UNDERSTANDING INTERCULTURAL PARTNERING PRACTICES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: THE CASE OF PERSIAN IMMIGRANTS

By

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To my parents

Abstract

Drawing on empirical data, this thesis investigates the interplay of cultural differences in the ways Persians practice, negotiate, and sustain their partnering relationships across cultural differences; reasons for and implications of failure; and the extents to which Persian intercultural partnering practices could be understood in relation to wider social processes. I grounded this analysis on the Pre-Partnering, Prevailing-Partnering, and Post-Partnering Practices, and argue that Persians in intercultural partnering relationships 'do partnering' in relation to Internal, External and Intergenerational social positionings. I suggest that participants' in-between cultural identities help them to sustain their partnering relationships, with negotiations centring on the interplay of five cultural sources: gender, religiosity, relationality, life course, and language. Failure in partnering relationships are usually attributed to shifting positions on the continuum of cultural identities, due to participants seeking their best 'me', which is social, and is defined through personal relationships with wider social connections. Partnering practices in the particular context of this study may not align with the claims of detraditionalization theory. I argue that religion should be considered independent from other forms of traditions to understand the wider social processes relevant to construction of contemporary family lives.

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Introduction

Intergroup partnering relationships are increasingly common, and it is likely that they will become a popular type of couple relationship in the near future. This type of relationship is not a recent phenomenon; however, the number of intergroup partnering relationships has been growing because of recent mass immigration into developed countries (Cretser 1990; Lee and Bean 2004). These immigrations, whether voluntary or not, represent a global social phenomenon with multidimensional implications for both the immigrants' points of origin and destination. These mass movements of people present challenges for the global institutions that deal with international legal regimes and human rights (see collections of articles by Bryceson and Vuorela (2002a), Estin (2008), Goulbourne et al. (2010), and Charsley (2012a)). Scholars in various fields of study have attempted to address partnering trends relevant to immigration. However, many aspects of intergroup partnering relationships remain unstudied, and little is known about the complex implications of these relationships at either the micro or macro level of social relations. For the purpose of this thesis, an intergroup partnering relationship is defined as a couple relationship between members of different social groups. This enables a discussion about partnering across social difference/s without interference from cultural connotations and/or diverse theoretical assumptions.

Given that the study of intergroup partnering relationships could be approached from several disciplines, subject areas, or perspectives, it is important to clarify at the outset that this thesis presents a solely sociological account of Persian intercultural partnering practices in the UK. It does not include psychoanalytical or psychosocial theories and

methodologies about intergroup couple relationships nor does it involve discussions of social policies that may be required to deal with these relationships. Furthermore, because this study is based on the theoretical and conceptual developments inherent in British sociology of family life, personal life, and relationships (discussed in chapter 2), the issues debated may be slightly different from American or other continental perspectives.

This doctoral thesis investigates partnering relationships across cultures, involving Persian immigrants to the UK and non-Persians. The goal is to contribute important insights on the diverse nature of family life in a late modern multicultural society. This thesis, therefore, challenges mainstream sociological conceptualizations and theorizations about family life, furthering the investigation of the consequences of late modernity on the partnering practices of immigrants living in developed societies. Intercultural partnering practices are examined to derive a clearer picture of the intersection of cultural differences such as gender, religion, language, life course, and generation that shape partnering practices in multicultural societies.

This thesis consists of two parts, the first of which, over the course of three chapters, provides the foundation of the research and the conceptual and methodological tools used for this study of Persian intercultural partnering relationships in the UK. Chapter 1 contextualises the issues related to intergroup partnering relationships. Theories that have been employed to study intergroup partnering relationships, such as exchange theory, assimilationism, multiculturalism, and transnationalism are discussed in this chapter. By applying the feminist notions of subjectivity and intersectionality, Chapter

1 considers the differences that could potentially affect intergroup partnering relationships, ultimately addressing the limitations of concepts based on national, racial, ethnic, and religious differences. This chapter also explains my preference for the term 'intercultural partnering relationships' for this study, based on the contributions of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies and Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity. By qualifying the uniqueness of the Persian population residing in the UK, Chapter 1 explains why researching this particular group is significant.

Following, Chapter 2 discusses the most relevant sociological debates in the UK on the conceptualization of family life and relationships, and poses empirical questions that further drive this thesis. In particular, I argue that the salient theory most discussed in existing literature is reflexive modernization theory (Giddens 1991, 1994; Beck 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002), which shapes the current discussions of the sociology of family life and relationships in the UK. My adoption of a critical approach toward the theory's two core notions of individualization and detraditionalization highlights how these notions are problematic. My discussion is based on earlier critiques that tradition remains distinctively important in defining people's everyday lives (Smart and Shipman 2004; Gross 2005; Smart 2007), and individuals' biographies are still extensively bound by economic and socio-political structures (Jamieson 1998, 1999).

I suggest that religion be considered independent from other forms of the traditional (e.g. local/regional traditions), more as a meaningful, distinctive determining factor interwoven with these other forms in the construction of individuals' partnering

practices and intimate biographies. Furthermore, by exploring some Shia practices that have not closely been examined by previous research, such as temporary marriage, I suggest that the Shiaism of the participants in this study may influence their partnering relationships. This discussion leads to the exploration of new conceptual developments in the sociology of family life and relationships in the UK, particularly Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) concept of 'family practices' and Smart's (2007) notions of 'personal life' and 'relationality'. These ideas shaped the way the data collection and analysis were conducted in this study.

My philosophical tendency is toward social constructionism, so the third chapter explains the methodological approach used to conduct the empirical part of this research, while also acknowledging the role of the researcher in collecting and interpreting qualitative data. I approached all stages of the study (i.e. research design, data collection, and data analysis) through the lenses of reflexivity and subjectivity. Thus, I sought to collect subjective accounts from the research participants about their experiences in intercultural partnering relationships. I interviewed 36 Persians who had experienced at least one partnering relationship with a member of a non-Persian social group[1]. In line with my sampling strategy, the analysis was based on components of Persian cultural identity, including gender and religion. The ethical implications of conducting the research are also explained in Chapter 3.

The second part of this thesis explores the ways in which Persians practice, negotiate, and sustain their partnering relationships across cultural differences. This is supported

[1] A description of the sample's characteristics can be found in Appendix.

by the empirical findings and an analysis of the study data based on my interpretation of the current literature. Because the meanings and the construction of partnering practices differ across cultures, I explain the ways that Persians practice, negotiate, and sustain their partnering relationships across cultural differences. Based on Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity, the research participants and their partners were identified as holding a social position in-between their respective cultures, which enhances the feasibility of maintaining and enduring partnering relationships for these people.

Grounded in Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) notion of 'family practices', the analysis focuses on partnering practices in and throughout three stages of a couple relationship: (1) Pre-Partnering, (2) Prevailing-Partnering, and (3) Post-Partnering. In this regard, chapters 4 and 5 explore Pre-Partnering Practices by focusing on partner selection and partnership formation. In particular, I investigate the reasons why these individuals became involved with partners from outside their social group, how they formed the relationships (whether permanent or temporary and whether monogamous or polygamous), and the ways in which they managed the financial implications of the relationship.

Chapters 6 through 8 mainly concern the Prevailing-Participants Partnering practices. Considering the 'me' in Smart's (2007) theory of 'personal life' and her idea of 'relationality' as well as 'multiple social positionings' in the theory of intersectionality (Brah and Pheonix 2004; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006), I argue that Persians in intercultural partnering relationships exist in three social positionings: (1) in relation to

their partners, (2) in relation to members of wider social networks outside the partnering relationship, and (3) in relation to generational ties.

In this sense, Chapter 6 explores Internal Partnering Practices, which are practices exclusively between members of a couple. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the research participants did their everyday practices and negotiated their daily matters across cultural boundaries. In the course of an intercultural partnering relationship, these couples ought to negotiate many situations with diverse cultural connotations, from expressing their emotions to managing personal rituals, such as hygienic and dietary practices. Compromising about these cultural situations was often highly significant to sustaining these relationships.

Chapter 7 explores External Partnering Practices by focusing on practices exclusively relevant to extended family members and members of other social networks, such as friends and neighbours. My findings show that managing these relationships in conjunction with intercultural partnering relationships often requires constant negotiation between partners, as their life together is often influenced by these external relationships. For example, In this regard, external people to a couple often come togetherduring culturally significant celebrations and ceremonies, such as Christmas, Norouz (Persian New Year), Islamic Eid holidays, Shia festivals, and other traditional occasions. Negotiations about these cultural events highlight the significance of traditions for Persian immigrants living in the UK.

The eighth chapter is about Intergenerational Partnering Practices, the exclusive practices relevant to generational ties and intergenerational responsibilities of Persians in intercultural partnering relationships. Persians are culturally expected to respect and care for their parents. Moreover, Parents, in the Persian context, often tend to intervene in partnering relationships of their children. This was shown to have reflexive effects on the research participants' partnering relationships. Furthermore, issues regarding the transmission of cultural identities to their children were found to surface when naming, baptising, circumcising, clothing, and educating them. Negotiating such practices was significant because the fate of the participants' partnering relationships was depended on their intergenerational relationships.

The concluding discussion chapter re-establishes my approach to the study of Persian intercultural practices by returning to the conceptual discussion on which this research is based. This concluding discussion addresses the main question of this research: How Persians in the UK practice intercultural relationships and what are the driving factors behind their practices. I suggest that their in-between cultural identities help them to sustain their relationships. Their negotiations were primary related to five cultural sources that interplay in the construction of their partnering practices: (1) gender, (2) religiosity, (3) relationality, (4) life course, and (5) language. I also suggest that shifting identities as well as cultural differences might result in relationship failure. Moreover, the implication of such failure was often the return to the original Persian cultural identity. This shift, I argue, was because the participants were searching for their best 'me', in the way that Smart (2007) employs the term in her theory of personal life. 'Me' here is social and is defined through wider personal relationships

(i.e. internal, external, and intergenerational positionings). Those participants who had bad experiences in any of these social positionings while partnering with a non-Persian returned to their culture of origin to find their best 'me' in relation to others, their extended family, and community members.

In light of my empirical evidence, this thesis argues that family life and relationships within this study's particular social context may not align with the claims made by individualization and detraditionalization theories. This is evident in the continuous influence of traditions on partnering practices of Persian immigrants while living in the UK. Moreover, I argue that while religious traditions may interplay with local traditions, each may also produce contradictory values. Thus, further theoretical refinement and reconceptualization in the field are required. Ultimately, this thesis proposes potential future research questions that could improve our understanding of this increasingly popular type of intergroup partnering relationship in modern societies.

1. Contextualising Persian Intercultural Partnering Relationships

In this chapter, I provide the context for the subject matter of this research and establish the way that I approach the study of Persian partnering relationships with non-Persians in the UK. I first explain bodies of thought that initially have been generated in response to the growing diversity in developed countries, but also have been applied to the study of immigrant family life and intergroup partnering relationships. The notions I consider include exchange theory, assimilationism, multiculturalism, and transnationalism. Based on this argument I explain that to understand the growing diversity in society, the first step is to conceptualise the idea of 'difference' because social diversity makes sense only when elements of differentiation between social groups are recognised. Similarly, to understand an intergroup partnering relationship, it is necessary to identify the significant difference/s between the two individuals involved because an intergroup partnering relationship makes sense only when the two social groups can be differentiated. In this respect, the feminist conceptualization of subjectivity and intersectionality are explored as I find them the most useful conceptual tools for understanding difference/s. Then, I employ these feminist notions to identify the significant difference/s that matter in intergroup partnering relationships. I then move to a discussion of the ways that the idea of intergroup partnering relationships may be conceptualised by exploring notions that were developed to analyse partnering across national, racial, ethnic, and religious differences. That is followed by an explanation of my preference for using the concept of 'intercultural' partnering relationships as the focus of this research. My understanding is grounded in the work of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, in general, and Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity, in particular. Last, I document

the uniqueness of the Persian communities in the UK and the importance of researching their intercultural relationships. This chapter, hence, maps out the type of partnering relationship that is under examination throughout this thesis.

1.1. Bodies of thought pertinent to the study of intergroup partnering relationships

Scholarly debates regarding intergroup partnering relationships arguably have a longer history in anthropological writings than in the sociological literature. In the anthropological literature, in-group and out-group marriages have been conceptualised as endogamy and exogamy, respectively. One notable work on the latter is Margaret Mead's ethnographic work included in her book, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societie*s (1963, orig. 1935). Mead explored three societies of the Arapesh people of Papua New Guinea who used exogamy practices to maintain social security and extend cooperation between families (Nanda and Warms 2010). Endogamous marriages also have been practiced for a long time; in some communities, this practice was enforced by religious authorities or otherwise encouraged in minority groups to protect and maintain cultural identities (Abraham 2008; Charsley 2008; Sheel 2008). Famous examples of this behaviour include the practice of endogamous marriage in the Greek-Cypriot diaspora, Gypsy travellers, and Orthodox Jewish communities (Monger 2004).

In the sociological writings, there used to be a tendency to address these kinds of relationships using a socioeconomic understanding of family composition and to analyse the racial, and class hierarchies of individuals in family relationships. Studies

have been conducted on hypergamy and hypogamy[2], particularly regarding class status and, most notably, regarding marriages between members of different castes in Hindu society (Van Den Berghe 1960). However, this approach has been criticised for being gendered and too often about women 'marrying up' to improve their social status (Rubin 1968). Moreover, there have been debates on homogamy and heterogamy[3]; for example, Blackwell and Lichter (2000) study mate selection and 'whether women and men trade in socioeconomic status and racial caste prestige' (2000: 275). Blackwell and Lichter (2000) conclude that a type of spousal trade[4] can be identified in heterogamous marriages. Moreover, most of the literature examines educational homogamy (Michielutte 1972; Rockwell 1976; Kalmijn 1991; Blackwell 1998; Smits et al. 1998). Given the above, as Muhsam states, '[m]ost attempts to explain heterogamy consist in trying to prove that more profound analysis will show that apparently heterogamous marriages are, in fact, not as heterogamous as they appear at first sight' (1990: 309). These approaches have faded away in recent years, and precise ways of thinking have encouraged, often in relation to wider social changes. In the following section, I explore four perspectives that have been employed by scholars to better understand intergroup partnering relationships.

Exchange theory

[2] Hypergamy and hypogamy are defined as marrying persons of higher and lower status than oneself, respectively.

[3] Homogamy and heterogamy describe unions between individuals of the same or different racial or socioeconomic status, respectively

[4] Spousal trade means 'high education in one spouse is associated with higher colour status in another' (Blackwell and Lichter 2000: 275).

One of the primary bodies of thought that emerged to analyse intergroup partnering relationships is exchange theory (Homans 1958; Blau 1964; Edwards 1969; Emerson 1976; Nye 1980), which once dominated the sociology of family life. This theory is rooted in behavioural psychology and microeconomic analyses (Cheal 1991), as well as in symbolic interactionism and the growing notions of individualistic thinking and the ideology of individualism (Smith 1995). Exchange theory is founded on the assumption that individuals make rational choices to minimise the costs of their interactions while maximising the potential rewards of those interactions. The theory assumes that people act primarily for personal gain and individual benefit; thus, partnering relationships are perceived as platforms for exchanging benefits and services.

Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) argue that exchange theory is based on three notions: rewards, resources, and costs. Rewards are associated with social acceptance and approval or anything that empowers a person involved in the interpersonal exchange in one way or another. Resources include any commodities that can be transferred to another person to reward them, ranging from interpersonal and emotional rewards, such as expressions of love, to financial rewards. Costs are resources given up in exchange for the rewards. Costs may be realised through direct exchanges or by investments in an exchange in which the rewards are deferred. Costs can be in the form of punishments inflicted for behaviours not in line with the goals of a given exchange. Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) also note that the on-going exchanges that are characteristic of relationships are not limited to the individuals directly involved in the

interactions and, rather, include the complex network of individuals and groups that might gain rewards from the actions of the individuals in the relationship.

Studies of intergroup partnering relationships that employ exchange theory have primarily perceived the issues related to partnering relationships through the lens of the exchange of socioeconomic benefits and rewards, mainly across racial or ethnic boundaries. Most of the discussions have focused on partner selection (e.g. Ingoldsby 1995) or gender relations in marital interactions (e.g. Balswick and Balswick 1995). Particularly, previous studies have suggested that marriages between white or local women and non-white or immigrant men can be explained from the perspective that the partners exchange benefits. For example, wives could benefit from their husbands' financial or social status in return for which the husbands could receive racial, ethnic, or national benefits (Davis 1941; Merton 1941; Kalmijn 1993, 1998; Qian 1997).

Exchange theory has been criticised for simplifying human relationships into give-and-take interactions based on cost-benefit calculations of gain-and-loss intentions, while neglecting other aspects of social structure and cultural boundaries that could prevent people from seeking the rewards they believe they deserve. The main problems seem to be that the theory assumes that individual interactions are 'rational', based on an economic system of benefits and costs (Cheal 1991) and that it lacks a firm empirical foundation (Muhsam 1990; Rosenfeld 2005). The most notable criticism of exchange theory is from a feminist standpoint, which rejects the theory's assumption that individuals are free from restraints and the structural social forces that might limit their freedom to choose which resources to give up for potential benefits because it is not

always true for women (Hartsock 1985). It is further argued that women in many societies have fewer resources available to them (particularly, financial resources), and their relatively unfavourable positions may preclude a fair exchange in their relationships (Osmond and Thorne 1993). As White (1992) argues, based on her study of gender and class in Bangladesh, social and cultural boundaries, not personal preferences, define women's interactions.

Although exchange theory has been well considered in the USA, and some studies on intergroup partnering relationships have employed the theory, as Cheal (1991) pointed out, it has not been favoured in British or other European family sociologies. There has also been a shift away from individual level socioeconomic analysis and exchange perception of intergroup partnering relationships towards an aggregate level of understanding personal relationships, achieved by contextualising them within broader social changes. In this regard, a continuum that begins with the assimilationist standpoint and moves to multicultural and transnational dimensions can be identified. This continuum will be explained next.

Assimilation

There has been a perception that immigrants' practices of intergroup partnering relationships can be understood as a form of assimilation into the host society. Assimilation, in this regard, is a process by which immigrants shed their original cultural affiliations as they adapt to the dominant culture of their host countries (Marcson 1950; Price and Zubrzycki 1962; Levine and Rhodes 1981; Alba and Golden

1986; Lee and Yamanaka 1990; Rosenfeld 2002; Qian and Lichter 2001, 2007). Much of the discussion on assimilation has focused on whether or not, and, if so, in what ways do immigrant families assimilate. An additional focus has been on identifying the factors that promote assimilation because immigrants' assimilation has been assumed as the best way to maintain social cohesion, solidarity, and order. The prevalence of intergroup partnering relationships used to be considered a measure of the extent to which cultural groups or immigrants had been integrated into their host societies (Alba and Golden 1986). More recent studies have focused on the extent to which discrimination in host societies influences assimilation because of the proposition that assimilation involves mutual interactions between existing and new groups (Jayaweera 2012; Sims 2012).

It could be argued that intergroup partnering relationships have been perceived as problematic by assimilationists (Kannan 1972; Spickard 1989), which require resolution (Benson 1981). Hartmann and Gerteis (2005) argue that assimilationism has been a response to growing differences in societies that deal with differences by eliminating them. They argue that according to this viewpoint, '[d]ifference is understood as something dangerous, to be rid of or at least minimized. The emphasis is instead on cultural homogeneity and conformity' (Hartmann and Gerteis 2005: 226). More recent studies, however, have shown that not only are these types of unions not problematic (e.g. immigrants losing their cultural identity in the process of assimilation), but they can be both enduring and highly satisfactory (Waller and Spiegler 1997; Leslie and Letiecq 2004; Reiter and Gee 2008; Zhang and Van Hook 2009; Bucx and Seiffge-Krenke 2010).

Two other perspectives that have tended to view intergroup partnering relationships more positively than the assimilationist accounts of these relationships, are multiculturalism and transnationalism. These two approaches have been primarily developed to address increasing diversity in the contemporary social and political world, but they also provide tools that are useful for understanding the situations or social conditions in which intergroup partnering practices occur. I will explain each of these in turn.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a vague notion because it incorporates several different social processes. In an effort to describe multiculturalism and nationalism in the 20th century, Watson (2000) explores the concept's ambiguity and explains that academics and laypeople ascribe different meanings to the term. Because the use of the term 'multiculturalism' has gained popularity over the past decade, Watson (2000) warns that the concept should not be used casually in scholarly work. This ambiguity has resulted in what Murphy (2012: 12) recognises as a 'multicultural identity crisis'. He states that, 'there are now so many multiculturalists, and so many different theories of multiculturalism on the market, that many are finding it difficult to say what exactly multiculturalism is and what it stands for' (Murphy 2012: 12).

Given its slippery usage, it could be argued that the main premise of multiculturalism is that members of a multicultural society can enjoy its cultural diversity and have their

differences accommodated in both public and political spheres while maintaining social order and unity (Goldberg 1994; Gordon and Newfield 1996; Willett 1998; Kivisto and Rundblad 2000; Alexander 2001). Arguably, the idea of multiculturalism has had relatively greater application in the political arena, although several scholars have attempted to employ this notion in sociological theorising[5]. Cornwell and Stoddard (2001) present case studies from several countries and claim that there is not a universal multiculturalism within the political sphere; rather, individual countries address their own social and cultural diversities related to minority groups based on their particular socio-political circumstances. Proponents of this theory argue that '[m]ulticulturalism gives minorities in liberal democracies an unprecedented opportunity to live as equal citizens without suffering the worst excesses of forced assimilation' (Malik 2006: 211). Moreover, huge efforts have been made to find a foundation that could bring cohesion into a diverse society, primarily through activities leading to enacting new laws and policies which could begin to address the implications of human rights in secular states (see a collection edited by Estin 2008). Nevertheless, relevant to the topic of this study, the multicultural perspective recognises that there are differences between families and that there is not a universal model of family life because family values and practices are culturally specific on a global scale[6].

[5] See Hartmann and Gerteis (2005) as an example of a sociological approach that conceptualises three types of multiculturalism: cosmopolitanism, fragmented pluralism, and interactive pluralism.

[6] Some examples of these types of differences between families can be found in Cheal's (2002) argument on cultural diversity and in a collection of articles edited by Ingoldsby and Smith (1995) that describe the multicultural dimensions of the family across the globe. Another

Some scholars, particularly feminists, have criticised the idea of multiculturalism. Their main problem with the multicultural approach is found in a dispute over the ways that differences might be accommodated in the public and political spheres. Some theorists have proposed that a multicultural society could be a threat to social unity, order, solidarity, and stability (Schlesinger 1991; Hughes 1993; Miller 1998). Moreover, it is argued that multiculturalism seeks to protect the rights of cultural groups in a society, but not necessarily the rights of individuals. This is problematic in that in a secular state, priority should be given to individual rights over the rights of specific cultural groups to practice their cultural customs (Kukathas 1995, 2003). Along these lines, some argue that, in a multicultural society, oppression of vulnerable members of minority groups (often women and children) can be reinforced because multiculturalism has focused on achieving equality among the cultural groups of a society rather than among the individual members in those groups (Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev 2005). Thus, because most culturally oppressive practices influence women and children (particularly girls), many feminists criticise the multicultural approach because recognising the rights of cultural groups can lead to undermine gender equality, which is what feminists have been fighting for (Shachar 2000). These feminists point to cultural practices, such as polygamy, arranged and forced marriages, and unilateral divorce rights for men (Shachar 2001; Deveaux 2006; Song 2007), to support their arguments. They argue that if such traditional customs were accommodated in a multicultural state, equality in family life would be threatened

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example is a collection of articles edited by Harvey (2001) that includes some interdisciplinary essays on ethnic, religious, or gender relations in multicultural settings.

which then could potentially harm women. Here, the dilemma for feminism is that some women choose to adhere to their cultural norms—which, for some feminists, may not always provide women with sufficient power with which they can preserve their interests or protect their equal rights and relations. In this situation, '[t]he problem for feminists becomes most acute when there are claims by not only men but also women from traditional cultures that they prefer traditional legal rules to govern their private disputes' (Malik 2006: 214). For example, there are reports that many women immigrants choose to go overseas to attend the jurisdiction of the country of origin to resolve family disputes and problems, such as divorce, that, in some cultures is a unilateral decisions made by husbands (Malik 2006).

There has also been extensive political backlash against multiculturalism recently in Europe, as some European leaders argue that the goal of state multiculturalism — to bring about a cohesive and harmonious society — has failed. Most notable was a comment made by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, echoed by British Prime Minister David Cameron and French president Nicolas Sarkozy (BBC News 2010; The Telegraph 2011; Aljazeera 2012). Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, British Prime Minister David Cameron stated:

> Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values. (National Archives 2011)

This approach has been intensified by some far right political activist groups in northwestern Europe, such as the French Front National party and the United Kingdom Independence Party (see Farage (2015) and Mammone (2015)).What apparently is important to these groups of politicians is the belief that a strong national identity is vital to social unity.

However, it should also be noted that the legal implications of cultural practices could be significant in politics because legalising some cultural practices could lead to violations of fundamental principles of secular states. Regarding family law, legal problems usually emerge in matters of divorce and raising children. More particularly, some traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, could harm young female citizens. This practice has recently become a major debate topic in British politics because '[i]t is estimated that 24,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of female genital mutilation in the UK' (Topping 2014). It has been proposed that '[t]he failure to tackle female genital mutilation (FGM) is a "national scandal" with as many as 170,000 victims in the UK' (BBC 2014). Many of these girls might be sent abroad to undergo the practice and then return to the UK (for the full report, see House of Commons 2014). Thus, the role of the state regarding some cultural practices of minority groups is still being debated.

Regarding strong national identities, the above argument that opposes multiculturalism is closely tied to the notion of assimilationism. From this perspective, different cultural groups must be assimilated into a solid national identity, which could yield a strong

sense of belonging to a nation and thereby hold a society together. Basing the argument on national identity leads us to another new way of thinking about diversity in liberal democracies, which is transnationalism, a response to assimilationism that will be explained next.

Transnationalism

Another response to the premise of assimilationism is the emerging idea of transnationalism. Whereas the assimilationist perspective suggests that immigrants would break away at some point from their culture of origin and adopt the cultural practices of their host society, transnationalism emphasises the extent to which immigrants continue to maintain their cultural identities and retain their ties to their countries of origin (see Bryceson and Vuorela 2002a, 2002b; Goulbourne, et al. 2010; Charsley 2012b). Thus, transnationalism highlights the interconnectivity of individuals, groups, and organizations and their relations with places across nation-states. This theory is closely tied to the idea of globalization; however, it emphasises the recent technological advancements in transportation and communication that have simplified the maintenance of social relations and contacts across national boundaries. Thus, family members can now exercise retention of their family relationships across great distances (see Urry 2000; Vertovec 2004; Wilding 2006; Huang et al. 2008; Metykova 2010).

Based on the idea of transnationalism, the notion of 'transnational families' has recently become popular among scholars. This concept is used to address a range of

issues, such as the legal implications of transnational family practices (see Hellum et al. 2010; Wray 2012; and Jørgensen 2012), transnational kinship ties (Levitt and Schiller 2004; Mason 2004; Harris and Shaw 2006), caring practices (Baldassar et al. 2007a; Baldassar, et al. 2007b; Baldassar 2008; Baldassar and Merl 2013), and parent-child relationships (Parrenas 2001, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Dreby 2006; Bonizzoni and Boccagni 2013). However, defining 'transnational families' continues to be a focus of discussion across the relevant disciplines. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002b: 3) state that these are 'families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders'. Goulbourne et al. (2010: 4) express concerns about this conceptualization and argue that it 'is of little analytical use because it remains too large, too porous, and therefore too vague; the phenomena that we perhaps intuitively sense to be new remain elusive or slippery'.

Specifically regarding partnering relationships, there is no integrated approach to transnational marriage/partnering practices because the definitions provided by scholars are fragmented and cover numerous aspects of family practices in various disciplines, leaving this field of research 'conceptually under-developed' (Charsley 2012b: 5). Thus, these concepts seem to be problematic for scholarly debates because they tell us very little about the types of family practices that are the subjects of study. Heath et al. move the argument further and question 'whether the implied distinction between 'ordinary' family practices and transnational family practices is a useful one; and if so, what constitutes a specifically transnational family practice as opposed to a non-transnational (intra-national?) family practice' (2011: 3.4). Thus, the transnational

understanding of family practices may be useful only if it can describe the kind of family practices that have unique transnational characteristics, and can explain specific transnational family experiences. Thus, another issue that needs to be considered is the extent to which immigrant family experiences and practices are unique to transnational circumstances and if any meaningful distinctions can be drawn between transnational family practices and family practices across distances. It could be argued that, increasingly, more people in contemporary societies are choosing to practice their family relationships across cities and regions, but within a nation-state, making them similar in family practices to those who are maintaining family ties across national borders, because both types of families practice their family lives across geographical distances. With the emergence of LAT (living apart together) relationships (Levin and Trost 1999; Bawin-Legros and Gauthier 2001; Levin 2004; Haskey and Lewis 2006; Roseneil 2006; Strohm et al. 2009; Duncan and Phillips 2010; Reimondos et al. 2011; Amato and Hayes 2013), conducting family practices across distances is not unique to transnational circumstances in contemporary societies. Therefore, it is apparent that family experiences and practices unique to transnational circumstances are strictly limited because many family practices previously identified by scholars as transnational family practices are, in fact, family practices across various distances in the global village, rather than only across state-defined borders.

This line of thought leads to my main concern regarding the transnational understanding of family life, which is that the concept is founded on the idea of 'nation-states'. There have been attempts to overcome this limitation by refining the concept to 'transnational communities' (Levitt 2001) or 'transnational social space'

(Charsley 2012c), for example. However, from my perspective, the problem is not solved by shifting attention to communities or social spaces. Rather, grounding our investigation on the idea of transnationalism is problematic because any analysis based on this notion would be associated with the implications of nation-states and national identities. To understand this viewpoint, it is important to focus on family practices and experiences. Levitt and Schiller (2004) develop a useful argument in this regard, proposing that we differentiate between ways of being and ways of belonging, particularly when actual practices of daily life are the subjects of investigation. An individual may feel a sense of membership to a certain minority group, but he or she continues to do daily practices in the ways that are consistent with mainstream society. Thus, an individual may feel a sense of belonging to a certain nation-state from which she or he has emigrated, but do everyday practices like a native of the host country. Therefore, basing an argument on national identity and transnationalism limits the scope of sociological thinking about immigrant families, particularly when the subject of sociological enquiry is everyday family practices, rather than legal or policy issues related to family life. Even for the latter topics, these notions suffer from limitations; for example, Toyota (2008) suggests using the concept of 'international marriage' instead of 'transnational marriage', simply because no transnational authority exists to recognise these marriages. Above all, centring the discussion on the notions of nation-states seems inconsistent with the wider social changes embodied in emerging ideas of cosmopolitanism and a post-national world (see Tonkiss 2013), since new evidences suggest that the sense of belonging to a particular nation-state has weakened.

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In sum, exchange theory might be useful for explaining some partnering practices; but, because of its broad and simplistic view, not all partnering practices fit into the theory. Moreover, the idea of assimilationism is problematic because it neglects to address and seeks to eliminate the cultural dimension of everyday life practices. Furthermore, I find the idea of transnationalism problematic because of its assumptions regarding the nation-state. However, in my opinion, the idea of multiculturalism is useful as a way to think about the types of contemporary societies in which intergroup partnering relationships occur. Although the theory may not be able to explain partnering relationships at the micro level, it could be useful for understanding social processes of negotiating and accommodating differences at the macro level. In this sense, if the ways in which cultural groups can negotiate, compromise, and accommodate their differences in a multicultural society are identified at the macro level, the ways in which intergroup and intercultural partnering relationships can be sustained at the micro level could be better understood. Likewise, understanding the ways in which intercultural relationships operate would illustrate how cultural groups in society could coexist across difference/s. In my view, societies such as the British society can be considered multicultural because many cultures obviously coexist in the society and major efforts have been made by members of numerous social groups to accommodate their cultural differences at the political and social levels. Along the same line, people in intergroup partnering relationships try to settle their differences and sustain their relationships. Therefore, I believe that it would be best to retain the framework of multiculturalism and refine the theory to understand diverse, but parallel, social processes.

As discussed, the above-explained theories were developed mostly to address the growing diversity of contemporary societies. Diversity can only be understood when elements that differentiate among individuals or social groups are recognised. In fact, the idea of intergroup partnering relationships is about difference/s because to define a social group and separate it from the others requires at least one element of differentiation. This discussion leads to the bigger question regarding the type of difference/s that matter when studying and understanding diversity and, more particularly, intergroup partnering relationships.

Difference/s raise divergent expectations regarding family life and relationships. They may cause a partnering relationship to be more difficult or, alternatively, more exciting. Moreover, people in partnering relationships across difference/s must negotiate their difference/s and make compromises to sustain those relationships. Hence, the key to understanding intergroup partnering relationships is knowing how the people in these relationships perceive their difference/s and the extent to which and in what ways their differences influence their partnering relationships. The main question here, then, is: What are the significant differences that shape people's partnering practices? I aim to answer this question in next section.

1.2. What differences matter in intergroup partnering relationships?

Although the concept of 'difference' is extensively contested, and, as Brah argues, has 'different meanings in different discourses' (Brah 2000: 441), it is one of the central themes in the social sciences because it is through the understanding of social difference/s that any representation of the social world could make sense (Hall 1990). Brah (1992, 1999, 2000) argues that there have been four ways to perceive the notion of 'difference': as experience, as social relation, as subjectivity, and as identity. The last way is a classic approach to understanding social differences through collective identity. An individual's collective identities are also about differences because it is through differences that individuals identify and distinguish themselves from 'others'. In this sense, the partners in intergroup partnering relationships, could be perceived as outside of each other's collective identities. However, many scholars have questioned this standpoint. Identity has never been a fixed term in the social sciences and its meaning in recent times has been one of the most debated issues, sparking extensive discussions in the scholarly, intellectual, and political arenas (see Jenkins 1996). As I explain below (relying on the feminist field of intersectionality), although a collective identity can be constructed simply by excluding people who are different, such an identity may not capture internal differences.

That said, the most famous argument on the concept of difference was Derrida's notion of '*différance*', which asserts that the meanings of difference/s are constantly in flux and always subject to changes and evolution (Derrida 1982). Reflecting on Derrida's account, Hall (1990: 229) argued, '[w]ithout relations of difference, no representation could occur. But what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialised'. From this perspective, social differences are arguably

fluid, shifting, and fractured across time and space. Understanding difference/s, however, is not limited to Derrida's (1982) sense of it or to the understanding of difference through or as identity. Extensive theoretical refinements of these classical standpoints of difference/s exist, mainly offered by feminist scholarship. In fact, understanding and addressing differences has been a central topic of feminist thinking because differences potentially lead to social and political inequalities for women.[7]

Acknowledging that defining difference has been vital to feminist politics, Barrett (1987) argues that, in addition to understanding difference as having a positional meaning (based on the Derridean sense of difference), difference can be understood as experiential, indicating that women have diverse social experiences. ''Difference' used in this sense is a relatively 'commonsensical' term, …. But it is nonetheless very influential' (Barrett 1987: 30). This perspective shifts the understanding of difference from being a way to distinguish between categories (e.g. women and men) to being a way to discern differences within a category (e.g. among women). In this sense, Barrett (1987) attempts to deconstruct the conventional categorisations of women and men and suggests that the notion of difference should be understood not only as between genders, but also within them.

This emphasis on experience leads us to an important contribution made by feminism to the study of difference and diversity through the feminist work on subjectivity. Generally, the concept of 'subjectivity' suggests that the category of difference that a

[7] See Archer (2004) for a useful discussion on the way that feminist thinking and practices could address social difference/s.

scholar chooses to study should correspond to the subjects' self-identified categories of difference. In other words, the perspectives that people have about the types of difference/s that matter to them and their perceptions of their self-identified difference/s relative to others are keys to understanding social inequalities (e.g. see Meyers 1994; Kruks 2001; Bondi et al. 2002; Malik 2006). The feminist literature on subjectivity highlights the importance of bringing individuals' perspectives into scholarly conceptualizations of couples' daily lives. It is necessary to do so because the types of differences that matter to people in their daily lives are the very ones that should be the focus of the sociological enquiry of intergroup partnering relationships. In other words, if the category of difference under study does not correspond to the individuals' understandings of their difference, then the category would not provide a proper way of assessing individuals' actual experiences. I will return to the topic of subjectivity in the methodology chapter as part of the philosophical perspective underlying the empirical research. For now, however, it is important to note that it is through the concept of subjectivity that we understand that people are subjects who experience inequalities, which is why we need to know how they perceive their difference/s in their daily lives.

The feminist field of intersectionality, however, has had the most influence on the study of difference. Intersectionality has its roots in critical race studies and was put forward in the work of feminists of colour, originally Davis (1981), Crenshaw (1989, 1991), and Collins (1990, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2004; also see Andersen and Collins 2007). Shifting away from the Marxist notion of class as the dominant source of inequality, these scholars suggest that to understand the contemporary status of

people's lives, diverse sources of inequality relative to class should be investigated (Rothman 2005). Initially, Davis (1981), a black feminist activist, pointed out that feminist activists should note that the racial biases had divided them in their fights for suffrage and civil rights. It is, however, widely accepted that the notion of intersectionality was first introduced by Crenshaw (1989) in her analysis of the intersection of race and sex in the context of women employment in the USA. Later Crenshaw (1991), examined the intersectionality of race and gender in her analysis of violence against women, and she suggested that the notion could be applicable to other social contexts. Collins (2000a) explores her theory of the 'matrix of domination', which presents class, race, and gender in simultaneous intersection. She argues that people are disadvantaged because a 'matrix of domination' comprises complicated and multiple strands of oppression in which gender is just one strand. In this sense, numerous combinations of multiple identities or types of discrimination could result in numerous types of inequalities (Collins 2000a). Thus this perspective rises above gender because male members of disadvantaged groups may be as oppressed as female members of disadvantaged groups, although perhaps in different ways.

Thus, the core idea of the intersectional approach is that centring feminist scholarship and wider practices on one social category, such as gender, produces a simplistic and overgeneralised understanding of inequalities, discriminations, and oppressions against women. Thus, a multidimensional analysis of axes of social division was suggested in response to the problem as a way to better understand discrimination. This field, therefore, has transformed feminist thinking from a focus on one category of social

inequality to considering the range of dynamics of difference (see Berger and Guidroz 2010 for fuller discussion).

The theory suggests ways that different categories of social divisions operate in parallel and reinforce each other (Andersen 2005). The interplay of categories of difference could shape experiences, meaning that it could produce numerous meaningful experiences of difference. These categories of difference inform each other and may produce different meanings in different contexts, circumstances, or historical moments (see Smooth 2010 and Risman 2004). The concept of intersectionality offers a richer and more complex understanding of inequalities than approaches that focus on one aspect of experience per study. Arguably, the one-category approach fails to capture the reality of life and thus cannot truly grasp how multiple identities may produce both advantages and disadvantages at the same time. Thus, there are very complex and complicated ways that discrimination and oppression are experienced. Through this theory's lens, it is possible to understand the importance of and investigate the interplay of categories of differences in the construction of partnering practices.

Since its emergence in the USA, intersectionality has been widely applied across disciplines, in feminist political engagement, and in numerous practices around the world (see Brah and Phoenix 2004; Flintoff et al. 2008; Cho et al 2013; and Lewis 2013). Feminists who accept the principle of intersectionality may not all agree about the ways that it can or should be applied in research and practice. As Lewis outlines, feminist scholars 'set up to further refine intersectional inquiry and to make it more

relevant to feminist scholarship' (2013: 888). The core of the debate is about sections or categories that intersect. These could be identities, sources of inequalities, differences, forms of oppression, or, as Phoenix and Pattynama (2006: 187) state, 'the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life'. Initially, the focus of intersectionality was on social divisions, such as gender, sexuality, class, race, and the ways that these categories interplay with each other. Later, researchers introduced a diverse range of other sources of difference in the play, such as sexual orientation, disability, generation, age, and violence. Because of this growing list of possibilities, it is arguably impossible to identify all of the relevant categories of social inequality or difference in a given investigation and impractical to warrant that all the possible sources of inequality and difference be covered by a single analysis. This situation produces the so-called problem of 'etcetera' (see Knapp 2011 and Lykke 2011).

The second debated issue concerns the weight or relative importance placed on each category of difference. Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that the focus of intersectionality has been on major social divisions and the concept has widely been used to theorise on social stratification. However, she points out that, in addition to the interplay of axes of social divisions, the extent of the influence that different categories have on individuals should be considered. Some feminist scholars have agreed that not all social differences are equally important in different social contexts and that certain dimensions of difference carry varying extents of importance (e.g. Barvosa-Carter 2001; Ward 2004). In this regard, what is relevant to this research is that, to study intergroup partnering relationships, it is necessary to identifying which of an individual's collective identities (and, therefore, differences) are central and significant

to the extent that they could meaningfully influencing everyday partnering practices. For example, how significant are national or ethnic differences to partners who share a religion? Or, how significant are racial differences to partners who share an ethnicity with a strong sense of belonging?

The third issue concerns the party or parties that define the categories of difference. The bigger concern is whether or not these categories are imposed by dominant groups. If so, the critical question in an intersectional approach becomes, 'which intersections, power differentials and normativities should be given priority in which political contexts' (Lykke 2010: 67). Moreover, individuals, in their actual daily lives may resist mainstream categorizations of difference imposed upon them by social structures or other sources of power (Moya 2001; Francis 2002; Rowe and Licona 2005; Jackson 2012). Some feminists perceive these categorizations in mainstream society as problematic terrains. In social constructionist feminism, all categories of difference are considered socially and culturally constructed and, thus, social groups are perceived as trying to establish and maintain their distances from others (Wharton 1992; Ferrante-Wallace and Brown 2001; Lorber 2003). In this sense, the dominant groups are seen as enforcing the social rankings or hierarchies to maintain their superiority, which could result in further social inequalities (Chancer and Watkins 2006; Weber 1998). What is important from a social constructionist perspective is that people can change what they perceive to be their differences and modify the extent of the significance of those differences because the categorizations are neither permanent nor natural (Malik 2006). Some feminists go further and propose that normative categories of differences

need reconstruction or, in Butler's terms, 'resignification' (Butler 2008, orig. 1990; Olson and Worsham 2000; Borgerson 2005).

While in the above I have tried to define and outline the current thought pertinent to intersectionality relevant to this thesis, it has to be acknowledged that this area of feminist study is full of uncertainty. However, as Davis (2008) argues, the conceptual ambiguity and open-ended approaches of intersectionality could be one of its advantages because it can encourage critical engagement with the diverse range of inequalities and differences and allow the feminist perspective to be reflexive when dealing with the limitations of the theoretical and methodological aspects of feminist inquiries. The ambiguity also allows us to investigate the complexity and multiplicity of social divisions and differences and open up space for conducting creative analyses.

Because of the exploratory and open-ended nature of intersectional analysis, intersectional researchers tend to prefer qualitative studies. Arguably, understanding the interplay of sources of difference requires a qualitative approach because it is mainly through qualitative tools that sources of inequalities and differences can be identified and understood. Only empirical qualitative studies can tell us the ways that types of difference intertwine in particular social contexts. Intersectionality seeks to learn about individuals' real life experiences of difference/s, thus. favours qualitative research. This intersectional understanding justifies this qualitative study of Persian intercultural partnering relationships.

In sum, to understand differences and conceptualise the types of intergroup partnering relationships being investigated, we first need to establish which difference/s matter to the people under observation at the subjective level, because these may vary by context or culture and may have varying extents of influence on the subjects' practices or experiences. It would not be accurate, then, to conclude that all differences have equal significance in the social world. Therefore, it is important to address the ways that differences influence individuals' partnering practices. In other words, it is vital to understand the ways in which the multiple sources of difference/s interplay in the construction of individuals' day-to-day intergroup partnering practices.

1.3. Conceptualising intergroup partnering relationships

The core aspect of intergroup partnering relationships is partnering across 'difference/s', which means partnering with someone who is considered different from oneself. However, all partners are different from and similar to each other in various ways. Apparently, all individuals have personality differences which influence their interests and preferences for everyday activities. Although it may seem that these characteristics should be subjects of psychological studies, sociologists have been increasingly interested in considering these factors through what has recently been referred to as 'individual identity' or 'individuality'. This shift resulted from the increasing perception that individuals have relatively more freedom to exercise their preferred sets of practices and activities (Goulbourne et al. 2010). This perception highlights the part that individual identity plays in shaping daily practices. Recognising

that personality and individual differences are important in the construction of partnering relationships, my focus is on social differences that influence (or even enforce) certain kinds of practices that shape daily lives and partnering practices.

Some general terms used to describe intergroup partnering relationships, both in the public and academic spheres, do not appear to capture the important differentiation dimension of intergroup partnering relationships. These terms include 'intermarriage', 'mixed marriage/families', and 'marrying in/out'. Apart from the fact that these terms exclude important modern forms of partnering relationships (such as cohabitation), they tell us very little about the nature of the relationships under observation. Moreover, they may not provide the conceptual tools we need to think through the sociological puzzles created by these relationships. Thus, the term 'intermarriage' does not meaningfully reveal the nature of the difference/s between the partners. Regarding 'mixed marriages', it is not clear in which ways members of the couples being described are mixed, and neither does the term indicate to what extent the degree of being mixed or any possible range of mixtures could be sociologically meaningful and significant. The notion of 'marrying in/out' suffers from a similar problem because it does not specify into or out of which particular types of sociologically important categories of differences the partners are marrying. Clarity about the types of difference/s we aim to explain in our conceptualizations is necessary.

Before moving to the main discussion, it is important to mention that the main dynamic of difference in any partnering relationship could obviously be about differences in sex and/or gender identities or sexual orientations. From that

perspective, numerous types of partnering relationships between the sexes and genders can be imagined as partnering across differences. Apart from possible sex and gender differences present in heterosexual, bisexual, or same-sex unions, which have already been well researched (see Barrett 1987 for a philosophical discussion of sexual differences), sex and gender differences in other unconventional relationships, such as mixed-orientation marriages or partnerships, were also considered earlier (for the latter example see Buxton 2000, 2004; Wolkomir 2009; Hernandez et al. 2011; Kays et al 2013; Bertone and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2014). Given that this study is focused on heterosexual relationships and acknowledging that the consideration of gender difference is crucial for understanding such relationships, the following paragraphs explain the ways that intergroup partnering relationships can be conceptualised for the purposes of qualitative research. The discussion is framed by the subjective and intersectional understanding of difference/s that was described above. Moreover, the concept is considered in the light of the context and preliminary findings of this research. I cover discussions about differences in class, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, and culture and I conclude with an explanation of the reasons that using the concept of 'intercultural partnering relationships' is the best way to conduct this study.

Class, racial, and national differences

In the first section of this chapter, I mentioned to some previous studies on hypergamy and hypogamy, particularly with regard to marrying an individual of a higher or lower class than oneself, most notably the body of work on marriage across caste in Hindu society (see Van Den Berghe 1960). However, scholarship is shifting away from the

Marxist argument and a focus on class as the source of social difference has faded away. As was explained in the previous section, the idea of intersectionality entered scholarship as a major critique of understanding difference/s from the standpoint of class division. Moreover, using the concept of class in the Persian context is deeply problematic because class in its Marxist sociological understanding has hardly existed in Persian social history.

Recently, much of the research on intergroup partnering relationships has focused on the most visible type of difference, that is race (e.g. Kennedy 2004; Leslie and Letiecq 2004; Childs 2005; Jacobson and Johnson 2006; Forry, Leslie, and Letiecq 2007; Bratter and King 2008), or on the type that is the easiest to indicate, that is national affiliations (some studies of which are described above in transnationalism section). From my perspective, these differences seem superficial and not necessarily useful for a comprehensive sociological understanding of intergroup partnering relationships. Founding an argument on racial difference is problematic because the approach does not necessarily correspond with people's self-identifications. This is particularly true with respect to this study's target group (the Persian immigrants in the UK), as the subjects of this study did not indicate that they experience racial difference from their non-Persian partners. Moreover, people sometimes find imposed racial categories offensive because the categories tend to label racial differences as problems by implying an absence of racial purity in some groups (Phoenix and Owen 2000; Tizard and Phoenix 2002). Furthermore, the use of the term 'mixed' could lead to problems, in that 'the terms mixed marriage; intermarriage and miscegenation … accept binary notions of 'race' and have negative overtones' (Phoenix and Owen 2000: 74).

In addition to these concerns, I previously described problems associated with founding analytical discussions on national identity. The primary problem with the assumption that an intergroup partnering relationship is international or transnational is that these categories may not correspond with a subject's self-identification. As the results of this research demonstrated, many people do not recognise nationality as a leading source of difference in their partnering relationships. Some of them embraced dual nationalities; others chose to change their national identities. Moreover, many people do not recognise the political borders that delineate nation-states. Regarding Iran, many people who originated from that country do not label themselves as 'Iranians'; they consider themselves as 'Persian', 'Kurd', or 'Azari', for example. These identifications are attempts to distance themselves from political disputes by identifying with cultural heritage or past rather than the political national entity. Moreover, national difference tell us very little about everyday partnering practices and experiences, particularly when the partners are of different nationalities yet share the same cultural practices for their everyday partnering, such as the partnering relationships between Iraqi and Iranian Kurds.

Ethnic difference

There have been some attempts to develop the notion of ethnicity as a distinct social identity, alternative to concepts of racial or national identity. The notion originally developed to label social groups that 'shared historical experiences, geographical origins, cultural practices, and/or kinship ties' (Ansell 2013: 57). Ansell traces back the

concept of ethnicity to its origins and argues that it had strong religious connotation, which now seem to have faded away 'and instead emphasize common descent and shared cultural practices' (2013: 57). Some scholars contend that one of the central defining features of ethnicity is heritage or the collective memories of a shared past (see Bulmer 1986; Smith 1991; Hutchinson and Smith 1996). Thus, the concept contrasts with, but overlaps, the notion of race, which often has been perceived regarding biological attributes. Moreover, the emergence of ideas about cultural racism and racial background, introduced by Barker (1981), has challenged the distinction between race and ethnicity. These ideas refer to cultural aspects of one's racial history, which have weakened the conception of ethnicity, to the extent that, as Giddens and Sutton (2014: 218) argue, they 'may have the effect of making the concept of ethnicity less useful in sociology'.

Employing the idea of ethnic identity, some researchers have used the concepts of 'inter-ethnic marriage or inter-ethnic relationships' to define relevant intergroup partnering relationships (Burma 1963; Bagley 1972; Jansen 1982; Jones 1982; Coleman 1985; Lomsky-Feder and Leibovitz 2010; Chiswick and Houseworth 2011; Huijnk et al. 2013; Spörlein et al. 2014). However, ethnicity has been one of the highly contested concepts in the social sciences. It seems vague, and it is sometimes equated to culture. The concept of 'ethnicity' also has a subjective problem because many laypersons (including many of this study's participants) neither acknowledge an ethnicity nor can they identify their ethnicities; therefore, the concept does not correspond to many people's self-identifications. Furthermore, it is problematic because the provisional ethnic categories bleed into one another, making them not

mutually exclusive. For example, various ethnic group labels used in the USA and the UK censuses have often been subjects of disagreement and/or amendment.[8]

The concept of ethnicity is particularly confusing when it is applied in the Persian context. Not only is the concept slippery in the English language; it carries different connotations and understandings in the Persian language. Furthermore, the comparable Persian word for 'ethnicity' (*qoum*) means something rather different than what it means in English. There are different *qoum-s* in Iran (such as Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Azerbaijanis, Baluchs, Gilanis, Jews, Kurds, Lurs, Mazandaranis, Taleshis, Turkmen, and Qashqais) that are not necessarily ethnically different, using the English language interpretation of the meaning of 'ethnicity'. Therefore, referring to 'Persian inter-ethnic relationships' can confuse Persian speakers because they may understand the reference to be about inter-*qoum* relationships between variations of Persians. Thus, at the early stage of research design I ultimately concluded that using both concepts of 'ethnicity' or '*qoum*' for this study would be too likely to confuse the research participants who were supposed to be Persian language speakers.

The other problem with employing the notion of 'ethnicity' in the Persian context is that it is politically very sensitive, which could cause practical problems in the empirical research. Iran suffers from internal *goum* disputes; therefore, an individual's *goum* affiliation in country is more about political activities than cultural or everyday practices. Thus, for practical reasons, it seemed inappropriate to use a politically

[8] See Ratcliffe (2004) for fuller a more in-depth discussion of the problem of empirically measuring the an individual's ethnic group membership

charged term in a study that was, by its nature, culturally sensitive because of the personal and sexual dimensions of research on partnering relationships. Given the above, it should be clarified that I am not the only person who is critical about the concept of ethnicity, as there is a substantial literature focused on limitations of this concept. While I do not entirely dismiss the concept, as it could be useful in certain context, I find it problematic within the context of this research.

Religious difference

Partnering across religious boundaries has historically been of interest to sociologists and, thus, ideas about 'inter-religious and interfaith marriages' have long been established (see Lee 1994; McCarthy 2007; Kaplan 2004; Seamon 2012; McAloney 2013). These are useful concepts, particularly because they focus on the variety of religious practices within couple relationships, and explain the ways that people tend to negotiate their religious practices that could affect both parties. They also have examined the ways that inter-religious marriages are sustained in a context of conflicting religious practices and rituals. In addition, inter-religious or interfaith partnering relationships are banned or punished in some countries. For example, according to Iranian law, it is illegal for a non-Muslim man to marry a Muslim woman. Therefore, investigations of the legal and political implications of these types of relationships would be a fertile area of enquiry by scholars of inter-religious and interfaith studies.

The important question here is whether the subjects under observation consider religion to be a leading and significant source of difference in their intergroup partnering relationships. Aspinall and Song (2013) study highly educated individuals of mixed race in the UK to examine how they understood their racial and ethnic identities. They conclude that people self-identify in diverse and complex ways, partially because of an increase in the importance of other types of identity for individuals (the authors particular point to the increasing importance of religious identity), which has challenged the importance of both racial and ethnic identities. This finding conforms to the recent literature on the revival of religion in late modernity (which is further elaborated in the next chapter).

Here, the point is that religious difference apparently has become a central factor for the way that people self-define. Even so, centring scholarly focus on religious difference may risk missing the mark by being inconsistent with subjects' self-identifications. Many people claim that they are nonreligious, although, at some point in their lives, religious practice may become a vital part of their lives. For example, as I explain in a later chapter, a son's circumcision became a point of conflict in an intergroup partnering relationship between a professed nonreligious Persian Shia and her/his European partner, although both partners had claimed that they were not at all religious.

At first glance, both concepts, 'inter-religion' and 'interfaith', seem like umbrellas that cover all of the people of the same religion, enabling comparative analysis of adherents' interactions in their partnering relationships. However, the umbrellas are too

big to be useful in sociological analysis. For example, to consider all 'Muslims' or all 'Jews' as unique communities in which all members follow the same family practices is the wrong approach to academic enquiry. It is problematic to regard family practices of members of Muslim or Jewish communities as 'Islamic' or 'Jewish' practices because even Muslims or Jews themselves do not necessarily agree among themselves in terms of defining their religious practices. Moreover, there are different branches or refinements of religions (e.g. Sunni and Shia branches of Islam or Haredi and Alternative Judaism) that permit latitude in partnering and/or sexual practices, evidenced by the different, sometimes contradictory, types of partnering and/or sexual practices that exist within a religion. Thus, the concepts of 'inter-religion' and 'interfaith' are problematic because defining a set of practices accepted under one religion or faith is almost impossible. For example, wearing the *Niqab* (veil that covers the face), which has become a popular socio-political issue in the West, is perceived by some Muslim communities in northwestern Europe as an aspect of women's religious dress code. At the same time, the majority of Muslims worldwide have not adopted this practice. Thus, the practice of wearing the *Niqab* is considered as an Islamic practice by some Muslims, but at the same time it is not regarded as such by many other Muslims. [9] In terms of intergroup partnering relationships, it could be argued that very different partnering practices may be conducted under the name of one religion, but these practices may not be verified as attributed to that religion. Instead, they may be rooted in the local customs of the adherents. These limitations of the applications of the terms create problems for understanding religion as a leading source of difference.

[9] For more examples of differences between members of Muslim communities in Europe, see Lutz (1991) and Brah (1993).

Cultural differences and cultural identities

Few studies of intergroup partnering relationships have been based on the idea of cultural differences, using terms such as 'cross-cultural/intercultural marriage/relationships' (Biever et al. 1998; Gaines and Agnew 2003; Reiter and Gee 2008; Cheng 2010; Bystydzienski 2011; Bustamante et al 2011; Karis and Killian 2011). Studies on cross-cultural/intercultural relationships mostly are psychological (see Sullivan and Cottone 2006 for a fuller literature review of the psychological perspective). For the purposes of this thesis, I have adopted the concept of 'intercultural partnering relationships' as an alternative to the terms presented above because it is less problematic for conceptualising the differences that matter to partnering relationships under observation, and it provides a better analytical tool for understanding such relationships. This is particularly true in the case of this study because, as the primary results of this research demonstrated, culture was what Persian participants in this study recognised as the major source of difference between them and their partners, and what they frequently mentioned during the course of data collection, directly or indirectly, as the main source of differences mattered to them.

However, culture has not been a fixed concept in sociology. Therefore, it is initially important to define my use of the term 'culture' in this thesis. Hall et al. (2003: 6) propose that defining culture is important because 'those who write about "culture" sometimes mean very different things by the term, and they thereby fit culture into alternative theories that offer radically different understandings'. Some sociologists

have tried to define culture based on its distinction from the concept of 'society', whereas others attempted to identify different types of culture, such as 'high' culture, 'ideal' culture, 'real' culture, 'mass' culture, or 'popular' culture (see Hall et al. 2003).

More importantly, sociologists differentiate between material and symbolic/ideal culture, which is useful at the analytical level. This distinction is rooted in wider sociological theorisation because some sociologists contend that symbols and meanings are relatively more important, whereas others argue on behalf of social structure and materials as the most important factors for analysing culture (Giddens and Sutton 2014). My understanding of culture is that it can be best understood at the symbolic level and that it is mostly about meaning-making practices. A working definition for this thesis could frame culture as a set of shared perceptions about the ways of living in a particular society or social group, which includes aspects of everyday life, such as norms, values, beliefs, customs, practices, and languages as ways to convey cultural meanings.

The social sciences have taken a cultural turn and sociology stands out in that respect. One area of debate has concerned cultural identity. Defining cultural identity is indeed complicated, particularly because scholars across and within disciplines have used it based on diverse epistemological and ontological perspectives. Moreover, the two components of the term (i.e. culture and identity) are defined and applied differently across, and even within, disciplines. Further complicating matters, the concept of identity is understood differently in different cultures, which could be far removed

from Western scientific discourses (see Markus and Kitayama 1991; Ho 1995; Holland et al 1998; Norenzayan et al 1999; Cross and Gore 2011).

One defining moment of the cultural turn is attributed to an interdisciplinary development in cultural studies at the Birmingham School that introduced an alternative standpoint for use when considering issues of racial and ethnic differences.[10] The Birmingham School's contribution to our understanding of cultural significance is mostly found in Hall's (1990) work on cultural identity (see also Hall and du Gay 1996).

Hall's (1990) essay has become a classic on cultural identity. He argued that there are two perceptions of cultural identity. The first perception views cultural identity as a collective 'one true self' that 'people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common' (1990: 223). This type of identity is imposed, unchanging, and can function as the frame of meanings for certain people. The second type of perception of cultural identity, according to Hall (1990), is not only the identification of being; it is about becoming. In other words, it is based on historical experiences, but also in continuous development in response to current circumstances. This type of cultural identity is strategic and is about positioning because it is ever evolving and future-oriented. Cultural identity in this sense is not merely a unifying category of sameness; significant differences could appear internally between people of the same cultural identity. Hence, this type of cultural identity acknowledges difference/s between members of a cultural group, while excluding outsiders. From this perspective,

[10] See Brah 1996 for fuller account of this work

members of cultural groups share ancestries, memories, and historical experiences, but more importantly, they constantly try to position themselves according to the broader socio-political conditions.

Closely tied to Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity, Bhabha (1994, 1996) developed the concept of hybridity, proposing that people live and position themselves between cultures. In his essay 'Culture's In-Between', Bhabha (1996) summarises his notion of hybrid cultures as follows:

> … I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the 'authoritative', even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole. (Bhabha 1996: 58)

Therefore, cultural identity is not static because members of cultural groups are continuously negotiating their positions of cultural identity. This understanding of cultural identity provides a conceptual framework with which we can think about the internal differences of a cultural group. Both Hall (1990) and Bhabha (1994, 1996) argue that membership to a cultural group is ambivalent because the sense of commonness held by its members is strategic and usually negotiated to maintain a wider contingency of socio-political interests.

Understanding cultural identity in the way that Hall (1990) used the term, to embrace becoming as well as being, coincides with the intersectionality framework because black feminism(s) discuss the interplay of internal differences within an identity (Ahmed 2000). Hence, through this understanding of cultural identity, internal sources of differences, such as languages, religions, traditions, values, and norms, can be located under the umbrella of cultural identity.

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In sum, I reviewed all of the major sources of difference/s that could potentially shape intergroup partnering relationships. At the subjective level, I proposed that, in light of the primary result of this study, the main source of difference that the participants usually recognise in their intergroup partnering relationships is cultural difference. Furthermore, I explained that centring the argument on differences such as class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, could be problematic in the context of this study. I accept that it would be problematic to assume that there are discrete cultural identities

to which people can be assigned to the exclusion of the others. In real life, people in fact belong to many communities. Here, however, as Ahmed (2000) points out, cultural identities can consider and recognise internal differences. Cultural identities, in this sense, offer a useful analytical tool because they are dynamic and reflect everyday social positionings, rather than binding people to unchanging observations, such as places of birth or skin colour, that are associated to their nationality or racial identity.

Cultural identity is more inclusive than racial, ethnic, or national identities, and has a greater capacity to explain daily life practices. It can include aspects of an individual's past and background that need to be investigated in a study of family relationships. It encompasses the traditions, local costumes, religion, languages, and expectations of lifestyles and, even, the life course. It can be detailed to include such things as the types of food that an individual eats, which can be associated with their sense of belonging to their original background. Therefore, the concept of 'culture' is an inclusive concept comprising all things that matter to the construction of daily life partnering practices.

In this thesis when I refer to 'Persian', I indicate the research participants' cultural identity rather than their nationality (which may or may not be Iranian) or their *qoum* identity (which may or may not be Azerbaijani, Baluch, Gilani, and so on). In the next section, Persian communities in the UK are mapped out, and the importance of conducting research for this particular group of immigrants to the UK is outlined.

1.4. The significance of studying Persians in the UK

Arguably, research on immigrant families and, more specifically, on intergroup partnering relationships, has a relatively longer history and a firmer theoretical and empirical base in the USA (Basch et al. 1994; Portes et al. 1999) and the Asia-Pacific region (Constable 2005; Palriwala and Uberoi 2008; Lee and Bean 2004) than in Europe (Kofman 2004; Bailey and Boyle 2004). This may be because of the diverse demographic composition and relatively longer history of immigration in the North American and Asia-Pacific regions. In Britain, the focus has been on the intergroup partnering relationships of immigrants who arrived in the UK *en masse* since the 1950s, following the colonial era and world wars (Benson 1981; Young 1995). Previous studies in the UK have focused on South Asians (see a volume of Global Network edited by Shaw and Charsley 2006a; Shaw and Charsley 2006b; Becher 2008; and Charsley 2013) and black immigrants of African or American descent (see Pasura 2008; Phoenix and Owen 2000), most likely because they constitute much higher numbers of immigrants and are more visible.

The Persian diaspora in the UK is relatively small and, therefore, it has been under-represented in the literature. We know very little about the conditions of their family lives, in general; or about their intergroup partnering relationships, in particular. The unique history of immigration and cultural characteristics of these people make research on their family practices valuable. In this section, I first explore the patterns and waves of Iranian immigration that created many unrelated communities, a situation that potentially could encourage immigrant Iranians to seek out-group partnering relationships. Then, I explain the characteristics of members of the Persian

communities in the UK who have a unique cultural identity steeped in a strong sense of belonging to their traditional past. In these communities, Persian gender norms can shape partnering practices in numerous ways. For instance, gender norms created a shortage of Persian women immigrating to the UK, which, in turn, encouraged Persian men to seek spouses from other social groups. Their religious background also uniquely influences their partnering relationships because it differs from what majority of Muslim communities in the UK adhere to. Before entering the main discussion, I first present the most recent statistics on the Iranian population in the UK.

The number of Iranians in the UK

It is almost impossible to establish the current Persian population in the UK, as arguably there are migrants who have not been recorded by both the British and Iranian authorities. According to the most recent official estimated figures for the overseas-born population in the United Kingdom during the period January 2012– December 2012, published by the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS 2013), 74,000 Iranian-born people resided in the UK, 39,000 of them were nationals of Iran. These figures are believed to be the best possible estimate of non-UK born residents in the country; however, they are based on the UK's Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS does not include certain groups of people, such as students in university halls who do not live with a parent, and people who live in other types of shared accommodation, which is common to migrants. The figures also do not include certain groups of people who have a migration heritage but have also obtained UK citizenship, such as second-generation migrants, who constitute a large proportion of the Persian diaspora. Certain

groups of migrants, especially illegal migrants, are not always eager to be recorded by officials, as they fear legal prosecution. These groups of refugees—often known as 'hidden groups' (Bloch 2004)—are likely not included in the official figures, although these estimated figures are based on the most reliable methodology available to the ONS.

The Iranian government's figures vary from showing between 300,000 to 1 million Iranians living in the UK. In his interview with the Iranian paper *Ettela'at International* (2011), Hassan Faqih, the then-Iranian Consul in the UK, stated that the embassy has records of approximately 400,000 Iranians in the UK, but claimed that the embassy estimated the number to be around 1 million . However, in late 2011, Hassan Ghashghavi, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran, said that there were 300,000 Iranians in the UK (BBC 2011). In September 2012, Mohsen Karami, the Deputy Head of the National Organization for Civil Registration in Iran, claimed that they have around 410,000 records of Iranians living in the UK (Mehr News Agency 2012). Further, reports by the Iranian authorities regarding the range of 300,000–400,000 Iranians living in the UK are not accompanied by any criteria or methodology describing how the data were collected. It can be assumed that their figures include second-generation Iranians, who demand Iranian passports and documentation for greater ease traveling to and from Iran. Given the above, it could be argued that to discover the true size of this population, we need to add the numbers of second-generation Persians, students, and hidden group immigrants to the figure provided by the British ONS, resulting in a figure that should be well above 100,000.

Patterns of Iranian immigration to the UK

Iranians have a unique pattern of migration that differs from other migrant groups in the UK. Although Iran has been invaded several times—including the Anglo-Soviet invasion during World War II—it has never been colonized. As such, there is no colonial relationship between Iran and other Western countries, including Britain. It is not possible to determine the specific reasons for which Iranian migrants chose the UK as a migration destination. However, possible reasons for many Iranian migrants viewing Britain as a desirable destination are links to other relatives and the fact that the UK is an English-speaking country (so they are more familiar with the language and it is easier for them to communicate with local people and settle in a new society).

Over the past few decades, various groups of Iranians have left Iran and spread out into Western countries for complex and interwoven political and socioeconomic reasons. Most research agrees that there have been two specific waves of Iranian migration since the 1950s: one before and one after the 1979 revolution (for detailed historical information see Spellman (2002), (Jalali, 2005), and Nassehi-Behnam (2012)). In the first wave, Persians arrived in the UK from the 1950s to the 1970s, when the then-government of the Shah had a good relationship with its British counterpart. These migrants primarily sought education or business opportunities. The second wave of Persian migrants arrived in the UK from around the time of the revolution through the end of the Iran-Iraq war in the late 1980s. Most people in this latter group were seeking political asylum and were sympathizers of the Shah monarchy, left-wing communists, members of religious minorities, Muslim but in opposition to the newly established

Islamic Republic, escapees from the war and military draft, or people who simply found it difficult and inconvenient to stay in Iran under new Islamist rulers.

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Persian migration has not followed a simple pattern, but it can be argued that there were three additional mini-waves of politically motivated migration. First, in 1990s, those who had lost hope of any major political moderation left the country. The second mini-wave happened after the reformists' movement failed and the country was taken over by hardliners under Ahmadinejad's presidency. Finally, the most recent wave happened in the aftermath of the disputed presidential election in 2009 and subsequent crackdown of the opposition. In both 2010 and 2011, Iranians finished first out of all nationalities seeking asylum in the UK, accounting for 1,866 applications (10%) of the 17,916 applications in 2010 (Refugee Council 2012), and 2,477 applications (12%) of the 19,865 applications in 2011 (Government of the United Kingdom 2012). In 2012 and 2013, Iranians were second among those who submitted asylum applications in the UK, accounting for 2,667 applications (12%) of the 21,785 applications in 2012 (Government of the United Kingdom 2013), and 2,417 applications (10%) of the 23,507 applications in 2013 (Government of the United Kingdom 2014).

To fully understand the patterns of Iranian migration into Britain, it is important to highlight that while political events undoubtedly forced some political opposition groups to leave Iran, many people left Iran or chose to remain in the receiving countries due to a variety of socioeconomic reasons, such as having more social freedom or economic stability. It should also be mentioned that some of the Iranian

migrants granted political asylum are not in any way political and have never been activists. According to my observations and conversations with some people who fall into this group of Iranians in the UK, they are migrants who simply wanted a better life, and the only way or the easiest way for them to settle in the UK was to seek asylum through false cases in order to obtain British citizenship. Perhaps because the Iranian authorities have a certain knowledge that this group of migrants is not comprised of political activists, they allow this group of Iranians to travel frequently to and from Iran without being questioned, prosecuted, or arrested. In addition, it is difficult for the UK border agency to detect that these migrants had travelled to Iran (although they were granted asylum on the basis that they would face political prosecution if they returned to Iran), because they use their Iranian passports to enter Iran and their British passports to enter the UK. Ironically, some of these asylum seekers (who were assumed to be escaping from the Islamic rulers) are very religious and even active members of the Islamic centres across the UK that are funded and controlled by the Iranian government.

Moreover, it is important to indicate that not all Iranians in the UK are in political opposition to the Islamic rulers of Iran, as a meaningful number of Iranians in the UK are in favour of the Islamic government. Most of these Iranians, along with their children or dependents, were sent to the UK by the Iranian government. They have been PhD students sponsored by the Iranian government, diplomats, or those who work at branches of Iran-based companies in the UK, owned by the Iranian government.

It is worth noting that in all waves of Persian migration, and in all these communities, there is a diverse range of socioeconomic positions. Although there is no reliable data to formulate the exact socioeconomic characteristics of Persians in the UK, recent studies by Kyambi (2005) and National Archives (2009) suggest that the socioeconomic status of Persians in the UK is very diverse. My own exploratory observations and familiarity with Persian communities support the assertion that a wide range of people with different socioeconomic positions, such as varying levels of education and incomes, can be found among the different migratory waves and communities of Persians in the UK.

The diverse range of Iranians who arrived in the UK has resulted in the creation of several Persian communities that are not necessarily linked to each other. The members of each community may feel a sense of togetherness, but ultimately avoid any fellow countrypersons who are outside their own community for political and security reasons. There is a perception amongst the Persian diaspora, expressed to me during interviews of this research, that Iranians 'make trouble'. This leads to a fear that is especially significant for those who travel to Iran and want to avoid any (false) reports to Iranian authorities about their activities in the UK that could result in prosecution inside Iran.

Cultural Characteristics of Persians in the UK

It could be argued that most Iranians feel a strong sense of attachment to their cultural heritage. They believe that the so-called 'greater Iran' or Persia has had a thousand

years of civilization upon which to develop this sense of pride and belonging. This strong sense leads them to adhere to cultural traditions that shape their everyday practices and, consequently, their family life in a variety of ways; for example, the types of foods they eat, the dress code to which they adhere, their ritual purification, the way they organize family ceremonies or parties, and celebrate certain occasions. For these people, what is significant is their affiliation to the Persian culture, not being a citizen of the nation-state of Iran. In this light, many Iranians in the UK or other Western countries claim that they are Persian rather than Iranian, to more closely link themselves to the Persian history of civilization and make a distinction between themselves and the current situation in Iran under the Islamic Republic. This cultural attachment is what defines their selfhood and distinguishes them from other social groups in the West. Given the diverse range of Persians in the UK, and in light of available data and my own observations and familiarity with their communities, the following discussion explores two of the cultural characteristics that potentially shape Persians' family lives and which are unique to Persians in the UK. These characteristics are their gender and religious identities.

Initially, there has been an unequal gender ratio within these communities, which could be regarded a result of Persians' gender construct. Many of those who sought asylum in the UK for political reasons or arrived in the country for economic aims were single men. The large number of Iranian single men migrating to the UK is mainly based on a cultural construct that expects men to be politically involved, make money, and become educated. On the other hand, Persian gender norms advocate that women's gender responsibilities are to be a 'good housewife' and 'good mother', not a good

businesswoman, scholar, or political activist, so it is not typically expected that Iranian women go abroad to study, work, or seek asylum. In addition, Persian cultural stigmas prevent families from letting their daughters travel alone, not to mention migrating to a foreign country. This is due to a traditional perception that a single girl could potentially become an object of 'immoral behaviour'. In this respect, travelling alone could even 'discredit' the girl. A shortage of women does not entirely depend on cultural norms, but is also due to other structural boundaries imposed on women and enforced by the law with regard to travelling outside of Iran. In order to cross Iranian borders, a woman needs her vali's consent (who, by law based on Islamic teachings, is either the woman's husband or, if she is single, her father or guardian). All of these factors have resulted in relatively fewer single female Persian migrants, which is especially important in terms of partner selection, as it has forced many Persian men to choose a partner from within other social groups. It also bears mentioning here that gender norms affect other aspects of partnering relationships which range from selecting a partner and forming and sustaining a relationship, to daily aspects of partnering, such as cleaning and other household chores. I will explore these aspects in subsequent chapters.

There are very limited data available describing the gender ratio of Persians in the UK. Very little empirical evidence could be found to support the idea that women constitute a smaller proportion of Persians in the UK. For instance, Spellman (2004) stated that the 1981 census indicated that, at that time, there were 18,132 male and 10,485 female Iranian-born individuals residing in the UK. Kyambi (2005) reported that only 38% of Persians who arrived in the UK before 1990 were women. More recent UK censuses

do not indicate gender ratios, but the latest refugee figures show that in 2011, when Iranians submitted more asylum applications than any other nationality, only 21% (512 out of the total 2,477 Iranian asylum applicants) were women (Refugee Council 2012).

The second characteristic to which I want to draw attention is the Persian religious identity. The predominant religion in Iran is Shia Islam; accordingly, most Persians in the UK have Shia background. It should be mentioned, however, that a considerable proportion of Persians in the UK are people of the Bahá'í faith who fled Iran because the Islamic republic does not recognize their faith, and who could potentially face difficulties in practicing their religion. There are also reports of Iranian Christian migrants in the UK. They are mainly the Iranian Armenians and Assyrians and those Iranians who were born Muslim but later converted to Christianity. There is also a sizable number of Persian Jews and Zoroastrians in the UK.[11]

It is widely believed and often presented in the media that Persian Shias in the UK, or in the West in general, are not practicing Muslims because it is assumed that they fled from Islamic hardliners or did not want to stay in Iran and adhere to an Islamic lifestyle. In reality, however, evidence suggests that religious people constitute a considerable proportion of Persians in the UK. For example, there are religious people among those who arrived in the first wave of migration before the revolution. Some of them are now even supporters of the current Islamic establishment. Even amongst the second wave, there are those who left due to opposition of the version of Shia Islam advocated by the government, but they still to some extent practice their own

[11] For more information, see Spellman (2004).

interpretation of Shia Islam. Among those who arrived later in the 1990s for economic reasons, and sought asylum, many are religious people and active in the Iranian-run Islamic centres. Further, after the collapse of the reformist movement, the emergence of Ahmadinejad's government, and later, the disputed presidential election of 2009, the number of religious people who left Iran or decided to remain in Britain has increased. Among the groups of Persians (and their dependents) who were sent to the UK by the Iranian government for education or business purposes, some are very religious or pretend to be religious, but they remain in the UK. To provide religious services for Persians, there are Islamic centres in almost all large British cities that are controlled and funded primarily by the Iranian authority –these centres also attract Arab, Afghan and Pakistani Shias as well. The Islamic Centre of England in London, the Manchester Islamic Institute in Manchester, and the Imam Reza Cultural Centre in Birmingham are among the largest Iranian religious centres across the UK.

Degrees of commitment to religion always vary among people, but what is sociologically interesting is that there are migrants who became religious or more religious while living in a 'late modern' receiving society. While reflecting on the theory of 'reflexive modernization', I will explain in the next chapter that there is a growing body of work that argues that one consequence of modernity is the resurgence of religion. In line with this argument, as my research data and observations suggest, there are individuals within Persian communities who become practicing religious Shias or practice more actively while living in Britain. It can be argued that for this group of newly religious individuals, religion is something that gives them a sense of protection in a risky late modern society. Moreover, becoming more religious can help

them restore their original identities, and so differentiate themselves from other people in the host society and confidently define (or redefine) their selfhood in relation to other individuals in their new surroundings.

Given that a sizable proportion of Persians in the UK follow Shia Islam, this religion may drive certain types of family practices that have not been explored by previous studies. Thus, the study of Persian family life is necessarily exploratory in nature, particularly because the previous studies focused only on Sunni Muslims.

In conclusion, I would like to point out how the waves of Persian immigration, their cultural identity, and the related gender and religious characteristics could potentially shape the partnering practices of the population. The diversity of the Persians who immigrated to the UK resulted in the creation of several distinct Persian communities in the country. Political tensions among these communities have often forced them to avoid each other, resulting in personal relationships with non-Persians, including partnering relationships and friendships. Because there are fewer Persian women than men in the UK, Persian men are encouraged to seek partners from non-Persian communities. The fact that most Persians have a Shia heritage is also significant because this branch of Islam advocates certain types of partnering practices that are distinct from those of Sunni Islam (which have been more frequently explored in previous studies).

These factors make the study of Persian family life in the UK and, particularly, their exclusive partnering practices, sociologically important and exploratory in nature. I

initially had proposed to study family life among members of Persian communities. However, in the early stages of research design, I decided to narrow the focus to the study of Persian intercultural relationships. I made this decision not only because they could provide a better picture of immigrants' family life in a late modern context, but also because this specific type of relationship better reveals the complexity of partnering relationships in contemporary societies, offers a clear picture of the interplay of differences in the construction of such relationships, and provides a stronger understanding of the ways in which people practice, negotiate, and sustain such relationships across their differences.

1.5. Conclusion

I tried to clarify my approach to an investigation of the ways that intercultural partnering relationships may be operating in contemporary British society by contextualising them. First, I explained the theories that have contributed to the current sociological understanding of diversity and intergroup partnering relationships. One early attempt to conceptualise these relationships was social exchange theory. However, this theory has some limitations in its approach to the actual exchange of tangible and intangible things. The other theories that I discussed were assimilationism, followed by and in dialogue with multiculturalism. The core of multiculturalism is to find ways in which numerous social groups can coexist without losing their cultures of origin. Thus, multiculturalism can be a social process of negotiation among social groups at the macro level. At the micro level, people in intergroup partnering relationships must negotiate their difference/s and find ways to

sustain their relationships. However, I argue that the idea of multiculturalism could be useful for thinking about intergroup partnering relationships. A response to assimilationism and multiculturalism is the notion of transnationalism. I proposed that this theory also has some limitations, particularly regarding its assumptions concerning nation-states. This way of thinking raised questions about the nature of the significant difference/s that people must negotiate to maintain their relationships.

In the second section, I address these questions. I argued on behalf of feminists' understanding of subjectivity and, more importantly, their position on intersectionality as the most useful conceptual tool for understanding difference/s in intergroup partnering relationships. This approach suggests that we first must acknowledge the difference/s that subjectively matter to people, then determine which of those difference/s are significant to the subjects, and, finally, investigate the ways that those difference/s could interplay and intersect to shape the subjects' partnering practices.

Having explained the importance of identifying and understanding difference/s for this particular research, I analyse the reasons that all difference/s between partners are not equally important. Then, I focus on an analysis of the particular difference that is the most significant. The third section explains why the words and terms that are commonly used to study intergroup partnering relationships are inadequate in the context of this study. Following this, I discuss concepts that are based on numerous sources of difference (such as class, race, nationality, ethnicity, and religion) that are commonly used in intergroup research and explain how these approaches have fallen short.

This chapter discussed the reasons that cultural differences are the main sources of difference and pointed out that, according to the primary result of this research, the participants recognised cultural difference as the main source of difference they had with their non-Persian partners. To support this, Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity was discussed. Hall's (1990) ideas help us to think about the ways that people position themselves relative to broader social conditions. From this perspective, each partner brings to the relationship a unique set of cultural values, norms, and expectations, which potentially influence the relationship in contradictory ways. This means that, on the one hand, a partner's difference/s could become a source of conflict with regard to everyday rituals. On the other hand, these difference/s could enrich the relationship by bringing a diversity of socio-cultural practices into the relationship, which could prevent the partners from falling into a routine and boring everyday life. Therefore, these differences must be negotiated on a daily basis. These negotiations can occur within the couple or they can extend outward to include the extended family or social networks. These negotiations are crucial to accommodating difference/s between partners and sustaining their partnering relationship. These ideas will be further developed in subsequent chapters in light of the research results.

In the final section of this chapter, I posited that the study of the family practices of Persian immigrants is underdeveloped, despite their unique immigration history and cultural characteristics. I mapped out the Persian immigrant population in the UK and discussed the nature of the waves of Iranian immigration, which created many Persian communities and Persian cultural identities. Persian cultural factors resulted in a

shortage of women immigrants that has encouraged Persian men to seek non-Persian partners. I explained that gender norms and religious affiliations are significant cultural elements than can shape everyday life in the Persian population in the UK. The major religion among UK Persians is Shia Islam, which differs from the Sunni Islam that has been the focus of previous studies. The distinctive cultural characteristics of Persians in the UK means that this is a uniquely interesting target population for the study of intercultural partnering relationships in late modern British society. In the next chapter, I situate the intercultural partnering relationships of the UK Persian diaspora in the broader debates of British sociology of family life and relationships.

2. Locating intercultural partnering relationships in British sociological conceptualization of families, relationships, and personal life

To establish a theoretical framework for this research, I considered expansive debates in Western sociologies on the family life of migrants. There are apparently two major streams on this topic in the literature. The first stream is found in the field of migration studies, in which the primary interest is migration, and the family life of migrants are a necessary topic for a full understanding of migration (see for example discussions on marriage migration by Watts 1983, Fan and Huang 1998, Timmerman 2006, Davin 2007, and Williams 2010). The second approach is found in the sociology of family life and relationships, where the focus is on familial relations and practices. Here, the family lives of migrants are treated as an emerging type of family relationship in contemporary societies (see for example Smart and Shipman 2004). There have been calls to merge these two fields and interweave the arguments about sexualities, emotions, relationships, and migration to arrive at a better understanding of family lives of migrants (Smart and Shipman 2004; Smart 2007; Mai and King 2009; Heath et al. 2011).

Because the focus of this research is the study of couple relationships and partnering practices, I have based my argument on recent developments in the field of family life and relationships while bringing the migration dimension of family life into the discussion. In the following, I present my critical reading of the latest sociological developments and discussions in this field in the UK. First, I present my interpretation of reflexive modernization theory, which is the most recent theoretical framework of

the British sociology of family life and relationships, as proposed mainly by Giddens (1991, 1992, 1994), Beck (1992, 1994), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002), and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). This theory is widely regarded by sociologists in the field as 'individualization' and/or 'detraditionalization' theses, which are the two chief propositions of reflexive modernization that are the most debated in recent theoretical development in the field. Then, I explain the criticisms of reflexive modernization, including the limitations of the concepts of individualization and detraditionalization, mostly through the work of Jamieson (1998, 1999), Smart and Shipman (2004), and Gross (2005).

Following that, I explain the theoretical strategy of this study. Classically, there are two ways of linking theory and empirical research: through grand and grounded theorizing. Explaining the ways that these two differ permit me to justify my theoretical strategy for this research, which is a middle way between the two approaches. This argument also includes an explanation of the primary problem in reflexive modernization, which is the lack of empirical evidence supporting it. In the next section, I evaluate the recent conceptual developments in the field, mostly by exploring Morgan's concept of 'family practices' (1996, 2011a, and 2011b) and Smart's (2007) notions of 'relationality' and 'personal life'. I discuss the usefulness and relevance of these concepts to this research. I conclude this chapter by justifying my conceptual approach and defining the research objectives and questions that this study attempts to address. The arguments presented in this chapter outline the relevant debates in the field and they are revisited in the latter chapters in the light of my results.

2.1. Reflexive Modernization

Arguably, the theory of reflexive modernization is the most discussed theory in the recent scholarship of family life and relationships in the UK. This sociological perspective has been developed primarily to explain social change and offer a sociological explanation of the socio-political horizon rather than an examination of contemporary family life and relationships. However, scholars who advocate the theory suggest that because a late modern society has changed through the process of reflexive modernization, family life has also undergone several changes in response. Since the early 1990s, ideas embodied in the reflexive modernization theory put forward by theorists including Giddens (1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1999), Beck (1992, 1994), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 1996, 2002), Beck et al. (2003), Beck-Gernsheim (1998, 2002), and, to some extent, Bauman (2000, 2001, 2003, 2005). In the following sections, I offer my interpretation this theory and unpack the propositions of it that are of the most relevance to my study of Persian heterosexual intercultural partnering practices in the UK.

Reflexive modernization is based on broad social changes regarding the emergence of the welfare state, capitalism and its association to nation-states, universal suffrage, political and civil rights, labour markets, educational advancements, and, most importantly, the process of globalization in all of its aspects, from the economic to the political and cultural. Its argument concerns the second phase of modernity, often referred to as ‘reflexive’ or ‘late’ modernity, meaning ‘the modernization of modern

society' (Beck et al. 2003: 1). In this phase, modernization begins to radicalise itself and transform the key social elements of modernity. This distinction between the first and second modernity is important to the theorising of the above-mentioned scholars. Beck (1992: 11) explores this idea and argues that, '[j]ust as modernization dissolved the structure of feudal society in the nineteenth century and produced the industrial society, modernization today is dissolving industrial society and another modernity is coming into being'. This new modernity, in their arguments, is detraditionalized modern society.

Detraditionalization refers to the social processes through which traditions lose their authority and, thus, shape people's lives less and less over time. In other words, in a late modern society many people are choosing to conform to traditional ways of living less and less. This is the process of 'disembedding', which dissolves the bonds and boundaries of the traditional. Furthermore, detraditionalization is an on-going reflexive process, which means that detraditionalization in classical or first stage of modernity is about the detraditionalization of the social institutions and networks of traditional societies and the emancipation of individuals from traditional norms and customs. However, the process of detraditionalization in the second stage or late modernity has, in turn, detraditionalized the social parameters of industrial societies. Through this process, family practices and relationships may no longer abide by the traditional rules that formerly regulated individual lives in their smallest details.

Although Giddens (1994: 100) accepts that in the post-traditional order, 'traditions do not wholly disappear' and, to some extent, 'they flourish', he argues that, in late

modern society, traditions can exist only on one of two possible bases. They may continue their existence by defending themselves by means of a 'discursive justification' or they can transform into fundamentalism, which he contends is 'tradition in its traditional sense', manifested as assertions of prescribed values and truth in the modern world of radical uncertainty and, thus, of no surprise in late modernity (Giddens 1994: 100). The nature of this level of doubt will be discussed below, but for now, I explore his notion of 'discursive justification'. Giddens argues that in the new modern society, cultural pluralism can no longer settle clashes between the various values of individuals or communities; thus, by the intensifying process of globalization,

> Traditions are called upon to 'explain' and justify themselves in a manner already alluded to. In general, traditions only persist in so far as they are made available to discursive justification and are prepared to enter into open dialogue not only with other traditions but with alternative modes of doing things. (1994: 105)

To explain this concept, Giddens represents traditional cases of gender and personal relationships. He mentions that until modernity, gender differences were rooted in traditional values because women were absent from public life and because the traditional notions of femininity and masculinity were not engaged in public dialogue. However, in the era of modernity, gender relations, sexuality, and intimate life have been publicly called into question, which for Giddens means those notions were asked for their 'discursive justifications'. In his view, because of the significant structural

changes in modern society, together with the achievements of the feminist movement, traditional gender relations and personal intimate relationships cannot be justified by individuals throughout a discourse space. He mentions the increase in the divorce rate, saying that now one can move out of a relationship and start looking for another, partially because the traditional bonds of the relationship may no longer be justified by individuals. Thus, in Giddens' theory, every behaviour and attitude has to be justified by individuals, which means that people have to provide reasons for their undertakings. The authority of traditions thereby starts to dissolve, and the process of detraditionalization begins and continues.

However, Giddens states, 'Modernity destroys tradition' (1994: 91). Distinguishing between simple and late modernity, he emphases that 'a *collaboration between modernity and tradition* was crucial to the earlier phases of modern social development – the period during which risk was calculable in relation to external influences' (Ibid.). Since in his view, risk is no longer predictable, he argues that the earlier phase of modernity has now ended with the birth of high or reflexive modernity. The concrete form of this new reflexive modernity is the 'risk society'.

According to the theory of reflexive modernization, 'risk' has becomes one of the main components of late modernity. In his book *The Risk Society* (1992), Beck argues that modern societies generate a diversity of possible dangers, hazards, and insecurities. This is partially because in modern societies, the traditional has been losing its significance as a guide for people's actions; thus, the future is seen as uncertain or 'risky'. Since the members of traditional societies usually viewed their traditional

norms and customs as guides for actions, the future was not considered as risky because what we understand as ‘risk’ in late modernity was traditionally perceived as acts of God, fortune, luck, or fate. Thus, in Beck’s account, the breakdown of tradition itself has led to a decrease in certainty and security and has resulted in a risk society.

More importantly, both Beck and Giddens recognize the growth in manufactured risk in reflexive modernity, mainly as a result of the scientific advances and technological development that dominate the social world. In this respect, there are few things in the external world that are not influenced by human beings or by their advanced technology in some way or another, so that the risk society is ‘the end of nature’. Here, Giddens proposes the notion of ‘manufactured risk’. He points out that a few decades ago, people were fearful about the risks coming from nature, such as earthquakes and floods, which were perceived as external to human society, but they are now much more worried about manufactured risks that can change their biographies at any moment, such as the Chernobyl disaster.

For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), the result of living in such a detraditionalized and risk society is biographical uncertainty. They emphasize that members of modern societies are both expected and forced to lead their own lives because they are not led by their pasts and traditions; rather, they have to make their own individual choices. Thus, individual normal or standard biography, which was defined by tradition in a traditional society, has now become a chosen, elective, or do-it-yourself biography (Beck 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This new biography ‘is always a ‘risk

biography' indeed a 'tightrope biography', a state of permanent (partly overt, partly concealed) endangerment (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 3).

For Giddens, this new modern biography is a 'reflexive biography' and can be understood through the reflexive project of the self, which to him is one of the most marked components of late modern societies. In his *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), he maintains that the consequences of modernity demand that individuals work on and construct their identities through reflexive projects; this means that they act, while simultaneously interpreting and reinterpreting social environments in order to construct their biographies and invent their life projects. Thus, '[s]elf-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*' (Giddens 1991: 53). Giddens consequently affirms that self-identity is not inherited or static, nor is it a set of visible characteristics in a moment; it is something on which a person continuously works and reflects. Thus, self-identity becomes unavoidable, in the sense that every person thinks about and questions it. He argues:

> What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour (1991: 70).

Therefore, according to Giddens, while one was provided with more or less clearly defined social roles in traditional societies, one would rather have to work out one's

social roles in modern society. Thus, one has to make choices throughout her or his life, from the details of everyday lifestyles, such as clothing and appearance, to more important decisions related to social roles and beliefs.

In circumstances in which the traditional has been weakening, uncertainty has intensified, individuals have been constantly required to make choices and elect their identities or construct their biographies reflexively; life has become a 'planning project' (Beck-Gernsheim 2002) and society has undergone the 'individualization of lifestyles' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). To explain this process in the reflexive sense, the ways of life of industrial society were first disembedded and then re-embedded in new ways of life in late modernity, in that individuals are required to produce and stage their biographies themselves (Beck 1994). Consequently, individual agency has risen, which means that individuals now have greater autonomy to lead their lives without strong ties to other social groups and, more importantly, to their families. In this sense, one direct result of the individualization process is the change in familial relationships. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that in the contemporary world 'in every marriage, different lifestyles, values, ways of thinking and communicating, rituals and everyday routines have to be fitted together in one family world' (2002: 93). In their view, this unique family world especially applies to bi-national or bicultural marriages because individuals involved in such unions 'act within a space that has been little structured beforehand, as two different worlds meet' (Ibid.). Thus, each couple is free to choose its lifestyle and way of living, which may be in accordance with the culture of either of partners, or be culturally divergent from that of her or his respective cultural backgrounds. Partners in such intergroup relationships

may also combine, pick, and choose elements of their respective cultural origins, experiment both cultures, and switch back and forth between them (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In this sense, 'each bi-national couple lives out its own story, its own distinctive version of bi-national family culture' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 93). The couple relationship, therefore, becomes fragmented under the circumstances of individualization and faces the risk of collapse, if couples fail to maintain the synthesis of their biographies.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that in an individualized society, the family becomes an affiliation of individuals who have their own biographies; thus, much more determination is needed to keep these different biographies together. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, this new form of family connection is one of elective affinities or relationship, while in pre-industrial society, the family was principally a union of need that was kept together because of the social obligation for solidarity. This traditional institution has now become a 'zombie category' for Beck, which is 'dead and still alive' (2002: 203), although Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) deny claiming that the traditional form of family is vanishing; rather, they see it as losing momentum as new forms of familial ties have been emerging, including cohabitation, single parents, same-sex relationships, part-time unions, and living apart in more than one household or in different cities. These new emerging relationship forms are, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, the future of family life or what they describe as 'the post-familial family' (Beck-Gernsheim 1998; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

In their view, one other reason for these changes in family relationships and the decline in the traditional form is the change in gender relations, which itself is another consequence of individualization. With their socioeconomic advancement spurred by educational and occupation opportunities and the legal systems of welfare states, women are now less dependent on men as financial providers. Marriage is no longer the only source of financial security for women, enabling them to more freely make choices about whether they want to stay single, marry, divorce, or adapt to other forms of the post-familial family. More recently, Beck et al. (2003) borrow Judith Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity and argue that one consequence of individualization has been the transformation of gender roles, in the sense that categories like 'men' and 'women' within a heteronormative framework are now performatively founded. This change in gender roles has led to changes in heterosexual relationships, which were explored earlier in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's *The Normal Chaos of Love* (1995). In that book, they claim that because of living in a detraditionalized and individualized society, love has become 'our secular religion' because it is an alternative to doubt and a place to find security in the risk society. This modern need for love is generated by the insecurities that have emerged in late modernity. This uncertainty, however, has another significant result in terms of who loves whom. They believe that, due to the consequences of living in an individualizing world, love for a partner has become temporary as such romantic bonds have become fragmented; this has resulted in shifting individual attention to children as a secure and permanent form of love (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Thus, this form of love is increasing.

Although ‘love’ is central for all theorists of reflexive modernization, they represent diverse interpretation of the emergence of late modern notion of love. Giddens believes that love in modernity is closely associated with identity and the search for one’s authentic self. In *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), Giddens’ argument is founded on the assumption that marriage as an economic alliance between families is declining. He also points to the rise of the idea that love should predate marriage rather than arise afterwards. Moreover, according to Giddens, the belief that there is one particular person in the world who will meet all one’s needs and with whom one may live happily ever after is in decline because the quality of sexually intimate relationships has become more important than finding the right person. Thus, an intimate relationship only endures as long as both partners are satisfied with it and what they expect from of it. Giddens terms this stage in the transformation of intimacy ‘pure relationship’, which refers to:

> a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it. (Giddens, 1992: 58)

Therefore, the ‘pure relationship’ is not regulated by law and is not tied to social institutions, such as the traditional form of marriage, or other forms of kinship, such as the desire to raise children. Rather, Giddens argues that it is ‘free-floating’ and independent of economic alliances between individuals. Furthermore, Giddens speaks about ‘confluent love’, which as he argues ‘is active, contingent love, and therefore

jars with the 'forever', 'one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love complex' (Giddens 1992: 61). For Giddens, the nature of sexuality has also changed; late modern sexuality exhibits 'plastic sexuality', which is fluid and no longer only meant for reproduction. In this sense, Giddens argues that because of the emergence of the pure relationship and plastic sexuality and because of the reflexive project of the self on which people are required to work, individuals are in search of more egalitarian relationships –a process that he calls 'the democratising of personal life'(1992: 188).

2.2. Conceptual Limitations of Reflexive Modernization

The theory of reflexive modernization has some conceptual limitations. Most critiques do not entirely reject all of its claims; however, they argue that it exaggerates the extent of social change in late modernity. Moreover, as Duncan and Smith point out, the components of the theory 'pay inadequate attention to stabilities and continuities as well as change' (2006: 168-169). It could be argued that the critiques mainly revolve around the two notions of individualization and detraditionalization, which I will, in turn, explain.

It has been extensively argued that the theory of reflexive modernization exaggerates the extent of an individual's active agency because it assumes that an individual's actions are mostly a consequence of her or his choices. Many scholars contend that this claim of the theory does not match with the reality of the social world (Lewis 2001; Crow 2002a, Budgeon and Roseneil 2004; Williams 2008). The most challenging opposition is by Jamieson (1998, 1999), who engages in a critical dialogue with

Giddens' (1992) account of the transformation of intimacy. Referring to empirical data, she claims that most individuals' everyday lives are structured by diverse inequalities and that intimacy continues to be multi-dimensional and to coexist with structural inequalities. Jamieson argues that Giddens' view of modern intimate relationships is that they are platforms open to negotiation by the partners free of structural inequalities (such as class or racial differences) and social power relations (such as those embedded in gender and generational relations). She points to the results of empirical data analyses that reveal the extent of social inequalities of everyday life, particularly gender inequality, which cannot be divorced from discussions about intimacy in heterosexual partnering. Jamieson (1998, 1999) contends that these problems exist in Giddens' (1992) work because of an inadequate consideration of the feminist perspective, which results in a misinterpretation of gendered power relations in modern intimacy. She rightly criticises Giddens for not sufficiently considering the gender dimensions of modern intimate relationships, initially because the essential element for any egalitarian heterosexual relationship — what Giddens (1992) terms 'democratic relationships' — is balanced gender relations. Jamieson critically engages with Giddens' notions of 'the pure relationship', 'confluent love', and 'plastic sexuality' to argue that there is little evidence that these practices have, in fact, developed. She goes on to claim that '[t]heoretically, the pure relationship seems to be a near impossibility for domestic partnerships … that are necessarily embroiled in financial and material matters over and above the relationship' (1999: 490).

The other aspect of the critique of reflexive modernization theory focuses on the notion of detraditionalization. Notably, Heelas et al. (1996) evaluate the concept in a

collection of articles titled *Detraditionalization*. In his introduction, Heelas points to the comprehensive evidence that disproves a clear break with 'the traditional' in Western social history. Most of the volume's contributors similarly argue, although with different approaches, that tradition remains a significant feature of modern societies. Some contend that the process has occurred, but that it is not as radical as reflexive modernization suggests. Hence, they claim that numerous traditions have remained operational and they reject the distinction between tradition and modernity (see the contributions of Thompson, Luke, Adam, and Campbell in the volume). Along those lines, Thompson (1996) concedes a refashioning of the traditional in modernity because its nature and role are shifting or de-localising, but individuals still rely on their traditions to make sense of their social worlds. Adam (1996) goes on to argue that traditions are being remade or altered, and thus she suggests that the notion of re-traditionalization can equally be applied to explain social changes in modernity. Using a relatively stronger approach than other contributors, Poster (1996) and Rose (1996) argue from Foucault's discursive understanding of power relations to dismiss detraditionalization, maintaining that traditional discourse still has power, meaning that it informs individuals' habits and behaviours, even under liberalism.

Regarding family life and relationships, the critics reject the theory's simplistic overall assessment of the role of the traditional in the construction of family practices. They argue that there were considerably more variety and diversity of traditional rituals in the past and that structural inequalities have a more powerful role in contemporary everyday life than what is suggested by reflexive modernization theory (Crow 2002b). In particular, Smart and Shipman (2004), who investigated the family obligations,

particularly marital obligations, of minority Irish, Indian, and Pakistani communities in the UK, argue that original traditions are maintained within such families and their communities. They suggest that the traditional values of immigrant families in the UK operate through constant negotiation and adjustment. Furthermore, they point out that, because of the immigration experience and geographical boundaries, the traditions of immigrant families may have different extents of significance. Hence, they argue that the members of immigrant families may embrace some traditions while breaking others. Nevertheless, Smart and Shipman (2004) conclude that immigrants are committed to both holding onto their traditions and alert them. They argue that this manner must be perceived regarding generational relationships, and as a process of negotiation and change across immigrant cohorts. Thus, they suggest that the culture, context, and complexity of the social group under observation must be considered.

More recently, Gross (2005) advances arguments about detraditionalization conceptually and distinguishes between 'regulative' and 'meaning-constitutive' traditions. He proposes that '[t]he former involve threats of exclusion from various moral communities; the latter involve linguistic and cultural frameworks within which sense is made of the world' (2005: 286). He bases his argument on numerous empirical studies of American intimate relationships and claims that their regulative traditions, such as 'lifelong, internally stratified marriage', have declined in recent years. However, meaning-constitutive traditions, such as the idea of the monogamous romantic sexual couple, continue to operate as powerful sense-making tools for individuals. Thus, he tries to locate individuals in their historical and cultural backgrounds, and he does not regard them as free agents who can make choices

without any involvement with the traditional. For Gross, meaning-constitutive traditions are patterns of sense-making that guide cultural ideals and are passed down through the generations.

Considering the above discussion, it could be argued that detraditionalization is in progress and that individuals may not slavishly follow the traditional customs and beliefs; however, some forms of traditions remain distinctive and important in modern societies. Therefore, the significance of traditions as intrinsic features of modern societies must still be considered. Smart and Shipman's (2004) and Gross' (2005) arguments have meaningfully refined the idea of detraditionalization, however, what seems to be little discussed in the literature is the place of religion and its role in the construction of individuals' everyday lives. The question of religion's role has particular significance for studies of groups that immigrate from very devout and traditional societies to developed countries, such as the Persians in the UK under observation in this research. I seek to provide a better understanding of this dimension.

Generally, the theorists of modernity tend to assume an increasing secularization (see Wilson 1982), which seems to be similar to the ideas of detraditionalization. However, Giddens (1991) distinguishes between forms of traditions. He contends that key aspects of late modernity, such as risk and doubt, favour a resurgence of religion as one form of traditions. He explains that,

> [i]n modern times some forms of traditional authority continue to exist, including, of course, religion. Indeed, for reasons that are to do precisely with

> the connections between modernity and doubt, religion not only refuses to disappear but undergoes a resurgence. (Giddens 1991: 195)

Nevertheless, it seems that there is conceptual problem with the theory of detraditionalization regarding religion. On one hand, religion is considered as traditional, which loses its authority under the condition of detraditionalization; on the other hand, Giddens (1991) recognises its resurgence. Nonetheless, empirically speaking, religion remains a central part of modern societies; for example, many empirical studies on minority groups and immigrants in various societies show that the role of religion is central to their daily and family lives. For example, the studies by Sherkat (2000) on the role of conservative Christian values in 'transitions into housewifery' in the USA, Ens et al. (2001) and Peters (2001) on the effects of the Old Order Mennonite religion on family life stages in Canada, Husain and O'Brien (2000, 2001) on the importance of religion to Pakistani families and their community life in the UK, and Smit (2000) on the importance of the Calvinist religion to husbands' perceptions in dual-earner families in South Africa all suggest that religion is still distinctively important to the construction of daily and family life. Other studies suggest that religion may not only resurge in modern societies; its role may even intensify under the conditions of modernity, leading to extremism. These studies' results imply that members of immigrant communities have become more religiously extreme and more devout than the people in their countries of origin (Thomas 2005; Wiktorowicz 2005; Emerson and Hartman 2006; Antoun 2008; Pratt 2010; Loza et al. 2013). Taken together, it seems clear that an independent consideration of religion as a distinct form of tradition is required.

The final issue that I raise in this regard is that the theorists of reflexive modernization originate from northwestern Europe, where Protestantism and the ideas of the religious reformation are widespread and accepted. The socio-historical background of the Protestant movement *may* influence their interpretations of the meanings of tradition and religion and, consequently, influence their theorising. It is important to recognise that the historical journey of Shiaism differs from that of Protestantism. Islam has never faced a massive reformation movement and strong opposition to amending or reforming religious tenets has always existed in Muslim societies and among Muslim scholars. Thus, it is claimed that the principles of Islam remain unchanged, although it is accepted that some Islamic practices may be somewhat mixed with other forms of the traditional. A great deal of historical evidence backs up this claim, such as the fact that there is only one version of the *Quran* —compared to several versions of the Bible. To this end, it may be problematic to assume that Islam, as a part of the traditional, has undergone a process of detraditionalization. Thus, I argue that to gain a deeper insight into partnering practices in Muslim communities, religion must be considered as a meaningful and distinct determining factor interwoven with other aspects of tradition in the construction of individual biographies. In this light, I structured this research with the hope that this study of Shia's partnering practices would highlight some of the diverse components of the traditional that may function differently, distinctively, and, possibly, paradoxically.

2.3. Linking Theories and Research: Grand or Grounded Theorising of Family Life and Relationships or a Middle Way Forward?

In approaching the topic of this research, I initially aimed to establish how knowledge about the subject matter of this research might be produced, and thereby I considered an expansive debate over the epistemology and philosophy of the social sciences. Classically, there is a dichotomy of linking theories and empirical research in the social sciences: We may either generate data based on a set of existing concepts and theories, often by employing grand theories, or construct concepts in a grounded way on the basis of data. Although this distinction is in fact one of the most complicated dilemmas in the philosophy of social sciences and demands a lengthy discussion to be explored, I briefly describe it below to justify my theoretical strategy.

The notion of 'grand theory' was first coined by the American sociologist C. Wright Mills in his *The Sociological Imagination* (1970, orig. 1959). This class of theories includes any theory that attempts an overall explanation of social life and individual practices and that is often highly abstract and driven by metaphors. Mills' notion of grand theory is rooted in larger debates over the philosophy of the social sciences. It stands in contrast to the idea that knowledge can only come from experience and be produced by recording empirical facts. This approach is associated with the so-called 'positivist' and 'empiricist' point of view, which suggests that in scientific language, all references must be empirical and not metaphysical. In this respect, grand theories are not rooted in empirical explanations and are based on a deductive methodology. Since many sociological theories very closely resemble this definition, it could be argued that grand theorizing is a popular practice in the discipline of sociology. More particularly, 'a kind of pattern [has been] developing since the 1950s in which there have been phases of grand theorizing in which understandings of family life are linked

to wider social forces (industrialization, capitalism, post-war social order/functionalism, patriarchy and latterly globalization)' (Smart 2007: 8). In this respect it could be argued that, at the risk of oversimplification, the core theoretical debates in the field of family life and relationships are functionalism, feminism as well as reflexive modernization. These theories are to arguably grand theories that seek to explain social horizon wider than a particular social context. For this reason the components of reflexive modernization theory have been extensively criticized as not being empirically well founded, as misrepresenting everyday life, and as inapplicable to particular social contexts (Jamieson 1998, 1999; Lewis 2001; Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2003; Smart and Shipman 2004; Brannen and Nilsen 2005; Gross 2005; Duncan and Smith 2006; Smart 2007). These criticisms lead us to consider an alternative way of theorizing family life and relationships: grounded theorizing which is based on empirical data.

Grounded theory is based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) famous account of theorizing, which involves the development of hypotheses from data and the building of a theory based on these hypotheses. Hence, grounded theory, unlike grand theory, employs an inductive methodology, which means that data is collected and analysed in the absence of any prior hypotheses. As a result, a set of analytical notions can be developed to illuminate the data, generate concepts and typologies, and, more importantly, build a theoretical framework. In this light, some researchers in the field, such as Brannen and Nilsen (2005), propose employ a grounded approach based on which theories could be generated from real social evidence rather than on abstract imagination of family lives and relationships. Based on their own comparative study of

life course transitions and youth perspectives on future parenthood, which was conducted in five European countries, Brannen and Nilsen (2005) question the usefulness of the grand theorizing of reflexive modernization, arguing that it 'is neither sensitive to context nor to the complexities and diversity of societies' (Ibid.: 425). For them, grand theories are problematic because they have no connection to specific social contexts in which individuals live; whereas grounded and exploratory researches, which are based on empirical evidence, can generate meaningful typologies and concepts that provide a better understanding of the complexity and diversity of social realities.

Nevertheless, the grounded approach also has its own limitations. Initially 'the idea that theory can ever come last has been much criticized, since in its most naïve form this appears to assume that research can be begun and undertaken in a theoretical vacuum' (Mason 1996: 142). Moreover, as Silverman (2006) argues, compared to the abstract vision of grand theories, the grounded approach at its best can only offer an approximation of theory building and only when it is based on high-quality empirical work. Similarly, Smart (2007) warns against relying confidently on the grounded approach because while current methodological tools may be advanced, but they may not be sufficient to insure the identification of everything that may affect relationships. Moreover, she argues that as most empirical work has been local, small-scale, and interpretive, focusing on very particular groups of people in particular contexts; such studies may have a rare 'impact on sociological Thought (with a capital T)' because none of them individually 'appears to have set the sociological agenda or to have become the focus of intense debate' (Smart 2007: 8). Further, Silverman (2006) also

states that grounded theory explains how to generate theories but does not provide an account of how to test them. Thus, it could leave researchers to develop empty categories, or it may become a way of legitimizing the results of empiricist research.

The above debates over grand and grounded theorizing leave us with a wider set of questions related to the philosophy and epistemology of the social sciences. We have to identify which approach best generates the kind of knowledge that we are seeking to develop about the particular social context that we are studying. On the one hand, we know that the developers of reflexive modernization theory have never suggested that they explain every detail of family relationships, only that they explore the wider horizon of social changes and that the theory is about ideal types of gender relations, family and relationships, or forms of living that may develop in the future. Thus, conducting empirical work to test grand explanations of a particular social context may not prove or disprove the grand ideas of reflexive modernization but can only challenge their credibility. On the other hand, conducting research based solely on empirical evidence could, as discussed above, be problematic. For this reason, some researchers suggest a middle way in order to build knowledge and theories, which I explain in what follows.

Reflecting on Duncan and Smith's article (2006), Smart (2007) advances two critical notions and argues that it would be inappropriate to deprive the field of grand theories of 'heuristic devices' and 'abstract visions'. She also borrows Berger's (1972) concept and argues, 'all of these ideas have seeped into our 'ways of seeing' ... and have facilitated different ways of both generating and interpreting empirical data' (2007:

25). She discusses Giddens' work and states that 'in spite of all the adverse criticism, Giddens has provided a kind of platform for new ways of thinking about families, and his work has not been entirely divorced from the findings of more empirical sociology' (Smart 2007: 22). This observation is important in the sense that some sociologists have found this 'platform of thinking' rather useful, although they approach it critically. Notably, Weeks et al. (2001) find the theory applicable to research on same-sex relationships, particularly Giddens' idea of democratic relationships. Budgeon and Roseneil (2004), who edited a collection of articles in an issue of *Current Sociology*, suggest in their editorial introduction that the articles engage and support this theory, particularly its two core ideas of individualization and the transformation of intimacy, in the sense that these notions explain recognizable shifts in the organization of the intimate lives of individuals and the increased diversity of personal relationships, all of which can be better understood in the framework of an individualizing society. In their own article, they critically refer to the components of reflexive modernization and suggest that the theory 'maps the theoretical terrain from which investigations of the future of intimacy and care must proceed, and has proved extremely influential on those conducting empirical research on family change' (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004: 140). Hence, as some of these theories provide useful ideas for sociological thinking and research, Smart (2007) proposes that they be kept but refined through empirical work.

Apart from the usefulness of the components of reflexive modernization theory for sociological thinking, which makes them essential in scholarly debates, they are popular in the public and political spheres (Brannen and Nilsen 2005; Smart 2004,

2007; Chambers 2012). This is crucial in two senses. First, it leaves researchers in the field no other choice than to consider the theory. As Gabb (2010) mentions that whether we accept or contest the theory, it has become a common conceptual framework for the evaluation and understanding of intimacy. Second, these theories provide ideas for ordinary people. For example, Chambers (2012) argues that Giddens' notion of democratic relationships is welcomed in today's public discourse as it is an inspiration for women to seek more egalitarian relationships. For these reasons, the backdrop provided by discussion of reflexive modernization cannot be entirely divorced from the sociological discussion.

Because of the limitations of both grand and grounded theories, the middle way seems to be the best direction forward. It would be better to retain both approaches, but consider the ways in which concepts and ideas influence empirical studies and the ways in which empirical works influence sociological thinking. This study therefore contains empirical research in a very particular social context that has not been studied before; it is consequently justified by its exploratory nature and its significance *per se*. At the same time, it sees reflexive modernization theory as a 'platform of thinking', as Smart would say, which 'maps the theoretical terrain', as Roseneil and Budgeon would suggest. This perspective can hopefully help the study to arrive at deeper insights into how a particular social group, the Persian diaspora, shape their particular partnering practices of intercultural relationships in the UK.

2.4. Defining the Unit of Investigation

Outlining the importance of a middle way approach in theorizing family life and relationships in the above that seeks to assess the conceptual limitations of existing theories and to contribute to an understanding of the contemporary lives through empirical evidence; it is now necessary to conceptualise the unit of analysis of this study. Defining the unit of investigation is crucial in the sense that theoretical approaches towards the subject of the study can vary significantly, even if the subject of investigation is taken as it is as commonly understood, such as the family (Cheal 1999). The concept of 'family' has, in fact, been one of the most contested notions in the social sciences. Cheal argues that as the concept of 'family' has different connotations for different theorists; some scholars use 'the family' to mean the nuclear family, others question the meaning of the term entirely (i.e. what 'the family' is), and still others ask whether or not researching a social unit called 'the family' is even achievable (Ibid.). More particularly, Gabb and Silva (2011) argue that, as a result of feminism's engagement with the idea of individualization, the concept of family has been extensively challenged since the 1990s, as it no longer adequately explains the realities of individuals' lives. Feminist scholars in their side have extensively criticised the conventional understanding of family life, particularly with regard to the division of labour and the construction of gender practices in close intimate relationships. Gabb and Silva specify that 'The debate was energised and expanded by materialist feminist interventions, which highlighted the significance of dependencies, interdependencies, connectedness and relationality as central features in social groupings identified as family or intimate relations' (Ibid.: 1.2). On their side, reflexive modernization theorists, as has been explained above, point that individualization has resulted in

increased individual autonomy in late modernity replacing conventional family dynamics with new forms of relationships that cannot be defined in traditional terms. In the following, I first explore the arguments around the notions of 'the family', 'family' and 'families', by discussing the structural functionalist approach to family life in the mid-twentieth century, the idea of companionate marriage, and the shift in focus from the family as institution to relationships. I then examine the more recent conceptual developments in the field, with particular emphasis on Morgan's (1996, 2011) notion of 'family practices' and Smart's notions of (2007) 'relationality' and 'personal life'.

The background: The Family and Families

The concept of 'the family' is rooted in the perception that there is a universal form of family union, which itself is rooted in structuralism, functionalism, and structural functionalism, all of which dominated the theoretical discussion of the sociology of family life for most of the mid-twentieth-century. According to these theories, the family is an essential universal institution because it provides particular functions to satisfy certain needs of its members, most obviously, sexual satisfaction and reproduction. These theories were most prominently established in the work of Talcott Parsons, which claims that society is a social system in relation to individual needs and the functions that meet those needs. He saw the 'nuclear family' as a functional system for the industrial era, having evolved from the 'extended family', which was functional for pre-industrial society (Parsons 1956). Parsons articulated two core functions for the

nuclear family: primarily socialisation, that is, child development and education, and the stabilisation of adult personalities, that is, the satisfaction of the emotional needs of family members (Ibid.). Although the classical account of structural functionalism seems to suggest a fixed family structure that articulates the positions or roles of its members in order to fulfil certain functions, new developments in the functionalist approach offer a more flexible definition that emphasises that the diverse functions of families may shift in response to socioeconomic change (Cheal 2002).

Nevertheless, these theories have been heavily criticised. Some critics argue that what is perceived as the family and assumed to be functional could in some cases be dysfunctional – a straightforward example is when parents do not provide nurturing socialisation to their children. More particularly, a family can become dysfunctional at certain points: for instance, when love as an emotional function of family turns to heated interactions that generate negative emotional responses, or, more dramatically, when the caring function of the family is transformed by domestic violence (Duffy and Momirov 1997). Moreover, it has been argued that, while some families may be functional as far as their members are concerned, they could be dysfunctional in a societal context; for example, a family may observe a moral framework that satisfies its members, but not observe that framework to satisfy other members of the society (Cheal 2002). To this end, Barrett and McIntosh (1982) go on to argue that the nuclear family is anti-social. Moreover, in opposition to the structural functionalist claim that the family is essential and universal, social constructionists claim that family unions are socially, culturally, and historically constructed. Most notably, feminists have criticized the functionalist approach for justifying gender imbalances in the domestic

division of labour, thus legitimising the patriarchal breadwinner/housekeeper model. Therefore, these critics argue that the family may not be functional for women because extensive and systemic gender inequalities shows that it does not provide justice to them, and thus they argue that the functionalist approach is inherently biased in favour of men. Moreover, there are conceptual variations of the idea of family that may exist at both the macro and micro levels. For example, Cheal (2002) argues that the sociological perception of the nuclear family is rooted in the northern European, Christian cultural traditions. As different cultures, places, and periods may generate different kinds of families, he argues that 'thinking about the 'the family' only as a nuclear family of husband, wife and children would be a restrictive viewpoint in crosscultural studies of family life' (Ibid.: 5). Thus, considering family life through the lens of the family is particularly problematic, when the field of investigation is across cultures, such as this research, which considers minority migrants in the UK.

There has been a shift from the structural functionalist idea of the family as an institution to the notion of it as a form of relationships. Finch and Summerfield (1991) claim that, from the years immediately following the World War Two, there was a rise in 'companionate marriage', which, despite the presence of the patriarchal male breadwinner/female homemaker structure, was characterised by an egalitarian rapport between the couple, a view of family life as friendship or teamwork, and shared responsibilities. This emerging form of family union was influenced by the improved understanding of the distinction between sexual pleasure and reproduction; thus, marriage was no longer solely perceived as a means to have children, although childbearing was still perceived as its central function (Chambers 2012). In this sense,

Morgan (1991) describes a long-term ideological shift in marriage in Western societies from an institution to a relationship. He outlines the ideology of marriage, in which marriage is perceived as a matter of choice, not only because people can choose their partners, but also because they can choose marriage from among various types of couple relationships. The unifying element of marriage in this ideology is love (either romantic or companionate). Marriage also establishes emotional and financial security (such as buying a house), as well as stability, by establishing a stable domestic union, embedded within wider social networks. Finally, he states that according to this ideology, marriage is seen as natural in the relational sense, as it is perceived as true to people's nature. This shift in the conceptual field has thus profoundly changed the way in which family lives are understood.

More recently, new forms of family relationships have emerged, such as cohabitation, LAT (living apart together), step-families, single-parent families, and families with LGBT parents. Though these new types of families do not align with the conventional form of the family, their members seek both public and governmental recognition as family units (Chambers 2012). Scholars have endeavoured to formulate new concepts to describe these changing relationships. Generally speaking, there have been attempts to employ the notion of families in order to include all the variation in contemporary family lives. More particularly, the concept of 'families of choice' (Weston 1991) was introduced in order to capture lesbian and gay relationships, and 'brave new families' (Stacey 1998) in order to describe families that are not defined by conventional gender roles and blood ties, especially step-families and step-kinships.

In addition to the above discussion, the concept of family is limited in terms of people's sense of membership in a certain family union. In this sense, sociological theories differ as to who is included in and/or excluded from family membership. Moreover, the connotation of the concept varies widely, not only for sociological thinking but also, as Allan and Crow (2001) argue, in public discourse, since diverse perceptions of family are found in everyday conversations between ordinary people and in their understanding of family life. For example, one person may use the concept of family to refer only to their partner and children in certain contexts, while using the same concept in other contexts to include their parents and siblings, in-laws, or more distant connections (e.g. grandchildren or cousins). Moreover, people do not have the same understanding of the concept in the same context.

These varieties of memberships as well as the emergence of new forms of intimate relationships have led many scholars to question whether conventional concepts adequately define evolving families, or if a new comprehensive concept can be introduced to capture all the nuances and variations of contemporary lives, since such a concept would be instrumental in apprehending different aspects of family life at the analytical level. In this sense, some scholars take a more general approach to retain the notion of family. Cheal argue that 'a family is considered to be any group which consists of people in intimate relationships which are believed to endure over time and across generations' (Cheal 1988, cited in Cheal 2002: 4). As will be explained below, Morgan (1996) favour keeping the concept of family but offers additional tools, by highlighting family activities and interactions in his notion of 'family practices'. On the other side of the argument, some family experts claim that the family is

undefinable and can only be understood by considering it as discourse within its social and political context (Bernardes 1999). Thus, there have been attempts to avoid the concept of family, by employing notions such as household, parenting, and kinship. More recently, Jamieson proposes the notion of 'intimacy', which means 'any form of close association in which people acquire familiarity, that is shared detailed knowledge about each other' (1998: 8). Smart introduces the notion of 'personal life', which includes 'all sorts of families, all sorts of relationships and intimacies, diverse sexualities, friendships and acquaintanceships' (Smart 2007: 188). As I explain below, I have found Morgan and Smart's contribution most useful for this research.

Family practices

Criticizing the structural functionalist approach, Morgan offers an expedient account to understand contemporary families through his idea of 'family practices', first introduced in his *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies* (1996) and then elaborated in his more recent works (2004, 2011a and 2011b). He offers additional tools for understanding family life by suggesting that the interactions and activities of family members or, in a more comprehensive wording, their 'family practices' is key to understanding family life. Family practices are 'sets of practices which deal in some way with ideas of parenthood, kinship and marriage and the expectations and obligations which are associated with these practices' (Morgan 1996: 11). In this sense, as Silva and Smart (1999) simply assert, families are what families do. Hence, in Morgan's view, focusing the analysis on family performance can reveal important clues as to how and why relationships change. Moreover, the decline of the

nuclear family as an institution can be understood by evaluating family practices rather than structures. Similarly, analysing family practices enables a better understanding of new kinds of relationships. Therefore, in Morgan's view, performativity is the key element, not structure. He compares his notion with the structural functionalist understanding of the family:

> A whole set of what appears to be trivial or even meaningless activities is given meaning through its being grouped together under one single label, that of family. The focus on doing, on activities, moves us away from ideas of the family as relatively static structures or sets of positions or statuses. (Morgan 2011b: 6)

He argues that his notion of family practices captures all the 'ordinary', 'everyday' 'activities' people perform (Ibid.). The concept possesses 'a sense of fluidity' in that it regards different areas of family, work, and other everyday activities as merged or overlapping, rather than separate and distinct (Ibid.). Hence, not only does this concept provide greater insight into family life, it also expands the analytical scope to include relationships that are not based on co-residence. There have been two principal attempts to refine Morgan's concept of family practices. These are 'displaying family' of Janet Finch and 'personal life' of Carol Smart, which I explore below.

Displaying family

Janet Finch (2007) expands on Morgan's work by introducing the concept of 'displaying family', in which she argues that family is not only practiced but also displayed. By the notion of displaying family, she refers to the procedure that family members show to each other, as well as to people outside the union (such as friends and relatives), that they are 'doing family practices' so as to prove the existence and success of their family relationships. Thus, the important element in Finch's model is social interactions that deliver certain meanings to people inside and outside family union. She cites everyday rituals such as family meals, photographs, parties, and ceremonies as examples of displays that produce a powerful meaning and feeling of togetherness. She argues that one of the advantages of her concept is that it can include unconventional relationships, such as same-sex relationships; for example, same-sex partners can use a family photograph to display their commitment to each other and to others.

However, the main problem with Finch conceptualisation is that it relays heavily on the interpretations and recognitions of people outside family unions. Some scholars thus argue that the concept is especially problematic in terms of same-sex relationships because such unions may be perceived by some observers as far removed from their perception of what constitutes family life, since they do not recognise same-sex unions as a form of family life, let alone considering its displays (Almack 2008; Gabb 2011; Heaphy 2011). Moreover, the concept does not explain the kind of family practices that remains *un*displayed (Gabb 2011) which is especially problematic for evaluating family life in a cross-cultural context, as some display practices (such as the family photograph example) may vary across cultures. Some cultures discourage the display

of family life, particularly in cases where family matters are very sensitive and subject to stigma, as in Persian families. In such contexts, people do not tend to disclose their relationships and affections to those outside their own relationships, even to their children. In light of such variation, this analytical concept may only be useful in cultures where display is not discouraged or disfavoured.

Friendship

The move from structural functionalism to the consideration of practices and personal interactions highlights that the everyday practices of intimacy has progressed beyond the conventional, heteronormative family framework. In this sense, Pahl (2000) suggests the idea of 'friends as family', acknowledging that many people feel not only attachment to their friends but also responsible to them. Later Spencer and Pahl (2006) suggest that categories such as friends and family members are merging, since friends have increasingly become more family-like in term of commitment and support. Spencer and Pahl (2006) expand on this argument with the concept of 'personal communities', which include a diverse range of given or biological and chosen or elective personal and family-like relationships that are significant in networks of intimacy, such as neighbours, colleagues, and mates. These kinds of connections introduce dedicated types of intimate relationships and belonging.

Moreover, Budgeon and Roseneil (2004) argue that it is no longer appropriate to consider intimacy from a family and kinship perspective because new patterns of intimacy and care are no longer understood through a heteronormative framework.

They recognise the significance of polarising the concept of the family but argue that the notion of families is also problematic in the sense that it does not challenge the heteronormative frameworks of the field so that its analysis of social change is insufficient. They argue that the category of family is still quite noticeable, but it is too exclusionary, since some kinds of relationships, such as friendships, have become sources of the care, support, and intimacy that used to be assumed as functions of family and kinship (Budgeon and Roseneil 2004). Roseneil and Budgeon also propose an extension to the heteronormative framework to understand new transformations of intimacy and argue that the new sociological thinking should extend beyond the family, since 'much that matters to people in terms of intimacy and care increasingly takes place beyond the 'family', between partners who are not living together 'as family', and within networks of friends' (2004: 135).

Personal Life, Relationality, and Connectedness

Smart (2007) also holds that the earlier understanding of the concept of the family was too exclusionary. She argues that while the term has historically been used to describe people who are biologically connected and co-reside to some degree, more and more families have come to include people who are related across distance or without genetic bonds. With this in mind, Smart introduces the concept of 'personal life' to highlight 'relationality' and include new forms of intimacies that are not based on biological kinship or partnership, but on meaningful relationships. Her concepts draws on Morgan's theory of family practices in its focus on 'family connections', which can cover all family-like practices that occur among those who are not traditionally

understood as members of the family, such as friends, neighbours, and other close social relationships. Smart's framework therefore not only attempts to include different types of families, from the family to elective/chosen families, but any relationships that are a source of meaningful intimacy that matter to people. Further, she proposes that since the concept of personal life includes relationships that are not governed by biological ties, co-residence, or marital bonds, it does not undermine the significance of relationships such as friendships and same-sex intimacies.

Smart prefers the term 'personal' to 'individual', as the former term does not imply the free choice and agency of the latter, which was put forward by the individualization thesis. She states, 'The 'personal' designates an area of life which impacts closely on people and means much to them, but which does not presume that there is an autonomous individual who makes choices and exercises unfettered agency' (Smart 2007:27). The personal is, therefore, linked to social experiences and cultural context as well as other structural factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, Smart incorporates Gross's (2005) notion of 'meaning-constitutive traditions' into the concept of personal life, arguing that cultural transmission, which involves transferring memories across generations, is significant in the experience of relationality. Moreover, personal life, in her view, is more fluid than suggested by the previous concepts, as it can capture any kinds of motion that can alter personal circumstances, such as divorce that could shift people into an entirely different situation. More importantly, she argues that the concept can unify the multiple important dimensions of everyday life, such as the body, sexuality, intimacy, and more generally emotions into one field of sociological enquiry.

In concluding this section, it is important to point that, contradictory to the above-mentioned discussions, there have been arguments developed in recent years on reclaiming the notion of family. For instance, Gillies (2011) maintains that decentring the predominated notion of family is problematic in that new concepts, such as intimacy and personal life, cannot capture all the activities and relationships understood as family life. For example, decentring the family could result in decentring childrearing. She argues that because family is flexible and historically endured, it should be retained.

2.5. The Research Objectives: Explaining the Stages and Social Positionings of Persian Intercultural Partnering Practices

In this chapter, I outlined the most important theoretical perspectives of recent British sociological studies of family life and relationships relevant to this thesis. I explored the connotations of the theory of reflexive modernization, which can provide useful insight into contemporary lives. I pointed out, however, that the theory has not gone unchallenged due to its limitations, particularly for certain social contexts. I outlined the conceptual limitations of its two core propositions of individualization and detraditionalization. These notions may exaggerate the dismantling of traditional authority and the increasing freedom individuals may exercise to construct their biographies. These ideas may neglect social and cultural boundaries, undermine social structures (particularly regarding gender relations), and underestimate the traditional dimensions of family relationships. In terms of the last point, I argued that much

empirical evidence indicates that religion remains a powerful element in constructing everyday life practices in modern societies; therefore, the influences of religion must be independently considered rather than conceptually treated as tradition.

These limitations of reflexive modernization theory led me to argue that the theory's main shortcoming is its lack of empirical evidence; thus, it is essential to conduct additional empirical studies to gain deeper insights into particular practices within specific social contexts. The results of using this approach could thereby reveal more about the nuances of family practices and more detailed understanding of wider social changes. Thus, one of the aims of this study was to explore the ways in which Persian intercultural relationships operate under the conditions of late modern British society.

To define the unit of analysis of this study, I reviewed emerging terms and concepts that attempt to transcend the conventional notion of the family. In this regard, I found Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) concept of 'family practices' to be particularly useful for this study because it provides a conceptual tool to capture regular, everyday, and fluid family activities. Based on Morgan's argument, I developed concepts dedicated to three stages or phases of partnering practices: 'Pre-Partnering Practices', 'Prevailing-Partnering Practices', and 'Post-Partnering Practices'. These were developed to answer the main research question of this thesis: How do Persians in intercultural relationships in the UK do partnering practices? In the following I define these stages and present my reasons why they are useful for conducting this empirical research and thinking sociologically to answer the research question.

Pre-Partnering Practices (the first stage) refers to partner selection, which comprises all of the practices involved in finding, meeting, and choosing a partner; finalising the conditions of the marriage contract; and forming the relationship. In the Persian context, this process is a serious undertaking, future partners may become close, but any practices regarding future partners rarely involve sexual interaction. Thus, the practices during this stage are different in nature to how they will interact when they become partners. The two basic concerns are: (1) the ways in which Persians do Pre-Partnering Practices across cultural differences, and (2) the reasons why they do these particular practices.

Prevailing-Partnering Practices (the second stage) refers to daily practices during the period when a partnership exists, including negotiations and compromises made to sustain the partnering relationship. These Prevailing-Partnering Practices can be exclusive to the partners (e.g. expressions of love, food choices, cleansing rituals, and housework activities); however, they also can relate to extended family members and social networks (e.g. cultural celebrations, family parties, neighbouring, caring for elders, rearing children, and transmitting identities through the generations). Because I was aware of the significance of broad personal relationships in the Persian context, I found the ideas of relationality and connectedness, as presented by Smart (2007), to be precisely useful. These concepts indicate the significance of personal connections and relations with extended family and community members, which may influence individuals' partnering practices.

Considering the 'me' from Smart's (2007) sociology of personal life as well as 'multiple social positionings' in the theory of intersectionality (Brah and Pheonix 2004; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006), I argue that Persians in intercultural partnering relationships are in three personal positions in relation to the following social connections: (1) their partners, (2) members of wider social networks, and (3) generational ties. Thus, to observe the ways in which individuals position themselves in relation to other people, I developed the concepts of 'Internal Partnering Practices', 'External Partnering Practices', and 'Intergenerational Partnering Practice' to more precisely address dedicated Prevailing-Partnering Practices with significant others outside the focal partnership, in addition to the partners. The two basic concerns are: (1) the ways in which Persians do Prevailing-Partnering Practices across cultural differences, and (2) the reasons why they do these particular practices.

Post-Partnering Practices (the third stage) are partnering practices that have recently increased in importance, particularly because of the growing prevalence of post-divorce personal relationships and their implications (see Smart 2000, 2006; Smart et al. 2001). It is increasing likely that the partners remain in a personal relationship as their parenting practices continue to exist, albeit in a transformed state, after separation or divorce. Moreover, there is growing evidence that couple relationships can be transformed into friendships after a separation or divorce, which indicates the increasingly popular notion that lovers or members of a couple may remain friends after ending their partnership (see Sprecher 1999; Roseneil 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Regarding the Persian context, I (as a Persian cultural insider) observed that partners tended to either remain a couple or turn into enemies following

divorce. In this culture, partners must exercise forbearance until a marriage becomes unbearable, or, as a Persian saying puts it, ‘a hell’, at which point they may sue for divorce. Despite this, my use of the concept is intended to identify and provide a platform to consider any possible emerging Post-Partnering Practices in the context of Persian intercultural relationships in the UK. Experiencing the failure of a partnering relationship may influence an individual’s future partnering relationships in some way; thus, one area of consideration in this research was on the ways that an experience of failure might inform and/or shape future partnering practices.

These three stages order partnering practices chronologically, which helps in the evaluation of the process of partnering relationships throughout the life course and in the investigation of the ways that people interoperate and re-interoperate their life experiences across times and in relation to wider social processes. The stages are sociologically meaningful because they facilitate an in-depth account of distinct interactions, activities, meaning-making practices, expectations, and obligations across the stages of partnering relationships. In addition, they capture the progressive and fluid nature of the practices and experiences, which could reflexively shape and reshape each other over time. The stages also facilitate the application of theoretical and conceptual ideas to practical research designs and analytical arguments. Therefore, each stage could offer a separate base upon which theoretical concerns about the limitations of reflexive modernization (and other theories discussed above) could be addressed. Moreover, the interplay and intersection of various sources of cultural differences, such as religion, language, generation, and life course, can be independently investigated at each stage.

The central focus of this research is the idea of partnering across difference/s, and the notion that people respond to difference/s by constantly defining and redefining their difference/s with their partners. The questions regarding these reflexive interpretations of difference/s could be answered relatively more easily by understanding these stages because they show the process of people's understandings of their partnering relationships. Individuals constantly evaluate and re-evaluate their perceptions of their relationships based on new experiences. Thus, these stages allow me to contrast the traditional meanings of Persian partnering practices (the ideal culture) with individuals' actual practices and/or experiences throughout the life course (the real culture)[12].

This study explores how the Persian understandings of partnering practices in intercultural partnerships are constructed, experienced, and reconstructed throughout the life course. In particular, it reveals the ways in which Persians in intercultural relationships negotiate their cultural difference/s in the stages and social positionings of partnering practices, how they sustain those relationships despite cultural difference/s, and how (and why) their negotiations succeed or fail. The key questions addressed regarding the stages and positionings of intercultural partnering practices were around the following four areas:

[12] For more about the distinction between ideal and real cultures see Panopio and Rolda (1999).

1. What are the cultural differences that intersect in shaping intercultural partnering practices? How do these differences interplay in the construction of partnering practices?
2. How do the partners in intercultural partnering relationships work together to sustain their relationships across their cultural differences?
3. What are the reasons, consequences, and implications of failure of intercultural partnering relationships?
4. To what extents are partnering stages, practices, and positionings understood in relation to wider social processes, especially in terms of detraditionalization and individualization? What roles do different forms of tradition, such as religious and local, play in these processes?

I will explore these areas in more detail in the findings chapters 4 through 8 as well as in the concluding discussion chapter. The next chapter explains my process of transferring the research questions presented above into the research design.

3. Methodology: Producing Knowledge from Empirical Data

In the previous chapters, I discussed the importance of conducting empirical research for producing knowledge and the necessity of linking conceptual frameworks to empirical data to improve our understanding of the social world and its conditions. Having explained the conceptual frameworks and the objectives of this research in the previous chapters, this methodological chapter explains my perspective on the ways that knowledge can be produced from empirical data. Therefore, this chapter explains the strategies that support the research design and the methodological challenges of conducting research on the sensitive topic of this research. This chapter comprises four sections. First, I establish my philosophical assumptions regarding the production of knowledge from empirical data. This section revolves around the ideas of subjectivity and reflexivity. This discussion leads to describe the strategies I employed to collect the data. First, I explain the way that I selected the research participants, my sampling unit and the way the sample may relate to the wider population that would allow me to generalise the results. This explanation is followed by a description of the theoretical sampling strategy and the key variables. To address the objectives of this research and its questions, a qualitative approach was employed to capture deeper insights into the ways that intercultural partnering relationships operate. Next, my choice of semi-structured interviewing, along with the validity of the data produced is discussed in the third section. I also describe the difficulties that I faced during data collection and how the data collection process was reflexive and on-going. The final section explains my ethical concerns related to this sensitive research.

3.1 The philosophical assumptions

In this section, I clarify my epistemological and ontological position regarding the production of knowledge from empirical data that informed the methods I employed in the empirical portion of this research. In particular, my position informed my assessment of the extent of the reliability and validity of the data, my method of accessing and collecting them, my method of analysis, and the development of my interpretation of the analytical findings.

Mason argues that different disciplines and research traditions 'have different ideas about the extent to which empirical research can tell us anything meaningful, and of course about how it might do this' (1997: 3). My philosophical tendency is toward the sociological perspective of social constructionism. Therefore, my ontological assumptions indicate that reality is socially constructed. Personal life is not essential or ascribed at birth because, as Morgan (2011c: 12) argues, '[w]hat appears to be so strongly connected to individual lives and experiences can, in fact, be seen as arising out of particular social contexts' (Morgan 2011c: 12). Specifically, I presume that individuals' understandings of the meanings of their partnering practices, their interpretations of their partnering experiences, and their expectations of their partnering relationships were socially constructed. Hence, I was focused on the roots of their partnering experiences and meaning-making practices, and the ways that they continue to exist in particular ways.

Moreover, my epistemological assumptions imply that the stages and process of the study, from data collection to analysis, comprise a reflexive process of social

construction. Thus, my research questions were developed to identify meaningful social constructs regarding partnering relationships. Conducting interviews and analysing data (explained later in this chapter) also were perceived as reflexively constructed. Social constructionists do not seek a universal truth because they believe that there is no single truth; there are numerous relative versions of truth (Gergen 2001; Lock and Strong 2010; Burr 2015). Thus, what is considered truth depends on the perception and judgment of the researcher. Social constructionism could be more understandable through the lenses of subjectivity and reflexivity, which are discussed below.

In the first chapter, the feminist perspective on subjectivity was outlined. I argued that subjectivity provides an important conceptual tool for understanding difference/s because it indicates that the interpretation of difference by subjects is crucial in understanding the way that they self-define themselves and positioned in a given social context. Subjectivity has become popular in feminist scholarship because some feminists perceive scientific objectivity as a political means by which men maintain social superiority over women or through which oppression against women is justified. Some feminists argue that women's feelings and experiences should become the feminist area of study, to the extent that Stanley and Wise (1983) called subjectivity as 'the feminist consciousness'. Therefore, at the risk of oversimplification, subjectivity refers to a subject's self-perception of that subject's experiences that then shapes that subject's biography. Thus, producing knowledge about the ways that subjects perceive the social world is important and justifies conducting empirical research for sociological thinking.

However, subjectivity in social research is complex. Peshkin (1988) suggests that the subjective approach has a positive influence on qualitative research because it challenges the researcher to be aware of her or his role at every stage of the research. Ratner (2008) argues that subjectivity is vital in qualitative research because it indicates that research subjects are free to express themselves in whatever ways they choose and the researcher actively interprets their accounts from her or his own subjective perspective. Maso (2003) explains that the researcher has a subjective role in choosing accurate and useful research questions, which should be based on authentic intellectual doubt for the researcher; at the same time, however, she or he should reflexively ensure that the research questions are genuine for the intellectual community and not yet answered by other scholars. This argument led to what is increasingly known as 'reflexivity' in social research.

Broadly speaking, reflexivity, in the context of social research, indicates that the researcher has a meaningful influence on the outcomes of the research. Finlay (2003: 5) posits that 'the researcher is a central figure who actively constructs the collection, selection and interpretation of data'. Therefore, researchers should be aware of their role at all stages of research, reflexively identify and re-examine that role during the course of a study, and take responsibility for the type of social explanation provided at the conclusion of the research (Gough 2003). Finlay (2002a and 2002b) casts a positive light on the researcher role as an opportunity instead of a problem. It could be argued that reflexivity throws light on the fact that the research product (knowledge) is co-constructed by the researcher and the subjects. As Denzin states, 'in the social sciences

there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself' (1994: 500). Thus, the research method (such as interviews) are reflexively constructed by the researcher and it would be the researcher who interprets the data and presents the findings. In this sense, I argue that the analysis of the data I collected is my subjective interpretation of hundreds of pages of interview transcripts from the perspective of my subjective interpretation of the conceptual framework that I explained in previous chapters. Furthermore, the translation of the interviews into English was my subjective interpretation of the participants' words.

3.2. The Sample

The first chapter provides descriptions of the cultural characteristics of Persians in the UK. However, the target population of my empirical study was a particular type of Persians in the country: those heterosexual Shia Persians raised in Iran who had experienced at least one intercultural partnering relationship while residing in the UK. Because covering the entire population was not feasible, 36 study participants were recruited, which could be theoretically generalised to the overall population. In the following section, I explain how I understood my sampling units, discuss how I perceived the relationship of my sample to the overall population, and argue on behalf of my sampling strategy as an appropriate approach to address my research questions.

Sampling unit

I critically considered what needed to be sampled because it was essential to choose the most appropriate sampling unit that could then be generalised to the overall

population and address the research questions. The sampling unit could have been the individual, experience/s, or practice/s. However, my aim was to investigate partnering relationships of a certain group of individuals in a particular social context. Thus, I sampled individuals. To be precise, my sampling unit had five specific conditions, as follows.

1. Persian background: The sample members must have spent their childhoods in Iran as Persians, which provides the presumption of a Persian cultural background. The experience of being raised as a Persian meant that they had been inculcated by a set of cultural norms and traditional customs in Iran that are widely accepted as Persian.[13]

2. Shia background: Persians may practice different religions (as earlier explained). However, the focus of this study was on Shiaism. Thus, members of other religious group were excluded from the target population. The Shia religious experience I meant to capture was the experience of those who raised as a Shia and had a Shia heritage, not necessarily those who were practicing Shia or raised by practicing parents. The extent of devoutness to a religion varies; however, the important condition for selecting a sample was that the participants were born into a Shia family and raised as a Shia, which could then have a meaningful influence on shaping their partnering relationships. This point is explained below in more detail.

[13] This criterion excludes second generation Persians in the UK from my target population.

3. UK immigrant: Immigrant status was a key component of the thesis. This experience is about the conditions of immigration and the social context in which the participants lived that could shape their partnering practices.

4. Intercultural partnering relationship: The intercultural partnering relationship status was the driving force of this research. Thus, my focus on the Persian communities was directed towards those who had experienced at least one partnering relationship with a non-Persian.[14]

5. Heterosexual: For numerous methodological and theoretical reasons, this study was designed to study heterosexual Persians. Although studying individuals who embrace other types of sexualities such as homosexuals, could be of sociological interest, there were theoretical concerns regarding merging heterosexual and homosexual partnering practices. Moreover, there was the practical problem of accessibility of the target population.

Thus, the sample members needed to be individuals with all of the above conditions. It is now important to indicate the relationship of the sample to the overall population, which is about generalisability of the data, or what is sometimes referred to as 'transferability'. The most conventional sampling strategy to achieve generalisability is representative sampling based on probability, which is rooted in the positivistic approach in science. In quantitative studies, such sampling is usually based on

[14] It should be noted here that I did not control for the background of the partners of participants because my focus was on Persians' narratives regarding their partnering experiences with someone of a different background than theirs.

mathematical formulations and statistical logic; however, in qualitative research, it is usually based on the meaningfulness of the theoretical logic. This is because, as Mason (2002) explains, representative sampling may not be the best way to conduct qualitative studies with respect to both generating and analysing data. She points out that probability sampling is often not doable in qualitative studies because it 'requires the construction of very large samples which make the use of qualitative data generation methods very time consuming and costly (and in many instances therefore impossible to achieve)' (Mason 2002: 126). Furthermore, representativeness may be impossible because, to obtain a random sample, we need a sampling frame or list of population members. Those lists simply do not exist for many types of populations. Moreover, the characteristics of the population are often unknown empirically. Thus, in many qualitative studies, probability samples are not feasible or possible.

The problem of representativeness is an historical topic of disagreement in qualitative studies. Some scholars argue that generalisability and theory-building are not concerns of qualitative social research because qualitative research is, in their opinion, largely descriptive (see Stake 1994). However, as Mason (1997: 6) argues 'qualitative research should produce social explanations which are generalizable in some way', it must not be restricted to 'producing explanations which are idiosyncratic or particular to the limited empirical parameters of their study' (Mason 1997: 6). Even so, she recognises that there are challenges relative to generalising qualitative findings. Many qualitative researchers have employed purposive sampling (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Stake 1994) that uses the typology, so that the units of sample 'guided by time and resources' (Silverman 2006: 306) based on the researcher's subjective assessment for the type of

sample chosen. In relation to this, one way to sample in qualitative research is theoretical sampling. Mason argues:

> theoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical positions and analytical framework, your analytical practice, and most importantly the argument or explanation that you are developing. Theoretical sampling is concerned with constructing a sample … which is meaningful theoretically and empirically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory or your argument. (2002: 124)

Mason (2002) explains that theoretical sampling provides an opportunity to choose samples based on their theoretical significance, which could enable the researcher to develop analytical and theoretical propositions. She adds that this strategy 'links sampling very directly into the process of generating theory and explanation 'inductively' from or through data" (1997: 93). This approach is consistent with the argument discussed in the previous chapter that a 'middle way' approach is necessary to link theoretical frameworks and empirical data. Thus, my sampling strategy was theoretical sampling and the purpose of such strategy was to achieve a theoretically grounded and defined sample. This is explored in the following section.

Sampling strategy

The sampling technique I used to recruit participants was snowball sampling. I had previously become acquainted with some Persians in London, Manchester, and Birmingham. I asked those individuals to introduce me to people who might become participants in the study. Snowball sampling was then performed to recruit additional participants. Snowball sampling allowed me to build the sample through referrals, which was useful because my target population was not easily accessible or identifiable.

Choosing an appropriate sampling strategy is a vital step in qualitative research because it can shape the ways in which the data are analysed and the interpretations and social explanations that are produced. I was strategic in sampling the individuals for the study. I considered the intersectionality of the sampling units (participants) based on my theoretical perspective. Therefore, I was looking for individuals who had the characteristics of differences that might meaningfully shape their partnering practices. This approach was consistent with my standpoint on cultural identity, which means that I was looking for participants who had characteristics that demonstrate the Persian cultural identity. The approach was strategic because my sample was theoretically representative of the categories of differences that I had presumed (from my understanding of the underlying theory of the thesis) were theoretically significant to the participants' partnering practices. Thus, it was important that my sample be varied with respect to the following characteristics:

1. **Gender:** Perhaps the most important category of difference in the sample was gender. It was important to have a meaningful sample size of women and men

to achieve understanding of the ways and reasons that cultural gender constructs might shape people's intercultural partnering relationships. However, because of the political and cultural sensitivity of the study, it was difficult to recruit female participants. For many Persian women, talking to a man (which I am) about their intimate relationships is usually an uncomfortable experience and convincing women to participate was one challenge that characterises this particular group as often inaccessible. Women's hesitations can be attributed to Persian cultural stigmas on talking about partnering relationships that discourages Persian women from publicly speaking about their personal and intimate relationships and experiences.

To overcome this problem, I offered potential female participants two options: interviews with a woman or unrecorded interviews over the telephone. Providing these options helped to recruit 11 female participants, who were willing to participate in unrecorded telephonic interviews (none of the possible recruits chose a female interviewer). The women who agreed to participate made important contributions about their experiences and the average length of the interviews with the women was 100 minutes (about 20 minutes longer than the average length of the interviews with the men). The relatively low number of women participants is justifiable theoretically and statistically. The first chapter explains that the number of Persian women in the UK is about one-third the number of Persian men. This ratio is represented in my sample. Moreover, not only does the number empirically reflect the gender ratio of the

target population; it is adequate in the context of qualitative research to theoretically represent the overall target population.

2. **Religiosity:** Religion is a major cultural component that could be significant to shaping people's lives. However, the extent of religious attachment is a complex idea. Religiosity can be multidimensional and the dimensions can interact in numerous ways. Moreover, religiosity can vary across the life course. Many scholars have attempted to conceptualise and measure types or modes of religiosity.[15] A discussion of these studies is beyond the scope of this research; however, Glock's (1959, 1962) and Glock and Stark's (1965) work stands out as the most foundational classic conceptualization of religiosity that is useful for thinking about partnering practices. They introduce five dimensions of religiosity: (1) 'ideological', which refers to beliefs in core religious doctrines; (2) 'experiential', which indicates emotional feelings of connectedness to certain gods and/or to a spiritual realm; (3) 'ritualistic', which refers to specific practices of worshiping such as prayers; 'intellectual' dimension which is about knowledge of one's religion; and (5) 'consequential', which refers to the prescriptions that a religion provides for everyday life practices. The fifth dimension is the most complex of the five and it is understood as the outcome of the other four dimensions. Arguably, the extent of an individual's religiosity varies by dimension and across the life course.

[15] For recent conceptual developments, see Whitehouse (2002) and Atkinson and Whitehouse (2011), who provide socio-political and cross-cultural analyses of religiosity.

Considering these dimensions, an individual could be a believer but not practice; on the other hand, an individual could practice, but have little sense of connectedness to the religion or feel strongly about it. My interest was investigating the ways that numerous types of partnering practices could be informed and shaped by religious teachings. Thus, my focus was on the consequential dimension of religiosity. Therefore, I chose three categories of religiosity to examine in the study: (1) religious participants for whom the five dimensions of religiosity were strong; (2) nonreligious participants who self-identified as nonbelievers but were born into Shia families, and (3) partially religious participants, those who were in between, most of whom believed in the core ideas of Shiaism but did not practice most of the religious rituals. It was important to explore the influence of the consequential dimension of religiosity for shaping everyday partnering practices. Notably, some of the participants who considered themselves nonreligious engaged in practices attributable to the Shia background.

Thus, my strategy was to recruit equal numbers of these three categories of religiosity to obtain a clear picture of the influence of religion on partnering practices. I found it difficult to convince religious people to participate in the study because of religious stigmas regarding disclosure of intimate and sexual experiences. I sought out all the possible ways to convince them to participate. In December of 2011, I went to the Manchester Islamic Centre during the *Muharram* event to meet with the Imam and other officials, asking them to introduce me to possible participants. I also contacted the Al-Khoei Islamic

Centre in London, run by Iranian and Iraqi Shias. Moreover, I contacted Imam Reza Centre in Birmingham and Al-Zahra Centre in Nottingham, which are run by Iranian Shias. All of these effort resulted in the recruiting of about one-third of the sample as religious participants. This proportion is justified because it was theoretically and empirically representative.[16]

Although religious participants are a small proportion of my sample, all of the participants could have something to say about Shiaism. They talked about the influence of religious values and teachings on their partnering experiences and they provided reasons that they did not observe religious tenets. Thus, religion clearly played a part in their partnering practices and they constantly defined and redefined their relationships with religious values. As I earlier explained, the primary reason for theoretical sampling was to select participants who would provide data that would help to advance theoretical propositions. Therefore, my sample size is adequate to the type of explanation I aimed to develop regarding the function of religion in Persians' intercultural partnering practices.

3. **Age:** Age is an important dimension of partnering relationships because as people age they have experiences that can inform their future partnering practices in some ways. For example, individuals in middle age likely attach meanings to partnering that are different from those they held in earlier

[16] As Chapter One explains, religious Persians in the UK comprise a relatively small proportion of the UK Persian population and the nonreligious and partially religious Persians' partnering practices are more common in the target population.

adulthood. Sociologically, I believed that the life course was a potential source of difference/s that could influence the partnering relationships. There is a substantial literature on the concept of the life course and its cycles or phases. Although a detailed discussion of the life course is beyond the scope of this research, I point out some key aspects here. Erikson's (1950, 1980) classic work on the 'Eight Stages of Man' was a psychosocial analysis of human development, in stages from infancy through maturity, ending at death. Since Erikson's contribution, the life course perspective has been developed across disciplines, including cultural psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Scholars know that the defining characteristics of the life stages have changed across time and that they are culturally diverse (see Jessor et al 1996; Shweder 1998; Menon and Shweder 1994, 1998). For example, young adulthood, middle age, and late adulthood are defined differently by different cultures. Moreover, shared generational experiences of socio-political and economic events are often important because they influence the values and attitudes of the people born in specific periods (e.g. see Light 1988 for baby boomers, and see Pilcher and Wagg 2005 and Russell et al. 1992 for Thatcher's Children).

Considering this study's target population, the participants who experienced the Iranians revolution of 1979 or the Iran-Iraq war in their childhood could have different perspectives on family practices. Similarly, participants who experienced aspects of Iranian immigration (as described in Chapter One) could have unique understandings of family life.

Moreover, it should be noted that understanding the influence of the life course could be accomplished through the lens of reflexive modernization. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue about the individualization of the life course in late modernity in that individuals living in contexts of individualization must individually and personally construct their biographies. Nevertheless, I recruited the participants from all age groups to engage the above-described dimensions. The participants ranged from their 20s to their 70s, which allowed me to analyse the life course as a source of difference/s.

4. **Deviance**: Scholars have discussed the merits of choosing 'deviant cases' for a sample; namely, participants who are not likely to support a researcher's primary assumptions. The purpose would be to test whether the researcher's assumptions are correct (see Lipset et al. 1962 and Seale 1999). There are some categories of difference/s that I had initially believed to be irrelevant or unimportant to the focus of this research. For example, the geographical distribution of the participants in the UK seemed to be unimportant to partnering practices across cultural differences. Similarly, political orientations seemed to be an unlikely factor for furthering my understanding of partnering practices. However, I recruited a sufficient diversity with respect to these two factors because I believed that deviant cases could be crucial to testing the theory with observed data. Specifically, I included participants from dense areas of the UK where Persians tend to reside (the London, Manchester, and Birmingham large metropolitan areas) and from smaller cities, such as Nottingham, Newcastle, and Plymouth. Moreover, I included a wide diversity

> of political orientations, from pro- and anti-Iranian revolution supporters to supporters of the (then) hard line government to reformists to supporters of the anti-Islamic republic establishments. The results of the fieldwork, however, supported my theoretical assumption that neither geographical residence nor political orientation had much influence on intercultural partnering relationships and their effects were beyond the scope of this research.

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In sum, this section first explains my reasons for choosing the individual as my unit of analysis. I explained that the individuals I recruited and included needed to have five characteristics: (1) Persian background, (2) Shia background, (3) UK immigrant, (4) intercultural partnering relationship status, and (5) heterosexuality. I then explained that, because of the qualitative nature of the empirical study, my participants needed to be theoretically representative regardless of the extent of their statistical representativeness. To achieve that, I was strategic in recruiting participants. My theoretical premises directed the sample to be theoretically meaningful regarding gender, religion, and age. Finally, I pointed out that I included deviant cases to test my assumptions about the importance of certain characteristics. In the next section, I explore my methods of collecting the data.

3.3. The interviews

Because my goal was to obtain deeper insights into the meaningful construction of partnering practices, I sought a method (or methods) of gathering the data that would

generate data through interaction or, as Burgess (1984: 102) describes it, a method that is a 'conversation with a purpose'. This led me to consider all types of qualitative interviewing because interviewing 'is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals' attitudes and values – things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire' (Byrne 2004: 182).

Generally speaking, there are four main types of qualitative interviewing. First, the structured interview, was rejected as unsuitable to this study because it has limitations regarding obtaining in-depth information in exploratory studies such as this one. In structured interviews, the questions are pre-written and new questions are not allowed during the course of an interview. The second type is the open-ended interview, but it also was problematic because the outcome of the study would be more or less guided by the participants than based on addressing the theoretical questions and the objectives of this project. Such a method as Noaks and Wincup (2004) argue is most suitable to life history studies, which was not the focus of this study. Another type of interviewing is the focus group discussion, which has recently gained popularity. I did not use this method because of the Persian cultural characteristics of the sample, particularly among the women, that resist talking about their sexual relationships and intimate experiences in public.

The forth type of interviewing is a middle approach between structured and open-ended interviewing, usually referred to as semi-structured interviewing. I chose this method because it allows me to guide the interview process and ask relevant questions that are conceptually related to the objectives of the research while remaining flexible

in listening to the participants' narratives about their partnering experiences. Moreover, semi-structured interviewing was consistent with my philosophical assumptions (explained above), meaning that it gave the subjects the freedom to narrate their emotional experiences and understandings of their practices and to choose to talk about what was important to them.

Thus, I was flexible during the interviewing and continue the conversations with the subjects, but in a way that addressed my research questions. I used an interview schedule, which had five distinct sections. The sections were thematic and topic-centred to enable the participants to talk flexibly about their understanding of that topic. The first part of the interview was designed to gather basic data, timelines, and details of the history of participants' partnering relationships.[17] This part also gathered basic data about the participants' partners. Part two concerned the participants' ideas about types of relationships in modern Britain and their understanding based on their personal intimate experiences. Part three attempted to learn about the ways that cultural difference/s influenced the participants' partnering experiences and practices in three partnering stages. In the final part of the interview, I investigated the ways that the meanings of certain aspects of the participants' partnering relationships had changed over time, such as love.

[17] Partnering relationships mean different things to different individuals. For this study, it was defined as 'all the possible types of heterosexual couple relationships, including casual and one-night-stand, but excluding relationships based on money exchange'. This was because this research was about meaningful intercultural practices between individuals with different cultural backgrounds. I believed sexual relationships based on money exchange would be a topic requiring another dedicated study.

Because the nature of this study is sensitive, the preparation of the interview schedule was a long and reflexive process. I conducted five pilot interviews to work out how to obtain reliable and valid responses in an actual interview situation and test the interview questions, so that modify the interview schedules. Three of the pilot interviews were with men and the others were with women, all of whom had experienced at least one intergroup partnering relationship.

Then, between the end of November of 2011 and May of 2012, I conducted 36 interviews, comprising about 54 interview hours (i.e. each interview lasted about one and one-half hours, on average).[18] The interview schedule was designed to capture all of the pertinent data in one sitting per participant to avoid multiple interviews. It should be noted that I modified the research questions during the fieldwork as part of my reflexive approach to the interviewing methodology.

I did not interview people in couples and only focused on Persian party of the partnering relationships under observation. This was because of ethical issues such as the risk of developing tensions between the partners over the interview contents. There were also methodological considerations, such as the effects on the reliability and validity of the interview outcomes if both members of a couple were present, which could influence the participants' responses to some of the interview questions[19]. I did not control the backgrounds of the partners of the participants because what was the

[18] A description of the sample's characteristics can be found in Appendix.

[19] Similar to face-to-face interviewing, in the telephonic interviewing, I asked the participants to verify their privacy during the interviews because having another person present could have influenced their answers to my questions.

objective of this research was the Persian perspective of intercultural partnering practices.

To interact with the Persian participants during the interviews, some communication skills were necessary to meet cultural interaction norms and appropriate language usage. As a native Persian (thus, an insider in Persian culture), I was able to ask interview questions in a culturally acceptable way for the participants and, sometimes, drop certain questions when interviewing particular types of participants to avoid causing offence. In particular, consideration was given to the women participants and the religious participants by dropping questions that could directly relate to their sex lives. Because all of the interviewees were native Persian speakers (like myself), all of the interviews were conducted in the Persian language. I was confident in the tone that I used during the interviews (e.g. formal, informal, friendly, or official) and I was convinced that the participants properly understood the questions and that their answers were accurate, yielding effective interviews.

Validity of the data collected

Some commentators discuss that data produced from an interview method may not reveal the truth of the social (see Kitzinger, 2004; Rapley 2004). However, what I was looking for was not identifying what actually happened before, during and after the participants' relationships, but what they actually understand about partnering practices and their account of intercultural partnering experiences. So that I can understand how

the meanings of partnering practices were constructed in terms of these practices. This is based on my epistemological position that the personal life is constructed, and that it should be understood subjectively.

I agree with Byrne's (2004) point that 'few researchers believe that in the course of the interview, you are able to "get inside someone's head". What an interview produces is a particular *representation* or *account* of an individual's views or opinions' (2004: 182, emphasis in original). Similarly, I was looking for participants' accounts that could reveal about how the participants may perceive meanings attached to partnering practices in the particular social context of the study. These accounts, as Hammersley and Atkinson put it, 'are not simply representation of the world; they are part of the world they describe' (1983: 107).

To put it more simply, I did not see this research as investigating the factuality of the intercultural partnering relationships in question, because it was already clear that by interviewing one member of a couple the full account of what had happened between the couple could not be investigated. Moreover, I knew that the interviewees were not about to tell me all the facts of their story because of various practical reasons (such as the time limit of the interview), to cultural and political stigmas (e.g. perhaps the culturally understood fact that people do not tell one of the most sensitive area of their private life instantly and at the first meeting with the researcher). However, they were about to tell me the facts as they saw them and wished to express them, meaning their subjective interpretation of what they had experienced in relationships with another person in the intercultural relationship in the situation of the British society. To this

end, the factuality of interview data was not a major concern for me because what I wanted to know was how interview participants had actively created meanings of partnering throughout their life, not what actually happened to them.

This is what Silverman, drawing on constructionists' position, argues: 'we need not hear interview responses simply as true or false *reports* on reality. Instead we can treat such responses as displays of perspectives and moral forms which draw upon available cultural resources' (Silverman 2006:144, emphasis in original). This position therefore is based on my standpoint of social construction. Kitzinger argues 'this approach is valuable insofar as it draws attention to the fact that experience is never 'raw', but is embedded in a social web of interpretation and re-interpretation' (2004:128). To this end it could be argued that data collected through the interviews were valid for the type of social explanation I wanted to produce.

One important point here in the participants' motivation in taking part in the research as one might argue that their motivations could affect their responses to interview questions in one way or another. In terms of this research, apart from the fact that many participants expressed that they intended to contribute in producing knowledge about Persian partnering practices, some participants indicated some personal, religious as well as political motivations. For example, one expressed that she took part in the research in the hope that she could seek consultation in order to fix her personal problems with her non-Persian partner. This shows the extent to which her intercultural relationships were problematic and unsolved that put her in a position to seek advice through the act of being interview. Moreover, it shows that her account was an honest

account of her understanding of her intercultural relationships which she they wanted to find solution for her relationship failures. In one other case, a participant told me that he agreed to take part in the research in the hope that he could advertise Islam and show to the world that only Islam can guide human beings to the best way of family life. This kind of expression shows the strength of religious teaching in his relationship which was one important aspect of culture that I was interested to investigate. These kinds of motivations could of course influence their responses to the interview questions. However, it did not pose any problem to my methodology because what I was investigating was exactly the way in which they understand their partnering experiences, justify their expectations form a relationship, the success or failure of their relationships; rather that an accurate account of the factuality of their intimate life.

Interviewing was considered as an interactive process. During the course of interview, the interviewees might think of the ways in which the researcher perceive their narratives (as expressed by some of the participants) and try to make an impression of themselves. Similarly, it happened many times during the interviews that the participants told me they were worried that I would think they were bad people. I needed to convince them that I do not value or disvalue their practices. One might think such incidents undermine the validity of my data. But in fact this kind of expressions by the participants shows me the extent to which they may adhere to the cultural norms and appreciate social values.

Moreover, during the interview some participants posed some personal questions to me, such as questions related to my own intimate and relationship stories and my opinion about Persian cultural norms related to marriage and relationships. More particularly, religious participants wanted to see how religious I was and if I supported their religious views. On the other hand, irreligious participants wanted to see if I support their irreligious practices. Any answers to these kinds of questions could potentially have an impact on the way in which the participant responds to my further question since they might adjust their narratives in relation to my view of the religion, cover up or lie about certain practices. My practical strategy to deal with such inquiries was politely decline to narrate my story and explain that as the researcher I could not share my own experiences with them as it would affect the course of interview and could have impact on the result of the research. No need to mention that I had an ethical responsibility to not lying to them about my own subjective experiences. The participants comprehended this. However, the point here is that the kind of question they posed to me could reveal the kind of important concepts and meanings of practices they had in mind which were exactly the topic interest of this research. I wanted to know their subjective view of their relationship experiences. The above examples shows that data produced were valid for the type of social explanation I wanted to produce.

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In this section, I argued how I went about collecting empirical data for this research. My sampling was theoretical so that I was strategic in choosing samples that were

meaningfully related to my theoretical position rather than representing the target population statistically. I also discussed that the type of method that I used (semi-structured interview) was suitable for the kind of knowledge that I wanted to produce. In this sense, I argued that data produced were valid for my research objectives. To conclude this section I wish to mention to two challenges that I faced during data collection in the following.

The data collection procedure was reflexive. Because of the above-mentioned challenges and lack of accessibility to certain groups I needed to alter my approach to collect data. As Silverman correctly points out "one of the strengths of qualitative research design is that it often allows for far greater (theoretically informed) flexibility than most quantitative research designs" (2006: 309). Other researchers such as Bloch (2004) who researched refugees also faced similar difficulties and therefore point to an on-going decision making on sampling and finding new strategies to carry out such research on hidden groups. In this sense, at the middle of my filed work I decided to set up a Facebook page, introduced telephone interviewing, offering the possibility of female interviewer to potentials female participants, in order to recruit more participants. Towards the end of the sampling I also focused to recruit only from certain characteristic groups. They are female and religious participants that I had lack of accessibility.

Apart from cultural stigmas that limited my data collection, politics also hindered my research both while recruiting interviewees and collecting data, as political attitudes influenced potential participants' motivation in taking part in the research and

consequently the interviewees' responses to the interview questions. For example, 'Persians' Uncle Napoleanism', a concept originated in a work of fiction that refers to a widespread Persian belief that all events or undertakings in the world, such as a PhD thesis, have been designed by the English for colonisation purposes; is one factor which discouraged people from participating in my research. Because of this historical background, it could be argued that if I had conducted this project based in a French or German institution I would have faced less opposition. On the other hand, I had to convince people that I neither wanted to collect data for the Iranian intelligent service nor to help the Iranian government to achieve their political objectives. Thus, one thing that took me a lot of time during the fieldwork stage was convincing people that this research was not designed to support the Islamic republic.

3.4. Ethical practices

The researcher has various ethical responsibilities in conducting research on human subjects. As is explored in Eisner and Peshkin's (1990) edited book, prior to conducting any empirical work, the researcher needs to identify ethical concerns involved in the kind of research they are about to conduct and then commit to addressing those concerns in appropriate ways and in a timely fashion. In this sense, considering ethical issues involved in conducting qualitative research is not restricted to a specific stage of the research, but rather is a matter of careful consideration throughout all stages of the research and even after the research period is over. In the following, I explain three key ethical issues that were important in conducting this

research: voluntarily participation and informed consent, confidentiality, and planning for potential risks.

I ensured that the research participants each took part in the research voluntarily. This approach is often understood through the notion of 'informed consent', which indicates 'that research subjects have the right to know that they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time' (Ryen 2010: 418). For these ethical observations, all respondents were provided with the 'Information for Research Participants' sheet which clearly outlined the process through which participants can withdraw from the study, along with the relevant deadline for such withdrawal and who to contact. Moreover, they also were informed that they have right to decline answering any of the questions, ask their comments to be off the record, or withdraw from participation completely without having to give a reason.

Because this study was politically and culturally sensitive, it was important to ensure that the confidentiality of participants would be protected throughout all stages and processes of the study, from the interview questions and situation and location, to transcribing and translating the interviews, to storing the data, and to analysing and reporting the findings. To further protect the research participants' privacy, coded names instead of real names have been used in all presentations of the participants' accounts. In this thesis, instead of pseudonyms I use M or F to indicate gender and the

number of the interviewee.[20] No information presented in this thesis could be traced back to an individual in any way.

Protecting the interviewer and interviewees from any potential risk involved in the research, is another ethical responsibility of the researcher. I was aware that the sensitivity of the interview questions might be upsetting or distressing to some participants, especially if there was any family conflict regarding their relationships or if their past relationships had ended painfully. My method for dealing with breaking down circumstances was asking them if they prefer to terminate the interview, suspend the interview until they feel able to carry on, or re-arrange the interview. I also provided details of relevant supporting services, such as counselling services and local multi-faith chaplaincies.

It should be noted that this study was conducted in compliance with the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Research[21] and the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice[22]. Moreover, the project has been approved by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

[20] This was also because pseudonyms might confuse a reader who is not familiar with Persian names and cannot distinguish the gender of each participant.

[21] Available at http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf

[22] Available at http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx and http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf

3.5. Towards the Empirical Study

In this chapter, I first explore my philosophical assumptions regarding the empirical portion of this research. I explain my tendency toward the sociological perspective of social constructionism. I sought to collect subjective understandings of the participants' experiences of their intercultural partnering practices. I reflexively approached all of the stages of the research design so that the interviews were co-constructed between the research participants and me. Taking a reflexive approach to this qualitative research, I highlighted recent discussions regarding the role of the researcher, from choosing a research question to interpreting interview transcripts and presenting results.

The central discussion in this chapter concerned the way that the data were collected. I used a theoretical sampling strategy and recruited people with characteristics specific to the conceptual underpinnings of the thesis, specifically gender, religiosity, age, and deviance. I chose semi-structured interviewing as my method of data collection because it was the most useful tool for collecting data in the context of this research. Because the focus was on participants' subjective accounts of their intergroup partnering relationships, I was not concerned with the facts of the participants' partnering relationships, but rather with the ways that they perceived those experiences at the time of the interviews. My social constructionist perspective indicates that there is no absolute truth about reality and, therefore, the participants' current accounts about their experiences were considered valid.

From the next chapter on, I present the empirical findings of this research. In order to analyse the data, I went through hundreds of pages of interview transcripts and first established the overall picture. Simultaneously, however, I considered each interview individually because each participant had her or his unique partnering narrative and particular conditions or circumstances in life, which had influenced their partnering practices. My indexing was reflexive, using a process that involved reading through interview transcripts, indexing, revisiting the data then re-indexing again. I employed a combination of cross-sectional and non-cross-sectional indexing. The latter was employed to identify exceptional cases that could potentially produce in-depth explanations of a particular practice and help to answer the research questions. As Flyvbjerg (2004: 425) argues, 'the typical or average case is often not the richest in information. Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied'.

The aim of data analysis was to answer the research questions in such a way that the findings of the study could be transferable or generalizable to other similar social contexts. The analysis was based on the idea of intersectionality, so I was looking for sources of difference that meaningfully shaped the participants' partnering practices. Arguably, intersectionality is descriptive, which is valuable in its own merit; however, it can be highly analytical when trying to explain the ways in which various categories of difference/s interplay in real life. The following chapters are based on this type of intersectional social explanation.

Chapter Four: Partner Selection

This chapter covers procedures related to participants' partner selections in the UK.[23] The first section explores the traditional Persian process for selecting a partner, and compares it with the process followed by participants selecting a non-Persian partner. To explain partner selection practices, I examine how most participants are caught between traditional norms and their individual choices. I also employ Gross's (2005) notions of 'regulative traditions' and 'meaning-constitutive traditions', to explain the role of traditions in the construction of these practices. To gain deeper insight into the traditions associated with partner selection, I explore the dilemma of virginity in Persian communities, and explain how different forms of traditions may in some cases contradict one another. Moreover, based on Smart and Shipman's (2004) argument, I explain how participants amended and changed the traditional value of preserving virginity. To explain why Persians chose partners from other social groups, I discuss a series of practical issues, such as obtaining UK citizenship and overcoming a lack of social acceptance in the host country. However and more importantly, I analyse the parts of the Persian cultural identity that participants were in conflict with, which mainly revolved around gender constructs and relations. Finally, based on Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity, as well as Bhabha's (1994, 1996) concept of hybridity, I explain how Persian 'inbetweeners' look for those closest to their adapted position on the continuum of cultural identity. The final section highlights the importance of Persian family values when selecting a partner, and elucidates the role of the emotional dimension of relationships for Persians, which appears to be important

[23] In this manuscript I refer to the participants in this research simply as 'participants'.

when choosing a partner, despite differing from what Giddens (1992) describes as 'the pure relationship'.

4.1. The Partner Selection Process: Between Traditional Norms and Individual Choice

Choosing one's own partner individually can be considered breaking with Persian local traditions. Conventionally, Persians are introduced to their future partners through their families. In Iran it is widely believed that a mother is responsible for finding her son a wife, so she arranges for him to meet with a series of 'good girls', from which he chooses a wife.[24] It should be noted here that this traditional process of matchmaking is

[24] During such meetings, the son is accompanied by his parents and sometimes by other senior members of his wider family. At the *khastegari*, both families offer input about the couple's life direction and their possessions, and other practical matters such as their plans for employment. After the *khastegari* ends, the families are given time to discuss the case amongst themselves, and decide whether they wish to move forward. If the groom's family decides to proceed, a designated family member, usually the mother, will contact the bride's family to arrange the next meeting. If the bride's family also wants to proceed, the second session, which is called a bale *boroun* (literally, 'taking the yes'), is scheduled. During this session, the groom's family usually presents a valuable gift, such as a jewel, to the bride, to convince her to say yes to their marriage proposal. After this meeting, the couple's intention to become engaged is announced and the bride's family agrees to organise a *namzadi* (engagement party), to which extended family members of both parties are invited to formally celebrate the engagement. Some families may host additional sessions between the *khastegari* and *namzadi*, such as *shirni-khoroun* or *kharj-boroun*, to discuss things in more depth (especially about marriage expenses which will be discussed in the next chapter), and give the couple more time to interact. However, the social norm is that the interactions are usually limited and time-bound; thus, there is no substantial dating process between the time of finding and choosing a partner, and when the engagement is announced. For more information about the meetings mentioned, see Touba (1972); Mir-Hosseini (1989); and Abarkhooyee et al. (2012).

not like the so-called ‘arranged marriage’ that has been documented regarding some members of South Asian communities (e.g. Bhopal 1999; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Costanzo-Kapur 2010; Mines and Lamb 2010; Purkayastha 2005; Puwar and Raghuram 2003). Unlike arranged marriages, in the Persian context, both parties retain some degree of autonomy, in that they can choose between candidates, though women still have less freedom to choose a future husband because their options are limited to those who are asking to meet them through the local traditional selection process. This process is still a common pattern in present-day Iran—even in the capital Tehran and other large cities. It should also be acknowledged that the reason the process of partner selection is highly supervised and mediated by families may be due to the fact that the pair’s partnering relationship is a collective decision that affects all members of the wider family, rather than simply the pair members themselves.

According to the data, a handful of participants practiced these local traditions. However, most of them found their partner(s) by themselves, at socials, work, or study places, and made their choices without first participating in local traditional sessions arranged by their parents. A simplistic interpretation would involve adopting the detraditionalization explanation, and arguing that Persian traditional norms are losing momentum. However, participants’ partner selection practices were more complicated. I found Gross’s (2005) notion of ‘regulative traditions’ and ‘meaning-constitutive traditions’ more useful for viewing these participants’ practices. On the one hand, it could be argued that the local traditional process for partner selection for Persians in the UK is in decline. This is consistent with Gross’s notion of ‘regulative traditions’, because there was no great fear of exclusion from moral communities in the UK, for

approaching someone to start a relationship, although it had to be in a way that was in line with their future partner's moral framework. On the other hand, Persians' 'meaning-constitutive traditions' for partner selection continue to play a role for Persians living in the UK. Although most participants found and selected their partner(s) individually, they understood and convened their relationships in ways that were consistent with local traditional ideas of the practice. Their criteria for selecting a partner were based on Persian traditions and those of Shia Islam, which outline certain characteristics of a suitable partner. These factors include the Persian understanding of purity and modesty, as perhaps one would expect, but principally, a commitment to the kind of family life values important to Persians—these values will be explained in detail in the final section of this chapter. Maintaining these cultural meanings appears to remain important to Persians when they want to select a partner, even after years of living in the UK, because that is how they make sense of their partnering relationship.

However, Gross's argument also seems to be limited in the context of this research, especially when it comes to parental approval. While most parents were not involved in participants' partner selection process, their approval of the relationship remained of vital significance. According to local Persian traditions, this approval is essential when selecting a partner, and especially so for women. Likewise, it is believed by most Shia scholars that the marriage of a virgin girl is invalid without the consent of her *vali* (father or guardian).

The pattern that emerged from my data is that regardless of the degree of religiosity, selecting a partner is an individual choice, but parental and family approval of the

relationship is essential. For instance, some of the nonreligious participants who cohabitated with their partners also waited for parental approval, and had ongoing negotiations with their parents about the future of their unions—a few of them for as long as eight years. Considering Gross's (2005) argument, it could be said that parental and family approval can be understood as a meaning-constitutive tradition, because for most participants a partnering relationship only makes sense if their parents approve of the union. But it can also be perceived as a vital regulative tradition, because of a pervasive fear of being excluded from moral communities. This regulative tradition of marriage is not in decline in the context of this study, contradictory to Gross's theoretical proposition.

In relation to the above, another noteworthy facet of this study is that the male participants had more freedom of choice, because their parents were more accepting of their brides. However, for female participants, their parents were more reticent to approve their relationships, and parental approval was usually subject to lengthy negotiations. This is consistent with local Persian traditions in which women are regarded as more vulnerable and in need of protection against deceptive suitors. What is most interesting about the female participants is that some of them made sense of the relationship only if their *vali* approved, because they also believed in the local traditional concept of a 'vulnerable girl', and by extension, in that the *vali*'s approval was key to selecting a trustworthy partner.

Between the time of selecting a partner and the wedding, participants might have spent some time together to get to know each other. Most of them said they had not become

sexual partners until after their wedding ceremony, and instead had some sort of 'close friendship' during their engagement period. For religious participants, any sexual excitement before their Islamic marriages was *haram* (sinful), but a few of them agreed on a kind of Shia trial marriage called *sighe-ye mahramiat*, to make their sexual excitements *halal* (permitted) during their engagement period—this form of Shia marriage will be explained in detail the next chapter. For most participants, including some who were partially religious or nonreligious, the traditional notion of remaining chaste until marriage was as important as avoiding to be sexual partners during their engagement period, which in a few cases lasted up to eight years. Some of them said that remaining chaste until marriage was also in deference to their partners' strong religious backgrounds, which in most cases meant that their Catholic future partners often refused to have sex before marriage.

Not properly getting to know each other before marriage posed many problems for some participants later. Some of them said they were disappointed, and experienced difficulties in their emotional and sex lives later in their marriage. In some cases, participants said that the lack of knowledge about each other before their actual permanent marriage resulted in their getting a divorce. Although the traditional values of both the Persian participants and their partners played a significant role in how they practiced their engagement periods, the difficulties they suffered later in their marriages led some participants to regret the way in which they had conducted their engagement, and to rethink the notion of remaining chaste before the permanent marriage. Consequently, at the time of the interviews, some of these participants supported the idea of having a meaningful short-term relationship before the

permanent marriage, to make sure that it would be successful. This suggests that life experiences in new surroundings could potentially devalue certain traditional practices.

Considering the partner selection process of Persians in the UK, it could be argued that in line with Smart and Shipman's (2004) argument, participants were selective in their use of traditional customs in terms of partner selection, but overall, they followed 'meaning-constitutive traditions', in the sense that Gross (2005) uses the term. Their approach is not an individualistic approach, to the extent suggested by the reflexive modernization theory, but rather, is shaped by traditional conceptions and is arbitrated in a collective family decision. I have touched on the religious tenets that influence partner-selection practices, however, to understand the role of traditions in these practices requires more focused attention on the different forms of tradition, and an acknowledgment that religious teachings may intensify or displace certain local traditional norms. This will be explored in the next section, using the example of virginity.

4.2. The Importance of Virginity when Choosing a Partner

The previous section pointed to Persian traditions that denote what characteristics one should look for in a potential partner. In this section, I examine one such characteristic, virginity, that can serve to showcase how different forms of the traditional play different roles in constructing partnering practices. I put the discussion in context by exploring the meanings of virginity in Persian traditions. I then posit the significance of virginity for participants, and how they understood the notion of virginity when they

chose to engage in an intercultural relationship and afterwards. Hence, I explore how traditional notions of virginity were amended by some participants, due to their new circumstances and surroundings.

Virginity in the Persian Tradition[25]

As previous studies have shown, female virginity has historically been important in Iran, and usually a physical sign of virginity has been required to prove a woman's purity (Afary 2009). This means that bleeding as the result of first penetration is considered evidence of the woman's purity, and is viewed as confirmation of her chastity (Afary 2009). Floor (2008) writes that evidence of virginity had to be demonstrated to other family members, especially the mother of the groom, by hanging a white handkerchief stained with the bride's 'virginity blood'. In this sense, both families would be confident that the bride had been a virgin—meaning she had been untouched and pure. Recent studies also confirm that female virginity remains vitally important before marriage. Sanasarian (1992) points out that according to Iranian traditions, premarital sex and losing one's virginity outside of legal marriage implies an extremely bad reputation for the woman. Hojat et al. (1999: 20) argue that, 'Virginity (*bekarat*), chastity (*nejabat*), and authenticity (being from a family with a good reputation) (*esalat*) are among the "gold standards" often used when a man searches for a future wife'. Tohidi (1993) also explains that traditionally, men have

[25] Some ideas presented in this section, were previously used in my MA dissertation submitted to the University of Manchester.

wanted to marry a virgin. She reports that this tradition remains strong, even between members of Iranian communities in Western countries.

Contrary to common perceptions, however, Persian's high regard for virginity may not be related to their religion, and is perhaps rooted in pre-Islamic patriarchal values. Of the two primary sources of Islamic teachings, neither espouses the importance of being a virgin. The first source is the primary Islamic book of the *Quran,* wherein there are two references to virginity. Although the *Quran* is always open to interpretation, according to Tabatabaee's (1996) interpretation, none of these verses could be regarded as valuing virginity.[26] The second primary source of Islamic teachings is the *Sunnah* (the way of living) of the Prophet of Islam. One of the widely accepted narratives of his life describes his first marriage to a widow. The couple had a monogamous marriage for 28 years, until she passed away (Shahidi 2000), which suggests that 'virginity' itself was not an important factor for the prophet in choosing his first wife.

[26] Tabatabaee has come to be regarded as one of the best Shia interpreters of the Quran in recent decades. Tabatabaee (1996) interpreted the two verses as follows. First, regarding verse 36 of chapter 56, which is concerned with women in paradise—although it is not agreed on who these women are—he argued that these women find themselves as virgins anytime they want to make love with their husbands in paradise. Thus, he argued, their sexual gratification is as pleasurable and exciting as the first sexual experience. Second, verse 5 of chapter 66 says that Allah can give the Prophet better wives, and then describes such wives, and at the end states they can be 'previously married or virgins'. Tabatabaee (1996) argued that Allah said 'previously married or virgins', only because good women are either virgins or previously married women, and there is no other category.

Although the above interpretation of the Islamic source is open to further discussion, the distinction between Persian local traditions and Islamic teachings is sociologically important, in that it reveals that the traditional has a series of interweaving levels and different forms, one of which is derived from religious teachings. This shows the strong Persian norm of preserving virginity, which is not of importance in their religious teachings. This suggests that various forms of tradition can produce conflicting values, and it would be an overstatement to say that all traditional norms have undergone the process of detraditionalization. I next explore how the research participants perceived the traditional notion of virginity.

The Notion of Virginity for Persians Living in the UK

To assess the study's findings on how Persians in the UK perceive virginity, it is necessary to explain the different meanings attached to the notion of virginity. Bernau (2007) explores connotations of the concept, and explains that virginity may refer to the physical, psychological, or spiritual virginity of male or female individuals. In respect to physical virginity, Bernau argues that '[m]ost people who think of virginity in physiological terms assume that it can be 'found' in the body; that the body can provide incontrovertible evidence of it, usually in the shape of an intact hymen' (Bernau 2007: xiii). However, she explains that according to medical writings, neither lost nor maintained physical virginity is verifiable. She then explains the religious understanding of virginity, and argues that for religious thinkers, virginity is both physical and spiritual, because what is essential for religion is one's state of mind. Understanding distinctions between different types of virginity is important to

comprehending the complexity of Persian social constructs of virginity. For my purposes, I focus on the Persian cultural meaning of virginity, which is the notion of not engaging in any sexual interactions, physical and/or emotional, with another person before marriage.

Initially, my data suggest that preserving virginity is more important for women, since, regardless of their religious commitment, most women who took part in this research preserved their virginity until marriage—in some cases even until their 30s—although a few of them had some sort of intimate, friendship-like, but not partnering relationships with a member of the opposite sex prior to marrying. This was because of the Persian gender notion that a woman's reputation is preserved exclusively through her virginity, and should only be lost within a lifelong marriage to the father of her children. The accounts of female participants indicated that preserving their virginity was important not only for Persian women, but also their future husbands' virginity was of considerable importance to them. In fact, some female participants stated that they would not marry men who had been with other women. Thus, a potential male partner was asked whether he was a virgin, although the participants acknowledged there was no way to discern whether he was telling the truth. Others said that they were curious, but accepted that a man might 'play around' with other girls before marriage, because they believed men had stronger sexual desires in general. This conception is intensified by the fact that these women hail from a patriarchal society, where the social world is seen as being constructed to accommodate men's desires.

The male perspective on virginity proved to be more complicated. Although it did not matter for a number of participants, for many of them, regardless of their level of religiosity, the virginal status of their future wives was important—even those men who were not virgins themselves at the time of their marriage suggested that for a woman not being a virgin. This perspective was not limited to physical sexual activities, as some men stressed that emotional virginity was also an important matter for them, because they could not accept a woman who had loved someone else before them. On the other hand, male virginity could also be important to them. While some men felt it was natural for men to have sex before marriage, others valued the notion of having a couple lose their virginity with each other.

Given that the Persian local tradition of virginity remains important, some religious participants made a distinction between physical virginity and the Islamic idea of chastity and purity. That means they were tolerant of how and under what conditions a potential female partner might have lost her virginity. Therefore, for some religious participants, not being a virgin only became a concern if their potential partner's virginity had been lost in a sinful way (i.e. having sex outside the Islamic marriage). Otherwise, they could make concessions about, and rationalize the social importance of virginity if their potential partner's virginity had been lost in an unsuccessful but legitimate relationship.

Based on participants' comments about virginity, most men and women regard remaining a virgin until marriage a principal matter. This tradition can be considered as a 'meaning-constitutive tradition', in Gross's (2005) terms, because this is how

Persians make sense of their partnering practices. Moreover, this 'sense making' is not only about physical virginity, but also about spiritual, emotional, and psychological virginity. This suggests that what matters to people is the concept that their partner has not been with, or had emotional connections with someone else, rather than that their partner has not had sexual intercourse prior to marriage. This tradition, therefore, has been actively observed by many Persians in the UK.

Amending the Cultural Value of Virginity in the UK

Smart and Shipman (2004) suggest that traditions are subject to negotiation and realignment, and thus people may follow some parts of their traditional norms, yet break away from other parts. They suggest this process of negotiation and realignment should be seen in successive generations. I find Smart and Shipman's theory useful for explaining Persians' attitudes towards virginity in the UK, since it can be argued that the Persian local tradition of preserving virginity has also been the subject of negotiation and realignment for some participants, especially as they experienced being in intercultural relationships. In this sense, some of the participants compromised on the virginal status of their future partners, after considering their cultural backgrounds. This means that when they met a Persian versus a non-Persian, they perceived the notion of virginity differently. Some participants said that they understood the social norms of the UK, and therefore did not insist on finding a virgin to marry in the UK. Some of the male interviewees argued that the virginal status of their future wife depended on where she was from. That is, if she were European, then not being a virgin was inconsequential, because they thought in Europe she was not

regarded as tainted, but if she were Iranian, they believed she had to be a virgin. Thus, participants perceived virginity differently under different circumstances.

As suggested by Smart and Shipman (2004), this process of negotiation and change is happening across generations. The cultural value of virginity is negotiable and mutable, and it may or may not be passed down from one generation to the next. Consistent with this idea, some female participants said that although they preserved their own virginity until marriage, they now thought that it would have been better to have had some sexual experiences before marriage, at least to ensure a successful marriage. Moreover, they said that they now saw younger women as being happier to embrace their sexuality before marriage; thus, they now go so far as to recommend that their daughters cohabit or otherwise have a proper relationship with the man they want to marry. They regret their own adherence to tradition, as exemplified by F7, who preserved her virginity until she was 33, when she married her current husband.[27] Although she claims to be in a good relationship, she regrets staying a virgin until marriage:

> Well, before my marriage I thought girls should stay virgins, but now I think it was a massive mistake, 'cause there's no difference between girls and boys: human is human and the sex instinct is the sex instinct. No, I think I was wrong by then, 'cause if you have sex before you get married, you would know your husband better. Emm, I don't know,

[27] In this manuscript, instead of pseudonyms I use the number of the interviewee and M/F to indicate gender. Pseudonyms might confuse a reader who is not familiar with Persian names and cannot distinguish the gender of each participant.

maybe it's because I have aged, 'cause I see these teenagers, I don't know …. I mean, the girls also have sex instincts —it is more than obvious that every human being has this—so why should this be said that the girls should preserve their virginity, but the boys are free to do whatever they want to?

+ You mean if you go back, you would have sex before your marriage?

Yes, yes.

+ Do you feel you missed something?

Emmm, don't know, em maybe not that much.

F7 did not say whether she wanted to experience more people, or whether she had wanted to experience her husband before marriage, to see if they were sexually compatible. However, what is clear from her account and the accounts of other female interviewees is that some of them, at some point in their life course, started to believe that preserving their virginity before marriage was not the best course of action. They started to question this cultural norm, and consequently did not pass it on to their daughters.

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This section argues that preserving virginity until marriage is vital in the Persian context. However, its importance is not attributed to the religion of the majority of Iranians. As will explain in the next chapter, through the practice of temporary marriage, people are allowed by Shia Islam to exercise their sexuality before their

permanent marriage. Overall, remaining a virgin until permanent marriage remains important for Persians in the UK, and this is especially so for women. This suggests that religion and other forms of traditions can produce conflicting values, because, as already explained, Shiaism does not value staying virgin. That said, participants' attitudes towards virginity were subject to amendments in their new surroundings. In some cases, the lack of virginity of a possible non-Persian partner was tolerated by considering her cultural background. In other cases, participants changed or regretted the tradition, as a result of their immigration experiences and new surroundings.

4.3. Why Choose a Non-Persian Partner?

The process of selecting a Persian partner and the role of tradition in identifying a good partner are discussed above. In this section I will consider why participants selected partners from different cultural groups. When I asked them why they did so, their first responses were often simple: 'It happened'. However, when they continued to narrate their biographies, it became clear that several other factors were involved. Initially, and in a more practical sense, those who sought asylum in the UK could not go back to Iran to find a partner. In addition, male participants who travelled to the UK in the 1970s and 1980s did not encounter many Iranian girls in the UK—as discussed in chapter 1, there were fewer Persian women immigrating to the UK than Persian men. Thus, their chances of finding a Persian partner were already limited. Moreover, some participants acknowledged that part of the reason they found and married a British or European person was to obtain UK citizenship or to facilitate their residency. Furthermore, social exclusion and overcoming a lack of social acceptance in the host country was another

factor that encouraged their selection of non-Persian partners. Some participants hoped that by partnering with a local person they would be accepted more easily by the host society. There is also the question of sexual attraction to other races, which might play a role in partner selection. I tried to trace this conjecture back in the data, to see whether sexual attraction was a possible factor for other participants. While the sexual fantasy of partnering with someone who looks different could be a valid factor, as was suggested by a handful of participants, most of them said that they preferred and chose to partner with someone who looked similar to Persians (e.g. brunette Irish or southern Europeans).

The main reason for not choosing a Persian partner given by many participants was their opposition to the Persian gender construct, relations, and responsibilities. This suggests that some of these migrants had already distanced themselves from their Persian cultural background, which could be one reason for not preferring to partner with someone from their own original cultural group. To put it in reflexive modernization language, they wanted a more democratic relationship, as Giddens (1992) uses the term. Thus, they were looking for a partner amongst Europeans to satisfy their desire for a more egalitarian relationship. I will explore this notion by explaining the male perspective first, and then moving on to explore female opposition to the Persian gender construct, which has proven to be stronger.

Many male participants cited extensive financial demands by a possible Persian wife as the reason they avoided Persian women. In Iran, the social expectation (also required by law and enforced by religious authority) is that men are responsible for providing

for all the financial needs of the family, and the wife has no responsibility in this matter. Given that job opportunities for women are relatively limited in Iran, it is reasonable for a woman to look for a wealthy husband to secure her financial stability. In this regard, what many male participants tried to avoid was being the only breadwinner in the family. In contrast, some male participants argued that if a Persian man partners with a European woman, he may still be regarded as responsible for the household's financial stability, but his partner presumes that she has to contribute to the living expenses. Thus, male participants were looking for a more egalitarian intimate relationship, but in a financial sense that meant that they wanted both parties to be responsible for the financial costs of running the household, at least to some extent. Related to this, many male participants expressed concern about how Persian women approached partnering relationships in terms of emotional meaning (i.e. they did not see women who is overexcited about wealth as a true lover).

Female participants, on the other hand, often expressed their opposition to Persian patriarchal gender norms, and suggested that by partnering with non-Persian men they were seeking more egalitarian intimate relationships, in terms of gender relations. For instance, they said that Persian men think that women are fully responsible for housework, and for taking care of their husbands and children, while the men do not tend to help equally with the housework. The other issue that troubled some female participants was the perception that Persian men see their wives only as sex objects, not as the beloved or better half, so that a relationship with a Persian man seemed to them only a way of providing sexual gratification for their husband. Some female participants said that they opposed partnering with a Persian man because of their

feeling that men tend to be dominant, and would limit their wives' freedom with regard to personal rituals, such as their choice of hairstyles or clothing preferences. In more extreme cases, some female participants also said that they had the feeling that Persian men behaved as if they were superior, since they had a disparaging view of women.

This position could be regarded as consistent with the claims of the individualization thesis, since female participants had greater chances of exercising their preferred relationships under the conditions of late modern society. Several female participants said that economic independence was one of the driving factors they looked for a non-Persian partner. They had not much financial expectations of their non-Persian partners, but, in return, they hoped for a more democratic relationship. In the same vein, reflexive modernization theory argues that changes in the labour market in late modernity have resulted in changes to gender relations and family life, in that 'women are no longer referred to marriage as the route to economic security' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 90). That acknowledgement aside, these women said they would seriously consider finances if their potential partner were Iranian, because it is one of the only facets of gender relations that makes a partnering relationship meaningful to both Persian men and women. They said that if a woman did not expect financial support from a Persian man, he would view that woman as cheap and dishonourable. Thus, the mentioned understanding on financial exchange is part of a bigger picture regarding women's views of gender relations. Economics, in this sense, was only a secondary factor that the female interviewees considered. Their primary concern was that they opposed the cores of the Persian construct of gender relations and responsibilities expected.

This section reveals that some participants had practical reasons for starting a relationship outside their social group (including obtaining UK citizenship or being more accepted in the host country). However, the main reason for their decision was cultural, in that most of them felt distant from their original cultural backgrounds so that they defined new positionings through their work on their cultural identities. Because they felt they were not complying with all the norms of their original cultural framework—of which the most troubling aspect was the Persian gender construct—they tended to seek out outsiders.

4.4. Looking for a Warm Partner and a Family Person

Above I posited that one of the reasons participants selected a partner from another social group was their opposition to certain aspects of their culture of origin. I also mentioned that participants amended and readjusted their traditional values when selecting a partner under the conditions of the British society. In other words, they redefined their social positionings, based on their current circumstances. This behaviour is consistent with Hall's (1990) understanding of cultural identity, as well as Bhabha's (1994, 1996) concept of hybridity and being in-between cultures. This section discusses the possibility that these people were looking for someone who was in some way close to their own 'in-between' cultural identity. In other words, they sought a person who was at the optimal point between two cultures—a point on the continuum where a relationship can be comfortable and easy to sustain. The most obvious evidence supporting this claim that emerged from the data is that many of

participants' partners already had some sort of passionate engagement with Persian or other Middle Eastern cultures. This means that before starting a relationship, they had learnt the Persian language, researched the history and culture of the Middle East, or had good experience of friendships with people from the wider Middle Eastern or Islamic countries. In other words, they had a predilection for Persian traditions, and honoured some elements of Persian cultural identity. In this regard, while I did not control for the background of the partners, one of the sociologically interesting points and meaningful patterns that emerged is that many participants selected a partner with a Catholic background, in a country where Catholics constitute a small percentage of the population. Most partners who fit this category had Irish ancestry. Based on these data it can be argued that this preference is attributable to three main factors: participants were looking for those who shared their understanding of emotions and ways of expressing affection, who have shared family values, and who had also experienced immigration difficulties. These are now explained in turn.

The question of how Persians in the UK perceive love at the beginning of a relationship, and how it affects their partner selection, is complex. Some participants claimed that they fell in love, or thought that they had fallen in love. However, it seemed to me that they offered this evaluation out of a sense of social obligation, as this is a dignified way of selecting a partner. In particular, some interviewees said that the only reason they got married was for love, but by the end of the interview, it came to light that they also wanted a British passport. Thus, implications related to immigration had played a significant role in their decision to marry a British or European Union national, but they did not initially provide this information.

Considering all of the research data, I could not conclude that there is a meaningful pattern that fits into Giddens' (1992) 'pure relationship' theory, that participants selected partners for the sake of the relationship itself. This conclusion is also partially due to my choice of methodology (i.e. the interview), which is not an adequate tool for investigating such a complex question, especially since I knew in advance that based on their culture, Persians would try to offer answers geared toward impressing their audience regarding their family relationships. Therefore, I suggest that a specially designed psychosocial project may be required to investigate the complexity of this issue.

From a sociological perspective, however, I can say that Persian understandings of falling in love, intimacy, and affection play a significant role in how partners are chosen. Arguably, the participants in this study were looking for a partner who had an understanding of love, intimacy, and affection closest to their own. For instance, I quote M20, who gave a typical justification for the selection of an Irish partner:

> To be honest with you, I was with other girls at the beginning, but it was her comportment that really attracted me. She was emotionally really very much like Iranians—that was what attracted me. And also, I was alone here, so talking to her and the way she showed her tenderness and kindness was like Iranians. I can say when I see other Irish women, I don't know why, but they are like very warm and passionate towards their husbands. We now have been together for more than 25 years, because of that affection, that she shows, that has been the reason we

> stay together. She likes her house, her kid, yeah she shows that she likes her family life. And the way she expresses her feelings is without any expectation, you can see that it's not fake or something.

At the end of this quote, M20 mentioned that his partner created the kind of family life that he had expected. It was also mentioned by many other participants that before selecting a partner, they tended to negotiate common ground and shared family values. Many of them said they were looking for a 'family man' or a 'family woman', meaning a person who believed in Persian-like family values. The values they discussed included the beliefs that virginity for both sexes should be preserved, marriage is the best form of partnering relationship, it is good to have a big family household (i.e. many children), and that relationships with extended family members should be sustained. Moreover, gender responsibilities (e.g. who is the breadwinner, who does the housework, who cares for the children) were similarly discussed. Obviously, these values were not the same for every individual who took part in the research, but together they provide an overall picture of the patterns undergirding Persian partnering relationships. In several interviews, a partner's Catholic beliefs were characterized as common ground that ensured shared family values and a sustainable union. I will unpack these values in later chapters.

In the search for a partner, the findings of this study prove that Persians do become intimately involved with other immigrants in the UK, or a second generation of immigrants, and especially so with people of Irish ancestry. One discussion point that people mentioned is how a migrant's partner can alleviate difficulties experienced as a

migrant, as well as homesickness, and a lack of affection. In these cases, migrants' partners had more understanding of, and empathy for, emotional troubles, and could be more sympathetic about others' experiences of being marginalized and excluded in the host country. This was particularly important for those who were trapped in the UK because of the 1979 revolution in Iran, or the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. For example, M14, who had had all three of his relationships with Irish women, said he related to the Irish because migrants from both countries 'were from nations hindered by political games'. He described the difficulties he had encountered when he arrived as a student, and argued that the Irish people have been more understanding about his situation than others. Here is his narrative describing his first Irish girlfriend:

> Because of her friendliness and warmth and affection, because I thought the Irish are more kind than the English, and also their wider family members are also very warm, I think these were the reasons that I was attracted to her. You know, when we arrived here, the revolution took place in Iran, and we were trapped here, thousands of miles away from our family, and I think all of us Iranians kind of rush to get married 'cause being away from our family was really difficult, and so we were looking for someone who is more similar to our own family, and so I also wanted a girl who is warm and friendly, so you know, emmm, it was really difficult, Ali Agha! 'cause we worked back then and our wage was one pound per hour, and I mean it was even the rate on the black market; we had no other options, you know. Because of the revolution and the war, the family couldn't send money from Iran,

> so we had to work, but my point is that we worked for one pound per hour, and then the cost of calling to Tehran was two pounds per minute. You see that is why I'm saying it was a really difficult time —the pressure of loneliness and stuff, so I decided to find a girlfriend, a kind and very passionate girlfriend who was understanding and who can help me continuing. And my Irish girlfriend could help me keep going…

M14's story typifies how many participants found Irish migrants, or their second generation, as more friendly and emotionally supportive in a society where they found little support. They also said they looked for someone whose expressions of affection were similar to Persian sensibilities. In this sense, for M14, and many other participants, their partner's family friendliness was as important as their partner's warmth. I will return to this issue and explore the importance of relationships within the wider family in more depth chapter 7.

This section discusses why study participants were encouraged to look for and eventually decided to partner with a Catholic—who in most cases was Irish. In choosing a partner, there was a dimension of emotional involvement, but it was not 'the pure relationship' or 'confluent love', as Giddens (1992) posited. It was a kind of emotion that is understood by Persians in relation to their wider families. Their similar understanding of intimacy, therefore, was not solely about the partnering relationship, but was also about a person's relationship with a wider circle of family and friends, who affected the partnering relationship. Similarly, it could be argued that one important aspect of partner selection for participants was finding a person who shared

their family values. In addition, having similar experiences with immigration difficulties also provided participants with common ground on which to start their relationships.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter explains partnering practices from the stage of finding a potential partner to a couple's engagement. In the UK, Persians are caught between their own individual choices and Persian traditions. Using virginity as an exemplar, Persians are also depicted as being caught between cultural norms and religious teachings. Although tradition remains significant in terms of partner selection, even for intercultural relationships, it is subject to negotiation and change. The Persians participating in this study seem to be 'in-betweeners', since they realigned the Persian construct of gender relations that resulted in seeking more compatible partners within non-Persian communities. However, at the same time, they tried to find the optimal point between their own cultural identity and that of a possible partner. Consequently, most participants selected Catholic/Irish partners, because they gauged Catholic family values and affection as being similar to those of their own original culture. The next chapter will explore how Persians form their intercultural relationships.

Chapter Five: Marital and Other Partnership Arrangements and Permutations

This chapter explores how the Persians who participated in this research formed their partnering relationships. Marriages in the Persian context can be permanent or temporary. They can also be monogamous or polygamous. In this chapter, I consider these traditional forms of marriage in three sections. First, I explore the importance of the permanent monogamous marriage, which is imposed on people by their traditional values and social norms. I also examine how people practice their engagement periods before marriage, and arrange for marriage-related ceremonies. Moreover, this section discusses the expenses involved in getting married, such as the *Mahr* and *Jahaaz*. The second section reviews how Persians perceive the Shia's temporary marriage (*sigheh*), in relation to other forms of temporary or non-permanent relationships. I discuss how people amend and change their religious traditions, and produce reformed models of temporary relationships such as *sigheh-ye mahramait*. In the third section, I consider how Persians perceive and practice multiple partnerships, including polygyny, adultery, and extramarital sex. Here I describe an exceptional case from my participants, a man who has had two wives for over a decade. I discuss how his practice of polygyny can be considered, along with those who conducted adultery and engaged in extramarital sex.

These sections highlight the interplay of religious teachings and other forms of the traditional, such as local customs, in the construction of marital relationships. More particularly, I explore how religious teachings can be in conflict with other forms of the traditions, which may result in contradictory values. Arguments made by proponents of the theory of reflexive modernization with reference to individualization

and detraditionalization theses are evaluated. It is important to remember that this evaluation is about a particular social group, namely Persian migrants in the UK, in a particular social context, namely those involved in an intercultural relationship in the UK.

5.1 The Permanent Relationship: Practicing the Traditional Marriage

Data show that most participants preferred and practiced permanent monogamous relationships. These participants believed that marriage was the best form of partnering relationship for them, although a handful had experienced only cohabitation. I begin this section by explaining why people choose permanent monogamous marriage, after which I describe various marriage ceremonies and the engagement process that leads to marriage. I then review the expenses associated with the traditional forms of Islamic marriages. These expenses are namely *Mahr* and *Jahaaz*. I conclude the section by evaluating the reflexive modernization theory in relation to these marriage practices conducted by Persians in the UK.

Why Permanent Monogamous Marriage?

In order to understand why participants married, it is necessary to consider what they regarded as marriage, and why that was their preferred choice. What can be learned from their responses is that they believed in a bond recognized by their family and community members as a traditional permanent marriage, regardless of its religious connotations. For religious participants of course, marriage has religious overtones, but for others it remains a necessary ritual by means of which one fulfils social

expectations and avoids social exclusion. In other words, participants followed their traditional codes of practice—fearful that they would otherwise be excluded from their communities. Moreover, most of them, regardless of their gender or degree of commitment to religion, expressed their conviction that permanent marriage was the only union in which they would have a child—although a religious person is permitted to have a child from a temporary marriage. They mentioned that it was important to them that their extended family members and the larger community would accept their children. Participants' preferences remind us of three points regarding the role of the traditional in the construction of marriage. First, we are reminded that observing the tradition of marriage still plays a significant role in modern societies, as opposed to the contrary claim of detraditionalization theorists. Second, although permanent monogamous marriage as a traditional value is still important, its importance has less to do with religion than one might think, since Islam does not impose permanent monogamous marriage. According to Shia Islam, believers can practice temporary marriages and have children from those marriages, and men also can practice polygamy, but Persian people do not prefer these practices. Third, marriage as a 'regulative tradition', as suggested by Gross (2005) regarding the US context, is not in decline in this particular community in the UK. Most participants practiced the traditional permanent marriage, and were fearful that they would otherwise be excluded from their communities—especially so if they wanted to have children.

Participants, however, positioned themselves according to their current situation and surroundings in relation to wider socio-political conditions. One of the best examples of this is the participants' immigration condition. It was mentioned in the previous

chapter that one of the reasons some of the participants chose a British or European partner was to obtain UK residency, or the right to remain in the country, which could be achieved by marrying a British or European national. Moreover, some people claimed that they chose an Islamic marriage in order to get the official documents needed to acquire Iranian birth certificates for their children, or Iranian passports for their spouse and children, which would enable them to travel to Iran more easily. These causes were among the reasons they chose to marry their partners, rather than cohabit with them.

The data show that issues like choosing a marriage bond, having children in such a union, and making sacrifices to save the marriage, are more important for women than for men. These values are consistent with Persian traditional gender norms for women, which restrict their choices regarding whether or not they want to be in a marriage union and have children in such union. This finding supports Jamieson's (1998, 1999) critiques, in which she argues that existing gender inequalities and the social construction of gender relations are more powerful dimensions in shaping people's marital lives than the propositions of individualization and detraditionalization theories.

As discussed in the second chapter, the reflexive modernization theory presents good ideas about the process of social change in late modernity, but needs to be refined in order to provide a better account of the reality of contemporary lives. One useful contribution to the discussion of the role of the traditional in terms of marriage is provided by Cherlin (2004), who has considered contemporary American marriages,

and who argues that the current status of marriage remains a symbolic practice. He says:

> I see the current state of marriage and its likely future in these terms: At present, marriage is no longer as dominant as it once was, but it remains important on a symbolic level. It has been transformed from a familial and community institution to an individualized, choice-based achievement. It is a marker of prestige and is still somewhat useful in creating enforceable trust. (Cherlin 2004: 858)

Cherlin's account describes a general idea about the status of marriage in contemporary American society. However, in terms of participants in this research, getting married remains the dominant behaviour, which carries more than just symbolic meanings. This decision depends very much on the wider social network of family and the larger community, since people need family approval, and it is not entirely an individualized achievement, since individuals' options are restricted by many social boundaries. Cherlin (2004), however, recognizes that marriage still provides a foundation for building trust in contemporary American society. This is due to the traditional connotation of marriage, and not surprisingly, security and family commitment are among the reasons mentioned by participants most often for believing marriage is the best form of partnering, although the data show that female participants had more hopes than male participants that marriage would bring security and commitment.

Apart from participants' reasons for getting married, Cherlin's consideration of marriage from the perspective of its symbolic meaning, as well as Finch's (2007) idea of displaying family life, mentioned earlier, provide useful tools for understanding how participants perform their marriages. Given that permanent monogamous marriage was preferred by most participants, and choosing to get married had not been vigorously negotiated with their intercultural partners, the data show that the way of displaying marriage and delivering its symbolic meaning was a matter of substantial discussion and negotiation, not only between the participants and their spouses, but also with the extended family members of both parties. An interesting issue that emerged from the data was the importance of making a religious ceremonial display of the marriage, even for partially religious or nonreligious participants. The intention behind this display is not to satisfy religious tenets, but rather, to express the symbolic meaning of these ceremonies. They are not being used as evidence that a couple is obeying the religious authority, rather, they are used to convey parental approval for the marriage, and to showcase the alliance of the two families to the extended family and larger community. Some of these participants claimed that they got married to the same person as many as three times, so that in addition to registering their marriage at a Registry Office (since they wanted their marriage to be recognized under UK law), they went to both or either a church and a mosque, because they wanted to respect both parties' religious traditions, and meet the expectations of their wider social network. The justifications given by two such individuals for having religious ceremonies were as follows:

> … for my second marriage we went to a church. She was saying that her mother wanted us to get married in a church. So it was sort of, how could I say, hmm, I agreed only to please them, it didn't mean anything to me, but it meant something to them, and I had no problem with it. I said ok, you choose whichever church you want, and we will go there to take some memory pictures for your mother's album, and then we will come back. (M9)

> Me and my wife married twice, once in a church and the other ceremony was a very Islamic one, like we had *Aghd* [Islamic ceremony] and stuff. We did that because there were quite a few people in her family who knew, for example, what a mosque means. And we had the Islamic marriage for my own mummy and daddy, and you know, for other family members, cousins, and so on 'cause we also wanted to show them that she converted to Islam. We thought it could be better that way, that we respect both families' traditions, and my father said that we should have the *Aghd*, and her family said that the minister should say, I don't know, 'I pronounce you husband and wife', that sort of thing…. (M17)

M17 mentioned that he wanted to show his family that his wife had converted to Islam, and that his marriage was not inter-religious. This, he said, was because of his fear of being excluded from his community due to his intergroup marriage. To sum up this argument, I return to the claim that I made at the beginning of this section, namely, that in this study's particular social context, not only has detraditionalization not occurred to the extent that the theorists of reflexive modernization suggest, but also, the 'regulative tradition' of marriage is not in decline, as Gross (2005) suggests. The

tradition of getting married is still of considerable significance for Persians in the UK, since it needs to be displayed to convey a specific symbolic meaning to the extended family and community members. This requirement is intensified by other social and cultural boundaries that restrict people's free choice with regard to forming relationships. Due to these constraints, most participants follow Persian traditions, and practice monogamous permanent marriages.

Marriage Ceremonies and Expenses

Participants who decided to get married had to agree on who would pay the costs of the marriage-related ceremonies.[28] Traditionally, it is the bride's family's responsibility to pay for the engagement ceremony (*Namzadi*) and the religious ceremony (*Aghd*). The groom, or his family, is responsible for paying for the wedding ceremony (*Arousi*), which is usually the bigger and more expensive ceremony. However, as far as my data show, paying for these ceremonies was not a major issue of negotiation for participants, particularly since many of them, together with their partners, did not have enough money to fully practice these traditional ceremonies at the time of their

[28] In the Persian context, when families of both the bride and groom have agreed to the marriage, they organise an engagement ceremony called *Namzadi*. Next, they have the wedding ceremony, which is called *Arousi*, and they leave this ceremony to celebrate the union when the bride is formally moved into the groom's house. The religious ceremony wherein the couple is pronounced husband and wife is called *Aghd*. Sometimes *Aghd* and *Arousi* are both held in succession in one night; sometimes religious people hold a separate meeting for *Aghd*, at some point between *Namzadi* and *Arousi*. There is usually a gap between these ceremonies, which could be some weeks or years in duration, but it is usually short. People actually first start dating at their engagement ceremony, and this continues until their *Aghd*, when the couple becomes husband and wife.

marriage. Consequently, their limited means restricted their choices, and, as a result, they chose the simple party they could afford to have, which could not be considered as *Namzadi* or *Arousi*, according to Persian standards.

Apart from the ceremonial expenses, two other Persian marriage rituals traditionally practiced by Persian Shias called *Mahr*[29] and *Jahaaz,* which incur expenses. These appear to have been a matter of negotiation for participants. *Mahr* is required by both Islamic and Iranian law, and is used to solemnize any kind of Islamic marriage; *Jahaaz* is not required by law, but is traditionally practiced by many Persians. Both are explained in the following paragraphs.

In Shia Islam, *Mahr* could be anything from a flower, a volume of the Quran, the price of a pilgrimage (e.g. traveling to Mecca in Saudi for Haj), to some amount of money, or gold, or property. It is *end-al-motalebah*, which means it is payable to the bride whenever she demands it during the marriage contract, or at the time of divorce. An agreement regarding the amount of *Mahr* is mandatory to validate any Islamic marriage contract (temporary or permanent, the former will be discussed later in this chapter). Traditionally, brides do not request their *Mahr* at the beginning of marriage, and as long as the marriage is sustained, they do not tend to demand their *Mahr*. There is a Persian saying: '*Ki dade Ki gerefeteh*?' literally meaning, 'who paid the *Mahr* and who received it?', indicating that no one has paid and no one has demanded the *Mahr*, and the agreement is only for purposes of observing the formality of the religious ceremony.

[29] Also known as Mehr, Mehriye, or Mahriye in Persian.

This Islamic tradition, however, has been controversial among Persians. On one hand, there have been a lot of accusations that *Mahr* is nothing but a payment for sex, or that it is simply buying a slave. When money is involved, it is argued, emotion is not involved, and the practice is comparable to prostitution. On the other hand, the practice can be justified by considering that the *Mahr* originated in patriarchal societies where women were not involved in the labour market, and had no financial power. In this sense, it could be perceived as a very clever move to guarantee women's financial security in the event of divorce, since they lived in a patriarchal society where working and earning money for a divorcee was not easily possible. Thus, if there were no *Mahr*, then divorcees had no financial means for survival.

In the socio-political circumstances of the UK, where the participants in this research practiced their partnering lives, women are not in the same position as the women in Iranian society, and therefore they do not need *Mahr* for financial security. They have job opportunities, the backing of the welfare state, and regulations are in place to ensure a minimum standard of financial support for women. Moreover, in the event of a divorce, according to UK law, all the possessions of both parties have to be equally divided, or, with the rule of the court, they will be divided fairly. In this respect, some participants argued that there was no need for the *Mahr*, as both parties believed that women's financial security was guaranteed. Moreover, the idea of *Mahr* provoked a lot of confusion for the participants' partners, as it sounded to them as if the *Mahr* was a form of payment for sex. For this reason, some participants chose not to suggest this practice to their partners, to avoid the possible negative connotations.

Interestingly, many religious participants understood that this practice would not work in British society, so they just convinced their partner to agree on a small sum, or sometimes offered other things like the Haj, the Quran, or sweets, for the sake of obeying the Islamic tenet. Some religious participants said that they paid the *Mahr* at the beginning of their relationship, although they were not asked to do so. Only one, who had an English wife, claimed that his wife demanded a full set of jewellery at the time of their marriage, which is an interesting exception to the behaviour of other participants' partners.

Some of the male participants found it financially rational not to disclose the idea, and thereby avoid making a commitment to paying a sum of money to their non-Muslim wives. Others said that it was important for them to make sure their partners did not assume there was a sort of business deal or bargaining from which their wife might want to benefit. In their minds, the amount a woman might request revealed her motivation for getting married. In this sense, they wanted to be sure the woman who wanted to marry them should do so purely for the sake of that relationship, and not for the value of the *Mahr*. On the other hand, for female participants, requesting the *Mahr* was a sort of indignity, as there was always a fear that the practice would indicate prostitution. Thus, they had to explain that the practice was only a formality of Islamic marriages.

The issue of the *Mahr* appears to have come up only when a participant was religious, or wanted to get an Iranian certificate of marriage, which requires people to observe

the Islamic marriage rituals and agree on the bride's *Mahr*. Initially, they had not intended to discuss the issue. In many cases, when they had to have the Iranian marriage, there had to be some sort of explanation to the other party, in a way that was not embarrassing to themselves and not offensive to the non-Persian partner. For example, they had to say that the *Mahr* is just a marriage gift from the groom to his bride.

Jahaaz is another marriage expense, which, in contrast with the *Mahr*, can best be described in English as a dowry. Providing *Jahaaz* is the bride's, or her family's, responsibility, and often includes furniture, home accessories, kitchen accessories, and household appliances needed for the establishment of a new household. Most participants said that both partners brought, or started to buy, the household appliances, and none of the female participants claimed that they brought *Jahaaz* to the household, but they often said that they contributed to it. Some male participants said that their non-Persian wives actually contributed some money voluntarily to purchase household appliances. Almost all the male participants claimed that they never asked their partners to provide *Jahaaz*. It could be argued that one of the main reasons that people do not observe *Jahaaz* may be that it is not required either for the Islamic marriage contract, or under Iranian law, as opposed to the *Mahr*, which was observed by many participants, since it was required for either the Iranian legal documents or the Islamic contract.

These traditional practices may suit the socio-economic circumstances of Iran, but may not be effective in the UK context. Thus, Persians' traditional marriage expenses have

been detraditionalized, in light of the UK's economic conditions. Only the *Mahr* is observed, unwillingly, since it is enforced by the religious authority and required by Iranian law, leaving those who need official Iranian documents in the position of having to accept the practice. Apart from believers who obey the religious teachings, it does not seem that the practice of *Mahr* has a powerful meaning for the other participants.

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To conclude this section, what can be argued on the basis of the data is that tradition continues to influence people's decisions regarding the type of partnering relationships they choose. The conventional notion of permanent marriage remains significant at the symbolic level, when the commitment to permanent monogamous togetherness needs to be conveyed to the extended family and community. As staying in such relationships is required by tradition, most participants claimed that they did their best, and disregarded many of their own preferences to save their marriages. Some of them said that they changed the nature of their relationship to LAT (living apart together), in order to save their unhappy marriages, by living apart. Others, especially female participants, made sacrifices to save their marriages. This insistence on staying in the marriage appears to conform to traditional Persian values and gender norms, especially as they pertain to women. There is a well-known Persian expression that 'the bride is moving in with a white dress and moving out in a white dress'. The first white dress refers to the bride's wedding dress, and the latter refers to the *Kafan*, the white Islamic shroud, which indicates that the only circumstance under which she will be leaving her

husband's house is upon her death. Thus, all these traditional norms influenced participants to choose a permanent marriage and to stay in it.

Those whose first marriage had failed, however, often tried to experience other forms of relationships. Most of them claimed that they still preferred monogamous permanent marriages as a decent form of relationship accepted by other people around them, but they often cohabited or experienced casual or short-term relationships secretly. They reasoned that 'the must do' (marriage) had been done, and they were now free to do other things. This means that permanent marriage remains something people feel obligated to display, but once it has been done and ended, they feel free to explore other options, often secretly.

The engagement period before marriage seems to have been under the shadow of the traditional practice of remaining chaste until marriage, and consequently many participants did not actually have a dating relationship. That they had observed, this tradition was regretted by the participants, as it resulted in unsuitable marriages, caused many difficulties in later life, and sometimes ended in divorce. The costs associated with a traditional marriage seem to have become less important, as a consequence of the economic situation in the UK, and partnering with a non-Persian person. These traditions, therefore, seem to have lost momentum, though they are still observed to avoid social pressures and to respect boundaries.

In this section, I explored the contemporary status of three Persian permanent marriage traditions: the symbolic importance of having a permanent marriage, regretting the

engagement tradition, and the declining significance of marriage expenses. These findings do not support the extent of the process of detraditionalization claimed by its theorists, but show that Persian marriage traditions are playing a significant role in the formation of partnering relationships. These traditions, however, are being reshaped by participants as a result of their circumstances while living in the UK, and being in intercultural relationships. These findings support Smart's (2007) suggestion that the detraditionalization theory provides some good ideas about social change, but needs further refinements. Thus, it would be better to say that those traditions remain significant in forming people's relationships, but they have been reshaped in some ways in the new circumstances and surroundings.

5.2 *Sigheh* (temporary marriages) and Other Temporary Relationships

Temporary marriage, or *sigheh* in Persian, is a kind of marriage exclusive to Shia Islam that is not accepted by the Sunnis who constitute the majority of Muslims.[30] In short, temporary marriage is an agreement between a heterosexual couple to be married for an agreed-upon period of time, and an agreed-upon *Mahr*. To solemnize the marriage, the woman says to her future temporary husband: 'I marry myself to you for the agreed *Mahr*, and for the agreed time period'. The man responds immediately by saying, 'I accept the marriage'.[31] People do not need to go to a mosque or see a

[30] Also known by its Arabic form: *Nikāḥ al-Mutʿah*, or simply *Mut'a*.

[31] The conditions that validate the agreement are a matter of discussion among scholars. Some believe that the vows should be spoken in Arabic; others argue that saying them in other languages is also acceptable. Some even say the vow is not necessary, and the two parties' mutual agreement to form the relationship is enough, and so the relationship is not haram (sinful). Moreover, conditions are prescribed for women practicing this kind of marriage. In

member of the clergy to undertake this kind of marriage; they also do not need witnesses to be present. Thus, they can easily become a couple without informing others, or revealing their marriage to the wider family or to community members. The belief is that this marriage contract is between the two of them, for which they are responsible to Allah. Although religious people understand the religious justifications for the practice, they usually refuse to exercise *sigheh*, because it is not socially and conventionally regarded as a decent practice in contemporary Iran.[32] Historically speaking, some even viewed the practice as legitimizing or Islamizing sex work or prostitution (see Floor 2008, Afary 2009). In this respect, the social perception of *sigheh* has traditionally been in conflict with religious teachings. In the following paragraphs, I first describe how Persians in the UK perceived this practice, and then explain in what ways religious participants exercised it. Employing Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) concept of family practices, in the final section I evaluate how this

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every kind of Islamic marriage, if the woman is a virgin or not *rashideh* (mature enough to decide her own sex life)—she needs her *vali's* (father's or guardian's) permission to marry. However, who, in what condition, and at what age, can be regarded as *rashideh* is a matter of dispute between Islamic scholars.

[32] There are several religious justifications for this practice. Tabataba'i (1975) who is regarded as the most respected Shia interpreter of the Quran in a century, argue as follows:

> Islam is a universal religion and in its legislation takes all types of human beings into consideration. Considering the fact that permanent marriage does not satisfy the instinctive sexual urge of certain men and that adultery and fornication are according to Islam among the most deadly of poisons, destroying the order and purity of human life, Islam has legitimized temporary marriage under special conditions by virtue of which it becomes distinct from adultery and fornication and free of their evils and corruptions. (Tabataba'i 1975: 229)

religious practice could be understood in relation to other forms of temporary relationships.

Perception of *Sigheh* Among Participants

Most participants, including some of the religious participants, rejected the idea of *sigheh*. However, their opinions were complicated, because while many of them opposed *sigheh*, they practiced temporary relationships in some form. Moreover, the data show that their opinions about *sigheh* and/or other non-permanent relationships were not meaningfully correlated with religiosity or gender identity, although women did have stronger preferences for permanent relationships.

According to the participants' responses, opposition to the practice of *sigheh* was usually centred on two arguments. Initially, people opposed the idea of *sigheh* because of its temporary nature, which could bring with itself the fear of losing at some point. In this sense, many people claimed that they opposed *sigheh* because of the lack of stability and security (in all aspects of one's relationship, including the emotional aspects), which they believed they could find in a permanent relationship. This perception was apparent, regardless of the participants' gender identity. Although women's opposition to a temporary relationship was stronger, many male participants also said that they did not want temporary or short-term relationships, because they wanted to settle down and start a decent and respected family life (which would be

accepted by their extended family and community members), with a permanent source of love and emotional security.

Second, the participants' objections to *sigheh* were strengthened by social norms and local traditions. Basically, the idea of *sigheh* is contradictory to the normative tradition of permanent relationships, so that the majority of participants claimed that they would prefer monogamous permanent relationships for the reasons discussed above. However, the most significant element among Persian norms is the importance of preserving one's virginity until one commits to a permanent marriage. For women who want to partner for the first time, the practice of *sigheh* could lead to the loss of their virginity, which, according to social norms, must be preserved until their permanent marriage. Consistent with these opinions about virginity, participants' opposition to *sigheh* was independent of their religiosity and gender identity—although women's opposition often appeared to be stronger. Thus, many of the religious participants also expressed disagreement with the idea of *sigheh,* due to the custom of staying chaste until marriage. In addition, there had been a widespread idea that *sigheh* is a form of sex work, as it was locally been seen as a way of formalizing, legitimizing, or Islamizing prostitution. This is so because there may be a payment to the woman as part of her *Mahr*, since agreeing on the *Mahr* is essential to solemnizing the *sigheh*.[33]

[33] Although it could be imagined that a man chooses *sigheh* and actually pays for sex in the form of the *Mahr*, and the woman involved accepts the payment in order to have sex with the man, nonetheless, the *Mahr* does not have to involve cash or an expensive item. It can be as inexpensive as a flower, and it should only be delivered at the woman's request, which means the woman can choose not to demand the *Mahr*. Thus, from a religious point of view, it is not logical to assume that the *sigheh* relationship is entirely based on an exchange of money or imposed financial transfers.

Nevertheless, the practice of *sigheh* historically has not have a good public image in Iran, and people do not tend to accept the idea that a person could be involved in a temporary relationship for reasons other than sex for a money exchange. According to the data, this negative perception appears to be accepted by religious people, which again reminds us that religious teachings sometimes contradict local traditions, and are even perceived as doing wrong by religious people. I will now explore how those who opted for *sigheh* as a religious form of a relationship practiced it with their non-Persian partner.

Practicing Intercultural *Sigheh*

From a religious point of view, any sexual practices outside an Islamic marriage are *haram*, so some religious participants use the *sigheh* ritual to commence their engagement period, to make their sexual activities during this period *halal*. For such a *sigheh* relationship, the woman's family usually imposes the strict condition of preserving the girl's virginity, which has to be observed in order to keep the *sigheh* contract valid. In other words, the marriage contract would be invalid and the relationship would be *haram* if the couple engaged in any sexual intercourse. This kind of *sigheh* is usually called *Sighe-ye Mahramiat* by Persians, or trial marriage in some English academic writings (see Haeri 1986, 1989. 1992). It should be noted here that the intention behind *Sighe-ye Mahramiat* is testing a relationship to find out, with some degree of confidence for both parties, whether or not the partners are suitable for a permanent marriage. Thus, *Sighe-ye Mahramiat* is not a temporary arrangement, in the

sense that the couple will leave each other after a certain period. It is temporary in the sense that it is a trial relationship, used to find out whether they are a good match for a lifelong relationship, before they commit to it permanently. It could be argued that this kind of *sigheh* is a new innovation, taking the momentum and becoming increasingly popular within Shia communities. This type of practice cannot be traced back to early Islam, but it has recently been practiced more often in contemporary Iran, because of the increasing number of people saying that members of a couple need to know each other well before their permanent marriage.

In addition to the *Sighe-ye Mahramiat* practiced by some participants, it can be assumed that other people may not want to enter into any permanent relationships for different reasons. For example, M18 did not want to enter a permanent marriage because of his personal circumstances. He had had an unsuccessful marriage and left two children behind. Since his ex-wife was addicted to alcohol, the court later ruled that their children should stay with him. He subsequently had concerns about raising his two teenage children. He said he could not start a permanent relationship again, as he supposed it could potentially hurt his children, and also make his situation more complicated, and involve him in another 'huge responsibility' of committing to another marriage. He therefore concluded that the best kind of relationship for him was a temporary relationship, mainly to satisfy his sexual desires. However, he modified the traditional way of practicing *sigheh* by proposing a 'until further notice' time bond instead of a fixed term. He said 'you begin a relationship, until it ends, it may be 24 hours, 24 days, or 24 years, you actually stay in the relationship as long as you enjoy

it'. For him the relationship could continue as long as it did not disturb or hurt him in any way, otherwise, he said, he would break up.

M18 experienced several *sigheh* relationships, but his account of these relationships was a modified and reformed version of the religious tradition of a *sigheh* marriage. What almost all Shia scholars argue, and what is commonly known, is that in a *sigheh* marriage, the exact timing should be mentioned in the vows. However, for M18, the timing was limited and short, but it was not exact, and it was always until further notice. M18's modification is consistent with the growing perception of the status of partnering relationships in contemporary western societies. This reminds us of the reflexive modernization argument regarding the stability and longevity of relationships in late modernity. As has already been mentioned in chapter 2, reflexive modernization theorists argue that forms of intimate relationships have been transformed, and they last as long as both members of a couple are satisfied with the relationship (Giddens 1992). Bauman argues that '[n]owadays everything seems to conspire against … permanent bonds, ... togetherness lasts no longer than the gratification of one of the partners, ties are from the outset only 'until further notice'' (cited in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1996: 26). It could therefore be argued that in late modernity it is not important what we call the relationship—marriage or cohabitation—even if it is meant to be permanent, in real life it lasts 'until further notice'. M18's account, therefore, could be considered as an adaptation of the increasingly popular perception of couple relationships, so that his idea of *sigheh* was readily welcomed by his non-Persian partners.

In general, it can be concluded that all of the religious participants who practiced *sigheh* argued that the idea of a non-permanent relationship was more acceptable for their Western partners, to the extent that they rather liked it. They argued that for their partners, *sigheh* was no different from a casual or dating relationship according to Western standards, but it had something extra: it brought a sense of security that both parties were acting in good faith, since they believed that the relationship was being observed by God. This supports my earlier suggestion that practicing temporary couple relationships could be seen through the lens of Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) concept of family practices. From this perspective, we could understand that in both *sigheh* or boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, people actually 'do' the same practice of a temporary relationship, with the same intention, but under different names.

Practicing Intercultural Temporary Relationships

Although it may seem at first glance that *sigheh* is a religious exercise, if we are interested in investigating temporary relationship 'practices', as Morgan (1996, 2011a, 2011b) used the term, then arguments regarding *sigheh* relationships could be expanded to broader types of temporary relationships. This position is more understandable when considering the earlier discussion that people within marriage or cohabitation bound, do similar family practices (Silva and Smart 1999). In this respect *sigheh* would be similar in 'practice' to other forms of non-permanent casual relationships, or even the one-night stands in contemporary Western societies.

For those who had experienced failure in their first permanent relationship, or were in an unsuccessful permanent relationship, the tradition of permanent marriage seemed to be losing its meaning. As I explained above regarding the engagement relationship, having lived in the UK, and having learned about other forms of relationships, particularly relationships before a permanent marriage, many participants had started to think that there should be a temporary or casual relationship before agreeing on a permanent tie. Most of these participants preferred to be seen as still committed to, and not confronting the traditional norms and social values; thus, when they said that they now agreed with the idea of a temporary relationship, they did not refer to it as *sigheh*, but preferred to call it a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship—although these two could be similar in practice. Of sociological interest, some of the female participants actually said that they now regretted not having a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship before their permanent marriage. However, the intention of such a relationship was still important for some participants, especially for women, meaning that they often wanted that temporary relationship to lead to a permanent one. They said that if the temporary relationship would lead to a permanent one, they could accept the practice. I quote F30 as an example of these women, one who was partially religious, remained a virgin until marriage, and was in an unhappy marriage at the time of the interview. At that time she supported the idea of a temporary trial relationship before permanent marriage, and she rationalized the choice of such a relationship for her daughter and other girls as follows:

> Actually it was an interesting topic for me, because I thought NO! It is unfair to the girls, but nowadays, many girls actually like to do this. So as long as the

> girl is happier with that, that is fine for me, yeah, but the reason I initially sort of dismissed the idea was because I thought, you know, it is sort of an abuse of the girls' sort of position, but nowadays, a lot of girls don't mind that, I mean they want that as well, so I think as long as it is a mutual understanding that the girl thinks that this guy is going to marry me, you know if it is understood and both are happy with that, so that is fine….

F30 mentioned the widespread perception that women are more vulnerable in such relationships, and a non-permanent or casual relationship is often to the male's advantage, because it is believed that males tend to promise a permanent relationship, and then enjoy a temporary sexual relationship before leaving the woman. This perception is even endorsed by some scholars. Arguably, the most highly regarded study of temporary marriages in English is that of anthropologist Haeri. She argues, 'the purpose of a *mut'a* marriage is enjoyment, not to both parties, but the husband only' (Haeri 1989, 57). The findings from this research prove this point of view is wrong, as a few female participants said that they had some kind of a relationship for fun only, without any intention of continuing with that relationship permanently. Thus, although they denied the label of 'temporary', '*sigheh'*, or '*mut'a*', their intention was to be involved in temporary relationships, and this was of their own volition, to satisfy their sexual desires and needs for intimacy. I quote F19, an atheist, to show that an nonreligious woman could accept the practice of having a temporary relationship—without any religious overtones, for the purpose of having fun—although she avoided the label of temporary. She was talking about her relationships with two ex-boyfriends before her current marriage:

It was like a game…. Everyone said a girl at my age should have a boyfriend, having a boyfriend was something all my friends did, so I also found myself one.

+ Did you think your relationships with your ex-boyfriends were temporary?

No, I didn't think they were temporary, but I also didn't think they were serious, it was something that made me happy and cheered me up for that moment.

+ So you don't see anything wrong with a kind of temporary relationship that enjoys the moment?

Hmmm …. it depends on your aim. No, I don't see any problems with that. If it works for you, then it is not right or wrong, and no one can tell you what you should do, and what you shouldn't do in your personal life. And yes, for me, if the conditions were OK, yes, I would accept a temporary relationship.

In summary, it could be argued that despite all the negative opinions about *sigheh*, many participants at some time in their lives had had temporary relationships. Few of them had such relationships before their permanent marriage, but most of them did after their first permanent marriage failed. Although partially religious or nonreligious participants did not use the word *sigheh*, their actual practices and intentions were to have temporary relationships. What is more interesting is that some of those who rejected the notion of a *sigheh* marriage often perceived similar, short-term, casual relationships or one-night stands as rather acceptable, or even good practices, although they were not eager to label these relationships as temporary. Sometimes they claimed

that they would prefer a monogamous permanent relationship, but, in practice, they might experience several casual encounters or short-term relationships. Thus, participants had complicated opinions about time-limited or life-long relationships, and sometimes their beliefs were in conflict with their actual practices.

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Participants' perceptions of *sigheh* are another example of conflicts between religious teachings and local customs. Temporary marriage is something that is allowed in Shia Islam, but even religious Persians sometimes judge the practice according to local values, and regard it as a form of prostitution. In this sense, people are more likely to adhere to their local norms and customs rather than their religious teachings. This example showcases how contradictory social values may be generated by religion versus locality. However, participants' approaches to *sigheh* were more complicated because they usually expressed opposition to the idea of temporary marriage, but, in terms of their own practices, they had either experienced similar short-term relationships or accepted the idea of them, although they did not consider those relationships as forms of *sigheh*. It seems that the differences between their expressions and practices were more related to how other people around them regarded their temporary relationship than with what they wanted to do. Their opposition to the idea of temporary marriage, therefore, could be understood as respect for their local normative, or to avoid social ostracism. Their actual practices were in accordance with the kind of relationship they wanted to experience in their new situation—often after the failure of their permanent marriage. This indicates how important observing local

norms is for them, in that they could disregard religious teachings for some practices such as *sigheh*.

Those acknowledgements aside, those religious participants who chose to follow the practice, reformed and modified it in accordance with their local norms and new surroundings. *Sigheh-ye mahramiat* is a new form of *sigheh* that has emerged in recent years. It is, however, consistent with the local norm of a permanent monogamous relationship, because it is intended to lead to a permanent tie. It is also a response to the growing awareness that more interaction is needed before making a permanent tie. Of more interest is M18's decision to change the time commitments of *sigheh*, to make it more like a contemporary casual relationship, and more acceptable to his western partners. These amendments are steps being taken to adapt the religious traditions to the new surroundings and dominant traditional norms. What can be learnt from participants' accounts of *sigheh* is that local norms and religious teachings interplay in the construction of Persians' temporary relationships. These traditions have been reshaped, but have remained powerful in forming individuals' lives, so that the claim of detraditionalization theory is not applicable in this particular context, although it provides good ideas about the transformation of those traditional values in terms of how participants practice temporary relationships. Similarly, the social boundaries described above—such as the perception that women are vulnerable in temporary relationships, or the negative image of *sigheh*—restrict people's abilities to choose whether or not they want to perform temporary relationships. These constraints challenge the claim of individualization theory, since there are still many boundaries that limit individuals' choices.

5.3 Polygyny Marriage and Multiple Relationships

There is much evidence to suggest that polygyny has been practiced for a long time in Iran, and was practiced even before the emergence of Islam (Floor 2008; Afary 2009). However, Islam legitimizes the practice, under certain conditions. From the religious perspective, the idea of polygyny is based on verse 3 of the *Nisa Surah* (Women Chapter) of the Quran.[34] The most important aspect of this verse, according to interpreters, is the condition it imposes on a man's choice of polygyny, which addresses the possibility of doing an injustice to his wives. According to many scholars, the reference to justice means that the man should treat his wives equitably in all aspects of his partnering relationships, including expressions of love and affection for his wives (Tabatabaee 1996). Many scholars argue that it is almost impossible to meet this requirement in practice, and so polygyny is not encouraged, and is even discouraged (Tabatabaee 1996).

From a religious point of view, polygamy is exclusive to men, as religion allows a woman only one husband at a time.[35] Shia interpreters of the Quran argue that the

[34] The verse is: 'And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course'. (translated by Shakir 1983)

[35] It bears mentioning here that Islamic and Quranic scholars offer several justifications for the legalization of polygyny in Islam. The most well known argument pertains to both sexes' bodily needs and conditions. It is argued that some males always have polygamous desires, or

verse referred to above allows a man up to four permanent wives, but according to the Shia perspective, he is also allowed to have as many temporary wives as he wants. However, these two practices should not be combined, because a man may have only one temporary marriage at a time, which means that he cannot practice polygyny. Moreover, the practice has a specific meaning in Islam, and cannot be conflated with what may be understood by an English reader as a type of polygamy that is practiced openly. Islamic polygyny can be conducted secretly, without informing the other wives or reaching agreement with them on a new relationship. However, the practice is not adultery, in the Islamic sense, because the religious authority legitimizes it. In this respect, the practice differs from what may be understood as adultery, or more generally extramarital sex, in the British context. Defining these terms is not the purpose of this thesis; however, it is necessary to clarify that, if we look at these notions through the lens of Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) concept of 'family

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at least that males have stronger sexual desires than women, and unless steps are taken to accommodate their needs, these men may end up having extra-marital sex. Also there are issues like woman's monthly periods, or pregnancies, which may inhibit the fulfilment of men's sexual desires, or women's menopause can prevent husbands' from having more children. Moreover, there are arguments that support legislation for the practice for socioeconomic reasons. These arguments pertain to the population's growth and natural sex ratios, since there are always fewer older men than younger women, and since men tend to prefer younger women, and women tend to prefer older men, there is always a shortage of older men available for younger women. Men are also more likely to die as a result of wars, or working in dangerous places. This shortage of men could preclude some women from enjoying a marital relationship, which in turn could lead them into sinful sexual behaviours. These arguments point to the advantages of polygyny for women in a patriarchal society, in which women cannot easily earn money, and in which a woman needs a husband to provide her living expenses. For these reasons, it is argued that the practice should be allowed for the good of some women, and not only for the sake of satisfying men's sexual desires. See Tabatabaee (1996) and Mutahhari (1981) for a fuller discussion.

practices', and regard them as something people do in their everyday lives, then we can understand having multiple partners at the same time as one category of relationships. In this category, what people actually 'do', is have more than one sexual partner at a time, whatever that behaviour may be called, within different contexts.

After introducing the religious idea of polygyny above, I next consider the overall picture of participants' accounts of the practice, and then go on to consider an exceptional case in my sample, namely a man who has had two wives for about ten years. I conclude this section by explaining how polygyny is similar to other forms of relationships with multiple partners, and how these practices can be evaluated in terms reflexive modernization theory.

How Polygyny is Perceived by Participants

Although polygyny is allowed under Sharia law, arguably it is not a respected practice in Persian communities, so most participants, regardless of their gender, opposed the idea. Instead, as discussed above, they said that monogamous marriage was a form of relationship they considered acceptable. Women's opposition to polygyny was usually stronger than men's, because they felt that the practice undermined affection, emotional attachment, and the ideology of loving someone forever. Moreover, they seemed to believe that the real purpose of the practice was to satisfy men's sexual desires. That said, some of the religious participants expressed acceptance of the religious justifications for the permission in certain situations, which they believed were not related to their own circumstances. In particular, religious women said that

the practice was not for everyone, certainly not their own husbands. They also rejected the thought of this kind of marriage becoming common. Nevertheless, it could be argued that although it is widely alleged by Persians that polygyny exists to satisfy men's desires, the idea could be accepted by religious women in certain contexts. That said, there were religious, or partially religious participants, who opposed the practice. I use a male participant's account to show that opposition to the practice is not gender based. M18, who had experienced several *sigheh* relationships as a religiously accepted practice, opposed polygyny and said:

> Well, I don't see any reason for polygyny. Because you either enjoy a relationship or not, when you don't enjoy your relationship you would leave it, and would enter another relationship that you would enjoy. I think if you have a relationship, and you still would want to have another one at the same time, that would be inhumane.

Here, regarding the practice as inhumane behaviour by a somewhat religious participant showcases how problematic the practice is perceived to be, even by practicing Shias. This takes me back to my original argument, presented in the second chapter, that religion and other forms of tradition, such as local traditions, interplay, and sometimes they produce contradictory social values, so people have to choose between these conflicting values. M18 exemplifies this conundrum. He practiced *sigheh* as a practice allowed by his religion, but regarded polygyny, which is also allowed by the same religion, as inhumane. Overall, neither practice was acceptable for

participants, indicating that local traditional norms are more important for people than their religious teachings.

The Story of Participant M34

Although polygyny is not socially accepted or recognized by the British state, it can be assumed that there are some people in the country who have experienced such a relationship. Given the difficulties of finding these individuals and convincing them to take part in culturally and politically sensitive research, such as this study, I was able to interview only one male who had been practicing polygyny in the UK. M34, a practicing Shia who had been living in the UK for about twelve years at the time of my interview, is an exceptional case. He has had two wives for about ten of these years. He had had his first wife and three children in Iran for about seventeen years when he came to the UK to claim political asylum (although he was not political, and as was mentioned earlier, many people just claimed to be political refugees to be allowed to settle in the UK). His asylum application was not accepted for over nine years, and therefore he stayed in the country for that period of time, and could not return to Iran. He made it clear at several points during the interview that his only intention for having a second relationship with his English wife was for sexual satisfaction and avoiding sinful sexual interaction, because, he said, had he not gone into the second marriage he would inevitably have had sinful sexual relations with other women. His second relationship started as a temporary marriage, but was later changed to a permanent marriage. He justified his second marriage in this way:

> My Iranian wife was in Iran and I came here. For around a year and nine months I was patient, trying to be a pious man, because I have been Muslim, and didn't want to sleep around….but later I felt that I couldn't wait anymore, I mean, I was forced to find a girlfriend, *sigheh* I mean, … And what I did is not something that I want to blame myself for, but it was something that I can be proud of, because I have been Muslim, and this was one of my rights, even if you look at non-Muslims, I mean look at the English and you see they have a wife and six other girlfriends and lovers, I know a person who was blind at birth and he has a wife and children, but also a secret lover. So I don't feel guilty, because I was not with my wife, and it took me more than nine years to go back to Iran to see my family again.

M34 also said that during these nine and a half years he did not forget his family in Iran, and continued to send them money and provide financial support. As soon as he got his British citizenship he went to Iran to see them, and it took about one and a half years to bring them to the UK. This indicates that he was still attached to his first wife, and his second marriage was not out of dissatisfaction with the first marriage, and cannot be considered as a kind of casual love affair. He did not disclose his other relationships to his wives, which can be considered deceptive by a western reader. However, according to his religious code of practice he did not need to inform them, or agree with them should they object to his practices. His justification was that he initially thought of ending his second relationship as soon as he was able to bring his Iranian family to the UK, but later he could not do so, because his second wife became pregnant and converted to Islam.

Another argument M34 gave regarding his intentions for his relationship with his second wife, and in support of his claim that he was still attached to and felt responsible for his family in Iran, is that he did not choose his marriage with the English wife as a way of getting UK citizenship. He said that after they had been in their temporary marriage for about two years, his English wife converted to Islam, and asked for a permanent marriage—at that time she was not aware of his first marriage. They did elevate their temporary marriage to a permanent one in the religious sense, but did not register their marriage with the government. If he had registered his marriage with an English woman, he would have received his UK citizenship more readily, instead of waiting nine years for his asylum application. However, he said that if he had registered his marriage with his English wife, then he would not have had the right to bring his first wife to the UK, because according to UK law, the only way he could bring his family members from Iran to the UK was as dependents, and he would not have been allowed to claim two marital relationships. This could be another sign of his attachment to his Iranian family, although I have to say that his strategy had financially benefitted him, despite all the immigration difficulties he had suffered. The second English wife was only a wife under Islamic jurisprudence, and under British law she was a single mother with three children, so as a single mother she was eligible to get financial benefits from the UK government.

The most interesting part of M34's story occurred when his wives' learned about his polygyny. He claimed that his English wife, who was twenty-one years younger than

he was, agreed to stay as his second wife. At the time of his interview he said that both wives were fine with the situation:

> It is now about five years that my wives have understood that I have two wives, and there is no problem with it. I mean there were problems but they are now resolved. I mean there was like an earthquake, and some aftershocks also occurred, and now there is no problem, the only problem is that I am divided between these two.
>
> + And how did you let your English wife know about your family in Iran?
>
> You see, she didn't know I had a wife in Iran. I started with a temporary marriage and then things got serious, you know; after sometime she had her first baby, it was after that when she understood about my wife in Iran. Then there were arguments and quarrels, then she said NO, she couldn't, and things like that, and then she asked me to divorce my first wife. My other wife also understood consequently, and she also said I had to divorce my English wife. I told both of them that I couldn't divorce either of them, whoever wants to stay, stay, and whoever wants to leave, then leave, no quarrels! And then they both stopped arguing, and both agreed to stay. Now one of them lives in London with her children, and the other lives in Birmingham with her children. Monday to Thursday I am with my Iranian wife, and Friday through the weekends I am with my English wife.

The reason for his decision to settle his two families in two different cities was that the wives could not get along with each other. He claimed that he had initially tried to settle them in one household, after the Iranian family arrived in the UK, but despite all his efforts the wives could not stand each other. The reason he stayed with the English wife on the weekends was that he wanted to see his school children during weekends, while his Iranian children were adults, and did not have to go to school on weekdays. In order to observe the condition of polygyny mentioned in the Quran, he claimed he was doing his best to treat both wives equally. However, he mentioned that the English wife was sexually more attractive, as she was twenty-one years younger, but emotionally he felt more attachment to his Iranian wife, as they had been together since their early twenties, and they understood each other better.

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Despite all the social and legal constraints, M34's story provides an example of the practice of religious polygyny in the UK, and serves to indicate how powerful religious teachings are in shaping a religious person's partnering practices. His example cannot, however, be regarded as consistent with Persian traditions, as polygyny may not be acceptable according to Persian local tradition, and reveals a clear division between local traditional norms and religious teachings, as M34 has been practicing a behaviour that is allowed in his religion, but is not consistent with Persian local traditions. The religious spirits (or rights, as he put it) helped M34 continue with the kinds of relationships he preferred, so he was able to overcome all social and political constraints to save both of his relationships: one across distance for a long term of nine

years, and the other, despite the fact that his polygyny could be considered illegal under British law. All these intricacies suggest that religion is a powerful factor in shaping people's lives, and cannot be blended with other forms of tradition at the analytical level.

It is important to note that M34 was the only participant who followed the religious process, but some others conducted the same practice, since some nonreligious or partially religious participants (including one female) said that they had had multiple partners at the same time, although not under the Islamic codes of practice. In this sense, although some participants might have rejected the Islamic idea of polygyny, or not recognized their extramarital sex as adultery or cheating, or not let it be revealed publicly, yet, what they actually 'did', was have more than one sexual partner at a time.

Considering these practices as one category of relationships (with multiple partners) is important in the sense that we are interested in exploring people's 'practices', as Morgan (1996, 2011a, 2011b) has suggested. In this sense, those who had multiple partners at the same time actually behaved similarly, but under different names: polygyny and other casual forms of multiple relationships.

All participants who had multiple partners commenced these relationships secretly. M34 could save both relationships under Islamic teachings (although it may also have been due to other reasons such as his Iranian wife's financial dependency), but for other participants, either their partner did not find out, or their marriage ended because

their extramarital relationships were revealed. This means that relationships with multiple partners have always been contrary to social acceptability, but that is what some people do, although it is often done in secret to avoid social stigmas and possible legal implications.

With regard to the discussion of reflexive modernization it could be argued that participants' perceptions and practices are again complicated and often contradictory. Most participants opposed the religious code of polygyny and instead followed their local traditions. In terms of their own practices, however, many of them had had multiple partners at a given time—although they had their own justifications for doing so. What could be learnt from participants' practices is that both the local and religious traditions were in conflict with what some of them actually practiced. Since they were required to obey the traditional norms and convey their acceptance of these norms to others in their community, they conducted such practices secretly. In this situation, it would be difficult to agree that individuals were free to make their own choices and conduct the forms of relationships they preferred. In this context, both ideas of detraditionalization and individualization seem to be simplistic.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter explored the importance of the traditional norms and customs associated with Persian marriages. It shows that people in this particular social context are still attached to their local traditions, although they may have amended some parts of them, depending on their new surroundings, and adapted them to their new situations. The

three preceding sections can be thought of as being on a continuum. The first section indicates that some traditions—such as permanent monogamous marriage—continue to be of vital importance. The second section shows that religious traditions are subject to amendment and change as they concern temporary marriage. The third reveals how complex local and religious traditions may interplay in the construction of one's family life. Bringing these ideas back to the argument I raised earlier in the second chapter, religion is a form of tradition that interplays with other forms of traditions. The results of these intersections are complicated, and may produce either contradictory or consistent values. In the case of *sigheh* and polygyny, some participants opposed the religious guidance, but conducted similar practices. Some others reformed the religious teachings and tried to adapt them to either or both their local traditions, and the social norms of the UK, their receiving country.

Chapter Six: Internal Partnering Practices

In previous chapters I explored how and why Persian immigrants who participated in this study selected partners from other cultural groups in the UK, how they formed their relationships, and why they did so in their certain ways. From this chapter onwards, I explain participants' practices during their partnering stages. Thinking about the 'me' and 'relationality' in Smarts' (2007) theory of 'personal life', and also 'multiple social positionings' in the feminist theory of intersectionality (see Brah and Phoenix 2004; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006), it could be argued that when a person is in a partnering relationship, she or he is engaged in three distinctive types of personal positionings. First is her or his position in relation to her or his partner. Second is her or his position in relation to people external to her or his partnering relationship. Third is also about her or his position in relation to people external to the couple's relationship, but is exclusively about the intergenerational positioning that is meaningfully important in shaping one's partnering practices. These three different positionings produce three different types of relational partnering practices, which reflexively affect each other and the couple relationship itself.

In this chapter and the following two chapters I explore the reflexive interplay of these different relational positionings, in order to better understand how and why Persians involved in intercultural couple relationships do their partnering practices in the ways they do. The two latter positionings will be discussed in the next two chapters. This chapter focuses on exploring partnering practices that are internal to a couple's union. I use 'internal' partnering practices to distinguish practices that are conducted within the confines of a couple relationship from those that are conducted in relation to people

external to a couple relationship. I do not use 'private' partnering practices to conceptualise practices exclusive to members of a couple, because the private/public binary does not seem to be useful here since all three positionings could be public in some respect, and private to certain people.[36] Both internal and external partnering practices are personal, in the sense that Smart (2007) uses the term, because personal is also about social relationships. In this sense, all three kinds of partnering practices are dimensions of one's personal life.

This chapter provides an exploratory analysis of the everyday affairs of Persian intercultural partnering relationships. More particularly, it considers the internal practices participants did in the 24 hours of their everyday partnering lives. I view their daily practices from the perspective of cultural identities, and investigate how their daily practices were shaped by their cultural differences, and how they negotiated their differences to accommodate one another and attempted to sustain their relationships on a daily basis. Those practices that were most often mentioned by the participants as being significant and challenging fall into two categories. I first explain the language differences, which mattered mostly when participants expressed their emotional feelings. I then explore the personal rituals of everyday life that shaped intercultural relationships, including hygienic and dietary practices. In conclusion, I point to the ways that these micro level partnering experiences can be understood in relation to wider social changes and the socio-cultural context in which they take place.

[36] See a collection of essays edited by May (2011) for a fuller discussion of overlapping private and public spheres in personal life.

Before moving to the main discussion about the internal practices of intercultural relationships, it is important to mention here that two of the most important aspects of internal partnering practices could be the ways that a couple manages the financial expenses of living together or partnering, and the housework—if they do not live apart. Despite all the opposition to the Persian gender construct (which advocates the patriarchal approach discussed in chapter 4), most participants said that they had, at least to some extent, adopted the conventional model of the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the housekeeper. According to the data, it was widely believed that it was the woman's job to do the housework, though many participants said that it was not a woman's responsibility, but was accepted for the sake of having the household function in a better way. This perception was not related to gender, as many of the female participants said that they agreed, and preferred to stay at home and do the housework for the good of their spouse and children. Moreover, some of the male participants provided justifications for this viewpoint, and said that their wives did not need to work, because they made enough money and there was no need for additional income. Thus, the conventional model of male breadwinner was practiced by most of the participants, but it was subject to amendments and readjustments depending on a couple's financial situation. While acknowledging that these participants' perceptions did not appear to present major problems to their intercultural relationships, there were two main areas of Internal Partnering Practices that presented challenges to the participants' couple relationships. These will be explored next.

6.1. The Language of Intercultural Lovers

As mentioned earlier, according to the reflexive modernization theory, love has become a central attribute of modern relationships (Giddens 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). For this reason, it was important to examine how people in intercultural partnering relationships understood love, and managed to convey their feelings to their partners, given that they were bilingual couples. Emotions have not traditionally been the focus of sociological attention. However, in recent decades attempts have been made to understand emotional feelings sociologically, which broadly means identifying the social patterns of people's emotions.

Hochschild's (1983) work on stewardesses in the US is one of the earliest attempts to show that emotions are socially constructed, and that the way in which people present their emotions depends on the social structure and situation. She suggested that there are 'felling rules' that are embedded socially and culturally, which guide people to perform their emotions in certain ways (Hochschild's 1983). Thus, the ways in which people meant to feel are depended on social situation. To her, 'emotional labour' is the way in which people display emotional feelings through their faces and bodies (Hochschild's 1983). Furthermore, she argued that women are culturally expected to do the 'emotional work' in their personal relationships, as well as in other social places where they have responsibilities, such as workplaces. Duncombe and Marsden (1993) take these ideas further, by suggesting that even during sexual acts, individuals display their feelings to their partners, in a culturally constructed manner, which is in their view, the 'emotional work' expected of a partner. Duncombe and Marsden (1993) argue that the failure to satisfactorily display emotions at these times may result in

relationship breakdowns, and that responsibility for emotional work is based on gender. Their primary focus is understanding how gender differences affect emotional practices.

Arguably, addressing emotional feelings within couple relationships, particularly love, has been neglected in most sociological studies of relationships, although as Smart (2011) posits, sociology can provide a unique way of thinking about emotion. Referring to Lupton (1998), who rejected the essentialist idea of emotion, Smart (2011) argues that given emotions are socially and culturally constructed, they are subject to change, and differ from one culture to another. She states that in terms of emotional expression, western culture has changed over the years. Smart (2011), therefore, acknowledges the importance of culture and cultural differences, such as gender, in relation to emotional expression.

In this section, I consider language differences as one source of cultural differences that shape intercultural partnering relationships, especially regarding the ways in which participants expressed their emotions. Language difference in a couple relationship is important, in the sense that language is the mean by which every couple interacts and communicates with each other on a daily basis, and even more so in order to convey their feelings. The language that people use to convey their intended meanings to each other is a system of communication that includes signs and symbols, and is not only verbal. In this regard, couples with different native languages could experience challenges to their couplehood in a variety of ways, from misunderstandings in

everyday life conversations, to struggles when attempting to express emotional feelings towards each other.

Some participants indicated that their situation was more challenging when neither partner's native language was English, and they had to speak in a non-native language (i.e. English) to communicate with each other. Yet, some other participants said that this situation was preferable, because their partner did not feel superior in the sense of being fluent in the language they spoke. Moreover, some participants said that language differences were good, because they were not able to get into details during negligible discussions or quarrels, and thus language differences were good for the stability of their relationships. Nevertheless, most of them said that language differences posed challenges for them in a variety of ways. A handful of participants said that they felt they could not discuss serious societal, cultural, or political matters, or have intellectual debates with their partners. However, most participants had problems during daily conversations and expressing emotions. The challenges caused by language differences that were mentioned most often by participants will be explored next.

Everyday Conversations and the Culture of 'Beating Around the Bush'

It is common practice in Persian culture for its members not to mention things directly, especially when someone wants to request something of another person. In this culture it would be perceived as impolite if someone made a direct request. Instead, people talk about issues in a roundabout way. According to my data, speaking indirectly

caused problems at the beginning of participants' intercultural relationships. As the non-Persian parties in these relationships were not familiar with this practice, they became confused, and a lot of misunderstandings occurred during their daily conversations. On the other hand, the Persian party often assumed that their partner would naturally understand their indirect points, but since their partner did not, they got annoyed and became angry. In this situation they had to negotiate misunderstandings, and often accepted the need to talk and express themselves in more direct ways, so that both parties understood each other's positions on everyday matters.

Performing *Naz*

In relation to the culture of 'beating around the bush', performing *Naz* is another Persian practice that presented challenges to intercultural unions. Generally speaking, in a partnering context, performing *Naz* requires that the woman pretend to refuse what has been offered to her by her partner, but this apparent rejection does not necessarily mean that she has actually rejected the offer. The first response to an offer is 'no', and this 'no' does not usually mean no, but is meant to convey that 'if you insist I might accept'. Thus, in the Persian culture, a woman is not expected to accept her partner's offer straightaway. In this context, a man knows that he should continue to repeat his offer.

For a native Persian it is easy to understand and respond appropriately to the actions and reactions required in a *Naz* exchange, but it appears from the study data that doing so is often confusing for a western person. Some female participants said that they

even became heartbroken, because they expected their partners to keep insisting on an offer, or thought that they should keep insisting on an offer, but as they had not done so, they felt their partners had not paid enough attention to them. Hence, female participants said they had no alternative but to accept that for Westerners no means no, and they should not follow the *Naz* practice. On the other hand, many male participants said they understood that they did not have to repeat their offers when their female non-Persian partners did not accept what they offered them.

The *Naz* exchange is part of the language of love and affection. Arguably, *Naz* has been constructed in response to gender relations in the Persian context. The practice of *Naz* values and empowers women in a patriarchal society, one in which men have more power and financial superiority than women. In this sense, *Naz* empowers women, and functions as an assurance that the husband really wants his wife, and he would be a desirable partner. That means, the more he wants her, the more he insists. Thus, *Naz* serves as a measure the woman uses to assess how determined he is to fulfil his marital responsibilities towards her.

Emotional Expression

Most participants said that they had had emotional problems at the beginning of their relationships, because they could not express their feelings in the language of their partner, or in English, and they could not fully understand their partners' emotional expressions either. This created a difficult situation, and led to quarrels. For this

reason, they tried to disclose their feelings through certain actions such as using sign language, preparing food, or buying presents.

Furthermore, there are some expressions in every language that cannot be translated into other languages. It may be possible to find an equivalent or close translation in meaning in English, but, as many participants explained, these equivalences could not convey the exact meanings intended by the native speakers. For example, the following expressions provided by participants cannot be translated from Persian into English:

- *Jeegaret ro bokhoram* literally means, 'May I eat your liver?' A close meaning in English is, 'Sweetheart' or 'Honey'.
- *Elahi ghorboonet sham* literally means, 'May I be sacrificed for you?' A close meaning in English is, 'I can't live without you', or, 'I love you'.
- *Fadayeh to* literally means, 'May I be sacrificed for you?' A close meaning in English is, 'Thank you dear'.
- *Joonam* literally means, 'My life'. A close meaning in English is, 'Dear'.
- *Jooneh delam* literally means, 'The life to my heart'. A close meaning in English is, 'Yes dear?'

Some participants mentioned that they said these expressions in Persian because any translation or equivalent phrase in English could not convey their intended meaning. Moreover, they did not feel that they had expressed what they felt, if they spoke in a language other than Persian. These emotional expressions could be meant for their partners, as well as for their children. Participants said that they used some of these

phrases to express their feelings to their children, but they made no sense to their partners, so some misunderstandings and arguments resulted. Their partners' reactions depended on their individual characters and personalities, and sometimes they were positive, and sometimes they became angry. In terms of the former, some non-Persian partners even began to use Persian phrases to express their feelings.

Presenting Cards

The expression of emotional feelings is not restricted to verbal communications. Symbols are also used to convey meanings. Different symbols in different cultures are used to express emotional feelings. For instance, in the UK a usual practice is to present cards; in Iran, however, this is not a common practice. Presenting or not presenting cards was one of the major issues in these unions. Many participants could not understand the significance of presenting cards in their partners' culture. They did not consider buying cards as a means of conveying love, but instead, as M34 put it, buying cards was 'a waste of money'. Some of them said that they could not understand the point of presenting cards, when they saw each other daily and could congratulate or greet each other face-to-face during celebrations such as New Years or Christmas. Nevertheless, participants had negotiated ways of settling the issue of presenting cards. Some participants accepted the practice of presenting cards because they did not want to bring troubles to their couplehood, or quarrel over this matter, but not because they felt the practice had meaning. Below is an excerpt from M9's interview, which exemplifies the common responses of participants:

> Well, I still struggle about it [presenting cards]. I even said to her that instead of buying cards, I'd give you 20 pounds to spend on whatever you want. What is this that a piece of cardboard is folded and finds value? But she still insists that she wants a card! I always get it for her too. Because, silly things like this is not supposed to bring problems to our life. This is why I ease on it. But I'm not really into this card exchanges.

This quote shows that some participants adopted the practice of presenting cards for the good of their relationships. Other participants said that their partners had accepted that the Persian way was better, or understood that their Persian partners would display their feelings in other ways.

6.2. Everyday Personal Rituals

The practice of personal rituals was one of the main areas participants had to negotiate daily with their partners. The focus here is on dietary, hygienic, and cosmetic practices as they were discussed by most participants. It has long been established that these practices are socially constructed and have cultural connotations (see Lupton 1996; Smith 2007), especially in the case of minority groups and migrants (see Rabikowska 2010 and Cox and Marland 2013). This section investigates the impacts of cultural differences on the practice of personal rituals in intercultural couple relationships. Negotiations regarding these practices are important, because they can potentially

shape the partnering relationships, and define their fate. Thinking intersectionally, I identify the sources of the differences that shape these practices.

Dietary Practices

To begin, I explain the issues related to dietary practices caused by cultural differences. Firstly, many participants said that they had problems with the taste of non-Persian food, which they were required to eat occasionally, because their partners were not Persian. Some argued that since they could not eat Persian food on a daily basis, they felt like something was missing in their lives. The other issue was related to the way participants ate their food. Generally speaking, Persians eat their food using a spoon and fork, but Westerners usually use a fork and knife to eat their food. Some participants had to negotiate how they would eat their food and/or their food choices with their partner, and they described some ways of accommodating these cultural differences. One way was to divide up weekdays, so that they had some days for Persian meals, and other days for non-Persian meals. Sometimes they had separate meals, which meant that each partner cooked for himself or herself, especially at lunch, when at least one member of the couple was at work. In this way, they would make a food they desired for themselves, when they were apart, and had the same meals together on the weekends.

Some gender dimensions were involved in negotiating dietary practices. On the one hand, some female participants complained that their partners had only agreed to eat Persian foods once or twice a week. One resolution to this arrangement was that they

cooked Persian food for lunch for themselves and their children, while their husbands were at work, but for dinner, when their husbands were back at home, they had non-Persian meals together. For male participants, the number of days they would have Persian food depended on the extent to which they could convince their partner to cooperate. In this sense, one way many negotiated and resolved the issue was by having the male participants teach their wives to cook Persian foods.

The degree of religiosity also played a significant role in negotiations over dietary practices. For some participants there were religious restrictions on the type of food they could eat (i.e. *halal* or *haram* foods from the Islamic viewpoint). Observing these religious requirements in their diet was often important for religious or partially religious participants. That said, some participants claimed that they ate *halal* meat, because they thought it tasted better than non-*halal* meat, and not for religious reasons. Although I cannot be sure that this approach was not just an excuse to eat *halal* meat (because they did not want to appear to be obeying a religious authority), this behaviour illustrates the extent to which religious teachings may become interwoven in everyday practices.

Dietary practices, then, are cultural, in that they have meanings that are embedded in how people live. These practices can be different across cultures, but also through one's life course. It seems that the kind of food participants tended to eat varied at different ages. A discussion about dietary practices extends beyond the kinds of food people eat, or how they eat their food. It considers practices in the kitchen, including

food preparation and dealing with dirty dishes (see Fine (1996) for a fuller discussion). This leads us to the next section, where hygienic practices are explored.

Hygienic Practices

People from different cultures have different notions about cleanness, cleaning, and hygienic practices. Thus, these cultural differences had to be negotiated daily in the participants' intercultural unions. According to Persian traditions, unclean objects should be rinsed using running water, and this practice is similar to Islamic jurisprudential purification codes.[37] According to participants, differences in hygienic practices pose difficulties in three main areas: washing dishes, using the toilet, and using the bathroom. These difficulties are discussed below:

1- Washing dishes: In the Persian context, dirty dishes should be washed using running water, while in the British culture, people usually leave dishes that have been washed to air-dry, without rinsing off the residue of froth that remains on the dishes from the dishwashing liquid. Although dishwashers have resolved the problem for some participants in recent years, washing dishes remained one of the main areas of conflict for participants. The resolution in almost all cases was convincing the partner to wash dishes in the Persian way.

[37] In Islamic rituals, purity is one of the fundamental aspects of the religion, and must be observed in order to be able to say the obligatory daily prayers five times a day. In the Islamic context ritual purities are called *paak* and ritual impurities are called *najis*. Running water is usually, though not always, needed to make things ritually pure.

2- Using the toilet: Cleansing the body after defecating is another issue that has caused problems in these unions. In the Persian culture it is assumed that running water is needed to cleanse the body after defecating, and toilet tissue is not sufficient. Since there is usually no running water available in UK toilets, some participants said that they asked their partners to shower after returning from work, because during the day they would not have been able to use water to cleanse themselves, and so were not considered clean by their Persian partners.

3- Using the bathroom: Similar to the above examples, running water is needed to rinse off shower gel residues. Thus, some participants said they asked their partners to shower after taking a bath, in order to rinse off the residue. Also, the need to wear slippers when going to the bathroom, and even when taking a shower, was another issue in some participants' relationships. For example, F23 said that she wanted everyone to go to the bathroom wearing slippers. This resulted in her husband mocking her and laughing at her, which somewhat influenced their breakup.

These practices had to be negotiated. Most participants claimed that they had convinced their partners to adopt Persian standards of cleanliness. However, it seemed that religious and local traditions interplayed with, and were interwoven into, the construction of these practices in a complex way. Religious participants believed that hygienic practices should be conducted according to their religious teachings, so they had to explain notions of Islamic purification to their partners, and ask them to obey these religious rules. Their partners consequently agreed to do so, and adopted what their partners' introduced as the Islamic hygienic jurisprudence. However, the data

show a sense of complexity here. Religious participants who married partners who were already Shia (that means they shared the same religion but not the local traditions) had some clashes regarding what they had perceived as the Islamic hygienic codes. In other words, Islamic purity were slightly different for each member of these couples, and therefore, their different understandings of Islamic purity had to be negotiated. For example a religious participant who married a Khoja Shia person said one of the major issues in their partnering relationship was defining what was ritually clean or unclean, as each partner had different cultural understandings of the subject. This shows that Shias with different origins, such as Khoja versus Persians, have different conceptions of these personal rituals, which might be attributable to their local traditions and customs, and not to their religion, which they shared.

Cosmetic Practices

In relation to hygienic practises, cosmetic practices and body beautifications were also matters for negotiation in these unions, since these practices also differ in different cultures. Based on the study's data, people with different cultural backgrounds have different understandings of beautification, and their expectations of their partners are culturally shaped. These attitudes might also have religious roots, as in Shiaism, where it is strongly suggested that both members of a couple should care about their appearances, and use cosmetics to improve their appearances. However, they could also be locally shaped because the extent to which people use make-up differs across locations. Study data indicate that cosmetic practices and body beautifications were a matter of concern for some of the male participants. They said that European women

use less make-up than Persian women usually do, and in this regard they requested their non-Persian partners to behave more like Persian women, because without make-up, they did not find them as sexually attractive as Persian women.

Thinking intersectionally about participants' personal ritual practices, it could be argued that different religious traditions caused most of the clashes in their intercultural relationships. Religion defined how participants chose the kinds of food they ate, the way they perceived cleanliness, and even their cosmetic practices. To a lesser extent, gender was important in arranging family meals for example, or in terms of perceptions of cosmetics. Arguably, age group and stages in the life course were also factors in their willingness to accommodate their partners' cultural practices.

6.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore how Persians in intercultural partnering relationships practiced their everyday Internal Partnering Practices across cultural differences. We observe that cultural differences were the defining factors behind the construction of these practices. Multiple sources of cultural differences, and in particular language and religious differences, interplayed in shaping the participants' Internal Partnering Practices. To a lesser extent, gender identity and the stage of participants' life courses were also significant. In this regard, everyday partnering practices are cultural, so that people involved in intercultural relationships have to negotiate differences and find resolution. These negotiations do not necessarily mean the adoption of, or assimilation

in, the opposite culture, but as Hall (1990) and Bhabha (1994) argued, they involved strategic positioning in order to find a sustainable position. For example, positioning according to new social circumstances was how they managed their language differences: on the one hand they stopped performing *Naz,* or beating around the bush; on the other hand, most participants' partners stopped demanding cards. Participants had to find an optimum point on the continuum of cultural identities, and agree with their partner on how they would construct their everyday life rituals, and how they wanted to proceed with the practical issues of their partnering.

This chapter offered a micro sociological understanding of their everyday practices and how they were constructed. This micro approach provides a detailed account of some rather small and brief practices that had been shaped by cultural norms and current social conditions and situations. This account, therefore, shows that the individualization and detraditionalization theses neglect the role of culture in everyday practices, and undermine the consideration of particular social groups in particular social contexts, but at the same time, they suggest useful ideas about the social process of negotiating individuals' 'project of self' (Giddens 1991, 1992). From this perspective, it seems that each couple had its own 'family world', in the sense that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) used the term.

Chapter Seven: External Partnering Practices of Persian Intercultural Couplehood

After explaining Internal Partnering Practices in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the most important External Partnering Practices. The people involved in partnering relationships do these external relational practices, and expect their partners to participate. Intercultural couples have to negotiate mutual expectations regarding these cultural practices, in order to sustain their own couple relationship. This chapter investigates how a couple's external relationships can shape an intercultural partnering relationship, and tries to identity specific practices that are exclusively about relationships with people external to a couple union. It investigates how cultural differences shape relational practices with extended family members, as well as with members of other social networks and communities, such as friends, acquaintances, and neighbours. These external relationships could present challenges to a couple. Managing these relationships in conjunction with an intercultural union often requires constant negotiations between the intercultural partners, and even negotiations with members of wider social networks. These negotiations could influence their life together.

Issues with members of wider social networks usually emerged at a time of gatherings, such as cultural celebrations, religious ceremonies, and family parties and visits. These issues posed challenges to these unions because of the partners' cultural differences. The first section in this chapter explores the driving factors behind gatherings. I note that people usually come together during culturally significant celebrations and ceremonies such as Christmas, *Nowruz* (Persian New Year), Islamic Eid holidays, Shia

festivals, and on other traditional occasions. Successful negotiations about the couple's involvement in these events, which often involve members of wider social networks, are vital to sustaining a partnering relationship across cultural boundaries. The next two sections focus on more practical issues related to gathering practices that challenge the intercultural couple. Language differences were often problematic when people got together. In particular, the practice of *Ta'arof* (the Persian custom of over-complimenting and showing extreme kindness to others) was often confusing for the partners of participants, and, on the other hand, their partners' reactions and/or responses were often confusing for participants. The next section explores how personal rituals such as hygienic and dietary practices might pose problems for these unions. In particular, their partners' drinking culture was problematic for participants.

Using empirical evidence, this chapter concludes that the partnering practices in this study's particular social context may not be consistent with the claims of individualization and detraditionalization theses, and thus a more advanced theoretical approach such as Smart's (2007) idea of relationality and sociology of personal life may be more appropriate (also see May 2011).

7.1. Traditional Celebrations and Ceremonies

Relational gathering practices could occur when members of a couple come together with other members of their wider social networks. People have different reasons for gathering, such as routine socials, parties, and family visits, but most gatherings are for

purposes of celebration and ceremonies. At the risk of oversimplification, it could be observed that some reasons for celebrations are fairly modern, while some are driven by tradition. Examples of the former include celebrating marriage anniversaries, Valentine's Day, and Women Day. Most participants either did not celebrate these occasions, or did so privately with their partners. Thus, arranging these celebrations was an internal practice, between members of a couple, and did not pose a major problem to these unions, as each couple had to find a satisfactory approach only for the members of the couple. They might give each other gifts or go out to a restaurant; alternatively, they just might have a good meal together at home. It appears from the data that women were more observant of these occasions than male participants. In some cases, female participants said that their husbands did not remember their marriage anniversaries, and that upset them.

The second type of celebration, however, often involved members of wider social networks. These traditional practices of gatherings therefore, are external relational practices that had to be practiced by the couple, but also necessitated displaying to people external to the couple relationship. Hence, Finch's (2007) concept of 'displaying families' seems to be useful here. These traditional celebrations were subject to extensive negotiations in these unions, because they could potentially affect a wide network of social relationships. These included occasions such as Christmas and Easter, or some ancient Persian celebrations such as *Nowruz* (Persian New Year), *Yalda* (the longest night of the year), or *Chahaarshanbe-Suri* (bonfire celebrations held on the last Wednesday of the Persian year). More challenging, however, were religious celebrations, such as *Eid Fitr*, *Eid Adha* (*Qorbaan*), and other Shia-specific

celebrations (*Eid Qadir*, or birthdays of Shia Imams and figures) that religious participants were eager to celebrate.

A handful of participants said that it was a luxury to have more opportunities for parties and celebrations, because they tended to celebrate both partners' traditional occasions. However, many of them did not welcome all these opportunities, and they sometimes became a matter of intensive negotiations between partners, especially if they wanted to emphasize passing down their own cultural identity to their children through their celebrations, and more particularly when religion was important for either side of the relationship. Here, the important point is distinguishing between religious celebrations and other ancient Persian celebrations. Data show that there was an interplay of ancient Persian traditions and Islamic traditions. In this sense, those who had a stronger religious affiliation often preferred to celebrate Islamic festivals and Shia occasions, rather than the ancient occasions. Some of them mentioned that they had not celebrated ancient occasions even when they had been in Iran. This suggests the important role of religious traditions in shaping people's lives in ways that differ from other forms of the traditional. This is reminiscent of my earlier comment that it would be problematic to treat all forms of the traditional equally, so that the detraditionalization thesis provides a simplistic explanation.

Most religious participants however, accommodated their partner's wishes and accepted their traditional celebratory practices, but for purposes of religious justification. They compromised and agreed to celebrate the Christian festivities because they respected Jesus as one of the *Ulu'l azm* prophets of God, and the

predecessor of the prophet of Islam.[38] They also might celebrate traditional occasions such as Christmas (or even *Nowroz*), only because of the Islamic ruling for strengthening kinships ties (*Silat-ur-Rahim*), which requires Muslims to maintain strong kinship relationships and regularly visit with each other, since relationships with the extended family network is of vital importance in Islam. In this context, Christmas was only celebrated for the moral positive of *Silat-ur-Rahim*, not for its own traditional or cultural meanings. Furthermore, some religious participants said that although their partners had converted to Islam, they still wanted to celebrate Charismas because they had good memories of it, and had had emotional attachments to this holiday since their childhood, so they wanted their children to have the opportunity of celebrating this festive occasion as well. In one case, a religious participant said that his wife had argued that even though she had become a 'good Muslim' and obeyed all the Islamic rules, she still wanted their children to celebrate Christmas, because 'she genuinely loves the festive spirit and wants our children to enjoy it' (M31). This group of religious participants celebrated Christmas, to the extent that they had Christmas decorations (the full tree and gifts) at their houses. Only a few religious participants refused to celebrate Christmas at their households, or convinced their partners that since they were Muslims, celebrating Christmas was an inappropriate practice.

As mentioned above, celebrations and ceremonies can involve all groups of one's social networks. They are about familial relations, but they are also about wider social connections. These occasions bring all the relatives, friends, and people who are

[38] The five greatest prophets accepted in Islam are Noah (*Nuh*), Abraham (*Ibrahim*), Moses (*Musa*), Jesus (*Isa*), and Muhammad.

considered important in one's life together to celebrate the occasion. In this sense, one kind of negotiation between these couples involves deciding how to congratulate friends, acquaintances, and neighbours on these occasions. Some participants said that they had accepted the practice of presenting cards (negotiations over presenting cards were discussed in the previous chapter), gifts, or a box of chocolates to members of their social network on occasions such as Christmas. Religious participants could use their religion to justify (as explained above) their display of respect for the traditions of the 'people of the book' in the Islamic sense, which refers to the followers of Abrahamic religions.[39]

Practicing Persian traditional celebrations required the cooperation of the non-Persian partner. Some participants said that their partners had regarded the Persian traditional celebrations as nonsense, but other partners considered these traditions to be meaningful celebrations. Few members of the latter group of partners were excited about these celebrations, as they had found the ancient Persian celebrations based on science. For instance, they understood that the Persian New Year fell on the day the sun crosses the celestial equator, or that *Yalda* was held on the night of the Northern Hemisphere's winter solstice. It appears from these data that the astronomical bases for Persian celebrations were of more interest for partners with higher educational levels and intellectual abilities.

[39] Note that this expression may have different connotations in other Abrahamic religions, but exploring these dimensions is beyond the scope of this chapter.

It appears from the accounts of a few participants that they regarded their own and their partner's traditional celebrations as exchangeable. They helped celebrate their partners' traditional occasions, and in return, their partners accepted and facilitated their Persian celebrations. For example, some of them helped decorate the Christmas tree, after which their partners helped set up *haft-sin* table decorations for *Nowruz*. Although exchange theory seems to be a useful notion here, this exchange pattern was not always acceptable to both sides of a relationship, and particularly so for religious partners. Nevertheless, it is useful to view these exchanges as one strategy that partners in intercultural partnering relationships use in order to compromise and accommodate each other, so they can sustain their relationship.

Situational dimensions also could shape the way in which they held traditional celebrations. Some participants argued that there were situational boundaries that constrained the celebrations of Persian occasions. For example, they said that it was almost impossible to participate in the *Chahaarshanbe-Suri*'s bonfire celebrations on the eve of the last Wednesday of the Persian year, because the places they lived were not suitable for such fireworks. Moreover, Persian holidays are working days in the UK, so they had to attend work. Speaking of situational conditions, some argued that one reason they agreed to celebrate Christmas was due to the societal pressures they experienced when their children saw friends celebrating Christmas and receiving gifts, and their non-Persian grandparents and aunties sent them cards and gifts. Moreover, there were celebrations at school, and their children might be exposed to a Christmas market that was often set up a few months before Christmas. Thus, in this situation,

their children expected gifts from their parents as well, and to have a joyful holiday. Consequently, some participants found it difficult to avoid celebrating Christmas.

It is apparent that couples' negotiations about these celebrations depend mainly on their position on the continuum of cultural identities, which means that their negotiations depend on how strongly attached they are to different aspects of their original Persian cultural identity. Thus, for instance, if they did not have a strong sense of belonging to ancient Persian traditions, they did not find it useful to practice the ancient Persian celebrations. In the same vein, those who had a stronger sense of belonging to religion were more eager to celebrate religions occasions. Contrary to the claims of detraditionalization, these findings indicate that considering the traditional as one unit of analysis is problematic, especially in terms of religious traditions.

7.2. Practices of *Ta'arof* and Hospitality

According to the data, one of the cultural differences that posed problems in gathering practices was the language difference. Since their partner often could not communicate well with native Persians, some disappointments occurred for some participants. Some partners went to Persian gatherings at the beginning of their relationship, but later stopped attending these meetings because it had become boring for them, since they could not interact with other native Persians and enjoy their time there, so they felt excluded and apart from the group—though they might still appreciate Persian celebrations. This became a big issue when the Persian partners realized that they

could not enjoy company of their partners and their friends at the same time. On the one hand, their partners were not happy to be alone amongst a group of people speaking Persian; on the other hand, their friends did not speak English, because they wanted to enjoy and express themselves in their mother tongue. Moreover, it was difficult to keep translating everything. Failing to satisfy both the partner and members of the wider family or friends sometimes became upsetting for one or both members of the partnering relationship, and even caused quarrels and tensions between the partners.

However, as was discussed in the previous chapter, language is a system of communication that conveys cultural meanings, and it is not restricted to verbal exchanges. As was explained earlier regarding the cultural practices of performing *Naz* and beating around the bush, and how both caused misunderstandings in the couple's daily lives, the non-Persian partner had difficulties interacting with the Persian people external to their couple relationship. Many participants said that their partners had issues when other Persian members of their external network spoke indirectly, or not frankly.

Moreover, there is a specific Persian practice of over-complimenting called *ta'arof*. *Ta'arof* is a form of Persian etiquette based on treating others with respect and politeness, in order to showcase that the actors involved in the practice are gracious and/or hospitable. Adhering to this cultural practice means that Persians must compliment other people heavily, and insist on a good social deed. It is a verbal dance that continues between the contributors of a *ta'arof* exchange by repeating an offer

until the other people involved accept it. Interestingly, those who are recipients of the offers should show that they are more polite than to accept the offer in the first instance, but would accept it the second or third time it is offered. In other words if they do not accept the offer at the right moment, they may be perceived as impolite by the other party.

One example of *ta'arof* occurs when the host of the gathering invites the guests to begin eating. Thereafter, the host has to keep asking the guests if they need anything further. Persians do not touch the food or their drinks unless the host asks them to do so, even though everything has been placed on the table. In this respect, participants asked their partners to insist repeatedly that any Persian visitors eat or drink something. This caused confusion for the non-Persian partners. An excerpt from F8 provides an example to illustrate this behaviour:

> My husband couldn't understand *ta'arof* at the beginning of our marriage. He used to tell me that he has placed everything on the table and that our guests can help themselves. But I use to tell him that he should ask them if they want anything; they are Iranians, they won't touch the food unless they are asked by the host.

Consistent with the above example, there is a famous Persian expression—*Chai dovom* (the second tea)—which is used to ask a visitor to stay longer. Most of the time a non-Persian wife is puzzled as to why her Persian partner wants her to insist on offering tea when the visitor has already said 'no'. In this case, the Persian partner had to explain

that ‘no’ did not necessarily mean no, in the Persian culture. Furthermore, it was also reported by participants that their non-Persian partners could not understand why they were being asked to have another cup of tea. M33’s experience was typical one of this situation:

> … my wife used to complain about my mother *ta’arofing* her, so I used to explain to her that this is an Iranian tradition and that she means well. She always replied with: “well it doesn’t make any sense, ‘cos I said I didn’t want to drink tea and every five minutes she again asked and insisted that I drink another cup of tea”. I mean I can understand, some customs are alien to other people. This particular Iran custom doesn’t really mean anything in her culture.

Another example of *ta’arof* occurs when Persians go out together, and want to pay for the food or drinks, and everyone keeps insisting that they want to pay for everyone else in the group. A native Persian could understand from the context which offer is being made for the sake of displaying politeness, and who is actually offering to pay for the others. Non-Persian partners would again not understand the verbal dance, and often argued that everyone should pay their own share, so they did not see the politeness point of the Persian interaction of *ta’arof*. This remained an issue in some of these unions, because every time they went out with a group of Persians, the argument of who was going to pay always ensued. Moreover, in some cases, when the Persian partner of the relationship wanted to pay for the others, the non-Persian partner complained about why they wanted to pay for many other people’s food.

In relation to the practice of *ta'arof*, other linguistic differences present challenges to these intercultural unions in terms of gathering practices. For example, when a visitor enters a house, other people inside the house should stand up. Moreover, the way in which Persians see their guests off differs from a typical British practice. Persians usually walk their guests to the front door, and then pause and have another conversation with them before those visitors leave. They wait until they are sure that their visitors have climbed into their cars and actually departed before going back inside their houses and closing the door. Persians use these little practices to convey their respect for their visitors. According to participants, at the beginning of their relationship these practices led to misunderstandings between the members of these unions and their social networks, so that they had to negotiate how best to accommodate these practices in order to avoid further confusion.

Finally, it should be mentioned that issues about language differences and the Persian practice of *ta'arof* might reflexively present challenges to the Persian party of an intercultural relationship. Some participants said that at the beginning of their relationship, when they went to the non-Persian's gatherings and parties, they got upset and felt that they were disrespected because they were not *ta'arofed* by the non-Persian host, or their host did not come to the front door and stay until they actually departed. Participants said that at the beginning of their relationship they had to negotiate these issues with their partners, in order to ease their discomfort.

This section explored how language differences might challenge Persian intercultural couple relationships. Most participants convinced their partners to follow the Persian

culture of *ta'arofing* and hospitality when they visited a Persian relative, friend, or acquaintance, or when they had Persian visitors. On the other hand, they came to understand that they could not expect to be *ta'arofed* by the non-Persian members of their partners' social networks. Rather, they had to act and interact according to their partners' cultural codes of practice. This is how most participants and their partners positioned themselves on the continuum of cultural identities.

7.3. Personal Rituals: Hygienic and Dietary Practices

The role of cultural differences in shaping the everyday personal rituals of Persians involved in intercultural couple relationships was explored in the previous chapter. This section explains how personal rituals shape External Partnering Practices. It is important to mention here that I use the term 'personal' in the sense in which Smart (2007) uses the concept in her theory of personal life. This approach indicates that the personal is social, so it would also be cultural. Therefore, as will be explained below, personal rituals have cultural connotations that pose challenges to a couple whose members are of a different cultural origin. Two main types of personal rituals that presented challenges to participants are hygienic and dietary practices, which are explained next.

Hygienic practices

In terms of cultural differences regarding hygienic practices, most participants identified two issues that had become problematic during gatherings. The first issue pertains to the cultural differences associated with washing up dishes (as discussed in

the previous chapter). F25's account exemplifies how differences in hygienic practices could be challenging for people in intercultural unions:

> Well, my in-laws don't have a dishwasher at home. They wash their dishes by hand and leave the dishes to dry without rinsing the froth from the washing up liquid on the dish. This is a bit awkward for me. Whenever I go to visit them, in such a way that they don't get offended, I say to them that even in my own house, I always before pouring tea in my cup, I rinse the inside of the cup with boiled water. Then they would ask, but why? Then I excused that the tea remains hot for longer this way. But in fact I always had the fear that the froth may still remain in the cup and I may have ended up drinking it with my tea.

The other issue was that people were expected to remove their shoes before entering the participants' houses. This practice was sometimes not observed by their partners' relatives—although some participants said that some English families also have the habit of taking off their shoes when entering a house. Those couples with this issue had to find a way to resolve it. In most cases, they agreed not to confront visitors because, as has been explained, visitors are greatly appreciated in the Persian culture. Moreover, according to Islamic teachings visitors are perceived as the friends of God. According to the data, for religious participants, welcoming the visitors was more important than observing their hygienic codes of practice. So they allowed visitors to enter their homes without removing their shoes, but cleaned the house afterwards.

Dietary practices

Dietary practices were mostly challenging for religious participants. This group of participants had religious restrictions in terms of what they could eat, and thus they had to negotiate the kinds of food that might be served at gatherings. On the one hand, they had to explain to their partners that because of religious teachings it was necessary to visit extended family members—especially parents—and people in the community and social networks. On the other hand, they had to specify that they should be very considerate about the types of food served in these gatherings, and that they had to be consistent with Islamic codes regarding dietary practices. In some cases they took this very seriously, to the extent that they cooked food and took it to the host's place, to ensure that a non-Muslim host did not cook *haram* food. The situation was more difficult and unpleasant for religious participants when they attended parties organized by their partners' workplace colleagues and acquaintances, because they were not able to eat or drink most of the things on the menu. They said that in these situations they usually felt under pressure, sat in the corner, and ate some salad to observe their religious codes of practice.

Most participants, including nonreligious participants, said that they had experienced difficulties with the British culture of drinking and going to bars and pubs. More obviously, drinking alcohol was forbidden to religious participants, and they asked their partners to stop drinking before getting married. However, some said that they had seen their partners have some small sips at parties after their marriage and had justified it by saying that they felt uncomfortable not drinking while out with their friends. Drinking was a red flag for religious participants, and when their non-Persian

partners drank alcohol it led to tensions. However, drinking practices also posed challenges to nonreligious and partially religious participants. Some of them said that they did not want to go to pubs and drink as frequently as their partners (or their wider social networks) did. Some said that although they did not have any moral or religious problems with drinking alcohol, they thought that their partners' drinking habits were not appropriate, and these habits exceeded their level of tolerance. Some said that if their partners wanted to drink they would not object, but that they should not drink too much in front of visitors, because they did not want their partner to appear to be a silly drunk person in front of other Persian friends and acquaintances. In some cases the drinking habit became a main cause for divorce. To show that this way of thinking was not religious, and was important amongst nonreligious or partially religious participants, two examples from these groups of participants are provided below.

> I used to get irritated because of her excessive drinking. It just wasn't right what she was doing. She would drink to the extent of getting sick and would say silly things to me. No one wants that nice mental image of his wife to be distorted because of drinking. I would tell her that its fine that she drinks, but she needs to have a limit. Within my Iranian social group, men look at each other's wives to see what sort of woman they have married. I told her when you drink too much and start to act silly; we'll both look silly at the end. This was the main reason I asked her not to drink and to be fair, she accepted. (M14, an nonreligious participant)

> In my opinion, our main cause of divorce was her unwillingness to stop drinking. Two glasses of alcohol would instantly change her character. … I also had a certain image to uphold among my social group of people whom respected me immensely. After drinking, she would become aggressive and say hurtful things, which made me conscious of my surrounding. I would feel that the entire neighbourhood is listening and judging me at the same time. So at the end I concluded that NO I couldn't continue with her. (M18, a partially religious participant)

7.4. Conclusion

Relationality should be understood culturally, since relational practices are perceived and practiced differently in different cultures. Managing relational aspects of intercultural partnering relationships is important to sustaining such relationships. That means not only that relationality could shape partners' practices, but that the failure to manage External Partnering Practices could then result in the failure of the couple relationship itself. In particular, I argue that gathering practices are challenging for participants because they are the key places for developing close relationships and emotional ties. The cultural reasons for people getting together had to be negotiated in these intercultural unions. These negotiations were more important for religious participants, because their religion imposes certain requirements for such gatherings. It was also mentioned that language differences posed problems for these unions, especially in terms of the Persian cultural practices of *ta'arof* and hospitality. Personal

rituals such as hygienic and dietary practices should be perceived as cultural practices that had to be negotiated in intercultural relationships, and religious teachings were central to shaping these practices.

Traditionally, relationships with extended family members have been significant in the Persian context. This claim is understood in the traditional sociology of family life and kinships. However, this chapter indicates that apart from having strong kinship ties, members of wider social networks, such as friends, neighbours, and visitors, were also often important for participants, and any interactions with them could affect their relationships with their partners in one way or another. More importantly, it should be understood that maintaining good relationships with this wider network of social connections is also advocated by their religion, as the notion of community is significant in Islam. In Islam, a friend is as important as a sibling.[40] Also, a visitor to the household is considered a *habib-u-Allah* in Islam, which means a dear or friend of God. Moreover, neighbours are regarded as even more important than members of one's household. Therefore, what became clear in this chapter is that religious teachings remain a significant and meaningful element in shaping peoples' lives. The significance of relationality is not only a modern phenomenon in contemporary societies, but has traditionally been central in some societies such as Persian society.

In line with my research findings presented in above, there has been a shift in the recent literature regarding the significance of the family-like relationships that have

[40] That is why the concept of brotherhood (and to some extent sisterhood) is so central in social relations in Islam. Note the significance of the brotherhood movement in some Middle Eastern Muslim countries such as Egypt.

become central in people's personal lives in recent years (see Smart (2007) and May (2011)). These evidences undermine the claims of the individualization thesis as exaggerating and over-emphasizing the roles of individuals when constructing their own biographies (Beck-Gernsheim 2002) by developing their own 'project of self' Giddens (1991, 1992). This chapter showcases how people negotiate and compromise their differences to find a resolution (which might be unique to themselves) that will sustain their partnering relationship; however, relational boundaries continue to limit their choices in inventing their biographies, in the sense advocated by individualization theory.

Chapter Eight: Intergenerational Positioning in Intercultural Partnering Practices

As already discussed, Persians involved in intercultural couple relationships do their partnering practices in relation to others, which is consistent with Smart's (2007) idea of relationality. I, however, argue that when thinking intersectionally, there are three social positionings in relation to others that can be imagined for a partner in a couple relationship. These positionings are culturally constructed and have cultural connotations. Employing Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) concept of 'family practices', it is discussed in chapter 6 that a partner's first positioning is in relation to his/her partner, and involves everyday practices. Furthermore, in the previous chapter, it is explored that participants' positioning in relation to people external to their couple relationship is of special importance in terms of gathering practices and cultural celebrations. However, as the data suggest, there is an intergenerational dimension to participants' external relationships that produced another special positioning, namely generational ties. This positioning is important because it appeared from the data that participants' relationships with their blood-related family members were still of considerable significance, and meaningfully different from other external relationships. The data suggest that these familial external relationships were culturally defined, but were individually negotiated and modified.

This way of thinking is informed by the idea of social positionings in the theory of intersectionality (see Brah and Phoenix 2004; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006), and also by the assumption that the intersection of generations, as a source of cultural differences, can shape people's lives. The understanding of generation differs from one

culture to another. Likewise, intergenerational ties may advocate diverse responsibilities within different cultures. In this sense, people in intercultural couple relationships need to negotiate their different perceptions of generation to sustain their couple relationships.

As was discussed in chapters 4 and 5 in the Persian context, when one wants to marry—or even form an unconventional partnering union—it usually will not be an individually driven process, but rather, a couple's pre-partnering practices are largely shaped by their relationships with immediate or extended family members. Forming a couple relationship in the Persian context cannot be perceived as an agreement (i.e. marriage contract) between two individuals, but rather as an agreement between two families or networks of kinships, and consequently relationships with those extended family members affect the partnering practices of Persians in a variety of ways.

In the following I unpack the intergenerational practices that mainly occurred in the Prevailing Partnering stage of participants partnering relationship. Participants' main considerations in this regard were about their offspring, so the main part of this chapter discusses negotiations over participants' offspring. I first explore the significance of children in participants' couple relationships, and their negotiations over caring for a newborn. In particular, I explore negotiations with regard to the naming and baptizing of a child, as well as the circumcising of a male child. Issues related to rearing a child are addressed next. This includes choosing the religion the child might practice, and the language/s she or he was expected to speak by her or his intercultural parents. Two other dimensions of rearing a child follow, namely a discussion of gender socialization

and passing down the Persian culture of relationality. Negotiations over offspring are intergenerational, so I then review grandparental interventions in issues related to offspring. I argue that some responsibilities are associated with intergenerational ties. For example, the parents of the Persian party in these relationships must be respected and cared for. Persians involved in intercultural relationships also had responsibilities for their siblings and senior kinship members. For example, there is the expectation that a younger sister should be financially supported by an older brother. These cultural practices had to be negotiated to sustain participants' relationship. At the end of the chapter I return to the broader question of how these relationships operate under the conditions of reflexive modernization. In this sense, I consider Smart and Shipman's (2004) argument that traditions are subject to change and alteration, but the process of negotiations regarding traditional practices and values and their readjustment is occurring across generations.

8.1. Offspring: Negotiations About Their Relationships with Children

Although Giddens (1992) says little about children in his theory of the transformation of intimacy, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) claim that because partnering relationships became more fragmented and fragile in late modernity, people have shifted their focus of attention to their children, as a permanent source of emotional attachment. In Persian culture the status of the children and their future is a defining element when choosing a partner and sustaining a relationship. As already explained, some Persians may get married mainly because they want to have children, and thus

the intention of getting married is to have children, not for the sake of a pure or romantic relationship as is suggested by Giddens (1992). Therefore, they look for a 'good mum' or a 'good dad' for their possible children, not necessarily for a 'good lover' for themselves. This kind of relationship is merely a relationship between lovers; it is mainly a relationship between parents. Moreover, Persian people may stay in a relationship because they think separation will damage the well-being of their children. Some participants said that in their culture caring for a child is important to the extent that parents are perceived as being responsible for their children's well-being even until they reach their thirties and forties.

Given the importance of children for Persians, some issues in relation to rearing their offspring in these unions were identified. Most participants spoke of hoping that their children would be proud of their Persian heritage, and have an understanding of their Persian origin. Some participants said that one of the advantages of cultural differences between parents was that their offspring had the opportunity to get the best of two cultures, which made them culturally richer than other British or Persian born people. Some others said that they wanted to make their children like themselves (i.e. Persian), though doing so was almost impossible because their children were inevitably half Persian and half other, and there was another culture in the house where they raised their children. Some even went on to say that they thought that they could not establish a desirable parent-child relationship because their child was half other. So they had a sense that something was lacking. This might be an imaginary or constructed fantasy, but it was something that could hurt them. In below I review the main challenges participants faced, in terms of issues related to their offspring. These challenges occur

at the birth of a child and when rearing a child, and mainly involved passing cultural identities on to their children.

Negotiations Over the Newborn

Different cultures advocate certain rituals upon the birth of a child. Some are spiritual and do not have physical consequences, so partners in intercultural unions do not usually oppose them strongly. For instance, there is an Islamic tradition of saying *Shahadatain* (the two testimonials) in infant's ear.[41] This did not raise a major objection among the couple under observation, as it did not cost anything, or have major consequences. However, some decisions do have long-term consequences. These include the naming, baptizing, and circumcising of a child, which will be explained next.

Naming of a child

The first decision to present challenges because of the parents' cultural differences is naming their child. Within intercultural partnering relationships, the discussion around naming a child is intensive and may lead to tension, because a child's name could potentially carry some cultural meanings that concern the parents. According to the data, naming of a child had to be negotiated, and required compromise. The participants sometimes chose two names as the first and middle names, one in Persian,

[41] That is a formula that declares 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah'.

and the other in the native language of the other parent. In other cases, however, partners had to negotiate a resolution.

They first had to choose a name that could be pronounced easily by both Persians and those who spoke in the partners' native language, because it was important that both families could pronounce the name of their child. Some said that they chose a Persian name because a foreign name was a fantasy or luxury for their partners. Some made a safe choice by choosing an internationally popular name such as Rose or Elizabeth (also related names such as Isabel, Isabella, and Isabelle). Alternatively, names that had good meanings or were used in both languages were chosen. For example, Dara is a given name in both Persian and Irish, and is also is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, and Arman is a Persian derivative of the name Herman in Dutch and English.

For some religious people the solution was to find a name that was respected in Abrahamic religions, namely biblical names such as Josef and David, which are known and appreciated in both Islam and Christianity. For more religious participants, whose partners had converted to Islam or already had a Muslim background, Islamic names were agreed on in their Arabic forms, namely those names mentioned in the Quran.

Infant baptism

Those participants' partners, who had Christian backgrounds who had not converted to Islam, often demanded that their child be baptized. The issue of baptizing was mostly

important when the partners were Catholic. Some couples did not baptize their children because the religious identity of their non-Persian partner was not so strong that they wanted to insist that their children should be Christianized. Many argued that they did not christen their children, or they refused their partners' request to baptize their children, because they did not want to force their children into a religion, but preferred that their children decide for themselves what religion, if any, they wanted to follow. Thus, they left this matter to their children to decide later in life.

Both partners' positions on the continuum of cultural identities were important. If the Persian party were religious, their opposition to the idea of baptizing was stronger. Some of the nonreligious participants said that they did let their partners baptize their child, because it did not cost them anything, and, as one said 'it was like taking a day off from work and going to a picnic or restaurant' (M10). If their partners' Christian identities were strong, their insistence on performing the practice was stronger. In some cases, a partner baptized their child without their Persian partner's consent. More interestingly, because of shifting religious identities of few participants or their partners, they baptized the first child, but for their later children, they left the matter of whether or not they wanted to be christened to them to decide later in life.

Circumcision

Circumcision could be considered a traditional religious practice.[42] The decision to circumcise a boy is critical because it is an irrevocable decision. Arguably, it was the hardest decision the partners, under observation in this study, had to make about a child. The decision often required extensive negotiations as to if, when and how they would want to do the practice.

Almost all participants, regardless of their commitment to religion, had the issue of circumcision lingering in their minds. Data show that all religious participants circumcised their male children, no matter what their partners' religious backgrounds were. As mentioned in chapter 4, partners of religious participants either were Muslim before meeting the participants, or had converted to Islam at the time of marriage.[43] In either case, they agreed with their Persian partners that the Islamic tradition of circumcision should be practiced. That said, agreement on the practice was still reached by negotiation and providing justifications to convince their partners that circumcision was a right and beneficial undertaking, in order to get their agreement. Participants' most often mentioned justification was the hygienic benefits of circumcision. They argued that it would be easer for the boy to clean a circumcised penis, and would reduce the risk of his becoming infected later in life.

[42] This practice is advocated in both Islam and Judaism. In Shia Islam it is widely believed that the practice is mandatory, but it does not make the circumcised person a Muslim, nor is it required to become a Muslim, so the practice cannot be considered as Muslimizing, comparable to christening, or equal to infant baptism.

[43] It should be reminded here that it was not possible to verify whether or not they only pretended to change their religion to get the official Iranian marriage certificate, or if they truly became believers.

Although it is believed that circumcision is enforced by religion, it was also widely practiced among partially religious or nonreligious participants. This group of participants said that they had mixed feelings about the practice, and did not remember how they reached their decision at the time. This means that they did not know if their decision had been based on religious teachings, local traditions, or social pressures, and thus they concluded it had been based on a mixture of these factors. Some argued that they still did not know the real reason they had agreed to the practice. That said, they still had to provide some justifications to convince their partners. The most often mentioned justifications by both males and females of partially religious or nonreligious participants were again for heath and hygienic reasons. Some also said that they did not like the appearance of an uncircumcised penis, and made their decision on this basis.

Some participants conducted bargaining, to convince their partners to let their son be circumcised. For instance, in order to have their sons circumcised they allowed their partners to have their children baptized. This occurred even though neither party in the relationship claimed to be religious.

Some participants said that they had had their first son circumcised because of their social backgrounds, but did not have their later sons circumcised. M10 explains why he and his wife did not have their second son circumcised:

> … however, with my second son, I later realised that this wasn't my decision to make. After sometime, we realised that we don't want to circumcise him and

> put him through the pain that our first son went through simply because of social opinions, backgrounds and things like that. For this reason, we didn't circumcise our second son.

Thus, a number of participants had sons that had not been circumcised. This group was not religious. They either said that they could not bring themselves to have their sons circumcised because it was a hard decision to make, or they could not face it because it would be painful for their sons. Thus, they said that they did not even discuss it with their partners. Some of them believed that a modified penis could possibly affect their son's social and private life, and present problems in terms of their son's social acceptance both at school and in their private lives with a possible partner. This opinion was based on their own bad experiences. One of the male participants said that because he had had a circumcised penis he had suffered bullying at college before and after sport sessions in the changing room, so he decided not to have his son circumcised.

Participants' attitudes towards circumcision were not gender based. There was not a meaningful difference between male and female responses. However, it should be acknowledged that some of the female participants said that they were more considerate about the well-being and health of their sons than their husbands were. Some said that they were concerned about the pain their boy might suffer. Moreover, convincing a partner to allow circumcision was difficult for those female participants who had a European partner (who was not a Muslim or had not converted to Islam), because their partners had argued that there was nothing wrong with them and there

was no basis for arguing that the practice was necessary. The only case amongst those female participants who had a son but did not negotiate the decision of whether to circumcise was a female participant who married an American. Circumcision is a more common practice in the US than in Europe (see Denniston et al. 2010), and this American husband had himself been circumcised. Thus, it was not a matter of discussion and negotiation with her American partner.

These examples illustrate how participants negotiated the issue of circumcision. Their identity was fluid and shifting. This was more apparent in cases when they circumcised their first, but not their second son. They had been more religious in the early stages of their partnering, and had then lost their attachment to the religious practice (at least to some extent), over the course of time. Therefore, the timing of the birth of their son in their life course was important. Likewise, their age, and the length of time they had been in the UK directly affect their decision as to whether or not they wanted to follow the tradition of circumcision, or other traditions, when a child was born. Moreover, their decisions were based on their own earlier personal experiences, such as having been subjected to bullying at college or dis/liking the appearance of a circumcised penis.

Negotiations Over Rearing a Child

According to my data, there were negotiations between participants and their partners about how they wanted to raise their children. In other words, they discussed what identity they wanted to pass down to their children, and how they wished to do so. The

type of identity they wanted to pass down that seemed to be most challenging and subject to negotiation was the religious and the original cultural identity, and the two most negotiated issues were teaching their children the parents' native languages, and passing down their religious identities. These issues are explained next.

Languages a child should speak

Passing parents' language skills on to their children plays an essential role in the intergenerational transmission of culture. In order to pass their cultural values on to their children, it was often necessary to teach them the Persian language. Moreover, language serves as a social glue, and showcases their distinctiveness, by showing that they are raised as Persians.

Many participants said they had concerns at the time of their child's birth, with regard to what would happen if their children could not communicate with their Persian family. Moreover, in that case, would they still have a parental feeling towards their children? What would happen if there were communication barriers between them and their children? Thus, there was a sense of fear, to the extent that they felt they might not consider their child a Persian. The participants who had partnered with a native English speaker claimed that they expected their children to be bilingual. Most of the participants who shared parentage with a non-English native speaker claimed that they expected their children to be tri-lingual (i.e. fluent in Persian, English, and their partner's mother tongue). However, in most cases it was just a wish and not possible in reality.

Learning Persian was a difficult process for their children, given they were in an environment where most people, particularly the child's friends, did not speak Persian. This difficulty intensified when the Persian parent of a child could not spend enough time with them, due to job circumstances and work demands. By acknowledging that the situational factors were important, successfully teaching Persian to their children was mainly based on the interplay of their in-between identity, their willingness, and their partners' cooperation. These key factors affected the extent to which their children could speak Persian. I explain them next.

The cultural positions of Persian partners

The most important aspect of teaching the Persian language to their children was the participant's attachment to the Persian culture, and their sense of belonging. In this regard, participants' approaches to teaching their children Persian depended on their in-between position on the continuum of cultural identities discussed earlier. A handful of interviewees said that the Persian language was not useful for living in the modern world. They meant it was not useful for living in Europe, or dealing with technology, and that the language might only be useful if they wanted to deal with their Persian cultural heritage. They claimed that when they did not want their children to go back to Iran, then there was no point to learning the language. One participant even said that learning Persian was a 'waste of time'.

The gender identity of the Persian partner did not appear to be a strong factor when teaching Persian to children. One would expect that teaching Persian would be easier if the mother were a native Persian speaker, but still, achieving this goal depended on her willingness, and how she perceived her Persian cultural identity. If her own cultural identity was strong, then she tried to teach the language to her children, and if not, she would do nothing about it.

Although the data show that it was more difficult for male participants to teach Persian (since the mother of the child was not a native Persian speaker), they also show that if a male parent wanted to teach Persian to his child, he did so. Those male participants who successfully taught their children Persian had strong cultural identities, and they insisted on speaking Persian with their children in front of their wives, and their wives' wider networks, to make sure that their children were not ashamed of the language or of displaying her or his cultural heritage.

That said, for male participants it was extremely difficult to teach a language to their children, because in these unions, as discussed, men were usually the breadwinners and women were the housekeepers who took care of their children, and were responsible for spending time with and talking to the children. Only a handful of male participants expressed a wish that their children would have at least an elementary knowledge of Persian. Some of these participants claimed that they tried different self-learning DVDs, CDs, computer programmes, games, and books for children, or had enrolled them in Persian courses at Iranian cultural centres or schools across the UK.

Participants' religious identities were also important in this process. For some of the extreme religious participants, Persian was less important, and some of them said that they preferred Arabic to be taught to their children, because that is the language of their religion and the Quran. They therefore enrolled their children in Quranic or Arabic courses, rather than Persian language courses. They held this view mainly because their religious affiliation was more important to them than their Persian heritage.

The cultural positions of the non-Persian Partners

Teaching Persian to children raised in these unions also depends on the cooperation of their non-Persian partners, which in turn depends on their position on the continuum of cultural identities. Some partners were encouraging, and some, in one way or another, even opposed the idea of teaching their child Persian. For those who had separated from their partner, teaching Persian had become almost impossible, because their children were not with them all the time, and they could not send them to Iranian schools or Persian language courses. In some cases their ex-partners got a court injunction against the Persian party, to prevent them from sending their children to Iran for holydays, or to an Iranian school.

Some female participants said they feared their husbands would get annoyed if they spoke in Persian with their child, so they ended up not speaking Persian with their children. For example, F30 said that her son spoke Persian perfectly when his father was at work overseas, and her son spent most of his time with her and her mother who

lived closed by. When her son was some years old they moved out of England to join her husband at his workplace overseas. She said:

> We then went to his father and whenever he entered his father's arms, he spoke in Persian. This kept making his father very upset. So He really, sort of very badly, kept rejecting him, saying to my son: 'go away I don't understand you' or things like that. So instead of being impressed that his son is speaking another language, he was annoyed. This made me worry because I felt it's distancing my husband from my son. I foolishly then decided not to speak Persian with my son anymore because my husband really were rejecting our son.

On the other hand, those participants whose partners cooperated with them were usually more successful in teaching their children Persian. I quote F8 as a good example of this positive attitude.

> My husband believed that knowing one's mother tongue was very important and my son's mother tongue was Persian. And so that now my son speaks Persian fluently. I remember when I was pregnant my husband purchased a radio for me and tuned to Persian language programs so that my child inside me could listen to the Persian language even before he was born. When my son was born, he learnt Persian first.

What religion a child should practice

For religious participants, passing down their religious identity was regarded as a religious duty, for which they were responsible to God. Doing so was more important than passing on their national Iranian identity, or their traditional Persian heritage. As mentioned, the partners of this group of participants converted to Islam upon marriage, or they were Muslims before their marriage. They therefore initially agreed to raise their children as Muslims, and this was a 'condition' of their marriage, so they did not have any major arguments about this matter later in life. However, in practice they might still have had to negotiate some aspects of certain religious practices for their children with their partners (e.g. fasting, or wearing the hijab in terms their daughters).

For religious participants, the main objective was to ensure that that their children practiced and knew about Islam, performed their daily prayers, and read the Quran. M33 said of his son that 'Practicing his religion is the real force that will let him thrive and reach eternal salvation'. He and his wife enrolled their son in Quran and religious classes, and took him to the mosques to say prayers as ways of exposing him to the religious teachings.

These participants felt that their social surroundings in the UK were not the best of environments for raising a child, as they would not encourage their children to follow the Islamic teachings, and would most probably have a negative impact on their upbringing. Their main concern was that the environment might directly affect their children's spiritual well-being. This notion became particularly important when their

children were at school, since at this point they thought that they had lost control over what their children were being taught.

In some of these unions there was talk of going back to live in Iran, so their children could be raised in a better environment. However, there was not usually much agreement for this move from their partner. A handful of them, however, could manage to take their children to Iran for several years, and raise them there, in order to instil the moral values of Iranian society. They all returned to the UK after a few years.

Some partially religious or nonreligious participants decided not to intervene in deciding what religion their children would follow, or instead offered both their own and their partners' religious backgrounds to their children, and then left that matter to their children to decide for themselves later in life. Most of these participants agreed on certain moral values, regardless of the religious teachings of either party. That meant they allowed their children to adopt the British popular culture, but as some mentioned, 'with certain restrictions'. Participants who had this attitude were not influenced by their gender, according to my data.

In the process of passing down religious identity, the degree of commitment their partners had to their own religious backgrounds was also significant, since when they did not insist on adopting their own religious traditions, the Persian party in the relationship did not face any obstacles in bringing up their children according to the tenets of Islamic tradition.

Gender socialization: Raising a daughter

One important issue that I would like to flag in terms of rearing a child is gender socialization, which caused clashes in some cases because the construction of gender was deferent for members of intercultural couples. This presented issues especially for rearing a girl. It was said by some participants—regardless of their gender or religious commitment—that a girl needed more protection, and her social relationships and friendships had to be more controlled than those of boys. In particular, the most contentious issue for these couples was about their daughters' clothing. For religious participants, obviously, girls had to follow the Islamic dress codes. But even for partially religious or nonreligious participants, usually the girl's clothing had to be more conservative in comparison with the British norms. Thus their daughters should not wear tight jeans or short skirts, for example. Because there were disagreements between these couples, some said they were worried that their daughters would have 'two faces' and behave differently in front of each parent, and also when in the presence of others.

As indicated, the Persian idea of what constitutes decent clothing is not only a religious practice. For example, one religious participant, M32, whose wife was a British born Shia Muslim, had extensive arguments with her over the way their daughter wore the *hijab*. This example indicates that even though both partners were regarded as Shia Muslims, their ideas of *hijab* and Islamic clothing codes were different, and these differences caused extensive quarrels and problems in their relationship. This is reminiscent of the argument I raised earlier about the construction of social values that

were often perceived as religious, although they might have been local values. Here, the example is the *hijab*. Both partners were religious, and believed in the same branch of Islam, but their conceptions of the *hijab* and how it should be worn were different.

Passing down the Persian culture of relationality

As indicated, relationality is cultural, and the data suggested that some participants wanted to pass down Persian relational values to their children so that their children would observe these relations with their extended family and community members according to Persian traditions. They wanted their children to adopt the Persian culture of hospitality, celebrations, gatherings, and socializing with others. This caused problems in some cases, and was a matter that required negotiation, because their non-Persian partners did not agree with passing down those Persian practices of relationality (which were explained in the previous chapter).

In addition to this overview, religious participants usually seemed to be more motivated to pass down religious teachings about relationality. They wanted their children to have good feelings about the religious festivals, and tried to make them enjoyable and important occasions for their children. They usually bought gifts (*Eidi*) for family members in conjunction with religious celebrations, or took them out for dinner, because they wanted their children to understand that the religious ceremony was of special importance so that they would continue to observe these religious tenets.

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In summary, issues involving children in these unions matter in a reflexive way. Initially, there were negotiations between partners and their wider family and community members about passing down their cultural identities to their children. In other words, all the above-mentioned issues were also related to, and could be shaped by, parents of participants, their wider family, and community members. More particularly, grandparents and members of their wider family could become involved in issues related to a newborn. Naming a child is related to this network of relationships, in that the name should be pronounceable for them, and should be consistent with community values. Moreover, infant baptisms and circumcisions were related to the wider family and community members insofar as the community would accept the child. Similarly, the language their children speak, and the religion they practice, could also be a matter of concern for people external to the couple relationship. In this sense, others' (especially grandparents) interventions and expectations could potentially affect their partnering practices, as could their children's interactions with the wider social network. These interactions reflect the three social positionings I explored in this and two previous chapters: Internal, External, and Intergenerational positionings.

8.2. Parents, Siblings, and Senior Kinship Members

Parents' involvement in almost all aspects of partnering practices—including partner selection, partnership formation, and marriage arrangements—has been discussed in previous chapters. It has also been mentioned that parental interventions occur in

relation to newborns and rearing children. In this project, parents from both the Persian and non-Persian sides of the intercultural relationships intervened in their intercultural relationships. Their interventions were usually motivated by their commitment to traditional norms, and more importantly by their religious beliefs. This illustrates the intergenerational dynamic of partnering practices, since the grandparents wanted to ensure that their culture and traditions were passed down. Issues such as infant baptism, circumcision, and naming a child were of vital importance for the parents of the couples in this study. As explained by some participants, their parents believed they had rights over their grandchildren. It was up to each individual to find a balanced way of dealing with their parents' interventions, one that was also acceptable to their partners. They had to make it clear and understood to their partner, that their relationships with their parents did not affect their relationship with their partner, and vice versa. In this sense, it was important for these couples to define a clear line between the two types of relationships, so that they would not contradict or interfere with each other. Establishing such a clear border and differentiation between the two types of relationships could prevent them from misunderstanding each other, and running into difficult problems. That said, it was not always possible for participants to reach an agreement with both their partners and the parents of both parties.

The complexities associated with this intergenerational dimension introduce challenges to the conception of reflexive modernization. In the following example, two concerns about the Persian side of these unions with regard to their own parents will be explored. These concerns involve the Persian partner's expectations (or demands) that their partner will help or even should participate in caring for and respecting the

Persian partner's parents. These practices are traditionally advocated. Thus, the ways in which parents should be treated was a matter of negotiation between these couples throughout their relationship. The most important issue for the participants was convincing their partners that both caring and respecting should be perform in the ways acceptable for Persian audience. Thus, even if the partners did not genuinely agree on the importance of these practices, they still needed to display care and respect for the parents of their Persian partners. For example, they should stand up when these parents enter a room they are sitting in or they should always be available to provide service and assistance to their parents.

The values associated with respecting one's parents and caring for them have religious roots, as Islamic sources demand that people behave in this way. In Islam, respecting and caring about one's parents is crucial, and the ways in which people should conduct themselves in doing so is clearly indicated in several verses in the Quran. However, this attitude and its display were of importance to all participants, regardless of their degree of religiosity. For example, in one extreme case, M3, a nonreligious participant, argued that his wife's disrespectful behaviour towards his mother accelerated their divorce. His account was as follows:

> The British are generally private people, and my ex-wife belongs to a small family with not much of an interaction between them. So she found my social interactions with family and friends to be unusual or even maybe too much. She always had an issue with my parents coming over and for example staying for long at our place … for example when my mother came to visit me for the

> second time, the Iran-Iraq war was just began. I told her that I couldn't send my mother back to Iran while there is a war in progress; she has to stay for longer. But she left the house and said that she stayed here with my mother for three months, and that she cannot take it any longer. She initially had agreed on three months and so left the house exactly after three months, on the 91st day. And for the further two months that my mother was here, she never visited. Then As soon as my mother left, she came back the following day. I didn't think her behaviour could be acceptable in any ways. My mother is an important part of my life. Loving and respecting her is part of my genes and culture. If she couldn't understand this, why on earth did she get married to an Iranian? This was what triggered off all of our problems and our relationship was never the same after it.

Not only was the practice of parents staying too long an issue, but also in a few cases the Persian partners wanted to live with their parents in the same household. This could be considered normal practice in contemporary Iran, but might create a fairly difficult situation for a typical English lifestyle. Usually the Persian male party of the relationship wanted to live with his parents. Those who agreed to live with their partners' parents, or accepted that the parents of their Persian partner stay for a long period in their house, had Catholic backgrounds, and had often been raised in a big family household. This background explains their close position on the continuum of cultural identities.

To a lesser extent, the couple's connections with their siblings and senior members of their kinships were also significant, as those relationships could shape their partnering practices. Some participants believed that they had responsibilities towards this group of relatives, such as providing financial supports for younger sisters. In this sense, paying for a sister's expenses caused tensions in some of these unions. The most common issue, however, was how this group of relatives should be treated at parties and gatherings. For example, as one participant explained, when an older brother was visiting, because he was senior to all the others, no one could touch the food until he came to the table, because culturally it is proper for the most senior person to begin to eat first. In this case, the non-Persian wife learn that she should serve the older brother or senior kin first, after which the others could help themselves and begin to eat.

8.3. Conclusion

This chapter discussed intergenerational positioning during partnerships. It considered how a person's intergenerational position in her/his web of 'familial' relationships shapes partnering practices, and vice versa. As was explained, this was a reflexive process, according to the findings of this research. This chapter shows the extent to which familial relationships are still of significance, not only in parallel with other close relationships like friendships, but on their own merits. Many examples throughout the chapter show that this positioning was culturally constructed, and had cultural connotations.

The section on offspring considered how the couples passed down their cultural heritages to their intercultural children. This depended on the their position on the continuum of cultural identities, and the strictness with which they passed down their culture of origin. At the time of their interview, some participants who were still in relationships with the person they had had children with, but they regretted being in such a relationship mainly because they could not bring up their children as they wished, like themselves, Persian. In some other cases, the clashes of two cultures over bringing up children resulted in divorce. In these cases, issues related to their children remained their top priority for the rest of their lives (and were the reason they contacted their ex-partners).

This chapter also argues that relationships with other blood-relatives had a defining role in constructing participants' partnering relationships. In particular, negotiating and managing relationships with parents was vital for the Persians involved in these relationships, in order to sustain their partnering relationships.

The wider question here is how these intergenerational practices may be understood under the conditions of detraditionalization and individualization. As mentioned, religious identity appeared to be a defining factor in these intergenerational practices. For religious participants, the most important aspects of their identity that had to be passed down to their children were their religious values. It appeared from the data that for other nonreligious or partially religious participants religious teachings were also significant. This was especially so regarding some certain practices such as

circumcision. This attitudes indicate their consequential religiosity, as Glock (1959, 1962), and Glock and Stark (1965) used the term.

These kinds of religious expectations caused clashes with their partners that often required extensive negotiations to resolve. If religious participants could not agree on how to bring up their children they would end up getting a divorce, because for religious people religion cannot be compromised. These findings illustrate the significance of religion as a form of tradition that still guides people's family lives and shapes how they conduct their partnering practices. However, these religious traditions were negotiated, and subject to change and amendment. This is consistent with Smart and Shipman (2004), who argue that the detraditionalization theory has exaggerated the process of social change, because traditions remain significant, but they are readjusted and altered through negotiations. Similar to Smart and Shipman's empirical findings and analysis, this research shows that the process of readjusting the traditional is negotiated across generations. These negotiations could be understood through the process of individualization because individuals were constantly defined and redefined in their own biographies, according to their current situation. However, the ways in which they made their choices in regard to intergenerational practices was limited by their prescribed traditional values.

In conclusion, there have been extensive discussions positing that some forms of close social relationships, such as friendships, have become central in people's lives in contemporary societies (see Budgeon and Roseneil 2004). The purpose of this chapter, however, was not to identify the relationships that were relatively more important or to

define a hierarchical system of close relationships. Rather, it was to document that 'familial' ties and relationships still have considerable meaning and distinctive value in contemporary societies. Because these 'familial' relationships have special connotations for participants, they should not be conflated with other close social relationships. These intergenerational dimensions confirm the importance of retaining the concept of family, or reclaiming it, as Gillies (2011) would argue. This argument could be considered as supporting Morgan's (2011b) notion of family practices, rather than Smart's (2007) proposed new conception of 'personal life', because there is still much content in the concept of 'family' that cannot be divorced from the field.

Concluding Discussions

In this conclusion, I recount my approach to studying Persian intercultural partnering practices in the UK. Firstly, it should be mentioned that this study was exploratory in nature because very little is known about the family practices of Persian immigrants in the West. Revealing Persian partnering practices in an intercultural context could help with furthering conceptualization of the field of family life and relationships. In particular, this thesis highlights how the current main theories of sociology of family life and relationships neglect the cultural dimensions of everyday life partnering practices. I critically review relevant notions at the outset of this thesis, subsequently addressing my critics. I argue that I take a middle way of linking theory and empirical study. Therefore, this study is not testing the previous theories presented in chapters 1 and 2.

To provide a bigger picture of the outcome of this research, I briefly return to my four main research questions, as stated in chapter 2. I conclude that cultural differences represent the most important differences in the participants' partnering life. Employing Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity, and consequently the notion of intercultural relationships, I attempt to bring the cultural dimensions of partnering relationships into conceptual dialogue. Cultural identity, or as I would prefer, the continuum of cultural identities, can better explain the social positionings of the immigrant within the host society. To provide an account of how these intercultural partnering relationships can be understood in relation to wider social processes, I explore the propositions of reflexive modernization theory, examining how the partnering relationships of participants may be situated within the conditions of detraditionalization and

individualization. In the first section, I highlight the different roles that religious and local traditions may play in these processes.

The second section examines how partners in intercultural partnering relationships cooperate to sustain their relationships across cultural differences. I argue that there are five cultural aspects through which participants sustain their relationships: traditional gender constructs; degree of religiosity; relationality; age and stages in life course; and language difference. The third section discusses the reasons, consequences, and implications of failure in intercultural partnering relationships. In particular, I observe that participants are in search of the best 'me', in the sense that Smart (2007) uses the term in her sociology of 'personal life'. This chapter concludes with my final observations and some considerations for further research.

1. The approach to the study: A sociology of intercultural couple relationships

Considering the topic of this research could be approached from various disciplinary perspectives, and it could be studied interdisciplinarily or multidisciplinarily, it is important to note that this thesis represents a sociological account. In chapters 1 and 2, I establish my sociological approach and present a critical account of the current debates in the field of immigrant couple relationship studies, noting some bodies of thought pertinent to this field, namely, exchange theory, assimilationism, multiculturalism, and transnationalism. I discuss that all these theories have some limitations when it comes to conceptualizing intergroup relationships. More

specifically, I argue that the conceptualization of transnational families is problematic because the concept is associated with the notion of nation-states. However, I argue that the idea of multiculturalism provides a good platform for thinking of the ways in which cultural differences can be negotiated, compromised, and accommodated. The core idea of multiculturalism involves finding ways in which different social groups within a multicultural society can have their differences accommodated both in the public and political spheres, while maintaining social cohesion and unity (see Goldberg 1994; Gordon and Newfield 1996; Willett 1998; Kivisto and Rundblad 2000; Alexander 2001). Nevertheless, these theories were mainly developed to address the increasing diversity in modern societies. I argue that the key to comprehending diversity is understanding differences. Along the same lines, the key to understanding intergroup partnering relationships is to understand the ways in which the subjects perceive difference/s. This leads me to consider the significant differences that needed to be negotiated and accommodated by Persians in order to sustain their intercultural couple relationships. Throughout this thesis, I argue that the main differences within the relationships I studied were cultural differences.

To be more precise, I find that feminist thoughts on subjectivity and intersectionality provide the most useful conceptual tools for understanding differences between members of intergroup relationships. As the results of this study indicate, the research participants mostly spoke about their cultural differences with their partners, as their main source of difference that needed to be negotiated – not their racial, class, national, religious, or ethnic differences. Moreover, I argue that all of the latter concepts have limited application to the Persian context. For example, the concept of nationality is

problematic, as many people do not recognize the current nation-states. The concept of religion is problematic as people do highly contradictory practices under the name of one religion. The concept of ethnicity is problematic as it has special political connotations in the Persian context, or because people did not know what their ethnicity was. While I do not entirely dismiss it, I argue that the concept of ethnicity is not suited to the context of this study for practical reasons.

In chapter 1, I argue that the participants' significant differences should be understood not only subjectively but also intersectionally, which requires investigating the ways in which those core differences interplay in the construction of their relationships. The theory of intersectionality, put forward by Davis (1981), Crenshow (1989, 1991), and Collins (1990, 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2004; also see Andersen and Collins 2007), holds that a multidimensional analysis of axes of social division is required to understand the dynamics of difference. Hence, the theory suggests that it is crucial to investigate the ways in which various categories of social divisions operate parallel to one another, engage in interplay, and/or reinforce one another other (Andersen 2005; also see Berger and Guidroz 2010). This feminist field sheds light on understanding how intercultural couple relationships may operate across differences. In the sense of intersectionality, there is not only one source of difference as a driving factor behind these unions, but rather many sources, intersecting with each other to inform the ways in which these unions take shape. Throughout the thesis I discuss the interplay of gender constructs, religiosity, language (or ways of communication), age and stages of life course, and generation. All these dimensions are culturally defined, meaning that Persians may perceive them differently from people of other cultural backgrounds.

To conceptualize cultural differences, I find the work of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, and in particular, Hall's notion of cultural identity (1990; also see Hall and du Gay 1996), useful for this study. For Hall, there are two types of cultural identity. The first is the given and essential identity with which a person is born. The second, however, is not only about the past and being but also about the future and becoming through constant positioning in relation to current social circumstances. This perception is in line with Bhabha's (1994, 1996) concept of hybridity which theorizes how people position themselves in between cultures. In this sense, throughout the findings chapters 4 through 8, I explore the ways in which Persians negotiate their differences with their partners in search of better positions to sustain their couple relationships.

To conceptualize the process of negotiating difference I find Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) notion of 'family practices' useful in furthering analysis of partnering relationships because it provides a conceptual tool to capture the regular and everyday sense of fluid family activities. I consequently use the idea of practices and, for theoretical and methodological reasons, distinguish between three stages of partnering relationships: Pre-Partnering Practices, Prevailing Partnering Practices, and Post-Partnering Practices. These stages show the entire process of one's partnering biography, but at the same time enable us to think about each stage independently, because each stage has its own implications and consequences.

These concepts then facilitate an investigation of the evolution or adjustment of meanings embedded in partnering practices for individuals across various stages of their life course. As discussed in chapters 4 through 8, the participants' perception of partnering practices varies depending on the stage of partnering relationships. Tradition was more important in pre-partnering stage, the stage referring to practices prior to the partnering relationship as well as any practices related to forming the relationship. In the prevailing partnering stage, participants seemed to be more concerned with doing whatever was possible to maintain their relationships. Thus in many cases, participants tried to accommodate their partners by strategically adapting to the practices of opposite culture. In other words, they became more relaxed about their own culturally specific practices.

Thus, these conceptions allow the key research questions in relation to each stage to be examined separately and in detail. These stages help me to investigate the key research questions in each stage independently. For example, the interplay of sources of cultural differences, such as gender, religiosity, life course, and language, are considered in each partnering stage. This is relevant as people might have different understandings during or after each stage based on their latest experiences and positions in their life course. Thus, these stages are in line with the sociological notion of life course. People change over time, their social surrounding as well as wider socio-political circumstances also may change, so that people may act differently in each stage. In this sense, partnering experiences could be investigated in relation to earlier experiences. For example, as discussed in chapter 5, the experience of failure in an intercultural relationship might lead people to choose to experience an alternative form of

relationships, such as temporary relationships, or they may choose not to practice intercultural relationship any longer and seek a Persian partner.

The first two findings chapters 4 and 5 are about Pre-Partnering Practices and they explore practices of selecting a partner and then forming a relationship. The next three findings chapters mainly focus on Prevailing Partnering Practices. Embracing the notions of 'me' and 'relationality' from Smart's (2007) theory of 'personal life', as well as 'multiple social positionings' in the feminist theory of intersectionality (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006), I conceptualize three distinctive positions that a person may have in relation to others while engaging in a couple relationship. First is her/his position in relation to the partner; second is her/his position in relation to people external to the couple; third is the position in relation to people external to the couple, but is exclusively about intergenerational ties. These positions can meaningfully shape one's partnering practices.

This way of thinking helps to investigate the variety of practices that a person engages in over the course of a couple relationship. Chapters 6 through 8 explore the ways that these positions inform and shape each other. The latter chapter on intergenerational practices shows the importance of familial ties. Thus, like Gillies (2011) and Morgan (2011b), I argue that the concept of family must be retained despite emerging notions, such as Smart's (2007) concept of 'personal life'.

Chapter 2 establishes that a middle way approach is needed in order to link theories and empirical data. I therefore take a critical approach to employing concepts in order

to better understand the ways in which intercultural unions may operate in contemporary societies. This research therefore does not test the previous theories presented in chapters 1 and 2, but rather uses their ideas to shed light on why and how Persians do intercultural partnering practices in the UK.

Most of these theories have limitations with regard to particular social context, so the findings of this research may suggest ways toward refining them. For example, exchange theory was considered, as it has been a popular notion in the US literature. In light of this theory and according to the findings of this research, it could be argued that some people may see the partnering relationship as a package, considering what they could get in return for what they might give. Thus if they compromise for something, they expect that they would get something in return. It appears from the data of this research that, in some cases, the research participants deployed such an exchange strategy. In some cases, their practices were similar to bargaining. For example, they accepted to celebrate Christmas in return for their partner celebrating Nowroz (the Persian New Year) or they accepted baptizing their children in order to get permission to circumcise them (fuller explanation of these examples can be found in chapters 7 and 8). One participant even said that these exchanges were like playing a game for him. He thought that he had given some points to his wife and in return got some points from her. For example, he consented to wearing more Western-style clothes and, in return, upon his request, his wife consented to wearing looser and more covering clothes (in accordance with his religious beliefs). While it could be argued that exchange theory could somewhat explain the intergroup partnering practices, it is

not exclusive and has various limitations mentioned earlier in chapter 1, such as its overly simplistic giving-taking view of the complexity of intergroup relationships.

It is now necessary to provide a bigger picture of intercultural partnering practices in relation to wider social processes. In chapter 2, it is argued that the theory of reflexive modernization (Giddens 1991, 1992, 1994; Beck 1992, 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002) has been the centre of theoretical attention in British sociology of family life and relationships. As explained earlier, the components of this theory (particularly detraditionalization and individualization theses) could be useful for furthering sociological thinking, but they fall short of providing an accurate explanation for contemporary couple relationships. In other words, these are important notions because they provide ideas about the process of social change through which some forms of tradition, such as local traditions, are losing their momentum and individuals are more capable of making individual choices and inventing their own biographies. However, as discussed throughout findings chapters 4 through 8, detraditionalization and individualization exaggerate the extent to which these processes of social transformation actually occur in family and everyday practices, as is seen within the context of this research. They also neglect the impact of the structural dimension of personal relationships, as Jamieson (1998, 1999) suggests.

The findings of this research show that most religious or local traditions of partnering practices remained significant for the participants in all stages of their partnering practices. However, in line with findings by Smart and Shipman (2004), the participants' traditional practices were subject to amendment and readjustment based

on their current situation and surroundings. Thus, as Gross (2005) and Smart (2007) suggest, it is wise to preserve the propositions of reflexive modernization, but further theoretical refinement is required.

One significant limitation of the concept of detraditionalization that is highlighted in this thesis is that this concept is often used to refer to the traditional as a whole, although different forms of the traditional could operate inconsistently and advocate contradictory values and practices. In particular, I discuss the importance of religion as one distinctive driving element of the traditional that is not always in line with local traditions in the Persian context. I suggest that religion should be considered exclusively in order to gain deeper insight into the current status of family lives and relationships in modernity. Religion in the Persian context occasionally advocates practices that are contradictory to local traditions. In particular, in chapter 4, I take the example of the practice of preserving virginity until permanent marriage, which is a local value in Iran, but is not advocated by religion. In chapter 5, I argue that permanent marriage is not the only form of couple relationships allowed in Shia Islam, but it appears from the data to be the only form that most participants accepted to display to their wider social network, especially if they were partnering for the first time and if they wanted to have children from the relationship. In chapter 5, I especially reference temporary marriage, which is permitted in Shiaism but highly controversial according to Persian local traditions. Chapter 7 discusses how religious and nonreligious participants hold different views over the celebration of traditional occasions. The former group of participants preferred to celebrate Islamic festivals and sometimes refused to celebrate Persian ancient occasions such as Persian New Year.

The latter group preferred to celebrate ancient occasions and was not concerned with celebrating Islamic occasions.

These examples showcase the distinct difference between different forms of the traditional. In this respect, I argue that regarding tradition as a whole, which can pass through the process of detraditionalization, is overly simplistic. In this respect, I suggest that in order to understand the nuances of traditional influence on the construction of social behaviours, religion as one defining form of tradition should be considered independently. This is also important because recent empirical studies, including this research, show the revival of religion in late modernity in various ways (e.g. see Sherkat 2000; Ens et al. 2001; Peters 2001; Husain and O'Brien 2000, 2001; Smit 2000), presenting a view of religion that is inconsistent with the overly simplistic view taken by detraditionalization theory.

2. Positioning in-between cultures: How might intercultural partnering relationships work?

The participants' practices of intercultural partnering relationships are explored in detail throughout the findings chapters 4 through 8. It could be argued that they did their partnering practices through constant work on their project of the self by inventing and reinventing their biographies, in the sense in which Giddens (1991) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue in their theorization of individualization. That means they constantly negotiated and compromised, adjusted and readjusted their traditions, defined and redefined their differences with their partners, as well as what they understood as the meanings embedded in their partnering practices. Then they

tried to find ways to accommodate their differences and sustain their relationships. This process produced the 'one family world' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 93), which is unique to each couple.

This constant work on identity challenges facing people involved in intercultural relationships, is also explainable through Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity and Bhabha's (1994, 1996) conception of cultural hybridity and positioning in-between cultures. In this sense, I suggest that the research participants might position themselves somewhere in between two cultural origins, which I referred to as a continuum of cultural identities. Finding a position along this continuum involved continuous work so that their position was always strategic in response to their new social surroundings, subject to negotiation, and consequently shifting to new positions. As explained in chapter 4, both members of an intercultural couple initially altered their given cultural identities (in the sense of the first type of cultural identity in Hall's (1990) conception) prior to partnering with an out-group person and this was in fact one of the main reasons why they chose a partner from another cultural group. Thus, both sides of the intercultural relationship were in-between cultures of origin before engaging with their future partner. Earlier theories, such as cultural assimilationism, could not grasp the complexity of such positionings because people involved in these unions negotiate their position and are strategic with regard to their social circumstances; they are not assimilating into another cultural group. Moreover, assimilationism looks at assimilation of one part (immigrants) into the culture of the host country, while in fact the cultural engagement is from both sides involved in the intergroup relationship.

Knowing that both members of a couple in these unions were cultural in-betweeners, the question then becomes how did they sustain their relationship? This was done, again, through their constant work on inventing their in-between cultural identities. Although they might experience some difficulties concerning their differences at the beginning of their relationships, as explained in findings chapters 6 through 8, during their relationship, they negotiated, agreed to compromise, and/or adapted to some aspects of their partner's culture so they could reach an optimal point on the continuum of cultural identities, achieving a stable position in their partnering life. This position on the continuum seemed to be unique to each couple or 'one family world' as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 93) would argue. The outcome of this process of negotiation and positioning was significantly based on five cultural aspects: their perception of gender constructs; their degree of religiosity; understanding of relationality; their age and stage of in the life course; and their language abilities. These are explained below.

Gender constructs

Persian gender constructs as an aspect of cultural identity were among the defining factors for the positioning of participants on the continuum of cultural identities. In chapter 4, the ways in which Persian gender constructs might affect the participants' decision to partner a non-Persian person are discussed. They did not fully believe in Persian gender norms and therefore wanted to be in a relationship with a non-Persian in the hopes of achieving a more egalitarian couple relationship. In this sense, their

partner selection in terms of gender relations could be considered positioning in between cultures. However, it should be acknowledged that it appears from the participants' narratives that they chose partners whose understanding of gender relations were close to the Persian traditional perception of gender. In particular, many of the participants chose partners from Catholic backgrounds and whose traditions regarding gender could be considered similar to Persian traditions. Moreover, both parties in these intercultural relationships tended toward traditional understandings of gender during their actual partnership. In chapter 5 it is demonstrated how the traditional gender norms of both parties influenced the couple's decision to marry and stay in a marriage. It is also discussed that women are usually expected to make sacrifices in order to save the marriage, mostly for the well-being of their children (discussed in chapter 8). Chapter 6 shows that the traditional model of men as the main breadwinner and women as the main housekeeper was practiced by most of the research participants.

Considering all the data regarding all stages of partnering practices, it could be argued that in the process of negotiating cultural differences, female participants were more willing to adjust to the culture of their non-Persian partners, while male participants were more insistent that their partners adapt to Persian culture. It could be argued that this intention was in line with the traditional Persian construction of gender. In order to sustain a relationship, many of the female participants indicated that since their childhood they had learnt from their mothers that a wife should always submit to her husband. Thus, the data demonstrate that females were, in fact, more willing to adopt their non-Persian husbands' cultural practices, because, according to their gender

perception, a wife should sacrifice for the good and stability of her family life. In this sense, many of the female participants perceived themselves as responsible for saving their marriage and argued that they learnt to see themselves as the servant of their family. They argued that the reason why intergroup relationships between Persian women and European men could succeed, was that Persian women behave according to a proscribed morality that encourages preserving a marriage despite all the difficulties. Therefore, it could be argued that a participant's adherence to conventional gender norms was itself a means of sustaining their relationships.

Overall, it could be argued that the traditional perception of gender was negotiated and altered in some respects. However, it remained powerful in defining people's partnering practices in both sides of these relationships. The position of Persian female participants was explained above. However, the female partners of the participants also were more likely to acquire their male partners' Persian cultural practices. This became apparent from the accounts of male participants, although I did not interview the partners of the research participants. This detailed account of the research participants and their partners poses challenges to the perception of reflexive modernization (Giddens 1991, 1994; Beck 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Although the traditional gender norms were subject to negotiation and readjustment, they remained powerful in defining and, more importantly, sustaining the intercultural unions investigated in this study.

Religiosity

The other dimension important in sustaining Persian intercultural relationships was the participants' degree of religiosity. It could be argued that in order to sustain a relationship, having a mutual set of moral values is important, but, when it comes to practicing different religious customs, problems may arise. Nonreligious or partially religious participants in this study did not experience major problems with regard to everyday religious practices because, as they did not have a strong religious sense of belonging, they did not experience any conflict with regard to everyday personal rituals that are either advocated or proscribed by the religion, such as the type of food they were allowed or not allowed to eat. In this sense, not having a strong religious identity prevented them from clashes. They just needed to find common moral ground with their partners. Nonetheless, they still might encounter problems concerning a few important religious ceremonies, such as baptizing or circumcising a child, that they needed to negotiate with their partner to find a resolution and accommodate each other's wishes. This attitude can be understood in terms of 'consequential' dimensions of religiosity (Glock 1959; 1962; Glock and Stark 1965), in the sense that the nonreligious or partially religious participants' desire for and negotiations over certain religious ceremonies represents a consequence of their religious background that remained significant in the construction of the participants' partnering practices.

Furthermore, the participants' degree of religiosity was of primary importance if one or both member(s) of a couple was/were religious. For religious participants, carrying out practices advocated by the religious authority was more important than any other social or cultural norms or values. Conducting such religious practices enabled religious participants to make sense of life. In this sense, for those who had a stronger religious

identity, practicing partnering according to religious rules was more important than observing any other non-religious cultural norms. In several points throughout the findings chapters I attempt to highlight the preference of religious participants for adhering to religious traditions over other local traditions. Their decision to celebrate religious occasions rather than ancient Persian celebrations (discussed in chapter 7), or their decision to teach Arabic to their children rather than Persian (discussed in chapter 8) are examples of this.

Therefore, this group of participants expressed a need to maintain their relationships in a way that was accepted by the religion. In this sense, basing their negotiations on religious teachings and emphasising religious practices was one way to overcome other cultural differences and sustain the relationship. This group of participants declared Islam to be the foundation for how they conducted their partnering practices. As some of the religious participants expressed, they regarded Islam as the constitution of their life and partnering relationship and agreed that every practice in their relationship should be done in accordance with it. For example, they agreed that Islam should define their everyday personal rituals (explained in chapter 6) or how they manage their relationships with the wider family and community members (explained in chapters 7 and 8). Moreover, whenever they faced any conflicts in terms of their daily practices, they solved their problems through Islamic solutions, meaning that they referred to Islamic sources[44] to determine the religion's position on the matter and learn what it advocated in such circumstances. Consequently, they followed the religious guideline and had no further disagreements or insistence upon their own

[44] The Quran, Sunnah, Hadis or/and other accepted sources of the religion.

opinions or preferences. In this sense, the reason they could overcome most of their conflicts was that they based their life on the religious teachings rather than personal preferences.

Relationality

Findings chapters 4 through 8 discuss how the ways in which people in intercultural partnering relationships perceive their relationships to others is culturally defined. Thus, I argue that the concept of relationality has diverse, culturally specific connotations. In addition of familial and generational ties, the research participants often had extensive networks of social relationships that shaped their partnering relationships. In fact, most of the partnering practices in the different phases of a partnering relationship, from selecting a partner to forming a relationship to rearing children, were carried out in relation to the other people, external to the couple itself.

Chapter 7 explains exclusive practices that the couple needed to do in relation to people external to the couple relationship, especially focusing on relational gathering practices. Chapter 8 explores practices that the participants did in relation to their intergenerational ties. This chapter explores intergenerational positionings and is mainly concerned with practices related to newborns and rearing children, as well as caring for and respecting parents and senior members of the extended family. It also discussed familial responsibilities with regard to siblings.

Thus, one important aspect in sustaining the relationships was negotiating the relational practices and finding agreeable relational positionings. As mentioned above, failure to manage the relational practices could result in failure of the couple relationship. Thus, it was necessary for the research participants to find a suitable position for both members of the couple.

Age and stages of life course

Life course has a cultural connotation and should be understood culturally (see Jessor et al 1996; Shweder 1998; Menon and Shweder 1994, 1998). Hence, the life stage at which people find it necessary, for example, to get married or to have children, is culturally defined. In this regard, age is important. The timing of arrival in the UK in the participants' life course was important in the construction of their in-between cultural identity. If they arrived at a younger age, they were more flexible in adapting to the culture of the host country. Similarly, if they started their intercultural relationships at a younger age, it was easier for them to adapt to their partners' culture and to be able to accommodate each other's wishes, as it coincided with the development of their personalities. The amount of time they had been in the UK was also important; the longer they had been in the UK, the more likely they were to accept the cultural practices of the host country, especially in terms of everyday partnering practices (explored in chapter 6) and gathering practices (explored in chapter 7). More importantly, it appears from the data that people within different phases of their life course had different perceptions of partnering practices. For example, those who had experienced a divorce and were in their late middle age or above, had different

perceptions of partner selection than those in their 30s; the former group had more willingness to explore alternative forms of couple relationships, such as casual relationships.

In summary, the timing of their arrival in the UK as well as the length of time spent in the UK were important factors in sustaining their intercultural relationships. This, again, can be better understood through Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity and Bhabha's (1994, 1996) conception of cultural hybridity and positioning in-between cultures, rather than through assimilationism theory. The more time participants spent in the UK, the more they learnt to position themselves according to the prevailing social circumstances. Their social positionings did not imply that they abandoned aspects of their cultural values, but rather that they became strategic at negotiating in order to sustain their relationships.

Language

In chapters 6 and 7, it is noted that language difference can pose challenges in the couples' interpersonal relationships as well as their relationships with people external to the couple. Here language means a system of communication and conveying cultural meanings. Members of intercultural couples needed to find ways in which they could communicate without misunderstanding. The data show that after some initial negotiation at the earlier stages of their couplehood they were able to sustain their relationships despite language difference.

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Before moving to the next section, it should be noted that a pattern can be identified from the data suggesting that the research participants deliberately tried to change their partner's cultural values and practices in order to find a desirable point within the continuum of cultural identities. In this sense, some of the participants claimed that their partner had become more 'Persian', especially in terms of everyday issues explored in chapter 6 (e.g. they asked their partners to take a shower after having a bath, or to cook Persian food). As mentioned above females were more likely to adapt to the culture of their partner. Moreover, for religious participants, their partners' adoption of religious traditions was vital, so they were determined to align their partner's practices with religious teachings. From the pre-partnering stage, they urged their future partner to convert to Islam, not only because they wanted to be in a marital relationship with a Muslim (explained in chapter 5), but also because they wanted their partners to perform everyday practices according to Islamic teachings or to abandon some practices that were not accepted by the religion; for example, drinking alcohol or not wearing the *hijab* for women (explained in chapters 6 and 7). It goes without saying that attempting to change a partner's practices was not always successful. When negotiations over cultural practices did not reach a sustainable position then failure of the relationship was the outcome. This argument leads us to the wider question of how and why these relationships might fail, which I explore in below.

3. Seeking the best 'me': The failure of an intercultural relationship and its implications

While still in relationships, some of the participants expressed that they regretted their decision to enter into an intercultural partnering relationship, but that they had managed to stay in their relationships for various reasons, mainly for the well-being of their children, as they believed that the event of divorce would hurt their children. This perception was stronger among female participants. Moreover, some other participants, who were still in intercultural relationship at the time of the interview, expressed that they would not recommend such relationships and, in fact, would advise against them because they now knew that it would not be the best match for fellow Persians.

The above perceptions notwithstanding, some of the participants ultimately separated from their non-Persian partners. From the accounts of participants who experienced separation or an unhappy relationship it can be concluded that there are two factors involved in the failure of intercultural partnering relationships. One is personality conflict that is not exclusive to the intercultural couples and could be seen in any other kinds of partnering relationships. The other factor is cultural clashes, which will be explained below.

Because of the couple's cultural differences, conflicts might occur in these unions. As was explained earlier, people involved in intercultural partnering relationships are in-between two cultural frameworks (that of their own and that of their partner's cultural origin) and their positions on the continuum of cultural identities shift over time. Thus in order to find a comfortable point for both members of the couple, constant

negotiation is needed, which might end in major confrontations in the three types of social positionings: Internal, External and Intergenerational. Thus, for the participants in this study, their conflicts were about (1) their everyday practices, for example, as some participants expressed, the perceived inability to understand each other emotionally (more examples discussed in chapter 6); (2) their relational practices relevant to wider family and community members, especially in gathering practices (discussed in chapter 7); (3) passing down their identities to their children or fulfilling their responsibilities in relation to their parents, siblings and senior members of extended family (discussed in chapter 8). Hence, if all the possible negotiations failed and they could not reach an agreement or retain their convenient position on the continuum of cultural identities, then their relationships could fail.

In addition to the above, it could be argued that cultural clashes could occur because of the shifting identities of both or either member(s) of a couple. That means clashes might arise when one or both partner(s) changed positions from their agreed optimum position on the continuum of cultural identities. It could be argued that in the incident of identity struggles in their new social world, surroundings and social relations, they often reverted to their culture of origin. Along the same lines, some of the research participants at some point in their life course felt that their own original Persian culture was richer compared to that of their partner's culture, so they started shifting back to their culture of origin. Some of this group of participants had come to the UK in their teenage years and later in life at some point started thinking that they did not belong to the host country's society, and that they were different from the people surrounding them, hence they tried to find their roots or their real 'me'. For example, some of the

research participants said that after being in the UK for some time and being in intercultural relationships, they understood that their religion represented the best way of living so they became more religious. In some cases, they asked their partners to change their religious identity and adhere to the Islamic teachings, for example, wearing the *hijab*.

More importantly, another consequence of such an identity shift causing the relationship to fail was that some participants decided to subsequently choose a partner from the Persian community in order to become a complete Persian and not an in-betweener. In one interesting case, M3 said that he had an English girlfriend and they even discussed marriage, but when he travelled to Iran for the first time after many years, he faced an identity crisis and, upon his return to the UK, he decided not to partner with a non-Persian person any longer. Thus, he ended his relationship with his English girlfriend and, from that point on, all of his relationships were with Persian women – even if, as he said, it was a one-night stand. He said that now he could not even imagine being with a non-Persian partner. He described his English former girlfriend as 'an angel' with whom he had had no problems, and though he could find no weakness in her as a partner, his only issue was his unwillingness to be in a partnering relationship with a non-Persian.

In some cases, this identity shift happened for the partners of participants. In this sense, one of the main reasons mentioned by many participants regarding the failure of their relationship was that their partners, at some point in their relationships, had started to shift towards their own culture of origin. This was a crucial issue, especially for

religious participants. Some of their partners initially had consented to following Islamic rules but later rejected adhering to Islamic teachings. That meant after some years, the participants' partners decided to leave Islam or not to perform the religious practices (e.g., they refused to wear *hijab* any longer). This shift became particularly important when the religious participants understood that it could potentially affect the rearing of their children (discussed in chapter 8). Such participants wanted to raise their children as practising Muslims, however, the partner's identity shift prevented them from doing so, and therefore they ended the relationship with their partner so they could raise their children in accordance to Islamic teachings. In one case, the non-Persian female partner, who had initially converted to Islam, reverted to Christianity and became practising to the extent that she took their children to church without her Persian husband's consent. Such a shift resulted in divorce.

In other cases, the non-Persian partners reverted to their original cultural identity because they were confronted with two different types of Persian cultural frameworks: on the one hand, their Persian partner and their social network in the UK (which had in-between Persian cultural identity); on the other hand, Persians in Iran. In some cases, they went to Iran to stay or visit and realised that other Persians in Iran do things differently than Persians they had met in the UK. For example, some religious participants said that they had explained to their partner what a perfect Islamic society could be and their partner accepted their interpretation of Islam as a reasonable and respectful way of living. However, when they went to Iran and experienced other Persians practising their everyday life, which did not match their expectations of a perfect society, then they concluded that what they had accepted as Islam was not what

they saw in Iran. It was explained by one participant that his ex-wife had an otherworldly image of Islamic society but that when she stayed in Iran for a few years she concluded that the Persian Muslims were not as inspiring as she had expected. Partners like her decided that what they believed to be Islam was not the right choice for them, so they ceased to adhere to the religion, to wear the *hijab* or say their daily prayers. In some cases, this identity shift could not be accepted by both members of the couple, resulting in separation.

Overall it could be argued that, in case of dissatisfaction in the intercultural relationships, or after the experience of failure, participants were in search of their best 'me', as Smart (2007) uses the term in her theory of personal life. 'Me' here is social and is defined trough personal relationships, the three social positionings and their exclusive partnering practices that I explain in chapters 6 through 8. In other words, intercultural partnering relationships might fail if either partner is dissatisfied with regard to any of the three key social positionings. That means they may experience dissatisfaction with internal everyday practices (between themselves and their partner); with practices relevant to relationships with people external to the couple itself; or with regard to intergenerational practices. If participants were unhappy with any of these positionings, then the partnering relationship was unsatisfactory and/or failed. In this sense participants were constantly working on their personal life to find the best 'me' in relation to others: the 'me' that is satisfied with relationships with partner, parents, offspring, and wider family and community members.

4. Further research and ways forward

Acknowledging the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of the topic of this study, I outline some suggestions below for possible future sociological inquiry. I propose two ways forward in order to better understand the increasingly relevant topic of intercultural couplehood from a sociological perspective. These ideas, discussed below, revolve around the notions of Post-Partnering Practices and relationships with ex-partners, as well as intercultural partnering practices of cultural insiders.

As I had anticipated, Post-Partnering Practices were uncommon among the research participants. In the Persian context when a partnering relationship is over, everything else between the couple is over. The only reason they may need to get in touch is with regard to their children. Likewise, the ways that the participants conducted their Post-Partnering Practices was in accordance with the Persian tradition (i.e., not being in any meaningful relationship with their ex-partners). Thus, there were insufficient cases in my data to suggest any patterns with regard to relationships with ex-partners after the event of a divorce or separation. However, it is important to leave the category of 'Post-Partnering Practices' open for the future research, as there has been empirical evidence in recent years suggesting that people's relationships with their ex-partners have become significant and meaningful to them (see Sprecher 1999; Roseneil 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Thus, further research could focus on this emerging type of partnering practices and investigate possible implications of post-partnering relationships.

Out of practical and methodological concerns, in this research I did not interview the partners of the Persians. However, accessing the accounts of both members of a couple would provide deeper insight into intercultural relationships. The outcome of this research is limited to the ways in which the research participants interpreted their relationships with their non-Parisian partners, which may not show us the whole picture of intercultural practices. From the participants' accounts, it could only be understood that their partners' identities were also in-between and that they cooperate in order to sustain the relationship, but we do not know about the details of their partners' perceptions.

Researching local people who have experienced a partnering relationship with an immigrant to the UK would probably tell us more about the character of contemporary partnering relationships. It could provide a better understanding of how people in the host country deal with differences with regard to members of minority groups. This understanding could potentially provide vital information for social policymakers. Indeed, issues related to immigrants are currently high on the political agenda in the UK and Europe.

Concluding Observations

This research is an explanatory study in nature, revealing many of the nuances of intercultural partnering relationships in contemporary British society. Investigating these relationships is important because intercultural partnering relationships have

become increasingly common in recent years in Western societies, while very little research has been done to address the diverse range of implications they present. Furthermore, this study challenges the current sociological theorizing of couple relationships, especially regarding immigrants, minority groups and particular social contexts; and opens up lines of thinking for further conceptual refinements. In particular, I am critical of employing the notions of detraditionalization, transnational families, and ethnicity. Invoking Hall's (1990) notion of cultural identity, this research puts forward an alternative way of thinking about partnering across differences and researching immigrants' intergroup couple relationships through the lens of cultural differences and social positionings, as opposed to earlier studies that based their observations on national, racial, or ethnic differences.

This thesis owes to Morgan's (1996, 2011a, 2011b) notion of 'family practices', Smart's (2007) theory of 'relationality', as well as 'multiple social positionings' in the feminist theory of intersectionality (see Brah and Phoenix 2004; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006). Based on these concepts, I introduce terms for three stages of partnering practices: Pre-Partnering Practices; Prevailing Partnering Practices; Post-Partnering Practices. Furthermore, I delineate three concepts for exclusive partnering practices based on three distinctive personal positionings taken by partners: Internal Partnering Practices; External Partnering Practices; and Intergenerational Partnering Practices. The detailed accounts of participants' practices (presented in chapters 4 through 8) invite us to rethink the conceptual field of partnering relationships and further our sociological thinking about family lives in particular social contexts.

Whether intercultural relationships can succeed ultimately depends upon the extent to which partners achieve an optimal position within the cultural continuum in which they find themselves, a continuum that is dotted with points of reference from both the subject's original culture and their partner's culture. Through the stories revealed in the findings chapters, a clearer picture of the migrant partner's experience in the UK comes into view, raising questions into the very core of cultural difference and exchange. Crucially, it becomes clear that previous sociological observation have failed to account for the vast diversity of intercultural experience. This study will hopefully serve to usher the discussion around intercultural partnerships away from overly monolithic conceptions of ethnicity, race, and/or nationality, and toward a renewed focus on culture, in all its variations, as this has been shown to be the true site of critical engagement with this topic

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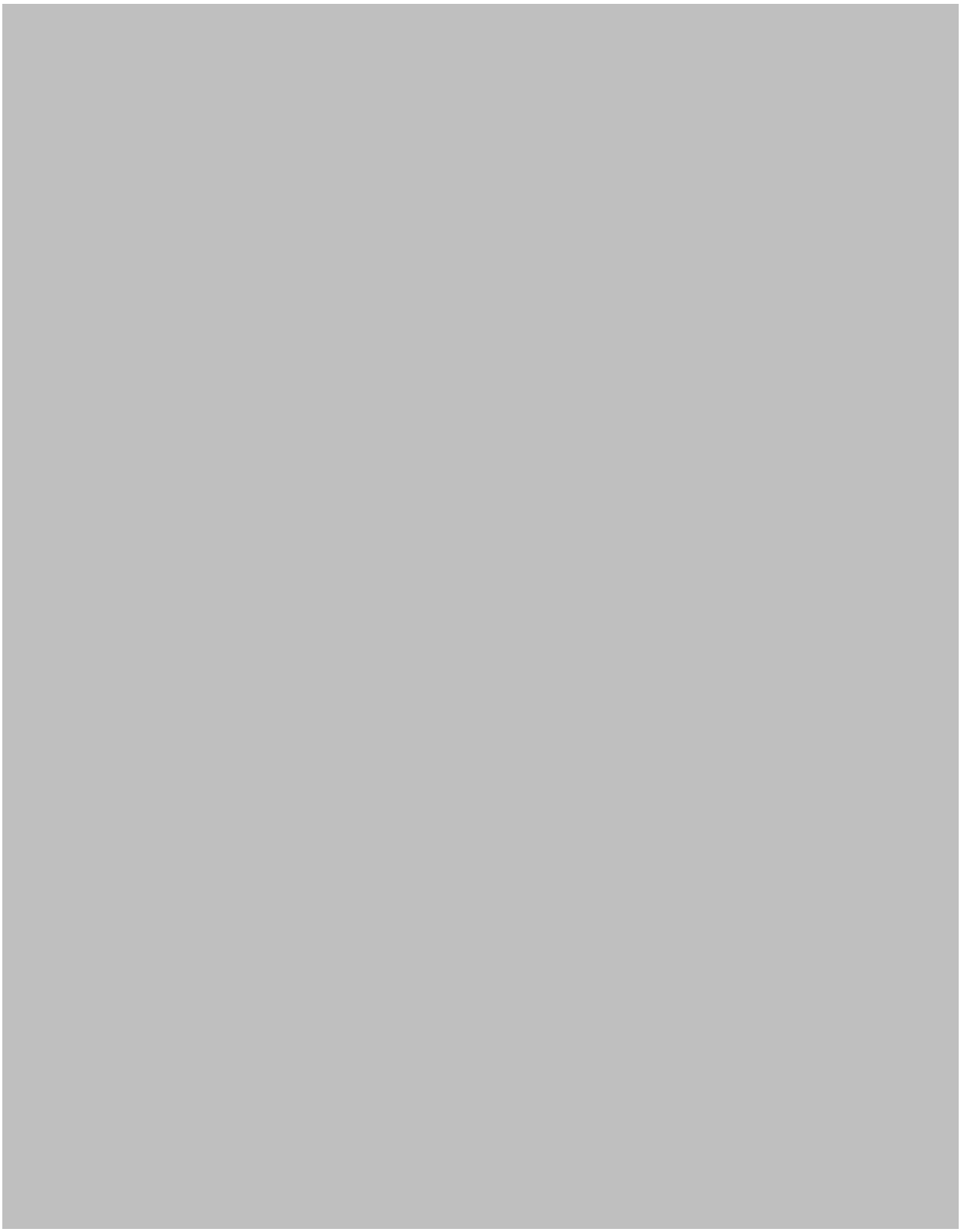
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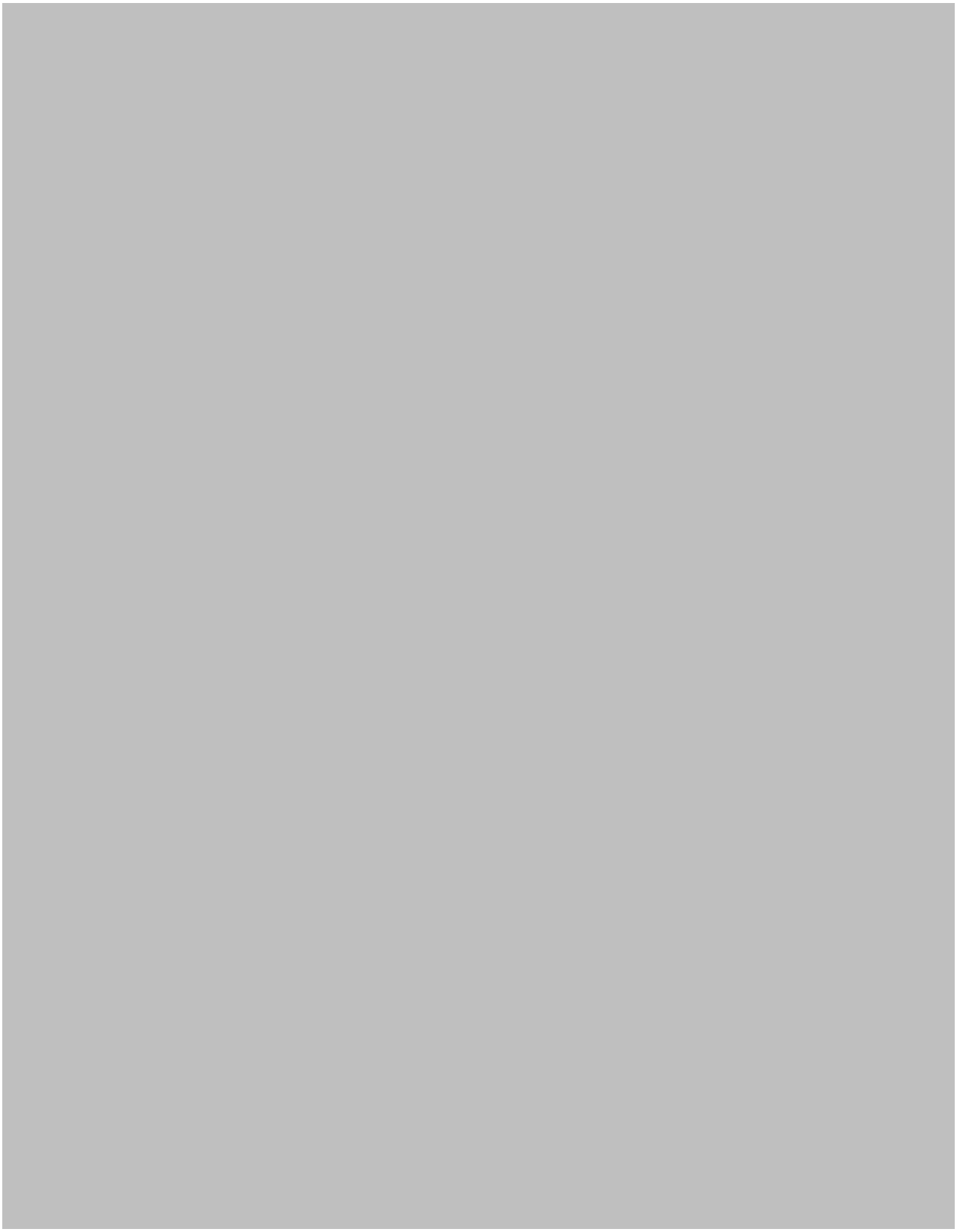
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Appendix

1: Brief Biography of Female Participants of this Research





2: Brief Biography of Male Participants of this Research

