uloom*” (p. 3), there is a gap in the literature which documents how DU graduates construct and negotiate their religious and national identities to understand the lived reality DU students experience outside the DU after they graduate. As the leading academic on Deoband, Barbara Metcalf (cited in [Tayyib 2022](#)) suggests, “the need to understand Deoband and other Islamic movements in their own terms . . . continues to be of greater urgency in the plural, global world of today” (p. 23). Hence, the most valid research perspective may be through the lens and analyses of researchers who have access to this community and have been through and understand the DU system in context, such as an *Aalim*.

3. Methodology

This study utilised an interpretive phenomenological methodology with an emphasis on qualitative interviews. The epistemology employed in this study is intrinsically connected to the perception of identity construction and the theoretical emphasis which underpins it. It is informed by social constructionist theory, which views identities and identity construction as a form of meaning making by which individuals seek to make meaning of their social lives ([Savin-Baden and Howell-Major 2013](#)). The research examined the DU experience as a phenomenon in question through the participant's lens to gain insight of his perception of the phenomenon and understand how he makes sense of his identity in context. This is because the ontological assumptions of phenomenology rest in the intentionality of consciousness ([Creswell and Poth 2018](#)); in other words, reality is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual. Phenomenology, therefore, focuses on the subjective experiences of individuals and attempts to unveil the world as experienced by them through their life stories. This requires a rich description of individual narratives; however, phenomenology is not only about description. As [van Manen \(1990\)](#) suggested, it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher interprets through mediation different meanings of the lived experience. [Sarup \(1996\)](#) suggested that individuals construct their identity at the same time as they tell their life story, which indicates that there is also a close relationship between the self and the narrative.

3.1. Research Design

The research explores the complex notion of identity and, more specifically, to what extent DU education influences perspectives in constructing identities framed within the context of the participant's self-narrative. Concepts of identity construction involve complex social processes shaped by individual beliefs, attitudes, and experiences. Thus, the need for rich description to communicate the context within which the process of identity formation takes place, and the goal of understanding the participant's story from his own frame of reference, were best achieved with qualitative research methods ([Wolcott 1994](#)). This also corresponds to the interpretive philosophical perspective that meaning is subjective and

highly individualised (Bansal and Corley 2011; Creswell 2005) and individual subjective meanings and purposes which direct human behaviour, such as consciousness, thoughts, feelings, meanings, intentions, and ideas, cannot be objectified nor quantified (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Schwandt 2000). Therefore, the authors closely examined the participant's DU experiences, relying on his personal perceptions and accounts of those experiences as opposed to seeking an objective statement or account of the DU experience.

As the aim of the research was to provide a thick description (Geertz 1973) of how DU experiences affected the participant's identity construction with consideration of the embedded social meanings of the community, a research design which enabled the establishment of a rapport between the researcher and the participant was necessary. Furthermore, in a qualitative phenomenological research study, description and interpretation of the process of identity formation are only possible in context, and any effort to share what is learned from the participants requires an awareness of the context (Merriam 2009). It was, therefore, important for the researcher responsible for data collection to not only be aware of, but familiar with the context of the research which includes the values that govern the actions of the DU community. This involved understanding the historical and, more significantly, religious contexts and educational practices of DUs. The researcher's role was to translate and describe how the participant narrates the DU's impact in shaping his identity as a British *Aalim*. This was only possible through the lead author's role as a self-aware translator, able to translate and make sense of the participant's narrative (Smith and Osborn 2015).

3.2. Positionality

The proclivity of researchers in the first half of the twentieth century to investigate the unfamiliar often stigmatised the researcher as an outsider. This inevitably led to problems of access, intrusiveness, familiarity, and rapport between the researcher and the researched community (Mercer 2007). In the second half of the twentieth century, however, researchers developed a new approach in the systematic studies of the familiar in terms of culture, gender, religion, and ethnic backgrounds (Hockey 1993). This approach maintained the idea that researchers who possess the same values as their participants have privileged access to certain kinds of knowledge (Merton 1972). Griffith (1998) suggested that the insider "shares a lived familiarity with the group being researched, whereas the outsider is a researcher who does not have any intimate knowledge of the group being researched, prior to entry into the group" (p. 361).

However, negotiating trust, establishing rapport, and perhaps, more significantly, overcoming suspicion despite shared familiarities could also be a barrier to access participants. It was, therefore, important to consider the current geopolitical climate in which this research was undertaken. Busher et al. (2019) and Ragazzi (2016) highlighted that, in recent years, Muslim communities had in many ways taken on the status of a suspect community. As a result, Bolognani (2007) writes that the rise of Islamophobia has "created a general sense of mistrust towards people investigating issues concerning Muslims in Britain" (p. 281). Thus, the 'insider' identity of the lead researcher, who was not only a member of the community under study, but also a graduate of a DU, having studied in three different institutions in England, played a significant role in gaining intimate access, negotiating trust, and overcoming suspicion.

The insider's perspective also addressed the gap in the literature by providing a nuanced account of the complex and often contentious debates associated with DUs and their graduates by taking into consideration the religious, social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and theological values shared by the researcher and the participant, thus adding to the study's originality and uniqueness. Furthermore, the study demonstrated how, as a graduate of a DU, the author was well positioned to understand the participant's complex religious, social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and theological values, which were highly significant for capturing rich and authentic data. The author's insights and experiences further helped inform the research and consequently enriched the data.

Nonetheless, it is still important to acknowledge that the insider/outsider complex is far more than just a dichotomy (Crossley et al. 2016) but more of a continuum. It was important for the author to locate himself within the research in relation to the participant by not only identifying and acknowledging the similarities between himself and the participant, but to also acknowledge the differences. Essentially, the author was positioned as both an insider and outsider (Miller and Glassner 2004). For example, although the author shared the same religion, gender, language, and, to a certain extent, educational background with the participant, it was important to note that their culture, age, generation, experiences, class, status, and position were different. Thus, whilst the similarities were advantageous, the author needed to consider how he would negotiate the differences through the process of reflexivity throughout the research. Thus, the author's positionality as a researcher in relation to the differences between himself and the participant were a constant point of reference to enable the author to carefully consider and reflect on his position and influence during the study.

Within the context of this study, the data collection author's attitudes, values, and worldview certainly informed his interpretation of what the participant said (Temple 1999), but this was considered useful as he is a member of, and represents, that community. His commonality and familiarity with the participant's world supported the understanding of many of the specific cultural and localised nuances (Bhopal 2000). These conceptions were not only required, but essential to make sense of the participant's personal world through the process of interpretive activity (Smith and Osborn 2015).

4. Data Collection

This paper reports on data and analysis from three one-hour interviews with a participant who graduated from a DU in England, UK after 2005. Using the lead author's access to *Ulamaa*, information about the research was disseminated to over 400 *Ulamaa* through social media applications. The first six respondents who met the criteria for the research were then selected for interviews. Some of these interviews remain ongoing and this paper reports on the data acquired from the first complete set of interviews with one of the participants. A single case study in this context, however, is justified within the confines of a phenomenological research approach, whose purpose is to capture rich, in-depth, and detailed accounts from participants, and it is not unusual to have single participant case studies (Wheatley 2019). Nonetheless, to widen the scope of the research and capture a broader yet authentic view of DU experiences, in an ongoing study, the author has recruited participants who have studied in major DUs across the UK, such as Birmingham, Blackburn, Bury, Dewsbury, Kidderminster, and London (not reported on here).

Data for this study were collected through three one-hour semi-structured interviews with the participant. The semi-structured approach, in which the interviewer and participant shared control of the interview (Sharp 2009), enabled the author to gain valuable insight into the complex behaviours of the DU graduate, taking into account religious, cultural, and social nuances. The shared power dimension embedded in semi-structured interviews also allowed the participant to remain comfortable whilst expressing his views, and produced authentic and honest data (L. Davies 1985; Jayaratne and Stewart 1995).

After ethical approval was gained from the University of Cumbria, the three interviews were conducted with the voluntary participant, between October and November 2020. The first interview took place in a *Masjid* which was negotiated with the participant as a safe and neutral space. Due to the subsequent Covid lockdown, the second and third interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. All three interviews were audio recorded with the informed consent of the participant. The audio recordings were then manually transcribed verbatim with the assistance of voice recognition software. Following transcription, the participant was given the opportunity to read through, reflect and validate the transcript for accuracy adding further authenticity to the research. This is known as "respondent validation" (Reason et al. 1981), where the researcher presents drafts of interview data

to prevent misquotation and misrepresentation ensuring that the data are authentic and accurate.

5. The Interview and Reflexivity

The process of gathering data through the interview involved social interactions with the participant both online and face-to-face. Considerations of reflexivity, therefore, played a significant role throughout the research process. [England \(1994\)](#) defined reflexivity as a self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self within the research which induces self-discovery. By engaging in this process throughout the research as well as afterwards, the authors were able to identify particular strengths and weaknesses of the research which will inform future fieldwork.

The two most significant aspects of conducting the interviews related to the author's personal experience of studying in and graduating from a DU. The reflective process highlighted that his shared experiences with the participant were useful in understanding and interpreting the participant's narratives; however, they could also be a potential interference. During transcription, listening to the recordings allowed the author to distance himself from the interview and although extremely time-consuming, it played a crucial role in his objectivity. Nonetheless, the author's personal experiences and interests and recognising when to suspend and utilise them were still a significant challenge in this study. Familiarity with the participant as well as the participant's familiarity with the author enabled the forming of a close and trusting relationship. This was useful in creating a comfortable and relaxed environment which was clearly evident through the rich data gathered from the interview.

Moreover, the rapport was further enhanced by the author's and the participant's shared language competencies. The author's language repertoire played a major role in navigating through and, more importantly, understanding the participant's story. Throughout the interview, the researcher and participant used translanguaging ([Hassan and Ahmed 2015](#)) as a tool to communicate; the conversation frequently switched between English, Arabic, Urdu, and Sylheti whilst integrating them within a single linguistic system ([Garcia and Wei 2014](#)). Additionally, the shared understanding between the researcher and the participant of familiar concepts and language competences facilitated a fluid interview process without the need to pause for clarification.

6. Findings and Analysis

Following transcription, [Smith et al.'s \(2022\)](#) IPA framework for analysis was employed to analyse the data. This process began with multiple readings of the transcripts to capture a holistic account of the participant's narrative. Exploratory noting and free coding were then undertaken to make unfocussed notes about the participant's responses. Experiential statements also known as phenomenological coding ([Larkin and Thompson 2012](#)) were then constructed by carrying out a line-by-line analysis of the transcripts. Conceptual themes and patterns which captured the core essence of the participant's narrative were then identified by searching for connections across the experiential statements. These conceptual themes, referred to by [Smith et al. \(2022\)](#) as personal experiential themes, were then clustered and consolidated under superordinate conceptual headings which, in the case of this participant's narrative, were culture, religion, and community. Furthermore, transcripts were continuously referred to throughout the analysis to ensure the emergent themes authentically captured and reflected the participant's narrative. This iterative process, required for interpreting individual experiences also involved "cycling and recycling" ([Larkin and Thompson 2012](#), p. 105) between the various steps outlined by [Smith et al. \(2022\)](#), whilst examining the data collection author's reflexivity (as mentioned earlier). In addition, the data collection author worked with the second author during analysis and theory construction in considering issues of validity, thus ensuring the data were appropriately represented, thereby capturing a detailed examination of the participant's identity as an *Aalim*.

Our analysis of the participant's interviews, however, resisted problematising the presence, identities, and loyalties of DU *Ulamaa* and instead focussed on providing a nuanced and intimate understanding of a member of this community. Nonetheless, we must also acknowledge here, that this partial account of one *Aalim's* narrative inevitably has limitations. The purpose of this study was not to provide a comprehensive account of the participant's narrative, nor was it intended to serve as a representative analysis of all *Ulamaa* in Britain. Rather, it was a first step in overcoming barriers to access a community somewhat shrouded in mystery as a result of which they are targeted, marginalised and misrepresented. Furthermore, due to the richness of the data gathered through the three one-hour interviews, our conversations were much too lengthy to include in their entirety. Therefore, conscious decisions were made about which themes, quotations and parts of the participant's narrative were included. The paper does not provide a full account of the participant's narrative but interpretations and reflections about particular themes related to the participant's identity construction and negotiation. Therefore, the conclusions that are drawn are only relative to the participant's reality of his identity and our interpretations of that reality. His narrative suggests that the place of *Ulamaa* in Britain is complex, multidimensional, and, worryingly, unsettling. But this is not due to the well-known documented reasons purported in most mainstream media and political discourse, rather there are underlying factors within local communities which we begin to explore here.

Maulana Sulaiman, pseudonym, (MS) was born in London, however he initially enrolled at a DU in Bangladesh as a boarding student to complete his *Hifz* (memorisation of the *Qur'aan*) at the age of nine. He completed his *Hifz* in 2004 and then began his Islamic Studies education at primary level whilst still in Bangladesh. In 2009, MS chose to return to England and enrol at a DU in Dewsbury. He completed his Islamic Studies there in 2014 earning a degree equivalent qualification in Arabic and Islamic Studies. In line with the traditional South Asian custom of DUs, he also gained the status of an *Aalim* and the title, '*Maulana*'. After graduating, MS began teaching part time at an Islamic secondary school during the day and in a *Maktab* (supplementary Islamic school) in the evenings. During his time at the secondary school, he was tasked with teaching Islamic Art and developed a passion to study the subject further. He then completed an MA in Traditional Arts at the Prince's Foundation in 2019. Still in his mid-twenties, MS describes himself as a scholar of Islam, a happily married man, and a father of two children. Reflecting on his identity as an *Aalim*, MS stated:

"Well, my identity is an *Aalim*, so if I was to say that, you know, the person who I am today is because I'm an *Aalim* I won't be lying. I think, everything positive about my character, about my ... the way I approach people, about my professionalism, is because I'm an *Aalim*. So, for my self-development, I think it [referring to his DU education] was excellent. It was, I think ... the best thing that happened to me."

Data from the interview revealed through MS's personal voice, some of the wider concepts concerning issues of identity, such as culture, religion, and community, that he considered important contributors to his complex and multifaceted identity as a DU *Aalim*. He highlights the significance of Islam and its importance in negotiating his faith and place in Britain. For MS, his religious identity and spiritual nourishment acquired through his DU journey were the primary markers of his identity which clearly distinguishes his experience from that of non-DU *Ulamaa* and other British Muslims. However, it was also identified that, along with his religious identity, there were several overlapping factors between his DU identity, culture, and community.

6.1. Identity Construction

Throughout the interviews, MS highlighted the impact his local community had in shaping his identity. His own motivation to become an *Aalim* was driven by a personal commitment and desire to serve and lead his community. However, conflicting views of what it means to be an *Aalim* made the relationship between him and his community

complex. MS considered his community to have constructed a super-orthodox perception of DU *Ulamaa*, which contradicted his own view of what it means to be an *Aalim*. His community's perception was one that reflected a rigid monastic image of *Ulamaa*, whereas MS presented a more fluid view of his position and status as an *Aalim*. These contradicting views of what an *Aalim* is and should be, seemed to have created intercommunity disparities between MS and his community.

Significantly, however, the community to which MS referred to was not homogenised and monolithic, but complex and multi-layered. These layers were identified and categorised by MS as the inner community which included his friends, family and peers; the outer community which included his congregations and his employers and; the wider community which referred to the wider Muslim and non-Muslim British public with whom he did not have any direct interactions. Although he felt variable levels of disparities existed within all layers, according to MS, the most significant layer influencing his identity was the outer layer which, he felt, possessed a culturally influenced perception of DU *Ulamaa*, which contradicted his perception. An example MS provides for this is the issue of wearing headphones:

"One of the biggest things I experienced [referring to misunderstandings about *Ulamaa*] . . . I know for a fact if I wasn't a DU student, no one would point a finger at me. The fact that I wear headphones instead of earphones . . . I wear it because it keeps my ears warm (laughs), but people would point fingers like, it doesn't suit you to be wearing headphones, because . . . and I was like because what? I mean why? Why? Why can anyone else wear headphones and I have to wear earphones . . . that was one of them. Also, I think we're expected to wear a certain type of clothing. The clothes play a big role in our community, it's like if we're wearing the clothes of you know . . . the way we do dress, with long *thobes* [traditional Muslim gown] all the way up to above our ankles and you got a hat on our head, then we're wearing clothes appropriately. Whereas if we just normally go out with anything casual, then it's as if we've done the worst thing in the world."

When probed about the issue further and asked about his own experiences with clothing, he stated:

"Although I do believe that you [referring to Islamic scholars] don't have to wear a *thobe* to be wearing the *Sunnah libaas* [Islamic dress code], as long as you're covered, your clothes are above the ankle and, you know . . . that's completely fine. Me, I think it's a personal thing with me. I'm just comfortable with what I wear [referring to the traditional Muslim gown] so I wouldn't go out wearing anything else because I'm just generally, not comfortable with it. But I mean even my own brothers [who are also *Aalims*], they wear different things at different times and it's completely normal. I've seen amongst my friends as well, when we would go out to eat or we would go out to the shops or something like that and, whoever's wearing long clothes . . . this is the funny thing, in our community, if you're wearing long clothes, long dress, a *thobe* and everything, you'll be treated with respect and the other person, will be treated as okay, you're just the guy with him."

MS's experiences revealed that his community made a distinction between the use of earphones and headphones. Earphones were considered to be an acceptable device for an *Aalim* to wear due to their multifunctionality, but headphones were not because, within his community headphones were perceived to be a device used exclusively to listen to music (an act which is considered forbidden by many Muslims (Otterbeck 2008, 2014; Otterbeck and Ackfeldt 2012)). Although MS does not listen to music, this socio-cultural construct of headphones meant that he had to navigate his way through the assumptions of listening to music that were projected onto him. His frustration at dealing with these socio-cultural

constructs were clearly evident in his response through repetition, asking “Why? Why? Why can anyone else wear headphones and I have to wear earphones?”

Furthermore, MS’s experience with clothing demonstrates that despite choosing to wear the traditional DU attire and considering it an important identity marker of his DU identity, he maintained that it was not necessary to do so. On the other hand, these experiences made him feel that the outer community imposed a particular dress code on DU *Ulamaa* for them to be recognised as a genuine *Aalim*. On the other hand, he maintained that although most *Ulamaa* who have studied in DUs are considered to be genuine within their communities and, to an extent, a source of pride within their inner and outer communities, the stability of this perception particularly for the outer community, often depends on the *Aalim*’s ability to successfully maintain and fulfil high and arguably, unrealistic expectations as evidenced by the examples of wearing headphones and adhering to a particular dress code. Failure to fulfil these expectations can lead to a rapid shift in perception placing *Ulamaa* like MS, as outsiders, marginalised and segmented within their own community.

This was certainly the case in MS’s narrative; he perceived such views as a barrier to fitting in within his own community suggesting a lack of belonging. From a young age, he was aware of the stigma associated with enrolling at DU but was also conscious of the high expectations that would follow. When describing his views on how DU *Ulamaa* were perceived by the outer community, he believed they were viewed as “black sheep” “scapegoats,” and with “no other use” than to study in DUs as a last resort in comparison to studying Western disciplines. He stated:

“In our communities . . . we’re the black sheep, I’d say the scapegoats. Some people in the community, I might say the vast majority even, have this kind of thought, that if he’s gone to DU, that means (laughs) his family had no other use for him. He won’t be a doctor, he won’t be an engineer, he won’t be anything that will make any difference to the community, let’s just send him to DU . . . that’s the family’s last resort kind of thing. If nothing [else] he’ll probably help us in the hereafter . . . that’s our golden ticket. The rest [those who pursue secular education] you know, they have to be successful, they’re going to have their own houses, they’re going to get married, and you know have successful lives.”

At the same time, he recalls and contrasts the negative labels ascribed to DU students with the high expectations held by the same members of that community:

“The community has extremely high expectations and extremely high hopes, I remember specifically when I was here on holiday and my brother mentioned that . . . the chairperson of my local mosque wanted me to lead *Salaah* (daily Muslim prayers) as much as possible, because he thought that as long as you’re studying, you’re on the right path. I remember, when I came back from Bangladesh and before I was going Dewsbury there was about a 5–6-month gap, I would constantly go to the mosque, pray there and everything and I remember the community . . . they had such high expectations and such high hopes, that you know, this is a graduate of our locality, he will one day spiritually lead us . . . they have quite high expectations, high hopes and I think they treated me like that as well.”

This revealed that MS was very aware of the outer community’s changing perception of him and described it as “something he was used to”. On the other hand, he strongly expressed his disagreement with their views and was confidently aware of his own profile and status as a DU *Aalim*. MS did, however, feel that these perceptions influenced his identity as an *Aalim*. He felt that identity was shaped by one’s self-perception which dictates outward behaviour, and that outward behaviour is judged by the community, which is then embodied into one’s self-perception. In other words, his DU identity, in part, was often unconsciously dictated and influenced by the changing expectations and perceptions of the outer community and the role he had within it. When asked about whether he felt his identity as an *Aalim* had changed over time, he commented:

“Yeah, that has changed dramatically I would say, I mean once you leave *Madrasah* . . . you have certain mind sets that, you know, you would go out into the community, you would do this, you would lead them, but that changes over time. I think you start to identify yourself on your current situation and place in the community, rather than your expectations.”

This suggests that MS, to an extent, embraced the nature of his community’s changing perceptions and expectations, and that they were time specific and dependant on phases of the DU journey. During the initial stages of his DU education, MS was met with low expectations and pejorative labelling, however, as he progressed through his studies, and reached the stage of competently leading prayers (before graduating), he became acutely aware of the now higher expectations placed on him, although these expectations were positive. These higher expectations then began to grow into what MS described as ‘unrealistic’ expectations after graduating. The ‘unrealistic’ expectations were directed at the DU ‘*Aalim*’, not the DU student thus separating the essence of the DU experience from its outcome i.e., the *Aalim*. The dissonance between MS’s perception of an *Aalim* and his community’s may arise from this subtle distinction between the DU experience and the DU *Aalim*. Whereas MS views his identity as an *Aalim* and his DU experience as integrated, the community’s perception (and therefore expectations) make a distinction between the *Aalim* and the DU experience suggesting a lack of awareness and nuanced understanding of *Ulamaa* in society. Highlighting this, throughout the interview, MS made clear distinctions between the *Aalim* and the *Imaam* (Muslim religious leader) which he suggested were often conflated by his community. He referred to being an *Aalim* as a personal issue stating:

“Being an *Aalim* is a personal thing because what you’ve learned in DU is literally the way of life according to the *Qur’aan* and the sayings and doings of the Prophet (s.a.w), nothing more, nothing less.”

In relation to the *Imaam*, he went on to state:

“Now, amongst all those things in ‘way of life’, you have business, you have family, you have economics, you have farming, you have hygiene. Also, you have leadership [referring to the role of the *Imaam*] and I think that’s what, that’s one of the only aspects that the outside community sees from you . . . it’s [the] only one that we’re judged by, or there’s only one that we’re expected to do.”

For MS, there was a clear distinction between the *Aalim* and the *Imaam*. Being an *Aalim* for him, was a personal issue and a way of life, whereas the *Imaam* was considered to be a profession or an occupation. *Imaams* i.e., religious leaders of communities, can be understood as public servants and are therefore, often subjected to high standards, high expectations and at times, blatant criticism. Although the two statuses overlap, MS highlighted that not every *Aalim* was an *Imaam* and that the lack of awareness and distinction between the two in society meant that many *Ulamaa* were, at times, left grappling with an identity they may not have embraced. MS, however, was required to navigate through this sensitive yet challenging trajectory which clearly impacted his identity; from having “no other use” to being expected to become a spiritual and religious leader, to having to embrace an identity that was, to an extent, imposed on him. This, along with his view that perceptions of *Ulamaa* and the (unfair) standards that they are held against, are fuelled by a lack of awareness and, more significantly, social misunderstandings, created a dissonance between him and his community, which in turn, played an important role in his identity construction.

6.2. Navigating and Negotiating Conflict

Contrary to the literature (Al-Alawi 2016; Cantle 2014; Casey 2016; HM Government 2018; O. B. Jones 2016; Taher 2019), MS did not feel a significant tension between his DU identity and his British identity. He constantly reinforced the idea that his identity as a DU *Aalim* did not contradict his British identity, insisting that they were compatible. He considered his DU identity and his Britishness well integrated; even referring to himself

as a 'British *Maulana*'. Whilst there were notable incidents of perceived tensions between his religious and national identity, the issue of navigating and negotiating his DU identity with his British identity appeared to be less complex and seemed to have been overcome through open dialogue and the forming of mutual understandings, tolerance, and respect. For example, when asked about the issue of shaking hands with the opposite gender, he responded:

"I mean everyone has their different views about it, but I think as long as there's no physical contact it, it's necessary because the information [the message of Islam] still has to go to everyone, cause I remember very specifically one of my teachers, they visited the construction site of a new mosque and in charge of the construction was a lady and what she did was, she extended her hand for a handshake, and he didn't do it, but at the end he, he definitely had to give them an explanation of why he didn't do it. Obviously [due to] Islamic values, he didn't do it, but at the end he said, he made it clear that the reason why I didn't shake your hand is out of respect, because I believe you're so valuable that the only people that can touch you is [are] your husband, your father, your son, you know it's out of respect it's not out of, because we put woman in a lower space and it turned out that she was very respectful of that view."

He maintained a tolerant view of others who differed with his views and lifestyle and did not distinguish between British values and Islamic values but viewed them holistically. This was another theme which emerged during the analysis; indeed, the concept of an "us" vs. "them" mentality did not exist for MS, nor did a separation of values and customs. For example, when addressing types of knowledge, MS did not view his DU education as separate or distinct from secular Western education but viewed both as an integrated body of knowledge. When asked about his decision to pursue a Master's degree in Islamic art from a Western university instead of completing advanced studies at an Islamic institute he stated:

"I think understanding the question you just said plays a huge part because if you say *takhassus fil hadeeth* [advanced studies in Prophetic traditions], and I say a Masters in Art, it sounds completely different whereas I can just say I just did *takhassus fil fann* [advanced studies in art] or someone might say that you did a Masters or you did a PhD in Prophetic traditions. So, I don't think they're different, I don't think doing a *takhassus* [advanced study] is different than doing a Masters. The environment might be different, but knowledge is all the same . . . I understood any type of further knowledge as an enhancement to whatever I'm learning, whatever I did learn in DU is, the only difference is one would be in a DU environment and one wouldn't, but enhancement of the knowledge that I've learnt, is all the same."

He confidently maintained that it is not Islam that is incompatible with British values, rather the perceived contradictions between DU orthodoxy and British values were conflated with cultural resistances emanating from Britain's colonial legacy in India that were contradictory. He also considered DU teachings to be compatible with British values and not contradictory. When questioned about the perceived conflict between DU orthodoxy and British values, he explained:

"So, what I'm trying to kind of say is that the majority of the perceived conflict between being an *Aalim* or the religious, orthodox religious beliefs and values and British society or British values, they're kind of embedded in culture and not within our beliefs . . . I don't know if this will explain it more, so Islam's religion was not designed for a specific people, it was for anyone and everyone, from any time or space . . . I'm just going to go into a slightly deeper discussion, here. For example, when Islam came to Turkey, when it came to Egypt, when it came to Morocco, it kind of embraced the culture there, and that's why you have Moroccan Muslims, Egyptian Muslims, Turkish Muslims, and they all have their

... you can identify them by the way they dress, by the way they, they read the *Qur'aan* ... their accent is slightly different. With Islam in Britain, what happened was we didn't, it [was] not just Islam [that] came over to this country, the entire Indian culture came with it. That's why the majority of Muslims in this country are from the Indian subcontinent and where, I think, we're looked at as Muslims and also as Indians. Whereas, if Islam was to spread in this country to the number that we have today through someone like Abdullah Quilliam, it would have been completely different. He used to wear furs, he used to wear a long trench coat, it would have been a bit more different, and we would have seen being an *Aalim* is not at all contradictory to British values much faster. So, the orthodox beliefs that are, you know, established in DUs, they're not contradictory to British values. What's actually contradictory to British values and British society is the culture that came with the Indian scholars that came and propagated the religion [referring to the culture imported by non-*Ulamaa* when learning about Islam from *Ulamaa*] but that contradiction that even happened through culture, that wasn't intentional. It kind of was the vibe at that time because of the entire situation of the segregation, the war between Bangladesh and Pakistan, everything that happened because of the East Indian trading company ... it goes a bit deeper than that, but I, I think you know what I mean".

This passage from the interview demonstrates MS's belief in the universality of Islam and that the essence of Islam is not contradictory to a people, time, place, or culture. Therefore, Islam is perceived as compatible with all cultures and, more specifically, it is not separate or distinct from one's nationality (i.e., being British). The perceived conflicts, in fact, stem from clashes between national identities and cultures, and, in this case, it was the South Asian culture (conflated with Islam) that was understood to be contradictory to British values. What is important to note, however, is that the culture was not brought by the *Ulamaa*, it was imported by the non-*Ulamaa*, perhaps unintentionally, as a result of pan-ethnic nationalities and the aftermath of colonialism. Conflicts and resistance were therefore identified as not religious, but cultural.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to address the gap in literature in relation to the study of *Ulamaa* in Britain and facilitate giving voice to a marginalised and often misrepresented group of the British Muslim community. Because of the identity of the data collection author as an *Aalim*, the study was able to provide a platform to a member of the DU community and empower him to tell his own story of life in Britain in order to begin to understand the identity of British *Ulamaa* from their own frame of reference. The study contributes to understanding the complex identities of British *Ulamaa* by providing initial nuanced insight into life in Britain for a DU graduate and examined, through his self-narrative, how he constructs, navigates and negotiates aspects of his identity.

As with all identities, the identity of this DU graduate is clearly shaped by the concept of self and external attributions. The participant's narrative draws attention to how DU *Ulamaa* are often misrepresented and misunderstood due to ethnic, sociocultural, and religious discrimination. A significant finding of this study was that the participant's DU identity was not only misrepresented and misunderstood within mainstream media and public discourse, but also within his own community. His identity was not characterised by a crisis between his orthodox DU values and Britishness, but by a number of factors tied to misrepresentation within the wider British public and misconceptions within his own community. Through cultural stereotypes, marginalisation within his community, and the wider misrepresentations of Muslims in general, the participant suggests his identity was consistently impacted in a negative way. For example, the participant reveals that conflicting views of what it personally means to be an *Aalim* and his community's perception of an *Aalim* make the relationship between him and his community complex. The lens through which he is viewed by the community he serves has a socio-cultural impact;

the consequences of which, he felt, led to intercommunity disparities. The participant posits how negative public perception of his identity as an *Aalim*, especially of those within his own community, has both personal and social consequences. The findings suggest that the participant's identity is characterised by a dissonance between his personal and social identities. He maintained that although his primary identity markers were constructed through the religious and spiritual nourishment acquired in DU, and that he was confident and comfortable with this identity, the social identity imposed on him by others create feelings of unease.

In relation to navigating and negotiating DU orthodoxy with British values, it is evident that the establishment of DU Deoband in India and its history with British colonialism, together with the government's failed attempts to engage with Muslims in Britain meaningfully and indiscriminately, make the politics of identity for DU *Ulamaa* complex as it unfairly pits their DU allegiances against their loyalties to Britain. The findings suggest that the participant's DU identity and his British identity were complex and multi-layered and could not be explained by an oversimplified conflict between 'Britishness' and DU orthodoxy. Instead, his DU identity needed to be understood beyond the 'British-Muslim binary'. Binary categorisations of DU values and British values seemed to obscure the nuanced reality of his identity. Furthermore, divisive politics, fuelled by counter terrorism, security and integration policies, seem only to fabricate a polarisation of the participant's DU identity and national identity. This highlights the importance of understanding this minority group through their own voices. Providing a platform for *Ulamaa* will enable them to take ownership and control of their narrative and counter the neglect amplified by the dominant misinformed discourse surrounding their presence in modern-day Britain.

Finally, using the participant's self-narrative, this study has highlighted the usefulness of exploring the individual and social dimensions of an *Aalim's* identity. These aspects remain severely under-explored with respect to DU *Ulamaa*, even though *Ulamaa* are a major part of the social fabric of Britain as spiritual and religious leaders of their communities. Our research, so far, has examined the individual identity construction of an *Aalim* and highlighted the complex nature of researching these communities. Most importantly however, the study reveals that researching and understanding the identity of *Ulamaa* requires a sensitivity to shared values and familiarity with the community which can perhaps only be achieved effectively through insider positionality. Our research suggests that there is much more nuance to understanding the identities of DU *Ulamaa* in Britain. Reflexive engagement throughout the research process, however, is integral to researching communities in which positionality not only provides access to the researched group but plays a major role in locating and understanding the terms of reference from which they tell their stories. A sustained research focus on the identity of a group unjustly associated with controversies, whilst one is a part of that community itself, is challenging as it involves continuous reflexive examination of not only the controversial aspects associated with the group, but the sensitivities of researching a group who are considered hard to reach, orthodox in their beliefs and values, and cautious of researchers as a result of stigmatisation and surveillance.

Future work will draw on the narratives of other DU *Ulamaa* who have studied in different parts of the country to explore how they construct their identities and how they negotiate perceived conflicts not only with the wider British mainstream, but within their own communities. By gaining unprecedented access to intimately explore the lives and identities of DU *Ulamaa* in Britain, our work will explore the identities of *Ulamaa* in a collective context, filling the gap in literature about the study of DU *Ulamaa* in Britain.

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Article

Loyalty and Identity Formation: Muslim Perceptions of Loyalty in France

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Abstract: This paper sets out to study loyalty as identity formation through the cases of three Muslim leaders in France (T. Ramadan, A. Mamoun and M. Zenati). First, I will discuss the state of research on “Muslim loyalties” in the West. Afterwards, Ramadan’s concept of critical loyalties, Mamoun’s loyalty as gratitude, and Zenati’s human brotherhood as the basis of loyalty will be thoroughly examined. The main goal of the current study is to determine how the three Muslim leaders incorporate loyalty as an element of shaping the identity of French Muslim citizens while attempting to resolve the current tensions between the French state and Islam.

Keywords: loyalty; identity; disloyalty; alliance; disavowal; France

1. Introduction

In the aftermath of every Islamist terrorist attack in the West, the question of Muslim loyalties is raised; Muslims, as Iner and Yücel express it: “must not only prove their loyalty and integrity, but also continually *try to detach Muslims and Islam from the ideology and actions of the vocal minority*” (Iner and Yücel 2015, pp. 6–7). Discussions are also conducted in Islamic ethics about loyalty to non-Muslim states (March 2009, pp. 181–206). Some researchers, then, would refer to the Salafi doctrine of alliance and disavowal (*al-walā’ wa-l-barā’*) to explain “Muslim” attitudes of loyalty and disloyalty. Other researchers consider this doctrine to be marginal in contemporary Islam and insufficient to draw any conclusions from. Although this doctrine has indeed been emphasized by Salafists, reformist Islamic organizations and figures of religious authority distance themselves from the doctrine of alliance and disavowal. Conversely, little is known about reformist Muslim perceptions of loyalty and disloyalty.

Loyalty/disloyalty is a fundamental value to social ethics, expressed in various rituals of allegiance, social practices, political alliances, group memberships, rivalries and conflicts within societies; loyalty/disloyalty is used, among other things, to adapt to challenges, resist pressures, respond to crises, undertake individual and collective actions, and repel attacks from rival groups (Haidt 2012, pp. 154–57). Loyalty/disloyalty is, thus, essential to social structuring (family, clan, community, nation, etc.), political action (party, elections, coalitions, war, etc.) and identity formation (in-group vs out-group belonging).

The securitization context that has emerged in France since 1994 (beginning with the terrorist attacks carried out by The Algerian Armed Islamic Group in France) led many to question Muslim loyalties to France. Muslims had to constantly justify their relations to other groups, and present the evidence of their loyalty and strong commitment to French society and state. Nowhere in Western Europe are such demands of Muslim loyalties as overt as in France, where different governments and other institutions of the state incessantly request Muslims to show loyalty.

By way of illustration, in 2015, after the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris, the deputy mayor of Nice Christian Estrosi said that there are “fifth columns” of Islamists in France, to which Dalil Boubakeur, Rector of the Great Mosque in Paris, a significant Islamic organization, replied “the citizenship and loyalty of Muslims in France cannot be questioned and

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that far from constituting any kind of “fifth column”, the Muslims of France, in their vast majority, are deeply attached to the Nation and defend the values of the Republic”.¹ This pattern of suspicion of disloyalty cast by French politicians and officials on Muslims and the accentuated responses by Muslims to prove their loyalties has been continuing over the last 30 years.

Meanwhile, Muslim leaders in France have engaged in the re-foundation of Muslim ethics to adapt to the French context and have rethought the hierarchy of loyalties established among Muslims in France, reconsidering conflicts of loyalty and identity formation. Thus, a huge amount of Muslim discourse, practices and concepts of loyalty have emerged in France. However, to date, no research study has been dedicated to the question of loyalty and disloyalty in reformist Islam in France. Overall, the few existing publications on Muslim loyalty in Western Europe have focused on loyalty in Salafist milieus. The main aim of this paper is to bridge this gap and investigate loyalty/disloyalty as a dimension of belonging and as a religious norm of group construction and cohesion in the discourses of three Muslim leaders in France: Tariq Ramadan, Abdelali Mamoun and Moncef Zenati. The choice of these three case studies comes from the fact that the three reformist scholars represent distinctive and diverse profiles in terms of professions and ethnic backgrounds and adopt different theoretical approaches to loyalty (i.e., Ramadan is a Swiss-born scholar-activist, while Zenati is a Franco-Tunisian imam and theologian close to the Muslim Brotherhood and Mamoun, from a French-Algerian background, is an imam close to the French authorities and media). Moreover, these three figures of religious authority enjoyed or still enjoy wide influence in their respective Muslim communities. Other figures of authority in French Islam, including female Muslim intellectuals (Kahina Bahloul for example), contribute a great deal to producing a Muslim discourse of loyalty and deserve to be studied separately.

2. The State of Research on “Muslim Loyalties” in the West

Very little research has been conducted on loyalties among European Muslim communities, especially in France. The work performed so far has focused exclusively on the *securitization of loyalty*, i.e., on the ability of Muslims to be loyal to Western societies as Islamist terrorism has destabilised these societies in recent years; accusations of Muslim disloyalty emerged at a more limited level in Britain in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair and the Gulf War (1989–1991) (Werbnier 2000, pp. 307–24). Thus, it is only in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, that the first research started to appear on Muslim loyalties in the West. In 2003, M. S. Seddon et al. edited the book *British Muslims: Loyalty and Belonging*, which includes two contributions on loyalty by Muslim thinkers Imtiaz Ahmed Hussain and Tim Winter, who both believe Muslim loyalty should be shown to the British state and society provided that the latter recognizes Muslims; both thinkers consider a “*minimal loyalty*” to be necessary as a starting point for Islamic reform in Western society (Seddon et al. 2003). In 2007, Frederic Volpi showed how jihadists in Europe through individualized approaches to religiosity undermine the construction of pacts of loyalty between Muslims and European states (Volpi 2007, pp. 451–70). A year later, Joas Wagemakers explored how Salafism views Islam as religiously and politically threatened, which would require Salafists to be loyal to God and Islam and to disavow everything else (Wagemakers 2009, pp. 1–22). In 2014, Uriya Shavit distinguished between Salafist perceptions of loyalty that require Muslims to refrain from befriending or loving non-Muslims, or imitating the beliefs and customs of reformists who hold that the dogma of covenant and disavowal applies only to non-Muslims who fight Muslims (Shavit 2014, pp. 67–88). In 2015, Said Hassan identified three distinct legal positions within the fatwas of Muslim jurists on the issue of a Muslim subject’s loyalty to a non-Muslim state: the alienation position, the conciliation position, and the commitment position (Hassan 2015, pp. 516–39). In 2017, Fabien Truong described how debt recognition and loyalty conflicts among young Muslims in France construct a “*tacit*” moral code that forms neighbourhood solidarities (Truong 2017). Truong shows how Muslim youth in France learn “to become men by experiencing competing loyalties to their neighbourhood,

to their friends and to the unspoken aspects of their family history. But also towards the Nation and its meritocratic ideal, and towards a capitalism that promotes individualism, virility and economic competition" (Truong 2017, p. 5). He also discusses how "the factory of loyalty conflicts works between the behaviour expected from fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, teachers, 'big brothers', youth workers, educators, the police, classmates, neighbourhood mates, gang mates, business partners or girls" (Truong 2017, p. 36). He adds that loyalty is constructed in connection to the acknowledgement of social debts which "bring into existence, from relative to relative, the values that end up circumscribing the perimeter of the sacred" (Truong 2017, p. 40). Thus, for Truong, young Muslims define their loyalties by their social debts to friends and family and attempt to solve the conflict of loyalties which emerges from their multiple social identities. In 2018, Imène Ajala explored, in *European Muslims and their Foreign Policy Interests: Identities and Loyalties*, the loyalties of French and British Muslims in terms of foreign policy and particularly towards Palestine (Ajala 2018). Ajala highlights, in particular, how "the Securitization of Islam affects the perception of Muslim loyalties in France and how the context relating to Global Islam hijacks Muslim expression over foreign policy in the French setting. The 9/11 attacks have reinforced the problematization of Muslims in Europe under the security paradigm and Muslims are increasingly perceived as a threat from within and constructed as the "other", raising questions about their loyalty" (Ajala 2018, p. 79). She also draws attention to the French political system which "rejects ethnic group politics. In a framework which is unfavourable to the expression of specific interests and characterized by a strong centralization, it is even more difficult for ethnic groups to mobilize and exert influence" (Ajala 2018, p. 43). Ajala's work helps us understand loyalty to French foreign policy as matter of loyalty to the French state, which makes any disagreement with this policy as a form of disloyalty (although French foreign policy has changed few times in recent years). In 2019, Damir-Geilsdorf et al. investigated a group of Salafists in Germany whose ideas of individual loyalty and disavowal intersect with issues of identity, belonging, inclusion, and exclusion, which are strongly intertwined with the realities of everyday life (Damir-Geilsdorf et al. 2019, p. 124).

Two shortcomings of these previous studies of Muslim loyalties can be pointed out. First, most studies have focused on Salafism, ultimately a minority interpretation in contemporary Islam. Second, most research in the West to date has focused on the Anglo-Saxon world; the Francophone space in Europe, and especially in France, has benefited little from the research interest in loyalty/disloyalty among Muslim leaders. In general, there is still very little scientific understanding of Muslim attitudes toward loyalty/disloyalty as an element of identity formation in European contexts.

3. T. Ramadan: Multiple Identities, Critical Loyalties

Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss Muslim intellectual of Egyptian origin, was born in Geneva in 1962. His father Said Ramadan (d. 1995) was the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe and his grandfather Hasan al-Bannā (d. 1949) is the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, in 1928. Ramadan benefited from a double education. On the one hand, he received an Islamic education at the Islamic Centre of Geneva, which is a religious and political centre of the Muslim Brotherhood run by his family, and became exposed to Islamism and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. Ramadan also briefly pursued a traditional curriculum of Islamic knowledge at al-Azhar University in Egypt between 1992 and 1994. On the other hand, Ramadan studied philosophy and French literature in Switzerland, obtaining a PhD in Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Geneva.² Between the mid-1990s and 2017, T. Ramadan was a key figure in French Islam, delivering hundreds of lectures and sermons, founding a number of associations and institutes, and connecting influential networks of Islamic action and ideas; several allegations of rape and sexual violation in 2017 put a halt to his tremendous influence.

Ramadan discussed loyalty in a systematic and extensive way in his book *Mon intime conviction (My Deep Conviction)* published in 2010. For this reason, I took this book as the basis of my discussion of his discourse on loyalty. Ramadan wrote this book as a response

to his critics, who accused him of double talk (liberal to the faces of non-Muslim audiences and conservative when addressing Muslims). With this book, he wanted to unveil what he “really believes”. Ramadan perceives loyalty through two premises: 1. multiple identities equal multiple loyalties, and 2. loyalties are always critical and never blind. With regard to the first premise, Ramadan maintains that “one cannot only have one identity, one cannot only have one loyalty” (Ramadan 2010, p. 69). Ramadan illustrates the idea of the multiple identities of Muslims in Europe with his own case: “I am Swiss by nationality, Egyptian by memory, Muslim by religion, European by culture, universalist by principle, Moroccan and Mauritanian by adoption. There is no problem with that: I live with these identities and one or the other can become a priority depending on the context and the situation” (Ramadan 2010, p. 71). If that is the case, how can one navigate between multiple loyalties? Ramadan answers this question by affirming that Muslim citizens should sustain “the coherence of the conscience that marries identities around a body of principles whose use, to be just, cannot be selective and must remain critical as well as self-critical” (Ramadan 2010, p. 71). Ramadan means, by the body of principles, the Islamic ethics of justice, dignity and equality; the latter cements the multiple loyalties by establishing priorities and hierarchies according to the hierarchy of Islamic values.

Ramadan considers loyalty together with language and law as the three L requirements for Muslim citizens in Europe: mastery of the national language, respect for the law, and critical loyalty to their society (Ramadan 2010, p. 153). In his view:

Loyalties are critical: with one’s government, with one’s co-religionists or with the *umma*, it is never a question of supporting ‘one’s own’, blindly, against all ‘others’. It is about being faithful to principles of justice, dignity and equality, and being able to criticize and demonstrate against one’s government when it engages in unjust warfare, when it legitimizes apartheid or deals with the worst dictators. It is similarly about having critical loyalty to one’s own Muslim (or other) co-religionists and opposing their ideas or actions when they betray these same principles, stigmatize the other, breed racism, justify dictatorships, terrorist attacks or the murder of innocents. (Ramadan 2010, pp. 72–73)

Since loyalty is mutual between the members of the group, and not only an expressed emotion of one particular side to another, Ramadan asserts that loyalty should operate through social experience and dialogue so that “one can trust oneself and one’s partner, and thus measure the loyalty of the other” (Ramadan 2010, p. 72). Although trust is a different emotion from loyalty, they are usually associated in social relations. This trust-in-interaction is carried out through two dynamics: 1. national movements of local initiatives as expressions of responsible commitment of all citizens in Western societies. 2. Diversity of cultural expressions in the West (Ramadan 2010, p. 72). We can infer from this perception of multiple identities-cum-loyalty that as long as every culture is respected as part of the collective identity, more trust could be achieved, and, therefore, more loyalty to Western societies and states.

Ramadan does not address the problem of trust after the terrorist attacks in France. Between 2015 and 2022, France faced 37 Islamist terror attacks of various scales. Between 1979 and 2021, 82 Islamist terrorist attacks targeted France, killing 330 people. Furthermore, the French security services put under surveillance 10,500 individuals registered in France for jihadist radicalization.³ In general, Western societies take Islamist terrorist attacks as signs of the lack of reliability of “Muslims” as a trustworthy component of society. This, in turn, is mobilized as an argument to doubt Muslim loyalties. Although reformist Islam denounces Islamist violence and commits itself to “saving” trust within Western societies, the latter find it hard to resume trust building after each terrorist attack. In this context, trust is permanently targeted and undermined by terrorist organizations, bringing doubt to trust building and diversity accepting. For the time being, in France, only the state takes measures to fight Islamist terrorism (sometimes suspecting ordinary Muslims as well). Reformist Muslim organizations denounce unanimously Islamist terrorism, but take few practical measures in this regard.

For Ramadan, critical loyalty agrees with the values of Western societies themselves (democracy, critical thinking, justice, freedom, etc.). That is why he sees no contradiction between being loyal to these societies and “combating the spread of a discourse that normalizes ordinary racism, discriminatory treatment and the stigmatization of a part of the population” (Ramadan 2010, p. 203). For, as he puts it “true civic loyalty is a critical loyalty: it means refusing to have to systematically prove one’s membership of society and, knowing one’s responsibilities, claiming one’s rights and establishing a fundamental critique of government policies when these betray the ideals of democratic societies” (Ramadan 2010, p. 203).

Accordingly, critical loyalty is a form of dissidence (or disloyalty to certain practices) which aims to reform the system or resist injustice. There is room, here, to debate what constitutes acceptable resistance or dissidence. There is the kind of critical loyalty of Edward Snowden (the American computer intelligence consultant who fled to Russia) which made him a renegade (and disloyal from the American point of view) and there is the kind of critical loyalty of Cornel West (an American social critic and philosopher) who is critical of the current US internal and foreign policies. Critical loyalty is a dilemma and a lot depends on the confines of loyalty/disloyalty, for specific people, in specific situations.

4. A. Mamoun: Loyalty, Gratitude and Patriotism

Abdelali Mamoun was born in France to Algerian parents in the late 1960s. He studied the Koran in the mosque of Mantes-la-Jolie and participated in a Koranic chanting competition in Libya in 1982. In 1983, he went to Syria to study Islam for six years in an Islamic institute. He then studied in Saudi Arabia before returning to France in the early 1990s, where he completed a postgraduate degree in the history of philosophy at the Sorbonne and taught in the mosques of Mureaux and Mantes-la-Jolie. In 2001, a leadership conflict pitted him against the Islamic World League, which propagates a rather fundamentalist vision of Islam, and which he reproached for its interference (which was ultimately that of the Saudis) in French Islam. In 2012, he created and began directing the *Maison de la Culture Musulmane* (House of Muslim Culture) in Paris, an association which offers religious training, but also mediation activities, the handling of phenomena considered paranormal, marriage preparation, and one-off activities such as trips, etc. In any case, Abdelali Mamoun has been promoting a “republican” discourse in which he advocates for the supervision of French Islam by the State, the reform of Islam, the de-radicalisation of young people, and opposition to Islamist discourse. He became highly publicised in the wake of the terrorist attacks in France (since 2012). In 2004, Marie Dolez devoted a film to him entitled *L’Imam du vendredi* (The Friday Imam), in which A. Mamoun discusses Islam and the role of Islam in society. Mamoun focuses on Islam and social problems in the suburbs of French cities.⁴ Eleven years later, he participated in a documentary film entitled *Djihad 2.0* to raise awareness against radicalization.⁵ Mamoun shares the journey of part of the second generation of immigrants to Europe who chose the “authentic option” in terms of religion, i.e., to follow their parents’ advice to study Islam in a fairly consistent manner, and then to return to Europe seeking reintegration from the use of the religious capital acquired in Muslim countries to carry out the mission of helping Muslims in Europe to claim more of their religious identity, through the dissemination of traditional knowledge. In 2017, he published *L’islam contre le radicalisme: manuel de contre-offensive* (Islam against Radicalism: A Manual for Counter-Offensive) at Éditions du Cerf. This book is one of a series of Islamic books written in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in France (2015–2017) which shook French society; as an imam and theologian, Mamoun also represents the reaction of Muslim leaders in France to the accusation that some imams condone violence or do not take on the responsibility of reforming Muslim thinking so that it can accept the values and laws of the Republic in France. The book is aimed at a Muslim public of young French people who are sensitive to Islamic ideologies ranging from Islamism to Salafism, from messianism to jihadism and from pan-Islamism to the Muslim Brotherhood. This audience often confuses religion with contemporary ideologies; the author then sets out to explain what distinguishes Islam as a religion from different

contemporary ideologies, which are all radical according to the author, even when some of these ideologies are not violent. I take this book as the foundation of my analysis of Mamoun's discourse on loyalty because it is the only work he dedicated to this issue.

For Mamoun, loyalty is an expression of patriotism and an important Islamic virtue to be cultivated in the French context as well. This virtue, he says, is "*wafā'* in Arabic, an Islamic virtue which imposes on Muslim citizens gratitude towards their homeland or the one they have adopted and the benefits it has given them" (Mamoun 2017, p. 85). Mamoun, thus, links loyalty to gratitude:

We are not the commensals of France but its trustees. And this is contrary to what many young people from immigrant backgrounds think, who are struggling to appropriate this legacy, discouraged as they are by, among other things, the speeches of imams who indulge in maintaining a dichotomous and inverted relationship between the fervour of the believer and adherence to the nation. At best, they talk about the respect of the laws of the host country that the guest owes to the host. But this is not true. No, we are not guests of the French Republic, but its children. No, we are neither nostalgic for an Islam from elsewhere that we would like to transplant here, nor the precursors of an Islamic future that we would like to implant here. (Mamoun 2017, p. 85)

Mamoun criticizes, here, the Salafist view of loyalty which states that Muslims should be anti-Republican, or at best should evolve in parallel to the French Republic; they call for respect of laws insofar as foreigners should respect the laws of the land they travel to, without owing loyalty to the host country or building bridges of trust and gratitude with the rest of society. In general, this view follows the traditional Salafi doctrine of alliance and disavowal (*al-walā' wa-l-barā'*), which separates Muslim communities from the rest of society emotionally, while still calling for respect of the laws of the Republic as mutual agreements. Jihadist Salafism takes this doctrine further and rejects these laws as infidel regulations and undeserving respect. That is to say, building a reformist Islamic view of loyalty necessitates, as well, critical engagement with the Salafi view of alliance and disavowal.

Mamoun admits that it is not that easy to reconcile loyalty to Islam and loyalty to France. He embraces the concept of the double loyalty; as he puts it, "as Muslims our love is shared because it shows our gratitude towards two entities that cherish us. On the one hand, France, which is our homeland and which we love because it satisfies our physical and vital needs, a love that impels us to contribute to its growth and glory. On the other hand, Islam, which is our "motherland" and which we love in the same way because it fulfils our emotional and spiritual needs" (Mamoun 2017, p. 86). Reconciliation between two parents, France and Islam, is necessary all the more when the parental relationship "unfortunately now seems to be in the process of divorce" (Mamoun 2017, p. 86). Mamoun asserts that if this relationship breaks then "you either love France or you leave it. I am not ashamed to be a chauvinist, because I consider that this is the least recognition that Allah himself imposes on us. The Prophet said in the Bukhari collection of Ethics: He who is not grateful to people, will not be grateful to God" (Mamoun 2017, p. 86).

At first glance, the dilemma between loyalty to France and Islam seems difficult to resolve, but Mamoun brings it back to its first principles. Contrary to the beliefs of the Salafis and the Republicanists, this double loyalty is a false contradiction. There should not be a contradiction between the two since the love of each entails a different kind of moral obligation. The Republic is a regime for the common good and Islam is a faith. While he emphasises the values of patriotism, loyalty and gratitude to France as the homeland adopted by Muslims because it fulfils the physical and vital needs of Muslims, Islam is still relevant because it fulfils their emotional and spiritual needs. The two loyalties are not competing and are not mutually exclusive. If there is a contradiction, Mamoun points out, it is in the Salafi discourse which "disavows the Western system while enjoying its privileges, praising their original home country, but have long since left it because they know that their needs will never be met there" (Mamoun 2017, p. 86).

Similarly to T. Ramadan, Mamoun does not embrace blind loyalty to France. As he utters, “being loyal to one’s country does not mean that one should be passive, sheepish or blind” (Mamoun 2017, p. 86). He adds that approving and appreciating state institutions “does not prevent one from contributing to their improvement since the expression of thought and opinions are by definition, as one learns in school, free as soon as they are put to the test of criticism: these are even expressions of the very French passion for politics, understood as the public life of the City, but should be always in respect of democratic rules, never by illegal and immoral manoeuvres, and in no case by barbaric acts of terror” (Mamoun 2017, p. 86).

Thus, critical loyalty should be voiced through free speech, politics, citizen initiatives and democracy; it cannot be violent dissidence. Nonetheless, Mamoun seems less enthusiastic than Ramadan about expressing critical loyalty. For Ramadan, critical loyalty is a normal implication of citizenship, encouraged to show resistance to government policies, by any peaceful means, while Mamoun seems to approve of the right to criticism rather than encouraging resistance to government policies. Mamoun is particularly critical and sensitive to the Salafist discourse than Ramadan. He seems to take the mistrust towards Muslims in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in France (2015–2017) that shook French society, as a Muslim responsibility in some sense; as an imam and theologian, Mamoun represents the reaction of the majority of Muslim leaders in France to terrorism as a sign of disloyalty to France.

5. Moncef Zenati: Human Brotherhood and Loyalty

Moncef Zenati is a Franco–Tunisian Muslim theologian and imam (born in 1970), and a member of the organization *Musulmans de France* (MF, French Muslims), formerly *Union des organisations islamiques de France* (UOIF, Union of Islamic Organisations of France), the biggest Muslim umbrella organization in France (which is close to the Muslim Brotherhood). Born in France, he grew up in Tunisia. He then obtained a degree in mathematics and another in Islamic theology at the *Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines* (European Institute of Human Sciences), the most important Muslim private higher education institute in France where he still teaches, in addition to being an imam in Le Havre. He has published several short theological works and translations of Islamic books from Arabic. In 2008, he published *La fraternité humaine en islam* (*Human brotherhood in Islam*).

Zenati discusses loyalty in his text *La fraternité humaine en islam* (*Human brotherhood in Islam*), which explains the choice I made to investigate his discourse in this particular book. Its context, thus, predates the wave of terrorist attacks of 2012–2017 (although the low-scale terrorist attacks of the 1990s in France had a huge impact on French society). In a similar fashion to Mamoun, Zenati sets out to convince extreme voices, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, about Muslim loyalties. He takes issue with the Salafis who believe that no loyalty, alliance, affection or friendship should be shown to non-Muslims, while he also takes issue with the anti-Muslim French view which sustains biases against Muslims.

For Zenati, human brotherhood is based on the exchange of knowledge, mutual assistance, dialogue, common good, justice, equity, struggle against racism, respect and tolerance (Zenati 2008, p. 86). Zenati asserts that some Muslims misunderstood the doctrine of alliance and disavowal. He maintains that the form of ‘alliance’ or ‘loyalty’ (*al-walā’*) which is forbidden in Islamic ethics is that “shown by Muslims toward non-Muslims who committed aggression against Muslims. This type of loyalty is to the detriment of Muslims, and entails an *alliance with an enemy of nation and religion, who practices all forms of treason and espionage*” (Zenati 2008, p. 86). Thus, disloyalty to non-Muslims can only be cautioned if it is a reaction to previous disloyalty from non-Muslims, and is valid only “if non-Muslims change their loyalty from one nation to another, from one people to another, which constitutes, in contemporary jargon, an act of high treason” (Zenati 2008, p. 87). In this case, Muslims are proscribed to enter into alliances or friendly relations, pacifying or acting benevolently with the one who declares war on Muslims and offends and oppresses them, because no one should take enemies as allies while they diligently work “to triumph

over one's own nation, submitting completely to the enemy and spying on Muslims" (Zenati 2008, p. 89).

Thus, Zenati provides context for Muslim disloyalty towards non-Muslims, which is that of non-Muslim aggression towards Muslims. Putting this exceptional case aside, Zenati maintains that "there is no harm in making alliances in the secular realm with non-Muslims, nor in showing them sympathy and friendship" (Zenati 2008, p. 91). Thus, he makes an *argumentum e contrario* (if the *ratio legis* of disloyalty to non-Muslims is the latter's aggression, and such a reason does not exist in the French context, the normal course of things is to be loyal to people who share nationhood with Muslims). Thus, the mobilization by Salafis of the dogma of alliance and disavowal, he says, is both "reductive and erroneous" (Zenati 2008, p. 91).

Furthermore, Zenati adds that "alliances and friendships may arise between Muslims and non-Muslims because of neighbourhood, work, study or the human qualities that one perceives in the other; all these relationships do not contradict the Islamic principle of '*al-walā'*" (Zenati 2008, p. 91). He illustrates this socially built loyalty with the permission given by Islamic law to mixed marriages between Muslim men and non-Muslim women (Jewish and Christian women, specifically), a marital relationship that is based on love, tranquillity and tenderness which shows, for him, that Muslims are allowed by Islamic law to show loyalty to non-Muslims (Zenati 2008, p. 92). Islamic law indeed trusts Jewish and Christian women as long as the orientation of the family is defined by the Muslim husband (not when a Muslim woman wants to marry a Jewish and Christian man, which is a forbidden form of marriage in Islamic law because the orientation of family in this case would be defined by the non-Muslim man).

Even so, Zenati's argument, at least partially, undermines the Salafi interpretation of alliance and disavowal as a ban on loyalty to non-Muslims. In normal cases, one cannot imagine being disloyal to one's wife because she is non-Muslim or to one's children because their mother is non-Muslim, knowing that family still constitutes, for most people, not only the core of social structures, but also a space of the shaping identity of individuals and social groups.

For Zenati, the principles of universality, humanism and peace (which are essential to Islamic ethics in his view) are simply ignored by Salafism and its binary conceptions of loyalty/disloyalty. Salafism also discards basic premises of social interaction, from family to trade, which are all premised on trust and ability to build trust with others as individuals and communities.

6. Islamic Loyalties as Identity Formation

In the section that follows, it will be argued that Muslim reformist discourses in France envision loyalty as an element of the identity formation of French Muslims. Before proceeding to discuss loyalty as identity formation in the discourses of the three Muslim authorities here (Ramadan, Mamoun and Zenati), I will proceed to frame loyalty as identity formation in social theory. Let us begin with Georg Simmel, who envisaged loyalty and gratitude as the two emotions which cement social relations, converting them into permanent institutions calling loyalty the "enabler of society" and "the inertia of the soul" (Simmel 1964, pp. 379–80). As for Jürgen Habermas, he argued that "modern political-administrative units are systems which exchange administrative achievements and political decisions for loyalty and taxes" (Habermas 1987, p. 320). Similarly, Mabel Berezin draws attention to the "exchange between the democratic nation-states and their citizens in which states deliver security and receive confidence and loyalty in exchange" (Berezin 2002, p. 38). Helena Flam perceives loyalty as a routine and significant social emotion, arguing that "loyalty seems to pervade every nook and cranny of modern society. In fact, most prominent social scientists attribute great significance to its binding role" (Flam 2005, p. 21). Jonathan Haidt's work on loyalty and disloyalty shows that it is a moral foundation through which individuals and groups form alliances; mark territories; negotiate familial, tribal, national and religious loyalties; establish group cohesion or engage in rivalries (Haidt 2012, pp. 154–57). We can

clearly see that as we move through time, sociologists see political obligations as the basis of loyalty (in accordance with the liberal view), while conservative thinkers and earlier sociologists believe that the basis of loyalty to the state lies rather in friendship or virtue (Scruton 1982, p. 277).

Turning now to T. Ramadan, whose view of the basis of loyalty to the French state seems to be the mutual political obligations between the state and its citizens. In this sense, it can be said that Ramadan's perception of loyalty is liberal; the state ought to accept Muslims with their diversity of identities and critical views in exchange for their loyalty to the state. Thus, Ramadan requires the state to recognize Muslims qua Muslims as part of the nation; the state here is not merely a political-administrative system or a provider of security. His view, thus, is far from Berezin's and Habermas' views of loyalty. Neither is it a Simmelian view of loyalty based on gratitude. Instead, Ramadan's has a Weberian element of loyalty as a debt to effective leadership. If the state can assume effective leadership by embracing Muslims as different and critical, its authority is legitimate and it has the right to Muslim loyalties. Therefore, Muslim identity formation in France consists, for him, in building a community of Muslims and non-Muslims on the basis of the mutual recognition of differences, shared trust and common loyalty.

Let us turn now to Mamoun, whose perception of loyalty is based on gratitude, which is clearly a Simmelian way of viewing society. Simmel sees gratitude as predicated on reciprocity and moral bondage (Simmel 1964, p. 387). For Simmel, loyalty and gratitude are closely linked because they both build constancy in social relationships, which are needed by individuals and society (Simmel 1964, p. 394). Mamoun justifies gratitude towards France as being motivated by two considerations. First, that France gave benefits to Muslims (which even Muslim states did not provide to their populations). Mamoun expresses gratitude to "the mother-France as provider of material well-being to its citizens. Muslims are also now children of France, not its guests, and as such they feel "filial loyalty" towards France. Loyalty is, consequently, a way to "return the many favours" Muslims received from French state and society. Those who fail to show loyalty to France are ungrateful, refuse to reciprocate the favours they received and, so, should leave the country.

Second, Mamoun draws on Muslim ethics, and particularly on the notion of *wafā'* to posit that Muslims are morally bound to their homelands. The notion of *wafā'* has slightly different meanings than *walā'* or *muwālāt*, which are the standard religious terms for loyalty in Islamic political ethics. *Wafā'* denotes the meanings of the fulfilment of a promise, discharge of an obligation, faithfulness, fidelity, good faith, loyalty, allegiance and accomplishment (Wehr 1976, p. 1086). As for *walā'* and *muwālāt*, they indicate friendship, benevolence, fidelity, allegiance, loyalty, clienthood and constancy (Wehr 1976, pp. 1100–1). While the Salafis in France use the terms of *walā'* or *muwālāt*, Mamoun chose to use the term of *wafā'*. If we are to justify this shift in vocabulary, we might say that Mamoun avoids *walā'* and *muwālāt* for their implied meanings of friendship and clienthood. It could also be that Mamoun wanted to use a less controversial term (*wafā'*) than that of *walā'* or *muwālāt*. Furthermore, *wafā'*, even more than *walā'*, expresses fervent veneration of faithfulness and loyalty in Islam, inherited from nomadic vigorousness and respect of loyalty to the bounds of the tribe and kinship by blood (extended to friendship), a virtue that enjoys a high status in the Islamic moral code (Izutsu 2002, pp. 86–87). As Izutsu puts it, Islam has made the virtue of *wafā'* into "something supertribal, truly human, a moral force capable of operating in an individualistic society" (Izutsu 2002, p. 88). The Quran has strongly discouraged Muslims from betrayal.⁶ In Islamic ethics, there is also a foundational relationship between religious loyalty to God, and *ikhlaṣ* loyalty to "faithful believers", *wafā'*. Moreover, the sermon of allegiance, *bay'a*, is not exclusive to the figure of a political leader, but to that of the Prophet, the Sufi master and God as well. Paying allegiance as a sign of loyalty plays a significant role in structuring Muslim societies. Since duplicity implies a dual loyalty, the duplicity of the hypocrites, *munāfiqūn* is so denounced in Islamic ethics Muslim ethics is also sensitive to apostasy, *ridda*; Muslims usually react strongly to apostasy as disloyalty.

As for Zenati, loyalty is based on friendship and human brotherhood. This is clearly an Aristotelian–conservative view of associating loyalty and friendship as virtues (Fletcher 1993, p. 6). Zenati mobilizes here a daily fact of friendly relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in France (and elsewhere), at work or in the neighbourhood, in families, sport, and beyond. In such social settings, one cannot discard how these relationships play a considerable role in building loyalties. It is not only the vast networks of dialogue and exchange between Muslims and non-Muslims in education institutions, media and cultural forums, but also the good practices of care, common projects, and social interaction which make loyal solidarities. Friendship can create opportunities for cooperation, marriage, and trade, which all help foster these loyalties. As Fletcher puts it, “loyalties crystallize in common projects and shared life experiences” because friendship “rests on loyalty, requires an implicit understanding of continuity and reciprocal reliance, caring, relations and shared histories. And so, loyalty does not arise in the abstract but only in the context of particular relations” (Fletcher 1993, p. 7). While many Muslims chose to live in a parallel world to French society, a considerable number of Muslims do the opposite, interact in all sectors of society, and construct a French Muslim identity with customers, friends, and colleagues. This is a solid ethical–sociological foundation of social identity and loyalty embraced by many Muslims.

With regard to human brotherhood, Zenati cross-references here the Islamic notion of *ukhuwwa* (brotherhood) and the French value of *fraternité* (brotherhood). Modern Islamic thought has come to accept the notion of human brotherhood, *ukhuwwa fi 'l-insāniyya*, although Salafism and other extremist Islamic trends adhere only to the brotherhood in Islamic faith, *ukhuwwa fi 'l-īmān*. Nowadays, the majority of Muslim jurists and thinkers distinguish between brotherhood in religion and brotherhood in humanity or nationality as two different types of brotherhood that should not be opposed. A recent international forum of the Muslim World League, one of the most important transnational Islamic organizations, stated that between Muslims, Jews, Christians and others, there is brotherhood in humanity and brotherhood in citizenship.⁷ The notion of human brotherhood and of citizenship between Muslims and non-Muslims became even more acknowledged in Islamic thought when the religious authorities of al-Azhar and the Vatican issued the document of human fraternity in Abu Dhabi in 2019.⁸ Zenati also mobilizes the French notion of *fraternité* (brotherhood), one of the values of the national motto of France, intended to promote national unity and solidarity. *Fraternité* (brotherhood) has been mobilized in France by various Muslim leaders and intellectuals after the wave of terrorist attacks (2015–2017), among whom is Abdennour Bidar, who published his *Plaidoyer pour la fraternité* (*A Plea for Brotherhood*) in 2015 which stresses brotherliness between French citizens, despite cultural diversity, to confront terrorism (Bidar 2015).

Is the French state capable of embracing Muslims as different and critical, in a Republican model of citizenship? As explained by John R. Bowen “any social groups claiming special rights run up against the Jacobin heritage of French political culture. When private religious groups seek to act publicly, they incur double suspicion” (Bowen 2007, p. 162). He adds that any claim to multiple loyalties “competes with the state for the loyalties of their members, and thus promotes communalism. But they are also suspected of going further and promoting constraints on their members that have divine sanction and thus higher authority than that of the state. Hence the great French fascination with cults (*sectes*) and with the Masons”. (Bowen 2007, p. 162). Likewise, Jocelyne Cesari observes that, in the French model, “visible Islamic identities are inversely correlated to civic and political loyalties”. (Cesari 2014, p. 173). The doubts about Muslim loyalty in France expressed constantly by various French officials calling Muslims to “love France or leave it” divides Muslims into those who are good Muslims (who respect the notion of the Republic and secularism by assimilating to French values) and the rest (who are suspected of disloyalty). Finally, one cannot ignore the arguments made by French politicians underlining the impossibility of integrating Muslims in connection to dual loyalty and the primacy of the law (Roy 2012, pp. 96–109).

7. Conclusions

The aim of the present paper was to examine the discourses of three reformist Muslim leaders in France (T. Ramadan, A. Mamoun and M. Zenati) on loyalty. This study identified Muslim loyalties as based on mutual recognition, diversity, gratitude and human brotherhood. These findings suggest that, in general, reformist Islam discards the Salafi doctrine of banning loyalty to non-Muslims. The three Muslim accounts analysed here show that loyalty is an essential component of Muslim identity formation in France, reconciling multiple identities and loyalties and attempting to resolve possible tensions between Frenchness and Islam by adopting the attitude of critical loyalty (when it comes to unjust policies endorsed by the French state). These results are generalisable only to reformist Islam, which is traditionalist and moderate political Islam; they are subject to certain limitations, as Salafism and other extreme interpretations of Islam do not apply loyalty to non-Muslim states and societies.

The variables/meanings of loyalty identified in the discourses of three key Muslim leaders in France show different results from research covered in Section 2 on the State of Research on Muslim Loyalties. The two main differences to emphasize, here, are that: 1. Muslim loyalty, according to reformist leaders, does not depend on the securitization context in France since the 1990s and the doubts about Muslim loyalty. Loyalty is taken as a foundational moral value inherent to Muslimness, although this loyalty is not exclusive to one single identity (France or Islam). 2. Loyalty to non-Muslims is motivated by social, political and theological considerations and not determined solely by religion (which seems to be the focus of literature on Salafi loyalty).

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Notes

- ¹ «Cinquièmes colonnes»: la Grande Mosquée de Paris tacle Estrosi Available online: https://www.saphirnews.com/Cinquiemmes-colonnes-la-Grande-Mosquee-de-Paris-tacle-Estrosi_a20725.html (accessed on: 12 September 2022).
- ² Éléments de biographie Available online: <https://tariqramadan.com/elements-de-biographie/> (accessed on: 12 September 2022).
- ³ Fiches S, la surveillance des Renseignements qui alimente le débat politique Available online: https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/fiches-s-la-surveillance-des-renseignements-qui-alimente-le-debat-politique_1847110.html (accessed on: 12 September 2022).
- ⁴ L'Imam du vendredi Available online: http://www.lussasdoc.org/film-l_imam_du_vendredi-1,14702.html (accessed on: 12 September 2022).
- ⁵ Regardez "Djihad 2.0", un documentaire d'Olivier Toscer Available online: <https://www.telerama.fr/television/regardez-djihad-2-0-un-documentaire-d-olivier-toscer,134445.php> (accessed on: 12 September 2022).
- ⁶ See in particular:
 - Q. 4: 107 (And do not dispute on behalf of those who betray themselves; surely God loves not the guilty traitor).
The Koran, translated by A. J. Arberry, New York: Touchstone, 1996, p. 117.
 - Q. 8: 58 (And if thou fearest treachery any way at the hands of a people, dissolve it with them equally; surely God loves not the treacherous).
The Koran, translated by A. J. Arberry, p. 204.
 - Q. 12: 52 ("That, so that he may know I betrayed him not secretly, and that God guides not the guile of the treacherous).
The Koran, translated by A. J. Arberry, p. 260.
- ⁷ Bi-ḥuḍūr 'ulamā' al-'ālam al-Islāmī wa-l-majāmi' al-Islāmiyya: Mu'tamar fiqh al-ṭawāri' yaḥsim al-qawli fi mawḍū' al-ukhuwwa al-insāniyya Available online: <https://themwl.org/ar/node/37567> (accessed on: 12 September 2022).
- ⁸ The Abu Dhabi Declaration on Human Fraternity Available online: <https://www.christians-muslims.com/document> (accessed on: 12 September 2022).

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Article

Identity among Turkish Shi'is: An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract: This article examines the cultural identity of Turkish Shi'is in a border province in East Turkey and how their ethnic and religious identities are positioned within the political and cultural context of Turkey. Shi'is living in Iğdir, the easternmost province of Turkey, may share the ethnicity of the majority in Turkey, but they are in the minority in terms of their religious identity. Their cultural identity is shifting contextually and is always under construction. In this context, cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains identity as a never-ending construction, a process never completed—always in progress. This paper traces the multilayered and interdisciplinary approach of Hall's identity interpretations and applies them to discuss the social, cultural, and political positionings of Iğdir Ja'faris in Turkey. The study uses ethnographic data based on field observation and semi-structured interviews with Turkish Ja'faris in Iğdir.

Keywords: Turkish Shi'is; cultural identity; Shi'i culture; Stuart Hall; Ja'fari; East Turkey; Muharram

1. Introduction

Iğdir province, with Armenia in the north, Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in the east, and Iran in the south, is a border city in the easternmost part of Turkey. This region, where different cultures and nations have historically lived together, maintains this feature today. The local population of the city consists of Turks, most of whom are of Azeri origin, and Kurds.

Considering Turkey's sociopolitical dynamics, it may be possible to make some inferences about the cultural and political structure of the city at first. According to this inference, because of their ethnic identity, Kurds would be restless residents of the city and Azeri Turks would be natural members of the state. However, this is not exactly the case for the city of Iğdir. Turkey, which was built as a nation-state, has had a fragile relationship with different ethnic origins throughout its hundred-year history. It is possible to see different manifestations of this fragility in this city. Azeri Turks in Iğdir have the founding ethnic identity of the state, but have a religious belief which differs from the majority because they are Ja'faris.

Ja'farism, also called Isnaashariyya, Imamiyya¹, and Shi'ism², expresses adherence to the path of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. However, while this school is mostly known by the name of Ja'farism in Turkey, it has become famous with the names of Shi'ism in countries where Ahl al-Bayt (People of the Prophet's House) friends share the same faith.³ Although the Ja'faris living in Iğdir share this common faith, their Turkish identity makes their story worth examining in a different sociocultural context. In this regard, this study is an attempt to explain the social, cultural, and historical contexts that shape the cultural identities of Turkish Ja'faris living in Iğdir. Referring to the cultural theorist Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity as a never-ending construction, the first aim of this study is to try to understand the sociocultural dynamics of the identity construction processes of the Turkish Ja'faris living in Iğdir. The second aim is to trace how Turkish Ja'faris position themselves in Turkey's general sociopolitical and cultural context.

The article consists of four sections. In the first section, the methodology, the data collection process, the criteria for the interviews, and the resources to collect the data are

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explained. In the second part, the Shi'i concepts that are thought to be relevant for the content of the study are explained and a brief information about the history of Shi'ism is given. Following this, the article tries to explain what Turkish identity means to the Ja'faris, how they view the Ottomans, and how the Ja'faris historically and culturally position themselves within the history of the Turks. The transnational relationship between Turkish Ja'faris and Iranian Twelver Shi'a Muslims is also outlined in this section. The historical, cultural, and religious connections of Turkish Ja'faris with Iran, the largest Shi'i country in the Muslim world, are also discussed in this context. In the fourth section, the article discusses what Atatürk, the founding leader of the Turkish Republic, means to the Ja'faris and how the love of Atatürk has a function in the construction of their religious and cultural identities. The views and reactions of the Ja'faris towards the laic practices of the state (along with the Sunni reflexes of the latter), their perceptions regarding state-run Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), and the issue of representation are analyzed in this section.

2. Methodology and Data Sources

Based on field observation and interview methods, this ethnographic study was conducted between 2020 and 2022. Since the starting point of the study was an effort to understand how the Ja'faris living in Iğdir defined themselves and which identities they adopted, many references were made to how the interviewees expressed themselves and how they approached the researched topics. The fact that the studies about the Ja'faris are mostly about their faith, my involvement in daily life in the city where I work as an academic and the multicultural structure of the city encouraged me to do this study.

The ethnographic approach of the study and its emphasis on interviews may have some methodological dangers. Hammersley states that "the shortness of contemporary field works can encourage a rather ahistorical perspective" (Hammersley 2006, p. 5), and that what the researcher observes may not always be typically there and may vary. However, the fact that I have done this study in the city I currently live in, that the interval of fieldwork is extended over a long period of time, and that the questions asked in the interviews are on topics such as historical and cultural identity help to eliminate these dangers. Wolcott characterizes the researcher's role as an "integral part of reporting qualitative work" (Wolcott 2009, p. 17) and he underlines the necessity of writing descriptive accounts in the first person. In particular, I tried to use the first person when describing my fieldwork and recounting my experiences in the interviews as a non-Ja'fari researcher as the visibility of the researcher helps the reader recognize "the critical nature of the observer role and the influence of his or her subjective assessments in qualitative work" (Wolcott 2009, p. 17).

As in a typical semi-structured interview, a list of questions and topics to be covered was prepared, but there was a "flexibility in how and when the questions are put and how the interviewees can respond" (Edwards and Holland 2013, p. 29). At the beginning of many interviews, I felt that the participants approached me with uneasiness because I am not a Ja'fari. However, when they felt that my main purpose was not to discuss their beliefs, but that I was interested primarily in their cultural identity and that it was for serious study, many of the issues I wanted to talk about were discussed without prompting questions. The duration of the interviews ranged greatly, from 45 min to almost two hours.

After the content of the study was presented in detail, ethics committee approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Iğdir University. In accordance with the ethical rules, participants were asked to sign release forms which added a formal tone to the interview. As a consequence, however, almost every participant was uncomfortable. For that reason, many interviews were unusable. Only about one-third of the interviews were audio recorded as many participants refused requests to be recorded; however, most of the interviews were written down verbatim. Participants who did not emphasize their Ja'fari identity did not object to being recorded. As I had been warned that Ja'faris might object to being recorded, I was prepared for this possibility before the interviewing began.

I interviewed 28 people for this study. It was a struggle to find female participants, but with the help of interviewees and students who had grown up in this city, eventually I found seven women to interview. Two of the women were housewives, two were teachers, one was a university student, and two were private sector employees. The interviewees came from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The interviews I benefited the most from were the interviews I had with teachers. In addition, the interviews I conducted with people who lived outside the city for a while and then returned to Iğdir were rich in content. Some of the interviewees were not religious, and these interviews were especially useful in terms of looking at the Ja'fari society from the outside. I had the opportunity to meet with five mullahs⁴ for the study. These interviews were quite similar in content. Most of the interviews were held in the city's local cafes. I carried out eight interviews at Ja'fari mosques and associations. Four interviews were conducted with home visits.

Interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 65. All interviews were conducted in Turkish and transcripts were translated by me into English for the study. The interviews were recorded or written down verbatim, but there were sections that I also edited. In some interviews, I had to remove some parts that were irrelevant. After transcribing the data, I extracted the repetitions and tried to make connections to find the relevancy between the interviews. Specifically, I gathered dialogues on belonging, culture, rituals, Iranian influence, identity, Turkish identity, and Shia identity into clusters.

The first meetings were with people who approached Ja'farism with a critical attitude, not by conscious choice but because the contact person who set up my initial meetings introduced me to people who were not in the religious circle of the Ja'faris. The first mullah I interviewed helped me a lot and introduced me to many religious Ja'faris. I talked to people from his social circle for a while. Meeting with the opinion leaders of the Ja'fari community in the city added to my credibility.

3. Some Related Concepts of Shi'ism

Since this study is not a detailed examination of the belief principles of Shi'ism, a selective approach is more applicable here. The concepts mentioned during the interviews and the ones that are considered important in order to understand the culture of the Ja'faris living in Iğdir will be briefly mentioned. Considering the ethnographic feature of the study, these concepts will be given together with field observations.

Ahl al-Bayt: The term Ahl al-Bayt means people of the house. In Islamic literature, it is used for the family of the Prophet. It is an important concept not only for Shi'is but also for Sunnis, but what distinguishes these two groups in the context of this concept is not the honor it brings but for Shi'is, as Sharon explains, "it represented a major component in the fight for power and leadership in Islam and highly important element in the search for the legitimacy of rule" (Sharon 1986, p. 169).

When I visited the Ja'fari mosques in Iğdir, I saw portraits of the Ahl al-Bayt, especially the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin Ali, and his son, Hussein. In the commemoration ceremonies held in the city, women wore ribbons with the inscription of Zeynep, the Prophet's granddaughter and Ali's daughter, and Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, and Ali's wife. In certain parts of the city, special importance was given to the Ahl al-Bayt and his family through displays of pennants with the words "Ya Imam-i Hussein" and portraits of Ahl al-Bayt. Moreover, during the interviews, when asked about their beliefs, most of the interviewees emphasized their love for Ahl al-Bayt.

The Imamate: Throughout my study, I interviewed mullahs and religious leaders in the city. As someone who does not come from the Shi'i tradition, I had difficulty determining their role in the community. In other parts of Turkey, in Sunni cities, imams who are in charge of mosques have neither influence outside the mosque nor a leadership role in their community. This is a radical difference from the roles of the mullahs, the imams of the Ja'fari mosques. In order to understand the importance of the mullahs, who take a leading role in religious and social issues, it is necessary to investigate the Imamiyya doctrine in Shi'ism.

Most Shi'is believe in the guidance of the twelve imams as the heirs of the Prophet and they believe that with the death of the Prophet, "the function of guiding man and preserving and explaining the Divine Law continued through the line of Imams" (Momen 1985, p. 147). All of the imams must come from the household (blood) of the Prophet. Shi'ism, which supports this doctrine with verses from the Qur'an, the words of the Prophet and the expressions narrated from the Imams, differs from the majority of Muslims in this regard. Although the main point of the Shi'ism and Sunnism debates is the leadership fight after the death of the Prophet, Shi'is state that Shi'ism is a sect that existed while the Prophet was still alive. According to Nevbahti, a 9th-century Shi'i scholar, Shia was the name of the sect formed by those who were known as the supporters of Ali during the time of the Prophet and who claimed his imamate after him, and many of the Prophet's leading companions were included in this sect (Nevbahti 1355).⁵

The first Imam was Ali bin Ebu Talib and the eleventh Imam was Hasan al-Askari (d. 874). After the death of Hasan al-Askari, "theology of occultation was developed, which aimed at removing chiliastic aspirations by delaying the return of the Mahdi⁶ to an indefinite future date" (Kohlberg 2003, p. XXVIII).

In the Ja'fari mosques in Igdır, it is possible to encounter diagrams that show the twelve imams in the form of a family tree. While the date of death of each imam is given there, there is a question mark next to the twelfth imam, Imam Mehdi. According to Shi'i belief—Twelver theologians to be exact—"this Hidden Imam has not been seen in the world since 941" but "he remains alive and will ultimately return as the Mahdi, the one guided by God" (Pinault 1992, p. 6). The existence and necessity of a leader figure was evident in the mosque and during the interviews, I asked questions about the reverence of the Hidden Imam. In general, the responses indicated that religion cannot be lived without allegiance to an imam, a leader, and a mujtahid.

Mujtahid (authorized interpreter of Islamic Law): Mujtahid is an Islamic scholar; "a title for the most learned jurists in Shi'i jurisprudence" (Dabashi 2011, p. 334). Those who have trainings and skills are allowed to practice *ijtihad* (juridical opinion) and those who do not have those qualifications are required to follow a mujtahid. When I asked the participants, whom I believed to have knowledge about Ja'farism, about these characteristics, I received answers such as "years of training, dedication, some innate characteristics and getting permission from the boards". Mujtahids are mostly men who, with some exceptions, live in Iran.

Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989), the founder of Islamic Republic of Iran and the religious leader of 1979 Iranian Revolution, defines mujtahids as those "who are able to distinguish the narration of the Most Noble Messenger in accordance with the true ordinances of Islam" (Khomeini 2017, p. 63). He states that they are the successors of the Prophet with the criteria they inherited from the imams, and they have the duty to guide people in Islamic science.

Hierarchically, mujtahids are at the top with local mullahs serving below them. The mullahs I interviewed in Igdır communicate with these mujtahids as they are "the main means of spreading public recognition of a mujtahid's piety and learning as the common people are not considered (able) to discern such things" (Momen 1985, p. 205). Local mullahs also need the approval of a mujtahid and his personal status to strengthen their own legitimacy where they live.

The majority of mujtahids live in Iran and Iraq. As a rule, Shi'is must "affiliate themselves with local or regional mujtahids" (Halm 1997, p. 106). It is believed that "they are the ones able to assess all different aspects and implications of a ruling and to deduce the true ordinances of Islam" (Khomeini 2017, p. 63). Almost all of the religious Ja'faris stated that they were affiliated with a mujtahid in Iran. Among the interviewees were those who frequently went to Iran and visited their mujtahids.⁷ I asked a question in all the interviews about the bond to mujtahids because I thought that such a commitment might play a role in cultural identity.

Taqiyyah (Dissimulation): According to Shi'i belief one has permission "to conceal one's religious identity and even deny one's faith in circumstances where there is persecu-

tion or a threat to life or property” (Momen 2015, p. 358). It may be necessary to take into account the current interpretations of this concept when examining Shi’i Turks living in a predominantly Sunni country. In the preliminary interviews I conducted before starting the fieldwork, some people warned me that taqiyyah could be an obstacle for me and that as a non-Shi’i researcher, I might not get the required answers for my study. However, when I started the interviews, it did not take long for me to realize that these prejudices were unfounded. For, as the Shi’i religious scholar Tabatabai states, taqiyyah “is permitted if there is definite danger facing one’s own life or the possibility of the loss of the honor and virtue of one’s wife or of other female members of the family. . . ” (Tabatabai 1979, p. 199). In addition, since the Shi’is are in the majority in the city of Igdir, there is no circumstance that requires the practice of taqiyyah.

The Month of Muharram (Ashura): The death of Imam-i Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet, “has traditionally been seen by Muslims of all persuasions as perhaps the greatest single calamity that befell the community in its early history” (Crow 2016, p. 41). Majlisi, a seventeenth-century Shi’i scholar, also associates this death with the oppression of the followers of Ali after the death of the Prophet and states that this event prevented the correct introduction of Islam to the world (Majlisi 1983). Therefore, the death of Imam-i Hussein in 680 is one of the most important starting points of the Shi’i belief and in the month of Muharram according to the Hijri calendar, Shi’is all over the world commemorate the martyrdom of Imam-i Hussein in Karbala with various rituals and ceremonies. Igdir is one of the central places of these ceremonies in Turkey. The population of the city increases in Muharram because people come from many different places to watch and participate in these ceremonies. In Muharram, the city is the embodiment of a mourning culture. People wear black-colored dresses, all entertainment activities and celebrations are suspended, and workplaces are closed on busy days of commemoration.

These mourning ceremonies are an important part of the city’s culture and Ja’fari of all ages, even small children, participate in these intense ceremonies. Rituals include the reading of elegies and poems, cursing the oppressors, and praying to the martyrs of Karbala. While remembering the Muharram ceremonies he attended in his childhood, Dabashi expresses this intensity of emotion as follows: “Shi’ism is a poem, an elegy, a eulogy, an epic, a panegyric pausing for a moment for history to recollect itself and start anew” (Dabashi 2011, p. XII).

4. Turkish Identity as a Compensator of Being the Other

When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, it inherited a youthful nationalism that emerged in the late stages of the multinational empire. As stated by Uzer “Ottoman past, Islam, and Westernization . . . were major points of reference in the makeup of Turkish national identity” (Uzer 2016, pp. 4–5). Nationalism, which was implemented as a state policy in the early years of the Republic was based on an imaginary Turkish race and “the cleansing of Islamic elements in the culture was called “science”, and a secularism loaded with a high dose of anti-religion is applied (Karpas 2009, p. 49). After the 1950s, along with nationalism, Islam began to emerge as an identity again, especially in the political arena. Turkish–Islamic Synthesis became one of the main discourses of nationalist and conservative parties. In this context, it is worth mentioning that Islam in Turkey has a Sunni character with references to the Ottoman Empire. It would not be easy for the Ja’faris to find a place in this synthesis. Although Turkish identities brought them politically closer to this field, the blending of this identity with Islam did not appeal to them completely.

Considering the ups and downs of the Shi’i Turks’ relationship with the Sunni Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman past is not always a source of a mighty identity for the Ja’faris. During the interviews, I occasionally encountered critical comments about the Ottomans. While some of these criticisms were quite harsh, there were also those who said that they were their ancestors and that they respected them. However, if we consider that the Ottomans were positioned as the Other in the history of Shi’ism, it would not be difficult to make sense of this confusion for the Turkish Ja’faris.

In the 16th and 18th centuries, the Safavid Dynasty ruled in Iran. It is not possible for the Safavids to be called the state of a single ethnic element because there were Turks among the founding elements of the state and “in the sixteenth century Azerbaijani Turkish was spoken in areas where now it is not anymore” (Floor and Javadi 2013, p. 570).⁸ Also in Anatolia, which was the Ottoman land, there were many supporters among the Turks. In addition, the Ottoman Empire, located to the west of the Safavid lands, was their greatest threat. Some scholars attribute the strength of Shi’ism in the region as a reaction to the rise of the Ottoman Empire as an invading power. Ottoman threat “seems to have made the imposition of a distinctive official religion somewhat more palatable to Iranians” (Nasr et al. 1988, p. 284). Safavid rule, by accepting the Shi’ism as the official religion, “had the effect of isolating Iran both culturally and in religion from the rest of the Muslim world” (Rahman 1966, p. 7). Iğdir Ja’faris, who are at the intersection of the Turkey and Iran, still carry this tension in different ways. A twenty-seven-year-old journalism graduate Ja’fari brought up this historical situation in my questions about cultural belonging:

Ö: Let’s look at the Safavid period. For example, Tahmasb⁹, son of Shah Ismail.¹⁰ Were it not for their mistakes, we would be part of the Safavid state today. There has been silence for years. There is alienation. You can see this in America, of course for the Blacks. Now they have to live by the rules of the Whites. Or let’s look at Algeria. French culture dominates. The oppressed retreated to their own regions.

While talking about the troubles experienced by the Ja’faris, the Ottomans were accepted as a milestone and a historical framework was drawn up to the present day. A Ja’fari philosophy teacher, takes an indecisive attitude while describing this situation with the Ottoman Empire. He does not neglect to add exceptions to his speech, which he started with “We love the Ottomans. Of course, we should not forget what Yavuz¹¹ did. He committed atrocities in the wars with Shah Ismail. I mean, the troubles we experienced actually started from those times.”

The Ottoman past, which is one of the biggest references of Turkish nationalism, has different meanings for the Ja’faris compared to the nationalist groups in Turkey. Some religious Ja’faris, who also embrace their Turkish identity, prefer not to see the Ottoman Empire as a part of their ethnic identity. An interview I had with a retired civil servant in his sixties was mostly about the belief system of Ja’farism. In part of his interview, in which he constantly referred to historical events, he explained his ideas to me on the subject without being asked any questions about the Ottoman Empire: “For example, our Turkishness has nothing to do with the Ottomans. We acknowledge all Turkish history. We accept the whole picture. Our claim to Turkishness is also related to the Ottomans.”

This situation may be different for those Azeri Turks who push their Shi’i identity into the background. Some interviewees, who described themselves as nationalists, refused to talk about it by simply saying that Ottomans were their ancestors. Some said that the Ottomans had made some mistakes, but they still identified with them because they were important in Turkish history. It should be noted, however, that this important element of Turkish nationalism has different meanings for the Ja’faris living in Iğdir.

The Turkish identity, which is an important part of the cultural identity among the Iğdir Ja’faris, is not abandoned or abolished, although they are religiously different from the majority. By fulfilling the requirements of their own identity, it is differentiated by decentering features and by reconceptualization. The Ja’faris’ ignoring or reshaping of the Ottoman past according to their own cultural or religious identities means they are formulating a Turkish identity, in Hall’s words, “in its new, displaced or decentered position within the paradigm” (Hall and Gay 1996, p. 2).

5. A Shi’i City under the Ataturk Silhouette

Ataturk led the War of Independence after the First World War and afterwards became the founding leader of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. On his way to building a modern

nation-state, he abolished the institution of the caliphate and repudiated Ottomans by launching Western social and cultural reforms in the cities that “would redefine the empire as a compact territorial political community aligned with the ethnic nation of Anatolian Turks” (Smith 1991, p. 104).

I was quite surprised¹² to see a portrait of Atatürk in the first Ja’fari mosque that I visited in the city. I was used to seeing the picture of the founding leader, the symbol of secularism, in Alevi places of worship (cemevi), but I had never seen it in a mosque before. After a while, I realized that these portraits are not only a part of official institutions but also a part of daily life. If there was a picture of Atatürk in a shop I entered, it was a clue that it was most probably an Azeri shop. In my first interviews, I did not ask any questions about Atatürk but when I realized that this issue was brought up without my asking, it became one of the main questions.

Even the most devout Ja’faris answered my questions about Atatürk honestly. This was one of the subjects in which they felt most comfortable. It is possible to categorize the reasons underlying this devotion into several groups. First of all, Atatürk is seen as a symbol of Turkishness and as a savior of the nation. A twenty-three-year-old woman working in a telecommunication company used very clear expressions when I asked her why Atatürk’s portrait was found in mosques: “Very simple. He is our Father. It is thanks to him that we exist today.” A former professional football player, who is now a hairdresser in his thirties, said, “Nobody loves Atatürk more than us but it’s different. It doesn’t look like Izmir, Antalya or Istanbul.” A sociology teacher in his forties connected his love for Atatürk with his Ja’fari identity as well as with his Turkish identity:

I’m a devout Shi’i living in Iğdir but I put Atatürk on a pedestal. In Anatolia, there is sectarianism among Sunnis. We don’t have it. We do not take kindly to the issue of sects. We are grateful to Atatürk for closing the sects and zawiyas. He built a nation-state from its ashes by putting laicism at the center. This is so important for us. We can easily say our prayers in our Shi’i mosques. We can commemorate Hussein’s passing by mourning with thousands of people. And we say that it is good that Atatürk existed. Atatürk put this laicism in the center and built a system that is equidistant for everyone.

A civil servant in his fifties, who expressed throughout the entire interview that the Ja’faris were very uncomfortable being seen as the Other, explained this love in a similar way. On the day of the interview, a popular Sunni preacher had been on social media talking about the Ja’faris and the interviewee was quite angry. When I asked about Atatürk, he replied with references to this preacher:

Sevgi: I see that there is a very special love of Atatürk in the city. He is everywhere to be found, even in mosques.

E: There are two reasons for this love of Atatürk. Firstly, we see him as our savior. Secondly, if the Republic of Turkey were not secular, the Sunnis would strangle us. Look, you saw what the man said, not everyone, of course. Shi’is are infidels, hang them, etc. So, we have a mosque. Our mullahs and scholars are doing their duties here without fear. What gives us this opportunity? The Secular Republic. Thanks to this foundation, we can sit here and talk about issues with a Sunni brother. We take comfort from laicism and identify it with Atatürk.

The AKP (Justice and Development Party), which has been the ruling party in Turkey since 2002, has gained the support of Sunni religious groups by highlighting the despotic practices that laicism claims to have established on Muslims. Kaya states that “laicism was always regarded and represented by pro-Islamist political parties, including AKP, as anti-Islam and anti-religion” (Kaya 2015, p. 9). Some elites in Turkey supported the AKP’s anti-laic approaches, thinking that it could create a secular society by securing religious freedom (Kuru 2009; Yavuz 2009). Others claim that the Republic established by Atatürk supported Sunni Islam and that Sunni Islam was prioritized with the establishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in 1925 (Türkmen 2009; Hanioglu 2012;

Pinar 2013). Ja'faris also think that the Directorate of Religious Affairs is an institution that exists to institutionalize Sunnism. In particular, the issue that the imams (mullahs) of the Ja'fari mosques should be appointed as civil servants, like the imams of the Sunni mosques, stays up-to-date¹³. While some supported the appointment of imams to Ja'fari mosques by this institution, some opposed it, thinking that this would cause the state to interfere with them.¹⁴

The fact that the Directorate of Religious Affairs was established by Atatürk does not constitute an obstacle to the love of the Ja'faris for Atatürk and he maintains his immunity. A pastry seller, who hung pictures of Hussein and Ataturk on the walls of his shop, said that for some old Ja'fari people, Ataturk was ranked right after the Prophet.¹⁵ While some of the devout Sunni religious groups in Turkey are uncomfortable with Ataturk's distance from religion, the Ja'faris consider this distance as an advantage for them. The establishment of a laic state after the Sunni Ottoman Empire increases the importance of Ataturk for Shi'is.¹⁶ Ataturk's reforms almost become the guarantee of Shi'ism. They think that their being seen as the Other, as a minority sect and the troubles they may experience because of their beliefs can be prevented by the presence of the founding leader. When they identify with Ataturk, they can both emphasize their Turkish identity and take cover against some Sunni religious groups that try to marginalize them.

Hall emphasizes the necessity to "situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively settled character of many populations and culture" (Hall and Gay 1996, p. 4). In this context, it will not be enough to explain the relationship of the Ja'faris with Ataturk without considering it from a historical perspective. In the final analysis, identities are, as Hall said, about 'questions of using the resources of history'. Due to the tensions with Sunnis since the Ottoman period, claiming a non-religious figure with almost religious references shows the ties of the identity with the past in a different way.

6. Conclusions

The thing that impressed me the most during the interviews was the constant use of historical references while talking about the identities of the participants. Almost every participant knew where their forefather had come from and described in detail the events that were decisive for Shi'ism in the history of Islam. "The pull of the past as continuity and tradition, as 'our ancestors', is strong" (Hobsbawm 1972, p. 14) among Ja'faris in Igdir. Both this historical discourse that Shi'ism conveys to the members of the sect that it established by taking the important events in Islamic history as reference, and the reflex of keeping the past constantly alive in the geography where they are positioned as the Other ensures that history is a living element for the Ja'faris and is still speaking to them. However, it is not a simple, unadulterated past, since their relation to it "like the child's relation to the mother, is always- already 'after the break'" (Hall 1990, p. 226). When using this Freudian reference of Hall for the Ja'faris, it is not possible to attribute this break to a specific historical phenomenon like colonialism. However, we can consider the establishment of the secular Turkish Republic after the Sunni Ottoman Empire as one of these breaks. The transition from an empire, to which they did not feel a sense of belonging, to a secular state in which the Turkish identity came to the fore, led to the reconstruction of their cultural identity. Established, traditional Shi'i culture became unstable or patchworked within the discourse of Turkish identity and the identity emerges as a positioning, not an essence. Blessing the secular structure of the state in order to live comfortably with the Ja'fari identity and emphasizing the Turkish identity against being stigmatized as the Other is an indicator of the positioning of their cultural identity.

The Shi'i culture, which is reflected in the daily life of the city and is constantly produced with rituals, the Turkish culture, which is also kept alive with rituals and old customs shows us a static cultural identity image. When we go deeper, we move away from our superficial, static understanding of identity towards a more dynamic and alive identification as a process. Ja'fari identification, in this sense, is not unified, but 'multiply

constructed' across Turkish identity, Shi'i identity, different rituals, changing 'discourses, practices and positions.' This identification uses resources of history and culture in the construction of Ja'fari identity "within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies" (Hall and Gay 1996, p. 4). Because Ja'faris have to act strategically in the sociopolitical context, they adopt a balanced mix of Shi'i and Turkish identity as their culture. This mixture coincides with Hall's deconstructive approach to discuss cultural identity. This duality in their identities (outsider as Ja'fari, insider as Turkish) and having an ambiguous meta-narrative causes the cultural identity of the Ja'faris to be one that is constantly played, moved, and constructed.

As this study tries to reveal, there are different contexts for this constant construction of the cultural identity of the Turkish Shi'is living in Iğdir. (1) By emphasizing their love for Atatürk, the founder of the state, they make their Turkish identity visible, and with this emphasis on Atatürk, who is seen as the symbol of laicism, they interpret the laic state as a guarantee of their own religious freedom; (2) as a Shi'i minority, they maintain a distant relationship with the Sunni state-run institution Diyanet and attach importance to the autonomy of their religious identity; and (3) as Shi'i residents of a city bordering Iran, the largest Shi'i state in the Muslim world, they add a different context to their identity by maintaining their religious, historical, and cultural relations with this country. The issue of Turkish identity, which is also one of the subjects of this study, can be used as a starting point for future studies on nationalism among Turkish Shi'is. The field studies in this study can provide the necessary background for Turkish Shi'is' attempts for the autonomous acceptance of their beliefs, the attitudes of the Shi'i mosques towards the Diyanet, and the social roles of the Shi'i clergy (mullahs). Due to the dearth of studies on Turkish Shi'is, examining their unique identity through a wide variety of concepts in the cultural, religious, and sociopolitical context of Turkey will contribute to the conceptual framework of minority studies in Turkey. Furthermore, it will provide a rich content necessary for a multi-layered and interdisciplinary approach to the concept of identity.

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Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon request.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ For detailed analysis, comparison and historical transformation of these two concepts, see: (Kohlberg 1976).
- ² Shi'is living in Iğdir define themselves as Shi'i and Ja'fari. Both concepts will be used in this study.
- ³ Ja'faris think that there are close to three million Ja'faris in Turkey (Erdoğan 2015). Some researchers states that this figure is exaggerated and that the population of Ja'faris is around half a million (Büyükkara 2013). In the statistical information published by the Presidency of Religious Affairs in 2014, it is stated that the Ja'faris constitute one percent of the population of Turkey (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2014). This means that around 700,000 Ja'faris live in Turkey. The population of Iğdir province is close to 200,000 in official figures. It is thought that approximately 100,000 Ja'faris live in this region.
- ⁴ A Persian word, mullah, is used for Shi'i clergy with religious education and it is "derived from the Arabic mawlâ, "sir" or "master," a form of address comparable to the Christian "Reverend Father" or the Jewish "Rabbi" (Halm 1997, p. 90).
- ⁵ The ninth and tenth centuries mark an important time period in the history of Shi'ism. The early history and teachings of Shi'ism are not the subject of this study. However, evaluating the first sources of that period may be important in terms of understanding the historical and religious context. Especially the translations of Paul Walker and Wilferd Madelung shed light on the formation of Shi'ism in this period. In this sense, it would be useful to cite Ibn al-Haytham's Kitab al-Munazarat (Walker and Madelung 2000), in which he records his personal recollections and which deals with the history and teachings of the concepts of Imamate and Shi'ism.

- 6 According to Shi'i belief, the twelfth imam is alive and had gone to occultation and in an unknown future, he will return to bring people to the right path. For a more detailed examination of the concept of occultation, see: (Said Amir Arjomand 1996; Said Amir Arjomand 1997).
- 7 This religious bond between Iran and Iğdir is a controversial issue among the local Ja'faris. During the interviews, thoughts on Iran ranged greatly among the participants. Some of them criticized Iran, others said that they felt sympathy towards Iran, while the remaining participants said that Iran meant nothing to them. The relationship of the Ja'faris with Iran seems to be the biggest obstacle for Alevis to approach the Ja'faris. Although they meet at many points in terms of the principles of belief, the close relationship between Shi'ism and Iran is not welcomed by the Alevis. David Shankland draws attention to this point in his field studies in Alevi villages: "It is by no means clear whether the Alevis can be labeled Shi'ite or not. The Alevis rarely categorize themselves as anything but 'Alevi' and, in the village at least, have no desire at all to call themselves Shi'ite, saying that the Shi'ites are 'those fanatics from Iran'" (Shankland 2003, p. 85).
- 8 Many primary sources of that period also emphasize the presence of Turks here. For detailed information see (Chelebi 2010; Smith 1970; Chornicle 1939).
- 9 Tahmasb (1524–1576) is the eldest son of Shah Ismail and second ruler of Safavid State.
- 10 Shah Ismail (1501–1524) is the founder of Safavid State. He is one of the important names of Azerbaijani literature. Although he is fluent in Arabic and Persian, he wrote his poems in Turkish.
- 11 I. Selim was the ninth Ottoman sultan. Although he remained on the throne for only eight years, his conquests in the east made the Ottoman Empire the most powerful Islamic state in the world. As soon as he came to the throne, he showed a Sunni reflex and declared war on the Shi'i Safavid State. By winning these wars, he "consolidated the hold of Sunnism" (Karpát 2002) and prevented the spread of Shi'ism in Anatolia becoming a popular figure among Shi'is. The same discontent is valid for most of the Ja'faris living in Iğdir.
- 12 The reason for my astonishment is that since the creation of the Republic, religious people in Turkey have had a distant relationship with Atatürk. The secular nation-state, which was established after an empire in which the official religion was Islam, had difficulty in getting the religious masses to accept its changes. Serif Mardin explains this troubled relationship with the destruction of the existing framework: "By replacing the official religion with the principle of laicism, Atatürk erased the possibilities of legitimation offered by the framework. The 'little man's' religion was thus placed in an ambiguous situation: tolerated but not secure." (Mardin 1971, p. 209)
- 13 For discussions on the appointment of imams to the Ja'fari mosques by the Directorate of Religious Affairs, see (Güsten 2013; Yeler 2020).
- 14 Similar debates took place over whether Alevis should be officially accepted by the Diyanet. Although the Diyanet published Alevi-Bektashi classical works during the mid-2000s, and some Alevi religious leaders (dedes) were included in the commission that prepared these works for publication, this initiative was denounced by most of the Alevis. The Diyanet's "positioning itself as the promoter and producer of Alevi knowledge" (Massicard 2012, p. 9) has been widely criticized.
- 15 The hanging of Atatürk's paintings along with religious portraits is a sight I often encounter in the city. Again, this situation shows similarities with the attitude of Alevis in their own religious areas. "Alevi's reverence for Atatürk actually bears nearly religious traits which goes far beyond the usual" (Kehl-Bodrogi 2003, p. 53). It can be said that Atatürk had an almost sacred place for the Ja'faris as well. However, this is not a religious significance, as some of the interviewees stated above. They see Atatürk as the person who made it possible for them to live their religion and identity.
- 16 We observe that similar results are obtained in studies on Alevi groups in Turkey. Köse explains the love of Atatürk among Alevis as follows: "As members of a 'minority sect', in comparison to Sunnis, many Alevis are aware of the fact that Kemalist laicization policies situated them in a relatively better position in comparison to their position during the Ottoman era, when they were completely marginalized and stigmatized as a heterodox community. This change maintained Alevi appreciation and support of the Kemalist reforms. Kemalist reforms are seen as barriers against the return to the Ottoman legacy, which is represented in the Alevi public memory as a period of marginalization, oppression and violence. Many Alevis often perceive Islamists and conservative Sunni citizens in Turkey as the descendants of the Ottoman legacy." (Kose 2013, p. 602).

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Article

Clothes That Make the Man: Understanding How the Extended Self Is Formed, Expressed and Negotiated by Male Tablighi Jamaat Adherents

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Abstract: Deviating from the predominantly women-focused investigations on Islamic clothing in anthropology, religion and consumer studies, this research places men's Islamic clothing under the spotlight to understand how the notion of the extended self is evidenced in a religious context. Using a multi-sited ethnographic and in-depth interview approach to study the context of middle-class Pakistani male participants of the traditional revivalist movement the Tablighi Jamaat, this study finds that possessions such as clothing serve as a conduit to participants' sense of extended self. In this case, the extended self is associated with the Muslim nation, its Prophet and his work. This investigation furthers the concept of the extended self by implicating the consumption of religiously identified clothing as an entity that becomes associated with the self. Moreover, this study concludes that possessions and the extended self are imbricated into one's religious career path.

Keywords: extended self; Tablighi Jamaat; clothing; attire; possessions; identity; multi-sited ethnography; Islam; Pakistan

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1. Introduction

Some consumer possessions—more than others—have a special connection with one's self. For instance, clothes have the quality to suffuse their consumers with identity and power (Twain 1905). Particularly from a religious point of view, believers exhibit fervent connections in relation to sacred belongings (Belk et al. 1989). In line with this idea, one question that requires further examination is how do religious possessions relate to one's identity and what meanings do they inculcate for their owners?

Religious possessions are the result of moral choices made by their owners and have a complicated position in modernity. Modernity affects consumer choice in myriad ways by shaping consumers with varying senses of identity. A large body of literature argues that the shaping of selfhood (or identity) in modernity is inevitably a moral project (e.g., Alexander 2006; Calhoun 1991, 1994; Smith 2003). Even when the path towards identity is individualistic, pluralistic or devoid of institutional intervention, consumer identities are inescapably grounded in a moral shaping that is inextricably tied to the self (Winchester 2008). The self is involved with a web of normative relationships with society and implicated in socially constructed understandings of what is right, wrong and worth living for. Related to this idea, identity in modernity is argued to be an evolving process of 'becoming' as opposed to 'being' (Dillon 1999, p. 250). Personal identity can gradually transition due to individual experiences and larger sociocultural forces (McMullen 2000; Nagel 1995). The present study aims to substantiate this body of knowledge by prioritising the consumption of religious clothing as the focus of attention, and understanding how it can result from an ever-changing religious, moral self.

Theorists have espoused the idea that religion in modernity continues to provide meaning to many consumers (Edgell 2012; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019b; Iner and Yucel 2015).

Religion shapes key narratives that govern individual and social comportment. For example, consumers turn to spiritual solutions such as pilgrimages (Higgins and Hamilton 2016; Moufahim 2013) or participation in religious movements (Appau 2020; Rauf et al. 2019). In this quest for meaning, materiality and spirituality co-exist (Rinallo et al. 2013). For instance, Moufahim (2013, p. 421) concludes that material consumption is inherent to religious rituals and transforms the experiential into the tangible. Further, Husemann and Eckhardt (2019b) note that engagement with the material helps religious consumers transcend beyond geographies, time and life.

While contemporary consumers have been embroiled in attaining spirituality through commercialisation and innovation in religion—including forms of digital religion (McAlexander et al. 2014; Whyte 2022; Yucel and Albayrak 2021)—many religious adherents today practice a form of religion that relies on tradition or relives a utopian past to craft spiritual and pious lives. Prominent examples of such practices include participation in the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage or revivalist Islamic movements such as the Tablighi Jamaat (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019a; Rauf et al. 2018). In such cases, modernity is implicated as a substrate for such spiritual drives as the discomfort with modern ways of living spurs consumers to break away from chaotic state of affairs and concentrate on religious ideals (Rauf 2022; Rosa 2013).

Among these religious adherents, consumption elements play an integral role in maintaining a focus on tradition or attempting to recreate the epitome of historic sacredness (Rauf 2022). Clothing is one such element. Researchers have studied clothing as an integral facet of life that lies at the intersection of consumer choice and religious regulation (Coşgel and Minkler 2004). Clothing is infused with meaning and plays a particular part in forming identity (Coşgel and Minkler 2004; Sandikci and Ger 2010). With this backdrop, I ask what meanings clothes have when they are considered part of the religious extended self? Considering this question is important as specific possessions can have great significance for religious adherents. At the same time, such attire could easily be considered mundane and taken for granted by onlookers. In such situations, contestations may arise that could instigate anxious reactions from religious adherents, as witnessed in the veiling and headscarf debate in Europe and more recently in India (Hass 2020; Mir 2022). Even if they do not provoke ostensible backlash, the lack of acceptability of religious attire in certain settings such as official meetings or public spaces can be the basis of muted consternation as well as a signal of exclusion in what may be otherwise considered diversity-welcoming settings. Therefore, to be a truly inclusive society, it is important to consider what meanings specific modes of dress offer to religious observants.

Previous research has helped us understand how women's religious attire in the Islamic context is negotiated and what it represents for adherents (Bucar 2017; Sandikci and Ger 2010). While such research remains important, the counterpart gender (male) has been largely overlooked; we are yet to fully understand the meanings associated with men's Islamic attire and how they are negotiated in everyday contexts.

In this study, I look at how male religious attire is a source of identity meaning for adherents of an orthodox Islamic movement and what challenges these followers face in wearing such attire. I specifically use the case study of the Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan to address the research question. The Tablighi Jamaat is an apolitical traditional revivalist movement that aims to improve Muslims' religious state. To accomplish this, the group emphasises preaching to Muslims only, to align their lives with traditional religion as it was practised at the sacred time of Islam's inception. I investigate the research context using three 40-day ethnographic sojourns and 20 in-depth interviews.

I use the theoretical lens of the extended self model proposed by Belk (1988) to help us understand the meanings behind religious attire. The concept of the extended self elucidates how objects, ideas, people and social groups can be considered part of the self as consumers attach special meaning to such entities. In the current investigation, I aim to understand how clothing in its form is embodied to the degree that it becomes part of the extended self.

This article makes three contributions to the extant literature on religious possessions, embodiment and the extended self. First, it redresses a gender imbalance in previous Islamic literature on dress in consumer research and religious studies by focusing on men's attire. Second, it provides empirical support to Belk's extended self thesis in the case of religion, particularly Islam. Third, it shows how male attire for a particular Islamic movement develops into a part of the self because of its association with an imaginary, distant religious personality and his legacy.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, I review the existing literature on Islamic attire, which has predominantly focused on women to date. Second, I review Belk's (1988) conceptualisation of the extended self that provides the framework for this study. Next, I describe the research context and methods for this investigation and briefly mention researcher reflexivity. Then, I detail the findings of this study and discuss their implications for current conversations in consumer research and religion. Finally, I offer a conclusion that sums up this research.

2. Literature Review

The Gender Skew in Research on Islamic Clothing

Religious dress serves as a signifier that helps promote individual identity and maintain ties with social groups (Williams 1988). Regarding the latter, religious institutions may provide the resources, norms and practices that foster adopting certain attire (Riesebrodt 2010). However, particularly in the case of Islam, the connotations of religious attire are not limited to the domain of religion itself; Islamic dress is intertwined with sociocultural and political connotations. Engaging with these issues, consumer research and social science literature have discussed the adoption, lived experience and meanings associated with religious attire. Yet, the conversation to date has predominantly focused on female attire.

Researchers have made the Muslim women's veil the subject of extensive investigation and discussion (e.g., Almila and Inglis 2017; El Guindi 1999; Hughes 2013; Osella and Osella 2007; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Secor 2002). The veil can be categorised as either the hijab (headscarf) or the niqab (additionally includes the face veil). As a visible mode of consumption, the veil incites controversy and contestation in the public domain and brings with it many different connotations.

Bucar (2017, p. 1) mentions that many people from the West view the veil as a sign of enforced oppression of women (both in its form as a headscarf or as a body covering) that ostensibly demeans them or weakens their status compared to men. Among others, Hass (2020) and Hass and Lutek (2019) have discussed how this understanding of 'oppression' resulted in the veiling ban in the Netherlands and Dutch Muslim women taking up the matter as a contest to maintain a distinct Islamic identity and inclusivity in the Dutch populace. In consonance with this stance, Mahmood (2005) contends that the veil is a means to volitionally achieve pious goals to pursue the identity of a good Muslim woman. Additionally, Winchester (2008) finds the hijab is a style of dress that identifies a modest woman and a means through which such modesty is inculcated. Moreover, wearing the hijab can incur opportunities to signal moral and religious understanding (Bucar 2017).

Bucar (2017) argues that wearing the hijab may not just be a fulfilment of religious injunction or to inculcate modesty. The hijab can be donned for social and political reasons, encompassing various wearing styles and designs. For instance, colour choice, brand names and textures are a means to express new fashion and distinguish oneself from others (Bucar 2012, 2017). Bucar (2017, p. ix) notes that when she donned the veil herself, it modified her self-image, how she interacted socially and how aesthetically she understood Islamic clothing. Moreover, as a cultural object, the hijab varies in its meanings and styles across contexts (e.g., it may symbolise acquiescence in Tehran while indicating pious volitional choice in Istanbul). The veil is also interwoven with social class, whereby lower-class women adorn the article in a less fancy manner while upper-middle class women attempt to appropriate the garb more fashionably (Bucar 2017; Sandikci and Ger 2010).

In the Turkish context, [Sandikci and Ger \(2010\)](#) illustrate how the practice of wearing the *tesettür* (a large headscarf combined with an overcoat) transformed from an ostracised stigma statement to a fashionable modern choice. Abetted by market and political forces, the Turkish attire came into vogue via the support of multiple social actors. Customisation and aestheticisation also helped the article gain widespread acceptance.

Indeed, market and religious logic have spurred much writing on the issue of Islamic sartorial choice. Researchers have explored the paradox of women trying to practice modesty on the one hand and express overt vanity on the other, as observed among Arab women ([Sobh et al. 2012](#)). Here, the authors conclude that women balance two distinct needs: the need to abide by Islamic prescription and the need to express beauty tastes.

The issue of logic is also prevalent in tween dress choices in Pakistan, where both the market and Islam are central to choice and manner of consumption ([Husain et al. 2019](#)). Visibly identifiable consumption as per market logic, as opposed to its negation in the religious logic, forms a space to creatively navigate consumption practices so as to not disregard both logics and craft new boundary practices that straddle both separately.

[Sandikci \(2021\)](#) made halal nail polish the centre of her investigation to understand the debate between permissibility and impermissibility of consumer goods for Muslims. This context provides an opportunity to explore how market and religious relations shape the consumption and adoption of innovative products in mundane settings. Here, consumer choice is undergirded by the logic of religion as it interacts with the logics of the market, culture and economics. Further, it is complicated by transitory influences of multiple sources of religious authority (including self-proclaimed consumer experts) that govern the apt course of action.

In a study that serves as an exception to the focus on female dress, [Gökanksel and Secor \(2017\)](#) examined males in two Turkish cities to illustrate how Muslims adapted masculine dress and pertinent practices to shape two very different versions of moral geography in the two metropolitans. Their study highlights the diversity of Islamic and masculinity interpretation and enactment.

Nevertheless, the literature on male Islamic attire remains scant. The present study aims to bolster this pool of work using the extended self framework that is discussed next.

3. Theoretical Framework: Belk's Notion of the Extended Self

In 1988, Russell W. Belk introduced the notion of the extended self. [Belk's \(1988\)](#) article has become a cornerstone for subsequent consumer research discussions on materiality, identity, ownership, sharing and consumer relationships with objects. The extended self thesis advocates that we consider our close possessions as parts of ourselves; that is, our belongings are an important contributor to our identities. Belk offers a gamut of evidence to support this premise and proffers that consumers create, express, enhance and reify their sense of being through what they have.

The extended self encompasses physical and non-physical entities. Belk theorises that the extended self also caters for persons, places, ideas, brands and experiences in addition to material possessions ([Belk 1988](#), p. 141). For instance, children, reputation and objects are as beloved to a person as their own self. [McClelland \(1951\)](#) mentions that external objects may be incorporated into the idea of the self if one can deem control over them as they would a part of their body. Hence, personal objects may be considered part of the extended self more easily than other humans (such as friends) since one has more control over the inanimate than the animate. Along the same lines, Belk buttresses [McCarthy's \(1984\)](#) argument that material things reinforce one's identity and that identities may reside more in inanimate objects than humans.

The extended self may expand or contract. Using the ideas of [Rochberg-Halton \(1986\)](#), Belk elaborates that as people grow older, the extended self grows as the span of possessions expands, particularly those received as gifts or to which one is related. In this vein, the paper notes that possessions are not only critical for comprising the self but also influential in the development of the self ([Belk 1988](#), p. 141). The article also proposes that conversely,

the loss of possessions diminishes the extended self. Citing [Goffman \(1957\)](#), Belk argues that in institutional settings such as military camps or monasteries, when members are stripped of their belongings and provided standardised substitutes, it effaces heterogeneity and increases the self's sense of group affiliation. Shared consumption symbols enact social loyalty. Hence, possessions can individualise but also antithetically create group association. Similarly, when close loved ones are viewed as part of the extended self, Belk proposes that one grieves when relations die due to a loss of self. Relatedly, Belk notes that the extended self waxes and wanes over time and is not static.

The extended self thesis also argues that one can symbolically extend the self through material items, such as when having a medal or a firearm allows us to feel that we are a different being than when we did not have one ([Tanay and Freeman 1976](#)). Moreover, we can relate to a mythic or nostalgic past through possessions ([McCracken 1986](#)). Hence, material objects are a means to maintain values across generations and through history. Possessions help us emote, experience and relive.

The experience of using material items also helps them become part of the self. [Belk \(1989, 2014\)](#) asserts that the longer one keeps a possession, the stronger the feeling of attachment to that possession becomes. Further, [Mittal \(2006\)](#) states that items tend to become more 'I' over time than when first acquired. This is due to the time and energy spent on such products, which gives rise to special significance. For example, driving a car regularly can enable the car to become like a second skin. Clothes ([Solomon 1986](#)) and houses ([Jager 1985](#)) are other such examples. [Mittal \(2006\)](#) adds that more expensive and rare possessions are more likely to become part of the self due to the investment (time, money and effort) made in them.

Overall, the extended self may be visually considered in terms of a core central self with concentric circles around it depicting the extended self, showing greater or lesser attachment with the self, depending on how far they are from the centre. Based on how important one's affiliation to a certain identity is (e.g., nation, family, ethnicity), possessions will correspondingly be closer to or further from the core self.

Next, I examine the meanings religious possessions have for consumers in the literature and how these can be related to the extended self.

The Extended Self Thesis and Religious Possessions in Consumer Research

Religious possessions have important meanings for many consumers. Authors argue that consumers can imbue mundane objects with special characteristics that make them sacred ([Belk et al. 1989](#)). Conversely, consumers can strip away the sacredness of certain products, thus making them perceptibly profane. [Belk \(1992\)](#) concludes that the decision to leave behind (sacrificing) possessions in sacred journeys has played a part in advocating the regard for a higher, purposeful calling. Later work has shown how deep affection for certain brands like Harley Davidson and Apple results in a cult-like following for objects associated with these brands ([Muñiz and Schau 2005](#); [Schouten and McAlexander 1995](#)). Such brands have the capacity to transform the self due to their specific subcultures and brand communities. In a more traditional, non-commercial context, [de Britto et al. \(2017\)](#) find that a sacred object such as a scapular can be transcendental and extraordinary, not only due to religious belief but also because of the source with which it is associated. Having received the gift of the scapular from a close loved one, Catholic consumers believe this object can protect owners from harm. Hence, the extended self is integrated with the scapular due to its special connection with the gift-giver (e.g., the mother) and one's close connection with them (also part of the extended self).

Nevertheless, explorations of the extended self in the religious context have been rare. Belk's paper focused on consumption belongings in a general sense. He argued that the extended self could encompass things one feels attached to, such as the body, internal processes, ideas and experiences, and special persons, places and things. Particularly remiss in Belk's paper is how religious possessions are inculcated into the self and how their meanings are contested in the everyday. Moreover, another advancement that may be

added to Belk's conceptualisation is the understanding of the *process* by which adherents can identify with another entity as the extended self. Ostensibly, Belk's thesis can be expanded to include religious dress if it is consistently worn and identified with. Even though Belk did not initially discuss religious or Muslim consumers while outlining his thesis, it is reasonable to incorporate Islamic dress (such as the loose male dress or female veil) in the extended self thesis' purview. This is what this paper sets out to examine.

In order to delve into understanding this topic, I now outline the research context and methods for this study.

4. Research Context

4.1. Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan

Born in the 1920s in the British-occupied Indian subcontinent, the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), literally meaning preaching group, is one of the largest Islamic revivalist movements in the modern world (Reetz 2007). One estimate places the number of TJ adherents at 80 million worldwide (Rauf et al. 2018; Taylor 2009). TJ's influence is spread worldwide, and its presence is felt in both Muslim majority and Muslim minority countries (Siddiqi 2018; Timol 2019).

Founded on the premise that Muslims were far removed from the teachings of Islam, TJ fashions a distinct method of drawing lay Muslim participants back to traditional religion: a focus on preaching and maintaining an orthodox lifestyle in an attempt to recreate Islam's heyday in the 7th century (Metcalf 1999). Other defining features of the TJ are that it is apolitical and does not aim to preach to non-Muslims nor intend to convert them (Kabir 2010). Instead, TJ focuses its efforts on bringing the lives of lapsed Muslims closer to Islamic teachings (Timol 2019).

A major component of the TJ program is participant-based preaching missions assembled in small groups called *jamaats* that travel from one locale to another for stipulated time periods. By virtue of this preaching or *dawah* approach, TJ aims to revive orthodox Islam at the grassroots level across the world (Ali 2003). *Dawah* means inviting Muslims to be better practising Muslims (Kabir 2010). One of the major chapters of TJ is based in Raiwind, Pakistan, from where *jamaats* are routed across the world.

4.2. The TJ Program

TJ emphasises the revival of Islamic traditions as they were practised in the Golden Age of Islam. These traditions, called *sunnah* (or the Prophetic way), comprise rituals, practices and other entities transmitted intergenerationally from the utopian era to the present day through texts and religious clergy (Rauf 2022; Yucel 2009). Traditions are important for TJ but equally, so is the style in which they are resurrected. TJ elders stress performing tasks such as preaching, eating, sleeping, reading the Quran, teaching, learning, decision-making, observing etiquettes, sharing, caring and worshipping as they were performed in the 7th century. The prescribed texts from which TJ participants read in ritualistic group circles also help educate adherents about how Islam was practised at a sacred time and the virtues of performing traditional Islamic injunctions (Metcalf 1993; Pieri 2021). In terms of consumption, TJ participants are advised to refrain from indulging in the material world and only partake as required.

The sojourns are a critical component of the TJ program. Participants divide their yearly and monthly schedules to devote time to participating in sojourns. These sojourns can last from three days monthly to four months annually. Adherents also participate in international sojourns ranging from seven months to one year. The sojourns serve as a retreat from participants' busy lives to engage in sacred rituals and lifestyles (Gaborieau 2006). The mosques or *masjids* play a cardinal role in the TJ regimen, especially during sojourns. Participants travel to and from *masjids*, practice rituals there, and are advised to maximise their time in the *masjid*.

5. Research Methods: Multi-Sited Ethnography and In-Depth Interviews

This study is based on a larger study comprising multi-sited ethnographic work and in-depth interview data. Ethnography aims to understand the construction of culture or subculture by observing and recording people's behaviours and discourses (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). The approach seeks to understand an insider perspective of experience (emic) and relies on researcher interpretation to make sense of the observations on a sociocultural level (Denzin 1989).

Marcus (1995, p. 96) defines multi-sited ethnography as a method that 'ethnographically constructs the life-worlds of variously situated subjects [and] ethnographically constructs aspects of the [world] system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among [local] sites'. The underlying tenet of the approach emphasises that the social construction of reality is created at multiple sites (Marcus 1995). In so doing, the approach helps connect micro- (local) and macro- (global) constructions (Ekström 2006). The locations are united by the topic of study (people, places, objects, relationships, etc.), which becomes the instrument of analysis (Marcus 1995). The multi-sited approach can also equate to a theory-driven investigation of connections between locations (Boccagni 2019). Falzon (2016) notes that the effectiveness of multi-sited ethnography implies the limitation of single locations as settings and units of analysis. For the present study, multi-sited ethnography helped me understand first-hand the meanings of rituals, practices, possessions and discourses undertaken by TJ participants. Multi-sited ethnography is pertinent as observations took place at multiple locations while travelling with the jamaats on sojourns. At multiple sojourn locations, I undertook field observation, note-taking and corroboration from other off-site sources to develop understanding.

In-depth interviews enable appreciation from an in situ informant's perspective of how they behave, feel and communicate with context-related people, processes, events, practices, discourses and materials. In-depth interviews also allow informants to share their own background and relate stories and incidents that may help inform researchers of the sociocultural context of on-site observations and behaviour. In the present case, in-depth interviews allowed me to achieve my research objectives by helping me comprehend informants' narratives regarding cognitive processes, tensions, choices, meanings, life histories and relevant stories.

6. Research Design, Data Collection, and Researcher Reflexivity

This study is based on observation of and interlocution with middle-class Pakistani TJ participants. This focus was taken to distinguish the participants' dress from lower and middle-class Pakistanis whose regular attire is culturally similar to those worn by TJ participants.

As a researcher, I had already spent four consecutive months in TJ sojourns in 2012. The four-month immersion period is prescribed by TJ elders as an essential course for Muslims to understand the effort of preaching (dawah) (Ali and Orofino 2018; Rauf 2022). Hence, I was well-versed in the TJ program and was a regular participant in TJ activities when I collected data for this project. I undertake the annual recommended 40-day sojourn. For this particular project, I undertook fieldwork during three 40-day sojourns (in 2014, 2018 and 2020). These included visits to masjids in Sialkot, Hasilpur, Faisalabad, Gilgit, Okara, Haripur, the national TJ markaz (centre) at Raiwind, and regional TJ centres in Lahore, Faisalabad, Gilgit, Okara, Rawalpindi and Bahawalpur. Additionally, I observed participants at retail outlets, public transport terminals, public vehicles and their local masjids.

Keeping in view the closed nature of the religious community that I studied, research ethics was instrumental to the integrity of the investigation. I obtained my university's ethics approval for the project and disclosed my identity to sojourn participants as an academic researcher. The 40-day periods provided sufficient time to immerse and build connections with my other sojourn participants, who I had never met before the start of the journey. Being visibly identified as practising Muslim (through dress, cap and beard), I

was able to easily appease jamaat members of any apprehensions of being observed. Three sojourns help crystallise my findings and achieve theoretical saturation. Moreover, as an ethnographic observation participant, donning such attire helped me reflect more closely on the meanings associated with wearing such clothing. To create distance from the research context during analysis, I discussed findings and interpretations in detail with three senior colleagues who were unrelated to the TJ. With one Muslim and two non-Muslim colleagues, their views provided useful sounding boards to my participant position.

During the sojourns investigated for this study, as per TJ recommendations, I did not have access to a mobile phone or the internet. However, I did use an audio recorder. I kept a diary to inscribe observational data, usually as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

In addition to ethnographic observation, I carried out 20 in-depth interviews with TJ informants from the Pakistani upper-middle class in Lahore who varied in their degree of participation with the movement (from newcomers to long-term participants), age (from 20 to 62 years) and professions (students, professionals, small and large business owners, etc.). I interviewed participants during the sojourns in their local masjids or at homes. The interviews ranged from 45 min to 279 min, with some informants interviewed multiple times. The names of all informants have been pseudonymised.

The following section will relate the findings from the qualitative data collection for this project.

7. Findings

The findings for this study are organised as follows: what constitutes religious attire in the TJ (using ethnographic data); how changes in appearance occur as one is involved with the TJ; how TJ-related appearance creates tensions and how these are negotiated at home and at work; and, finally, what meanings TJ-related attire holds when it is embodied over a long period of time, that is, becomes part of the extended self.

7.1. Men's Attire in the TJ

The findings of this study reveal that TJ sojourns are an essential vehicle in creating a distinctive subculture of rituals, discourses and consumption behaviour. I adapt Schouten and McAlexander's (1995, p. 43) explanation to describe a subculture as an identifiable subgroup of society that is formed on the basis of a shared commitment and/or beliefs with its own social structure, ethos and mode of expression. My ethnography reveals that while consumption practices in the subculture of the TJ overlap with the rest of Pakistani society (eating, drinking, sleeping, using the toilet, wearing clothes, etc.), these practices differ from cultural norms in their style of consumption. For instance, what separates eating normally and in the TJ is the way this activity is performed (e.g., TJ meals are eaten while sitting on the floor with the food and utensils placed on top of a sheet; participants use two fingers to eat while sitting in a specific stance). In the case of TJ, specific style is an outcome of the ideology of doing an action to please Allah and the way that is pleasing to him; that is, the Prophetic way or sunnah. This style is evident in clothing that I explain now.

Strictly speaking, Islamic law mandates men to cover their bodies only from the belly button to below the knees (Shakona et al. 2015). However, from my notes, I observed that the TJ attire, which is commended by traditional Islamic scholars and clerics (who TJ participants hold in high regard), comprises a loose shirt down to the knees or longer (called the *kameez* in Pakistan or *jubba* in Arab countries)¹ and loose pajamas (called *shalwar*). The pair of top and bottom is known as the *shalwar kameez* (see Figure 1a,b). This attire is meant to present a modest appearance that hides the physical outline of a person. No specific colour or pattern for the garb is advised. However, some of the most stringent TJ participants, including many seniors and elders, are seen to wear plain white clothing all the time. This is in accordance with a *hadith* (narration of the Prophet ﷺ) in which preference (but not compulsion) for white clothing is mentioned: 'Wear white clothes for they are purer and better, and shroud your dead in them' (Za'ī et al. 2007). The other part

of the TJ attire is the head covering in the form of a skull cap known as the *topi* in Pakistan and the *kufi* in Arabia (see Figure 1c). More senior TJ participants also continuously don the *imamah* or turban (see Figure 1d). The head covering via the *topi* or *imamah* also form part of the sunnah. The usual simultaneous occurrence of a triad—long beard, shalwar kameez and *topi*—is an indicator for lay people that the incumbent has turned into a more religious person.



Figure 1. (a) Example of a kameez or jubba (source: author notes); (b) Example of a shalwar (source: author notes); (c) Example of a *topi* (source: author notes); (d) Example of an *imamah* (source: author notes).

7.2. First Signs of Change in Appearance

As participants increase their activity in TJ, they often incur a discernable change in physical appearance. They usually stop shaving their beards, an act carried out as a sunnah. The other act of appearance that draws attention is continuously wearing the shalwar kameez. Less religious Pakistanis dress up in the shalwar kameez occasionally as a cultural norm. For instance, they will wear it on Fridays, the day for special congregational prayer, or on special events like marriage ceremonies. However, regularly wearing the shalwar kameez is an act of ostensible religiosity. Moreover, the difference between wearing the garb out of cultural respect and as a sunnah is the pajamas usually reach below the ankles in the former, and are kept above the ankles (as prescribed in hadith to avoid arrogance) in the latter. Newcomers to TJ sojourns will also wear the shalwar kameez in the previously described cultural normative style or Western clothes such as jeans and a t-shirt. For instance, one student newcomer in my jamaat, Anwar, donned a bright yellow shalwar kameez whose shirt was short (reached above the knees), had the shalwar reaching below the ankles, and had significant embroidery and fancy design elements on it. Such attire would stand out as an anomaly in TJ circles because, as per TJ norms, the shirt should reach below the knees, the pajamas above the ankles, and yellow is an ostentatious colour.

To fit in with the group, first-time participants of a jamaat will don the shalwar kameez even if they are not accustomed to it previously. For instance, one of my sojourn cohort members Shameer, a 19-year-old motor mechanic, was a newbie and did not even own sunnah attire before he joined the jamaat. He had especially borrowed the shalwar kameez for our sojourn:

Shameer: I have decided to change (the style of my clothes from now on) . . . these (clothes that I am wearing) aren't my own clothes. They belong to my brothers.

Interviewer: Where are your own clothes?

Shameer: I use pant shirt. I have never worn shalwar kameez. But now I will get it made (when I return) at home.

I conducted the interview with Shameer in the second half of the 40-day sojourn. By this time, Shameer had decided to switch to more orthodox garb upon completion of his time in jamaat.

7.3. Initial Contestations with Family and Colleagues Due to Changed Appearance

In Pakistani society at large, the religious are stigmatised (Alam 2012; Amir 2005). Based on outward appearance, this stigmatisation deems *maulvis* (or those with a religious appearance similar to Islamic scholars) to be problematic. A general criticism is the extraneous time and effort spent in religious activity, which is deemed unnecessary. Less religious Pakistanis believe sacred work takes away time and effort from worldly activities, roles and responsibilities. Maulvis are thought to be poor in breadwinning, worldly progress, education, occupational skills, money and prestige. They are also generally opined to be inconsiderate towards their families. Apart from mundane stigmatisation at the workplace and homes, maulvis are stigmatised in the media run by elites (see Alam 2012; Amir 2005). Press pieces also show that the term *maulvi* has changed meaning from one of respect to stigma. This situation has been exacerbated by political events around the world at the turn of the century (9/11 attacks, Danish cartoon controversy, etc.), after which the media has portrayed religious people as violent, curtailing liberalism and imbibing an Orientalist doctrine (Hughes 2013; Said 1978).

Hence, family members who are unaffiliated with TJ are disconcerted when a relative decides to spend time with the movement or returns from a sojourn. Talha, a medical college student, talked about how his family resisted his changed outlook when he started spending time in TJ:

Yes, at the start . . . they (family) did comment a bit . . . for example at a walima (wedding event), they said take off the topi . . . or that now you have finished praying your namaz (act of worship), drop your shalwar below your ankles . . . it looks bad, it looks very weird . . . they would say things like these.

The stigmatisation stems from stereotyping all religious persons similarly based on their outlook. A fine point here is that Talha is singled out for his style of appearance rather than his possession of shalwar kameez per se. As noted above, family resistance usually occurs when other family members do not have a religious background. In families where there is already connection with traditional Islam, these contestations do not manifest.

Another form of contention often occurs in the workplace. TJ employees often face the problem of winning the struggle for acceptance of a different guise, particularly where work policies are stringent. As Salman, a university professor, relates in his interview, corporate culture defines certain etiquettes and norms that prohibit sunnah attire:

The corporate world has its own set of social norms. Tabligh (work of calling to Allah) also changes your lifestyle and your norms. And so generally it appears . . . that the corporate world will not tolerate your going away from norms. Any work which involves very high levels of commitment generally is very intolerant for deviation. So an example can be a simple thing as clothes. In the corporate world, at a senior level, to wear shalwar kameez is just not acceptable. It just cannot be done.

The issue of clashing norms is evident in Salman’s quote. In Pakistani society generally, lack of inclusivity remains a problem for those who desire to sport religious attire. Hence, TJ participants are often faced with the dilemma of keeping their jobs and observing office rules or sacrificing their jobs to abide by sunnah. The next section explores this dilemma.

7.4. Consequences of Continued (or Lack of) Persistence to Wear TJ Prescribed Attire

TJ participants who persist with wearing sunnah attire either win over their social circle or end up changing their social circle to maintain TJ etiquette. I heard several stories during my interaction with participants relating how certain people had left their jobs or made career decisions based on whether they could practice sunnah. Tanveer, formerly a corporate head at a television channel, relates his story in the following excerpt:

When I got sick, I got a clear message that I was probably not welcome. Because nobody came and attended to me, nobody asked me. They probably thought I was making it up. But people who came and met me were obviously people from the mosque, and my Tablighi saathis (companions). I decided to leave the job then. The moment I got well, I got to the office (and said to myself) that this is the last time I am going to the office, and I wore my normal clothing: my shalwar kameez and my imamah. I went to the office and everyone was looking at me . . . you know, look at, look at the way he is dressed. And there were people talking behind me. But I was there for just that day. And I told them, and I said today is my last day in this office, and I will not return. Not to the office and not to this profession Insha’ Allah (God willing).

Many of my informants claimed the change to move to sunnah attire permanently came after spending four months in *jamaat*. While in the *jamaat*, no specific instructions to abide by a certain dress code are disseminated. However, the continuous inhabiting of the *jamaat* subculture helps inculcate a sensibility that appreciates the importance and virtues of following the sunnah. While this is akin to Schouten and McAlexander’s (1995) observations when they wore the Harley Davidson biker attire to fit in their subculture, for TJ participants the attire has added significance, as I will explain later.

In my interviews, participants who did not have prolonged exposure to TJ and its principles at the time told me they swapped between sunnah attire and Western clothing as per the demands of the situation. For instance, property dealer Muqaddam told me that when he had spent 40 days only (i.e., this was before his four months), he used to interchange between the different styles of clothing:

Interviewer: What about wearing shalwar kameez regularly (after your 40 days)?

Muqaddam: Both things were there. Both things went together—pant shirt sometimes, and shalwar kameez.

However, once he had completed his four months in *jamaat*, Muqaddam switched to shalwar kameez permanently. Recent university graduate Hammad, who spent 40 days in *jamaat*, was able to sustain his TJ clothing for a short period of time before returning to shirts and pants to yield to his new job norms:

Yes, after coming back from chilla (40 days in sojourn) I wore shalwar kameez for like two or three months and I wanted to keep a beard too, but it wasn’t growing properly so I shaved it. My mother also said that keep it when it starts to grow properly; don’t keep it right now. I would wear shalwar kameez consistently and a topi also—even in university after coming back from chilla.

But since I have been in Islamabad, it has been about a month since I have left wearing it . . . because my job is in marketing.

Marketing, in particular, is important here because it represents the face of a company. Marketing professionals are expected to be presentable as per company standards so they can attract more clientele. In the view of many corporations, religious attire can deter potential clients as it indicates a lack of work ethic or professionalism.

7.5. Sunnah Becoming Part of the Extended Self

7.5.1. The Ummah as the Extended Self: Clothing as a Form of Social Imaginary Identity

For many participants, the four-month sojourn seems to be a rite of passage towards a new identity. An indicator of this identity is that the sunnah attire becomes a constant feature of the participant's makeup to the extent that participants are willing to take tough decisions such as leaving their jobs to prevent compromise with the extended self of which the shalwar kameez and topi are integral. More senior TJ participants also don the imamah and consistently wear white clothing. For instance, I observed that senior participant Salman, who has spent time in numerous 12-month, 7-month and 40-day jamaats and is now a resident at the headquarters in Raiwind, predominantly than not wears the white imamah along with white shalwar kameez. He also wears this clothing at his university workplace, which is considered odd among his colleagues and students. Salman reports that he has 10 white shalwar kameez in his collection; they are plain but made of high-quality material, so they are presentable and durable.

The durability of the material is an important factor. Several of my informants reported that they would not switch to a new piece of garment unless it tears or fades. As summer material is lighter than winter material, it usually does not last and needs to be replaced every year or two. For instance, Ismail, a garment trader and a senior TJ participant, explained his clothing choices:

Interviewer: Do you buy (sunnah) clothes every season or are they used more than one season?

Ismail: I get one or two new ones in summers, but in winters I still use very old clothes . . . In fact, I have some clothes that I have been using for over 20 years . . . I got two pairs of clothes in 1995, I still wear them . . . But in summers, because the clothes wear out quickly . . . cotton fades in colour and gets torn, I need to get new ones. Otherwise, in winters I have not made new clothes for a while.

Like Ismail, other informants also mentioned retaining clothing as long as it lasts. This is supported by TJ participants' quest for simplicity in their clothing and not changing clothing unless required. TJ elders advise the sunnah norm of simplicity in their sermons. The garb TJs wear is not ostentatious but usually of a single colour without adornments. Such attire may stand out to outsiders in their social class because of its style; nevertheless, in TJ circles sunnah clothing is considered simple because it is affordable and commonly worn by lower classes. Thus, the garb diffuses class differences since it is the common man's attire. Relatedly, TJ participants are not particular about brands, even if they were previous to joining the movement. Indeed, many have their clothes stitched by an unknown tailor. For instance, Muqaddam relates the following:

Interviewer: (After your four months) was there a change in (preference for) brands also?

Muqaddam: Yes, there definitely was a change . . . when you walk (travel) with the jamaat, simplicity does come into a person. So then there is a change in (preference for) a brand. When you embrace simplicity, then the branded things finish.

Interviewer: For example, what brands did you use before that you do not use now?

Muqaddam: For example . . . clothes. Before we would wear Levis and get clothes stitched from Dandy (a renowned tailor). It was like that, getting clothes from nice outlets and then getting them stitched. But when you embrace simplicity, then you say let's just get them stitched from him (the ordinary tailor).

Unbranded clothing ensures the attire is synonymous with the Prophet's clothing, which was bereft of branding. Brandless, simple clothing also relates to the common man. This ties into the feeling of unity with the Prophet's *ummah* or nation. In my observations, I felt that TJ participants could relate to other participants wherever in the world they met, even if they did not know each other previously. This was by virtue of identification of their shalwar kameez and topi. Unfamiliar TJ participants connected with each other

regardless of language, social class or other demographic barriers. The TJ movement's universality in its practices and emphasis on brotherly bonding enabled other Muslims to become part of the self. However, this feeling also suffused to Muslims generally. As a preaching movement, TJ participants were expected to reach out and be nice to everyone they met. This was invoked by a frequently mentioned hadith:

You see the believers as regards their being merciful among themselves and showing love among themselves and being kind, resembling one body, so that, if any part of the body is not well then the whole body shares the sleeplessness (insomnia) and fever with it. (Kandhalvi 2003)

In line with this hadith, TJ work emphasises the Muslims as one body, which is a point that directly relates to the thesis of considering the ummah as the extended self.

7.5.2. The Noble Figure as the Extended Self: Clothing as a Replication of Sacred Celebrity

The question is how does the religious extended self develop during the four-month period in jamaat? My involvement in the sojourns shows that the social subculture within the jamaat plays an important role. However, perhaps more importantly, the discourse and practices within the jamaat are critical in inculcating the change towards the extended self. The four months in jamaat are a prolonged period in which rituals and dialogues that emphasise the Prophetic life are carried out. The everyday reading of the prescribed texts (*Fazail-e-Aamal* and *Fazail-e-Sadaqaat*) that comprise Quranic verses, hadith and corresponding explanations mainly relate the virtues of obeying the Prophet and his lifestyle. For instance, one of the Quranic verses often mentioned in the text and other rituals advocates the argument:

Say (O Prophet): If you really love Allah, then follow me, and Allah shall love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful—Al Quran 3:31 (Usmani 2010)

This verse essentialises that love with the Creator and his forgiveness depend on following the sunnah or the Prophetic way. In this vein, TJ discourse accentuates that the way of practising Islamic rituals is as important as practising them per se. For example, TJ elders discourage the use of innovation in the jamaat for preaching as it goes against the sunnah. Hence, the use of cell phones for dawah is condemned.

Related to the emphasis given to the Prophetic way, one ritual that is part of the daily routine in jamaat is the *ailaan* or announcement. The words of the *ailaan* are prescribed, repeated, taught and practised verbatim by all participants in discussions. The *ailaan* also signifies the importance of the Prophetic effort and the manner in which it should unfold. The words of the *ailaan* are as follows:

Brothers, elders, and friends: please listen to an important announcement. Allah (the pure) has kept my, your, and the entire mankind's complete success in complete religion. Religion comprises fulfilling Allah's commandments as in the way shown by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Complete religion will come into all our lives through the way of the effort of the Prophet ﷺ, which due to the finality of Prophethood is incumbent on each of us. Regarding this, there will be a talk after the supplication/worship. Everyone is requested to attend. InshaAllah (God willing) it will be very beneficial.

Known as the complete dawah (invitation), the *ailaan* summarises the spirit and essence of all the TJ rituals. Salient in the announcement is the connection of success with religion, and religion not only being an attempt to simulate the Prophet but the process of bringing religion is also that of the Prophetic way and the responsibility of each Muslim. With the significance of the Prophet's ﷺ personality an overarching theme of all discourse and practice within TJ, it is not surprising that over the course of 120 days of continuous repetition of this message, TJ participants engrain within themselves a special connection with the figure of the Prophet. Hence, it can be deemed that the Prophet ﷺ becomes part of the extended self where every action, sign and discourse is related to the personality becomes an integral part of the participant. This aligns with the proposition that people and ideas can be part of the extended self.

An indicator that a possession is part of the extended self is the hurt felt when the extended self is injured. In our case, we see that TJ participants consider the personality of the Prophet ﷺ as part of the self when any simulation of the figure is disrespected. For example, Mustafa, a director at an electronics family business, felt aggrieved when he returned from his four-month sojourn to see his family members complaining about his change in appearance:

Interviewer: Have you worn shalwar kameez since the start or . . . ?

Mustafa: No, I started wearing it after the four months (sojourn).

Interviewer: How did people look at you and perceive you at that time?

Mustafa: They did give their opinions and were shocked to see the change.

Interviewer: So what do you feel when people objected?

...

Mustafa: It pinched me a lot. My eldest brother had his mehndi (wedding) function (event) and we had just come back from the four months. So at the start it pinched a lot and I remember I cried from inside.

Interviewer: Really? Why?

Mustafa: (In reaction) They commented 'what is this that you have started?' . . . they said that religion should be to an extent and not to such a large extent.

The emotion of bereavement indicates how clothing style has become part of the self. Notably, this happened after the four months sojourn, which, as stated earlier, is when the discourses regarding the exaltedness of the Prophet ﷺ are constantly repeated. Hence, the clothing style is an imitation of the Prophet, and when the style is insulted, the Prophet ﷺ is effectively insulted and, in turn, the extended self is insulted.

An excerpt from Musab's interview highlights another variation of the aforementioned injury. Musab relates the story of his uncle and when he started wearing the sunnah attire and sporting the beard. The reaction from his uncle's father (i.e., Musab's grandfather) was repulsive and hurtful to Musab's uncle, but he justified the change with a rhetorical, poignant question that the elder could not rebut:

Musab: (When TJ participation) changed Chachu (paternal uncle) . . . he also started keeping a little beard. Dada (paternal grandfather) told him, 'trim your beard, what are you doing?' Chachu (paternal uncle) knew how to respond the right way. He said, 'Father, when people used to compare your son's looks to Rock Hudson you used to get very happy, but now that he looks like Hazoor (Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) you feel sad?'

While this quote indicates the repulsion of an onlooker specific to the beard, the beard is part of the triad that comprises semblance to the Prophet ﷺ. Hence, it denotes a broader problem with religious guise. Insulting the likeness of the Prophet ﷺ is injurious to the one bearing it because it is contained within the extended self, which provokes various sentiments; for example, in this case, anger. Chachu's question brings to the fore the issue of values. Since some part of every Muslim honours the Prophet ﷺ, the contrast of the values foreign to Islam and native to it serve as a reminder to the disparager of one's own Muslim identity. Hence, Chachu's retort prompts Dada to honour the status of the sacred image of the Prophet ﷺ, whose exaltedness is unquestionable for any Muslim.

7.5.3. The Purpose as the Extended Self: Clothing as a Uniform for Sacred Work

The sunnah attire also signifies a connection with sacred work; that is, the work of the Prophet ﷺ. In TJ circles, elders and participants incessantly reiterate how the work of preaching is incumbent for every participant and for this, time, wealth and energy has to be spared. To this end, TJ participants often narrate the Quranic verse in sermons:

Say (O Prophet): This is my way. I call (people) to Allah with full perception, both I and my followers.—Al Quran 12:108 (Usmani 2010)

The above verse explains that it is the responsibility of each follower of the Prophet ﷺ to call others towards Allah and religion. While imitating the Prophet in other respects is also encouraged, TJ ideology stresses that if each Muslim gives due credence and honour to the work of dawah, other parts of the religion will be revived. Since this work requires dedication and sacrifice, it is in very serious and senior participants that the work is embodied in the extended self such that they are willing to prioritise the work over all other commitments. While on a preaching sojourn, Tanveer relates how he explained this stance of following the Prophet in entirety to a group of people from another sect:

I said, look, you and I believe that Muhammad ﷺ is the last prophet, don't we? They said yes . . . Then I said, I said prophets are meant to be followed, and followed not in piecemeal, but in completeness, and I said don't you think it is important? They said yes. I said do you see me visibly as a follower of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ because I am wearing an imamah, I'm wearing this attire, right? They said yes, pretty much so. I said this is it. Whoever is following the prophet, he is on the right lines.

Tanveer's quotation only highlights how dress is actually a manifestation of a partial emulation of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and since he was on a preaching mission, it implies the work is also a cardinal facet of following the Prophet. Hence, the significance of the Prophet's work is not lost on TJ veterans who give years of their lives to carry out the work and sacrifice work and family life in the process. Thus, the TJ guise is emblematic of the work of TJ. Aslam, a plastic surgeon and TJ senior, depicts this stance in the following quote. While on a jamaat to Brazil, he responded to a non-Muslim Brazilian's question stressing the relationship between dress and the work:

We were in Brazil dressed in sunnah attire. One non-Muslim asked us, 'Why are you dressed like this?' I said, 'this is the attire of our Prophet and we like to imitate him'. He said, 'I know that. But why are you dressed like this? You are not Prophets.' At that moment, it struck me and I replied, 'we are not Prophets, but we are doing the work of the Prophet and because of that we have to also resemble the Prophet'.

The shalwar kameez is a uniform for TJ's work, just as a policeman's outfit would be for a traffic policeman to perform his duties. Without the uniform, people at a traffic junction would not obey the officer. Similarly, people would probably not entertain the preaching of a TJ participant seriously if he is not in the proper attire. Hence, it can be said the work and the uniform go hand in hand.

Some informants, and I myself, felt the sunnah clothes and beard engrained a higher sense of responsibility and status in participants. Because of the attire, people looked up to them and expected good from them. I often met people in preaching tours who appreciated the work TJ participants were doing, even though they were not able to take part themselves. Hence, the responsibility of the attire and its connection to a noble figure and the related work made it more difficult and shameful to sin.

8. Discussion

This article investigated how a style of clothing can develop into the extended self of TJ participants. The findings show that the path towards sunnah attire becoming a second skin for TJ participants is non-linear and shaped by social pressures emanating from their families and workplaces. However, the four-month sojourn seems to be a rite of passage (see Section 7.5.1). It is in this prolonged continuous time in the TJ subculture that participants' understanding of the effort of preaching grows. TJ members develop a sense of self for loosely fitting long shirts and pajamas and some form of head covering. This evolution is interlaced with the participants' advancement towards their version of piety, comprehension of their place in the global Muslim community, attachment to the noble figure of their Prophet, and shouldering the responsibility of the work of tabligh.

Contributions

This paper has aimed to contribute to existing conversations in religious consumer research in a few ways. First, this article shifts the existing emphasis on Islamic female attire in the literature towards men's attire. While female attire is a charged subject that has been under scrutiny in global discourse for a number of sociopolitical reasons, this article notes how male Islamic attire can also be a source of sociocultural contestation as religious adherents try to practice the ideals of a pious life. The gender angle plays out differently in the case of men, as males are not as restricted in terms of religious prescription and have a distinct role in the TJ. Men are required to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ more saliently, which brings its own struggles.

Second, this research provides empirical support in the context of religion to Belk's (1988) extended self thesis. The concept of the extended self has received tremendous support over the years across disciplines in consumer research. However, religion has remained subjugated in this conversation. This is a gaping caveat since religious practice and sacred objects have deep emotional and experiential dimensions. Hence, we see in this research using the South Asian context of Pakistan that there appears to be a strong capacity for sacred objects and figures to become part of the extended self. This paper adds to Belk's concept by explaining the various ways religious entities can be identified with the self.

Third, this paper shows how male attire in an orthodox Islamic movement develops into a part of the self because of its association with a distant religious personality, his legacy, and the Muslim nation. The conceptualisations of the extended self with regard to historic personalities and work were missing in the original thesis. More explicitly, a dress code associated with simplicity brings into the extended self a feeling of oneness with the ummah. Moreover, TJ participants consider the shalwar kameez an extension of the self as they consider the imitation of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his work to be their own selves and work. A certain identity is imbued in this goal, with adherents trying to mimic the lifestyle of the holy person and the purpose for which he came. The shalwar kameez not only underscores emulation in terms of materiality but also functions as a symbol of brotherhood, piety and responsibility. Moreover, due to these factors, religious clothing becomes an embodiment for devout TJ participants such that they do not think they can do any other form of dress.

Thus, this paper articulates that possessions in the religious sense do not attain the status of the extended self per se, but do so because they are associated with another being that becomes part of the self. We can use Mittal's (2006) idea of the 'I' as a signifier of the self for understanding. The reason TJ participants refrain from choosing particular brands is that the garb they wear is not used to express and signify the 'I' to signal material value. Instead, the attire signifies different entities; that is, the Prophet and the work of TJ. Hence, extending Belk (1988), we see that no particular article of shalwar kameez becomes part of the self; however, the form of attire is something that is part of the self since it resembles a noble figure. Hence, I propose that style of attire rather than attire per se can become part of the extended self. While participants could wear clothes of varying colours, designs or even brands and even replace old ones, the form of the garb remains loose as per religious prescription.

In a talk, Mahmood (BAK basis voor actuele Kunst 2009) tries to explain the injury caused by the blasphemous cartoons emanating from Denmark by reasoning that orthodox Muslims contested those images because they deeply identified with the Prophet ﷺ. On 30 September 2005, 12 cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in a satirical fashion were published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (Lægaard 2007). The cartoons were offensive and insulting to many Muslims, which resulted in global riots, violence and even killings (Battaglia 2006; Post 2007). In the present investigation, we see the reaction to a similar offence (although less severe in degree) when the appearance of Musab's uncle, Mustafa, or Tanveer was criticised. While this reaction was not violent and can be interpreted as culture shock, it did arouse sentiments like in the Danish cartoon controversy due to similar reasons. This hurt was due not only to criticism of adherents' own beliefs or

lifestyle, but it was a blot on the guise of the Prophet ﷺ (Asad et al. 2013; Mahmood 2013). When the embodiment of the Prophet ﷺ is disgraced, the (extended) self is disturbed. This is another instance that supports Belk's reasoning of one grieving the loss of a loved one. The difference here is that the loved one is a distant, historic personality that lived in Arabia.

Adding to Belk's theory, this study shows that the (style of) possession grows over time into the extended self. It is a process; it does not come about spontaneously. The regular wearing of sunnah attire engrains a sense of identity in the self. I note that if religious possessions are to become part of the extended self, then this process is subject to the life course of religious change in participants. The TJ regimen of sojourns is a means to accomplish this, where a 'safe' space for regularly wearing sunnah clothing helps embodiment. Moreover, TJ discourse and practices indirectly reinforce the significance of the attire by idealising the Prophet ﷺ, crafting a sense of purpose for life and being united with the ummah. Setting aside conflicting ideas of the self in a noisy world, the TJ program allows one to focus their energies towards fulfilling Allah's command and trying to replicate the Prophet ﷺ. For TJ travellers, the embodiment of attire can be contrasted with the lack of embodiment of places. In sojourns, necessary belongings like clothing are continuously with oneself for which one develops a sense of self; however, one develops no sense of attachment to the places visited as one is always in transition in sojourns.

Mahmood's (2005) study also shows that Islamic veiling brings about shyness within its female subjects who, over time, become accustomed to wearing the cover so much that they feel uncomfortably shy not wearing it. Hence, certain practices can induce moral capacities. In Islam, such practice is not only virtuous itself but also a means to virtues. This helps connect inner and outer spirituality. Thus, in the case of TJ, the sunnah dress is not just an object representing modesty; it is a route to personal development and piety. Hence, stigmatising personal clothing cannot only scar one's religiosity (Sandikci and Ger 2010) but can also restrict one's right to becoming religious (Bucar 2012). Moreover, in the current case, participants do not aim to just live pious lives but purposeful pious lives. The goal of participants is not only to achieve virtuousness but also to spread piety, which in itself is a virtuous act.

Another advancement to Belk's (1988) thesis is that the formation of the extended self is dependent on other social forces or relations. A possession's path to becoming part of the extended self can be hampered if other pressures (like work or family) are disapproving and the participant is still nascent in his religious career. However, participants who become firm in their beliefs are able to chart their own life course based on religious principles. Furby (1980) espouses that we build a firmer sense of self by learning to effectively control the material in our environment rather than being controlled by it. This aligns with a frequently narrated TJ saying that if a TJ participant does not preach, they will be preached to. We see that unless participants take a firm stance, they accede to living by others' ideals.

9. Limitations and Future Research

This research is not without limitations. As noted earlier, social factors help or hinder in making the extended self. While this study identified family and the workplace as important factors in shaping the self, future research could scrutinise in more detail how family composition, religious upbringing or friendships are important in influencing participants' lifestyle choices and religious involvement. Additionally, future examinations could focus on how different kinds of work (family businesses, multinational corporations, small businesses, etc.) and positions in related organisations (junior versus senior) help or hinder the adoption of TJ consumption norms.

Moreover, this research looked at the particular context of an Islamic orthodox religious movement and how a related possession shaped the self. However, future research could investigate other religious movements from Christianity, Judaism or any other religion and how particular material consumer items (clothing or otherwise) can become associated with the self. Within Islam itself, other religious movements, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami

or Muslim Brotherhood, could be studied to understand sacred consumption and the extended self.

Dress is a part of a network of other parts of the TJ identity. While this particular investigation focused on attire, future work could study other consumption facets, such as eating style, gifting or food preparation, and how they help develop the extended self.

10. Conclusions

Modernity brings myriad choices of moral pursuits resulting in an array of possible identities. The TJ, in the context of Pakistan, represents a peculiar strand of the diversity of possible Islamic choices in modernity. Hence, this article exhibits the variegated nature of Islamic interpretation and identity, which differs in accordance with social, political and cultural conditions (Iner and Yucel 2015).

With a focus on preaching to the Muslim community, TJ adherents aim to revive and relive a utopian historic past by following the style of the sunnah. This distinctive regimen creates a particular self that manifests itself in specific forms of consumption, one of which has been explored in this article. Consumers are aided in their vision to reenact traditional Islam via clothing consumption. Therefore, consumption is part and parcel of identity formation.

Additionally, this paper illustrates that the concept of the extended self can be advanced usefully in the religious context. Nevertheless, in this regard, we see some additions to the original extended self thesis Belk proposed. This study shows that personal identities are evolutionary, as are the consumption practices associated with them. This article unravels the processual yet reciprocal relationship of one's belongings with one's religious trajectory. Relatedly, we also see the hardening or softening of the extended self as tied to these possessions. As such, possessions become part of the extended self, they come to be imbued with deep emotions and meanings for consumers and are inextricably tied to one's religious trajectory.

Moreover, identity formation through the extended self results from a continued investment of time and effort to live out a specific TJ vision. Hence, we see that a vision can help develop the extended self.

Contrary to the sociopolitical nature of attire that goes against the Western paradigm discussed with regard to female Islamic attire, the focus on TJ male attire is more about crafting a specific identity that emulates distant celebrity; that is, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Hence, this article also extends the notion of the extended self from prior notions of objects, persons and places to more abstract concepts removed by time and space. As clothing becomes a part of the self, like a second skin, religious consumers feel an increase in responsibility towards what the clothing represents; that is, historic celebrity, nation and religious work. The meticulous nature of emulation through clothing and relatedly religious practice helps embody a certain style in the extended self that allows for nostalgia and affinity with distant, abstract entities.

The process of extended self development is abetted by the institutionalised nature of TJ doctrine and its rituals. In particular, TJ sojourns play an important role in the formation of the extended self. Sojourns allow the time and space to craft distinct identities in addition to resources such as discourses, community and rituals. Therefore, this article shows how the extended self requires a sustained environment for its grooming. In sum, this article illustrates that well-defined identities are a product of particular sustained conditions and consumption practices in modernity.

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Notes

- ¹ The slight difference between the kameez and the jubba is that the kameez has long slits on the sides reaching the waist, while the jubba does not.

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Article

Australian Muslim Identities and the Question of Intra-Muslim Dialogue

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Abstract: This paper explores the connection between intra-religious dialogue and Muslim identities in Australia. Drawing on empirical literature and analysis, this article investigates the increasing identification and interplay between Australian Muslims from different sects, sub-sects and faith-based groups of Islam. It argues intra-Muslim dialogue is gaining more noticeability among Australian Muslims working to build civic and inclusive identities. At the same time, the article points to the socio-political, organisational and sectarian issues challenging intra-religious unity between Muslim groups in Australia. To achieve genuine and long-lasting intra-faith relations, the article argues for a need to develop organic, theologically inclusive and contextually grounded articulations of intra-Muslim dialogue in Australia. The article concludes that diverse experiences of identity formation in Australia serve as an impetus for strengthening intra-Muslim relations based on previous success with inter-faith initiatives, as well as intergroup contact with non-Muslims.

Keywords: Australian Muslims; identity; intra-religious dialogue; inter-faith dialogue; Sunni; Shi'a; religious pluralism; diversity; Muslim minorities; sectarianism

1. Introduction

Intra-faith dialogue is unique in the development and cultivation of Muslim religious identities. While there has been sustained commitment and relative success with inter-faith dialogue between Abrahamic faiths in Australia and worldwide, there has been little research and commentary on intra-religious relations between Muslims. In filling this knowledge gap, this paper aims to address the benefits, prospects and challenges of intra-religious dialogue in Australia within a theologically inclusive framework. It aims to address three main points: (1) the religious diversity of Australian Muslims and their self-identification with various Muslim sects and schools of thought; (2) the level of public and informal engagement between different Muslim groups; (3) sectarian and socio-political challenges to intra-religious dialogue, particularly relating to intra-communal tensions and the exclusion of Muslim minorities in peak Muslim organisations.

Despite living in a relatively harmonious multicultural society, sectarian politics and overseas conflicts have sharpened identity politics between Australian Muslims in recent times. Media reports and analysts note the increasing sectarianism between Sunnis and Shi'is in Australia following the 2003 Iraq War, the 2012 Syrian conflict and rise of ISIS (AMWCHR 2015; Shanahan 2014; Hume 2014; Zammit 2013; Olding and Elliot 2013). Fears of a clandestine sectarianism can also be traced to the Saudi exportation of Salafi-Wahhabism in Australian mosques and Islamic schools, which has been criticised for its intolerance of Shi'is and non-Salafi sects (Dorling 2015; Zwart 2009). While Australian mosques and Muslim congregations have diversified over the last few decades (Underabi 2014), sectarian and politically motivated rivalries continue to surface within peak Islamic bodies and the broader community, resulting in the exclusion of Muslim minority groups (Whyte 2021, pp. 564–65; Yasmeen 2014, p. 29; Yusuf 2014).

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Outside of Australia, growing *takfiri* (accusation of unbelief) ideologies have spread in authoritarian and conflict-torn countries in what commentators call a “vocabulary of sectarianism.” This reached its apex in Syria when various Sunni and Shi’a groups engaged in a long-term “sectarian dehumanization strategy” as part of a prolonged religious struggle, igniting sectarian rivalries (Zelin and Smyth 2014). Such language is readily invoked and intensified inside Muslim cyber environments as a battleground for intra-religious supremacy (Seigel 2015). Worryingly, the language of sectarianism has grown as a counter-ideological movement against Islam’s inherent pluralism and unequivocal stance on religious freedom (see Q2:136; 2:256; 2:262; 2:285; 3:84; 4:163; 10:99; 11:118; 18:29; 16:32; 41:33; 42:13).

The lack of receptiveness in improving intra-Muslim relations correlates with studies indicating a “dialogue deficit” in the Muslim world. Krause et al. (2019) attribute the dialogue deficit to the lack of recognition of intra-sectarian issues, scepticism towards intra-faith dialogue as a “Western Christian innovation” and an undersupply of robust civil society institutions to effectively facilitate Sunni–Shi’a dialogue. A further obstacle inhibiting intra-Muslim dialogue is entrenched in the blasphemy laws enforced by authoritarian regimes in Muslim-majority countries, which punish and suppress religious and ethnic minorities for religious and political dissent (Kuru 2020; Khan 2019, p. 26; Saeed and Saeed 2017, p. 101). While defenders of anti-blasphemy laws allege that they protect religious belief and practice, they do the opposite in denying freedom of speech and expression (Amnesty International 2016).

Despite the challenges of sectarianism, a strong cohort of Muslim theorists and educators have advocated for religious pluralism and intra-Muslim dialogue (Saeed 2019; Sachedina 2010; Duderija 2010; Kamali 2009; Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 2007; Engineer 2007; Afsaruddin 2007). Raimundo Panikkar, a Catholic Priest and scholar of intra-faith dialogue, emphasises the need for mutual understanding and pluralism within religions. He argues intra-religious dialogue does not aim for “uniform unity or a reduction of all the pluralistic variety of Man into one single religion, system, ideology, or tradition” (Panikkar 1999, p. 10). Adis Duderija (2010) similarly argues against the imposition of a particular orthodoxy on Muslims for intra-religious dialogue to prosper. He writes:

A call for intra-Muslim dialogue is therefore not a call for imposition of any interpretational hegemony or a push for ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘orthopraxis’. On contrary a call for intra-Muslim dialogue is based upon the absolute need to facilitate dialogue between various contemporary Muslim schools of thought and build bridges of better understanding between them based on the universal values of mutual respect and dignity.

Duderija makes an important point about the interpretational hegemony or push for orthodoxy or “true Islam.” This is evident in the way some Muslim groups weaponise proselytisation (*da’wa*) as a religio-political summons to compete and claim dominion over rivalling schools of thought (Kuiper 2021, p. 78).¹ A genuine dialogue, on the other hand, does not try to convert or persuade participants to follow a particular faith or sect (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 2007, p. xvi; Engineer 2002, p. 2).² As seen with inter-faith initiatives, religious participants draw on overarching Abrahamic beliefs to instill commonality and mutual understanding between participants. Intra-faith conversations, by contrast, tend to be overshadowed with polemics, past grievances and preconceived ideas of the “other”—whether it be theologically, historically or politically motivated. As Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2007, pp. 49–50) note, inter-faith and intra-Muslim dialogue can be enhanced with proper etiquette, good manners and conflict resolution techniques grounded in the Islamic tradition.

This paper aims to address the theological roots of intra-religious dialogue in Islam. It identifies key concepts relating to ethnic, religious, intellectual and cultural diversity, as well as Qur’anic and Prophetic instructions encouraging mutual kindness (*tasamuh*), pluralism and the right to disagreement (*ikhtilaf*). This is followed by a methodological background and justification for the study of intra-religious dialogue in Australia. The

article dissects Australia's intra-Muslim diversity and efforts to engage in intra-religious dialogue, as well as the socio-political and communal challenges it faces in the context of sectarian and organisational exclusion of Muslim minorities in peak Islamic bodies in Australia.

2. Theological Roots of Intra-Faith Dialogue in Islam

Muslim theologians argue that Islam is a universal religion that addresses all humankind. Yet, they also admit divergence between human beings, including within the Muslim communities themselves. When the related Qur'anic verses, Sunna and scholarly interpretations are examined, it is clear Islam inherits a Qur'anic epistemology that promotes dialogue between its believers and non-Muslims (Saeed 2019; Sachedina 2010; Kamali 2009; Afsaruddin 2007). *Kalam* (speech) is an attribute of God for communicating or engaging in dialogue with His creations. Thus, God sent prophets and holy scriptures to communicate with human beings (5:48). God also created the ability to speak in human nature as a virtue or gift. Accordingly, God created humankind into tribes and families so they "come to know the other" (49:13). Abou El Fadl (2007, p. 281) interprets this verse as an "ethical imperative to strive to create the necessary moral and material conditions in which people can come to love one another." Said Nursi (2001, p. 380) similarly claims that being divided into groups, tribes and nations encourages "mutual acquaintance and mutual assistance," rather than "antipathy and mutual hostility."

Islam's universalism and intra-religious diversity are embedded in the notion of *tawhid* (oneness of God). Through *tawhid*, Muslims are invited to connect themselves and each other via God's Divine Names and attributes (Nursi 2001). The inter-connectedness of God's Divine Names establishes social and spiritual bonds that transcend worldly, ideological and cultural barriers. Muslims can find unity within "Divine names such as my Creator, Inventor, Fashioner, Provider, Sustainer, Forgiver, Giver of Life, The Reckoner, The Guide ... (Nursi 1997, p. 313)." Muslims also share a deep reverence for their sacred scriptures, the Qur'an and Sunna (traditions of the Prophet); ritualistic practices, such as the *shahada* (testimony of the faith); daily prayer; fasting; hajj; and zakat. Within this theocentric worldview, all humans are equal before God, regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, geographic or socio-economic backgrounds (17:70; 49:13; 2:30).

From an intra-faith perspective, the Qur'an and Sunna promote unity, diversity and collaboration between Muslims in all aspects of life. Both sacred texts model the notion of an *umma* (community of faith) (3: 110). Such a community is analogous to the human body in the Islamic tradition (Al-Bukhari n.d.). Given that the whole body is connected and all limbs support each other for the continuation of life, all Muslims need to connect and support each other for a socially and spiritually healthy society. For this to work, Muslim inter-relationships need to embrace pluralism. Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2009, p. 35) argues that the Qur'an and actions of the Prophet "attest Islam's affirmative stance on pluralism." This is not merely limited to religious pluralism, but also encompasses ethno-lingual, cultural, legal and political pluralism. For this reason, engaging in dialogue between Muslims is not only a recommendation, but a communal obligation (*fard kifayah*) to peacefully co-exist as "God's viceroys on earth" (Abou El Fadl 2007, p. 281).

Islam is full of epithets emphasising the unity of human beings. In many Qur'anic verses God proclaims, "O humankind" or "O who you believe." By such a calling, God honours humanity and believers. This is reflected famously by the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), who declared people are of two types: "a person is either your brother in faith, or your equal in creation" (Tabataba'i 1980). The notion of humanity extends to the unity forged with the first human being sent to earth, the Prophet Adam. The Qur'an honours humans as "the children of Adam (17:70)." This unity is also explained in a hadith (Prophetic narration) which declares: "All of the people are the children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust" (Al-Tirmidhi).³ The Qur'an, moreover, enjoins all Muslims as brothers (9:10). Major traditional, opinion-based, Sufi and linguistic classical Qur'anic exegetes highlight the importance of brotherhood from

spiritual, social, juristic and political angles. For some, Islamic brotherhood is superior to the fraternity of parenthood because of its eternity in the next world. Others compare it to being siblings from the same parents (Al-Tabari 2000; Al-Razi 1999; Al-Qurtubi 2006; Ibn Kathir 1988; Al-Qushayri n.d.; Al-Zamakhshari 1986). This can also be referred to as inter-sibling dialogue.

However, as various opinions and conflicts happen between brothers, the same occurs among adherents. This is not because of the sacred text, but due to the ambiguity and contestability surrounding its verses, interpretations, cultural differences between Muslims, as well as competing economic and political interests between various ethnic, nationalistic and sectarian groups. This has resulted in the diversity of opinions, widespread scholarship, conflicting views and, at times, direct confrontation between Muslims. The latter can be seen among the Prophet's companions, the Sunni-Shi'a split, and later Muslim generations embattled in tribal, ethnic and religious conflicts. Differences in religious views and cultural practices, however, are seen as a mercy from God, as God, with all His power could have made everyone the same (16:93). The utilisation, tolerance and facilitation of difference in Islam is known as *ikhhtilaf* (the right to disagreement). Kamali (2009, p. 30) argues that *ikhhtilaf* is an entrenched feature of Islam, noting that *ikhhtilaf al-tanawwu* (disagreement that implies diversity) is considered praiseworthy (*mahmud*) among scholars of Islamic jurisprudence (see Badri 2018; Kamali 2015; Al-Alwani 2011; Ad-Dihlevi 2006).

The reconciliation of different opinions is an important topic in all Islamic disciplines. While Muslims from different tribes, ethnic and cultural groups may differ on orthodoxy and orthopraxy, their ability to contribute ideas, cultural practices, intellectual and artistic feats add to Islam's dynamism and universality. In situations where tension and conflict are apparent, the Qur'an urges believers to reconcile their hearts (*ta'lif al-qulub*). Such reconciliation requires dialogue: "... He united your hearts, so you—by His grace—became brothers ... " (3: 103). The word of '*allafa*' is used for uniting the hearts. The lexical meaning of *allafa* is "to be attuned to each other, to be connected and united, to be in harmony with each other" (Wehr 1976, p. 23).

Tensions, nevertheless, around sectarianism remain high. Attempts to address blasphemy, apostasy and puritanical ideologies have been well documented among Muslim scholars advocating for religious freedom (Kuru 2020; Saeed and Saeed 2017; Kamali 2015; Abou El Fadl 2007). The Amman Message (2004) is one major attempt among traditional religious scholars from Sunni and Shi'a schools of thought to prevent declarations of apostasy between Muslims. The Message declares various Sunni, Shi'a, Salafi and Sufi branches of Islam as orthodox, although it does not include other Muslim minority or syncretic groups.

In his book *Reopening Muslim Minds*, Turkish journalist and author Mustafa Akyol urgently calls on Muslims to develop a theology of tolerance. He addresses the tolerance deficit among certain Muslims who see their path as the only right way, or as part of a "saved sect." He writes:

The remedy to these toxic divisions is not in the endless calls to "unite" all Muslims on "true Islam," the definition of which is the source of tension. The remedy is rather in the Murji'ite [postponement] solution: let all Muslims follow their own traditions and persuasions, "postpone" their unresolved disputes to the afterlife, and respect each other as Ahl al-Qibla [people of the Qibla, or direction of prayer to Mecca]. (Akyol 2021, pp. 221–22)

It is important to note that non-exclusivity in truth does not diminish Islam's universal truths. Rather, calls for tolerance fall under pluralistic notions around accepting difference, freedom of conscience and facilitating healthy dialogue under God's providence. This is supported by various Qur'anic passages instructing Muslims to defeat one's ego, self-interests and group ideology for higher moral and spiritual virtues (4:135; 17:70; 3:59; 4:36).

The moral mechanisms used to guide and safeguard respectful dialogue revolve around emulating Prophetic behaviour, such as demonstrating *adab* (etiquette), *ahklaq* (moral conduct) and *ihsan* (moral excellence). As these principles exist within Islam's

scholarly tradition, they provide a strong theological foundation and precedent for Muslims to successfully engage in intra-faith dialogue.

3. Methodology

The study of intra-religious dialogue in Australia is unique given its diverse demographic and multicultural landscape. Australian Muslims come from 183 different countries, consisting of major ethnic groups from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, India and Indonesia (ABS 2016). Australia also inherits Muslims from diverse religious orientations including Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, Alawi, Alevi, Ahmadiyya, secular and non-denominational Muslims (Chamas and Shelton 2021; El Matrah et al. 2014; Saeed 2003, pp. 2–3). It is hard to determine the exact figures of Muslim religious sects in Australia as there is no official census recording of Muslim denominations. However, most of Australia's largest mosques and congregations identify with Sunni Islam (Underabi 2014).

Australian Muslims, like other Muslim minorities in the West, exercise greater constitutional freedoms and civil liberties compared to Muslim-majority states under authoritarian rule (Akyol 2020; Pew Research Center 2012; Mogahed 2006). While Western Muslims have experienced increased forms of discrimination and Islamophobia in the post-9-11 era, their ability to openly identify with their theological denomination remains an important feature of intra-Muslim diversity. Hence, while intra-religious dialogue is integral to Islam's theological outlook, its ability to thrive requires strong civil institutions, democratic freedoms and a communal willingness to actively engage in intra-faith initiatives and platforms. Australia is unique in this respect, as it shares an eclectic mix of Muslims from various religious, ethnic, cultural and inter-generational backgrounds. However, the extent of intra-Muslim dialogue is yet to be tested against any empirical study.

This paper uses primary and secondary Islamic sources, including the Qur'an, Sunna and exegetical works to elucidate a theoretical framework for intra-Muslim dialogue. As religion and identity intersect on various levels, the article adopts a multi-disciplinary approach in examining the communal interactions between Sunni, Shi'a and other minority Muslim groups in Australia, as well as the socio-political, institutional and transnational factors shaping intra-religious interaction. This follows Iner and Yucel's (2015, p. vii) conceptualisation of identity as a complex, multilayered and ongoing process. Muslim identity, as they argue, is shaped and influenced by the "theological, social, political and regional circumstances and discourses" (2015, p. vii). As such, this paper draws on existing empirical and social scientific literature on Muslim identity formation in Australia to investigate existing and future patterns of intra-Muslim dialogue. This includes an analysis of the increasing intra-denominational identification among Australian Muslims and the prospects and challenges hindering intra-Muslim dialogue in Australia. The final section provides a discussion about the findings and recommendations for further research on the topic.

4. Intra-Muslim Diversity in Australia

The cultivation of Muslim identities has undergone extensive research in Australia against the backdrop of migration, assimilation and multicultural policies shaping diverse Muslim communities. These works investigate Australian Muslim experiences of citizenship and belonging, youth identity, inter-faith dialogue and Muslim minority identities (Ali 2020a; Mitha et al. 2020; Atie et al. 2017; Roose and Harris 2015; Iner and Yucel 2015; El Matrah et al. 2014; Schottmann 2013). Literature accumulating in the post-9/11 period has largely engaged with issues of identity formation, for example, the creation of a collective Australian Muslim identity; the challenges of Islamophobia; intergroup contact between Muslims and non-Muslims; and the politics of inclusion and exclusion (Yilmaz et al. 2021; Ali 2020b; Kabir 2020; Abdel-Fattah 2017; Akbarzadeh 2016; Yasmeen 2014; Ozalp and Keskin 2015; Johns et al. 2015; Mansouri et al. 2015; Woodlock 2011).

Earlier studies suggest Australian Muslims did not strongly identify with a particular religious denomination. In a 2001 study of Muslim communities in Australia, Muslim

participants indicated their differences were minor (Bouma et al. 2001, p. 64). They referred to Islamic anecdotes of brotherhood: “we are all part of the one family because we all come from Adam” and “are all equal in front of God”. Abdullah Saeed’s (2003, pp. 67–78) earlier work on Islam in Australia indicated the same sentiments “... there appears to be a tendency on the part of both Shi’is and Sunnis in Australia to narrow their differences and come to a more common view of their identity as Muslims.” Muslim relations, rather, after the post-war migration waves, were ethnically orientated as organisations catered for the needs of their respective ethnic groups.

Whereas earlier research indicates Australian Muslims did not identify strongly with their religious affiliations or sect, more recent research suggests otherwise. Whyte’s (2021) study on Australian Muslims saw 81% of respondents identifying as Sunni, 10% identified as Shi’a, 7% as non-denominational Muslims and 2% as “other.” A small portion of participants identified as Ahmadiyya, Alawite and Sufi in the other category. Likewise, Rane et al.’s (2020) survey findings indicate most Muslims identify as “Sunni” (63.6%), followed by a large cohort that answered, “just Muslim” (34.0%). Other responses included Hanafi (18.0%), Ahl Sunnah wal Jamaa (12.6%), Shafi’i (6.7%), Sufi (6.5%), progressive (5.2%), Shi’a (4.1%) and Salafi (2.8%). Similarly, Yilmaz et al.’s (2021, p. 6) study on Young Australian Muslims and intergroup contact surveyed 64 Muslim participants with 46 identifying as Sunni, 12 as Shi’a (Jafari) and 6 as non-denominational Muslims. Apart from identifying with broader sects, these findings show an increase in sub-sect identification and intra-denominational diversity.

It would be a mistake to assume the increasing denominational identification among Australian Muslims as purely political or sectarian, especially when many Muslims inherit theological outlooks from their familial, intellectual and cultural upbringings. Another contributing factor to the increasing identification with different streams of Islamic thought is the level of comfort Australian Muslims have in expressing their religious identities in safe democratic environments. This is supported by research that shows how intercultural contact between Muslims and non-Muslims reduces prejudice against Islam (Yilmaz et al. 2021; Mansouri and Vergani 2018). At the same time, it would be naïve to suggest sectarian and ideological politics do not play a role in determining intra-religious relations, or at the very least, limiting intra-religious interaction.

5. Intra-Muslim Relations in Australia

Intra-Muslim relations in Australia can be traced to the migration, cultural ties and intermarriages formed between Muslims from different ethnic and kinship groups. On a socio-religious level, the interaction between Sunni and Shi’a Muslims was frequent prior to the 1980s, as many Shi’as attended Sunni mosques for prayer (Bouma et al. 2001, p. 63). While most mosques in Australia are non-sectarian, the migration and settlement of Muslims in the post-war period witnessed the development of ethnic and sectarian enclaves with strong ties to mosques and Islamic centres. Jan Ali (2020a, p. 55), for example, notes how the ethnic formation of civic Muslim bodies isolated them from each other, resulting in “limited to no inter- or intra-communal interaction.” Ali refers to the Sunni and Shi’a Lebanese communities that have had separate community organisations, as well as Turkish Sunni Muslims who have run separate mosques with little intra-communal engagement.

Ethnic affiliations among Muslim migrants were advantageous to some degree as Muslims could effectively mobilise to establish religious organisations within their own communities. This did not thwart efforts by Muslim leaders from different cultural groups to establish the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), Australia’s first peak multi-ethnic Islamic organisation (Saeed 2003, p. 139). AFIC (2020) was founded in 1964 as an umbrella group and remains a predominately Sunni organisation. AFIC’s (2011) main objectives are to articulate Australian Muslim interests in areas of social policy, political advocacy and administrative support through its local and state councils. However, AFIC’s (2011) constitution draws clear distinctions between certain Muslim minority groups. For

example, AFIC (2011) explicitly excludes Ahmadis from its membership, while its position on syncretic Muslim groups like the Alawites and Alevis remains absent.

AFIC has come under scrutiny for its lack of inclusivity and leadership from Sunni and Shi'a members of the community. For many Shi'as, AFIC did not provide adequate services to their congregations. Mohammad Taha Al-Salami (2017, p. 143), a member of the Shi'a community in Australia, argues that in the past, many Shi'a scholars had to consult AFIC to receive any legal documents or recognition, or to apply to become a registered marriage celebrant, which in many cases was rejected. This, in large part, along with Australia's growing Muslim population, has led to the establishment of various peak Islamic bodies, mosques and Muslim civil society groups with their own services and administrative centres to cater for their respective congregations (Amath 2014, pp. 100–2; Underabi 2014).

Similar criticisms have been directed towards other peak Islamic bodies in Australia. Despite holding the largest membership of imams in the country, the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) excludes members outside of Sunni Islam. This notwithstanding, a growing number of Sunni, Shi'a and Ahmadiyya leaders have shown a desire to establish inclusive ecumenical councils (Whyte 2021, pp. 565–66). Survey results from Whyte's (2021, p. 565) study indicate that nearly half (48.6%) of respondents agree there is a need for greater representation of Shi'a sheikhs and minority groups in peak Islamic organisations. At the same time, 30.5% of respondents were unsure or neutral, while 20.8% disagreed. This highlights a certain tension or reluctance among Muslims to establish multi-denominational organisations. Several participants attributed this to the theological and logistical issues between different Muslim sects, and their wish to acquire institutional autonomy. Others, meanwhile, argued for the need of Sunni, Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslims to "work together" and identify "neutral platforms" to speak to each other (Whyte 2021, pp. 565–66).

There has been intra-religious interaction between Sunnis and Shi'is at organisational and clerical levels. For example, in 2017, members of the Islamic Council of Victoria attended the launch of the Islamic Shia Council of Victoria (ISCV) to express their support for the new organisation (Edwards 2018, p. 90). Likewise, in 2018, ISCV (2018) met with the Victorian Board of Imams to promote unity between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims (Whyte 2021, p. 566). A further sign of solidarity occurred in 2017, when several Sunni and Shi'a groups denounced the Adelaide-based fringe Shi'a cleric, Imam Tawhidi, for inflaming sectarian tensions (Adcock 2017; Patton 2019; Mackey 2019). Australian Muslims, in this respect, are acutely aware of the dangers of sectarianism, particularly given that many Muslims have fled from overseas sectarian violence.

Other attempts to promote inter-sectarian diversity have occurred among civil society organisations, such as the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR). In 2015, AMWCHR organised a range of activities and workshops to promote Muslim sectarian diversity between Alawi, Alevi and Sunni Muslims. The program reached out to young Muslims, including Alevi Kurds and Iraqi Shi'is. AMWCHR's (2015, p. 10) evaluation report, titled "Speaking Across the Sectarian Divide", identified several achievements through its dialogue initiatives, including increased community capacity to deal with inter-sectarian conflict, raising awareness of sectarian diversity and creating networking opportunities between Alawi, Alevi and Sunni youth. AMWCHR's project provides a solid blueprint for future intra-faith initiatives among different generations, community members and national stakeholders.

Whether such efforts have turned into long-lasting and genuine interactive and organisational inclusion remains to be seen. There are small signs however of intra-communal dialogue. For example, anecdotal evidence shows there has been inclusion of Shi'a students in some Sunni-populated faith-based Muslims schools in Sydney and Melbourne. Leaders from Sunni and Shi'a mosques have also invited each other for Eid gatherings during Ramadan. In the academic sphere, there is a greater awareness of reaching out to under-represented Muslim groups to increase representation. However, as noted above, more needs to be done at communal and organisational levels to set examples for future Muslim generations to follow.

6. Discussion: Advancing Intra-Muslim Dialogue

Preliminary research on intra-religious dialogue in Australia reveals both strengths and weaknesses to achieving meaningful dialogue. Australian Muslims have demonstrated immense resilience as minorities to engage with Australians from different faiths and non-religious backgrounds, especially in the context of Islamophobia. It is no surprise that intra-religious dialogue is often left on the backburner, given Australian Muslims have invested significant resources into countering Islamophobia, negative media representation and communal unrest following the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. However, what this paper has demonstrated is that Muslims from different backgrounds are becoming increasingly inter-connected and mindful of their shared and common interests. Studies with diverse sample groups of Muslims indicate they are united on various issues relating to equality, social justice, human rights, environmental sustainability and a communal resolve to fight Islamophobia (Rane et al. 2020, p. 22).

Australia is not immune from communal and overseas sectarian tension. Fostering of intra-faith initiatives plays an important role in mitigating sectarian politics, in addition to cultivating organic and civic Muslim identities. However, the move towards intra-religious dialogue needs to come from within, at personal, local and organisational levels, for it to share genuine and long-lasting relationships. The challenges of intra-faith dialogue should not lead to theological deprivation or communal apathy (Yilmaz 2010). The need to merge socio-political realities in Australia with an accessible theological framework is required. The Amman Message, despite its limitations, is one example of opening dialogue through the recognition of Islam's diverse schools of thought. This can be seen at a more local level with a growing number of imams and Muslim leaders highlighting the need to work together on shared platforms to advance Muslim interests. Further enhancement of intra-religious activities can be spearheaded by Muslim community groups, civil society actors and Islamic studies departments at universities well-versed in facilitating inter-faith initiatives. These organisations and leaders can utilize past experiences, existing frameworks and resources to create safe and vibrant spaces for diverse Muslim groups to engage in meaningful dialogue.

A closer look at Islam's sacred sources and exegetical tradition illustrates that there are more theological, scholarly and spiritual bounds that unify Muslims than what separates them. History testifies that Muslims contribute to peace and social harmony when there is mutual communication and understanding between them. This paper proposes the importance of Qur'anic principals and norms emphasising unity, pluralism and difference. It also advocates for deeper dialogue among Muslims to address contextual issues impacting the community based on common interests and values. For this to take place, Australian Muslims must build the courage to inclusively speak with other congregations, including majority and minority groups, to discuss new challenges confronting the community.

7. Conclusions

At present, Australian Muslims have showed the ability to interact with other faith groups and non-Muslim groups. Intra-Muslim relations, on the other hand, have remained limited. Some Australian Muslim organisations have demonstrated their ability to accommodate for the diverse needs of Muslims and are pushing for greater intra-religious tolerance. However, greater communal, grassroots and bottom-up mobilisation is required to promote sustained and genuine dialogue as part of a civil and tolerant Islam.

As this paper has identified, ignoring such a dialogue will deepen sectarian and political divisions and sustain negative stereotyping of the religious "other." This paper argues that intra-religious dialogue is Qur'anically inspired through its universal and theological principles. As far as the practicalities of engaging in dialogue are concerned, Islam inherits overlapping concepts, enabling positive, mutual, holistic and ethical dialogue, which have been successfully embodied in inter-faith initiatives and intergroup contact with non-Muslims. In this respect, it is important Muslims distinguish between the goals of *da'wa* and genuine dialogue. At times, overseas preachers and movements with vested

interests polarise Australian Muslims on political and sectarian issues. These attempts can be mitigated for the betterment of Muslims who want to establish strong and politically conscious communities with the ability to identify sectarian motives.

As argued in this paper, Australian Muslims have negotiated various identities throughout the process of migration, settlement and times of political upheaval. As a minority group, they have achieved success in various dialogue events with diverse audiences, not just among Abrahamic faiths, but also individuals, politicians and media corporations with Islamophobic tendencies. Given their success in these fields, Australian Muslims are well equipped to engage in healthy and robust intra-faith dialogue. To further enhance dialogue, we have proposed a theologically inclusive approach towards promoting intra-religious relations, alongside practical and communal steps to nurture and enhance intra-group contact among Muslims. Further empirical research on intra-religious relations will benefit and enrich the preliminary findings of this paper, particularly with respect to intra-communal interaction, bottom-up mobilisation and the socio-political dynamics of Islamic organisations and Muslim leadership in Australia.

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Notes

- ¹ It is important to highlight *da'wa* also helps facilitate intra-religious and inter-faith debate. As Kuiper (2021, p. 12) notes, *da'wa* “served as an important mechanism in catalysing the inter-and intra-religious encounters by which Islam has come to define and constitute itself as a religious tradition”.
- ² The modernist thinker, Ali Engineer (2002, p. 2) insists that “dialogue is needed rather than *da'wa* or missionary activities” at the present time. He opposes aggressive forms of *da'wa*, and notes that “*da'wa* is desirable only if it does not lead to loss of peace and harmony”.
- ³ (Al-Tirmidhi) Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith. No. 3955. Available online: <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2012/06/28/all-people-children-adam/> (accessed on 1 October 2022).

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