

“It’s scary how many people believe what Trump believes”:  
How a Muslim women’s Sisters’ Circle interactionally navigate socio-  
political realities.

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أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم  
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## Abstract

The Othering Muslims face in Britain, and the Western world more broadly, has long been under critical review—from Said’s (1978) seminal work on Orientalism, to more recent developments in the conceptualization of Islamophobia, and how and where it manifests systemically, institutionally, and in the everyday (Massoumi et al, 2017; Runnymede Trust, 2017). Given the current number of Islamophobic hostilities, research into the experiences of Muslims at British universities showcase high levels of anxiety and insecurity, where Muslim women—specifically visibly Muslim women—are most affected (NUS, 2018; Thompson and Pihlaja, 2018). Studies indicate that many Muslim students, therefore, seek safety through joining university Islamic Societies, or ISocs (Brown, 2009; Song, 2012). However, uncertainty regarding the future is prevalent amongst female Muslim students, particularly with the tensions that fed into, and were also subsequently brought on by Brexit and Donald Trump’s election (Thompson and Pihlaja, 2018). This study, thus, endeavours to examine how Muslim women as part of a Sisters’ Circle at a British university’s ISoc interactionally navigate socio-political realities. Using an integrated qualitative method of analysis, this research adopts Teun van Dijk’s (1984) socio-cognitive approach to explore how narrative and argumentation functions work to achieve discursive actions through processes of sense-making and navigating the socio-political. The analysis finds that lying at the heart of these interactions is a cognisance of Otherness, which produces minority angst and efforts of micro-resistance. More specifically, the micro-resistances within this study constitute subverting problematic discourse, and a discursive ‘undoing’ of Otherness through the use of humour, asserting refusal, and disrupting the gendered somatic norm within the (physical) space the Sisters’ Circle occupies. This research thus evidences the psychological impact of Islamophobia, as well as showcasing the efforts Muslim women students have made in creating a space where tensions and uncertainties regarding the future can be discussed, and critical consciousness can be cultivated. As such, the findings show not only that, but *how* the creation of safe spaces, or spaces of care and/or comfort can be a valuable tool in offering support to Muslim women at university, and beyond. This study thus contributes an under-explored interactional perspective on how Muslim women work through socio-political realities, as well as adding to literature on the following: 1) the need for spaces of care and support in the face of Islamophobia; and 2) the ways in which Muslim women work through the tensions, difficulties and angst Islamophobia produces. This study also contributes methodologically to showcase how interactional data can

be considered using a multi-pronged analytical approach to allow for an in-depth examination of discursive action.

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# **Chapter 1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis focuses on the ways in which a Sisters' Circle (SC) as part of a British University's Islamic Society (ISoc) in the North of England navigate and work through socio-politics, and Otherness. This introduction chapter thus begins with offering a brief overview of the background and motivations for this study, followed by the research questions, and will conclude with an overview of the chapters of the thesis.

## **1.2 Background and Motivations**

Since the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (9/11) attacks in the United States of America, and the July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 (7/7) London bombings, the construction and positioning of Muslims as a threat to Britain and the West more broadly intensified (Saeed, 2016). The Othering of Muslims, however, is no new phenomenon, as Said (2003) has demonstrated through his works on Orientalism showcasing the ways in which Muslims have historically been constructed as the uncivilised, barbaric, exotic and mysterious Other, as deviant from the Western (white) norm. With the historic Othering and intensification of anti-Muslim sentiments post-9/11 and 7/7, the Othering of Muslims in Britain translated into targeted hate crimes (Runnymede Trust, 2017), negative discourses and depictions in the media, and Islamophobia at a state-level, which has led to structural and institutional discrimination against Muslims—for example, through securitisation and surveillance (Kundnani, 2014; Massoumi et al, 2017). Given the current level of Islamophobic hostilities, research into the experiences of Muslims at British universities showcase high levels of anxiety and insecurity, where Muslim women—specifically visibly Muslim women—are most affected (NUS, 2018; Thompson and Pihlaja, 2018). Studies indicate that many Muslim students, therefore, seek safety through joining university Islamic Societies, or ISocs (Brown, 2009; Song, 2012). However, uncertainty regarding the future is prevalent amongst female Muslim students, particularly with the tensions brought on by Brexit and Donald Trump's election (Thompson and Pihlaja, 2018).

To thus consider the 'Other' status of Muslims in Britain, this study seeks to explore how Muslim women, specifically a Sisters' Circle, navigate reality through interaction as a collective. Among the factors motivating this study and its focus, the main one is the fact that

I, as a Muslim woman, was a part of the SC in question during my Masters (MA), which was the year prior to the commencement of this study. During that year, although I did not engage with the ISoc in any other capacity, I found the SC to be a nurturing and supportive space; it served as a space to seek advice, share concerns (which included concerns about Islamophobia in wider society *and* patriarchy within Muslim communities), explore differing religious standpoints, discuss politics, and it was ultimately a place where I made lifelong friends. As it would happen, my personal journey of unpacking my own identity as a Muslim, Irish, Pakistani and British woman drove me to research identity in interaction for my MA, where I then collected data from the SC.

I then decided to embark on a more lengthy research journey to consider how the SC functions from a more critical perspective. In doing so, soon after I commenced my research, I came across Teun van Dijk's monograph 'Prejudice in Discourse' (1983), which piqued my interest. What particularly spoke to me was the way in which van Dijk employed a socio-cognitive approach, using a number of analytical tools, to unpack the ways in which majorities talk about minorities and construct them as Other. Primarily, it's the link between spoken discourse and the socio-cognitive interface through which van Dijk (ibid) highlighted the prevalence of prejudiced ideology and the subsequent construction of minorities as Other that drew me to his work on socio-cognitive discourse analysis. Having researched more on his approach (e.g. van Dijk, 1998; 2018), it became increasingly apparent that there is a need for the application of van Dijk's approach to minorities, as opposed to focusing on majorities *talking about* minorities. In effect, this study is a combination of my love for applied linguistics (specifically interactions) and an awareness of my own identity as Other based on my Muslimness.

In terms of focusing on the SC, this study considers different theories and their linkages—including Orientalism, feminisms, and Islamophobia—to understand the multifaceted nature of the Othering of Muslims, specifically Muslim women, and how women have thus responded, which includes its psychological impact (e.g. Zempi and Chakrobarti, 2015; Chaudry, 2020). Whether it is through Islamic Feminism to counter patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an (e.g. Wadud, 1992; Barlas, 2002), or creating space(s) in the online world—my interest lies in the discourse that is produced within such spaces. With this in mind, this study aims to centre the voices of the sisters in the SC as a space that has been created at a British university in the North of England, with a key interest into how socio-politics and Otherness are thus navigated.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following research questions (RQs), with the Othering of Muslims and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach in mind. The aim is to consider how Muslim women as part of the SC work through socio-politics and the tensions of marginality, and their impact(s). These questions (and this study more broadly) will additionally draw on the foundational elements of bell hooks' (2015) concept of homeplace (as explained in Chapter 2, section 2.3.5) vis-à-vis the functioning of space as a place for affirming one another, a space that is safe to express and work through anxieties, and one that encourages critical consciousness. The focus will thus be on navigating socio-politics, Otherness, and resistance:

- RQ1: How do Muslim women as part of a British university's ISoc's Sisters' Circle interactionally navigate socio-politics and its impact?
- RQ2: How do Muslim women in the Sisters' Circle resist ideologies that position them as other in racial and/or gender hierarchies?

It must be noted that the mention of 'racial' hierarchies in RQ2 is referencing (though is not limited to) the way Islamophobia mobilises and Others Muslims. As such, this thesis adopts the view of Islamophobia as a form of racism in accordance with the conclusions of Kundnani (2014) and Massoumi et al (2017).

Another point to consider is that although this study focuses on Muslim women at university, which the NUS (2018) report suggested is an area requiring further research—the mechanics of Islamophobia within the institution are not the primary focus for this study per se. Rather, the aim is to examine the ways in which the SC navigates socio-politics and Otherness as a collective—which can include Islamophobia on campus. This position, therefore, does not preclude institutional discrimination; rather, the aim is to centre what the SC deem relevant vis-à-vis the drivers of Othering.

### **1.4 Thesis overview**

Having introduced the research study in this chapter, this is followed by Chapter 2, which traces the ways in which Muslims, and Muslim women more specifically, have been (and continue to be) othered through Orientalism, feminisms (which include Western Feminism as an ally to Orientalism, Islamic Feminism as a response to patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an, and

intersectionality), and Islamophobia. The ways in which Muslims in Britain are othered is considered, along with the gendered aspect of Islamophobia, and the experiences of Muslims at university. It is particularly important to note that researches (e.g. Brown, 2009; Song, 2012) have found that Muslim students often seek to engage with ISocs as a place for support given Islamophobic hostilities, and the subsequent anxieties over such hostilities. As such, the SC is an interesting case as it offers support through the ISoc for Muslim women (sisters) specifically. In exploring Muslims in Britain, the psychological impact of Islamophobia is also considered within this chapter, along with the ways in which Muslims (and Muslim women) have made space in the face of Islamophobia.

Following the overview of the backdrop to the study vis-à-vis how Muslims (and Muslim women) are constructed as Other in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 proceeds to outline the methodological approach. Drawing from van Dijk's (1984) socio-cognitive approach in his monograph entitled 'Prejudice in Discourse', this study follows in van Dijk's footsteps to employ an integrated qualitative approach to consider the SC's interactions through drawing from conversation analysis (purely in the operational sense given that the data for this study is dialogical), critical discourse analysis (namely van Dijk's socio-cognitive position), narrative analysis and ethnography. The main analytical tools used are van Dijk's socio-cognitive analysis as inspired by his aforementioned monograph, and Ochs and Capps' (2001) narrative analysis, as their focus lies on everyday narratives, which suits this study insofar as the interactions within this study constitute everyday interactions, and narratives subsequently proved to be prevalent in the data.

With the methodological approach established, this thesis proceeds to commence the analysis in Chapter 4, which specifically seeks to consider RQ 1—in other words, the ways in which the SC navigate socio-politics and its impact. An interesting feature of this chapter is that since this study commenced in the year that the Brexit vote went through, and Donald Trump was elected, the SC's discussions almost entirely orbit Trump, in some instances Brexit, and how bleak and uncertain the future consequently looks. Findings for this chapter thus include the prevalence of minority angst, and a cognisance of Otherness—both of which are found to be mutually supportive. Considering the socio-political climate (i.e. post- the vote for Brexit and Trump's election), this chapter is entirely made up of sense-making narratives attempting to elucidate political events, and how they might impact the future. As such, the sisters as part of the SC project a lot of uncertainty, and express concern and fear regarding the future.

This chapter is then followed by Chapter 5, which subsequently seeks to consider RQ2, namely how the SC resists ideologies positioning them as Other in racial and/or gendered hierarchies. As per the findings of this chapter, it is important to note that Otherness did not always yield minority angst amongst the SC, as socio-politics and Othering were in some instances countered with humour. As such, the broader form of resistance seen in this chapter is micro-resistance (i.e. micro-level resistance, within the confines of the SC that is not directly active beyond the SC space), which manifested through humour, and asserting refusal. Humour in particular was deployed to subvert and/or invalidate discourses of Otherness (for example, the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists), while asserting refusal saw the rejection of expressions of White feminism. This chapter also found that the SC engaged in micro-resistance within the ISoc building where the SC meetings were held, as they (we) refused to vacate the meeting space on the request of ISoc brothers. In effect, this worked to disrupt the somatic norm (Puwar, 2004)—i.e. maleness—within the building.

As Chapter 5 concludes the analysis for this study, Chapter 6 offers further discussion on the observations from the analysis to break down the concept of minority angst further, along with micro-resistance, for which refusal and ‘safe’ spaces are foundational. I write ‘safe’ in this manner as the politics of safety is also considered within this chapter, which subsequently highlighted a limitation of this study; in considering safety in safe spaces, the following question arises—safe for *who*? Considering this SC in particular, it is largely reflective of majority sub-groupings within the broad category of ‘Muslim’ on the basis of religious sect, race, and sexuality. That is, all the women (including myself) were of the Sunni Islam sect, Women of Colour (WoC) but there was no representation of Black Muslim women, and heterosexual. To thus consider minorities within Muslim communities, and their marginalisation *by* fellow Muslims, a consideration to take forward for future research on spaces such as the SC is that while it may serve as safe for certain womxn, how safe is it for those who are marginalised, and who does it exclude?

Within this chapter, methodological reflections are also offered to consider how an integrated qualitative approach benefited this study, along with the limitations of van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach vis-à-vis the need for centring minority voices further to add to his conceptualisation of the approach in order to reflect discourse production (and socio-cognitive processing) amongst minorities. Considering these points, this chapter then argues for key contributions of this thesis to various areas of research. As this discussion chapter then comes

to a close, this thesis ends with a conclusion chapter, Chapter 7, which summarises the journey this thesis has embarked on, along with suggestions for further research.



## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the multifaceted background literature underpinning this study vis-à-vis Muslims in Britain and their construction as the societal ‘Other’, with a consideration for the gendered aspect of Othering affecting Muslim women. The literature is referred to as ‘multifaceted’ here as the very nature of Othering that is manifest today—particularly with the focus on Muslim women within a higher educational setting—is influenced by a myriad of factors and structures, thereby requiring an overview of Muslims (namely Muslim women) as Others from an intersectional lens. For example, a very brief view of the marginality of Muslim women constitutes the intersection of the following factors: gender, religious orientation, race and/or ethnicity, class, and sexuality (and so on). As such, intersectionality is at the heart of this research in terms of how Muslim women are understood as ‘Other’. This chapter will thus offer an overview of the following:

- Section 2.2: ‘Constructing the Other’ – this section will consider factors that contribute to the construction of Muslims, and Muslim women more specifically, as Other, including Orientalism and Feminism(s). This section will, therefore, be broken down into the following subsections:
  - Section 2.2.1: ‘Considering Orientalism’.
  - Section 2.2.2: ‘Feminist tensions’.
  - Section 2.2.3: ‘The Other within’ – this segment considers how Muslim women are othered within Muslim communities, and how they respond to this Othering.
  - Section 2.2.4: ‘Western Feminism’.
  - Section 2.2.5: ‘Considering intersectionality’.
- Section 2.3: ‘Considering Islamophobia’ – this section provides an overview of Islamophobia as a concept, and is then broken down into the following subsections:
  - Section 2.3.1: ‘Muslims in Britain: the Islamophobic experience’ – this segment considers how Islamophobia has manifested in Britain from a state-level to the interpersonal.
  - Section 2.3.2: ‘Gendered Islamophobia’.
  - Section 2.3.3: ‘The psychological impact of Islamophobia’.
  - Section 2.3.4: ‘Muslim women and University’

- Section 2.3.5: ‘Making space in the face of Islamophobia’.
- Section 2.4: Summary

## **2.2 Constructing the ‘Other’: Orientalism and Feminisms**

As per Dervin (2012), Othering as a process is considered a form of social representation that is tied to stereotyping. Scollon and Scollon (2011), however acknowledge the suggestion that the concept of constructing an ‘Other’ is viewed as part of the socialization process where they make no separation in identifying an “Other” from the very process of identifying the “self”; in other words, “the identification of the “self” is only done through the identification of some “other”” (ibid: p271). They hence consider the process of Othering through the mode of communication where they assert that because of the process of socialization, “all communications have the simultaneous effect of producing “others” who are identified as not being members of the relevant community of practice” (ibid). Dervin (2012), however, places greater emphasis on stereotyping as opposed to positioning the construction of an ‘Other’ as a ‘by-product’, so to speak, of identifying the self and communications. Instead, he likens the process of stereotyping to that of Othering: “just like stereotyping, Othering allows the individuals to construct sameness and difference and to affirm their own identity” (ibid: 187). The origins of the process of ‘othering’, however, trace back to postcolonial theory, namely Gayatri Spivak as she has long engaged in scholarly work to highlight the ways in which imperial and colonial discourses create their respective Others (Ashcroft et al, 2013), thereby anchoring the politics of power within the construction of the ‘Other’. In relation to the positioning of Muslims today (in a number of Western states, and beyond), many post-colonial, political and sociological scholars have theorised and reflected on the ways in which Islamophobia has long served as a mechanism for othering; from heightened levels of securitization post-9/11, and historical trends of Orientalism that have worked to construct Muslims as uncivilized, inferior, and exotic (Said, 2003; Kundnani, 2014; Meer, 2014; Massoumi et al, 2017)—Islamophobia as a phenomenon is entrenched within a discursive and political dehumanisation of Muslims, which Meer (2014) posits is a continuity of Said’s Orientalism. With this in mind, this section will begin with considering Orientalism vis-à-vis how Muslims are constructed as the ‘Other’.

### 2.2.1 *Considering Orientalism*

I come from a land,  
From a faraway place,  
Where the caravan camels roam.  
Where they cut off your ear,  
If they don't like your face,  
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.

—Arabian nights, Aladdin

These are the original lyrics to the opening song ‘Arabian nights’ from Disney’s (1992) animated feature, *Aladdin* (Shaheen, 1993). “Why begin a children’s film with lyrics such as “barbaric” and “cut off your ear”?” asks Shaheen (2009: p73)—a question that merely touches the surface of the Orientalism permeating through *Aladdin*. Shortly after the screenplay’s release, Shaheen’s (1993) article entitled “*Aladdin* Animated Racism” responded to Disney’s Orientalist imagination vis-à-vis the savagery of Arabs and ‘Arablands’, including visual distinctions between a good/bad binary of Arabs where the ‘bad’ were depicted with larger noses and Arab accents, while the ‘good’ were given distinctly smaller—more European looking—noses with American accents (i.e. *Aladdin* and *Jasmin*’s characters; *ibid*). Later, under public pressure, the lyrics from the opening number had been altered, ostensibly to remove tropes of barbarianism and savagery, although seemingly despite the efforts to do so, Disney did not see fit to change the final line of the verse:

Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place  
Where the caravan camels roam  
Where it's flat and immense  
And the heat is intense  
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.

The criticisms surrounding *Aladdin* made a resurgence between 2017 and 2019 in light of three events—firstly, the death of Jack Shaheen in 2017, one of the most prominent voices criticizing Disney and Hollywood more broadly for Orientalist depictions of Arabs and Muslims during his time; secondly, in 2017, the announcement of the upcoming motion picture’s casting, which left many dissatisfied—particularly with its ‘multicultural’ and ‘diverse’ cast (Beydoun, 2017); and finally, in 2019, the release of the motion picture remake.

Interestingly, the lyrics of *Arabian Nights* were altered yet again for the newest version of *Aladdin* hitting cinema screens:

Oh, imagine a land, it's a faraway place  
Where the caravan camels roam  
Where you wander among every culture and tongue  
It's chaotic, but hey, it's home.

Although it has not explicitly been addressed by Disney—or the musical team and actors involved in the production of its soundtrack—the irony in ‘updating’ the lyrics in switching references of cutting off one’s ear to now conjure up an image of this ‘faraway place’ as a land where one wanders ‘among every culture and tongue’ that is ostensibly ‘chaotic’ does little to conceal the perpetuation of the exoticness and mysteriousness of this ‘faraway place’; in fact, it further highlights yet another Orientalist trope: the conflation of “Arab and Indian, Middle Eastern and anybody and everyone Brown” as a homogenous cultural body (Beydoun, 2017: paragraph 8), effectively constructing non-Whiteness as a monolith. This was further reflected in the casting process with Mena Massoud, an Egyptian actor cast to play Aladdin, while Jasmine was portrayed by a mixed-raced (half-Indian and half-White) actor named Naomi Scott, and the Genie was depicted by Will Smith—an African American actor. And yet within this ‘representation’ of “every culture and tongue”, the glaringly discernable Anglicization of Jasmine and Aladdin—both of whom, yet again, had American accents—compared to the Orientalisation of the antagonist Jafar and the everyday street vendor (all of whom had Arab accents) essentially regurgitated the Orientalist tropes from the original animation, albeit packaged under the guise of ‘diversity’. Thus, the cumulative impact of the ‘diversity’ in actors and performers, as well as the overarching Orientalist tropes that have seemingly been carried forward in the motion picture, casting a Middle Eastern man as Aladdin was in effect deemed redundant (Beydoun, 2017). As Kini (2017) posits, such contradictory and Orientalist homogenization of ‘minorityness’ as a story that could “appeal and represent *all* shades of skin” (Kini’s emphasis) demonstrates how representation becomes “yet another careless rendition of Other” (ibid: paragraph 4).

I consider *Aladdin* here to introduce Orientalism in reference to the construction of Muslims for a few reasons. Firstly, as one of the only Disney movies I felt a real connection with as a child, coming to terms with its problematic nature growing up was an unpleasant introduction into Orientalism, and the homogenized representation of bodies (like mine) sitting

outside the margins of Whiteness; secondly, not only does Aladdin serve as a good example vis-à-vis a plethora of Orientalist tropes the franchise indulges in (courtesy of inaccurate derivations of supposed Islamic practices and perceptions of the Middle East), its popularity and success testifies to the continuation of the Occident's historical imagination of the Orient—which includes Orientalised bodies—as barbaric, mysterious, exotic, a monolith, and Other. That is, the stringency of the deep-seated Orientalism that remains in both renditions of the story—despite critiques on the animation spanning three decades—showcases how the historical extension of the Orientalist's positionalities on the Orient persists to this day through consistent and unfluctuating Orientalist regurgitation. This is aptly captured by Jack Shaheen (2009: p27) in his opening line of 'Reel Bad Arabs':

*“Al tikrar biallem il hmar. By repetition even the donkey learns.*

*This Arab proverb encapsulates how effective repetition can be when it comes to education: how we learn by repeating an exercise over and over again until we can respond almost reflexively. (...) For more than a century Hollywood, too, has used repetition as a teaching tool, tutoring movie audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of the Arab people. I ask the reader to study in these pages the persistence of this defamation, from earlier times to the present day, and to consider how these slanderous stereotypes have affected honest discourse and public policy.”*

Interrogating the history of problematic Hollywood depictions of Arabs is beyond the scope of this study, however what Shaheen offers is a valuable insight into how the repetitive nature of certain discourses leads to a cyclical reproduction and an eventual internalization of such discourse that pervade the micro-level, as well as a state policy level. Orientalist depictions in art is thus, in many ways, representative of the continual existence of Orientalist imagination within the fabric of Western thought, institutions, and states; it permeates through all modes of existence where the Orient, and Orientalised bodies, are continually positioned and structurally reinforced as Other.

To delve into this deeper, it would be pertinent to describe what is meant by the term 'Orientalism'. In his canonical work (originally published in 1978), Said (2003) argued that Orientalism serves as a tool for representing and constructing images of the Orient as barbaric, uncivilized, mysterious, exotic, inferior and effectively Other. This construction of Otherness was, according to Said, inextricably tied to the Orientalist's efforts to produce an image of the

Occident (constituting Europe and North America)—civilized, educated, developed—as oppositional to that of the Orient as a means to justify colonial and imperial ambition(s). What Orientalism, as per Said (ibid: p2-3), essentially represents is:

*“...a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on.”*

This “style of thought” was effectively a projection of the West’s reductionist and essentialist imagination of the East constituting “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)” (ibid: p43). Said thus ascribes to Foucault’s (1980) power-knowledge dynamic as a lens through which to consider how the Orient has been constructed as an object of knowledge through discursive and textual production (Lewis, 2013) in a myriad of spheres, which thereby served as grounds for the Occident to assert its power over the Orient, and for the expansion of empire.

Within the bracket of Orientalism are two strands that Said specifies Orientalist discourse falls into: ‘latent’ Orientalism, which refers to the unconscious site of imagination, where the fantasy of the Orient resides, while ‘manifest’ Orientalism encapsulates “the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, [and] sociology” (Said, 2003: p206). It could thus be argued that manifest Orientalism is the externalization and outwardly expression—through language and perhaps even multi-modal embodiment—of latent Orientalism, which Yegenoglu (1998) recognizes in proposing that Orientalism therefore simultaneously relates to a mode of knowledge production, as well as a realm of the unconscious whereby “the “Orient” is at once an object of *knowledge* and an object of *desire*” (ibid: p23, Yegenoglu’s emphasis). Despite her appreciation for Said’s bilateral conceptualization of Orientalism through the two aforementioned strands, Yegenoglu nonetheless critiques Said’s interrogation of latent Orientalism, which she contends is rather surface level, and subsequently questions why Said failed to delve deeper in his excavation of the psychoanalytic aspect of Orientalism. She does not consequently condemn or denounce

latent Orientalism as an irredeemably redundant strand of the theory, nor does she override the importance of considering the latent aspect of the concept by virtue of categorically expressing a preference for psychoanalysis as a more legitimate approach; rather, she traces the duality of Orientalism (latent and manifest) as offered by Said, back to the field of psychoanalysis, thereby calling for the merging of the two fields of work.

Perhaps one of the more crucial criticisms of Orientalism in relation to this research is its male-centredness. Reina Lewis (2013) points to a ‘gender-gap’ in Said’s work as she denotes the presence of gender-related discourse as a vague shadow slipping behind the largely masculinist focus. Although Said does engage with feminist discourse in his later works (*Culture and Imperialism* published in 1993), Lewis (2013) however continues to highlight the significance of shedding light on the missing pieces of women’s contributions to Orientalism as agents within colonial and imperial powers who, in her view, played a part in colonial expansion. Yegenoglu (1998) similarly points to this gap as she additionally criticizes the ostensible separation of sexual difference and discourse of Orientalism as two disconnected and mutually exclusive entities, independent of each other whereby “questions of sexual difference in the discourse of Orientalism are either ignored or, if recognized, understood as an issue which belongs to a different field, namely gender or feminist studies” (ibid: p1). She opposes such a positionality in asserting that sexual difference and cultural difference are, in fact, inextricably linked, while calling for a recognition of the complicities between certain iterations of ‘Western’ Feminism and Orientalism’s imperialist endeavours as two intertwining entities contributing towards the construction of Muslims—Muslim women more specifically—as the Other, and the subsequent oppressions they are subjected to.

The outlining of Orientalism here is to anchor the backdrop to this study whereby Muslims are understood as Othered beings, Othered bodies, within Britain today. Specific examples of the manifestation of Otherness will be discussed as this chapter progresses, however it is of vital importance—as Lewis and Yegenoglu point out—to ‘gender’ Orientalism before proceeding; that is, to understand the role of gender, of women, in the perpetuation of Orientalist discourse that Others Muslim women vis-à-vis feminism. To that end, this section will now turn to understanding some of the tensions between Feminism and Muslim women—which is not only to understand how Orientalism is engrained within certain dominant iterations of feminism, it also allows for the recognition of how Muslim women are Othered within Muslim communities.

### ***2.2.2 Feminist tensions***

In the autumn of 2017, I attended the annual 3-day long Muslim Women's Council's conference in Bradford, dedicated to discussions on Muslim women from theological and socio-political perspectives. The politics of gender was at the heart of the event; the rights of Muslim women, how they take up space and are perceived within Muslim communities, and without, were discussed in depth. It goes without saying that patriarchy and feminism were particularly topical, as debates on the oppressive forces residing in a myriad of spaces that ultimately seek to shrink Muslim women and their agency largely dominated the event. This conference as a whole was somewhat pivotal for my own journey, both as a Muslim woman, and as a feminist, as it was the first time I came across the term 'Islamic Feminism' upon meeting one of the pioneering researchers in the field: Riffat Hassan. Islamic Feminism essentially refers to feminist endeavours using an Islamic framework (i.e. countering patriarchal interpretations of religion with rebuttals constructed from within a religious framework). At this point of my feminist journey, I was aware of some fractures within the broader feminist movement vis-à-vis White-centeredness, for which reason I had sought to adopt the label of 'intersectional feminist' as coined by Kimberley Crenshaw (1989). However, it was Riffat Hassan's speech at the event that inspired my desire to consider the very notion of feminism with a heightened level of criticality in terms of its functionality within an Islamic framework. Ironically, despite being seen as one of the first few scholars initiating the Islamic feminist movement, Hassan resolutely declared her disavowal of the very term 'feminism' in her plenary talk; she located her contention within the parameters of linguistic and socio-political Westocentrism as she asserted that the word 'feminism' is, in fact, western, and is thus inherently bound to the erasure of a number of 'non-western' women's efforts into striving for equality, freedom, and challenging patriarchy. That is, a number of women—and their histories—who don't qualify as 'western' on the basis of geographies and social constructions.

One of the most prominent examples of what one may refer to as anti-patriarchal, spiritual or stoic resistance in Islamic history is Rabi'a al-A'dawiyya al-Qaysiyya, a Sufi saint who has made tremendous contributions to the development of Sufism (a strand of Islam commonly known as Islamic mysticism). Born in AD 717, she faced many struggles in her life through a poverty-stricken childhood, and enslavement after her parents passed away (Smith, 2001). However, upon gaining freedom, she chose to live a life of independence and celibacy in devotion to God. Her celibacy, however, was not to gain or maintain spiritual 'purity' through the prohibition of sexual activity as a means to enter heaven after death; rather, she refused to



commit to men romantically in any capacity as she refused to seek emotional or material comfort, stability, or financial security from the opposite sex, whom she considered an obstruction to her journey of connecting with the Divine—the true source of happiness and abundance, in her view (ibid). While she may not have led a movement to structurally dismantle the patriarchy of her time, she rejected the patriarchal norm of male guardianship and gender roles by claiming her independence as she sought her own financial, emotional and spiritual freedom. Unfortunately, Rabi'a is a woman who is not very well known in feminist circles despite her revolutionary influence on Sufism and present day Muslim women's feminist awakenings and journeys. Thus returning to Hassan, her contention with employing the term 'feminism' lay primarily with the mechanisms of oppression that global feminism—which is overwhelmingly westocentric—purportedly subjects women in the East and global South to, the secularist and White centeredness of the value-sets underpinning this word 'feminism', and the subsequent erasure of the history of women-led resistances (including collective and individual) that are ingrained within 'Other' societies, cultures and religions. This invisibilisation, Hassan suggested, is yet another tool supporting the positioning of Muslim women—and many other women of marginality—to be seen as helpless beings and bodies in need of western liberation.

Susan Carland (2017) also accounts for this tension in using the word 'feminism' within 'pockets' of Muslim communities. Accordingly, she claims these tensions occur between the pillars of: resistance toward Orientalist visions of Muslim women as victims to patriarchy, as peddled by Western feminist discourse serving imperialist ambitions; and resistance toward, what Carland explains is, an understanding of feminism as a devaluation of gender roles as decreed by God. Indeed, as Carland finds in her research—which follows the position of many female Muslim theological scholars—herein lies the real struggle Muslim women face: resisting the Orientalist imagination of Western feminist discourse and imperialism on one hand, while resisting patriarchal interpretations of religious texts on the other. What is, however, often left unaddressed in debates surrounding Islam, feminism, and their (in)compatibilities are these starting questions that Mir-Hosseini (2011) alerts her readers to: "Whose Islam? Whose Feminism? These questions continue to remain unaddressed in most discussions on Islamic feminism, whether in academic or activist forums." As Mir-Hosseini rightly points out, refusing or embracing feminism may not wholly be productive for Muslim women, and men, if these questions remain unanswered; different iterations of feminism, for example, operate in vastly different ways focusing on different issues. Can, and should,

feminism then be rejected in its entirety? Amina Wadud (2006)—yet another leading voice on gender justice scholarship in Islam—adds some nuance to the issue as she discusses her own position on resisting the term ‘feminism’, while addressing an often circulated opinion (amongst supporters of patriarchal iterations of Islam, and Western feminisms alike) that sexual equality and Islam are inherently incongruent (a notion Wadud vehemently opposes). Interestingly, despite recognizing that her work falls within the bracket feminism, she too refuses to identify as ‘feminist’, although she does not denounce the term either (ibid: p79):

*“It is no longer possible to construct Third World and all other specified articulations and philosophical developments of feminism without due reference to the Western origins of feminism. That is why I still describe my position as pro-faith, pro-feminist. Despite how others may categorize me, my work is certainly feminist, but I still refuse to self-designate as feminist, even with “Muslim” put in front of it, because my emphasis on faith and the sacred prioritize my motivations in feminist methodologies. Besides, as an African-American, the original feminist paradigms were not intended to include me, as all the works on Womanism have soundly elucidated.”*

Wadud’s examination points to the need to consider the barriers to gender justice and equality beyond the confines of ‘gender’; she recognizes her own journey through the prism of gender, as well as faith, race, and political geographies. Notably, she places her faith above all else. On that account, there needs to be a consideration for the positioning of women, in line with the focus of this study, from a perspective that is multi-dimensional. That is not to say that there is a requirement to impose a feminist positionality on the women in this study (myself included); it is rather to offer a space for inclusivity within—or, indeed, without—the paradigm of ‘feminism’ to understand the mechanisms of othering that Muslim women are subjected to, which includes othering within Muslim communities, and othering in wider society. This is where Crenshaw’s notion of intersectionality is helpful as a mechanism to understand the oppressive modalities that serve to Other Muslim women, and how these modalities are subsequently being responded to. As such, before reviewing intersectional feminism, this section will now consider two sources of tension that are constitutive of the double bind Carland (2017) found her participants faced: patriarchy and western feminism.

### ***2.2.3 The Other within: Muslim women responding through scholarship***

Before proceeding with this section, I am very aware of the narratives surrounding Muslim women and patriarchy that largely dominate academic and activist discourse; the conversations and studies interrogating patriarchy, particularly in relation to Muslim women in Britain, overwhelmingly discuss the hijab, niqab or burqa, with attempts to either frame such practices as submissive to religious patriarchy, as resistance to Western sexualisation and objectification of women, or with a view to merely ‘understand’—ostensibly from an objective academic lens—identity and the ‘why’ behind Muslim women’s choices to cover in the ways that they do (e.g. Dwyer, 1999; Franks, 2000; Dwyer, 2008; Meer et al, 2010; Tarlo, 2010; Allen, 2015). While much of this research into veiling—conducted by Muslims and non-Muslims alike—is well intentioned, and some, indeed, helpfully shedding a light on the difficulties and dilemmas Muslim women face vis-à-vis embodying the hijab, niqab or burqa, I would argue, nonetheless, that at this moment in time the investigation(s) into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind Muslim women’s choices to cover or not, and the effects of their decisions, is an exhausted narrative when considering patriarchy internal to Muslim communities. It is a narrative that has been similarly exhausted by countless television interviews, where Muslim women have been plunked on morning news segments to speak and account for, justify and defend their—and other women’s—decision(s) to wear the hijab. They are effectively called upon to serve as a mouthpiece representing the views of *all* women who choose to wear a veil in whatever capacity they desire.

Examples of such debates or questioning include This Morning’s segments entitled “Should Veils Be Banned In Public Buildings” (2016), “Should Britain Ban the Burka” (2016), and Good Morning Britain’s segment “Piers Morgan Debates Headscarf Ban With Muslim Women” (2017). These are discussions which illustrate a pattern of serial attempts to investigate and ‘understand’ Muslim women and the ‘why’ behind their choices (a typical Orientalist practice), to hold them to account, and seemingly to ‘humanize’ (or, indeed, dehumanize) Muslim women in British society. This ultimately saturates the conversation and reduces Muslim women’s existence, how they move through spaces, and the issues they face into a one-dimensional box. For this reason, the issues surrounding the wearing of hijab, niqab or burqa as either symptoms of patriarchy, or radical feminist resistance, will not be interrogated within this segment of the literature review (see section 2.3.2 that touches on gendered Islamophobia). That is not to deny the occurrence of patriarchal policing of women’s bodies in Muslim communities and societies (Mernissi, 1987), or to ignore the plight of those women

who are forcefully made to wear a veil. However, and this decision comes with a recognition of the risk of this study being positioned as a research that has weakened its validity by not doing so—this section will not consider patriarchy through the prism of veiling practices, or indeed other stereotypical views of Muslim women that victimizes their existence (examples include, though are not limited to: forced/arranged marriage, honour killings, household/domestic gender roles, masculinist polygyny, and female genital mutilation). The fact that within the realm of academia and religion, there exists an entire field of research and religious scholarship dedicated to confronting and contesting the interpretation of Islamic texts through a patriarchal lens, should testify to an internal admission and addressing of the problematic existence of patriarchy; the focus of this section is thus to acknowledge that patriarchy does, indeed, exist, however within that acknowledgement to consider how Muslim women have responded beyond the constriction of considering veiling practices.

Simply put, feminism is largely understood as an ideology and mode of resistance, struggle, fight, and project for sex and gender equality in the face of a patriarchal world (Hannam, 2007). For Muslim women, this struggle gains contextual nuance insofar as patriarchal interpretations of religious texts are utilized as grounds for upholding hegemonic masculinity, whereby women are conceived of as hierarchically positioned below men in a linear relationality with God: Allah—men—women. This is often materially brought to life via male guardianship and the privatization of Muslim women as bodies, and/or bodies moving through public spaces (Hassan, 1999), which effectively positions Muslim women as the ‘Other’ within (Einstein, 1984 cited in Barlas, 2002). Barlas’ (ibid: p12) following definition of patriarchy will thus be considered to understand the starting point of the process of resistance that Muslim feminist<sup>1</sup> and/or anti-patriarchal Islamic scholarship is currently engaged in:

*“...a historically specific mode of rule by fathers that, in its religious and traditional forms, assumes a real as well as symbolic continuum between the “Father/fathers”; that is, between a patriarchalized view of God as Father/male, and a theory of father-right, extending to the husband’s claim to rule over his wife and children.”*

This paternalism and masculinist centrism is notably prevalent in the translation and transmission of religious texts (mainly the Qur’an, and hadith—sayings of the Prophet

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<sup>1</sup> It is not intended to use the term ‘Muslim feminist’ as a forceful categorisation of anti-patriarchal Islamic female scholarship as a representation or constituent of “Islamic feminism”/“Muslim feminism”, particularly given that some scholars within the field categorically reject such labelling. It is used here to acknowledge scholars who are not opposed to the association with ‘feminism’ (e.g. Carland, 2017).

Muhammed (peace be upon him)), as well as practices within much of Islamic scholarship, which have been the primary stimulus for the production of reinterpretations of the Qur'an, and hadith transmissions. The reinforcement of a patriarchal paradigm of existence has been widely refuted, with Wadud (1992) and Barlas (2002) engaging in linguistic analyses to contest patriarchal jurisprudence as misunderstandings and misappropriations of religious texts serving sexism. Hidayatullah (2014) places these efforts of analyses in 3 separate categories: 'historical contextualization', where the Qur'an is considered in relation with the time in history in which it arrived; 'intra-textual' analysis, whereby isolating Qur'anic verses is deemed insufficient in understanding messages from the Qur'an since it "must be understood as a whole, unified text" (ibid: p87); and the 'tawhidic paradigm', which "takes its name from the core Islamic concept of tawhid, the doctrine of God's unity and incomparability." This paradigm is used by exegetes "to assert that sexism is a form of idolatry since it attributes a God-like role to men over women" (ibid: p110).

Although she does not necessarily offer re-interpretive linguistic analyses of Qur'anic text, Shaikh (2015) also takes a spiritual position to support gender-justice from within an Islamic framework. She draws from Sufi mysticism in exploring gender equality and justice on spiritual grounds that while our bodies may be gendered in this material reality through variations of biological and social constructions (i.e. gender as a social construct), she adopts the Sufi position in arguing that the soul within our bodies are not gendered. On that basis, she seeks to nullify patriarchal driven religious justifications for disparities in the basic rights and roles between the gender binaries (male-female). Using Islamic mysticism, she essentially deconstructs and thus disconnects the manifestation of gender in this world from the hereafter, where patriarchal gender roles are otherwise purported as a mode for preventing sin so as to enter heaven. She thereby asserts that gender, as a social construct (and a construct limited to this three-dimensional reality), bears no weight on the spiritual outcome to one's deeds in the hereafter. On that basis, she refutes patriarchal readings of the Qur'an upon which religious rulings are passed, subsequently influencing Islamic law. In terms of Hadith, Mernissi (1991) in particular has offered historical accounts for the corruption behind some cases of its transmission. She tackles topics such as the hijab, women and public spaces, offering contextual histories that may have informed related hadith that displace women as secondary to men. By no means does she negate hadith as a valuable historical source for consideration; rather she sheds light on political motivations that have acted as a force for patriarchal and misogynistic manipulation of hadith, which has ultimately informed the cyclical adoption of patriarchal

family and community systems, and the subsequent privatization (read: marginalisation) of Muslim women from public spheres of existence. Furthermore, Lamrabet (2016) put forward an alternative ‘emancipatory’ analysis of the accounts of women mentioned within the Qur’an, such as Maryam (mother of Esa (peace be upon them), recognized as Mary mother of Jesus in Christianity) to quash the narrative that Muslim women are, inherently within the religion, victims of patriarchy, oppressed, and submissive. She reformulates stories of women beyond the confines of patriarchy to elucidate how women in Islamic history have maintained their agency and autonomy.

In addition to written, scholarly efforts, Muslim women have also responded to patriarchal norms through engaging in roles typically reserved for men. For example, in 1994, Wadud (2006) was the first woman to lead a prayer and Khutbah (Muslim congregation) in South Africa; she has since led many prayers (which have been met with a combination of celebration and hostility), and has thus adopted the name ‘The Lady Imam’ over the years. Madinah Javed, a Scottish female reciter, has started an online movement under the hashtag ‘#FemaleReciters’ to encourage women to enter the space of Qur’anic recitation—a practice typically carried out by men. She has subsequently been asked to recite Qur’anic verses in the Scottish Parliament, as well as the British Museum in 2019. Perhaps one of the more revolutionary scholarly driven applications of resistance to patriarchy has been the formation of Musawah in 2009. Musawah, meaning ‘equality’ in Arabic, is a global organization striving for equality and justice in ‘the Muslim family’ (Mir-Hosseini, 2011). Through research and advocacy, they offer a framework for equality for Muslims to adhere to, in conjunction with the challenging of patriarchal norms that are still widely accepted amongst many Muslims (ibid).

The specifics of Islamic jurisprudence and religious rulings on beliefs and practices is beyond the scope of this study; the motive for this section is to recognize that patriarchy is a force for othering Muslim women via the unjust or wrongful leveraging of patriarchal interpretations of Islam, which Muslim women are resisting using the framework of the Qur’an. As such, gender justice and equality are very much considered a spiritual and religious issue for Muslim women, as opposed to a secularist feminist movement alone. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the very presence of a scholarly field dedicated to refuting and resisting such practice, as well as embodiments of resistance outside of academic scholarship, attests to the extent of othering that Muslim women face within. Nonetheless, while the struggle of Muslim women is often reduced to battling internal patriarchy, it is not the only factor of othering; Western

feminism, as discussed by Carland (2017), has been—and, arguably, continues to be—another source marginalizing Muslim women.

#### **2.2.4 Western Feminism**

*“What people in the West often get wrong is that they believe that they have taught us Feminism, whereas the fact is Indian women were dressing up as soldiers and fighting wars hundreds of years before there were any suffragettes.”*

(Sohaila Abdulali, 2019, Guardian News, Sydney, Australia)

Speaking backstage at the ‘All About Women’ festival in Sydney, Sohaila Abdulali offers these poignant words highlighting a fracture within Western Feminism, which speaks to the issue surrounding the historical lens through which ‘Feminism’ as a whole is predominantly defined. That is, feminism tends to be seen through the paradigm of three distinct waves of the movement (Hawthorne, 2007), largely centering white women in Europe and the United States (Hannam, 2007). The stages are as follows (Hawthorne, 2007): First-wave Feminism, running from the 1850s to the commencement of World War II; Second-wave Feminism, which is said to have occurred between the aftermath of World War II and the 1990s; and Third-wave Feminism emerging in the 1990s, ostensibly as a result of “an explosion of theoretical perspectives informed by poststructural, postcolonial, and queer theory, each of which problematized the dominant (European) liberal presentation of individualism as homogenous and universal” (ibid: p1). There are, however, ambiguities and disagreements about the very meaning of the term ‘Third wave Feminism’, and the factors that influenced it (Hannam, 2007), giving rise to certain issues. What is perhaps most striking is that with such a definition of ‘Third wave Feminism’, and with the centering of White European and American women within the relative Feminist ‘waves’ as the locus of Feminism’s conception, it anchors Feminism as a product of Western progression and development of thought, which in turn supports Orientalist views of non-Western women as backward and in need of Western intervention. It also limits the critics of and critiques on European liberalist infused feminism to the spatio-temporal and conceptual boundaries of the ‘Third-wave’, supposedly as a result of theoretical expansion. This is problematic on two counts: first, the notion of ‘theoretical expansion’ is tied to institutional development of theory in academia that essentially centers academic knowledge production, which thus constructs a hierarchy of intellect through attaching the capacity for critical thinking onto institutional theoretical work as opposed to

operational activism and embodied knowledges and experiences; secondly, it consequently overlooks the struggles and contributions of women of Colour (WoC) across the globe who had campaigned for their rights and engaged in feminist works long before the arrival of the ‘Third-wave’. This would include women in the global South and the East (essentially women from ‘Orientalised’ and colonized lands), as well as WoC in the West. As such, the White Euro-American centrality dominating remembrance of Feminism’s emergence and history, its continuation to this day, and its value set negates the historical presence and efforts of a long history of Muslim women, for example, who have engaged in ‘Feminist’ endeavours over centuries (Fazaeli, 2007), as well as Black women as part of the civil rights movement in the US. It is imperative to note the efforts of Black women in particular that preceded the Third-wave as they embodied and espoused feminist ethics that construct the backbone of Intersectional Feminism, which, in challenging race and class privileges, was formally conceptualised as a response to White/Western hegemony in Western Feminism long before the third-wave (Jibrin and Salem, 2015).

An example of a historical Black feminist figure is Ida B Wells, a Black suffragist during the time of Feminism’s first wave in the US. Unfortunately, she is not widely recognized outside of Black or Intersectional Feminist circles, despite the fact that she had refused to move cars on a train (given her race) a few decades prior to Rosa Parks’ resistance on a bus. In fact, Wells spent much of her activist life speaking out and campaigning against racism and lynching in particular (Giddings, 2009). Her activism was thus embedded in a vision of equality that was intersectional (May, 2015), which May asserts has been foundational to the conceptualization of today’s Intersectional Feminism as she posits that the intersectionality practiced by the likes of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks is an extension of the works of Black Feminists such as Ida B Wells. Indeed, Crenshaw—who coined the term ‘Intersectional Feminism’—acknowledges the intersectionality within Wells’ activism as she states (2010: p232-233): “Black suffragists such as Ida B. Wells wrapped their support of suffrage around the intersectional nature of racist patriarchy, framing the vote as a tool to empower their advocacy against lynching and other insults to black men and women”. What Wells’ approach essentially attests to (as do intersectional approaches more broadly) is the recognition of Western Feminism’s limited White/Western hegemonic scope (in that it largely disregards intersectional identities), as well as a countering of a systemic Whiteness that inhibited her rights as a Black woman (as with the rights of Black men) in a Western state (the USA). This in turn highlights one of the issues entrenched within Western Feminism—its negligence vis-



à-vis intersecting factors that shape the realities and struggles of women who do not fall into the brackets of White, upper and/or middle class, and Western. One may argue that this is an inevitable by-product of centring White, Western and upper/middle class women in feminist discourse and policy making, while simultaneously erasing a longstanding history of ‘feminist’ works that women from Orientalised and colonised lands, and WoC in the West have engaged in.

The centring of White, Western and upper/middle class women as the prototype for womanhood and women’s freedom has been critiqued by many (Leila Ahmed, 1992; Mohanty, 2003; Abu-Lughod, 2013; Salem, 2013;), particularly given mainstream Western Feminism’s fixation on liberalist ventures imposed on the non-Western, Orientalised woman in the name of freedom and empowerment. This discourse of liberation has a long-standing history as Leila Ahmed (1992) traces past Orientalist depictions of Muslim and Arab people in the Victorian period where “Victorian womanhood and mores with respect to women, along with other aspects of society at the colonial center, were regarded as the ideal and measure of civilisation” (p151). The veil had subsequently been weaponized to justify colonial projects as it had been constructed as a form of dress that epitomised oppression, thereby signalling the inferiority of Muslim men and women ostensibly requiring Western intervention as a means to implement civility (ibid). Moreover, the discourse of Muslim women needing ‘saving’ was reproduced by missionary men *and* women who believed that liberation via Christianity will be the Muslim woman’s saving grace (ibid). Interestingly, although there was resistance towards ‘Feminism’ and liberatory projects for women within Britain at the time, it was an accepted ideological praxis in determining progressiveness and modernity (or a supposed lack thereof) in Orientalised states, societies and communities (ibid). As such, Ahmed (ibid: p154-155) notes:

*“Whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the ideas of Western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of the comprehensive superiority of Europe. Evidently, then, whatever the disagreements of feminism with white male domination within Western societies, outside their borders feminism turned from being the critic of the system of white male dominance to being its docile servant. Anthropology, it has often been said, served as a handmaid to colonialism. Perhaps it must also be said that feminism, or the ideas of feminism, served as its other handmaid.”*

Here, Ahmed's assertion indicates support for Said's (2003) claim that the Orientalisation of the East served as a tool to legitimise the West's centralisation of power and control over the Orient. However she specifies feminism as the vehicle for both: the Orientalisation of Muslim women, *and* the justification for Britain's continual engagement with colonial projects. A similar stance has been taken by Farris (2017) as she considers the ways in which Western Feminism has been weaponised by European states to Orientalise Muslim men by virtue of painting Muslim women as weak and oppressed at the hands of the men in their lives. Ahmed (1992) effectively responds, seemingly unintentionally, to calls by Yegenoglu (1998) and Lewis (2013) to 'gender' Orientalism through her positioning of Western feminism—or the ideas of feminism—as another 'handmaid' to colonialism.

Although Western Feminism has since evolved its outer shell to function out of a secularist paradigm (Salem, 2013), a commitment to the discourse of Muslim women needing saving and liberation from Islam, Islamic culture(s), and Muslim men is an ideological view it has been unable to shed. Abu-Lughod (2013) notes the intensification of the 'liberate Muslim women' discourse within Western Feminism in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attacks as voices pointing to the oppression of Muslim women at the hands of Islam, culture and Muslim men amplified in tandem with a call for the need to save them. Laura Bush, the then First Lady of the US, seemingly developed a sudden concern for Afghan women, whom she used to bring forth the urge to (militarily) mobilise against Afghan, Islamic patriarchy as a legitimising force to engage in imperialist war (ibid). In the name of women's rights, the plight of the Afghan woman at the hands of the Taliban was seen as a constituent of countering terrorism (ibid), and indeed, Cheri Blair, wife of Tony Blair (the then British Prime Minister) proceeded to voice similar concerns for Afghan women (Ward, 2001). As such, Afghan women and their oppression were weaponised to validate the need for launching attacks on Afghanistan in the name of countering terrorism. Not only was this discourse of the submissive, oppressed, and helpless Afghan woman in need of Western liberation used for geopolitical purposes, it was taken up by mainstream western feminists who seemingly capitalised on the struggles of Afghan women to perpetuate the Orientalist dichotomy of the backwardness of the Orient vs the humanity of the Occident. This quickly became apparent in an 'all-star' 2001 production of Eve Ensler's 'The Vagina Monologues', where her monologue entitled 'Under the Burqa'—a monologue that resulted from Ensler's, a White woman's, travels to Afghanistan and observations of Afghani women—was recited by Oprah Winfrey; a sample of this monologue can be read below:

“imagine no one is putting rupees in your  
invisible hand  
because no one can see your face  
so you do not exist  
imagine you cannot find your children  
because they came for your husband  
the only man you ever loved  
even though it was an arranged marriage”

Setting aside the issue of how this monologue panders to the Orientalist imagination of the invisible, Afghan woman ‘under the burqa’ as a subject of inquiry in a backward and dangerous society, what followed Oprah’s recitation was particularly harrowing. A representative for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)<sup>2</sup> named Zoya, covered from head to toe in a burqa, joined Oprah on stage. As Oprah concluded the monologue, she turned to Zoya to publicly unveil her (Thrupkaew, 2002). This public unveiling of a woman wearing a burqa symbolised Western feminist saviourism, in the name of liberating the oppressed Muslim woman, through literally representing the Western woman’s imagination of ‘handing’ the Oriental woman her freedom. That is, the subject in need of liberation by Western Feminism was discursively and materially positioned as the oppressed mind and body literally being ‘saved’ by the Western woman’s hand.

This discourse on the veil—be it in the form of hijab, niqab, or the burqa—and its framing as a threat to democracy, modernity and freedom have overwhelmingly dominated discussions on or about Muslim women in recent times. Femen—a Ukraine based feminist movement—has been especially vocal and active in its targeting and portrayal of Muslim women as victims to following an ostensibly patriarchal faith, who helplessly comply with the demands of Muslim men. The rhetoric that Femen regularly espouses through written works and nude protests is that “female liberation can be directly linked to what women wear” (Salem, 2012: p1)—a narrative that, as Salem states, is not new, “and in fact has formed the basis of

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<sup>2</sup> RAWA is an organisation of Afghan women fighting for equality and human rights. Although the organisation works to protect Afghani women from oppression, it has been criticised for espousing Western Feminist ethics. Indeed, their partnership with Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues* was thus heavily critiqued and questioned if it was most productive platform to effectively serve the purposes of countering violent patriarchy, misogyny and sexism in Afghanistan (Thrupkaew, 2002).

much of western feminism” (ibid: p1). Western feminism thus, despite its intention to ‘save’, effectively functions to further oppress Muslim women through the endeavour to liberate. This is not to deny that the policing, often violent policing, and erasure of women’s bodies in public (and private) spaces as a product of patriarchal interpretations of the Qur’an is an issue many women face (Hassan, 1999; Mernissi, 1991).

What is concerning with regards to Western feminism is with the Orientalist vision and documentation of the non-Western woman, there is a centralisation of the White Western woman and her value-system as the standard for liberation and freedom, which comes with the assumption that Western intervention is the source of non-Western women’s/WoC’s freedom, and that in turn further erases and mutes the grassroots work being done by the non-Western woman/WoC under scrutiny. This is a direct consequence of Western feminism’s commitment to first-wave feminist assumptions that was predicated on exclusion of marginality (Salem, 2013). Essentially, by using a framework that is devoid of intersectional criticality, a limited (Orientalist) understanding of what the needs of Muslim women are, and a subsequent homogenisation of the experiences, suffering, and reality of Muslim women, the feminist aid Western Feminism seeks to offer in effect fails Muslim women (and this holds truth for non-western women, marginalised women and WoC more broadly). And yet, despite its failures, the likes of Oprah Winfrey, RAWA, and other WoC (such as Asra Nomani, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Mona Eltahawy) choose to support and work from a Western feminist paradigm; that is, the centralisation of White, Western womanhood, and the construct of Western civilisation is seen as the standard for progressiveness and modernity through which liberation can purportedly be afforded. In fact, some do so as Muslim women purportedly seeking to help their sisters in Islam (Eltahawy, 2009), while others such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali enter feminist discussions as ex-Muslims with the aim to ‘call out’ Islam and Muslim men for their suppressive patriarchy out of adherence to an inherently oppressive faith (Ali, 2015). There is something, then, to be said about how ‘Western feminism’ is defined, particularly when WoC, Muslim women and women with a Muslim heritage espouse the ethics of Western feminism.

In considering the ideological factors underpinning it, the risk of homogenising and essentialising Western Feminism does not go unacknowledged, particularly given that it is a large movement that carries within it a myriad of feminist iterations (Salem, 2013). The apprehension of post-modern scholarship to acknowledge ‘structural analyses of power’ and macro-level narratives for similar reasons vis-à-vis the risk of essentialising (Jibrin and Salem, 2015) is also worth noting as it can work to nullify critique of Western feminism as a hegemonic

praxis that works to Other women of various marginalities. However, as Salem (ibid: p3) asserts, there is “a certain body of knowledge” built on “certain underlying assumptions” that cumulatively constructs a movement that represents ‘Western feminism’. Mohanty (2003) discusses this through her exploration of the construction of the ‘Third World Woman’ as a monolith, which Salem (2013) incorporates in her own exploration to identify the defining parameters of Western Feminism. The following excerpt from Mohanty’s (2003) canonical work ‘Feminism Without Borders’ is quoted in Salem’s work, which is also helpful in unpacking the notion of Western Feminism in this thesis (Mohanty, ibid: p17-18):

*“Clearly, neither Western feminist discourse, nor Western feminist political practice is singular or homogenous in its goals, interests, or analyses. However, it is possible to trace a coherence of effects resulting from the implicit assumption of “the West” (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and in praxis. My reference to “Western feminism” is by no means intended to imply that it is a monolith. Rather, I am attempting to draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by writers that codify others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western. It is in this sense that I use the term “Western feminist””*

Here Mohanty points to Western feminism as a *process*, one where the centrality of Western-ness is the determinant for discursively constructing the self and Other. That is, another woman’s non-Western-ness is predicated on the implicit inheritance of one’s Western-ness. She then extends her explanation to deconstruct the visual of what a ‘Western’ feminist can look like outside of Whiteness, as she asserts that “similar arguments can be made about middle-class, urban African or Asian scholars” who weaponise class privilege as a modality for othering, which Mohanty positions as an identical strategy to ‘un-Westernising’ the ‘Third World Woman’ (ibid, p18). Although Mohanty describes this process in relation to women from Orientalised and colonised countries (i.e. the ‘Third World’), her thoughts also reflect the ways in which Western Feminism functions and affects Western WoC, or WoC in the West, as well as offering an explanation for why WoC and Muslim women often work from within a Western feminist paradigm. There is a process of implicit self-Westernisation with a motive to ‘un-Westernise’ an Other through centring and imposing Western constructs of modernity and progress as universal truths of civility and freedom. As such, Western Feminism is not something that is solely embodied by White Western women, nor do all White Western women embody the problematics of hegemonic Western feminism (many, in fact, are doing valuable

work to counter it). What is essential in the recognition of what Western Feminism looks like is an outlining of the ‘underlying assumptions’ foundational to the Western feminist body of knowledge that Salem (2013: p3) speaks of:

*“...the theorization of “women” as an unproblematic category of analysis that assumes women have homogenous or similar experiences and needs, which serves to construct a “universal” womanhood that erases power relations between women; the subsequent use of academic research to prove the universality of women’s experiences; and the construction of third world women as the opposite of Western women: in other words, constrained, victimized, poor, ignorant as opposed to Western women who are educated, modern, and free to make their own choices.”*

In effect, along with Salem’s explanation, this study considers the following as determinants of Western Feminism—an espousal of feminism that, even if it is embodied by WoC or women of marginality (in or outside of ‘the West’) is a by-product of: the extension of first/second wave feminism, which inherently sees the centering of White European and/or American upper/middle class women and their narratives; the vision of White Western womanhood as the image and standard for progressiveness, modernity and freedom; using the aforementioned vision as the basis for liberating non-Western, Orientalised women or WoC, where the iteration of feminism is built on the humanity of the White, upper/middle class western woman and the Orientalisation of the non-Western woman; and, essentially, a brand of feminism that is devoid of intersectional criticality and recognition of structural, systemic factors of discrimination that humanize White westernness, while dehumanizing the Oriental. However, given the complexities of ‘Westernness’, this thesis will henceforth interchangeably refer to hegemonic Western Feminism as White/liberal feminism in order to emphasize the main facets of hegemony that function to Other women of marginality, and, in relation to this thesis—namely Muslim women. In other words, White/liberal feminism will be used to underscore the dominant source of hegemony: the historical standard of political whiteness as the epitome of civilized womanhood and freedom that has been seen to form a justification to ‘liberate’ marginalized (Muslim) women using a framework devoid of intersectionality.

### ***2.2.5 Considering Intersectionality***

In considering feminism vis-à-vis Muslim women and unpacking the problematics of Western feminism, the need for intersectionality has been pointed to given the multiple axes of

oppression Muslim women experience. A single-axis analysis of Muslim women's experiences—an approach upheld by White/liberal feminism's universalization of womanhood—is not sufficient and, in fact, would be rather reductive in any attempt to understand or unpack our realities. However, it is important to note that the focus of this study is not to define or pinpoint the specific margins of oppression that Muslim women interact with as there are a plethora of differing intersections *within* the category of “Muslim woman” that creates contextually nuanced forms of realities and oppression (for example, LGBTQ+ Muslim womxn being subjected to homophobia or transphobia, and Black Muslim womxn being subjected to anti-Blackness—both *within* Muslim communities). In other words, despite the commonalities of macro-structural oppressions as postcolonial beings and bodies on the grounds of religion, gender, class, sexuality, race and ethnicity (and more), “Muslim woman” is not a monolith, or a homogenous grouping sharing exactly identical vertices of oppression, suffering, privileges, happiness, or general realities. Rather, this chapter seeks to situate intersectionality as the *modus operandi* for understanding the complexities of Muslim women's Otherness—particularly an Otherness that is structurally and systemically embedded—that informs our reality so as to offer a contextual backdrop for the interactions and discourses the Sisters' Circle in this study engage in. Intersectionality has also, therefore, formed the basis for an interdisciplinary qualitative methodological approach to offer a more holistic unpacking of the narratives and conversations that are subject to analysis in this research (cf. Chapter 3).

The term ‘intersectionality’ in itself was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, who sought to highlight the exclusions Black women were being subjected to within feminist theory and anti-racist policy discourse, as she posits both outlets “are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender” (Crenshaw, 1989: p140). As such, intersectionality was a response to mainstream feminism's position of a universalized view of women (Jibrin and Salem, 2015), thus rejecting a single-axis framework (Nash, 2008) and the mutual exclusivity of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). It created space for Black women, and women of marginality more broadly as it has developed overtime, who were (and arguably still are) otherwise kept on the margins. Crenshaw (*ibid*) uses the analogy of a four-way traffic intersection to demonstrate the complexities underpinning Black women's subordination, which Crenshaw argues, cannot be adequately explicated or understood in any analysis devoid of an intersectional lens:

*“Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one*

*direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.”*

(Crenshaw, 1989: p149)

Intersectionality, as per Crenshaw’s coinage in 1989, essentially sought out to re-contextualize and re-centre the “multidimensionality of Black women’s experience” (ibid: p139) vis-à-vis feminism that otherwise contorts and obscures their lived realities with reductionism, and it does so by ensuring there is no separation between factors of marginalization. It has since gained currency in gender studies with an increasing number of scholars engaging with the theory (Salem, 2013). In fact, as Salem (ibid) suggests, “as more scholars engage with it, more intersectionalities emerge” (p.11).

The dispersal and increasingly widespread use of intersectionality, however, has brought to surface certain complications, including the risk of essentializing categories of identity and marginalization that intersectionality seeks to destabilize due to its “definitional dilemmas” (Collins, 2015). That is, the continual discussions and debates surrounding the defining parameters of intersectionality has seen a reproduction of essentialized views of social groupings through a ‘whitening’ of institutional knowledge production, which Jibrin and Salem (2015) note has led to anti-Black racism, for example, as feminist approaches towards oppressed women’s struggles have generalized sexism and misogyny displayed by Black men as characteristic of their existence. Not only does this work to reify stereotypical views of Black men as sexist and patriarchal, it also reinforces Black women’s victimhood. This is also a consequence of the ‘whitening’ of intersectionality as much of intersectional scholarship has seen a re-marginalization of Black women (ibid). In relation to this research, the main intersections considered thus far are that of religion, gender, and race/ethnicity insofar as Islamophobia is often enacted by a process of racializing a subject’s (supposed) Muslimness (see section 2.3 looking at Islamophobia as a concept, and the process of racialisation). The risk thus lies in essentializing Muslim women’s oppression on account of an essentialist notion of any one or more of those categories, as well as essentializing oppressive actors within said categories—such as Muslim men vis-à-vis religion and gender. This phenomena has already been recognised as Farris (2017) has written extensively on how White/liberal feminism in Europe has weaponised Muslim women’s double bind and struggles via an imposition of an



unwavering portrayal of Muslim women's victimhood, where Muslim men are ostensibly the unquestionable and sole perpetrators, to discursively position the latter as barbaric, uncivilized and oppressive. This position has thus been leveraged to encourage and inform Islamophobic policy at state levels. To avert this risk, however, Crenshaw (1990) responded to criticisms of her theorization of intersectionality to point to the clustering of power around socially constructed categories, and to thus consider the subordination faced on the premise of power leveraged on certain categories as a *process*. She does not support essentialism vis-à-vis intersecting categories, though she does, nonetheless, address the ways in which experiential differences based on socially constructed categories and power structures organizing around such categories produce a process of subordination that is structural, systemic, and very *real*, by engaging with (or rather critically responding to) antiessentialism (ibid: pp1296-1297):

*“One version of antiessentialism (...) is that since all categories are socially constructed, there is no such thing as, say, Blacks or women, and thus it makes no sense to continue reproducing those categories by organizing around them. (...) But to say that a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world. On the contrary, a large and continuing project for subordinated people (...) is thinking about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others. This project attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them. It [intersectionality] is, then, a project that presumes that categories have meaning and consequences. And this project's most pressing problem, in many if not most cases, is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies.”*

The objective of intersectionality is, thus, not the recognition or definitive declaration of categories that intersect as fixed, unchangeable and constant typologies of identity; rather, it is the recognition that hegemonic powers assemble around certain social constructions of identity that form oppressive or privileged realities of a people through a process of subordination or privileging. Collins (2015) and Nash (2008) support this in encouraging the viewing of categories in and of themselves as processes within a sphere of interlocking power structures (Bilge, 2013) as “knowledge projects are not free-floating phenomena; they are grounded in specific sociological processes experienced by actual people” (Collins, 2015: p5).

It is within this view that this thesis is thus situated within an intersectional paradigm with regards to aiding a contextual understanding of the multidimensional realities and marginalizations that Muslim women experience on the basis of religion, gender, and ethnicity. While these categories should not be essentialised, there is a need to engage with the ways power, in Crenshaw's words, cluster around these categories to produce a process of subordination.

Therefore, to reiterate what has been mentioned earlier, intersectionality is thus situated as the *modus operandi* for the purposes of understanding the complexities of Muslim women's Otherness with the view to offer a contextual backdrop for the interactions, discourses and narratives the Sisters' Circle within this research engage in. In Salem's (2013) words, in line with the objectives of intersectional study, the aim of this research is thus "to listen to the voices of [Muslim] women (...) on their own terms, in order to piece together narratives and unpack experiences that can help in understanding social life" (ibid: p11). Not only does it then account for the complexity of experience(s), intersectionality helps bridge the gap between gender and culture that, as identified by Yegenoglu (1998), are seldom considered with a view of interconnectedness within the study of Orientalism.

### **2.3 Considering Islamophobia**

Although the positioning of Muslims as 'Other' in the Western world is not an entirely new phenomenon, the rise in the present-day use of the term 'Islamophobia' over the past two decades locates it as a relatively new addition to the British (and global English) vernacular (Saeed, 2016). In tandem with the increasing use of the term, 2017 saw the Runnymede Trust publish its second report on Islamophobia, marking the 20th anniversary of its seminal report. This report conceptualises Islamophobia as an "unfounded hostility towards Islam" (Runnymede Trust, 1997: p4), entailing practical consequences for Muslim individuals and communities constituting "unfair discrimination" and "exclusion (...) from mainstream political and social affairs" (ibid). This explanation was further developed within the 2017 report (p7) as the following two definitions were put forward:

*"Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism."*

This first definition, as per the report, is aptly classified as the ‘short definition’, which is then accompanied by the following that had been developed using the United Nation’s definition of racism (ibid p7):

*“Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life”*

Despite such efforts to define ‘Islamophobia’, debates on the accuracy and legitimacy of the term as a mode of reference for “anti-Muslim racism” remains. This contention did not go unacknowledged by the Runnymede Trust; the first report (1997) particularly sought to counter criticisms of the word ‘Islamophobia’ to refute the notion that it obstructs critical commentary on Islam—thereby ostensibly impeding freedom of speech—while conceding that “the term is not, admittedly, ideal” (Runnymede Trust, 1997: p4). Among the voices disputing its use, Fred Halliday’s article entitled “‘Islamophobia’ reconsidered” (1999) is, as Massoumi et al (2017) point out, the most highly cited article on Google Scholar nearly two decades after its initial publication and, as they claim, still holds currency in political discourse. The ‘reconsideration’ Halliday offers is twofold; not only does he refute the term, ‘Islamophobia’, for similar reasons regarding the hampering of free speech (to which he provides the alternative ‘anti-Muslimness’)—he also disputes historical influences on the manifestation of Islamophobia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as he states: “it is tempting, but misleading, to link contemporary hostility to Muslims to the long history of conflict between ‘Islam’ and the West” (ibid, p895). The irony of such a statement is that within these words is the very recognition that there *has* been a long-drawn historical tension between ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’ (as he puts it), with oversight of how such tensions have catalysed and influenced critical historical events (such as the Crusades, colonialism, American imperialism) and their linkages with the construction of today’s socio-political (and structural) anti-Muslim/Islamic sentiments and hostilities. In fact, in his contradictory attempt to dislodge the historical link (while still acknowledging the tensions between ‘Islam and the West’), Halliday inadvertently supports Said’s (1998) view that “Islam has uniformly appeared to Europe and the West in general as a threat”, which Meer (2014) reflects in denoting that Islamophobia is, in effect, an extension of Orientalism.

Halliday then proceeds to denounce those drawing links between history and present-day Islamophobia for doing so “without evidence” (p895), once again overlooking the extensive body of work carried out by post-colonial scholars whose works—dedicated to demonstrating the impact of colonial histories and its ripple effects on today’s socio-political climate—have been groundbreaking in understanding the structures of power and hegemony positioning post-colonial beings and bodies as ‘lesser than’ Whiteness and/or ‘Westernness’ (e.g. Sartre, 2001; Fanon 2004; Mohanty, 2003). Indeed, this also includes the inferior positioning of Islam and Muslims (e.g. Ahmed, 1992). Additionally, the dichotomy of ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ in itself is indicative of a problematic trope often cropping up in Orientalist criticisms of Islam and/or Muslims that displaces ‘Islam’ as a constituent of ‘Westernness’, as though Islam cannot be a part of the Western tradition (Qureshi, 2019) as it belongs to the Orient.

However, if one were to offer the benefit of the doubt, one could say the implication here is not to assert that the two entities are mutually exclusive. Instead the use of this dichotomy is to open up the dialogue of how Islam is *seen* and *treated* in the West—as is the case in Said’s excavation of Orientalism, and intersectionality’s critical view of interlocking power structures and apexes of realities and oppressions. That being said, it is essential to note that Halliday invokes this binary to reject historical and structurally racist linkages to the conceptualization of Islamophobia, as opposed to critically engaging with how Islam is seen and treated in the West (as Said does in his discussions on Orientalism). It is also worth noting that despite his critiques of the term, Halliday does acknowledge the existence of anti-Muslim racism. However, his overall position is a problematic one; as such, an additional alarming factor of Halliday’s article is his secularization of Muslimness vis-à-vis ‘Muslim grievances’ against the West (e.g. the Israel-Palestine issue, or the Afghan war) and the intersectional identities of Muslims. That is, he firstly claims that grievances Muslims hold towards the West “has little or nothing to do with religion” (ibid, p899), reducing religious-related issues to micro-politics such as “school curriculum, dress, diet” (p899); secondly, despite making earlier assertions of intersecting identities of Muslims, he isolates religion to a near invisibilised faith-centeredness whereby racism is entirely disconnected in its manifestation from one’s religious orientation, thus his assertion that ‘anti-Muslimness’ is a more accurate semantic variant in referring to anti-Muslim sentiment. Putting aside the contradiction of how ‘anti-Muslimness’ in and of itself speaks of a prejudice against a people *based on* their religious orientation (and ethnicity)—thereby proving the racist nature of anti-Muslim sentiment—Arun Kundnani’s (2014) position on Islamophobia highlights the issue in Halliday’s view that macro-political

‘Muslim grievances’ with the West are ostensibly non-religious, and that prejudice against Muslims is supposedly little to do with religion:

*“My emphasis is on Islamophobia as a form of structural racism directed at Muslims and the ways in which it is sustained through a symbiotic relationship with the official thinking and practices of the war on terror. Its significance does not lie primarily in the individual prejudices it generates but in its wider political consequences—its enabling of systematic violations of the rights of Muslims and its demonization of actions taken to remedy those violations. The war on terror—with its vast death tolls in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and elsewhere—could not be sustained without the racialized dehumanization of its Muslim victims.”*

(Kundnani, 2014: p10)

In effect, what is lacking in Halliday’s (1999) article (beyond its problematics) is the acknowledgement of the structural dimension of discrimination against Muslims—transcending the micro-politics—that pervade systemically and thus translate into state and institutional violence, securitization, and violent foreign policy targeting Muslims and Muslim majority nations. What Kundnani (2014) also asserts is the racialization process that locates prejudice against Muslims as a form of racism that is inherently tied to state power (Massoumi et al, 2017). He clarifies that the denial of accepting Islamophobia as a form of racism permeating through the systemic, structural, institutional and state levels is predicated on the objection to view Muslims as a race. Kundnani counters this position by arguing the social and political constructions underpinning racisms as opposed to biological form; as such, he suggests the possibility of cultural markers serving as racial signifiers (such as certain forms of dress, or languages) that can drive anti-Muslim racism. Indeed, Hopkins’ et al’s (2017) project demonstrating the experiences of Islamophobia amongst non-Muslim South Asian, Black, and Central and Eastern European people in Scotland of being misrecognized as Muslim testifies to the process of racialization (ibid)—as do the experiences of Muslim women facing gendered Islamophobia given their visibility through the wearing of hijab and/or niqab (see section 2.3). Kundnani (2014: p11), therefore, notes that “this racialization of Muslimness is analogous in important ways to anti-Semitism and inseparable from the longer history of racisms in the US and UK”.

Massoumi et al (2017) take a similar stance in theorizing Islamophobia as racism; in response to Halliday (1999)—and those denying Islamophobia as a form of racism—they posit

that although it seemingly targets a religion, Islamophobia overwhelmingly impacts ethnic minorities. However, despite their acknowledgement of this reality, they claim this to be a limited position to take as it implies that “any policy, practice or set of ideas can only be considered racist insofar as it relates to a specific ethnicity” (Massoumi et al, 2017: p5). Such a position comes with an implication that discounts religious identity as a constituent of race—or that the latter is more ‘real’ than the former—and, as Massoumi et al assert, it can lead to the view that religious identity “is a more legitimate basis for discrimination and oppression” (ibid). As such, they align with Kundnani (2014) in proposing Islamophobia as a form of racism through unpacking the term ‘race’ in itself:

*“If ‘race’ is a fiction created when certain ethnic heritage or cultural practices attach to social advantage or disadvantage, it is hard to see religious identity as ontologically distinct from ‘race’. For good reason then, racialisation is increasingly used to explain Islamophobia as a form of racism”*

(Massoumi et al, 2017: p5)

With this in mind, Massoumi et al refuse to consider Islamophobia as a set of ideas or beliefs circulating through society alone; instead, they propose their view on the phenomenon through a ‘materialist’ or ‘realist’ lens (ibid: p6) to understand it as a structural issue—once again echoing Kundnani’s (2014) view. This chapter will thus turn to consider how Islamophobia has manifested—and continues to manifest—in the West, with a particular eye on Britain. However, before proceeding with this, I note that the position I take as a researcher reflects the views of Kundnani (2014) and Massoumi et al (2017). As such, the motive behind critiquing Halliday’s article is not to breathe life into his assertions; rather, it has been viewed to understand the term ‘Islamophobia’ through the recognition and addressing of voices that a) refute the racist nature of the positioning of Muslims as ‘Other’ in Britain today, and b) deny the connections between Islamophobia and history. This has been carried out in the hope to consider the multifaceted and intersectional nature of how Muslims are Othered (which would hold true for any form of Othering of any marginalized group). That is, to understand Islamophobia is to understand how Muslims are discursively and structurally Othered today and have been historically, which permeates from the state-level through to the micro-level, and vice-versa.

### ***2.3.1 Muslims in Britain: the Islamophobic experience***

It has widely been acknowledged that with the historical tensions surrounding Muslims and/in/from the West, the September 9/11 attacks in the US, followed by the 7/7 bombings in London, have been pivotal in greatly intensifying Islamophobia in Britain, as well as Europe, North America, and the West more broadly (Afshar, 2008; Zempi, 2020; Hasan, 2015a; Saeed, 2016; Massoumi et al, 2017). The nature of Islamophobia has taken many forms; from abuse at an interpersonal level in the form of verbal and/or physical violence, Islamophobic depictions and discourses of and about Muslims in the media, to state-level policies trickling into institutions (and vice versa), which has given rise to systemic and structural forms of Islamophobic discrimination. This intensification has seen state-level securitization of Muslims through increased surveillance and policing in the form of counter terrorism policies (Saeed, 2016), and policies that consequently reinforce Otherness. The Prevent strategy is one such example; sitting within the four strands of UK's counter-terrorism strategy (Countering Violent Extremism, or CVE) called CONTEST (Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare), Prevent had originally been introduced in the UK in 2003 in response to the 9/11 attacks as a tool to counter radicalization and extremism (Qurashi, 2018), ostensibly as a means to 'prevent' individuals from engaging in terrorist activity "*in the future*" (Younis and Jadhav, 2019: p417; original emphasis).

As of 2015, it was governmentally stipulated as a mandatory policy to be implemented in all public sector institutions (Qurashi, 2018), including schools—as well as the National Health Service, or the NHS (Younis and Jadhav, 2019). NHS staff are thus required—as are teachers and other public sector employees—to undergo Prevent training to identify and subsequently report individuals who are ostensibly at 'risk of radicalization' (ibid). Despite the government's insistence that Prevent seeks to counter *all* forms of extremism, the tool nonetheless lends itself to institutional Islamophobia (see Qurashi, 2016; Qurashi, 2018; Younis and Jadhav, 2019; Cohen and Tufail, 2017; Qureshi, 2017) as the policy is predicated on the assumption "that future violence can be predicted based on specific types of profiles that are presented as common sense". However, these 'common sense' profilings are in actuality "based on bigoted understandings and ultimately racist assumptions" (Qureshi, 2019: 92). The inefficaciousness of the scheme is evident in the latest release of Prevent's statistics showing that "95% of referrals are unnecessary and Muslims remain *50 times more likely* to be referred" (CAGE, 2018; my emphasis). Of these referrals, 58% are "signposted to other services such as mental health", showcasing that those who are vulnerable and in need of wellbeing services are

instead being monitored, surveilled and securitized, which are “skewing statistics and stigmatizing people for life” (ibid). Massoumi et al (2017) thus conclude that they “regard the state, and more specifically the sprawling official ‘counter-terrorism’ apparatus, to be absolutely central to production of contemporary Islamophobia – the backbone of anti-Muslim racism” (cited in Qureshi, 2019: 93).

In tandem with the post-9/11 and 7/7 securitization of Muslims, the UK has subsequently seen many attempts by academics, journalists, politicians and public figures more broadly to interrogate the compatibility of Islam (and thus Muslims) with ‘British values’, and Muslim identity in Western nations (Joppke, 2009; Hopkins, 2009; Ahmad and Sardar, 2012; Mirza, 2013; Kabir, 2016). The former head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Trevor Phillips, for example, stated in 2016 that Muslims are “not like us” and differ behaviorally to the rest of Britain as he concluded that “it may be that they see the world differently from the rest of us” (Patel, 2016). Not only does this pander to the separation of Muslims and Islam from the West as mutually exclusive entities, perpetuating the ‘Islam vs the West’ binary (Johnson, 2017), it contradicts previous research showcasing that Muslims express a stronger sense of ‘Britishness’ than other Britons (Nandi and Platt, 2012). Discourses mirroring Phillips’ were, however, permeating through governmental policies as David Cameron—the then UK Prime Minister—had announced plans to launch a £20million language fund in 2016 to teach Muslim women English as a lack of proficiency in the language could ostensibly result in an increased susceptibility to extremism: “if you’re not able to speak English, not able to integrate, you may find therefore you have challenges understanding what your identity is and therefore you could be more susceptible to the extremist messaging coming from Daesh” (quoted in Mason and Sherwood, 2016). There is a clear process of Islamophobic racialisation along with Orientalism occurring here through linguistic discrimination, as proficiency in English is positioned as a model for integration and identity formation that is somehow seen as a repellent to Daesh messaging. In contrast, other languages spoken by Muslim migrants and diasporas are supposedly more absorbent and thus susceptible to terrorist propaganda.

Not only was the year in which these comments were made, 2016, the very year this study commenced, it was also a significant year regarding Islamophobia (and its rise) as two significant political events had transpired: first was the Brexit referendum in June where the UK voted to leave the EU with a 52% majority; the second was Donald Trump’s election as the President of the United States in November. Both political events were infused with



Islamophobic discourse within the respective campaigns (Perra, 2019; Buncombe, 2017; Klaas, 2019), and saw a rise in Islamophobia in the aftermath of each event. The Muslim Council of Britain, for example, had reportedly compiled a dossier of 100 anti-Muslim hate crimes in the weekend after Brexit, while the National Police Chiefs' Council saw a 57% rise in reports of online hate crimes to the police (Jeory, 2016; Versi, 2016). In the years that followed in the UK, specifically in 2018, there were two significant spikes in Islamophobic hate as documented by Tell MAMA (2018)—an organisation dedicated to reporting and measuring anti-Muslim incidents in the UK. The first occurred after the circulation of the first 'Punish a Muslim Day' letters that were sent to homes and workplaces. These letters were initially sent in March of that year with a proposed day of 'punishing' Muslims in April, after which a second round of letters were circulated in May that were titled 'Punish a Muslim Day 2'.

While anxieties amongst Muslims were understandably high during that period, Tell MAMA reported 37 offline incidents that referenced these letters directly. The second spike occurred in August 2018 when the then foreign secretary, Boris Johnson—who is now the Prime Minister—wrote an article in which he referred to Muslim women who wear the niqab and burqa as 'letterboxes' and 'bank robbers'. In the week that followed, anti-Muslim incidents reportedly increased by 375%, from 8 incidents in the week before the article's publishing, to 38 in the following. And over the three weeks that followed the article, Tell MAMA documented 57 anti-Muslim incidents, of which 32 were directed towards visibly identifiable Muslim women—that is 56% of the Islamophobic incidents that targeted visibly Muslim women—and 42% directly referenced Boris Johnson's language from his article (Dearden, 2019). Meanwhile, during his Republican campaign, Trump targeted Muslims in Britain as he tweeted to insist that the UK has "a Muslim problem", and called for a banning of Muslims from entering the USA following the San Bernardino shooting in 2015 (Walters, 2015; Trump, 2015). Trump's anti-Muslim sentiments were made all the more apparent following his election when he eventually came to breathe life into his words by signing an executive order banning citizens of 6 Muslim majority countries from entering the US, which was then dubbed the 'Muslim ban' (Buncombe, 2017). Feelings of anxiety, however, were not limited amongst Muslims in the US as per Ibrahim Hooper—a founder of the Council on American-Islamic Relations—who also stated that White supremacists had been emboldened under Trump to a point where many Muslim women no longer considered it safe enough to publicly wear the hijab (ibid; Kentish, 2016). Muslim anxiety in Britain was consequently heightened after his

election as his sentiments and actions yet again triggered “harmful debates about Muslims in Britain” (Tell MAMA, 2018: 17).

In addition to the varying ways in which Islamophobia manifests, what is particularly alarming is the state’s leveraging of ‘minority’ agents to function within the Islamophobia ‘industry’. Here, I refer to Muslim and/or PoC individuals and organisations, ostensibly committed to ‘equality’ endeavours, who not only work beside but as part of the structural, state-level Islamophobia. The Quilliam Foundation, for example, is a think-tank founded by former extremists who have denounced their pasts to commit to and promote a ‘moderate’ Islam (Elshayyal, 2013). As an organization supporting CVE and its agendas (Miller and Sabir, 2012), the think-tank actively engages in pushing narratives that further reinforce negative stereotypes about Muslims. For example, their 2017 report on group-based child sexual exploitation claiming that 84% of grooming gangs are Asian gained currency in mainstream politics as it led to the then Home Secretary Sajid Javid’s buy-in (Cockbain, 2019). The danger here not only lies in the fact that government surveillance and securitization of Asians, and Muslims, are further pursued via policy—the foundations to this report in itself lack credibility, and have been labelled ‘bad science’ by experts on child sexual exploitation. For example, Ella Cockbain (ibid), an expert in the field, heavily criticized the report for omitting information on peer reviewing, conflicts of interest vis-à-vis funding sources, and for lacking transparency in methodological and data mining details (ibid). The think-tank, therefore, functions as an active agent in the Islamophobia industry through supporting Islamophobic tropes and policies.

Tell MAMA, including its founder Fiyaz Mughal, is another such example. Thus far, I have mentioned Tell MAMA as a point of reference to account for evidence of Islamophobic incidents in recent times. For many Muslims (up until the point of writing this paragraph, this included myself), the problematics of Tell MAMA can appear to be quite opaque. As a result, Tell MAMA has been a point of call for many Muslims experiencing Islamophobia (the statistics the organisation reports on is evidence of this). In turn, people, like myself, circulate and reference its findings<sup>3</sup>. However, the Cage report entitled ‘Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) Exposed’ (2019) unpacks the functioning of the Islamophobia industry, evidencing some manifestations of the more opaque channels and individuals working within

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<sup>3</sup> The paragraph including Tell MAMA statistics was written prior, at a time when I was not aware of its links with the Islamophobia industry.

the industry. Concerning Tell MAMA (and its founder Fiyaz Mughal), it sits under its parent organisation ‘Faith Matters’—an interfaith organisation founded by Mughal in 2006 (ibid).

Even though both, Faith Matters and Tell MAMA have denied receiving funding from the Prevent scheme (i.e. CVE funding), it subsequently transpired that Faith Matters—which houses Tell MAMA—is funded by a government initiative entitled ‘Building a Stronger Britain Together’<sup>4</sup> (BSBT), which is a “programme under the Counter Extremism Strategy 2015” (ibid: p29). This programme funds several Muslim led organisations and projects (BSBT, 2018), including the 2019 Bradford Literature Festival (BLF), which saw some speakers withdraw from the event. The poet, activist and scholar Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, for example, also withdrew and issued a statement of concern regarding BLF’s decision to accept BSBT funding as she acknowledged that while BLF were not functioning to mirror the agendas of BSBT, “taking CVE money in any circumstance legitimizes the strategy of the state which approaches Muslims as criminal”, thereby reinforcing “the narrative that Muslims need to be monitored and put ‘on the right path’ because they’re otherwise on a trajectory to violence” (Manzoor-Khan, 2019). A similar outcry ensued when it transpired that a lifestyle website for young Muslim women called ‘SuperSisters’ were also in receipt of BSBT funding—a website that was founded by its parent company, J-Go Media, in response to Shamima Begum’s (a 15-year-old school girl) travel to Syria after online grooming (Iqbal, 2019). This fact alone has raised suspicions amongst Muslims regarding the nature of the website’s existence as a branch of CVE directing its surveillance on to young Muslim women. The creation of such a platform in response to Shamima Begum’s case brings to fore the gendered aspect of Islamophobia, which I will address next.

### ***2.3.2 Gendered Islamophobia***

Despite the rise in Islamophobia and Muslims’ anxieties post-Brexit and post-Trump, the gendered aspect of Islamophobia is not wholly isolated to the spatiotemporal bounds of Brexit and Trump’s election, as European far-right extremism had been on the rise in the years leading up to these events (Gündüz, 2010). Research into Islamophobic experiences of veiled Muslim

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<sup>4</sup> As per the Government website for Building a Stronger Britain Together, the programme refers to itself as “funding and support for groups involved in counter-extremism projects in their communities”. Not only does this consequently position the organisations and projects it funds as agents of CVE initiatives, the receipt of funding from this programme ensures the continuation of the securitization and surveillance of Muslims in Britain.

women in British public spaces—and Europe more broadly—evidence targeted verbal abuse (being called a ‘ninja’ or told to ‘go back where you came from’, for example), as well as targeted physical abuse such as pushing and spitting—all of which occur similarly in England and France given the visibility of Muslims (Bouteldja, 2014). Zempi’s (2020) study mirrors these findings as she notes the banality of Otherness her participants express as some stated how they ignore Islamophobic abuse and accept it as ‘part and parcel’ of everyday life as a Muslim in the UK. Others, however, chose to resist abuse through humour and rebuttals against verbal insults (ibid). Of these women who engaged in resistance, some recount having to use their bodies to physically defend themselves from violent attacks, such as attempts to remove their veil, spitting, and in some cases passing vehicles attempting to run them over (ibid).

As such, Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) note the heightened levels of vulnerability experienced by Muslim women who wear the hijab and niqab in London (also see Perry, 2014), and Zebiri’s (2008) study on Muslim converts found that women reportedly experienced higher levels of Islamophobia on account of their visibility as Muslims (i.e. through wearing the hijab and/or niqab) as compared to their male counterparts. Interestingly, Allen (2015) notes how despite the veil serving as a marker of visibility for Muslim women, it is the same veil that society weaponizes to render them invisible, such that they are ‘neither seen nor heard’. This reflects the binary terms through which Muslim women are seen and positioned as either a victim of religion and/or culture, or a threat to Britishness (Saeed, 2016). As such, Saeed (ibid: p64) states that:

*Media portrayal of Muslims, particularly young women as the vulnerable fanatic, further locates their identities within the moderate-extremist spectrum. Such terms influence the way Muslim women are positioned within society, with young women negotiating their identity often against such overarching categories. With media and state actors using words such as ‘moderate’, ‘extremist’ or ‘radical’, young Muslims in their everyday experiences are limited to such terms.*

Therefore, while the ways in which gendered Islamophobia manifests in response to visibility through targeted victimization, the securitization of girl-, woman-, and mother-hood is also on the rise. As mentioned earlier, the very fact that a platform that claims to empower young Muslim women, SuperSisters, was formed in response to Shamima Begum’s case—and receives CVE funding—showcases that Muslim women are also being securitized and subjected to targeted surveillance. It is important to acknowledge the dehumanisation and

objectification of Shamima Begum by the UK government through revoking her British citizenship after her involvement in ISIL, which led to her statelessness (Johnson and Fernandez, 2019). Johnson and Fernandez (2019) posit that the very act of revoking Shamima's citizenship demonstrates "that even when People of Colour are born and bred in Britain, they are still seen as aliens within the nation". With the villainization of Begum on one side, the subsequent centralization of Shamima Begum's case—and the 'Bethnal Green Girls'—in Prevent narratives pushed the position that as a victim, Begum required 'the right kind of support', resulting in teachers and other public sector workers being required to monitor for 'signs of extremism and radicalisation' amongst members of the public they respectively interact with (ibid). Effectively, the 'jihadi bride' narrative has been weaponized in representations of Muslim women as potential threats, which in turn has served as a means to rationalize Islamophobia (Saeed, 2016).

Furthermore, the securitization of Muslim women and motherhood can be seen in David Cameron's £20million language fund in 2016 (as mentioned earlier), as it was not solely a linguistic (arguably, a linguistic imperialist) endeavour—migrants, particularly Muslim women and spouses on migrant visas were to be given two years to learn and pass English language testing. Those who failed to do so would be forced to leave (ibid). As Saeed (2016) and Mason and Sherwood (2016) note, this was incorporated in a counter-terrorism strategy that aimed not only to supposedly 'prevent' the Muslim women undergoing linguistic testing from being susceptible to ISIS messaging (as though English cannot be a vehicle for, thus inherently serving as a repellant to ISIS messaging)—the strategy believed that it would allow Muslim women to ostensibly protect children from radicalization as they have greater access into the lives of their children. Essentially, this securitizes the relationship women have with domesticity (where relevant) and their children. Fernandez (2019) makes this very point in her article on Vogue's 'glam-washing' of counter-extremism as the magazine released a publication endorsing women who are a part of the counter-extremism industry. In response to the publication encouraging women to 'challenge extremism', premised on a similar notion to Cameron's English language policy vis-à-vis women having greater proximity and thus access to witnessing their children potentially being radicalized, Fernandez (ibid) states that "such a suggestion relies on the assumption that women are more inclined to "fight" extremism simply because they may be mothers. Not only is this incorrect, but it will inevitably result in the securitisation of motherhood as an expectation is placed on mothers to inspect and monitor their children and homes carefully". Considering the different ways Muslim women face

Islamophobia, the Muslim girl, woman, and mother all become politicized, be it in the public or private sphere. The simultaneous hyper-visibility and invisibilisation, victimization and villainization of Muslim women and girls positions them in a continual binary of either the Other requiring discipline, or the Other in need of saving. As such, the psychological impact of Islamophobia is worth considering.

### ***2.3.3 The Psychological Impact of Islamophobia***

The psychological impact of existing as an othered being has been theorised by Meyer (1995) as ‘minority stress’. Through his efforts to examine the impact of societal rejection on the mental health of gay men in the US, he described minority stress as “psychological stress derived from minority status (...) related to the juxtaposition of minority and dominant values and the resultant conflict with the social environment experienced by minority group members” (ibid: p38-39). Meyer thus found that minority stress was not only linked to direct experiences of discrimination—existing as a stigmatized being in a heteronormative (and homophobic) society led to internalized homophobia and psychological distress, with expectations of facing rejection and discrimination. Balsam et al (2011) took a more intersectional approach to study LGBT people of colour (PoC) to similarly find the prevalence of minority stress, although with differing levels and stressors throughout the participant group based on intersecting identities (for example, concerns surrounding immigration was more prevalent amongst those LGBT-PoC who were born outside of the US). In a separate thread of research within the field of psychology, the collective nature of concern for the future, with fears of adverse events befalling any group (minority or not) has been studied and theorised by Wohl and Branscombe (2009) as ‘collective angst’, however, studies within this area have tended to focus on majority groupings perceiving the presence of minorities as threats (e.g. Wohl et al, 2010; Jetten and Wohl, 2012).

With regards to Muslim women, and Muslims more broadly, studies on the impacts of Islamophobia showcase a combination of minority stress, as well as collective angst—although studies into the impact(s) of Islamophobia on the mental health of Muslims has predominantly taken place in a US context. For example, Hassounah and Kulwicksi (2007) carried out a small pilot study (consisting of 30 participants) on mental health, discrimination and trauma in Arab Muslim women in the US, specifically looking at first-generation immigrants. They found that with increasing levels of discrimination and targeted hate-crimes towards Muslims since 9/11,

67% of the participants reported more overall stress. This was coupled with 43% indicating that either their mental health, or the mental health of their family members, had been adversely affected. At a much grander scale (with 102 participants), Abu-Ras and Suarez's (2009) research on Muslim men and women's perception of discrimination and post-traumatic stress found that majority of their participants reported experiencing post-traumatic stress symptoms, including anxiety and fatigue.

In a more recent study on microaggressions and Islamophobia (in the US), Haque et al (2019) distributed open-ended daily stressors questionnaires to 314 Muslim adults (consisting of 84 males, 228 females and 1 unidentified gender) to find that feelings of overwhelm were commonly experienced, which was attributed to participants constantly having to be in a state of 'damage control' as a means to explain the Islamic faith and undo misinformation. Their participants also reported feelings of stress from both, carrying the burden of having to be the spokesperson and/or expert on Muslims and Muslim communities, as well as witnessing media bias against Islam and Muslims. The consequences of experiencing Islamophobic microaggressions and witnessing anti-Muslim and anti-Islam biases led some participants to report fearing the prospect of leaving their homes, particularly in instances where media circulated reports on attacks on Muslims and masjids (mosques). As this fear was tied to an awareness of 'looking Muslim' (ibid), Haque's study showcases a cognizance of Otherness their participants carried. The study overall reflects sentiments of minority stress vis-à-vis demonstrating psychological stress due to a minority status, which in turn reflects a collective angst on account of fearing the possible consequences of leaving their homes (as a direct response to media reports on Islamophobic attacks). Elkassem et al's (2018) study on the impact of Islamophobia on children in a Canadian community showcase similar findings as their participants (students ranging from grade six through to grade eight) expressed an awareness of Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric, which subsequently led to fear that was reinforced after the Quebec City Mosque shooting in 2017.

In the UK, Zempi and Chakrobarti (2015) investigated the impacts of Islamophobic hostility towards veiled Muslim women through 60 individual interviews and 20 focus groups; they found that nearly all the participants of their study expressed that their confidence levels had been "severely affected as a result of their recurring experiences of targeted hostility, with many using terms such as feeling 'worthless', 'unwanted' and that they 'don't belong'" (p46). Furthermore, experiences of Islamophobic hostility also led to increased levels of feeling insecure, vulnerable, and feelings of anxiety—particularly for those participants who were

repeat victims of targeted hatred. Mirroring Haque et al's (2018) findings, Zempi and Chakrobarti (2015) also found that long-term effects for individual victims of such hostilities included feeling afraid to leave the house, and feeling like a social outcast. These participants also reported experiencing panic attacks, severe anxiety and depression, all of which were catalyzed from the fear of facing the possibility of enduring future victimization. As a result, this led to an avoidance of public spaces (such as shops and parks) as well as public transport. Some participants thus attempted to employ coping mechanisms through 'playing down' their Muslimness in public spaces by removing their veils (albeit reluctantly) to create a sense of 'safety'.

However, the consequences of experiencing Islamophobic hostilities was not limited to the women being subjected to direct Islamophobia alone; the participants also reported their children experiencing feelings of confusion and upset from witnessing their mothers facing Islamophobic abuse. Zempi and Chakrobarti subsequently suggest that the Islamophobic hostilities do not affect the individual alone—instead, there is a collective victim that is affected. Furthermore, they note a strong cognizance of Otherness in this collective victim as Zempi and Chakrobarti assert that the “awareness of the potential for Islamophobic victimisation enhances the sense of fearfulness and insecurity of all Muslims due to their group membership” (ibid: p50).

In terms of the impacts on Muslims, and Muslim women more specifically, in a university environment, Manejwala and Abu-Ras (2019) interviewed 12 South Asian Muslim women at university in the USA on their experiences of microaggressions on campus. Their participants considered Islamophobia a banal reality of existing as a Muslim and expected 'hard times' ahead with regards to experiencing Islamophobic hostilities. They expressed an overall confusion over microaggressions, questioning as to why they were happening and how to respond to such incidents. As such, Manejwala and Abu-Ras note that “Muslim students may feel uncomfortable in the classroom, which is generally believed to be a safe environment” (ibid: p31). In a British context, Chaudry (2020) interviewed students identifying as 'British Muslim' at a Russell Group university in Northern England to find students felt they were being treated differently on account of their appearance, or visibility as Muslim (particularly for Muslim women wearing the hijab). One participant in particular, Nusrat, recounted instances of being the only hijab-wearing student in lecture halls where other students would cluster away from her, even if she occupied a seat in the middle of the lecture hall. As per Chaudry, she expressed an awareness of the fact that she did not represent the somatic norm (Puwar, 2004),



and thus did not fit in. As such, Chaudry notes that the students in her study carried an awareness of their Otherness, and the cumulative effects of Islamophobia and this cognizance of Otherness adversely affected their mental health—with some noting stress and paranoia of being hyper-visible and watched. Taking these studies into consideration, the next section will now turn to consider Muslims, particularly Muslim women in higher education.

### ***2.3.4 Muslim women and university***

With the commentary and investigations into how Islamophobia manifests at state and societal levels in Britain, research into the impact of Islamophobia and/or Islamophobic discourses (and discourses of Otherness more broadly) on students at university in the UK is limited—particularly with female Muslim students vis-à-vis gendered Islamophobia and dealing with the double bind. In fact, the National Union of Students' (NUS) report entitled 'The experience of Muslim students' (2018) states that with an approximation of 330,000 Muslim students in further education in the UK, there is little formalized information on or insight into their experiences. As part of their report, they found that women at university who are visibly Muslim had heightened levels of anxieties over the possibilities of facing physical and verbal abuse, vandalism, and theft from their study-space. They also found that veiled Muslim women were more likely to be affected by the Prevent scheme.

Since this NUS report, however, Stevenson's (2018) report entitled 'Muslim Students in UK Higher Education: Issues of Inequality and Inequity' interviewed just over 100 students (consisting of undergraduate and post-graduate students, as well as prospective students seeking access to higher-education) to find that Muslim students had varying experiences of higher education—some negative, and some positive. However, Stevenson found that some overall concerns were imparted by most of her participants, including the feeling of being invisibilized or overlooked as religious diversity was considered largely unrecognized (as compared to social and ethnic diversity), while also feeling highly visible. This visibility was a result of "prevailing discourses around the threat faced from Islamic fundamentalism on campus", as well as the implementation of Prevent policies, and debates on issues such as "free speech, gender segregation, religious clothing, and/or immigration status" (p4). Students thus noted experiencing Islamophobia in the form of microaggressions, as well as more overt forms of discrimination that were left unchecked on campus. The cumulative effects of these experiences affected the students' sense of belonging, while also negatively impacting self-esteem and

confidence levels. This was brought on by having to constantly negotiate their position in terms of engaging with staff members, as well as non-Muslim students. As Stevenson notes, the ‘everyday world’ of the participants was “structured by power relations which can make them feel powerless” (p10). Furthermore, Stevenson asserts:

*“For many of the students interviewed it is clear that they were engaged in a constant process of pushing back against the boundaries that others were drawing round them. The attempts to belong were not, however, singular. Rather they were engaged in a constant process of developing multiple belongings. However, misconceptions and stereotypical assumptions about Islam or assumptions made about gender expectations made it difficult for Muslims to engage in meaningful interactions with nonMuslims and/or to integrate effectively.”*

(Stevenson, 2018: p10)

Other research on Muslim students at university, such as Song (2012), for example, considers the impact on identity vis-à-vis a sense of Britishness. She explored Muslim students’ participation in Islamic Societies (ISoc) in three British universities, finding that some factors that motivated Muslim students to engage with ISocs included: seeking camaraderie and a space for networking with other Muslims, and opportunities for doing charity work. Meanwhile, of those Muslim students who decided against joining ISocs, they expressed a feeling of judgment and exclusionary rhetoric espoused by their respective ISocs that they did not wish to engage with. Interestingly, even though Song argues against the positioning of Muslims as threatening via generalized narratives and stereotyping throughout much of her paper, she still proceeds to inquire if her participants encounter any students displaying “radical tendencies”, which her participants refuse. She then presses her participants to share their thoughts on the tensions between a binary of Britishness and Muslimness (as is often portrayed as two mutually exclusive identities), where most students asserted that both facets of their identity were of importance, and refuted the notion that Islam is inherently incompatible with Britishness. What is problematic about such lines of inquiry is that they effectively seek to confirm the humanity of Muslim students who are once again having to affirm their ‘moderate-ness’ and thus ‘goodness’ as Muslims; in other words, they are put in a position, by being posed with such research questions, to affirm that they do not pose a risk (or know of other Muslims who do) to the university, British society, or the state.

Research focusing on the impact of and responses to Islamophobia and negative discourses about Muslims amongst female Muslim students specifically includes Thomas and Pihlaja's (2018) study, who found that negative public discussions often led to subtle exclusions in public spaces. In other words, the participants noticed people would often avoid sitting next to them on public transport (such as trains). Furthermore, participants recognized rising levels of Islamophobia and thus expressed fear about what the future would look like if things get continually difficult for Muslims. Anxiety levels were seemingly so high that many questioned their future in Britain out of concern for their own safety, and the wellbeing of their families: "the young people in our research were acutely aware that they were objects of fear, as well as being fearful themselves of the exclusion they face, both direct and indirect" (ibid: p1341). Brown (2009) found similar fears and anxieties amongst international Muslim students at a British university. They sought out ISocs and friendships with Muslim students generally (i.e. within and without the ISoc) as a means to seek common religious ground with the hope of feeling understood. Their intention for doing so was essentially due to feeling vulnerable, and thus wanting security given their cognizance of rising levels of Islamophobia. More specifically, feelings of vulnerability were high as some students had reportedly been physically and verbally abused in various public spaces, and they also had a heightened awareness of negative discourses about Muslims in the media. The creation of a subgroup was thus a mechanism to find safety: "by creating a sub-group based on faith, Muslim students on this British campus provided themselves with a source of stability and coherence, as well as a defence against the threat of Islamophobia in an alien and apparently hostile environment" (ibid: p65). Manejwala and Abu-Ras (2019)'s study on South Asian Muslim students in the US also noted that students sought support from their respective Muslim Student Associations (MSA)—the US equivalent of ISocs at British Universities—which also served as a coping mechanism.

Housee (2012; 2010a) has explored the practice of creating a safe space within university classrooms to allow for the development of anti-racist works, and to foster critical thinking, as she claims that Muslim students' (both, women and men) challenging of 'master narratives' offer valuable insights and allow for the development of their critical voices. She thus emphasizes the importance of creating the space within the walls of the classroom such that students can and should feel safe enough to voice their opinions. She posits that "teaching and learning in our classroom should encourage the critical consciousness necessary for pursuing social justice" (p118). However, in her earlier work, Housee (2010b) interviewed

Asian female students to find that from the students' perspective, the classroom, at times, served as a hindrance. She found that her participants did not always feel safe enough within the classroom to express their views or to challenge Islamophobia. Instead, they were more willing to offer counter-narratives to resist Islamophobia, and to express their concerns in informal spaces outside of the classroom. She, therefore, stressed the importance of creating such spaces for Muslim students, and female Muslim students specifically as her participant base felt "the classroom was too public and intimidating, and the *informal* out-of-class was a *safer space* for sharing their views and experiences. The student's comments here are important, and indeed are telling of the more hidden/silenced views that are "untapped" in class. Students do search for "safer" spaces" (ibid: p432). This need for 'safe' spaces was also supported by Possamai et al (2016) who, despite supporting secularism within institutions, encouraged universities in Australia to provide Muslim students with such spaces.

### ***2.3.5 Making space in the face of Islamophobia***

As discussed in the previous section, the need for safe spaces amongst female Muslim students, and the Muslim student body as a whole, has been highlighted by several researchers. Lewis et al (2015) have questioned the meaning of what constitutes 'safe' for women more broadly, and thus posit that it has two distinctive strands: to be "safe *from*" misogyny, and "safe *to*" be fully human (p1, original emphasis). However, the study fails to incorporate an intersectional view of safety as being safe from misogyny for a Muslim woman or WoC does not always yield *safety from* Islamophobia or racism, which inherently destabilizes the capacity for *safety to* be fully human. The notion of 'safe space' for female Muslim students would, therefore, need to be more intersectional; one that caters to gender-safety with a recognition of what is 'unsafe' to ensure safety on multiple grounds of religion, race, sexuality and so on. The Roestone Collective (2014) thus note that the making of 'safety' through eradicating un-safety as constituents of space-making "are socially produced and context dependent" categories, such that "safe spaces respond to the often patriarchal, heteronormative, racialized and classed "imaginary construction[s]" of safety" (p1350). Safe spaces are thus responsive to the borders of marginality that situate groups as Othered.

In reference to Housee's (2012) meditations on making the classroom a safe space for students, her view reflects the historical practices of marking spaces such as classrooms, offices and community centres as 'safe' with the symbol of a pink triangle in a green circle for members

of the LGBTQ+ community (Roestone Collective, 2014), as well as bell hooks' (1989) view on feminist classrooms to ensure there is a creation of space for feminist interventions. In each instance, there is a space for marginality to be given a voice, to be heard, and to be given safety to be present in their being-ness within the respective environments. The Roestone Collective (ibid) then look beyond the classroom to consider how the civil rights, feminist and queer movements sought to create safe spaces that ensured marginalized groups were protected from violence and harassment, while also encouraging free speech and discussions on strategies for resistance. One particular type of safe space they refer to that reflects the functioning of the 'Sisters' Circle' as part of this study is the "separatist" safe space, where those with shared marginalities and identities "go to regroup and enjoy a common understanding and acceptance", thus serving as a "safe base" (p1352). This is reflective of Brown's (2009) findings vis-à-vis International Muslim students at British universities seeking safety and common ground with other Muslims amidst anxieties about Islamophobia. As such, bell hooks' (2015) meditations and honouring of Black women's creation of the "homeplace" as a site for resistance offers a valuable insight into how developing a space that is nurturing, though not always devoid of problems, can be extremely beneficial for marginalized groups. She recalls the historical role the homeplace played as "a radical political dimension" (p78) in the times of racial apartheid, where (p78):

*"one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world."*

What punctuated the role of the "homeplace" as a site of resistance was, as hooks (ibid) notes, its capacity for cultivating critical consciousness, and more specifically a "black female political consciousness" (p84). The sense of comfort through affirming, loving and nurturing each other was not occurring in a 'depoliticized' environment; rather, the space was open to and encouraging of the development of critical thinking as beings and bodies that were otherwise Othered outside of the homeplace (ibid). In the face of this Otherness then, "working to create a homeplace that affirmed our beings, our blackness, our love for one another was necessary resistance" in and of itself (p84). That is, the very creation of the homeplace by Black women was an act of resistance in itself. She thus praises Black women from the past and present, including her own ancestral lineage for not only creating safety in the face of violent

White supremacy, she reveres their efforts for developing a practice of space-making that Black women globally have learnt to embody and continue to benefit from generationally.

hooks' rumination on the homeplace vis-à-vis the struggles of Black women offers insightful guidance of how safe spaces can exist and function in times of hostility. What is interesting to note is how the capacity for facilitating critical consciousness, similar to what Housee (2012) encourages for Muslim women within a classroom, is given space to nurture within the informalities of the homeplace. What Muslim students have often sought on campus grounds, often through joining ISocs, is a type of safety that the homeplace bell hooks (2015) reflects on provides: a space that allows for affirming, nurturing and loving one another, where one can speak freely of their anxieties, and where one can also talk freely against oppressions and marginalization, and in effect cultivate critical consciousness. It must be noted, however, that the experiences, oppressions, marginalizations, resistances and the existence of all Muslim women in Britain does not equate to the experiences of Black (and Muslim) women's struggle in the times of historical racial apartheid and the White supremacy of today; indeed, for the Black Muslim community, such an equation would hold truth.

However, for Muslims who are of other minoritized backgrounds will hold certain privileges that do not yield the type of multiple-jeopardy Black Muslims—particularly Black Muslim women—face. Within the context of Britain, this has been evidenced by the Runnymede Trust's (2017) report showcasing that Muslim women are the most economically disadvantaged social grouping in the UK, with Black Muslim women being the most disadvantaged compared to their non-Black Muslim counterparts. To draw from bell hooks (2015) is thus not an attempt to appropriate Black women's struggle, or to liken their struggle with that of non-Black Muslim women. It is particularly important to highlight this as Black Muslims often face heightened levels of racism and Othering *within* the Muslim community (Khan, 2018). And given the fact that I am a light-skinned Muslim woman, I myself have benefited from the social privilege of having paler skin in ways that my Black Muslim sisters will not. To seek inspiration from bell hooks, and the Black women she honours in historically and continually constructing the homeplace is to learn from and thus also honour how safety is created in the most hostile of environments.

As such, there are a few Muslim spaces that have been created with similar foundational ethics, though outside the physical home-space. The Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) is one such example; co-founded in 2012 by two queer Muslim women, The IMI claims to be

dedicated to the cause of creating a safe space for prayers and spiritual practice for *all* Muslims. In order to develop this safety, they also highlight that it “means having a critical awareness of the dynamics of power and privilege, and working against racism (including anti-blackness, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism), homophobia, gender-based discrimination, poverty, ableism, and environmental damage and all the ways these intersect” (IMI, “About”; see Appendix A). They thus allow for mixed prayers (i.e. prayers that are not gender-segregated), prayers to be led by women and non-binary people (which amina wadud, or ‘the Lady Imam’ has often frequented and led prayers in), and for women to pray without covering their heads (as general Islamic custom is, even for non-hijab wearing women, to wear a headscarf at the time of prayer). There has also been a rise in the creation of virtual spaces such as ‘Sisterhood Magazine’ ([www.sister-hood.com](http://www.sister-hood.com)), and Amaliah ([www.amaliah.com](http://www.amaliah.com)), who seek to centre Muslim women’s voices online. Amaliah also runs a podcast series called ‘Lights On’ with a guest host and sex-specialist (Angelica Lindsey-Ali) who offers sex-education and answers anonymous questions on the topic. As mentioned in section 2.2.3, Madinah Javed has also created a virtual space of inclusion for Muslim women using the hashtag #FemaleReciters to encourage more women to recite the Qur’an—a role that is generally reserved for men.

Despite these physical and meta-physical spaces, there is still more work to be done to offer Muslims, specifically Muslim women, space to be safe from marginality, safe to simply *be*, and to nurture one another with love, encouraging critical consciousness. Zempi (2020) highlights this need as she found in her study of veiled Muslim women, her participants reportedly had a lack of formal support. They thus sought out informal networks of support through friends, family, and by generally speaking to other veiled Muslim women to find a place where they can feel heard and affirmed. And considering the anxieties and marginality Muslim women face in higher education, there is also a great deal yet to be done to create such spaces within universities. With this in mind, the Sisters’ Circle—the core of this study’s focus—is a compelling case of a quasi-formal, yet informal space that mirrors some of the values underpinning bell hooks’ (2015) homeplace. It is quasi-formal insofar as the Sisters’ Circle is a part of the institution’s ISoc, occurring each Wednesday at 6-7pm. However, beyond the mechanics of organization vis-à-vis the regularity of the date, time, venue (the meeting room in the university’s prayer building) and the system of choosing a topic to discuss before each meeting, it maintained its informality through entirely unstructured interactional practice (despite setting meeting topics). The sisters attending the circle also sit on the floor, with no hesitation to lay down mid-conversation if they wish to, and a member from the group brings

snacks and drinks to each meeting to create a sense of comfort. As such, this chapter will now turn to consider how the Sisters' Circle will be studied.

## 2.4 Summary of Chapter

The purpose of this literature review was to create a contextual backdrop of the intersections of oppression Muslim women face, which subsequently contribute towards informing the realities of Muslim women studying at university (NUS report, 2018). As the NUS report highlights, there is a need for further research into Muslim student experience, particularly with regards to gendered Islamophobia (p23):

*“NUS should undertake further analysis of this data to better understand the distinct experiences of Muslim women in the student movement and create guidance to challenge gendered Islamophobia.”*

The focus of this research, however, is not to further excavate the ways in which Islamophobia manifests; rather, in addition to the motivations for this study vis-à-vis centring the voices of the SC to consider how Otherness is navigated (see Chapter 1, sections 1.1), in many ways it also serves as a response to researchers that have considered the issues Muslim women, and Muslim students more broadly face, that have subsequently led to the emphasis on the need for a 'safe' space where one can openly express their anxieties. That is, a safe space that is not part of the classroom, and has a level of informality as Housee (2010b) suggests.

Furthermore, this study has also been borne out of my own experience of being a part of a Sisters' Circle during my Master's degree, and the role it thus played in my own life. In that regard, in tandem with the need for further research into Muslim women's student experiences, this study also contributes to insights into Muslim women's processing of, responses to and impact (including the psychological impact) of socio-politics and Otherness—and this includes the positioning of Muslim women as the Other within Muslim communities in terms of patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts (Barlas, 2002). An additional contribution of this study is the consideration of everyday interactions, as studies into the experiences of Muslim women as a whole tend to adopt interviews or focus groups—this study thus offers an additional (linguistic) dimension to current research. By analyzing discourse and narratives in interaction, it allows for an additional lens into the micro-analytic view of how Muslim women at university interactionally, and collectively work through socio-politics and the tensions of



Otherness within a space where they feel safe enough to express anxieties and opinions openly. This literature review thus sought to demonstrate and highlight the positioning of Muslim women as Other in British society so as to offer the backdrop and contextual nuance within which these interactions as part of the Sisters' Circle are occurring. This thesis will now turn to consider the research questions for this study, and the methodological approach employed to address the questions.

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to outline the methodology for this study—beginning first with a reiteration of the research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: How do Muslim women as part of a British University ISoc's Sisters' Circle interactionally navigate socio-politics and its impact?
- RQ2: How do Muslim women as part of the Sisters' Circle resist ideologies that position them as Other in racial and/or gender hierarchies?

To begin with, in line with these RQs, I propose that examining how the Sister's Circle (SC) negotiate, work through, and resist socio-political realities involves understanding how the SC make sense of, and respond to reality and subsequent societal positioning (vis-à-vis Otherness) as per the SC's interactional output. This study, therefore, considers an interpretivist approach the most conducive paradigm to answer the RQs as it entails the examination of how people “construct their everyday reality, how they experience their world, how they interpret this world, and what everyday methods of communication they use” (Rosenthal, 2018: p36). These concepts are at the very heart of this study's focus, particularly given the space interpretivism affords to observe the realities and subsequent meanings people construct through collective interactional processes (ibid).

As with the intersectional view of how Muslim women are positioned as Other in Western, specifically British society, the interactional focus on how the Sisters' Circle navigate socio-politics will adopt an integrated qualitative approach to view the interactions through a lens that incorporates the following three spheres: discourse in interaction, everyday sense-making narratives, and context. The formulation of the narrative sphere as ‘everyday *sense-making* narratives’ is a derivation of the sense-making work embedded within the RQs, as outlined above (see section 3.2.4 for sense-making as narrative work). The intersection of these spheres has been deemed a point of significance firstly given the fact that this study aims to address a research gap through analysing the ways Muslim women, namely the Sisters' Circle, work through socio-politics from an interactional perspective—where the conversations are naturally occurring, and are not deliberately steered to engage with the research aims. Secondly, this study is informed by Teun Van Dijk's theoretical framework from his 1984 monograph entitled

‘Prejudice in Discourse’. While the approaches may not mirror entirely, the shaping of this methodology is influenced by the interdisciplinary framework Van Dijk (ibid) puts forward, which incorporates the following: paying attention to narratives as he considers stories about minorities within the monograph, employing a social-psychological lens through which to explicate the implications of the discourse and stories about minorities, and drawing from conversation analysis (CA) as a tool for unpacking dialogical data. Other discursive elements such as stereotyping and prejudice as practices have been mentioned, however the mechanics of the analysis, specifically, centres these three elements. Therefore this study adopts the skeleton of Van Dijk’s approach to account for how the Sisters’ Circle engage in: sense-making narratives *as* minorities as opposed to narratives *about* minorities; discourse in interaction, which considers the dialogical nature of the research and the social-psychological implications of discourse and narratives; and finally the context, which takes into account the environmental and circumstantial settings in which the interactions occur. To explicate this approach further, this chapter will be split as per the following:

- Section 3.2: Conceptual framework – this section of the chapter will be broken down into five subsections to offer an overview of the method of analysis to be employed for this study. With the three spheres as part of the conceptual framework in mind (discourse in interaction, everyday sense-making narrative, and context), this section will be divided to consider the following:
  - 3.2.1: Conversation analysis, ethnography and minding the contextual gap – given the interactional nature of the data, this subsection explicates the decision behind foregoing conversation analysis as the primary methodological approach, how CA feeds into the analysis, and how ethnography sits within this research to provide reflection of the context.
  - 3.2.2: Critical discourse analysis (CDA) – an overview of CDA
  - 3.2.3: Teun van Dijk’s socio-cognitive discourse approach (SCDA) – an overview of SCDA, and its application in this study as the primary methodological framework.
  - 3.2.4: Narrative approach – an overview of the narrative approach, namely Ochs and Capps (2001) explanatory sequence to be adopted as a tool for analysis.
  - 3.2.5: Merging the discourse approach and sense-making as narratives: argumentation sequencing and data presentation – how the discursive and

explanatory sequence elements merge to build the analytical tools for this research.

- Section 3.3: Research design – this sections considers the research design, which includes the following subsections:
  - 3.3.1: Research setting
  - 3.3.2: Participant make-up
  - 3.3.3: Ethical considerations
  - 3.3.4: Data collection.
- Section 3.4: Reflexivity – this section reflects on my own presence and involvement with the Sisters’ Circle as both, a participant and researcher.
- Section 3.5: Summary

### **3.2 Conceptual Framework**

As mentioned in the introduction, this study is informed by Teun Van Dijk’s interdisciplinary framework from his monograph entitled ‘Prejudice in Discourse’ (1984). However, given the substantial size and scale of the study on which his monograph is based, replicating Van Dijk’s analytical approach in its entirety would have been beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, while Van Dijk considers prejudice in discourse whereby people talk about and thus construct a negative image of minorities, this study has inverted the lens to focus on a minority group working through ‘minority-ness’ themselves. A need for such a perspective is something Van Dijk passively suggested himself, although his focal point centred on those *doing* racism. That is, given his focus on racist discourse, within his suggestions for further studies into the topic, he maintained an interest in how majorities talk *to* minorities in order to add nuance to his exploration of how majorities talk *about* minorities. However, in constructing his argument vis-à-vis the need to explore how majorities talk to minorities, he ultimately concedes that at the point of racism unfolding within interaction, the conversation itself is not as important, as “the experiences of the minority group member[s] are decisive” (p76). He calls for more research on “actual experiences, interpretations, and evaluations of minority members themselves” as he posits that minorities “are the real experts on our [the majority’s] prejudices” (p77)—which is seemingly why Van Dijk states that “this kind of research can be conducted reliably only by minority researchers” (p77).

As covered in the Literature Review (see section 2.2), the ways in which Muslims have largely been researched, explored, interrogated, depicted, and essentially criminalized in the West is founded on the Western Orientalist imagination of Muslims as Oriental subjects—subjects that are deviants from eurocentric normalcy. This foundation stretches into the groundwork for Islamophobia as Meer (2014) suggests it is an extension of Orientalism. This also holds truth for White/liberal feminist praxis and evaluations of Muslim women, which at one end frame us as helpless victims of a patriarchy we have internalized to a point where “every action is interpreted as pregnant with patriarchal meaning” (Carland, 2017: p16), and weaponizes a supposed Muslim woman victimhood in order to criminalize Muslim men at the other (Farris, 2017). Van Dijk’s position, therefore, aligns with the criticisms of Orientalist practice from the point of carrying out academic research as he acknowledges the need for not only centring voices of the marginalized as participants—he notes the importance of members of marginality carrying out such research. Essentially, there is a recognition on his part of the research process as a political process.

It is for this reason that this thesis grounds Orientalism and intersectionality as foundational to the study; not only does it construct the backdrop for this research and the Sisters’ Circle’s existence—it is a crucial part of the framework of this methodology as: a) the lens through which analytical points are to be developed is informed by the positionalities of the critical scholarship behind Orientalism and intersectionality; and b) my position as a Muslim woman and researcher are closely intertwined. The fact that I am a part of the community being researched in terms of being a Muslim woman as part of the Sisters’ Circle confronts the arbitrary lines of division placing the scientist/researcher on one side, and the participants as data on the other—a division that is central to Orientalist practice vis-à-vis the placement of the Oriental as subject and Occidental as the researcher or observer (Said, 2003). As such, the ways in which Orientalism and White/liberal feminism have affected my life as a Muslim woman plays an integral part in my identity as a researcher, which is a contributing factor informing my criticality. My role as researcher and participant will be unpacked further in the section discussing reflexivity (see section 2.4). For now, however, the focal point is the ways in which Van Dijk’s approach and position regarding his call for members of marginalized communities to carry out such research correspond well with the criticisms of Orientalist and White/liberal feminist praxis. Therefore, inverting the lens to focus on a minority group working through minority-ness with a view to reject the Orientalist gaze is in alignment with Van Dijk’s suggestion.

To thus return to Van Dijk's interdisciplinary approach, the aforementioned intersecting spheres central to this methodology include discourse in interaction, everyday sense-making narratives and context. And to reiterate what has been outlined earlier in the introductory section of this chapter, these cumulatively align with Van Dijk's framework as per the following: sense-making narratives *as* minorities as opposed to narratives *about* minorities; discourse in interaction, which considers the dialogical nature of the data, as well as the social-psychological implications of discourse and sense-making narratives; and finally the context, which accommodates the environmental and circumstantial settings in which the interactions occur. Each of these elements will be considered in the upcoming subsections as the analytical approach will be broken down in further detail—commencing with the incorporation of CA in line with Van Dijk's approach.

### ***3.2.1 Conversation analysis, ethnography and minding the contextual gap***

Within his framework, Van Dijk incorporates the use of CA as a means to observe the micro-level moves in talk and conversational storytelling as a constituent of interactional strategies that contribute towards 'doing' prejudice in talk, though it is not the primary mode of analysis. This research follows a similar thread given that the data in this study is primarily interactional, and it endeavours to maintain a micro-level view of how the Sisters' Circle conversationally work through socio-political realities and Otherness. To that end, this methodology is informed by CA in an operational sense, however the foundations of the approach as a primary mode of analysis were deemed unsuitable for this study. This position has resulted from an evolving methodological journey that had initially commenced with the intention to employ CA as the primary method. To explicate the change in trajectory, I will begin with offering an overview of CA, and the gaps that were subsequently identified in the approach in relation to this research.

Growing out of Garfinkel's theory of ethnomethodology, CA gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s through the works of Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson (ten Have, 2007). CA, as a study of social interaction (Sidnell, 2007) is a bottom-up approach examining the social workings of everyday life (Van Dijk, 2014) through interrogating the organization of talk, and how understanding is signaled as interactions unfold. CA can therefore be defined as "an approach (...) that aims to describe, analyse and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life" (Sidnell, 2011: 01). However, the primary issue that emerged out of CA with regards to the potential for its application to this study is that of

context; as per Hopper (1990), many researchers within the field traditionally view ‘talk extrinsic’ contextual factors as irrelevant, as the relevant interactional elements are considered to be embedded within the ‘empirical details’ (p163-164). That is, social context is seen to interactively emerge as opposed to existing beyond the spatio-temporal confines of the interactional episode under observation. Application of context in analysis is therefore seen as problematic by CA researchers (de Kok, 2008) as it is argued that analytical consideration of significant contextual features should be based on and limited to what the participants explicitly attend to as opposed to analysts drawing from socio-political theory, which de Kok (ibid: p887) labels “theoretically informed assumptions”. Additionally, the use of context to explicate or develop analytical points regarding participants’ social actions is seen to position them as ‘cultural dopes’, which ostensibly, as per Schegloff (1997: p167 cited in de Kok, 2008), raises the risk of “theoretical imperialism” and “hegemony of the intellectuals”. In other words, with this view, contextual relevance is determined solely by the participants’ orientations.

Billig’s (1999a 1999b) responses to Schegloff’s (1997) criticisms of critical discourse analysis (CDA) offer an effective counterargument to ‘traditional’ CA’s reservations regarding the use of context. He highlights CA’s inadequacy to deal with episodes where “power is directly, overtly and even brutally exercised” (Billig, 1999a: p554), and proceeds to put forward the examples of racist abuse, bullying or rape under the hypothetical scenario that examples of such interactions are recorded. Focusing on the example of rape, he poses the following questions: “how should the participants be identified and how should their talk be analysed?” (ibid: p554). Billig then proceeds to question orthodox CA’s insistence to focus on organization and sequentiality of interaction, as well as participants’ making relevant context alone without consideration for the broader contextual factors and power dynamics that drive such violences, such as rape. Billig’s critique essentially focuses on traditional CA practitioners’ view of attending or disattending to content that is or is not specifically oriented to by interlocutors respectively as he states that “to imply that CA *must* disattend to such a matter (or must do as a first step) is to say something about the limitations of an orthodox CA and its implicitly uncritical theory of the social world” (ibid: p555, original emphasis). He later (1999b) noted that CDA specifically endeavours to draw from and subsequently incorporate social theory and other social sciences—something, he argues, traditional CA excludes thereby overlooking insights from alternate disciplines of scientific inquiry.

Given the nature of this study, traditional CA and its discouragement of incorporating context within analysis does not fit. However, as Billig maintains in his responses, micro-level

analyses of episodes of talk do not necessarily preclude the potential for critical undertakings—which is an extremely important point to note given that occurrences such as micro-aggressions would benefit from a micro-analysis. To *not* invoke context as an analyst in such a situation would lend itself to erasure of the micro-aggression from a form of verbal oppression to a decontextualised episode of passive aggression, where intersections of oppression—as well as spatiotemporal elements such as place, time (era, or a specific time), and the (social) atmosphere of the time—could be rendered irrelevant. Therefore, the concluding position Wetherell (2014) takes in her post-structuralist critique of Schegloff's criticisms of CDA is one that creates the space to engage in a micro *and* critical analysis of conversational data. She notes the value in CA's focus on participant orientations as an important method in understanding subject positions, and supports a synthetic approach as part of her field of critical discursive social psychology that entails a focus on "the situated flow of discourse, which looks at the formation and negotiation of psychological states, identities and interactional and intersubjective events", as well as describing "the collective and social patterning of background normative conceptions" (p112). While this study does not necessarily define itself as sitting within the field of critical discursive social psychology, the parameters of analysis vis-a-vis the analytical tools that are at the analyst's disposal with such an approach allow for a micro *and* critical view of interaction. In fact, as Van Dijk (1999) asserts amid the debate between Schegloff, Billig and Wetherell—there is scope for CA and CDA to compliment each other so as to account for the micro and the critical when analysing text or talk, which is a position that this study adopts.

Other researchers who have sought to bridge the gap between (traditional) CA and context include Moerman (2010) and Maynard (2006), both of whom have combined the use of CA with ethnography within their studies to compliment their conversation analytical findings, with the former (2010) offering a 'culturally contexted conversation analysis'. Maynard (2006), in fact, proposes various affinity models to consider the ways and the extent to which CA and ethnography can be merged in such a manner that CA's principles regarding disattending to extrinsic contextual elements of social reality are not disrupted, while still allowing for the combination to yield an in-depth analysis of data. The use of ethnography in linguistics and applied linguistics studies is not a new phenomenon as Duranti (1997) notes the common use of ethnography by linguistic anthropologists via methods such as participant-observation, elicitation techniques and working with "native speakers to obtain local interpretive glosses of the communicative material they record" (p84). The integration of ethnography beyond the sphere of linguistic anthropology has been on the rise within the



domains of discourse studies, sociolinguistics, and indeed—as mentioned earlier—conversation analysis (e.g. see Sercombe, 1996; Wodak, 2000; Oberhuber and Kryzanowski, 2008). It is worth noting at this point that, as asserted at the beginning of this section, the application of CA in this study is limited to an operational sense; that is, the fact that the data to be analysed in this study is interactional coupled with the micro-analytical focus of this research, interactional analysis will be carried out devoid of traditional CA's theoretical underpinnings. This will allow for a consideration for micro-level strategies in talk where relevant to the analysis without being confined to orthodox CA's disavowal for the macro-level contextual elements—thus accounting for one of the three spheres making up the conceptual framework for this study, namely 'discourse in interaction', while also building space for the sphere of 'context'. Essentially, the stance held by Wetherell, Billig and Van Dijk (as covered above) is adopted, with the intent to place this research within discourse studies. As such, the integration of ethnography with linguistics will henceforth be considered in terms of discourse studies as opposed to CA.

With this in mind, Duranti (ibid: p85) describes ethnography as “the written description of the social organization, social activities, symbolic and material resources, and interpretive practices characteristic of a particular group of people”. Despite the integration of ethnography, as defined, within this research and other linguistic studies, the anthropological theoretical underpinnings of ethnography do not necessarily speak for or mirror the foundations of discourse studies (Oberhuber and Kryzanowski, 2008). To that end, in terms of how ethnography can be integrated with or applied to discourse studies is dependent on the issues and points of focus, and what questions are sought to be answered within research (ibid). Here, Oberhuber and Kryzanowski (ibid) offer two oppositional ends of a scale of the degree to which ethnography can be incorporated (p186):

*“On the one end of an ideal continuum, ethnography might be employed as an element of the process of gathering discourse material, that is the researcher contacts and interviews people in the field with the aim of collecting documents he or she would not have access to otherwise (...). On the other end of the scale, there is the traditional in-depth ethnographic experience which consists of participation in the field over an extended period of time, and which involves an open process of data collection and theory-building.”*

As this study is primarily concerned with how the Sisters' Circle interactively make sense of reality and work through Otherness interactionally, ethnography in its most anthropological form will not be applied; rather, it will play a limited role through observations of the setting(s) and behaviour—or certain aspects of behaviour. The analysis will primarily rely on discursive and narrative methods, with ethnographic observation accommodating the sphere of 'context' from the conceptual framework of this research. This will help describe and build a picture of the Sisters' Circle and the setting(s) in which interactions occur. In that sense, ethnographic observation will play a supplementary role to ensure context is accounted for—which, in fact, is also reflected in Maynard's (2006) 'limited affinity' model vis-a-vis CA and ethnography.

Although the matter of context has been addressed in tandem with the operational aspect of approaching interactional analysis, there is a need for a critical perspective given the politicization of Muslim women in the UK, as well as intersecting oppressions grounded within the notion of Otherness (with regards to Islamophobia, Orientalism and/or Feminism(s), for example). Therefore, this chapter will proceed to consider critical discourse analysis, followed by an overview of Van Dijk's socio-cognitive discourse approach.

### ***3.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)***

Having developed out of the field of Critical Linguistics (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a problem-oriented approach that focuses on social issues, particularly in terms of how discourse functions in the production—and reproduction—of power and hegemony (Van Dijk, 2001). In fact, given its criticality, Van Dijk (ibid) refers to it as “discourse analysis ‘with an attitude’” (p96), which ‘acquires’ its criticality by the placement of its focus on the interrelation of language with power and privilege (Riggins, 1997: p2). Therefore, as per Wodak (2001a: p2), CDA is “fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” with “aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse)”. Effectively, in its simplest sense, the objective of CDA is to excavate the relationship between language in use, power, and inequality in society.

Weiss and Wodak (2003) contend that making consistent statements on the theoretical foundations of CDA can prove to be quite difficult as there are a number of different approaches

within the discipline. As such, “there is no such thing as a uniform, common theory formation determining CDA” (ibid: p6). The difficulty in tracing theoretical roots is also noted by Meyer (2001) as he points to the lack of any one singular guiding theoretical standpoint that is consistently mirrored across each one of the myriad of positions held within CDA, thereby observing its interdisciplinarity (see also Van Dijk, 1995a; Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018). There have, however, been philosophers and scholars who have had a strong influence on CDA and its different epistemological positions, such as Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). For instance, CDA draws from Habermas’ theory of communication vis-a-vis the basis for critique, which works towards anchoring the ‘critical’ in CDA as it grounds a standard for ‘language in use’ that fundamentally rejects discrimination and suffering (Forchtner, 2010). Wodak (2001) therefore supports Habermas’ following assertion that, she posits, most critical discourse analysts would be in agreement with: “language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. In so far as the legitimations of power relations, ... are not articulated, ... language is also ideological” (Habermas, 1977: p259, quoted in Wodak, 2001a: p2).

CDA, therefore, considers ideology an important element from where unequal power relations are anchored and subsequently sustained, and thus commits to an interrogation of the ways in which ideology is mediated through language (Wodak, 2001a). It is seen to underpin discourse (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018) whereby social forms and processes are communicated, transferred and circulated through the social world (Thompson, 1990). Van Dijk (1995b) thus posits that ideologies essentially represent “basic frameworks of social cognition” that “have the cognitive function of organizing the social representations (attitudes, knowledge) of the group, and thus indirectly monitor the group-related social practices” (ibid: p248)—which includes talk. This position sits well with the aim of this study as it seeks to unpack how the Sisters’ Circle respond to their (our) socio-political realities (or socio-politics) and Othering; that is, how ideologies that position Muslim women, and Muslims more broadly, as Other (i.e. the social representations of the group that constructs Muslims as Other) are collectively worked through. With the focus of this study in mind, discourse is of primary interest and, as unpacked thus far, one may deduce that the ‘critical’ and ‘discourse’—of which the latter incorporates ideology—are key facets to ‘doing’ CDA as a mechanism to explore and explicate the relationship between language and society (Fairclough et al, 2011).

As with the multi-dimensional nature of CDA vis-a-vis its interdisciplinarity, definitions of ‘discourse’ are just as—if not more—diverse (Fairclough et al, 2011). For this

reason, in the interest of fine-tuning the breakdown of the approach to be adopted specific to this study—and with the view to maintain discussion within the scope of this thesis—I will not indulge in an in-depth analysis of discourse through a philosophical lens; I will instead consider the conceptualizations of discourse within the field of CDA that build towards the position adopted for this research. For this, I begin with Foucault as a central figure who has influenced the approach.

In his seminal book 'The Archaeology of Knowledge', Foucault (2002) offers a summarized description of 'discourse' before working through and arriving at a more formalized conceptualization. As such, the basic tenets of discourse, as per his summary, consist of (pp120-121):

- A group of verbal performances.
- Acts of formulations.
- A series of sentences or propositions.
- A group of sequences of signs through statements.

He then proceeds to offer a 'full meaning' of discourse that entails "a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation" that is "made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined" (p131) – where "the same discursive formation" refers to shared traits across the said group of statements (el Aidi and Yechouti, 2017).

For Fairclough et al (2011), discourse is an 'analytical category' (p357) that describes the multitude of meaning-making resources available at our disposal. They offer the synonymization of 'discourse' with 'semiosis' to specify the types of resources one may use—such as words, pictures, gestures and symbols—while also recognizing discourse as "a category for identifying particular ways of representing some aspect of social life (for example Republican vs Democrat discourses on immigration)" (p357). As per Fairclough et al (ibid), discourse, namely discourse as semiosis, within CDA is thus seen as a social practice holding a dialectic relationship between discursive events and the discursive processes and elements of context, social structures and institutions that frame them. In other words, these aspects of 'discourse' and the social world are interrelated; discourse is seen to be "socially *constituted* as well as socially shaped" (p358, emphasis in original). Practically, this means that the order, organization and hierarchy of the social world is presented through a linguistic

conceptualization of reality, where ideologies reside and operate, subsequently producing and reproducing social inequality (such as racist, Orientalist or sexist ideologies).

In a similar vein, Wodak (2001b) supports the view of the dialectic relationship between discourse and social process, however she intensifies its linguistic focus as she defines discourse as “a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts”, which are then manifested “within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as ‘texts’ that belong to specific semiotic types, that is genres” (p66). What is interesting about Wodak’s view of discourse is the intersectional lens through which she considers ‘macro-topics’ and the interconnectivity and overlapping of subsequent ‘sub-topics’—of which the former in particular is, as she posits, the “most salient feature of the definition of a ‘discourse’” (p66). She refers to this as ‘interdiscursivity’—where, in accordance with the example Wodak provides, a macro-topic such as ‘unemployment’ may be addressed through racist reasoning to encourage other policy shifts as a mode to combat unemployment (such as the imposition of restrictions on immigration). In other words, immigration is brought to the fore as a sub-topic when addressing the macro-topic of unemployment—which could also include further sub-topics, such as ‘trade unions’ or ‘social welfare’ (ibid). What Wodak essentially notes when she refers to discourse as hybrid and interdiscursive is the interconnectedness of sub-topics that can interact with and cross one another at different points and convergences within the margins of a macro-topic. In essence, from this view, discourse is, indeed, ‘a complex bundle’.

To Van Dijk, while he does not negate a linguistic centering of discourse, he takes more of a socio-psychological position with regards to CDA more broadly. In his support of a linguistic lens through which to carry out CDA, he describes discourse as a communicative event that can be constitutive of “conversational interaction, written text, as well as associated gestures, face-work, typographical layout, images, and any other ‘semiotic’ or multimedia dimension of signification” (Van Dijk, 2001: p98). However, in investigating the function and implications of discourse, Van Dijk (ibid) puts forth a ‘discourse–cognition–society’ triangle as a lens through which to investigate discourse, and as an approach to ‘do’ CDA. Van Dijk admits his disdain for labels, even with his own branding of his approach as ‘socio-cognitive discourse analysis’ (ibid); however, he concedes that his focus on cognition is aptly captured within this titling of the category of CDA. As such, he proceeds to offer a breakdown of ‘cognition’ and ‘society’ following his definition of discourse, where ‘cognition’ constitutes personal and social cognitions, “beliefs and goals as well as evaluations and emotions, and any

other ‘mental’ or ‘memory’ structures, representations or processes involved in discourse and interaction” (ibid: p98). And ‘society’ is comprised of both—the micro *and* macro-level structures of reality and the world, including “local, microstructures of situated face-to-face interactions, as well as global, societal and political structures” (ibid: p98). In order to then carry out CDA within these guidelines, Van Dijk postulates that the relationship between context and talk, therefore, require outlining and theorizing—which has been the endeavour of the Literature Review (see Chapter 2). That is, the context for this research, and the theories of (systemic) Othering informing the reality of Muslim women—and thus the SC—have been covered to offer a backdrop, or context for (some of) the socio-political macro—and micro—structures impacting the SC (and Muslim women more broadly) at a macro and micro level. It is within this backdrop that this study then seeks to explore discourse in interaction amongst the Sister’s’ Circle.

Van Dijk’s approach is one that resonates particularly with respect to this study, as the focus here is not only what the Sisters’ Circle say—there is also an interest in how the group works through Otherness as a process, which includes the possible personal or collective implications and effects on the SC as a minority who are making sense of and working through reality as Muslim women in the UK. Furthermore, Van Dijk’s position on CDA as an approach that endeavours to employ a perspective that is supportive of the ‘dominated’ and their struggle against social inequality, where the voices of the marginalized are taken seriously fits with the objectives of this study—which is to center the voices of Muslim women, namely the Sister’s Circle. Therefore, this study adopts Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive discourse approach as the primary mode of analysis.

### ***3.2.3 Teun van Dijk’s socio-cognitive discourse approach (SCDA)***

I begin this section with a reiteration of Van Dijk’s position with regards to CDA in that he considers it a multidisciplinary and problem-oriented approach. Within this positionality, while he aligns with the likes of Wodak and Fairclough with regards to the connection between discourse and the social world—i.e. discourse as social action—he contends that the dialectic relationship between discourse and social processes and actions, or social structures, is mediated through a socio-cognitive interface (Van Dijk, 2018). In other words, the understanding and interpretation of discourse and society, the link between the two, and the subsequent effect socio-political structures can have on text and/or talk are mediated through

this socio-cognitive interface—or, as Van Dijk puts it, through the minds of language users (ibid). Hence the ‘discourse–cognition–society’ triangle, as outlined in the earlier section (cf. section 2.2.2 for breakdown). The core essence of SCDA is, thus, as follows:

*“It is theoretically essential to understand that there is no other way to relate macro-level notions such as group dominance and equality with micro-level notions of text, talk, meaning and understanding. Indeed, the crucial notion of reproduction needed to explain how discourse plays a role in the reproduction of dominance, presupposes an account that relates discourse structures to social cognitions and social cognitions to social structures”*

(Van Dijk, 1993: p280, quoted in Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018: p7)

In view of this socio-cognitive inclination, although Van Dijk (ibid) accepts certain parallels with cognitive linguistics insofar as both approaches take into account the cognitive dimensions of using concepts and metaphors in language, he makes a distinction between the two in noting that SCDA specifically deals with shared social knowledge and common ground, “as well as the attitudes and ideologies of language users as current participants of the communicative situation and as members of social groups and communities” (ibid: p26). Van Dijk, therefore, offers three main components that work to build the socio-cognitive interface, which include ‘mind, memory and discourse’, ‘personal cognition’, and ‘social cognition’ (Van Dijk, 2018). These are summarized as follows:

- Mind, memory and discourse processing – this includes cognitive processes that take place in the mind or memory of language users—where Van Dijk describes ‘language users’ as individual social actors existing as members of broader collective social groupings and/or communities. Examples of cognitive processes include “thinking, perceiving, knowing, believing, understanding, interpreting, planning, hoping, feeling” (ibid: p29) and so forth, as well as the production and comprehension of discourse. Short-term memory (or working-memory) and long-term memory play an active role in this processing as the former involves ‘live’ or ‘online’ processing of information and discourse elements, which is then stored into the latter that then contributes to the formation of knowledge and beliefs. This storage is then at the disposal of the working-memory as it can then draw from the available resources for future “perception, action or discourse” (ibid).

- Personal cognition – this includes mental models. Van Dijk describes these as subjective mental representations of events where communicative episodes sit in the episodic memory within the long-term memory (Van Dijk, 2001). In a nutshell, mental models are summarized as “individual, personal, subjective, and multi-modal” that not only represent an event, situation or circumstance, “but also opinions and emotions” where the “direct communicative intention (...) is the transmission of the mental model of speakers/writers” (van Dijk, 2018: p38). These can then either be construed or misconstrued by hearers/readers depending on their own mental models. Of these mental models, Van Dijk (2001) makes a distinction between two of the following: context models, which serve as the interface between the mental information held on an event or situation and the meanings constructed in discourse; and event models, which—as Meyer (2001: p21) puts it—function as the “semantic’ part”.
- Social cognition – Van Dijk frames this as knowledge, attitudes and ideologies. The facets of this framework are interconnected, with each preceding element working to build towards the next one(s) respectively.

Van Dijk situates SCDA within social constructionism as a particular application of the philosophical position, although he maintains that it sits differently than other forms of social constructionism on two accounts: firstly, the social constructions of reality are considered mental representations of language users vis-a-vis the ways in which discourse and society interact, where discourse is a social action; secondly, and most importantly, Van Dijk underscores that “these mental processes and representations should be taken seriously and analysed in detail, for instance in terms of contemporary advances in cognitive sciences” (Van Dijk, 2018). The importance of this position with regards to the present study is that it does not limit the realities of the SC as articulated through communicative events as mere, or even false constructions of reality; that is, any anxieties, hurt, pain, trauma, or negative associative emotions and feelings potentially expressed through language by the SC surrounding Otherness as Muslim women will not be limited to mere constructions—rather, this approach creates the space for such constructions to be dealt with as discourse that evidences the impact of prejudiced discourse and social structures beyond the spatio-temporal bounds of the SC and its meetings. This study thus fits well within Van Dijk’s approach as the excavation of how the Sisters’ Circle work through Otherness, or discourses of Otherness, entails a construction and representation of a socio-political reality as seen, understood, and interpreted through the SC, the socio-political implications and the ways in which such a reality affects them (us).



In terms of how this approach is to be applied, I turn to Van Dijk's (2018) assertion that similar to views on discourse analysis, and by extension CDA, SCDA is *not* a method; rather, it is "a multidisciplinary *type* of CDS [critical discourse studies] relating discourse structures with social structures through a cognitive interface" (ibid: p28, my emphasis). SCDA thus carries with it a methodological diversity vis-à-vis the nature of studying the cognitive component, as well as the overall analysis of discourse and society within the approach (see also Van Dijk, 1984; Van Dijk, 1995; Van Dijk, 1998). As such, Van Dijk (2018) shares his preference for updating the titling of Socio-cognitive Discourse Analysis to Socio-cognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) instead. This, therefore, allows the admission of different theoretical approaches, as well as different "analytical or ethnographic methods, experimental procedures, and practical applications" (p35), so long as they are cumulatively carried out with a commitment to a critical perspective.

With this in mind, while the methodological approach for this study is founded on an acceptance of mental models, I will not be constructing or basing analysis on any context or event models as either a lens through which to conduct analysis, or to build a model as a product of the analysis. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, given the multidisciplinary and multi-pronged nature of this approach, it is quite a grand and inclusive framework with regards to *doing* a socio-cognitive discourse study. To employ every theoretical and methodological dimension at the disposal of the approach is not only beyond the scope of this study, it is *not* a stipulation. That is, to focus on particulars within the approach when carrying out analysis does not disqualify a study from being a socio-cognitive discourse study. For example, some analyses may centralize their analytical lens on context models, while others may focus more on semantics—though both can sit within the broad category of SCDS. Secondly, I put forward the argument that given VanDijk's focus on prejudiced or racist discourse, the context and event models he has conceptualised in his work (e.g, Van Dijk 1995b; Van Dijk 1984) are largely built with the centering of the social cognition of majority groups, and/or groups, communities, political figures or media outlets holding prejudiced views on an Other. That is not to say that these models are untrue, false, inapplicable, or reductive; quite the contrary. However, I believe that there is a possibility that these models may not entirely be reflective of a minority or marginalized group's and/or community's experiences and social cognition of reality. To take the framework for social cognition as an example, as mentioned earlier, it is made up of knowledge, attitude and ideology—where Van Dijk grounds the notion of an 'ideological

square’ that encompasses an overall strategy for ideological communication consisting of the following moves:

- Express/emphasize information that is positive about Us.
- Express/emphasize information that is negative about Them.
- Suppress/de-emphasize information that is positive about Them.
- Suppress/de-emphasize information that is negative about Us.

(Van Dijk, 1998: p267)

Let me note that I do not reject this ideological square or negate its value or accuracy vis-à-vis ideology in discourse reflecting an ‘Us’/‘Them’ dichotomy. However, my point of departure is predicated on the possibility of this square being incomplete (where it would perhaps, then, no longer qualify as a square and alter its shape). To explicate this point further, I look to Franz Fanon’s canonical book, *Black Skin White Masks*, and two chapters entitled “The woman of color and the white man”, and “The man of color and the white woman”. In each chapter, he considers narratives written by a woman (named Mayotte Capecia) and a man of colour (Jean Veneuse), and their views on love/relationships. I will first share a passage from each chapter before asserting my point:

*“Mayotte loves a white man to whom she submits in everything. He is her lord. She asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life. When she tries to determine in her own mind whether the man is handsome or ugly, she writes, “All I know is that he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin, and that I loved him”. It is not difficult to see that a rearrangement of these elements in their proper hierarchy would produce something of this order: “I loved him because he had blue eyes, blond hair, and a light skin.””*

(Fanon, 2008: p29; chapter: “The woman of color and the white man”).

*“Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now—and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me, she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization ... I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness”*

(Fanon, 2008: p45; chapter: “The man of color and the white woman”, opening lines. Original emphasis)

These passages show a social cognition of race, of Blackness, where there lies the desire for whiteness – a reflection of an internalization of a racial hierarchy placing whiteness at the top, and Blackness at the bottom. Within these chapters, Fanon showcases how the desire for whiteness through love reflects the acceptance of white superiority on the one hand, and Black inferiority on the other, where the self as Other is internalized to a point where whiteness is desired. As Fanon says in the introductory pages of the book: “the black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level”. I then pose this question: where, in Van Dijk’s ideological square, does the discourse of seeing the ‘Us’ as the ‘Other’ fit, and where each of the points of this square could then potentially exist in their inverted states?

Another example showcasing the possibility for further dimensions to be added to this square can be seen in bell hooks’ work, particularly her book called ‘The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity and Love’ (2004). As she breaks down the workings of patriarchy, she dissects the ways in which it is women who often reproduce patriarchal norms, limitations and violence, as opposed to men being solely responsible. As women, this involves the internalization of patriarchy, where, once again, the marginalized ‘Us’ is accepted as the ‘Other’ along the margins of gender; how, then, would the ideological square fit? To conclude this point, I share this excerpt from W. E. B. Du Bois’ seminal writings entitled *The Souls of Black Folk* to further explicate the complexity of Otherness, which the ideological square may not entirely reflect:

*“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a N\*\*\*\*; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”*

(Du Bois, 2007a: p2. The ‘N’ word has been censored as a matter of ethics so as not to reproduce racism through rearticulating a term that is a racial slur, and although it is present in the original writings, the implications of using it as a pale-skinned South Asian woman are far different to a Black man including it in his writings.)

I do not hold the answer to my above questions, rather I suggest that the ideological square Van Dijk puts forward, and the subsequent mental models provide apt groundwork from which prejudice and Us-Them dichotomies can be understood and analysed. However, I

propose that since the concept of ‘double-consciousness’ (Du Bois, 2007a) vis-à-vis the ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ binary is not reflected in Van Dijk’s ideological square, this thesis will, therefore, not apply the specific context model Van Dijk constructs (see Van Dijk 1998, p254) as a *mode of analysis*. Rather, this research is built upon a foundation that *accepts* Van Dijk’s theory that mental models *do* exist within the ‘discourse-cognition-society’ triangle, and aligns with social-cognition, or the socio-cognitive interface through which discourse and social structures and processes are mediated—which includes cognitive processing vis-à-vis the interlinking of the mind, memory and discourse processing. However, the mode in which the data in this study will be analysed is through a focus on discourse as interactional and sense-making narrative elements, which incorporates social cognition where active informational processing as a collective, and any reproduction of Otherness or an awareness of Otherness is considered a mental representation of such a social positionality (and ideology) within episodic memory. In other words, the discourses produced and/or reproduced within the interactions/narratives to be analysed are considered a vocalization of social cognition.

I would like to then suggest that this methodological position is a first step in the long process (that requires further research) of formulating a context model that can reflect social cognition and discourse processing as a minority, in line with Fanon’s (2008) ‘Black Skin, White Masks’. Therefore, with regards to the interactional focus as opposed to building mental models for this study, Van Dijk adopts a similar approach in his monograph entitled ‘Prejudice in Discourse’ where he examines—as the title suggests—prejudice in discourse through interaction. In doing so, he notes that ‘prejudice’ is a cognitive, *and* a social phenomenon, which he examines through analyzing talk about minorities reflecting prejudice. This study mirrors Van Dijk’s stance, although it inverts the lens; as with prejudice, I suggest that Otherness, or Othering, is a social and a cognitive phenomenon, which I seek to examine through analyzing a group of women of marginality (the Sisters’ Circle) interactionally working through.

In terms of the methods of analysis, ethnographic reflection (as a supplementary method) and interaction analysis as SCDS that has been informed by CA at purely an operational level (as discussed in the previous three sections) have thus far been covered to account for the ‘discourse in interaction’ and ‘context’ spheres. To account for the sphere of ‘everyday sense-making narratives’, this chapter will now turn to consider the narrative approach adopted for this study.

### ***3.2.4 Narrative approach***

Narratives have been identified as a conversational component worth considering for analytical purposes as they play a significant role in our everyday lives (Van Dijk, 1984), and thus the analysis of sense-making narratives in particular vis-à-vis negotiating and working through socio-political realities (in line with RQ1) has been identified as a valuable mode of studying discourse (Labov, 2003). From formalized, structured storytelling through novels, plays and film, to the everyday, mundane narratives—and all that lies in between—narratives, or stories, are an important facet of human existence. As the dataset in this study is entirely interactional, narratives and storytelling in the literary sense will not be considered any further—although this does not mean a denial of the narratology and literary roots underpinning narrative inquiry and narrative studies (Benwell and Stokoe, 2012; Labov, 2013). As Labov (2013) notes, with the growth of the field of sociolinguistics came an increasing linguistic interest in narratives of personal experiences; further reasons for thus incorporating narrative analysis in this study is this interest in narratives, as well as the centralization of the ‘complication’ element within the theorization of narrative episodes (Van Dijk, 1984). The relevance of this lies in the aims of this study in terms of what the RQs seek to explore, as working through Otherness as an individual or collective entails discourse and experiences fraught with complication. It would thus be of great value to acquire an insight into how narratives play a role in producing and/or reproducing discourse.

As a pioneering researcher in the field, Labov identified specific components present within narratives to form a type of narrative coding, including orientation, complication, evaluation and resolution (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972). The ways in which these manifest within a ‘fully formed’ narrative “begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before the resolution, and returns the listener to the present time with the coda” (Labov, 1972: p369 quoted in Benwell and Stokoe, 2012: p132). These elements making up Labov’s (1972) as well as Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) framework are broken down as follows (Labov, 2003: p64):

- The insertion of the narrative into the framework of conversational turn-taking by an ‘abstract’, which constitutes summarizing clauses directing an audience/listener(s) to the story ‘in a nutshell’, so to speak, and its point (Benwell and Stokoe, 2012).
- The orientation of the listener to the time, place, actors and activity of the narrative (in other words, the context and setting).

- The temporal organization of the complicating action through the use of temporal juncture (the when).
- The differential evaluation of actions by a juxtaposition of real and potential events through the use of irrealis predicates.
- The validation of the most reportable event by enhancing credibility through the use of objective witnesses.
- The assignment of praise or blame for the reportable events by the integration or polarization of participants.
- The explanation of the narrative through a chain of casual relations from the most reportable event to the orientation.
- The transformation of the narrative in the interests of the narrator through deletion of objective events and insertion of subjective events.
- The termination of the narrative by returning the time frame to the present through the use of a coda.

Evidently, Labov's view of narratives is one that is lengthy, quite structured and highly reliant on reportability. In other words, for a telling to qualify as a narrative requires the inclusion of a reportable event, which subsequently unfolds in accordance with a particular narrative structure. However, the most glaring issue of this conceptualization of narratives as structured is that it does not reflect the flow of *all* narratives, and not all narratives fit these schemes and structure (Benwell and Stokoe, 2012). Worse yet, Benwell and Stokoe (ibid) posit that in a bid to employ a narrative analysis comprised of a stringent structure, narratives are arbitrarily fit into the analytical framework. That is, stories are *made* to "fit the ready-made, idealised (...) categories" (ibid: p134, my emphasis). Many scholars also argue that the components within such a structure often occur in an alternative order to a uniform chronology proposed by such frameworks, and not all facets of such a framework are necessarily required to *qualify* a telling as a narrative or story (ibid). In addition, there is the issue surrounding linearity of time as Ricoeur (1980) raises the point that theories underpinning historical and fictional narratives tend to work from a position where any presence of a time element in narrative "is always a time laid out chronologically, a linear time, defined by a succession of instants" (p171). He instead views time, particularly time within narrative, as a complex entity that does not adhere to linearity. Conversation analysts point to further critiques regarding the structuring of narratives and subsequent analytical frameworks as the 'design' of tellings "will vary significantly with the circumstances in which they are produced" (Goodwin and Heritage,

1990: p299). CA practitioners therefore encourage narrative analysis to consider how stories are embedded and managed on a turn-by-turn basis in interaction as the purposes behind narrative function can differ from telling to telling (Benwell and Stokoe, 2012).

Taking these critiques on board, Ochs and Capps' (2001) approach to narratives is one that can offer an alternative mode of analysis, and may, perhaps, work to bridge the gap between Labovian narrative structure and the criticisms that have ensued with his scholarly output on narrative structure and analysis. I will, however, begin with explaining two main views on narratives put forward by Ochs and Capps (2001) that had initially drawn me to their approach. I will follow this with an explanation of how I endeavour to treat sense-making discourse as narrative, and why Ochs and Capps' (ibid) approach subsequently suits this research. Returning to Ochs and Capps' views on narratives that drew me to their approach, first is the attention given and significance afforded to the everyday, mundane storytelling in their book entitled 'Living Narrative', or in their words: "ordinary social exchanges in which interlocutors build accounts of life events, rather than polished narrative performances" (ibid: p2). They then proceed to suggest that the "mundane conversational narrative of personal experience constitute the prototype of narrative activity rather than the flawed by-product of more artful and planned narrative discourse" (p3). This focus on narrative and the credit given to everyday storytelling is highly suitable for the present study given that the data to be collected for this research is naturally occurring conversation (not directed by me) as opposed to more directed efforts to attain data, such as interviews or questionnaires. That is, the SC meetings to be recorded as data will be going ahead regardless of my study, and what will be recorded is the natural flow of interaction within the meetings that have not been moulded or guided to suit this research and its aims. As such, there will be no interview or focus group process; the SC meetings will be recorded *as is*, so to speak. Second, given that the SC meetings occur as a group, Ochs and Capps also pay attention to narratives that occur as a collective. As they posit:

*"The difference between telling a story to another and telling a story with another is an important one. (...) Narrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life. (...) In these exchanges, narrative becomes an interactional achievement and interlocutors become co-authors."*

(Ochs and Capps, 2001: pp2-3, original emphasis)

This view not only allows for the consideration of narratives as a collaborative effort—which, in turn, facilitates the exploration of how discourse can be produced and reproduced collectively—it also creates the space to consider narrative as non-linear in a temporal and structural sense. As Ochs and Capps note, everyday narratives are often recounted as ‘rough drafts’ as opposed to ‘finished products’, and in such cases, collaborative recounting and reflection plays a significant role in maintaining—or diverting—narrative trajectory.

In terms of narrative structure, Ochs and Capps maintain that narratives do not follow any simple, uniform, or generic ‘blueprint’ to set it apart from other types of discourse production. Therefore, they put forward a set of dimensions through which narratives can be examined, which they claim will always be relevant to tellings, if not always overtly and explicitly manifest. The dimensions put forth are then considered through ranges, with polar opposites offered as a continuum where each dimension can manifest within the narrative at any point in its relative continuum. The dimensions, along with their respective ranges, are as follows:

- Tellership: one active teller – multiple active co-tellers.
- Tellability: high – low.
- Embeddedness (vis-a-vis surrounding talk, activity and context): detached – embedded.
- Linearity: closed temporal and causal order – open temporal and causal order.
- Moral stance: certain, constant – uncertain, fluid.

(Ochs and Capps, 2001: p20)

What is of particular interest with regards to Ochs and Capps’ approach, however, is their view of how problematic or unexpected events are explained through narrative, which they call ‘explanatory sequences’. The premise of this concept is a rejection of the importance scholars tend to give to the temporal sequencing of personal experiences; rather, Ochs and Capps align with the view that temporal sequencing and chronology are *not* necessarily a defining characteristic of such narratives. As such, they propose that explanatory sequences that entail the explaining of problematic and/or unexpected events do not adhere to such linearity. Of these sequences, Ochs and Capps put forward two distinct responses to unexpected and/or problematic events within narratives: goal based and non-goal-based responses, where the latter “include changes in a person’s psychological or physiological state, unplanned actions, and/or changes in an object’s physical state” in response to a problematic event (ibid: p173); on the other hand, the former entails a goal that a person attempts to attain through conceptualizing



and executing a plan as a response a problematic/unexpected event. Each response can occur in isolation within a narrative episode, or one may invoke the other through what Ochs and Capps call ‘narrative recursion’ (i.e. both responses can occur one after the other in a non-orderly fashion). To clarify what explanatory sequences may entail (which includes both, goal-based and non-goal-based responses), Ochs and Capps suggest the following components that can be seen in such a narrative (although the presence of every single component within a telling is not a necessitated pre-requisite to qualify it as an explanatory sequence, nor are they required to occur as per the chronology of the upcoming order):

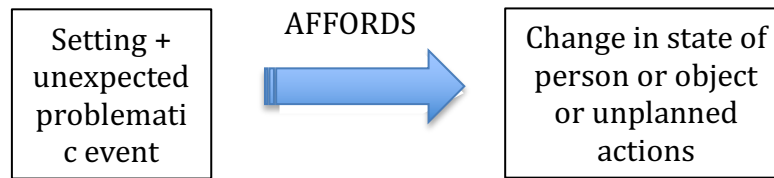
- Setting: time, location, physical, psychological, and socio-historic conditions, bodies of knowledge and other relevant background information.
- Unexpected event: unanticipated, usually problematic, incident.
- Psychological/physical response: change in person’s thoughts, emotions, or somatic state, provoked by unexpected event, unplanned action, attempt, physical response, and/or another psychological/physiological response.
- Object state change: alteration in the state of an entity in the physical world.
- Unplanned action: unintended behaviour.
- Attempt: behaviour initiated to attain a goal and resolve a problematic unexpected event.
- Consequence: repercussion of psychological or physiological response, object state change, unplanned action, or attempt.

(Ochs and Capps, 2001: p173)

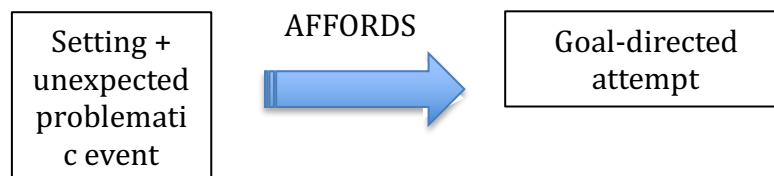
A key point that Ochs and Capps note is that this is not an exhaustive list of the components making up explanatory sequences (i.e. there may well be more components that have not been listed here), nor is there a stipulation for each and every component outlined above to be present in a telling (as mentioned above). In fact, the collective nature of conversational narratives can result in a collaboratively built logic of events where narrative components may be ‘supplied’ by various interlocutors. This allows for some breathing space with regards to narrative structure and temporal linearity as it does not impose any stringency. What Ochs and Capps suggest is that the placement of a setting in a narrative builds the foundation for understanding the problematic and/or unexpected event, which then yields a range of responses such as psychological or physiological changes, or object state changes (and so forth). To thus visually explicate the difference between the non-goal-based and goal-based

responses, the two models are laid out below (of which the former will be adopted in the analysis):

a. Non-goal-based affordance model



b. Goal-based affordance model



(Ochs and Capps, 2001: p174)

As this study considers how the Sisters' Circle *work through*, process and in turn make sense of socio-political realities and Otherness through discourse in interaction (vis-a-vis the RQs), my interest lies more in the non-goal-based nature of explanatory sequences as opposed to goal-based affordances. This is, first and foremost, due to the presence of psychological responses and consequences as components of non-goal-based responses (that are not a part of goal-based responses), which makes it suitable to utilize as an analytical tool alongside a socio-cognitive discourse approach. The point of departure, however, lies in the conceptual grounding of how the term 'narratives' is understood. By this, I do not mean structural forms a narrative can take, or its characteristics; rather, I speak here of the (defining) parameters of 'narrative'. In other words, I ruminate here on what a 'narrative' *means*.

Ochs and Capps put forward the explanatory sequence model as a framework to represent and analyse narratives as personal experiences, where an unexpected and/or problematic event occurs; I, however, endeavor to employ this approach on narratives as sense-making of problematic events, primarily to aid the answering of RQ1. Considering sense-making as narratives may be seen as a contentious stance, however, as Rudrum (2005) posits,

outlining strict markers to define narratives has not only been a difficult undertaking, there has yet to be a consensus on its definition. He works through past definitions that have formed the foundational basis for further theorizations and conceptualizations of narrative structure and function to find the element of representation of one or more events as a methodological constant in narrative studies. In other words, at its most basic level, the function of narratives is to do representation work for one or more events. However, Rudrum quickly recognizes how this function does little to narrow down the types of discourse that can be considered a form of narrative through showcasing two images (see Appendix B): one is a series of sketches depicting a boy walking, tripping, bouncing and standing up again exclaiming ‘ta-daa!’—almost as though the boy pretends the completion of a gymnastic sequence; meanwhile, the other showcases a series of images of aeroplane parts with numbers as the plane progresses from separated parts to an assembled plane in 5 pictures. Rudrum proposes that a commonsensical view would consider the first set of images a comic strip, and therefore a narrative, while the second a set of instructions, thus disqualifying it as a narrative. However, Rudrum proposes that through the eyes of an archaeologist, the aeroplane images could be read as a pictorial narrative depicting a construction project—in other words, a narrative showcasing how the aeroplane has been assembled at some point in the past, which serves as valuable narrative content from an archaeological perspective. He then proceeds to flip the lens on the first set of images—which has thus far been considered a narrative—to highlight how it could be interpreted as a set of instructions if presented in a manual for clowning techniques. After considering these examples, Rudrum concludes that:

*“...such classifications as “narrative” and “non-narrative” are at best provisional, inconsistent, and not mutually exclusive. They certainly cannot be grounded in the classic narratological notion of a representation of a series or sequence of events. It is even possible to conclude that there can be no such thing as a watertight definition of narrative that can be given independent of context, and of the uses and practices to which text are put: narrative practice is simply too vast and diverse a realm to make a simple definition workable, and, as the examples (...) suggest, non-narrative texts can be used as narrative. (...) there is, perhaps, a fundamental problem with the very idea of a definition of narrative or a hard and fast line between narrative texts and non-narrative texts.”*

(Rudrum, 2005: pp200-201)

Although Rudrum meditates on narratives in a textual format, I argue that the same holds truth for talk—the parameters employed to define a set of interactional sequences as ‘narrative’ or ‘non-narrative’ are elusive. Miskimmon et al (2014), for example, considers how political actors utilize ‘strategic narratives’ as a means to “construct a shared social meaning of the past, present, and future” (p2) of politics so as to influence civilian behaviour. In this context, narratives are seen as discursive constructions of states and systems, and “who we are and what kind of order we want” (p2). To consider RQ1 of this study and the focus on the SC negotiating and working through tensions of Otherness in terms of politics and Islamophobia, removing the ‘strategic’ element of Miskimmon et al’s view on narratives allows for the consideration of reflections on and constructions of socio-political realities and relevant shared social meanings as a form of narrative. In terms of viewing sense-making as narratives more specifically, Brown et al’s (2008) defense of sense-making as a valid category of narratives is predicated on the notion that “man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal” (MacIntyre, 1981: 201 quoted in Brown et al 2008: p1039), where human experience is primarily made meaningful through the form of narrative. As such, the process of making sense of the world, or everyday reality (and in terms of this study, the socio-political) involves the reflection and recounting of unexpected or problematic events, potential outcomes, and evaluations—all of which are considered characteristics of narratives (ibid). Furthermore, considering sense-making as a process where individuals and/or collectives interpret and reflect on phenomena (ibid), Brown et al further ground their position through considering sense-making “as a kind of creative authoring on the part of individuals and groups who construct meaning from initially puzzling and sometimes troubling data” (p1038). Although Brown et al (ibid) consider sense-making in an organizational context with work teams, their theorizing and subsequent viewing of sense-making narratives is a stance adopted by this study. As Peter Brooks notes, “narrative is one of the principal ways we organize our experience of the world” (Ryan, 2007: p1).

To thus return to this study, the processes of negotiating and working through Otherness in terms of the socio-political world is considered a narrative process for the above reasons, and Ochs and Capps’ (2001) view of narrative as a collaborative arena to build understanding complements this stance well. More specifically, their view on narrative activity as a “tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life” (ibid: p2-3) parallels the concept of collective sense-making, and the explanatory sequence model thus offers valuable tools to excavate how the SC’s process of sense-making, and

working through socio-political realities manifests. As such, to reiterate this position, this thesis will not limit explanatory sequences to personal narratives and subsequent unexpected or problematic events within such episodes—general and collective attempts to make sense of or explicate problematic events will also be treated as explanatory sequences as the general explanatory model is one that benefits the examination of interactional episodes as a *process* of doing the negotiation work the RQs seek to investigate.

Having outlined the ways in which narrative analysis plays a methodological role, the following section will now explain how Ochs and Capps' explanatory sequence, namely non-goal-based responses, will be adapted and merged with Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive approach to analyse the SC's interactions.

### ***3.2.5 Merging the discourse approach and sense-making as narratives: argumentation sequencing and data presentation***

Before delving into how the approaches covered thus far will be merged, I will begin with the three spheres mentioned in the introductory section (3.1) that the methodology seeks to cover, and the analytical tools that have been considered to work in unison as part of the integrated analytical approach for this study. The three spheres were: everyday sense-making narratives, discourse in interaction, and context. The tools for analysis that have thus been called upon are: Ochs and Capps narrative analysis, specifically in relation to the non-goal-oriented response model as part of explanatory sequences; Van Dijk's socio-cognitive discourse approach to consider discourse within interaction, where interactional analysis will be aided and informed by CA purely in an operational sense; and ethnographic reflection as a supplementary tool to cover context and contextual points of relevance within the analysis.

As this study considers SCDA the nucleus to the methodology, I will begin this subsection with showcasing how analysis will be carried out using this approach. Firstly, it is worth reiterating that the general position held within CDA is that it is not a method—it is a multidisciplinary *approach* made up of multiple methodological tools (cf. Section 2.2.2). Similarly, Van Dijk highlights the same point for SCDA as he underscores its multidisciplinary (cf. Section 2.2.3). It is this position that has allowed for the construction of a conceptual framework that is comprised of an integrated approach that utilizes more than one analytical tool. With this in mind, I now turn to Van Dijk's work, namely his book *Prejudice in Discourse* (1984), which serves as the foundational framework that has inspired this study. As

Van Dijk analyses how prejudiced discourse manifests in talk using SCDA, he employs multiple methodological tools to analyse his interview data, including the analysis of topics of discourse, stories, argumentation, semantic strategies in talk, stylistic properties of talk, and pragmatic and conversational strategies. With this set of analytical methods, Van Dijk primarily views his data as talk. As such, although the talk is not always displayed in line with transcripts typically seen in CA work (as he states the same level of detail is only required in a few cases for his data), he does, nonetheless, consistently interrogate talk at a micro-level—and therefore explicitly claims that he draws from CA to analyse his dialogical data, as it is the interactional space where discourse is embedded. In line with this position, this study parallels his views as it considers the SC's interactions as the space where discourse is primarily embedded. For this reason, each conversation to be analysed will be displayed as data in two forms—one of which will be showcased using Jeffersonian transcription conventions to highlight certain micro-level details of interaction that may aid the analysis (see Appendix C for the specific conventions used). The reason why Jeffersonian transcription conventions have been chosen are firstly due to the training I have received as an analyst of social interaction; as my background knowledge of interrogating conversation is rooted in Conversation Analysis, the training I received (over the course of my Masters degree) was based on Jefferson's transcription methods (Jefferson, 2004). Secondly, having considered other forms of transcription conventions, I found myself in alignment with ten Have (2007) as he states: “most, if not all, transcriptions used in CA (...) employ a more or less close variant of the transcription ‘system’ devised by Jefferson”, which he thus suggests is a useful transcription method to employ as a means to train budding conversation analysts. While this study has, thus far, been distanced from being positioned within CA due to ideological differences (see section 3.2.1), it is nonetheless employing CA in an operational sense, for which reason I contend that treading away from Jeffersonian transcription conventions may not be entirely productive—or indeed necessary—to carry out the analysis.

The second form each conversation takes is where there is a visual merging of Van Dijk's (1984) approach, and Ochs and Capps' narrative analysis. Firstly, the interaction will be displayed as argumentation sequences; the reason for this is that the research questions are dealing with interactions where the SC negotiate and/or resist various discourses of Othering (e.g. Islamophobia). The very nature of the interaction is thus argumentative in that negotiation and resistance both entail putting forth positionalities or standpoints that are subsequently explained and/or justified. As van Eemeren et al (2008: pxiii) state:

*“(...) argumentation is a verbal, social, and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of one or more propositions to justify this standpoint. (...) argumentation is viewed not only as the product of a rational process of reasoning, like arguments are traditionally seen in logic, but also as part of a developing communication and interaction process”*

What is interesting to note is that given the fact that the SC's interactions occur within a confined space where the sisters may be grounding opinions on the socio-political world, the individuals, groups, or collectives the SC address through such argumentation sequences are the non-present social actors and/or structures that are the enactors of the discourses and ideologies that other Muslims (and Muslim women more specifically). Additionally, displaying the data as argumentation allows for a clear and distinguishable breakdown of the interactional process(es) of working through discourses that Other at both—the individual and collective levels. Furthermore, Van Dijk (1984) suggests that people often provide illustrations or examples through stories as part of argumentation as a mechanism to ratify their positions, which are often presented through stories or narratives. This showcases the link between argumentation and narratives, as the latter supports the former. However, within his work, Van Dijk (ibid) separates the argumentation analysis from the narrative analysis; I will, instead, be merging the two. In order to do so, I will adapt Van Dijk's presentation of argumentation sequences, and consider how these flow in the (re)production and/or resistance of discourse (this will be demonstrated shortly).

Accompanying the argumentation sequences will be an overall, summarizing discourse topic as Van Dijk proposes that episodes of discourse entail 'global' and local structures, which account for the micro-level discourse production (e.g. sentences or turns of talk), as well as the macro-level topic or overarching theme that summarizes the episode of discourse. Therefore, each argumentation sequence will be accompanied by a 'higher-level discourse' to reflect the overall topic of discourse being addressed, however where interactions involving resistance are concerned (vis-a-vis RQ2), 'macro-level discourse' will be altered to 'locus of subversion and/or invalidation', or 'locus of refusal' so as to reflect the overarching issue being resisted, and the mode of resistance employed.

The final element(s) to accompany the argumentation sequences is the (non-goal-oriented) narrative element in terms of explanatory sequences. Here, personal narratives will

not solely be considered as explanatory sequences—where there is an attempt to explicate a problematic/unexpected event (i.e. does sense-making work), as long as the components of explanatory sequences are demonstrably present, they will be treated as such. Therefore, where relevant, the explanatory sequence components will be highlighted in the argumentation sequence, and the analysis will consider the non-goal-based nature of the sequences where problematic events catalyze psychological responses. With this approach, narrative is seen as a component of argumentation sequencing, and vice versa; not only does this then allow for a clear recognition of narrative elements and specific units of argumentation as part of an interactional process, it also aids with the clear visual demonstration of social cognition as part of SCDA. As such, the psychological responses in particular, and how these responses come to the fore through the interactional process reflects Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach—particularly given that this study considers Otherness and/or Othering a cognitive and social process, mirroring Van Dijk’s stance on prejudice.

Having highlighted the ways in which the data will be presented, I will share an example of an interaction from data collected thus far to explicate this visually:

**Higher level discourse:** *the American election validates right wing opinions*  
**Problematic event:** *Donald Trump winning the American election*  
**A1.** I think my biggest concern with like the American election generally ]-----PR  
     though  
     **A1.1.** is the fact that it validates right wing opinions in a lot of  
         ways  
**A2.** not America specifically  
**A3.** how it looks to people in The Netherlands and in Austria and in  
     France  
     **A3.1.** where they’ve got significant right wing parties  
**S4.** Post Brexit and Trump  
     **S4.1.** it’s just like hate has won this year  
         **S4.1.1.** anti-immigrant sentiments have really just ]-----C  
**A5.** Cause The Netherlands have their election next year  
     **A5.1.** Geert Wilders is leading in the polls  
     **A5.2.** He is their right wing candidate  
         **A5.2.1.** It’s not good ]-----PR  
         **A5.2.2.** Not very impressed ]-----PR  
**S6.** I wonder where all this hate comes from

The first thing to note here is that this is not a direct narrative account of a personal experience—it is an explanatory sequence in terms of demonstrating a collective effort to explicate the problematic event being discussed—which is Donald Trump’s election as President of the United States. The higher-level discourse has been marked, and the lettering



on the right hand side is highlighting elements of the explanatory sequence model, where ‘PR’ is psychological response—more specifically, a verbal response reflecting a psychological position (at the time)—and ‘C’ is consequence. Finally, the order and breakdown of the interaction with lettering and numbers note the following:

- The lettering marks the speakers, where ‘A’ represents Alia, and ‘S’ represents Sara (both are pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of the speakers).
- The numbers showcase units of argumentation, and how the argumentation sequence progresses. For example, as Alia puts forward argumentation A1, the unit of argumentation that Alia follows with is directly linked to the preceding argumentation insofar as it offers an extension and further explains unit A1. As each new argumentation follows, the letters continue to represent the speakers, and the numbers increase in accordance with new units of argumentation put forward. Where there is an argumentation that links to the one that precedes it, a further ‘decimal point’ (so to speak) is added to showcase how the argumentation units do, or do not, interlink. Each time there is an argumentation unit marked with a new ‘whole’ number (for example, the jump from A5.2.2. to S6), it marks a new unit of argumentation that is not dependent on or linked to the one that precedes it.

Having outlined the ways in which the analysis will be conducted, and how the data will be presented, this chapter will now proceed to offer an overview of the research design.

### **3.3 Research Design and Procedures**

To highlight the research design, this section will begin with outlining the research setting and context, followed by an overview of the participant make-up, as well as an overview of ethical considerations. This section will, finally, close off with taking a look at the data collection process, which will also take into consideration the obstacles faced in obtaining data for this research.

#### ***3.3.1 Research setting***

This study physically takes place within a prayer building for an Islamic Society (ISoc) at a British University in the North of England, focusing specifically on the women’s (or the

‘sisters’’) division of the ISoc. To first outline what an ISoc is functionally—an ISoc is a student led and student run association with the objective to cater to the “spiritual and social needs of students” (Song, 2012: 146). While the management of each ISoc is the responsibility of the internal organizational committee, as is the case with all university societies, many ISocs are affiliated with an external organisation called FOSIS – the Federation of Student Islamic Societies. Founded in 1963, FOSIS is an umbrella organisation in the UK and Ireland working to represent and support Islamic societies at universities. However, the university at which this research has been conducted had disaffiliated from FOSIS prior to the commencement of this study. Alternatively, the ISoc in question works closely with a regional organisation, IDC North East (Islamic Diversity Centre), in joint ventures to raise awareness of Islam, and implement community welfare projects. As such, this ISoc works slightly differently to many other Islamic societies in the sense that it functions as a separate, ungoverned, entity in comparison to the collective ISoc movement in the UK and Ireland. However, it has expanded its network with a local organisation (IDC) to collaboratively achieve its objectives of spiritual and social support.

In terms of the student experience as a whole, the centrality of alcohol on many campus spaces, and social events often held by societies, prevents the willingness of many Muslim students to partake in certain activities – often rendering it difficult to engage in university events, and with other students (Hopkins, 2011). Islamic societies thus offer Muslim students with a means to network and meet with other students on campus (Song, 2012), thereby enhancing the Muslim student experience. However, the role ISocs play in the lives of Muslim students is much more nuanced than what university societies generally offer. Brown (2009) observes that student engagement with their respective Islamic societies is often down to their pursuit of seeking a sense of security in politically turbulent times, which have led to a significant rise in Islamophobia. As a result, ISocs enrich the Muslim student experience in a far greater sense than merely acting as a source of networking and socials; it seemingly operates in the manner of a ‘safe-haven’ for Muslim students who are being impacted by the rise in anti-Muslim sentiment (ibid).

With this in mind, Islamic societies tend to attract a diverse set of Muslim students, as Brown (ibid) denotes that Muslim students often seek to find common ground and unity from a religious standpoint, particularly during times of religious significance (for example, the month of Ramadan or Eid celebrations). As such, prayer spaces that have been provided to Islamic societies often hold greater significance than the sole purpose of addressing students’ prayer needs. These spaces house activities that help reinforce a sense of ‘togetherness’

amongst Muslim students—an important element of the ISoc experience. Not all universities have prayer spaces that are dedicated to ISocs alone; many provide ‘multi-faith’ rooms, which are open to students of all faiths. However, the ISoc considered for this research has been provided with a two-storey building, which is used as the designated base for the society.

At the time when data was collected from this ISoc, the prayer building was accessible to students twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In September 2017, however (post-data collection), the hours changed to 7am-11pm during weekdays, and 8am-1pm on weekends. Considering prayer times occur five times a day, the prayer space is then used for additional ISoc activities during the hours in between. One such activity was the weekly Sister’s Circle meetings, from which the data has been collected. These meetings served as a support network for female Muslim students, which, as discussed, is an example of the types of activities that play a role in strengthening the unity and sense of security among Muslim students in a university environment. The meetings, thus, were a means for Muslim women (myself included) studying at the university, of all degree levels, to come together to share their experiences, offer advice and support to one another, and to have a general, informal catch-up. Going forward, I will refer to the ‘participants’ of this research as ‘sisters’, in line with the ISoc’s own reference to the women’s section as the sisters’ section, and the subsequent labeling of the meet-up circle as the ‘Sisters’ Circle’.

The Sister’s Circle meetings are organised in an informal manner. In the days leading up to each meeting, the group members decide on a topic to discuss for the gathering. While a topic is agreed upon prior to each meeting, the group does not go in to the Sister’s Circle with a formalized agenda, a formal minute taker, or with an outlook to take away any possible actions from the meetings. It is treated as a ‘catch-up’ of peers and/or friends to touch base with on a weekly basis. Thus, diverting the conversational focus away from the decided topic of discussion is not an uncommon occurrence. The main aim of this women’s circle is to bring female Muslim students together and build a support network. Similar to this informal approach to the meetings, planning the catch-ups was also treated casually. The two platforms used to plan meetings were on a Facebook group, and a WhatsApp group; on both social media and networking outlets, members of the group who were regular attendees of the meetings would put forward topics that they would like to discuss in the upcoming week. The most popular option would then be the selected topic of discussion. Once a topic had been chosen, the meetings would take place on Wednesdays at 6pm in the prayer building’s meeting room; this is a room situated at the back of the building, which is open for both, men and women to access.

The rooms designated specifically for prayer are segregated (with the women's section situated on the ground floor, and the men's in the basement).

In terms of the meetings that have been recorded, the following is a summary of the topics that were decided upon to discuss in the meetings:

- Meeting 1: studying in a co-educational system (i.e. men and women studying together)
- Meeting 2: studying with non-Muslims (N.B. after deciding the topic, the group went on to discuss Donald Trump's election and politics instead)
- Meeting 3: studying with non-Muslims (taken from the previous week as it had not been discussed)
- Meeting 4: Experiences of Islamophobia (with a non-Muslim research student collecting data)
- Meeting 5: Feminism and Islam
- Meeting 6: Canada's lost girls – documentary on women going missing in Canada
- Meeting 7: Women, Islam and marriage
- Meeting 8: Undecided topic, general catch-up
- Meeting 9: Feminism and Islam
- Meeting 10: Undecided topic, general catch-up

It is worth noting, however, that the sisters do not necessarily maintain their focus on these topics for the entire duration of the meetings. Additionally, on two occasions, although the group had not decided upon a specific topic to discuss (meetings 8 and 10), we proceeded to meet regardless.

### ***3.3.2 Participants make-up***

The sisters involved in this study were all members of the University's Islamic Society, and attendees of the 'Sister's Circle' meetings (myself included). As such, a formal participant sampling process was not sought after, as the aim of this research was to collect naturalistic data from the aforementioned meetings. Therefore, this study considered all meeting attendees as the 'participant sample', thereby maintaining the naturalistic element. There were a total of thirteen participants (including myself as researcher and participant), with ages ranging from nineteen to twenty-six, and a great degree of cultural diversity among the group. The term 'culture' is, admittedly, a complex matter in itself (Richards et al, 2012), however, it has not

been deployed in this instance with the intent to reduce the concept to solely reflect the upcoming descriptors – its use here is merely functional to underscore the diverse backgrounds present within the Circle. Delving into a theoretical debate is beyond the scope of this chapter, therefore, the descriptors used in the upcoming table will reflect how the participants identified themselves within the data.

<b>Name (pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the sisters)</b>	<b>Cultural, ethnic and/or national identity as self-described</b>	<b>University degree</b>
Alia	British Indian	Medicine (undergraduate student)
Anum	British Pakistani	Medicine (undergraduate student)
Faiza	British Pakistani	PhD in Education
Hafzah	Egyptian	Dentistry (undergraduate student)
Layla	Indonesian	Business Management (undergraduate student)
Maryam	Egyptian	Dentistry (undergraduate student)
Nazia	British Bengali	Physiological sciences (undergraduate student)
Nura	Malaysian	Medicine (undergraduate student)
Sara	Irish Pakistani	Psychology (undergraduate student)
Summaya	Swedish Pakistani	Ecology (post-graduate Masters programme)

Zainab	British Pakistani	Dentistry (undergraduate programme)
Lucy	White British	Geography (undergraduate student)
Hanain (myself)	Irish Pakistani British	PhD in Applied Linguistics

**Table 3.1: Sisters' profiles**

It must be noted that this table reflects all the sisters who were present at all of the meetings put together, and who have thus been recorded; not all of these sisters will necessarily be reflected in the analysis. In other words, not all interactions will be relevant for analysis in terms of the RQs, therefore there may be some names present in this table that may not appear in the analysis.

As the participants are members of the Islamic Society, they all identify as Muslim belonging to the Sunni sect of Islam. The homogeneity of the participants' religious sect was a matter of coincidence, as the Islamic society does not explicitly cater to Sunni-Muslims; it is open to members of all sects of the religion, although the fact that Muslims of minority sects are not active within the ISoc speaks to broader issues of Sunni hegemony and (a lack of) inclusivity within the society, and discriminatory positions held in Muslim societies more broadly. The same holds truth on the margins of race—no Black Muslim women engaged with the Sisters' Circle, and the lack of Black presence within the sisters' section of the ISoc more broadly is quite apparent. There was, however, one exception to the profile of the sisters' religious orientation; Lucy is a non-Muslim student who attended one meeting to collect data for her own research. Consequently, although Lucy does not regularly engage with the ISoc, or identify as Muslim, she has been considered a constituent of the data due to her attendance and engagement occurring organically within the respective meeting (meeting 4).

It is also necessary to note my presence as researcher and participant (or sister) in the data. During the initial stages of planning the data collection process, a few sisters had expressed their reservations regarding the prospect of a researcher setting up cameras and exiting the premises to record the meetings. The most welcomed solution to alleviate this discomfort among the sisters was my presence as an active participant in the meetings—and this was a more organic solution as I had been an active member of the Sisters' Circle the year prior to this study (although majority of the sisters from the previous year had left the university

at the time this research commenced, therefore most of the sisters in the Sisters' Circle as seen in the data are new members). As this method of data collection was seen to be less threatening than the alternative, this approach was adopted to ensure the sisters' comfort. The possible consequences of this recourse will be discussed in section 2.4 (on researcher reflexivity).

### ***3.3.3 Ethical considerations***

As part of the internal Research Approval process at Newcastle University, research students are required to complete an Ethics application form that deems the respective study as either 'high risk', which entails further ethical permissions to be sought; or 'low risk', which enables the researcher to commence their data collection immediately after gaining project approval. Given that the data collection for this project did not involve vulnerable adults, or permissions to attain data from an external organisation, this study was classed as 'low risk'. Subsequently, the remaining ethical permissions that were required were from the ISoc itself, and the participants' own consent.

Acquiring permission from the respective ISoc proved to be a relatively smooth process. Having discussed the intended research plans with the head of the women's/sisters' section of the society (commonly referred to as the 'head-sister'), it was taken forward to the committee, who kindly permitted for data to be collected from the Sister's Circle meetings. The final step in this process entailed obtaining participant consent. As I had intended on collecting data using video recordings, there were certain considerations that were imperative to take into account in order to protect the sisters' privacy and wellbeing, with specific regard to faith. Namely, this was in relation to some sisters wearing the hijab (head coverings). As the meetings take place at the ISoc prayer building, where men and women are segregated, women often choose to remove their hijabs. Even though the meetings are held in the meeting room, the same holds truth for the duration of the meetings as the room then temporarily served as a 'women's only' space. As such, the privacy of hair is a matter to be dealt with great care and sensitivity, to ensure that the sisters' faith perspectives and value sets are not compromised for this study. Therefore, the consent forms used for this research offered the participants the option to refuse video recordings from being obtained, and to restrict the data from being shared with third parties for academic purposes (e.g. conferences, data sessions or journal articles). The possible ramifications of being rejected access to video data on the pending analysis had been acknowledged, however this circumstantial impact on the type of data attained was of

secondary concern in ensuring that the research primarily adheres to ethics. Had it been the case that this research was refused access to video recordings, audio data would have to suffice. Nonetheless, all participants granted permission for video data to be recorded, as well as consenting to the sharing of data within an academic forum. With regards to the possible removal of the hijab, all participants who practice this form of head-covering chose not to remove their headscarf during the meetings. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms have been employed within the transcripts to maintain privacy (see Table 2.1).

### ***3.3.4 Data collection***

The university granted ethical approval on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016, and data collection commenced on the following week—5<sup>th</sup> December 2016 to 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017. While the ‘Sister’s Circle’ occurs on a weekly basis, I attended and therefore recorded a total of ten meetings. It was not possible to collect data every week during the data collection period; this was due to the Christmas break, where the Sister’s Circle was inactive, and I missed about 6 weeks of university due to ill health, which led to my absence in a few meetings. As discussed earlier, it had been agreed upon with the sisters that a camera would not be left to record data in my absence. Consequently, approximately 15 hours of video recorded data has been obtained for this research, with approximately one hour accounting for one meeting each (where some meetings lasted much more than an hour, and some a little shorter). The meetings themselves commenced a week prior to the data collection. It is customary for the Sister’s Circle to begin their meetings in conjunction with each new academic year, however, due to an internal organizational time lag within the society (for reasons that I was not informed of), there had been a delay in commencing the meetings

In terms of the recording process, although there were two digital cameras (both with tripod stands) at my disposal, technical issues hindered the possibility of utilising both cameras simultaneously. The layout of the meeting room proved to be particularly problematic; there were only two possible locations for placing the camera(s) in the room – either on the windowsill on one side of the room, or on a chair that was placed in a corner of the opposite side of the room. Unfortunately, noise pollution from outside the building appeared to interfere when data collection was attempted by positioning the camera on the windowsill. Having tried and tested the process of carrying out video recordings from this location, the risk of possibly



recording ‘un-transcribable’ data was one of the determining factors influencing the decision to locate the camera on the chair. In terms of the cameras themselves, while they produced decent quality video and audio recordings, unfortunately both required to be plugged into a socket to remain charged for the duration of the meetings—which posed a problem once again as the plug situated by the windowsill was dysfunctional. This cemented my decision to record the meetings by placing the camera on the chair. Additionally, it is worth noting that while there were a total of thirteen participants in this corpus, not all the members were present at every meeting that has been recorded; therefore, using one camera to capture the entire meeting group was considered to be a feasible option. Thus, all things considered, the decision to use one camera has not been too damaging to the collected data.

Finally, one unforeseen obstacle in collecting the data was faced when attempting to set up the camera prior to the arrival of the sisters. While the room used for the meetings is communal (i.e. it is open to both men and women; the men’s and women’s spaces dedicated to prayer are separate to this room), I found that this room tended to be occupied by men. The issue that arose here was that entry into the meeting room often required a few minutes of negotiation with the men occupying this space before access was ultimately given for us to enter and commence the Sisters’ Circle meetings (see Chapter 5, section 5.4). Consequently, a few of the meetings resulted in the setting up of the camera in front of the sisters, which may have impacted the subsequent actions of the data (ten Have, 2007). With respect to this observer’s paradox (Labov, 1972), while the placement of a recorder may impede on the extent to which data is ‘naturalistic’, the SC meetings would have proceeded to occur regardless of my research and data collection, therefore the environment and spatio-temporal context are arguably as natural as can be made possible for this study. In terms of the impact of the camera, Gordon (2013) found that although the camera’s presence was often forgotten in her study, “the moments when the recorder’s presence is highlighted are not ‘contaminated’ but multilayered”. In fact, considering the ease the sisters felt with my presence in the meetings as a sister as opposed to a researcher (or a non-present researcher), one may argue that through entering the meeting space as a sister works to alleviate the observer’s paradox to a certain degree

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

Given my position as both, researcher and participant (or sister) in this study, I recognize my participation in this study, and by extension—the impact my roles and presence have on this

research needs considering. To address my presence on both sides of the research sphere and any potential adversities this may pose, I will begin with referring to Said's (1993; 2003) work on Orientalism where he meticulously demonstrates the ways in which Western (or the Occident's) interpretations of the Oriental Other, through an Orientalist gaze, has worked to the detriment of the Orient, and Orientalized peoples. He uses examples of literature and media reporting to evidence how the Orientalist gaze translates in creative and reporting output. Although his focus has been on literary and media outputs, I argue that Western institutions and the field of academia are not untouched by Orientalist knowledge production. For example, the recent 'Decolonise the curriculum' movement in the UK has pointed to the coloniality and racism underpinning British institutional curricula (Swain, 2019). Kapoor (2006) holds a similar view vis-à-vis research conducted in the field of Development. She draws from Gayatri Spivak to highlight the ways in which the 'Third World subaltern' are Othered through intellectual output as she notes how an Us/Them dichotomy results where researchers and workers in the field are positioned as the 'Us', the 'saviours' helping and observing 'Them' as the Other—whether such Othering is intended or not (ibid). My intention here is not to claim that any research carried out by one who is an 'outsider' from the community under observation will yield Orientalist output; however, what I am putting to question is whether absolute zero researcher impact is ever possible to attain, as well as the very notion of 'objectivity'—and with that, the institutional insistence on employing 'academic rigour'. I do not mean to imply that these processes hold no value when conducting research; rather I question the modalities in place in order to achieve this rigor—one being the exclusion of observer subjectivity (Duranti, 1997).

As such, in terms of my research, I recognise that my position as a participant may have an impact on the research, however, I do not consider this a disadvantage. I thus draw from Duranti on his meditations as to why objectivity may not necessarily benefit research from an ethnographic perspective:

*“With respect to ethnography, the problems with the term “objectivity” arise from its identification with a form of positivistic writing that was meant to exclude the observer’s stance, including emotions, as well as political, moral and theoretical attitudes. Such an exclusion, in its more extreme or “purest” form, is not only impossible to achieve, it is also a questionable goal, given that it would produce a very poor record of the ethnographer’s experience”*

Therefore, I consider being reflexive towards my position as a member of the SC as a benefit rather than a disadvantage to this study. The reflections offered in the previous section (with regards to the research design) showcases how my position was negotiated as a researcher *and* as a member of the SC to alleviate the discomfort of an ‘outsider’ entering the space via a recording device. Therefore, being a member of SC, I propose that this research and my presence on either side (as the observer and the observed) works to disrupt the ‘Us/Them’ binary that objectivity-led research positionalities support vis-à-vis ‘Us’ academics studying ‘Them’ as subjects. I am both, the observer and the subject. With this view, I hesitate to definitively take a stance as either an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ researcher as this binary does not adequately reflect my position.

I thus enter this study with an awareness of the dynamics of my existence as a participant, as well as a researcher who identifies as a Muslim woman in the UK—although I may not always be visibly Muslim as I do not wear the hijab. With this view, I accept that my understanding and internalized construction of the world is based on my own awareness of my existence as an Other in society, which manifests in varying degrees that changes in different spaces and situations. For example, where I may be Othered for my gender and ethnicity in certain situations, I still hold privilege as a non-hijab wearing (light skinned) Muslim woman, and racial privilege vis-à-vis anti-Black racism and colourism that permeate through South Asian and Muslim societies. This is why intersectionality serves as a highly valuable lens through which to understand the context behind this study, and it is through this lens that I take forward an understanding of how intersectional realities can yield different experiences and discourse for a group of people, despite their belonging to any one given community (e.g. the SC as Muslim women students at the same British university does not produce homogenous realities for all the sisters). And to return to the insider/outsider binary, this lens once again obfuscates the boundaries marking researcher position as the margins of intersectional identities simultaneously place me as an insider as well as an outsider.

I endeavour to analyse the data with an understanding of the socio-political context in which Muslim women, and Muslims more broadly, exist in the UK, with a view to analyse discursive production in accordance with the positions the sisters (myself included) interactionally take. Employing a critical perspective is then helpful in producing an analysis that is not devoid of context, and ethnographic reflection within the analysis is applied to the

reflections ‘surrounding’ the talk. With this in mind, I mirror Duranti’s position in rejecting absolute objectivity as a plausible or even a *possible* endeavour in ethnographic research.

### 3.5 Summary of chapter

This chapter has presented the methodology for this thesis through highlighting the methodological journey that was undertaken with regards to dealing with dialogical data, which saw the forgoing of CA as the primary mode of analysis. That is, the theoretical underpinnings of traditional CA were not seen to fit with this research. Instead, this study follows in the footsteps of Teun van Dijk’s (1984) *Prejudice in Discourse* monograph. Where van Dijk (ibid) considered the ways in which majorities talk *about* minorities and subsequently construct them as Other, this research inverts the lens to consider how minorities work through minority-ness, specifically with regards to navigating socio-politics and discourses of Otherness. As such, this study adopts the skeleton of van Dijk’s (1984) approach to account for how the Sisters’ Circle engage in: sense-making narratives *as* minorities as opposed to narratives *about* minorities; discourse in interaction, which considers the dialogical nature of the research and the social-psychological implications of discourse and narratives; and finally the context, which takes into account the environmental and circumstantial settings in which the interactions occur. Accounting for these elements, the analytical tools to be used have once again been drawn from van Dijk’s (1984) monograph, which includes: the use of CA as an operational tool (insofar as dialogical data is being analysed); considering how discourses are produced in interaction through argumentation; and narrative analysis—specifically in terms of considering sense-making narratives, for which Ochs and Capp’s (2001) explanatory sequence model (namely the non-goal oriented response) will be used. Ethnography will also be employed as a supplementary tool. Having outlined the mode of analysis, justifying each tool and the methodological choices this study makes, this chapter then turned to outline the research design, followed by noting the element of reflexivity in this study.

## Chapter 4. Analysing the navigation of socio-politics

### 4.1. Introduction

As per the research questions (RQs) of this study, I commence the analysis for this thesis with a view to address RQ1, which is as follows:

- How do Muslim women as part of a British University ISoc's Sisters' Circle interactionally navigate socio-politics and its impact?

As such, taking into consideration the long-drawn positioning of Muslim women—and Muslims more broadly—as Other (see Chapter 2), along with the psychological impacts of Islamophobia (see section 2.3.3), this chapter explores the manifestation of 'minority angst' amongst the Sisters' Circle (SC) in response to recent Euro-American political events, namely post-Brexit and Trump's 2016 election victory. To explicate this term, the concept of 'minority angst' has been derived from the convergence of two distinctive theories (cf. section 2.3.3): 'minority stress', which considers the psychological stress an individual or group undergoes on the premise of their minority status (Meyer, 1995) as a result of "stressful stimuli such as prejudice, discrimination and attendant hostility from the social environment" (Moritsugu and Sue, 1983: 164 in Bowleg et al, 2003); and 'collective angst', which encapsulates "affective responses" demonstrating "concern about what might happen to the ingroup at some point in the future" (Wohl et al, 2010: 290). However, the latter has been theorised in relation to the threat to group distinctiveness amongst majority groupings whereby minority groups are positioned as a threat (see Wohl et al, 2010; Jetten and Wohl, 2012), which is inapplicable and theoretically divergent from this study. Therefore, the arrival at 'minority angst' for this research emanates from the synthesis of the two theories so as to define it as the affective responses regarding concern about the socio-political environment and the future, and a subsequent cognisance of Otherness on the premise of the Sisters' Circle's minority status. Additionally, in the interest of excavating the socio-cognitive aspect of how the SC navigate the socio-political, considering the ways in which Otherness and relative psychological positionalities emanate within interaction is key. The minority angst evidenced in this Chapter thus manifests as sense-making exercises of a new political reality through non-goal-based narrative responses (in line with Ochs and Capps (2001) explanatory sequence; see Chapter 3, section 3.2.4) riddled with psychological responses of realised and unrealised outcomes to

political events (ibid), as well as projections of concern over significant Euro-American political happenings (namely the 2016 American election results).

As a reminder of the temporal settings in which these SC is meetings took place, the two pivotal Euro-American political events that had occurred in the lead up to the data collection for this study were Britain's EU referendum where the 'Leave' campaign succeeded (or Brexit) in June 2016, and Donald Trump's Presidential election in November of the same year, with the latter having occurred a month prior to the commencement of the Sisters Circle meetings of the 2016/2017 academic year. The centrality of the US election in discussions on politics is notable, which may be indicative of the temporal proximity and thus greater need to make sense of, and negotiate, the reality of the President-elect. However, the positioning of the United States as a global influencer by the Sisters' Circle, along with parallels with Brexit, suggests that the angst surrounding the US election may be more nuanced than a mere time-bound need to unpack the most recent political episode alone. That is, deeming the concerns over the outcome of the 2016 US election as merely temporally proximal reactions may not capture the depth of the minority angst experienced. This is not to deny that the need to unpack or elucidate what a post-Trump reality means in the eyes of the Sisters' Circle is not premised on the temporal proximity to Trump's election; however, as seen in the upcoming analysis, the angst expressed as fear in conjunction with the view that Trump's election could empower the right-wing globally suggests that the United States' status as a world superpower is a contributing factor to the degree of angst experienced. Indeed, the Sister's Circle's decision to dedicate an entire meeting (Meeting 2) to the topic of 'Trump's election' evidences the significance of this particular political event for the sisters. Therefore, this Chapter is split into three sections as per the following:

- Section 4.2: 'Navigating the political terrain' – this section entails, as described, the SC's navigation of the political terrain vis-à-vis the positioning of Trump's election, and the European (namely Brexit, France, and The Netherlands) socio-political environment as concerning, whereby the future is deemed uncertain.
- Section 4.3: 'A scary post-Trump future' – this section reflects how the SC consider a post-Trump reality, with contemplation over potentially negative outcomes passing through policy.
- Section 4.4: 'The gendered repercussions: "it's no longer safe to wear a hijab"' – this section showcases the SC discussing the gendered consequences as Muslim women in the face of Trump's election, namely regarding the possible removal of hijab.

In terms of the analytical approach deployed in this analysis chapter, as outlined in the Methodology chapter, Teun Van Dijk's (1984) socio-cognitive discourse approach will be applied with the use of argumentation structures as the primary object of data analysis, which will be supplemented by Ochs and Capps (2001) Explanatory Sequence model of non-goal oriented narrative responses (cf. sections 3.2.3–3.2.5) so as to consider narrative elements that aid in the construction of higher-level discourses. These narrative elements are labelled on the argumentation sequences using the following acronyms:

- PR = psychological response
- PE = problematic event
- C = consequence
- HC = hypothetical consequence

Each argumentation sequence highlights the higher-level discourse the represented discussion constructs, however it does not render this analysis as devoid of a micro-level focus altogether; the first section gives attention to micro-moves—particularly evaluative markers—that work in conjunction with discourse functionalities in the positioning of political events as negative and concerning, which ultimately work toward the higher-level discourse. Each section thereafter increases its macro-level focus, whereby micro-moves are not given the same level of analytical attention as they are each concerned with specific consequences of Trump's election. What has emerged from this analysis are two forms of narrative sense-making that are not informed by Teun Van Dijk (1984), or Ochs and Capps (2001): reverse engineering, and informational funnelling. Reverse engineering entails the process of elucidating a given socio-political phenomenon in terms of the past, present and a subsequent projection made by the Sisters' Circle, and informational funnelling is a process of discursive refinement to arrive at a particular point as part of the argumentation sequence. The cumulative analysis, nonetheless, demonstrates minority angst through sense-making attempts to comprehend the socio-political landscape.

## **4.2. Navigating the Political Terrain**

The Sisters' Circle express their concerns over Trump's election, and the broader Western political terrain through embedded psychological responses and evaluative remarks within sense-making narratives, often building up to construct an uncertain future. This section will thus focus on the Sisters' Circle's attempt at elucidating political events (both realised and

hypothetical), and the subsequent validation of the Right Wing. The excerpt below demonstrates how psychological responses, or evaluative comments, are knitted throughout two interwoven strands of narratives – one of which is a narrative of the ‘irrealis’ (Ochs and Capps, 2001), or a hypothetical narrative, while the other a narrative of a realised outcome:

**Excerpt 4.1:** *The American election validates right wing opinions*

**Preceding discussion:** disappointment over Bernie Sanders dropping out of the election running for the Democratic Party, and a lack of a political left in the UK.

**Sisters:** ALIa, SARA, MARYam, NAZia.

- 01 ALI: I think my biggest concern with like the American election  
 02 generally though is the fact that it validates right wing  
 03 opinions in a lot of [ways]  
 04 SAR: [yeah ]  
 05 MAR: °mhmo  
 06 ALI: like it's not- ne- America specifically but it's like (0.8) u:m:  
 07 (1.3) kind of how it- how it looks to people like in: (.) The  
 08 Netherlands and in Austria (0.2) and in France .hh where  
 09 they've got significant like right wing parties and like (0.7)  
 10 [like then-]  
 11 SAR: [ (\*\*\*) ] post Brexit an:d Trump it's just like  
 12 ALI: yeah [(\*\*\*) yeah ]  
 13 SAR: [hate has won this year and then like you know]  
 14 anti-immigrant sentiments have re:ally just  
 15 ALI: °very true° (0.3)  
 16 SAR: .hh:: yay: hh  
 17 ALI: and cause like The Netherlands have their election next year  
 18 (0.3) and Geert Wilders has been leading in the polls and he  
 19 is their like right wing (candidate) (0.3) °t's just not-° (0.8) it's  
 20 not good  
 21 NAZ: ((chuckle))  
 22 (0.4)  
 23 SAR: mm::=  
 24 ALI: =not very impressed  
 25 SAR: I just (wonder) where all this hate comes from it's like  
 26 (0.5)

Alia commences a hypothetical narrative regarding the elections in the Netherlands with the use of a ‘contential evaluation’ (Polanyi, 1989), where the (first) evaluative device (line 01: “*my biggest concern*”) is positioned within the same narrative clause as the evaluated information, which in this case is the outcome of the American election (Donald Trump as the new President-elect). In referring to this election as a “concern”, it is treated as a problematic event; this evaluative remark—which also serves as her psychological response—thus effectively lays the foundation for Alia to elaborate on her perception of the current state of political affairs through a hypothetical explanatory sequence (Ochs and Capps, 2001) that results in a co-construction of an uncertain future. In fact, this narrative episode, as a whole,



functions as an evaluative cluster building a discourse argumentation (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012) that Donald Trump's election validates right wing opinion. Therefore, before unpacking this hypothetical explanatory sequence in further detail, the argumentation structure that interweaves the aforementioned discourse within this interaction will be explored.

#### Argumentation sequence 4.1

**Higher level discourse:** *the American election validates right wing opinions*

**Problematic event:** *Donald Trump winning the American election*

- A1.** I think my biggest concern with like the American election generally }-----PR  
 though
- A1.1.** is the fact that it validates right wing opinions in a lot of ways
  - A1.2.** not America specifically
  - A1.3.** how it looks to people in The Netherlands and in Austria and in France
  - A1.4.** where they've got significant right wing parties
- S2.** Post Brexit and Trump
- S2.1.** it's just like hate has won this year
    - S2.1.1.** anti-immigrant sentiments have really just }-----C
- A3.** Cause The Netherlands have their election next year
- A3.1.** Geert Wilders is leading in the polls
  - A3.2.** He is their right wing candidate
    - A3.2.1.** It's not good }-----PR
    - A3.2.2.** Not very impressed }-----PR
- S4.** I wonder where all this hate comes from

[*A* = *Alia*, *S* = *Sara*.]

This argumentation sequence has two sub-argumentation threads working together, both serving as a tool to strengthen the plausibility of the higher-level discourse (Van Dijk, 1984), which is: 'the American election validates right wing opinions'. Though the narrative trajectories of the sub-argumentation threads differ—one with concern for what Trump's election *has* caused (the consequence: anti-immigrant sentiment), and the other on what *could* be caused (further successes for right wing political parties, namely Geert Wilders winning the election)—both converge at the point of constructing concern, angst, about the future. Interestingly, neither outcome—the realised or the unrealised—is explicitly stated; both are implied, with Sara uttering an incomplete: "anti-immigrant sentiments have really just" (**S2.1.1.**), and Alia building up her argumentation sequence to end with factual statements that Geert Wilders, the right wing candidate in the Netherlands, is leading in the polls (**A3.**–**A3.2.**). However, neither argumentation is treated as inconspicuous, as each sister receives acknowledgement tokens for their argumentations (see lines 04, 05, 12, 15 and 23 from Excerpt

4.1), suggesting that there is an awareness towards the argumentation trajectories, and perhaps then some agreement towards the higher-level discourse.

Individually, Alia's argumentation builds on her overarching concern for the ramifications of Trump's election: the rise of the right wing. Not only does this recognise Trump's presidency as a right wing phenomenon, the domino effect of the anticipated right wing validation is positioned as an election after-effect that is spatially transcendent of the American geographic borders. The use of "generally" and "it's not- ne- America specifically" (A1. and A1.2., and Excerpt 4.1 lines 01 and 06 respectively) expands the boundaries of Alia's concern towards a spatially broader context, emphasizing the perceived gravity of Donald Trump's election. Alia then offers a list of European countries, all of which had upcoming elections at the time (Austria in 2016, and The Netherlands and France in 2017) in conjunction with a real-world rise in right wing populism in Western Europe (Wodak et al, 2013). Having deemed the American election as influential in validating right wing opinions, as mentioned earlier, Alia proceeds to state facts as argumentations: first justifying her concern as she centres her focus on the election in The Netherlands (A3.), highlighting that Geert Wilders is leading the polls (A3.1), stating he's the right wing candidate (A3.2), and finishing with evaluative remarks "it's not good" and "not very impressed" (A3.2.1-2); this leaves the unsaid consequence—that Geert Wilders may win the election now that Trump's electoral victory is validating right wing opinions—as an evidential negative outcome, and thus a worrisome consequence to the American election.

Sara's argumentation sequence—sandwiched in between Alia's—functions differently, though it feeds into the same angst that Alia expresses. Sara introduces Brexit to the narrative and puts forward a temporally linear account of the political events and their consequences using a discursive compounding argumentation:

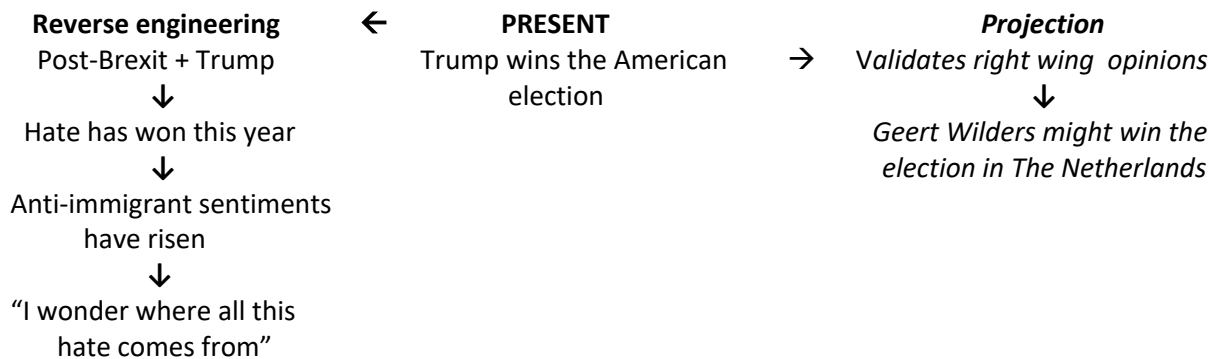
<b>Political event 1</b>	→	<b>Political event 2</b>	→	<b>evaluative remark</b>	→	<b>negative realised outcome</b>
"post-Brexit"	→	"and Trump"	→	"hate has won this year"	→	"anti-immigrant sentiments have just"

The paralleling of Brexit with Trump positions Brexit as a right wing phenomenon, and thus a more nuanced affair than a simple referendum to leave the European Union, which then fits with the broader discourse of a growing right wing and its validation. While Alia proposes a hypothetical as an evidential negative outcome, Sara implicitly puts forward a realised consequence that had already unfolded in the real world: a rise in anti-immigrant sentiments

(Miqadaad, 2016). Sara emphasises the negativity of the situation with the loaded word “hate”, evaluating the combination of Trump’s election and Brexit as a manifestation of said hate: “hate has won this year” (S2.1.). Additionally, Sara’s argumentation of a post-Brexit and Trump reality also functions as a conclusive reflection of the consequences of a rising right wing. That is, interjecting Alia’s argumentation sequence as she was building up to her hypothetical outcome with a conclusive round-up of the real-world repercussions of the right wing’s growing platform temporally places the functioning of the right wing in the here and now, as opposed to an unrealised future. As evident in line 13 of Excerpt 4.1, this is further punctuated by the use of the stressed state clause “*has*” (Polanyi, 1989). As Alia then returns to her argumentation (A3.), Sara repeats the notion of ‘hate’, adding to her sequence using a ‘deictic evaluation’ (ibid): “I wonder where all this hate comes from” (S4.). In other words, the evaluation is not encoded within the same clause as the evaluated information, which produces a slight ambiguity as to what Sara is evaluating as ‘hate’ here; she may, perhaps, be extending her argumentation with a reinforcement of her conclusive view on this post-Brexit and Trump reality, or she may now be incorporating Alia’s hypothetical and thus the broader discourse within the sphere of a ‘hate’ that had induced the then political climate. Whether the former or the latter holds truth, what is clear nonetheless is that the repetition of this evaluative position, and its sequential placement at the end of the argumentation sequence, re-establishes Sara’s characterisation of the political terrain’s catalyst as hate, which in turn bolsters Alia’s commencing psychological response and evaluation of the American election as being a cause for concern (A1.).

The formulation of Sara’s aforementioned argumentation (S4.) is interesting in itself; its syntactic structure creates a slight semantic obscurity as to whether it functions as a direct question, or as a rhetorical one. Though it could be argued that she ‘ends’ her utterance with “it’s like” (Excerpt 4.1, line 25), which seemingly leaves her remark incomplete—Sara’s use of the inquisitive verb “wonder” (Karttunen, 1977) suggests that there is an attempt to elicit further information on the political events being discussed. Indeed, her utterance is treated as such where Alia offers a possible explanation to locate the ‘hate’ driving the political terrain (see Appendix D). Notably, however, Sara’s inquisitive statement is no longer focused on understanding the reasoning behind the political outcomes; rather, having determined ‘hate’ as the catalyst, she is now moving on to elucidate the source of this hate. What we see then, in and amongst the hypothetical and realised argumentations and narrative, is an attempt at reverse engineering the political reality. The projection of what the effects of the American election

*could be* is interlaced with an examination of the active agents behind the general political climate:



#### **Reverse engineering model 4.1-** Sara reverse engineering *x* Alia hypothetical

Demonstrably, this narrative sequence as a whole then serves as a sense-making activity as the sisters not only express angst through psychological responses and hypothesising or concluding on an evidential rise of the right wing, there is an attempt to discursively breakdown and comprehend this political reality. Sara deems ‘hate’ to be the nucleus of both Brexit and Donald Trump’s election, and having affirmed this within the interaction, her final argumentation (S4.) progresses the narrative to try to make sense of the *why* behind it, or to make an attempt to identify the locality of the hate that catalysed these political events. Thus, the discursive co-construction of angst towards Trump’s election that lead up to Sara’s ‘*why*’ shows how the sisters are making sense of this political reality, as Ochs and Capps (2001: 02; emphasis added as non-italics) posit:

*“(...) the activity of narrating with a family member, friend, neighbour, or perhaps a healer serves as a prosaic social arena for developing frameworks for understanding events. Narrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life.”*

In line with their perspective, we can see that the functionality of the narrative in Excerpt 4.1 is that of a non-goal oriented response to a problematic event; that is, the purpose of this narrative is not to offer a resolution that can be operationalised in the form of an active goal one can accomplish. Rather, it is a collaborative reflection on a recent political event functioning as a “social arena for developing frameworks for understanding” (ibid) the American election, along with Brexit and other possible political outcomes in the West. Indeed, sharing thoughts and attempting to comprehend the nature (and possible ramifications) of the

socio-political terrain may in itself serve as a goal to somewhat collectively ‘process’ Trump’s election; however, there is no clear objective being discussed to act upon as a response to his election, hence it’s ‘non-goal oriented’ nature as per Ochs and Capps’ (2001) narrative classification (cf. Chapter 3, section 3.2.4).

Beyond the broader discursive strands in this co-constructive narrative, these frameworks for understanding have embedded within them micro-moves that demonstrate the angst the Sister’s Circle are experiencing. Drawing from Ochs and Capps’ (ibid) view on explanatory sequences, the data shows how the sisters interactively identify a problematic event—the American election—and how they respond to this political stimulus in a temporally non-sequential manner as a means of explaining the event(s) being discussed. While not entirely unexpected insofar as the lead up to the American election demonstrated a level of popularity towards Trump, the sisters’ explanatory efforts to elucidate and express angst surrounding the American election and the broader political terrain shows their consideration of Trump’s election as a problematic one. What we see then is that within the two argumentation sequences offered by Sara and Alia, the realised consequence (the implication that anti-immigrant sentiments have risen), and the projected consequence (the implication that Geert Wilders may win the election in The Netherlands), elicit psychological responses as evaluative remarks (ibid).

The evaluative comments made by Alia and Sara demonstrate emotive responses as provoked by the political climate, namely the realised and projected consequences. As per Ochs and Capps (ibid), such narrative components are viewed from the perspective of personal narratives, where explanatory sequences function as a means of “understanding the logic of events in everyday narratives of personal experience” (ibid: 173); in such instances, they posit that psychological responses expressed by tellers may not only serve to recount the thoughts and feelings of protagonists (which may include the tellers themselves) confined within the temporally-spatial boundaries of the narrative, rather tellers may insert their own thoughts and feelings evoked *by* the telling in the *present* time, and they may also do so in co-constructive instances to demonstrate sympathy, or as a means of aligning their emotive stances with each other. Although these are not personal narratives, similar phenomena can be found in this data, suggesting that the sisters identify the personal implications of the political outcome(s). In other words, the political is taken as personal. While the linearity of events (both the realised and the irrealis) have been discussed earlier, the psychological responses (which are also the evaluative

remarks considered earlier) can be found in the following lines of the corresponding excerpt of the argumentation sequence, Excerpt 4.1:

- 01 Ali: I think **my biggest concern** with like the American election
- 16 SAR: .hh:: **yay: hh**
- 19 Ali: (...) °t's just not-° (0.8) **it's**
- 20 **not good**
- 24 Ali: **not very impressed**

These psychological responses, namely Alia's, carry within them evaluative predicates indicating her positioning with regards to the political climate (lines 01, 19-20, and 24); we see a shift in her affective stance that suggests an implicit expansion of the parameters of her view from that of a personal opinion to a more generalised evaluation. Her initial psychological response, which is specifically directed towards the American election, incorporates an affective predicate (Du Bois, 2007b) – “*concern*” – that is preceded by the first-person possessive pronoun “*my*”. However, as she progresses with her hypothetical narrative, which sees the injection of Sara's input, her evaluative predicate shifts to “*not good*”, which is preceded with the impersonal “*it's*”, after which her final stance “*not very impressed*” is left without a pronoun altogether (it has been ellipped)—though it is formulated as a personalised stance.

These psychological responses demonstrate that in Alia's perspective, Trump's election, and the broader political climate, are being seen in negative terms; it's treated as worrisome (line 01), a situation that Alia subjectively finds unfavourable (line 24), while she also offers a general evaluation of the political reality from what could be said is constructed as an ‘objective’ view (line 19-20). The impersonal “*it*” indicates that Alia's conception of what has happened, and what could consequently happen, is a socio-political circumstance that is objectively negative in her view. She thereby shifts the parameters of her evaluative conclusion (Van Dijk, 1984) beyond her own point of view, which works to establish legitimacy for her concern over the political happenings. In terms of Sara's response (line 16), Belyk and Brown (2014) consider the word ‘yay’ an exclamation; this exclamation, however, is used as a form of irony in response to the political situation. Rockwell (2000) posits that the determinants of ironic statements are vast and inclusive of verbal and non-verbal traits that express the speaker's intent or attitude, however the characteristic verbal mechanism of irony lies in the oppositional inference of their literal utterance, where “the speaker's intent is negative and the literal content is positive” (ibid: 484). Given the preceding and following talk surrounding

Sara's "yay" (along with its elongation: see line 16), it is evident that her perception of the political reality discussed is all but positive, indicating that her utterance is, indeed, ironic. On this basis, Sara's utterance conveys her emotional response, namely her despondency and discontent towards Trump and Brexit, which in turn can be considered psychological in nature as per Ochs and Capps' explanatory sequence framework. It is also social-psychological in nature given that these sentiments are representative of how groups are affected by such socio-political environments and events.

All in all, what these psychological responses then collectively showcase is a level of angst surrounding what has been discursively constructed to be an uncertain future. Furthermore, considering the narratives and argumentations, we can see that the narrative activity has become "a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life" (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 2). The co-authoring of this narrative thus produces a discourse of fear surrounding Trump's presidential election that is anticipated to have a domino effect beyond the US in validating right wing opinions in Europe, thereby demonstrating the Sister's Circle angst. This fear, combined with the positioning of Brexit and Trump as manifestations of hate, demonstrate the sisters' consciousness of the implications for those who are Othered (see Excerpt 4.1, line 14) *as Others*, and the attempted sense-making showcases the group's angst not only in terms of what *has* happened, but what *could* happen as a result—thus building an image of an uncertain future. Indeed, while Trump's election largely remains the dominant source of political angst amongst the sisters, perhaps due to the temporal proximity of the election with the data collection (as well as the gravity of the shock-factor)—references to Brexit and other European political happenings demonstrate the Sister's Circle's concern surrounding broader Western political spaces vis-à-vis a growing right wing populism. For example, we see a similar occurrence in Excerpt 4.2 (below) embedded within another hypothetical narrative. In this upcoming interaction, Alia had expressed an interest in discussing the ongoing French election in 2017, where the right wing candidate Marine Le Pen was making headlines at the time, which I orient to.

**Excerpt 4.2:** *French election – Marine Le Pen*

**Preceding discussion:** Layla’s (a member of the SC) was due to take part in a flash-mob for the Indonesian student society that she is a part of. As she leaves the meeting to attend a rehearsal session, we briefly discuss the upcoming event.

**Sisters:** ALIa, HANain.

- 01 HAN: You wanted to talk about the: French [election]  
02 ALI: [ awh I]  
03 don’t mind it’s not eheh (0.2) I don’t know that  
04 much about it either °so° (0.6) I just thought like  
05 cause obviously (0.3) if you’re suggesting I think  
06 it’s important that people contribute (.) to this  
07 (0.6) [[[inaudible]])]  
08 HAN: [ awh yeah] (0.8) I mean if: Le Pen  
09 wins (0.4)  
10 ALI: it’ll be disappoint[ing ]  
11 HAN: [it’ll be] so depressing

Given the informal nature of these meetings, it is not uncommon for discussions to swerve in and out of the varying meeting topics chosen, which would often lead to non-linear, informal and personal conversations. Hence, a seemingly ‘irrelevant’—or significantly deviant—preceding talk in relation to this excerpt. Layla had left the meeting to attend a practice session for a flash-mob she was partaking in for the Indonesian student society, after which the remaining members of the Sister’s Circle (myself, Alia and Faiza) briefly ponder over her flash-mob. As our discussion on this subject comes to a close, I orient to a topic that Alia had expressed an interest in prior to the meeting—the (then) upcoming French election. Although Alia mitigates or downplays the need, or perhaps her desire, to discuss the election (lines 02-04), she supplements her mitigation with the suggestion that it is a topic she considers worth contributing to (lines 05-06). As she claims that it’s important for “people” to contribute to the topic, the use of the term “people” leaves it unclear as to whether she is referring to people in general—any individual or group—to offer their thoughts on the matter, or if she implies that the sisters as part of the Sisters’ Circle group should do so. In any case, the mere fact that the French election is being given significance, and considered important enough to discuss, arguably demonstrates the ‘noteworthiness’, one could say, of the political climate in France.

The significance Alia gives the French election elicits the launch of a hypothetical narrative by myself, where Marine Le Pen winning the election is put forward as the projected consequence—which is also the projected problem. The short argumentation sequence that follows effectively serves to platform the psychological responses, formulated as projected psychological state changes of the interactants (“*it’ll be disappointing/so depressing*”). Not only does it showcase our angst over the French election, it demonstrates an unspoken yet mutually



understood and agreed upon view that constructs the higher level discourse that Marine Le Pen's election is a negative political prospect:

#### Argumentation Sequence 4.2

**Higher-level discourse:** *Marine Le Pen's election victory would be an undesirable, negative political outcome*

**Problematic event:** *The French election and Marine Le Pen's popularity*

**A1.** It's important that people contribute to this

<b>H1.1.</b> If le pen wins ]	-----	HC
<b>A1.1.1.</b> It'll be disappointing ]		
<b>H1.1.2.</b> It'll be so depressing ]	-----	<b>A1.1.1. – H1.1.2.</b>
		PR

[*A* = *Alia*, *H* = *Hanain*.]

Unlike the interwoven double argumentation sequences in the previous excerpt, there is a collaborative construction of a single hypothetical argumentation strand in this interaction, which functions primarily as a platform for expressing dismay over Marine Le Pen's possible election. That is, in contrast with the previous excerpt, this hypothetical narrative is not assembled using argumentations building up to an implied projection for an undesired political outcome; the hypothetical—Marine Le Pen winning the election—is explicitly stated and put forward with immediacy with a turn-initial “I mean” at line 8 (Fox, 2002). This micro-move interactionally indicates an upcoming adjustment to a speaker's prior turn, “skipping over the other speaker's turn in-between” (ibid: 741), which, in this case, effectively diverts a potential interactional trajectory of a more detailed argumentation breakdown of a hypothetical, towards the immediate provision of the projected outcome and our subsequent psychological responses (where the latter (line 11/**H1.1.2.**) emphasises the former (line 10/**A1.1.1.**)) without any further discursive build up:

→ 10 Ali: **it'll be disappointing**  
 → 11 Han: **it'll be so depressing**

Interestingly, both of these psychological responses are preceded by the impersonal “*it'll be*” followed by affective predicates, which positions these evaluative markers as more factual in nature as opposed to a matter of personal opinion alone. The use of possessive pronouns would imbue a stronger tone of subjectivity to our responses. These viewpoints could, perhaps, have been offered as follows:

→ 10 Ali: <b>I'll be disappointed</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>I'd be disappointed</b>
→ 11 Han: <b>I'll be so depressed</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>I'd be so depressed</b>

This alternative formulation with possessive pronouns situate the relative affective predicates upon Alia's and my conception of reality that, at a micro-level, may not leave much room for discursively broadening the boundaries of our stances beyond our perceptive state. That is, the notion of Marine Le Pen's election being disappointing or depressing would be personalised; it would be specific to our comprehension of the projected political outcome that would inhibit generality of these evaluative remarks beyond the interactional boundaries of this conversation, and its interactants. However, the impersonal pronouns, similar to what was seen in the previous excerpt, expand the parameters of these stances to a more generalised evaluative position that at a micro-level creates a discursive space that blurs the lines of perceptive specificity. That is, these stances may no longer reflect the sisters' (our) opinion alone—one may infer that our positioning reflects our conception of an objective reality where Marine Le Pen winning the election is considered—*objectively*, in our view—a negative outcome.

Once again, what we see in this brief hypothetical narrative is a sense-making exercise on the political plane insofar as there is a collaborative reflection on political happenings (the upcoming French election) and its place in the general scheme of life (the hypothetical outcome of the election, and our psychological responses) serving as a framework for understanding (Ochs and Capps, 2001). The use of a hypothetical narrative combined with the psychological responses that are affective in nature demonstrate a co-construction of an uncertain future that speaks to the angst the (we) Sisters' Circle feel towards the broader European political climate in a post-Brexit and Trump reality. The higher-level discourse that 'Marine Le Pen's election victory would be an undesirable, negative political outcome' is thus constructed through implication.

Continuing with this focus on the European socio-political plane, the next excerpt (Excerpt 4.3) showcases an attempt to collaboratively navigate the vote in favour of Brexit.

**Excerpt 4.3:** *Brexit – “giving the country the go ahead, your views are validated”*

**Preceding discussion:** Sara explains how her friend in the US, who wears a headscarf, is considering taking her hijab off because she no longer feels safe to wear it after Donald Trump's election (see Section 4.4 Excerpt 8).

**Sisters:** SARA, MARYam;

- 01 SAR: I- same with like Brexit you know there's a 500 percent increase  
 02 in hate crime after (0.4) it went through because (0.5) it's kind  
 03 of the country giving the go ahead like you know your views are  
 04 validated  
 05 MAR: yeah [literally and then what are they validating] in this case  
 06 SAR: [that's the way I look at it ]  
 07 MAR: [it's crazy ]  
 08 SAR: [yeah exactly]

09 (0.5)  
 10 MAR: can't imagine what will happen

As outlined in the details for the preceding talk—which will be analysed later in the chapter—Sara narrates how a friend of hers who lives in the United States no longer feels safe enough to wear the hijab after Donald Trump's election (see Section 4.4 Excerpt 4.8). Sara then launches her reflection on Brexit in an argumentation sequence where she instantaneously parallels it with the situation in America—“*same with like Brexit*” (line 01; emphasis added to highlight discourse marker initiating the parallel)—and supplements it with a statistic of an increase in hate crime, which she puts forward as an aftermath of the vote for Brexit. These points of argumentation represent the problematic event and the consequence: Brexit, and a rise in hate crime respectively. These are foundational to what unfolds as a collaborative build-up towards the construction of an uncertain future, as well as the higher-level discourse, that: the vote for Brexit validated views that led to a rise in hate crime. The argumentation sequence from this excerpt is as follows:

### Argumentation sequence 4.3

**Higher-level discourse:** *Brexit validated views that led to a rise in hate crime.*

**Problematic event:** *Brexit, and a 500% increase in hate crime*

**S1.** Same with like Brexit

**S1.1.** There's a 500% increase in hate crime after it went }-----C  
 through

**S1.1.1.** Because it's kind of the country giving the  
 go-ahead

**S1.1.2.** Like you know your views are validated

**M1.1.2.1.** Yeah literally and then what  
 are they validating in this case

**M1.1.2.2.** it's crazy

**M1.2.** Can't imagine what will happen }-----PR

[*S* = Sara, *M* = Maryam.]

Before proceeding to break this sequence down in further detail, it is worth noting that the figure Sara mentions regarding the rise in hate crime is not entirely accurate; the National Police Chief's Council reported a 57% increase in hate crime just days after the referendum (Jeory, 2016), and at around the same time Miqaadad Versi had written an article in the Guardian documenting that he had collated more than 100 reports on Islamophobic incidents related to Brexit for the Muslim Council of Britain (Versi, 2016). Despite this inaccuracy, her sentiment is not unfounded as the statistic she quoted did unfold in reality—a few months after this Sisters' Circle's meeting, there was, indeed, a 500% increase in Islamophobic hate crime

reports after the Manchester Arena attack (Halliday, 2017). The crux of the matter to which Sara is thus referring—a rise in hate crimes following the Brexit vote—is, indeed, reflective of the socio-political climate at the time. Therefore, to return back to the argumentation sequence, the provision of this statistic (**S1.1.**) legitimises the parallels she draws between the two events. It solidifies Sara’s positioning of the vote for Brexit as a similarly fear-worthy political phenomenon to Trump’s election, as the statistical figure functions as supporting evidence to her argument; it is presented as a negative realised outcome that lays the grounds for feeling a lack of safety. By positioning the vote for Brexit and Trump’s election side by side in this manner, this paralleling may lend itself to function as an evaluative argumentation insofar as both political outcomes are framed as events that have led to minorities and marginalised groups feeling unsafe—particularly those who have been categorically targeted in the respective political campaigns.

Despite the fact that there are no psychological responses offered at this stage in the interaction, the very essence of a ‘hate crime’—coupled with the carry-over of the discourse of fear from the preceding talk—constructs the vote for Brexit and its after-effects as negative. With this logic, Sara’s initial argumentation may discursively perform in a similar fashion to a ‘contential evaluation’ (Polanyi, 1989), where “same” (**S1.**) serves as the adhesive linking the discourse of feeling unsafe from the preceding talk and applies it to Brexit, which in turn is the event being evaluated. This demonstrates an element of the sense-making process being undertaken in understanding the vote for Brexit (and Trump’s election), and the subsequent angst surrounding this political event.

Having established this parallel, Sara then moves on to excavate exactly why the vote for Brexit induced an increase in hate crime; she suggests that the political outcome of Britain voting to leave the European Union is in itself a seal of approval whereby “the country” (i.e. Britain) is politically ratifying people’s views (**S1.1.1.** and **S1.1.2.**). Sara’s lexical choice in formulating her argumentation (**S1.1.2.**) is rather interesting as she adopts the use of the second person pronoun ‘*your*’, which, according to Ushie (1994), is not uncommon in conversational narratives when referring to third parties. Indeed, the use of ‘you’ in conversational narratives is multifaceted (ibid); in instances where an interactant refers to a certain group of people while excluding themselves (the first person speaker) from said group, such utilisation of ‘you’ falls into the category of “‘non-inclusive’ generic + ‘non-egocentric’” (ibid: p129). The range of reference constituting this ‘you’ is restrictive, and the positionality thus embodied with this form of ‘you’ is that of a narrator who establishes a distance from the third party being spoken

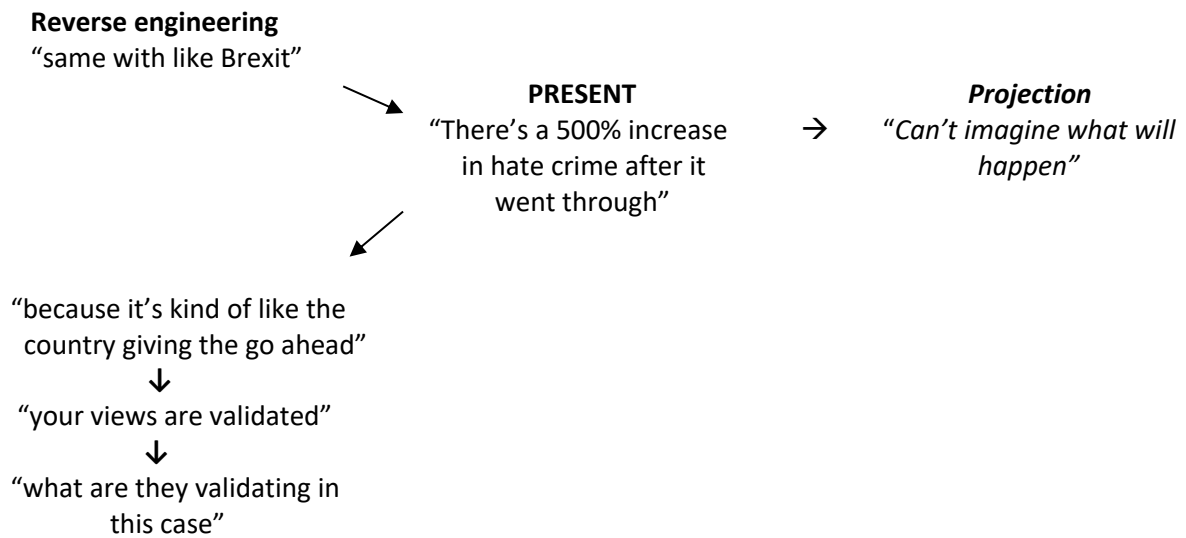
about. This is evident in Sara's use of 'your' in "*your* views are validated" (S1.1.2.; emphasis added), where she is speaking of those whose views are, in her perspective, the basis of the hate-crime she references. That is, she locates the catalyst for the hate-crimes within a political affirmation of a specific set of views amongst the public via Brexit; she proposes that hate crime rose *after* the EU referendum *because* it validated a perspective that views certain societal demographics with disdain, which was, indeed, also reflected in the rhetoric used by some politicians in the 'Leave' campaign (e.g. Nigel Farage).

Once Sara has set the scene, so to speak, Maryam aligns with Sara's breakdown of the relationships between the three main facets of her argumentation thus far: Brexit, the validation of views and the subsequent rise in hate crimes. She demonstrates a strong agreement with Sara's reflection: "yeah literally", and goes on to question *what* exactly is being validated (M1.1.2.1.). If this argumentation were to be considered in isolation—"and then what are they validating in this case"—it may appear to hold some semantic obscurity in the nature of its framing, specifically regarding whether it is discursively utilised to function as a direct question, or a rhetorical one. From a de-contextualised perspective, Sara makes no reference to a 'right-wing' within this argumentation sequence (or any other 'wing' for that matter) as a descriptor of the socio-political spectrum underpinning the views that are being validated. This, in turn, may provide sufficient grounds for one to deem Maryam's question a 'direct' one; it may be seen as an attempt to identify the specific views that are being validated "in this case". However, the socio-political rhetoric the vote for Brexit and Trump's election fostered has been understood by critics to be predicated on right-wing attitudes (Wilson, 2017), thus Sara's explication of how the feeling of a lack of safety has arisen with Trump's election and Brexit positions these events within the margins of the right-wing. This is also reflective of how these political events have largely been treated within the dataset.

Considering the notion that right-wing attitudes and movements are inherently separatist and exclusionary (Wodak et al, 2013), Sara's use of the statistical rise in hate crime then serves as a form of evidence to implicitly bolster the positioning of Brexit as a right-wing phenomenon. Thus, Maryam's question does not seek to elucidate the views that are being validated; referring back to Excerpt 4.3, her alignment with Sara that precedes her question ("yeah literally"), and the immediate continuation of her turn from this utterance (line 05) to her psychological response (line 07) is devoid of any pause where the information she may have been eliciting could be offered. Indeed, the "*what*" that's being validated according to the sisters is not explicitly stated; nonetheless, her statement is treated as rhetorical as Sara's alignment in

line 08 of Excerpt 4.3 demonstrates the synchronisation of “discourse participants’ commitments, confirming their shared beliefs about the world”, which Rohde (2006: 135) posits is characteristic of rhetorical questions. In this instance, then, the views in question could possibly be deemed right wing, and ones that they oppose.

Having collaboratively reflected on Brexit, Maryam offers her psychological response (“it’s crazy”; **M1.1.2.2.**); similar to those seen in previous excerpts, the pronoun preceding what is also an evaluative remark is impersonal. One could then consider that the discursive parameters for her remark are thus perceptively transcendent of her personal opinion as her lexical choice suggests that her conceptualisation of the vote for Brexit, the rise in hate-crime, and the views that have been validated are objectively preposterous. That is, her perspective of the preposterousness of the aforementioned focal points the sisters discussed is a matter of an objective analysis on her part. Had she preceded her psychological response with “*I think* [it’s crazy]”, the discursive margins of absurdity that she interactively draws would have been limited to her personal opinion alone. However, as seen in previous excerpts with the use of impersonal pronouns, her conceptualisation of the ‘craziness’ of the situation is not, according to her discursive articulations, one that is subjectively her opinion alone; instead it implies that within her framing of the vote for Brexit and its aftermath, she entrenches it within an evaluative sphere where the political happenings and their consequences are a matter of objective preposterousness in her view. This psychological response, along with the argumentation sequence prior, foregrounds the sentiment of fear, or angst, around political happenings insofar as the sisters interactionally perform a sense-making exercise using reverse-engineering (see below) to breakdown and understand Brexit, while constructing the higher-level discourse of ‘Brexit validating views that led to a rise in hate crime’ within the framework of feeling ‘unsafe’ that is carried over from the prior discussion (see section 4.4, Excerpt 4.8). This is then punctuated by Maryam’s final utterance of the sequence “can’t imagine what will happen” (**M1.2.**), which works to project an uncertain future—an uncertain future that does not look bright by implication. The cumulative impact of the sense-making exercise, the psychological response, and the projection of an uncertain future not only functionally construct the higher-level discourse, it builds an air of angst the sisters feel regarding the political climate, and possible unknown consequences that it may bring.



#### **Reverse engineering model 4.2-** *Sara reverse engineering with Alia's hypothetical*

The underlying sentiment of feeling a lack of safety, or perhaps a sense of fear, in the given political events is prevalent in discussions where the SC attempt to unpack the motivation of those who aligned with and voted for right-wing political parties and/or political campaigns driven by a right-wing rhetoric. In Excerpt 4.4 (below), we see a continuation of a 'fearfulness' when engaged in an interactional sense-making activity unpacking Trump's election—namely, what motivated those who voted for him. In most cases, other political events or political climates in other Euro-American nations are used as comparative tools paralleling the socio-political planes across Europe and North America that are causing the Sisters' Circle angst. For example, as we have seen in previous excerpts, the vote for Brexit is not only used as a political event to demonstrate the bleakness of the political landscape; rather it is positioned as an equally troubling event to Trump's election insofar it has had real world negative realised outcomes vis-à-vis a rise in hate crime and xenophobic sentiments at the point at which these interactions had occurred (cf. Chapter 2, section 2.3.1). However, in this excerpt, we see a departure from such a positioning where Brexit is still used as a comparative tool to emphasise the negativity and angst surrounding Trump's election, though the severity of all that it encapsulates is slightly mitigated as a means to reinforce the alarm over Trump's presidency. That is, a level of understanding towards the motivating factors for those who voted in favour of leaving the European Union is afforded as a contrastive to stress the horror over Trump's election, and his electors. Indeed, this may, perhaps, be due to the fact that the focus of this interaction is not the political events themselves, rather an attempt to understand the voters' motivation for voting as they did:

**Excerpt 4.4:** “*it’s scary how many people believe what Trump believes*”

**Preceding discussion:** general discussion of Trump’s election

**Sisters:** SARA, MARYam, NAZia.

- 01 MAR: (dunno sometimes) it’s scary how (.) many people (0.5) believe  
02 (1.0) tu- what Trump believes (0.4) and racist views that he  
03 has and like (0.2)
- 04 SAR: yeah (.)
- 05 MAR: to vote for someone like that (0.6) things that have been  
06 exposed about him (0.4) what kind of person is he and then  
07 people go and vote for him I don’t see how (0.3)
- 08 NAZ: thing [that scares- ]
- 09 MAR: [how they are] accepting he’s their president
- 10 NAZ: thing that scares me is with Brexit (.) is was kind of- you can  
11 you can kind of see why they won because (.) the actual  
12 campaign there was loads of like misleading stuff and stuff
- 13 SAR: yeah
- 14 MAR: mhm
- 15 NAZ: whereas with
- 16 MAR: ri[ght ]
- 17 NAZ: [this] it’s like (0.5) it’s m- all kind of more about the actual  
18 person (0.6) and everyone knows what k(hh)ind of a twat he  
19 i(hh)s [b(hh)asicaly heh]
- 20 MAR: yeah but that just shows-
- 21 NAZ: yet they still went to [vote for him]
- 22 MAR: [ are you not] scared about that though  
23 (.) that that probably reflects how a lot of people
- 24 NAZ: that’s what I’m saying [that’s what s-] that’s what I’m saying
- 25 MAR: [think ]
- 26 SAR: [yeah ]
- 27 FAI: [yeah ]
- 28 NAZ: that’s what scares [me ]
- 29 MAR: [and] that’s actually a really bad thing
- Part 1
- Part 2

For the purposes of analysis fluency, this excerpt will be analysed in two parts, as sectioned out above, as there are lower-level discourses embedded within each segment that together work towards constructing the higher level discourse, which is effectively precisely what Maryam states in lines 1-2 – that “it’s scary how many people believe what Trump believes”. The sense of fear has now been extended towards people aligning with Trump rather than the election that resulted in his presidency alone. The two lower level discourses, which will be broken down in upcoming argumentation sequences, are situated firstly in Maryam’s refutation of the American population accepting Donald Trump as their president – “I don’t see how they are accepting he’s their president”; and secondly, in Nazia and Maryam’s co-constructed argumentation point that ‘people voting for Trump reflects how a lot of people think’, carrying within it the implication that the very act of voting for him is indicative of a



problematic collective psyche amongst the public, or perhaps a psyche that is a cause for concern. Voting for Trump is thus treated as symbolic of the very attitudes and beliefs he embodied himself during his Presidential campaign. The two argumentation sequences, along with the higher level discourse, demonstrate that the state of fear the sisters are expressing is not solely instigated by the political events alone; the opinions of the general population that are in alignment with Donald Trump are also affecting their sense of security.

Turning to part 1 of this excerpt's argumentation, Maryam commences her sequence in a similar fashion to Alia's in Excerpt 4.1, whereby her evaluative marker is embedded within the first argumentation:

#### **Argumentation Sequence 4.4**

**Higher level discourse:** *"It's scary how many people believe what Trump believes."*

**Lower level discourse:** *"I don't see how they are accepting he's their president."*

**Problematic event:** *People voted for Trump despite (or because of) what he stands for.*

**M1.** It's scary how many people believe what Trump believes]-----PR

**M2.** And racist views that he has

**M2.1.** to vote for someone like that

**M2.1.1.** things that have been exposed about him

**M2.1.2.** what kind of person is he

**M2.1.2.1.** and then people go and vote for him

**M3.** I don't see how they are accepting he's their president

[*M* = Maryam.]

The evaluative marker Maryam employs, 'scary', reflects her fear-based response to the notion of people aligning with Trump. However, what she's evaluating here is not simply the fact that people may believe what he believes alone; she is also responding to the vastness of his support base in terms of its potentially sizeable impact, which is captured in her argumentation **M1**.: "it's scary *how many* people believe (...)" (emphasis added to highlight the point within Maryam's utterance that orients to the extent of his support base). While she does not quantify this in any specific terms, the use of 'how many' centres her evaluative focus on his expansive endorsement by others from a place of concern, or angst. Her consequential positioning of the public's alignment with Trump as a matter of concern is achieved through a progressive construction of the various reasons as to why Trump, as an individual and a politician, is a questionable choice to vote in as President. These cumulative argumentations work toward the lower-level discourse where Maryam ultimately disputes the acceptance of Donald Trump as President of the United States.

Having initiated her argumentation sequence with an evaluative sentiment grounded in fear, Maryam then extends her concern regarding the endorsement of Trump and the concurrence with his beliefs by specifying an element of said beliefs; that is, she adds onto her initial evaluation by proceeding to state the fact that he holds racist views (**M.2.**), which is given phonetic significance through her enunciation of the beginning of the word ‘racist’ (Excerpt 4.4, line 2). What is seen to then unfold in this sequence is an attempt to negotiate a reality where people support Trump despite all that he espouses. In so doing, Maryam centres his problematic nature within her argumentation sequence as a basis for implicitly discrediting his legitimacy as President of the United States, as well as tacitly refuting the decision to vote for him on the grounds of his questionable character that she constructs. Interestingly, she uses argumentation couplets focusing on why he is questionable before orienting to the act of voting for him. As we see from **M1.**–**M2.1.**, Maryam uses the first two argumentations as described above, after which she puts forward a third argumentation to subtly refute the decision to vote for him on the basis of her preceding statements: “to vote for someone like that” (**M2.1.**). Within this third argumentation, she uses the to-infinitive verb form in stating “to vote for”, which somewhat functions similarly to instances where impersonal pronouns are used in previous excerpts. There is an element of non-specificity in this utterance, not in terms of this implicit refutation having a discursive link to the preceding argumentation or Trump per se, rather the discursive sphere of these utterances demonstrate a slight generality in her sentiment. That is, while she uses her evaluative remark to express concern over people ascribing to Trump’s beliefs, as well as putting forward the fact that he holds racist views, her follow-up refutation of people choosing to vote for “someone like” Trump does not only encapsulate why voting for Trump himself is questionable; it also questions the boundaries of acceptability in politics. To vote for someone like Trump, or to vote for someone—anyone—who espouses what Trump espouses, is discursively marked as part of her refutation with the use of the to-infinitive verb.

Maryam then brings her focus back on to Trump for the second argumentation couplet, this time delving deeper into him as an individual. She progresses from his views and beliefs to his behaviour and character (**M2.1.1.**: “things that have been exposed about him”; and **M2.1.2.**: “what kind of person is he”), thus refining the factors one should be taking into consideration when voting—from an individual’s value-system to who they are as a person. Her lexical choice of the word “exposed” in the first argumentation of this couplet is indicative of the discontent she holds for Trump’s character and behaviour, as it implies the revelation of something unfavourable. For something to be ‘exposed’ about any given entity (human or

otherwise) does not simply refer to the revealing of some information alone; it invokes a certain level of negativity relating to that which has been revealed. The second argumentation (M2.1.2.) from this couplet thus demonstrates that Maryam's disapproval of Trump as a person is inclusive of, or perhaps influenced by, his problematic statements and behaviours from behind the scenes that were brought to surface. Now that Maryam has narrowed in on Trump specifically, her refutation to this couplet is put forward with greater specificity than the previous one. She is not only refuting the notion of voting for someone *like* Trump, she is directly questioning the choice to vote for him despite holding the knowledge of what he stands for (M2.1.2.1.). Indeed, the order in which these argumentations are put forward demonstrate how the broader mechanism of arriving at discursive points within the sequence is largely achieved through a process of 'informational funnelling', so to speak. Each argumentation functions as a discursive marker that works towards the gradual refinement of the sequence, where the argumentations begin to narrow down towards the main discourse output that is being constructed. In this case, the output is Maryam's refutation of people accepting Trump as their President (the lower-level discourse) – which is the final argumentation to complete the sequence. Thus, her initial evaluative remark at the start of this interaction serves as the foundation for her to work towards this refutation (M3.). The process she engages in to arrive at this lower level discourse is not one in which she simply invalidates him as a person and political figure – she expresses her concern for the support he holds amongst the public. Thus, in providing justifications as to why she thinks Trump is a questionable choice, the 'scariness' that Maryam refers to in her psychological response is implicitly weaved into the entire argumentation sequence as a whole.

This sentiment of concern, of feeling scared, is further extended by Nazia in the second half of the excerpt. The argumentation sequence is as follows:

#### **Argumentation Sequence 4.5**

**Lower level discourse:** *People knowingly voting for Trump reflects how a lot of people think.*

**Problematic event:** *People voted for Trump despite (or because of) what he stands for*

**N1.** Thing that scares me is ]-----PR

**N1.1.** With Brexit you can kind of see why they won

**N1.1.2.** because the actual campaign there were loads  
of misleading stuff

**N1.2.** whereas with this it's all kind of more about the actual  
person

**N1.2.1.** and everyone knows what kind of a twat he is

**N1.2.1.1.** yet they still went to vote for him

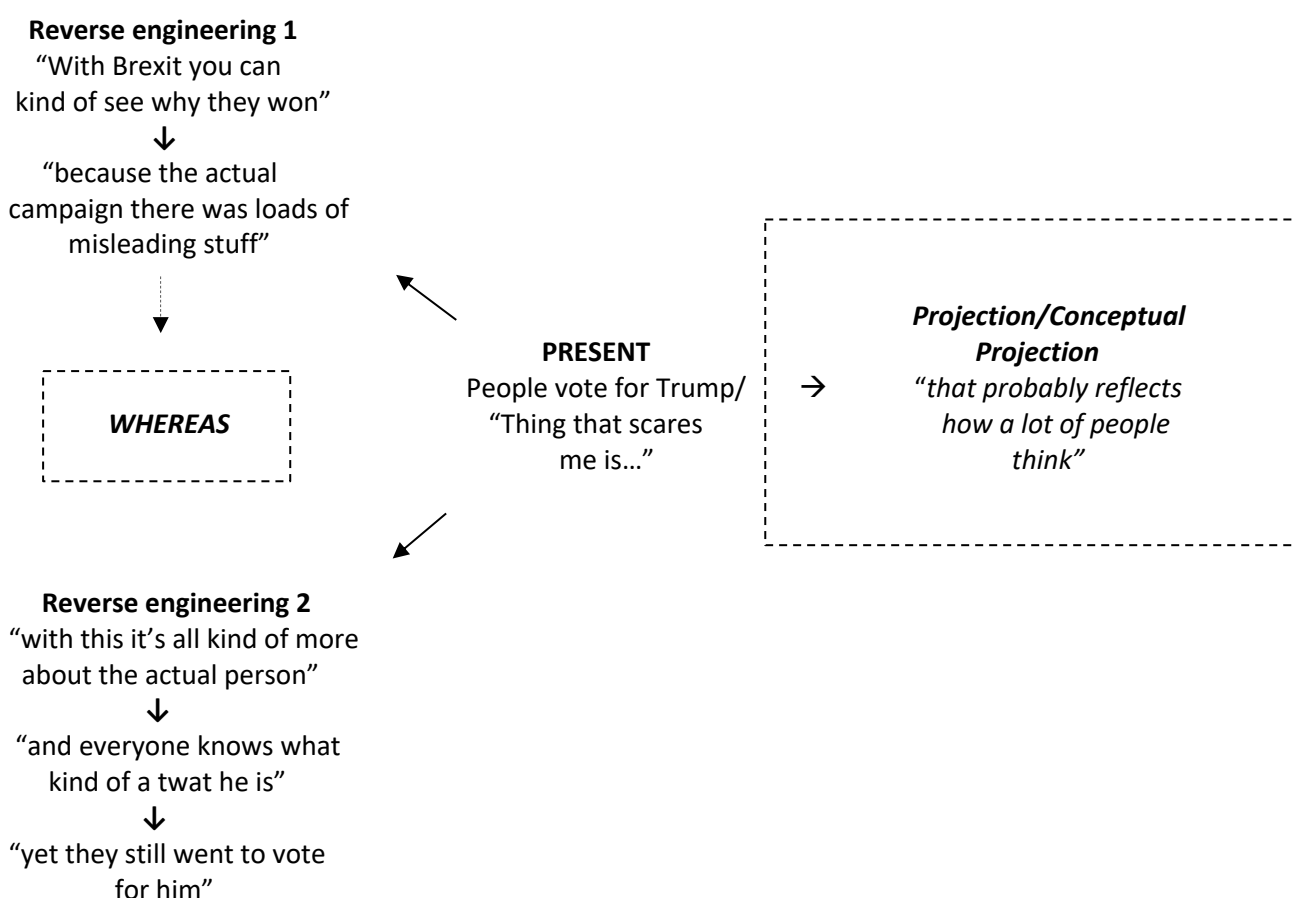
**M2.** are you not scared about that though ]-----PR

**M2.1.** that that probably reflects how a lot of people think

N2.2. that's what I'm saying  
 N2.2.1. that's what scares me }-----PR

[*N* = Nazia, *M* = Maryam.]

As part of her extension to Maryam's concern surrounding the very act of supporting and voting for Trump, Nazia employs a double stranded comparative reverse-engineering process in her argumentation sequence as a tool to emphasise how worrisome the situation is. She achieves this by initiating her perspective on the 'scariness' of Trump's attainment of votes alongside a mitigation of how concerning the notion of people voting for Brexit is. Effectively, she offers two brief contrastive breakdowns of the political events to discursively assemble and make sense of the state of their present reality. Contrary to the reverse-engineering processes from previous excerpts, in this instance the 'projection' that Nazia and Maryam work towards in expressing their angst is not time-bound; rather, they operate as conceptual extrapolations from a sense-making exercise unpacking political voting in Trump's election and Brexit, offering a discursive projection of a societal value set.



**Reverse engineering model 4.3-** *Nazia reverse engineering Brexit and Trump*

To better understand the functionality of this sense-making process, there are discursive moves within this argumentation sequence to unpack. The commencement of the sequence with Nazia offering an evaluative marker grounded in fear, or angst (N1.: “thing that *scares* me is”; emphasis added to highlight evaluator) parallels Maryam’s sequential ordering from the first argumentation sequence of this excerpt. However, the sequential trajectories of their narrative episodes diverge thereafter as Nazia orients to Brexit as opposed to turning to critique Trump with immediacy, as Maryam does. Previous excerpts have seen the positioning of Brexit as a similarly bleak political event to Trump’s election as a means of emphasising how worrisome the general socio-political landscape is, however Nazia discursively utilises it slightly differently; she reflects on Brexit with a degree of mitigation in terms of its severity. That is, she offers a level of understanding towards the possibility of pro-Brexit voters effectively falling into a trap of being misled by falsified claims made by the ‘Leave’ campaign that they may have unknowingly bought into (N1.1.–N1.1.2.). One of the most discussed falsifications in the days leading up to the vote, for example, was the claim that Britain would gain back a weekly sum of £350million that could, or would, get circulated back into the NHS (which was labelled a “misuse” of financial statistics by the UK Statistics Authority (Khan, 2016)). Thus, in essence, rather than positioning Brexit as a parallel to the American election, Nazia utilises it as a contrastive political event—albeit an undesirable one—to accentuate the ‘scariness’ of Trump’s election. The mitigation thus offered towards the motivating factors of those who voted in favour of Brexit is pivotal in discursively constructing the angst Nazia is expressing towards the motivating factors of pro-Trump voters.

Having positioned Brexit as a comparative political event, Nazia then turns to consider the American election by bringing Trump as an individual—not just as a politician—to the forefront. She begins with noting that the difference between Brexit and the American election is that the latter is “more about the actual person” in the running to be President that voters politically invest in (N1.2.). Next, she echoes Maryam’s critique of his character; however, her focus on the awareness the voters will have had prior to the election is conveyed more emphatically than Maryam. As discussed in the analysis for the previous argumentation sequence, Maryam is seen to employ informational funnelling to work towards the lower-level discourse, where she gradually narrows down to her point of questioning Trump’s character to then implicitly refute the decision of those who voted for him. Nazia, on the other hand, not only explicitly refers to Trump as a “twat”, she unequivocally states that “everyone” has an awareness of “what kind of a twat he is” (N1.2.1.). On the back of this, she then offers her

refutation: “yet they still went to vote for him” (N1.2.1.1.). This argumentation mirrors the underlying sentiments of Maryam’s refutations whereby the decision to vote for Trump is being challenged on the basis of the fact that the voters will have made an informed decision. That is, they will have known prior to the election exactly “what kind of a twat” Trump is, and “yet” the voters “still” decided to vote for him – which is effectively seen as the core of the fear-worthy issue at hand. At this point Maryam reorients the discussion back to expressing fear regarding the people’s choice to vote for Trump as she interjects Nazia’s conveyance of her final argumentation with a psychological response (M2.–M2.1.): “are you not scared about that though”, “that that reflects how a lot of people think”. Nazia affirms Maryam’s position (N2.2.–N2.2.1.) with a psychological response confirming that what Maryam is orienting to is exactly what scares her, after which Maryam offers a closing evaluation that “that’s actually a really bad thing” (Excerpt 4.4, line 30). All in all, what this showcases is that central to Nazia and Maryam’s angst is not simply Trump’s Presidency, or the environment his election created; rather, it’s the very fact that he has public support, and the public mind-set this support for him is reflective of, which is evident—as per Maryam and Nazia—given that people chose to vote for him despite holding knowledge of his values. Effectively, what Nazia and Maryam allude to is that the consideration of an individual who holds racist views as an acceptable candidate to vote into a leadership position evidences that their voters possibly mirror their views, or perhaps do not consider all that they espouse problematic enough to deem them an inappropriate leader.

The two argumentation sequences, with their lower level discourses, combine together to construct the higher level discourse: that Maryam and Nazia find it “scary how many people believe what Trump believes”. The backbone of this discourse has been outlined in the breakdown of the lower level discourses. The angst Maryam and Nazia are thus expressing—with the use of variants of the psychological response ‘scary’ woven through the interaction—is transcendent of Trump’s election to centre the views and opinions of the public. Therefore, although the problematic event of this narrative episode remains to be Trump’s election, the sense-making exercise in this instance is directed at the voters as opposed to the political event itself. That is, what is treated as the problematic event in this instance is not the election result alone—it also includes the fact that such a high volume of voters supported and voted for him, and given the electoral result, the acceptance of Trump as President is considered both refutable and worrisome. The foundation of this discursive sense-making process vis-à-vis their non-goal oriented response, the functionality of this interaction yet again paralleling Ochs and Capp’s

(2001) model of personal narratives, as well as the expression of angst surrounding Trump's election further demonstrates how politics is personal.

Given the discussions considered thus far, the Sisters' Circle's concern over Trump's election validating right wing opinions across the globe—despite the geographical distance—and the American public's mind-set is indicative of how members of the Sister's Circle are experiencing this political reality as one that will directly impact their (our) personal socio-political world. Resultantly, the SC view the future with uncertainty and fear, which demonstrates the SC's minority angst. Where the vote for Brexit is utilised as a comparative to Trump's election, the latter in particular has catalysed a dedicated effort to engage in sense-making efforts to navigate the socio-political plane, including how Trump's election may influence political happenings in Europe. The following section thus showcases how the Sisters' attempt to make sense of the future implications for the socio-political landscape now that Donald Trump is President of the United States.

#### **4.3 A Scary Post-Trump Future**

Given that the stimulus that has triggered the upcoming sense-making responses is Trump winning the American Presidential election, the problematic event for all of the narratives analysed in this section is, indeed, Donald Trump successfully entering the Office. However, in a couple of the excerpts there are instances where this is not the only problematic event; there are secondary issues that elicit further sense-making and conveyance of fear. The primary focus on Trump within the discussions considered in this section emphasise the angst experienced by members of the Sister's Circle as there is a dedicated effort to excavate the pending reality of Trump as President of the United States. Additionally, as all of the interactions presented in this section are on Trump's election, they have all transpired within the broad discussion of Trump's election. For this reason, 'preceding discussion' will not be highlighted, as each conversation is preceded by talk on Trump's election. The excerpt below follows on from the discussions in the previous section where the Sister's Circle interrogate the socio-political mechanics of how the election result came to be. The sentiment of fear, or feeling scared, is once again made relevant:

**Excerpt 4.5:** “what is it gonna be like now that he’s president”

**Sisters:** HANain, SARa, FAIza.

- 01 HAN: what- what is scary is (0.5) the (0.6) re:ason  
02 as to why he came into power so it’s the  
03 rhetoric (.) [that was] present throughout  
04 SAR: [ yeah ]  
05 HAN: his campaign  
06 FAI: mmhmm  
07 HAN: that attracted people and secondly what  
08 environment that’s gonna attract because  
09 .hh it- it already- ready created (0.4) such  
10 a bad environment throughout the cam[paign]  
11 SAR: [yeah:]  
12 HAN: what is it gonna be like now that he’s president

This excerpt showcases an instance where I offered my thoughts during discussions on Trump as a member of the Sister’s Circle, and it will be analysed in tandem with previously considered interactions demonstrating yet another example of angst surrounding the nuances to Trump’s election. That is, this excerpt demonstrates once again that the ‘scariness’ of this political reality is not isolated to the fact of Donald Trump entering his Presidential term, rather it is inclusive of the broader socio-political elements that resulted in his victory, and the possible (incomprehensible) after-effects.

Similar to previous examples, the evaluative marker ‘scary’ is used as a means to initiate the opinion put forth in building up to the higher-level discourse, which in this case is: Donald Trump’s Presidency will lead to an undesirable socio-political environment. Below is the argumentation sequence for this excerpt showcasing how this discourse has been worked toward:

**Argumentation Sequence 4.6**

**Higher-level discourse:** *Donald Trump’s presidency will lead to an undesirable socio-political environment*

**Problematic event:** *Donald Trump’s election and his support pre- and post-election*

- H1. What is scary is the reason as to why he came into power }----- PR  
    H1.1. so it’s the rhetoric that was present throughout his  
        campaign  
        H1.1.1. that attracted people  
    H1.2. and secondly what environment that’s gonna attract  
        H1.2.1. because it already created such a bad  
                environment throughout his campaign }----- C  
    H1.3. what is it gonna be like now that he’s president

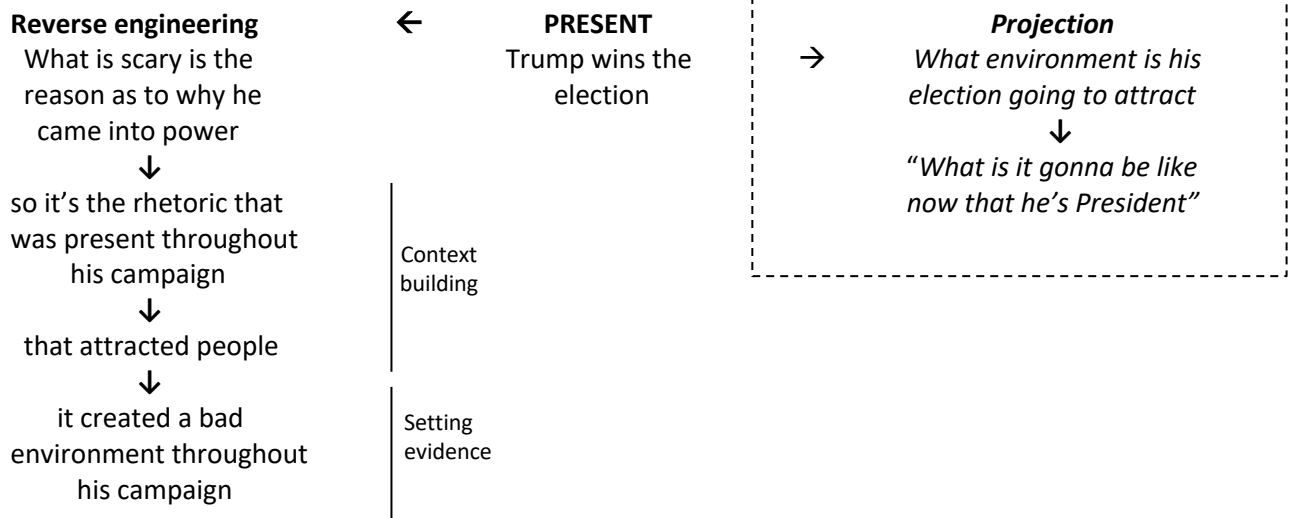
[*H* = Hanain]



The higher-level discourse in this sequence is achieved by implicitly working towards the notion of a pending bleak future, where the sequence is closed off with an argumentation querying how things will unfold (**H1.3.**). My input in the discussion works to reaffirm the shared angst being expressed by other members of the Sister's Circle over the motivating factors behind Trump's election by orienting to "the reason as to why he came into power"—which, as mentioned earlier, is introduced as 'scary' (**H1.**). Similar to Excerpt 4.4 (see argumentation sequence 4.4), a process of informational funnelling has been deployed, carrying within it a reverse-engineering process as a form of sense-making in an attempt to comprehend the uncertainty of the future. The process of funnelling not only parallels Maryam's example structurally insofar as each argumentation functions as a discursive marker cumulatively working to arrive at a discursive destination—in this case being the projection of an uncertain and negative future—the commencing evaluative markers in both instances are also identical. In other words, the sentiment of fear, or angst, in both argumentation sequences are mirrored through the use of the same psychological response: 'scary'. Additionally, as seen in Excerpt 4.2 (argumentation sequence 4.2), this evaluative marker is devoid of a personal pronoun; it is not articulated as "*I am scared*" or "*I find it scary*", for example, which precludes the framing of this stance as a personal one from my perspective (as articulated) at the time. With it formulated as a factual reality, objective in nature, as opposed to a perceptual subjective expression of one's feelings more explicitly through the use of personal pronouns, the discursive parameters are once again widened beyond the sphere of the personal. This, as seen in previous excerpts, works to emphasise the depth of angst felt by members of the Sister's Circle, as it is painting a picture of scariness through articulating it as a matter of objectivity rather than perception. Indeed, the repeated use of variants of feeling 'scared' and 'scary' throughout the interactions holds significance, as it is indicative of the broader psychological impact Trump's election is having on the members of the Sister's Circle; not only is his election being positioned as an undesirable political event, it is framed as an outcome eliciting fear, further evidencing the ways in which the political is taken as personal.

Having laid the foundation of angst regarding the circumstances that led to Trump's election (**H1.**), the specifics of what is being alluded to is clarified – the rhetoric present throughout Trump's campaign trail (**H1.1.**). It is worth noting that the phonetics of the commencing argumentation indicate that this narrative factor is being given significance as the word 'reason' in itself is enunciated (Excerpt 4.5, line 1). Indeed, Trump's rhetoric and political orientation have already been collectively positioned within the right of the political spectrum

through previously questioning his character vis-à-vis his racist disposition, as well as the post-election concern regarding the projected consequential validation of right wing opinions rippling far beyond the geographical borders of the US. The reference to his rhetoric in this instance is thus loaded. That is, given the Sister's Circle's previously determined view of Trump's value-set and political orientation as right wing, re-establishing the nature of his rhetoric could be considered superfluous. Indeed, the lack of explanation regarding the specifics of his rhetoric, Sara's displayed alignment following argumentation **H1.1.** (see Excerpt 4.5, line 4: "yeah"), and a lack of requests for clarification, together indicate a shared recognition of what is meant by "rhetoric". The utilisation of phonetic tools is carried out once again as the argumentation sequence proceeds to draw attention to the fact that Trump's rhetoric in itself is what attracted his supporters (**H1.1.1.**), indexed by the enunciation of 'that' (see line 07). Therefore, the constituents incorporated in the bracket of 'scariness' surrounding the factors that led to Trump's election is not his rhetoric during his campaign alone – it is also inclusive of the fact that it was the values he espoused in itself that attracted people to support him. This may, perhaps, function to tacitly suggest that public alignment with right wing views is a fear-worthy phenomenon, which was also implicitly discussed in the final interaction of the previous section (see Excerpt 4.4). At this point, this sequence's temporal trajectory alters slightly by turning to the unrealised future, whereby the resultant environment that Trump's election could attract is questioned (**H1.2.**). This questioning is justified by once again turning to the past to lay down some evidence (**H1.2.1.**); by highlighting the fact that his campaign had already created a bad environment, it anchors the implication that the socio-political environment, given Trump's election, is predisposed to negativity or undesirability. The non-linear temporal shifts are thus consequential to the narrative at hand, as the underlying purpose these discursive time-jumps serve is the hypothetical transference of an outcome from the temporal sphere of the past to bind it into the future, thereby evoking angst. Effectively, the past is used to authenticate the construction of the higher-level discourse through the recollection of a previously realised undesirable outcome (i.e. the creation of a bad environment). Within these back and forth temporal shifts in the narrative, a reverse-engineering process can be seen to unfold, where the argumentations referencing the past are effectively a combination of context building and establishing evidence to arrive at the higher-level discourse, working to project uncertainty and concern for the future:



#### **Reverse engineering model 4.4-** *My reverse engineering of Trump's campaign*

While the argumentation points listed in the 'Reverse engineering' section are not consecutively uttered in the argumentation sequence as they have been laid out in the diagram, its purpose here serves to reflect the order in which argumentations situated in the past are relayed. That is, this sense-making model does not demonstrate the temporal shifts as and when they occur in the interaction; rather it separates the narrative points as spoken within their temporal relative categories in accordance with the framework of this model (i.e. 'Reverse engineering', 'Present', 'Projection'), and how each point progressively works to build the higher-level discourse. The purpose of this model is thus to showcase how the process of reverse engineering—though deployed in a slightly different order than the argumentation sequence—is present nonetheless, and broadly functions to make sense of the situation at hand, as well as constructing uncertainty regarding the future. Therefore, the fragments that function as 'context building' points and 'setting evidence' have been marked for clarity. Defining argumentations **H1.1.** and **H1.1.1.** as contextual facets of the sense-making process is not to erase their more nuanced micro-level purpose of signifying the specific elements of the reason(s) behind Trump's electoral victory that elicit fear; they have been labelled as such in this instance to locate their broader discursive function at a macro-level in relation to the higher-level discourse. They have been marked as contextual to demonstrate how establishing the sentiment of fear, and justifying that state of being, are foundational to the broader objective of this narrative, which is ultimately to construct angst surrounding the future vis-à-vis the higher-level discourse. The 'setting evidence' facet of this narrative is thus pivotal in establishing the

trajectory of this sequence, as it operates as the trajectorial juncture forming the basis to not only question the future – rather, to question it while implicitly projecting a bleak future.

The formulation of the final argumentation (H1.3) as a query therefore finalises the discursive tone of the sequence to concern for the pending reality: “what is it gonna be like now that he’s President?”. Though it may appear to be a simple question in isolation, the preceding argumentation generates a discursive backdrop of Trump’s political presence having a negative impact on the socio-political environment, thereby adding weight to this question. The query is thus not simply seeking to understand what it is “gonna be like now that he’s President” – it carries within it the implicit projection of, and conveyence of concern for, the possibility of a pending doom. This essentially effectuates the arrival at the higher-level discourse, that: ‘Donald Trump’s presidency will lead to an undesirable socio-political environment’. The query posed in the closing of this argumentation sequence thus functions as a rhetorical one, as the answer is implicitly encoded within the prior argumentation. Indeed, it is treated as such, as nobody offers any specific consequences to Trump’s Presidency, nor do they entertain hypothetical situations that may possibly unfold. Such a line of questioning regarding how a post-Trump reality will play out is a common feature in these discussions. The following two discussions showcase instances where the impact of Trump’s leadership on policies are questioned – one considering governance in the US (Excerpt 6), while the other considers the global impact (Excerpt 7).

**Excerpt 4.6:** *“is he gonna actually implement stuff”*

**Sisters:** MARYam, FAIza, HANain, SARa, NAZia.

- 01 MAR: What d’you thinks gonna happen though (.) what’s  
 02 he gonna do (0.4) like what’s he gonna do to people  
 03 FAI: [I don’t-]  
 04 HAN: [hones- ]  
 05 (0.2)  
 06 MAR: Is he gonna [actually] implement stuff  
 07 HAN: [ (\*\*) ]  
 08 (0.2)  
 09 FAI: I [don’t think like] half the things that politicians say  
 10 MAR: [ (°that he said°) ]  
 11 FAI: before they actually get into office they actually: (.)  
 12 implement or they actually [do ]  
 13 SAR: [°yeah°]  
 14 (0.3)  
 15 FAI: and a lot of it is based on fear-mongering and that’s  
 16 exactly what he did and he got e- what he wanted in  
 17 [the end but I don’t think he’s] actually gonna go into  
 18 SAR: [ but th- thing is um ]  
 19 FAI: office and- .hh sterilize all gay people or whate- what

20 did he say about gay people=  
 21 HAN: =mmm=  
 22 FAI: =or like (0.4)  
 23 HAN: [so ridiculous ]  
 24 NAZ: [some sort of like] therapy [for gay] people  
 25 FAI: [ yeah ]  
 26 SAR: [but they-]  
 27 NAZ: [it's like- ]  
 28 SAR: they could [pass a lot of laws now because- ]  
 29 FAI: [I don't- literally think he's gonna do that]  
 30 NAZ: [oh and he wants to make]  
 31 abortion [illegal again or something]  
 32 SAR: [ like this is the first time] I think  
 33 [since ninetee:n- ]  
 34 FAI: [they have to pass it through] congress though [don't ]  
 35 SAR: [twen-]  
 36 FAI: they [first]  
 37 SAR: [but-] they're all Republican (.) now (0.4)  
 38 FAI: not [all of them ]  
 39 SAR: [no not the congress] but like you know- house and  
 40 senate and stuff they're all Republic for the first time  
 41 (0.4)  
 42 in like almost a hundred years it's [all Republican]  
 43 FAI: [mmhmm ]  
 44 HAN: °oh shit°=  
 45 SAR: =so they could pass laws that're like dodgy  
 46 [or yeah it's terrifying isn't it]  
 47 FAI: [ they're all Republicans ]  
 48 HAN: [ that's so shit ]

The effort to grasp the nuances of why Trump's election win is worrisome, and what it could subsequently mean for the future, now progresses from broader concern for how the general socio-political landscape will be impacted to specific ways in which it may be (re)shaped at a policy level. While individual policies are not discussed in depth, references to political promises and values Trump pledged support for during his campaign—as recalled by the sisters in this interaction—are referenced. Interestingly, this narrative sequence differs to previous examples where sense-making exercises are undertaken with a mutual focus of digesting, or cognitively processing the political events, and expressing fear over an uncertain future. In this instance, however, concern for how the future may unfold through questioning from Maryam is quickly mitigated by Faiza, who repudiates the plausibility of Trump's claims attaining legal ratification through legislative enactment. This is not to deny that the vocalisation of differences in opinion is not a form sense-making in itself, as it is demonstrative of a collective effort to comprehend the possible ramifications (if at all) of a political event. Nonetheless, it triggers overlapping talk as their dis-affiliative stances regarding the potential

for Trump's values being actualised in policy causes Faiza and Sara to attempt to substantiate their respective positioning regarding the issue. As quite a large proportion of this interaction is thus constituted of overlapping talk, the argumentation sequence below separates each argumentation to their respective points of completion, without marking the intersections of overlap (though incomplete utterances due to interruption have been included and marked with a '-' as per the Jeffersonian transcription standard).

#### Argumentation Sequence 4.7

**Higher-level discourse:** *Trump's administration could pass dodgy laws*

**Primary problematic event:** *Trump winning the election*

**Secondary problematic event:** *the House and Senate are all Republicans for the first time in almost a hundred years*

- M1.** What d'you thinks gonna happen though  
**M2.** What's he gonna do  
     **M2.1.** like what's he gonna do to people  
     **M2.2.** Is he gonna actually implement stuff that he said  
**F3.** I don't think half the things politicians say before they actually get into office they actually implement or they actually do  
     **F3.1.** and a lot of it is fear mongering  
         **F3.1.1.** and that's exactly what he did  
             **F3.1.1.1.** and he got what he wanted in the end  
**F4.** but I don't think he's gonna go into office and sterilize all gay people  
     **F4.1.** what did he say about gay people?  
         **N4.1.1.** some sort of therapy for gay people  
             **N4.1.1.1.** oh and he wants to make abortion illegal again or something  
**S5.** but they could pass a lot of laws now  
     **S5.1.** because like this is the first time I think since nineteen twen-  
     **F5.2.** they have to pass it through congress though don't they first  
         **S5.2.1.** but they're all Republicans now  
             **F5.2.1.1.** not all of them  
                 **S5.2.1.1.1.** no not the congress but like you know house and senate and stuff  
                 **S5.2.1.1.2.** they're all Republican for the first time in like almost a hundred years  
                 **S5.2.1.1.3.** its all Republican  
                     **H5.2.1.1.3.1.** oh shit  
     **S5.2.2.** so they could pass laws that're like dodgy or  
         **S5.2.2.1.** yeah it's terrifying isn't it  
         **H5.2.2.2.** that's so shit  
         **F5.2.2.3.** they're all Republicans?
- M1. – M2.2. PR
- S5.2.1.1.1. – S5.2.1.1.3. Secondary PE and C
- PR
- Hypothetical C
- S5.2.2.1. – H5.2.2.2. PR

[*M* = Maryam, *F* = Faiza, *S* = Sara]

Before proceeding with this analysis, it is worth noting that two problematic events have been identified in the following accounts: firstly, Trump's election—the primary problematic event—is the nucleus of the Sister's Circle's angst in this section as a whole, insofar as all

discussions are pertaining to the after-effects of his election, which has consequently catalysed a series of sense-making attempts; secondly, the secondary problematic event—the total domination of the House and Senate by the Republican Party—is the pivotal argumentation marker that warrants the redirection of the sequence’s trajectory from the attempt to mitigate Maryam’s fear of what Trump may implement, to ratifying her sentiment. This will, indeed, be unpacked in detail in the forthcoming analysis. It is, nonetheless, worth noting that this secondary problematic event simultaneously functions as a narrative ‘consequence’ (as per Ochs and Capp’s explanatory sequence model) as the Republican dominance of the House and Senate are a direct result of the American election.

This sequence commences with Maryam questioning what the future entails, specifically whether Trump will, in fact, follow through with the political actions and values he endorsed during his campaign (**M1. –M2.2.**). While these argumentations do not function as informational insofar as they are not discursively working to provide information or to convey a particular point, the mode of questioning has nonetheless been deployed in a fashion that resembles the informational funnelling seen in previously analysed excerpts. That is, the specificity of what Maryam is trying to elicit information on, and an answer for, is made increasingly direct with each question. She starts with a broad query, “what d’you thinks gonna happen though” (**M1.**), where she attempts to envisage the consequences of Trump’s election on the socio-political plane, effectively trying to comprehend what will unfold. She then adds more specificity to her line of questioning by asking “what’s he gonna do” (**M2.**). In so doing, she shifts the focus of post-Trump’s election contingencies from a lens of passivity (**M1.**)—where happenings situated in the socio-political sphere were questioned without reference to specific actors catalysing events (i.e. things simply happening)—to a more active lens (**M2.**), where accountability is now being placed directly onto Trump and his actions (i.e. somebody does something to cause something to happen). This shift of focus is further emphasised by the enunciation of the word “do” (see Excerpt 4.6, line 2), demonstrating that the locus of concern is, indeed, Trump’s direct actions. Maryam then delves deeper into the issue by extending her specification by asking what he will do *to people* (**M2.1.**; emphasis added). She resultantly adds to the realm of concern not just his actions as the President of the United States, rather his actions deliberately directed towards people. She effectively includes a subject to her query who, if one were to inverse the argumentation structure, would be directly affected by Trump’s intentional actions. She eventually concludes her questioning with a final query considering whether or not he is “gonna actually implement stuff that he said” (**M2.2.**); this effectively

closes Maryam's question loop as she arrives at the nucleus of her point of concern, which is seemingly whether or not Trump will actualise the values he endorsed throughout his campaign via the implementation of his pledges into policy.

The use of the word 'actually' signifies the extent of Maryam's concern as its use places emphasis on the potential for Trump *actually* implementing certain policies reflective of the *stuff that he said*. Tognini-Bonelli (1993) posits that among the myriad of uses of 'actually' in discourse, it is often used as a "correlation between two elements" (ibid: 203); that is, "*actually* has the function of dividing and differentiating" between two elements that may otherwise appear as a single entity, where 'actually' signals a "postural change" (ibid: 204; her emphasis). The differentiation made here is not simply between the election of Donald Trump as President, and the subsequent potential that he may *actually* implement new policies; rather, the emphasis is also drawn toward the very real possibility that he may in fact implement the *stuff that he said* throughout his campaign, which, through previous discussions, has been positioned as right-wing and worrisome (or in the words of the members of the Sister's Circle thus far – *scary*). This effectively underscores the broader locus of concern behind Maryam's line of questioning onto the *actual* possibility that Trump may: a) proceed to pass bills, and b) pass bills that are harmful to many people. While Maryam's questions do not construct a definitive negative future, they do demonstrate uncertainty of what may happen as a direct result of Trump entering the Office based on speculative concerns. This, coupled with her indirect reference to what he endorsed prior to the election does, nonetheless, suggest that Maryam's comprehension of the uncertain future is tacitly infused with pessimism, thereby demonstrating her angst. On that basis, one could consider Maryam's line of questioning as a psychological response insofar as it demonstrates her concern about the upcoming post-Trump's election future.

Interestingly, where previous examples in this chapter showcase a discursive continuum within each respective discussion insofar as the functionality of the argumentation sequences have broadly demonstrated a shared experience of angst surrounding the socio-political landscape (albeit with differences in sense-making actions and trajectories)—this interaction, however, exhibits a departure from this narrative form whereby the discursive flow is interrupted with a mitigation. As Maryam approaches the completion to her line of questioning, Faiza intervenes (F3.) to mitigate her brewing angst surrounding Trump, and what he may now *actually* implement as President. It is worth noting that Faiza makes two attempts to interject as Maryam relays her questions; she attempts to share her thoughts in line 03 (Excerpt 4.6), though she does not proceed with her turn until Maryam nears completion of her fourth and



final query – which Faiza consequently overlaps with amidst the 0.2sec pause in Maryam’s turn (between “implement stuff” (line 06) and “that he said” (line 10) from Excerpt 4.6). While the purpose of this chapter is not to interrogate who successfully holds the interactive floor, or the functionalities of overlapping talk and interruptions, Faiza’s efforts to intervene before Maryam concludes her questioning indicates that her response is not specifically directed at Maryam’s closing query—and thus the core of her concern—vis-à-vis Trump *actually* implementing stuff *that he said*; instead, it suggests that she may perhaps have initially been responding more broadly to the general perceived threat of Trump in Office.

The overlapping talk lingers on for quite an extensive period of the remainder of this interaction, which speaks to the divergence of discursive trajectories in terms of their positioning in cognising the risk Trump’s Presidency holds. That is, as Faiza jumps in to mitigate the potential for, and thereby the severity of, Trump and his administration passing problematic bills, Sara refutes her mitigation by affirming the legitimacy of Maryam’s angst with corroborative information on the threat Trump’s administration poses. What interactively unfolds is the emergence of two distinct yet intertwined oppositional narrative trajectories; while both are effectively hypothetical narratives, insofar as they work to project a possible unrealised outcome, they differ in their discursive output where one functions as a negative hypothetical narrative, and the other is a positive one. The narrative categorisation (as positive and negative) in this context is not to define the boundaries of desirability in terms of what the preferred hypothetical from the Sister’s Circle’s perspective would be; rather, it is to mark the direction of the discursive flow in relation to the positioning of the argumentation sequence initiator, viz. the trajectory Faiza and Sara’s hypothetical narratives take relative to Maryam’s concern regarding the potential for Trump implementing problematic policies. In other words, the positive narrative trajectory is considered positive in terms of the directional stance in relation to Maryam’s fears in that it affirms her angst, whereas the negative serves to counter it. As such, Faiza’s narrative thread functions as a negative hypothetical, as she counters Maryam’s concern over the (unspecified) possibilities of Trump’s actions, while Sara’s narrative trajectory is thus positive as her refutation of Faiza’s narrative substantiates Maryam’s fears. While the narrative trajectories are oppositional, they are, indeed, both part of one single argumentation thread, as they are discursively responding to Maryam’s initial questioning (and subsequently to each-other). The point at which there is a divergence in the sequence producing a separation in the argumentation thread—further adding to the overlapping talk—is Nazia’s input. This will be explained in greater detail as this analysis progresses.

Focusing on Faiza's mitigation, once again we see the utilization of informational funnelling; each argumentation serves as a discursive point that is progressively refined to arrive at her projected hypothetical outcome. She thus commences her negative hypothetical narrative by characterising typical behavioural traits of politicians in terms of the disparity between their proposed policies during pre-election campaigning, and post-election implementation of earlier proposals. In so doing, she positions Trump within this bracket of embodying the 'typical politician', insinuating that his right-wing proposals prior to his election are among the "half the things politicians say" (F3.). Indeed, not only does Faiza's commencing argumentation as a whole then work to mitigate the notion of Trump posing a threat with immediacy, the statement "half the things politicians say" in and of itself invalidates the credibility of his pre-election proposals, as well as the probability of effectuating them. One could argue then that she effectively dismisses much of Trump's rhetoric—or perhaps his proposals—as illustrative of 'empty promises'. Interestingly, Faiza repeats the use of 'actually' three times in this argumentation, which in-turn implicitly emphasises her stance on the (im)plausibility of any ensuing threat of Trump actualizing his words into legal, political action. She then extends her offering on defining politician traits by labelling such behaviour as a 'fear mongering' tactic, which reinforces her attempt to nullify the potential of Trump following through on the statements he made during his campaign. In fact, after speaking of political behaviour in general terms, she proceeds to apply this descriptive onto Trump specifically, subsequently framing much of his rhetoric, statements, and proposals as a means to an end, where the 'end' is winning the election. That is, after formulating an image of the typical politician from campaign to election, she superimposes that image onto Trump by claiming, "that's exactly what he did", "and he got what he wanted in the end" (F3.1.1.–F3.1.1.1.). In so doing, she somewhat engages in an undoing of the previous discursive action of invalidating Trump as a legitimate politician as seen in previous discussions (see Excerpt 4.4); on this occasion, Faiza characterises him as the embodiment of the typical politician, on which she bases her negative hypothetical.

Faiza then moves on to specifying, with the use of an example, the kind of policy that Trump would not *actually* commit to, thereby projecting the non-outcome to her negative hypothetical narrative (i.e. that Trump is not going to follow-through with his proposals, despite people fearing otherwise): "I don't think he's gonna go into office and sterilize all gay people" (F4.). What Faiza's informational funnelling demonstrates is that by setting the parameters of the archetypal politician vis-à-vis the inconsistencies in what they say pre-election, and what is

done post-victory, she works to construct a reality in which politicians are unreliable. This effectively functions as a form of discursive engineering to establish a blueprint of both, the typical politician, and how the typical politician operates during the election period (i.e. putting forward empty promises that are not followed through post-election). This, in turn, is used as evidence to legitimise the dismissal of politicians' problematic claims in terms of the potential for governmental implementation of problematic policies. Setting these terms before orienting to Trump specifically eases the process by which to justify the reason as to why he could be considered a non-threat as it offers a discursive mould for a reality that he fits into, which has already entrenched within it the superficiality of politicians that Trump is positioned as being a representative of, as opposed to a threatening anomaly. To then orient to a specific policy Trump endorsed (F4.) further emphasises the implausibility of any such bills being passed.

Before Faiza seeks confirmation on the specifics of Trump's campaign proposition (F4.1.: "what did he say about gay people?"), Sara begins interjecting to rebut her mitigation. Though she quietly aligns with Faiza's construction of the archetypal politician (Excerpt 4.6, line 13: "yeah"), she begins dis-aligning with her as Faiza focuses in on Trump whilst developing her mitigation (see Sara's interjections lines 18 and 26). Once Nazia responds to Faiza's request for clarification on Trump's campaign endorsement (N4.1.1.: "some sort of therapy for Gay people), Sara then proceeds to take her turn (Excerpt 4.6, line 28; S5.: "but they could pass a lot of laws now"). At this point, it becomes evident that Nazia treats Faiza's request for information as an invitation to list out the problematic policies that Trump could potentially implement as per his campaign. The continual overlapping between Faiza and Sara is then exacerbated as the divergence in argumentation trajectories occurring at this stage brings Nazia's overlapping talk to the fore. Nazia subsequently puts forward another one of Trump's proposed policies: "oh and he wants to make abortion illegal again or something" (N4.1.1.1.), which seemingly gets lost in the midst of Sara refuting Faiza's mitigation. Though her secondary informational provision regarding Trump's problematic campaign stances was left unacknowledged by other members of the Circle, it does, nonetheless, indicate an alignment with the generally established view of Trump collectively being positioned as a potential threat to society within the US, and beyond. That is, while Nazia's provision of the additional informational soundbite does not add further details regarding the information Faiza seeks to elicit regarding Trump's endorsement of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments and policy, it nonetheless fits within the broader bracket of 'Trump's problematic views'

After her attempts to interject and oppose the certainty that Faiza had been building around the improbability of Trump implementing “half the things” he said during his campaign, Sara eventually completes her interjection (S5.) with the claim: “they could pass a lot of laws now”. The ‘they’ whom she refers to is not clarified, though one may presume that the person(s) in question is an individual or body led by Trump (his administration perhaps) within the government. She seeks to justify her assertion by attempting to work up to a historical fact from the 1920s (S5.1.) in relation to the current US-political climate, however Faiza cuts her off. Once again, she challenges the notion of any potential for the enforcement of legislative action based on Trump’s campaign claims with the rebuttal that policies will require processing and concession through congress (S5.2.), thus carrying within it an underlying implication that congress may be the governmental block that would prevent such bills from passing. Sara’s response induces further contention between herself and Faiza as she hastens to verify her position regarding the possibility that problematic bills could, indeed, be passed. She is quick to claim that “they’re all Republican now” (S5.2.1.), which Faiza counters by highlighting that the congress is not entirely made-up of members of the Republican Party (F5.2.1.1.: “not all of them”). This initiates a repair from Sara (Fox et al, 2012), in which she corrects her previous assertion of the congress being Republican as a whole, to “the house and senate and stuff” (S5.2.1.1.1.). At this point, Faiza concedes interactionally; whether she is satisfied with Sara’s argumentation or not is unclear as she does not explicitly profess a change of opinion. However, her conceding does create the interactional space to allow for Sara to proceed with her ratification of Maryam’s earlier line of questioning in constructing fear over the threat Trump poses. She does this by reinforcing the weight of the dominance—or, indeed, the monopolisation—of the “house and senate and stuff” by Republicans with a reiteration that “they’re all Republicans”, to which she affixes the fact that this reality has unfolded “for the first time in like almost a hundred years” (S5.2.1.1.2.). Underscoring the temporal distance and thus the historically sparse dispersion of such an occurrence signifies not just the rarity of an all-party control, it indexes the criticality of this phenomenon. Sara then repeats the fact that “it’s all Republican” (S5.2.1.1.3.) once again, after which she progresses to explicitly assert that on the basis of her previous argumentations, “dodgy” laws can, indeed, be passed (S5.2.2.).

While this projection is temporally placed in an unrealised future, it functions as a hypothetical consequence insofar as it represents an alteration of legislation in the futuristic physical world as a result of the election’s outcome. The repetition of the Republican control of the House and Senate works to firmly entrench the notion of a governmental Republican

authority into the argumentation to build up to the higher-level discourse, though it does also indicate efforts to amplify this point, and possibly to emphasise emotional effect (Vickers, 1994) – all of which strengthen the foundation for justification of the higher-level discourse. In between Sara’s argumentations, I quietly put forward a psychological response (**H5.2.1.1.3.1.**), which in pragmatic terms operates as a standalone interjection (Norrick, 2007) made up of two units – the ‘primary interjection’: “oh”, and the ‘secondary interjection’: “shit” (**H5.2.1.1.3.1.:** “oh shit”). Not only does it register affect, it additionally possibly functions as an interactional transition marker (ibid) that does not go undetected by Sara, as she subsequently utilises it as a pivot to orient to fear with the following psychological response sandwiched between confirmation and affiliative markers: “yeah *it’s terrifying* isn’t it” (**S5.2.2.1.**; emphasis added to highlight psychological response). The use of an impersonal pronoun has yet again been employed in conveying sentiments about the issue at hand, though on this occasion it may slightly differ to previous examples where evaluative markers, or psychological responses, are devoid of personal pronouns.

As Sara is showing alignment in response to my psychological response, her use of an impersonal pronoun in this instance may not be reflective of an implicit construction of a perceived objective view vis-à-vis the terrifying qualities of Republican domination; it may have been deployed to extend the discursive parameters of experiential fear surrounding Trump from her own conceptual framework of understanding and cognizing this reality, to align with and include my psychological response within that sphere. In contrast, my own closing (psychological) response, which overlaps with Sara’s, is responding to her earlier assertion (given the overlap) regarding the passing of “dodgy laws” with the conclusive remark “that’s so shit” (**H5.2.2.2.**). Notably, the lexical choice that served as the ‘secondary interjection’ within my earlier psychological response (“shit”) now functions as an evaluative marker that is preceded with an impersonal pronoun. As this remark is not adjacent to another psychological response (like Sara’s), the use of an impersonal pronoun in this instance may then indicate the framing of this evaluative positioning as a matter of objectivity; that is, the potential for dodgy laws being passed—given the Republican domination in the House and Senate—is considered objectively “shit”, as opposed to discursively concentrating the ‘shittiness’ (so to speak) of the situation to one’s own subjective conceptualisation of the world. In and amongst Sara’s psychological response and my evaluative marker, Faiza returns back to the issue surrounding whether or not the House and Senate are all Republicans as she inquires “they’re all Republicans?” (**F5.2.2.3.**); while her query goes unanswered (which may be due to the

overlapping talk), it is unclear as to whether this is a request for clarification or confirmation, or whether it is a token of surprise. Indeed, if the latter is true, this question could then be considered a psychological response insofar as Faiza has processed this as a new revelation she did not previously have a knowing of, which she may possibly be bewildered by.

While this discussion shows a split in the positioning of how threatening Trump could be in office, the positive and negative hypothetical narratives, as catalysed by Maryam's questioning, does nonetheless demonstrate an attempt at sense-making this reality through collaborative interactive work. The construction of Trump's election is initially mitigated by Faiza, however the argumentation put forward by Sara in refuting Faiza's mitigation allows for the arrival at the higher-level discourse – that *Trump's administration could pass dodgy laws*. This discourse in itself, accompanied by Maryam's opening questions and my psychological responses, are indicative of the angst the Sister's Circle express, as well as the harbouring of an uncertainty over the future that is imbued with concern over Trump's possible actions. It is worth noting that the potential political actions that are oriented to in this discussion are localised within the United States; contrastingly, the following interaction showcases the angst the Sister's Circle express regarding the effects Trump's election could have (or have already had, at the point in time this interaction took place) on international relations.

**Excerpt 4.7:** “since Trump's been elected, we can stop considering the Palestinian state”

**Sisters:** SARA, MARYam, NAZia, FAIza.

- 01 SAR: .hh um (0.2) uh literally since he was elected  
 02 one of th- uh: like this Israeli minister .hh he:  
 03 was like you know that Trump's been elected  
 04 it means we can stop uh: (0.6) considering  
 05 u- the [Palestinian state] like that's just  
 06 MAR: [ oh:: yeah:: ]  
 07 SAR: [out the window now]  
 08 MAR: [ I heard that ]  
 09 (0.3)  
 10 SAR: like you know there are only e:m  
 11 [entertaining the idea of a Palestinian state]  
 12 NAZ: [ ((inaudible)) ]  
 13 SAR: because you know (0.9) [the US ]  
 14 HAN: [is that why] your  
 15 coat- (0.2) why your coat  
 16 SAR: yeah my [baggy] ironed-on patch  
 17 HAN: [ heh ]  
 18 MAR: [heheh]  
 19 SAR: [ u:m ] (0.5) u:m (0.4) but yeah- (0.3) um=  
 20 FAI: =was that a true statement o::r-  
 21 SAR: yeah (.) he tweeted it  
 22 MAR: yeah (inaudible)

23 FAI: [the minister]  
 24 SAR: [ the minst- ] yeah the minister [tweeted]  
 25 MAR: [ yeah ]  
 26 SAR: he was like (0.2) Palestinian:: state is now  
 27 out the window we don't have to th- (.)  
 28 consider it anymore  
 29 FAI: but [(isn't that when)] Obama came into  
 30 SAR: [ because Trump ]  
 31 FAI: office as well (0.7)  
 32 SAR: they said the Palestinian state is gonna  
 33 happen? .hh I mean like the- you know  
 34 the [two state] thing [u:h ] America's  
 35 FAI: [two state] [yeah]  
 36 SAR: pushing for a two [state thing] well on  
 37 FAI: [yeah yeah ]  
 38 SAR: (.) uh Israel's side whereas [right now um]  
 39 FAI: [ (\*\*\*) yeah ]  
 40 SAR: (0.3) they're like no screw that (.) you know  
 41 Palestine's gotta go (0.5) which: (0.7) is  
 42 scary because (0.8) cause America is a  
 43 super power (0.4) a:nd (0.4) other like  
 44 racist countries (0.5) are gonna (.) you  
 45 know (0.4) they're gonna (.) feel safer  
 46 (0.2) being racist knowing that (0.6) he's  
 47 leading the country

This narrative episode parallels the previous discussion in two distinct ways: firstly, both excerpts consist of two problematic events, with mirroring primary problematic events – Trump winning the American election; secondly, the Sister's Circle engage in a sense-making activity to comprehend how Trump's presence in Office could potentially impact policy. The policy type at the centre of this interaction, however, differs geographically. That is, the discussion from Excerpt 4.7 (to be analysed) does not consider local (i.e. American) politics directly; rather, the sisters focus on the possible policy shifts beyond the United States that are nevertheless driven by Trump's election. It is on this basis that the secondary problematic event (the declaration made by an unnamed Israeli Minister to no longer recognise the Palestinian state) also serves as a consequence, since Trump's election—as reported by Sara—is what warranted his statement. Indeed, not only do the two discussions echo each other at a discourse level, this interaction showcases a continuation of the back-and-forth opposition between Faiza and Sara, which has been broken down in the argumentation sequence below. It must be noted that this sequence has been drafted with an omission: lines 14–19 (Excerpt 4.7)<sup>5</sup> have been

<sup>5</sup> At this point in the interaction, I point to a badge of the Palestinian flag on the sleeve of Sara's coat, which I orient to as a recognition of Sara's solidarity with Palestine.

excluded as they are not discursively instrumental in building up to the higher-level discourse, or indeed, constructing minority angst. It does, however, offer an insight into the embodiment of a symbolic allegiance with Palestine by Sara.

#### Argumentation 4.8

**Higher-level discourse:** *Trump's leadership encourages racists in other countries to be racist.*

**Primary problematic event:** *Trump winning the election*

**Secondary problematic event:** *An unnamed Israeli minister declared that given Trump's election, they can stop considering the Palestinian state.*

- S1.** Literally since he was elected like this Israeli minister he was like
- S1.1.** you know now that Trump's been elected
    - S1.1.1.** it means we can stop considering the Palestinian state
    - S1.1.2.** like that's just out the window
      - S1.1.2.1.** like you know they are only entertaining the idea of a Palestinian state
        - S1.1.2.1.1.** because you know the US
  - F1.2.** was that a true statement or
    - S1.2.1.** yeah he tweeted it
    - M1.2.2.** yeah
  - F1.3.** the minister
    - S1.3.1.** yeah the minister tweeted
      - M1.3.1.1.** yeah
    - S1.3.2.** he was like Palestinian state is now out the window
      - S1.3.2.1.** we don't have to consider it anymore
        - S1.3.2.1.1.** because Trump
  - F1.4.** but (isn't that when) Obama came into office as well
  - S1.5.** they said the Palestinian state is gonna happen?
    - S1.5.1.** I mean like the you know two state thing
      - F1.5.1.1.** two state yeah
    - S1.5.2.** America's pushing for a two state thing
      - S1.5.2.1.** well on Israel's side
  - S1.6.** whereas right now they're like no screw that
    - S1.6.1.** you know Palestine's gotta go
      - S1.6.1.1.** which is scary
        - S1.6.1.1.1.** cause America is a super power
        - S1.6.1.1.2.** and other racist countries are gonna
          - you know feel safer being racist knowing that he's leading the country

**S1 – S1.1.1.**  
Secondary PE and C

C

PR

---- C

[*S* = Sara, *M* = Maryam, *F* = Faiza].

Sara commences the argumentation sequence by signifying Trump's election, thereby positioning his electoral victory as an influential factor—or more specifically, a catalyst—for the upcoming narrative episode marked by the opening words “*Literally since he was elected*” (*S1.*; emphasis added). Not only does this index the narrative to follow as one that is temporally



sequential, it suggests its occurrence to be one that is consequential to Trump's election. The secondary problematic event that follows this argumentation thus simultaneously functions as a consequence in (Ochs and Capps', 2001) narrative terms (as stated earlier); it is both, the epicentre of this argumentation sequence from which angst and uncertainty are drawn, and an evidential consequence in the real world directly influenced by the broader focal point of concern – Trump's election. Sara delves into direct reported speech (DRS) as marked by 'enquoting devices' (Berger and Doehler, 2015): "this Israeli Minister he was like" (S1.), as well as personal pronouns, to deliver the upcoming narrative segment. Indeed, as Holt (2010) and Sidnell (2006) denote, DRS is often employed to offer spatiotemporal access into an occurrence in situ, whereby the DRS serves as evidence (Holt, 2010) in validating a broader discursive point in the form of enactment (Berger and Doehler, 2015). Interestingly, the political statement being recounted in this instance is not exactly a form of *verbal* speech, as Sara later clarifies that she is recalling a tweet this unnamed Minister put out on the social media website Twitter (S1.2.1.). Nonetheless, the delivery of the Israeli Minister's stance using DRS, underscored by the use of personal pronouns, does work to ingrain a sense of reality to what has been said. What Sara effectively does is launch this argumentation sequence with an example of an evidential negative outcome to Trump's election as a means of circumnavigating to the higher-level discourse she is building up to.

While the point at which the DRS commences is clearly marked, the ending is a little ambiguous; whether the argumentation "like that's just out the window" (S1.1.2.) is put forward as part of the DRS or not is not so easily discernible. Sara does, nonetheless, later reformulate this argumentation as DRS: "he was like the Palestinian state is now *out the window*" (S1.4.2.; emphasis added to mark similarity), though the ambiguity surrounding the actuality of this utterance having been stated by the original speaker verbatim remains. Notably, Maryam ratifies Sara's DRS with tokens of alignment and confirmation (see lines 06 and 08 from Excerpt 4.7). It is, however, clear that what follows—"like you know *they* are only entertaining the idea of a Palestinian state" (S1.1.2.1.; emphasis added)—is no longer part of the DRS as Sara marks her separation from voicing the Minister to now offering her own commentary on Israel's actions with the use of the impersonal collective pronoun "they"<sup>6</sup> (as emphasised). She thus proceeds with an explanatory effort to explicate the context of the Israeli Minister's

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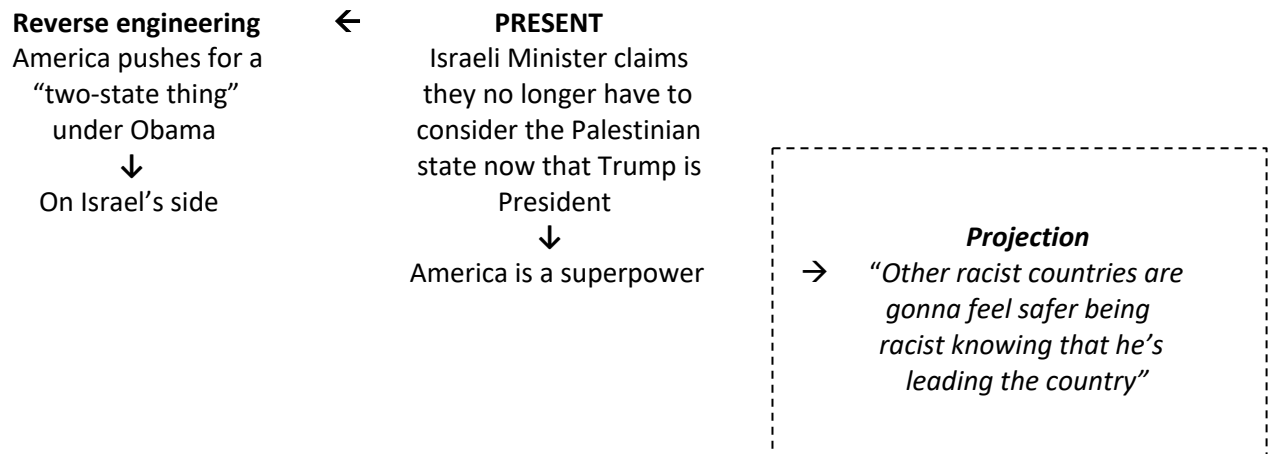
<sup>6</sup> This pronoun is considered an impersonal collective 'they' as reference to the Minister has earlier been deployed using the singular 'he' in argumentations S1., S1.2.1., and S1.4.2. indicating that the pronoun 'they' is indicative of a shift in the subject being referred to.

declaration whereby Israel's consideration of "the idea of Palestine", leading up to that point in the socio-political realm, is deemed superficial.

Before Sara could elaborate on the role of the US as part of her explanation (S.1.1.2.1.1.), my question regarding her Palestinian badge on her coat (omitted talk; see excerpt lines 14–19 in Excerpt 4.7) halts her narrative progression, after which Faiza interjects to seek verification vis-à-vis the validity of what Sara reports the Israeli Minister to have said: "was that a true statement or" (F1.2.). It is at this point where Sara confirms the validity of her DRS as a written rather than verbalised statement, with the clarification that it had been tweeted (S1.2.1.), which is then ratified by Maryam (M.1.2.2.). Seemingly discontent with the response(s), Faiza seeks confirmation for a second time, in this instance simply stating "the Minister" (F.1.3.), to which Sara repeats her confirmation with an explicit mention of the fact that "the Minister tweeted" the statement (S.1.3.1.), and it is, once again, confirmed by Maryam (M1.3.1.1.). On this occasion, however, Sara expands her response by reiterating her DRS (as mentioned above), wholly immersed in her enactment of the Israeli Minister's tweet through the use of personal pronouns—"we don't have to consider it anymore" (S1.3.2.1.)—ending with the Minister's reasoning for such a stance: "because Trump" (S1.3.2.1.1.). This yet again signifies Trump as the influential factor for the Israeli Minister to publicly declare their stance. Additionally, the blunt simplicity with which Sara recounts this reasoning as the sole cause for the denouncement of the Palestinian state in a one-word response adds considerable weight, and dramatic value, to the gravity of the influencing power of Trump's election.

Despite the verification sought by Faiza, and the explanation along with a corroboration offered by Sara and Maryam respectively, Faiza continues to probe the significance Sara gives to the Israeli Minister's declaration to no longer consider the Palestinian state: "but isn't that when Obama came into office as well" (F1.4.). At this point, Sara seeks clarification on what Faiza means. It is worth noting that the ambiguity surrounding Faiza's query is not entirely unfounded as Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, purportedly advocated a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine, which he particularly stressed leading up to the end of his Presidency (Hasan, 2015b; Obama, 2015). Indeed, such a political positioning is deviant to the Israeli Minister's stance insofar as a two-state solution does not entirely constitute the eradication of the Palestinian state. Thus, the clarification Sara subsequently seeks—"they said the Palestinian state is gonna happen?", followed by "I mean like the you know two-state thing", which Faiza then confirms (S1.5. – F1.5.1.1.)—demonstrates an attempt at informational shuffling to elucidate what Faiza is referring to. That is, she first questions support for the

formation of the Palestinian, though it is unclear who she refers to as “they” (S1.5.), after which she orients to “the two-state solution” that is confirmed by Faiza. This discursive disjuncture in comprehending Trump’s influence on global policy vis-à-vis this unnamed Israeli Minister’s claims leads to an episode of reverse-engineering from Sara as a means to make sense of the stance the US has held on the Palestine-Israel conflict, and what the situation is at present:



#### Reverse engineering model 4.5

In the process of breaking down and clarifying the situation surrounding Palestine, Israel, and the US’ stance on pushing for a two-state solution, Sara accelerates her pursuit to construct the higher-level discourse. She achieves this by clarifying the US’ standpoint on the two-state solution (S1.5.2.–S1.5.2.1.), and reiterates the change in the situation. She delves into a recounting of the attitude towards Palestine one final time, noting that “they” now hold the following view regarding the recognition of the Palestinian state: “screw that”, and “Palestine’s gotta go” (S1.6.–S1.6.1). Once again, there is a lack of clarity as to who the “they” are that Sara refers to, and whether or not this is DRS. It could reflect Israel’s stance, as the sentiment expressed parallels Sara’s initial DRS; it could demonstrate a shift in US—or, in fact, Trump’s campaign rhetoric on—foreign policy; or it may, perhaps, mark Sara’s cognizance of the attitude of both parties towards Palestine. Nonetheless, the general essence of her argumentation, as foregrounded by her commencing DRS, establishes the discourse that Trump’s election warranted the proclamation by the Israeli Minister to no longer consider the Palestinian state.

Sara then registers her sentiment regarding the issue by putting forward a psychological response that also serves as an evaluative marker, “which is scary” (S1.6.1.1.); once again, we see the orientation towards the sentiment of fear, of feeling ‘scared’. She justifies her

psychological response by positioning America as a nation-state that holds socio-political and thus influencing power—“America is a superpower” (S1.6.1.1.1.)—to initialise the arrival at the higher-level discourse: ‘Trump’s leadership encourages racists in other countries to be racist’. This is put forward as a hypothetical consequence: “other racist countries are gonna (...) feel safer being racist knowing that he’s leading the country” (S1.6.1.1.2.). Effectively, this ties in with discussions from section 4.1, where the Sister’s Circle express concerns that Trump’s election validates right wing opinions across the globe, as though his election operates as the precursor to the snowballing of right-wing politics. It bolsters the construction of an uncertain future as the Israeli Minister’s statement is put forward as an evidential negative outcome to Trump’s presence in office, and the subsequent positioning of America as a country that empowers the right wing, a country that holds influential power, affirms the notion that his election can have a direct impact on socio-political reality. Indeed, this fortifies the Sister’s Circle’s angst vis-à-vis the taking of politics as personal; the use of an explicit example of a potential policy change in a nation-state beyond the US, as a direct result of Trump’s electoral victory, works towards the higher-level discourse that effectively projects an uncertain future where racism could rise. Voicing the sentiment of fear towards this uncertainty demonstrates that the Sisters are not only concerned about the Israeli Minister’s stance—the influence Trump may have beyond the geographical boundaries of the US, and the possibility of racism increasingly disseminating around the globe that comes with it is considered a ‘scary’ prospect. The SC (we) are demonstrably affected by the present, and the projected uncertainty about the future. This evidences the consciousness of the Sister’s Circle’s socio-political positioning beyond the Circle’s space; the triggering of angst by the socio-political landscape is not happening in a vacuum. The cognisance of Otherness—though not overtly stated in discussing politics—is palpable within the sense-making activities to comprehend the political sphere, the construction of uncertainty surrounding the future, and, indeed, angst.

The following section showcases how the Sister’s Circle plunge deeper into efforts to make sense of a post-election Trump reality. However, rather than attempting to understand the socio-political world, the sisters orient to the gendered experiences of being a Muslim woman in a ‘Trumpian’ world.

#### 4.4 The Gendered Repercussions: “it’s no longer safe to wear a hijab”

In this section, unlike the previous two segments of this chapter, the Sister’s Circle do not construct any uncertainty regarding the future per se. The focus is primarily on the gendered experience of facing a post-Trump present reality as a Muslim woman, namely as a Muslim woman who wears the hijab. All three of the excerpts analysed in this section are thus tethered to the spatiotemporal boundaries of the United States after Trump had been elected, with the final excerpt in particular occurring immediately after the implementation of Executive Order 13769<sup>7</sup> – which came to be known as the Muslim ban (Frej, 2017). That is, they are all related to the existence of Muslim women in America. As such, similar to the previous section, the upcoming narratives each consist of two problematic events, with Trump’s election continuing on as the primary problematic event from the previous section. The discussions thus demonstrate the sisters’ angst and cognisance of Otherness through bringing to the fore narratives of women consequentially reconsidering the decision to wear hijab as a means of making sense of what the implications of being visibly Muslim are. Interestingly, the first two excerpts showcase the Sisters relaying narratives of other American Muslim women known to them, which thereby issues an implicit narrative of concern about being a Muslim woman in a post-Trump reality by proxy of the vulnerability other women and their families feel. It must be noted that all of the women who are actively (verbally) engaged in these discussions are hijab wearing women, excluding myself. The first of these narratives to be considered is Excerpt 4.8 where Sara narrates how a friend of hers who lives in the US is thinking about removing the hijab.

**Excerpt 4.8:** *Sara’s friend in America considering taking off hijab*

**Preceding talk:** see Excerpt 4.4 – Maryam and Nazia discussing how they feel scared about the fact that people voted in favour of Trump in the US election.

**Sisters:** SARA, HANain.

- 01 SAR: I have a friend in America and she (goes) this is the first time  
02 I’m actually considering taking off my hijab because I don’t  
03 feel safe (0.4) because whenever the majority of the country  
04 votes you know (0.3)  
05 HAN: mm (0.2)  
06 SAR: in favour of someone who doesn’t like immigrants doesn’t like  
07 Muslims doesn’t like black people like  
08 HAN: mm:

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<sup>7</sup> The Executive Order 13769 was signed in January 2017, which denied visitors from seven Muslim majority countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen) from entering the United States.

This excerpt follows on from the discussion in Excerpt 4.4 where Maryam and Nazia both express their concern, expressing fear, about the fact that people voted in favour of Trump despite their cognisance of his discriminatory beliefs. Sara then narrates how a friend of hers in America is resultantly considering removing her hijab for the first time. She predominantly delivers this narrative in DRS, and leaves it somewhat incomplete; that is, she does not proceed to elaborate any further on this topic beyond her final utterance in line 07, which seemingly sits within the sphere of DRS. The sequence below showcases how each argumentation operates to cumulatively work in establishing the higher-level discourse: ‘it is no longer safe to wear the hijab in public’:

#### Argumentation Sequence 4.9

**Higher-level discourse:** *It is no longer safe to wear the hijab in public.*

**Primary problematic event:** *Trump winning the election*

**Secondary problematic event:** *The country voted in favour of someone who doesn't like immigrants, Muslims or Black people.*

**S1.** I have this friend in America and she (goes)

**S1.1.** this is the first time I'm actually considering taking off my hijab ]-----C

**S1.1.1.** because I don't feel safe ]-----PR

**S1.1.1.1.** because whenever the majority of the country  
votes in favour of someone who doesn't like  
immigrants

**S1.1.1.2.** doesn't like Muslims

**S1.1.1.3.** doesn't like Black people like

----- **S1.1.1.1. – S1.1.1.3.:**  
Secondary PE and C

[S = Sara]

Sara begins the argumentation sequence with a micro-introduction of the narrative setting to orient to a friend of hers residing in America as part of her ‘enquoting device’ (Berger and Doehler, 2015), thus marking the initiation of DRS (S1.). She then commences the relaying of the lack of safety her friend feels by centring the narrative on the consequence: that her friend is considering taking off her hijab in light of Trump’s election. Notably, the context of Trump’s election does not simply encapsulate his overt Islamophobic sentiments as part of his campaign (Khan et al, 2019); evidence suggests that his campaign rhetoric engendered a real rise in Islamophobia in the US as the Council on American-Islamic Relations reported a 57 percent increase in anti-Muslim incidents in 2016 (the year of Trump’s Presidential campaign and election), alongside a near tripling of anti-Muslim hate groups from 34 to more than 100 in that same year, as per the Southern Poverty Law Centre (ibid). The vulnerability Sara’s friend reportedly experiences—although positioned adjacent to Trump’s election—is thus arguably grounded in the broader mechanism of right-wing politics in which discrimination can foster,

where Trump's campaign rhetoric and subsequent election operated as the pivotal crux that first brewed and empowered, then accelerated, a hostile (Islamophobic) environment. The resultant socio-political atmosphere that drove her friend to consider removing her hijab is thereby indexed as a violation of her selfhood with the use of "this is the first time"—placing such a contemplative action in a paradigm of selfhood that would otherwise have been deemed inconceivable—as well as "actually", which positions the possible removal of hijab as a deviation from her friend's personal norm of societal existence (S1.1.). Initiating the DRS with the consequence to the problematic event(s) first, followed by the argumentation explaining its cause, signify the impact Trump's election and the ensuing socio-political environment vis-à-vis the support he garnered had on Sara's friend's psyche. This is accentuated by the argumentation conveying her friend's psychological response that comes immediately after the DRS opening line: "because I don't feel safe" (S1.1.1.). Not only does this mark the feeling of angst brought on by the socio-political climate, it is used to explain why she is recalibrating her visibility as a Muslim woman in a USA under Trump, which therefore underscores the ways in which his election has affected her.

Having established the core indicator for angst in this narrative, Sara then proceeds to set out the triggers that led to her friend's consequential assessment (and reconsideration) of her continuation to wear the hijab in the public sphere. As stated earlier, this latter phase of the argumentation sequence is also within the parameters of DRS as Sara does not provide any explicit discursive marker to notify its closing. As such, Sara highlights three categorical social groupings targeted by Trump during his campaign: immigrants, Muslims, and Black people. She attends to this list by preceding it with the explanation that the reason as to why she does not feel safe is "because whenever the majority of the country votes in favour of someone who doesn't like" the groups listed (S1.1.1.1.–S1.1.1.3.). Highlighting the fact that it is not only what Trump espouses, rather the decision of "the majority of the country" to vote for someone in favour of such values parallels the angst as discussed in Excerpt 4.4 (section 4.1): that the source of insecurity and concern regarding the socio-political terrain is not wholly concentrated on the political leadership; the public's act of voting for an individual holding problematic views resulting in their election also has a negative impact. Sara thus begins with "immigrants" in her list, whereby the complete argumentation for S1.1.1.1. is: "because whenever the majority of the country votes in favour of someone who doesn't like immigrants". As with "immigrants", Sara repeatedly uses "doesn't like" as she turns to mention the disdain towards "Muslims" and "Black people", which works to reinforce and intensify the myriad of ways in

which the elected President's values are problematic, and possibly emphasise the degree of discriminatory views that voters either overlooked (or agreed with) when voting for Trump. Indeed, it also demonstrates how the vulnerability felt regarding Trump is not towards Islamophobia alone – it is towards all that he espouses vis-à-vis his embodiment of a right-wing politician discursively positioned as a xenophobe, Islamophobe, and a racist (specifically an anti-Black racist) respectively (**S1.1.1.1. – S1.1.1.3.**). It is worth highlighting that while the Electoral College vote secured Trump's position as the President of the United States, it was his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, who won the popular vote, albeit by approximately 2.8 million votes (62,980,160 to 65,845,063 respectively; Begley, 2016). By no means does this statistic mitigate the sentiments and angst experienced by Sara's friend – or, indeed, the Sister's Circle; rather, it underscores the intensity of the discriminatory rhetoric and right wing populism that gained momentum, which saw the increase in anti-Muslim sentiments and incidents in tandem with Donald Trump successfully entering his Presidency.

The cumulative process of initiating the narrative with the consequence to the problematic event(s), offering the psychological response that led to the consequence, followed by the root cause triggering the psychological response, together function as somewhat of a discursive domino that jointly construct the higher-level discourse: that it is 'no longer safe to wear the hijab in public'. The argumentation as a whole also operates as a sense-making narrative, though not one that is being carried out by Sara's friend alone; considering the narration of this angst-filled dilemma her friend experiences as a discursive suffix to the preceding interaction regarding how "scary" Trump's election and people voting in favour of him are (see Excerpt 4.4), it also discursively works to supply an evidential negative outcome to Trump's election within the gendered sphere of existing as a visible Muslim in a post-Trump world. In offering this narrative of a friend, a hijab-wearing Muslim woman, being thrust into questioning her form of existence as a matter of safety, Sara effectively attempts to make sense of the parameters of 'scariness' induced by the socio-political terrain by proxy of this example, whilst ratifying Maryam and Nazia's angst from the preceding talk. Indeed, the very thought of reconsidering how one exists in society, and the contemplation to alter—or rather, censor—one's external identity that is sacred to one's spiritual being, all as a means of minimising one's visibility as a safety precaution, showcases the cognisance of one's Otherness. In other words, the Sister's Circle's general angst towards the socio-political plane, and Sara's friend's awareness of the xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism that subsists whereby her visibility as a Muslim could threaten her safety, all signify the consciousness of being an Other.



Interestingly, this cognisance of Otherness is not only limited to the respective women elucidating the socio-political terrain (which includes both: the Sister's Circle, and those women being narrated about) – the following example demonstrates an instance where familial intervention is offered as an advisory proposition for a hijab-wearing woman to reconsider the continuation of wearing the hijab as a matter of safety.

**Excerpt 4.9:** *Nazia's friend's cousin's mother advising her daughter to remove her hijab*

**Preceding talk:** discussing whether Trump's election was a revolt against Obama's 8 years in Office.

**Sisters:** NAZia, SARa.

- 01 NAZ: yeah o- like you said about- before about your friend just  
02 considering taking off hijab my friend was saying how em  
03 (.) cause her cousins live in New York and em (0.2) she was  
04 saying how her mum was actually advising her just take it  
05 it off  
06 SAR: yeah  
07 NAZ: cause I don't want you to like (0.6) I don't want there to  
08 be like racial [violence] and all that  
09 SAR: [ yeah ]  
10 NAZ: I don't want you to get hurt you know

This particular interactional sequence is not entirely connected to its preceding talk insofar as it is not considering if or how Barack Obama's 8 years in Office will have triggered some form of a socio-political rebellion in favour of Trump. However, it is not entirely discontinuous in terms of the overarching problematic event (Donald Trump's Presidential election) at the core of both – the preceding talk, as well as this interaction. Nazia thus swiftly changes the focal point of the preceding conversation by referring back to Sara's earlier narrative on her friend in America who is considering taking off her hijab. She subsequently shares a telling of a friend's cousin whereby the consequence to the problematic event(s)—the possible removal of the hijab—parallels Sara's example, though on this occasion it comes as a suggestion from family: namely, her mother. In fact, given that this entire narrative is predominantly delivered through reported speech (as with the previous one), all narrative components are thus a reflection of this particular Muslim woman's mother's response to Trump's election, as demonstrated in the argumentation sequence below:

#### Argumentation Sequence 4.10

**Higher-level discourse:** *wearing the hijab may threaten one's safety.*

**Primary problematic event:** *Trump winning the election*

**Secondary problematic event:** *a rise in Islamophobic sentiments parallel with Trump's campaign.*

**N1.** Like you said before about your friend just considering taking off hijab

**N1.1.** my friend was saying how

**N1.1.1.** cause her cousins live in New York

**N1.2.** she was saying how her mum was actually advising her just take it off }-----c

**N1.2.1.** cause I don't want you to like

**N1.2.2.** I don't want there to be like racial violence and all that }

**N1.2.2.1.** I don't want you to get hurt you know }

-----**N1.2.2. – N1.2.2.1.**  
HPE & PR

[N = Nazia]

Before delving further into this analysis, given the similarities between Nazia's narrative and Sara's, this segment will largely focus on the way in which the delivery of this telling differs on two accounts: first, the form of reported speech used, and second, the fact that Nazia recounts a narrative about a woman with whom she is not directly acquainted. As such, this argumentation sequence is seen to ratify Sara's telling in Excerpt 4.8 insofar as it diverts the interactional focus away from discussing Barack Obama back to Sara's narrative, and thus it corroborates the angst from the previous narrative, the higher-level discourse, and the cognisance of Otherness (though on this occasion, this awareness is demonstrated on behalf of a mother of a hijab-wearing Muslim woman). For this reason, this narrative will not be analysed with the same depth as the previous one.

As stated earlier, Nazia begins this argumentation sequence by returning back to Sara's telling of her friend considering removing the hijab: "like you said before about your friend just considering taking off hijab" (**N1.**)—here, she directly orients to Sara and re-centres her telling before as a means to introduce her narrative. She essentially uses it as a springboard to offer her own narrative about a similar case, though in this instance Nazia is not personally acquainted with the woman about whom she narrates. Incidentally, this telling is thus twice removed from Nazia in that she is not only recounting an experience of her friend's cousin, she relays the advice given to her friend's cousin by her mother. In any case, the decision to share this narrative not long after Sara puts forth her friend's experience works to align with and thus solidify the angst surrounding the wearing of hijab in public spaces. For ease of understanding

as this analysis section progresses, Nazia's friend's cousin will henceforth be assigned the pseudonym Zainab. As such, what Nazia then proceeds to narrate is advice offered to Zainab by her mother.

Similar to Sara's telling, Nazia grounds the consequence of the problematic event(s) in the initial argumentation of the sequence, which she delivers through indirect reported speech (IRS): "she was saying how her mum was actually advising her just take it off" (N1.2.). The remainder of this narrative is recounted using DRS, however she does not use any explicit enquoting devices to mark the beginning or end. The argumentation preceding this point is comprised of a reorientation to Sara's earlier telling (N1.), an incomplete attempt to relay the IRS (N1.1.), a brief turn to a micro-introduction of who the upcoming narrative is about (i.e. setting the scene; N1.1.1.), after which she proceeds with IRS to foreground the consequence as the locus of discursive continuation to the prior discussion on the angst surrounding Trump (N1.2.). As such, it is the use of personal pronouns that operates as the prime indicator that the latter half of this sequence is DRS, along with the use of "cause" (in N1.2.1.) that signals an upcoming explanation for Zainab's mother's advice to remove the hijab. This point of switch from IRS to DRS is crucial in fortifying the experiential angst triggered by Trump's election as this segment of the argumentation sequence serves as the psychological response. Ochs and Capps (2001: 173) define this narrative component—the psychological response—as follows: "change in person's thoughts, emotions, or somatic state, provoked by an unexpected [problematic] event, unplanned action, attempt, physical response, and/or another psychological (...) response". Arguably, with this definition, Nazia's telling as a whole encapsulates a psychological response as it demonstrates a mother's concern, provoked by Trump's election, which resultantly leads to her encouraging her daughter to undertake an unplanned action (removing the hijab). However, the remaining argumentations carry greater depth in the sphere of psychological responses as they relay the crux of Zainab's mother's concern that elicits her advice: "I don't want there to be racial violence and all that" (N1.2.2.), followed by "I don't want you to get hurt" (N1.2.2.1.). Firstly, it must be noted that this argumentation couplet is more forthright than Sara's telling in outlining the potential risk of maintaining visibility as a Muslim—the fear of being subjected to racial violence. Not only does it advise that removing the hijab is a safety measure, it explicitly outlines what such a measure is for: as a safeguard to protect Zainab from facing racism, specifically racial violence. This couplet thus simultaneously functions as an additional hypothetical problematic event, whereby the event that catalysed this advisory maternal intervention is projected to possibly

result in further issues if Zainab continues to wear the hijab. To then deliver this latter segment of the argumentation sequence using DRS stresses the gravity of Zainab's mother's concern. Nazia essentially traverses from the precipice of a peripheral account of the situation through the use of IRS (her friend's words) in narrating what Zainab's mother advises her vis-à-vis removing the headscarf, to the spatiotemporal locality of this advice brought to her in explaining the crux of her concern – the threat to her safety as a visibly Muslim Woman. The use of DRS thus bolsters the sentiment of angst that Nazia conveys on behalf of Zainab's mother, as it discursively transplants the interactants from this discussion as part of the Sister's Circle to the space-time locality of a mother's angst.

In essence, this argumentation sequence ratifies the quintessence of Sara's narrative that in itself functions as an affirmative telling to validate the angst the Sister's Circle feel towards Trump's election. It achieves this by providing a gendered evidential negative outcome – that Muslim women are considering taking off their hijab to attenuate their visibility as a Muslim in order to protect their own safety. This ratification of Sara's positioning, and more broadly the concern the Sister's Circle have towards the socio-political climate, works to construct the higher-level discourse: that wearing the hijab may threaten one's safety. While it parallels the higher-level discourse in Sara's narrative, it slightly differs on the grounds of the fact that Zainab's mother orients to an explicit ramification (racial violence) that could resultantly arise. It is through this mention of racial violence that one may deduce that the rise in Islamophobic sentiments paralleling with Trump's campaign serves as the secondary problematic event in this argumentation sequence. Indeed, as this example showcases, the possible hijab removal as a precautionary measure is not one that is reflected upon by hijab-wearing Muslim women alone – this recalibration of visibility in public is also being encouraged by family, which indicates a manifestation of a secondary minority angst; that is, angst for family. The final excerpt considered in this chapter showcases another example where family members offer their concern:

**Excerpt 4.10:** *Alia taking off hijab for electives in America*

**Preceding talk** – Alia explaining that she had started wearing the hijab about a year prior to this moment in time.

**Sisters:** ALIa, HANain, FAIza,

- 01 ALI: so I'm off to America for my elective in- in a [couple of weeks]  
 02 HAN: [ no wa:y ]  
 03 (0.2)  
 04 ALI: yeah [so: ]  
 05 HAN: [that's] awesome (.)  
 06 ALI: but my dad was really concerned who- wha- w- not my dad

07 but like both my parents as well were saying like- (0.5) d'you  
 08 think you'd be alright you know you're going on your own: you:'re  
 09 gonna go through border contro:l (.) it's kind of like (.) really  
 10 shady at the minute (0.3) do you: wanna: (0.3) like wear your  
 11 scarf and its an interesting question and I don't really know:  
 12 what I'm gonna do yet because .hh  
 13 FAI: mhm (0.5)  
 14 ALI: like I quite want to (.) because this is a choice that I made and  
 15 I don't really feel like I wanna back down on this like .hh (0.2)  
 16 e:m: (0.5) I feel comfortable an- and I don't really ca:re (0.2)  
 17 what other people think .hh (.) but at the same tim:e (.) like (.)  
 18 I am worried about my personal safety an- (.) I think (0.2) it  
 19 would be a lot ea:sier for me to not wear a scarf .hh (0.3) but  
 20 (0.3) you know (.) I dunno I guess it's (.) [the struggle]  
 21 HAN: [ it's diffi]cult isn't it  
 22 because like (.) how far do you go to compromise yourself  
 23 ALI: y:eah  
 24 HAN: for society  
 25 ALI: exactly (0.9)  
 26 HAN: mm:=  
 27 ALI: =and li::ke it would make things easier sure (1.4) but-

At the time of this Sisters' Circle meeting, Alia (a medical student) was due to travel to the United States for her electives, and Executive Order 13769 had been passed a couple of weeks prior. For this reason, in addition to Trump's election serving as the overarching problematic event dominating this segment of the chapter, the implementation of the Order is considered the secondary problematic event – although it does also simultaneously represent a consequence of Trump's election. Indeed, Alia (through quoting her parents) placing significance on having to pass through border control (which is labelled as “shady at the minute” (line 10)) implies an awareness of a negative shift in border politics, thereby affirming the possibility of the ‘Muslim ban’ effecting Alia's dilemma. Thus, in contrast with the previous two examples, Alia does not narrate the predicament of a Muslim woman from the US considering removing her hijab; rather she explains her own concerns regarding whether or not she will continue to wear it for her trip. The verbalisation of her introspection is brought to the fore via her recounting of her parents' apprehension vis-à-vis travelling to America with a hijab, after which she shares her thoughts on the situation leading to the higher-level discourse (once again mirroring the previous two examples): ‘travelling to the US wearing a hijab could put one's personal safety at risk’. The argumentation sequence below demonstrates how it unfolds:

# Argumentation Sequence 4.11

**Higher-level discourse:** *travelling to the US wearing a hijab could put one's personal safety at risk.*

**Primary problematic event:** *Trump winning the election*

**Secondary problematic event:** *the implementation of Executive Order 13769, the Muslim ban.*

- A1.** So I'm off to America for my electives in a couple of weeks
- A2.** But my dad was concerned
- A3.** not my dad but like both my parents as well were saying like
- A3.1.** d'you think you'd be alright?
- A3.2.** you're going on your own
- A3.3.** you're gonna go through border control
- A3.3.1.** it's kind of like shady at the minute
- A3.4.** do you wanna like wear your scarf?
- A3.4.1.** and it's an interesting question
- A4.** I don't really know what I'm gonna do yet
- A5.** because like I quite want to
- A5.1.** because this is a choice that I made
- A5.2.** and I don't really feel like I wanna back down on this
- A5.2.1.** I feel comfortable
- A5.2.2.** and I don't really care what other people think
- A6.** but at the same time like I am worried about my personal safety
- A6.1.** I think it would be a lot easier for me for me to not wear a scarf
- A7.** I dunno I guess it's the struggle
- H8.** it's difficult isn't it
- H8.1.** because like how far do you go to compromise yourself for society
- A8.1.1.** yeah
- A8.1.2.** exactly
- A8.1.3.** and like it would make things easier sure but-

[*A* = *Alia*, *H* = *Hanain*]

After establishing the fact that she will be travelling to USA for her electives (**A1.**), Alia immediately foregrounds the psychological response—"concern"—that her parents hold about her travels. She initially only mentions her father, but through a self-initiated self-repair (Fox, 2012), she reports that both her parents are concerned for her (**A2.–A3.**). She then marks the initiation of DRS through the following enquoting device to highlight that the upcoming argumentation echoes her parents' words: "both my parents as well *were saying like*" (**A3.**; emphasis added to mark specific locus of the enquoting device). Alia thus commences her DRS within which she delivers the argumentation with the use of informational funnelling, starting with a broad query her parents pose: "d'you think you'd be alright?" (**A3.1.**). The progression of the sequence thereafter seemingly issues a list of reasons that may cause them to alert Alia to reconsider wearing her hijab during her travels (**A3.2.–A3.3.1.**). This occurs as follows: she

first orients to her parents' concern that she will be on her own (A3.2.), followed by the fact that she will have to go through border control (A3.3.), which is subsequently evaluated as being "kind of like shady at the minute" (A3.3.1.). At this point in the telling, the anchoring of parental angst depicted through Alia's DRS is given weight; highlighting the fact that she will be passing through a highly politicised (hostile) space—the US border—on her own amply indexes her parents' concern in and of itself, however the recognition that the environment of this space is "kind of like shady at the minute" discursively works to underpin the legitimacy of their concern. With Alia thus due to enter the physical socio-political sphere of the US, the 'Muslim ban' is now treated as a personal issue through implication showcasing once again that the political is taken as personal. Alia's functioning in the public realm is directly being impacted by the political. This discursive informational funnelling, a process of refinement conveyed through DRS, thereby builds the premise to arrive at the penultimate question vis-à-vis Alia's visibility as a Muslim woman: "do you wanna like wear your scarf?" (A3.4.).

Once this grounding work is done, with Alia implicitly rooting her parents' positioning vis-à-vis their concern for her travelling with a hijab—as well as tacitly releasing the possibility of its temporary removal within the discursive ether—Alia proceeds to mark the end of DRS by launching a sense-making attempt for the situation at hand. Essentially, embedding her parents' perspective through DRS functions as an introduction allowing for Alia to discuss this subject matter. She thus immediately responds to the query with the evaluative statement "it's an interesting question" (A3.4.1.), thereby signalling her upcoming introspection offering her own perspective. She subsequently engages in a form of a pseudo-discursive-cost-benefit-analysis, so to speak, on what to do; she verbalises her inner quandary as to whether or not she should continue to wear her hijab for the duration of her trip to the US. She begins with positioning herself on the fence, as somewhat disconcerted: "I don't really know what I'm gonna do yet" (A4.), after which she elaborates on why she has not yet arrived at a decision. As such, first come the reasons as to why she wishes to continue wearing the hijab (despite her parents' worries, and the Executive Order), followed by what could push her to remove it.

The reasoning Ali puts forward in this moment in time to keep her hijab on is fundamentally tethered to her desire to maintain the agency she exercised in choosing to wear it. She begins with stating; "like I quite want to" (A5.), after which she then proceeds to expand on why. Not only does she orient to the notion of wearing the hijab as a "choice that I made" (A5.1.), thus underlining her autonomy – she stresses her commitment to it with the assertion that she does not wish to backtrack on, or compromise, her dedication to the hijab (A5.2.). Alia

then concludes her reasoning by professing her contentment as a visibly Muslim woman: “I feel comfortable and I don’t really care what other people think” (A5.2.1.–A5.2.2.), which alongside the previous two argumentations showcases the security she feels in the act of wearing the hijab as a Muslim woman, and how integral it is to her selfhood as a Muslim woman exercising autonomy. She then counters her reasoning for wanting to wear the hijab for her elective visit with a psychological response that straightforwardly ratifies her parents’ argumentation: “but at the same time like I am worried about my personal safety” (A6.), where “am” in this argumentation is enunciated (see Excerpt 4.10, line 18), thus positioning herself in alignment with her parents vis-à-vis the concern for her safety. She supplements this with a hypothetical situation where removing the hijab is considered to make matters easier: “I think it would be *a lot easier* for me to not wear a scarf” (A6.1.; emphasis added to demonstrate the level of ease entrenched in this argumentation is one that, although immeasurable and unquantifiable, would possibly make a significant impact on her experience in the US, and perhaps ameliorate certain hostilities).

Alia then adds her final musing: “I dunno I guess it’s the struggle” (A7.); this argumentation is an interesting one given the ambiguity surrounding the defining parameters of “the struggle”. It could, thus, imply one of two things: either the struggle of having to recalibrate one’s existence in the public sphere as a visibly Muslim woman, where such a weighted decision is required to be made; or, it may refer to the struggle regarding the very existence as a visibly Muslim woman that involves engaging in a continuous risk assessment to consider one’s safety. Or alternatively, it may indeed encapsulate both of the aforementioned predicaments. Nevertheless, while the definitive nature of this struggle is not clarified, I interjected at this point, offering a supplementary reflection on the extent to which one alters their existence in society<sup>8</sup>. Although Alia aligns with this, and reiterates that it would make things easier for her, her final utterance, however, halts after “but” (which is left incomplete) – once again showcasing her internal dilemma (H8.–A8.1.3.).

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<sup>8</sup> It must be noted that my interjection here is anecdotal at best; as a non-hijab wearing woman, I do not encounter and experience public spaces in the same way that my hijab-wearing sisters do as I do not carry the same level of visibility. This is particularly important to note considering the fact that for many women, this is not really a matter of ‘compromising’ insofar as Islamophobic and racial violence are very real phenomena. That is, mitigating ‘how much’ one exists in public spaces, so to speak, in response to Islamophobic and/or racial hostilities is far more political than a simple compromise. Upon reflection, it is more accurate to consider such ‘compromise’ as mitigation, or shrinking, hiding, muting or ‘giving-up’ certain elements of the (spiritual) self in the name of safety.



The cumulative process of asserting her parents' concern for her wearing the hijab, coupled with her own externalisation of her predicament, together construct the higher-level discourse, that: 'travelling to the US wearing a hijab could put one's personal safety at risk'. Alia and her parents' angst is thus a response to the shift in the socio-political landscape of the US, whereby the possibility of editing—or somewhat 'muting'—her 'Muslimness' with respect to the hijab is considered a way of mitigating any possible threat to Alia's safety in the US. In fact, this section of the chapter as a whole is reflective of the consequence to the problematic event(s) and consequence(s) of the narrative, regardless of whether or not these Muslim women proceed to remove their hijab. That is, the mere contemplation to remove the hijab is demonstrably triggered by a hostile (arguably Islamophobic) socio-political environment, and it could thus be deduced that this recalibration of one's visibility as a Muslim woman in the public sphere may not have occurred if circumstances were different. It is essentially an attempt at sense-making in terms of their own existence in the socio-political realm, notably in this Trump era. Indeed, in Alia's case, it is evident that the socio-political happenings (the 'Muslim ban') had not gone ignored outside the US resulting in the aforementioned contemplation of how to alter oneself (or how a family member should alter oneself) as a matter of maintaining safety when travelling into the geographical borders of America. It thus showcases, once again, that the cognisance of Otherness is not limited to Alia—a visibly Muslim woman; her family are also cognisant and are therefore concerned for her safety, which has demonstrably been heightened after Trump's election (and the subsequent shifts in the socio-political landscape).

#### **4.5 Summary of chapter**

To summarise, there are findings in this analysis chapter that can be separated on the basis of a social-psychological grounding, and a socio-linguistic one. In terms of the social psychological, the main points emanating from the analysis are as follows:

- Firstly, the very need to employ sense-making to elucidate political events is demonstrative of minority angst in and of itself, as each attempt is imbued with the air of concern and fear regarding the socio-political climate and the future.
- Secondly, projections of uncertainty regarding the future through construction of an incomprehensible impending reality, as well as negative hypothetical outcomes also demonstrate a state of minority angst.

- Thirdly, politics is demonstrably taken as personal as each sense-making attempt is delivered through the lens of personal narratives in accordance with Ochs and Capps' (2001) conceptualisation of 'Living Narratives', and the prevalence of psychological responses throughout the discussions also showcase the impact political events have had on select members of the Sisters' Circle.
- Finally, the amalgamation of the experience of minority angst throughout this chapter, taking the political as personal, and the discussions surrounding the prospect of altering one's selfhood through possibly removing the hijab (which is inclusive of narrating the experiences of Muslim women in America, and Alia sharing her own predicament) suggest that there is a cognisance of Otherness in terms of the sisters' positionality in wider society.

The final point of this summary is of particular importance as it coalesces the findings into a sphere of Otherness through which sense-making and minority angst has been borne and/or reinforced. The cognisance of Otherness and minority angst are thus mutually supportive, as it is the awareness of one's Otherness that is catalysing these sense-making narratives in response to political events, thereby producing minority angst; and the minority angst in itself is indicative of the consciousness of Otherness that feeds the need to elucidate the socio-political. Additionally, it is important to note that this cognisance of Otherness is not limited to the individual sisters'; as demonstrated in section 4.4, there are also instances where families of sisters are advising the removal of hijab out of concern for their safety.

In terms of the socio-linguistic aspect, the main points to be made are regarding the formulation of complementary narrative forms of processing that aid the construction of the higher-level discourses: 'reverse-engineering', and 'informational funnelling'. Though these processing forms are not the primary method of analysing the argumentation sequences in this chapter, they do, indeed, play a significant role in explicating how the Sisters' Circle arrive at specific discursive points.

Having considered the ways in which the socio-political is interactionally navigated, this thesis will now turn to consider the ways in which Otherness is resisted.

## Chapter 5. Analysing Micro-resistance

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter follows on from the previous analysis to explore navigating Otherness from an alternate lens; that is, the focus in this chapter is specifically on resistance work. To explicate this further, I begin with reiterating the second research question (RQ) of this study, which this chapter seeks to address:

- RQ2: How do Muslim women as part of the Sisters' Circle resist ideologies that position them as Other in racial and/or gender hierarchies?

With this RQ in mind, the ways in which the Sisters' Circle (SC) contest Otherness, or discourses of Otherness, through 'micro-resistance' will be considered. I refer to resistance as 'micro-resistance' in order to describe a form of resistance work that is not 'active' or overtly working to challenge a (collective or individual) hegemonic entity/power structure in a significantly rebellious form as part of an explicit movement; rather, the resistance within this chapter encompasses a form of defiance through every day discourse (or discursive action) that is exercised within the boundaries of the Sisters' Circle, such that its expression is anchored in and amongst the confines of the group. Such expressions of defiance are considered 'micro-resistance' insofar as there is an unambiguous and definitive challenging of Othering, albeit at a small scale. As such, I draw from Evans and Moore's (2015) consideration of 'micro-resistance' as part of their study on People of Colour (PoC) engaging in everyday, micro-level resistances in white institutional spaces where they assert that everyday acts of resistance need not be explicitly or outwardly visible to be recognised. They thus consider micro-resistance as an endeavour to "resist and reject the emotional injury of white racism" (ibid: p447).

With respect to this study, I take on board the position Evans and Moore (ibid) take vis-à-vis the motive to resist and reject emotional injuries of discrimination, with the additional consideration of micro-resistance work to constitute forms of everyday resistance enacted at a micro-level, where the motive is more geared towards a discursive 'undoing' of Otherness as opposed to causing seismic shifts at the epicentre of Othering.

Before proceeding with this analysis, it is also important to unpack what is meant by "ideologies that position them in racial and/or gender hierarchies" as part of the RQ; to first address the 'racial' hierarchy, I specifically consider Islamophobia as part of a racial hierarchy

as a basis for which Muslims are positioned as Other. As such, this view is founded on the notion that Islamophobia is a form of racism (see Literature review, section 2.3 on defining Islamophobia). In terms of ‘gender’ hierarchies, I consider the internal patriarchy within Muslim communities, as well as gendered Islamophobia where Muslim women are Othered. I include both categories within the one RQ firstly given that different forms of oppression can intersect (in line with intersectionality), and with this consideration of intersectionality, the point of interest in this RQ is the resistance work in particular, which may then be performed in the face of myriad forms of Othering.

In seeking to answer this RQ, this chapter is split into three sections to work through three distinct thematic manifestations of micro-resistance:

- Section 5.2: Micro-resistance through humour—this section explores how humour can be used to subvert and/or invalidate discourses of Otherness, and how it can subsequently transform a site for sense-making into micro-resistance—and vice versa.
- Section 5.3: Micro-resistance through asserting refusal—how refusal functions as a tool to reject the ways in which Muslim women are Othered.
- Section 5.4: Resisting within: ‘space invading’—this section explores the fusion of micro-resistance—namely verbal discourse—with the physical to consider how micro-resistant discourses and actions can work together to create a more dynamic force of micro-resistance (through ‘space invading’ (Puwar, 2004)). This section will be analysed using ethnographic reflections as opposed to in-depth interactional analysis.

As this chapter is primarily concerned with discursive actions vis-à-vis resistance as opposed to the navigation or making sense of socio-politics as explanatory sequences—as seen in the previous chapter in answering RQ1—the narrative elements of the argumentation sequences will not be broken down in the same level of detail as the previous chapter. However, the Problematic Event (PE) of each sequence will be highlighted so as to identify the core of the issue warranting micro-resistance. Additionally, the higher and lower-level discourses will not be included (once again, as seen in the previous chapter); in order to complement the study of micro-resistance, after lengthy reflection, analytic excavation was carried out with greater clarity when the PE was accompanied with a ‘locus of subversion and/or invalidation’ for humour, and ‘locus of refusal’ for asserting refusal as they both, respectively, complemented the interrogation of micro-resistant sites and/or discursive actions relative to the form in which the resistance occurred.

## 5.2 Micro-resistance through Humour

As mentioned in the introduction, this section explores how humour is employed as a tool for subverting and/or invalidating discourses of Otherness. The upcoming interaction to commence this section does not necessarily incorporate a discourse or narrative that Others Muslim women, rather it directly serves to invalidate Donald Trump (and those who voted in his favour in the American election). It has been included in this chapter as the discussion in itself is an extension to sense-making activities navigating the socio-political sphere in the previous chapter, whereby Donald Trump's election discernibly triggered angst amongst the Sisters' Circle. It is thus used as an introductory example of how the Sisters' Circle use humour as a form of micro-resistance so as to invalidate a political body who has espoused anti-Muslim rhetoric and, as per the discussions in Chapter 4, invokes minority angst and a cognisance of Otherness. As such, this section will be split in two as per the following:

- Subsection 5.2.1: Extending the political—this subsection considers interactions focusing on the socio-political as an extension to the previous chapter.
- Subsection 5.2.2: Resisting microaggressions—this subsection focuses on how the Sisters' Circle navigate everyday microaggressions.

Before proceeding with the analysis, the concept of humour will be considered so as to determine how it can serve as a tool for micro-resistance. As per Holmes and Marra (2002), humour is a multi-functional discursive tool that can serve to mark aspects of one's social identity, as well as marking boundaries between subordinate and dominant groupings. What lies at the heart of humour, in accordance with Sorensen (2008) is incongruity; that is, the use of contradictory and incongruent discourse whereby a facet of reality is inverted, or turned upside down to the extent that it can be used as a form of "nonviolent resistance" that works to turn "oppression upside down" (ibid: p175). Rossing's (2015) view on humour, namely racial humour, adds further nuance to Sorensen's positioning in asserting that humour can in fact be emancipatory for marginalised subjects; he positions such humour as a "disarming critical public pedagogy that challenges racist hegemony" (p619) as it allows one to "rearticulate and disarticulate ideology, knowledge, meaning, common sense and power relationships" (p617). While the format of humour employed by the Sisters' Circle does not involve public exposure in any capacity (other than the sisters present within the Circle), the use of humour is, nonetheless, indicative of a development of critical consciousness toward a hegemonic social order through the disarticulation and/or re-articulation of discourses or experiences of Othering.

The subsequent effect of such humour is that it essentially forms a mode for subversion and invalidation of problematic discourse, experiences, or people. To interrogate the intricacies of how humour functions at a micro-level, or to offer a detailed breakdown of its mechanics, are beyond the scope of this study. The primary focus here is not how humour is manifested, or the detailing of interactional elements that allow for its production; rather, this analysis is concerned with how it can be utilised as a form of micro-resistance. Therefore, the functional identifier used to recognise utterances as constituents of humour is derived from Holmes and Hay's (1997) definition of 'conversational humour' as "an utterance which was intended to amuse the listeners and which evoked a positive response" (p131). Indeed, intentionality is difficult to determine, thus it will—for the purposes of clarity and cohesion with this study—be seen through the lens of attempts of subversion and/or invalidation signalling an intention to amuse.

### 5.2.1 *Extending the political*

As outlined above, this section begins with the Sisters' Circle's deployment of humour so as to invalidate Donald Trump:

#### **Excerpt 5.1:** *"Orange is the new Black"*

**Preceding discussion:** see Chapter 4, Excerpt 4.3

**Sisters:** FAIza, SARa, NAZia, MARYam, HANain

- 01 FAI: do you think Obama's eight years in office had an affect  
 02 [on- ]  
 03 SAR: [I think so]  
 04 I thi- I think White people [were sick of having Black people]  
 05 FAI: [what policies do you think he- ]  
 06 SAR: [I don't think it was the policies] I think it was a race thing to  
 07 NAZ: [((laughter)) ]  
 08 SAR: be honest I think that  
 09 FAI: d'you think it was just cause it was a Black [man in] office  
 10 SAR: [yeah ]  
 11 yeah (.)  
 12 FAI: as President people were like no- (0.6) [we're not having (this) ]  
 13 NAZ: [need to rebel against this]  
 14 heheh  
 15 SAR: yeah  
 16 MAR: really  
 17 FAI: instead let's have an orange (0.5)  
 18 \*\*\*: [((laughter)) ]  
 19 NAZ: [thing heheheheh ]  
 20 FAI: [(\*\*\*) wearing- yeah] thing  
 21 ((laughter))

- 22 HAN: have you seen that meme (0.3)  
 23 NAZ: Orange is the new Bl(hh)ack  
 24 \*\*\*: [((laughter)) ]  
 25 MAR: [oh yeah that one is hilarious]

The argumentation for this excerpt is as follows:

### Argumentation sequence 5.1

**Locus of subversion and/or invalidation:** *Trump's election as a retaliation to having a Black President.*

**Problematic event:** *White people voting for Trump in retaliation to Obama's (a Black man's) eight years in office*

**F1.** do you think Obama's eight years in office had an affect on-

**S1.1.** I think so

**S1.2.** I think White people were sick of having Black people

**F2.** what policies do you think he-

**S2.1.** I don't think it was the policies

**S2.2.** I think it was a race thing to be honest

**F3.** d'you think it was just cause it was a Black man in Office as President

**S3.1.** yeah

**F3.2.** people were like no

**F3.2.1.** we're not having (this)

**N3.2.2.** need to rebel against this

**F3.2.3.** instead let's have an orange

**N3.2.3.1.** thing

**F3.2.3.1.1.** yeah thing

**H3.2.3.2.** have you seen that meme

**N3.2.3.2.1.** Orange is the new Black

**M3.2.3.2.1.1.** oh yeah that one is hilarious

The interaction directly preceding this argumentation sequence is Excerpt 4.3 (Chapter 4) where Brexit is used to draw parallels between the socio-political environment surrounding the British vote to leave the European Union and Trump's election as a means of evidencing the mechanism of political events validating right-wing opinions. To briefly relate the essence of the preceding interaction, its higher-level discourse is: *Brexit validated views that led to a rise in hate crime*; not only does this encapsulate the mutuality of a right-wing rhetoric subsisting in a socio-political sphere validating views that led to a rise in hate-crime—the sense-making the Sisters' Circle engaged in constructing this higher-level discourse also highlights their sentiments of angst, feeling unsafe, and uncertainty surrounding the future. Effectively, for this argumentation sequence (5.1) to follow on from its preceding interaction positions it as yet another endeavour of sense-making Trump's election, as Faiza attempts to elucidate another

dimension of what may have served as a motivational factor for people to vote for Donald Trump – the fact that his predecessor was Barack Obama (a Black man).

The overarching problematic event for this interaction is, therefore, Trump’s election as President, although the specific PE that is responded to with micro-resistance within this argumentation—‘White people voting for Trump in retaliation to Obama’s (a Black man’s) eight years in office’—will be explained in the upcoming analysis. Additionally, as sense-making is not the main focus of this chapter, the functioning of sense-making in an effort to comprehend the socio-political world will not be broken down in intricate detail; rather, this analysis will demonstrate the point at which sense-making becomes micro-resistance. That is, this analysis is committed to explicating how the discursive environment where the occurrence of sense-making of a serious situation quickly transforms into a site for micro-resistance, which in this case is carried out using humour.

Faiza initiates the consideration of the possibility that Obama’s Presidency may have been a contributing factor in Trump’s election as she launches the closed query: “do you think Obama’s eight years had an affect on-” (F1.). This question serves as a discursive pivot in manoeuvring the trajectory of the argumentation sequence to highlight another form of racism that may have fed into the election result, particularly one that is not solely based on the receptivity of Trump’s rhetoric; rather, it also positions the voting for Trump as a retaliation against Obama’s eight-year-long Presidency on the basis of his race (i.e. anti-Black racism). This specific positioning regarding the underlying cause for the retaliation is asserted by Sara, where she affirms Faiza’s question with the confirmation that Obama’s Presidency did play a role in Trump’s election (S1.1.: “I think so”), after which she elaborates with further nuance: “I think White people were sick of having Black people” (S1.2.). The form of retaliation Sara thus constructs is not simply one in terms of Obama—a Black man—having access to the Office; to be ‘sick of’ any given person or entity implies the feeling of an undesirably prolonged exposure to or experience with someone or something, which may then grow to become tiresome.

This consequently brings the element of time into the equation; as Sara produces this argumentation in response to Faiza’s query that itself incorporates the time-element (Obama’s eight years in office), it thus carries the implication that the duration of Obama’s Presidency may have been a trigger source alongside the fact that a Black man held the Office, such that completing two Presidential terms—something white Presidents have achieved before Barack



Obama—was considered worthy of retaliation. Sara essentially creates a racial binary of Black and White in her response; she posits that the retaliation from “White people” is against “having Black people”, though her argumentation creates some obscurity. The notion of anti-Black racism as a real phenomenon in the US is not under question here, rather the ambiguity in Sara’s reference of the capacity in which it resides. It is unclear as to whether she is aiming to describe a general retaliation against Black people as a collective community that has arisen in tandem with the completion of Obama’s two-term Presidency—along with Trump’s overtly racist campaign rhetoric—or whether she is making a generalisation of this retaliation subsisting towards the idea of Black people attaining success and/or having access to leadership positions whereby Obama is implicitly framed as a representative for such retaliation-worthy success through the eyes of White people. In any case, what is clear is that Sara’s utterance further adds to the cementing of Trump’s election as a racist phenomenon propelled by the exercising of political whiteness, and thus lays down the foundation for constructing the PE.

The ambiguity of Sara’s argumentation (S1.2.) may have arisen as a result of overlapping talk that could have halted an otherwise upcoming elaboration of her point. As Sara was adding nuance to her initial affirmative response (S1.1.), Faiza proceeded with her line of inquiry, orienting to the possibility of Obama’s policies serving as a catalyst for the retaliation (see lines 04-05 from Excerpt 5.1): “what policies do you think he-” (F2.). Notably, the framing of her question departs from the response Sara provided to her initial query, though this too may be a result of overlapping talk. That is, this epistemic-referential question (Kearsley, 1976) that Faiza puts forward seeks to acquire information on specific policies set by Obama (or more broadly, his administration) that may have served as motivation for Trump voters to retaliate.

While Sara was engaged in elaborating on her confirmation to Faiza’s first query, so as to draw ties with race-politics, Faiza simultaneously directed the trajectory of her questioning towards policy. Her choice to do so, along with formulating her question so as to elicit an opinion on *which* of Obama’s policies had an effect, as opposed to inquiring *if* his policies played a role, indicates an implicit assumption through an embedded self-assertion in her questioning that Obama’s policy-making may have encouraged the decision to vote for Trump. However, Faiza’s query is left incomplete as Sara interjects refuting the notion that Obama’s policy played a role, at which point she unequivocally asserts the issue of race politics serving as not only the primary – rather the dominant factor serving as the locus of provocation to retaliate against. She notes: “I don’t think it was the policies” (S2.1.), “I think it was a race thing to be honest” (S2.2.). At this point, the PE—‘White people voting for Trump in retaliation

to Obama's (a Black man's) eight years in office'—is firmly established. Once Sara clarifies the specifics of her assertion vis-à-vis the cause for voter-retaliation in response to Obama's eight years in office, Faiza returns to her questioning once again as she approaches the crux of the matter that Sara has—until now—been attending to by posing a final pseudo-closed question: “d’you think it was just cause it was a Black man in Office as President” (**F3.**), which Sara, indeed, affirms. However, along with Sara confirming this, the following two discursive events unfold at this juncture: firstly, the locus of subversion/and or invalidation that is tethered to the PE is collectively established – *Trump’s election as a retaliation to having a Black President*; and secondly, the sequence transforms from a sense-making activity to micro-resistance as it takes a jocular turn.

The first point to note about this juncture of the interaction—lines 09-17 in Excerpt 5.1, and **F3. – F.3.2.3.** in the argumentation sequence—is that Faiza's ‘pseudo-closed question’ (**F3.**; lines 09 and 12) is labelled as such given its initial structure as a closed question, and the trajectorial shift in line 12 providing a hypothetical assertion of refusal on behalf of the “White people sick of having Black people”. It thus elicits an overlapping response from Sara, where she supplies tokens of agreement (“yeah” in lines 10 and 11) mid-way through Faiza's utterance, which unfolds as follows: while Sara affirms her questioning vis-à-vis the cause for retaliation being “just cause it was a Black man in Office”, Faiza proceeds to offer a hypothetical scenario to narrate the retaliation. She animates the initial refusal as “people were like no” (**F3.2.**); here we see the markings of a commencing hypothetical direct reported speech, or DRS (“people were like”), initiated with voicing their rejection at first: “no”. After a short pause (see line 12), both Faiza and Nazia add to the hypothetical DRS, with Faiza further detailing the refusal (“we’re not having (this)”, **F3.2.1.**), and Nazia marking rebellion as a call for action (“need to rebel against this”, **F3.2.2.**). This is the interactional epicentre from where the locus of subversion and/or invalidation is constructed, as the retaliation towards “a Black man in office” is firmly established, and the jocular shift follows as Faiza continues on with her hypothetical DRS.

Before arriving at the next DRS within the argumentation sequence, lines 14-16 from the corresponding excerpt have been omitted from the sequence as they do not make a significant discursive impact on the argumentation in demonstrating a shift from sense-making to micro-resistance via humour. Therefore, until this point (argumentationally, that is), the DRS Faiza articulates encapsulates an assertion of White refusal towards Black presence in Office, however what she follows with is a hypothetical DRS that voices the desired alternative to

having “a Black man in Office”: “instead let’s have an Orange” (F3.2.3.). She effectively juxtaposes the seriousness of a racial identity facing racism (a racism that is historic, systemic and structural) with a colour used for satirical purposes that is commonly applied to mock excessive, unnatural and artificial tanning – orange (Woloshyn, 2018). As Woloshyn (ibid) posits:

*“Orange is a colour with such comedic value because it is impossible, disingenuous: it is a mark of artifice. (...) the orange fake tan (or serious overuse of bronzer) is widely viewed as unacceptable within popular culture”.*

Indeed, Faiza thus employs the tactic of satire with her labelling of Trump as “orange”, which was prevalent at the time of the US election (ibid). In fact, it seems that she uses “orange” not only as a descriptor—it’s also used as a metonym for Trump. As Woloshyn notes:

*“Orange is not bronze, not brown, not black (and never will be). It is laughable, therefore, because it is a mark of failure, an act of mimicry gone wrong. Put simple, orange isn’t “of value” to us because it isn’t a skin colour at all”.*

In using this satirical choice to describe Trump, Faiza also tacitly ridicules the retaliation towards Obama as she mocks the electors’ intellect vis-à-vis their acumen to make rational socio-politically sound choices, thereby spotlighting their decision making based on skin colour (driven by anti-Black racism) alone. Their retaliation is thus ridiculed by leveraging the race-politics already established in the argumentation that effectively invalidates the credibility of the retaliation votes by White people who were “sick of having Black people”. What Faiza mockingly underscores here is the extent of the disdain towards a “Black man in Office” where even “an Orange”—“a mark of artifice” (Woloshyn, ibid)—is deemed a more preferable alternative. Not only does this then position the rationality of such voters’ decision making as questionable, it also works to invalidate Trump as a credible politician (as discussed by the Sisters’ Circle in the previous chapter – see section 4.2, Excerpt 4.4).

Such tactics of discrediting Trump with the placement of ridicule on his appearance was not uncommon at the time of election, and is an ongoing phenomenon at the time of writing this chapter; from mocking his ‘orange glow’ (Wade, 2019), his hair (Bruner, 2018), to his hand size (Horton, 2016), Faiza’s employment of satirical race-politics thus ridicules both – voter retaliation, as well as Trump himself. This is emphasised by Nazia referring to him as a “thing”

(N3.2.3.1.), which Faiza confirms and repeats (“yeah thing”, F3.2.3.1.1.)<sup>9</sup>. This works to further invalidate Trump as his ‘humanness’ or ‘humanity’, so to speak, is now explicitly rejected in tandem with the caricature-esque non-human skin colouring descriptor. Not only does this advance the ridiculing of his very existence in a leadership capacity through the combination of his caricaturisation and eradication of his humanness, one may argue it also dislodges and repurposes the functioning of dehumanisation—which is otherwise liberally employed in Trump’s right-wing rhetoric—to comically reduce his being-ness and perhaps political presence as a ‘man’ to a “thing”, thus rendering his election a degradation of socio-political progress. As this elicits laughter from the group (see line 21), I make reference to an internet ‘meme’ mocking Trump that had been heavily circulated at the time of his election: “have you seen that meme” (H3.2.3.2.). Without any need for further inquiry or excavation of what I may have been referring to, Nazia recalls the meme I intended to relate: “Orange is the new Black” (N3.2.3.2.1.), eliciting further laughter, and a proclamation from Maryam: “oh yeah that one is hilarious” (M3.2.3.2.1.1.). While this is not necessarily a joke or use of satire being originally produced by the sisters (us) in situ within this spatio-temporal setting, referring to it nonetheless discursively compliments the invalidation of Trump and his voters-by-retaliation against Blackness. Put simply, it adds another layer of satire to ridicule Trump and his voters.

To briefly explain the phrase, the ‘is the new’ segment of ‘[insert colour] is the new black’ is rooted in fashion (Huffpost, 2013), with the popularisation of adding the colour ‘black’ to the tail-end of the phrase occurring in the 1980s (Zimmer, 2006). The addition of ‘orange’ to create the statement ‘orange is the new black’ was then commercialised with the growing popularity of a TV show of the same name when it first hit TV screens in 2013. This had then been repurposed after Trump’s election for political satire (the original creator of this meme is unknown); it effectively summarises the argumentation and satirical mockery of Trump and his voters that precedes the orientation to this meme (see image 5.1 below).

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<sup>9</sup> N.B. the first half of line 20, where Faiza attempts to make reference to something Trump wears has been omitted from the argumentation sequence as: a) it is not consequential to the overall discursive shift from sense-making to micro-resistance through humour, and b) it is unclear as to what she says (its inaudible).



**Image 5.1 [see Appendix E]**

Essentially, this interaction showcases how sense-making transforms into a site for micro-resistance; from trying to elucidate further points of motivation that may have encouraged people to vote for Trump, micro-resistance is applied using humour, which is carried out as a mode of subversion and ridicule to effectively turn “oppression upside down” (Sorensen, 2008: 175). The ‘oppression’ in question here is not specifically regarding an overtly physically violent one; rather, it refers to the discourse of dehumanisation deeply entrenched in Trump’s rhetoric that he is widely criticised for, and thus the subversion of a right-wing and White supremacist practice of dehumanising marginalised and minority communities functions to reduce his ‘humanness’ to a comical caricature (i.e. “Orange” and “thing”). Indeed, as mentioned throughout this analysis, the adoption of political satire also ridicules the retaliation-voters (i.e. the ‘White people sick of having Black people’) reacting against Obama’s presence in Office due to his race by mocking racial prejudice of anti-Blackness and its functioning. Their disdain for a “Black man in Office” is comically framed to subsist to such a degree that the alternative of an ‘orange thing’ is deemed more appropriate as President. In so doing, the Sisters’ Circle collectively “rearticulate and disarticulate dominant ideology, knowledge, meaning, common sense, and power relationships” (Rossing, 2015: 617); the discourse and function of racism predicated on White hegemony, White supremacy, and an overall concentration of power dominance of Whiteness that produces such sentiments of anti-Blackness and subsequent retaliation is thus subverted. Put simply, the subversion of the hegemonic power of Whiteness producing such discourses and actions of anti-Blackness is achieved by ridiculing the choice of voting for an ‘orange thing’ as a retaliation against “White people sick of having Black people”.

Besides such subversive discourse embedded in this use of humour, it also reduces the tension of the situation as the discourse of fear and uncertainty surrounding Trump’s election that had been established in the sense-making interaction directly preceding this argumentation sequence is given a comical twist. Not only does this momentarily create a space where the

intensity of their (our) angst is thereby lessened, it in turn grounds the potential for initiating healing through generating solidarity afforded by the use of humour (Sorensen, 2008). The problematic event posed in this interaction, therefore, induces a different response to what can be seen in the previous chapter; rather than furthering the production of minority angst, it initiates micro-resistance as humour.

A similar phenomenon can be found in the following interaction where the Sisters' Circle recount an incident that unfolded in the ISoc Sisters Facebook group, and the subsequent discussion on the incident that ensued in the corresponding WhatsApp chat group for ISoc Sisters. This interaction differs slightly from the previous example, however, as micro-resistance through humour is not being produced in situ; rather, the act of employing humour in response to a problematic event that had occurred in the past is being recounted. Interestingly, the recounting of this incident has been prompted by Alia reflecting on how the use of humour in itself had been positioned as problematic by some sisters in the WhatsApp chat group, which effectively puts into question the boundaries of humour as micro-resistance.

For ease of clarification, this excerpt will be split into four (Excerpts 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 5.2.4) to demonstrate the prompt for narration (5.2.1.), recounting the problematic event that instigated micro-resistance (5.2.2.), the site of micro-resistance (5.2.3.), and the justification of why this particular use of humour serves as resistance discourse (5.2.4.), which in turn explains and underscores its functioning as micro-resistance. As the site for micro-resistance occurs in Excerpt 5.2.3, this is the only segment of the interaction that will be interrogated using an argumentation sequence; the remaining excerpts will be considered using the transcripts alone to construct the context in which micro-resistance had occurred.

**Excerpt 5.2.1:** *“you can't joke about ISIS”*

**Preceding discussion:** how polite and considerate the ISoc sisters' WhatsApp chat group is in comparison to the brothers'.

**Sisters:** ALIa, MARYam, NAZia, HANain, FAIza, SARa.

- 01 ALI: I thought the whole thing about li:ke (.) oh you  
 02 can't joke about ISIS and that's goin a bit too  
 03 far I thought was [(\*\*\*) ]  
 04 MAR: [oh ISIS yeah that was no ]  
 05 NAZ: [I mean I was the one who]  
 06 \$(actually) p(hh)osted [the thing heheh .hh\$]=  
 07 MAR: [I thought ]=  
 08 ALI: =\$it's like [that was- that] was funny though\$  
 09 NAZ: [ um I mean- ]  
 10 ALI: [\$like take the jo(hh)ke\$ ]  
 11 NAZ: [I mean I thought it- I thought] it was a jo:ke  
 12 (.) [but em]

13 ALI: [ yeah ]  
 14 (0.6)  
 15 NAZ: I mean I [don't- I don't] think there's anything  
 16 MAR: [ thing is- ]  
 17 NAZ: wr- [wrong with it cause I was-]  
 18 MAR: [no (\*\*\*) ]  
 19 ALI: [ (\*\*\*) ]  
 20 HAN: [ wait I didn't read-] (0.2) I didn't  
 21 I didn't read this what-  
 22 ALI: [read it] heheheh  
 23 NAZ: [(\*\*\*) ]  
 24 MAR: it was like the funniest thing [(\*\*\*)  
 25 ALI: [\$I thought it was  
 26 hilarious personally\$]  
 27 MAR: and then someone like (.) got a bit upset I  
 28 ALI: [yeah ]  
 29 MAR: [thought] that was like=  
 30 ALI: I thought it was [hilarious but heh]  
 31 MAR: [(perfect) cause ]

Before engaging with this segment of the conversation, as outlined above, the discussion preceding this interaction involved the sisters (specifically Maryam) asserting that the sisters' (i.e. the women's) ISoc WhatsApp chat group<sup>10</sup> is much more polite than the brothers' (i.e. the men's) Whatsapp group, to which Alia positions the politeness of the sisters' group as "go in a bit too far" vis-à-vis an incident that involved joking about ISIS (lines 01 – 03). What the sisters in this group effectively engage in at the onset is questioning the definitive boundaries of the constituents of humour; what topics are, or are not, off limits? Recounting the instance in which humour had been deployed with a disapproval of others' dismay over its use thus frames this telling from an added lens of proving the validity of its comedic effect. It is not only recounted as a remembrance of a funny interaction, it also demonstrates an attempt at disqualifying or challenging the stringency of comedic limits. Whether or not the decision to joke about ISIS can be classed as pushing or over-stepping the boundaries of morality, what ultimately unfolds in this interaction is the Sisters' Circle defending the use of humour as a form of subverting and invalidating the power of ISIS vis-à-vis its ideological grounding as a supposed Islamic state functioning from an Islamic framework.

After Alia's orientation to the incident, Nazia claims that she was the one who posted the joke regarding ISIS (lines 04 and 06). At this point, Alia continues to mark Nazia's input in

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting at this point that not every 'sister' in the Islamic Society was involved with the Sisters' Circle. While the provision of this space was made available to all women in the Islamic Society, not everyone engaged with it; the WhatsApp chat group thus consisted of a much larger group of sisters compared to the numbers in the Sisters' Circle, accounting for those women who were part of ISoc, but not the Sisters' Circle.

the chat as jocular (lines 08 and 10), which Nazia echos in line 11. As I was not part of the WhatsApp group at the time this interaction took place, I had not witnessed the chat being referred to, hence my request for information on what had happened in lines 20–21<sup>11</sup>. This instigated further assertions of the humorousness of Nazia’s comments by Maryam and Alia (lines 24–26 and line 30), at which point Maryam orients to the fact that it had made someone in the group upset: “and then someone like (.) got a bit upset” (line 27). Here, Nazia seeks to recall further information on the incident that led to the WhatsApp chat exchange, which results in the outlining of the problematic event that triggered the utilisation of humour to counter the PE:

### Excerpt 5.2.2

- 32 NAZ: are you on [about em- ]  
 33 MAR: [what was it] (0.3) that weird girl  
 34 that was on Facebook [she got a- she got added]  
 35 NAZ: [ oh ye- oh yeah ]  
 36 FAI: [ o:h yeah:: ]  
 37 MAR: in the group (0.2)  
 38 NAZ: [basi-]  
 39 FAI: [Amy] White (.)  
 40 NAZ: yeah=  
 41 MAR: =and it was a- (0.4) paedophile or something heh  
 42 NAZ: yeah it turned out- (.) it was something about  
 43 [then ]  
 44 MAR: [\$it was] a guy\$ [heh ]  
 45 ALI: [yeah]  
 46 NAZ: and then I [sai:d u:m ]  
 47 SAR: [such a good] conversation (what)  
 48 MAR: no but [(\*\*) asking about] modelling  
 49 NAZ: [ (\*\*\*) ]  
 50 (0.2)  
 51 NAZ: a-  
 52 ALI: yeah  
 53 NAZ: [basically they were askin-]  
 54 MAR: [ (\*\*\*) ]  
 55 ALI: [ \$I just said] na::h\$ (.)  
 56 NAZ: basically tryin to lure someone to meet up with  
 57 them and- (0.7) [I don’t] really-  
 58 MAR: [ yeah ]  
 59 (0.4)  
 60 ALI: send [pictures or something]  
 61 NAZ: [ (\*\*\*) ]  
 62 MAR: yeah and then like do you have like [a bra (\*\*\*)]

<sup>11</sup> While I was not a part of the Whatsapp Chat group at the time this interaction took place, I was on a different chat group for the ISoc that was active in the year prior to the setting up of the one the SC are referring to here. As there had been a change in Head Sister the year this study commenced, the new Head Sister set up a new chat group for the ISoc sisters where this interaction took place (which I joined soon after).



Here, Nazia, Faiza, Alia and Maryam collectively narrate the incident that had occurred on the Facebook group page; an individual called Amy White had been approved to join the ISoc Sisters' Facebook Group, who inquired if anybody on the group would be interested in modelling. This persona of Amy White is marked as peculiar at the onset with Maryam stating: "that weird girl that was on Facebook she got a- she got added" (lines 33–34). Amy White's peculiarity is not just marked by the evaluative marker "weird"; the use of "girl" in conversation has been considered a downgraded status of femininity—in contrast with "woman", for example—as Edwards (1998) suggests it signals "normative assumptions about age or marital status", where "girl" is positioned below "woman" (Stokoe and Smithson, 2001: 231). In this case, the use of "girl" may be indicative of the behaviour depicted by Amy White as disapprovingly puerile, thereby attending to the age-based negative characteristics associated with "girl" so as to underscore the peculiarity of Amy White's character.

This discursive effort is employed despite the fact that the co-constructed narration in this excerpt progresses to reveal that Amy White was, in fact, "a guy" (Maryam in line 44), who was "basically tryin to lure someone to meet up with them" (Nazia in line 56), inquiring if members could "send pictures or something" (Alia in line 60), and making requests such as "do you have like a bra" (Maryam in line 62). It thus becomes evident in this segment of the interaction that Amy White was ostensibly a man masquerading as a woman, falsely seeking expressions of interest for a supposed modelling opportunity so as to attain photos of the members in the group to "lure someone to meet up with them". This may explain Maryam's use of "paedophile or something" (line 41) in further marking Amy White's strangeness. The Cambridge dictionary defines the word "paedophile" as "someone who is sexually attracted to children"; it is important to note that all the sisters within the university ISoc (and in turn the Facebook group and Sisters' Circle in question) are adults aged 18 and above; the act of paedophilia is evidently then inaccurate and inapplicable. What it does, however, discursively mark is an implication of perversion and predatory behaviour on Amy White's part, thus adding to the markings of his/her oddity to further invalidate them. The way this information was uncovered and brought to light within the Facebook group is unclear, however the problematic event in the narrative—an act of predation—is hence established: a man masquerading as a woman to gain access to the ISoc Sisters' Facebook group, to obtain photos and attempt to meet a member under the guise of a modelling opportunity. As the PE has now been grounded, this produces the site for employing micro-resistance via humour:

### Excerpt 5.2.3

- 64 NAZ: I said I said em aw get that (.) Dark Justice group  
65 cause I've seen them like on Facebook and stuff  
66 em (.) basically they: (0.6) track down like  
67 paedophiles and stuff and confront them=  
68 MAR: =yeah on [WhatsApp]  
69 NAZ: [ and hand] them over to the police or  
70 whatever  
71 MAR: yeah  
72 NAZ: em and then: em:: (1.4) someone mentioned  
73 something about like a Muslim version: there's  
74 a [Muslim version and then I said]  
75 MAR: [ yeah like I said that] I just said  
76 like [ Muslim justice ] and then the other one  
77 NAZ: [then I said and I=]  
78 MAR: was (.) genius [(\*\*\*) ]  
79 ALI: [ehh ]  
80 NAZ: [ and then and then I and then]  
81 I said oh we should- we should form our own  
82 group like us girl(hh)s in the WhatsApp group  
83 .hh em .thh iz- what was it something like  
84 [Islam sisters inv- investigating] secrets hehe  
85 MAR: [ Islamic sisters investigate ]  
86 NAZ: or for sho(hh)rt ISI(hh)S  
87 [ ((laughter)) ]  
88 MAR: [\$it was hilarious ]  
89 ALI: [\$I thought that was so funny it was clearly a joke\$]

The argumentation sequence is as follows:

### Argumentation sequence 5.2

**Locus of subversion and/or invalidation:** *ISIS, Amy White, and the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists.*

**Problematic event:** *a man masqueraded as a woman to gain access to the ISoc Sisters' Facebook group, attain photos and attempt to meet a member under the guise of a modeling opportunity.*

- N1.** I said aw get that Dark Justice group  
    **N1.1.** cause I've seen them on Facebook and stuff  
    **N1.2.** basically they track down like paedophiles and stuff  
    **N1.3.** and confront them  
        **M1.3.1.** yeah on WhatsApp  
    **N1.4.** and hand them over to the police or whatever  
**N2.** and then someone mentioned something about like a Muslim version  
    **N2.1.** there's a Muslim version  
    **N2.2.** yeah like I said that  
        **M2.2.1.** I just said like Muslim justice  
    **N2.3.** and then the other one was genius  
    **N2.4.** I said oh we should form our own group  
        **N2.4.1.** like us girls in the WhatsApp group

- N2.4.2.** what was it
- N2.4.3.** something like Islam Sisters Investigating Secrets
  - M2.4.3.1.** Islamic Sisters Investigate
- N2.4.4.** or for short ISIS
  - M2.4.4.1.** it was hilarious
  - A2.4.4.2.** I thought it was so funny
    - A2.4.4.2.1.** it was clearly a joke man

Before proceeding with this analysis, the invalidation of Amy White has been outlined as one of the three loci of subversion and/or invalidation; this, however, is not specific to this argumentation sequence alone. As seen in the previous segment of this interaction, Amy White has already been invalidated, which continues on into this sequence. The outlining of ‘Locus of subversion and/or invalidation’ is thus relevant to the telling as a whole (which includes excerpts 5.1–5.4).

Once the PE for this narrative has been collectively established, Nazia shares the response she put forward in the WhatsApp chat group using DRS, marked by ‘I said’: “I said aw get that Dark Justice<sup>12</sup> group” (N1.), after which she proceeds to explain her suggestion. The explanatory markers ‘cause’ (from N1.1.) and ‘basically’ (from N1.2.) indicate that Nazia may be stepping out of DRS as a form of narrative commentary to offer contextual information to the Sisters’ Circle. As I do not have access to the chat group data for the incident being recounted, it is not possible to verify and thus ascertain whether these argumentations (N1.1. and N1.2.) are in fact DRS, or if Nazia is, indeed, producing the explanation for the benefit of the Sisters’ Circle group listening to the recounting of this incident. In any case, she justifies her suggestion vis-à-vis calling for the involvement of Dark Justice (DJ) based on the fact that she had “seen them on Facebook and stuff” (N1.1.), and proceeds to describe what DJ do: “they track down paedophiles and stuff” (N1.2.), “and confront them” (N1.3.), at which point Maryam then contributes to the explanation to highlight that they do so “on WhatsApp” (M1.2.1.).

Nazia then explains that at the end of their investigative journey, they hand over the perpetrators to the police (N1.4.). This serves as the first point of subversion, which is an extension of the invalidation seen in the previous interactional segment; taking into consideration the fact that Maryam previously called Amy White a paedophile, to then select DJ—an anti-paedophilia group—as a model of (a parody) defence for the sisters to collectively

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<sup>12</sup> Dark Justice are an investigative group based in Newcastle Upon Tyne run by two men; as per their ‘About Us’ section on their website, they are committed to catching “potential sex offenders who try to groom and meet up with children following sexual grooming”. They do so by setting up fake profiles to draw in groomers (Dark Justice Website – ‘About Us’ page: see Appendix F for screenshot).

take action, it thus extends the framing of Amy White as a paedophile. However, one may argue that this labelling may have been discursively used in isolation of the previous interactional sequence, and Nazia's intention may be to focus on DJ's functional framework—the process of tracking predators online to then hand them over to the police—as opposed to the tracking of paedophiles specifically; that is, the fact that DJ selectively target paedophiles may be coincidental in relation to the previous labelling of Amy White as one. In any case, it nevertheless showcases that Amy White's behaviour warrants the mobilisation of sisters through an outside investigative group, which—as we will see next—takes a humorous turn.

Now that the foundation for the telling has been set and DJ has been brought to the fore, Nazia orients to the mentioning of a Muslim version: “and then someone mentioned something about like a Muslim version” (N2.), which Maryam corroborates: “yeah like I said that” (M2.2.) – she confirms that she had put forward “Muslim Justice” (M2.2.1.), a personalised repackaging of ‘*Dark Justice*’ (emphasis added to demonstrate site of alteration). This is the specific juncture where the interaction begins to shift towards a jocular tone, as Maryam offers a positive evaluation of what Nazia had followed her ‘Muslim Justice’ suggestion with: “and then the other one was genius” (M2.3.). In order to demonstrate how this jocular shift occurs, it is worth noting that although the argumentation points have been distinctly separated to construct the argumentation sequence, from the point of Maryam's corroboration to her positive evaluation of “the other one”, Nazia had been attempting to share her comedic interpretation of the ‘Muslim version’ of DJ – see overlapping talk in lines 74-80 of the corresponding excerpt (Excerpt 5.3.3) below:

- 72 NAZ: em and then: em:: (1.4) someone mentioned  
 73 something about like a Muslim version: there's  
 74 a [Muslim version and then I said]  
 75 MAR: [ °yeah like I said that°] I just said  
 76 like [ Muslim justice ] and then the other one  
 77 NAZ: [then I said and I=]  
 78 MAR: was (.) genius [(\*\*\*) ]  
 79 ALI: [ehh ]  
 80 NAZ: [>and then and then I and then<]

It is thus difficult to determine if the ‘Muslim version’ of DJ that Nazia recalls someone mentioning, which Maryam clarifies was her input with ‘Muslim Justice’, is a real, existing organisation, or if what is being recalled is Maryam's play with words vis-à-vis the personalisation of DJ to tackle Muslim issues. Indeed, Maryam's contribution to this telling corroborating Nazia's memory implies that it may, perhaps, align with the latter; her use of ‘just’ coupled with ‘like’ (lines 75 and 76) may hold some indication as to whether or not her

input was imaginative or factual. With regards to the discourse marker ‘just’, Lee (1987) posits that it possesses a depreciatory meaning, as a downplaying mechanism. ‘Like’, on the other hand, is seen to hold two distinct semantic functionalities; first is the ‘focuser like’, which can pragmatically serve to “initiate, sustain or repair discourse, to mark a boundary or sequential dependence between two discourse segments” (Dailey-O’Cain, 2000: 61); second is the ‘quotative like’, which is a marker for an upcoming quote (ibid). To consider Maryam’s use of ‘like’ in this instance (**M2.2.1**. I just said *like* Muslim justice), one may argue that its function in this argumentation is not quotative as that discursive role is being fulfilled by “said”. It is also unclear as to how it may serve to mark a boundary between discourse segments, however there is a possibility that this ‘like’ is a discourse-repair marker.

The overlapping talk ensues as Nazia puts forward that “someone mentioned something about like a Muslim version” (**N2**), and—as mentioned earlier—there is some obscurity surrounding her recalling of this detail as a serious suggestion of an existing organisation under that name, or if she holds the recognition that it may, perhaps, have been a joke suggestion. This elicits a response from Maryam; the discourse repair thus may serve to either fill in the informational gap so as to clarify that she had put the suggestion forward (i.e. that ‘someone’ was Maryam herself), to supply the specific name of the ‘Muslim version’ that Nazia was possibly unable to recall at the time of this telling, and/or to perhaps mitigate the ‘seriousness’ of her suggestion so as to imply that it may not be a real organisation. The latter is supported by the ‘just’ preceding ‘like’, which may cumulatively then work to downplay Maryam’s suggestion—perhaps also in relation to its effectiveness as humour—as she follows her corroborative argumentations with a positive evaluation of the suggestion that had come after hers. The overall effect of these discursive actions serve to intensify the comedic value of Nazia’s upcoming account of her input vis-à-vis the formation of their own group (**N2.4**. I said oh we should form our own group).

The jocular shift in this interaction is thus, evidently, a gradual one. As outlined above, the shift commences with Maryam’s interjection, after which Nazia resumes her reflection so as to work towards the punchline. As she puts forward her suggestion vis-à-vis forming their own group (**N2.4**), she clarifies that her proposition was directed at the ISoc sisters within the WhatsApp chat group: “like us girls in the WhatsApp group” (**N2.4.1**). Her transition towards the joke is not entirely smooth as she attempts to retrieve the specific words she uttered from her memory bank: “what was it” (**N2.4.2**) and “something like” (**N2.4.3**. – the first half of the argumentation), after which she arrives at the penultimate stage of the joke delivery – her

recalling of the name for the group she had proposed in the WhatsApp chat: “something like Islam Sisters Investigating Secrets” (N2.4.3. – the complete argumentation). Once again, Maryam interjects with a corrective: “Islamic Sisters Investigate” (M2.4.3.1.). This build-up then allows for the arrival at the punchline: “or for short ISIS” (N2.7.). This elicits laughter from the group, along with approval through positive evaluative remarks from Maryam (M2.4.4.1. it was hilarious), and Alia, who reaffirms the comedic nature of Nazia’s attempt at humour, thereby reinforcing the positioning of it as “clearly a joke”: “I thought it was so funny” (A2.4.4.2.), “it was clearly a joke man” (A2.4.4.2.1.).

The subversive function of this joke is two-fold – it has two foci: the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists, and ISIS—the terrorist group—themselves. It is yet another example of disarticulating and rearticulating “dominant ideology, knowledge, meaning, common sense, and power-relationships” (Rossing, 2015: p617), however in this instance this action is performed within the two outlined dimensions. In terms of the first dimension of subversion—the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists, of being seen as “inherently prone to terrorism” (Kundnani, 2014:191)—the call to organise against, to resist Amy White through the formation of the group ‘ISIS’ (Islamic Sisters Investigate Secrets) is an inversion tactic commonly practiced by stand-up comedians (Bilici, 2010). The terrorist stereotype has not only been seen to rise within everyday life, government led anti-radicalism, anti-terrorism, and anti-extremism policies have subjected Muslims to surveillance, targeted institutional discrimination and state violence and oppressions (Qureshi, 2019). In tandem, the rise of ISIS and subsequent attacks the group claimed to have taken responsibility for in particular saw an increase in the implementation of specific policies ostensibly in place to prevent Muslims from succumbing to ISIS recruitment—such as David Cameron’s call to require Muslim women to take English language lessons as English proficiency, Cameron claimed, would reduce their susceptibility of falling prey to radical ideology (Sattar, 2016). Islamophobic systemic discrimination also intensified through mechanisms of erasure of Muslimness in the name of ‘British values’—for example, Ofsted banning the wearing of hijab in primary schools (Weale, 2018)—along with the reinforcement of surveillance tools, such as the Prevent scheme (Qureshi, 2019; see also Literature review, section 2.3). The stereotype of Muslims as terrorists, or the susceptibility to terrorist messaging, thus demonstrably penetrates a multitude of spheres of a Muslim’s existence in today’s world, namely in the UK where such policies (and racist incidences) are prevalent. The stereotype is omnipresent.

What Nazia effectively does is steer a discussion on an incident where Muslim women have been subject to predation toward a site for resistance. The contextual elements of the incident outlined in the argumentation sequence build the foundation for this resistance: predatory behaviour by a man towards Muslim women, and the women's call to investigate this predation for protection. To thus produce an investigatory group name that just so happens to have the same acronym as a terrorist group—one whose activities and mere existence are used to justify structural discrimination via policy—demonstrates a deliberate repurposing of the term 'ISIS' for comedic effect. Where ISIS is considered a threat to public safety, which—according to UK government policy—warrants surveillance and profiling of Muslims as an appropriate response, Nazia creates an inverted scenario where ISIS is a response to a predatory threat to the ISoc sisters' safety through investigative surveillance. The inversion of Muslims as being under surveillance to now doing the surveillance, as well as the adoption of a group name identical to a globally recognised terrorist organisation mocks the oppressive categorising of, and rhetoric about, Muslims. This, in turn, destabilises an essential element foundational to the proliferation of the 'terrorist' stereotype: that ISIS is representative of an ostensibly homogenous religious grouping—Muslims—who are supportive of and committed to the extremist views espoused by ISIS. By taking on the name 'ISIS' as a mock anti-predatory investigative group, the distorted reality that imposes the terrorist stereotype is ridiculed and thus subverted, such that humour rectifies and reasserts the sisters' "own sense of what is real" (Bilici, 2010: 205).

The repurposing of the name 'ISIS' feeds into the second dimension of subversion – the terrorist group itself. As previously mentioned, the grounding for what ISIS stands for has been inverted from posing a threat to civilian life to serving as a mode of protection from a threat to the ISoc sisters. What ISIS claim to stand for, the violence they commit, has been erased; ISIS is now an acronym representing 'Islamic Sisters Investigating Secrets'. The subversion modality here is thus an alteration in meaning, and erasure of the violence ISIS otherwise represents. Where ISIS' presence has fed into the creation of a distorted reality for Muslims, Nazia distorts the reality of ISIS and the threat this acronym represents, thereby disempowering the associative fear and dread the terrorist organisation otherwise thrives on. Essentially, the perceived threat of ISIS, the violence they commit and threaten to commit, for which the UK government has rendered Islamophobic systemic discrimination permissible (e.g. the Prevent strategy), is juxtaposed with a self-organisation of Muslim women as a protectionist measure against predatory behaviour under the same name. By 'owning' the group's title with an

inverted meaning serves as an implicit dissociative mechanism rejecting ISIS' ethos by virtue of replacing it with one that suits the sisters' needs, which extends to sever the connection between Muslims and ISIS that the terrorist stereotype purports to exist. In repurposing and 'owning' the group's title, this instance of humour works to undo Otherness, as Bilici (2010: 207) notes:

*"(...) the power of comedy becomes a means of undoing otherness. The comic vision rehumanizes Muslims and allows comedians to engage in a symbolic reversal of the social order. Muslim ethnic comedy is the world of Islamophobia turned upside down".*

While Nazia's approach to humour in this interaction may not entirely effect a reversal of the social order as Bilici suggests, it does work towards disrupting and disempowering the terrorist stereotype, as well as ISIS as an organisation. Nazia effectively disarticulates and rearticulates the following: the dominant ideology positioning Muslims as a threat to society vis-à-vis being subject to the terrorist labelling; power-relationships, which subsequently position Muslims as inferior, as Other, whereby Islamophobic rhetoric is consequently allowed to persist; and the meaning of the acronym 'ISIS'. The cumulative effect of subverting the stereotyping of Muslims and ISIS as an organisation ridicules both phenomenon, thus transforming an account of an experience with cyber-predation into micro-resistance against the broader criminalisation of Muslims in everyday society, as well as ISIS. The Sisters' Circle emphasise resistance against the latter, as they insist Nazia's use of humour serves as an invalidation of ISIS, which they consider necessary (the relevant lines are marked in bold with an arrow pointing to them):

#### Excerpt 5.2.4

- 86 NAZ: or for sho(hh)rt ISI(hh)S  
 87 [ (laughter) ]  
 → 88 MAR: [**\$it was hilar**ious ]  
 → 89 ALI: [**\$I thought that was so funny it was clearly a joke\$**]  
 → 90 [ma(hh)n .hh] come o(hh)n .hh [there is] no other  
 91 NAZ: [uhehehe .hh] [I mean-]  
 → 92 ALI: **way you can [take] that (0.2) [but]**  
 93 NAZ: [ like-] [ I- ] I mean like I- (0.6)  
 → 94 **like I d- I do understand like obviously we shouldn't**  
 → 95 **joke around w- with [ ISIS ] but it's not like I was-**  
 96 ALI: [yeah]  
 → 97 NAZ: **(0.4) I r- I re- [I don't- I don't think I took it] too far**  
 98 FAI: [ (not everybody was into it)]  
 99 NAZ: and=  
 100 FAI: =yeah=



101 ALI: =[yeah ]  
 102 NAZ: [like ]  
 103 MAR: [you know what] [right ] [it's- ]  
 104 ALI: [I don't-]  
 105 NAZ: [at all ]  
 106 MAR: no-no no matter what it is like if this is a ba:d (0.3)  
 107 subject or someone that people hate (0.4) the:re's  
 108 there's gonna be someone who feelsut- (.) that like  
 109 it shouldn't be joked about there's [always]- y- you  
 110 FAI: [ mm ]  
 111 MAR: all agree on that d- sorry (.) they're like a bad group  
 112 .hh then someone's gonna be there all like they feel  
 113 really sensitive and like they'd rather you didn't [joke ]  
 114 ALI: [yeah]  
 115 MAR: about [it]  
 116 NAZ: [m]hmm  
 117 MAR: I see this in comments as well (0.2) like any joke about  
 118 ISIS everyone's like aw so funny and then someone's  
 119 like you shouldn't joke about them  
 → 120 ALI: **this is the thing though [I feel like] ISIS should be**  
 121 MAR: [ basically]  
 → 122 ALI: **ridiculed because they are such a [bad group]**  
 123 NAZ: [b- d- thas- ]  
 → 124 ALI: **[they're ridiculou:s]**  
 → 125 NAZ: [ I- I r- I- I ] [rema] afterwards I [said] something  
 126 HAN: [hmm]  
 127 ALI: [yeah]  
 → 128 NAZ: **like their existence is a [joke] .hh [and]**  
 129 ALI: [yeah]  
 130 MAR: [yeah]  
 131 (0.2)  
 132 NAZ: I- I- f- t- t-  
 133 ALI: [yeah: ]  
 → 134 MAR: **[it's the] [effect ]**  
 → 135 NAZ: **[exactly] what you just [said] now=**  
 136 ALI: [yeah]  
 → 137 MAR: **=it's the effect [that they have ]**  
 → 138 NAZ: **[like that's the whole reason] I would**  
 → 139 **joke about them [is because] they are ju<sub>s</sub> so [ridiculous ]**  
 → 140 ALI: [ yeah ] [I think w- we]  
 → 141 **have to invalidate them as a:- (0.2) like as Islam [((inaudible))]**  
 142 NAZ: [ye th- that ]  
 143 (.) as well yeah=  
 144 ALI: =yeah=  
 145 NAZ: =because I:-  
 → 146 ALI: **[as a representation of Islam you can't ] ((145 & 146 first overlap couplet))**  
 → 147 NAZ: **[definitely do not see th- I definitely do not]**  
 → 148 **[even see them as Muslims at all anyway ] ((147 & 148 second overlap couplet))**  
 → 149 SAR: **[I mean the only reason you probably shouldn't] uh: joke**  
 → 150 **about them is (.) because of the damage they have**  
 → 151 **[caused ]**



“then someone’s gonna be there all like they feel really sensitive and like they’d rather you didn’t joke about it” (lines 106-115). Interestingly, in her attempt to somewhat explain ‘the other side’, she frames those objecting the humourisation of ISIS in any capacity as “really sensitive”; what is thus implicitly indicated here is that opposition toward such jokes is a matter of (over) sensitivity, thereby further emphasising Maryam’s interpretation of Nazia’s joke as comedic, despite her attempt to offer a level of understanding towards those taking offence. The example she then puts forward of seeing differing reactions under comments on online platforms (lines 117-119) with polar opposite responses from “aw so funny” to “and then someone’s like you shouldn’t joke about them” is taken up by Alia who unequivocally states that ISIS *should* be joked about, or as she articulates it: “ISIS should be ridiculed because they are such a bad group”, followed by the emphasis: “they’re ridiculou:s” (lines 120-124).

Nazia responds to this positively, first by reinforcing the ‘ridiculousness’ of ISIS with the assertion: “their existence is a joke” (line 128), then by taking Alia’s explanation up as a justification for her own decision to joke about ISIS, claiming: “like that’s the whole reason I would joke about them” (lines 138-139). This, in turn, produces an alignment by Alia who extends her assertion regarding the need to joke about, or ridicule, ISIS as she states: “I think w- we have to invalidate them as a:- (0.2) like as Islam” (lines 140-141), “as a representation of Islam you can’t” (line 146). This position on the ridiculing and invalidation of ISIS is particularly potent as Alia arrives at the heart of the mode of subversion, which not only speaks to how it disrupts the ideological underpinning of ISIS as a group – it also points to the foundational view that terrorist stereotyping is predicated on: that ISIS is representative of Islam. This stance is thus reinforced by Nazia who categorically denounces their identity as Muslims (lines 147-148).

In the midst of Alia and Nazia signifying the ridiculing and invalidation of ISIS, Maryam seemingly attempts to once again explain the grounds for opposition to such uses of humour, however she is unable to construct her argument beyond “it’s the effect that they have” (lines 134 and 137). Sara, on the other hand, successfully develops this point as Nazia denounces ISIS as Muslims, where she unambiguously asserts that the damage ISIS have caused is “the only reason you probably shouldn’t uh: joke about them” (lines 149-150), which leads to a collective agreement amongst the Sisters’ Circle. Sara’s final utterance in the excerpt indicates a possible alignment on her part with the group vis-à-vis their disdain towards ISIS (line 154), though the interaction concludes with no real consensus as to whether or not ISIS is an acceptable topic for humour. Nonetheless, what is clear is the assertion—primarily by Alia

and Nazia—that humour can be used as a mode of subversion to ridicule and invalidate, which can effectively serve as micro-resistance.

This cumulatively signifies, as per the Sisters' Circle, how joking about matters such as ISIS is a mode of subversion vis-à-vis the existence of the group; Alia explicitly states that ISIS need to be invalidated as Islam, thereby justifying how humour can serve as a voice of dissent in destabilising the power of such a group, thus functioning as a form of ridicule. While this segment of the interaction does not entail specific use of humour, the follow-up discussion on Nazia's input in the WhatsApp chat nonetheless demonstrates how comedy can act as a form of micro-resistance. Indeed, this specific example does not demonstrate how sense-making transforms into a site for micro-resistance via humour – perhaps the extent to which this could hold truth would be in terms of the attempt at making sense of the PE that had occurred (Amy White's attempted cyber-predation) within the WhatsApp chat group that prompted Nazia's joke. However, what can be deduced with greater certainty is how the use of humour itself initiated sense-making, in this instance vis-à-vis the appropriacy of humourising certain topics as a mode of subversion. A similar phenomenon can be found in the upcoming example for the next sub-section as the Sisters' Circle attempt to navigate the experiencing of everyday micro-aggressions catalysed by the use of humour.

### ***5.2.2 Resisting microaggressions***

This subsection focuses on how humour is used as a tool for micro-resistance with regards to microaggressions experienced in the everyday world. The first excerpt considered, as mentioned in the previous section, demonstrates an example where humour not only serves as resistance, it initiates sense-making, or an attempt at negotiating the sisters' reality of Otherness played out through subtle reminders in everyday encounters. The discussion commences with Maryam sharing an experience she had at a WH Smith store, which effectively serves as a springboard for Nazia and Sara to share their thoughts:

#### **Excerpt 5.3: “it's the small things”**

**Preceding discussion:** racism, politics and Islamophobia – the sisters generally concurred that they have not had any major racist incidences prior to Brexit and Trump's election, and that the environment may become more hostile since these votes went through. This instigates Maryam to share her experience.

**Sisters:** MARYam, HANain, FAIza, NAZia, SARA,

- 01 MAR: like this morning I went to WH Smith to get (0.5) coloured  
02 pencils in a rush cause I didn't know we needed them .hh

03 and I got there at twenty past eight (0.4) so they only open  
 04 like the food bit and they have these like (0.2) barriers  
 05 HAN: [mm]=  
 06 FAI: [mm]=  
 07 MAR: =and then they open at half eight the rest of the place  
 08 \*\*\*: mhm=  
 09 MAR: =so I walked in I was like (0.4) I found the barriers and I  
 10 looked at the lady who's like cleanin I was like (.) can I go  
 11 in she was like (0.5) no: \$I could tell she was- (0.2) terrifi:ed  
 12 (0.4) like I'm some kinda terrorist with a bo:mb\$  
 13 ((laughter))  
 14 MAR: \$like literally\$ she was like (.) no (0.5) and she was like  
 15 hiding in the corner I was like (.) \$ok fine I'll just come\$  
 16 [\$b(hh)ack in ten minutes\$]  
 17 [ ((laughter)) ]  
 18 MAR: [\$walk a(hh)round tow:(hh)n\$] heh (.)  
 19 [ ((laughter)) ]  
 20 MAR: I can tell: that I dunno [if its just- ]  
 21 HAN: [ heheh ]  
 22 NAZ: [ I mean I've ]  
 23 SAR: [i-i-it-its ]  
 24 the [small things like you know like ]  
 25 MAR: [ is it just me or like ]  
 26 NAZ: [I mean I've had the sma:ll things] [that they do (like)]  
 27 MAR: [ (\*\*\*) ]  
 28 SAR: [ yea:h ]  
 29 NAZ: little things there peep- like I can tell people are givin me looks  
 30 o[:r ]=  
 31 MAR: [yeah]=  
 32 SAR: =[yeah and this is- ]  
 33 NAZ: =[I think maybe said the] odd word but I've never had like  
 34 prope:r (.) full confrontation [or anything like that ]  
 35 MAR: [ (right) ]  
 36 SAR: [ no no me neither but] small  
 37 things like you know if you're- (0.3) at the checkout and like  
 38 the persons smiling at everyone else 'n you get there and  
 39 they stop smiling ['n you're like come o(hh):n ]  
 40 HAN: [ mm(hh): ]  
 41 NAZ: [ th. heheh .hh ye(hh)ah ] I've s- I've ha-  
 42 I've [had little] things]  
 43 SAR: [ yea::h ]  
 44 NAZ: [like that happen before] ye(hh)ah .hh  
 45 SAR: [like that yea::h ]  
 46 (0.8)  
 47 MAR: less serotonin for y:ou (0.3) smi[lings good]  
 48 SAR: [ right ]  
 49 \*\*\*: [ (hmhm)hm)  
 50 MAR: [people ]  
 51 SAR: [ exactly]

This analysis will begin with a definition of ‘microaggression’ so as to make clear the nuances to Maryam’s experience that situates it within the very sphere of microaggressions. The term itself was first posited in the 1970s by Chester Pierce (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Hopper, 2019), and has since been developed by academics and activists alike. Sue et al (2007) hence put forward this working definition for ‘microaggressions’ (ibid: p273):

*“Simply stated, microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group. In the world of business, the term “microinequities” is used to describe the pattern of being overlooked, underrespected, and devalued because of one’s race or gender. Microaggressions are often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and tones. These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous.”*

Within this paper, Sue et al break down microaggressions into three distinct categories: 1) ‘microassaults’ – “an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions”, which tend to be conscious (p274); 2) ‘microinsult’ – these are “characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color”, which can also manifest non-verbally through avoidance (p274); and 3) ‘microinvalidation’ – these are “characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (p274).

With this definition and breakdown of microaggressions in mind, this analysis will proceed to consider the problematic event in Maryam’s telling that leads to humour. The argumentation sequence is broken down below.

### **Argumentation sequence 5.3**

**Locus of subversion and/or invalidation:** *everyday Otherness, terrorist stereotype.*

**Problematic event:** *the localised PE- the cleaner’s reaction to Maryam; the broader PE-experiences of everyday Othering or micro-aggressions.*

**M1.** like this morning I went to WH Smith to get coloured pencils in a rush

**M1.1.** cause I didn’t know we needed them

**M1.2.** and I got there at twenty past eight

**M1.2.1.** so they only open like the food bit

**M1.2.2.** and they have these like barriers

- M1.3.** and then they open at half eight the rest of the place
- M2.** so I walked in
- M2.1.** I found the barriers
- M2.2.** and I looked at the lady who's like cleanin
- M2.3.** I was like can I go in
- M2.4.** she was like no
- M2.4.1.** I could tell she was terrified
- M2.4.1.1.** like I'm some kinda terrorist with a bomb
- M2.4.2.** like literally she was like no
- M2.4.2.1.** and she was like hiding in the corner
- M2.5.** I was like ok fine
- M2.5.1.** I'll just come back in ten minutes
- M2.5.2.** walk around town
- M3.** I can tell that I dunno if its just is it just me or like
- S3.1.** it's the small things
- N3.2.** I've had the small things that they do
- N3.3.** like little things
- N3.3.1.** like I can tell people are givin me looks
- N3.3.2.** or I think maybe said the odd word
- N3.4.** but I've never had like proper full confrontation or anything like that
- S3.5.** no no me neither
- S3.5.1.** but small things like if you're at the checkout
- S3.5.2.** and like the person's smiling at everyone else
- S3.5.3.** 'n you get there
- S3.5.3.1.** and they stop smiling
- S3.5.3.2.** 'n you're like come on
- N3.6.** yeah I've had little things like that happen before
- M4.** less serotonin for you
- M4.1.** smiling's good people

As outlined in the sequence, there are two forms of problematic events: one is localised, which is a specific PE that is bound within Maryam's telling; the second is the broader PE, which showcases what the localised PE is representative of in the broader discourse world. Within **M1.–M1.3.**, Maryam sets the scene outlining the spatiotemporal scenario in which the localised PE occurred. It is important to consider that this incident is shared as the Sisters' Circle discuss how they had not experienced any major or overt racist encounters prior to Brexit, and that a hostile environment may now ensue since the vote to leave the European Union. Maryam's commencing argumentations thus describe how she had been refused access beyond the food section of a WH Smith (a UK stationary store) that had been cordoned off with barriers as she entered the store 10 minutes earlier than the opening of the main shop floor (which is 8:30am). After highlighting the contextual elements serving as the backdrop to the recalled event (the where, the when, and the why: to get colouring pencils), Maryam then proceeds to share the encounter she had with a staff member (a cleaner) within the space she

has thus far described (M2.–M2.4.). She explains how she saw the barriers cordoning the main shop-floor off from the open food section, and that she inquired as to whether she could access the shop-floor, to which the “lady who’s like cleanin” (M2.2.) says “no” (M2.4.). This is the narrative juncture where Maryam orients to the occurrence of the localised problematic event. It is worth noting, however, that while the refusal of entry in itself serves as a facet to the localised PE, as Maryam continues to describe the cleaner’s response, it becomes evident that it is the manner in which she delivers the refusal that Maryam gives significance to—which this analysis argues is the locus of the microaggression (thus the PE) catalysing micro-resistance.

To develop this point, it is important to consider the micro-level elements at play that implicitly construct this experience as a microaggression – the first one being the very fact that Maryam shares this telling on the back of discussions on racism, and a rising hostility in the socio-political environment at the time of data collection (i.e. post-Trump’s election and post-Brexit). Notably, the commencement of her telling with the discourse marker ‘like’ could thus serve as a connective link tethering the upcoming narrative to the preceding discussion. If one were to erase the contextual elements of this narrative, such as the space and time in which this telling is shared, Maryam’s reference to the terrorist stereotype as she builds descriptive detail to her encounter—and the input from the rest of the Sisters’ Circle on their general experiences of facing everyday hostilities in response to Maryam’s telling—there may have been scope to categorically deduce that this narrative, in isolation, is simply describing a case of a customer being refused entry to a store a few minutes before official opening hours. However, the spatiotemporal locus of this telling, as well as the response from the rest of the sisters suggests that there is nuance to this event. Additionally, the shifts from *event clause* to *state clause*, specifically with the formulation of the ‘terrorist’ stereotype using the *state clause* with the historical-present tense embedded within Maryam’s delivery is worth noting. As per Polanyi (1989), event clauses describe a specific event. They are “semantically *non-iterative*, *non-habitual*, and *temporally bounded*” (p17; Polanyi’s emphasis). That is, it describes a specific occurrence within the narrative account that does not transcend the given interactional space as a common occurrence in the broader discourse world, and it remains confined within the spatiotemporal parameters of the narrative episode. *State clauses*, on the other hand, encode “states of affairs which persist over some interval of time in the discourse world rather than occurring at one unique discrete instant” (ibid: p17). While both clauses can incorporate the use of the simple past and/or historical-present tenses, one element that separates the two clauses are the types of verbs, where event clauses tend to use dynamic, action-oriented verbs, and state



clauses generally use stative verbs – or verbs which describe a state of being. If we then shift back to the argumentations **M1.** to **M1.2.**, they demonstrate examples of event clauses using the simple-past tense with dynamic verbs: Maryam “*went* to WH Smith” (**M1.**), and she “*got* there at twenty past eight” (**M1.2.**). These events are spatiotemporally bound to this specific instance of Maryam’s telling, and cannot therefore be considered constants in the broader discourse world. Moving forward in the argumentation sequence where the localised PE occurs—from **M2.4.** to **M2.4.2.1.**—the shift toward the state clause using the historical-present tense in this specific segment is of particular significance.

As Maryam narrates how she had been denied access to the main shop floor (“she was like no”, **M2.4.**), she proceeds to add descriptive detail to build nuance to this “no”, which (I argue) subsequently strengthens the framing of this encounter as a microaggression. Within this segment of the argumentation sequence, the state clause is employed first in Maryam discerning that she “could tell she [*the cleaning lady*] was terrified” (**M2.4.1.**), after which she shifts tenses to the historical-present in stating: “like I’m some kinda terrorist with a bomb” (**M2.4.1.1.**). Using the state clause with the historical-present in this argumentation works to disseminate this descriptive, this state of being, to the broader discourse world experienced by Maryam. This utterance could have been constructed using the simple past tense by, perhaps, saying: “like I *was* some kinda terrorist with a bomb”; however, her choice of the historical-present tense indicates a possible transcendence beyond this specific incident in this spatiotemporal narrative sphere, such that Otherness based on profiling—and the possibility of being met with resultant Islamophobic microaggressions—are not confined to this telling. In other words, it may also be indicative of her reality outside of the recounting of this incident. In fact, the very description of the cleaner’s response as being ‘terrified’ as opposed to being annoyed or frustrated at a customer seeking access to the main shop-floor too early, along with the choice to use the terrorist stereotype in itself as an explanatory mechanism to illustrate the degree of her reaction positions this event as a microaggression, and thus the localised PE. As such, while the very use of the terrorist stereotype works to mark the incident as a microaggression, it is also a form of micro-resistance as its function is effectively metaphorical for comedic value, which is marked by the laughter from the group that ensues in response (see line 14 in corresponding excerpt 5.3). This further underscores the ridiculousness of the cleaner being ‘terrified’ of Maryam given her visible Muslimness.

Maryam then proceeds to emphasise the degree of fear, or fright, expressed by the cleaner as she reiterates the abruptness of the one-word refusal she received “like literally she

was like no” (M2.4.2.)—which, as per the corresponding excerpt, is punctuated with a 0.5 second silence after uttering “no” (line 15 in Excerpt 5.3). She further emphasises her point by describing the cleaner’s timid body language: “she was like hiding in the corner” (M2.4.2.1.). The consequent framing of the magnitude of the cleaner’s response as disproportionate and unnecessary is further established with the juxtaposition of Maryam’s own mundane-ness against the terrorist stereotype and the cleaner’s timidity. Her narration of her response to the cleaning lady’s fear ostensibly seems non-descript at face-value, however the lack of detail—in comparison with her description of the cleaner’s fright and timidity—depicts her non-threatening-ness, and the everydayness of her existence in that space. She employs DRS to express the non-threatening-ness of her response where she “was like ok fine” (M2.5.), “I’ll just come back in ten minutes” (M2.5.1.), in which time she would “walk around town” (M2.5.2.). Referring back to the corresponding excerpt (5.3), this is further emphasised by her use of ‘smiling voice’ whilst chuckling during her delivery of these argumentations, along with the laughter from the rest of the group (lines 16-20); it showcases the effectiveness of the juxtaposition employed by Maryam as the laughter works to mark the absurdity of the situation. Once again, this juxtaposition subsequently functions as a subversion of the distorted reality in which every day micro-aggressions subsist (Bilici, 2010).

The discursive outcome to the use of the terrorist stereotype as micro-resistance is thus two-fold: as already mentioned, it works to ridicule the cleaner’s response, which in turn ridicules the very process of Othering foundational to microaggressions; additionally, it works to diminish the power of the stereotype in itself as its functionality is reduced to metaphorically marking the profiling of Muslims as threatening subjects as a far-fetched view of Muslimness, thereby highlighting the absurdity of the stereotype. That is, the degree to which Maryam evinces the fear embodied by the cleaner, and her response to Maryam as suspect and/or threatening, it ridicules the very act of Othering Muslims as Bilici (ibid: 207) denotes: “the power of comedy becomes a means of undoing otherness”. What Maryam effectively employs in using the terrorist stereotype is a “comic-jujitsu”, subverting both Otherness and the stereotype itself, as often seen in racial humour by comedians whereby “artists leverage an opponent’s power in order to neutralize or defeat the opponent. Rather than directly attacking (...) the dominant narratives or racial oppression, humour manipulates these forces against themselves” (Rossing, 2015: 624). In this instance, those committing Othering (including the cleaner) along with the imposition of the mentioned stereotype could be classed as the opponents (which could include everyday offenders, and build up towards systemic oppressions

at a state level), and indeed, the dominant narratives foundational to Islamophobic Othering are not explicitly or overtly attacked – they are implicitly subverted through humour. Taking this approach of humourising the incident may in turn be tension reducing as researchers observing the effects of humour suggest that it may ameliorate the impact of hardships in life, given that it is seen to “shift situations from the negative to the positive” (Hylton, 2018: 330). Laughter—which is present in this dataset—may thus represent a form of relief from stress induced by such experiences (ibid), which can subsequently provide a safe space for healing as a means of “enhancing the wellbeing” of those facing Othering (ibid: 331).

Given the multi-dimensionality of the effects of utilising this stereotype through humour, it creates the space for other members of the Sisters’ Circle to share their own view on the “small things” they experience – which subsequently cements the positioning of Maryam’s experience as a microaggression, and opens up the forum to discuss the broader PE: experiences of everyday Othering or microaggressions. As Rossing (2015) states in reference to comedians, “humour allows these artists to reclaim their agency, assert their voice, and affirm their experiential knowledge” (p623), as it creates a space in which “unfiltered venting of cultural and political anger” is deemed safe (Haggins, 2007 quoted in Rossing, 2015: 623). What unfolds after Maryam’s account of her experience then is an interjection from Sara and Nazia where they repeatedly assert that they too have experienced “small things” and “little things” (S3.1.–N3.3.), to which Nazia adds some nuance to explain that she “can tell when people are givin me looks” (N3.3.1.), “or I think maybe said the odd word” (N3.3.2.), concluding with the position that she has not otherwise had any overt or direct forms of racism and/or Islamophobia (N3.4.). Sara aligns with this view where she affirms that she too has not been subjected to more direct forms of discrimination, after which she proceeds to validate the experiencing of microaggressions as she shares her account on “small things like when you’re at the checkout” (S3.5.1.), “and like the person’s smiling at everyone else” (S3.5.2.), “n you get there” (S3.5.3.), “and they stop smiling” (S3.5.3.1.), which Nazia once again affirms as she agrees that she has had “little things like that happen before” (N3.6.).

Within this short exchange between Nazia and Sara, the phrase “small things” occurs three times, and “little things” occurs twice, substantiating the shared cognition of Maryam’s experience as a microaggression, which is used as a springboard to validate that they share a common ground in experiencing the “small things”. This is demonstrative of how Maryam’s use of micro-resistance via humour catalyses sense-making insofar as the members of the Sister’s Circle not only validate Maryam’s experience, they proceed to register the dynamics

of their own existence as Muslim women, where they too experience “little things”. This is not uncommon, as Sue et al (2007: 279) posit that in determining whether or not a microaggression has occurred: “people of color rely heavily on experiential reality that is contextual in nature and involves life experiences from a variety of situations.” This further explains Nazia and Sara’s interjections as they treat the interaction as a collective exercise, where Sara then shares her view of experiencing microaggressions at check-outs.

As the argumentation sequence comes to close thereafter, the concluding remarks by Maryam in response to Sara’s account once again employs humour as a tool of subversion. In stating “less serotonin for you” (M4.), with the clarifier “smiling’s good people” (M4.1.), she reconfigures who is at a loss in such a situation – it is not just the one receiving the microaggression, rather the one who is committing the act as they are then putting themselves at a disadvantage in depriving themselves of serotonin.

A similar form of subversion is evident in the next excerpt as Nazia describes a social experiment she internally engages in to see if people avoid sitting next to her on the bus. While the mode of subversion in this instance does not showcase how (Islamophobic) microaggressions puts those offending at a disadvantage (as Maryam suggests in jest in the closing sequence of the previous interaction), Sara uses humour to reconfigure how this manifestation of Islamophobia ironically works in favour of Muslims. This interaction will be split in two to showcase the micro-resistance (Excerpt 5.4.1), and a supplemented discussion on whether or not the incident discussed can be considered a microaggression at all (Excerpt 5.4.2).

#### **Excerpt 5.4.1 “the only perk of Islamophobia”**

**Preceding discussion:** see Excerpt 5.3

**Sisters:** NAZia, MARYam, SARA, FAIza

- 01 NAZ: I remember this one time I was on the bus and like  
 02 I knew it would be packed em (0.2) and I had like a-  
 03 (0.2) fair bit of a journey .hh so- (0.4) I remember I  
 04 was sat down I was k- I was kinda doin like a little  
 05 mini social experiment in my head (0.4) em (.) just  
 06 \$trying to see if [people would sit next to me or not\$]  
 07 \*\*\*: [ ((laughter)) ]  
 08 NAZ: and I r- I actually remember em .hh (0.3) people  
 09 were basically avoiding the seat next to me  
 10 MAR: yeah sometimes I notice [that there’s-] sometimes  
 11 NAZ: [ a lot ]  
 12 MAR: they do but like it’s absolutely [fine] [((inaudible)) ]  
 13 NAZ: [ em]  
 14 SAR: [thas one thas]

15           like the only perk though  
 16 FAI:     ((chuckle))  
 17 SAR:     of Islamophobia [I'm like yes two seats           ]  
 18 MAR:                     [\$I guess that is actually a perk\$]  
 19 NAZ:                     [           ((laughter))           ]  
 20 FAI:     \$can put my bag there\$  
 21 \*\*\*:     ((laughter))

Contrary to the previous interaction, in this instance, the use of humour as micro-resistance initiates sense-making – though the humour itself could also be considered a form of sense-making insofar as it showcases the navigation of everyday microaggressions as it incorporates the offering of an ironic practical benefit to Islamophobia. Before proceeding on to the breakdown of the argumentation sequence, this analysis positions others' avoidance vis-à-vis sitting next to a visibly Muslim woman on a bus as a microaggression under the possible categories of micro-assault or micro-insult (Sue et al, 2007). The difficulty in determining which one of the two categories Nazia experiences is due to the inability to discern whether the avoidance is occurring as a result of an unconscious bias driving unconscious microaggressions (which would qualify as a micro-insult), or if the avoidance is conscious and deliberate (which would be a micro-assault). In any case, the recognition of Nazia's experience as shared demonstrates a collective understanding of this phenomenon.

#### **Argumentation sequence 5.4**

**Locus of subversion and/or invalidation:** *Islamophobic microaggressions, namely others' avoidance to sit next to a visibly Muslim woman on public transport.*

**Problematic event:** *people avoiding sitting next to Nazia on the bus.*

**N1.** I remember this one time I was on the bus  
     **N1.1.** and like I knew it would be packed  
     **N1.2.** and I had like a fair bit of a journey  
     **N1.3.** so I remember I was sat down  
     **N1.4.** I was kinda doin like a little mini social  
         experiment in my head  
         **N1.4.1.** just trying to see if people would sit next to me  
             or not  
             **N1.4.1.1.** and I actually remember people were  
                 basically avoiding the seat next to me  
                 **N1.4.1.1.1.** a lot  
     **M1.5.** yeah sometimes I notice that sometimes they do  
         **M1.5.1.** but like it's absolutely fine  
     **S1.6.** thas like the only perk though  
         **S1.6.1.** of Islamophobia  
             **S1.6.1.1.** I'm like yes two seats  
                 **M1.6.1.1.1.** I guess that is actually a perk  
                 **F1.6.1.2.** can put my bag there

Nazia begins with recounting a “mini social experiment” (N1.4.) she internally engaged in whilst on a bus journey, where she says she was “just tryna see if people would sit next to me or not” (N1.4.1.). She felt that people were, indeed, avoiding the seat next to her (N1.4.1.1.), enunciating the degree of avoidance by stating that it was happening “a lot” (N1.4.1.1.1.), thus marking the PE within the narrative. Maryam validates Nazia’s findings to her social experiment by affirming that she too notices that people avoid sitting next to her at times (M1.5.), however she immediately mitigates the problematisation of such behaviour by claiming: “but like it’s absolutely fine” (M1.5.1.). Despite her attempt at normalising such occurrences, her comments go unacknowledged as Sara responds to Nazia’s PE with a subversion tactic; she humourises the situation by subverting the social-psychological consequences of such avoidance by framing it as a “perk”: “thas like the only perk though” (S1.6.), “of Islamophobia” (S1.6.1.). As she elaborates on how such Islamophobic microaggressions work to one’s advantage—i.e. it results in a reward of having two seats for a journey (“I’m like yes two seats”, S1.6.1.1.)—Maryam simultaneously concedes to the irony of its framing as a ‘perk’: “I guess that is actually a perk” (M1.6.1.1.1.), which she utters while smiling (see ‘smiling voice’ marked in corresponding Excerpt 5.4.1, line 18). Faiza then furthers the comedic trajectory of the narrative outcome with a suggestion of a practical use for the additional seat: “can put my bag there” (F1.6.1.2.).

Here, the response to the PE with micro-resistance through humour is done with immediacy, despite Maryam’s effort to rationalise such avoidance behaviour. As seen in previous examples, a distorted everyday reality is turned upside down and subverted; that is, the general outcome to such manifestations of Islamophobic microaggressions where a visibly Muslim woman is avoided on public transport is positioned as an advantageous outcome insofar as it provides one with more space to occupy within said public transport. In so doing, it invalidates the Islamophobia underpinning such avoidance behaviour, and the use of humour may also work to lighten the heaviness of the situation in tandem; the laughter in response to Sara’s comments (see lines 16 and 19 in corresponding excerpt) and Faiza’s (see line 21), along with the use of smiling voice (see lines 18 and 20) are indicative of tension release. This further suggests the possibility of healing occurring when such approaches as a form of micro-resistance within such spaces are employed in navigating the reality of existing as an Othered being. Additionally, the very act of sharing the story with others who add to it (and show empathy) can also work towards healing to a certain degree.

Notably, as mentioned earlier, the sense-making commences at the onset of Nazia highlighting the PE as Maryam attempts to mitigate the problematisation of this form of avoidance behaviour. This is momentarily halted given Sara's interjection, though it does simultaneously work to counter Maryam's stance as she affirms the positioning of this experience as Islamophobic. However, Maryam continues on to normalise avoidance on public transport as Nazia returns back to discuss her thoughts on the matter. As this segment of the analysis is not focusing on sense-making itself, the excerpt below has been shared to briefly demonstrate the back and forth in positioning that ensues vis-à-vis the framing of this experience as a problematic one (Excerpt 5.4.2); the argumentation will thus not be broken down.

#### Excerpt 5.4.2

- 22 NAZ: but I jus- I jus remember thinkin right ok I can't tell  
 23 if this is just a coincidence or if people are actually  
 24 purposely avoiding me: but em .hh I remember one-  
 25 woman sat next to me but I dunno if that's cause  
 26 like it was the only seat left [or- ]  
 27 MAR: [you know] what I think  
 28 it happens right so let's say you're on the metro and  
 29 like (0.4) there's- all the seats are taken up by one  
 30 person so potentially anyone come in (.) they could  
 31 sit down next to anybody (0.4) people tend to go  
 32 towards- (0.2) people that are n- like closer to them  
 33 or (.) similar to them=  
 34 NAZ: =mhmm=  
 35 MAR: =like if you go in you found a hijabi sittin down you  
 36 probably [choose] her (0.4) they would probably just  
 37 NAZ: [ yeah ]  
 38 MAR: go in be like aww that's an English person next to  
 39 him  
 40 NAZ: mhmm  
 41 MAR: like I think that's kinda normal (0.4)  
 42 [possibly normal ]  
 43 NAZ: [like I mean- I mean] gener- like generally in my he-  
 44 like (0.6) (a:) I think when I go on bus I generally do  
 45 tend to go for like say the younger people or like (0.2)  
 46 the [women on the side or- yeah I mean] I've- o-  
 47 MAR: [yeah similar as- similar to me ]  
 48 SAR: [ yeah ]  
 49 NAZ: ow- [obviously I've had- ]  
 50 MAR: [actually I go for \$old] people\$  
 51 NAZ: I've- I've hade many times  
 52 [as well where people sit next to me] no problem  
 53 MAR: [heh they're ni(hh)ce ]  
 54 NAZ: obviously  
 55 SAR: yeah

56 MAR: [yeah]  
 57 NAZ: [em ] (.) but then there [have] been other times  
 58 MAR: [ heh ]  
 59 NAZ: when like (0.5) I feel it's a bit ((chuckle))  
 60 d(hh)odgy heeheheh .hh  
 61 \*\*\*: ((laughter))

Nazia reorients the discussion back to discern whether or not being subjected to avoidance is coincidental, or if it does indicate something deeper and problematic; she offers an example where on one occasion a woman had sat down next to her, although she proceeds to question if this was the result of the seat next to her being the only available one left (lines 22-26). As per Sue et al (2007), questioning whether or not a microaggression is, indeed, a microaggression is not uncommon amongst those who have been subjected to such hostilities and Othering, and it often takes collective reflection to aid one's navigation around such experiences (ibid). In the first segment of this interaction, the very use of micro-resistant humour works to affirm the positioning of Nazia's observation as an Islamophobic microaggression, despite Maryam's attempt at mitigating such a framing. However, in this segment, Maryam interrupts Nazia's musings to elaborate on her previous mitigation with a generalisation that people tend to gravitate towards those who are "similar to them" (lines 27-33). She then centres Nazia as a hijabi woman to offer a hypothetical scenario where she would "probably choose" another hijabi to sit next to, which she then uses as a contextual backdrop to normalise those who would avoid Nazia as people merely gravitating towards another "English person" (lines 35-41). She explicitly asserts that she thinks it is "kinda normal", which she then repairs to reframe it as "possibly normal" (lines 43 and 44). Nazia then concedes that she does often go to sit next to younger people or women, while admitting that there have been instances where people have willingly sat next to her; however, she does eventually revert back to the previous positioning of avoidance as problematic, as she ends the interaction with claiming that she has noticed that in certain instances things have seemed "dodgy" (lines 45-60).

The sense-making that occurs here does not render the previous micro-resistant humour redundant as it showcases the navigation of discerning whether or not certain experiences as visibly Muslim women can be classed as microaggressions; as mentioned earlier, this is not uncommon amongst those living in a reality of Otherness. What this interaction thus showcases is how responses to such problematic events vary to a point where framing an incident as problematic can be put into question. Nonetheless, the humourisation of Islamophobia on public transport as a mode of subversion remains, despite the back-and-forth in normalisation and problematisation of Nazia's experience.



Thus far, this chapter has considered the use of humour as an interactional instrument to perform micro-resistance so as to subvert or invalidate certain discourses or occasions of Othering. Another tool often employed is the practice of refusal; the following section considers how refusal can work to invalidate Othering and/or certain rhetoric.

### 5.3 Micro-resistance through Asserting Refusal

As this section is focusing on the assertion of refusal as a form of micro-resistance, the argumentation sequences will highlight the ‘locus of refusal’ within the interaction, as opposed to ‘locus of subversion and/or invalidation’ seen in the previous section.

The first interaction considered here showcases a narration by Sumaya reflecting on an encounter she has with a colleague regarding women wearing the hijab and ‘covering up’. Within the interaction, there are different levels of refusal occurring; one will be termed ‘intra-narrative’, which refers to the refusal established as part of the narrative Sumaya shares, while the other will be labelled ‘extra-narrative’, referring to the refusal asserted outside of the narrative space.

#### **Excerpt 5.5** *“there’s more to this world than looking pretty”*

**Preceding discussion:** a brief discussion on covering one’s body as a means of privatising one’s sexuality.

**Sisters:** SUMaya, HANain, ANUm,

- 01 SUM: this woman at my wo:rk she would always be like (0.2)  
 02 o:h (0.2) but why: do people wear hijabs and I- I told  
 03 her this entire thing right .hh (0.2) em (0.3) they’re t-  
 04 [they’re like] (0.7) defying the fact that women are just  
 05 obje:cts like its (0.4) or like you know (\*\*\*) she’s like (.)  
 06 .hh na:h I still don’t get it like why would you (wanna)  
 07 cover up (.) \$i’m like (.) there is more to this world than  
 08 looking pretty\$ heh [huh .hh ]  
 09 HAN: [yeah: ]  
 10 ANU: [no but the point] is they don’t need  
 11 to: understand why they need to understand its that  
 12 person’s ch[oice (so its like)] I don’t-  
 13 HAN: [ yeah: ]  
 14 SUM: .hhh yeah well [that’s I ob]viously [said that as well ]  
 15 ANU: [ (it isnt) ] [you dont need to-]  
 16 HAN: [ yeah: ]  
 17 ANU: yeah yeah  
 18 HAN: [yeah: ]  
 19 ANU: [its not like] (.) if someone who like goes out (.) [practically]  
 20 SUM: [ yeah ]

21 ANU: naked im not gonna be like mm I need to understand  
 22 why you do that I don:t ca:re why they do it (.) .hh if  
 23 they wanna do it they do i:t in [my mind]=  
 24 HAN: [ yeah ]=  
 25 SUM: =mm:  
 26 (.)  
 27 ANU: I just appr- (.) I just- you know (0.5) preciate that they  
 28 have the choice [to do it] and that's it  
 29 HAN: [ yeah ]  
 30 SUM: cause my sister worked in the opposite shop (0.3) and  
 31 she would always come in (.) .hh and she would always  
 32 be like but why: is your younger sister wearing it when  
 33 your older sister (isn't) wearing it (0.7) so I was like yeah  
 34 (.) its cuz I don't want to wear it and she wants to wear  
 35 it (0.6) [if thats how she's] chosen yeah (0.2) .hh hh.  
 36 HAN: [ mm: ]  
 37 SUM: some people just like (0.5) refuse to: understand and  
 38 (0.2) there's not really much you can do about it=  
 39 HAN: =y[eah ]  
 40 SUM: [to be] honest (0.2) so

This interaction has a number of refusal practices weaved throughout, both within the narrative(s) Sumaya shares, and without. Effectively, the conversation as a whole serves as a space for refusal of varying degrees, all of which are grounded within the refusal of the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood so as to preserve autonomy. To unpack this, it would be necessary to clarify what is meant by the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood specific to this example. As highlighted in the literature (see Literature review, section 2.2), this study adopts the positioning founded on Orientalism that considers how Muslim women (and Muslims more broadly) are situated and treated as Othered beings within a British context. As such, to be an 'Other' founded on Orientalism is to be an Orientalised mind and body, which the Orientalist mind values "as an object of rational investigation", whose 'characteristics' have historically been up for scrutiny (Womack, 2011: p444). This Otherness of Muslim women—namely visibly Muslim women—is marked by Sumaya's colleague through the very act of questioning (in what she narrates in an interrogative tone) why Muslim women choose to wear the hijab and 'cover up'. This not only serves as an example of a micro-aggression insofar as it demonstrates an insensitivity towards one's identity (Sue et al, 2007), it depicts an Orientalist mind as the inquirer of this information engages in an 'investigation' scrutinising the Muslim woman's body vis-à-vis the ways in which she may physically choose to exist within societal spaces – and it is worth noting that such scrutiny is often the basis for societal and systemic forms of gendered Islamophobia (Carland, 2017). This then falls within the premise of Orientalising Muslim womanhood on two accounts: firstly, the questioning represents a

response to a deviation of a supposed norm where women are expected *not* to wear the hijab or cover up. To do so, as per Sumaya's colleague, is treated as nonsensical to the degree that it warrants questioning and investigation; the very act of questioning thus indicates the positioning of women who wear the 'hijab' and/or 'cover up' as 'Other', seemingly sparking intrigue. That is, the physical embodiment of Muslim woman-ness vis-à-vis the act of covering the head (and 'covering up' more generally) is treated as "an object for rational investigation" (Womack, 2011: p444), thereby Orientalising such embodiments of womanhood. Secondly, to not only question the embodiment of Muslim woman-ness once, but to overlook the explanation offered by Sumaya so as to continue on with the line of questioning reinforces the supposed right to investigate, interrogate and scrutinise Orientalised or Othered bodies. In so doing, her colleague extends her inquiry from asking *why* women choose to wear the hijab and/or cover up, to questioning why women hold the desire to do so. This shift in questioning the external embodiment of Muslim womanhood to the internal desire of externalising Muslimness showcases how the very being-ness of Muslim women is Orientalised; at this point, the mind of the Muslim woman has been Orientalised along with her body as her desire to engage in a supposed Orientalised practice of embodying a Muslim womanhood is questioned. The argumentation sequence below will thus be considered in detailing how this refusal manifests within the interaction.

### **Argumentation sequence 5.5**

**Locus of refusal:** *the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood; intra-narrative locus – the objectification of women; extra-narrative locus – the questioning of Muslim women's autonomy vis-à-vis covering up, and the need to justify their actions.*

**Problematic event:** *the questioning of women's autonomy vis-à-vis covering up.*

**S1.** This woman at my work she would always be like

**S1.1.** but why do people wear hijabs

**S2.** and I told her this entire thing right

**S2.1.** they're like defying the fact that women are just objects

**S2.1.1.** she's like nah I still don't get it

**S2.1.2.** like why would you wanna cover up

**S2.1.2.1.** I'm like there is more to this world  
than looking pretty

**A3.** no but the point is they don't need to understand why

**A3.1.** they need to understand its that person's choice

**S3.1.1.** yeah well I obviously said that as well

**A4.** its not like if someone who like goes out practically naked

**A4.1.** im not gonna be like mm I need to understand why you  
do that

**A4.2.** I don't care why they do it

**A4.2.1.** if they wanna do it they do it

**A4.3.** I just preciate that they have the choice to do it and that's it

**S5.** cause my sister worked in the opposite shop

- S5.1. And she would always come in
- S5.2. and she would always be like
  - S5.2.1. but why is your younger sister wearing it
  - S5.2.2. when your older sister isn't wearing it
    - S5.2.2.1. so I was like yeah
      - S5.2.2.1.1. its cuz I don't want to wear it
      - S5.2.2.1.2. and she wants to wear it
      - S5.2.2.1.3. if that's how she's chosen
- S6. some people just like refuse to understand
  - S6.1. and there's not really much you can do about it to be honest

As previously mentioned, the refusal occurring in this interaction is grounded within a refusal of the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood, though it occurs at different junctures of the conversation. The refusals have thus been broken down as follows: the first that occurs is intra-narrative—or one that is embedded within the narrative Sumaya shares; here she asserts a refusal against the objectification of women by proxy of accounting for why women who cover up and/or wear the hijab may choose to do so. The second refusal that unfolds in response to the intra-narrative refusal is extra-narrative—or one that occurs outside the narrative space, though still constituting part of the interaction. In this instance, Anum asserts refusal towards the very questioning of (Muslim) women's autonomy vis-à-vis the degree to which she may, or may not, choose to cover up. Therefore, the questioning Sumaya then narrates to have faced by a colleague of hers serves as the PE catalysing micro-resistance via refusal.

The interaction thus commences with grounding the PE, where Sumaya launches the narrative by initiating an upcoming DRS to recount how a colleague of hers “would always be like” (S1.): “but why do people wear hijabs?” (S1.1.). Notably, the “why” within the DRS argumentation is enunciated (see line 02 in the corresponding Excerpt 5.5), indicating an insistence on her colleague's part to attain an answer to her query, also possibly marking her dismay regarding the wearing of the hijab. This may hold truth especially given that the DRS begins with the contrastive conjunction “but”, along with the fact that Sumaya frames this line of questioning as one that repeatedly occurs since her colleague “would *always* be like” (S1.; emphasis added). This demonstrates an insistence for Muslim women to account for such practices of dressing. It is also worth noting that her colleague essentially holds Sumaya specifically accountable to respond to these queries, positioning her as a representative and/or spokeswoman for Muslim women whose choices she's answerable for. As such, this works to construct Muslim womanhood as a monolith, as though the embodiment and choices of Muslim womanhood is uniform, which adds to the Orientalisation of Muslim women.

Sumaya then proceeds to share her response to the question, thus arriving at the initial assertion of refusal occurring at the intra-narrative level; she states how she delved into an explanation (S2.) to highlight that women who wear hijabs are “defying the fact that women are just objects” (S2.1.). It is important to note that this refusal develops over a few argumentations; in the snapshot moment where Sumaya offers her explanation, she asserts a refusal of the objectification of women on behalf of those Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab. However, as her colleague rejects her explanatory offering—“nah I still don’t get it” (S2.1.1.)—after which she annexes the questioning of Muslim women’s desire to cover up (“like why would you wanna cover up”, S2.1.2.), Sumaya works to embed the refusal by contesting the centrality of one’s external value alone: “there is more to this world than looking pretty” (S2.1.2.1.). Indeed, the boundaries of ‘pretty-ness’ are highly subjective, and one may then question what the implications of ‘looking pretty’ are when positioned as a refutation in response to the scrutiny Muslim women are subjected to for choosing to cover up. However, the underlying discourse of Sumaya’s argumentation is the underscoring of the refusal of conforming to a norm, or a standard of womanhood, that her colleague insinuates Muslim women are (seemingly to her disapproval) deviating from (i.e. the norm of not wearing the hijab, and/or supposedly not covering up).

As the narrative comes to a close, Anum immediately asserts the extra-narrative refusal through defending women’s autonomy vis-à-vis how much they do, or do not, cover up. She begins with refuting the explanation offered by Sumaya, though not in a mode of disagreement regarding the content of reasoning she had put forward; rather, Anum refutes the very need to offer any justification at all: “no but the point is they don’t need to understand why” (A3.). If one inspects this utterance within the corresponding excerpt more closely (lines 10-11, Excerpt 5.5), her positioning is punctuated with the enunciation of the words ‘need’ and ‘why’, thereby emphasising her rejection of owing one questioning Muslim women’s dress codes an explanation to understand the *why* behind their choices. Instead, she highlights that it is simply a matter of respecting choice: “they need to understand it’s that person’s choice” (A3.1.). Sumaya acknowledges Anum’s refutation as she claims that she “obviously said that as well” (A3.1.1.), after which Anum builds on her refusal, now focusing more specifically on the interrogative queries Sumaya was faced with. She achieves this by constructing an inverse hypothetical narrative in which she utilises her position as a hijabi woman questioning the polar opposite of ‘covering up’, in other words: “someone who like goes out practically naked” (A4.). She asserts that she is “not gonna be like mm I need to understand why you do that” (A4.1.) so

as to orient back to anchoring the importance of autonomy, as she claims that she does not care “why they do it” (A4.2.), “if they wanna do it they do it” (A4.2.1.). The centring of choice is further emphasised as she conclusively puts forward her explicit appreciation for women’s choices: “I just preciate that they have the choice to do it and that’s it” (A4.3.). This latter half of Anum’s refusal is directed at the very act of questioning a Muslim women’s choice of clothing by asserting that all women have a right to agency and autonomy; her overall refusal is thus two-fold: it refutes the need to provide an explanation justifying Muslim women’s choices, as well as the very act of questioning not just Muslim women’s autonomy—women’s autonomy as a whole, whether they are Muslim or not, and if they cover or not. Therefore, her refusal is all encompassing against the Orientalisation of Muslim women’s bodies, as well as the scrutiny directed at women altogether.

Once Anum establishes her refusal, Sumaya returns to her narrative, though on this occasion she seemingly ‘updates’ her telling, so to speak, to account for the refusal to justify the *why* behind Muslim women’s choices that she claims to have also asserted (S3.1.1.). In many ways, this could then perhaps be considered a response to Anum’s refusal of Sumaya offering a justification for women choosing to wear the hijab in the first place. Sumaya begins with adding further context to the scenario, whereby her sister who wore the hijab “worked in the opposite shop” (S5.), and was thus used as a subject for scrutiny as her colleague questions her sister’s decision to wear the hijab when her “older sister isn’t wearing it” (S5.2.2.). It is worth noting some ethnographic detail here that of Sumaya’s two sisters, her older sister does not wear the hijab (as with Sumaya), making her younger sister the only sibling to wear it. She then proceeds to note that she did, indeed, make reference to the very choice of wearing hijab alone, as opposed to justifying that choice: “it’s cuz I don’t want to wear it” (S5.2.2.1.1.), “and she wants to wear it” (S5.2.2.1.2.), “if that’s how she’s chosen” (S5.2.2.1.3.). Once she ends this narrative with the updated refusal, she concludes that “some people just refuse to understand” (S6.), and that “there’s not much you can do about it to be honest” (S6.1.)—which may, perhaps, serve as argumentations to implicitly mitigate or justify the explanation she had offered to account for the choice of wearing hijab in her initial telling, as opposed to asserting the refusal to offer any justification at all.

Similar themes of asserting refusal can be found in the following two excerpts regarding the broadly labelled concept of ‘Feminism’; it is considered ‘broad’ given that Feminist movements have come about in different waves with different conceptual frameworks for and by different groups of women, with many critiquing the very term as a Western tenet of gender

equality given that women in the global South have historically engaged in fighting for such equality prior to the genesis and development of the word ‘Feminism’ (Carland, 2017; Barlas, 2002). Additionally, within a British context, the domination of liberal and/or White Feminism (see Literature Review, section 2.2.4) has monopolised Feminist discourse, creating a hegemonic movement benefitting White (neo)liberalism to the detriment of Women of Colour (WoC), which has been specifically weaponised against Muslim women *and* Muslim men (Farris, 2017). Indeed, the focus here is on Muslim women, namely the Sisters’ Circle group—which does not overlook the fact that they are all WoC—thus any analytical excavation of the effects on Muslim men is beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, what becomes evident within this continuum of interactional analysis—from the previous excerpt to the two upcoming discussions—is that intersectionality is at the heart of the Sisters’ Circle’s assertion of refusal. Additionally, while the previous excerpt looks at a specific example of micro-resistance towards a direct practice of Orientalising Muslim womanhood (which arguably represents White/liberal feminism), these excerpts assert refusal against the specific form of Feminism that espouses Orientalism, which will be explained further in conjunction with the analysis for each excerpt.

This section will thus proceed to consider the first of the excerpts discussing Feminism. Here, Faiza begins with sharing her experience of taking part in a research run by an Undergraduate student who was looking into Muslim women’s responses to Feminist activism. As her selected participant base was Muslim women, she had contacted the ISoc in search for interviewees. The Sisters’ Circle were thus aware of who Faiza was speaking about as she refers to her interview (for anonymity, a pseudonym has been used in the transcript where Faiza mentions the researcher’s name). As I had also signed up to take part in the research—for which I was interviewed after this Sisters’ Circle meeting took place—I will share some information as to what the interview entailed for contextual purposes. The interview commenced with the researcher inquiring as to whether or not I had heard of Femen<sup>13</sup>, after which she showed a series of photos from their protests where women were demonstrating topless. She then proceeded to ask how the photos of these demonstrations made me feel, why I felt a particular way, and what Feminism then meant to me. With this in mind, Faiza begins with sharing the fact that she had attended the interview “with that Laura girl” (line 1, Excerpt 5.6 below)—

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<sup>13</sup> As per their website, Femen is “an international women’s movement of brave topless female activists painted with the slogans and crowned with flowers.” Their claimed ideology is as follows: “Sextremism, Atheism, and Feminism”. Their approach to Feminism has been heavily criticised—see section 2.2.4 in the Literature Review.

bearing in mind that at this point, Faiza was the only member of the Sisters' Circle who had partaken in an interview for this research student

**Excerpt 5.6** *"I don't class this as Feminism"*

Preceding discussion: the sisters mulling over how they feel about Feminism

Sisters: FAIza, HANain, LAYla, ANUm

- 01 FAI: I just (went) for that interview with that Laura gi:rl (.)  
 02 HAN: oh yeah how'd [that go ]  
 03 FAI: [and she was show]ing: pictures of em  
 04 (.) women (0.5) in the western world em (0.2) taking their  
 05 tops off being:=  
 06 LAY: =.hh  
 07 (0.5)  
 08 FAI: breastless 'n (.) campaigning against femini- or (0.2) for  
 09 feminism (.) and she was like how do you feel when  
 10 you see these pictures (1.0) I was like (0.3) I don't like it  
 11 (0.4)  
 12 ((laughter))  
 13 FAI: .hh I don't class this as feminism  
 14 (0.8)  
 15 LAY: we did learn something about those kinds of  
 16 adver[tising:s ]  
 17 ANU: [it's very much a certain] type of feminism  
 18 FAI: yeah=  
 19 ANU: =asking for one certain thing  
 20 FAI: yeah  
 21 (0.4)  
 22 ANU: feminism should be like (0.3) all inclusive (0.3) like [all women]  
 23 LAY: [ yeah ]  
 24 ANU: and that's (.) very much like not it

The argumentation sequence for this interaction has been broken down below:

**Argumentation sequence 5.6**

**Locus of refusal:** *White/liberal Feminism*

**Problematic event:** *White/liberal Feminism*

- F1.** I just went for that interview with that Laura girl  
     **H1.1.** oh yeah how'd that go  
**F2.** and she was showing pictures of em women in the western world em  
     **F2.1.** taking their tops off being breastless  
     **F2.2.** 'n campaigning against femini- or for feminism  
     **F2.3.** and she was like  
         **F2.3.1.** how do you feel when you see these pictures  
         **F2.3.2.** I was like  
             **F2.3.2.1.** I don't like it  
                 **F2.3.2.1.1.** I don't class this as feminism  
**L3.** we did learn something about those kinds of advertisings  
**A4.** it's very much a certain type of feminism  
     **F4.1.** yeah  
     **A4.2.** asking for one certain thing



- F4.2.1.** yeah
- A4.3.** feminism should be like all inclusive
  - A4.3.1.** like all women
    - L4.3.1.1.** yeah
- A4.4.** and that's very much like not it

Before proceeding to offer analytic reflections on this argumentation sequence, it is worth noting that the PE has been identified as the same as the locus of refusal: White/liberal Feminism. This is based on the general critique of Femen as a White/liberal Feminist movement (Adewunmi, 2013; Nagarajan, 2013; Salem, 2012), and the assertion of refusal within this sequence comes as a response to Faiza's narrative where she is faced with photos of a representation of White/liberal Feminism; the final refusal is, in a sense, a response to Faiza's response to the photos. A couple more reasons behind the reference to the PE/refusal as 'White/liberal Feminism' is firstly given by the fact that at no point does Faiza explicitly state that the images shown during the research are of Femen; instead, she refers to them as "women in the Western world" (F2.)—and the comments that follow, by Faiza and others, are indicative of a refusal towards White/liberal Feminist praxis grounded in "the Western world" that many women resist (Carland, 2015). Secondly, the decision to label the PE/refusal as such is founded on the researcher's (Laura's) decision to frame her investigation on Muslim women's responses to 'Feminist activism'—it was not until the research interview that Femen was brought up, and images of their protests were shown as a representation of 'Feminist activism'. This in itself is demonstrative of the domination of White/liberal feminism given that Femen was not a clearly outlined specification as an objective driving the study on Muslim women's responses, which is particularly poignant as Feminist activism is a heterogeneous movement constituting a myriad of expressions that manifest in different ways, at different levels, with different value-sets underpinning each expression. That is, the framing of the research—in terms of the extent to which we, as participants, were given an insight into the study—as an exploration of how Muslim women feel towards Feminist activism, when the focus was specifically on Femen, implies an assumption that Femen represents a normative expression of Feminist activism that we, as Muslim women, were asked to respond to—when in fact it is a form of Feminism that is heavily critiqued by women of Colour and Muslim women.

Given the backdrop to the research that Faiza recounts to have partaken in, the identifying of White/liberal feminism as the PE and locus of refusal (which Femen is seen to be representative of) does not overlook the fact that, in many ways, the Sisters' Circle asserted refusal towards an iteration of Feminism predicated on Orientalism. As is seen in White/liberal

Feminist discourse, Muslim women are commonly portrayed as victims of their religion, and the patriarchs policing their religiosity, who are in need of saving by White/liberal Feminism (Carland, 2017; Farris, 2017); additionally, given the spaces Femen disrupt coupled with their discourse surrounding the hijab, for example (as Femen activist Inna Shevchenko writes “there’s no such thing as a Feminist who supports the hijab” for their website in 2016), it evidences an alignment with the foundations of White/liberal Feminism. What lies at the heart of such movements, particularly if it is imposed onto women who do not share such Feminist outlooks, is an Orientalisation of those women’s bodies and minds who perform an alternate form of agency and autonomy that is oppositional to the agency enacted and propagated by White/liberal Feminists choosing to bare their skin in the name of Feminist resistance. The practice of covering up is thus treated as Other, as is women’s understanding of ‘liberation’ and ‘Feminism’. Therefore, such forms of White/liberal Feminism is criticised heavily for “the Orientalist way in which it represents the social practices of other races as backward and barbarous” (Carby, 1970 quoted in Tyagi, 2014: p47), and its “ethnocentric bias in presuming that the solutions which White Western women have advocated in combating their oppression are equally applicable to all” (ibid: p47). What the refusal as seen to have been asserted by the Sisters’ Circle then yields is a call for an intersectional approach to Feminism, which will now be considered.

Returning to the argumentation sequence, the refusal within this interaction occurs twice—first when Faiza reports her response to being shown photos of Femen protests, and second when Anum elaborates on—and reinforces—Faiza’s refusal. The argumentation sequence thus commences with Faiza orienting to the research interview she had partaken in (F1.), first describing the images the interviewer had shown her (F2-F2.2.). While she does not explicitly point out that the images are of Femen protests, she nonetheless describes that the pictures showcased “women in the western world” (F2.) who were “taking their tops off being breastless” (F2.1.). Although Faiza has not yet overtly offered any personal opinion on the protests, pointing out that the images are of protests of women in the *Western world* holds some significance as it marks a spatial and ideological boundary vis-à-vis sites for—and possibly iterations of—resistance (both physical and meta-physical) in the initial stages of the argumentation sequence. This is particularly noteworthy given that ‘Western’ (read: White and/or liberal) Feminism(s) have long been refuted and refused by Postcolonial, Black, Muslim and intersectional Feminists (for example, see Lila Abu-Lughod, 2013; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 2003; Angela Y Davis, 1990). Notably, the word ‘breastless’ in the argumentation

that follows (F2.1.) appears to be an erroneous descriptive expression, seemingly where Faiza appears to allude to the (*topless*) women ‘taking their tops off being’ *bare-breasted* (or any alternative formulation of having one’s breasts out and/or exposed when topless), which she ostensibly mis-formulates. She does, however, self-repair the next error as she explains that the images depict women “campaigning against femini- or for feminism” (F2.2.). It is an interesting error to make given that—as mentioned earlier—Femen has been largely critiqued for its approach to the Feminist cause, where their White hegemonic value-set is seen as opposing Feminist values by many (Carland, 2015). Nonetheless, if one were to remove the error and re-construct this argumentation in its repaired form, it would appear that Faiza claims that the women in the protests are “campaigning for Feminism”. Framing the argumentation as such implies a latent separation between the actions behind the protests, and Feminism itself. That is, the Femen protesters are tacitly positioned as ‘campaigning’ *for* Feminism, as opposed to engaging *in* a Feminist campaign, thereby creating a subtle distinction between the two. In other words, the actions constituting the campaign may, or may not, actually be Feminist.

One may then consider that perhaps such a positioning of Femen protests—coupled with the framing of the argumentation before her self-initiated self-repair—may be indicative of a cognitive spill-over from thought to spoken word implicitly reflecting Faiza’s thoughts on the matter; whether or not that is truly the case, what her erroneous utterance may have implicitly reflected is subsequently explicitly asserted as the argumentation sequence progresses. She employs DRS to state that the interviewer inquired how viewing such images make her feel (F2.3.–F2.3.1.), after which she recounts her assertion of refusal, once again using DRS: “I was like I don’t like it” (F2.3.2.–F2.3.2.1.), “I don’t class this as feminism” (F2.3.2.1.1.).

The PE embedded within the refusal—which also constitutes the locus of refusal—lies within the word “this” in the argumentation. “This” is what Faiza refuses as Feminism—the Femen protests—which has thus far in the analysis been considered representative of White/liberal Feminism in line with the critiques of the movement, along with Faiza’s reference to them as “women in the Western world” in mind. It also constitutes the PE as it is the very representation of such Feminism(s) that Faiza identifies as the problem, for which she then asserts her refusal. It may be argued that it is the showcasing of such images that is the PE triggering the refusal, however Faiza does not necessarily challenge the act of being shown the images by the researcher; rather, she expresses her dislike for what the images depict (F2.3.2.1.), and thus asserts her refusal upon being asked how the images make her feel. Any

indication of Faiza's aversion to the research, research question(s), or the researcher is only evident in her commencing argumentation where she refers to the researcher as "that Laura girl" (F1.). As Weatherall (2002) denotes, the term 'girl' "may be used to trivialise the status of a woman" (p8), which one could then take into account to contend that Faiza implicitly expresses her disdain towards any one, or all, element(s) of the research—especially when one considers how she refers to the researcher as "*that Laura girl*" (emphasis added). However, given that her refusal and dislike are more firmly entrenched against the notion of Femen protests/protests by women in the Western world, this analysis will assume that the sites for the PE and locus of refusal are the same. Indeed, this would mean that the PE is not a singular, individual occurrence that led to the refusal; it is not so much a 'Problematic Event' as it is more simply a 'Problem' that Faiza responds to.

Once Faiza completes her telling, Layla attempts to offer some insight as she states that she "did learn something about those kinds of advertisings" (L3.). However, before she could proceed to expand and build on her point, Anum interjects to elaborate on the refusal Faiza has thus far asserted against such protests. She begins with grounding the one-dimensionality of such Feminism(s) as she states: "it's very much a certain type of feminism" (A4.), "asking for one certain thing" (A4.2.). At this point, she has not explicitly positioned this as a 'good' or 'bad' Feminist praxis; rather, this is the initial stages of her reinforcement of Faiza's refusal—although, these argumentations do mirror the basis of much of the critique Femen is subjected to by critical scholarship (i.e. the one-dimensionality of values and demands serving as one of the defining characteristics of White/liberal Feminism). In essence, the build-up to Anum's refusal echoes an element of the narrative structures considered in the previous chapter, namely 'informational funnelling'. As defined in Chapter 4, informational funnelling is "a process of discursive refinement to arrive at a particular point as part of the argumentation sequence" (cf. Chapter 4, p101); turning back to Anum's refusal, it is evident that she employs a similar argumentation structure in discursively building towards her point—which is the refusal.

Once she grounds what the protests in the images Faiza was shown is representative of—a one-dimensional approach to Feminism—Anum proceeds to postulate what Feminism *should* look like: "feminism should be like all inclusive" (A4.3.). While this is not the final argumentation of Anum's sequence, it functions as a corrective oppositional to the one-dimensionality of Femen's/women in the Western world's (White/liberal) Feminism, which thus serves as the framework for her refusal. Unlike Faiza, Anum does not articulate her refusal in first person; rather, her final argumentation serves as a mechanism to position her initial

grounding of such protests as a praxis that is out of alignment with her expression of what Feminism should be (i.e. “all inclusive”): “and that’s very much like not it” (A4.4.). She thus asserts her refusal by virtue of informational funnelling. That is, by identifying what such Feminism(s) represents next to her view of what Feminism should be, she utilises the latter as a framework to arrive at her final assertion, that the images Faiza had been shown are not all-inclusive—therefore grounding a rejection of the former. This demonstrates the process of a discursive refinement—in other words, informational funnelling—in asserting refusal. One may argue that Anum’s argumentation offers a more detailed critique in accompaniment with Faiza’s refusal, particularly given that Faiza had not offered any critical insight into *why* she refused such Feminist praxis—which Anum subsequently does.

Regardless of the subtleties of difference between Faiza and Anum’s approaches to asserting refusal, what becomes clear as the argumentation sequence unfolds is that in refusing representations of White/liberal Feminism(s), the sisters anchor the need for intersectionality vis-à-vis Feminism and Feminist praxis. To firstly reject protests in the name of Feminism as Feminism (by Faiza), and to subsequently reject it for its one-dimensionality (by Anum), it embeds the exclusion of a number of women who do not fit in with such Feminist praxis—which Anum then uses to call for intersectionality as she asserts that Feminism should be ‘all-inclusive’. A similar theme can be found in the following excerpt, although this discussion also showcases how the obscurities surrounding the definitions of Feminism—particularly considering the domination of White/liberal Feminism—may at times result in a difficulty in expressing one’s positioning on Feminism adequately. This is particularly noteworthy as intersectionality is not exactly ‘all-inclusive’ per se, although it does create the space to consider different intersections of oppressions and thus the diversity in women’s needs (see Literature Review, section 2.2.5).

This interaction follows straight on from the previous excerpt, where Zainab is asked how she feels about Feminism (N.B. she had not been interviewed by Laura, and had in fact declined to take part in the research).

**Excerpt 5.7** “*Feminism is like whatever whachu think it is kinda thing*”

**Preceding discussion:** Excerpt 5.6, after which Layla turns to Zainab asking her what she thinks about Feminism.

**Sisters:** ZAI<sup>nab</sup>, HAN<sup>nain</sup>, ANU<sup>m</sup>, LAY<sup>la</sup>

- 01 ZAI: I don't think I ha:ve that many things (I wanna) say yeah  
02 I don't think I'm very (2.9) read up on the subject but (1.2)  
03 I don't agree with like (0.8) people thinking that (1.3) em  
04 (0.3) these protests (\*\*\*) they take their tops off and stuff  
05 and they're like aw (1.4) like this is feminism because (1.2)  
06 feminism is like whatever (0.9) whachu think it is kinda thing  
07 like whatever=  
08 HAN: =yeah  
09 (.)  
10 ZAI: (we) feel like (0.8) it should be (0.8) as in for a girl  
11 (1.5)  
12 HAN: mhm=  
13 ZAI: =that's (it) heh .hh  
14 ANU: wait I didn't get what you were saying about people who-  
15 (0.8) say:: (0.8) what about those protests  
16 (0.9)  
17 ZAI: as in like I don't agree with that bein:g (.) feminism (0.3)  
18 [like]  
19 ANU: [ oh ] okay you don't approve the protests being [feminism]  
20 ZAI: [ yeah ]  
21 ANU: [oh okay ]  
22 ZAI: [like ]  
23 LAY: [maybe it is] feminism (0.2) like acco[rding to] thei:r in[terest]  
24 HAN: [for them] [ yeah ]  
25 LAY: [but like not] for us (0.2) or  
26 HAN: [mm:: ]  
27 LAY: something like that=  
28 ZAI: =yeah (0.4) I don't know (0.4) I think its difficult because  
29 everyone's got (.) different [opinions on it]  
30 LAY: [it is difficult ]

The argumentation sequence for this excerpt is below.

**Argumentation sequence 5.7**

**Locus of refusal:** topless Feminist protests

**Problematic event:** White/liberal Feminism – namely protests as per Faiza's account in the previous argumentation sequence.

- Z1.** I don't think I have that many things I wanna say yeah  
**Z1.1.** I don't think I'm very read up on the subject  
**Z1.2.** But I don't agree with like people thinking that em  
**Z1.3.** these protests they take their tops off and stuff  
**Z1.4.** and they're like  
**Z1.4.1.** aw like this is feminism  
**Z1.5.** because feminism is like whatever whachu think it is kinda thing  
**Z1.5.1.** like whatever we feel like it should be  
**H1.5.1.1.** yeah

- Z1.5.2. as in for a girl
      - H1.5.2.1. mhm
  - Z1.6. that's it heh
- A2. wait I didn't get what you were saying about people who- say what about those protests
  - Z2.1. as in like I don't agree with that being feminism
    - A2.1.1. oh okay you don't approve the protests being feminism
      - Z2.1.1.1. yeah
      - A2.1.1.2. oh okay
  - L2.2. maybe it is feminism like according to their interest
    - H2.2.1. for them yeah
  - L2.3. but like not for us or something like that
    - H2.3.1. mm
    - Z2.3.2. yeah
    - Z2.3.3. I don't know
    - Z2.3.4. I think it's difficult
      - Z2.3.4.1. because everyone's got different opinions on it
      - L2.3.4.2. it is difficult

As this interaction continues from the previous excerpt, the PE has been carried forward to this argumentation sequence, particularly in view of the fact that when Zainab is asked about her thoughts on Feminism, she refers back to the protests Faiza had been shown photos of in the research interview. She begins with a mitigation, as though to offer a disclaimer that she does not have much to contribute towards the topic as she lacks expertise: “I don’t think I have that many things I wanna say yeah” (Z1.), “*I don’t think I’m very read up on the subject*” (Z1.1.; emphasis added to highlight specific locus of mitigation). What is interesting about such mitigation work is that not only does it lay the groundwork for Zainab to position herself as a possible novice on the topic, thereby self-minimising the cogency of her argumentation—in doing so, she erodes her own credibility and insight into Feminist issues as a woman. That is, by mitigating her own status as someone who is not well-read on Feminism, she implicitly frames book-expertise as the qualifying factor affording one the credibility to contribute to discussions on Feminism, where one’s lived experience(s) as a woman ostensibly does not suffice.

Despite mitigating her own credibility to participate in the discussion, she proceeds to assert her refusal towards topless Feminist protests in relation to the Feminism Faiza was posed with during the research interview she partook in. As mentioned earlier, Zainab makes reference to “these protests they take their tops off and stuff” (Z1.3.), linking back to the prior discussion that was essentially responding to Faiza’s telling of being shown images of such protests. She effectively adds her voice to the refusal already asserted by Faiza and Anum as she seemingly

claims that she disagrees with the framing of such protests as Feminism (Z1.2.–Z1.4.1.). Similar to Anum’s approach, she then proceeds to offer an alternative as to what she feels Feminism should be: “because feminism is like whatever whachu think it is kinda thing” (Z1.5.), “like whatever we feel like it should be” (Z1.5.1.), “as in for a girl” (Z1.5.2.). Once again, hints of an intersectional approach to defining Feminism come to surface as she attempts to centre the defining parameters of Feminism towards “whatever we feel it should be, as in for a girl”; however, there is a level of obscurity surrounding her exact focus of refusal—particularly given that she frames Feminism as “whatever we feel like it should be”. While this does, indeed, allow the space for women to take intersectional factors of their specific realities into account, it is, nonetheless, quite a broad and unclear proposition of defining Feminism. This is picked up by Anum as she seeks clarification on what Zainab refers to, namely regarding her locus of refusal “wait I didn’t get what you were saying about people who- say what about those protests” (A2.), to which Zainab responds that she does not agree “with that being feminism” (Z2.1.). Upon attaining this clarification, Anum rearticulates Zainab’s refusal: “oh okay you don’t approve the protests being feminism” (A2.1.1.), which she then confirms to somewhat mirror Faiza’s stance upon being shown images of Femen’s demonstrations (Z2.1.1.1.). What then becomes apparent is that while Zainab does not know how exactly to define Feminism, she is clear about what she thinks it is not.

This difficulty in defining Feminism is marked as the argumentation sequence progresses where Layla suggests that such protests may be iterations of Feminism that suit “their” (i.e. the women protesting) interests, thereby positioning it as a specific type of Feminism (which I show an alignment with): “maybe it is Feminism like according to their interest” (L2.2.) “but like not for us or something like that” (L2.3.). Interestingly, Layla does not delve further into the nuances behind differing stances on Feminism, and neither do I; rather, she offers these argumentations in response to Zainab’s refusal of considering the aforementioned protests as Feminism. Effectively, she does not disqualify such expressions of Feminism as Feminist—rather, she reasserts that it is a formulation of the movement that fits the needs and criteria of those women engaged in such protests. It thus sits differently within the discussion compared to the refusal asserted by Anum; while Layla does subtly assert a lack of affiliation with such movements in allying herself with Zainab—as seen in her argumentation that such Feminism is “not for *us*” (L2.3.; emphasis added to highlight affiliation marker)—what she does not then follow on to do is to offer an alternative of what Feminism should or could be, as both Anum and Zainab attempt to do. This thus leads Zainab on to mark the



difficulty in conceptualising Feminism and/or Feminist work as she first offers a token of agreement with Layla: “yeah” (Z2.3.2.); followed by an expression of uncertainty: “I don’t know” (Z2.3.3.); after which she explicitly marks the difficulty: “I think it’s difficult” (Z2.3.4.). She then proceeds to explain the reasoning behind the difficulty—which once again showcases hints of intersectionality underpinning this discussion: “because everyone’s got different opinions on it” (Z2.3.4.1.). This does not explicitly imply an intersectional approach in an operational sense, it does nonetheless demonstrate an awareness towards the differences in understanding amongst women vis-à-vis what Feminism means for them with respect to intersections of oppression and subsequent needs as women. The argumentation then ends with Layla affirming the difficulty expressed by Zainab as she reiterates that “it is difficult” (L2.3.4.2.).

While there is a lot more obscurity surrounding this assertion of refusal in comparison with the previous two examples, the reason why this interaction is seen as significant is because the locus of refusal is effectively an extension of the refusal in the preceding discussion, and—as mentioned in the preceding analysis—the protests in question are symbolic of a White/liberal Feminism that often Orientalises and Others Muslim women (Carland, 2015). One may then consider that perhaps the uncertainty surrounding Feminism is representative of a disengagement with mainstream Feminist discourse, which in itself is indicative of the disconnect between the output of dominant Feminism, and the needs of Muslim women. That is, to not want to engage with mainstream (or White/liberal) Feminist discourse may speak to its failure to cater to the needs of Muslim women, particularly pertaining to notions of the liberation of women’s bodies. What is, however, certain is that because of this disconnect, micro-resistance through refusal is exercised to reject the formulation of a Feminism—or perhaps an aspect of such Feminism—that is exclusionary towards Muslim women and their needs.

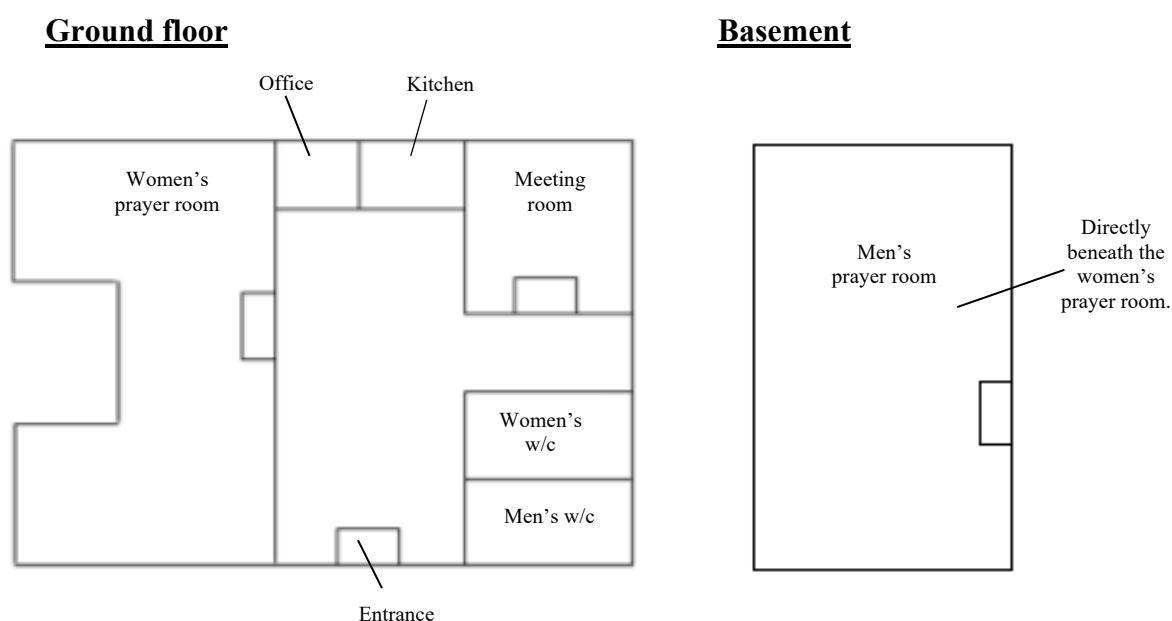
The micro-resistance employed in the two sections thus far demonstrate collective micro-level responses situated in the verbal space through humour and assertions of refusal. These discursive functions are directed primarily at the external (Orientalist) gaze, vis-à-vis terrorist stereotyping Muslims are commonly subjected to for example, or the intersection of gender with Muslimness positioning Muslim women as Othered beings (minds and bodies) in need of ‘liberation’ within broader society. This chapter thus closes with the upcoming final section focusing on the fusion of micro-resistance from the verbal space extending to the physical, and how spaces of verbal discourse can thus support a more physical embodiment of

resistance. However, this section considers acts of resistance deployed in response to problematic situations in and amongst Muslimness; that is, how the Sisters' Circle respond to issues within the ISoc, and the gendered gaze within the Muslim community as part of the ISoc.

#### **5.4 Resisting Within: Space Invading**

The motive of this section is not to break down the discursive elements of resistance solely at an interactional level; as the focus is the fusion of the verbal space with the beyond (i.e. the physical space), the conversational data used in this segment will be considered from an ethnographic lens. Therefore, an in-depth breakdown of the argumentations and interactional elements constructing discourses of micro-resistance will not be provided. The interactions will thus be presented in Jeffersonian-informed excerpts without the accompaniment of argumentation sequences. Therefore, this section will specifically focus on the politics of space within the ISoc prayer building, namely how members of the Sisters' Circle assert refusal with their bodies by taking up space in the ISoc building's meeting room.

As outlined in the Research Design (see Methodology, section 3.3), the physical site for the Sisters' catch-ups was the meeting room situated at the back of the prayer building allocated to the ISoc. The general structure of the building consists of two prayer rooms (on two separate floors, one on top of the other), an office for the committee, a communal kitchen, two toilets and a meeting room. The only explicit gender-specific rooms (as per the female/male gender binary breakdown within the building) consist of the prayer rooms and the toilets/ablution rooms—the rest are non-gender-specific (i.e. open to all genders). The layout of the rooms within the building is displayed below (Image 5.2):



**Image 5.2 – ISoc building layout**

While there is no available gendered breakdown on the number of women and men entering the building and its specific rooms, through observation during the Sisters' Circle meetings and general prayer times during the day (i.e. when I would access the prayer building to pray myself), the predominant use of communal spaces by men was quite apparent. The meeting room was specifically booked from 6pm-7pm every Wednesday for the Sisters' Circle, however given the nature of the data collection, I would access the meeting room space approximately five to ten minutes prior (5:50pm-5:55pm) to set up the camera. On the first three occasions, there were men sitting in the meeting room conversing; on all three occasions, I'd request that I set the camera up in the room, and that they kindly vacate the space for our meeting due to commence at 6pm. However, my initial request would be met with refusal each time, coupled with directions to the women's prayer room and the advice that I proceed with my activities there. Upon reiteration that the room had been booked for us, the men would vacate. It is worth noting that it was the same men on each occasion, and this issue did not persist beyond the first three weeks.

For a couple of meetings thereafter, I was stopped (by men) and diverted to the women's prayer section while walking towards the meeting room for the Sisters' Circle, and on one occasion we had a delayed start to the meeting as two men were praying in the meeting room despite the men's prayer section being visibly empty. What is thus interesting is the implicit gendered policy enacted for that given space. The room booking process entailed informing the Head Sister of the day and time of the Sister's Circle meetings, however there were no signs

posted on the meeting room door to suggest any timetabling. In the absence of such an explicit schedule, the accessibility to the room appeared to have been more restricted for women as opposed to men; that is, the meeting room space was treated as a space men were able to access at will, with or without a booking, a space that could be used for prayer and/or an informal space for resting/conversation, and a space in which men were seemingly given priority over women. There were three instances where men opened the door to walk in during the Sisters' Circle catch-ups without knocking, before turning away to go elsewhere. On one occasion, we were asked to leave the room with about ten minutes of the meet-up still remaining (see image 5.3 below):



**Image 5.3**

**Excerpt 5.8** *Interruption 1*

**Preceding discussion:** some of the sisters were discussing their disdain for feet.

**Sisters:** HANain, SUMaya, LAYla, FAIza, IB= ISoc Brother,

- 01 ((door opens))
- 02 HAN: \$hi\$
- 03 (0.7)
- 04 IB: can you move to other side please
- 05 (0.6)
- 06 HAN: uh: we have (.) this room booked until seven
- 07 (2.3) ((IB turns to leave))
- 08 HAN: thank [you ]
- 09 LAY: [sorry]
- 10 (1.6) ((door shuts))
- 11 FAI: [why did he want you to move]
- 12 SUM: [what ]
- 13 LAY: [wow (what) ]
- 14 HAN: they have a huge frickin section downstairs
- 15 (0.3)

- 16 SUM: why does he want us to move  
*((directs gaze between me and Layla))*  
 17 LAY: why doesh he wanna move here  
*((directs gaze at me))*  
 18 SUM: \$go on Nain tell us your answer\$ uheheh  
 19 LAY: ehe::h

As demonstrated in the accompanied snapshot of the interaction, there was still time remaining for the Sisters' Circle meeting, albeit just less than ten minutes. However, the group did not move as per the man's request; in fact, on this occasion, the meeting prolonged for an additional 23 minutes:



**Image 5.4** [meeting end time- approximately 7:23pm]

The assertion of refusal in this instance thus occurs at three separate junctures; it first occurs as I respond to the brother's request that we move to the women's section (line 04: "the other side") with the fact that we had the room booked until 7pm (line 06). It is not a direct or explicit 'no we will not move', however it does obliquely assert refusal through offering a reasoning as to why we would remain seated as an implicit declaration of our right to remain within the space we had been asked to vacate. The second juncture occurs once the brother turns away to leave the room, at which point Faiza, Sumaya and Layla proceed to voice their objections at his request that we move (lines 11-17). Sumaya and Layla seemingly direct their protests towards me—via their gaze (see image 5.5 below)—as a response to my comment that the men "have a huge frickin section downstairs" (line 14), which Sumaya then humourises

(lines 18-19), thereby lightening the tone. This momentary humour is not necessarily resisting the interruption and request for us to move, although it does subsequently end the interactional sequence, as the Sisters' Circle then return to their discussion on disliking feet.



**Image 5.5**

While this interaction depicts refusal embodied through verbal discourse—which includes my indirect ‘no’ when asked to leave, as well as the protests from Faiza, Sumaya and Layla—the fact that the Sisters’ Circle physically remained in the room showcases the embodiment of refusal with their (our) bodies—which is the third juncture. That is, we did not vocalise our refusal alone, we remained seated and denied the request that we move not only for the remainder of the meeting—we physically ‘occupied’ the space for an extended period beyond the time we had the meeting room booked for. The thought of leaving at 7pm is briefly contemplated by Layla as the hour was coming to a close, after which the members then suggested protesting in a jocular tone:

### **Excerpt 5.9** *Interruption 2*

**Preceding discussion:** unrelated- discussion on hair colour.

**Sisters:** LAYla, SUMaya, HANain, ALIa, FAIza

- 01 LAY: should we actually get out at seven
- 02 SUM: aw[:: can't (\*\*) ]
- 03 LAY: [or like should we not and then] we'll [make] him like
- 04 SUM: [ heh ]
- 05 LAY: wait outsi(hh)de .hh::
- 06 SUM: if that [guy comes back (\*\*) ]
- 07 LAY: [what (were) they gonna do anyway]
- 08 (2.5) ((door opens))
- 09 HAN: ghh.
- 10 (0.7) ((door shuts))
- 11 LAY: (they can't do this)
- 12 (1.2)

13 HAN: .hh hh.  
 14 SUM: \$oh he had his lunch box and everyth[(hh)i- heh\$]  
 15 ALI: [ heheh ]  
 16 SUM: \$so ready to [eat heh\$ ]  
 17 HAN: [why can't-] why- why are the women expected to  
 18 sit and chill and do everything in that little (.) cubby hole that we  
 19 have .hh and the men who have like a massive section downstairs  
 20 can't do the same thing  
 21 (2.0)  
 22 SUM: .hh \$should we protest instead of em\$ eh[eheheh (\*\*\*) yeah heheh]  
 23 ALI: [\$we just sit here forever\$]  
 24 stay sittin=  
 25 SUM: =(chuckle)  
 26 FAI: I don't think anyone [has said that]  
 27 LAY: [ so::meone]'s  
 28 FAI: that (0.2) those are the [rules though ts just ]  
 29 LAY: [looking through that hole]  
 30 I [think]  
 31 HAN: [ no it] [(\*\*\*) ]  
 32 FAI: [the way that] they're acting=  
 33 HAN: =yeah yeah of course=  
 34 SUM: =mm  
 35 LAY: mm no (0.5) hm (0.4) hm ((still looking at the door))  
 36 (1.2)  
 37 HAN: it's implicit (0.4) not explicit=  
 38 LAY: =do we really [have to g]o (.) I really don't wanna move  
 39 FAI: [\$hmhm\$]

From lines 01-07, Layla orients to the time approaching 7pm as she refers to the earlier interruption. She inquires if the sisters “actually” have to vacate the space at 7pm—which Sumaya groans at (line 02)—after which Layla laughingly suggests that we do not leave so as to “make him wait outside”. As Sumaya then begins working towards the possibility of the brother returning (line 06), with Layla overlapping her to question what the room is needed for (line 07), somebody opens the door to walk in once again (it is unknown if this is the same person as before). Sumaya injects humour into the situation once more by laughing at the fact that the brother “had his lunch box and everything” (line 14), remarking that he was “so ready to eat” (line 16). Rather than responding to the humour, I subsequently complained about the apparent disparity of spatial rights afforded to women and men within the building (lines 17-20), which Sumaya then uses to employ a jocular twist yet again as she suggests that we protest (line 22). Alia takes this up in proposing that we commit to a sit-in protest: “we just sit here forever” (line 23), “stay sittin” (line 24).

What is significant about these verbal actions vis-à-vis micro-resistance is the ways in which refusal is contemplated in a jocular tone as the Sisters’ Circle enacted that very refusal

without any serious or formal agreement on the back of this interaction. That is, my response to the brother during the interruption rejected the request that we move in that moment (previous Excerpt 5.8), while indirectly hinting that we will be vacating the space at 7pm as per our booking. However, as the time to leave approached, Layla jokingly suggested that we prolong the refusal to “make him wait outside” (Excerpt 5.9, lines 03 and 05), which would effectively breach the initial compromise my response had implied in informing the brother that we had the room booked until 7pm. However, in proposing that we “make him wait outside”, Layla in turn suggests extending the refusal beyond our right to remain in the room for the duration of the meeting. The proposed assertion of refusal would then transcend the temporal boundaries of the Sisters’ Circle meeting to claim our right of access to the communal space outside of our pre-planned gathering, which Sumaya and Alia jokingly support—and we ultimately did “make him wait”, albeit for an additional 23 minutes.

Rather than entertaining the discussion on protesting, Faiza contests my complaint as she highlights that the disparity I alluded to are not “rules” set in stone, rather its “the way that they’re acting” (lines 28-32), which I align with as I supplement her comment with: “its implicit, not explicit” (line 37). Interestingly, Faiza’s input effectively echoes Nirmal Puwar’s construction of the ‘somatic norm’ of a given space vis-à-vis the colonial and/or White-privileged institutional standard. Puwar (2001: 652) refers to the ‘somatic norm’ as follows:

*“By using the term somatic norm I am referring to the corporeal imagination of power as naturalised in the body of white, male, upper/middle-class bodies. Here I am relying on the incredibly instructive area of scholarly thought within feminism, race and the general criticisms of modernity that insist on revealing the exclusive nature of the body that lies at the centre of somatophobic constructions of modernity and the modern subject (Gatens 1996). I am particularly keen to highlight the ways in which different forms of privilege, especially those of class, gender and what in terms of race Frantz Fanon (1986) has characterised as epidermalization, is inscribed in the very character of the normatively located bodily habitus.”*

Puwar’s conceptualisation of the somatic norm as White, male, and upper/middle-class in her post-colonial critique of institutional hierarchies may not entirely correlate with the context of this analytical segment, however her theorising of the somatic norm and subsequent ‘space invader(s)’ offer much food for thought when considering the gendered fragmentation of spatial rights within the ISoc prayer space. Here, the somatic norm does not necessitate



whiteness or class privilege as direct mechanisms of exclusion; the focal point of Othering in this instance is predicated on gender, where male-ness is the centrifugal force constructing the somatic norm. Taking a step back from the semantics of embodied spatial politics for a moment, it would be beneficial to acknowledge the parallels in the implicitness of policy enacted within the institutional settings Puwar considers, alongside the ‘rules’—as Faiza puts it—of the prayer building, so as to effectively showcase how the functional premise of the ISoc space echoes Puwar’s institutional foci. In her book, *Space Invaders* (2004), Puwar theorises on the coloniality of space within institutions, primarily focusing on the civil service/political arena, as well as other institutions like academia. She meditates on how certain spaces have, in theory, opened up their doors to Othered bodies, affording them (limited) access, often in the name of filling up diversity quotas (e.g. the opening up of civil service jobs to Black men and women). However, the location of the normative bodily habitus remains fixated within White upper/middle-class maleness. There may be an absence of explicit policies documented on paper to legally obstruct and exclude ‘different’ bodies from entering such spaces, nonetheless “white male bodies of a specific habitus continue to be the somatic norm. These bodies are valorised as the corporeal presence of political leadership and presence” (ibid: p141). For an Other to thus enter spaces largely reserved for the somatic norm disturbs the expected order of the institution, such that Othered bodies are subsequently located as ‘space invaders’ (ibid). Essentially, “their presence disrupts and disorients expectations” whereby “their presence represents a discordant event” (ibid: p144).

Returning to the ISoc prayer building, other than the gender-specific sites designated to men and women (i.e. prayer rooms, toilets/ablution rooms), the communal areas do not have any explicit gender policy to favour or reserve the spaces for either sex. Namely, the kitchen and meeting room are both, in principle, equally open to women and men. However, as seen in the analytical reflections earlier, equal access as a policy is not necessarily enacted by the users of the space, and where space invasion occurs, there is a disruption. Faiza’s response to my complaint thus highlights how the disparity in the ISoc prayer building is grounded in the embodiment of gender inequity as she states that it’s “the way that they’re acting” (line 34), as opposed to the somatic norm effectuating any gender discriminatory rules of the communal space. In effect, she echoes Puwar’s rumination on the mechanics of exclusion in institutional spaces; that is, those situated outside of the somatic norm are not legally halted from entering the communal spaces, although they are treated as ‘space invaders’. Therefore, in this context, the somatic norm is to be male, while being female is to be a space invader.

Indeed, the politics underpinning the gendered disparity of access in the prayer building does not entirely mirror the colonial functioning of the institutions that Puwar considers; where present, the general differences in the treatment of genders within Muslim communities has been heavily critiqued by female Muslim scholars committed to reinterpreting Qur'anic jurisprudence that is often weaponised to uphold patriarchal inequity (e.g. amina wadud, Asma Barlas, Rifat Hassan). Scholars such as Ziba Mir-Hosseini have long been part of a global Muslim women-led movement denouncing gender disparity within Muslim communities (that are justified by religious texts) as patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith (Mir-Hosseini, 2011). One may thus deduce that the positioning of men as the somatic norm within this physical space, and women as space invaders, may be borne out of the inequalities driven by patriarchal interpretations of religion that the aforementioned scholars are dedicated to dismantle. Hosseini does, however, acknowledge linkages with the colonial history of the Islamic world that have breathed life into patriarchal interpretations of religion (ibid), although it is not considered the sole cause catalysing gender inequity. Be that as it may, to dissect the patriarchal dimensions ostensibly entrenched within the ISoc that may subsequently foster the embodiment of gendered inequality vis-à-vis spaces is beyond the scope of this study; however, what is clearly evident in this instance is that the members of the Sisters' Circle have recognised and are responding to an inconsistency regarding accessibility to the meeting room—a communal space—on the premise of gender. There is a recognition towards their (our) treatment as space invaders, which is precisely what we use—and subsequently propose to use—as a modality for resistance. In other words, the reminders and requests that the Sisters' Circle move out of the communal space, for example, to go to the women's section so as to vacate the space for men reflects the positioning of men and women as the somatic norm and space invaders respectively. With the knowledge that our presence in the meeting room is disruptive, some of the sisters then consider—albeit jokingly—that we remain seated in the room beyond 7pm as a form of protest, which we do, in fact, follow through with (even though it is for 23 minutes only).

Using 'space invasion' to assert refusal and resist the very positioning as space invaders essentially mirrors the tactics of humour as micro-resistance considered earlier in this chapter, insofar as it is used as a mode of subversion (see section 5.2). Where the presence of space invaders in spaces ostensibly belonging to the somatic norm is seen as a discordant event (Puwar, 2004), the Sisters' Circle (we) use that positioning to intentionally space-invade, which effectively turns "oppression upside down" (Sorensen, 2008: 175) by subverting the very



23 (1.5)  
 24 ZAI: (so)  
 25 SUM: \$hh.\$[ ((laughing)) ]  
 26 ZAI: \$[what if you fall in love] with someone\$  
 27 SUM: .hh [\$y(hh)e(hh)ah\$]  
 28 ZAI: \$[and they're not] Musli::m (and) bla bla bla\$  
 29 (0.5) ((ZAI re-enacts someone looking through a peephole))  
 30 \*\*\*: ((laughter))  
 31 FAI: \$he probably heard that and was like\$  
 32 (0.2) ((FAI peers at the door))  
 33 SUM: [\$y(hh)e(hh)ah probably\$]  
 34 ZAI: [ ((laughing)) ] these sisters need a  
 35 husban:d  
 36 \*\*\*: ((laughter))  
 37 FAI: \$I am [available ahahah]\$  
 38 SUM: [ (\*\*\*) ]

A few minutes before this interaction unfolded, I had left the meeting room to take a phone call. While I was away, Sumaya and Zainab appear to respond to some noises outside the room as they inquire where I had gone, after which they seemingly laugh while uttering ‘peep Tom’/‘peeping Tom’ (what they say prior to the words ‘peep Tom’ in lines 01-04 is inaudible). Sumaya then turns to Faiza to explain an incident in a previous meeting where someone was looking through the door as she was “pouring my heart out about love” (line 09). What had happened in the meeting referred to here is that the Sister’s Circle were discussing love, marriage, and considering what they (we) would do if they (we) fell in love with someone who is not a Muslim. In the midst of this conversation, someone opened the door to walk in, after which they were peering into the room through the peep-hole. At the time of the incident, the Sisters’ Circle erupted in laughter (similar to what is unfolding here), as some members who were actively engaged in the discussion appeared to feel embarrassed. What then becomes evident through the laughter in narrating the incident here—and the repeated enactments of someone peeping through a hole to then move away—is the awkwardness of the situation, as well as marking the encroachment of their (our) space. This is particularly noteworthy given that Zainab and Sumaya laughingly discuss peeping Tom(s) at the beginning of the interaction, which Sumaya then elaborates on by informing Faiza of the incident. To relay the account following their apparent jokes on ‘peeping Tom’ indicates a direct link between the joke and the narrative event. That is, they are not separate, detached entities coincidentally positioned side-by-side in the interaction; rather, they are linked. The jokes effectively serve as an introductory mechanism to orient to the account. Thus, while it is not explicitly stated that the

male members of the ISoc space are space-invaders, they are nonetheless depicted as such through discursively placing them as encroachers of the Sisters' Circle's space.

Furthermore, as Zainab re-enacts the incident in lines 26-29 using DRS to narrate the discussion that took place at the time, followed by role-playing someone peering through a hole, Faiza furthers the jocular tone of the interaction. She does this by insinuating that it is the potential availability marked by the sisters discussing the possibility of falling in love with a non-Muslim person that will have drawn the brother's attention in the first place, for him to then decide to peer in through the door-hole (lines 31-32). Zainab adds to this as she jokingly quotes a hypothetical thought on behalf of the brother: "these sisters need a husband" (lines 34-35), to which Faiza adds: "I am available" (line 37). Humourising the brother's act of intruding, as well as his intention, creates a mockery of the power dynamic within the space as they displace the awkwardness or embarrassment felt by the members of the Sisters' Circle to identify the intrusion as a laughable act. They re-construct the intrusion away from a brother encroaching their space out of an assumed entitlement as a member of the somatic norm to a brother who is now intruding in on the Sisters' Circle out of a longing for female partnership, a longing which comes across as seemingly desperate. By framing the somatic norm as such destabilises the power of the somatic norm through subversion; the underlying power and consequential behaviour embodied by the men in the space is re-positioned as space-invasion driven by a comical desire for women.

With a combination of asserting refusal, and some elements of humour, the Sisters' Circle showcase the fusion of verbal micro-resistance with a rather subdued physical refusal. It is referred to as 'subdued' here given that the physical aspect of resistance—though disruptive in nature vis-à-vis unsettling the somatic norm—is manifest through a rather reticent space invasion that predominantly lasted for approximately one hour each week, plus an additional 23 minutes on one occasion. Despite the 'softness' of such resistance, the fusion of the verbal with physical produces a dynamic force of resistance that not only resists the embodied "rules" within the ISoc prayer building—there is also a disruption of the somatic norm through the inversion of power dynamics in positioning the brothers as the space invaders of the Sisters' Circle sessions.

## 5.5 Summary of Chapter

In summary, the findings in this chapter demonstrate the different ways resistance—namely micro-resistance—can function at a micro-level as a means to discursively disrupt a social order placing Muslim women as Othered beings. The form such micro-resistance work can take include a more serious approach through asserting refusal, or a less serious one through humour, which highlights the ambivalence the Sisters' Circle experience in the face of Othering.

There are two main themes pertaining to the findings in this chapter: the first is the function of micro-resistance—that is, what discursive action micro-resistance serves to fulfil (i.e. the discursive outcome(s)); the second is a recognition of the multiplicity of forces that Other Muslim women. In terms of the discursive outcomes of micro-resistance, the main points emerging from the analysis are as follows:

- Firstly, navigating Otherness does not necessarily result in angst; whether it is issues pertaining to the socio-political climate or everyday microaggressions, PEs are also challenged with micro-resistance, which can serve to discursively undo Otherness and lessen sentiments of angst.
- Secondly, humour is used to repurpose tools of Othering for subversion and/or invalidation of problematic discourse or occurrences. The specific examples of Othering tools seen in this chapter include:
  - The use of the terrorist stereotype, which is utilised to subvert Otherness predicated on the use of that very stereotype. The Sisters' Circle achieve this by employing it as a metaphor to mark the farfetched-ness of profiling Muslims as threatening, thereby diminishing its power.
  - In that same vein, adopting the ISIS label—which is often leveraged as a justification to sustain the use of the terrorist stereotype—to once again ridicule the stereotype, as well as the terrorist group, ISIS, itself.
  - Inverting the negatives of Islamophobic occurrences into positive outcomes that ultimately serve to benefit, or as Sara refers to it—rearticulating the negatives of Islamophobia as “perks” instead.
  - Using the positioning as space invaders to space-invade, as well as discursively positioning men as space invaders encroaching on the Sisters' Circle's meeting space as a means to assert spatial rights.

- Thirdly, humour and refusal both work to undo Otherness by disrupting and dislodging dominant ideologies and structures of power facilitating problematic narratives creating a fragmented social order.
- Finally, refusal is representative of the practicing of an autonomy that Muslim women are very often denied in wider society.

Essentially, what such practices of micro-resistance enables is a cultivation of critical consciousness that in turn allows for the nurturing of voices of dissent—albeit within the confines of the Sisters’ Circle. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the examples of micro-resistance in this chapter showcase how the Sisters’ Circle develop this critical consciousness through the very act of micro-resistance, as well as collectively working through some of the issues (e.g. whether or not ISIS should be joked about, or attempts at conceptualising Feminism as Muslim women), which demonstrates a recognition of ideological forces that Other Muslim women (those observed in this chapter include Islamophobia, White/liberal Feminism, and patriarchy). As with the previous chapter, this ultimately speaks to the Sisters’ Circle’s cognisance of Otherness; to micro-resist problematic discourses, narratives or experiences through facetious subversion or an assertion of refusal showcases a recognition that there is an element of Othering that requires challenging. However, what is borne out of these actions given the SC’s cognisance of Otherness is, as mentioned above, a cultivation of critical consciousness, as well as healing through generating solidarity and lessening angst with the use of humour. One key point the Discussion chapter will thus consider is how such Circles can create the space for criticality, healing, and essentially serve as a safe space for Muslim women to navigate through and make sense of (socio-political) realities, where women can express anxieties and support each other’s needs.

## Chapter 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

Using an integrated-qualitative method of analysis through the combination of Teun Van Dijk's (1984) Socio-cognitive discourse approach, Ochs and Capps' (2001) narrative analytic tool of explanatory sequences, and ethnographic reflection (see Methodology chapter for breakdown), this study has conducted a micro-analytic interactional exploration of how a Sisters' Circle of Muslim women as part of a British university's ISoc work through and make sense of socio-politics and Otherness. As such, the starting point of this research entailed establishing an intersectional understanding of the ways in which Muslim women are Othered, focusing primarily on Orientalism, Feminism(s), and Islamophobia (see Chapter 2). This was carried out in order to explicate the contextual conditions in which the Sisters' Circle exists, within which the subsequent interactions have taken place. With the contextual backdrop hence anchored, this study then proceeded to consider discursive and narrative elements of the Sisters' Circle's interactions that collaboratively demonstrated the ways in which their (our) realities were being understood in situ, how these realities were made sense of, and how they were being responded to. This thus entailed taking into consideration the micro-details of discursive, narrative and interactional actions that cumulatively worked towards constructing specific higher-level (and in some instances, lower-level) discourses as part of sense-making processes, as well as interactional and discursive loci of subversion and refusal to unpack the ambivalence behind the Sisters' Circle's navigation of socio-politics and responses to Otherness.

The analysis that has been carried out specifically sought to explore the following, in line with the research questions (RQs): 1) how the Sisters' Circle navigate socio-politics vis-à-vis the impact of politics and Islamophobia; and 2) how the Sisters' Circle resist discourses that work to position them as the Other in racial and/or gender hierarchies. As such, the conversations that have been analysed in this study suggest the following:

1. The processes of navigating socio-politics and subsequently negotiating Otherness yields ambivalence, where in some instances the Sisters' Circle's cognisance of Otherness led to 'minority angst' (Chapter 4), while in others, they employed micro-resistance to subvert or assert refusal against Islamophobic discourses, or discourses of Otherness (Chapter 5).



2. The resistance towards ideologies or discourses positioning Muslim women as Other in a racial and/or gender hierarchy transpired as micro-resistance through the uses of humour (as a means to subvert discriminatory rhetoric and narratives), and, as mentioned in the previous point, asserting refusal.
3. With respect to point 2., embodying refusal through ‘space invading’ also contributed towards the resistance towards the positioning of Muslim women as Other in a gendered hierarchy, as the Sisters’ Circle claimed the right to occupy a physical space that had been booked for their (our) meet-up(s).
4. From a methodological standpoint, adopting an integrative qualitative approach has allowed this study to unpack the ways in which the Sisters’ Circle works through understanding socio-political realities and the tensions of Otherness with a multi-pronged and more holistic view. It thus showcased that negotiating reality and Otherness is not simply achieved through either narratives or argumentations as mutually exclusive fragments of interactional structure; rather, these conversational tools—along with a myriad of others—often intertwine and overlap to achieve interactional goals. By employing such an approach, it has thus allowed for the recognition of two narrative processes that are not highlighted within Ochs and Capps’ explanatory sequence models: ‘reverse engineering’, and ‘informational funnelling’.

The findings from this research, therefore, contribute towards studies on Muslim students at university—an area that remains formally under-researched (e.g. NUS, 2018; Song, 2012; Brown, 2009; Thomas and Pihlaja, 2017; Housee, 2010b). More specifically, this study contributes to literature focusing on Muslim women at university (in the UK), as studies on Muslims in higher education in a British context have tended to focus on the Muslim student body as a whole (e.g. Song, 2012; Brown, 2009). Additionally, this research adopts a micro-analytic linguistic approach, focusing on interactions specifically, while most studies on Muslims at university employ a combination of interviews and focus groups. In terms of the socio-psychological aspects of this research vis-à-vis ‘minority angst’, employing an integrated qualitative approach, grounded in van Dijk’s (1984) socio-cognitive discourse approach, through interactional excavation demonstrates the nuances to how angst is organically processed as a collective, as opposed to psychological studies offering a quantitative snapshot of how likely it is for any given group to undergo ‘collective angst’ (Wohl et al, 2012; Tabri et al, 2018).

While this study does then add to a paucity of academic literature on Muslim women at university, and interactional processing of angst by Muslim women, it does not, however, explicitly seek to excavate the modes of exclusion and Otherness that the Sisters' Circle experience at the hands of the institution specifically, nor does it represent experiential reflections of Muslim women within formal institutional settings. Rather, what this study showcases is *how* these students have come together and created a 'safe' space, or a space of comfort and/or care where discussions on serious topics occurred within an environment of informality (a kind of space that Housee (2010b) stated her participants were in need of). The formality, or quasi-formality, was, in some ways, curtailed to the operational organisation of the meet-ups vis-à-vis the regularity of the day and time of the week, and the venue in which they occurred, as well as the fact that the Sisters' Circle was officially a part of the university's ISoc. As such, the Sisters' Circle's discussions were not structured, organised, or monitored to limit conversational divergences away from the topics that had been chosen to discuss prior to each meeting. Much of the data set, in fact, constitutes interactions that are infused with jokes, and friendly conversation that are not related to any serious topic at all. Some meetings occurred without having a topic pre-set, while in others where topics had been chosen, it was only touched on superficially. Thus, what is of interest here is how the Sisters' Circle came together within an institutional environment to create a space, for an hour each week, that somewhat reflects bell hooks' (2015) meditations on the how the homeplace functions vis-à-vis creating a place of comfort.

These reflections of the findings will be discussed in further detail in tandem with the relevant literature (section 6.2), followed by methodological considerations (section 6.3), and finally, some concluding remarks with recommendations for future research (6.4).

## **6.2 Discussion of Analytic Observations**

This section will be divided into three segments to reflect how each RQ has been considered alongside the relevant literature, and to discuss further considerations and limitations of this study. As such, this section will be broken down as per the following:

- 6.2.1: Addressing RQ1: minority angst.
- 6.2.2: Addressing RQ2: micro-resistance.
- 6.2.3: Further reflections and limitations.

### 6.2.1 Addressing RQ1: minority angst.

Before proceeding with the discussion, RQ1 will be reiterated as a reminder of the first question the analysis sought to answer:

*How do Muslim women as part of a British university's ISoc's Sisters' Circle interactionally navigate socio-politics and its impact?*

A summarized response to this question would be as follows: minority angst and micro-resistance, which in effect indicate ambivalence. The two analysis chapters showcase an array of emotional and discursive responses, including minority angst, concern and uncertainty for the future, humourisation of discriminatory discourse and/or experiences that at times worked to lighten the mood, rejection of forms of Othering, and in one specific instance—acceptance of discrimination as a banal truth of existing as a visibly Muslim woman in public spaces (see Chapter 5, excerpt 5.4.2). While these responses may not necessarily be contradictory, they do, nonetheless, demonstrate a state of fluctuation in terms of how the Sisters' Circle navigate reality and respond to Otherness.

The analysis in Chapter 4 considered at length sentiments of angst—conceptualised as 'minority angst'—that were made apparent as the Sisters' Circle navigated a socio-political reality after the Brexit vote and Trump's election. To revisit the theoretical underpinnings that led to this conceptual definition, 'minority angst' is a derivation of: a) 'minority stress', which refers to states of psychological stress an individual or group undergoes due to their minority status, and stressful stimuli, such as discrimination, prejudice, and other hostilities society presents them with (Meyer, 1995; Bowleg et al, 2003); and b) 'collective angst', which entails an in-group's concerns for their vitality through affective responses (Wohl et al, 2010). The latter strand of angst, however, tends to be seen through the perspective of majority groupings as opposed to marginalised groups (although in some instances there have been considerations for minority groups, such as the Jewish community (ibid; Wohl et al 2012)), hence the convergence of the two terms. As such, Chapter 4 begins with outlining 'minority angst', which will thus be defined as follows: *affective responses regarding concern about the socio-political environment and the future, and a cognisance of Otherness on the premise of an individual or group's minority status* (cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.1, p99).

To further unpack the notion of minority angst, Wohl et al (2010) root angst within anxiety, which they assert “results from an expectation that a negative event may occur” (p899). Beck and Emery (1985) further add the element of fear into their conceptualisation of anxiety

as they claim that fear is a cognitive process that entails an ‘intellectual appraisal’ of a threatening stimulus, whereas anxiety is an emotional response to the appraisal. This emotional response, as per Beck and Emery (ibid), manifests as an experience of subjectively unpleasant feelings (for example, tension or nervousness), and/or physiological changes, such as heart palpitations. As such, in terms of the findings of this research, sense-making activities (such as reverse engineering, asserting and/or acknowledging problematic events, informational funnelling and collaborative narrative work) cumulatively serve as an intellectual appraisal of threatening stimuli—which, in summary, includes a fear of a rise in right wing populism (e.g sections 4.2 and 4.3) and Islamophobia (e.g. section 4.4) given pivotal political events, namely the vote for Brexit and Donald Trump’s election. The contemplation of negative hypothetical outcomes, expressing concern for the future and psychological responses as seen in the chapter then demonstrate interactional anxiety as they form the response to the aforementioned ‘fear’. It is worth noting, however, that measuring physiological changes was not sought to be implemented as it is beyond the scope of this study, thus conclusive remarks on this aspect of anxiety cannot be grounded within this discussion. What can, nonetheless, be said is how the conversational space effectively demonstrates the triggers and processing of (minority) angst as a collective.

Interestingly, Wohl et al (2010) note that angst is not limited to the individual, personal self’s future—rather, it can also be experienced by the ‘social self’. That is, angst can be endured by people within a group who may not have directly been subjected to problematic encounters or events, however others within the in-group experiencing such events may, nonetheless, fear the potential harm that may transpire upon the group as a whole *in the future*, thereby inducing minority angst. This has been the case in much of this data set—while there are a couple of Islamophobic incidents and/or experiences that are recounted, much of the discussions demonstrate angst borne out of right-wing political victories and events, and interpersonal encounters experienced by others, that have catalysed angst. For example, in section 4.4, the Sisters’ Circle are evidently concerned for the safety of hijabi women as they discuss women they know of, specifically in the US, who have been considering taking off their hijab as a safety measure—which is a step that is purportedly supported and encouraged by the respective families of the women that the Sisters’ Circle speak of. One of the Sisters’ Circle’s own members, Alia, also discusses her own thoughts on considering removing her hijab upon travelling to the US for her electives. What is thus made evident is the manifestation of angst through psychological responses recounted in the third person or direct reported speech (DRS)

as a reflection of the sentiments of the respective subjects of the narratives. That is, the angst experienced by the Muslim women and their families as part of the narrative is utilised to anchor, or perhaps justify, the minority angst experienced by the Sisters' Circle vis-a-vis a post-Trump reality. This has been deduced given the fact that these interactions had occurred in response to, or following on from discussions on Trump's election and the concerns over a rise in the right wing (within which the Sisters' Circle demonstrably displayed angst).

These narratives, therefore, can serve as legitimising accounts to validate, corroborate, and/or support the sentiments of angst experienced within the circle, which effectively indicates a ratification of a minority angst manifested in response to a threat to the 'social self'. The social self in question could serve as 'Muslim women', 'visibly Muslim women' (in the context of the SC, this would be women who wear the hijab), or Muslims more broadly. A threat to visibly Muslim women in America is having an impact on this group of Sisters' Circle in Britain, particularly the sisters who are visibly Muslim (as all the narratives recounted on the possible removal of hijab are put forward by the sisters who wear a headscarf). In effect, the threat Trump poses to Muslims, given his Islamophobic rhetoric, is catalysing a direct psychological impact on the women within the Sisters' Circle—and the uncertainty about the future the sisters express throughout the chapter, with concerns of a rise in right-wing populism given Trump's election (sections 4.2 and 4.3) further attests to this. Kunst et al's (2013) study further corroborates the findings of this research vis-a-vis experiencing minority angst through threats to the social-self, as their study explored psychological distress amongst Muslims; they found the following (ibid: p235):

*“Based on our results, it appears that perceptions of belonging to a group that is feared in society itself has a distinct effect on Muslim minorities' health and identification, regardless whether individuals personally experience discrimination in their daily lives or not.”*

Therefore, what is central to the experiencing of angst is a cognisance of Otherness, which is showcased throughout Chapter 4. In other words, minority angst is intricately tied to the awareness and consciousness the Sisters' Circle demonstrably have in terms of being a part of a group that is feared and Othered by society (and the state; see Literature Review, section 2.3.1). In fact, it is worth noting that minority angst and cognisance of Otherness have transpired to be mutually supportive phenomena within this study, which was seen throughout Chapter 4. To refer back to section 4.4, what lay at the heart of these interactions was the awareness of the

‘Other’ status held by the narrators who have subsequently responded with angst on the basis of a consciousness towards the possible consequences of facing (physical and/or verbal) bigotry as visibly Muslim women. More broadly, this is a pattern that is prevalent throughout much of this chapter as the Sisters’ Circle respond to the political (or socio-political) climate with angst out of a concern for potential reverberations to be felt in their (our) everyday lives in the future. Effectively, the minority angst experienced reinforces Otherness, while it is the simultaneous cognisance of Otherness that allows for the Sister’s Circle to take such a critical stance on political events. Thus, as stated in the summary of Chapter 4 (see section 4.5), cognisance of Otherness and minority angst are mutually supportive, as it is the awareness of one’s Otherness that is catalysing these sense-making narratives in response to political events, thereby producing minority angst; and the minority angst in itself is indicative of the consciousness of Otherness that feeds the need to elucidate the socio-political. On that basis, the fact that the Sisters’ Circle invested time and conversational space to make sense of the vote for Brexit and Trump’s election—the latter in particular—is demonstrative of their (our) cognisance of Otherness and their (our) minority angst existing mutually. As such, given this mutual functioning of these two factors, it demonstrates how the political is effectively, and affectively, taken as personal.

To explicate this further, the narratives in section 4.4 show examples of the political being taken as personal given that visibly Muslim women—and their families—are either reconsidering their decision to wear the hijab, or their families are encouraging them to do so, as a direct response to a political event: the election of Donald Trump. Such an act of policing or mitigating one’s Muslimness, for example, in response to the socio-political climate is not isolated to this study. Abbas (2019) investigated the effects of a membership in a suspect community on Muslims in Leeds and Bradford to draw similar conclusions. The focus of her research was not specifically on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women—rather, she was looking at how Muslims in Leeds and Bradford navigate their lives in the face of countering violent extremism (CVE) policies, and being treated as suspect by the state and society. However, the study showcased that fears of being targeted led to the implementation of self-policing measures. For the Muslim women participants who wore the hijab in particular, they sought to portray the image of a ‘moderate Muslim’, and consequently reconsidered their decision to wear the hijab in public spaces as a result of these fears. In effect, this evidences the depth of impact on those holding membership in a suspect community, and further establishes the notion that a threat to the individual can reverberate laterally to pose a threat to the ‘social

self'. Zempi and Chakrobarti (2015) thus similarly found psychological and behavioural harms of Islamophobic hostilities extending beyond first-hand individual victims as their participants held the consensual view that “an attack on one Muslim is an attack on all” (p52), whereby the “collective victim” is consequently affected; in other words, the single victim becomes the collective victim. This experience of collective distress further extended to the cognisance of Otherness whereby an “awareness of the potential for Islamophobic victimisation enhances the sense of fearfulness and insecurity of all Muslims due to their membership” (ibid: p52).

These reflections regarding cognisance of Otherness, particularly Zempi and Chakrobarti’s (ibid) findings that the awareness of the potential for Islamophobia increases fear and insecurity amongst Muslims may explain the process of the political being taken as personal in this study, and why the Sisters’ Circle were especially troubled by politics in expressing concern for the possibilities of right-wing victories within Europe (section 4.2), as well as fears of a post-Trump future (section 4.3). To respond to political events that have been actualised (i.e. Brexit and Trump’s election), as well as hypothesising and/or fearing further right-wing victories with angst attests to the political being taken as personal in and of itself, which in turn speaks to the cognisance of Otherness, and consequent fear of being a member of a suspect community. That is, the angst and uncertainty regarding the future vis-a-vis Euro-American political planes demonstrate a recognition of their (our) socio-political position as an Other, alongside their (our) recognition of the possibility of undesirable socio-political ramifications rippling down from state to society (and vice versa), hitting Muslims as a collective. In line with Zempi and Chakrobarti’s assertions, the Islamophobic discourse already present within much of the right-wing political campaigns at the time of data collection (2016-2017) could then be said to serve as a threat of “the potential for Islamophobic victimisation” which is thus increasing “the sense of fearfulness and insecurity” of the Sisters’ Circle “due to their membership” (ibid: p52) in the Muslim community.

Thompson and Pihlaja’s (2018) study further corroborates the findings of this research as they also make note of a cognisance of Otherness, with a particular insight into their participants’ feelings of uncertainty regarding the future. According to their findings, the participants held an acute awareness of political events vis-a-vis “the power of public discourse about them” (ibid: p1339), concluding that “negative public discourses clearly have a negative impact on young Muslims” (p1340), and given this awareness felt insecure about the future. Such heightened levels of awareness of negative public discourses on Muslims at university has also been noted by Brown (2009), who found that international Muslim students sought

security through ISocs (see Literature Review, section 2.3.4). What is, however, particularly poignant about Thompson and Pihlaja's study is the time at which it was carried out; taking place in March and April of 2016—in the months preceding the EU referendum in the UK, and the Presidential election in the US—19 female Muslim students at university in Birmingham and London were interviewed to explore what it was like to be young and Muslim in Britain at the time. To contrast this with my research, which was carried out shortly after Brexit and Donald Trump's election, the parallels in the findings of both studies demonstrate a continuum, or consistency in feelings of minority angst in the face of political events. As sections 4.2 (concerns about the future), and 4.3 (hypothesising negative outcomes to Trump's election) showcase, the Sisters' Circle respond directly to politics with minority angst; this uncertainty regarding the future speaks to the sensitivities the Circle hold towards Brexit and Trump's election given Islamophobic hostilities. This is also the case in Thompson and Pihlaja's findings as their participants specifically note that “the anti-Muslim rhetoric (...) that was being politicised and utilised” in the campaigns for both political events “contributed to a fear for the future” to a point where they questioned their future in Britain (p1338). The experiencing of minority angst in the face of political events leaning towards the right, where Islamophobic rhetoric had been peddled, was not unfounded as Islamophobic incidents were seen to rise in the months that followed Brexit and Trump's election—for example, Trump actualising the travel ban that had been deemed the ‘Muslim Ban’, and Islamophobic incidents rising in response to anti-Muslim public/political discourse (see Literature Review section 2.3).

Given the cognisance of Otherness amidst Islamophobic hostilities subsisting socio-politically, the Sisters' Circle experiencing minority angst is not an unusual phenomenon as researches point to Muslims in the US and Britain suffering heightened levels of anxiety—particularly in a post-Brexit and Trump era. Mogahed and Chouhoud (2017), for example, found that both Muslims and Jews report higher levels of anxiety compared to other faith groups as a direct result of the US Presidential election, with Muslim women experiencing “more fear” and “emotional trauma at a higher rate than their male counterparts” (p4). Meanwhile, Hankir et al (2019) denote feelings of insecurity, anxiety and depression amongst British Muslims, claiming that the “pressures on British Muslims are immense since they are seemingly being targeted on all fronts. Intrusive governmental surveillance systems, intensive scrutiny from employers, educational bodies and healthcare and social care staff, and day-to-day microaggressions in public areas place a tremendous toll on the mental health of Muslims” (p226).



With minority angst in mind, the studies considered as part of this discussion—as well as the present research—point to a need for safe spaces, or spaces of comfort and care for Muslims, and Muslim women more specifically. Researches into Muslims at university demonstrate how valuable such spaces are (see Literature Review, section 2.3.4), as many Muslim students have been found to seek out ISocs in search of safety, security and grounding (e.g. Brown, 2009; Song, 2012). Manejwala and Abu Ras (2019), for example, interviewed 12 South Asian Muslim undergraduate students in the USA to find that participants approached Islamophobia as a banal reality of their existence, with an expectation that tough times continue to lie ahead. As such, they sought support from family, friends, and Muslim Student Associations (MSAs—the American equivalent of ISocs at British universities) as a coping mechanism. Brown (2009) and Song (2012) have drawn similar conclusions to their studies, with the former finding that international Muslim students at British universities sought out ISocs in the hope of finding common religious ground to feel understood amidst Islamophobic hostilities, while the latter found Muslim students chose to engage with ISocs as a means to seek camaraderie and a space for networking with other Muslims. In all three instances, the seeking out and engagement with ISocs (or MSAs) were tied to the vulnerabilities the Muslim students (of all genders) experienced given anti-Muslim hostilities.

Indeed, the creation and seeking of space is not limited to Muslims at university (see Literature review sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 for further details), however the need for spaces at universities is vital, particularly for Muslim women, as the NUS report (2018) on Muslim students' experiences revealed that anxiety levels amongst female students were high—particularly amongst visibly Muslim women. Housee's efforts to create safe spaces within the classroom (2010a; 2012) and beyond (2010b) further attest to how valuable they can be, particularly given her view to ensure such spaces permit the cultivation of critical consciousness, for which she underscores the need for informality as per her participants needs vis-a-vis the comfort and security to speak freely (2010b). In fact, Possamai et al (2016), although exploring Muslim student experiences in an Australian context, also support the provision of safe spaces—or spaces of care and/or comfort—for Muslim students. As such, the Sisters' Circle has been an interesting case given the nature of its existence; as Chapters 4 and 5 have shown, the manner in which it functioned is quite reflective of the needs outlined by Housee's (2010b) participants vis-a-vis the kind of space they desired, as well as bell hooks' (2015) conceptualisation of the homeplace, where women affirm one another, and hold space for the development of critical consciousness. This will be unpacked further in the upcoming

section, which will work towards answering RQ2, as well as offering a reflection on further considerations regarding this study.

### **6.2.2 Addressing RQ2: micro-resistance**

As with the previous section, this segment of the discussion will begin with reiterating RQ2:

*How do Muslim women as part of the Sisters' Circle resist ideologies that position them as Other in racial and/or gender hierarchies?*

Chapter 5 endeavoured to tackle this question through exploring micro-resistances, from which three forms of resistances emerged:

1. Resistance through humour: this constituted subversion and/or invalidation of discourses of Otherness using humour.
2. Assertion of refusal: as implied in the description, this involved the assertion of refusal as a tool to reject the ways in which Muslim women are Othered, which included a refusal of the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood and White Feminism.
3. Space invading: this refers to the process of bodies positioned as 'space invaders' (as per Puwar (2004)) physically occupying and subsequently disrupting spaces that are otherwise reserved for the somatic norm (and disrupting the somatic norm itself). It thus follows on from the previous point vis-a-vis asserting refusal against the gendered construction of 'male' as the somatic norm within a Muslim non-gender specific space that is physically proximal to gender-specific prayer spaces.

As such, a summarised response to this question would be that the Sisters' Circle resisted ideologies positioning them as Other in racial and/or gender hierarchies through micro-resistances, which—as defined in Chapter 5 (section 5.1, p163)—encapsulates “*forms of everyday resistance enacted at a micro-level, where the motive is (...) geared towards a discursive 'undoing' of Otherness as opposed to causing seismic shifts at the epicentre of Othering.*”

An important aspect of the micro-resistance that has manifested in this study, which has not been incorporated in the above explanation, is that the resistance is not externalised insofar as the Sisters' Circle's resistance is not directly 'exposed' to the social actors, systems, institutions, or structures that espouse discriminatory ideologies. That is, the micro-resistances,

particularly with regards to the discursive ‘undoing’ of Otherness, is predominantly performed within the confines of the Sister’s Circle, such that their (our) resistance is not explicitly or outwardly actioned in a way, a space or time for it to be explicitly seen, heard, or immediately or directly felt by the forces being resisted—although this does not entirely hold truth for the micro-resistance in section 5.4 where the SC subtly disrupts the somatic norm of the meeting room in the prayer building. Evans and Moore (2015) acknowledge the everyday-ness of such embodiments of resistance as they refuse to limit resistance to externalised, active acts. They posit that resistance need not be outwardly visible to be recognised. Within their study, they interviewed people of colour (PoC) on their experiences of navigating White institutional spaces to find that PoC regularly engaged in everyday resistances, which they, too, labelled ‘micro-resistance’. They note that (ibid: p441):

*“...people of color in white institutional spaces negotiate their responses to racist institutional practices in such a way that creates avenues to resist racist objectification and degradation and emotionally protect themselves from the damaging consequences of racism.”*

This emotional protection as per Evans and Moore’s research is ostensibly sought by everyday actions such as pretending not to have heard a racist remark, for example, as the aim of resistance becomes “to resist and reject the emotional injury of white racism” (p447). As such, although their study does not focus on resistance embodied within separatist, ‘safe’ spaces, they nonetheless showcase how micro-level, less overt or outward resistances exist as micro-resistances, which works to create a space for refusal, self-affirmation and validation of the self—which can also be seen in the present study (as seen in Chapter 5).

Similar to Evans and Moore’s (ibid) attempts to reconfigure the defining parameters of ‘resistance’, El-Khoury (2012) also rejects the outwardly, organised actions as sole determinants of ‘resistance’. On the contrary, she argues that Black people’s “resistances to oppressions are ‘revolutions of everyday life’. They are silent non-compliance, acts of empowerment, non-coordinated collective ideas, and autonomy that do not necessarily have to create a new order. They are unorganized routine everyday forms of resistance” (p87). While El-Khoury, focuses on how such everyday resistances are individually performed, the essence of the everydayness, unorganized, and non-confronting nature of such resistance once again reflects the micro-resistance seen in the present study insofar as the Sisters’ Circle do not outwardly perform actions, nor are they engaged in organized, active resistance. In fact, El-

Khoury (ibid) positions rejection as an important facet to such forms of everyday resistances; for the participants in her study, it constituted a rejection of “the imposed criminal identity”, a pervasive stereotype levied against Black people—particularly Black men—widespread in Europe and North America. The essence of rejection as an element of everyday resistances is similarly reflected through assertions of refusal in Chapter 5 of this study. While sections 5.3 and 5.4 showcase refusal more explicitly, the focus on humour as a method of subversion in section 5.2 does not preclude the grounding of refusal as a constituent of the micro-resistance that occurs. That is, grounded within the analytical focus on subversion tactics through humour is refusal—a refusal to accept Donald Trump as a respectable, viable President of the United States (see excerpt 5.1); refusal to view ISIS as an expression of Islam, along with a refusal toward an effort of predation on ISoc sisters via the Facebook group (see excerpts 5.2.1-5.2.4); a refusal of the terrorist stereotype imposed on Muslims (see excerpt 5.3); and a refusal of the positioning of Muslims as a suspect community (see excerpts 5.4.1-5.4.2). As the chapter progresses, the assertions of refusals extend toward the following: the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood, White feminism, and a refusal of the gendered somatic norm within the ISoc prayer building vis-a-vis the Sisters’ Circle’s rights to the meeting room in line with their (our) meeting booking times.

As such, the two main components of micro-resistance that point to how the SC resist ideologies that position them as Other in racial and/or gendered hierarchies have manifested through: refusal, and safe spaces—or rather, small spaces of care/comfort. Before discussing these further, it would be pertinent to first outline the ideologies in question that functioned to position the SC as Other in racial or gendered hierarchies; to begin with, given the ties between Orientalism, Islamophobia and White Feminism (cf. Literature Review, section 2.2), Orientalism is foundational to the Othering experienced by the group. Thus, with the Islamophobic micro-aggressions experienced at the store by Maryam, on public transport by Nazia, or by Sumaya through her colleague questioning Muslim womanhood in relation to wearing a headscarf, Orientalism is at the heart of the SC’s experiences informing the subsequent micro-resistance—and minority angst. In addition, the need for intersectionality is highlighted through these very micro-resistances by the SC as Chapter 5 as a whole demonstrates that while there are gendered issues within the space of the ISoc’s prayer building (see section 5.4), the Othering the SC face is multifaceted. It does exist within the boundaries of Muslim communities, yes; however, it also exists through racist, Islamophobic discourse and structures. The preceding chapter on minority angst demonstrates this fact as the sources of

angst for the SC is heavily concentrated on right-wing populism, an increasingly Islamophobic socio-political climate, and subsequent uncertainty regarding the future and gendered Islamophobia. Furthermore, with respect to minority angst, the fact that the hijabi sisters were the ones to draw links to the socio-political climate (specifically Trump's election) and the angst about being visibly Muslim for wearing a headscarf further demonstrates that the dimensions of minority angst differ within the SC itself; that is, the minority angst experienced through wearing a headscarf is not something that I—and the other non-hijab wearing sisters—expressed, indicating that the angst across the group is not uniform. The focus of this study is not to dissect the mechanics of these oppressions—this research operates from a position of acceptance that these forms of discrimination, as outlined in the literature review, *do* exist. The aim has thus been to interrogate how the Sisters' Circle move and work through such realities. To identify the margins of Othering is, nonetheless, beneficial and necessary in unpacking the minority angst and micro-resistance that has manifested in this study. Having done so, this chapter will now proceed to further consider refusal and safe space.

As touched on in the literature review, bell hooks' (2015) rumination on the home place as a site for resistance for Black women offers a valuable reflection on how the SC functions through creating a space for self-affirmation, comfort, and cultivating critical consciousness. These elements can be seen with respect to the SC as the group (we) navigated the socio-political plane, particularly through sharing our anxieties about the future; to share angst and co-construct uncertainty becomes, as per Ochs and Capps (2001), a "tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life" (p2). And it is this collaborative reflection, and navigating "their place in the general scheme of life" that creates the space for empathy, intersubjectivity, and mutual support through *understanding* and recognizing each other's anxieties. Furthermore, the cultivation of critical consciousness can be seen through the recognition of the forces that Other, and the discursive undoing of these forces and/or of Otherness through refusal and the use of humour. The rejection of Orientalist and White/liberal Feminist positionalities/praxis (see section 5.3), for example, not only represents micro-resistance amongst the SC—it nurtures the voice(s) of dissent against the forces that Other Muslim women in a myriad of ways. This can, in turn, feed into resistance work beyond the SC space, and can also serve as restorative work in relation to the Othering that occurred/occurs outside that space (ibid)—which can be healing. In addition to this cultivation of critical consciousness, along with the recognition and understanding of each other's anxieties, the use of humour in particular can also serve to be healing, as it allows for

the mitigation of the seriousness and severity of Othering, and generates solidarity (Sorensen, 2008). Furthermore, the element of laughter that comes with humour affords some stress relief (Hylton, 2018), which further attests to the ways in which humour can be healing.

To thus return to the concept of safe spaces, and the nature of bell hooks' (2015) homeplace, it is an important facet of Black feminist resistance, which Patricia Hill Collins (1990) offers further insight into through discussing how safe spaces have contributed to Black feminist thought. In line with Evans and Moore's (2015) findings where their participants engaged in micro-resistance through self-affirming acts, and rejecting—thereby protecting themselves from—the emotional injury of whiteness, Collins (1990) offers some nuance as to how the everydayness of daily interaction, whether serious or through humour, allows for African American women to “affirm one another's humanity, specialness and right to exist” (p102), thereby grounding a shared recognition of who they are in the world. As per Collins (ibid), the creation of safe spaces allows U.S. Black women to resist oppression, as the carving out of such spaces provides the scope for refusal and self-definition. This is vital as “self-definition speaks to the power dynamics involved in rejecting externally defined, controlling images of Black womanhood” (p114). Although the dynamics, framework, and politics of existence and Otherness for the Sisters' Circle are entirely different (as none of the SC members are Black women, and this is a British context), the space within the SC enabled similar functions insofar as the sisters were able to perform self-definition through rejecting the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood, White feminism, and the politics of gendered spatialities within the ISoc prayer space. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the serious interactions (as seen in the expressions of minority angst and assertions of refusal) along with the humour (as seen in section 5.2) demonstrates the SC's affirmations of each other's humanity, and allowed for our concerns and opinions to be seen and heard amongst one another, thereby producing a shared recognition of who we are. In fact, the humour and distillation of worries can be said to contribute to a rejection of any potential for emotional injuries at the hands of the forces of Othering. The cumulative effect of this additionally work allows for the cultivation of critical consciousness, as the politics of our existence within the SC as Muslim women was collectively reflected upon. To thus circle back to the capacity for healing in this space, tensions of discrimination and right-wing populism are undercut using humour, and by collectively working through and making sense of the tensions of Otherness and socio-politics, voicing concerns about the future, and the refusal of external constructions of Muslim

womanhood via gendered Islamophobia and Orientalism, the subsequent scope for minimising potential emotional injury can in itself be form of healing.

The importance safe spaces play in the development and embodiment of resistance is further underscored by Byng (1998) in her study where she interviewed 20 African American Muslim women on their experiences with discrimination based on race and religion. She found that “...resistance develops from within safe social spaces and allows the oppressed to maintain a humanist vision” (p482). In fact, she draws from Patricia Hill Collins in positing that safe space where marginalised and oppressed people can find their voice is a condition for cultivating and *doing* resistance as they “provide a place for self-definition” (p482). In a setting that somewhat mirrors the SC space of the present study, Bhimji’s (2009) research on British Muslim women’s experiences of identity and agency in religious spheres furthers the notion of the importance of safe space as she proposes that they function as ‘counter publics’. Through discussing media discourse and socio-political figures supporting or not supporting Muslims, “the public sphere and private sphere come together” to form these counter publics “where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (ibid: p371). This is directly reflected in the SC’s micro-resistance, particularly in terms of formulating oppositional viewpoints. For example, the interactions on feminism (in section 5.3) demonstrated the Sisters’ Circle’s refusal of imposed White positionalities to assert the need for a more intersectional approach to feminism. This was also highlighted in the refusal of the Orientalisation of Muslim womanhood. The use of humour in section 5.2 also showcased examples of a dedicated effort to oppose external constructions of Muslimness, while in section 5.4 the SC disrupted the gendered hierarchy of the ISoc prayer building via ‘space invading’, thereby employing an oppositional interpretation of spatial gender norms. This latter finding is also reflected in Bhimji’s (2009) study as she states: “These women have feminized male dominated spaces such as the mosque” (p317).

In terms of an academic context, Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) point to the need for spaces dedicated to Muslim students on American University campuses to cater to their spiritual needs, as well as offering a place of safety given the students’ cognisance of Otherness. And as highlighted by Housee (2010b; see sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5), the classroom does not suffice as ‘safe’ enough for full self-expression. As such, the SC in this study demonstrates how small, private spaces allow for the safety that in turn allows for the distillation of worries, anxieties, cultivation of critical consciousness, and ultimately micro-resistance as it creates the

environment for micro-resistant work, such as discursively undoing Otherness through subversion tactics and refusal.

In summary, while Chapter 5 showcased at a micro-level how ideologies positioning the Sisters' Circle as Other in racial and/or gender hierarchies were resisted via humour, asserting refusal and 'space-invading', refusal and 'safe' space (or small spaces of care/comfort) are the two main facets of, or perhaps the foundational elements to cultivate micro-resistance within this study. This discussion will now turn to observe further considerations for this research, and some limitations.

### ***6.2.3 Further reflections and limitations***

While the two main themes of this research, minority angst and micro-resistance, have been analysed and discussed in detail, other themes have arisen that require further interrogation. Firstly, the notion of healing is a big topic that remains superficially interrogated within the analysis and discussion, though it has been touched on briefly vis-à-vis the functions of humour and safe spaces (or small spaces of care/comfort). This is primarily because it is beyond the scope of this study insofar as the markings, functioning, and processes of healing—and what healing is supposed to look like—have not been directly probed or examined as it was not the main focus of this study. It is important to note this as healing as a topic in and of itself is vast. The ways in which healing occurs and healing work itself are both diverse that require extensive, dedicated focus to examine and draw conclusions from. This holds significance given that intersecting identities produce varying forms and depths of oppression, which means the make-up of healing cannot be uniform. Thus, while some aspects of this study point to the possibility of a presence of healing, to truly consider if and how it manifests, and in what ways it is sought or processed (intentionally or not), would require further study.

Although minority angst *has* been focused on, this study, nonetheless, points to a need for further investigation on how socio-political discourse and events, Islamophobia, oppression, and microaggressions affect Muslim women's mental health—with a need to dedicate research space for Muslim women at British universities. Moreover, the effects of cognisance of Otherness in particular require thorough inspection as this study has merely identified that it exists, and that it occurs mutually with minority angst; however, the depths of its existence, and further insight into how it affects the ways Muslim women move through the world in their daily lives, and how it affects their health require further attention.



In terms of reflections in relation to the broader picture, I considered the ways in which my position as both, research and participant blurs the line of the researcher/participant or observer/observed that is seen through Orientalist praxis vis-à-vis the Occidental ‘observing’ the mysterious Oriental (Said, 2003; see Methodology, sections 3.2 and 3.4). To thus approach this study reflexively, with an eye towards rejecting Orientalist academic practice, the foundational aim of this study has not been to investigate a mysterious Other out of intrigue to understand their existence, physique, habits, values, actions and so forth; rather, the motive has been to understand how certain aspects of reality—as made relevant by the SC—are navigated given the long drawn history of Orientalism, Islamophobia and its impacts on this group of women (a group that I, too, am a part of).

With this in mind, while Orientalism may not be indicated or manifest within the interactional data as an immediately present and explicit phenomenon, this study does, nonetheless, showcase the everydayness of Orientalism and how it intertwines in the socio-political world and the everyday life events and experiences that the SC respond to. For example, at a grander scale, the right wing rhetoric prevalent behind the vote for Brexit, Donald Trump’s election and the ‘Muslim ban’ in the US that ensued are indicative of the ways in which Muslims have been (historically) constructed as a threat to the West (Said, 1998), which has subsequently influenced policy (see Literature Review, section 2.3), and hostile border politics. In fact, this is what Alia and her parents in particular are concerned about in Excerpt 4.10 (Chapter 4) with regards to her visit to the US for her electives, which, in turn, is causing her (and her family) to consider temporarily removing the hijab. Indeed, when the time came to her electives, she did remove the headscarf as a matter of precaution and safety.

Furthermore, the minority angst the SC thus experiences, the uncertainty and concern for the future with the cognisance of Otherness—these attest to the ways in which Orientalism has functioned across the political plane, where Islamophobia is manifest at all levels socio-politically, and the way it is affecting the SC in terms of how political events will adversely affect the future. This also includes micro-resistance; for example, mocking Donald Trump as a credible politician (Excerpt 5.1, Chapter 5), mocking the terrorist stereotyping of Muslims (Excerpts 5.2.3 and 5.3, Chapter 5), and re-purposing Islamophobia as a ‘perk’ that gives visibly Muslim women more space on public transport (5.4.1)—essentially, all of these micro-resistances work to subvert and/or invalidate Orientalist tropes positioning Muslims as the uncivilised, barbaric threats to the West. Considering another dimension to Orientalism, gendered Orientalism, the experiences the SC have had with White/liberal Feminism, and the

attempts to thus define ‘feminism’ (see section 5.3, Chapter 5) showcases how feminism and Orientalism intertwine to Other Muslim women (Yegenoglu, 1998; Lewis, 2013), which the SC assert refusal against. Therefore, the efforts to define feminism (see Excerpts 5.6 and 5.7, Chapter 5) indicates that not all members of the SC have the language to define or describe how it could benefit them.

To further consider micro-resistance, resistance in and of itself is not unique to this specific group of Muslim women (the Sisters’ Circle) in the given socio-political context, or Muslims more broadly. As the understanding of micro-resistance in this study is in alignment with Evans and Moore’s (2015) view of micro-resistance serving as emotional protection from the damaging consequences of racism (see section 6.2.2), along with Rossing’s (2015) view of humour as a form of resistance that allows for the disarticulation and rearticulation of discourses that Other (see section 5.2), there is something to be said with regards to the function of resistance and its grounding in an objective to confront, dislodge and disrupt discourses, ideologies, actions and structures that oppress and Other. However, it is also worth considering that different conditions may yield different forms of resistance in terms of the nature in which resistance is expressed and manifest.

For example, Evans and Moore (2015), as mentioned above, considered the ways in which People of Colour (PoC) resist Whiteness in elite law schools and the commercial aviation industry to find that PoC often chose *not* to engage in a discursive undoing or challenging of racial oppression as an emotional strategy. This ultimately served as a mechanism for emotional protection, in other words, to protect themselves from the emotional labour of engaging in such discussions and actions, which in turn enabled them to benefit from the resources white institutions offered. It is important to note that the decision to not engage was not grounded in the desire to attain professional success holding greater value than the importance of anti-racism; rather, it was a conscious decision by Evans and Moore’s participants as a way of protecting themselves from the burden of having to do the additional work of challenging racial oppression in tandem with an already demanding profession. In a similar vein, Davis (2017) considered Black women’s communicative resistance within the spheres of education, workplaces and personal relationships to find that while they do engage in resistance discourse in varying ways dependent on the sphere through which they are moving through, in some instances they chose not to resist institutional systems of oppression as a survival strategy in a hostile environment. Alternatively, Martinussen et al (2019) found that women in a New Zealand context considered friendship as a place of ease and refuge, which somewhat serves as

a form of emotional protection from the harms of Othering. While the women making up the participants were majority Pākēha (New Zealand European), there is still some food for thought here in terms of how gendered marginality is navigated (or perhaps mitigated). Van Laer and Janessen (2016) considered second-generation professionals of Turkish or ‘Maghrebi’ (Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian) descent and their struggles with navigating identity, career and social change to find that the resistance employed by their participants was imbued with contradiction. The attempts to place workplace identities above their ethnic, racial or cultural identities in order to fit in with the mould of the ‘normal employee’ involved “adapting to majority norms through suppressing difference” (p 211), while “redefining the stereotypical meanings attributed to ethnic identities” unintentionally, or inadvertently involved “compliance to the idea of traditional ethnic binaries constructing ethnic groups as fundamentally different, which forms the basis of the majority’s position of power” (ibid, p211). I would, however, argue that while Van Laer and Janessen (ibid) demonstrate the complexities of resistance, redefinition and with that—affirming ethnic difference does not necessarily bolster majority’s position of power; rather, I suggest that it has the capacity to dislodge the normativity of whiteness, as well as confronting ignorance (vis-à-vis the challenging of stereotypes). El-Bialy and Mulay (2020) also find the prevalence of resistance through challenging discourse in their study looking at how resettled refugees and asylum seekers (from Europe, Latin America and Africa) in Canada navigate the process of resettlement, finding that their participants actively worked to reject victimhood.

Considering the various ways in which resistance has been embodied from different minority or marginalized perspectives outlined above, one may deduce that specific conditions and environments—which also includes the historical trajectories of oppressions in conjunction with present-day oppressions of minority or marginalized subjects—may yield different forms of resistance in response to different forms and manifestations of othering.

Another point to consider in terms of this research is the use of the term ‘safe space’; this is primarily due to the fact that during the course of writing this thesis, it has transpired as a term of contention—which is why the alternate ‘small spaces of care and/or comfort’ has accompanied its use. The contention is grounded in the notion of what ‘safety’ looks like, and for whom. To interrogate this further, I will point to a quote by Collins (1990: p246-247) on why the ‘safety’ in safe spaces have been questioned within the Black feminist movement:

*“...the existence of these spaces does not mean that ugliness does not occur in safe spaces. As Black lesbians point out, safe spaces are safer for some than for others. Moreover, what quickly becomes apparent is that these internal processes of self-definition cannot continue indefinitely without engaging in relationships with other groups. (...) For example, it’s not enough to see that “Nigerian and U.S. Black women have been victimized” and to build an alliance solely on the foundation of shared victimization. The reality is that while Black women’s victimization in these two settings may be similar, it is not the same. Instead, coalitions are built via recognition of one’s own group position and seeing how the social location of groups has been constructed in conjunction with one another.”*

Pointing to the intersectionality of existence and experience, the parameters of ‘safety’ are respectively complex. Safety in accordance with certain margins of oppression—such as female and Muslim, for example—does not equate to safety for all Muslim women. And to belong to a particular kind of social grouping does not yield uniformity in the needs for safety; as Collins (ibid) states, shared victimization alone does not suffice. The ways in which heterosexual Muslim women, and Muslim women belonging to LGBTQ+ communities experience oppression differ; the ways in which Black Muslim women and non-Black Muslim women experience oppression differ—and it is particularly important to point this out as the oppressors of Black Muslim women, and Muslim womxn belonging to LGBTQ+ communities include cisgender heterosexual Muslim women (see Aceves, 2010; Khan, 2018). Therefore, the needs of each sub-group vis-a-vis accommodating ‘safety’ in safe spaces will differ considerably.

This brings the discussion to the limitations of this research, which also ties in with the use of Black Feminist thought throughout this study when neither I, or any of the members of the Sisters’ Circle, are Black women. Much of the scholarship this thesis has been inspired by and functions from—scholarship that I, too, as a researcher and woman of marginality have learnt from—is Black Feminism. This includes intersectionality as a theory and praxis rooted in Black women’s struggles, praxis and intellectual development. The fact, then, that there is no representation of Black Muslim women in this study, or of Muslims from LGBTQ+ communities, points to a shortcoming on two accounts: firstly, with respect to this study, there is a failure to represent a broader spectrum of diversity within the Muslim community, and thus a greater insight into the intersections of oppression within Muslim communities vis-a-vis minority angst and micro-resistance; secondly, given that this study focused on the SC from a

university's ISoc without making any attempts to influence its makeup to cater to the research, the lack of representation speaks to a failure of inclusion by the ISoc and SC.

To begin with addressing the first point regarding the use of Black Feminist thought and the failure to represent diversity in this research—this is a lesson to take forward for future studies with regards to how ‘safety’ is viewed and understood when carrying out research on Muslim women, particularly in relation to safe spaces. This is important to note as the oppressions that occur within Muslim communities are not solely based on gender; race, class and sexuality are also intersections where discrimination resides, which has not been reflected in this study in terms of discrimination *within* Muslim communities. As an academic, the gap between ‘objective’ scholarly work vis-a-vis engaging with literature, and praxis in terms of ‘doing’ science requires bridging. In that sense, to cite and use Black Feminists in a research devoid of Black Muslim women in the make-up of its participants puts this study at a risk of mirroring anti-Blackness present within Muslim communities. With this in mind, there is a need to: a) further question whose safety is prioritised and protected within Muslim spaces; b) consider how non-Black Muslim WoC carrying out research using intersectionality and Black Feminism shape research objectives; and c) to ensure that Black and Black Muslim women’s struggles are not co-opted when analysing and framing the oppressions non-Black Muslim women, or non-Black women of colour face. That being said, there is a need to emphasise that the intention of using Black Feminist thought and intersectionality in this study is not to equate the struggles, barriers, and oppressions faced by Black and Black Muslim women with non-Black Muslim women—they can never be alike. Rather, Black—and intersectional—Feminisms offer a more nuanced understanding of how oppressions that are more complex than gender disparities manifest, particularly given that White Feminism is a reductive tool when considering the struggles of Muslim women. Intersectional Feminism, its Black legacy, and indeed Black Feminism, therefore, offer a nuanced lens through which to consider the existence and experiences of non-Black Muslim women where White Feminism fails to do so. This study is therefore indebted to Black Feminist thought.

In terms of the second point vis-a-vis a lack of representation within the ISoc and subsequently the SC—this is a point for universities and their respective Islamic Societies to consider in terms of accommodating Muslim students and their needs. Indeed, these failures to accommodate students beyond the majority representations of non-Black and heterosexual Muslims, when considering safe spaces, it begs the question—safe for *who*? This is a vital question to ask given that along with a lack of representation at the intersections of race and

sexuality, the SC was entirely made up of Sunni Muslims—the majority sect of Islam. Minority sects of Islam, such as Shi’a and Ahmedi Muslims, remained largely invisibilized within the ISoc, despite their presence in the broader student body. Thus, in addition with addressing race and sexuality, there is also a need to consider the ways in which the exclusion of Muslims of minority sects can be prevented and prohibited, and/or how universities can ensure the provision of safe spaces—and thus safety—for Muslims of differing marginalities. In fact, this study arguably shows that the provision of safe spaces can benefit people of varying marginalities more broadly (Muslim or not)—particularly with regards to minority angst—as van der Kolk (2015: p79) suggests that “social support is the most powerful protection against becoming overwhelmed by stress and trauma”. This social support, he states is (p79, original emphasis):

*“...not the same as merely being in the presence of others. The critical issue reciprocity: being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else’s mind and heart. For our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow we need a visceral feeling of safety”*

Having considered the RQs, themes that need expanding in future, and some limitations, this chapter will now turn to methodological considerations for this research.

### **6.3 Methodological Considerations**

Methodologically, this chapter observed the ways in which minority angst transpired in non-goal oriented explanatory sequences as narratives (Ochs and Capps, 2001), which had embedded within them argumentations that cumulatively built towards making discursive points. In effect, it was found that the Sisters’ Circle commonly engaged in sense-making processes to comprehend a post-Brexit and post-Trump socio-political reality. Certain elements as part of this sense-making process highlighted specific forms of affective responses that demonstrated concerns over the socio-political environment, and the future. These include: psychological responses (as per Ochs and Capps’ (2001) explanatory sequence model), and pointing to negative realised outcomes as well as negative hypothetical outcomes. In each instance, the interaction orbited a specific problematic event, which corroborates Capps and Ochs (1995: p16) view on conversational narratives where:

*“The plot structure of stories centers on a problematic event, which is temporally and causally linked to a circumstantial setting and which anticipates and causes psychological and behavioral responses”.*

While not all of the interactions were ‘stories’ per se, they demonstrate narratives vis-à-vis commentary on socio-political events centring problematic events that often catalysed concern for how the future socio-political landscape will unfold (see Methodology, section 3.2.4 vis-à-vis sense-making as narratives). However, this study found that in some cases, the problematic events were not only temporally and causally tied to specific circumstantial settings—in some instances, these facets were identical. In other words, the problematic events and the circumstantial settings were one and the same, as opposed to being two separate narrative entities. For example, in Argumentation sequence 4.1 (Chapter 4, section 4.2), Donald Trump’s election serves as the problematic event, which the Sisters’ Circle consider in elucidating how his election might influence European political trajectories. However, it simultaneously represents an element of the circumstantial setting in which the Sisters’ Circle’s discussion takes place insofar as the decision to make sense of the post-Trump socio-political terrain is driven *by* the fact that Trump had been elected. The margins of narrative elements are therefore not as definitively set; they proved to overlap in this study.

This point also became increasingly apparent with the use of multiple analytical tools when considering the data. Firstly, displaying the interactions in a transcript informed by the Jeffersonian style brought to surface interactional nuances, such as enunciated words that, in some cases, benefitted the production of analytical points (e.g. see Excerpt 4.10 in Chapter 4, or Excerpt 5.5 in Chapter 5) with respect to identifying the manifestation of minority angst, for example. It also aided the showcasing of conversational flow by displaying certain elements such as overlapping talk, which would not be fully viewable through argumentation sequences alone. Secondly, to break down and display the interactions and narratives as argumentation sequences allowed for ease of fragmentation of the everyday narratives being analysed, which in turn assisted the identification of the different narrative elements as part of Ochs and Capps’ (2001) non-goal oriented explanatory sequence model. These elements were thus adaptable to different types of interactions where context-specific narrative elements were more easily identifiable—such as locus of refusal, which has not been included in Ochs and Capps’ (ibid) original model. Finally, the use of my personal ethnographic knowledge (as an SC insider) and reflection enhanced the findings insofar as it created the space and capacity for the development of how micro-resistance manifested in Chapter 5 (see section 5.4). From the use of humour and

asserting refusal to merging the two to engage in ‘space-invading’—inserting my ethnographic knowledge and reflection enabled the evidencing of the dynamic nature of micro-resistance in the context of the SC, as well as adding some nuance to the intersectionality of Othering Muslim women face (in other words, showcasing how Othering occurs within the ISoc prayer space on the basis of gender). Therefore, adopting an integrated qualitative approach through using more than one analytical tool yielded a more well-rounded, in-depth and holistic view of the data and subsequent answering of the RQs.

Furthermore, the identification of two sense-making tools were made possible due to the depth of analysis of interactional and narrative flow this approach permitted. These tools were ‘informational funnelling’, and ‘reverse engineering’ (see Chapter 4). While the former is relatively more mundane, the latter in particular played a significant role in elucidating how the SC were processing minority angst. This is significant as the non-goal oriented explanatory sequence proposed by Ochs and Capps (2001) does not specifically account for sense-making work, which contrastingly proved to be critical in the SC’s narrative work in unpacking the current and possible future socio-political climate(s). In fact, although it was not explicitly accounted for, it can be argued that much of Ochs and Capps’ explanatory sequencing in relation to this study *constitutes* sense-making as it inherently involves the interactional action of explaining events where problematic or unexpected incidents occur (ibid). As such, I contend that reverse engineering as a constituent of everyday explanatory narratives requires further study as Ochs and Capps’ approach proved to hold additional elements that have not been commented on or examined within the original model. While they do account for (non-linear) temporal shifts from the past, present, and future—the notion of reverse engineering as a narrative mechanism is not specifically mentioned. To that extent, further research would also constitute opening the boundaries of what is deemed a ‘narrative’; in other words, it would entail the recognition of sense-making *as* narratives (see Methodology, section 3.2.4), and thus further research into sense-making work more specifically would be beneficial in adding to the explanatory sequence model Ochs and Capps (ibid) have put forward. However, another side of the argument must then be noted in that given that ‘reverse-engineering’ has been recognised as part of a sense-making narrative process, specifically with regards to projecting uncertainties regarding the future or negative realised outcomes, the specificity of the process may not necessarily fit within Ochs and Capps’ (ibid) explanatory sequence model *as part of* the model. For this reason, along with the fact that this study has preliminarily highlighted this tool, further



research into reverse-engineering as a sense-making tool would be beneficial—perhaps with an eye to continue to focus on how minorities navigate socio-politics

With respect to the primary approach this study adopted—van Dijk’s (1984) socio-cognitive approach—the minority angst and cognisance of Otherness that has been found in this study is a start in demonstrating the ways in which van Dijk’s approach works well in exploring the experiences and realities of the marginalised. However, as critiqued in the Methodology chapter (see section 3.2.3), much of the foundation upon which van Dijk’s approach has been built is informed by those *doing* Othering; this is not to negate the importance of van Dijk’s work, however, as mentioned in the Methodology, I once again propose that van Dijk’s (1998) ‘ideological square’ may not necessarily apply to marginalised groups. This square is reiterated below:

- Express/emphasize information that is positive about Us.
- Express/emphasize information that is negative about Them.
- Suppress/de-emphasize information that is positive about Them.
- Suppress/de-emphasize information that is negative about Us.

(van Dijk, 1998: p267)

Taking the SC into account, how would this ideological square fit? Taking the discursive undoing of Otherness as an example, it does not necessarily constitute any of these dimensions of the square, as the undoing, through methods of subversion (humour) and refusal, are more in alignment with *rejecting* information that is negative about us, as opposed to suppressing/de-emphasising such information, or emphasizing anything positive. Similarly, the minority angst that transpired in Chapter 4 with regards to uncertainty and concern for the future, and the fears of existing as visibly Muslim women in particular (see section 4.4 in Chapter 4), the SC are *comprehending* information that Others—where ‘information’ serves as discriminatory rhetoric present in right-wing movements, and Trump’s pre-election campaign specifically. As such, this ideological square is not entirely applicable, and the context and event models van Dijk thus constructs (ibid) would benefit from an insight into the experiences of marginalised people. Therefore, further research into van Dijk’s approach that centres minority voices, with a specific focus on context models, would be beneficial. With this in mind, a key contribution of this study is that it inverts van Dijk’s (1984) lens through which he considers prejudice in discourse whereby people talk *about* and thus construct a negative image of minorities; instead, focusing on a minority group working through ‘minority-ness’ themselves offers further nuance to van

Dijk's approach, which he supported in his assertion that the experiences of minorities can best be researched *by* minorities (ibid).

In terms of the research design, replication of this study may prove to be difficult as the reconstruction of such an environment (the Sisters' Circle) that exists 'organically' may not be fully possible. This is not to say that sisters' circles, or safe spaces of any kind do not exist beyond this research. However, the barriers associated with access to such a space (for researchers) are worth considering, particularly given the amount of distrust prevalent amongst many Muslims due to state policing, and the construction of our communities and people as suspect. In that sense, other approaches—such as interviews or focus groups—may prove to be easier for data collection. On the other hand, it is worth noting that an outcome of this study is a recommendation for the replication of such spaces from a community perspective. That is, the need for and benefits of having safe spaces have been covered thus far in this thesis; in that regard, institutions can benefit their students and their wellbeing by investing in resources to provide such spaces for students of marginality.

#### **6.4 Summary of Chapter and Key Contributions**

To conclude this discussion, in seeking to address the research questions, minority angst and micro-resistance manifested as two dominant themes. To break this down further, I will reiterate how these terms have been conceptualised in this thesis. Firstly, minority angst is considered: *'affective responses regarding concern about the socio-political environment and the future, and a cognisance of Otherness on the premise of an individual or group's minority status'*. The cognisance of Otherness was prevalent amongst the SC (see Chapter 4), which thus led to feelings of uncertainty and concern for the future, particularly in terms of a post-Brexit and Trump reality. In terms of micro-resistance, it has been considered in this thesis as a form of resistance that encapsulates *'forms of everyday resistance enacted at a micro-level, where the motive is (...) geared towards a discursive 'undoing' of Otherness as opposed to causing seismic shifts at the epicentre of Othering'*. This was manifest through humour as a means to subvert and/or invalidate discourses/social actors that Other, asserting refusal, as well as 'space invading' to disrupt the gendered somatic norm in the ISoc prayer building (see Chapter 5).

What has thus proven to be pivotal in the expression of minority angst and micro-resistance is a distillation of experiences and anxieties, sense-making, and micro-resistance work that allows for a discursive undoing of Otherness and cultivating critical consciousness.

And the foundational element in creating the scope for this work to happen is ‘safe’ spaces. However, the political nature of the parameters of ‘safety’ has arguably led to the data being representative of the ‘majority’ sub-groupings within Muslimness on the basis of religious sect, race and sexuality. Considering these points, the key contributions of this study are summarised below:

- The concept and prevalence of ‘minority angst’—through merging the theories of ‘collective angst’ (Wohl et al, 2010) and ‘minority stress’ (Meyer, 1995), a working definition for ‘minority angst’ has been put forward, showcasing the ways in which the SC respond to socio-politics. Minority angst thus manifested through continual sense-making attempts in response to political events (namely Trump’s election, and Brexit), expressing angst and fear about the future, and ultimately projecting uncertainty ahead.
- Cognisance of Otherness—this study also showcases a cognisance of Otherness that the sisters in the SC hold. However, cognisance of Otherness and minority angst transpired to be mutually supportive as it is the awareness of one’s Otherness that catalysed sense-making narratives in response to political events, thereby producing minority angst; and the minority angst in itself indicates the consciousness of Otherness that feeds the need to elucidate the socio-political. On that basis, the fact that the SC invested time and conversational space to make sense of the vote for Brexit and Trump’s election—the latter in particular—is demonstrative of cognisance of Otherness and minority angst existing mutually. Given this mutual functioning of these two factors, this study has also demonstrated the ways in which the political is effectively, and affectively, taken as personal.
- Micro-resistance—this study adds to literature on micro-resistance (Evans and Moore, 2015), showcasing how humour and assertions of refusal can perform resistance work at a micro-level, as well as demonstrating that the SC do not always respond to Otherness with minority angst.
- The benefits of safe spaces—through having a space for the distillation of worries, concerns, anxieties, unpack socio-political events and make sense of them, assert refusal and use humour to discursively ‘undo’ Otherness, these factors point to the benefits of safe spaces for people of marginality. Benefits include: the potential for healing through humour, which can work to lessen the seriousness of certain issues, provide stress relief, and ‘undo’ Otherness through comic subversion and/or invalidation of problematic discourse; further possibility for healing through the act of sharing anxieties with one

another; cultivate critical consciousness through unpacking socio-politics, asserting refusal and essentially resisting problematic discourses to discursively ‘undo’ Otherness; and developing a support network in a backdrop of Islamophobic hostilities in wider society, and patriarchy within. As such, this study has practical implications with regards to how universities can make the campus safer for minority students: through the creation of safe spaces.

- This study also thus contributes to researches on Muslim women, specifically Muslim women at university, showcasing how socio-politics and Otherness are navigated and responded to on their terms.
- Methodologically, this study firstly contributes to the field of Applied Linguistics in showcasing that pushing the boundaries in the undertaking of an integrated methodological approach can allow for an in-depth, micro-level examination of data yielding a more holistic view with respect to the study’s observations. With this in mind, this study contributes in the following ways:
  - In conducting the analysis, ‘reverse-engineering’ as sense-making tool has been identified, which is not present in Ochs and Capps’ (2001) explanatory sequence model. The tool itself entails the process of elucidating a given socio-political phenomenon in terms of the past, present and a subsequent projection made by the SC in this case. However, given that ‘reverse-engineering’ has been recognised as part of a sense-making narrative process, specifically with regards to projecting uncertainties regarding the future or negative realised outcomes, the specificity of the process may not necessarily fit within Ochs and Capps’ (ibid) explanatory sequence *as part of* the model. As such, it is difficult to definitively position this as a contribution to Ochs and Capp’s (ibid) narrative model(s), or sense-making work more broadly. Indeed, as this discussion notes, there is need for further research into reverse-engineering as a tool as this study has preliminarily highlighted its presence.
  - The main methodological contribution this study makes is the inversion of van Dijk’s (1984) socio-cognitive approach by inverting van Dijk’s (1984) research lens through which he considers prejudice in discourse whereby people talk *about* and thus construct a negative image of minorities. Instead, by focusing on a minority group working through ‘minority-ness’ themselves, this study offers further nuance to van Dijk’s approach, which he supported in his assertion that the experiences of minorities can best be researched *by* minorities (ibid).

Furthermore, the absence of minority social-cognition from van Dijk's approach more broadly has been highlighted, as much of his theorisations are based on majorities' talk about minorities—for example, his ideological square (van Dijk, 1998) does not always apply to marginalised groups, particularly when processes of 'undoing' Otherness or sense-making are undertaken.

With this in mind, and considering all that has come to surface in this discussion, this thesis will now turn to the Conclusion chapter for this thesis to summarise key arguments and to consider suggestions and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 7. Thesis summary and suggestions for further research

### 7.1 Thesis Summary

For this final chapter, the research questions (RQ) will be reiterated as a reminder of what this study sought to explore, after which I will proceed to provide an overview of each chapter in order to consider how these questions were answered as per the analysis that has been carried out. I will follow this by reiterating the study's contributions, and further recommendations.

Therefore, to begin with, these are the RQs this study endeavoured to explore:

RQ1: How do Muslim women as part of a British university ISoc's Sisters' Circle interactionally navigate socio-politics and its impact?

RQ2: How do Muslim women as part of the Sisters' Circle resist ideologies that position them as Other in racial and/or gender hierarchies?

In order to answer these RQs, I employed van Dijk's (1984) socio-cognitive discourse approach as set out in his monograph entitled 'Prejudice in Discourse' to invert the lens he applied in examining how majority groups other minorities through talk, to instead consider how minorities *themselves* process othering through talk. This is a position van Dijk supported as he suggested that the centring of minority voices on both sides of a study—as the participant and researcher—are important in order to get an accurate picture of how minorities experience and respond to othering (ibid). As part of the methodological approach, the use of Ochs and Capps' (2001) explanatory sequence model to explicate sense-making as narratives within the interactional data was also employed, along with conversation analysis in an operational sense (insofar as the dialogical data required analysing interaction) and ethnographic reflection.

The overall integrated qualitative approach sought to address three spheres as part of the conceptual framework: discourse in interaction, everyday sense-making narratives, and context. As the former two have been actively excavated in the analysis chapters, the context has first been addressed through the Literature Review in itself as it set the backdrop to the socio-political reality of existing as a Muslim woman in the UK where Islamophobia is prevalent (which includes the historical and theoretical elements that have informed today's world); and second—through my ethnographic reflection.

To thus address the context of the research—Chapter 1 began with outlining the research focus, which was to study the ways in which a Sister’s Circle (SC) of a British university in the North of England navigate socio-politics and Otherness. The socio-political environment upon the commencement of this research was interesting in itself as it commenced in a year where the vote for Brexit and Trump’s election both occurred (2016). The development of the backdrop is then set out in Chapter 2, the Literature Review, which provides an overview of the ways in which Muslims are othered in a British context, tracing it through exploring Said’s (2003) concept of Orientalism, after which feminism was considered as another mechanism of Othering—specifically Western (or White/liberal) Feminism. This was followed with a consideration for alternate feminist positionalities that create the space to think about Muslim womanhood and their (our) realities more critically; firstly, Islamic Feminism was put forward as a response to patriarchal interpretations of religious texts that results in patriarchy within Muslim communities—a patriarchy that Islamic feminists, such as Amina Wadud (1992; 2006) and Asma Barlas (2002), resist against. This was followed by a consideration of intersectionality (and it’s Black Feminist legacy) as a feminist position and theory that allows for a more critical view of the intersection of circumstances and oppressions that feed into the reality of women, which Western (White/liberal) Feminism fails to do. This study has thus adopted an intersectional position in terms of understanding the complex existence of Muslim women, and in turn the SC, to understand that the forces Othering Muslims are not uniform, and thus the experiences of the Othering of Muslim women are not uniform. Through exploring Orientalism and feminism, the chapter then arrived at providing an overview of Islamophobia, and the ways in which it affects Muslims in Britain, along with its psychological impact.

Chapter 3 then presents the methodological approach (as described earlier), after which Chapter 4 commences the analysis. The focus of this chapter is RQ1, specifically the ways in which the SC navigate socio-politics and how it impacts them (us). Given the psychological impact of Islamophobia as outlined in Chapter 2 (see section 2.3.3), which involved feelings of anxiety on the basis of (Islamophobic) socio-political events and carrying an awareness of Otherness (Zempi and Chakrobarti, 2015; Manejwala and Abu Ras, 2019; Chaudhry, 2020), the analysis in Chapter 4 considers the ways in which sense-making of socio-politics produces minority angst. The term ‘minority angst’ has been derived from the convergence of the theory of ‘minority stress’ (Meyer, 1995) and ‘collective angst’ (Wohl et al, 2010) to produce the following definition: *affective responses regarding concern about the socio-political*

*environment and the future, and a cognisance of Otherness on the premise of an individual or group's minority status.*

The analysis in Chapter 4 thus found a prevalence of minority angst; to break this down, the findings are split in two, first in terms of a socio-psychological aspect, and the second in terms of socio-linguistics. With regards to the socio-psychological findings, following the analysis, it was deduced that the very need to employ sense-making to elucidate political events is demonstrative of minority angst as each attempt at making sense of socio-politics is imbued with an air of concern, fear and uncertainty regarding the socio-political climate, and the future. The uncertainty regarding the future was projected through construction of an incomprehensible impending reality (of doom), which involved the contemplation over negative hypothetical outcomes, and expressing angst. There is also evidence that the political is taken as personal, as the sense-making attempts are delivered through the lens of personal narratives in accordance with Ochs and Capps' (2001) conceptualisation of everyday, living narratives, and the subsequent prevalence of psychological responses throughout the interactions further demonstrates angst. Therefore, the amalgamation of the experience of minority angst throughout the chapter, the taking of the political as personal, and the discussions surrounding the prospect of altering one's selfhood through removing the hijab (which involved narrations of the experiences of Muslim women in America known to the SC, as well as Alia sharing her own predicament) suggest that there is a cognisance of Otherness in terms of the sisters' positionality in wider society. With this in mind, through analysis it was found that cognisance of Otherness and minority angst are mutually supportive, as it is the awareness of one's Otherness that catalyses sense-making narratives in response to political events, thereby producing minority angst; and the minority angst itself is indicative of the consciousness of Otherness that feeds the need to elucidate the socio-political.

In terms of the socio-linguistic aspect, two complementary narrative forms of processing aiding the construction of higher-level discourses were found; these are 'reverse-engineering', and 'informational funnelling'. Reverse engineering entails the process of elucidating a given socio-political phenomenon in terms of the past, present and a subsequent projection made by the SC, and informational funnelling is the process of discursive refinement to arrive at a particular point as part of an argumentation sequence. Though these processing forms were not the primary method of analysing the sense-making efforts in the chapter, they do play a significant role in explicating how the SC arrive at specific discursive points.



Next, Chapter 5 sought to explore RQ2, where the mode of resistance was seen through ‘micro-resistance’, drawing from Evans and Moore (2015) in that resistance need not be explicitly or outwardly visible to be recognised. As such, in terms of this study, micro-resistance is seen as resistance work constituting forms of everyday resistance enacted at a micro-level, where the motive is geared towards a discursive ‘undoing’ of Otherness as opposed to causing seismic shifts at the epicentre of Othering. With this in mind, in exploring the ways in which the SC resist Otherness in racial and/or gender hierarchies, this chapter found that micro-resistance work primarily occurred in two forms: through humour, and asserting refusal. Humour was found to repurpose tools of Othering through subversion and invalidation of problematic discourses or occurrences. Specific examples include the terrorist stereotyping Muslims are subjected to, where in one instance it was used as a metaphor to mark the farfetched-ness of the profiling of Muslims as threatening. In a similar vein, the label ‘ISIS’ was re-formulated as an acronym for ‘Islamic Sisters Investigate Secrets’ in response to an act of predation online (on the ISoc’s Facebook group) by a man under the profile name ‘Amy White’. The ISIS acronym was thus used to further ridicule the stereotyping of Muslims, as well as ridiculing the terrorist group itself—which is something the SC explicitly claimed to be doing in defending the use of the ‘ISIS’ acronym through humour. Effectively, the subversion and invalidation of problematic discourse through humour served as a means to turn “oppression upside down” (Sorensen, 2008: p175), allowing the SC to disarticulate and rearticulate discriminatory discourse (Rossing, 2015).

In terms of asserting refusal, the SC primarily rejected aspects of the White/liberal Feminism that Orientalises Muslim women vis-à-vis the choice to cover (i.e. wear the hijab), and how feminism in itself is understood. The two forms of micro-resistance, humour and asserting refusal, were then combined, showcasing how the fusion of verbal micro-resistance with physical refusal worked to resist the disparity of spatial rights in the ISoc prayer building on the margins of gender, where the somatic norm (i.e. maleness) was disrupted through the SC’s space invasion (Puwar, 2004) of the meeting room space in the prayer building. That is, the SC refused to vacate the meeting room on the request of ISoc brothers, and thus remained seated in the room for the duration of their (our) meeting as per our room booking, and one occasion the SC extended the meeting for an additional 23 minutes. The SC thus use the positioning as space invaders to space-invade, as well as discursively positioning men as space invaders encroaching on the Sisters’ Circle meeting space as a means to assert spatial rights (which was achieved using humour).

In essence, the micro-resistance work being done showcases that navigating Otherness—whether in relation to socio-politics or everyday microaggressions—does not necessarily yield angst. The discursive undoing of Otherness through micro-resistance, particularly in terms of humour, can work to lessen sentiments of angst. Furthermore, such practices of micro-resistance not only work to disrupt problematic discourse and structures, it enables the cultivation of critical consciousness that, in turn, allows for the nurturing of voices of dissent—albeit within the confines of the SC. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the examples of micro-resistance showcased within this study demonstrate how the SC develop critical consciousness through the very act of micro-resistance, as well as the collective working through of certain issues (for example, whether ISIS should be joked about, processing instances of Islamophobic avoidance of hijabi women (namely Nazia) on public transport, or attempts at conceptualising feminism as Muslim women), which demonstrates the recognition of the ideological forces that position Muslim women as Other, and further attests to the SC's cognisance of Otherness.

These observations of the SC are discussed further in Chapter 6, which then proceeds to consider further reflections in terms of the importance of safe spaces as it has been recognised as a foundational element in creating the scope for a distillation of experiences and anxieties, sense-making work, and performing micro-resistance in an environment where it is deemed safe enough to do so. Drawing from bell hooks' (2015) concept of the homeplace, certain parallels have been found in terms of how the SC functioned as a space for nurturing one another, empathy, comfort, and cultivating critical consciousness—which is the kind of space Housee (2010b) recognised as a need for Muslim women at university. Tied to this functioning of safe spaces is the notion of healing that was considered in this chapter; the capacity for the discursive undoing of and rejecting discourses of Otherness, as well as the use of humour, also serves as restorative work in relation to the Othering occurring outside the SC space, which can be healing. However, the very notion of 'safety' can be contentious as it requires the question—safe for *who*?

In terms of methodological reflections, using an integrated analytic approach allowed for an in-depth, micro-analytic examination of the SC's interactions, as well as the subsequent recognition of two sense-making tools—'informational funnelling', and 'reverse engineering'. As the former can be seen as a constituent of discursive action vis-à-vis argumentation, the latter in particular is of interest, as it has not been theorised within Ochs and Capps' (2001) explanatory sequence model. While they do account for non-linear temporal shifts within

narrative tellings to construct a logic for the present and future, there is no formalised consideration of reverse engineering as a discursive process within everyday narratives. In terms of van Dijk's (1984) socio-cognitive discourse approach, the limitations of his view of an 'ideological square' (1998) underpinning ideology and the processing of information via the socio-cognitive interface have been highlighted insofar as it fails to account for the positionality of marginalised people. That is, the interactional data from the SC has shown that the four sides of the ideological square are not represented in the SC's navigation of socio-politics and Otherness, which constitute *comprehending* and the *undoing* of 'negative things about us' (ibid), as opposed to suppressing or de-emphasising it.

Considering the observations of this research, this study thus provides an empirical contribution to three domains of academic literature. Primarily, it contributes to the literature on Muslim women—Muslim women at university specifically, which is considered formally under-researched by the NUS (2018). Additionally, the research contributes to socio-psychological studies vis-à-vis the theorising of minority angst, and the psychological implications of (targeted) discrimination against a minority group—namely the impact of Islamophobia in all its forms on Muslim women (which includes everyday microaggressions, and socio-political events). Finally, this study contributes to the field of applied linguistics through pushing the boundaries of merging various analytical tools. With this in mind, I argue that pushing the boundaries has benefitted this study as it allowed for an in-depth, micro-level analysis, the identification of reverse engineering as a sense-making tool, as well as evidencing a limitation to van Dijk's (1998) ideological square. Furthermore, practical implications of this study include further highlighting the benefit of, and need for, safe spaces on university campuses not only for Muslim women—for marginalised groups as a whole. This study showcases how such spaces can benefit a minority with regards to making sense of reality, distilling worries and anxieties with one another, and cultivating critical consciousness.

## **7.2 Suggestions for Future Research**

Considering the analytical observations and subsequent discussion, opportunities for further research have been identified; research into minority angst, the cognisance of Otherness that Muslim women carry, and the impact on the mental health of Muslim women—particularly Muslim women at university—would be beneficial. It is also recommended that such research incorporate a longitudinal study to allow for a broader view of if and how levels of minority

angst fluctuate. Additionally, further examination of micro-resistance through the everyday resistances that Muslims, and Muslim women, engage in, particularly within safe spaces, which will allow for furthering the understanding of how valuable such spaces can be in the cultivation of critical consciousness, and broader (more active) resistance. However, with regards to safe spaces, further research into the politics of oppression and ‘safety’ would be beneficial in terms of gaining further insight into how Muslim communities can ensure safety for groups of marginality within the community on the basis of gender, race, class, Islamic sect and sexuality.

To add to this further work on micro-resistance, another strand of suggested future research is to consider the commonalities or differences of micro-resistance through different groups of minorities—which would, indeed, also require considering the commonalities or differences of the levels and intersections of oppression and othering that is being resisted by these different groups.

Methodologically, reverse engineering as a sense-making tool in explanatory narrative sequences requires further examination, as does van Dijk’s (1984; 1995b; 1998; 2018) socio-cognitive discourse approach vis-à-vis the inclusion of minority voices and positionalities to consider how the conceptualisation of the socio-cognitive interface (and all the associated elements of the socio-cognitive discourse approach, such as the ideological square and context models) can further reflect those being othered, as opposed to those Othering alone.

To thus conclude this thesis, the key contributions (from Chapter 6, section 6.4), are reiterated below:

Firstly, the concept and prevalence of ‘minority angst’—through merging the theories of ‘collective angst’ (Wohl et al, 2010) and ‘minority stress’ (Meyer, 1995), a working definition for ‘minority angst’ has been put forward, showcasing the ways in which the SC respond to socio-politics. Minority angst thus manifested through continual sense-making attempts in response to political events (namely Trump’s election, and Brexit), expressing angst and fear about the future, and ultimately projecting uncertainty ahead. Subsequently, this study also showcases a cognisance of Otherness that the sisters in the SC hold. However, cognisance of Otherness and minority angst transpired to be mutually supportive as it is the awareness of one’s Otherness that catalysed sense-making narratives in response to political events, thereby producing minority angst; and the minority angst in itself indicates the consciousness of Otherness that feeds the need to elucidate the socio-political. On that basis, the fact that the SC invested time and conversational space to make sense of the vote for Brexit and Trump’s

election—the latter in particular—is demonstrative of cognisance of Otherness and minority angst existing mutually. Given this mutual functioning of these two factors, this study has also demonstrated the ways in which the political is effectively, and affectively, taken as personal.

With respect to micro-resistance, this study adds to literature on micro-resistance (Evans and Moore, 2015), showcasing how humour and assertions of refusal can perform resistance work at a micro-level, as well as demonstrating that the SC do not always respond to Otherness with minority angst. Additionally, the benefits of safe spaces (or spaces of care and/or comfort) have also been demonstrated; through having a space for the distillation of worries, concerns, anxieties, unpack socio-political events and make sense of them, assert refusal and use humour to discursively ‘undo’ Otherness, these factors point to the benefits of safe spaces for people of marginality. Benefits include: the potential for healing through humour, which can work to lessen the seriousness of certain issues, provide stress relief, and ‘undo’ Otherness through comic subversion and/or invalidation of problematic discourse; further possibility for healing through the act of sharing anxieties with one another; cultivate critical consciousness through unpacking socio-politics, asserting refusal and essentially resisting problematic discourses to discursively ‘undo’ Otherness; and developing a support network in a backdrop of Islamophobic hostilities in wider society, and patriarchy within. As such, this study has practical implications with regards to how universities can make the campus safer for minority students: through the creation of safe spaces. This study thus also contributes to researches on Muslim women, specifically Muslim women at university, showcasing how socio-politics and Otherness are navigated and responded to on their terms.

Methodologically, this study firstly contributes to the field of Applied Linguistics in showcasing that pushing the boundaries in the undertaking of an integrated methodological approach can allow for an in-depth, micro-level examination of data yielding a more holistic view with respect to the study’s observations. With this in mind, this study contributes in the following ways:

- In conducting the analysis, ‘reverse-engineering’ as sense-making tool has been identified, which is not present in Ochs and Capps’ (2001) explanatory sequence model. The tool itself entails the process of elucidating a given socio-political phenomenon in terms of the past, present and a subsequent projection made by the SC in this case. However, given that ‘reverse-engineering’ has been recognised as part of a sense-making narrative process, specifically with regards to projecting uncertainties regarding the future or negative realised outcomes, the specificity of the process may not

necessarily fit within Ochs and Capps' (ibid) explanatory sequence model *as part of* the model. As such, it is difficult to definitively position this as a contribution to Ochs and Capp's (ibid) narrative model(s), or sense-making work more broadly. Indeed, as this discussion notes, there is need for further research into the reverse-engineering as a tool as this study has preliminarily highlighted its presence.

- The main methodological contribution this study makes is the inversion of van Dijk's (1984) socio-cognitive approach by inverting van Dijk's (1984) research lens through which he considers prejudice in discourse whereby people talk *about* and thus construct a negative image of minorities. Instead, by focusing on a minority group working through 'minority-ness' themselves, this study offers further nuance to van Dijk's approach, which he supported in his assertion that the experiences of minorities can best be researched *by* minorities (ibid). Furthermore, the absence of minority social-cognition from van Dijk's approach more broadly has been highlighted, as much of his theorisations are based on majorities' talk about minorities—for example, his ideological square (van Dijk, 1998) does not always apply to marginalised groups, particularly when processes of 'undoing' Otherness or sense-making are undertaken.

Having considered the observations of this study, and the key contributions, this research, in summary, offers a micro-analytical view of how a group of Muslim women interactionally navigate socio-politics and Otherness through inverting the lens of van Dijk's socio-cognitive discourse approach.

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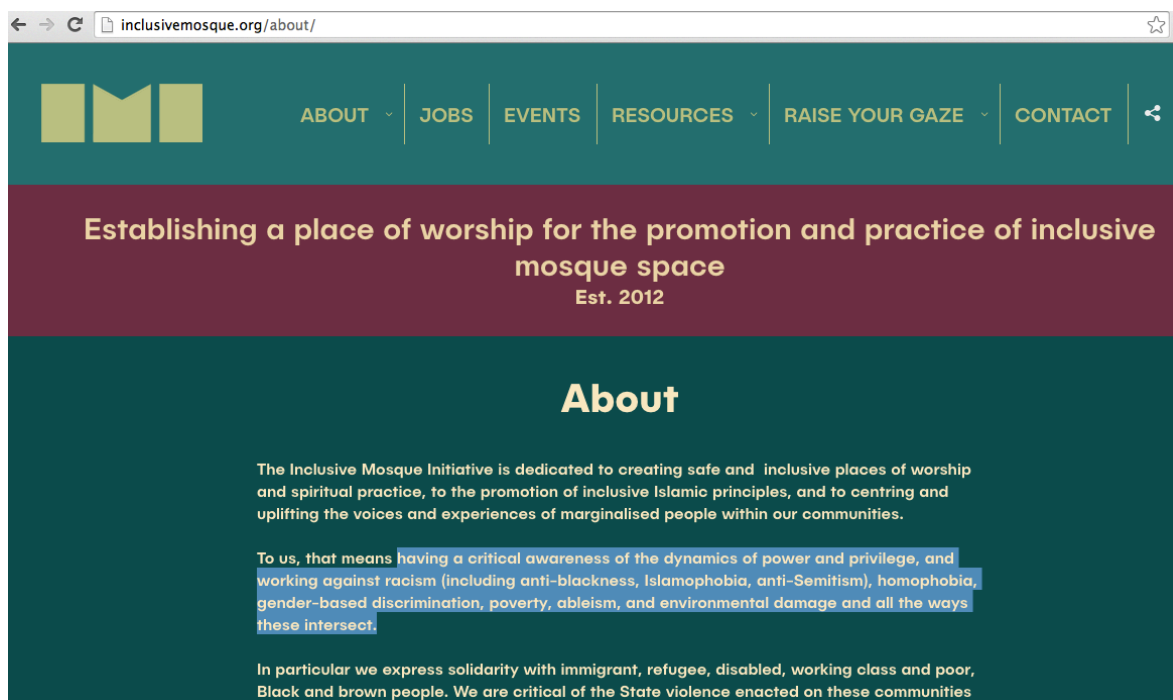
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## Appendix A



- Inclusive Mosque Initiative, 'About' webpage. Available at:  
<<http://inclusivemosque.org/about/>>

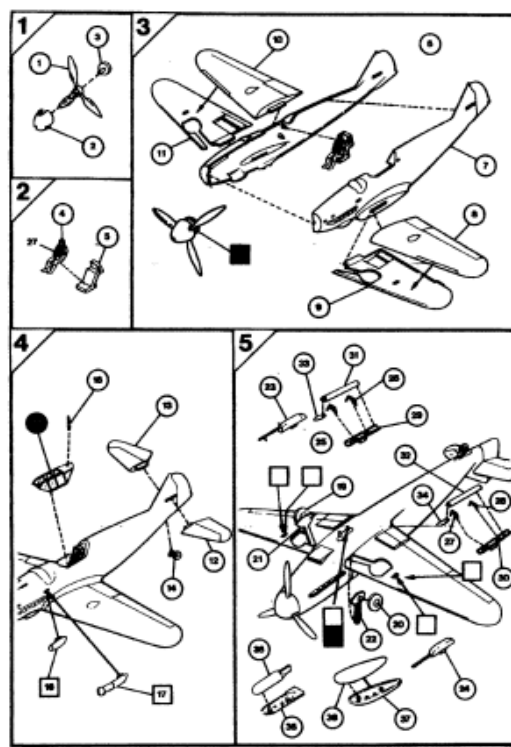


## Appendix B

Figure One<sup>2</sup>



Figure Two<sup>3</sup>



Figures from: Rudrum, D., 2005. From narrative representation to narrative use: Towards the limits of definition. *Narrative*, 13(2), pp.195-204.

## Appendix C

Transcription conventions (informed by Jefferson, 1989),

[ ]	Overlapping talk – beginning marked by: ‘[’, end marked by: ‘]’
=	Contiguous utterances from one speaker to the next
(0.4)	Represents the tenths of a second between utterances (0.2 seconds onwards)
(.)	A micro-pause (1 tenth of a second or less, or less than 0.2 seconds)
:	Elongation of words (longer stretches marked by more colons)
-	An abrupt stop in speech
—	Underlined letters/words represent enunciation/stressed words or letters
◦ ◦	Surrounds quiet talk (relative to speech levels within respective interactions)
hh	Exhalation/breathing out (or sighing)
.hh	Inhalation/breathing
he or ha	Laughing
(hh)	Laughter within a word
\$ \$	Surrounds ‘smile’ voice
(( ))	Analyst’s (my) notes
( )	Approximations of words that are slightly unclear/inaudible
***	Inaudible word(s)

## Appendix D

[FULL TRANSCRIPT]

**Excerpt 4.1:** The American election validates right wing opinions

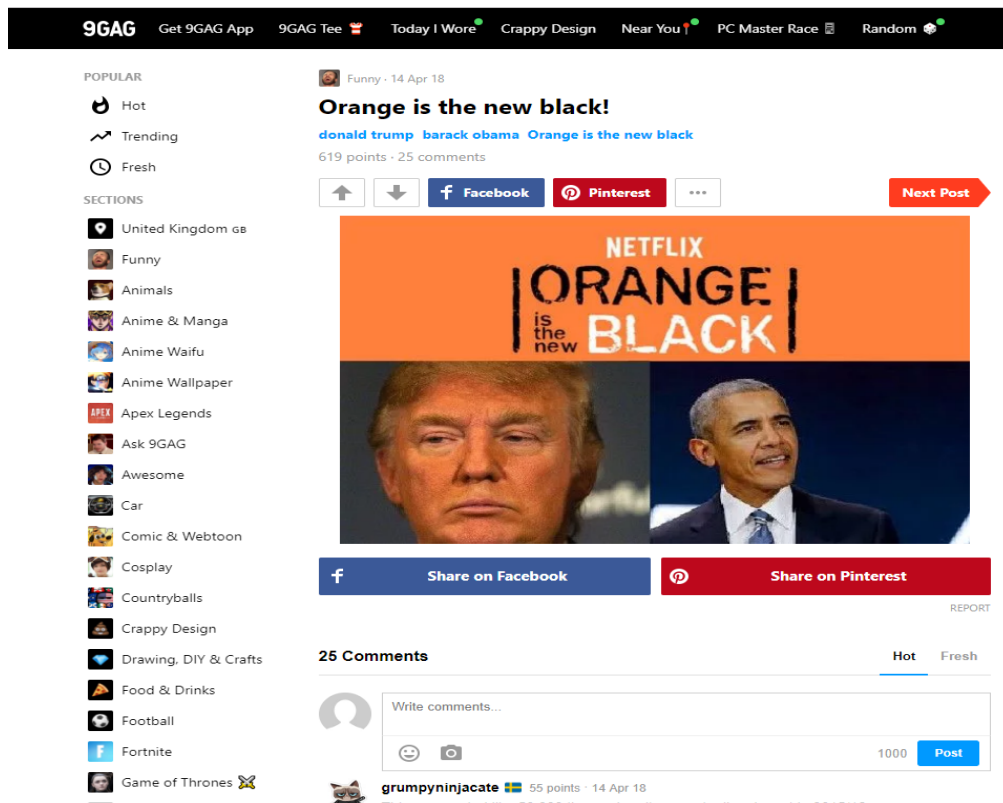
**Preceding discussion:** disappointment over Bernie Sanders dropping out of the election running for the Democratic Party, and a lack of a political left in the UK.

**Sisters:** ALIa, SARA, MARYam, NAZia.

- 01 ALI: I think my biggest concern with like the American election  
02 generally though is the fact that it validates right wing  
03 opinions in a lot of [ways]  
04 SAR: [yeah ]  
05 MAR: °mhmm°  
06 ALI: like it's not- ne- America specifically but it's like (0.8) u:m:  
07 (1.3) kind of how it- how it looks to people like in: (.) The  
08 Netherlands and in Austria (0.2) and in France .hh where  
09 they've got significant like right wing parties and like (0.7)  
10 [like then-]  
11 SAR: [ (\*\*\* ) post Brexit an:d Trump it's just like  
12 ALI: yeah [(\*\*\* ) yeah ]  
13 SAR: [hate has won this year and then like you know]  
14 anti-immigrant sentiments have re:ally just  
15 ALI: °very true° (0.3)  
16 SAR: .hh:: yay: hh  
17 ALI: and cause like The Netherlands have their election next year  
18 (0.3) and Geert Wilders has been leading in the polls and he  
19 is their like right wing (candidate) (0.3) °t's just not-° (0.8) it's  
20 not good  
21 NAZ: ((chuckle))  
22 (0.4)  
23 SAR: mm::=  
24 ALI: =not very impressed  
25 SAR: I just (wonder) where all this hate comes from it's like  
26 (0.5)  
27 Ali: °ye° I think hh. um: (0.3) there was a really good article in  
28 the:- (0.4) in the Guardian actually that I was reading it came  
29 out quite a while ago during this morning .hh um and it was I  
30 I think a lot of it is actually just disenfrancha- (0.4) dis in  
31 fran chisement ((disenfranchisement)) from (0.2) society  
32 from the establishment  
33 (0.3)  
34 SAR: mm::=  
35 Ali: =um I think like kind of poor White people (0.3) are felt like  
36 they been (.) overlooked (0.6) [by: ]  
37 SAR: [in favour] of immigrants=  
38 Ali: =yeah:=  
39 SAR: =yeah:=  
40 Ali: =or- ow not just u- m- by everyone (0.2)

41 [by: the elite ]  
42 SAR: [yeah they have] been [but that- that-]  
43 Ali: [ by- yeah] I think they  
44 [have and I think they- ]  
45 SAR: [but the government- the] choices they made didn: (.) get  
46 them any [closer to] being:  
47 Ali: [ (°yeah°)]  
48 (.)  
49 Ali: yeah [\$ve(hh)ry tr(hh)ue\$]  
50 SAR: [ ((inaudible))] like  
51 Ali: yeah (0.9) uh yeah I think they felt just (1.0) um I totally-  
52 understand where they're coming from li:ke I can- (0.4)  
53 see: that they've lost their jobs I can see that they can't  
54 provide for their families anymore and that's a horrific  
55 position to be in (0.5) but what I can't see is that you  
56 can't like (0.3) blam:e (1.3) o- outsiders or immigrants  
57 [for all your pr(hh)obl(hh)ems like heh heh yeah ]  
58 SAR: [yeah you can't hate your way into a better world it doesn't make sense]  
59 Ali: °its not- not gonna work°

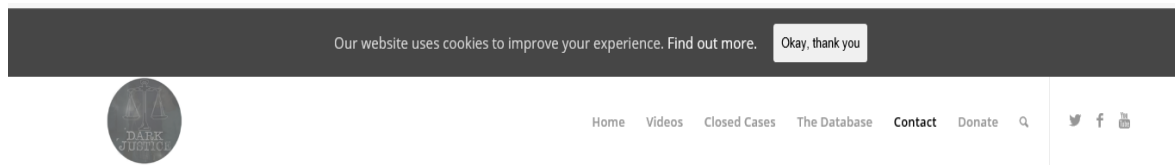
## Appendix E



Screenshotted from: <<https://9gag.com/gag/aW1GROq/orange-is-the-new-black>>

[Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2019]

## Appendix F



### About us

**Dark Justice (Founded on October 6, 2014)**, is a two-man operation based in Newcastle upon Tyne. Who catch potential sex offenders who try to groom & meet up with children following sexual grooming.

When conducting our investigations, we never instigate any aspect. Instead, we set up a profile and wait for messages. When we receive a message, we reply and withing the first few messages we tell them that the male/female is a child and underage.

When talking to anyone, we always try to avoid sexually explicit conversation. We act young and uneducated on the subject, and we NEVER encourage sexual chat or sexual behavior.

The people we talk to suggest a meeting, and at this point we take over and suggest a place where we know we can control whats going on, and where we'll be safe.

When a person confirms that they are coming, and when our team spots them, we ring the police and report the crime. We then confront the person with cameras, and ask them about their actions and intentions. As soon as they have been arrested we go to the police station to make statements.

If someone suggests a meeting after a chat online with our decoy and then doesn't show up for the meeting, our evidence is still handed in to the police and investigated.

Some people are sceptical about what we do and how we do it. We're not vigilantes who operate above the law, we're concerned citizens who work closely with the police to help effect change and to keep our children safe! We will continue to work to catch these sexual predators who terrorise our children, and we'll do our best to bring awareness to the epidemic our children are facing online today.

Dark Justice group, 'About us' webpage. Available at: <<http://darkjustice.co.uk/about-us/>>  
[Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> August]