“CORRIDORS”: AN EXPLORATION OF MUSLIM FEMALE IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION THROUGH RAP AND VISUAL ALBUM

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Abstract

In contemporary British media and culture, the representation of Muslim women is still narrow, stereotypical, one-dimensional, and crucially lacking in visibility. This thesis sits as the counterpart to the practice as research rap-visual album *Corridors*, exploring and investigating Muslim female identity and representation and its cultural and sociopolitical significance through the practices of rap and filmmaking to create a visual album. With the research conducted primarily through practice, this thesis places the practice in discussion with relevant theoretical frameworks and weaves through an extensive theoretical discourse, inclusive of but not limited to the following; postcolonial theory, intersectionality, multiple heritage, representation in sonic and visual spaces, Islamic female-centric ideas, and the practical and representational implications of the debated conceptualisation of the awrah, whilst employing rap and visual album as communicative instruments to navigate, activate, demonstrate and articulate findings. The motivations of this research reside in the desire to cultivate and contribute an interdisciplinary and intersectional auto-ethnographic insight into the expression of Muslim female identity, portrayal, and narrative to practice as research. Between rap, visual album and a critical discourse, this research unfastens and facilitates a conversation on the contemporary experience of British mixed/multiple heritage, gender, faith, and the Islamic and secular controversial notion of Muslim female rappers. With a distinctive methodology drawing on and conducted through an auto-ethnographic creation of rap and film, this research reveals a unique positioning of Muslim female expression, arguing for new languages, terms, and considerations around the way in which British Muslim women are considered, presented, and conceptualised within the discourse of practice and theory. *Corridors* navigates this contemporary discourse into a postcolonial playground where intersectionality and interdisciplinarity are showcased and explored in conversation with one another through practice, discovering that terms such as agency, representation, and identity when met with practice, shift into a discussion of characterisation, personae, shapelessness, shapeshifting, transformation, roleplay, visibility, metamorphosis, and mythology.

Links to the Practice

Corridors is intended to be watched and listened to before this thesis is read. However, if you wish to watch/listen/read in your own way then please feel free to do so.

Corridors can be watched by clicking the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVVqiBU75LU

Corridors can be listened to as an album on any music streaming platform. For ease, you can listen through the Bandcamp link below:

https://haleemahx.bandcamp.com/album/corridors

The *IF* series can be watched following the link below with all ten episodes in the playlist. Please see chapter 3.1 to understand the positioning of the *IF* series. It is not the practice as research like *Corridors*. *IF* is a side project that holds importance to the primary research project.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fb7UdtxVqwY&list=PLbxIFn4ifEuLaFSAL63AlawYhJ4cWW4KA

Throughout this research project, I have kept creative journals that consist of pictures, sketches, lyrics, and broader creative and theoretical ideas. I do not include copies of these pages within this thesis as I have journalled for many years and agree with the opinion of artists that say these forms of documentation should be kept in their original form and not copied/digitalised.

Acknowledgments

Subhaanallahi, walhamdu ililaahi, wa laa ‘ilaaha ‘illallaahu, wallaahu ‘Akbar

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To all of you, I thank you dearly for betting your imaginary money on the rapper and facilitating a space for this project to unfold.

To my family, I thank you for being my biggest hype-men/women and standing by me throughout this adventurous chapter of my life.

Your endless support, love and appreciation has gotten me through all the difficult days. Every week since this journey began, you have all told me how proud you are that I am the first person in our entire family to gain a PhD.

My Nani corrects this statement with adding “the first girl”, not because there is a man in the family that has one, there isn’t, but because she wants everyone to know it was a woman that did it first.

For my mother, who said "We have enough medical doctors, lawyers, and teachers in the family. Be a rapper…do something different. That would be epic".

Album Cover and Track List

1. The Introduction
2. The Headteacher's Daughter
3. The Contortionist
4. The Offering
5. The Novel Idea
6. The Internet
7. The Interruption
8. The Medusa feat. 766N
9. The Flat Shoes
10. The Intermission feat. 766N
11. The Hungry Hexenbiest
12. The Elevator
13. The 13 Mahrams
14. The Umi
15. The Undeniable feat. Sufyan X
16. The Inconclusive

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PaR – Practice as Research

1 Project Summary

This thesis addresses the pressing need for new understandings in the discourse surrounding Muslim female identity and representation and uses the rap and visual album *Corridors* as a practice-based means to explore Muslim female expression. Using a methodology situated in the creation of a rap/visual album, the research uses auto-ethnographic experiential techniques, such as rap (lyricism, wordplay, flow and tonality), creating from a home environment, a spiritual ritualistic routine and the drawing on biographical[1] experiences and distinctive visual features to offer new findings relating to Muslim female identity of mixed-heritage women in the UK. The findings suggest that Muslim female identity, when explored through the Practice as Research of rap and visual album, progresses the considerations of Muslim female identity from identity, representation and notions of agency, to a space where the discourse widens to introduce words and experiences such as shapeshifting, shapelessness, metamorphosis, transformation, roleplay, visibility, mythology, characterisation and expression at the core of the discussion. As with most forms of PaR, the findings of the research are embedded in the practice and are part of the experiential and embodied forms of knowledge (Nelson, 2013), creating not only an original contribution to PaR from the position of rap and film practice, but also contributing to the existing knowledge surrounding Muslim female identity and representation and postcolonial theory, challenging and questioning existing theories and presenting a unique account of an intersectional offering from the perspective of a contemporary, British, female, mixed-heritage, rhythmic experience.

1.1 Corridors

Corridors is the name of the music album and visual album that sits as this research project's practice. As I began my journey into the exploration of Muslim female

[1] Throughout this thesis, I use the term biographical rather than autobiographical. This is a conscious choice reflective of the way in which I perceive my artistic practices, my positioning throughout the experiential research and relationship with the scholarship. My navigation through the research and conceptualisations of persona and characterisation speak to a distancing throughout the work that I consider to be more of a biographical curation of experiences, rather than an autobiographical ingemination of experiential events.

identity and representation, I began using the word "corridor" to describe a space of understanding in which people could explore mixed-heritage Muslim female identity and pockets of expression. I also used this word to describe the occupation of space that I have experienced Muslim women are given within the artistic world in Britain to showcase our work. However, within this limited physical and emotional space I believe dwells something rather spectacular and is perhaps enhanced in its richness due to its conditions of creation.

Muslim female artistry has flourished over the years regardless of this seemingly never-ending lack of infrastructure that exists to support our artistry. Through my years as a practitioner, I have travelled through my own and others' experiences of this lack of space to occupy, unfold and exist. It is with these experiences that I know that whether we are assigned a corridor, a barber shop, an alleyway, a roof top, or a space that is only just big enough to pray in, our artistry only ever continues to thrive, and the number of Muslim women from global majority backgrounds that are pursuing artistic expression is proliferating. The idea of welcoming people to this corridor to experience Muslim female expression arrived during the second year of my project after I realised that I was thinking of my project like a house; a house in which the audience are visiting for the first time with each room containing a distinctive rhythmic intersectional experience.

Corridors, through quirky flows, haunting motifs, characterisations of mythological creatures and personae, opens a new discourse around the mixed experience and Muslim female portrayal in contemporary media. This discussion is of shapeshifting, transformation, metamorphosis, and shapelessness, with the methods of creation pertaining to *Corridors* also contributing to new ways of making, creating, and approaching practice. As well as "corridors", I created the terms "postcolonial playground" and "dystopian playground" to refer to the contemporary setting of my Muslim female identity and the experiential description of the way in which I situate my global majority heritage in Britain. As a rapper with a distinctive intersectional heritage, I feel that this description best fits the setting of not just where the practice *Corridors* takes place, but the cultural setting and dystopia that global majority people are living in. A dystopian playground may appear to be an oxymoron, and this would be exactly the point. This space of artistry and heritage is playful, undefined, and

resistant. Much like Bhabha's (1984) concepts surrounding realms and spaces of existence, I refer to the postcolonial/dystopian playground as a space where my experiences and practice are situated and a space in which the practice's findings are activated. Through this space, I created new[2] uses and personified expressions of terms that came as a result of the mobilisation and activation of the practice that characterise and describe the emerging representations that come through the practice. These are the terms characterisation[3], personae[4], shapelessness, shapeshifting, transformation, roleplay, metamorphosis, and mythology. These terms are interconnected and reside in the space in which the practice is situated. However, these terms can be related to and placed in conversation with wider areas of relating discourses such as postcolonial theory, intersectionality, rap, and identity. Characterisation and personae are words I use to describe the overarching expressions found within the practice, with shapelessness, shapeshifting, transformation, roleplay, metamorphosis, and mythology showing up as particular enunciated, activated, and embedded moments of the practice that speak to identity and representation. Shapelessness is a type of resistance that mixed-heritage people embody (Harris, 2018) and shows up in the practice with shapeshifting, metamorphosis and transformation describing expressive forms of resistance that erupt in the practice lyrically and visually both overtly and within the intricacies of the experiential research. Roleplay takes on a more indistinct feel of a playfulness that resides within a more ambiguous space between humour and truth, embodying and recreating tropes with narrative twists. This sits in conversation with mythology which refers to not just the mythical depictions of characters but characterises the sacred space and lore[5] that resides within the postcolonial playground and arena that situates the practice.

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[2] Visibility is a key theme, but it is excluded here from this list as this is not a new expressive term, but a pre-existing term that is already well used throughout scholarship. The terms listed here are specifically terms that have arisen from the creation of *Corridors*. However, the complexity, emergence and concept of visibility is discussed and explored throughout the thesis and practice.

[3] Characterisation is discussed in section 4.3 of the findings chapter.

[4] Personae/persona is discussed in section 4.2 of the findings chapter.

[5] "Lore" from the word "Folklore" refers to the bodies of knowledge and cultural expressions shared by subcultures, people, or cultures. In non/fictional works, lore often relates to characters and the world they belong to. These expressions often include poetry, myths, legends, proverbs, jokes, and oral tales.

1.2 Context/Motivation

From a young age I was naturally inclined to express myself through art. Concoctions of poetic melodies, rap, soundscapes, performances, and visual displays became the media I used to engage in storytelling. From rap battles on the back of the 197 school bus in 2005 at twelve years old, to my first headline show in 2018, age twenty-five, at the famous Rich Mix London where I intersected my rap set with a discussion of mixed-heritage identity and postcolonial discourse, I have witnessed the almost supernatural space that is manifested live when wordsmiths are given the opportunity to express their lived experiences through melodic discussions.

In 2014, I began experimenting with the merging of my creative practices between rap, poetry and film, examining the way in which I could tell poetic stories through audio and visual display. After much experimentation I created my first poetry film *Kintsugi* (X, 2015), a black and white visual story of growing up in south Manchester, created with diegetic and non-diegetic sounds and *a cappella* poetry-rap to guide and accompany the visual. I then went on to explore poetry films and conceptual mixtapes further and became fascinated with the way in which sound, rap and visual storytelling in combination could create an alternative intangible world[6] that audiences would figuratively[7] enter whilst absorbing the work. This was reminiscent of the space mentioned earlier that is created by wordsmiths when performing live, except that by combining interdisciplinary languages and making the output of the practice accessible by video, I was essentially able to deliver this space to the audience without people having to buy tickets to shows, which is something my peers were not doing as they only ever performed live to an in-person audience. As I progressed with this experimentation, I would become familiar with the idea of the space being co-created with the audience (Brook, 1968). However, I would further discover that the co-created space is significantly different when the MC is mixed-heritage, Muslim, and female.

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[6] I later explore the idea of other worlds through Bhabha's theory of partial existence.

[7] I also later explore the states of being through existence and third space.

In my experience I have found that far too often my colleagues would discuss this co-creation of a space but leave unquestioned *what* the space is that is being co-created. My interest lay more towards the exploration of what this space was rather than the existence of a co-created space because my space looked and felt different to that of my peers at the time. My space was shapeless and bypassing cultural norms by entangling a sociopolitical critical commentary in rhythmically packaged wordplays and boom bap beats.

Accessibility is important to my work. As a Muslim woman in the UK, I have often struggled with finding venues that I deem *halal*[8] and "Muslim friendly" to perform in. As an unapologetic and uncompromising Muslim, I refused any work in venues that had bars or any venues that I would not visit myself or invite Muslim friends and family to. I was informed by other Muslims that took work in such venues that they felt they had no choice but to perform in a pub or bar because the space for watching and participating in open mics and performances, unless they are of significant size, are these venues. Although I sympathised with my fellow Muslim artists, I remained stubborn. This inspired me to begin releasing content frequently online, a space that I believed was Muslim friendly and accessible, except this space was far from Muslim (and melanin) friendly amongst other things, which I quickly came to experience and understand.

In 2016, I created four EPs. The first was titled *The Inconvenience of an Impulsive Moment* (X, 2016), and much like the title, was rather on the nose, underdeveloped and premature. This served as an experimental work in which I explored transitional spaces and interludes between songs. The next was *Beauty and the Beat*, an EP that although has been performed live, is yet to be released in the public domain. Following this was my EP *Facts and Figures* (X, 2016), a work that went viral in the realm of Facebook, and subsequently resulted in my visibility as an artist increasing exponentially and finally, my visual EP *The Desperation of a Melody* (X, 2016) the first visual EP/second poetry film after the previously mentioned *Kintsugi* (X, 2015).

[8] The word "halal" refers to something that is religiously acceptable according to Islamic law.

It is in these two latter works that I unintentionally discovered the very early beginnings of my research project and began to consider its potential implications and contributions. *Facts and Figures* is an EP that contained a song called "Dear David" (X, 2016), a rap song that was addressed to the Prime Minister at the time, as a response to his reported comments that stated that the majority of Muslim women are traditionally submissive. I had already performed "Dear David'' live and received positive feedback, and casually made a video in my bedroom performing the song and posted it on Facebook. Within a day, the video had received thousands of views, and it would climb to half a million on my artist page, with reposts across other pages getting millions of views. I received praise and support, but the most interesting aspect was the large and vulgar backlash I endured. It is in this moment that I learned the following:

1. A number of Muslims believe it is entirely forbidden for Muslim women to rap, perform and use their voice for anything other than speaking very quietly to their family members and that engaging in the practice of music and rap is completely *haram*[9]. This is supposedly on the basis of the awrah[10] being inclusive of the female voice.
2. A large number of British white people in the UK *still* hold dangerously racist views and ideologies of Afro-Caribbean people, Asian people and followers of the Islamic faith, and this is enacted much more aggressively, in my opinion/experience, towards women than men.
3. A significant number of British white people in the UK appear to be confused by the idea of "Blackness" and its comprehensive spectrum, frequently verbalising and demonstrating confusion when Islam is advocated and practiced by those they perceive to be "Black" people.
4. The provocative and audacious nature of rap seemingly invites people to comment on the discourse of identity and its neighbouring complexities such

[9] The word "haram" refers to something that is forbidden according to Islamic law.

[10] The word "awrah" refers to the parts of a body that both men and women must cover in the presence of one another. The full definition, implications and debates around the awrah are explored in the literature review in section 2.1.7 and 2.1.8.

as stereotyping, postcolonialism and othering. Those that respond often respond as if they have been provoked.

5. There are hardly any Muslim female rappers, and Muslim female artists are missing from the creative outputs of music, rap, and visual album. In fact, there were at the time only eleven other discoverable and active Muslim female rappers of whom seven contacted me to introduce themselves and offer me solidarity during my backlash.

Following this Internet explosion, I continued releasing work across social media weekly, and would experience the same five findings stated above. This did not deter me from making and releasing work, but rather excited me about the potential discourse that could take place around the representation and identity of Muslim women when perceived through rap and film. I then released my first visual album/second musical poetry film mentioned, *The Desperation of a Melody* (X, 2016) which was screened in HOME cinema and exhibited across galleries in Manchester, as well as being available online. I started to see interesting stylistic elements emerge from my work but more importantly I detected an *opening space* that is presented when I, as a Muslim woman of *plenty* colour, produce practice using these very particular modes of communication and expression.

I became increasingly curious about the representations of Muslim women that had not yet been given space to unfold and the way in which I was interacting with themes, narratives, and occupying space. For the next four years between 2016-2020, I released countless works across social media and performed throughout the UK gaining a great deal of experience in my craft as a creative practitioner, racism and its complexity, and my unique positioning in the UK as a mixed-heritage Muslim woman.

In 2020 I released *UNSEASONED*, an E.P with a visual counterpart exploring the theme of a fictitious dysfunctional relationship. Feedback from my online and in-person community reiterated that we do not often see Muslim women offering their experiences of love and relationships, unless through media such as illustration and written poetry. I consider these to be often static representations and insights, as although they hold great significance, I would argue that performative rap-poetry in motion embodies and characterises representation differently and occupies a space

where malleability and movement are present in its practical form, which transforms when performed to audiences, resulting in a potential emotional movement in feeling or thought of the spectator. I was reminded of a previous song I released and often performed called "Coffee Conversations", a song about a date with myself, in which multiple comments across social media and in person would reaffirm that Muslim women are rarely visible in such dialogues and representations. I thought about the way in which as Muslim women, we are often haunted by the media representations of our love stories, and the dreaded question we are regularly asked of "will you have an arranged marriage?!". It is a question that is confusing, as those asking often have mistaken an arranged marriage as a forced marriage. Forced marriages are haram and arranged marriages are usually derived from culture and tribalism and are no different to English/British arranged marriages that were and still are encouraged for numerous reasons such as wealth (Ballard, 1978).

Over the years of my presence on social media, I released sixty-three pieces of work, all receiving similar feedback of its compelling representational necessity although I never escaped the harsh backlash and critiques from both Muslim and non-Muslim spectators. The lack of presence of Muslim women in music, particularly rap, hip-hop and alternative sounds, is no surprise. With a number of Muslims and Islamic schools of thought considering music to be haram combined with the harsh backlash that Muslim women receive for their involvement in music from both inside and outside the Islamic faith, it is an area that is permeated with disapprobation and arguably best left untrodden if one does not wish to feel ostracised.

However, such ostracism feels unfounded and appears a disproportionate and irrational reaction to the idea of Muslim women in rap. With the nature of this artistry and the overt presence of faith and sociopolitical commentary, I found myself, a mixed Caribbean and Asian heritage British Muslim woman, at the forefront of a controversial and underrepresented discipline, intimately involved, delving into a space of cultural, ethnographical and Islamic complexities, seeking to further explore and articulate this area, which I now refer to as a *corridor*. With these conversations in mind, I pondered on what rap and visual album can offer Muslim women, and in turn, what Muslim women in sonic and visual languages can offer this niche

interdisciplinary area of rap and visual album in which there is currently no scholarly evidence of contribution from a Muslim female practitioner.

1.3 Research Inquiry

Woven with auto-ethnographical experiences, this research project uses an interdisciplinary lens of rap and visual album[11] in conversation with a theoretical discourse to explore and investigate Muslim female identity, representation and expression. Through its practical creative features, this project simultaneously interrogates the intra[12] and external[13] Muslim female narrative whilst engaging with a discourse of Islamic female-centric[14] ideas, postcolonial theory, and the complexity of multiple and in-between identities to explore the following research questions:

1. In what ways can rap and visual album create new sonic and visual languages for Muslim women?
2. In what ways can these interdisciplinary practices explore and activate resistance, identity and visibility for Muslim women?
3. How does Muslim female identity "show up" and, re/present itself when explored through visual album and rap?

It is important to emphasise that this project is centred in creative practice and addresses its research questions and these areas of thought primarily through practice,

[11] It is worth remembering that the reason we use the word album to refer to a released collection of music is due to the gramophone discs and the way they were arranged in albums similar to photo albums. This could be interpreted as being suggestive of the idea that an album is the sonic version of the family photo album and a representation of who you and your family are.

[12] "Intra" is being used to describe the "world" inside the Muslim faith. It also describes the inner Muslim dialogue. The word internal is not used as Muslim female scholars have stated that "intra" is preferred.

[13] "External" is referring to outside of the Muslim faith.

[14] The notion of "Feminism" is controversial and problematic when considering Islam, and so the word "female-centric" will be used as this is more appropriate and a term that Islamic female scholars use when discussing women as central figures and women's rights.

with findings embedded in the practice itself. Muslim female identity and representation is an area that is contested, boisterous and somewhat governed by a domineering theoretical discourse. However, when visiting the area of research and contribution through PaR, there is an uncanny silence and cosmic gap. This gap is also present in the discourse of Muslim female identity and representation amongst mixed/multiple identities where there is simultaneously little noise in auto-ethnographical research in these areas.

With an intersectional research area entangled with intricacies, sensitivities and convolution, this project can present itself as a Pandora's box[15] that can unknowingly lead one astray when touching on the perimeter of areas in which there is great richness and a colossal existing historical debate. For this reason, there are many subject areas that are intentionally and respectfully not discussed in detail, as they are not the focus of the study or where the project is situated, although at times the research may sit on the peripheries of these larger themes and studies. A noticeable example of this throughout the project is the problematic nature of the debated translations of the Qur'an[16], pertaining to the Arabic language. One of the many significant areas of this project is in Islamic female-centric ideas. In order to understand the controversy surrounding Muslim female artistry, it is necessary to explore and contextualise the conceptualisation of the awrah and the nuanced and overt challenges that this research project addresses due to the notion of the awrah. To explore this, the *debate* of translation and its gendered connotations, societal and cultural implications around the word and debate are imperative, without delving into the study of translation itself.

Another example is the notion of "Blackness", an area that is saturated with testimony, debate, theory and revolution and holds a mammoth of interrogative research, rightly so, in the area of just the very word: Blackness. The auto-

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[15] This is ironically appropriate due to the mythological themes present through the practice, which are discussed in the findings section.

[16] The debated translation of the Qur'an in reference to the conceptualisations of women that have been derived from the Qur'an as a literary source, are discussed in the section of the literature review and begins in section 2.1.4.

ethnographical nature of this research naturally integrates the discussion of the regular exclusion and in/visibility of Afro-Caribbean[17] and African women from the discourse of Muslim female identity and representation, without embarking on a deep exploration of the historical and contemporary complexities in the understanding of "Blackness" itself and its relationship and positioning in and outside of Islam as it is beyond the scope of this research.

A third clarification is that this project explores rap outside of the popular generalised genre and conceptualisation of hip-hop, although in the practice review many rappers mentioned are immersed in hip-hop practice and culture. It is commonly overlooked that hip-hop was a curation of four pre-existing art forms coming together, and not a *creation* of the four art forms (Chang, 2007); rap is something one literally does in their delivery of lyrics and can be performed with any genre of music but is often socially spoken of interchangeably with hip-hop due to its significance in hip-hop's emergence in the Bronx in the 1970s. I argue that even though rap's presence in hip-hop is of great significance, this resulted in rap's creation and emergence often being attributed completely to the Bronx, resulting in rap in the UK's emergence being understood to have unfolded a decade later in the 1980s. With this understanding comes the overlooking of all those that employed rap as a musical lyrical delivery style around the world prior to hip-hop, and after hip-hop with no knowledge of hip-hop's existence. Although it is challenging to find recorded examples for obvious reasons of rap's oral history before hip-hop, its presence and essence can be heard in numerous cultures that pre-existed before hip-hop's arrival in the Bronx. Some examples would be in the Arabic poetry known as "Nabati", which features rhyming and rhythmic verses of traditional poetic expression with a focus on rhyme, meter and flow (Sowayan, 1985). Or, the West African Griot Tradition, where oral historians in West Africa use rhythmic storytelling, musical instruments, freestyle, and audience inclusion (Wilson, 1974). Similarly, if one walks down the streets of India, they will undoubtedly come across an art form called "solkattu"

[17] The discussion of the in/visibility of Muslim women from global majority backgrounds is woven through the literature and practice review throughout numerous sections.

which involves intricate patterns of claps and spoken syllables that has rhythmic and verbal interplay akin to many elements of rap (Nelson, 2008).

It is also important that we acknowledge Islam's very strong tradition of poetry going back to its classical period with a whole chapter in the Qur'an (Surah Ashu'ara, 26) being dedicated to poets.

> Historically, poetry was used as a form of dawah to invite non-Muslims to accept Islam. The Prophet Muhammad himself commissioned poetry for Muslim poets to refute verbal challenges to Islam and to inspire conviction amongst Muslims (Sharrief cited in Khan, 2020, p.1).

This poetry referred to is almost synonymous with rap and hip-hop and is derived from this practice and considered amongst many Black Muslims an inheritance of this poetic mantle, and therefore the questioning of whether hip-hop is permissible or haram was obsolete (Khan, 2020). Muslim female rappers often feel that

> Hip-hop is rooted in Islam. It's poetry slam. When the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was delivering the message, they called him a poet. His time was the time of poetry, where people were basically rap battling (Sharrief cited in Khan, 2020, p.4).

In my own experience, many times these practitioners have often never heard of hip-hop but they, of course, know what *rap* is and they certainly are experts of rap practice, although they refer to rap as a different thing musically in each culture.

This lack of understanding of rap practice outside of hip-hop often contributes towards the hyper-invisibility of practitioners with intersectional identities as these practitioners are not considered rappers due to the lack of awareness that rap is a feature of performance that is eclectic in nature, genre-less and as fluid in its applied practicality as it is in its essence. With this hyper-invisibility comes a lack of exploration into the differentiating methods of creation surrounding rappers from intersectional backgrounds and how one approaches rap, outside of the world of hip-hop, the impact it has and the understanding of its place and use in vocal performance. *Corridors* is no exception to this as its method of

creation around its practice are part of this project's original contribution and are outlined in the methodology chapter.

Furthermore, it is worth considering my experience and positioning within this project as an interdisciplinary artist. Although I consider and debate with concepts from Schafer's (1993) approach of treating the world as a macrocosmic musical composition[18], to Krims' (2000) idea that rap holds musico-poetic dynamics that are autonomous and unparalleled (p. 11), my position as a creative is peculiar. I sit between (unironically) as a practitioner of rap that has no expertise in ethno/musicology and no technical training[19] as a music maker, but experience in the practice of rap, the experiential understanding of identity formation and with the knowledge of every word that rhymes with mango (it is far more than you imagine). A project of this nature demands that I reflect on some of the social issues surrounding music that Krims (2000, pp. 5 - 14) speaks of that have directly impacted me, such as being one of the many people from a global majority background that desperately wanted to learn how to play music and understand musical theory but simply did not have access to spaces that did this. These institutions and spaces that denied access to individuals like me, contributed towards the creation of more corridors of expression.

With this, I approached this project by immersing myself further into the in-between and relied on theorists in rap music such as Brennan (1994), Jocono (1994a) and (1998), Keyes (1996), Potter (1995), Shusterman (1991) and Rose (1994) to validate my process and tacit knowledge. These scholars argue for the validity of rap,

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[18] This concept would be regularly mentioned during my undergraduate studies throughout the sound production module and was the first time I had heard of Schafer. Years later, I worked as a foley sound artist, and the concept was mentioned between colleagues. When beginning this research project, the concept was mentioned yet again in a seminar, leaving me with this feeling that it is a concept I cannot quite get away from and instead seems to follow me throughout my creative and academic pursuits.

[19] Although it is known that historically rappers would not have received an institutional musical education, my own experience throughout my musical career has been one where I have often been highlighted as the one that does not have any technical training. This is for many reasons such as age, location, peer group and cultural background. This presented my own situating as a practitioner as peculiar throughout this project, although I came to meet others that indeed shared my own experience.

suggesting that rap has its own logics and systems that must be acknowledged and understood as part of rap's autonomy.

> In fact, even the somewhat narrower project of validating rap via expositions of some of its poetics, turns out to be a project of a surprisingly high percentage of scholarship, occurring far more frequently than in any other genre I know of. Perhaps symptomatically of rap's precarious cultural position, much of the scholarly work on the subject has been concerned to demonstrate that rap has its own logics that must be understood. Thus, studies such as Shusterman (1991), Brennan (1994), Dyson (1996), Potter (1995), Jacono 1994a) and (1998), Keyes (1996), some of the essays in Spencer (1991), many of these essays in Perkins (1996) and Rose (1994, Chapter 3) among others, concern themselves at points largely with validating rap music against the cultural biases which inform against it. And indeed, the project of explaining rap, against common misconceptions and racialised discourses, cannot be underestimated in its urgency (Krims, 2000, p. 13).

Krims further states that these scholars further argue that the invalidation of rap's logics and own cultural world is often an extension of a form of racialised discourse that leans towards the denigration of Afrodiasporic musical aesthetics and positions the conversation as one for a Western reception (Krims, 2000, pp. 13-15). It is for this reason that I do not delve into discussions of musical theory, ethno/musicology and the in-depth technicalities and referencing of sound-art, electro-acoustic music, acoustic music and relating theories. Lastly, even though some may consider this project's positioning to be in the realm of intermediality, I do not consider this work intermedial in its traditional definitions as this work sits as an exploration of identity through the activation of joint experiential intersectionality and creative expressions. Intermediality often interrogates and/or explores the contemporary cultural digital media space along with accompanying theories of intertextuality and multimodality and can place much emphasis on the interrelations of these virtual spaces and connections, as seen in the work of scholars such as Johan Fornäs (2002). *Corridors* does not stem from conscious intermedial practices and focuses on an activated experiential, auto-ethnographical PaR that explores identity through intersectional concepts and interdisciplinary practices. For this reason, I do not interrogate

intermedial practices or theories and as a result, I do not contribute this work towards intermediality. I also do not delve into contextual storytelling due to potential Islamic complications discussed in section 4.1. This project is rather positioned in the realm of the intersectional in-betweens of British mixed-heritage, the hybridity of rap-visual album and Muslim female identity and its unexplored implications and potential.

Employing an intersectional framework and having an underpinning of intersectional theory enables this project to take a serpentine path through these themes and areas, drawing focus to their significance and relevance whilst refraining from the temptation to overindulge in extensive discussion and rather centring the practice, where the research is conducted and where its findings are situated. With an intersectional framework and approach to the theoretical knowledge and auto-ethnographical research alongside an interdisciplinary method of practice, the project is able to unfold and facilitate a discussion space held in the realms of the "in-betweens" of heritage, faith, gender and artistry. It is important to understand that intersectionality seeks to highlight the multiplicities of one's individuality and the coming together of multiplicity into a single form, rather than an exploration of many singularities (see chapter 2.1.1). The next section of this chapter will provide a brief overview of the reasoning for the adoption of the chosen methods that have been used to pursue this research inquiry and their application.

1.4 Methodology Overview

Throughout the previous sections of context/motivation and research inquiry, I have established that between creative practice, faith, gender and auto-ethnography, there is an intersectional research gap. As stated in the research inquiry, the project is centred in creative practice and addresses its research questions and surrounding areas of theory through practice primarily with focus on the pursuit of creating increased visibility and understanding of Muslim female narratives and expression in and through creative practices.

Figure 1, (X,H. 2022)

The image above illustrates the key functioning components of the methodology. Using critical theory, practice as research and auto-ethnography in conversation with one another, the research is conducted through practice and uses a critical discourse and auto-ethnography to situate findings into a contemporary body of knowledge surrounding Muslim female identity and representation and creative practice as research. The arrows in the image are intentionally suggestive of the project's fluidity and intertwining nature of the methodology.

This methodology also employs an intersectional[20] framework. Intersectionality is usually applied to understanding multiple aspects of one's identity and characteristics, however, by also applying the same theoretical framework to this research's interdisciplinary method of inquiry, the research presents an alternative application of intersectionality when pursuing knowledge through practice in areas that are challenging to navigate. An example of understanding its application could be seen as much like a person's faith. A person may identify as a Muslim, but also have other characteristics such as gender, dis/ability, heritage etc. that contribute to the defining of their unique lived experiences. Although they may identify primarily as a Muslim before other characteristics such as gender, and live through Islamic beliefs, their experiences are nonetheless informed by multiple experiences and the other

[20] A thorough explanation and discussion of intersectionality begins in section 2.1.1.

characteristics listed. The research methods employed for this research project embrace and employ a similar theory to this method.

Although the research is conducted primarily through practice with its findings also situated primarily in the practice, the project engages auto-ethnographical experiences and a theoretical discourse that inform, interrogate, and accompany its investigation, contributing to its articulated discoveries. Through *Corridors*, I attempt to mobilise[21] intersectionality and activate it through rap practice and visual album, resulting in a distinctive experiential expression. With intersectionality as an underpinning framework of the research and the interdisciplinary nature of the practice, it is evident that implementing intersecting methods of practice, interrogation/exploration of critical theory and auto-ethnography provides the project with the richness that it requires in an area that is lacking in contribution from a Muslim female practitioner and therefore, narrative.

Auto-ethnography is employed using rap and film practices that articulate and activate my experiential biographical experiences. Rap is of course already established as deeply ethnographical (please see section 3.1), and findings of the research are activated and embedded within the practice of *Corridors*. The essence of auto-ethnography sits in the reflective, introspective nature, where researchers examine and explore their own experiences within the content of their research questions (Cooper and Lilyea, 2022). Auto-ethnography faces critiques concerning the validity and rigour (Jackson and Mazzei, 2008), however, I believe these criticisms are inapplicable to this research project for various reasons, the primary reason being that scholarship is missing experiential auto-ethnographical research from rappers and Muslim women in Britain and presents a rather significant gap. Scholarship pertaining to both rap practice and the Muslim female British experience is oversaturated with contributions from researchers that are outside of both the practice and the religion. The intersectionality of this project provides a unique narrative, using auto-ethnography for its ability to illuminate the complexities of lived experiences, exploring the intersecting of gender, faith and heritage, and highlighting

[21] My approach towards how I began to consider the mobilisation of intersectionality begins in section 3.3.

their nuances (Ellis, 2004). With the findings embedded in and activated through the creative practice, auto-ethnography contextualises the space in which these findings emerge and are positioned theoretically.

This thesis will now move through the next chapter that consists of the literature and practice review, followed by the methodology and finally a comprehensive discussion and conclusion section that sit at the end of the thesis. Turning now to the next chapter of this thesis, chapter two will present the literature and practice review containing a summary of existing relevant theoretical and practical bodies of knowledge, contextualising and conceptualising the underpinning frameworks and thematic notions pertaining to this research project's inquiries and explorations.

2 Literature and Practice Review

This chapter presents a summary of existing theories, concepts, and ideologies that are relevant to this research project. Beginning with intersectionality, the chapter situates this project and contextualises the application of intersectional ideas alongside postcolonial theory. It also addresses theories surrounding heritage, highlights the gap in the discourse around British Muslim female multiple/mixed-heritage identities and their complexities, and explores the Islamic concept of the awrah with the conceptualisation of Muslim women in Islam and female-centric ideas. The theorists central to the literature review are Homi K Bhabha, Edward Said, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Jamaica Kincaid, Amina Wadud, Azeezat Johnson, Tariq Madood and Muna Tatari. The chapter then moves into existing creative practices that explore themes of identity, visibility, faith and gender through interdisciplinary examples of sonic and visual languages and discusses on screen representations of Muslim women and people of British Afro-Caribbean heritage throughout British cinema and music, highlighting the gaps in all relevant areas.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Intersectionality and Colonial Theory

In the 1989 essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," African-American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" as a way of framing interconnected characteristics of identity and the way in which these often create overlapping and interdependent systems of disadvantage and discrimination. Crenshaw's work articulates that intersectionality is a lens through which you can identify where power collides, interlocks and intersects which causes an already marginalised person to be further marginalised and face discrimination due to the intersection at which a person sits that others are not aware exists[22]. Crenshaw provides an example of African-American women believing they were not given a particular job on the grounds of discrimination against African-American women, but having their court case dismissed based on evidence that the employer hired African-American people and women independently of each other. Crenshaw begins by articulating "With Black women as the starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). This displays the difficulty in positioning and applying existing structures to Black women that are not designed to include them[23]. Crenshaw further states

> I want to suggest further that this single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race

[22] The concept and debate of existence/visibility is a theme that is present throughout this research project and its contestation can be experienced lyrically and sonically through the album in *The Interruption* and *The Hexenbiest*. This debate is also explored further on page 45.

[23] The concept of these existing exclusive structures is also present through much of the theoretical discourses surrounding identity and representation and is discussed more thoroughly in the discussions section of this thesis. It is also present throughout the creative practice review and in track three of album *The Offering*.

> and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group (1989, p. 140).

Therefore, the African-American woman denied the job role becomes invisible in this transaction due to the intersection that sits between race and gender. Even though there were indeed both African-American people and women hired for the job, there were no *African-American women* hired in the workplace. All African-American people were men and all women were white.

Two years later in 1991, Crenshaw expanded the framework in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour" where she explains how these oppressions overlap, creating distinct experiences for people with multiple identity categories[24] and cannot be framed singularly or separated from one another. Crenshaw simultaneously introduced the term "intersectional feminism", expressing that women experience oppression in varying configurations and the patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but influenced by those very interrelations, creating a system where women, particularly women of colour are disappearing from the narrative or were never there to begin with (Crenshaw, 1991). This can be seen across feminist theory and other disciplines (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw identifies the areas where women of colour are erased from these disciplines stating, "I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 141). This results in an already marginalised group of people becoming hyper-marginalised "because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 141).

The issue is that these specific exclusions and erasing of Black female lived experiences and discriminations require a new understanding and structure as "these problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 141). Working with intersectional theory and under an intersectional framework demands giving our focus

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[24] Much of Crenshaw's work when mentioning "multiple identity categories" refers to examples such as "gay, black women", but not necessarily the in-betweens between the in-betweens.

and attention to the spectrum of invisibilities that exist and have been unseen in pre-existing feminism and anti-racism. This compels us to understand and examine the way in which without intersectionality, we create a discourse of forgotten/unseen/invisible people whose experiences are not treated with validity and credibility due to the uniquely significant intersections at which they are positioned.

Crenshaw's focus is predominantly centred around African-American women but when applying this framework to this research project, intersectionality is a way of highlighting Muslim female identity and representation in the UK particularly amongst those with multiple identities and mixed-heritages. The positioning of these crossroads between gender, faith and heritage provides the opportunity for the exploration of untold narratives and overlooked experiences that are shadowed and, in many ways, forced to surrender and submit their validity due to the perceived unimportance that accompanies their hidden intersections. However, Crenshaw's work speaks of the intersecting of multiplicities, but often highlights individual *singularities*, e.g. "Disabled, Black women" or "Black Jewish women", and functions solely as a way of understanding and highlighting these multiple singular positions that I argue in turn creates multiple singular axes. Although as previously mentioned, Crenshaw states that these characteristics cannot be framed singularly or separated from one another, I argue that as Crenshaw's work is theoretical, there is no real way to appreciate its multiplicity in practice. Intersectionality, when applied as Crenshaw intends it to be applied, does not teach, exemplify, or demonstrate what intersectionality feels like, sounds like, or looks like. The *experience* of intersectionality is therefore sitting with the individual that possesses intersectional characteristics, and not with the party that is learning to identify individuals that are intersectional in nature and understand the implications of their unique positioning.

I argue that the notion of intersectionality when applied through this research project's specific auto-ethnographical practice becomes a fluid experience that can be shared, transferred, and experienced by those participating in the practice as audience members, listeners, and spectators. I liken this to the Islamic practice of *salah* (prayer). A person can theoretically explain the potential benefits of undertaking this practice that is performed by billions of Muslims daily by stating the positive impacts such as reduced stress, increased cognitive ability, increased blood flow and a general

feeling of spiritual and mental wellness, or a person could practice salah, the prescribed amount (five times a day) and experience these apparent benefits. Crenshaw's work serves as a way of highlighting these multiple characteristics, but findings in *Corridors* suggest that when intersectionality is applied to sonic and visual languages, and intersectionality is personified and curated through rap and film techniques such as rhythm, wordplay, visual depiction, characterisation and persona, there is a distinctiveness that is experienced and a shift in the understanding of capacity that intersectionality presents through artistic expression.

The use of these techniques offers a felt, aesthetic, shifting embodiment of intersectionalities and audience members and participants are potentially able to understand and explore what it means to have intersectional characteristics and begin to gain insights into what these experiences look, sound, and feel like resulting in an *intersectional experience*. Although it can be argued that other artists, practitioners, and creatives create work from their intersectional perspective, there is currently no scholarly contribution to PaR that states that it attempts to mobilise and activate intersectionality, nor is there evidence of any existing contribution to intersectionality from the perspective of a British, mixed-heritage, Muslim female rapper and filmmaker. Crenshaw's intersectionality in its original form therefore does not seamlessly position itself in relation to this project's research inquiry, but rather functions as Crenshaw initially intended it to, by highlighting and identifying the unique intersections present without employing solutions to issues of discrimination or embodying the cultural nuances throughout Crenshaw's work. This research project is situated in between the in-betweens, where the practice playfully exists and resists definition, rather than Crenshaw's multiple intersectional singularities (which are culturally American hence the use of "intersections" rather than the British crossroads) and employs practice as the primary tool through which findings are activated and present in a valley of between the in-betweens.

With multiple narratives that are entirely non-monolithic in nature, there comes a vast variation in lived experiences and their definitive interpretations and contexts. This provides much ambivalence and equivocation (particularly in theoretical discourses) in the understanding of Muslim female identity in the UK and its many representations. However, in the work of postcolonial theorist, Homi K

Bhabha, ambivalence is a key concept or perhaps better articulated as a symptom in those impacted by colonialism and is particularly important in understanding the relationship between our cultural hybridity[25] and sense of belonging. This understanding of ambivalence is explored in Bhabha's work all whilst characterising the complexity of the relationship between the coloniser and colonised which according to Bhabha, cannot always be separated from postcolonial identities. Bhabha highlights and exemplifies the many ways that colonialism does not remain in the past but thrives in the present continuously reinventing its relationship between colonised and coloniser. When looking at Bhabha's work and its broader relation to the research project, the impact postcolonialism has on Muslim women of global majority heritage in the UK, and the need to discuss these challenging concepts and realities through poetry and emotive language surfaces. This is particularly demonstrated later on in Bhabha's career through the incorporation of Toni Morrison's poetry.

2.1.2 Ambivalence

In the 1989 article "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", Bhabha explores the shaping of colonised identity and its arduous and transitional relationship with the coloniser, stating that "It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come" (p. 127). Here, Bhabha identifies complexities that sit deeply embedded in postcolonial identity and further goes on to examine the ambivalence of existence as a concept articulating that "the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely "rupture" the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence" (p. 127). Bhabha's work is male-centric with a specific focus on South Asian identity and often positions the "Englishman" and the "Indian" as parallels and doubles in a heavily theorised setting.

[25] The concept of "hybridity" originally stems from Edward Said's work "Orientalism" and its implications are discussed in this literature review in section 2.1.5.

This research inquiry explores the underpinning key themes and theories of Bhabha's ambivalence and its interconnected terms of mimicry, virtual existence, hybridity[26] and third space, challenging these theories alongside the interrogation of the idea of parallels and doubles by questioning their existence and role in practice based and auto-ethnographical experiential research. The concept of ambivalence is one that positions culture as something consisting of oppositional dimensions and perceptions. Bhabha argues that ambivalence is a duality that presents a "split" in the identity formation of those colonised, creating a hybrid identity that is formed of the combination of one's own cultural identity and the identity of the coloniser. In his 1994 work "The Location of Culture" Bhabha states that "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (p. 107).

Contrary to prevailing theories, whilst the essence of Bhabha's colonial subject may ring true in the periphery of the theory surrounding this practice, when explored *through* practice, findings suggest that the very opposite of these theories surface. Experiences such as ambivalence, mimicry, and virtual existence hold no weighty presence in the realm of *Corridors*; in fact, the practice presents a solid, self-assured competence in a characterisation that does not scream, but raps melodically and rhythmically "this is who I am", rather than "I wonder who I am", which can often be implied through much of the discourse of postcolonialism, particularly when discussing mimicry. Mimicry is defined throughout postcolonial discourses as "when people of the colonized country start imitating the behaviours, attitudes, language and culture of the colonizers" (Gupta, 2013, p. 3). The third space is understood as an ambiguous area that begins to develop when people from two or more cultures interact with one another, a space that Bhabha suggests is contradictory and ambivalent where cultural statements and systems are constructed and enunciated (Bhabha, 1994, p. 173).

When considering Muslim mixed-heritage in the UK, and the practice-based activation of this research project, it is apparent that such theories relating to

[26] Edward Said's concept of hybridity is expanded through Bhabha's work. Said's work is looked at later from section 2.1.5.

contemporary British identity have progressed and "shape shifted[27]" to some degree. I believe there are two potential reasons for this. The first reason for this arguable progression is that Bhabha along with other core male proponents across postcolonial theory, such as Edward Said, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Frantz Fanon, to name a few, have held the floor in discussions of identity and the articulation of its endless complexities and implications. Yet, it is not until we turn attention to the relatively few female voices of Jamaica Kincaid[28], Buchi Emecheta and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that we understand how male-gender-centralised the discourse of postcolonial theory is and remained up until relatively recently.

This research project through its auto-ethnography unavoidably contributes in discussion to the female postcolonial discourse, presenting an alternative insight through its practice-based methods, with findings articulating an evocation of identity that compliments contemporary ideologies within the postcolonial discourse. Through *Corridors*' embodied feminine intersectional and interdisciplinary experience, the practice exemplifies ideas surrounding agency such as Spivak's concept of "subaltern" (1998), with findings highlighting that there is contestation with the idea of presenting particular people as voiceless or unspeakable, especially if one wants to present this concept to rappers and musical performers. This is not to suggest that there is not hyper-marginalisation, as this project seeks to facilitate discussion amongst underrepresented people. However, it is common within pockets of cultural communities that one will hear others repeatedly draw on this idea of *giving* agency[29] to those they deem lacking in agency. Findings in *Corridors* suggest that this concept of deciding who does/does not have agency, and that agency can be given, is contradictory to the idea of agency. Rather, Corridors develops Spivak's concepts

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[27] The concept of "shape shifting" is a central activated key theme that is present through the practice. This is explored in depth in section 4.

[28] The work of Jamaica Kincaid is significant to this research project and is discussed at length in section 2.1.6.

[29] I do not interrogate agency as a concept in and of itself as this navigates to a space that is too distant to the research project. I am also not suggesting that the concept of agency is black and white and without nuance, rather, I am suggesting that as a person whose identity often falls within the discussion of agency, without being directly included in the discourse, I feel the conversation of agency unfolds in an arena that sometimes contradicts its notions.

through performative rap-visual album, extending agency's considerations into practice and reiterating Spivak's notions surrounding the struggle of legibility in the work of those from marginalised backgrounds when perceived, understood and interrogated through theoretical Eurocentric discourses.

The second reason is the passage of time and generational difference. People such as me are now the children of the figurative marriage between Bhabha and Kincaid, born and raised in the UK, multiple in heritage, overt in the practice of faith, have never visited either home of these parents or grandparents and are now saddened to only speak English, and must ask our parents and grandparents to teach us *their* languages. This is a different time, a different setting, a different playground[30] and a different *people*.

This is a time where countless lived experiences highlight the change in postcolonial setting. These generational differences and the complex notions of identity formation that accompany migration are explored in Les Back's (1996) book *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* whereby Back situates the complicated multitude of identity. In my own experience, I have witnessed almost a reversed assimilation such as a white British paramedic placing his hand on my mother's shoulder and saying, "I hope you feel better, Insha'Allah[31]", and a time where when giving change to a white Polish homeless woman, she responded to me with "Thank you! Mash'Allah[32]! Asslamu alaikum[33]!" I presume neither of these individuals were indeed Muslim, nor would this be the only time these incidents have taken place. Despite the racism still present in the UK[34] (and there is a lot of it), the UK is more

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[30] This concept of a "playground" is explained in section 1.1.

[31] "Insha'Allah" is the Arabic word for "God willing" and a common phrase Muslims use.

[32] "Mash'Allah" is an Arabic phrase that is translated as "what God has willed".

[33] "Asslamu alaikum" is the Arabic phrase that Muslims use when greeting and departing from one another, which is translated as "peace be upon you". This is similar to the traditional Jewish greeting "Shalom aleichem".

[34] The sixth track of the album *The Internet* is a song made from racist hate comments on social media, which serves as an insight into the nature of racism towards Muslim women from global majority backgrounds in the UK from other British citizens. These comments span outside of the UK, but due to this project's scope, the UK is the focus and so only comments from the UK were used.

multicultural and diversified now than it has ever been and the children, like myself who heard our parents' and grandparents' stories of travel, struggle and assimilation are now of the mature age to understand, but more importantly, articulate that this cultural setting our parents experienced on arrival has shape shifted and undergone a metamorphosis in which racism, existence, resistance, identity and visibility, look and feel distinctively different.

2.1.3 In-Betweens

Bhabha is exceptionally fluent in his ability to pinpoint and discuss delicate realms of space and existence and articulates that not only are these realms invisible, only to be felt by those who carry multiple identities, but are also simultaneously estranged yet familiar. When discussing these unknown, intangible spaces and the multiple states/realms of existence, this research project's practice positions itself *in* multiple realms of fluid existence, a spiritually sacred and in/tangible space referred to throughout this thesis and practice as a corridor. As mentioned, Bhabha speaks of the contestation that is present in relation to ambivalence and mimicry and describes the area between mimicry and mockery in which imitation is present, highlighting that it is not simply that a discourse is ruptured but completely transformed. He goes on to clarify "By 'Partial' I mean both 'incomplete' and 'virtual[35]'" (Bhabha, 1984, p. 127).

From this we see that there is an area of existence in between this space of imitation and resistance that is created by the relationship between coloniser and colonised. With the ambivalence of this idea of intangible space, come other complexities such as partial presences mentioned and thus, presumably incomplete narratives. Bhabha is clear in his expression of the complexity of these disruptions in identity and the way in which this relationship not only creates an identity that is "incomplete and virtual", but that the "success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so mimicry is at

[35] It is fascinating to consider the way in which being present on social media as an artist and woman of faith and mixed-heritage, impacts ones understanding of a virtual reality. Bhabha is articulating that virtual presence is already internal and experienced, but through online commentary, virtual presence is now also a literal thing, which did not exist at the time that Bhabha discussed such ideas.

once resemblance and menace" (p. 127).

The characterisation of both the coloniser and the colonised alongside the transformative nature of ambivalence itself displays the potential challenges in the positioning and understanding of Muslim female identity in the UK particularly for women of global majority heritage. Alternatively, I would argue that this is perhaps the exact unique skill and ability that Muslim women from global majority heritages in the UK possess and one of the strengths that this research project encompasses and offers to those wishing to gain insight into one "corridor of Muslim female expression". Rather than thinking in complete parallels or anchoring through multiple singular axes, this research project situates its body in a state of fluidity, metamorphosis and transformation that is not mirroring nor longing for a home, but rather lives confidently anywhere it wishes to perform and unfold its practice. Perhaps this is an extension to the notion of the fluidity of Black Muslim women's identities in Britain that Black British Muslim female scholars like Azeezat Johnson (2016) speak of. Our emotional geographies, our racially marked bodies, and the performance that our intersectional identities unfold creates a dis/comfort as we travel through different spaces (Johnson, 2016).

Between its visual characterisations of haunting motifs and dreamy layers of roleplay and its sonic composition between boom bap beats, quirky flows, tabla *thekas* and simple chords, *Corridors* is created eclectically and draws attention to the strength of fluidity, states of being, sudden abruptions and changes in flow, pace, and discussions, that others may refer to theoretically as a ruptured discourse that is disconnected and discontinued. The desire to impose mirroring[36] on oneself in order to better fit in a postcolonial society paralleled with the desire to reject those attributes and the simultaneous longing for a home is a theoretical stance popular amongst postcolonial theorists as mentioned between imitation, mimicry and mockery and is also present in the work of novelists engaging with themes of diaspora. This tempestuous relationship is artistically recounted in the work by author Toni Morrison in an epigraph found in her tenth novel *Home* published in 2012. Morrison poetically

[36] Themes of mirroring are also present in the practice review when discussing the work of Freddie Mercury.

asks the following:

> Whose house is this? Whose night keeps out the light In here? Say, who owns this house? It's not mine. I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats; Of fields wide as arms open for me. This house is strange. Its shadows lie. Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key? (2012. p. 1)

In 2019, Bhabha began a talk using Morrison's poem to frame his lecture on the need for new emotive languages within human rights. Morrison's poem captures the essence of the difficulty of belonging in places that many people of African diaspora were never truly meant to be. Attention is often drawn to the final line of the poem "why does its lock fit my key?" which probes the big question of belonging and identity and reaffirms Bhabha's statements of colonialism not remaining locked in the past, but continuing very much in the present, expanding on the earlier poetic statements of "it's not mine" and "I dreamed another". A question that Morrison asks resonates with this research project. "Who owns this house?", With diasporic heritages it is common that for many, places such as the UK as previously mentioned are the only home they know, yet this is contested due to the historical impact of colonialism and the intersection, or crossroad rather in which it positions second and third generations of global majority people in the UK.

Through Bhabha's work, it is clear that the constant transformative wheel of identity is ever turning, and that cultural hybridity, diaspora and difference are some of the most important tools in understanding oneself and their relation to the past and present. Much like Crenshaw's intersectionality, the hybrid cultural identity has borders of overlapping and intersections that support the creation of in-between identities. With this project's inquiry situated between the in-betweens, the exploration of Muslim female identity and representation through its interdisciplinary practice holds a distinctive potential and contribution to PaR and wider scholarly discourse in Muslim female identity, by introducing discussions of the multiple

characterisations that have revealed themselves through this PaR and their implications. In the spaces that exist between women of global majority heritage and their diaspora in relation to the UK, the introduction of the Islamic faith to this conversation intersects with a fascinatingly intertextual, cultural, and political dialogue, particularly when discussing the theories relevant to this research project's inquiry, positioning and engagement in Islamic female-centric ideas.

In their 2018 paper "Centring Black Muslim women in Britain: a Black feminist project," Azeezat Johnson highlights the way in which Black Muslim women are excluded from the discourse in Britain surrounding Muslim female identity stating that "when the label of British Muslims is employed, it is implicitly attached to Muslims with some form of South Asian heritage reducing this religious identity to an ethnically defined category (eg. Brown, 2006; Meer, Dwyer and Modood 2010; Phillips 2015)" (p. 8). Johnson, also employing Crenshaw's theories of intersectionality suggests that "when experiences of blackness are discussed, an overwhelming focus on the role of Christianity and churches" (p. 8) is evident, once again missing the intersection of Black[37] Muslim women in Britain.

It is common for Black Muslims to feel invisible from the multiple discourses due to feeling that some characteristics "discredit" or "disqualify" one's Blackness, Islamic and British identities or are considered "unbelonging" by other members of the Islamic faith, British culture, and Black communities (Black and Muslim in Britain, 2017). Some Black Muslims have articulated when asked what being Black and Muslim in Britain means that "it's to be erased from many conversations and discussions around identity" (Black and Muslim in Britain, 2017, 0:52 - 0:58). Many Black Muslims feel that "if there's a group of black people talking about black representation, black Muslims are left out of the conversation" (Black and Muslim in Britain, 2017, 1:25 – 1:33) and alternatively "if it's a conversation that is around Muslim representation, black Muslims are left out of the conversation" (Black and Muslim in Britain, 2017, 1:33 – 1:40) which results in Black Muslims feeling that "to be black and Muslim in Britain is to be left out of a conversation in one way or

[37] In section 1.2 of this thesis, it mentions how white British people appeared confused at the idea of the concept of "Black and Muslim" when commenting on my work online.

another" (Black and Muslim in Britain, 2017, 1:40 - 1:47). With these demonstrations of lack of visibility across multiple identity brackets, Crenshaw's statements on an already marginalised people becoming further marginalised, and Bhabha's already questionable realm of existence and partial presence demonstrates the urgency towards creating visibility and visible narratives around Muslim women of mixed/multiple heritage and the way in which we occupy space, further highlighting this research project's felicitous and timely significance.

Looking towards Black Muslim female scholars, it is evident that not only are Muslim women working with invisibilities across heritage and faith, but also a battle of patriarchy and *mistaken* patriarchy from both the intra-Muslim and external non-Muslim world. Amina Wadud is an African-American Muslim theologian who is known for examining the theme of gender-based interpretations of the Qur'an. Wadud specialises in Islamic feminism and Qur'an studies and is notable for her controversial act in 2005 of leading the Friday congregational prayer, which broke Islamic law only allowing males to lead the prayer in mixed congregations (Al Jazeera, 2005).

In order to later discuss the complexities in the implications of the awrah, it is important to first understand the debate of translation and the way in which gender historically and contemporarily plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of immense sections of the Qur'an. As previously mentioned, although this thesis is not situated in translation, it is necessary to consider the ways in which contemporary understandings of Muslim female identity within Muslim communities, whether positive, negative, or neutral, all stem from interpretations of the Qur'an. These (mis)conceptions are the foundational core context that underpin the way Muslim women are presented, portrayed and considered in both the "Muslim world" and "Non-Muslim world".

2.1.4 Gender-Based Interpretations of the Qur'an

In Wadud's 2009 article "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis", she interrogates the notion of equality and misinterpretation of the Qur'an's message. Wadud emphasises that "the Qur'an consistently cites both man and woman as morally responsible— promising reward or punishment for both based upon their faith, actions and intentions, whether they act alone, in the family, in

the community, or in the wider world" (p. 99). Wadud reaffirms this with a quote from the Qur'an that reads "Whoever does a good deed, whether male or female, and is a believer, all such shall enter the Garden" (Qur'an, 40:40). Wadud demonstrates here that the Qur'an does not differentiate between the judgment of man or woman based on gender but instead only focuses on the act of deeds alone. However, the necessity of Wadud's role and presence in scholarship throughout Islamic feminism is due to the way in which Islamic concepts have been arguably misinterpreted with gender-based ideologies. Wadud then goes on to discuss the challenging of patriarchy with reciprocity and asks an important question:

> …After the revelation was given to the Prophet Muhammad, to what extent did Muslim thinkers and members of Muslim societies move beyond this patriarchy in historical and intellectual terms, as well as in community and cultural practices? Did Muslims succeed in fulfilling gender justice to the extent required by the trajectory set forth in the Qur'an? (Wadud, 2009, p. 100)

When examining this fulfilment in relation to Muslim women in the UK, it is evident that Muslim women are regularly facing issues of what I would call "performative patriarchy" from both within and outside of the Islamic faith. This duality and complexity of issue is expressed by Wadud:

> Today we face a dual mandate. From within, we must address the persistent sub-standard status of women under Muslim laws and in Muslim cultures, countries and communities. At the same time, we must also challenge notions from outside Muslim cultures that Islam is not competent to participate fully in global pluralism and universalism and to meet the demands for democracy and human rights. We are more than competent, and we are addressing these issues from within an Islamic framework. In this way, we can overcome patriarchy and move towards more egalitarian notions and practices in Muslim

> civil society, whether in Muslim majority nation states or as Muslim minorities in the diaspora of North America and Europe. (p. 101)

With this intra-Muslim and external non-Muslim pressured patriarchy, intertwined with the contextualised intersections that Muslim women of colour in the UK experience in relation to postcolonialism, the overlapping in identity and in some ways, identity frustration is prominent. The cause of this frustration can often include the emergence of stereotypes held of the Muslim woman, which are born through skewed depiction, and understandings that colonisers often created through means such as orientalism. This "dual mandate" that Wadud refers to echoes the themes of multiple existence that many Muslim women of global majority heritage experience in the UK and postcolonial theorists mentioned expand on, and speaks to the experience of the backlash that Muslim women in performance often endure from within the Muslim and secular world. *Corridors* embraces this challenge of dual mandate and weaves in and out of discordance with the idea of existing in multiple worlds through its fluidity. Rather than attempting to address this mandate, the practice simply allows insight into expression to contribute to the discourse of Muslim female-centric commentary.

2.1.5 Orientalism

In Edward W. Said's 1978 book *Orientalism* these stereotypes and their formation are investigated. Similarly to Crenshaw's intersectionality, Said's orientalism can be used as a lens to contextualise the contestation surrounding identity. Said not only articulates the stereotypes created by the orientalist lens, but also the way in which the legitimation of those stereotypes is supported through giving the voice of the West "credibility" and creating silence amongst the voices of those being stereotyped. Said's 1978 *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* opening features the famous epigraph:

> They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented (p.10)

- Karl Marx, *The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Said frames the positioning of the East vs. West, similarly to Bhabha's parallels, and is clear in his stance of the West villainising and creating false realities of the East that then took form and became forced oppressive realities for people of global majority backgrounds and faith living in the West with the diasporic consequence of colonialism. In the introduction of the book (1978), Said strongly reaffirms his stance and clarifies that orientalism is not merely a myth that was created by the West, but a discourse that is widely accepted and deeply integrated into and amongst Western consciousness. Said stresses the reality of orientalism and emphasises how deeply embedded in Western consciousness it remains stating that orientalism "is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment" (Said, 2003, p. 25). Said reiterates the connection between the filtering of knowledge into Western understandings of the East as "continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient in to Western consciousness" (p. 26).

In her 2012 paper "Muslim Women in Britain: De- Mystifying the Muslimah", Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor explores the way in which the orientalist lens articulated by Said can be used to recognise the four people who "save" Muslim women, known as "the orientalist, the colonialist, the feminist or the patriarch" (p. 128). The active demonstration of these stereotypes is interestingly depicted in Mirza and Meetoo's 2017 article "Empowering Muslims girls? Post-feminism, multiculturalism and the production of the "model" Muslim female student in British schools" where their case study demonstrated that teachers perceived Muslim girls to "have a lack of agency" (p. 47) which resulted in teachers taking unsolicited initiative to "devise their own routes of empowerment founded on Western feminist and neoliberal modes of progression" (p. 47). This intervention from the teachers can be seen as the active embodying of the role of "the feminist and the colonialist" mentioned in Cheruvallil-Contractor's 2012 paper. Mirza and Metoo when interviewing Muslim schoolgirls found that girls were told their "home life was oppressive"(p. 177) and that they "needed to be saved"(p. 178) , stating that

schoolgirls “deeply internalised that their faith is perceived as backwards in a Westernised secular society” (p. 178).

Although they exemplify Said’s orientalist lens in play, these papers are demonstrating issues highlighted by Johnson (2018), on their lack of inclusion of Black Muslim women. This draws focus to and reiterates the intersection and corridor of the research project’s location between these multiple lenses of faith, heritage, and gender. However, through the practice’s findings, these tropes and stereotypes are unveiled as creations of the orientalist lens; they not only completely do not exist when explored through practice, but potentially only ever existed within a certain time frame, under particular conditions. With multiple intersections of identity not included in both Said’s and Mirza and Metoo’s research such as women of Black and mixed-heritage, how can one truly determine that this issue of perceived lack of agency is truly a secular vs religious issue, and not simply a cultural one? It is indeed true that a lack of agency is presumed over many people of faith and heritage, but to exclude an entire range of ethnic experience from a discourse, and then to summarise that people perceive those very people they excluded as having lack of agency, is problematic. Mirza and Meetoo did not include mixed-heritage and Black Muslim school girls in their research, therefore a significant commentary is missing from this discourse. Black and mixed-heritage Muslim school girls have a very different experience at school to their Asian peers and are not given space in the discourse to articulate these experiences.

African and Afro-Caribbean Muslim women in the UK alongside those carrying multiple heritages are positioned at an intersection of identity in which they are the receivers of the stereotypes placed on women from these backgrounds, whilst simultaneously being answerable to and assigned with the stereotypes created through orientalism. This can often be due to the understanding that the West holds of Islam, which is often confused with (inaccurate) Arab stereotypes (Said, 1978). The result of placing these stereotypes onto Muslim women of African/Afro-Caribbean/mixed/multiple identity means that they are positioned in an arena of multiple inaccurate narratives and do not get the opportunity to correct their *own* narrative as they are correcting the stereotype others have projected on to them, such

as the stereotypes of the Orient, that as mentioned are confused with the Islamic faith (Said, 1978).

This results in contestation within the community of Muslim women from these backgrounds and can often lead to individuals being perceived as problematic or difficult people to interact with, something I have often experienced myself when navigating through the British playground of cultural hybridity. *Corridors* positions the audience in this contestation, stepping beyond tropes and stereotypes and melodically and visually transforming into depictions of mythological creatures traditionally considered as creatures to be feared, such as the Hexenbiest and Medusa. Using mythology as a thematic throughout *Corridors*, the practice fosters a new sense of potential surrounding the ability that the contemporary British mixed-heritage Muslim female experience offers to sonic and visual representation, stretching beyond the common stereotypes, tropes, and arguments of agency and third party contemporary perceptions.

Tariq Madood, in his 2003 article "Muslims and the Politics of Difference" articulates that Muslims are viewed as a "problem" community, stating that "Muslim identity" is viewed by particular secular multiculturalists to be "the illegitimate child of British multiculturalism" (p. 106). For many years Madood has tirelessly protested for the recognition of Muslim cultural identity, but he states that this desire to be seen has been countered by politicians and commentators who perceive religion as "something one adheres to voluntarily" as opposed to a "cultural identity in its own right" (p. 108). This is the invisible and missed narrative that Crenshaw exemplifies in intersectionality and the shadowing that can happen when people sit at multiple intersections that are already marginalised, misrepresented, and misunderstood.

Crenshaw demonstrates how the experiences that women of global majority heritage endure are only judged in relation to others, pivoting on an axis that prevents the narrative of women of global majority heritage to be heard as the combined race and sex discrimination that Black women encounter "implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 143). This then insinuates that women of global majority heritage are "protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 143). This puts

women of global majority heritage in a potentially dangerous position as "where their experiences are distinct, Black women can expect little protection" if there is continuation in approach which "completely obscure problems of intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 143).

This axis of unrelated and inaccurate relativity prevents the visibility of true identity and suppresses individuals further resulting in representations that are already incorrect becoming the only representations seen and heard. Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discusses her concerns about under-representation in her TED Talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story". Here, Adichie argues that "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" (2009, 13:14). As an African Feminist, Adichie uses her storytelling as a way of challenging stereotypes and incomplete narratives, questioning themes of identity and continuously exhibiting the necessity of true representations across all under-represented cultures.

Interestingly, *Corridors*, in its essence, is full of incomplete moments. From its abrupt changes in tone and style, to its inconclusive ending, it moves the audience through musical segments that are snippets of expression. Rap has always had the ability to say as much as possible as succinctly as possible; it conceptually expands, then snaps back in punchlines, melodies and lyrical wor(l)dplay. In *Corridors*, this sense of incompleteness is a key component of its impact and ability to "move on", asking viewers with its pace to keep up, as listeners of rap will be used to. *The Offering* in *Corridors* opens commentary through satirical imitations of complaints of stereotypes, suggesting that essays of why stereotypes are wrong are not needed in this world, unless intending to be posted to Facebook.

Stereotypes, when met with rap practice, are often debunked the minute they appear, such as the media perception of Muslim women being traditionally submissive and cautious in their expression of self[38]. Findings suggest that the two arguably cannot exist, by the mere fact that rap is a skill created from a space of

[38] My own practice "Dear David" showcased in the intro was a direct response to the notion that Muslim women are traditionally submissive and do not possess the ability to articulate their thoughts.

ability that surpasses the bounds of where stereotypes originate. When contrasting the work of Adichie, the poetic and essayist writings of postcolonial theorist and novelist Jamaica Kincaid[39] employs a different texture of representation.

2.1.6 Jamaica Kincaid

As a Caribbean heritage woman and convert to Judaism[40], Kincaid's writing is nuanced with themes of multiple and in-between identities. Kincaid, despite being a renowned essayist, novelist, trailblazer of those writing about in-between identities and multiple heritage, and one of the arguably first women to tackle such complexities so uniquely, is, ironically, rarely mentioned in theoretical bodies of knowledge surrounding identity, when compared to other scholars and their works. Despite the area of identity being one that is constantly seeking examples of missed narrative and representation, Kincaid's work is significantly less well-known than that of Morrison, Said and Bhabha, according to the small amount of research into Kincaid's work available in libraries. I would argue that this is due to Kincaid representing many things that often go amiss and overlooked that this thesis draws attention to; the intersection of heritage, gender, and faith that Kincaid is positioned between.

Kincaid, awarded numerous times for her writing and displaying such originality in that way in which she writes creatively, auto-ethnographically, transparently and candidly about identity, deserves to be recognised and revered as one of few who initiated the conversation of in-between identities of women of underrepresented heritage through creative practice in the 1970s prior to Bhabha and Said.

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[39] Due to that lack of female voices in postcolonial theory, and the immense contribution towards the field of in-between identities and postcolonial theory that Kincaid holds, it is wise to include her work as a novelist and essayist, particularly as it holds close relevance to the research project and previously mentioned theorists. It is also relevant in relation to the auto-ethnographical elements of this research along with the biographical setting of the practice of the research project.

[40] It is worth noting that the concept of "Black Jews" is steeped in controversy and Kincaid reportedly faced many difficulties with this intersection.

In 1990, Kincaid published a short novel entitled *Lucy*, an eponymous story of a young woman coming from the West Indies to the United States to work as an au pair for a wealthy white family. The novel reflects Kincaid's own life intimately and the strained relationship that colonised identity creates between family members who each have their own understanding of in-between identities. As Lucy grapples with her exact identification, the prominence of her Black identity becomes challenging due to the expectations that Black women in America impose on her. White American women struggle to differentiate between her Antiguan identity and her appearance of a Black woman, pushing Lucy into further dialogue with herself as to what constitutes being Black vs. Caribbean, exploring themes of colourism and shadism often entwined with literal and metaphorical meanings.

> I, too, felt that I wanted to be back where I came from. I understood it, I knew where I stood there. If I had to draw a picture of my future then, it would have been a large gray patch surrounded by black, blacker, blackest. (Kincaid, 1990, p. 142)

Kincaid often writes in auto-biographical manner examining the disputation of double identity, in-between identity and the projected identity placed on individuals by others. With the complexity of identity magnified by the individual spectrum of which identity is placed on, enveloped with misrepresentations, and stifled with invisibility, Kincaid's work locates the acute contestation that is in conversation with the identity of those located at such heritage crossroads and intersections highlighted by Crenshaw. Much of Kincaid's work features a strained relationship between mother and daughter as a mirroring of her own relation, with freedom from the mother being closely personified through freedom from the motherland, and therefore, freedom from the atrocities of colonialism.

The characters in Kincaid's novels constantly seek to emancipate themselves from colonialism, and the differentiating understanding of the impact of colonialism that mother and daughter share, is in itself an in-between identity. The relationship

between mother and daughter often becomes a representation of the hegemonic relationship between mother-country (England) and daughter-island (Antigua).

In Kincaid's 1996 book *The Autobiography of my Mother*, the dual heritage protagonist, Xuela, proclaims the famous line "My mother died at the moment I was born" (p. 54). This can be interpreted as a metaphor for African diaspora as the character in the novel is mentally chained to the oppressive legacy of colonial domination, preventing Xuela from forming her own meaningful identity until she is a young adult. However, this suppression of identity is the very means in which the protagonist is able to later achieve autonomy and self-determination. This reclaiming of identity is also seen in Kincaid's previously mentioned book, *Lucy*. Kincaid follows a formula in her writing, which shows in order, oppression, contestation and finally emancipation.

When thinking of the multiple diasporic implications of Muslim women of global majority heritage in the UK, it is notable that the themes of contestation and oppression are insinuated through the very existence of the individuals as articulated by the commonalities found with the struggle of identity depicted by the scholars and authors mentioned. Through Kincaid, we see this chronologically ordered mode and staging of resistance, oppression, contestation, emancipation, and an examined space of existence in-between each of these in-between stages.

With the discussion in section 2.1.4 exploring the difficulties that Muslim women face in and outside of the Islamic faith due to gender-based interpretations of the Qur'an, and having expanded on how these concepts have been perpetuated by the West and embedded into the Western view of Muslim women, I will move into perhaps the most challenging discussion that these research project explores. When considering how an increase in visibility of not only these spaces, but Muslim women of global majority heritage in the UK and their representations can be achieved through the combination of theoretical and creative practices, there is an outstanding and distinctive challenge. This is the awrah and the permissibility of Muslim women's voices, literally, conceptually and in regards to its personification.

2.1.7 The Awrah and Conceptualisation of Muslim Women in Islam

This section focuses on the awrah, exploring the rulings and origin of the concept, the sexualisation of the woman and her depiction as a temptress whilst contextualising the strained relationship between Muslim female performers and the ideologies surrounding the awrah.

The awrah refers to the intimate parts of the male and female body that must be covered in the presence of the opposite sex. This differs from person to person with regard to the relation the parties share. According to Islamic rulings, both women and men must cover their private parts and wear loose fitting garments that are not transparent (Qur'an, 7:26). The majority of Islamic scholars agree that the voice of a woman is not included in their awrah, meaning that women can use their voices in front of men (Sulaiman, 2018). However, throughout the Muslim world, women have received a harsh backlash and critique from followers of the Islamic faith when using their voice for the purpose of musical performance, recitation of the Qur'an, or simply public speaking (Wadud, 2009). This has caused significant controversy and Muslim female rappers have been the main recipients of the disapproval (Rebecca, 2015). The argument of the awrah being inclusive of the female voice originates from verse 33:32 of the Qur'an stating the following:

> O wives of the prophet! You are not like any other women. If you keep your duty (to Allah), then be not soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy, or evil desire for adultery) should be moved with desire, but speak in an honourable manner (al-Ahzaab 33:32)

Abdalla Uba Adamu, in his 2013 paper "Veiled Voices: Islam, Women and Degrees of Visibility in Muslim Hausa Popular Singing", examines the notion of the awrah being inclusive of the voice, which he calls "veiling the voice". Adamu states that this verse of the Qur'an is interpreted by Muslim scholars to suggest that "men and women should not talk unnecessarily and when they do so, both the content and manner of conversation must be appropriate, and free of anything inciting" (p. 11).

Adamu furthers this and explains that the Hanbali[41] scholars prohibit women from reciting the call to prayer in public settings. This contextualises the backlash Amina Wadud faced by her act of performing the call to prayer in 2005. The depiction of reluctance in female speech is demonstrated by Adamu stating that Islamic commentators recorded that after the revealing of this verse of Qur'an, "if the need arose for women to speak with a non-Mahram[42] male, they would do so by placing their hands over their mouths. This was to prevent any softness or incitement in their voices" (p. 11).

With this concept and depiction, women who use their voice for performance reasons have been heavily interrogated over their permissibility to perform. Many suggest that Islamic scholars have indeed *not* agreed upon the awrah of the voice being permissible using Scholar Imam Abu Bakr al-Jassas, who is a Hanafi[43] scholar, as an example of this. Adamu (2013) states the following in relation to the aforementioned verse by Jassas:

> This verse (above-mentioned) indicates the impermissibility of women raising their voices in the presence of non-Mahram males, as this may lead to Fitna[44]. This is why our (Hanafi) scholars have declared the reciting of Adhan[45] for women as Makruh[46], as she will need to raise her voice, which is not permissible. (Ahkam al-Qur'an, 5/229; Adam 2004, par 12)

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[41] "Hanbali" refers one of the four juristic schools of Islam.

[42] The word "mahram" is a term used for the opposite gender. "Mahram" men are men that women cannot legally marry, such as siblings, parents, children, siblings of parents, grandparents, grandchildren etc (relations where there is generally considered to be no potential sexual attraction). "Non-Mahram" is somebody who does not fall into one of these categories.

[43] A "Hanafi" is someone who adheres to the Hanafi school of thought (one of four popular schools of thought in Sunni Islamic jurisprudence).

[44] "Fitna" is considered to be something that presents a significant trial or trouble to an individual or society.

[45] The "Adhan" is the Islamic call to prayer.

[46] "Makruh" refers to something that is disliked but permissible.

Expanding on this, Islamic scholar Murtadha al-Zabidi (2004) writes in his commentary of the *Ihya* of Imam al-Ghazali, *Ithaf al-Sadat al-Muttaqin* that "listening to the singing of non-mahram women has been declared haram" reiterating with the following that "if the singer is a non-mahram female, then it will not be permissible for men to listen to her. This ruling will apply, regardless of whether the woman is with or without hijab" (Adam 2004, par 6). With this argument, it is then clarified, in contradiction, that according to the Hanafi school of thought, a woman's voice is not considered part of her awrah, however, the fear of *fitna* is what constitutes the impermissibility of hearing the woman's voice and so is therefore considered haram, advising that if this is the fear, then "men should not listen to it" (Adamu, 2013, p. 12). It is stressed that the issue lies in the "timbre and pitch" of the woman's voice and that the woman must not "speak in any alluring manner which might lead to sexualised thoughts" (Adamu, 2013, p. 12). Ibn Humam, (another Hanafi scholar) states in his "*Fath al-Qadir'* quoting from 'al-Nawazil' that the "melodious voice of a female and her singing will be considered her awra" whilst Imam Ibn Abidin quoting from the same al-Nawazil writes in Radd al-Muhtar: "It is permissible for women to converse with non-Mahram men at the time of need... However, what is not permissible is that they stretch, soften and raise their voice in a melodious way" (Adamu, 2013, p. 12).

The origin of this conceptualisation of the awrah and its branch to fitna and conceptualisation of the woman, is intrinsically tied to the interpretation of three core statements made in the Qur'an, particularly those pertaining to the story of Adam and Eve, such as verses 4:1 and 2:35-36.

> O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate… (Qur'an, An-Nisa, 4:1)
>
> And We said, "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers. (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah, 2:35)
>
> But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been. And We said, "Go down, [all of you], as

> enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time. (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah, 2:36)

The positioning of women in Islam with regards to the contestation and debate surrounding the interpretation of these Islamic verses has created a strict cultural understanding and firm disapproval of Muslim female rappers using their voice for performance purposes. Within discussions of gender in Islam and this conceptualisation of the awrah, Muslim female rappers are perceived to be shamelessly breaking the Islamic code of conduct and engaging publicly in haram activities that incite sexualised imagery and create a fitna for men. When women were asked to recite the Qur'an publicly in Egypt, Muslim scholars of Al-Azhar University joined together to show their furore stating that "such calls echo a Western agenda" (Al Sherbini, 2010, par 2) and that "letting a woman read in front of men would tempt them, thereby earning her and them God's wrath" (Al Sherbini, 2010, par 2).

However, Amina Wadud alongside Islamic scholar Adnan Ibrahim, has led the discourse around reviewing earlier interpretations of the Qur'an that have created the origin and debated validity of these concepts. This has resulted in new methods of tafsir[47], and a surfacing of previously unheard, unpopular explanations of the Qur'an. The consistent traditional perception of the woman being a temptress and created in part to serve men can be traced back and linked to the conceptualisation of Eve (Wadud, 2004). Wadud stresses that serious implications have been derived from discussions relating to what Wadud refers to as the "first parents" (Wadud, 2004) of human beings, understood to be Adam and Eve, stating that multiple verses of the Qur'an have frequently been used to legitimise claims of the "inherent superiority of males over females" (Donohue & Esposito, 2007, p. 159). With entirely unique backgrounds and understandings, dispute can be anticipated and expected amongst scholars. However, the issue lies with the evidence that from these discussions, it is apparent that women are the only gender that is dangerously impacted by such interpretations that villainise the essence of the woman, remove the concept of agency and position the woman as a menacing entity that is to be feared and controlled. It can

[47] "Tafsir" is a Qur'anic exegesis written by a particular Muslim exegete.

also be seen that there is a consistent explanation in the translation of the Qur'an, from scholars, in reference to the aforementioned verses, that women exist primarily to act in the service of men and are inherently sexual in nature.

Verse 4:1 of the Qur'an orders the human creation to be mindful to their Lord who created them from "one nafs" and then created "her zawj from her". In accordance with Biblical tradition, many draw the conclusion that Eve was created from the rib of Adam, and this is reaffirmed by a hadith that states that woman is created from a rib (Wadud, 1999, Wadud, 2004). Ibrahim, in relation to this idea, states that all of the Islamic scholars accept that "Adam was created first, and then Eve" (ḥawāʾ hiya al-aṣl, 2014, p. 18).

The notion that the origin of the woman stems from being created secondary to the man and from a very small part of the male body can hold significant connotations of perceived inferiority, paralleled with other implications that women were created partly to act in the service of men. Despite the unanimous agreements of scholars stated by Ibrahim, Wadud argues that to claim the creation of woman to be after man, or from man, has no basis in the Qur'an, stating that it is a claim that "religious patriarchies make in justifying sexual hierarchy/inequality" (Taji-Farouki, 2006, p. 114).

This argument is made on the basis that Wadud clarifies that there is no confirmed gender of the word zawj or nafs in which the Qur'an refers to, and that the word nafs is grammatically feminine but when conceptualised, it is "neither masculine nor feminine" (Wadud, 2004, p. 19). Wadud speculates that the scarcity of details could have been a contributing factor that caused Muslim scholars to "rely on Biblical accounts" that teach that Eve was extracted from the "rib or side of Adam" (p. 20). Progressing with this conceptualisation of Eve and the derived notions of perceived female inferiority and inherent sexualisation, the understanding of the Muslim woman being a fitna arises which holds a significant branch in understanding the cultural implications in the discourse surrounding the concept and disputation of the awrah.

Muna Tatari, professor of Islamic systematic theology, in her 2013 chapter "Gender Justice and Gender Jihad: Possibilities and Limits of Qur'anic Interpretation

for Women's Liberation", discusses the creation of the temptress through the conceptualisation of Eve, resulting in the woman being perceived as a fitna. Tatari emphasises Wadud's concerns of "serious implications" stating that "here one finds a wealth of messages hostile to women" (Tatari, 2013, p. 159). Tatari expands explaining "this material has served and continues to serve many Qur'anic interpreters as hermeneutic key for understanding the Qur'an" (p. 160).

Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari is considered to be one of the most influential Islamic scholars known for his exegetes of the Qur'an. Tatari, when examining Al-Tabari's "non-Qur'anic sources for the creation story" discusses the way in which the temptress and representation of the woman as a fitna is created through Al-Tabari's assembling of these legends. In the story of Adam and Eve and the garden of paradise, Al-Tabari states that "Eve was able to persuade Adam to disobey God's commandment through her beauty and the seduction Iblis[48] gave her" (Tatari, 2013, p. 160). Al-Tabari expands with another legend, which alternatively says, "Eve first had to make Adam drink. Thereupon, God cursed the earth from which Adam came and Condemned Eve to difficult pregnancy and childbirth under threat of death" (Tatari, 2013, p. 160). Al- Tabari also relays that the legends teach that God "made her stupid and vain" (p. 160).

Tatari suggests when comparing the Verse of the Qur'an to the translation and legendary interpretation that Al-Tabari relays, that Eve is "never blamed in the Qur'an for her and Adam's disobedience to God, yet this blame attributed due to other sources has had seriously detrimental consequences for women" (Tatari, 2013, p. 161). Tatari articulates that due to Eve's purported behaviour whilst in the Garden "it was concluded that women are in themselves, a source of fitna and the reason for moral failings in men" (p. 161). The result of this is that "Islamic legal tradition sometimes defines, not only woman's body, but also her voice, as awra", acting as a "reason for banishing women from public and confining them to the sphere of domesticity" (p. 161).

[48] This is the Arabic name for Lucifer.

These debates and conceptualisations of the woman being inherently sexual in nature, existing solely for men whilst simultaneously being rejected by men as a source of fitna have caused Muslim female rappers to be positioned in an incredibly difficult space. Muslim female rappers have therefore been assigned with two opposing depictions and images. One image is of the activist, using performance to combat inequality, create visibility and cultivate female expression. The other image is the temptress "luring" men to earn the displeasure of God. With these two strong depictions, Muslim female rappers face a unique challenge in the integrity of faith and the cultural implications of openly demonstrating their disagreement with these gender-based conceptualisations of the awrah, whilst challenging the visual and sonic depiction of Muslim women that exists throughout contemporary media.

2.1.8 The Awrah Cannot Be Questioned. Literally.

It is only when beginning to interview Muslim women through this research project that I began to comprehend the full extent of how other Muslim women feel about being positioned in such a difficult space. Originally, this project included the following research question:

1. To what extent has the belief of the awrah being inclusive of the female voice influenced the emergence, identity and visibility of Muslim female rappers and Muslim female practitioners in music and vocal performance?

As I began exploring this question, it became clear that the extent of debate and scholarship surrounding the technicalities of the awrah and its cultural implications is beyond the scope of this research project. As a practitioner I was already aware, as previously stated in this thesis, that many Muslims perceive the female voice to be part of a woman's awrah, resulting in cultural and religious disapproval towards artistic practitioners using their voice as an instrument from Muslims around the world. Despite the scholarly evidence discussed in this thesis that demonstrates a lack of support of the notion of the awrah being inclusive of the voice, what begins to

appear through this angle of investigation is what I would argue is the real issue that this research project explores: in/visibility.

I intended to interview Muslim female rappers and other Muslim women and engage in discussion with them in relation to the awrah, investigating and exploring how this notion has impacted them/us as women, practitioners, and scholars. However, what I found was that this concept was considered by participants too controversial to discuss. As an artist, I have experienced the lectures, backlash, and harsh critique that, as women, we endure from what is often an unknown Muslim man who speaks monolithically of how terrible using my voice for this purpose is. I understood that women, unless scholars working in this specific area (these did not agree to the interview), would be hesitant to share their views and opinions regarding this Islamic ruling, knowing that it would be included in this thesis and creative practice which would ultimately be available publicly through an institutional repository. This meant that I had to eventually be resigned to accepting that this questioning of the awrah would not bear fruit in this research project.

After many conversations with other Muslim women, I shifted my focus from interviewing other Muslim female rappers to interviewing other Muslim female practitioners, under strict conditions of anonymity. The decision to pivot from Muslim female rappers to Muslim female practitioners was due to the limiting scope of Muslim female rappers based in England. Most Muslim female rappers live in America and consider themselves American, with the challenges in performing as Muslim female rappers relating to entirely different American sociopolitical and diasporic implications. These cultural challenges and implications are not the focus of this research as I have no experience in and little knowledge of American identity, politics, or cultural hybridity. This research project is situated in British identity, and although it does occasionally draw on those outside of British culture to emphasise or highlight a point, I concluded that it would not be conducive or wise to introduce Muslim female rappers from America and other parts of the world into a conversation. Despite many Islamic experiences being universal, the challenges and insights take on a distinctively different implication when considering what this means for British Muslim women of mixed/multiple heritage. I did, however, find global majority heritage Muslim female practitioners (I use the word practitioner to

maintain the anonymity) in England who were willing to be interviewed about their experiences as Muslim female artists in England, if I agreed to keep them anonymous in all possible ways.

It is through this new discussion that I gained insight into the exploration of representation and other biographical experiences that exemplified the harm that accompanies the lack of Muslim female depiction in both visual and sonic contemporary media. What is interesting is the uniqueness and specificity of this challenge.

As satirically quoted in *Corridors,* Toni Morrison has been known to critique the idea of invisibility, articulating that Black people are not invisible to other Black people, suggesting that the invisibility that Black people speak of is in relation to white people. Thus, Morrison created many works that were centred in Black worlds; her world. By this same logic, all Muslim women would need to do is create stories that are centred in Muslim worlds for other Muslims to consume and abandon the other worlds that do not accept them or hold space for their voices. However, what would Morrison do, if when she turned to write books for her world, she was met with an unspoken cultural or religious rule that states women cannot write books lest they experience a traumatic backlash from multiple members of *her* world?

This is the unique positioning of this challenge of the awrah with its misconstrued understandings that have resulted in such a severe lack of visibility from Muslim women from inside and outside of the Islamic faith. What I have discovered through this questioning is that although visibility should perhaps be considered a humanitarian right, in our current cultural playground of diaspora and religious and scholarly hierarchy, visibility is indeed a privilege. With this contestation and controversy apparent, I decided to lean into what women did want to discuss anonymously which was the gap in representation in contemporary media and their desire to be depicted truthfully and in varied abundance. Such lack in representation and visibility has resulted in Muslim women being portrayed one-dimensionally, narrowly, with singular narratives that are often derived from the ignorance of the writer/creator of the media. These depictions often show Muslim women in the most extreme and incomprehensible form; the bomber (Macdonald, 2006), the prostitute (Donmez-Colin, 2004), the wife of the terrorist (Hobson, 2008), or the young Muslim

girl who not only abandons her faith but begins to behave as outrageously as possible due to the oppression of the faith and her lack of agency and ability to show competence and moderation in her life choices as seen in popular TV shows like *Unforgotten* (2015).

Interestingly, throughout the creation of *Corridors*, I found myself in constant disagreement with the theoretical frameworks that I had believed were underpinning this research project. It is a striking reality that scholarship and discourse in and around Muslim female identity and representation has not yet developed its conversation in and through PaR. Existing bodies of knowledge are still arguing for (a lack of) Muslim female agency or are still deeply embedded in the realm of traditional depictions, often using worlds such as "representation", "agency" and "identity". There appears to be reluctance towards or perhaps little knowledge of how to navigate beyond these conversations into a discourse that uses words such as "characterisation", "persona", "shapeshifting" and "expression". These are the words that *Corridors* creates space for and activates through its practice, in response to and in partnership with this often rigid and limited discourse of Muslim female identity and representation.

When considering the awrah and its positioning and presence in the research project, I often found myself in internal conversation with the earlier mentioned scholar, Muna Tatari. Tatari discusses the ideologies and conceptualisation of women in Islam and speaks of the dangers of men holding these conceptualisations and beliefs of/around women due to the serious implications these views hold *over women*, in the lack of visibility of Muslim women and their literal and figurative voice. I however, found myself wavering between agreement and disagreement whilst producing *Corridors*. In terms of agreement, I feel that these views have of course impacted the limitation that is seen in the statistical presence of Muslim female practitioners, particularly rappers, which was the very motivation and gap in research that this project seeks to fill. In terms of disagreement, I question the lack of agency this once again assigns to Muslim women. Tatari, along with many others such as Wadud, speak of this danger that these conceptualisations present for Muslim women, but not of the danger that this presents for Muslim men.

I argue now that the danger lies with those that hold these beliefs and not with the subject of the conceptualisation. This belief instrumentalised and exacerbated by Muslim men behaving monolithically under what I deem as a skewed guise of religious belief harms the image and representation of Muslim men, but has not necessarily directly limited Muslim female expression. What may be more appropriate to consider and is discussed in the interviews is that these beliefs have placed a potential resistance, hesitance and fear in many Muslim women who wish to participate in the vocal arts due to the backlash that they do and will face. The idea that Muslim men possess the ability to silence or create a lack of visibility amongst Muslim women attempts to remove agency from Muslim women and positions women, once again, as the recipients of treatment, rulings, and beliefs, rather than independent thinkers who hold autonomy over their own representation and perception of self.

For many years, particularly throughout scholarship and contemporary media, Muslim women have been the topic and subject of research and exploration which often anchors the image of Muslim women to words such as oppression and freedom and situates them between these walls of forced liberation or forced oppression. The findings of *Corridors* suggest that when we consider stepping beyond these limiting theoretical ideologies and contemporary media, we find a sea of potential that is vast in characterisation, stretching beyond the current understandings of Muslim female identity. Engaging auto-ethnographically through rap presents this window into the lived contemporary British mixed-heritage experience of Muslim women that can be seen, heard, and felt.

The previous section discussed the conceptualisation of women in Islam in relation to the notion of the awrah's practical challenges and implications of the female voice, and situated the project between a theoretical framework of the intersectionality of postcolonial identity, gender and faith. The next section will now move into the practice review in which visual and sonic languages will be discussed as well as key relevant practitioners in the field of combined visual and sonic languages. The practice review will also unpack the significance and importance of visual and sonic storytelling in relation to diversified representations and highlight the gaps in creative practices that this project addresses. It is important to note that much

like the topics and areas explored in the earlier parts of the project's literature review, there are multiple themes and modes of practice that will be touched on but not thoroughly unpacked in detail due to the desire to maintain the focus and positioning of this project. Instead, this section provides an overview of historical and contemporary relevant practices, practitioners, and representations in the area of music, visual album and on-screen representation highlighting the cultural, representative, sociopolitical and faith inspired ideas informing these creative practices and their significance. The creative practice review is considered through an intersectional lens and is eclectic in nature as the relevance of this section lies in a range of modes and themes that situate this research project's practices that are drawn from a combination of notions, ideas, representations and creative displays.

2.2 Practice Review

When approaching sonic and visual practices, the sea of creative languages is vast and seemingly infinite. When considering Muslim female artistry, I sometimes feel pressured to make mention of the honorary early most influential Islamic poets such as the seventh century Arabic poet, Al-Khansa, whose name is translated to mean "gazelle", known for her documentarian-styled poetry and lamentations and elegies of the many deaths that took place throughout the Arabian Peninsula (Wormhoudt, 1973). Or, Umm Kulthum, the Egyptian singer and songwriter given the title "the voice of Egypt", a beloved figure throughout the Arab musicological world and considered to be one of the greatest singers in the history of Arab music (Rasmussen, 1999).

Alternatively, when considering current rap music in its entirety as a sonic mode of resistance, the existing body of work is endless and interwoven with intricate political and social commentary alongside an overt freedom of expression. Interestingly, such randomised mentions of broad cultural historical figures or a positioning of my own creative practice amongst a bodied lineage of Arab poets or practitioners (because they are Muslim), as suggested externally multiple times in the early developments of this project, (an idea that aided me in my thinking of how one situates a project of such particular nature and theme), I can now say confidently are

counterproductive to the project's inquiry and only seem to highlight a systemic challenge within the positioning and understanding of Muslim female expression.

The desire to connect people/things that do not share a connection appears to be something I am constantly experiencing as a British mixed-heritage Muslim female rapper and is not uncommon due to the lack of representation of non-Arab/Asian Muslim women in academic spaces (Johnson, 2018). This encouragement from both Muslims and non-Muslims to look at Arabic poetry in particular *niggles* the part of me that reaffirms the earlier discussion on the invisibility of Black/multiple/mixed-heritage Muslim women[49]. I began with the question of what does an early seventh century poet or an Egyptian singer, have in connection to this research project and the auto-ethnographical experience which this project is informed by? After much consideration, I realised abruptly that the answer was absolutely nothing, apart from this incredibly faint understanding of sharing the same faith, although I would argue faith looks distinctively different to each of us, and only the same in the eye of those making the suggestions, which reiterates this debate of orientalism and othering.

This was my first step into understanding the importance of the *approach* towards this project and its wider implications. The approach cannot be one of attempting to draw connective lines between artists that share no comparison, for the sake of building an understanding of a lineage of Muslim female expression when Muslim women are not monolithic in nature despite our seemingly esoteric[50] connection. This apparent lineage of Muslim female artistic expression would further

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[49] Conscious of deviating from this research project's inquiry, I have limited the recalling of personal experience when approaching such topics as a Muslim woman of plenty melanin in research. However, a range of personal experiences have been written about in the creative journal that accompanies this work. I find it is important that those of us undertaking research as non-white practitioners document our experiences in academia as academic institutions in England are still mostly white (Johnson, 2020) and currently has a lack of diversity training set in place to *aid* researchers of colour in their journey. I find that diversity training in academia serves a purpose of teaching one to avoid being racially discriminating, but not how to help students of colour in this sea of "white gaze" (Morrison, 2019).

[50] The word esoteric is being used with its original meaning "Intended for or understood by only a small group, especially one with specialized knowledge or interests*"*. In my own experiences of living in England where the percentage of Muslims is relatively low, I have noticed that there is this sense of immediate oneness and connection when meeting other Muslims that is sometimes commented on from my non-Muslim family, friends, and colleagues.

decrease visibility of mixed-heritage Muslim women and reaffirm this imagery of a pronounced Arab/Asian representation of the Islamic faith.

After all, despite a multilingual household, the primary language of use throughout my life is English, and despite my multiple heritages, my birthplace and home is England. I am a member of the new generation discussed earlier of many Muslim women in England with diasporic mixed identities who have never visited their parents' birthplaces and would have great difficulty stringing together a sentence in their mother's mother tongue, a bittersweet reality of the impact of colonialism further down the line. This demonstrated the naivety and, in some ways, irresponsible nature of attempting to unpack artists whose language I cannot speak and whose culture I have not experienced.

With the earlier discussion in mind of multiple identities and the impact of colonialism on Muslim women of multiple heritages in the United Kingdom, I disagreed with the idea that this project needed grounding in a worldly Muslim lineage or an existing positioning in the never-ending space of rap[51]. As a result, I decided that this project belonged in its own eclectic contemporary fluid interdisciplinary setting where sonic and visual practices inform one another as forms of expression that have historically created and continue to create significant representations and characterisations of global majority people and faith, leading to where the most distinctive gaps lie, which is in Muslim female creators of visual albums and Muslim female practitioners of rap in the UK.

The decision to approach eclectically with a focus on representation and characterisation honours *Corridors*, which already in its very early stages of development was speaking back to current contemporary representations and characterisations, suggesting that this window that opens with the tweaking of a word

[51] This is an interesting space. A person may suggest that I look generally at other rappers, but I find this unsuitable due to difference in culture, faith and gender (we need not delve into the ocean of male rappers lest we not make it out). So, this "figurative person" then recommends I look at Muslim artists, but once again there is too much difference within the implications of culture and faith, as I experience that many Muslims carry their culture *as* their faith and struggle to at times differentiate between the two. This is the challenge of the in-between and the lack of visibility of the in-between but also its unique ability to weave through multiple spaces silently.

from representation to "characterisation"[52], allows for an expansion in thinking surrounding Muslim female identity. Shifting to the use of the term characterisation when considering contemporary media mobilises the conceptualisation of Muslim women by attributing active notions that potentially encourage us to progress beyond static representations of Muslim women and into more dynamic[53] understandings and depictions.

2.2.1 Melanin on Screen

Visual albums are still relatively new (Melzer, 2019) and developing and are considered a hybrid art form (Harrison, 2014). Throughout artistic cultural history, visual albums have remained niche with a significant increase in output in the last few years from various artists such as Beyonce, FKA Twigs, Janelle Monae, Todrick Hall et al, and with cinema incorporating music videos and musical sequences into contemporary post classical films such as *Sucker Punch* (2011) and *Scott Pilgrim VS. the World* (2010).

The little research available around visual album suggests that visual albums as an art form have developed as a result of audiovisual art naturally progressing over time due to platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo changing the way we consume and create media (Vernallis, 2013). Almost all research into specific visual albums revolves around Beyonce's *Lemonade* (2016) with a handful unpacking the art of visual album itself, exploring the relationship between the interlinking of audiovisual media and narrativity (Vernallis, 2013).

Despite there being a relatively extensive amount of research into the technicalities of audiovisual media and music videos and the way in which media is received, there seems to be one crucial element that is rarely discussed when

[52] "Characterisation" enters into discussion with personae in section 4.2 and 4.3 and is discussed at length.

[53] A list of popular stock characters and their descriptions including "the dynamic character" can be found in section 4.2.

examining visual albums and audiovisual storytelling, which is the people creating these pieces of art and the heritage of these individuals/groups. Through my own research, I found that most popular visual albums have been created by people with intersectional identities such as FKA Twigs, a mixed-heritage-British woman and Todrick Hall, an African-American gay man. I argue that this is not a coincidence and that it is not surprising that individuals with intersectional identities gravitate towards using interdisciplinary languages to create a substantial body of work.

In my own experience, blurring the lines between music, cinema and storytelling creates a multimedia expression of an album's conceptual expression. Drawing on interdisciplinary media is a way of fostering a truer story, due to the way that each language relates to the other. Truer, not necessarily meaning in its literal sense of truth vs falsehood, but truer in relation to its natural authentic state. An example of this would be that in a multilingual, multi-heritage and multi-faith household, a person does not grow up experiencing *one* of *anything*. Therefore, to constantly exist in a state of multiplicity is one's natural state and therefore to express *through* multiple, is one's natural method and state of being and expression.

Another key aspect of visual album that appears to be undiscussed throughout audiovisual discourse, is *where* this change began for global majority people involved in audiovisual storytelling. With most extensive discourses around visual album beginning with Beyonce's 2016 *Lemonade,* it is important to look at some of the significant audiovisual showcasing from artists prior to *Lemonade* that created the opportunity for global majority people to stretch their conceptual artistry beyond the three-minute music video and the handful of novelty cameos that artists have in cinema, resulting in a deeper understandings of representation and characterisation of people of from global majority backgrounds and faith. By exploring these as "moments of new characterisations", attention can be drawn to practitioners that disrupted the mainstream narrative of global majority and faith, creating a new discourse around what exactly it means to have an intersectional identity in visual and sonic spaces.

Longer format musical storytelling beyond your typical three-minute music video began increasing slowly in America after Michael Jackson's 1983 cinema

showing of *Thriller*[54] in which Jackson hired director John Landis to direct and write *Thriller* with him after watching Landis' 1981 film *An American Werewolf in London* (Delmont, 2010). The song is still deemed forty years later as almost a rite of passage for playing and dancing during Halloween and other festivities, and it is questionable whether such impact would have been made had Jackson and Landis not stepped into a longer format interdisciplinary storytelling (Delmont, 2010). Beyond its obvious artistry in theme, choreography and memorable sound, there resides one of the more frequently overlooked aspects of the production, which is representation and characterisation.

It was only in the 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead* that audiences saw the first Black horror lead in a zombie film, Duane Jones, and the first significant interracial kiss in the famous Star Trek episode "Plato's Stepchildren", also occurring in 1968, as the interracial kiss featured in the *film Island in the Sun* (Zanuck, 1957) incited protests and was consequently banned due to miscegenation[55] being explicitly prohibited by the production code. Jackson, then, a person with an intersectional identity, playing himself as a Black mythological creature only fifteen years later in a musical visual production costing just fewer than one million dollars in "*Thriller*" opened a world of possibility for the representation and visibility of global majority people on screen in such modes and languages. Whilst I argue that this should have primarily facilitated a space for the development of a rethinking in cultural contemporary representation around Black mythology and global majority people on screen with the multiplicity of role play, it more so initiated a conversation of musical languages and their visual counterparts, slightly disarranging the lines between

[54] Throughout the practice review, I have added hyperlinks to particular practices and moments that I think are necessary to show in relation to the discussion. This is not the case with every practice and others are simply referenced traditionally.

[55] It is worth noting that this is only 65 years ago and we still have discrimination against global majority people and faith appearing in films. Please see research by Professor Mattias Frey & Dr Dieter Declercq from the Department of Film & Media at The University of Kent who have conducted a large scale 2022 research project on Muslim representation in film and TV. At their seminar that I attended, they stated their intention is to challenge the "conventional wisdom, which dismisses films with positive Muslim representation as commercially unviable" (Frey and Declercq, 2022).

traditional horror filmmaking and music video, with scholars like Joseph Vogel (2011), considering "*Thriller*" to be a groundbreaking cultural phenomenon.

This progression is seen particularly in Eminem's famous 2000 video "*Stan*" featuring his doppelganger and Dido, an eight minute music video featuring distinctive rap and visual storytelling, to Ashanti's 2003 *"rain on me*", an almost eleven minute music video/film, one of the first MTV recognisable examples of music, film and acting intersecting and alternating in segments, with a Black female R&B singer exploring themes of domestic violence. To ignore that these last two examples are possible because of Jackson's breakthrough with extended musical storytelling in "*Thriller*" is strange. In underground music scenes, I had often heard people speak of these last two examples as if independent to each other and Jackson's inception of *"Thriller"*. Jackson made this extension of musical expression beyond three minutes look attractive, doable and monetarily rewarding, opening a door to all those that extended their minutes of practice. Each practitioner then built on the last and extended. This is the nature of evolutionary art.

However, as earlier mentioned, what I feel is crucially missed is the discourse around Jackson's characterisation and the potential this presented for intersectional and interdisciplinary creatives like me that desperately wished to see melanin[56] on screen represented in radical ways such as Jackson's dancing-singing-zombie-werewolf. *Corridors*, with its multiple roleplays and embodiments, shapeshifts through characterisations, and transforms not just sonically from rap flow to rap flow, but is constantly unravelling layer after layer of new representation and movement from one scene to the next. With a similar radicalness to Jackson's "*Thriller*", *Corridors* skips over the mundane and goes straight to mythology and the world of fantasy, merging the worlds of fictional and biographical story and deploying this

[56] I use the word "melanin" throughout this thesis at times as a way of describing the depiction of global majority people on screen. This also speaks to my own work whereby I often speak of the dynamic understandings and implications of melanin. This use of the word is also reminiscent of Katlego Kekana's Colour Me Melanin (2019), and Moore's (2023) article "Freaks and B/Witches: Reverberative Memory, Subversive Pleasure, and Afro-Horror in Missy Elliott's Musical Cinema" where phrases like "thick thighs" and words like "melanated" are celebrated.

jollity throughout in its expression of Muslim female heritage which positions itself with a distinctive Britishness.

2.2.2 British Representations of Music/Visual Album

Whilst these few mentioned American displays of alternative and experimental story telling unfolded, England sat arguably light years ahead with the Beatles showcasing their famous work *A Hard Day's Night*, a thirty minute visual album released in 1964, demonstrating their early innovation and creative height. England had a handful of visual albums, which were referred to commonly as "long form music videos" displaying originality and experimental combined languages and few would go on to be nominated for a Grammy in "best long form music video" such as Kate Bush's 1993 *The Line, the cross & the Curve*. Directed and written by Bush, this visual masterpiece known for its camp comedy intertwined themes of ballet dancing and demonology. This combination is fitting for Bush and perhaps comparatively normal considering British rock band The Who and their 1975 visual album *Tommy*, originally a rock opera of the story of a "deaf, dumb and blind" boy who becomes an intellectually gifted philosopher of ping pong and eventually a cult leader. Assisted by director and writer, Ken Russell, *Tommy* (1975) was adapted for film and became a journey of fantasy psychedelic visual storytelling featuring other actors and singers taking on songs from the album such as Elton John and Tina Turner.

These iconic British visual albums may have been exceedingly progressive considering the lack of long format artistic display from other countries, however, the way in which British musical story telling was indeed light-years behind, was in its lack of racial diversity as not a single visual album during this inception of musical storytelling, was by a person of global majority heritage, nor were there any significant recognised works by people of global majority heritage, or examples of prominent figures, with the exception of Farrokh Bulsara, famously known as "Freddie Mercury" whose musical identity and biographical/ethnographical cultural experience is plagued with problematic notions reflective of the overt display of British bigotry between the 1960s-90s. Rather than delve and digress into the

discussion of the impact and problematic nature of changing ones name[57] in order to better assimilate into a cultural setting and the commonality of this found within musical figures and global majority people, it is more conducive to this project's inquiry to highlight this as evidence of Bhabha's post-colonial identity features; mimicry and mirroring, and its complex relationship with ambivalence.

From this example of Farrokh Bulsara, it could be argued that despite Bulsara's undeniable creative and musical talent, he knew that the way to acceptance, success, and a more palatable serving of talent to an overtly racist and relentless British climate and cultural setting, was under the guise of Freddie Mercury (Louw, 2017). This was a contrived storyline that accompanied what is essentially an unintentional but necessary alter ego born through the collision of the impact of postcolonialism and multiple identities, rather than Beyoncé's sensual and aggressive stage alter ego, Sasha Fierce, which was created through the rumoured desire that Beyoncé had to separate herself from the stage (Colton, 2020). This separation between artist and person is another type of in-between identity that is common amongst people with intersectional identities particularly in racially tense settings. But through *Corridors*' *The Intermission*, there is the exploration of the person VS the artist whereby through home video archive footage and lyricism, I suggest that the artist and the person can never be truly separated. Perhaps this echoes earlier parts of this thesis where I speak of being part of this new generation that sits in this postcolonial playground and welcomes people to the home of my artistry and experience.

After all, there is indeed a significant age gap between me, Freddie Mercury, and Beyonce, with all three of us stepping onto stages at different times in cultural history. Mercury stepped onto a British stage in a time I considered one of Britain's many dialectical experiences where the British audience was lovingly obsessed with Queen, yet simultaneously regularly racially abusing Mercury (Jackson, 2011). Fifty years later, I would step on to some of the same British stages that Mercury

[57] Toni Morrison also stated in her 2019 documentary *The Pieces I Am* that she told people to call her Toni because they could not pronounce her real name, Chloe. They would reportedly pronounce Chloe with the "ch" resembling the word "chair".

experienced in his early years around London and be met with a very different type of British audience; hip-hop heads and rap lovers of all ethnicities, Muslims, non-Muslims, and misfits.

To create such a significant gap Between Mercury's experience and my own, there were many representations and characterisations that emerged through visual and sonic art, each making way for the other to come through, slowly changing the face of Britain's cinematic and musical landscape. However, this was not easy with Britain's pushback such as the race riots that took place all throughout Britain that my own grandparents and parents remember, intolerance to change and the way in which Britain had already characterised people of global majority heritage as inferior through popular TV shows such as the BBC's *The black and White Minstrel show* that ran from 1958 to 1978.

Whilst Britain's pushback was strong, there were melanated seeds being planted that would erupt in these "moments of characterisation" where British hip-hop alongside British TV shows were about to radically change the depiction of British audio-visual culture. It is interesting that within theoretical bodies, there is commonly a separation of hip-hop scholarship and cultural representation on screen despite the developments in both happening within the same time historically resulting in Britain changing in what was being seen and heard simultaneously across different media. I argue that this *mutual* development in representation across British music and screens is often overlooked and not enough attention has been given throughout scholarship to the relationship that these media share with one another and how they sit in conversation with each other.

The hybridity of visual album combines both art forms and through *Corridors*', the intersectional experience inundated with diverse accents, melodies, enunciations, and visuals are suggestive of the significance of understanding that scholarship would potentially benefit from broadening the way in which it considers intersectional expression and work towards becoming more eclectic in areas of scholarship surrounding media when relating to people with intersectional identities. By approaching with multiplicity at the forefront and understanding that the multiple heritage experience must use diverse multiplicity to navigate through scholarship and

inform practice, people from multiple heritage backgrounds would potentially find areas of scholarship more accessible.

PaR scholars often reiterate that it is not the singular that often matters, but the areas working in relation to each other that is of significance to findings such as Nelson's (2003) "multi-mode inquiries". This understanding of multiple being extended to the understanding of how practitioners from multiple heritage inform and approach their practice would only further the understanding of the importance of PaR and its unique accessibility that it has into the creative-theoretical space. I argue that it is in representations *between* media, that characterisations historically changed radically and that this impact is often unseen at the same level of impact in singular media.

2.2.3 British Asian/Afro-Caribbean People on Screen/in Music

Between the landing of British hip-hop and a single TV show, the British cultural setting began to drastically change. *Desmond's*, set in 1989-1994 Peckham, London featuring a predominantly Black British Guyanese cast, was Channel 4's longest running sitcom with 71 episodes. Whilst *Desmond's* paved the way on the edge of the eighties and early nineties for other shows to come, British hip-hop and rap was busy in the eighties and nineties setting the scene for *Desmond's* debut with groups such as Hijack (1991), Blade (1991), Demon Boyz (1987), and Caveman (1991). All were establishing an early British rap sound that was reflective of American hip-hop through the display of "twangy" accents, inflections in their vocal deliveries, accompanied by New York influenced boom-bap-beats.

Desmond's along with British hip-hop captured the sound and representation of cultural pockets of heritage in the UK, with *Desmond's* set in a barber shop, a tiny space bursting and bristling with identity, faith, representation and most importantly, characterised conversation. *Desmond's* not only facilitated space for other shows to come such as the 1998 British Indian sitcom *Goodness Gracious Me*, but simultaneously demonstrated the significance in the importance of Black spaces whilst also creating visibility of the limited physical, social and emotional spaces in

which people of plenty melanin[58] are expected to operate. From this we learned that people from global majority backgrounds can indeed have our spaces to explore our identity, our colonial trauma, our socio-political views and the latest in our romantic interactions, but the space in which these discussions will take place will be a barber shop, a salon, a kitchen, or a corridor. These conversations will never reach centre stage and will always take place *just* off centre, and preferably, in the back where the lights are dimmed, and the microphone is not switched on so as not to disturb the main act.

Corridors, inspired through and based on this very theme, represents occupied space as a territory of excellence where only the best flows, lyrics, melodies, and explorations reside. Methodologically, the creation of *Corridors* was intentionally approached after each salah, as a reminder to myself as a practitioner that a space big enough to pray in is all the space I will ever need to achieve excellence.

Desmond's kickstarted a small influx of Indian cultural exploration on screen, leading to the late '90s and early 2000s showcasing 1993's *Bhaji on The Beach*, 1999's *East is East* and 2002's *Bend It Like Beckham*. With British-Indian director Gurinder Chadha being the only prominent name at the forefront of many British Indian films, and Ayub Khan-Din single handedly writing cultural explorative and biographical/ethnographical scripts, the representation from stories around Afro-Caribbean and Asian heritage remained limited both on and off screen and were few and far between (Bhattacharyya & Gabriel, 1994).

On screen TV representations and musical story telling by Afro-Caribbean and Asian people remained scarce until a sudden change occurred once again, with another sonic language along with a TV channel emerging in the 2000s; grime music and music video channel "Channel U" known later on as "Channel AKA" (Barron, 2013). Kano, Lethal Bizzle, Sway, Mr Wong, Dizzee Rascal, Remi Nicole, Tinchy strider and Tinie Tempah are just some of the hundreds of names that showcased on the channel that focused on promoting established artists and breakthrough acts whilst personifying and curating an emcee cultural musical voice for the British rap scene

which at the time, only featured London talent. On DVD, underground-recorded MC battles would circulate under the titles of *Lord of the Mics* and *Risky Roads*. Viewers could only get this DVD through a friend of a friend who had managed to purchase copies from London that made their way eventually to Manchester. Now, these episodes are found across YouTube and can be re-watched, but do not do justice to the excitement that one had when a new episode was released of two unknown MCs having an entertaining rap clash in their mother's basement and word of mouth would say it was the best one yet.

The evidence that Grime is ethnographical is strong, with theorists such as Lee Barron (2013) arguing that "British hip hop in the form of Grime is a potent exemplar" of the "ethnographic imagination" (p.1), a conceptual term coined by Paul Willis (2013) and that grime music parallels key facets of ethnography. Barron elaborates that this ethnography is "due to the resolutely cultural, special nature of grime music" and states that this is "a factor that marks out grime as a distinctive musical genre and a distinctive ethnographic form, as it is experientially rooted music about urban locations, made from within those urban locations" (Barron, 2013, p.1).

Although coined as a street corner rhyme tradition throughout popular music by scholars such as Barron (2013) and Gates Jr (2012), I experience that locality is the least important element in my own practice of rap auto-ethnography[59]. Furthermore, I find when relating to rap, terms such as "urban" and the drawing of focus to such terms in relation to auto-ethnographical practices such as rap, are not particularly useful when discussing the praxis as it immediately eliminates the discussion of rural practitioners and rap's existence in these vicinities of which the contribution to hip-hop, grime and rap are hugely significant and exposure to rap has not been lessened by one's locality in rurality. However, I also feel the manner that is adopted when considering genres such as grime as urban holds colloquially racialised implications and a sense of othering by assigning a particular exclusivity to urban experiences and situating experiences within the urban setting.

[59] I expand on the choices and thoughts of locality in *Corridors* throughout chapter 3.

Candidly, I suggest that had Kate Bush stemmed from Peckham, I doubt that her music would have been referred to as urban, despite the auto-ethnographical nature of her work, her commentary on her setting and the fact she was born in Bexleyheath. Why then, is Bush's work not the "sound of Kent"? Bush, along with all other practitioners of her heritage are never really considered as extensions of their environment. Yet, practitioners of hip-hop, rap and surrounding genres are continuously considered and referred to collectively, rather than as individuals that produce distinctive sounds, have distinctive methods of creating, and live in a range of places such as the rural settings in England. I am not alone in this view, since in 2020, the Grammys dropped the "Urban" music category after rapper, Tyler, the Creator, argued that it was reductive terminology that diminishes Black art (Williams, 2020). Although the word urban was originally a synonym for Black music, many artists feel that this word in its contemporary setting holds racist connotations. When asked to expand on his views, Tyler stated that "it sucks that whenever we - and I mean guys that look like me – do anything that's genre-bending, they always put it in a 'rap' or 'urban' category" and further went on to say "I don't like that 'urban' word. To me, it's just a politically correct way to say the N-word. Why can't we just be in pop?" (Tyler cited in Williams, 2020, p.6).

Since the term is not being used to refer to Black music in the way in which Frankie Crocker coined the term to be used (Remetancik, 2021) and is arguably not needed in this sense, I question why rap is still being referred to as urban, especially in *British* settings, if it is not to simply racialise and pigeonhole artists and limit the way in which audiences perceive practitioners of rap. If one insists that the word urban purely relates to where someone is, then I reiterate my earlier point of why this does not apply to any other settings, why rural practitioners of rap were never considered in the first place when these terms were "assigned" and why this term has almost exclusively only ever been used for *Black* people creating music.

It is only in the last few years that this urban exclusivity has been challenged by hip-hop heads in scholarship such as de Poar-Evans (2018, 2020) and Henderson (2020) who both reposition the way in which hip-hop is considered rurally with de Poar-Evans being the *only* scholar in hip-hop scholarship in Britain to challenge the notion of hip-hop as exclusively urban and delve into re-positioning hip-hop practice

in a new "arena", similar to the positioning of *Corridors* in its postcolonial playground. *Corridors* places emphasis on the biographical home and the home of experiences rather than the physical locality of the setting. As a result, findings such as the importance of the heritage of the practice, rather than the locations surrounding the practice emerge as significant in the way that PaR is approached methodologically and the way that findings are embodied through and embedded within the practice.

Although British hip-hop and TV representations began to unfold with this avalanche of expression, it was always glaringly apparent to practitioners from my background that from The Beatles' visual albums to *Desmond's* and from L*ord of the mics* to *Channel U*, the most significant gap in British interdisciplinary representation, remained women from global majority backgrounds and women of faith.

2.2.4 British Women of Colour and Faith in Music/Visual Languages

Despite the occasional appearances from melanated women across such platforms and the peculiar troublesome display of colonial identity in 2002's *Bend It Like Beckham* (Bissin, Patacchini & Zenou, 2016), which very much is almost an on-screen performative representation of Bhabha's ideology of "The Indian and the Englishman" (because apparently nobody else exists in between), women from global majority backgrounds and especially those of faith remained invisible across all forms of musical and media representation.

This lack of representation and visibility, as with many artistic births, resulted in the powerhouse introduction in 2002 of Poetic Pilgrimage, a British Muslim female hip-hop duo, melanated, engulfed in colourful hijabs and rhymes and rhythms biographically narrating and embodying "Black, British and Muslim" (Khan, 2020). The influence of their intersectional identities of Muslim, Caribbean and British heritage erupts through their music and of course the duo faced a horrendous backlash for being Muslim female rappers.

> Sometimes I feel like people look for codes and conventions. 'Is she wearing the hijab? Does she look Muslim-ish? How does she dress?' I may not mention 'Oh God' or 'Oh the prophet Muhammad peace be upon him'. It's almost as if you don't look a certain way, if you don't dress a certain way

> then you'll be held up to, 'Is this person even Muslim? (Williams cited in Khan, 2020, para. 16)

However, the duo continued with their artistry, and although no longer perform together, the former duo "have immortalised their status as hip-hop pioneers who unapologetically articulated the British Muslim and Black British experience through their music" (Khan, 2020, para 4). Thus, with Poetic Pilgrimage, a new era of Muslim female sonic and visual representation was introduced and began a distinguished and captivating visibility amongst Muslim female artistry and expression.

Whilst Afro-Caribbean Muslim female expression was simmering and seething, an unmatched distinctive Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu female narrative exploded single handedly with the peerless rapper Mathangi Arulpragasam, known commonly by her stage name "M.I.A". As an undoubted multipotentialite and seamless practitioner of almost every discipline of music, Arulpragasam sauntered through genres of music effortlessly with an undeniably unrefined spellbinding sound, challenging and unfolding a social political commentary on immigration, identity and warfare. Running parallel with Bhabha and the theoretical complexities of British South Asian identity, Arulpragasam through their combined musical and visual practice, danced, rhythm-ed and melodically interrogated and embodied the contemporary discourse of British South Asian diaspora.

These identifiable cultural births and creative declarations of female narrative and interdisciplinary story telling were sporadic in the UK, which resulted in the packaging of the UK's representational sonic and visual languages remaining primarily visibly white, but now, with an exigent streak of heritage that was melanated, multilingual and carried the intrinsic mother tongue of the United Kingdom's postcolonial playground, a tongue that was entangled with words such as "aja[60]" "dunya[61]" and bakwas[62]". Comparatively, one is reminded historically of the

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[60] "Aja" is translated as "come here" and is used primarily by people of South Asian heritage

[61] "Dunya" is an Arabic word that means the temporal world and all of its earthly possessions and concerns; "this life". It is also used in Jamaica to describe the same thing.

[62] "Bakwas" is an urdu word meaning nonsense.

British streets that once smelled only of hot mushy peas and delicious fish and chips, now carrying an enticing and alluring, sometimes overbearing scent of garam masala[63], ackee and saltfish[64] and oudh[65]. With the same sandal wearing feet that performed tawaf[66] around the Ka'bah[67] tap-dancing boldly through a curious yet unreceptive British artistic setting, the relationship between female artists of global majority heritage and faith, and a white British audience had been unexplored, and path left untrodden.

Hip-hop duo poetic pilgrimage found a home amongst Muslim followers and appreciators of their sounds and resonated particularly with the many followers of Sufism[68], as did Pearls of Islam, the first generation Muslim British Afro-Caribbean sister duo known for their fusion of cultural sounds and captivating Nasheeds[69]. Such allegiances are common when Muslim women engage in music with the previously explored notion of the awrah and music's controversial role in the Islamic faith. Sufism can be identified as a "safe space" for many music lovers and practitioners who use their sounds as a form of worship and devotion to Allah. This centres around the ascetic belief that dancing, music, poetry, chanting and rhythmic dhikr are considered an integral way to access an esoteric transcendent state in which an

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[63] "Garam masala" is a curry powder that is used often in south Asian cooking.

[64] "Ackee and saltfish" is a traditional Jamaican dish.

[65] "Oudh" is a perfume that originates in the Middle East and is a fragrance that many Muslims wear to the mosque. When entering the mosque, particularly on a Friday, someone may wipe oudh on your wrist.

[66] "Tawaf" is the circumambulating ritual of the Ka'bah seven times as a part of the Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca.

[67] The "Ka'bah" is a building that sits in the centre of the mosque called the Masjid al-Haram located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The word Ka'bah means "cube."

[68] "Sufism", also called "Tasawwuf" is a body of religious practice and school of thought usually situated in Sunni Islam, which is characterised by and embodies the practices of Islamic spirituality, esotericism, ritualism and asceticism.

[69] A "Nasheed" is a popular style of music throughout the Islamic world. They are formed primarily by vocal works and sang *a capella* or sometimes with instruments depending on the tradition or style that one wants to emanate. They are often coincident with hymns. There are many arguments and debates as to whether instruments such as string and wind instruments are prohibited in Islam, and many find that Nasheeds are a safe alternative to mainstream music, as they often do not contain any string or wind instruments or any instruments at all.

individual is able to ascertain the universe, revolution, oneness and all vibrational harmonies of existence, allowing them to ascend to a higher level of consciousness and unequivocal understanding and awareness of God (Lewisohn, 1997).

Music is such a controversial notion in Islam that it is common that Muslim women are presumed to be Sufis when they participate in the musical arts, as many other Islamic sectarian schools of thought would condemn such involvement. With such division inside the Muslim world, and complete lack of acknowledgment in a non-Muslim setting, visibility of Muslim women in sonic and visual languages is not only drastically lacking but is contorted and re packaged under titles such as "Sufi art" or a "novelty act", a "brave and bold" display of Muslim female representation, rather than a fundamental part of musical expression, heritage and culture. This is analogous to the way in which titles such as "Black history month" are prescribed rather than "history", which subsequently narrows and contains Black identity, contribution, and importance to one concentrated month of the year rather than integrating such significantly fundamental and central aspects of history to the core timeline of historical events and foundation of human existence.

Muslim female rappers have disrupted and fractured the broader postcolonial musical discourse and have been essential figures respectively in our contributions to rap, faith, heritage and politics. Whether any of us as practitioners of rap have escaped or experienced emancipation from the title of "novel" is debatable. Muslim men in the discipline of rap are considered and referred to commonly as "rappers" such as Busta Rhymes, French Montana, Mos Def and numerous others. Muslim women are first introduced by their faith, heritage or gender with phrases such as "Meet the Muslim hip hop duo making waves on social media" (TRT World, 2021) a nameless entity that arguably does not exist as they were introduced as a monolithic representative of an imaginary Muslim female rapper organisation[70]. One cannot deny that outside of the problematic nature of these introductions, this is perhaps partially

[70] When there are so few Muslim female rappers, yet rap is so deeply intrinsically tied to Islam, I feel it is important to not proliferate the idea of this act being "novel" and reduced to the intersections (Muslim, female, rapper) of one's identity to describe their unique positioning *to* the public. I argue this misrepresents the way in which intersectionality should be used, which is a way of highlighting these unique characteristics rather than using them in a reductive manner to attract public attention.

due to the incredibly small number of Muslim women in rap and so such given titles are often acts of praise and admiration.

It is only recently that people have begun speaking about Muslim female rappers and considering our place in music, representation and how this relates to a wider societal contribution.

> A new generation of female Muslim emcees, in the United States especially, have emerged in the last decade to carry the hip-hop mantle of their predecessors: Alia Sharrief, twin rap duo Ain't Afraid, Boshia-Rae Jean, Sister Keylani, Neelam Hakeem, and Mona Haydar, to name but a few (Khan, 2020, para 1).

Even with this new conversation, it is highlighted that Black Muslim women, even when they are the main practitioners in the field of rap, are often invisible when compared to Muslims of other nationalities that audiences deem "more Islamic".

> When Syrian-American rapper Mona Haydar released her superb debut single 'Wrap My Hijab' in 2017, mainstream media and some sections of the Muslim community celebrated her as the 'first' female Muslim emcee. It was a dismissal of the legacy of a genre born from the Afro-diasporic experience in the 1970s as a defiant riposte to crippling social inequalities and white supremacy in the United States (Khan, 2020, para 2).

As rappers, we have all shared the same experience (as mentioned earlier) of disapproval around our craft. Rappers articulate experienced such as "When I first started, they used to say things like I was hip-hopping my way to the hell fire" (Miss Undastood cited in Khan, 2020, para 17) and "The Muslim community would reject us. They said we were "too strong", "too Black", "too much like Malcolm X" (Sharrief cited in Khan, 2020, para 6).

When considering the small body of work available by Muslim women in rap, residing almost exclusively in America, the impact and offering of this interdisciplinary contribution of rap-visual album from a mixed-heritage Muslim female practitioner from the United Kingdom is nothing short of thrilling. The fact that *I* am the first from my background that gets to contribute *Corridors* to a

collective of British rap auto-ethnography, visual album, Muslim female-centric scholarship and PaR is less the icing on the cake, but more the chocolate ganache on the chocolate gateau; a deliciously decadent double delight. It is apparent that when considering Muslim female rappers, almost all are from diasporic African-American heritage or Afro-Caribbean heritage and the few that are not are coming from backgrounds such as Arab heritage. The mixed-heritage experience is distinctively different and relatively unexplored particularly through rap and of course serves as one of this project's unique contributions to the discourse around Muslim female identity, expression and PaR through rap-visual practice.

However, where I am certainly not the first is when I consider contemporary examples in the UK from mixed-heritage artists creating visual-albums. Interdisciplinary British artist FKA Twigs has been a pioneer in the niche area of visual album, using musical storytelling and visual album thematically and exploring long format storytelling and its interdisciplinary modes and media. From her visual album *M3LL155X* (Twigs, 2015) to her music video short film *sad day* (Twigs and Murai, 2021) and her more recent audio/visual mixtape *Caprisongs* (2022), Twigs has intimately showcased the interdisciplinary space between sonic and visual languages. Remembering its hybridity, unlike a music album which may contain unrelated songs and results in independent music videos that function often as singles, visual albums methodologically take a strikingly contrasting approach (Melzer, 2019).

The music album that one produces for the visual album is similar to that of a film script and knowing that the film, or in this case visual album, is going to be created on the basis of the script creates a fascinating relationship between musical and visual storytelling and the approach towards creating such works. FKA Twigs, as a British woman from a mixed-heritage background engaging deeply with interdisciplinary storytelling, exemplifies the rich nature of visibility and its multifaceted strengths when present in sonic and visual languages. Her sonic cultural sounds of diaspora combined with her struggle to discover her identity as a mixed-heritage woman in England is more experientially embedded sonically and visually in her recent mixtape *Caprisongs* (2022). This is portrayed sonically through her use of Caribbean and afro beats entwined with intentional overtly British enunciated words

linguistically present alongside classic British visual settings on buses, busy roads and the hustle and bustle of London life.

What is often overlooked in the appeal and characteristics of visual album, is the *time* spent with the artist and their chosen narratives. Reiterating earlier points, songs within reason, are relatively short and it is not until a significant body of work is produced, that an artist's work can be absorbed, situated and contextualised in its entirety. Some may argue that many artists were appreciated with the one song, painting, poem etc. and that this did not impact the way in which the artist was regarded. In my opinion, this is partly valid. However, what long format musical storytelling offers both for and from Muslim female practitioners is exponential. One only needs to consider earlier examples mentioned of visual albums to the contemporary work of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* (2016) and *Black Is King* (2020), Frank Ocean's *Endless* (2018), Todrick Hall's *Forbidden* (2018), Bo Burnham's *INSIDE* (2021) etc. to appreciate the distinctive and extraordinary contribution that visual albums/long format musical storytelling is. Visual album due to its multimedia expression has the ability to create rich and immersive experiences, allowing for a more holistic and profound emotionally impactful conveyance of messages and themes than perhaps the standard three-minute music video/song. By enhancing creativity through multimedia expression, visual album fosters a deeper connection with the audience and provides a unique platform for artistic innovation and storytelling.

Through *Corridors*, we are experiencing a closeness to British female mixed-heritage, a closeness to Islam and a closeness to rap. The practice engages with the audience intimately in this corridor of Muslim female expression through the sharing of biographical experiences engulfed in rhythmic melodic continuous moments of characterisation that unfold through the visual journey. It is here in the postcolonial playground that the findings are embedded, and the practice is activated.

Thus far, the practice review has provided an overview and insight into the historical context and current cultural setting of interdisciplinary sonic and visual languages, highlighting the significant continuous gap of Muslim female representation in music and on screen in the UK. The literature review discusses the challenges of the awrah and conceptualisation of women in Islam, alongside the

difficulties that accompany the postcolonial implications of women of Black/mixed-heritages and the need to focus on in-between and mixed-heritage narratives. Both sections identify the importance of increasing the visibility of Muslim women of mixed/multiple heritage and how practice in the form of rap and visual album can contribute towards this visibility in a range of modes and functions. The next section will provide a breakdown of the methods used to create the practice *Corridors*, focusing first on the development of the music album, explaining how the album came to be, why such methods were adopted/created and how they were applied, followed by the creation of the visual album. This chapter then transitions into the findings and discussion chapter of this thesis. The methodology overview which contains the underpinning methods chosen and their reason is located in section 1.3 and can be helpful to revisit before proceeding to the Methodology chapter.

3 Methodology

Before delving into the creation of the practice, I will present the overarching methodology of the research that situates PaR, auto-ethnography, the positioning of theory and the core practices which inform and underpin my methods. This chapter contains the methods used in creation of the practice *Corridors*, their implementation, and the reason these methods were chosen. It is common when conducting research through practice that one comes across particular methods of creation that also serve as potential findings and interesting points of discussion (Nelson, 2003). *Corridors* is no different in that through its auto-ethnographical and biographical heritage, new insights and articulations centred around the methods of creations of both music and visual album from the perspective of Muslim female artistry surface. Thus, for the sake of clarity, all findings and discussions around emerging themes and alternative methods of creation are discussed at length in the findings and discussion chapter. This chapter focusses solely on the chosen methods of the creation of *Corridors* and is divided into two sections, with the first section discussing the methods behind the music album and the second section discussing the methods behind the visual album.

3.1 PaR, Auto-ethnography, Theory, and IF

In the research inquiry in section 1.3, I lay out the three core elements of the project which are creative practice, auto-ethnography, and theory. I always intended that this project be explored through PaR and auto-ethnography, from my position as an interdisciplinary practitioner, examining Muslim female identity and representation through rap and visual album. The thesis therefore contributes to both the discourse around Muslim female identity and PaR, and to the wider discourse of the contemporary British mixed-heritage experience, re-positioning itself in relation to postcolonial theory.

As a Muslim woman, a rapper, a filmmaker, and a mixed-heritage British person, I always feel that theoretical discussions of Muslim female identity are not intimate enough and are limited in their accessibility to the personal accounts of the Muslim, female-centric experience. I argue that rap provides an accessible experience that is deeply intimate and holds a distinctive facilitation of an intersectional experience, conversation and exploration with practitioners who are often a marginalised global majority people. I have always been excited to think about the contribution that *Corridors* is to PaR, when considering the impact of PaR and its challenging of conventional methodologies.

As scholars like Nelson (2003) argue, PaR offers a unique avenue for generating knowledge that extends beyond traditional academic frameworks, blurring the boundaries between traditional research and creative practice. One of the key distinctions of PaR resides in its ability to create a bridging of gaps (a corridor) between theory and practice, emphasising the experiential embodied nature of knowledge creation. Attention is drawn to this by Barrett and Bolt (2007) who argue that in the process of making, creatives and artists engage in a type of inquiry that is inherently tied to their creative practice, which results in a deeper, more involved understanding of the subject matter. With this also comes the interdisciplinary collaboration that is encouraged between one's practice and one's research creating a more holistic examining of complex topics as practitioners bring their embodied knowledge into conversation with theoretical perspectives (Sullivan, 2010).

With rap and visual album used as PaR, I hope for this contribution to impact research methods and discourses by understanding that the incorporation of rap and visual album as artistic practice is a distinctive method of research that scholars and institutions can reflect on to nurture a more inclusive and diversified understanding of knowledge production and exchange, resulting in an increase in accessibility and visibility amongst underrepresented people. This is echoed by Haseman (2006), who suggests that PaR methods have the potential to revolutionise the way we learn and teach by placing value on creative practices as a legitimate method of contributing to scholarly dialogue and discourse. With a subject that holds distinctive complexities such as Muslim female identity and representation, PaR offers a mode of inquiry that is exceptionally well-suited to the exploration of complicated, dynamic, evolving subject matters and narratives (Biggs and Buchler, 2008). This is due to the fluidity of creative practice, which creates space for a nuanced investigation of areas that are resistant to traditional methods (Biggs and Buchler, 2008). I believe that with a focus area that requires one to go on an intersectional journey, this research project requires much adaptability and an eclectic approach, which is why adopting creative methods to investigate this project was the most effective way to explore this topic. Knowing that this was going to be explored through my creative practices meant it would automatically be deeply auto-ethnographical. I argue the two cannot be mutually exclusive with a subject matter of this type. As a practitioner, I create stories from my own experiences, and I am not convinced that there is any way to rap and create a visual album from an intersectional identity and not extend this to one's own experiences.

Rap *is* (already) a form of auto-ethnography because it is space for self-expression and a medium through which artists navigate their experiences, identities, desires, and fears and position their assertions within a broader socio-cultural content. It is through rap's auto-ethnography that rappers provide their commentary on systemic inequalities, marginalisation, and hyper-invisibility, using it as the tool for advocacy and awareness (Bennett, 2018). Although scholars suggest that the localised experiences or rap embedded in the music offer vivid representations of the economic landscapes that shape artist's lives (Ohriner, 2019), I think this reinforces my previous points about the problematic nature of "Urban music". I argue that what is more important, is the internal integral truth of one's beliefs, feelings and experiences that

through rap's auto-ethnography are depicted through flows, melodies, lyricism and rhymes that create a visual landscape that we can imagine and position the practitioner within or as I call it, the postcolonial playground. It is less the physical locality, and more the emotional and experiential locality that should be focused on in emergence. Whilst it can be argued that both auto-ethnography and rap possess distinctive conventions belonging to their fields, I elide them contextually through *Corridors*. This is not to reduce specificity of either field but rather to position *Corridors*, its methodological creation, and embedded findings in a space that has been given the authority to exist and unfold with a fluidity that interrogates the space in-between with malleability, rather than adhering to conventional contexts that may disrupt the nature of the practice.

From the experiential emergences of the practice, we are able to find threads of understanding and by weaving these threads together, we can begin to make these threads *look* like something. In my case, through this method, this time, these threads became a *Corridor*. Although I justify my case for PaR and auto-ethnography, I believe this would all be for nothing if it were not to be placed in conversation with theory. After all, I contribute *Corridors* to each of these theoretical discourses mentioned and feel that the challenging of these notions and desire to explore the theories mentioned in this thesis's literature and practice review function as the surroundings of the arena or playground in which *Corridors* operates. *Corridors* is situated between these theories with these theories being considered through the practice's making and creation, with the practice challenging these notions and being informed by ideas of these theories such as in-between identities, realms of existence, intersectionality and Islamic female-centric commentary.

Knowing that I would be embarking on a journey that undoubtedly held with its thrill and excitement much intensity, I decided to give myself a side project. This would be that I could make any type of creative practice outside of my research project that I wanted to as long as I did something. I have set myself this task in the past as a way of navigating through anticipated stress with the idea behind it being that it is better to create something than nothing at all and through my creation of something, I will understand my main project and simmer my creative juices. An example of my implementation of this outside of this project would be that I must

write a song by a particular time but have some writer's block. Therefore, I write anything I want, as long as I write *something*, until my real song emerges and rears its defiant, insubordinate head. *Corridors* was no different. However, after many years of knowing my own habits, I decided from the beginning to create my side project which became a musical comedy series called *IF*. But this time, my side project began directly relating to my main project and whilst the *IF* series is not PaR, as it was not led in its creation by research questions and inquiries, it sits as part of the conditions of how my PaR *Corridors* was made.

IF is my space of creative freedom where I explore characterisation through short sketches playing strange characters that each perform a song. It is the space where I live out all my imaginings and play characters that are sometimes mythically pre-existent, such as the wife of Dracula, but mostly created in the series, for the series. What began as this hilarious space where I appear on screen as the most irreverent character, act out the most bizarre story, then burst into song, started to develop into something I understood more deeply once my audience began to engage with the series and ask me about it in person. However, it was the words of a friend that truly resonated with me when casually in conversation she said "I love that I finally saw Dracula's wife mixed-heritage and Muslim. Do you think Muslim vampires exist? If so, do you think they pray?". People began asking me when the next episode would come out, they discussed with me at length what each character's backstory was and seemed too invested in this thing that was intended to be my side project that I hid from everyone due to the embarrassment of acting out Kate Bush's imaginary cousin "Flake Bush" in my parents' garden with a flower crown across my forehead.

What I quickly learned is that this was the Halle Berry *Catwoman* (2004) moment, a moment of characterisation that for mixed-heritage girls like me, was the first time seeing someone that looked like me playing an antiheroine waltzing across the screen. But the *IF* series does not just appeal to mixed-heritage Muslim women and seemed to have a universal appeal, so much so that this casual video series I began in my first year of the PhD as a side project, was something I was pitching to TV executives in my fourth year of the PhD due to its appeal. One episode of *IF*, "*The Elevator*" crossed over into *Corridors* and premiered there. This intertextuality was

the confirmation that the *IF* series was doing more than just functioning in the background as a side practice and was highlighting to me the key thread of my findings emerging through *Corridors* and embedded in the practice which was characterisation. *IF* was a space that was playful and irreverent allowing me to test out roles of shapeshifting, fluidity, and modes of creative resistance that later developed in *Corridors*. And so, with the *IF* series unfurling and with *Corridors* ready to be methodologically created, I began creating *Corridors* as PaR.

3.2 Part One - The Creation of the Music Album

With all work I create, I begin with a name. I have come to learn over the years and through the auto-ethnographical aspect of this research that this mostly stems from the lack of my own name. A name is belonging, context and crucial information. With "X" as my surname, which means "the absence of a name", I have always named my work early on. This is how I show the first respect to my work, its journey, and my inner resistance towards a ruptured colonial discourse. As mentioned, I began calling my practice for this research project "*Corridors"* early on.

I began to think of the shape of Muslim female expression, its sound, and its personification. How does Muslim female identity and representation sound? What is the tonality of Caribbean women in the north that *only* Caribbean women in the north would be able to identify? How do Muslim female spaces transform sonically when no men are inside the room? These were some of my many questions when approaching the creation of the album.

Over 158 days, which was around five months, I collected and created sounds. I called these sounds for *Corridors* my "quirk" (as I mentioned, I tend to name all things). Throughout my experience as a practitioner, I have always referred to my current project's sounds as different things. These words in the past have been "trickle", "bump", "nomnom", "hula" and "dinga". This time the word was "quirk". I consciously curated a library of biographical and auto-ethnographical sounds that captured and sonically represented my everyday life as a mixed-heritage Muslim woman. I also created sounds/beats that were sonic representations of the themes I found myself naturally gravitating towards exploring and I thought conceptualised the questions investigated through the practice. As many unmarried Muslim women do, I

have the great privilege of spending most of my time living at home with my parents. This is unlikely to change before I am married, and my parents take great joy and pride knowing I live with them. I thought of this "home-life" as a crucially overlooked aspect of Muslim female representation that is often misconstrued as something oppressive and fed to an often already misinformed general public.

Over these 158 days, I began paying close attention to my day-to-day life, which I found was and always has been rather similar to that of a princess in a castle. I can leave whenever I wish, except I do not *wish* to. This is the safe haven, the heart, and the paradise in the dunya. This is where there is no hijab[71], no restriction, no danger, and no explanations. If I go to a professional recording studio, I will have to wear my hijab and I perform *much* better in my recordings without it. As well as that, I have never truly valued (though I am able to appreciate) the "formality" of a recording studio. I wanted the sound of life in my work, the sound of Baba[72] calling the adhan[73], and Umi[74] slapping and folding chapatti flour aggressively. Even if these sounds could not be heard clearly in the recording, they were *there* at the time of creation and capturing of this corridor of Muslim female expression and what mattered to me was the existence of sound, not necessarily the curated evidence of it.

This home-scape contextualised the setting in which this work emerged through its method of creation. I solidified the decision to record the album from home, in one of the noisiest rooms in the house, with the sound of people and cars passing by outside resulting in a library of both diegetic and non-diegetic sounds and a live biographical cultural setting. There was a mystical duality of the physical and metaphorical window between the outside world and me, reminiscent of Bhabha's theory of partial presence and virtual world.

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[71] "Hijab" refers to the clothing that Muslim women must where when in the presence of non-Mahrams.

[72] The word "baba" is a term for father that many use in south Asia.

[73] The Islamic call to prayer.

[74] The word "umi" is an Arabic phrase meaning "my mother".

I have always produced music independently by collecting loops and beats and making instrumentals. This time, I collaborated with a producer on two songs from the album. The first was *The Medusa* and the second was *The Intermission.* I could not always tangibly capture the sound I wanted and discussed with my producer as to what I thought was needed. One of these discussions is heard on the intro of track nine *The Flat Shoes* as I had accidentally left my microphone on during a discussion but kept this discussion in the final recording as I felt this was demonstrative of the process and dialogue present at the time of production. I wanted loops and beats that would allow my vocal gymnastics to become immersed as part of the soundscape and rhythm rather than sit on top of the beat like some traditional and contemporary rap does. I did not want to flow "on" the beat, but rather flow "with" the beat or be in conversation and interrogation with the loop/beat. I thought it was important to approach the production in this way as I have found that if the voice is not used as a storytelling instrument, it can be easy to lose sight of the voices function, and it becomes more about timing and emphasis, resulting in the voice sounding and feeling static and rigid rather than fluid and mobile.

I have always thought of a beat or loop as a person because I argue that it is; at least personified temporarily. Anything created is an extension of oneself, therefore I found myself in deep intimate melodic conversation with my collaborators and sonic personifications, the extensions of my biographical and auto-ethnographical experiences and myself. Personifying the beat assists me in thinking of how I meet the beat rhythmically and how I *arrive* vocally by encouraging me to carefully consider elements of the beat such as the pace more animatedly.

After the five months of quirk collecting, I found myself with an accumulation of 100 sounds. Each sound was special, minute, and intricate. Some of these sounds were doors closing, footsteps, ululating, loop beats played through logic, tapping, recorded phone calls, birds chirping and singing, the tabla, the bongo, and of course, my voice. As I sat with a mountain of sounds, I now had the task as to what I do with them all, and how I arrange these sounds melodically to form an instrumental, or "cultural soundscape" with which I could begin to vocally interact and perform with. This is where my approach became particularly important to the research inquiry.

As discussed in the previous section of the practice review, the approach towards music albums for visual albums differs largely from a traditional album. I knew that the music album was going to be the soundtrack of the visual album, and so I sat in the interdisciplinary setting between filmmaker, performer, and sound-maker. As with most of my creative practices, what I was doing was simply telling a story, but this time I was using these specific practices as the primary investigative tools into Muslim female identity and representation. This highlighted that it was valuable to be conscious of what I was doing and why I was doing it, but without interrupting my flow state (Jackson & Eklund, 2002) of creation and production, which felt impossible; similar to breathing and swallowing at the same time.

As time passed, this seemingly challenging conundrum began to unravel and what initially appeared as a knotty and convoluted positioning between practitioner and researcher became effortless in many regards. I became aware that I was showing resistance towards my tacit knowledge (Gascoigne &Thornton, 2014) as I initially felt I did not know the whys and hows to my practice approach and would not be able to access the knowledge that sat at the core of how I arrange these sounds and why I arrange them in the way that I do.

For one month, I sat with these sounds arranging them like puzzle pieces. It was not until I realised that I was doing just that and began asking the right questions that unpick these methods, that I understood what I was doing, how I was doing it and why I was doing this. It became clear that I was reformulating and transforming auto-ethnographical practices and biographical experiences and insights essentially into a personified rap-poetic-musico-musical. I was arranging them into a chronological "script", by events unfolding in the musical story line, and balancing the narrative's emotions and intention by using these sounds to escort the intended audience through this corridor of Muslim female expression. It was strategic, precise, calculated and absolutely intricately curated paralleled with complete practitioner freedom and simultaneous deep intentional tacit knowledge. Here lay how I travelled between the multifaceted musicality and the interdisciplinarity of this practice.

After one month, I had completed my arrangement of instrumentals and had sixteen tracks, most without vocals, that sonically embodied this very specific practice led auto-ethnographical account of Muslim female identity and representation. The

instrumentals at this point, were beginning to *sound* and *feel* mixed-heritage and Muslim with musical motifs concocted of ululations, tablas, bongo drums, and boom-bap loops. I wrote the lyrics in a week. Song writing came easily once the instrumentals were in place, and I approached the events in this order as I intentionally wanted the music to sit as the supporting foundation and add to the sounds with my multiple vocals and lyricism as the final component and navigator of the album. This was also deliberately chosen in awareness of the controversial notion of the awrah, previously discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis. I considered this as an act of resistance towards such notions that suggest the awrah is inclusive of the female voice and found that by organising the events in this order, the female voice was placed as the absolute lead, narrator, and authoritative guide throughout the album. To begin with the female voice, felt suggestive of the idea that some sounds would come to accompany the female voice and story almost like a group of people coming to awkwardly clap along with a performer. I wanted sound, life, and rhythm to be present, and for listeners to experience the way in which the female voice, or rather, Muslim female expression with all its intricacies and quirks, hops over, skips through, pulls apart and reformulates not only the practices' narrative, but also the sonic composition of the audio experience.

As mentioned, I intentionally recorded the album in the comfort of my home, barefooted without hijab or inhibitions. Sometimes squatting and other times standing, I angled myself in whatever way felt appropriate for the performance. This space was important. I was conscious that the meaning of the word "hijab" is barrier. Although listeners will not see me performing without this barrier, the original recordings and practice were created without this barrier present, meaning that the listeners are invited to sonically step beyond this barrier of the hijab and all its implications, and experience this one account of Muslim female expression in its unrefined state. I reiterate my earlier statement of the existence vs. the curated evidence. Had I have performed wearing my hijab and been conscious that I had entered the "barrier realm", a very different performance would have unfolded. This performance would be the one I regularly offer to spectators. Refined. Controlled. Expressive. Filtered. I recorded both in the day and night and approached each

recording after I had prayed my daily salahs[75]. I chose this time due to the state of God consciousness that salah allows one to achieve. The gravitational pull of the earth as one places their forehead against it with open palms against the floor allows energy[76] flow to increase and a sense of calm flood over the body. This is quick access into the flow state (Suseno, 2024). I made dua[77] to Allah to assist me with each recording and each time before recording a new track, I recited the prayer that the prophet Moses (peace be upon him) recited before engaging in conversation with Pharaoh. Prophet Moses made this dua to Allah because he was known to have a stutter (Leon-Sarmiento, et al., 2013), and so Prophet Moses asked Allah to expand his chest with assurance, untie the knot from his tongue and allow people to understand his speech. I approached this album with the same hope, that my speech and expression would be understood and felt, and therefore, this practice and its contribution.

These spiritual practices were essential methods that anchored the practices intentions and approach and accentuated its auto-ethnographical features, demonstrating and highlighting the differentiating states of consciousness and being in which a Muslim vs. non-Muslim would approach such work. These methods are part of the original contribution that the thesis makes to practice as research in this area, as explored by scholars like Nelson (2003), Rink (2002), Cook (1998), Davidson (2012) and Arlander (2011), none of which appear to use spiritual practices in their work or approach from a conceptualisation of God consciousness.

I recorded the vocal performances over two weeks. I used sixteen different versions/tones of voice. These are the following:

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[75] The word "salah" is the Arabic word for prayer.

[76] Numerous studies have shown the neurological, skeletal and holistic benefits of salah. Please see articles by Ijaz, S., Khalily, M.T. & Ahmad on "Mindfulness in Salah Prayer and its Association with Mental Health". Also see Sayeed and Prakash on "The Islamic prayer (Salah/Namaaz) and yoga togetherness in mental health" for further reading.

[77] The word "dua" is the Arabic word for prayer.

- Standard performance voice
- Traditional Narrator voice
- Pidgin English voice
- Patois infused voice
- Front of throat voice
- Back of throat voice
- Hum (nose sounds)
- Stand-up comedy narrator voice
- Conversational voice
- Deeper voice (vocal effect)
- Male feature voice (rap)
- Male feature voice (narration)
- High pitch, low pitch and in-between ad libs
- Whisper voice
- Elevator voice (inanimate object with characterisation)
- Whale voice (allowing air to pass through the entirety of the mouth, accentuating the delivery)

When stepping into characterisation and delivery of the vocal performance, I used these multiple voices, tones, styles, vocal ranges and melodies as tools to navigate through this depicted corridor and sonically weave through a theoretical, socio-political, biographical and cultural setting/discourse of Muslim female identity and representation. Growing up in a multicultural/lingual household, accents, sounds, pronunciations/enunciations vary. I would not know how to pick one sound or voice to exemplify how my family and I speak. It would always be a combination of vocal arrangements and deliveries. I captured this multiplicity and variation through these multiple voices and have always been aware that multiple voices and delivery of these voices are a way in which I can layer not just vocal arrangements, but layer, diversify and *angle* the story and experiences told through these voices. These voices contort, challenge, comfort and chauffeur the listener round the corners of the contested and debated discourses of Muslim female identity, through the centre of the lived

experience of Muslim women of mixed-heritage in the UK and right to the edge of the emotional exhaustion of Muslim female practitioners in rap.

Multiplicity and mode of voice is used to soothe the listener in moments of respite and recovery before plunging visitors of this corridor back into a convoluted valley of the in-between where ambivalence and lack of closure are present in abrupt endings and experiential content. With the combination of cultural accents, biographical and auto-ethnographical literary content and an infusion of melodies, the music album rollercoasters through sixteen tracks, with each song sonically texturising the atmosphere independently, but contextualising the next, and the previous songs. These musical movements shapeshift and offer a shapeless resistance which is explored in the final chapters of this thesis.

The ordered structure of the songs but simultaneous mobile interchangeability is synonymous with the representation of the contemporary experience of Muslim female identity and representation in the UK in relation to the colonial playground in which an order of events, although contextualises historical play, is no longer *so* significant in the implications of the impact and rules of this current cultural setting. An example of this in a contemporary experience would be that those of us with mixed-heritages born and raised in the UK, although told stories of unfolding chronological events that led to our grandparents immigrating to the United Kingdom, have no experience of this first hand, and so have moved contextually beyond the theoretical cultural setting and timeline of "The Indian and the Englishman".

Instead, we have the interpretation of stories, emotional/physical collateral damage, and fragmented ruptured discourses, which I believe are better described as the remnants that make a "dystopian playground" rather than a paralleled "colonised" vs. "coloniser" setting. In many ways, it does not matter the order of events to those of us in the playground or even how we came to be in the playground, but more that we acknowledge the playground for what it is, what each fragmented piece means, how it is used and most importantly, how these pieces can be transformed into useful gadgets and tools to navigate through and beyond the walls of this playground.

Alternatively, an example of this in the album would be the way a listener could potentially listen to the album backwards or at random track selection without losing

entirely the impact of the modes and functions. This is distinctive to the visual component which could be watched as independent music videos, but perhaps not necessarily backwards as its on screen representations became distinguished within the storyline as the visuals progress. Listening backwards, would sacrifice *some* chronological[78] story[79], much like the contemporary experience provided, but what would be maintained is expression, functionality, visibility, resistance, metamorphosis, mythology, transformation, shape shifting and ultimately, identity all interacting and in conversation with one another, activated in the practice.

3.2.1 Summary of Key Methods of Creation

So far, the key methods of creation and findings arising from these key methods in the creation of the music album can be summarised as the following:

- Collecting and creating sounds from the biographical environment and engaging in auto-ethnographical practices
- Implementing a spiritual ritualistic setting in which the practice was created
- Arranging sounds in chronological/non-chronological order to correlate with biographical events and themes present in the practice
- Using multiple voices that serve to differentiate expressions and characterisations that function distinctively to one another

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[78] Interestingly, this conceptualisation of order and chronology is also present in the origin of the Qur'an, although this sits outside of the scope of this project and so is not discussed in the body of this thesis. The Qur'an is not in order in its literary sense, nor was revealed in order. Over twenty-three years, the Qur'an was revealed and memorised but not written down until much later. In order to understand the Qur'an, one would have to study it in its entirety, as verses and lines of these verses are not complete without reading the entire book and often sit very far in pages away from each other. This is because there is no *need* for the Qur'an to be in order as it is not a storybook but rather a book that is considered to be the literal words of God and holds a unique compositional style that conceptualises/contextualises its thematics and content. This means that the Qur'an is to be taken conceptually as a whole, with all relating features and timelines being taken into consideration.

[79] In addition to this point of chronology and order of the Qur'an, I questioned why it is that it is considered necessary to tell stories in order, particularly when thinking of relation to creative practices. There is an unspoken rule, that we tell stories in order, however when approaching the album, although some ordering in methods assisted with structuralising some elements, my focus lay on the album being *true* and *active*. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive with order, but I found myself letting go of chronological order and its unspoken rules.

3.3 Part Two - The Creation of the Visual Album

Just as I did with the music album, when approaching the visual album, I immersed the methodological inspiration of creation in auto-ethnographical practices and biographical experiences. I intended to have fun and allow room from my playfulness. After all, rap is fun, rap is playful, and I certainly have the best time doing it. With the *IF* series unlocking new characters in my mind daily, I was confident with my visual ideas for *Corridors*, and I was ready to shoot the visual album with plenty of enthusiasm. However, I first thought it was wise to decide on the areas of my visual album that I would be focusing on as key creative methods. Through this approach, I was able to divide the production of the visual album into six key elements. These are listed below, and I then explain the significance of each element in activating and responding to the research questions.

1. Location/settings
2. Camerawork
3. *Mise-en-scène*
4. Performance
5. Costume
6. Postproduction

Location/settings

Corridors is set across eight spaces. These consist of six locations and two settings. In chronological order of the visual album, the first is a relative's house in Huddersfield and the courtyard belonging to the house, the second is a bike path and surrounding areas in south Manchester, the third is the audiences mind, the fourth is Formby Beach in Liverpool, the fifth is Peckham, the sixth is Fletcher Moss Park in Manchester, the seventh is the "online world" and the final space is my house. These locations were selected by a combination of the literary content and representational elements of each song.

It was important that each song was able to take place in a location that had inherent biographical implications whilst also being tacitly chosen through the auto-

ethnographical relationship between myself, the practice, and its setting. I welcome the audience into a corridor of Muslim female expression, into my literal home and the biographical home of my experiences, my narrative, and mind. A question I would often ask myself when beginning to consider locations was "does this location honour the heritage and truth of the practice?". Although the practice is set in the in-betweens of biographical lucidity and alternative realms of existence, the experiences, stories, and heritage of the practice is firmly based in a true story. This meant that similarly to recording the songs without hijab on for the purpose of being able to access an uninhibited performance, I picked locations that I had real memories, connections, experiences, and dis/comfort in.

This led to each location evoking different feelings and therefore different characterisations of performance within the space being occupied. For the most part, I utilised the rooms inside and around my own house, responding to and exploring the concept of occupation of space and the lack of space that Muslim female practitioners are given, and arguably the lack of space we often need to pursue excellence. In my own practice and as highlighted in this thesis when considering urbanism and its implications, I do not believe that location/setting is of great importance when the focus of the project is rap, as I argue and have experienced that rap is something you do that transcends the space and is born through the intimate space between friends, family, and community. Rap is what one does amongst friends with other friends and strangers huddled around, creating a space filled with other people. One leans in closely to hear each lyric and rhyme. This is the heritage of rap, being born through togetherness and a love for lyricism, expression, metaphorical depictions, and catchy flows, without focus on the location that the rap takes place within. However, since I indeed had to pick locations in order to make the visual album, I decided that it made sense to pick biographical spaces. When considering the biographical elements of the spaces used, I also selected spaces that held wider implications of generational differences between myself and older relatives. An example of this would be the location for *The Headteacher's Daughter* in relation to Bhabha's *of Mimicry and Man.*

The relative's house used in *The Headteacher's Daughter* belongs to my grandma's sister and their husband and I grew up playing inside the house, always

amazed at how gigantic it was and how the winding corridors seemed never-ending. This location was perfect to embody the lyrical content of *The Headteacher's Daughter* which plays with the idea of a princess in her castle. I anticipated that my relatives would be present during filming, asking questions as to what each scene was about and sharing their ideas and offering their input.

In Pakistan, performances are not private events. A woman recording herself on camera, singing, rapping, and dancing around in her mother's old bridal sari will not go ignored. Performances are expected if one calls themselves a performer, and the whole village will gather around to watch this performance and join in. A performance, filming, costumes, and creative displays of expression are a moment that does not belong to the performer, but rather, to the community or whoever is around at the time, echoing theories of co-creation with audiences in live performance spaces (Brook, 1968). Those watching are there to support you, by watching you intensely, clapping along, sharing their opinions, and being deeply involved in the moment. By performing, you have called them to respond. England, specifically Huddersfield where *The Headteacher's Daughter* takes place, is a very different place to Pakistan, however. I know well that inside these impressive traditional British mansions often live elderly South Asian couples that are the depicted subjects of Bhabha's articulated *Of Mimicry and Man*. They often reveal a version of themselves that is only seen at big fat Asian weddings, when the music and dancing begin, and they hear the familiarity of the tabla and begin to clap and tap their feet along and utter words in sync with the beat. When the music stops, it is as if they quickly re-adjust their clothes and personas and are reminded that the cufflinks they wear are the contemporary marks and chains of the world Bhabha describes. Selecting locations that hold these biographical and ethno-graphical stories and histories, implications and features allows the practice to be created with inherently biographical elements that are imbedded in the practice as part of its method of creation, allowing for these features to surface, activate and reveal themselves as the practice unfolds.

Camerawork

When picking locations, I decided that I would shoot the visual album myself, with a single camera set up and still shots for most of the film. I have always worked independently and privately. Each scene was to be framed like a photo stemming

from a few concepts. The first concept is derived from music and visual albums stemming from the idea of photo albums as this is fitting for the heritage of *Corridors*. The second concept is derived from the occupation of space and the conscious decision to control stillness and movement throughout the performance, whilst being reminiscent of the differentiating camera set ups for different performances. A single camera set up, discreet and intimate, meant that each shot was set up like a postcard with everything in the scene that was necessary and allowed for the best angle per shot and focus and attention on the subject/s, drawing from traditional filmmaking and the desire to maintain intimacy and focus.

I did not want the camera movement to become noticeable and decided to prioritise the composition of each shot rather than camera tricks and movement. I intended to create an authentic "account" of interdisciplinarity meeting intersectionality and knew that for this to be hyper visible, other things would need to become invisible, such as the camera and postproduction decisions. Prioritising the composition meant that I could focus on what is happening in the scene and the positioning of my physical body in front of the camera. This decision was true to the origin of my craft. Despite occupying an identity and craft that is multiple, I have always operated singularly in an isolated manner with singular items, giving them attention and using them to their full capacity.

Using a single camera set up also meant that to capture different angles, I would have to stop filming and change the set up. Self-shooting means that I must go to the camera, stop recording and replay the footage to see if it is what I want and need. I have always enjoyed this process, because these repetitive sequences are where I feel I am thinking-doing and engaging in meaning-making processes (Narey, 2017). Using less equipment and having more focus on craft has always helped me to develop my craft and solve issues. I expected that due to the length of *Corridors,* and the amount of singular filming that I would be doing, I would be immersed into meaning-making and thinking-doing (Scott, 2016).

Mise-en-scène

Considering how each scene would ultimately come together with its *mise-en-scène* allowed me to further prioritise the storytelling cores of the performance. I decided

that the most important aspects of the *mise-en-scène* in *Corridors* were the costume and performance. Everything else felt like an extension of the performance. The core of the *mise-en-scène* was how I wished to present myself rhythmically and this rhythm would be embodied and represented through costume and performance that was in conversation with the music album. I identified this by questioning which aspects I feel were essential to the heart of the visual depiction. If I had to sacrifice some aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, which aspects would I feel I must absolutely need in the scene to tell this story and embody it properly? Costume and performance were the two aspects that I knew anchored *Corridors* in its rhythm and flow and so I felt that these two aspects were the foundations in which the rest of the scene would be built around.

Of course, I was not being asked by anybody to sacrifice elements of the production, but rather used this question as a way of asking the practice to reveal its most essential aspects of the production. Understanding that there is a difference between what I want and desire and what the practice needs is a convoluted area that presents trickiness the deeper I delve into executive decisions. I have learned over the years from my craft that it is useful at times to treat my practice as a separate entity to myself, rather than an extension of myself (mentioned earlier) and to sometimes act as the practice's representative or agent, rather than the creative of whom the practice belongs.

When I asked the practice how it wished for me to "show up" and be represented in this visual album, I quickly realised that each scene would be an opportunity to roleplay and shapeshift into characters that I had never seen growing up played by women like me. With this, I further solidified my choice that costume and performance would be key, and that this visual album would be the result of one woman's mind entangled in one prolonged speculated daydream, ruminating through the corridors of the past and present, in a postcolonial playground where fancy dress and trippy bars and banter inveigle the audience to indulge in a method of loci.

Performance

Approaching performance holistically and innately, I decided that the performance would be channelled through the embodiment of the different characterisations, using

each character as a way of personifying elements of *Corridor*'s concepts, themes, and cultural heritage. These personifications would be both overt and minute, revealing its edges in glimpses such as tiny endearing head nods in *The Headteacher's Daughter*, reminiscent of Indian performers. Or the more overt setting of positioning myself in the centre with another woman behind on a chaise longue, echoing traditional historical Bollywood music videos where the main performer would sit centre with her courtesan in the background (Slatewala, 2019). However, this time, the main performer would be mixed-heritage, which is still unseen throughout contemporary Bollywood music videos, and of course, the scene is set in a British-Pakistani household in Huddersfield.

I knew that I would be embodying characters from those that are inanimate in *The Elevator* to a character that is motionless in *The 13 Mahram*, and that these are roles I would shapeshift into and morph through to the next. I intended for each performance to be an independent showcasing of an embodied concept, whilst also relating to the next and previous sequence. Therefore, each character I played had to be the absolute embodiment of the practice's exploration but also reveal its uniqueness, showcasing each character's specific performative quirks (characterising the sonic quirks) whilst relating to the next character and sitting in conversation with the rest of the practice.

My experience with existing and expressing through multiplicity comes naturally to me, but the challenge resided in creating seamless transitions between characters knowing that each character would be distinctive yet interconnected through the same thread and core that the research questions pose. After contemplating on these transitions, I decided that I would rely on postproduction to create smooth transitions and a sense of relation between each characterisation and storytelling sequence on screen.

Remembering that *Corridors* is created conceptually as a metaphorical house, I imagined each character occupying a room in the house and transitions sitting as the hallways between these rooms. Postproduction has always been crucial in my creative process and so I focused on creating these characters as completely as possible and focusing on the connection between them later in post. I also knew that the music album was essentially the supporting foundation of this visual album and that

rhythmically, if I was moving with the beat, melodies, flows, bars, and lyrical content, I could trust that I would find the similarities and differences between each character's performance and create continuity. After all, this performance would be second nature to me and activating my tacit knowledge. I embraced the parts of the album that I felt did not need an onscreen performance and thought of these moments as sequences that would showcase the settings. As mentioned in the locations/settings section, some settings were the audience's mind, whereby the audience would just be listening to the song and reading text on screen, engaging in the practice sonically and disrupting the visual sequence. The audience are an active part of the practice and would also be performing often unknowingly by being asked to take on roles.

Not only is this the nature of rap, that it will intimately engage with the audience, but I decided there would be moments such as text on screen, and an audience task that requires the audience to engage in following certain rap flows and reading the textual story without a sonic narrator. Although it could be argued that the audience would be involved in and responding to the practice, I believe the right word is that they would be performing as I am performing through the practice and asking for others to partake in this performance as active members. As well as the audience, there would be voice actors reading parts of interviews that I had conducted with Muslim female artists that would sit as transitional sections and performances between the main performances, as some participants of the interviews had agreed to let voice actors read their words to protect their anonymity. This inception of performances enunciates the nature of the practice of building a world within a world, having micro performances between the main performances and variations of characterisation of main performances.

Costume

Rappers and the implications of their outfits is a lengthy discussion (Salaam, 1995). Over the years as a practitioner, costume has become increasingly important to my practice. In premature years of my practice, I almost felt that wearing a costume would immediately invalidate my practice as a rapper and result in me being kicked out of the imaginary rap school that I have been attending since the age of twelve, and automatically enrol me into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry where the

Sorting Hat[80] would place me in Hufflepuff before it even touched my head. This was until I realised that I wear a costume every time I leave the house when I put on the hijab and the rest of my "halalified[81]" outfit. This costume serves to hide certain parts of my physical appearance from the public and inform people that I am a woman of faith.

Due to rap's affiliation with hip-hop and the persona and physical appearance that is often associated with rappers, I have never looked like what people anticipate a rapper to look like, as most people's minds never go to Lauryn Hill or Shadia Mansour when thinking of rappers and there is almost this unspoken rule that thou shan't dress up "alternatively" unless one is Missy Elliott, who is the epitome of the impact a futuristically fantastical costume plays in one's performance. As I developed as a creative, costume became one of the staples in my performance and an extension of my expression. It served as the activated vessel between being in and out of character and the clarification between what I expressed and the way I expressed it. Rap, with all its auto-ethnographical features encourages individuals to approach rap with authenticity. Except, this is only half true.

I know full well from experience that a significant proportion of rappers are playing personas and characters, and these characters are extensions of their daydreams, desires, and experiences (Hess, 2005). Many rappers are not, for example, speaking to their mothers and fathers in the same characterisation in which they approach their songs. Why then, do we not consider a rapper's outfit to be part of that persona and essentially, a costume? Rap is a way in which people can authentically articulate their lived experiences, *or* playful imaginings of their deepest desires and wishes through lyrical narrative, in any outfit of their choosing. However, this

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[80] Although this comparison to the Sorting Hat in *Harry Potter* can sound imaginative and arbitrary as a metaphor to describe the relationship between rap and costume, I feel there is an interesting similarity in the concept of the Sorting Hat and the implication of what many argue rap is. Rap holds this connotation of authenticity and the revealing of a person's true nature and where they ultimately align themselves. Audiences will align rappers with causes and assign them characteristics all influenced by this idea that rap is real, much like the Sorting Hat's authority of being the absolute truth. I later use Harry Potter as an example of understanding characterisation in section 4.3.

[81] "Halalified" is a colloquial word referring to normal clothes that have been adapted to fulfil the requirement of hijab such as layering tops to make them more modest.

understanding of fiction surprisingly does not encompass the outfits that rappers wear. Or better yet, people might be able to detect that rappers play personas and tell fictional stories but somehow do not include their outfits as an extension of the narrative. Every performance is just that, a performance.

With this, often comes costumes that each rapper feels re/presents them in their truest form to meet that performance. Every open mic night in Manchester will have a huddle of rappers wearing oversized hoodies and joggers because at this point in their life, this outfit speaks authentically to them and the performance they are about to give and represents them as rappers.

As I began to discover my own identity as a creative, I began to understand that costume is an extension of my performance and part of my personal expression. My stories told through rap became more specific and my costume ideas became defined and articulated, creating significant characterisations around my stories, and building bigger worlds. I began to feel that through costume, I was honouring my practice and establishing boundaries as a performer. Rap is something I can do in any outfit, and something that lyrically reveals the inner parts of my experiences and thinking, and so I believe this should be met with a costume that thematically personifies and encapsulates its auto-ethnographical implications and heritage.

Whether rappers are aware or unaware, every time a rapper approaches their performance, they are stepping into roleplay and characterisation, and how they choose to do that in relation to their outfit will undoubtedly provide the audience with more information as to how that rapper is received thematically. Therefore, throughout *Corridors* I consciously chose to inform the audience of just how I wish to be received and incorporate costume as part of the storytelling narrative to set the scene and the performance. The *IF* series became crucial in understanding that these costumes are embodying shapeshifting and allowing findings to activate and mobilise in the creative practice. These costume ideas were independently designed and created, with the exception of my mother's wedding dress that features in *The Headteacher's Daughter*.

Each outfit would be either biographically or conceptually significant, or both. I thought of daydreams and nightmares and figures and shapes I would see and drew

from those as inspirations around thematic designs such as the caped figure in the woods, whilst utilising my interest and love for masks and their representations. I listened to each song in the album and would think of what texture and colour material matches the sound along with what visual depictions complimented the song and the characterisation in the scene.

Costume and editing were where I felt *Corridors* would really come to life with hidden messages embedded in the shapes, textures, and layers of material, such as the hoodie that I wore in *The Hexenbiest* that I have won countless rap battles in that always gives me a particular internal swagger when I wear it. Or the way in which this hoodie moves in slow motion once the drums drop and folds on to itself, rippling and bending with my body shape to the rhythm. These outfits essentially became a form of cosplay[82] and an extension of the resistance present in the *IF* series that had then mobilised in *Corridors* and gained a sense of legitimacy. The distinction of term between outfit, costume and cosplay began to inform the practice as words such as characterisation, persona, and the way in which I was activating the practice became clearer. It became fitting to think of my costumes as cosplay with the situating of the practice in a postcolonial playground and the intangible features of the practice that are activated whilst in this alternate realm of existence. Although as mentioned I had been developing my costumes as a rapper, it is only through the *IF* series that the activated shift between outfit-costume-cosplay emerged, impacting my approach towards *Corridors* as one where cosplay became the appropriate term for the costumes featured throughout the practice.

Editing

Before I began creating the filming plan, I would often daydream of editing *Corridors*. Editing has always been something that I find enjoyable due to the vast number of stylistic decisions that all dramatically alter the way in which the story is depicted and ultimately received. Through the edit, I would be able to control speed,

[82] "Cosplay", a portmanteau of "costume play" is a performance art in which people wear costumes to represent characters. This has been considered as the imaginative self, performative identity, and roleplay, whereby those participating often transform from an ordinary person to a superhero or from their everyday persona to a performer (Rahman, Wing-Sun & Cheung, 2012).

framing, focus, ratio, transition, and colour palette. This led to early decisions centred around the style of performance. For example, in *The Contortionist*, I knew I would be playing with the increase and decrease of speed in the edit and so I alternated my speed during the actual performance so that I could increase the postproduction play of speed. Postproduction is where I made frame ratio choices that packaged the setting and drew attention to stylistic elements such as the blurred focal lenses throughout *Corridors*, particularly in opening balcony scene of *The headteacher's Daughter*, and the finale *The Inconclusive*, representational of the dreamlike setting and curtain open/closed motif.

The intended colour palette in post was clear through shooting as I felt parts of the practice had already picked their colour palette and the alternation between black and white and colour was the most noticeable use of the palette throughout *Corridors*. I knew that the combination of black and white and colour felt like the correct artistic decision early on to showcase the subtleties of certain costumes, settings, and lyrical play. Editing has always been like reaching the final boss in a game, where I am certainly going to find out everything I should have done better to prepare. Except after editing my work for so many years, this time I was pleasantly surprised to find the final boss greeting me kindly. By knowing what colours and costumes I would be working with earlier on, I knew that a lot of the editing would be about capturing those colours strikingly and adjusting them afterwards to make sure that each costume and scene is vibrant enough.

3.3.1 Summary of Key Methods of Creation

These six key elements of production are instrumental in the articulation of the tangible features of the auto-ethnographical and biographical heritage of the practice and sit in compliment with the methods undertaken through the production of the music album. From these six key elements in production, the core themes emerging from the making of the visual album are the following:

- Visuals set in auto-ethnographical and biographical settings
- Making costumes that are biographically and mythically inspired and considering them as cosplay

- Roleplaying through each performance and approaching each segment with a different persona
- Engaging consciously with myself throughout the filming by questioning my intentions and interrogating the practice
- Drawing inspiration for visuals from the in-between of reality and fiction and approaching the visual album playfully

With the summary of key elements emerging through the methodology and an in-depth coverage of how *Corridors* was made, the next chapter is the findings and discussion where I will talk through the emerging themes, interpreting and discussing their implications.

4 Findings and Discussion

Before going into the body of the discussion, it is useful to recapitulate the research questions and outline some broader themes in relation to the findings before moving into discussing specific areas of the practice. The research questions are the following:

1. In what ways can rap and visual album create new sonic and visual languages for Muslim women?
2. In what ways can these interdisciplinary practices explore and activate resistance, identity, and visibility for Muslim women?
3. How does Muslim female identity "show up", re/present itself when explored through rap and visual album?

4.1 Broader Themes in Corridors

Corridors as a conceptual rap-visual album is an amalgam of all parts of this research project. From stylistic imagery to theoretical questions posed to the audience, *Corridors* is the home of the research findings, revealing another layer of its findings embedded in the practice each time it is watched. *Corridors* presents an expression of contemporary representation and auto-ethnographical exploration and biographical display of Muslim British mixed-heritage that feels rich in its belonging and heritage. The heritage of the practice is certain and unwavering, anchored in a fluidity of shapeshifting and roleplay and the multiplicity of identity though it escorts its viewers, who are also participants of the practice, through a roller coaster of themes, theories and experiences all tied to this singular gesture of welcoming its spectators to a corridor of Muslim female expression.

With its marrying (and divorce) of popular theories in postcolonialism and Islamic female-centric positioning, and its intimacy between auto-ethnographical conversation and intersectional experience, it opens up and interrogates the contemporary understanding of Muslim female identity. *Corridors* offers insight into an interdisciplinary practice display and intersectional account of what being Muslim, mixed-heritage and British looks, sounds and feels like today, with multiple layers of visibility being embedded and activated in the practice.

Visibility is conceptualised through pockets of inconspicuous visual depictions and subtle sonic arrays sitting within more open and obvious displays of visibility. *Corridors* is never just presenting a Muslim woman on screen, but rather, presents a Muslim woman in her multiplicity by its creations of sonic and visual decorations. It is through the combination of movement, occupation of space, cosplay, lyricism, setting, colour, pace, and performance together that this display of Muslim female identity and representation becomes characterisation, embodying and activating a new portrayal of "the Muslim woman" that is unseen in popular contemporary media.

With rap-visual auto-ethnography in conversation with an intersectional approach, intersectionality is mobilised and animated, moving from being used as a theoretical term to highlight the coming together of unique characteristics, to a sonic and visual depiction that when activated in the practice can be seen, heard and most importantly, felt. *Corridors*' intersectional experience is created through the on-screen performance changing throughout, and the way that it embodies different characterisations and personifications, with each performance differentiating significantly and encapsulating the thematic of the notion explored whilst also responding, challenging, and exploring the practice. The performance changing in its representation sits in partnership with the cosplay with each cosplay made up of multiple garments and materials that hold biographical history and connection such as my mother's wedding dress in *The Headteacher's Daughter* and the mythological inspired cosplay characterisations such as the crow/raven cosplay in *The 13 Mahrams*.

Each scene represents a different moment and notion all interrelated and informing one another with the location, stylistic shot, performance, and costume all creating a *mise-en-scène* that sets the stage for *Corridors* to invite viewers into a biographical, auto-ethnographical experiential story through an intersectional, multi-realm and dimensional journey. The audio and visual elements of *Corridors* inform each other lyrically, emotionally, and representationally, sharing a relationship of its own that contextualises the space between the audio and visual as a potential hidden hallway of further discovery that can change distinctively if audiences listen to each as independent practices rather than the complete practice of the sole visual album.

Situated in a postcolonial playground, inundated with experiential articulations through enunciated rap flows, hallucinatory visuals, and a theoretical discourse that is melodically disrupted, the themes emerging from the practice are eclectic. Such eclecticism speaks to the nature of the project, drawing from the multiplicity of identity, heritage, experience, and creative practice. This array of rap-visual display showcases elements of Muslim female identity that are rarely, if ever, discussed in relation to Muslim female identity and representation, such as characterisation, persona, expression, shapeshifting, and roleplay. These elements are activated, encapsulated, and embodied through an exigent exhibit of gothic mythology, lyricism, trippy rap flows and playfulness.

Beginning with the auto-ethnographical method of creation, the environment in which the practice is created and inspired by results in *Corridors* being a direct piece of organic heritage belonging to the contemporary experience of mixed-heritage Muslim women in the UK, and therefore a contribution to the sonic and visual artistic articulations of British audio-visual storytelling.

Through the method of creation, distinctive holistic and spiritual approaches towards music making are highlighted and speak to the relationship between the inherence of the Islamic principles and rituals when working as a Muslim female practitioner. The idea that the practice is an extension of oneself and so should be approached with humility and God consciousness, also known as the Islamic concept *taqwa*, anchors the practice already in multiple realms of existence. This is not to be conflated with the concept of Western esotericism (Goodrick-Clarke, 2018), but rather, an inherent understanding within Islamic identity and purpose that a person exists to serve God and will exist in another life, the akhirah, when they die in this life, the dunya. This belief means that the creation of the practice is intentional and holds an agenda of goodness. The clear intention that as a Muslim, a person should only ever intend to contribute goodness, means that there is already an often-unspoken rulebook when approaching production.

An example of this would be the use of profanity. It is true that many Muslims use profanity in their everyday lives, during casual conversations and throughout their artistic practice, particularly in music. It is also true that a Muslim could argue that certain words that are generally considered profanity do not create any harm as they

do not hold any meaning. However, I argue that what is truer than this stance is that there is an Islamic concept whereby all speech should be good speech and should not offend oneself or others and should be considered unoffensive within the society that a person lives within (Khairuldin, Ismail, Anas, Ibrahim, 2016). This does not mean a person should only speak about positive things, but that the intention behind such speech should be to ultimately encourage goodness and truth.

With the underpinning of Islamic principles in mind, consciously creating artistic practice with the understanding that it should be used for the purpose of good and contribute towards good, means that many popular concepts explored through music and film are not deemed Islamically permissible. Further examples of these concepts as well the use of profanity could be the spreading of falsehood, discrimination, harmful speech, and pornography. This can often result in the realm of what is Islamically permissible naturally encouraging one to look towards concepts that they believe are beneficial to oneself and the society they live in. Creating from an auto-ethnographical setting allowed the production to engage with these Islamic principles effortlessly and were complimentary towards one another. This also echoes the importance of things being true, mentioned earlier in the methodology section. Fictional stories are totally permissible under Islamic principles; however, when discussing biographical experiences, one should speak the truth and depict a truthful narrative (Qur'an, 2:43). This does not mean that metaphorical, abstract creativity cannot be used, but rather, means that when operating in a realm between fiction and biography, a person that identifies as Muslim must be cautious not to mislead others intentionally for the sake of entertainment (Qur'an, 2:42).

These considerations exemplify the inception of multiple realms of existence that a person is positioned between when approaching work with a biographical and auto-ethnographical methodology that will tacitly call for the emergence of Islamic principles. This also speaks to the fluidity of the ability to move between styles, flows and characterisations throughout the practice. The awareness of intersectionality along with this creative interdisciplinarity and balancing act of realms of existence, upheld by Islamic principles creates this sense of seamless weaving between states of consciousness and occupation of space existing in the in-betweens of worlds and realms of the postcolonial playground. Mixed-heritage Muslim women in the UK are

hyper marginalised, well versed, and often comfortable in interlacing the physical and emotional fabric of our experiences between intertextualities and extracting the nuanced subtleties of heritage into tangible representations (e.g. our art), much like Black Muslim British women (Johnson, 2016).

These can manifest in endless ways, but in *Corridors* these manifestations emerge and shapeshift through gothic mythological characterisations and sonic multitudes of voices. *The Contortionist*, *The Umi*, *The Hexenbiest*, *The 13 Mahrams*, *The offering* and *The Medusa* all showcase gothic mythically inspired unseen characterisations of Muslim women on screen, embodying a protagonist that is mobilising the characterisation of Muslim female representation and opening a discussion that differs in its terminologies to that of the conversation of agency. *Corridors* moves this conversation into a realm of reverie and poetic imaginings where the depiction of Muslim female identity and representation counters the contemporary tropes and stereotypes of Muslim women on screen by entering a realm of cinematic musical horror. In this realm reside characters such as a soul-sucking damsel in no distress, a grim-reaping bride no to be, a forest contortionist, a queen crow, a werewoman, a rapping elevator, whose characterisations and personas are expressed through their cosplays and distinctive lyrical narratives.

It is important to question *why* Muslim women are still being depicted on British screens roleplaying as the wives of bombers as seen in *The Bodyguard* (2018) with a plot twist that the main Muslim female character, was not the wife of the bomber, but the engineer who built the bomb (aha!). *Corridors* features an interview where a participant touches on this and discusses whether the writer/director had considered how this would impact the way in which Muslim women in the UK are perceived and how this portrayal impacted her. Considering this series is reported to have received the highest viewing figures on BBC One since 2008 (Corrodus, Corrine, 2018), it is nothing other than frightening to consider the danger of these depictions on such a significant scale. What is also featured in *Corridor*'s *The Internet*, - is the backlash that I receive from British audiences watching my work online. This is displayed through a song I wrote using audiences' hate comments. This unnerving and interrogative audience setting provokes a knee-jerking response

whereby the audience desire to separate themselves from the comments and create distance between their reality, and the reality of the commentators.

This desire to separate is explored when referring back to research mentioned in this thesis on the way that Muslims and global majority people on screen are received in England, what is learned through research in "White audience demand for Black and Muslim film casting" (2020) is that when white people in England are asked about the racism that Muslims and global majority people receive in such online spaces, they express the belief that other people are racist, but not them, and that they would like to see more representation, but do not think other people would (Frey and Declercq, 2020). This is the unusual and very specific denial that theorists such as Madood (2003) and Said (1978) speak of and the othering that is often seamlessly experientially present across British culture. It is never the one being questioned who holds racist views and in fact, according to them, they would like to see more representation, but they do not think other people would, although they also state that they do not know people that hold these racist views. This is not to suggest that what people say about themselves is untrue, but I argue that one of the many challenges with combating racism in Britain is that so many do not believe it is as prominent as people of global majority and faith claim it is.

This type of gaslighting is systemic and has been present throughout British culture for several centuries (Madood, 2003). Through *The Internet*, the audience are confronted with a satirically relayed reality, before swiftly moving on to the next room in *Corridors*. This is one of the many realms of existence that the audience experience through *Corridors*, which is created as a physical and metaphorical corridor, with each sequence being representative of audience members entering into a different room in the house. The biographical and auto-ethnographical setting of *Corridors* are features of the heritage of the practice, allowing spectators into a realm of dreamlike semibiographical experiences whilst physically experiencing the literal home of the practitioner. These two realms of existence echo and play with Bhabha's theoretical partial existence, but the practice not only activates and exemplifies this, but also asks the audience to experience and move through multiple realms at once.

The practice is always asking the audience to exist in many modes, sometimes as just a spectator, sometimes as a participant, but always as an active member of the

practice. When visuals are suspended and sound and text are the only features present, the audience are being asked to engage their audio senses and sharpen their comprehension. This becomes particularly challenging in one part of the visual album *The Interruption* where the text on screen is saying something different to the audio playing. Through the activation of the practice, viewers and listeners must attempt to understand information despite discordance and disjunction. This is exactly what the practice is depicting; an audio re-enactment of myself being asked questions about my faith and interrupted by a discourse on Islamic scholarship, whilst I write and perform a song. The audience are asked to experience this happening to me through listening to the re-enactment with lyrics on screen but then are asked to engage in a theoretical discourse on Muslim female identity and representation. This matrix like inception of creative layers of expression activating, combined with biographical experiences provides the audience with a glimpse of what it feels like to be a mixed-heritage Muslim woman walking the streets of England, desiring to progress creatively and personally but interrupted frequently to explain my identity.

Through situating this scenario in the mind of the audience, the practice allows the audience to create their own mental depictions and allows room for the setting to change with each person that imagines this interaction, with the practice mobilising differently each time depending on who is listening. This segment of sonic experience is using the ability of audio to tap into the imagination and listener's abilities to be aurally stimulated to imagine any potential situation if appropriately coaxed in that direction (Fryer, Pring and Freeman, 2013).

With interviews from Muslim women sitting as interludes within the practice, *Corridors* offers a singular piece of practice that is made up of the voices of many experientially and within its vocal composition. Not only is this true in its factual sense of these included interviews, but in its method of creation, multiple voices and the layering of vocals as detailed in the methodology section, serving as a way of representing and embodying the multiplicity of identity and its multifaceted sound and enunciation. This sonic multitude and layering of Muslim female voice and experience creates a type of visibility and resistance that is integrated into the fabric of the practice, resulting in an active sensory hypervisibility.

My approach methodologically through the production involved consciously thinking of the theories in conversation with the research project, such as Bhabha's realms of existence, Crenshaw's intersectionality, Tatari's ideas surrounding the implications of the awrah, Kincaid's metaphorical personifications of in between identities and Said's orientalism. I thought of the way in which my performance throughout the album moved sonically and visually, including the way in which my physical body occupied space whilst characterising my roles throughout each scene and speaking to, against, for, or with the theoretical bodies of knowledge underpinning the project. This created a unique resistance and tension that is positioned within the practice which can be experienced throughout the entirety of *Corridors* but shows up more candidly in scenes such as *The Hexenbiest*. Here, I initially sonically discuss Toni Morrison's ideas around visibility, whilst visually engaging in a mythological thematic display featuring a rat mask which transitions into a monstrous mask, before moving into a slow motion black and white dance sequence visually, whilst sonically playing bongo drums and performing with a Caribbean carnivalesque rap flow.

These theories and ideas were the "whispers" taking place during the production of both parts of the practice but are fully mobilised and embodied through the visual album when the sonic and visual elements come together as a rap-visual display. Paying attention to these whispers of theoretical stances and ideas during the production meant that methodologically, I was actively engaging in a discourse of exploration and experiencing the resonation of findings being activated through the practice and mobilised through audio-visual sequences of expression, characterisation and persona, speaking back to this experiential research and reinventing and manifesting through the practice.

It was clear that the findings began emerging initially at the methodology stage and that creating *Corridors* would be a practice that extended in its originality to the methods employed in the practice. Understanding and sharing how much of a role the Islamic faith plays in my creations opens the question of how other faith centred practitioners are making their craft and under what conditions. *IF* as mentioned, also played a critical part of the conditions of the practice and served as the key space in which characterisation initially started to emerge, activate, shapeshift and mobilise. It

was through creating *IF* that I was able to consciously find my thread of characterisation and translated this into *Corridors* with *Corridors* becoming a space where characterisation exploded in melodies, rhymes, and mythical creatures. Had it have not been for the decision to create *IF*, I doubt whether *Corridors* would have emerged in the way it has.

Through this, I solidify that when creating PaR, it is useful that one has a "second space" to retreat to in the form of a secondary practice. This secondary practice can often serve as a way of informing the first and allows the practitioner to engage in the act of "detangling", a word I use that describes unfolding the knotty areas of the primary practice and drawing out the main thread. The merging of these two practices when *IF*'s episode *If I Was an Elevator* is in *Corridors* as *The Elevator*, ultimately positions my practices intertextually and teaches me, not my audience, that I was always in conversation with the same idea throughout this project, searching for characterisation and expression that speaks to the contemporary Muslim female experience in Britain, one that does not include the argument of agency, the building of bombs, the removal of the hijab or the emancipation from fictitious Islamic oppression.

Instead, *Corridors* is a story about how limitless Muslim female identity is and how its potential is unseen and unexplored in contemporary media. *Corridors* is also about how exciting and thrilling it is to be Muslim, mixed-heritage and British and how rap is the ultimate encapsulation and expression of this excitement. Rap is the only way I believe that this expression can be contained because rap is the only performative vessel, I believe, that holds unlimited space and freedom for a conceptually multifaceted characterised expression that works seamlessly within an intersectional identity.

Corridors demonstrates how rap bends to its practitioner and allows itself to be totally consumed and personified in the way that the practitioner needs it to be. It becomes the practitioner's style, rather than other features such as "singing" which I feel often holds less flexibility. It is not that rap has fewer rules. Rap is something that I advise every practitioner of, to have a vocal coach because it requires just as much vocal practice and development of the larynx. Rap is something that if one is not going to rhyme and rhyme well, it is better that they walk over to spoken word

quickly. Rap is unforgiving because rap personified has had to fight harder to even be acknowledged as an art (Keyes, 2004). However, if a practitioner is willing to work, then within rap's vicinity they can do as they wish, and rap becomes a never-ending waterfall that continues to pour into its practitioner flows, melodies, rhythms, and rhymes that are always secretly embedding cultural codes into our understanding of how characterisation is created (Ogbar, 2007). The way Muslim female identity is characterised through *Corridors* is through rap-visual album, with the tonality of these characterisations beginning in the music. Rap requires persona. I am not convinced that these two can be separated due to the nature of rap. Rap due to its auto-ethnography has a way of reaching inside one's core and extracting exactly what it is that they want to say. In some cases, practitioners of rap present lyrical narratives that position their archetypal tropes between hero and seeker (Kravchenko, Zhykharieva & Kononets, 2021). There is no hiding behind musical riffs when it comes to rap. *Corridors* therefore opens conversations on just how Muslim female persona reveals itself through rap.

4.2 Personae

Muslim female identity "shows up" through the practices of persona in *Corridors* and is explored through relating to some commonly explored roles in fictional stories. Persona refers to the social role, identity, and image that an individual presents to the outer world (Popkin, 1985). In storytelling, this can also describe the character's public image/face/mask that they show to others (Appel, 1982). Throughout film and contemporary media there are countless popular stock characters/personas that often serve as familiar archetypes and stereotypes. Some of these are vague, general, and easily identifiable such as the traditional action hero. However, some are less overt and more nuanced, intricate, and delicately positioned and embedded inside the persona and the characterisation of the performer. This causes them to be often overlooked, go unnoticed and therefore perpetuated further in other literary and dramatic works due to what I feel is this oxymoron of these characters having the right combination of quintessential and atypical personae.

Some examples of these more nuanced distinctive personas are the "angry white male" seen in films like *Falling Down* (1993) or *Joker* (2019) which is often a

reactionary persona whose ever-growing frustrations with their treatment from others, politics and social change escalates into a fit of rage which can often turn violent. Mystical examples could be the "blind seer" in *Marco Polo* (2014) or the tortured, lonely, alienated "Byronic hero" in literary works like *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844). Racial examples could be the "black best friend" in films such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) who is a secondary character often used to mentor the main character and guide them through their complicated relationships with a sassy attitude and one-liners. Or the "dragon lady" who is an East Asian and South Asian stereotype portrayed in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931) and *Kill Bill* (2003).

Despite the distinctiveness of these personas, I believe they can all still be categorised into one of ten traditional storytelling personas that are identified as key roles in literary and dramatic works (Silver & Ursini, 1997). I find that by categorising personas into generalised, traditional storytelling roles, we can identify the raw form of the character's positioning in the story and see how personas and characterisations have been built and developed to create more nuanced personas. These common ten reoccurring personas throughout storytelling are the following:

1. The Protagonist - The main character driving the narrative forward, often with whom the audience sympathises.
2. The Antagonist – The character that is positioned as the direct force opposing the protagonist, creating tension and conflict.
3. The Antihero – A character positioned in the centre that has unconventional heroic qualities and is a focal point of the story.
4. The Sidekick – The supporting character that aids the protagonist, holds a close association, and often provides comic relief.
5. The Foil – A character that is created to highlight the traits and differences between themselves and another character.
6. The Dynamic Character – One who undergoes a distinctive and significant internal development throughout the plot.
7. The Static Character – A character that remains relatively unchanged throughout the plot.
8. The Round Character – The character that is complex and multifaceted, conveying a wide range of emotions and character traits.

9. The Flat Character – A one-dimensional character that often represents an archetype or stereotype.
10. The Stock Character – A character that embodies and displays conventional, formulaic traits that can be recognised from other works.

Corridors plays with each of these personas and multiple personas at once, activating, mobilising, and shapeshifting between the occupation of roles showing a distinctive multiplicity and dynamic ability of Muslim female intersectional expression.

I open with the roleplay of protagonist as the main character driving the story forward and welcome the audience into this space of spirituality, followed by a beautiful display of colourful heritage in *The Headteacher's Daughter* although the lyricism quickly begins informing the audience of the dangers that reside outside of the castle through lyrical whispers. Despite this, visuals take us outside where the sonic flick of a lighter turns the colour scheme black and white transitioning to *The Offering*. Suddenly, the tabla, beautiful vibrant colours and castle disappear and the tone of the performance changes, adopting a new persona of the potential antagonist that speaks with a cold, blunt tonality accompanied by the sound of water dripping, making the monochromatic scenes of nature present even colder. It is not clear at this point who exactly I am speaking to through this particular mode of address creating an increasing sense of unease. This feeling of unease manifests into the sound of rumbling and I begin my instructional poetry on reaching inside one's chest until they rip out their heart. With the howling of wolves and the beating of drums, the hooded figure emerges through the woods who appears to potentially be the real antagonist, although as the scene progresses it is arguable whether this is indeed the antihero.

Corridors is constantly hinting at and taking on different personas, creating this sense of foreboding and fluidity throughout. Interestingly, as this is an independent production, I am always in a constant state of roleplaying the round character by changing slightly throughout each song and embodying different emotions except the activated characterisation of each character is significant, making it feel like each character is totally distinctive. Is this the shapeshifting of one woman? Or is each character to be treated as entirely separate entities when I switch between

roleplays? Embodying characters and travelling through personas, all possessing different activating features such as rap flows, melodies and cosplays introduces the audience to this inception of the complexity and multifaceted nature of intersectional performance.

As soon as the audience believe they potentially have a grasp on the intangible, it is juxtaposed with something representative of a contradiction. An example would be that as soon as the audience are presented with the hooded figure who perhaps may be the anti-hero, then appears a dual persona of the stock character and anti-hero in *The Contortionist* where I wear the mask from *V for Vendetta*. This is a stock character as the mask represents noticeable traits from other works such as the activist dealing with totalitarianism, islamophobia, homophobia, and terrorism, but also holds association as the anti-hero. However, taking this representation and reassigning a Muslim female persona, characterised through fluid slow motion vogue movements evoking freedom and bewilderment, creates new associations with how these anti-heroes are curated and embodied when portrayed through Muslim female expression. Sharing the same woodland home of the wolf and hooded figure, the contortionist's persona is emerging with embedded themes of rurality and how rap positions itself in conversation with our landscape, speaking back to the conceptualisation of Urban music and its claiming of rap and hip-hop.

Juxtaposing this freedom, I reintroduce colour as I next perform *The Novel Idea*, taking on a triple persona of the sidekick, the flat character and the stock character, that provides a forced comical relief enhanced by the superimposed sound of applause despite the audience (the real audience, the viewers) knowing that what is being said, is not funny. This persona is exaggerated in its one-dimensional state and serves to represent nothing other than the archetype of the "speaker". However, this concoction of personae is making space for the audience to play a more active role when they technically witness *their* comments in *The Internet*. Although these are not the comments of many people watching, it is factually the audience's comments, which places this sense of confrontational interrogation onto them whilst they watch me in my role of racial conductor elegantly regurgitating these hate comments that I have now turned into a catchy anthem.

The audience are not given any time to recover, reminiscent of the lack of time as Muslim female rappers we are given to get over these "blacklashes" and we move into more persona play in *The Interruption* where I echo the foil, intertextually romanticising about fictional relationships only to interrupt myself with another stock persona of the "woman that wants to know all about my hijab but does not have any time to listen". Whilst this happens, text appears on screen posing a question to the audience and once again the audience are being asked to exist in many ways by contextualising and understanding all of this just as I am having to in this in-between world of roleplay, reenactment, and reality. These in-between moments of juggling multiple realities, sounds, scenarios, and information in an entangled web of performative experiential intersectionality stretch the feeling and experience of multiplicity within Muslim female identity and pull-on threads of Bhabha's realms of existence.

Whilst expanding these worlds, I then further enter the world of mythology with *The Medusa*. By roleplaying a mythological character, I once again embody the dual antihero and stock character, except my portrayal is in relation to the biographical story told through the lyricism which reveals that technically, I am still indeed the protagonist and the people in the story are the antagonists who assigned *me* the role of antagonist. This positions the persona of *The Medusa* as a round character with complexity to the narrative, with means that the persona of the character goes through a metamorphosis and is almost constantly existing in multiple states at once. These constant weavings in and out of personas and operating multiple personas at once fosters the embodiment of the practice's ability to activate and hold these pockets of characterisation hidden within the same characterisation, creating this loop of constantly revealing layers of visibility and resistance.

After these displays of multiple mixed persona, *Corridors* reveals one of its more vulnerable offerings of experiences in *The Flat Shoes* that resituates the story and reminds the audience that this story is about visibility and the challenges of being Muslim in the current climate, and that I am indeed the protagonist. It is from this stage in the story onwards that *Corridors* allows the audience to see beyond the singular experience of Muslim female expression to a wider depiction in *The Intermission* where home video archive footage is seen of me and my family. By

including this representation in the heritage of the research, the practice brings the audience closer to the practitioner and allows for the audience to see something that is rarely ever shown in contemporary media which is Muslim children in an authentic setting that has not been fabricated. Through our adverts, our films, our TV series' and even in our news, it is rare that we ever see Muslim children and their family homes. It is usually only through tragedy or skewed depictions that Muslim children become visible to wider audiences.

The biographical footage in *The Intermission* exudes joy and innocence and reaffirms the stance of the protagonist before plunging the audience back into the wacky warehouse where in *The Hexenbiest* I take on the persona of the dynamic character, the antihero, and the fake antagonist. I begin by engaging with Toni Morrison's theory of visibility whilst wearing the rat mask and then agree somehow with the silent encouragement of the audience to be a Hexenbiest. In story writing theory, as the dynamic character, by this stage I have undergone my moment of significant development during my reveal in *The Flat Shoes* and *The Intermission* and I should now be "reformed" (Bloom and Hobby, 2009). However, in *The Hexenbiest*, I somehow *un-reform* and have doubled down on my protagonist persona. Of course, this quickly changes once the cabasa gourd shaker comes in and the drumbeats drop and suddenly the portrayal of the Hexenbiest, who is mythologically written as a horrifying creature is characterised through the persona of a vibe-catching-Caribbean-carnivalesque-queen.

Following this persona displayed through *The Hexenbiest*, the next persona takes on both the foil character and sidekick that have their own side story in *The Elevator*. This is introducing another in-between world within *Corridors* by creating an episode of the *IF* series that is used intertextually to intersect comedically but also holds layers of characterisation that speak to the concept of invisibility and lack of understanding surrounding Muslim female identity and how we often wish to be represented visually and sonically. This particular window into expression through the personification of inanimate objects animates and mobilises the heritage of the practice, allowing the conceptualisation of intersectional heritage to be seen in its shapelessness. This shapelessness moves and transcends conventional personas, occupying space and illustrates that even inanimate objects when personified through

Muslim mixed-heritage expression are distinctive, irreverent, comical and hold endless potential.

Corridors then revisits idea of belonging to family in *The 13 Mahrams* which characterises the Islamic concept of the mahram by taking on the role of a static character that represents the Islamic practices and principles that have been used throughout this project to methodologically underpin them as a form of the heritage of the practice. By explaining the concept of the mahram in Arabic, the practices engage in another layer of multiplicity and reveals another intersection by using this as a gesture to inform the audience that they are still being asked to understand this expression in many ways, just as I am existing in many ways, languages, and expressions. From pictures in a photo album to my static picturesque performance, the persona and sequence throughout *The 13 Mahrams* is as static as the persona in *The Elevator* but embodied, activated and characterised distinctively, with *The 13 Mahrams* evoking the epitome of antihero with the combination of the costume, black and white colour palette, representation of crows in the setting, the use of strings and the tonality of the vocal delivery. Restrained in performance but exuding femininity, the formality of *The 13 Mahrams* speaks to the persona that Muslim men often adopt when caring for female family members and the responsibility that is placed on them to support the women in their family emotionally. It is common that these Muslim men are rarely visible within the media yet are in the background supporting Muslim female artistry.

This is contrasted with the persona of the character in *The Umi* which although carrying the same black and white palette, is uninhibited in expression and celebration through ululations, dhol drums and elated movement. The notion of wolves is furthered in this challenging of mythical depiction of wolves and werewolves by re-characterising this as something that celebrates and shares joy. Up until this point, audiences have only heard the wolf but not seen the wolf and to see the wolf embodying this persona as someone or something that is sharing the joy that a mother feels when pregnant with a daughter, rather than something that eats children is a challenging of representational motif.

In British contemporary media, Muslim mothers are often depicted as people that will give their daughters away to strange men and force their daughters into

marriages with men that they have never met before (Owen, 2017). I question what it is that viewers see when they see these Muslim women depicted in these visual stories. I feel this is similar to the *Black Mirror* episode "Men Against Fire" (2016) where soldiers hunt humanoid mutants called "roaches", but after a malfunctioning of his neural implant one of the soldiers discovers that these "roaches" are just normal human beings. In *The Umi*, one of the interpretations could be that the mother is happily willing to sacrifice herself for the sake of the daughter. The notion of sacrifice through the persona of a celebratory wolf-woman takes on a roleplay of an untraditional foil character, that rather than serving to highlight the traits of another character, serves to highlight the traits of the difference in the depiction of this representation and other contemporary examples of wolves and Muslim motherhood.

After *The Umi*, we are thrown into *The Undeniable* where the persona moves back into the role of protagonist and immerses the practice into the realm of rap bars, flows, melodies and punchlines, allowing space for the audience to be more intimately and playfully involved by setting them a challenge on screen. This prepares the audience to move into the finale of *Corridors* in *The Inconclusive* where I appear as "myself" for the first and only time throughout *Corridors*, to close as the protagonist. By beginning and ending as the role of the protagonist, *Corridors* allows for representation in-between to shapeshift, transform, and move fluidly between depictions allowing for each characterisation to be embodied differently throughout each persona. Each persona is multiple, distinctive, curated and intrinsically tied to my personified, intersectional experience and an extension of my essence as a British mixed-heritage Muslim female rapper.

4.3 Characterisation

Although persona and characterisation work in close relation to one another, characterisation is created through developing characters within the narrative and providing details about their traits, motivations, relationships, and personalities (Culpeper, 2014). According to various theorists throughout dramatic discourse Culpeper (2010), McIntyre (2010), Fernandez-Quintanilla (2017) and Igartua (2010), there are primarily two types of characterisation in storytelling. These are the following:

1. Direct Characterisation: In this approach, the traits and qualities of the character will be explicitly stated.
2. Indirect Characterisation: The method implies and reveals the character's personality and traits through their physical appearance, thoughts, speech, actions and how they are perceived through others.

A simple example of these two forms of characterisation can be seen in J.K Rowling's series *Harry Potter*. Through direct characterisation, Rowling explicitly describes Harry's physical traits such as his round glasses, lightning-shaped scar on his forehead and may mention his bravery and courage. Indirect characterisation is developed as the reader's learn more about Harry's character through his behaviour such as his willingness to sacrifice for his friends and confronting injustice, showcasing his bravery and courage. Dialogue between characters and Harry's own thoughts are used to further develop the direct and indirect characterisation creating a dynamic understanding of the characters personality, persona, beliefs, desires, priorities, and the decisions they make.

Corridors is overflowing in its characterisations and playfully shifts between roleplays characterising and activating each segment differently. Each song and visual sequence can be seen as an individual character that speaks, (rap) flows, dresses, performs, and engages distinctively to the next. Each character is characterised with particular traits to create a multidimensional experience throughout *Corridors* and engage in a sense of experiential feeling that Muslim female identity is shapeless and endlessly evolving. This is apparent through each characterisation being distinctive to the next but thematically relating and tying to the core of the intersectional multiplicity of the research.

The Headteacher's Daughter sonically and visually embodies the essence of the princess in the castle, wearing her bridal clothes, yet unmarried with no intention to leave, spinning typical tropes of the princess waiting to be rescued and wondering what is outside. In the *The Headteacher's Daughter*, the bride (who is married to herself) does not wish to leave and in fact, warns the audience not to go outside either, lyrically referencing the assumptions that others have of her as a prison. The implications of the bride being unmarried yet wearing her mother's wedding dress along with the lyrical narrative suggest that the character was given the mother's

wedding dress *to* marry herself. Bursting with confidence and boasting of her spoiling and self-love, this character is engulfed in her own desires and dreams and lives out the Bollywood dream in her day-to-day life knowing full well that she is indeed the main character. With her female companion who plays with her inside her castle, the bride's luxury is not just depicted through the grandness of the house but through her privilege of indulging in her own happiness and contentment. However, the bride also believes that outside of the castle, she will be burned at the stake as a witch. Dramatic in her gasps and exasperation, the bride is playful and totally absorbed with her own glamour and home-life.

Contrasting this with the contortionist whose home is in the middle of the forest, this character is the epitome of mobilised shapeshifting as she contorts, angles, curves and bends her body in conversation with the song and embodies its representation. Incorporating sneaky moments of vogue hands in her movements, reminiscent of Egyptian hieroglyphics along with her Guy Fawkes mask the contortionist is engaging in sociocultural ideas and displaying a strong sense of activism through the lyrical narrative, as well as clearly paying with and activating what is present in the postcolonial playground. Using contortion as a way of animating Muslim female identity, this segment speaks to the sense of identity that Muslim women hold that is often conflated with a sense of submission when they do things such as wear the niqab and choose to cover their face. The contortionist also covers her face except this face covering holds different connotations. With vine leaves traveling up her ankles, the contortionist is further characterised as one that contorts to and from her environment and will go back into the earth, emerging as something else afterwards, suggesting themes of rurality and spiritual rebirth. It is deliberately unclear who the contortionist is as the contortionist represents everyone and anyone that feels the way the contortionist feels, representational of an idea that is shapeless, resistant, and unchained to one form.

Following this with the positioning of two interrelated characters, the speaker in *The Novel Idea* and the Conductor in *The Internet*, these characterisations are like two sides of the same coin. The speaker plays the role of the MC hype-man, setting the stage for the conductor of the hate comments. These two characterisations play with the thematic of MC spaces where between bars and banter, the audience are going to

be exposed to and engaged in a sociopolitical discourse. This characterisation and sequence is significant because as a Muslim woman of global majority heritage who is being horrendously racially abused on the internet, deciding to turn this into a song and present the "blacklash" this way, speaks to the nature of being a rapper and how this shows up in its activation.

Ironically, I believe that rappers are brilliantly equipped to deal with these issues due to our experience with rap battles. The art lies in being dissed so aggressively that it genuinely secretly hurts your soul, but retaliating with a diss that is exceptional, resulting in one's crowning of the champion of the twenty people on your estate including the elderly and children. As the lead conductor of the orchestra of hate comments, this characterisation of Muslim female identity is not just comical, but authoritative in the occupied space by repositioning these comments and reformulating them into something that *serves* the practitioner, activating resistance.

Juxtaposing the harshness of these comments, is the softly subdued characterisation in *The Interruption* embodying the roleplay of the poetess. Leaning into the archetype of the romantic fantasist, this characterisation requires the audience to read and listen, which is commonly the case with the historical representation of the poetess that is never seen, but her writings and diary entrees are conveniently left around dramatically for people to stumble across so they may know of her lamentations. Just as archetypal dramatic and literary poets are portrayed, the poetess in *The Interruption* is a keen observer of the world around her, deeply reflective seeking solace in her solitude and deeply disrupted by the sudden interruption of the other character. This characterisation highlights the notion of sensitivity to language, using the differentiating sizing of words on screens and vocal delivery to draw attention to the poetess' sensitivities to certain words such as "crazy" and her obsessive lyrical attention to language. With the romanticisation of her imaginary man, the poetess is positioned directly parallel with the bride, with the bride having no need for a man and the poetess being obsessed with her imaginary partner. The poetess is so involved with her imaginary man that she even fantasises about their arguments and professes her own insanity whilst repeatedly mentioning that *he* never calls her crazy.

Continuing in infatuation thematically, *The Medusa* holds many implications to its characterisation. Medusa is typically retold in stories as the once beautiful mortal woman that was turned into a monstrous Gorgon with snakes for hair (Reik, 1951). Embracing the persona of the antagonist this portrayal of Medusa through *Corridors* is characterised as a woman who lives in the sea and whose lyrical storytelling is sympathetic to not just herself but the sociopolitical impact of injustice in the world. With the understanding that Medusa often carries a tragic backstory and becomes the victim of punishment whose fate serves as a cautionary tale, Medusa is often portrayed as lonely and isolated due to her petrifying gaze. But in feminist contemporary interpretations, many view Medusa as a symbol of female power who has been victimised through unjust punishment (Bowers, 1990). Appearing in all white and of course, wearing the hijab, this characterisation of Medusa speaks to death, faith, and mourning.

Traditionally, Muslims wear all white when they are buried at their funerals and so do those attending the funeral, contrasting British funeral colours which are usually all black. However, Medusa's all white costume also speaks to the ethereal and otherworldly positioning of *Corridors* holding much duality to her look. In this characterisation of Medusa, she is *still* a woman of faith and as the story lyrically unfolds, it becomes less clear as to whether Medusa should be demonised or not with the carrying of romanticisation in her delivery and narrative, challenging the notion of Muslim women being out of control that is often seen in contemporary media. In this characterisation, one of the most important aspects visually is the wearing of the hijab. In dramatic works, there are currently no depictions of mythological figures that wear the hijab. Although, the closest comparison could be the demonic entity "Valak" that wears the nun outfit in *The Nun* (2018).

Of course, throughout the entirety of *Corridors* I wear the hijab, but I draw significance to the presence of the hijab in *The Medusa* as it echoes a distinctive re-imagining of representation. Similar to the Drag Queen shows where artists lip-sync and sing popular songs just to create alternate representations, imaginings and visibility, the hijab showcases here as an alternate modern interpretation of the traditional story, creating visibility around the potential of Muslim female representations in mythological and supernatural stories.

The Flat Shoes expands on this characterisation of the depicted villainisation of Muslim women in contemporary media when Muslim women in fact make up one of the smallest groups that results in percentages of crimes committed but are one of the largest groups affected by hate crimes due to Islamophobia (Gohir, 2019). In the UK, every year, around four Muslim women are murdered with ten being murdered in 2014, and Muslim women are frequently the victims of hate crimes and sexual assault/violence (Gohir, 2019). It is questionable how a tiny percentage of women, that are already being victimised and targeted, somehow simultaneously became one of the leading characterisations in British shows as terrorists that advocate for mass violence (Macdonald, 2006). I argue that it is partially through these depictions where Muslim women are dehumanised that further violence can be perpetuated due to the contemporary image of Muslim women being one of violence, hostility, and danger (Eijaz, 2018). Although *The Flat Shoes* provides vulnerability and intimacy, this is balanced with veiling as I appear in an oversized fur jacket, huge hat, and sunglasses, placing distance between myself and the audience through physical over garments.

With an old school boom-bap beat *The Intermission* flows in next in which after this intimate moment in *The Flat Shoes*, the biographical story of how my art came to be is lyrically told whilst visually the audience receive an endless display of childhood and innocence. *The Intermission* characterises Muslim women as something to be humanised and understood as belonging to a family unit and community that love and cherish them. This snapshot into my childhood and family dynamics quickly transforms states when I suddenly take on the roleplay of a talking rat before shapeshifting into a Hexenbiest.

Hexenbiests appear as human women but possess the ability to transform physically into a menacing creature that is otherworldly (Yingling, 2023). Hexenbiests are a type of Wesen who are supernatural beings that exist alongside human, and Wesen transform into a form that reflect their mystical and fantastical nature. Hexenbiests are specifically known for being exceptional in magic and hold unique physical appearances that do not look like other Wesen (Wilcox, 2023). In Grimm mythology, Hexenbiest are considered amoral and cunning and tend to gravitate towards morally ambiguous and darker choices (Holm, 2022). However, Hexenbiests are vulnerable, and their magic has significant limitations with their

ability to navigate through other alliances and relationships being crucial to their survival and their positioning in the world.

This characterisation of the Hexenbiest in *Corridors* is slightly comical, as the character convinces herself to become a Hexenbiest which even shocks herself, as that really was not the plan. However, as a Hexenbiest she is still melodically led and rhythmically infused and so despite attempting to take on this horrific form and give this speech of how bad she intends to be, the vibe, smell of food and beat catches her and she becomes a Hexenbiest that is just there to have a good time. This animates and mobilises the characterisation of the Hexenbiest uniquely through musicality, heritage and faith, conceptualising another mythical creature through the intersections of Muslim mixed-heritage, resulting in an irreverent portrayal.

Drifting further from human forms, I then characterise an inanimate object in *The Elevator* along with a garden bench. Through the characterisation of inanimate objects, I play with the idea of providing service and the notion of objectification, building another intertextual realm in the *Corridors* world that also exists in *IF* and stems from *IF*'s realm. In *IF*, I play many characters that are received by the audience as gender-neutral such as the character Kyle Alto in season one, episode three; *If I Was The Emo Kid That Likes The Popular Girl*. However I feel the nuances of this gender neutrality is more noticeable with my character "The Garden Bench" as this character appears to have no dominant masculine or feminine traits (unlike Kyle's masculine name and voice) as opposed to "The Elevator" who has pronounced femininity. The concept of gender-neutralism is explored within the female-centric discourse in Islamic scholarship with Ibrahim (2020) discussing the way in which gender roles are portrayed in the Qur'an and suggesting that a significant percentage of the Qur'an addresses mankind in a gender-neutral tone and context. The characterisation of "The Garden Bench" through the lens of gender manifests through the practice as a further emergence of the shapeless resistance of intersectional identity.

This metamorphosis between states of human, mythical creature and object extends to animal form in *The 13 Mahram*s. The characterisation of the crow challenges some of the cultural symbolism and mythology of the crow. Crows are often roleplaying the trickster archetype, representing as mischievous and the omen of

death. However, in *The 13 Mahrams*, the crow represents loyalty and honour, whilst being representative of the nature of the research project with the mystical and supernatural symbolism of crows as crows are often depicted as shapeshifters and messengers between realms. Crows have a complex method of communication that is considered by experts difficult to interpret (Frings H, Frings M, 1959) and this speaks to the nature of the relationship between women and men in Muslim families and the nature of my practice as a rapper. The characterisation of the crow as interconnected and family focused comes forth through *The 13 Mahrams* and also carries embedded connotations of crows adaptability. Crows are considered highly adaptable birds that flourish and develop in challenging situations (Frings H, Frings M, 1959).

This is paired with the characterisation of the wolf in *The Umi*, which is portrayed as loyal, and family oriented as the mythology of wolves and crows are considered interrelated (Bukowick, 2004). Also known for its symbol of transformation, the wolf represents the duality of human and animal instincts. Playing on the idea of roleplay and persona of *The Umi* discussed earlier, the mother wolf celebrates her pregnancy uninhibitedly, dancing on and off screen to the dhol and ululations. In some cultures, the wolf gestures spiritual importance as a guide or guardian and has a divine communication to other realms (Baring-Gould, 1865). As a formidable and powerful creature, the mother is characterised as a wolf in *The Umi,* suggestive of a mother's instincts and positioning in the family as the leader of the pack.

Following *The Umi*, *The Undeniable* emerges where I finally play the role as rapper and sister, with no other complications and insinuations. In this space, characterisation of Muslim female artistry is represented through excellence, using every flow, rhyme pattern, melody, and enunciation to activate, personify, represent, and demonstrate the freedom and articulation of rap's ability. However, I connect this to the idea of being a sister, solidifying the importance of the family unit which I position in *The Undeniable* as holding equal importance to my abilities as a rapper.

Finally, I shapeshift into *Corridors*' final characterisation in *The Inconclusive* where I appear as the version of myself that travels through the real world, holding and containing all these previous characterisations. Like the rooms of a house that I described earlier, *Corridors* allows the audience to wander into each room discovering characters, their stories and expressions before leading to the final closing

performance, which is set in the small alleyway/outside corridor of my house. In this closing performance, the representations hold metaphors around the idea of containment, the occupation of space and the notion of Muslim female artistry. All previous characterisations are explored, unfolded and activated in small spaces with the final performance existing in just a tiny runway. With the voice over articulating the ability of Muslim female excellence and our desire to perfect our artistry regardless of the lack of emotional, physical and metaphorical space held for us, *Corridors* concludes its characterisation of Muslim female expression in a state of the duality of incompletion and complete arrival; the space in-between.

4.4 A Lyrical Narrative

Through lyricism, wordplay, melody, flow, enunciation and rhyme, *Corridors* is a rhythmically experiential journey in which rap is positioned as the core heritage of the practice. It is only through the activation of the lyrical narrative that the broader conceptualisation of *Corridors* is able to communicate its principles and beliefs. With every bar, the delivery of the bar and the way it meets the next, *Corridors* develops rapidly each minute like lyrical building blocks. Rap, succinct in essence, unfolds with each rhyme and communicates to the audience in a manner where the audience are given large quantities of information as quickly as possible with no recovery time to process, placing the audience in a state of fluidity being moved from one song to the next, and therefore, one concept to the next.

The songs I write tend to have a lot of words, phrases, and deliveries, as opposed to some of my rapper colleagues who lyrically prefer to use fewer words, phrases, expressions and verses and implement the repetition of their chorus numerous times. Some of my colleagues prefer slower beats and to take extended pauses in-between their bars. I have always preferred to use more words, descriptions and expressions but position these words succinctly providing as much information as possible in the shortest rhyme pattern and often skip a repetition of chorus or have no chorus at all. I increase the melody in my verses and delivery, making the audience often feel they have heard a chorus, when they indeed have not, they have just heard me rap in various melodious ways that serve as miniature hooks and often are not leading to the chorus. This makes the song unpredictable, and unpredictability is

something I enjoy in my writing and stems from my nature. I enjoy pleasantly surprising people, and tricking people into thinking I am going in a particular direction lyrically when in reality, I am leading them somewhere else entirely and towards another concept. I call it my lyrical bluff.

These lyrical tricks and vocal hints have always been at the core of my style as a practitioner. *Corridors* is a rhythmically, lyrically saturated concoction of my exploration of self and erupts in pockets of expression that sit distinctively as moments of what I think and feel Muslim, female, British mixed-heritage sounds like contemporarily.

It is through the fluidity and transformative nature of rap that *Corridors* can swiftly suggest "on to the next" and casually address subject matters through an oxymoron of comedic integrity. Between comedy and respect, rap serpentines through issues finding the thread of discussion and dancing around it rhythmically encouraging others to tap their feet in sync with the beat and not shy away from the subject matter. It is through its heritage of alternative methods of social commentary, healing, activism, expression, and community that rap still holds this authoritative position when speaking and fosters a sense of safe space expression when being practiced amongst audiences and peers. *Corridors* nominates rap as its navigator and the trusted voice that biographically and ethno-graphically musically escorts the audience through this corridor of Muslim female expression, with each musical segment like that of a room, displaying an unorthodox representation similar to a group of tourists that have come to see the freak show at the fun house.

Corridors' lyricism is cheeky and polished, with each enunciation and inflection suggestive of and activating its independent characterisations. The lyrical narrative serves as a form of combined direct and indirect characterisation, by lyrically describing some personality traits such as the Hexenbiest basking in her delight of monstrous galore, but also working with embedded characterisation such as the tonality of the voice of the Hexenbiest that at moments holds a mystical creature like petite inflection along with growls when she transforms.

Lyrical characterisations sit embedded in the practice and inform the audience of how each character should be received. Though monotonous in the delivery of *The*

Elevator, the character still uses melody and tonality that feels representative of the vocal capacity and range of an android, which is significantly different in comparison to the vocal range heard in other segments such as *The Flat Shoes*, *The Medusa* and *The Hexenbiest*. Each of these molecular changes to vocal delivery and modulation shifts the characterisation slightly, creating a completely different embodiment and roleplay, showing up and activating distinctively. With each performance comes body language and the embodying of character that reveals itself through facial expressions, posture, and movement that all inform the audience of the characterisation of the character and respond to the lyrical narrative.

Timing and pace throughout the lyrical narrative play a pivotal role in guiding the audience through the journey and the particular element of flow is explored in *The Undeniable* when the audience is set a task to follow the flow without the visual guide. This emphasises the importance of flow and the skill it requires create a flow, playing with activating the audience's role and their relationship with the practitioner. It is often overlooked that as rappers, we create our own vocal flows, paces, and timings and this is part of our significance and our differentiation to one another. Although sometimes it may appear similar, a rapper that is continuously honing their skill is developing their unique flow style and this impacts their rhyme pattern, inflections and where they take their breaths.

One of the biggest aspects of the lyrical narrative throughout *Corridors* and all my other work is clarity. I believe that rap should be clear and should be something that almost anyone despite their listening ability (within reason) should be able to understand. However, this is not easy. This comes from exercising the mouth muscles, throat muscles and working on breath control that eventually all contribute towards the improvement in a person's diction. *Corridors*, despite its different characterisations is relatively clear vocally and this clarity results in the narrative being strong and understood in its reception.

Lyrically and through the characterisation of voices, visibility not only emerges in the biographical and auto-ethnographical experiential story but as a showcasing of Muslim female expression in its many tonalities and intricacies. These intricacies are delicately positioned in their inflections, pitch, breaths, and arrangement. Much like the notion of presenting Medusa with a hijab, it is important to hear the physical

voices of Muslim women, its ability and expectation. This visibility occupies multiple spaces and emerges lyrically in differentiating ways. At times, this lyrical visibility is veiled, soft and subtle like in *The Flat Shoes*. Whilst in other moments, visibility is pronounced in its competence like in *The Undeniable*.

The lyrical narrative through *Corridors* sits as the foundation and core of the research, travelling through sonic transformations and representing metamorphosis between states of persona and characterisation, activating the shapeshifting, and allowing the mobilisation of the practice to emerge eclectically, lyrically and rhythmically personifying shapelessness.

4.5 Mythology

Corridors is a story that engages in mythological roleplay, characterisations, tropes and personae, shapeshifting between these representations, evoking different considerations around how these mythological representations are received, portrayed, and show up. As mentioned, there are currently no contemporary representations in British media of Muslim women as popular mythological creatures, especially ones that wear the hijab. These archetypal characters are missing new interpretations and embodiments, and it is through the *IF* series that I mention my awareness growing of the impact of these characterisations.

I have always loved mythology and gothic motifs and these stylistic choices emerged when I began creating *Corridors.* It is a combination of my love for fantasy, my desire to see Muslim women on screen beyond the typical roles, and the *IF* series that I began creating *Corridors* with mythical themes emerging. As I made one, the next one came, and this led to the next until finally I had almost played every character that I felt *Corridors* had the time and capacity for. As Muslim women, we already exist in multiple ways at once and I feel we have this esotericism (mentioned earlier) in our understanding of the world and creation (Saif, 2021). There is a magic to being a Muslim woman and perhaps as a rapper, I feel that magical elements more deeply due to feeling like a magician with everything I can do within my practice of rap.

Mythology is timeless and exhausted in so many ways yet when it comes to Muslim female representation, we have not even stepped onto screen in these images or displays and have been confined to the space of playing the stereotypical roles seen in contemporary media. It is not until Halle Berry played *Catwoman* (2004) that people saw a different type of Catwoman portrayal that was mixed-heritage and embodied Catwoman differently due to her ethnicity and heritage. People of different cultures and faith will of course have different characterisation of popular characters due to fact that people *are* different. Through my own depiction in *Corridors*, I have now seen multiple mythological creatures characterised through mixed-heritage Muslim femininity and these roleplays highlight how significant a gap there is within contemporary media.

Depictions of melanated female superheroes and villains are slowly growing overtime, and male antiheroes such as Blade (1998) and Spawn (1997) have remained some of the strongest depictions of antiheroes of melanated characterisation (Nama, 2011). However, Muslim women are still missing from the narrative significantly. Despite Ms. Marvel's introduction as Marvel's first Muslim female superheroine, there is still discourse around why Kamala Khan is portrayed the way she is and the reasons around her not wearing the hijab and coming from a Pakistan background. I argue that it is not that there is any issue with this specific character, it is that this is exactly what one would expect, that the first Muslim superhero is of Pakistani ethnicity and does not wear the hijab which is the most contemporarily acceptable display of Islam in the media. It is reported that Marvel wanted a Muslim girl and were open to her being from anywhere and G. Willow Wilson, who is the writer of the series, considered making Kamala Khan Arab but eventually settled on making her Pakistani (Dilshad, 2013). It is interesting that no other ethnicities were even in the question, especially since Wilson is a white Muslim woman herself who converted to the faith in 2003 (Tolentino, 2017).

With a lack of representation of mixed-heritage and Black Muslim women, it is down to our efforts that I believe representation will begin to expand and unfold. *Corridors*' deep resonation with mythology and representation through the gothic and supernatural is seen across the *IF* series also when I play Dracula's wife. The reaction to Black women playing the roles of characters that are white in previous depictions is

controversial. The decision to cast Halle Bailey as Ariel in the live-action adaption of *The Little Mermaid* (2023) resulted in a range of reactions. Of course, many people celebrated this casting decision and highlighted it as a step towards better diversity, but there was also a huge backlash from individuals that felt a Black woman playing this role was simply unacceptable and ruins their nostalgia (Bero, 2023). When looking at *Corridors*' mythological and supernatural hints, and the way mixed-heritage and faith are represented, it only becomes more exciting to consider how this would impact broader audiences if these characterisations came to be revamped through new cultural depictions.

4.6 Reflecting on the Practice

Corridors as a practice suggests that when Muslim female identity and representation is explored through rap and visual album, it is truly characterisation and persona that emerges and begins to showcase throughout. Rap and visual album have a way of skipping over the conversation of agency, refusing to entertain this discussion. I doubt that anybody listening or watching *Corridors* believes that I am a woman without agency, and I would expect that this question does not arise. When engaging in this type of PaR, the theoretical question of agency is already dismissed and forgotten about and belongs to the world of theory that has not yet visited the Muslim female experience through experiential research such as *Corridors*. The auto-ethnographical notion of this practice goes so far beyond agency that the discussion becomes about the characterisation of Medusa in Muslim mixed-heritage portrayal. It is persona that reveals itself and the very way in which intersectional identity when activated through practice, is able to shapeshift, transform, metamorphosise, roleplay and playfully immerse itself into different characters and fantasies seamlessly and stylishly.

Effortlessly, I found myself skipping through to the next roleplay and excited about which character I would be embodying for my segment. I realised in these moments that I was playing all the characters that I would have loved to have seen in dramatic works and that rap has a way of evoking and manifesting these characters when a practitioner immerses themselves into the practice of rap. Rap and visual album were acting as features that I trusted to tacitly guide me and tell me what to do in moments that I felt unsure. Their auto-ethnographical features are wise and foster a

relationship between the practice and practitioner that requires trust and patience as findings being to emerge and knotty convoluted concepts unfold and detangle. Travelling through the project using rap and visual album was like travelling in an extremely unstable truck that every time I felt a speed bump, I jolted and had to regain my balance, but began to understand that if I lean into the jolt, I end up finding something I had previously lost that rolled away under the seat of the truck. This truck that I thought was perhaps unstable to begin with would always provide me with exactly what I needed at every stage of the journey. I think it is the nature of artistry for one to fear that they are tricking themselves into thinking they are doing something legitimate when really, they are doing nothing other than causing more problems and making it up as they go along.

However, what continuously revealed to me through my journey is that my practice can be trusted and so can my skill. This craft, which I have spent years honing, developing, and polishing is something that is so tacitly connected to my core that I tend to overlook its almost supernatural abilities. This is play and this is work and this is the beauty of the artistry of rap that it never truly feels like work but holds all the rewards that work offers. Although the findings are embedded in the practice, they also extend to the journey of the practice and the way that the practitioner develops along the way. As persona and characterisation emerged from both the *IF* series and *Corridors*, I had a moment of dramatic recline in my chair as I felt the awkwardness of doubting my practice. I had somehow stepped over this idea of visibility and resistance and gone to a more arguably significant finding of shapeshifting and roleplay and metamorphosis. I found better language. A better understanding of what was happening.

A pleasurable metaphor to describe my process and discovery of such exciting findings throughout this project would be a visual that I often imagined throughout the process. This visual would be that I had entered a shop hoping to leave with a chocolate muffin and had left with a tray of delicious assortments and forgotten all about the chocolate muffin I came for because I was too busy tasting each treat, figuring out how long they had been sitting here and why nobody else had tried them. I would then find out that nobody saw this tray of delicious assortments because you can only enter that part of the shop if you go through the secret door which is a door

that nobody else had discovered. This is compared to how theorists address Muslim female identity contemporarily, through traditional methods of writing about identity, interviewing a group of Muslim women and asking them questions on their experience. However, if you use an alternate method of accessibility such as rap and visual album, you will reach the tray of delicious assortments because you have entered through the door that others do not know exist.

Through this door, I found that Muslim female expression is endless, unambivalent and courageous. By using rap and visual album, Muslim female identity twirls between, barks at, fiddles with and tickles audiences with its shapeshifting qualities and epic transformations. A limitless depiction and portrayal of femininity and faith is weaved between the experience and *Corridors* turns up the heritage of the practice to full volume, immersing the audience into intersectional expressions and irreverent narratives.

During the creation of the practice, I often found myself in conflict with the theoretical bodies of knowledge underpinning and sitting around this project. I have mentioned previously how Muna Tatari's ideas surrounding the awrah became questionable when practice was introduced, but another concept in particular that I found myself in conflict with is Bhabha's popular theories around identity and its argued undeniable ambivalence. Throughout *Corridors*, I found little to no ambivalence in its production, its findings, or the articulation of its representation. Bhabha theorises that with dual and multiple identity, the sense of ambivalence is almost non-negotiable, and that ambivalence is simply part of the postcolonial experience and being (Bhabha,1984). These theories, when explored through and in practice simply do not have the capacity to hold, express and articulate the subtleties and intricate characteristics of multiple intersectional identity and persona. These theories also did not seem appropriate or applicable when met with practice and the art of "doing-thinking" (Scott, 2016) as it felt that they did not translate or resonate with what the practice is uncovering. However, this is not only due to the method of practice as research as the way in which identity and representation are explored but also the contemporary auto-ethnographical experience that is present in and through the practice.

There is little research in the UK in the area of mixed and multiple heritage people of faith and their experiences. Research in mixed-heritage identity in the UK demonstrates a host of challenges that mixed-heritage people face in the UK usually showcasing that hostility, isolation, misunderstanding and lack of visibility are the most popular themes found within the mixed experience (Campion, 2019). When Bhabha speaks of ambivalence, he speaks only of a particular generation and person, which were men of Indian and south Asian heritage. Although Bhabha's articulation and fluency in the racial politics and lived experience of in-between/multiple identity is poetic, seamless, and admirable, I feel that this ambivalence and desire to either fit in or stand out, is no longer a leading thematic in the biographical lives of mixed-heritage people and those of us with multiple diasporas, nor is there so much confusion of self or desire to belong.

What I did find apparent is the shapelessness of mixed-heritage identity, spoken about by poet/author Will Harris in his 2019 book *Mixed-Race Superman*. Harris reflects on the lives of two mixed-race men, Keanu Reeves and Barack Obama, and argues that the mixed-race background of both men gave them a shapelessness that was a form of resistance. *Corridors* exemplifies this shapelessness and fluidity that is exacerbated by the nature of rap which is fluid and resistant. The combination of the method of inquiry along with my heritage certainly made me feel a sense of malleability to the way I embodied characterisations and effortlessly shapeshifted into the next.

In the creation of *Corridors*, I was careful to place focus on visual displays that I felt were resisting expectations within musical storytelling and societal normative femininity. The idea of resistance in relation to feminine display was important to the intentions of the practice and I wanted to depict and respond to female-centric ideas throughout Islamic scholarship. Dr Celene Ibrahim, expert in Muslim female scholarship with multiple writings on Muslim female archetypes and gender in the Qur'an, highlights the way in which Muslim female identity in the Qur'an is genderfluid and gender-neutral, explaining that women are varied, unique and distinguished but not less in quantity when it comes to their depiction in the Qur'an (Ibrahim, 2020). In fact, men and women are positioned so equally in the Qur'an that the word "man" and "woman" are both mentioned 23 times in the Qur'an. This

echoes Dr Amina Wadud's research and writing into the gender-neutral language and conceptualisations of women in the Qur'an.

When considering this Islamic representation of gender neutrality and gender fluidity, I thought about the act of movement vs. stillness on screen. Often, in music videos featuring women of Asian and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds and live performances, the highlight of the performance, is the dance segment. From my own experience working in the industry as a woman of mixed-heritage it is often frowned upon when women from global majority backgrounds do not include dance segments in their performances as it is almost expected that they will and should dance. This is not the expectation placed on men. This concept is explored in Seinabo Sey's 2018 song "I Owe You Nothing" where Sey demonstrates resistance against what is expected of her as a mixed-heritage woman of Swedish and Gambian ancestry. With *Corridors*' embedded intersectionality, I feel there is a significant movement between intersectionality's theoretical understanding and implication and the way in which intersectionality emerges in *Corridors. Corridors* mobilises intersectionality and attributes characterisation to it resulting in it becoming an intersectional experience and a type of active performative intersectionality.

In this chapter, the themes of the practice along with broader reflections on the practice were discussed. The next section is the conclusion that will discuss the wider implications of the research, its positioning in theory and PaR and the next stages of the development in response to the findings. To summarise, this discussion section has highlighted the following key findings:

4.7 Summary of Key Findings

1. When explored through rap and visual album, Muslim female identity becomes characterised rather than represented, resulting in Muslim female identity presenting itself as something that is mobilised rather than static
2. The discussion of Muslim female identity and representation would benefit greatly from considering using the terms characterisation and persona when discussing Muslim female representation in contemporary media

3. When Muslim female identity is explored through rap and visual album, notions of personae, characterisation, roleplay, shapeshifting, shapelessness, transformation and metamorphosis emerge and show up
4. Muslim women of mixed-heritage embody and characterise mythological characters and popular cultural phenomena distinctively due to their intersectional identity
5. Rap as a means of practice-based research, has the ability to find hidden threads of heritage and can act as a vehicle of transportation between exploration and findings, fostering a conversation around heritage and exploration of self that is situated in an arena where the articulations are distinctive
6. Rap and visual album as auto-ethnographical practices can unlock embedded tacit knowledge that is experientially valuable to the research and researcher, helping the researcher to understand what is emerging from the research and is a way of practicing "meaning-making" exercises
7. When Muslim female identity and representation is explored through Rap and Visual album, the conversation of agency is almost dismissed and bypassed due to rap's heritage of independent voice and competence
8. Mixed-heritage and intersectional identity when explored through practice, emerge with strong themes and notions of shapelessness that require new terminologies and positionings in order to articulate the experiences of mixed-heritage identity to postcolonial theory
9. *Corridors* methodologically holds contributions to PaR that are embodied in the processes, approaches and methods as outlined in the methodology chapter

5 Conclusion

It is with joy and excitement that I reach the conclusion chapter of this research project. Below are the original research questions with the summary of key findings also placed below to be contrasted:

Original Research Questions

1. In what ways can rap and visual album create new sonic and visual languages for Muslim women?
2. In what ways can these interdisciplinary practices explore and activate resistance, identity, and visibility for Muslim women?
3. How does Muslim female identity "show up" and, re/present itself when explored through visual album and rap?

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5.1 A Reflective Overview

Over the four years of this project, my understanding of Muslim female expression has changed and developed. I began with the hope that through my research questions, I would be able to open a new discussion around Muslim female identity and its positioning in theoretical bodies of knowledge and PaR. I desperately desired to see the way in which my identity would reveal, unfold and show up when it is explored through rap and visual album. Halfway through my project I became nervous and disheartened that I perhaps had approached my project with too much zeal and feared that there would be nothing significant waiting behind door number seven. However, what I worried would be nothing initially, revealed itself to be more than I could have hoped for with the discovery that this method of research inquiry, using rap-visual album auto-ethnography not only works, but works exceptionally well and is rewarding in its discoveries.

I began with the exploration of identity and representation, expecting that I would perhaps see visibility and resistance being activated. Instead, I found that Muslim female identity shapeshifts, transforms, roleplays, and metamorphosises with characterisation and personae emerging as key threads in my findings, unlocking an

otherworldly experiential journey. Discovering this feels like stumbling across the labyrinth and being in awe of its architecture. I did indeed see visibility and resistance activate through the emerging themes in *Corridors*, but these were in my opinion more obvious overarching activations that the project unlocked. Muslim female identity was doing so much more than becoming visible or resisting in *Corridors*. It is due to a lack of language that we use when discussing Muslim female identity that characterisation was not in the discussion from the beginning, and instead as researchers we have been repeating the same words of identity, representation, visibility, resistance, and agency.

Corridors introduces characterisation, persona, shapeshifting, roleplay, transformation, and metamorphosis along with the discussion of rap and visual album's ability to become a vessel in which findings are embedded, activated, and captured within. In this vessel is an understanding of hybridity in practice through not just the use of hybrid art forms like visual album, but that the combining of theories such as intersectionality and attempting to mobilise these concepts results in new understandings of how these theories can be explored and applied. This develops the way that we consider these theories and understand their application.

I began by questioning what intersectionality would sound and look like if I tried to mobilise it, and what Bhabha's ambivalence looks like in the world of the Muslim female rapper. It is important that in research we utilise the tacit knowledge of practitioner researchers and foster a more holistic approach towards research that is inclusive of diverse methodologies and experiential journeys. However, it is more important that as practitioner-researchers we trust out own set of crafts and pay attention to what our craft is trying to communicate and show us. Hall (1990) discusses how identities are not fixed but rather live in this constant state of becoming and emphasises the nature of identity being fluid and dynamic, shaped by the interplay of cultural influences. I feel this is true of more than just identity but speaks to the nature of the relationship between practitioners and their practice.

The practice unfolds in its own timed fluidity and is shaped by the position of the practitioner at that moment in time. The practice responds to the practitioner and is in constant conversation with the practitioner. It is expected that had I begun this research project years earlier or later than I did, my findings would potentially be

different as I would create practice that evolved from my current space as a practitioner. Practice and theories develop over time as do our readings of the work. I have learned from my own project that it is the miniature movements, actions and thoughts that often carry the biggest impact and that present the most unique findings. As tempting as it is to ignore the small niggles and quirks that arise during PaR and the whispers that simmer throughout theory, these reoccurring annoyances are one's own tacit knowledge guiding the project and navigating through tricky waters.

Nelson (2003) speaks of the rigor that lies in PaR and suggests that the artistic creation constitutes a form of research and a mode of inquiry in which the act of making is completely and utterly inseparable from the generation of knowledge. This is true in the case of *Corridors* whereby even at the very early beginnings of my methodology, I began seeing findings emerge not just in the practice's anticipated outputs but in the methods of creation and the way I considered the conditions of the practice. Johnson (2007) speaks of embodied cognition, drawing attention to the role of the body in shaping and informing the creative process which Nelson (2003) further argues that artistic insights and knowledge gained through PaR are deeply rooted in the bodily experience. Whilst producing *Corridors*, I felt a sense of emotional wellness that I had anticipated I would feel. Rap is therapeutic and leaves one feeling like they have unscrambled their brain and reached a resolution, even if they were not searching for one. Between the rhythm, the lyric, the delivery, and the pause to breathe, I started to feel a sense of ease and wellness pass over me as I created the practice and each repetition in cycle would make me feel clearer and succinct in my emerging themes. The experiential journey of *Corridors* was one that left me feeling as if I had magical pixie dust in my fingertips and this is the feeling that I hope other practitioners experience with their practice. I believe that feeling emotionally well is a sign of this project's success, but another sign of success is the fact that my project has led to new opportunities for ideas surrounding Muslim female characterisation and personae to be explored through my upcoming projects and collaborations.

It is exciting to think of the implications of representation for Muslim women of mixed-heritage by reconsidering the way we *access* fluidity and shapelessness. By evolving in our methods of exploration and incorporating PaR into more traditional

areas of study, the potential that it presents areas such as Muslim female expression is endless and will continue reformulating. There is much left to discover around the identity of Muslim mixed-heritage women and across disciplines and areas that require a flexible and versatile approach.

When I began this project, I believed that it was an accumulation of my experience as a rapper and mixed-heritage woman that had led me to question the impact that Muslim female artistry holds when explored. This is still true, but as my project progressed, I began to understand as characterisation and personae emerged, that sonically through rap I had always been creating and activating these stories, daydreams, and personas. Each rap flow, song and enunciation hold embedded characteristics that are specific to the character. However, it was not until I began exploring rap and visual album together that my characters began taking form and having cosplays, names, personalities, and personas. Through *IF*, I learned that it is the hybridity of the artistry that inspires specific characters to emerge, and that rap is so much more exciting when characters are embodied and distinctive. It is through having the courage to define the limits of the practice and employing specificity that characterisation emerged. Between rap, cosplay and a one-woman performance, I discovered threads such as shapeshifting and shapelessness and how these threads can be manoeuvred.

The more I engaged with my practice and allowed space for characterisation to emerge, the more Halle Berry's 2004 *Catwoman* walk, *Blade*'s 1998 entrance with flying kicks and the first slayer, Sineya, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997) came to the forefront of my mind. This led to *Corridors* being a multidimensional experience that pushes boundaries and introduces new conceptualisations in the discourse of Muslim female identity and British mixed-heritage. It is my hope that I will be able to develop and bring my characters and characterisations into contemporary media to fill the gap that currently exists of Muslim female representation across fantasy in the world of mythology, superheroes, and supervillains, creating musical moments of characterisation.

5.2 Rap and Intersectionality in Academic Settings

Where is rap's place in academia? I believe it should be at the front, next to all the other musical theories and practices, except it is not. Rap and hip-hop remain far too racialised, far too unexplored, and far too undervalued in its uses due to the host of cultural and sociopolitical issues, rap's connotations and systemic challenges that this thesis touches on. Despite rap and hip-hop's ability to auto-ethnographically dance through complexities with ease, its features and abilities are not utilised enough, especially in its broader potential to foster relationships between groups of people and communities. Had academia valued hip-hop the way it valued other musical genres, I know through experience that more practitioners would be undertaking PaR through rap, and I would not be one of the first British women to do so, though I am deeply privileged to contribute *Corridors* as a research project. What rap as an auto-ethnographical practice led by practitioners can contribute to the discourse of heritage and experiential research is too unexplored. Often, it is the lovers of hip-hop and rap that take interest in exploring its praxis and whilst this is essential it is important to welcome practitioners of rap and hip-hop further into the academic community and encourage practitioners to explore their practice more intimately within frameworks. Had I have not been supported by my institution and enthusiastically encouraged by my supervisory team, this project would not have found its way to completion. It was a challenging journey of racial otherings from many other institutions, before finding one that was able to facilitate me and my practice. Considering the way in which academia treats practitioners of rap is essential to understanding how to integrate more practitioners into academic settings and therefore it is important to re-think what inclusion should look and feel like. Practitioners of rap often come from global majority backgrounds and with that often comes a lack of understanding as to how to aid global majority people in our assimilation into academia.

People from global majority backgrounds often require different support to our colleagues that are not from global majority backgrounds. Creating intersectional facilities would expand accessibility throughout university settings. This could look like creating prayer spaces that are more accessible and integrated into the university buildings, rather than prayer spaces that are one space often far away from the buildings that people need to be inside. Muslims pray five times a day and

understanding that spiritual practices are part of our day to day lives, and not something we break away to do is still misunderstood. Often, lectures and seminars are held at times that interrupt the prayer time and the prayer room is as mentioned placed rather far away. This means that many Muslims must pick between seminars or prayer, particularly if these seminars are held on Friday when there is a significant congregational prayer.

This could also look like expanding the knowledge of scholarship from Muslims and global majority people. By this, I do not refer to the ideas of the decolonisation of the curriculum but a more nuanced issue that I have not heard discussed. It is common that due to the percentage of white academics, much of the knowledge considered relevant and significant is from white scholars. With this, comes the expectation that researchers from global majority and faith backgrounds know about these particular scholars. However, these (white) researchers do not appear to know of mountains of scholarship, for example, within the Islamic discourse despite there being a significant amount of contribution to all areas of knowledge from Muslim scholars universally. A more candid explanation of this would be, why is there an expectation for one to learn about the theories of white scholars, when white scholars often appear to have such small knowledge of Islamic scholarship and its implications? The expectation feels imbalanced and othering. I argue that without the considerations of Muslim scholarly contribution to discourses, an area is arguably not as rigorous.

Considering that the first and oldest university in the world was founded by Fatima al-Fihriya (Fejzic-Cenjic, 2020), a Muslim woman, I find it strange that universities are not beginning discussions around scholarship with the knowledge that this is all possible due to a Muslim woman and so to honour that through the regular inclusion of Muslim scholarship, particularly from and around Muslim women seems fitting.

A last suggestion is that groups organised for those with intersectional identities are necessary. The “mixed experience” and intersectional experience is still too unnoticed and until those with intersectional identities understand how to find each other, discussions around what we need cannot happen. Universities have identified that Black researchers are still facing invisibility, but this invisibility stretches beyond

typical mis/understandings of Blackness and has not yet reached understandings around more nuanced intersectional identities and their implications. Having a space where researchers with intersectional identities can share resources, experiences and find common threads and challenges will assist researchers in being able to identify what is normal, potential areas of concern and have confidence in judging the condition of their own journey.

5.3 A TV Series, A Stage Play and 217 Characters

Over the years spent with this research project, I made a conscious decision to expand my practice and theories within the creative industry and to use my project as a way of understanding my artistic and scholarly positioning in contemporary media. In a conversation with my supervisors, I described it as treating my project and doctoral experience as that of a lemon and squeezing out every last drop that I can get from it as I had the privilege of being around such knowledgeable peers and mentors. It is through this that I began connecting with industry executives, who showed interest in the *IF* series and my artistry and I landed my first cameo as a Muslim female rapper in season two of the Bafta winning Channel 4 TV series *We Are Lady Parts,* due to release in 2024.

I then began writing my own TV rap musical comedy series along with a stage play, with the support of executives, my supervisory team, family, and friends. Whilst writing the series (which is still being written), I started to think about the development of more characters that often frequent my daydreams and I began creating a graphic novel. In total, I have created across my transmedia projects 217 characters consisting of superheroes, supervillains, and irreverent representations of Muslim personas. All my characters are Muslim, and all my stories are musical. The next stage of development is to have these projects commissioned whereby I can expand the contemporary display of Muslim female expression and create distinctive characterisations and representations through dynamic characters.

I believe there is a space (unironically) between the creative industry and scholarship that sits as an interdisciplinary realm. By expanding the understanding of these discourses in both directions (artistically and theoretically), significant changes can be made to increase the visibility of and around Muslim female narrative and

expression. It is through the absurdity of combinations such as supervillains rapping about Bhabha's ambivalence whilst turning into zombies that I feel gems of articulation in heritage, faith and shapeshifting emerge, transcending our previous understandings of where we positioned the glass ceilings of representation and identity.

Whilst reflecting on the last stages of my doctoral journey, I started to consider more seriously the ways of interconnecting my stories and characters and picking apart my ideas around realms of existence. I created *Syntrica*; an undiscovered part of the world that is entirely musical. Whether I will be able to bring my next projects to fruition is unknown. It is challenging to navigate the waters of both academia and the creative industry when expectations within both can often present themselves as direct oppositions. Both have their languages, rules, socially embedded codes, and normative behaviours, though my weaving between the two so far has been rewarding. With this said, it is not possible for me to contain my musical characters to the real of my mind and I feel that once I have created a character, it is then my duty to ensure that this character has a place in my fictional world and eventually the real world of dramatic or literary works.

As I progress with discussions of development in my desire to continue to pursue showcasing Muslim female expression, I find countless likeminded individuals that wish to assist me and support me in my vision. A transformation in the way that Muslim female artistry is perceived had already begun with Muslim female rappers when we simmered in the background and went from open mic nights to our own independent shows. To expand this through representations on screen and in theatres would potentially result in radical moments of shapeshifting not just in practices but a shift in how audiences perceive Muslim female identity. *Corridors* is the snapshot into the beginning of my own articulations around Muslim female expression and the implications and potential it holds for discourses around British mixed-heritage Muslim female identity moving forward.

Unconventional and eclectic, *Corridors* sits significantly as a way of showcasing the extent of invisibility that remains around untold narratives and heritage in the British postcolonial playground. In this playground is shapeshifting, metamorphosis, characterisation, personae, mythology, and the shapelessness of these

identities and the way in which their emerging expressions are multiple, radical, uncontained, and commanding. With my attention shifting to rapping superheroes, supervillains, and mythological creatures, it is my hope that I am able to contribute further to the interdisciplinary world of scholarship and artistry as a practitioner-researcher, creating more corridors of Muslim female expression.

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