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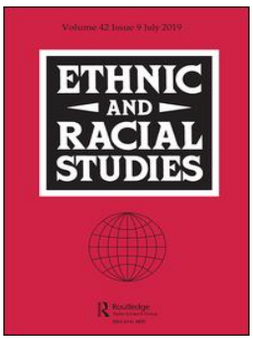

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Mobilizing Pakistani heritage, approaching marriage

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ongoing significance of Pakistani heritage in the lives of young British Pakistani Muslims. Drawing upon interviews with 56 women and men, it explores the link between Pakistani heritage and young peoples' lives, focusing upon marriage.

Pakistani heritage is widely regarded as a constraint and an anachronism, which young people are jettisoning in favour of religious or secular identities: as Muslims, British, or both. This is a half-truth, at most. Some young people are turning away from Pakistaniness, but others are embracing and exploring versions and elements of this heritage as they make decisions about whether, when and whom to marry.

Whether they are rejecting or embracing Pakistani heritage, young people are actively mobilizing the terms "Pakistan" and "Pakistani" as springboards from which to identify and make life choices. They are exploring possibilities rather than acknowledging inevitabilities, and approaching heritage as a resource rather than a constraint.

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KEYWORDS Marriage; Muslim; sexual relationships; Pakistani heritage; British Pakistani; identity

Some young British Pakistanis appear to have distanced themselves from Pakistan and Pakistani heritage (Jacobsen 1998) and moved on to identify more through their faith: as Muslims (Mohammad 2015). One of the most pronounced areas where this shift has been identified is marriage. Researchers have found that some young British Pakistanis, seeking to make their own life choices rather than simply conform to the interests of their extended families, are resisting their parents' assumption that they will take spouses from Pakistan, and otherwise follow Pakistani-identified marriage customs, which revolve around arranged, transnational kin marriages (Charsley 2005a, 2005b; Charsley and Bolognani 2016). More positively, they are

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choosing different ways of doing things, some of which they identify with Britain, some with Islam. Philip Lewis (2008) and Anshuman Mondal (2008) have shown how, by embracing Islam, young people have been able to make and assert choices, in some cases rejecting cultural traditions and norms, in others challenging parents while maintaining their goodwill and staying within the bounds of religious respectability. Drawing these points together, Pnina Werbner (2007, 171) explains that "[b]eing observant Muslims empowers these young men and women with the right to choose their own marriage partners, even against the will of their parents". Their religiosity offers license to "accuse their parents of being ignorant, locked into false or mistaken parochial 'customs' and 'traditions' of the old country".

But this growing identification with Islam does not necessitate the rejection of all things Pakistani. Culture and religion do not necessarily compete; they can coexist and interact. Social identities are not reducible to singular, fixed choices between one thing and another. Particularly in the context of transnational and diasporic communities, they gravitate towards hybrid forms, shifting shape and focus in different settings. This prompts a series of questions about ethnic and religious identity and their significance for marriage attitudes and practices among young British Pakistani Muslims. Is Pakistani heritage (still) important in young British Pakistani Muslims' approaches to marriage? Do young British Pakistani Muslims see Pakistani heritage as an asset or a constraint in their lives? And how are components of Pakistani heritage – including ethnicity, extended family, clan, kinship, regional and rural/urban background – mobilized in relation to marriage?

We address these questions through interviews with young British Pakistani Muslims. Our findings indicate that, whether they embrace or reject their Pakistani heritage, or have more mixed and uncertain feelings about it, young British Pakistani Muslims find this heritage useful as a reference point, guiding their approaches to and decisions about marriage. In other words, they use their heritage as a vehicle for the "capacity for action", which is how Saba Mahmood (2001, 203) defines agency. By speaking about their Pakistani heritage, alongside rather than in competition with their religious faith as Muslims, many young British Pakistani Muslims are identifying and making independent – but not individualistic – life choices.

Connecting Pakistani heritage and marriage

Through this emphasis upon *speaking* about identity and marriage, we seek to make distinctive contributions to two fields of research which converge in this article: research on British Pakistani approaches to marriage, and research on identification with or against Pakistani heritage.

Focussing upon what people *say* about marriage and how they say it, this paper complements other research on the subject, which is primarily

concerned with what people *do*. This work investigates: domestic and transnational marriages (Shaw 2006; Qureshi, Charsley, and Shaw 2014; Mohammad 2015); arranged, forced and love marriages (Wikan 2002; Azam 2006; Phillips 2012; Pande 2014); and marriage within families and kinship groups (Afshar 1989; Peach 2006; Shaw 2006). These researchers locate marriage within a series of geographical and cultural settings and scales: within cities, nations, and regions (such as Mirpur/Kashmir, Bradford and northern England, Glasgow and Scotland) (Azam 2006; Hopkins and Gale 2009); national and supra-national scales (including Pakistan, Asia, Britain, Europe and the West) (Shaw 1988; Vertovec and Rogers 1998); and relational geographies, encompassing caste (*qaum* or *zat*), clan and extended family (Cressey 2006; Charsley 2013; Shaw 2014). These settings are identified as both the contexts and the drivers for marriage practices. This body of research is building up a strong understanding of what people do, the pressures they are under, the expectations of families and communities, and the ways in which individuals engage with culture and religion through their sexual relationships.

Marriage practices in these different settings revolve around norms, which are linked to the economic interests of families and groups (rather than just the wishes of bride and groom) (Wood 2018). But group membership does not dictate behaviour (Jenkins 2014, 13). Individuals make choices about how they relate to groups – how they identify themselves – and also about the particular ways in which they "do" their identities. For those with Pakistani heritage, this leeway extends to choices about how to relate to this heritage and apply it to their lives – including the marriages with which they are directly or indirectly involved. The articulation and mobilization of identity is, in large part, a matter or discourse. Accordingly, this article shifts some of the attention that is currently being paid in relation to British Pakistani marriages from things people *do* to things they *say*: about themselves and the marriages around them; and about their experiences and preferences.

British Pakistanis have many choices about how to identify themselves because they are associated with more than one group. Most are both Pakistani and Muslim; these groups overlap. The vast majority (92%) of British Pakistanis – a community comprising 631,000 individuals born in the UK and 493,000 born overseas (2011 Census [ONS 2015]) – are Muslims (Change Institute 2009, 7–8; Muslim Council of Britain 2015). Conversely, those with Pakistani-heritage form the single largest element of Britain's 2.7 million Muslims, amounting to 43% of that group in England, 33% in Wales and 67% in Scotland (ONS 2015). British Pakistani Muslims are differentiated, geographically and religiously. Two-thirds trace their heritage to Pakistan's northeast, the majority of those to the Mirpur district of Azad (Free) Kashmir, which is administered by Pakistan but nominally independent. These British Mirpuri Pakistanis are concentrated in particular parts of the UK such as Yorkshire (Azam

2006; Change Institute 2009). Other British Pakistanis trace their heritage to West Punjab; still others (in smaller numbers) to the wider country. British Pakistani Muslims are also differentiated in terms of their individual and family histories. They include: children of second- or third-generation migrants; those with a mix of first-, second- or third-generation family members; young people who may never have been to Pakistan nor have any desire to go; others who live in Britain but periodically visit Pakistan; and those who have just moved from Pakistan to Britain, perhaps to marry a relative or someone else approved by the family (Charsley 2005a). Finally, British Pakistani Muslims are equally differentiated through their religious affiliations. Most are Sunnis, but some are Shias and Ahmadis (Balzani 2006; Peach 2006; Change Institute 2009). Sunnis are also diverse, including Deobandi and Barelwi traditions (Peach 2006) and numerous movements including the Tablighi Jamaat, the Jamaat-e Islami and the Ahl-e-Hadith (Change Institute 2009).

Thus, while British Pakistanis have much in common with each other, they are not all the same and nor is their community homogenous or static. This leaves them with choice about how to identify: whether as Pakistanis, as Muslims, some combination of these, and/or in other ways such as Asian-British and British-Asian. As Roger Brubaker (2004) argues, ethnic groups are not the coherent, bounded, distinct and homogenous entities they sometimes appear. Instead, they revolve around a shared sense of belonging, a way of seeing each other and the world, which is neither fixed nor given. Richard Jenkins (2014, 5) explains that identification is "something that one *does*" – a process rather than a thing – typically in the course of doing other things such as pursuing interests or life choices. People have some scope to decide how they will "do" their identities, and how they will bring those identities to the other things they do, such as their decisions about marriage. British Pakistanis have scope, in this context, to decide whether and how to identify as Pakistanis, as Muslims, or in some other way.

Many young British Pakistani Muslims, like other Muslims of their generation, are increasingly identifying with Islam rather than through their ethnic or national heritage (Lewis 2008; Mondal 2008). This development is taking place in parallel with another, in which British Pakistanis are increasingly identified by others as Muslims (Alexander 2000; Calhoun 2005) – though this is another story, beyond the scope of this article. Some of these young people are identifying more as Muslims because they are increasingly drawn to religion and a shared religious community; others because they are turning away from Pakistan and its culture (Samad and Eade 2002). The latter are eclectic, as are their reasons. They include Kashmiri separatist sympathizers who identify with Kashmir rather than Pakistan (Ali 2008; Bolognani and Sokefeld 2011; Lothers and Lothers 2012), and young people repelled

by features that they and others identify with Pakistani culture. The latter include sexual attitudes and practices. British Pakistanis – men in particular – have been portrayed in mainstream media as perpetrators of child sexual exploitation and abuse (Jay 2014; Britton 2018; Chambers et al. 2019) and forced marriages (Wikan 2002; Phillips 2012). These are just a few examples of the sexualized negativity that pervades mainstream representations of British Pakistanis. Pakistani "heritage" emerges as a euphemism, Pakistan and Pakistaniness as toxic terms with "burdensome … undertones in the imaginary of both British Pakistanis and Britons alike" (Bolognani 2014, 114). One might ask who, in these circumstances, would want to be seen as (British) Pakistani?

This shift from ethnic to religious identification resonates with the post-secular narrative, advanced by Jürgen Habermas (2008), in which religion is returning from the margins to the centre ground of public life, and in the process usurping other forms of identification, among them nationality and ethnicity (Cloke and Beaumont 2013). And yet, the resilience or resurgence of religion has not necessarily come at the expense of or in competition with other forms of identification. People present different versions or, as Erving Goffman (1975) puts it, "frames" of themselves in different social settings. The same individual may identify primarily as a Muslim in one situation and Pakistani in another. Of course, religious identification is likely in a primarily religious site such as a mosque, although many individuals also identify primarily as Muslims in other contexts from anti-war demonstrations (Phillips 2008) to workplaces (Lewis 2008). In other settings, the same individuals may emphasize their ethnic or national heritage (Din 2016). Spaces of identity are not always this tangible; identification also takes place across transnational and relational spaces such as the Pakistani diaspora or the (Islamic) Ummah (Anthias 2002). Across these different settings, we submit, young people are mobilizing both their Islamic *and their Pakistani* identities in the context of marriage.

We develop this case through an empirical study of the ways in which young British Pakistani Muslims speak about themselves and their attitudes towards marriage. Our interviews tell a gradated story, revealing mixed feelings about Pakistan and Pakistani heritage, and exploring the impact of such feelings in relation to marriage.

Interviews: questions and research methods

The contention that – to borrow terminology from Anne Phillips (2007, 106) – Pakistaniness acts as a "resource" rather than a "constraint" in the lives of young people who have some form of Pakistani heritage forms the backdrop to our central research questions about the ways in which young British Pakistani Muslims talk about marriage. Let's recap and develop the questions introduced above:

(1) Is Pakistani heritage (still) important in young British Pakistani Muslims' approaches to marriage? How, why, and to what extent is this the case?
(2) Do young British Pakistani Muslims see Pakistani heritage as a resource and/or a constraint?
(3) How are components of Pakistani heritage – including ethnicity, extended family, caste/clan, kinship, regional and rural/urban background – mobilized in relation to marriage?

We address these questions through interviews conducted with young (aged 16–30) British men and women who (in a brief screening questionnaire) identified as Muslims with some form of Pakistani heritage. Between June 2016 and May 2018 we conducted 56 interviews, concentrating on three areas with Pakistani Muslim communities: Yorkshire, Glasgow and Newcastle. Interviewees were recruited through personal and professional networks, leafleting and snowball sampling. Here we focus on those individuals (listed in Table 1) who had most to say – whether explicitly or between the lines – about Pakistani heritage and its relevance to their thoughts on marriage. Their varied responses revealed widely divergent attitudes towards Pakistan and Pakistani heritage, and towards other forms of identification: variously with Mirpur/ Kashmir and Asia, Britain, Scotland, England and the city or region where they lived. Furthermore, the interviews revealed a range of attitudes towards religion, and

Table 1. Interviewees quoted in this paper. The information and language here is that of the interviewees; it is how they describe themselves and their families. Note that one participant – Aliya – identifies as married to a revert, a term that some Muslims apply to people who are brought up in another faith or none, but later convert to Islam.

Name (pseud.)	Sex	Region	Age	Relationship status	Sexuality	Father born	Mother born
Ayisha	F	Yorkshire	27	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Pakistan
Esha	F	Yorkshire	27	Married	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Pakistan
Ifrah	F	Yorkshire	21	Single	Heterosexual	Britain	Pakistan
Dua	F	Yorkshire	23	Single	Heterosexual	Britain	Pakistan
Amir	M	Yorkshire	22	Single	Heterosexual	Azad Kashmir	Azad Kashmir
Farooq	M	Yorkshire	17	Single	Heterosexual	England	Pakistan
Safa	F	Yorkshire	22	Married	Heterosexual	-	-
Noor	F	Yorkshire	27	Married	Heterosexual	Pakistan	UK
Faisal	M	Glasgow	16	Single	Heterosexual	Scotland	Pakistan
Tahir	M	Glasgow	20	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Scotland
Saamiya	F	Glasgow	18	Single	Lesbian	Pakistan	Glasgow
Hanifa	F	Glasgow	22	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	–
Aliya	F	Newcastle	24	Married to a revert	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Pakistan
Janan	F	Yorkshire	30	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Pakistan
Hassan	M	Yorkshire	29	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Pakistan
Salim	M	Newcastle	24	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Pakistan
Hiba	F	Glasgow	27	Married	Heterosexual	Kenya	Pakistan
Khadija	F	Newcastle	19	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	England
Waheed	M	Glasgow	21	Single	Heterosexual	Pakistan	Pakistan

towards Islam's everyday (in)significance in their lives. The interviews moved from initial discussions of identity to explorations of sexual relationship attitudes and experiences, paying particular attention to marriage.

Evaluating the interview transcripts, we reflected on how and why these young people spoke – or remained silent – about their Pakistani heritage in the context of marriage. The theoretical framework through which interview data were interpreted was grounded in thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). NVIVO was used to analyse the data, in which macro parent themes of Pakistan, Pakistani, heritage, culture and marriage were identified. This coding frame enabled us to draw out the ways in which young people were bringing these terms together when speaking.

We conducted this research conscious of our positionality, variously as community insiders and outsiders (Henry 2003). We considered the impression that interviewees might be seeking to make when speaking, albeit anonymously, with the main interviewer – Nafhesa Ali – who identified herself (and was recognized) as both Muslim and British Pakistani. Might they seek or feel obliged to impress her as "good Pakistanis"? As "good Muslims" (Mamdani 2004)? Interviewees were offered – and some opted – to be interviewed by other members of the team, which included researchers with a variety of ages, gender and sexual subject positions, religious and ethnic identities. We anticipated that some people would speak more comfortably and freely with a person of their own choosing: a man with a man, perhaps, or a non-practising Muslim with a non-religious interviewer. Again, we remained conscious of positionality. Would an interviewee seek to come across as a "good liberal", when speaking to a non-Muslim interviewer, perhaps by virtue of being a "bad Pakistani"? The only way to answer question such as this is to remain conscious of our positionality, and self-reflexive, which we sought to do.

We also scrutinized how interviewees chose their words. What conversations and stories were they enacting, practising, repeating and reworking? We paid attention to moments of eloquence but also to those in which they struggled. We read between the lines, into gaps and fillers such as "like", "um" and "you know", verbal tics that indicate uncertainty, confusion and reticence. In all this, we explore the choices that young people are identifying and making, and the ways in which they bring their Pakistani heritage to these conversations. Our interviews reveal a range of attitudes towards – and uses of – Pakistan and being (or not being) Pakistani. One thing interviewees have in common is their continued mobilization of Pakistani heritage in the context of marriage.

Saying no to Pakistan and Pakistaniness?

Pakistan and Pakistani culture loom large in the lives of many young British Pakistanis. Some see the land of their heritage as a threat hanging over

them. Interviewees repeated stories they had heard about forced, corrective visits to Pakistan, arranged for those who failed to conform. Saamiya, who is 18 and identifies as lesbian, recounted a story that impacted on her when she was younger and has haunted her since:

> A couple of months back when I was in my last year of school, two girls who are both Muslim got like caught holding hands, or just like kissing each other's cheek, and their parents got called up because it is a Catholic school, so they are quite strict about these kinds of things. And like once their parents found out they were completely separated, one was sent off to Pakistan with her family for a good couple of months.

Saamiya speaks of "Muslim" girls – implicitly British Pakistani Muslims – being "sent to Pakistan". In her life, this story sounds a warning of what might happen if she should resist the heteronormativity not only of her family and community, but also her Catholic school (see Yip 2004).

This is not an isolated tale. It is repeated and embroidered in many different ways, which range in detail and tone. Contrasting with Saamiya's worrying story, 21-year-old Ifrah engaged more casually, even light-heartedly, with the idea of banishment. Doing so, she distanced her own family from those who might genuinely dispatch a badly-behaved relative to Pakistan. "My mum is not one of those people that is very strict on things and … . So she is not going to be, like, off to Pakistan with you, and you are never going to be back here kind of thing".

These are not just urban myths. Family and community members sometimes threaten to send their younger, more rebellious counterparts to Pakistan, and in some cases they follow through (Samad and Eade 2002). Elders arrange and sponsor "punitive, correctional or rehabilitative visits" to Pakistan for sons and daughters whom they see as wayward (Bolognani 2014, 110). These stories gather momentum through their retelling. Pakistan emerges as a point of reference or resource to encapsulate everything the speaker is saying no to, and how by contrast she wishes to live. Expanding on her negativity towards Pakistan, Saamiya found a backdrop for projecting the kind of life she wanted to live. Though she (like her mother) had been born and brought up in Glasgow, both her parents "expected [her] to wear kind of traditional kind of clothing, kind of stay at home, do the house chores, do the kind of traditional things that a woman would be kind of expected to do in Pakistan". Saamiya saw this as "a gender thing", with its origins "in Pakistan [where] men have always been seen above women". Her resistance to these expectations – the work that she was expected to do and the kind of husband she was expected to take – resonates with some things that other British Pakistani women are saying and/or sharing about Pakistani men, both in person and online (Bolognani 2014). None of the women we interviewed were as outspoken as the YouTube videos and other anonymous

content examined by Charsley and Bolognani (2016), but some said they would prefer a British- to a Pakistani-born fiancé. Putting this delicately, 30-year-old Janan said she was "looking for somebody who's British-born and not somebody who's maybe moved over from Pakistan, only because I think culturally we would have a bit of a clash". She spoke of disappointment when a "guy" she met online who turned be "lying" about this. These preferences should be set in the context of other research demonstrating the opposite: finding that some British Pakistani women would prefer to marry a man directly from Pakistani (Azam 2006; Shaw 2006).

Some young men also expressed unease, if not outright hostility, at the expectation that they should marry someone from Pakistan. Farooq, who is 17, spoke of pressure from his mother:

> Like she wants me to get married in Pakistan. And like find a girl from there, because my dad married my mum and she was from Pakistan. So she is saying like … get married from there. But I am saying I don't know if I want to.

Tahir, who is slightly older than Farooq and has already had a "long conversation" with his father, has made it clear that he does not want an arranged marriage with a woman from Pakistan, something his older brother recently agreed to. His resistance to this marriage qualifies the usual conclusion that British Pakistan men are more positive than their female counterparts about Pakistani heritage, traditions and marriage partners (Charsley 2005b; Afshar, Aitken, and Franks 2006; Bolognani 2014). Tahir reminds us that gender differences are not as clear-cut as they might appear.

For Tahir and Farooq, saying no to a Pakistani spouse could also mean refusing Pakistani family role models, authority figures and traditions. Janan made this explicit. She said she sees her parents' marriage as "the traditional Pakistani relationship for that generation" and knows she wants something different for herself: "I've looked at their relationship and just thought oh God, like I do not want to be in that situation".

For some, this rejection of Pakistani-identified traditions shades into apprehension about Pakistan as a country. 27-year-old Noor said she has become "uncomfortable with a lot of what happens in Pakistan", pointing to "aspects of the culture, the attitudes towards women … the way that Islam is misinterpreted" there. She spoke of Pakistan less as a fact of life and more a point of departure: "I have actively kind of moved away from it I guess".

Some of those who distance themselves from Pakistani heritage do so in favour of alternatives, which include greater identification with Islam (see Bolognani and Sokefeld 2011). As we have explained, not everyone sees conflict or competition between these forms of identification. Dua spoke of being "Pakistani, British and … Muslim", Amir of being "Pakistani Kashmiri". This echoes Mondal's (2008) observations about the panoply of identities expressed by young British Muslims. Others feel the need to choose

between these forms of identification, or at least to establish priorities. British Pakistani Muslims surveyed by Saeed, Blain, and Forbes (1999) were generally much clearer about their Muslim than their Pakistani identities, some distancing themselves from Pakistani heritage as they drew closer to Islam. The often-outspoken rejection of Pakistan and Pakistani ways (and synonyms such as "culture") contrasts with the careful tone that many of those we spoke to adopted when discussing religion. Reflecting on her ideal wedding, Noor stressed that for her Islam must come first: "I am not very cultural, I am not very attached to Asian culture", she explained, adding that she wanted a "segregated" rather than "traditionally Pakistani" ceremony. Similarly, Hanifa said she looks up to her mother, who "has a really rational, really kind of logical mind-set, and she doesn't believe in culture". Citing a broader conflict between being a "good Pakistani" and a "good Muslim" – a conflict that others see differently, and still others do not see at all – Hanifa finds a way to justify a life choice.

By identifying first and foremost as Muslims, young people may be able to justify life choices in ways that family members will find difficult to rebut (Lewis 2008; Mondal 2008). For some, this can mean justifying lifestyle choices they have already made. Others may be following through on new or renewed religious convictions. There is no reason to assume that people tell simple truths about their inner lives or experiences. However, the stories they tell and the things they say about themselves matter, defining what may be possible in their lives.

In this section we have shown how some young people are saying no to some expectations that come with being Pakistani in Britain, and how others are going further than this by saying no to Pakistani heritage itself. Refusing this heritage – naming it as the thing that one is not, and the customs or traditions one does not want to continue – can be part of saying yes to other ways of life. Even then, the terms Pakistan and Pakistaniness retain resonance. Not all young people are negative about Pakistan or Pakistaniness, nor so sure about the primacy of religion in their lives; hence the question mark in this section's title.

Mixed feelings and selective identifications

Pakistani is a catch-all term, encompassing many different spheres which are relevant to marriage: national culture, of course, but also ethnicity, extended family, caste/clan, kinship, regional and local culture. Some young British Pakistanis are choosing to distance themselves from certain traditions and customs that can be traced back to Pakistan, while hanging on to others. Some separate themselves from kinship networks which structure endogamous marriages. Philip Lewis argues that the extended kinship group known as the *biradari* was previously seen as a "resource" – offering "identity,

a code of behaviour and a support network" – but is increasingly regarded as a "constraint" (Lewis 2008, 46–48). He argues that some second- and third-generation individuals who have "grown up in a liberal society … and do not want to be held back by a centuries-old tradition" (Lewis 2008, 48) are turning away from *biradari*, but he does not read this as wholesale rejection of Pakistani heritage. Not everyone is turning away from this system in any case; some adhere to its guidance on marriage (Azam 2006; Shaw 2006). But whether they are rejecting or retaining *biradari*, young people are sifting through various dimensions of Pakistani culture, deciding which they want for themselves.

Reflecting this discriminating approach to Pakistani culture, some young people said they pick and choose "nice things" like South Asian food while ignoring or rejecting others, including illiberal attitudes towards sex and relationships. Noor said that her family "eat Pakistani food and we can speak the language", embracing "the markers of being Pakistani". These things can be enjoyed without buying into some other Pakistani-identified cultural attitudes and practices, such as customs for arranging and conducting marriages. In the fundamentals of her life – her "beliefs or kind of values that I kind of hold" – Noor distanced herself from Pakistan, stating that "there is none of it that I take forward". Her hesitant tone – referring to "*kind of* values" – undermines this seemingly categorical statement, though, intimating that she is still deciding what her values are, and where Pakistaniness does or does not fit in.

Some other interviewees embraced more demanding and less liberal aspects of Pakistani culture. 16-year-old Faisal alluded to the attractions of "educated" Pakistani women:

> Some of my friends think that they don't want to get married when they go back in Pakistan. They don't want to do that. But you get some girls over here that … that only mess about and that, they don't care about you. So you think that, in Pakistan you get more educated girls than you get here.

It seems unlikely that Faisal is speaking about formal education; he appears to be referring to what young women have learnt to expect from marriage. His words echo those of the 20-year-old Bradford resident interviewed by Bolognani (2014, 111), who said he saw "a lot to flee from in the UK – crime, people going to prison, bad girls, people not studying, ladies not wearing scarves". He would "prefer a girl from Mirpur" who would "make you chapattis", wash and tidy. "Whatever you say to her, she'll do it" (Bolognani 2014, 112). These young men appeal to an image of the traditional Pakistani woman. Their (unguarded) words illustrate the more widely-acknowledged point that some young British Pakistani men are more favourable towards Pakistan and Pakistaniness because they want submissive wives who know and follow customs (Shaw 2001, 330; Charsley 2005b). For them, Pakistan is a resource for continuing male privilege.

Others, less conservative than Faisal, expressed a selective approach to Pakistani culture. Hassan, still single at the relatively late age of 29, said that he would like a wife with a "good understanding of and a good mix of traditional Pakistani culture and modern British culture". In contrast with Faisal, who wants a traditionally Pakistani wife, Hassan adopts a hybrid approach, but both men reveal attraction towards what they see as Pakistani traits in potential wives.

Women experience Pakistani culture in different ways. Hiba is conscious of this, contrasting her own experiences of constant questions and scrutiny with the relative freedom enjoyed by "guys":

> So I think that is like women are already told about expectations of marriage and what to expect from a very early age. "What would your in-laws say?" or "What would your mother-in-law say?", "What would your husband say?" or "You can't do this you know, that's very embarrassing for me", that kind of thing. So I don't think guys ever got that.

Hiba's rhetorical questions – what would an older relative say? – evoke a claustrophobic sense of being hemmed in by Pakistani cultural norms, directed more at women than men. Consequently, young women often have more (than men) to gain by distancing themselves from their heritage. The more educated among these women are more likely to seek out Western-born men whom they hope will be more "modern" (Charsley 2005a; Shaw 2006). Conversely, increased religious identification can be empowering for women, particularly in relation to their ability to determine and perhaps to veto relationships and marriages. Women who adopt Islam enthusiastically – including hijab-wearers – are seen by some men as "undesirable brides" because they are thought to "know too much about their rights" and have too little respect for the "traditions" (Afshar, Aitken, and Franks 2006, 181).

But, even these empowered women express mixed feelings towards Pakistani marriage and heritage. Afshar, Aitken, and Franks (2006, 181) argue that, while their "faith supersedes nationality", nationality persists, along with regional and kinship identity and allegiance (see also Ballard 1990, 2008). Whereas Noor initially echoed Afshar et al.'s point about shifting priorities in terms of identity, broadly from ethnicity to religion, and from Pakistani to Islamic orientation in the context of marriage, she later acknowledged the ongoing and perhaps unexpected importance of ethnicity in her life. "I wasn't too worried about like ethnicity and things at the beginning", she reflected, but "over time it did actually become more important to me".

Khadija said she would rather not marry a man from Pakistan but she spoke light-heartedly of the possibility. "Ideally it's not my cup of tea, I wouldn't [laughs], but if it has to come to that, then yeah, probably". Other women were equally unsure of where they stand on the subject of Pakistani men and culture. Hiba was more positive about aspects she saw as "progressive"

than those she considered traditional. She expressed frustration with her parents, whose progressive attitudes falter when it comes to marriage. "Even though my mum and my dad are progressive and they're not too cultural", she reflected, her mother would bombard her with hypothetical questions family members might ask:

> "What are you going to do if your mother-in-law tells you to do that?", or "What would you do when your husband … ?" You know, like that kind of thing. And I think that is something that is specific to the Pakistani culture.

Hiba's experience illustrates how some young British Pakistani women, as well as men, have conflicting views about Pakistan and Pakistaniness. They do not always know where they stand, though one thing they have in common is a continued appeal to Pakistan as a reference point.

Complexity and uncertainty

While some of these young people expressed assorted but definite feelings towards Pakistan, others presented a more complex and uncertain picture, with implications for their approach to marriage. Some admitted to uncertainty about where they stand. For others, silences and verbal stumbles tell a similar story. British-born 22-year-old Safa is unsure how much individual autonomy she desires or thinks best. She speaks of what she imagines a British perspective on agency might be, in order to understand her Pakistani-born parents' views on the subject:

> Like it is the culture that comes into it and your parents have a like … certain way of bringing you up, which is not particularly the British way, but the Pakistani way. So like the kinds of norms and values? … like how to treat your elders and there is certain level of respect. How to be with your parents. Like in the British culture like parents like to give you more independence, which in the Pakistani culture they do, but like they like to be more part of your life and the kind of decisions that you make and stuff. So there is a lot, not interference, but there is a lot of input from parents, if you know what I mean in the Pakistani culture.

Safa is feeling her way, exploring a form of autonomy that might work for her, doing so tentatively. Even allowing for the tics that surface when microphones are switched on, the repetition of "like" and stuttering speech reveal uncertainty. Safa is buying time and thinking aloud. Her speech patterns are reminiscent of those of a woman interviewed by Mondal (2008, 68): "She began to think the question through, aloud, her sentences marked by hesitations, doubts and inconsistencies – symptoms of a mind wrestling with a problem that remains just elusive enough to slip through the established patterns of her thought". Searching as she speaks, Safa sketches two imagined positions – those of young Britons, and her parents' – and then suggests that these

positions may not be as distinct as they first appear. As she expatiates, essentialist British and Pakistani positions give way to messier lived experiences.

Other issues that are genuinely complex, and about which many young people feel undecided, revolve around the boundaries between culture and religion. While some are actively choosing Islam over Pakistani heritage, others see the two as intermingled. Pakistani culture is implicitly Islamic. Similarly, Islam is inextricably cultural, inflected with the Pakistani and other cultures of the groups that practise it. Like other British Muslims, British Pakistani Muslim communities reach across religious and ethnic differences with "cleavages of language, regional background and national loyalties", complicated further by extended family networks (Afshar, Aitken, and Franks 2006, 176). The point at which religion ends and culture begins is not always clear, nor could it be because there is no single, unchanging Islamic culture. Rather, different cultures are Islamic in different ways. A number of interviewees spoke of their own attempts to disentangle culture and religion. Some streamline this thorny question by differentiating between people who put culture first and those whose religion is purer or more "authentic". Aliya, who elected to wear hijab when she left school, spoke of distancing herself from peers whom she sees as "cultural-orientated rather than religious-orientated". Insisting that she is not "being judgemental", Aliya describes her search for a "more authentic Islam". She arrives at a simple position, which seems to resolve any confusion about the boundaries between culture and religion:

> I live and breathe Islam, like for me it is my identity. So that's why I always say like I don't care if I'm Pakistani, I'm a Muslim first. I'm not British, I'm a Muslim first. I might be these other things after but being a Muslim is integral to who I am, if that makes sense, yeah.

And yet, Aliya has negotiated rather than renounced Pakistani-identified culture. "I've changed and they haven't, if that makes sense? So they might dress a certain way, whereas I've gone through that change of wearing jeans to skirts to abayas now". Aliya's seemingly clear distinctions between culture and religion are clouded by her ongoing reference to cultural practices, through which different but no less "authentic" Muslims come to different conclusions and do different things. And, of course, not everyone born into a Pakistani-heritage Muslim family is as confident in their faith or its primacy in their lives as Aliya, nor as determined to interrogate the lines between culture and religion. They are more tolerant of uncertainty, less urgent and earnest in their attempts to resolve it, and happier to live with ambiguity.

Moreover, when young men and women embrace or reject Pakistaniness, they must first decide what that entails. The answers they formulate are varied, responding to Pakistan's complexity and diversity. Some point to the

surprisingly liberal world of sexualities and relationships that exists in parts of Pakistan, particularly among the urban middle classes (Werbner 2007). They contrast this with the more limited and restrictive pictures of Pakistan that prevail in the minds of many older relatives in Britain. Esha pointed to some of these changes, observing that "women who are coming from Pakistan are not just staying at home cooking and cleaning", and "they are becoming more equal" within relationships. 21-year-old Ifrah made a similar observation, based on recent experiences of Pakistan, where she observed liberal sexual attitudes, converging with those in "the Western world". Others expressed the opposite view, portraying Pakistan and the Pakistani-born as keepers of tradition, their British-born counterparts as more flexible and modern. Waheed compared the rigid upbringing and attitudes of his Pakistani-born parents with the "more relaxed" and "outgoing" ways of those born in Britain. Ayisha said that her Pakistani-born father had come to accept that "it is different in England from how it is in Pakistan". These young people are not sure what they make of Pakistan, or where they stand apropos of their own Pakistaniness. Still, the ongoing relevance of Pakistani heritage comes into focus at a key juncture in their lives: in decisions about marriage.

Some interviewees made related allusions to the complexity of Pakistan, with its geographical, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and Pakistaniness in all its forms. Salim's description of the wife he is searching for illustrates the multidimensionality of Pakistan and Pakistani culture. "Basically my checklist is she has to be Pakistani, Punjabi, Rai, Sunni (laughs). As long as she's those four things we're okay". This is not so much a list as a Venn diagram, composed of intersecting and interrelated ethnic, geographical, cultural and religious components, which belie the possibility of a singular or straightforward Pakistan.

Conclusion

Pakistan looms large in the lives of some young British Pakistanis. For better or worse, what Thomas P. Cohen (2004) calls the "idea of Pakistan" endures, even and perhaps especially for those who have never been and have no intention of going to Pakistan-the-country. Like the "idea of India" elaborated by Sunil Khilnani (1999), the idea of Pakistan points to a place on the map and in the mind, which is less a destination than a space of heritage and identity (Anwar 1978). This heritage is sometimes railed against, sometimes embraced, and often the subject of mixed feelings. In each case, though, it is a resource which young people draw upon while living far from that South Asian nation-state.

Young people speak of Pakistan, Pakistani and Pakistaniness as they identify and make choices about their lives and, in particular, whether and how they want to marry. Their words describe a spectrum: from rejecting this heritage to actively embracing it; and from rebelling against the Pakistani-identified values of their parents to actively seeking them out. Most fall between these

extremes, expressing complex relationships with their heritage, deciding what they want to take with them, and what to leave behind. Their uncertainty and creativity are illustrated in the words of some interviewees who started out with seemingly clear statements about their Pakistani heritage and its implications for their lives, but whose initial certainties gave way to something more complex and negotiable. Dua's simple opening gambit – "I am Pakistani, British and I am Muslim" – quickly transmuted into something more uncertain, with less inevitability and greater scope for Dua to make her own choices.

Rather than turning their backs on Pakistaniness or on elders who might be seen to embody it, young people are using their heritage to make choices about how they want or are prepared to live, particularly in relation to the when, whether and whom of marriage. The possibility of identifying and making choices – establishing "capacity for action" (Mahmood 2001, 203) – may be understood as a form of agency, and therefore as potentially a "positive" (Evans 2013, 47) aspect of the ongoing assertion of Pakistani heritage (Malik 2010). For the young people introduced in this article, Pakistani heritage has open-ended salience in daily life, especially as they approach the momentous milestones of marriage. Their mobilization – not necessarily endorsement – of Pakistan and Pakistaniness uses national heritage as a reference point and a resource for living.

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