MUSLIM - NON-MUSLIM MARRIAGES IN THE UK: PERSPECTIVES FROM MUSLIM WOMEN EXPERIENCING MARRIAGE TO NON-MUSLIMS

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increased number of interreligiously married Muslim women, especially in Western countries, the phenomenon remains overlooked. This research aims to highlight interreligiously married Muslim women's untold stories and to examine their experiences of being part of an interfaith marriage.

The research illustrates that Muslim women's interfaith marriages are seen as prohibited and unconventional by many Muslim scholars and communities, and they view this prohibition as a subject that is closed for discussion due to the traditional scholarly consensus supporting it. However, some contemporary Muslim scholars have started to discuss Muslim women's interfaith marriages and argue that the rule and consensus regarding these unions should be re-evaluated considering the ways in which society and gender roles in today's marriages are changing.

Using qualitative interviews with intermarried Muslim women, this study examines the impact of the families on Muslim women's decision to marry a non-Muslim, how they deal with the religious differences in the family and the impact the interfaith union has upon their religiosity. The research reveals that 'love' is the main reason behind the Muslim women's decision of interfaith marriage. The findings also indicate that while interfaith marriage does not directly impact Muslim women's religiosity, community pressure and negative perceptions of their marriages have curtailed Muslim women and their children's relationship with the Muslim community.

To my father, Prof. Huseyin ELMALI

and

my mother, Firdevs ELMALI

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In recent years discussions related to Muslim women's interfaith marriages have been increasing on online platforms (goatmilk.wordpress.com, 2010; El-Kassem, 2011; Orbala, 2017a, 2017b), in the media (Al-Jazeera, 2012) and at lectures/conferences (Festival of Interfaith Unity, 2010; Mohammed, 2012). In many of these articles and online posts, people continue to make extreme comments and accusations about Muslim women who marry out of their faith (Mohammad, 2010; Alhassen, 2010; Orbala, 2017b). However, while there is strong opposition among Muslims, and lively discussions under online posts related to Muslim women's interfaith marriages, there is a paucity of literature regarding these marriages. Even though there is an increasing interest in Muslims and Muslim marriages in Western Europe (Shaw, 2000; Buijs and Rath, 2003; Lucassen and Laarman, 2009; Muttarak, 2010; Carol, 2013), this interest is focused either on marriages of Muslims to other Muslims (inside or outside their ethnic communities) or the unions of Muslim men to non-Muslim women (Rozario and Samuel, 2012; Charsley and Liversage, 2013; Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Meanwhile, despite the common idea in Islamic culture that Muslim women should marry Muslims, many Muslim women get married to non-Muslims in the United Kingdom (UK). Eventually though, this belief has become controversial due to the increasing number of interreligiously married Muslim women (Abbass,

2012). However, despite the importance of the subject, there are only a few empirical studies on the interfaith marriages of Muslim women in Europe and the UK as a part of a study on Muslim interfaith marriage (Al-Yousuf, 2006). Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by investigating marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims in the United Kingdom through the perspectives of Muslim women.

Before embarking on the main focus of the study, this introductory chapter first defines the primary term of 'interfaith marriage', then introduces the theoretical basis of the study. Secondly, the related literature on interreligious marriage is reviewed. Thirdly, the research topic, along with the main aims and objectives of the study, is detailed. Lastly, the structure of the study is presented.

1.1. Definition of Interfaith Marriage

As a type of intermarriage, interfaith marriages or religious intermarriages are defined as marriages between two different faiths (Parsons et al., 2007; Törngren et al., 2016) or religious traditions (Zahidul Islam, 2014). According to this, interfaith marriages occur when persons who are identified with different religious groups in a society marry (Yinger, 1968b).

Before explaining the terms used in the literature to describe the marriages between people of different religious groups, it will be helpful to state the terms related to the subject that I used throughout this present research. In the study, three main terms used in the course of research:

Endogamy (Intramarriage): It is defined as a marriage between the same social groups, classes or ethnicities (Dzimiri, 2014). In this context, marriages between people of the same religion are named as endogamy or intramarriage.

Homogamy: It is defined as a marriage between individuals sharing similar characteristic (Pullum and Peri, 1999; Voas, 2003). In this respect religious homogamy refers the marriage between spouses having same religious belief.

Intermarriage: It is defined as marriage between different social groups, and ethnicities. It is a broad term which can be used to identify marriages between both different ethnicities (interethnic marriages) and different religious groups (interreligious marriages) (Yoo and Staples, 2000). As discussed further, in the present study the term 'intermarriage' is used to describe marriages between members of different faiths and religious groups.

In related literature the majority of the research on interfaith marriages has been conducted to examine intermarriages between Jews and Gentiles, and/or marriage among different Christian denominations and faiths (Locke et al., 1957; Barnett, 1962; Glenn, 1982; McCutcheon, 1988; Heaton and Pratt, 1990; Larson and Munro, 1990; Davidson and Widman, 2002; Parsons et al., 2007; Ata, 2009a), and there are few studies on interreligious marriages amongst Muslims (Al-Yousuf, 2006; Woesthoff, 2013; Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Gungor, 2016; Ali, 2017). This limitation has influenced the definition of interreligious marriage in the literature. Accordingly, the definition of interfaith marriages mostly depends on two groups of intermarriages: marriages among Christian denominations

(Axelson, 1972; Larson and Munro, 1990; Davidson and Widman, 2002) and marriages between Jewish people and Gentiles (Chinitz and Brown, 2001). For instance, in his study, Barlow (1977) defines interfaith marriage as a marriage in which either the bride or groom is a member of one religious group such as Protestant, Catholic or Jew, and their spouse is not. Many other scholars have also focused on Christian denominations in their definition of interfaith marriage as well (Yinger, 1968b; Glenn, 1982; Larson and Munro, 1990; Kalmijn, 1991; O'Leary, 2000). For instance, Locke et al. (1957) defined interfaith marriage as a marriage between Catholics and non-Catholics. As the majority of the research focuses on intermarriage among Christians and Jews, the definition of interfaith marriage reflects this limitation, and interfaith marriages are mostly defined in the scholarly literature considering marriages within Christian denominations and among the Jewish and non-Jewish.

Furthermore, among Muslims, interfaith marriages are mostly considered as marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christians and Jews (Friedmann, 2003; Leeman, 2009; Cerchiaro et al., 2015). In addition, marriage between Muslims who belong to different sects or denominations of Islam is not considered as an interfaith marriage in Islamic literature. Therefore, research on interfaith marriage among Muslims mainly addresses marriage between Muslims and Christians or Jews and the definition of interfaith marriage in Islam includes these marriages (Leeman, 2009; Zahidul Islam, 2014; Ali, 2017).

On the other hand, Yinger (1968b) emphasizes that there are differences in the definition of interreligious/interfaith marriage, depending on the type of

religiosity (which are identified by Glock and Stark (1965) as experiential, ideological, ritualistic, intellectual, and consequential) is/are considered in the research (Yinger, 1968b). Drawing on Glock and Stark's multidimensional concept of religiosity, Yinger (1968b) states that whether a religious marriage is intermarriage or intramarriage (endogamy) depends on which dimension of religiosity is taken into account. Those who are intermarried when viewed in terms of one dimension of religiosity may be intramarried when viewed in terms of another religious dimension. For instance, the rate of intermarriage might be more common than anticipated, if is measured in terms of religious experiences, rather than belief, (Yinger, 1968b). This means that if we focus on the ritualistic dimension of religion and measure the religiosity of an interfaith couple who are not practicing, by their religious practices, then their marriages might not be considered as intermarriage, as both persons are not practicing. However, if the couples' religious beliefs and identities are considered, then their marriages would be intermarriage/interfaith marriage as they believe in different religions.

Besides the specific definitions of interfaith marriage, Gordon (1966) defines interfaith marriage as a union 'in which the parties to the marriage were born or reared in families, each of which identified with a different religion' (1966, p.1). He emphasises that if the partners, prior to or following the marriage, continue to be members of different religions, the couple is not only intermarried but is also in a mixed marriage. However, if both spouses accept the same religion, this marriage is no longer a mixed marriage. Accordingly, in his study, he uses the term 'mixed marriage' to describe only those marriages in which one of the

partners has not converted to the other's religion and keeps their separate religious identity. On the other hand, the term 'mixed' is often regarded as confusing when applied to marriages as it can also be used to identify various marital unions in which spouses have different cultural, religious or ethnic backgrounds (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Nonetheless, many scholars prefer to keep using this term to identify the couples in relevant literature (Caballero et al., 2008; Cerchiaro et al., 2015) as it allows them to examine, one by one, the differences that the couples experience (Cerchiaro et al., 2015).

Furthermore, when we review the literature, we see that the terms '*intermarriage*', *'mixed marriage', 'interreligious marriage'* and '*interfaith marriage'* are used interchangeably to refer to the 'interfaith marriages'. For example, Woesthoff (2013) uses the term *'intermarriage'* in her study in which she focuses on marriages between Muslim men and non-Muslim German women. Although these marriages are between people of two different faiths, she denotes these marriages as 'intermarriage' or even 'interethnic marriage', rather than using the term 'interfaith marriage' (Woesthoff, 2013). However, I think using the term 'intermarriage' instead of 'interfaith marriage' is not always correct as 'interfaith marriage' may not be equated with 'intermarriage'. In such a way that intermarriages may also include marriages between spouses of different race or ethnicities, yet belonging to the same faith (Zahidul Islam, 2014), these marriages are not considered as interfaith marriage.

In summary, although the definition of interfaith marriage may differ depending on which aspects of religion are taken into account, the main point of

interfaith/interreligious marriages is the fact that it is the marriage between people of different faiths or religious traditions. Throughout this study the terms *interfaith marriage* and *interreligious marriages* will be used to refer to a marriage between different religious groups in the UK in general, and marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims in particular. In addition, since the term 'intermarriage' includes the marriages between different religions depending on the context, the term 'intermarriage' will also be used to refer to the marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims in order to avoid repetition of the term 'interfaith marriage' in the research.

1.2. Theoretical Framework: Partner Choice Theories

Partner selection is identified as the process of uncovering possible candidates in the marriage market (Dribe and Lundh, 2011). Research on partner selection indicates a common tendency within groups towards marriage to a person with similar social characteristics, like race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or religion (Kalmijn, 1991, 1998; Blossfeld and Timm, 2003; Muttarak, 2004; Rosenfeld, 2005; Dribe and Lundh, 2011). Thus, intermarriage is viewed as a practice against the mainstream marital pattern (Muttarak, 2004; Dribe and Lundh, 2011). Three social forces each play a role in marriage patterns: individual preferences for specific characteristics in a spouse; the influence of social groups like family, friends and community; and the limitation of the marriage market in which people are looking for a partner (Kalmijn, 1991). In addition, even though the final match also indicates the preferences and influence of families, a person's

selection of a partner is structured by common norms and religious institutions (Dribe and Lundh, 2011).

Socioeconomic status is a prime individual characteristic that determines individuals' propensity to intermarry (Muttarak, 2004). People tend to choose mates who have the same socioeconomic background (Wildsmith et al., 2003). Research has found that education and educational attainment affect people's attitudes towards intermarriage and play a significant role in the partner-selection process (Blossfeld and Timm, 2003; Wildsmith et al., 2003). More highly educated individuals intermarry more often than those who are lesser educated (Kalmijn, 1998; Song, 2009) because higher levels of education increase the likelihood of interaction with people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds in school or in a workplace (Wildsmith et al., 2003). In this context, the level of educational attainment is important in determining both preferences for selection and opportunities to meet a potential marriage partner (Kalmijn, 1998).

Also, the effect of education on the propensity of individuals to intermarry is also interpreted in terms of higher-educated persons having a more individualistic attitude and a more universalistic view of life than lesser-educated persons, and they are also less attached to their family and community of origin (Kalmijn, 1998). As a result, this situation counteracts the influence of family and community of origin in deciding whom to marry. Research also indicates that higher education promotes greater tolerance for difference and facilitates contact among groups that may not have had a connection in their community

and neighbourhood; therefore, college and higher education are consistent with higher rates of intermarriage (Song, 2009).

As with educational attainment, occupational class also influences people's attitudes towards intermarriage (Muttarak, 2004). The effect of occupational class on the choice of marriage partner is in line with the arguments in the literature concerning the impact of educational level on intermarriage. These arguments indicate that both educational level and occupational class increase the opportunities to interact with out-group members. Therefore, individuals with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to engage in interreligious and interethnic partnerships, as they have more opportunities to meet people from different groups in schools or workplaces (Muttarak, 2004).

Furthermore, cultural similarity has also had an impact on the choice of marriage partner. Having the same cultural background or sharing a similar cultural identity leads to mutual confirmation of each other's behaviour and worldviews; also, the similarity of knowledge that comes with a shared background provides a common area for conversation, which enhances mutual understanding (Kalmijn, 1998). Kalmijn argues that cultural similarity can be applied to marriage because it leads to personal attraction, because 'people prefer to marry someone who has similar cultural resources because this enables them to develop a common lifestyle in a marriage that produces social confirmation and affection' (Kalmijn, 1998, p.400).

Lastly, the structure of the local marriage market also has an impact on partner choice (Blau, 1977; Blau et al., 1982, 1984; Chiswick and Houseworth, 2011). 'The

availability of prospective partners of the opposite sex and the degree of ethnic, socioeconomic and residential heterogeneity influence the individual's likelihood of intermarriage' (Dribe and Lundh, 2011, p.301). Likewise, when a person from a religion held by a minority of the population in the area (such as 5%) seeks a partner, then the probability of them entering an interfaith union will be higher (Hoge, 1995).

1.3. Literature Review: General Background

'Intermarriage is viewed as a practice against the mainstream marital pattern, wherein individuals with similar social characteristics tend to marry within their own groups' (Muttarak, 2004, p.1). This definition raises sociological questions regarding the factors that have affected the decision of intermarriage, the intermarried couples' experiences and the challenges and the issues they have faced in having a successful marriage. Thus, intermarriage has long been a subject of interest in social science research. Therefore, since the 1940s, there have been many studies conducted in various countries about intermarriage, and these studies have analysed the subject from different perspectives (Davis, 1941; Kennedy, 1944; Risdon, 1954; Schoen et al., 1989).

In this literature however, it quickly becomes apparent that even though there is much research on marriages between Christian denominations (Barlow, 1977; Petersen, 1986; Larson and Munro, 1990; Heaton and Pratt, 1990), there is an emphasis on interfaith marriages in Jewish communities (Gordon, 1966; Lazerwitz, 1981; Glenn, 1982; Judd, 1990; Larson and Munro, 1990; Bullock, 1990;

Chinitz and Brown, 2001; Kaplan, 2004; McGinity, 2009). Hoge (1995) explains this wide literature on Jew-Gentile intermarriage by stating that the Jewish community considers interfaith marriages as a threat for the future of Jewish communities, and therefore they want to learn more about these marriages in their community. Thus, in order to understand the reasons behind Jewish interfaith marriages, and the issues arising in these interfaith families comprehensively, the Jewish community have sponsored ample research on interfaith marriages, their reasons and their characteristics (Hoge, 1995).

It is also appropriate to note that although there are some studies on interfaith marriage which were conducted in different countries such as Canada (Heer, 1962; Larson and Munro, 1990; Cila and Lalonde, 2014), the UK (Romain, 1996; Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010; McAloney, 2013), Pakistan (Khan, 1998), Italy (Cerchiaro et al., 2015), Australia (Ata, 2009b) and Germany (Woesthoff, 2013) the majority of the studies on intermarriages, interfaith and interreligious marriages have been conducted in the United States (US) (Locke et al., 1957; Reiss, 1965; Yinger, 1968a; Barlow, 1977; Glenn, 1982; Lehrer, 1998; Bisin et al., 2004; Sherkat, 2004; 2008 Undergraduate Fellows Report: A Leap of Faith: Interreligious Marriage in America, 2008; Seamon, 2012; Miller, 2013). As the literature on interfaith marriage in the UK is limited, in my study I have also drawn from the literature on interfaith marriage in other countries to understand the subject comprehensively.

The subject of interfaith marriage has been discussed in the literature from different perspectives. One group of research focuses on the relationship

between spousal religious differences, marital stability and satisfaction (Barnett, 1962; Glenn, 1982; Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993; Chinitz and Brown, 2001; Parsons et al., 2007). These studies aim to examine the effects of religious differences upon the quality and stability of marriage (Barnett, 1962; Barlow, 1977; Heaton and Pratt, 1990; Khan, 1998). Another body of research has studied interfaith marriages to investigate the factors that foster the intermarriage and to analyse which factors can affect people's decisions on interreligious marriage. In this context, these studies mainly discuss how their families (Barlow, 1977; Hanassab and Tidwell, 1998; Daneshpour, 1998; Dwyer, 2000; Buunk et al., 2010; Cila and Lalonde, 2014), their environments and the communities that they live in (Larson and Munro, 1990; Hoge, 1995; Davidson and Widman, 2002; Woesthoff, 2013; Cila and Lalonde, 2014) and their religious affiliations (Thomas, 1951; Locke et al., 1957; Barnett, 1962; Barlow, 1977; Cila and Lalonde, 2014; Igundunasse and Fatunji, 2015) influence individual's decision to intermarry. The last group of research has focused on the religious education and religious identity of children in mixed-faith families (Caballero et al., 2008; Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010, 2011; Kurttekin, 2017).

Furthermore, regarding research on Muslim interfaith marriages, the empirical literature is not rich enough to enable insight into interfaith marriages among Muslims and the social implications and consequences of these marriages. Even when this issue is raised in the literature, in the majority of these studies interfaith marriage is analysed in terms of Muslim men's interfaith marriages. Muslim women's interfaith marriages are only mentioned in the context of

examining their prohibition. In my opinion, the main reason for this is the fact that in these studies the issue of interfaith marriages in Islam has been discussed based on traditional Islamic resources discussing the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages and explaining the reasons behind the prohibition. The focus in the early Islamic sources has been primarily on Muslim men's interfaith marriages and marital rules, since Muslim women's interfaith marriages are considered as prohibited or the exception by the majority of Muslim scholars (Zahidul Islam, 2014). In short, Muslim women's interfaith marriages are often neglected in the scholarly literature.

The research that does exist on Muslim interfaith marriages can be divided into three groups: (i) research on the regulation of interfaith marriages in Islam; (ii) research on Muslim/non-Muslim marriages; and (iii) research on the attitudes of Muslims towards interfaith marriages. The first group focuses on interfaith marriages in Islam theoretically. In this group, Brussion's (2016) article entitled *Interfaith Marriage for Muslim Women* can be considered as a prime example for the academic articles on Muslim women's interfaith marriages. She focuses specifically on Muslim women's interfaith marriages and discusses attitudes of traditional Muslim scholars on Muslim women's interfaith marriages in a theological context and criticises the arguments put by classical and traditional Muslim scholars against these unions. Some studies focus on Muslim women's interfaith marriages as a part of their study on interfaith relations in the Muslim tradition (Friedmann, 2003). In a chapter of his book *Tolerance and coercion in Islam: Interfaith relations in the Muslim tradition*, Friedmann (2003) discusses the

subject with reference to classical Islamic resources in a historical context. He examines interfaith marriages from a broad perspective, including the understanding of marriage in the Islamic context, Muslim men's interfaith marriages and Muslim women's interfaith marriages, and the main arguments behind the prohibition of these marriages. It should be stated that his book is a foremost resource about interfaith marriages in classical Islamic sources, as he collects and narrates classical Muslim jurisprudence concerning interfaith marriages in Islam in general, and Muslim women's interfaith marriages in particular in one chapter of his study. Also, both Leeman (2009) and Azzam (2015) discuss the regulation and legal theory of interfaith marriages in Islam. Both scholars examine the legal theory in Islam about Muslim interfaith marriages. Not only do they discuss the traditional interpretation and understanding of Muslim women's interfaith marriages, but they also discuss the contemporary scholars' arguments for these marriages. Azzam (2015), who conducted his research as a master's thesis in a Department of Law, examines the reasons behind the consensus on the prohibition of Muslim women's marriages to non-Muslim men. His study is promising as it might lead to more academic study on the reasons behind the consensus prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages.

In addition, some other studies discuss Muslim's interfaith marriages as separate research on religious differences between spouses in Islamic marriages (Dalgin, 2005; Eskan, 2007). Those studies do not specifically focus on Muslim women's

interfaith marriages but discuss the subject as a part of their research.[1] For instance, Eskan (2007), in a chapter in her PhD research entitled '*The issue of religious difference as a prohibitive factor in Islamic marriage law*', discusses Muslim women's interfaith marriages and how these marriages are considered in the *fiqh* literature.

Secondly, a review of the relevant literature demonstrates that there are many researchers who have focused on intercultural marriages between Muslims and Westerners in their studies (Cottrell, 1990; Yamani, 1998; Khan, 1998; Roer-Strier and Ezra, 2006; Gungor, 2016; Ali, 2017), or on interfaith marriages among Muslims in different countries (Nielsen, 1983; Harpigny, 1983; Bop, 2005; Vardar, 2005; Chopra and Punwani, 2005). Unsurprisingly, research on intercultural marriages have also included interfaith marriages. In his research, Khan (1998) mainly focuses on marriages between non-Muslim women and Pakistani Muslim men and discusses the subject focussed on the dynamics and questions of self-identity for foreign partners, who are non-Muslim women who have left their native country and environment. Under the topic of mixed marriages in Islam, he (1998) focused on the issue of identity in mixed marriages in terms of non-Muslim women and conducted interviews with a group of foreign wives in Pakistan. In addition, Cerchiaco et al. (2015) conducted an ethnographic study

[1] I am aware that Haqqani (2018) also discusses Muslim women's interfaith marriages in a chapter of her PhD thesis entitled '*Islamic Tradition, Change, and Feminism: The Gendered Non-Negotiable*'. In her thesis, Haqqani focuses on American Sunni Muslims and aims to examine how the Islamic tradition undergoes change and discusses Muslim women's interfaith marriage as one of the 'non-negotiable' topics. However, I was not able to draw on her study for my research as it was opened to access very recently, when I had almost completed the first draft of my thesis.

with 15 Christian-Muslim couples in Italy about interfaith marriages between Christians and Muslims and religious pluralism in their families. In the study, they mainly focused on religious differences in the families and aimed to analyse the strategies that the partners relied on in order to deal with religious differences within the context of their family life (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Furthermore, recently Gungor (2016) made a sociological study on intermarriages among Turks in the US. He discusses the reasons for intermarriage between Turkish immigrants and Americans and the impact of these marriages on Turkish family structures. He interviewed 35 Turkish participants, and only 9 of them were women. In sum, it is important to state that in all these studies, the majority of Muslim spouses in the intermarriages are men. Thus, it is appropriate to say that the vast majority of the research in the literature on Muslim intermarriages is about marriage between Muslim men and non-Muslim women.

The third group of research on Muslim interfaith marriages focuses on the attitudes of Muslims towards interfaith marriages, and the voice of Muslim women on interfaith marriages can be heard in this group (Cila, 2012; Ahmad, 2012; Ansano, 2012; Cila and Lalonde, 2014). In their study, Cila and Lalonde (2014) examine the attitudes of Muslim Canadian young adults (both men and women) towards dating and marrying outside their religious groups and find that the men are more open to interfaith marriage and dating compared to the women. Ansano (2012) also conducted a study about Muslim women's marriage choices and she asked Muslim women aged 18-40 primarily living in New York City whether or not they would consider marrying a non-Muslim man. Although

those studies include Muslim women, which is different from the other studies, they mainly focus on the opinions of Muslims on their marriage choices, rather than the experiences of intermarried Muslims, or specifically the experiences of Muslim women.

In the case of the UK, as has been mentioned earlier, comprehensive and empirical studies of interfaith marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims are currently lacking. The literature on Muslim marriage in the UK mainly focuses on close-kin marriages (Shaw, 2001; Charsley, 2007) and arranged marriages (Charsley and Shaw, 2006; Charsley, 2007), especially among Pakistani Muslims. While close-kin marriages and arranged marriages are the main focus in the literature, polygamy among Muslims in Britain and cultural practices of it (Charsley and Liversage, 2013) are also examined. Since the majority of the Muslim population in the UK are Pakistani Muslims (Office for National Statistics, 2013), the research on Muslim marriages in the UK primarily examines the marriage practices of Pakistani Muslims. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that the majority of the research reflects marriage practices of Pakistani Muslims living in the UK rather than common marriage practices among Muslims in general.

Regarding interfaith marriages among Muslims in the UK, there are a few studies which concentrate on the issue. Al-Yousuf's study (2006) could be stated as a prime example of the studies focusing on Muslim/Christian marriages in the UK. As a member of the Muslim/Christian Marriage Support Group, she has conducted studies about Muslim/Christian marriages in the UK (Al-Yousuf, 2006).

Although in her work the majority of the interfaith marriages are also marriages between Muslim men and non-Muslim women, her research is important in understanding the negotiation of faith and identity in Muslim/Christian marriages. In addition, there is a recent PhD research on Turkish Muslim immigrants' intermarriages in the UK (Kurttekin, 2017). The research includes some brief information about intermarried Muslim partners as the father or mother, although the work mainly focuses on children's religious education in these marriages (Kurttekin, 2017). In her research, Kurttekin conducted interviews with 32 couples — Turkish Muslims and their non-Muslim spouses — in the UK. Among those participants, only nine couples are Muslim women with non-Muslim husbands. Even though the number of intermarried Muslim women is not high in the study, Kurttekin's study and the other previously mentioned academic research indicate the promise of more research on Muslims' interfaith marriages in general, and Muslim women's interfaith marriages in particular.

On the other hand, even though the number of research studies on Muslims' intermarriages in the West have increased in recent years, as can be seen, a review of the current literature shows a dearth of material on interfaith marriage in Islam, particularly with regards to Muslim women's interfaith marriages. Thus, in order to obtain a foundation for understanding of Muslim women's interfaith marriages, this study will also draw on the interfaith marriage literature which is not focused on Islamic intermarriage. Although existing studies are limited to other religions such as Christian and Jews, they still inform my study and are

important for understanding whether the arguments for these interfaith marriages are pertinent to Muslim women's interfaith marriages.

1.4. Statement of the Research Topic

Traditionally, people have married a person belonging to the same religion, ethnicity or class (Barlow, 1977; Schoen and Weinick, 1993). However, the increase in the immigration to Western European countries has led to these nations becoming increasingly more multi-religious and multicultural (Khan, 1998; Cila and Lalonde, 2014). Thus, barriers separating ethnic and religious groups in urban areas have been reduced in these societies. The reduction of the barriers separating ethnic and religious groups have inevitably led to a higher number of people having contact with individuals from different ethnic and religious groups. This increased interaction between different religious and ethnic groups has brought with it the increase in mixed relationships along with an increase in interfaith marriages (Khan, 1998). In recent years, intercultural and interreligious marriages have become more common, especially in countries with high immigrant populations such as the United States (Gordon, 1966). For instance, the Religious Landscape Study, which is conducted in the US about American religious affiliation, beliefs and practices, indicates that individuals who have married since 2010 are about twice as likely to be in an interreligious marriage as people who were married before 1960 (Pew Research Center, 2015). In addition, the Religious Landscape Study also indicates that 39% of Americans who have married since 2010, have a spouse with a different religious faith.

Moreover, specifically, 21% of Muslims living in the US are married to a spouse who has a different religion (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Similar to the US, through the interaction with other religious and ethnic groups in society, marriage preferences have also changed in the UK. As part of this change, Muslims living in the UK have started to marry outside of their faith. The rate of intermarriages among Muslims has increased and Muslim communities are increasingly partaking in intergroup marriages (Abbass, 2012). These intergroup marriages sometimes involve both intercultural and interfaith marriages. In other words, they may have occurred between Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds or between Muslims and people of other faiths.

As the second largest religious group in the UK after Christians (Office for National Statistics, 2013), Muslims form part of many interfaith marriages in the UK. Although available statistics indicate that compared to other religious groups Muslims in various Western countries are among the least likely to marry outside their religion (Lucassen and Laarman, 2009), over twenty thousand interfaith marriages involving a Muslim were recorded in the 2001 Census for England and Wales (ONS, 2001), and 17,163 of these were Muslim male-Christian female marriages while 4,233 marriages were recorded as Muslim women-Christian men marriages (Birtwistle, 2011). These numbers have since risen (Abbass, 2012; Millington, 2013), and in 2011 UK Census data, 5.5% of Muslim men and 2% of Muslim women were recorded as interreligiously married (Office for National Statistics, 2013). As expected, the rate of interfaith marriages for Muslim men is higher than the corresponding rate for Muslim women. In addition, among the

different ethnic groups in the UK, Arabs have the highest interfaith marriages rate in the UK (Voas, n.d.).

As a sign of the increase of interfaith marriages in the UK, many interfaith organizations have been established to support couples in these interreligious marriages (Miller, 2013). Examples of organizations playing an important role in supporting interfaith couples are groups aiming to support Muslim–Christian marriages, such as Christian–Muslim Forum, the Interfaith Marriage Network and the Muslim–Christian Marriages Support Group. For instance, Heather al-Yousuf, who was a former Christian family specialist in the *Muslim–Christian Marriage Support Group*, told me during our interview that many interfaith couples join these organization meetings to receive some support and guidelines from the organization and the other interfaith couples regarding their marriages and how they can deal with the problems they face/might face in their extended family and community (Al-Yousuf, 2016).

In addition, although the number of interfaith marriages among Muslims has increased, there are notable differences regarding gender and interfaith marriages in various Muslim communities. These attitudes towards Muslim interfaith marriages vary in Muslim communities as the norms and expectations regarding interfaith marriages are different for Muslim men and women. This difference depends on the traditional interpretation of the verses about interfaith marriages in the Qurʾān (i.e. 2:221; 5:5; 60:10) indicating that Muslim women are not religiously permitted to marry non-Muslims unless they convert to Islam (Friedmann, 2003; Azzam, 2015), which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The effect of this interpretation can be easily observed in the attitudes of Muslim families towards their children's decision to marry outside their religion. There is a gendered aspect to the acceptability of a marriage partner. While Muslim parents are permissive of their sons dating non-Muslim women, they are less tolerant of their daughters dating or marrying non-Muslim men (Hanassab and Tidwell, 1998). For instance, Randa (2006) argues in her research that Arab–American parents may accept their son marrying a non-Arab, non-Muslim but not tolerate their daughter doing likewise. A daughter marrying a non-Muslim would probably pay a higher price for breaking their expectations; they might even be disowned by their family and community (Randa, 2006). Similarly, Al-Yousuf indicates in her research on Muslim-Christian marriages that Muslims in Britain have also expressed strong disapproval of their daughters marrying outside the Islamic religion (Al-Yousuf, 2006).

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that when Muslim women in Western countries decide to get married, they are simultaneously exposed to two sets of norms about their decision. One set of these norms comes from their families and religious communities, who emphasize maintaining tradition and endogamy, especially for Muslim women; while the other comes from mainstream culture that values the idea of individualism and individual choice when choosing a prospective spouse (Cila and Lalonde, 2014). These two groups of norms are different, and they contradict each other at some point. However, although many Muslim women living in Western countries may feel stuck between these two ideas and know that their families and religious communities would not approve

of their marriages, there is a group of Muslim women who still decide to marry a non-Muslim and not ask their prospective husbands to convert to Islam (Cila and Lalonde, 2014). Even though many Muslim communities prefer to ignore it, Muslim women are involved in interfaith marriages, and the rate of these intermarriages has been increasing (Hoge, 1995). For instance, Al-Yousuf (2016) points out that recently half, maybe even more than half, of the couples attending the Muslim–Christian Marriage support group are Muslim women–non-Muslim men couples. An increasing number of interreligiously married Muslim women are seeking help and advice from the organisation. This increasing number of Muslim women in interreligious marriages shows that these marriages need to be analysed as a part of the ongoing change in Muslim communities living in Western countries.

With these considerations in mind, it is accurate to note that the increased rate of Muslim women interfaith marriages brings sociological concerns about these marriages with it. These concerns revolve around the reasons behind the decision of Muslim women to marry outside the religion, and how and why they decided to marry a non-Muslim despite opposition from within their religious community and their family.

In addition to the sociological aspects of Muslim women's marriages to a non-Muslims, these marriages should also be examined in terms of the theological view of interfaith marriages in Islam. As will be discussed in the following chapter, there are distinctions between marriages with various types of non-Muslims in Islamic jurisprudence, and also different rules were established for interfaith

marriages of Muslim men and Muslim women depending on the interpretation of relevant verses in the Qurʾān (Friedmann, 2003; Eskan, 2007; Azzam, 2015). When considering marital life for a Muslim woman with a non-Muslim and the effect of this interfaith marriage on the family, Muslim scholars have extrapolated from the verses in the Qurʾān that Muslim women are only allowed to marry Muslim men. This interpretation has been widely accepted in various schools of Islamic jurisprudence even though this restriction is never explicitly stated in the Qurʾān or the *Hadith* and *Sunna* literature (Friedmann, 2003; Al-Yousuf, 2006; Ansano, 2012).

1.5. Study Aim and Objectives

This study will focus on Muslim – non-Muslim marriages in the UK, specifically on marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how being married to a non-Muslim impacts Muslim women's religiosity and experiences of marriage. In doing so this thesis will significantly contribute to the field in two main subject areas:

(i) Sociology of religion – to explore the prevalence, significance, and importance of marriages been Muslim women and non-Muslim men in the UK; and the implications for these marriages regarding family, religious, and community life.

(ii) Religious/Islamic studies – to firstly understand the origin of Islamic legal edicts on interfaith marriages; to understand the reasoning and historical context of these edicts; and, importantly, to determine the Islamic legal ruling on

interfaith marriages in the context of the UK in the twenty-first century, and the implications for this ruling vis-à-vis marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men.

The aims of the study are twofold. First, to investigate the experiences of intermarried Muslim women with a particular focus on Muslim communities in the UK, to explain how the differences in their religious identities influences Muslim women's understanding and experience of marriage, and how intermarried Muslim women deal with religious differences in their families.

Second, to explore the origins of the regulation on Muslim women's interfaith marriages in Islamic law and conduct a critical review of the traditional Islamic jurisprudence resources by discussing Muslim women's interfaith marriages within the Islamic theological context.

The following research questions will be addressed in the current study:

(i) What are the reasons behind Muslim women's decision to intermarry? What are the attitudes of family and friends towards Muslim women's decision to marry out of the faith? How do Muslim women deal with family members that oppose their marriage?

(ii) In what circumstances and in what ways do religious differences matter to intermarried couples and what are the strategies that the couples rely on to deal with religious differences in their family? Also, what is the impact of interfaith marriage on Muslim woman and her non-Muslim husband's religious identity? Here, a key question is whether a Muslim woman retains

her religious heritage and practice upon marrying a non-Muslim man. This sociological question has an important connotation for Islamic studies and Islamic law. This is because the major argument put forth by classical Islamic scholars is that the religiosity of the husband influences the religious practice of the Muslim wife.

(iii) What challenges and issues do interreligiously married Muslim women face in managing religious differences when raising their children? Again, this question intersects sociology and theology. Given that a fundamental concern of Islamic jurists was that a child would adopt the faith of his/her non-Muslim father, it is important to understand if this is currently the case in the UK. Following on from this, an additional question is what intermarried Muslim women think about giving religious education to their children and whether religious tolerance, plurality and the right to individual religious belief in the UK means that the faith of the mother is less likely to be passed onto the child. The wider questions include what hurdles do Muslim women expect to face when they have children, and how do they envisage negotiating these hurdles?

(iv) How have Muslim women's interfaith marriages been portrayed by the scholars and religious leaders both in the historical literature and in practice? This question requires an in-depth analysis of orthodox and historical Islamic legal opinions on interfaith marriage. This necessitates an exploration of primary Islamic textual sources (the Qurʾān and Hadith) to determine the scriptural and theological evidence for interfaith marriage. In

addition, this requires an examination of where the prohibition of Muslim women's marriages to non-Muslims originates from the Islamic tradition, as there is not any explicit prohibition stated in the Qurʾān. Addressing this issue is important for reasons beyond theology and jurisprudence; examining this evidence has a direct impact upon the choices of Muslim women who are considering marrying, or who have already married, non-Muslim men. From this analysis the next question to be addressed is whether these legal opinions still remain valid, especially in the UK and European context?

Furthermore, to achieve the aims of the project, the study is divided into two main parts. The first part of the study comprises a critical literature review that analyses the arguments regarding Muslim interfaith marriages with a particular focus on Muslim women's interfaith marriages in Islamic jurisprudence. This literature review first considers the primary evidence from the Qurʾān and Hadith literature on interfaith marriage. It then discusses how Islamic jurists and exegetes derived rulings from these main sources on interfaith marriage and the historical context for those rulings. From this I move into an analysis of contemporary rulings and arguments on interfaith marriage. In addition, this part also provides various opinions of contemporary scholars and academics on Muslim women's intermarriage.

The second part of the study aims to investigate Muslim women's experiences of interfaith marriage. In this part, qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews is used to gather the data. This method has been chosen for two main

reasons. First, the semi-structured interviews enable us to examine intermarried Muslim women's views and experiences of marriage, and particularly their relationships with family members. Secondly, this method allows for individuals to share their stories (Creswell, 2007) and allows me as the researcher to have more information about experiences of people in their environment (Hunt 2011).[2]

1.6. Structure of the Research

This study consists of seven chapters and is divided into two parts: a theological examination of Muslim women's interfaith marriages and a qualitative study of interreligiously married Muslim women in the UK. This introductory chapter is followed by chapter two, which provides a theological basis for Muslim women's interfaith marriages in Islam. The chapter aims to represent main arguments and discussions of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars about Muslim women's interfaith marriage in order to provide background information for the following chapters.

Chapter Three will examine the methodology used in designing the research project. In the study, in-depth interviewing is used as a method of data collection. The chapter will describe participant selection methods as well as the research site and information about the sampling population. It will also provide detailed information about the participants. In the final part of the chapter, issues such as

[2] See Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of the research methodology.

role of the researcher, ethical concerns, limitations and the difficulties faced during the study and the data-analysis process will also be discussed.

Chapter Four will present the first part of the findings from the qualitative research. The chapter will provide the analysis of the interview data regarding the impact of social factors on Muslim women's decisions regarding interfaith marriage. It will explore families' and friends' attitudes towards the interfaith marriage and the main reasons behind their behaviours. The chapter will also highlight the strategies that Muslim women used to deal with family opposition to interfaith marriage.

Chapter Five presents the second and main part of the findings of the research regarding the influence of being a part of an interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religious identity. It discusses the impact of interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religiosity. The chapter then outlines the strategies that intermarried couples use to deal with religious differences in their family. The chapter also includes information about Muslim women's religious practices at home and their husbands' attitudes towards it.

Chapter Six first examines the impact of having children on interfaith marriages. Then, it provides the analysis of Muslim women's responses regarding their children's religious education. It mainly discusses the intermarried couples' attitudes towards religious education, namely what kind of religious education they plan to give/teach to their children.

The final chapter in the study will provide an overall summary of the research and a discussion of the findings. It evaluates the research findings in light of the research questions. At the end of the chapter, a number of recommendations for further research will be given.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERFAITH MARRIAGES WITHIN AN ISLAMIC THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

'I was at a Muslim Sister's Fashion Show (predominately African American sisters) when during casual conversation a young sister (mid-20s) stated that her husband is Christian. This as you can image created quite a stir. She was immediately verbally attacked. She tried to defend herself by saying that he did not prohibit her from practicing Islam and he has agreed that the children will be Muslim. She was advised to divorce him.

[…] However this issue is one that I need to understand because I can't adequately explain why there is a prohibition for the Muslim female in marrying from the people of the book and there is no prohibition for the Muslim male. More often than not I hear all non-Muslims classified as kuffar.

The only explanation I can provide is that the Qurʾān specifies that the male can marry a Christian or Jewish woman. Since he is the head of the household the expectation is that he will respect her rights and the children will take his religion. Really in actuality from what I've seen this is not the case. The woman has so much pressure put on her to abandon her beliefs that she eventually gives in or gets out of the marriage.

I have been asked does the Qurʾān specifically prohibit the Muslim woman from marrying a Christian or Jewish male. My understanding is the only specific prohibition is for polytheist. Am I wrong?'

(www.searchforbeauty.org, 2016)[3]

[3] This question was asked by a Muslim woman to Khaled Abou El-Fadl on searchforbeauty.org, a website owned and operated by his students, supporters and friends, to have scholarly explanation for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith

This question can be seen as a quintessential question as it shows common attitudes towards Muslim women's interfaith marriages in a Muslim community, and main arguments stated to explain its prohibition. As seen in the example, with the increased number of interfaith marriages among Muslims in Western countries, people who have religious concerns want to learn the religious edicts about the subject (for different examples of the questions about Muslims' interfaith marriages, see (Admin, 1999, 2000, 2004; www.understanding-islam.com, 2005; Abou El Fadl, 2016)). Therefore, to examine Muslim women's interfaith marriages comprehensively, in this chapter I will provide background information on the origins of the regulation on Muslim women's interfaith marriages in Islamic law by discussing the arguments put forward by traditional and contemporary Muslim scholars. In addition, since the main aim of the study is to explore intermarried Muslim women's experiences, I will only briefly elucidate the discussion on Muslim men marrying out of their faith and mainly focus on Muslim women's marriage to non-Muslim men within the Islamic theological context and ask how Muslim scholars have discussed the subject since early Islam.

In looking at classical or traditional Qurʾānic commentaries, it is clear that the issue of interfaith marriages was not discussed among Muslims until the early years of the Medina period of Islamic society, when the first verse related to

marriage. I will refer Abou El-Fadl's response to the question further in the chapter when the scholars' opinions are discussed.

interfaith marriage (Q. 2:221[4]) was revealed[5]. Before then, during the first period of Islam, Muslims maintained their marriages to non-Muslims, either Makkan polytheists or the People of the Book, and did not renew their marriage vows after becoming Muslim (Elmalili, n.d.). Even though their spouses retained their religion and only later converted to Islam, their marriages were deemed valid and legitimate; becoming Muslim did not have any effect on the validity of their marriages. Sayyid Qutb (1966) explains that Muslims during the Mecca period were only able to separate themselves from idol worshippers in that community spiritually, not socially. The change needed to be gradual, therefore they were allowed to marry Meccan idol worshippers until they obtained independent social and political identities in Medina (Qutb, 1966). Nevertheless, after the political atmosphere and social structure changed in the Muslim community with the growth of Islam and spread of religious authorities in Islamic lands, interfaith marriages became an issue of social and religion concern in the community (Friedmann, 2003; Aini, 2008).

In the Qurʾān, there are three verses governing interfaith marriage regulations: Surah 2:221, Surah 5:5 and Surah 60:10. These three verses were revealed in the period of Medina. Nevertheless, Muslim scholars and jurists often cited the first two verses (2:221 and 5:5) in their arguments and discussions relating to Muslim interfaith marriages (Friedmann, 2003; Ali, 2006; Leeman, 2009), as the

[4] In the chapter, citations from the Qur'an are identified by 'Q.' followed by the Surah (chapter) and verse number.

[5] The date of the revelation of the verse is not exactly known. For more information about the occasion of the revelation of the verse see Muqatil Ibn Sulayman, 1979; Elmalili, n.d.

revelation context of verse 60:10 is not associated with the issue of Muslims' interfaith marriages and it was revealed in a very specific context to protect women who converted to Islam from the extradition, sending them back to their family[6] (Ibn Abidin, 1907; Ibn Kathir, 1999). However, during my study I realised that some scholars interpret the verse 60:10 as it is prohibiting Muslim women's marriage to all non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians and use it to support their argument (Ibn Qudamah, 1984; Dalgin, 2005). For instance, prominent Muslim scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi uses the verse 60:10 in his well-known book titled *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* to explain the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages (Qaradawi, 1994). In addition, the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs also refers to the verse 60:10 in its response to a question in their *fatwā* (opinion) counsel which is about whether Muslim women can marry a non-Muslim. It says that 'early Muslim jurists indicated that a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man by referring to the verse 60:10 which is about Muslim women who migrated to Medina from Mecca. And until now, there is not any dissidence about the subject

[6] Q. 60:10: 'O ye who believe! When there come to you believing women refugees, examine (and test) them: Allah knows best as to their Faith: if ye ascertain that they are Believers, then send them not back to the Unbelievers. They are not lawful (wives) for the Unbelievers, nor are the (Unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them. But pay the Unbelievers what they have spent (on their dower), and there will be no blame on you if ye marry them on payment of their dower to them. But hold not to the guardianship of unbelieving women: ask for what ye have spent on their dowers, and let the (Unbelievers) ask for what they have spent (on the dowers of women who come over to you). Such is the command of Allah: He judges (with justice) between you. And Allah is Full of Knowledge and Wisdom' (The Qur'an, Chapter 60, Verses 10). – Throughout the thesis, I have quoted the Qur'an verses from Yusuf Ali's (1982) translation. -
For more information about the revelation context of the verse 60:10 see (Qurtubi, 1964; Al-Jassas, 1985; Lamrabet, 2013; Afsaruddin, 2014)

among the Muslim scholars, on the contrary there has been a consensus'. (The Presidency of Religious Affairs, n.d.)

In addition, when the classical exegetes interpreted the verses related to Muslims' marriages to non-Muslims, they categorized non-Muslims marrying Muslims into two main groups – *mushriks* (polytheists) and *ahl al-kitāb*[7] (Sabuni, 1980; Al-Tabarī, 1988; Kasani, 1997) – and based their *fatwā*s governing the permissibility of interfaith marriage for Muslims upon this categorisation (Abu Zahra, 1957; Dalgin, 2005; Ali, 2006; Azzam, 2015). In this chapter, I will use this categorisation to explain the regulations on interfaith marriages in Islam and divide Muslims marriages as (1) Muslim marriages to *mushriks* and (2) Muslim marriages to *ahl al-kitāb*. In addition, although I will not give detailed information on Muslim men's interfaith marriages, I will briefly explain the opinions and interpretations of Muslim scholars on relevant Qurʾānic verses in relation to Muslim men's interfaith marriages. In doing so I aim to examine how gender differences affect the traditional view of interfaith marriages in Islam.

2.1. Muslim Marriages to *Mushriks*:

In the Qurʾān, the main verse that clearly tackles interfaith marriage is Verse 221 of Chapter 2, which discusses the provision of marriage with a group of non-Muslims:

[7] *Ahl al-Kitāb*, the People of the Book, is a Qur'anic term referring to the possessors of divine books previously revealed by God. The term is originally applied to Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans but later it was extended by Muslim scholars to some other religious committees such as Zoroastrians and Hindus (for more information see Esposito, 2003; Hasan, 2015). In the text, unless otherwise stated, I will use the terms *'ahl al-kitāb'* and *'kitabī'* to refer Jews and Christians as this meaning is ostensibly used in most of the Islamic texts.

> *Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe. […] Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe. […] Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the Fire. But Allah beckons by His Grace to the Garden (of bliss) and forgiveness, and makes His Signs clear to mankind: That they may celebrate His praise. (The Qurʾān, 2:221)*

This verse was traditionally interpreted as a prohibition against for both Muslim men and women marrying a *mushrik* (Al-Tabarī, 1988; Kasani, 1997; Elmalili, n.d.). All Muslim scholars agreed that according to Islam, a Muslim, whether male or female, could not marry a *mushrik* (Friedmann, 2003; Dalgin, 2005; Eskan, 2007). However, a discussion about the definition of the term '*mushrik*' in the interpretation of the verse emerges: Who is a *mushrik*? Does it include all non-Muslim groups or only polytheists? Or does the term refer only to non-Muslim groups who have declared a war against Islam and Muslims?

- *The verse 2:221 and the definition of 'Mushrik':*

Literally, the term '*mushrik*' refers to a person who associates partners with God (Esposito, 2003; Ali, 2006). Nonetheless, in classical Islamic resources, a discussion and a complex discourse arises over the term's precise definition and the types of unbelieving man and woman who are classified as a *mushrik* in the context of the prohibition of marriage. Since religious edict governing who Muslim men and women can marry differ depending on definitions of *mushrik* among scholars, it is important to examine this matter further.

In classical commentaries, scholars discussed the meaning of the *mushrik* in the context of interfaith marriage with respect to Q. 2:221 (Ibn al-Arabi, 1974; Al-

Tabarī, 1988; Al-Razi, 1989). Among them, Al-Tabarī's (1988) Qurʾānic commentary is one of the earliest works, so much so that later exegetes typically cite from him. He categorised early scholars' and the companions' definitions of *mushrik* into three groups in his commentary on Q. 2:221 (Al-Tabarī, 1988). The first focuses on scholars who understand the term *al-mushrikāt* (*mushrik* women) to include all non-Muslim women, either polytheist or *ahl al-kitāb*. Al-Tabarī mentions Ibn Abbas, 'Ikrimah and Hasan al-Basri in the first group and he states that according to their reading, marriage to a Jewish or Christian woman is prohibited for Muslim men, but the prohibition was later abrogated by Q. 5:5. In the second group Al-Tabarī states a narrative from Abdullah b. Abbas and argues that in this verse (2:221) *al-mushrikāt* refers to and includes all non-Muslim women, whether polytheists, idol worshippers or *ahl al-kitāb*. Lastly, Al-Tabarī discusses – and sympathises with – Qatādah and Sa'īd b. Jubayr's opinion as the third group of scholars who argue that the non-Muslim women mentioned in Q. 2:221 as *'al-mushrikāt'* are polytheist Arab women. Thus, seen in this way, the prohibition discussed in the verse does not include marriage to *kitabī* women. So, there is not any abrogation in Q. 2:221, and Q. 5:5 has a separate provision on interfaith marriages (Al-Tabarī, 1988). Al-Tabarī (1988) also indicates that although the external (apparent) meaning of Q. 2:221 is general, its inner meaning is particular and the rule only encompasses a specific category of unbelievers who are polytheist idol worshippers. Therefore, it is not abrogated by

Q. 5:5, because *ahl al-kitāb* women are not included in Q. 2:221 (Al-Tabarī, 1988)[8].

It is important to state that when I review the interpretation of the verse 2:221 in different commentaries of the Qurʾān, I see that although some of the exegetes suggest that the term *'al-mushrikāt'* refers to all non-Muslim women, whether polytheists, Jews or Christian (Ibn Abidin, 1907; Sabuni, 1980), the majority of scholars argue that the word *'mushrikāt'* in the verse does not include women from the *ahl al-kitāb* (Abu Yusuf, 1962; Al-Tabarī, 1988; Kasani, 1997; Ibn Kathir, 1999). Kasani (1997) notes that even though it is suitable to suggest that the *ahl al-kitāb* are described as *mushriks*, traditionally the term *mushrik* is used to describe non-Muslims who are not Jews or Christians. In other words, in Islamic tradition, Jewish and Christian women are not the non-Muslim groups to whom marriage is not allowed for Muslims. Furthermore, it is interesting to see that when exegetes interpret Q. 2:221 and define the term '*mushrik'* in the context of interfaith marriages, most classical and contemporary scholars who carried out an in-depth analysis of the first part of the verse, define the word *'al-mushrikāt'*, then explain the rulings pertaining to Muslim men marrying to non-Muslims (for more information see Al-Tabarī, 1988; Al-Razi, 1989; Eskan, 2007). For instance, in his commentary of verse 2:221, Al-Razi (1989) gives a definition of term '*mushrik*' and discusses the scholars' opinion about whether it describes all non-Muslim groups including Jews and Christians. However, when he discusses the

[8] For more information about the abrogation of Q 2:221 by Q 5:5 or exception of *ahl al-kitāb* women from other non-Muslim groups mentioned in Q 2:221, as believers whom Muslim men can marry, see Al-Jassas, 1985; Sabuni, 1980; Al-Tabarī, 1988; Eskan, 2007.

subject he focusses on Muslim's marriages to non-Muslim women and gives less importance to the second part of the verse, which concerns the issue from the perspective of Muslim women (Lamrabet, 2013). It is suitable to state that the main reason behind this lack of attention to the second part of the verse has to do with the scholars' consideration of the ruling about Muslim women's marriages. Most probably, they think that prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriage is so obvious that it does not need commenting on. In addition, while they omit discussing the second part of Q. 2:221, they use the verse as evidence for the prohibition of Muslim women's marriage to all non-Muslim men, whether polytheist, Jewish or Christian (Sabuni, 1980; Kasani, 1997). For instance, Kasani (1997), who to my knowledge is among the few scholars who discuss Muslim women's marriage to non-Muslims separately, uses the verse 2:221 to explain why Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men. Likewise, surprisingly, when it comes to Muslim women's marriages, most exegetes argue that the term '*mushrik*' in the verse 2:221 refers all non-Muslim groups; and they do not make any distinction between polytheists, Jews and Christians (*ahl al-kitāb*). Al-Shafi'i (1973) states that there are not any differences between *mushriks* and *ahl al-kitāb* in the context of Muslim women's marriages, because the meaning of the verse is general and the word '*mushrik*' includes *ahl al-kitāb* and all other non-Muslim groups. In this light, it is not permissible for a Muslim woman to marry any non-Muslim (Al-Shafi'i, 1973; Azzam, 2015).

Furthermore, contradictions in the literature of classical Islamic interpretations can also be clearly seen in scholars' commentaries. Scholars who argue that Q. 2:221 excludes the People of the Book in their definition of the word *'mushrikāt'* (female polytheists) extend the meaning of the word *'mushrikūn'* (male polytheists) to encompass all non-Muslim groups, claiming that a Muslim woman cannot marry a Jewish or a Christian man because they are unbelievers (Sabuni, 1980; Azzam, 2015). This explanation in the classical resources shows us how the definition and interpretation of an identical word can differ depending on the gender: while 'female *mushrik*' refers only to the polytheist, 'male *mushrik*' encompass all non-Muslim groups, either polytheists or believers of any divine religions (Ibn Abidin, 1907; Sabuni, 1980; Al-Tabarī, 1988). For instance, in his interpretation, Sabuni (1980), a respected scholar of Qurʾānic exegesis, states that Q. 2:221 prohibits marriage to *mushrik* women whom he describes as non-Muslim women who are polytheist and who do not believe in any divine religions. He also emphasises that, according to many scholars, this verse does not include the *ahl al-kitāb* women (Sabuni, 1980). However, when he explains the second part of the verse, which says 'do not marry polytheistic (mushrik) men [to your women] until they believe', he states that this verse refers all non-Muslim men including polytheists, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians or apostates. Accordingly, the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men who belong to any of these groups is prohibited (Sabuni, 1980).

On the other hand, Asma Lambaret (2013), a Moroccan Islamic feminist, criticises the classical exegetes' interpretation of verse 2:221 with regards to Muslim

women. She (2013) states that the verse clearly and equally forbids the marriage of both Muslim men and women to polytheists. Besides, when the condition and situation at the time that the verse was revealed is considered, the Qurʾānic order and prohibition is reasonable, given that at that time *mushriks* were engaged in a war against Muslims and the new believers needed to be protected from their attacks and abuse (Lamrabet, 2013). Therefore the Qurʾān encouraged both Muslim men and women to get married to believers who shared the same faith. In addition, Lambaret (2013) also emphasises that the Qurʾānic order is directed towards both men and women equally, such that they are both prohibited from marrying *mushriks* and both are encouraged to marry believers. Therefore, even though some classical exegetes indicate the direct opposite in their interpretations, the meaning of the word '*mushriks*' does not differ for men and women. Conversely, it clearly stresses the totally egalitarian approach in respect to both Muslim men and women and urges them to get married to believers who have, like them, similar religious faith (Lamrabet, 2013).

In sum, even though the Qurʾānic order stated in Q. 2:221 clearly suggests that both Muslim men and women are equally forbidden from marrying polytheists or idolaters until they believe and that Muslims are encouraged to marry believers, Muslim scholars and jurists interpret the order and its scope differently. As a result, its application differs for Muslim men and women in the Islamic tradition. On this point, it is essential to ask and rethink how regulations related to interfaith marriages for both Muslim men and women came to be built and perceived differently in traditional Islamic discourse, given that the Qurʾān does

not make any distinction in its order. In the following section, I aim to answer this question and examine the issue in the light of the discussions on Muslim women's marriages to the People of the Book.

2.2. Muslim Marriages to Ahl al-Kitāb (People of the Book):

As discussed above, in Q. 2:221, Muslim men and women are ordered to get married to those who believe. Nonetheless, in classical interpretations, surprisingly the phrases 'believing women' and 'believing men' mentioned in the verse are defined differently depending on whether they refer to the marriage of Muslim men or Muslim women (Lamrabet, 2013).

For this reason, to understand the rules of interfaith marriages in Islam and scholars' attitudes toward these marriages, it is important to examine how the word 'believers' is defined and interpreted in terms of interfaith marriage: What kind of 'believers' are referred to in the verse? Does it refer only to people who are affiliated with Islam or does it imply the act of believing in one God, in its broad meaning?

Regarding the Muslims' interfaith marriages, the commentators explain the meaning of the 'believing women' to whom Muslim men can get married by referring to Q. 5:5 (Al-Shafi'i, 1973; Al-Tabarī, 1988; Ibn Kathir, 1999):

> *This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time,- when ye give them their due dowers, and*

desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues if any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good). (The Qurʾān, Chapter 5, Verses 5)

In this verse, it is clearly stated that Muslim men can marry *ahl al-kitāb* women, and, depending on the verse, the exegetes and jurists conclude that such females are the 'believers women' who are referred to in the verse 2:221 as a non-Muslim group that Muslim men can marry (Abu Zahra, 1957). However, similar to the definition of the *mushrik* in the verse 2:221, there is a gender difference in the understanding of 'the believers'. In her article on Muslim women's interfaith marriages, Buisson (2016) names this difference in the definition of the term as 'double standards on the concept of believer'. As Buisson (2016) argues that when the term refers to 'women believers', many classical and contemporary exegetes define 'believers' as 'believers of the monotheistic revealed religions', both Muslims and the People of the Book. However, strangely, when the term refers to men believers, they interpret the term as 'only' Muslim believers. In other words, while *ahl al-kitāb* women are considered as believers, when it comes the *ahl al-kitāb* men, they are not considered as believers and the commentators did not explain the idea of Muslim women's interfaith marriages (Al-Tabarī, 1988; Buisson, 2016)

Moreover, in the classical commentators that I have accessed there is not any information about the followers of revealed religion whom Muslim women can marry out of the Islamic faith. Also, neither explicit permission nor prohibition was expressed in the Qurʾān regarding Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men

from the *ahl al-kitāb*. For this reason, the situation of Muslim men and women are considered differently by Islamic jurists and exegetes and the interpretation of the gendering of the permission changes according to the different approaches of the schools of jurisprudence (Parolin, 2015; Azzam, 2015). Therefore, in the following section, I will examine the interpretations of rules surrounding Muslim men and women's marriages to *ahl al-kitāb* separately. In addition, as stated above, the word 'non-Muslim' will be used to refer to *ahl al-kitāb* (i.e., Jews and Christians) in order to avoid repetition of the latter term.

2.2.1. Muslim Men's Marriages to Ahl al-Kitāb

As mentioned, in the majority of classical Islamic texts Muslim scholars focus on Muslim men's marriages to non-Muslims when they explain and discuss the subject of interfaith marriages. They examine the issue from different perspectives and define the term in relevant verses in terms of Muslim men's intermarriage (Al-Razi, 1989).

When discussing verse Q. 5:5, the majority of the exegetes and jurists indicate that Muslim men are allowed to marry women belonging to *ahl al-kitāb* who are Christians or Jews (Abu Zahra, 1957; Abu Yusuf, 1962; Al-Razi, 1989; Kasani, 1997; Gomaa, 2011). According to their interpretation of the Q. 5:5, Christians and Jews are neither disbelievers nor polytheists; they are among the believers that Muslims are allowed to marry (Abu Zahra, 1957; Kasani, 1997). Therefore, Muslim men can only marry an *ahl al-kitāb* woman who is not an idol worshipper or polytheist (*mushrik*) and who believes in a divine, monotheistic religion (Sabuni, 1980; Al-Razi, 1989).

In addition, with Islamic conquests throughout the years, Muslims started to live in new areas and continents and so gradually came into contact with people from different religious groups. The interaction between Muslims and people living in these areas necessitated a revision of the definition of *ahl al-kitāb* (Hasan, 2015). However, there was not any consensus on the identity of the *ahl al-kitāb* and which religious groups should fall within this category (Darwaza, 1963; Esack, 1998). Different religious groups such as Hindus, Sabeans, Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Magians were either included or excluded from this category of non-Muslims at different times depending on the theological preferences of Muslim scholars, often based on the geopolitical context in which they lived (Darwaza, 1963; Esack, 1998; Azzam, 2015; Hasan, 2015). For instance, when Muslim conquests on the Indian subcontinent took place, a discussion between scholars occurred about whether these people should be considered as the People of the Book whom Muslim men can marry (Nasr, 1999; Hasan, 2015) They discussed the issue from different perspectives and, even though some Muslim clerics disagreed, many Islamic scholars concluded that Hindus should be considered as *ahl al-kitāb*; thus, a Muslim man can marry a Hindu woman (Nasr, 1999).

Although there is explicit permission for Muslim men's interfaith marriage with *ahl al-kitāb* –usually interpreted as Jewish and Christian women – in the Qurʾān, some early and modern Islamic scholars have discussed Muslim men's interfaith marriages and their effect on Muslim society (Al-Razi, 1989; Dalgin, 2005). Imam Malik (1905) indicates in his work that the marriage of a Muslim man to a non-Muslim woman from the People of the Book is permitted, even though it is

disapproved (*makrūh*). Similarly, Ebu Zahra (1957) states that Muslim men can marry a Jewish or Christian woman only if conditions regarding their marriage and future family are satisfied. For instance, among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, the second Caliph Umar and his son Abdullah Ibn Umar were against interfaith marriages and considered these marriages as harmful for the fledgling Muslim community and thus discouraged Muslims to marry out of their religion (Qurtubi, 1964; Al-Razi, 1989 and for more information also see Al-Tabarī, 1988). Sabuni (1980) also interprets that Ibn Umar is against these marriages, because if a Muslim man marries a non-Muslim he might think of leaving his religion and want to affiliate with his wife's religion. Additionally, children generally follow their mothers, so if the mother is Jewish or Christian, their children might lose their Islamic faith (Al-Razi, 1989; Sabuni, 1980). Therefore, if there is any danger of leaving his religion, or their children might become non-Muslim, then a Muslim man's marriage to non-Muslim women is not permitted (Imam Malik, 1905; Sabuni, 1980; Kasani, 1997). At this point it is important to highlight that, surprisingly, all these arguments put against Muslim men's interfaith marriages is similar to the arguments that scholars put forward against Muslim women's interfaith marriages. This similarity shows that the main idea and principles for the interfaith marriage in Islam is the same for women and men: having freedom of practice and keeping their faith/religion and raising their children as Muslim.

In addition, classical and contemporary Muslim scholars put some limitations on Muslim men's interfaith marriages, especially if Muslims live in a non-Muslim

country. Jurists from different schools of thought have argued that marriage to a non-Muslim woman is *makrūh* (disapproved) for a Muslim man if they live in a non-Muslim country, even if she is a *kitabī* woman (Al-Razi, 1989; Abou El Fadl, 2011; Khan, n.d.). Khan (n.d.) argues that in a non-Muslim society where cultural differences exist between couples the family life will be much more harmonious if both spouses belong to the same religion and agree on religious values (Khan, n.d.). In addition, children would be negatively affected in these marriages. Scholars argue that in a non-Muslim country, non-Muslim mothers will have more influence on their children and those children will also be affected by the non-Muslim society they live in (Abou El Fadl, 2011; Khan, n.d.). For instance, Abou Al-Fadl (2011) explains how his observation of children in Muslim-non-Muslim marriages affected his attitudes towards interfaith marriages. He says: ‘I must confess that in my humble opinion, I strongly sympathize with the jurists that argued that in non-Muslim countries it is reprehensible (*makrūh*) for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim. God knows best--I have reached this position after observing that the children of these Muslim/non-Muslim marriages in most cases do not grow up with a strong sense of their Islamic identity’ (Abou El Fadl, 2011).

Similarly, Sabuni puts limitations on Muslim men’s right to intermarry and states that a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman only if he is sure that this marriage will not affect their children’s religious beliefs negatively and if he is sure that they will be Muslim (Sabuni, 1980). In addition, the prominent Muslim scholar Yusuf Al-Qaradawi says that if a Muslim man is living in a country where the Muslim community is a small minority, they may not marry a Christian or

Jewish woman, since these marriages would make it difficult for Muslim women to find Muslim men to marry (Qaradawi, 1986, 1994).

Accordingly, scholars suggest that Muslim men must consider various issues before deciding on interfaith marriages and they should marry a non-Muslim woman only if some conditions are fulfilled, such as what type of family life he expects from his non-Muslim wife-to-be and how they raise and educate their children in terms of religious education (Khan, n.d.; Abu Zahra, 1957). Khan (n.d.) emphasises that when a Muslim man marries a non-Muslim woman, he should realise that he has already agreed to his wife-to-be's non-Muslim life and he cannot force her to convert to Islam and he should not expect her to behave like a Muslim woman (Khan, n.d.). Furthermore, Friedmann (2015) states that even though a marriage to 'scriptuary' women is permissible in the Qurʾān, Al-Qaradawi put some restriction in its applicability. He narrates that according to Al-Qaradawi the non-Muslim woman also should also not be from a country that is fighting Islam, and in this context 'it is forbidden to marry a Jewish woman as long as there is war between the Muslims and Israel' (Friedmann, 2015, p.144). Al-Qaradawi's opinion is in line with Imam Malik who condemned Muslim men's marriages to women from communities/groups with whom the Muslims are engaged in a war (Shatzmiller, 1996). In addition, Al-Hibri (2000) points out new circumstances in the Western countries regarding custody laws and importance of the re-examination of the traditional juristic permission to Muslim men's interfaith marriages. She states that American custody laws favour women, thus in the case of divorce the court would give custody of the children to their non-

Muslim mother (Al-Hibri, 2000). In this case their children will be raised by their non-Muslim mother and the Muslim father loses his ability to provide religious education to the children. In her assessment, Al-Hibri (2000) emphasises that Muslim men who are married to non-Muslim women in American society will have significant problems which have not been considered previously, and thus Muslim men's interfaith marriages now deserve 'protective attention of Muslim jurists' (Al-Hibri, 2000, p.69).

Consequently, before moving to discuss Muslim women's marriage to *ahl al-kitāb*, it is worth mentioning that when we look at how marriage between a Muslim man and an a*hl al-kitāb* woman is considered by classical and contemporary Muslim scholars and jurists, we see that even though there is an explicit permission for Muslim men's marriage to an *ahl al-kitāb*, Muslim jurists, both classical and contemporary, have discussed the restriction of its practice considering their time and circumstances that they live in. This change in the application of the marriage permission to non-Muslims indicates that the majority of scholars consider marriage as a part of *muʿāmalāt* (the sphere of social relationship, interpersonal relations). Depending on this understanding, it is possible to develop and change the law regarding Muslim men's interfaith marriages by taking the changes in their society into consideration. As a result, even though there is an explicit permission for Muslim men to marry Jewish and Christian women in the Qurʾān, scholars discuss the subject and emphasise certain conditions that must be considered by a Muslim man before deciding to marry an *ahl al-kitāb* woman.

After the discussion of Muslim men's interfaith marriages in Islam and Muslim jurists' attitudes towards its ruling, an inevitable question arises: Do Muslim jurists apply the same understanding to Muslim women's interfaith marriages? In the following section, I will discuss Muslim women's interfaith marriages in the light of the arguments put by both classical and contemporary scholars who are for and against Muslim women's interfaith marriages.

2.2.2. Muslim Women's Marriage to Ahl al-Kitāb:

Although there are many resources examining or discussing marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims from different perspectives (Friedmann, 2003; Dalgin, 2005; Na'im, 2005; Eskan, 2007; Aini, 2008; Jones et al., 2009; Leeman, 2009; Zahidul Islam, 2014), studies focusing on Muslim women's interfaith marriages and the regulation of Muslim women's interfaith marriages in the Islamic tradition remain scant. Only limited research focuses specifically on Muslim women's marriages and the regulation of these marriages in Islamic legal discourse (Ali, 2006; Eskan, 2007; Azzam, 2015; Buisson, 2016). In many studies the authors either mention Muslim women's interfaith marriages to explain its prohibition (Dalgin, 2005; Darwaza, 1963; Kasani, 1997; Abu Zahra, 1957) or skip the subject by saying that since there is a consensus on its prohibition, it is needless to discuss the subject (Zahidul Islam, 2014).

As mentioned, even though there is an explicit prohibition regarding Muslim women's marriage to *mushriks*, there is neither any specific prohibition or permission in the Qurʾān or *Sunna* on Muslim women's marriage to *ahl al-kitāb*. Because of the Qurʾān's silence on the subject, scholars' attitudes differ towards

Muslim women's interfaith marriages and different opinions have emerged on the issue. The classical Muslim scholars interpret this silence about Muslim women's intermarriage as an implicit order that Muslim women can only marry Muslim men and are strongly against Muslim women's marriages to non-Muslims under any condition (Imam Malik, 1905; Darwaza, 1963; Al-Shafi'i, 1973; Sabuni, 1980; Al-Razi, 1989; Kasani, 1997; Elmalili, n.d.). Some contemporary Muslim scholars also follow this ruling (Dalgin, 2005; Gomaa, 2011; Shaikh Ramzy, 2016). It is important to note that during the study I reviewed the majority of the prominent exegetics texts, as many as I could access, and to my knowledge, there is no affirmative opinion about Muslim women's interfaith marriages in classical references. Conversely however, a group of contemporary Muslim scholars argue that the Qurʾān's silence implies the possibility for interfaith marriages and argue that it is just as permissible for Muslim women as for Muslim men (Ali, 2006; Tuksal, 2016; Atay, 2016; Hargey, 2016; Mohammed, n.d.).

In order to gain a better understanding of the arguments behind the reasoning that prohibits Muslim women's interfaith marriages and to discuss the possibility of these marriages, I will examine two opposite opinions on Muslim women's interfaith marriages separately in the next section.

2.2.2.1 Muslim women are not allowed to marry Ahl al-Kitāb (the People of the Book)

Despite silence over Muslim women's intermarriage in the Qurʾān, in the Islamic tradition many classical and contemporary Muslim scholars have agreed that interfaith marriage between Muslim women and all non-Muslim men is

prohibited no matter which religion he belongs to (Shatzmiller, 1996). The arguments they use to support this position can be divided into two groups: (1) religious arguments which are related to the scholars interpretation of religious text; and (2) sociocultural arguments related to societies' perception and understanding of marriage.

2.2.2.1.1 Religious arguments:

These arguments are mainly related to how Muslim scholars interpret religious texts in terms of Muslim women's interfaith marriages. The scholars put forward two main religious arguments to support the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages: First, an analogy (*qiyās*) of the marriage between Muslim women and *ahl al-kitāb* men and prohibited marriages between Muslims and polytheists (*mushriks*) in verse Q. 2:221 based around the prohibitive operative cause (*illah*) 'unbelievers invite you to the Fire'; second, a consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of Muslim jurists on the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages (Ibn Ashur, 2014; Azzam, 2015)

2.2.2.1.1.1 Analogy of the marriages:

Some jurists and commentators see an analogy between polytheists and the People of the Book such that 'those invite [Muslims] to the Fire'[9] and they interpret the permissibility of interfaith marriage between a Muslim man and an *ahl al-kitāb* woman in verse Q. 5:5 as reflecting male authority in marriage

[9] As Q.2:221 states: 'and do not marry polytheistic (*mushrik*) women until they believe. (…) And do not marry polytheistic (*mushrik*) men [to your women] until they believe. (…) **Those invite [you] to the Fire**, but Allah invites to Paradise and to forgiveness, by His permission...'.

(Azzam, 2015). Kasani (1997) argues that since the cause or *ratio legis* (*illah*) behind the prohibition is the invitation to sin, the application of the rule is general. Thus, even though Q. 2:221 is related to polytheists, it includes all non-Muslim men and prohibits Muslim women's interfaith marriages (Kasani, 1997; El-Jercawi, 2009). This means that Muslim woman's marriage to non-Muslim men is forbidden in Islam, regardless of whether the spouse is polytheist or a Jew or Christian (Ibn Qudamah, 1984; Kasani, 1997).

It is quite noticeable that patriarchal thought within Muslim society and traditions has affected the interpretations of the part of the verse: '*those invite [you] to the Fire…*'. When the exegetes comment on this statement, they mainly refer to polytheist men, rather than talking about both polytheist men and women. They argue that men have power and authority over women in a family, but that the reverse is not true (Darwaza, 1963; Ibn al-Arabi, 1974; Sabuni, 1980). Thus, if a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man, her situation will be considered with her husband's situation. However, the woman does not have any power over her Muslim husband. So, invitation to the fire is not related to non-Muslim women (Ibn al-Arabi, 1974).

2.2.2.1.1.2 Consensus on the Prohibition of Muslim Women's Interfaith Marriages:

Throughout Islamic history, Muslim scholars and jurists have been asked about the rules (*fatwās*) on many different subjects and in almost every case when discussion turns to interpersonal relations (*muʿāmalāt*) there is a difference amongst the opinion of Islamic jurisprudence scholars. Muslim jurists have disagreed on many issues depending on their time and conditions and this is

common and acceptable in Islamic jurisprudence (Abou El Fadl, 2011). However, when it comes to the interfaith marriage of Muslim women, this general situation has changed. As Abu El Fadl (2011) points out in his review of classical Islamic resources that, unusually, Muslim scholars unanimously agree on the prohibition of Muslim woman's marriage to a Jew or Christian. As a prominent scholar in Islam and Islamic Law, Abou El Fadl's assessment is important to demonstrate Muslim scholars' attitudes towards Muslim women's marriages. He says: 'Surprising to me, all schools of thought prohibited a Muslim woman from marrying a man who is a *kitābi* (among the people of the book). I am not aware of a single dissenting opinion on this, which is rather unusual for Islamic jurisprudence because Muslim jurists often disagreed on many issues, but this is not one of them' (Abou El Fadl, 2011).

In addition, in her study, Azzam (2015) examines the reasons behind the consensus on the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages, arguing that it is not based on definite textual evidence from the Qurʾān or the sayings of the Prophet, but instead on a normative understanding of textual sources. Azzam (2015) argues that early Islamic scholars and contemporary Muslim scholars have used different means to deduce evidence from the Qurʾān for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages. For instance, as Tabari (1988) mentioned in his interpretations, a group of scholars have simply concluded that in Q. 2:221 the prohibition encompasses both polytheists and the People of the Book and that Q. 5:5 excluded marriage between Muslim men and *ahl al-kitāb* women. Others, who indicate that Q. 2:221 addresses polytheists, state that the rule is

also applicable to *ahl al-kitāb*, because of the reason behind the impermissibility of such a marriage to Muslim: namely, unbelievers may lead a Muslim to hell (Azzam, 2015). Also, even though the context and general meaning of the verse are not associated with the case of marriage to non-Muslims (Qurtubi, 1964), Muhammad Abu Zahra (1957) argues that Q. 60:10 ends the impermissibility of interfaith marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In addition, there is also one narrative (hadith) from the Prophet mentioned by Al-Tabarī (1988) in his commentary that is used by scholars to support and legislate the deductions made. According to this narration, from Jabir Ibn Abdallah, the Prophet said 'We may marry a woman from the People of the Book but they may not marry Muslim women' (Al-Tabarī, 1988). In his commentary, Al-Tabarī (1988), as the only narrator of the Hadith, points towards the hadith's reliability and its use by scholars in their opinions about interfaith marriage. He says that even though scholars disagree on the reliability of some of the narrators of this hadith (*isnād*) and consider it problematic, there is also general consensus of the scholars on the reliability of its meaning regarding Muslim women's interfaith marriage (Al-Tabarī, 1988). In this context, some scholars also have then used this hadith as a foundation on which they build their opinion about Muslim women's interfaith marriages (Dalgin, 2005) by saying that the meaning of the hadith corresponds to the verse 5:5 where only Muslim men's marriage to kitābi women is allowed (Darwaza, 1963). Here, it is worthwhile to point out the discrepancy in Darwaza's and some other scholars' attitudes in such a way that

while they accept that the hadith's reliability is problematic, they still use it as an evidence for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages.

Furthermore, many classical and contemporary Muslim scholars and jurists have continued to use the consensus among Muslim scholars in the early Islamic period in forming their opinion on Muslim women's interfaith marriages. They say that since there is a consensus on the prohibition of Muslim women's marriage to non-Muslims, the rule cannot be changed (Darwaza, 1963; Dalgin, 2005; Stowasser, 2009; Yasir Qadhi, 2009; Shaikh Ramzy, 2016). For instance, in 2002 the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey held its 2nd Annual Meeting for The Discussion of the Contemporary Religious Issues. The issue of Muslim women's interfaith marriages was among the subjects that were planned for discussion. However, at the end of the meeting the scholars did not agree on a decision and postponed the discussion of the subject to the next meeting (The Presidency of Religious Affairs of Turkey, 2002). They have continually referred to the consensus of the Muslim scholars in their *fatwās* about the interfaith marriages of Muslim women. They said: 'By taking into account maintaining of religious identity and the necessity of the protection of Muslim community, it was agreed that Muslim woman's marriage to a non-Muslim man is not allowed, even if he is *ahl al-kitab'*. (The Supreme Board of Religious Affairs of Turkey, 2002).

Therefore, these marriages are not acceptable and strongly prohibited and if a Muslim woman were to marry a non-Muslim their marriage would be considered null and void (Imam Malik, 1905; Ibn Ashur, 2014; Muhammad Salah, 2016; Shaikh Ramzy, 2016). For instance, among the contemporary Muslim scholars,

Muhammad Salah (2016) is strongly against Muslim women's interfaith marriage and he says in his responses to a question that if a Muslim girl is allowed to marry a non-Muslim boy that there is, in effect, no such wedding, even if they marry in civil court with a marriage licence, therefore these marriages are viewed as a relationship outside of marriage (Muhammad Salah, 2016). Furthermore, he asserts that if a third party were to claim that the marriage is acceptable, then even she/he is not considered as Muslim (Muhammad Salah, 2016).

Moreover, when the former grand mufti of Egypt, Ali Gomaa was asked about the religious rule on the marriage between a non-Muslim man to a Muslim woman, he indicated that a Muslim woman's interfaith marriage conflicts with the general rules and conclusive practices of Islam which are accepted by Muslims. In his *fatwā* he also emphasises that the prohibition of Muslim women's marriages to non-Muslims has become the subject of consensus, so having these marriages will mean being against the consensus which is considered as one of the principals of the religion (Gomaa, 2011). Thus, Muslim women's interfaith marriages is not acceptable and not a subject of further juristic interpretation (Gomaa, 2011).

2.2.2.1.2 Socio-cultural arguments:

When classical interpretations regarding Muslim women's interfaith marriage are reviewed, it can be seen that the reality of the society of the time that the scholars live in and the historical and social contexts have influenced their opinion about interfaith marriages. In this context, patriarchal perceptions of women in society (both in terms of their role in their community and as a family

member) have affected the argument and justification for the prohibition put forward by exegetes and Muslim jurists. These arguments can be categorized into three groups: (i) arguments related to the influence of a husband on his wife's religiosity, (ii) arguments that refer to the hierarchical perception of women both in society and family, (iii) arguments based upon the impact of the marriage upon their children's religious identity (Azzam, 2015).

2.2.2.1.2.1 Husband's impact on wife's religiosity:

According to scholars who advocate the prohibition of interfaith marriage for Muslim women, Islam wants to keep a Muslim woman away from things that may jeopardise her faith and thus aims to protect her religion, therefore, it prohibits a Muslim woman from being involved in a marriage that represents any threat to her religion (Sabuni, 1980; Kasani, 1997; Dalgin, 2003). As such, when a Muslim man and a Christian or Jewish woman marry, the non-Muslim wife lives under the protection of her Muslim husband, who should respect her religion given that Islam guarantees freedom of religion and practice to the Christian and Jewish wife of a Muslim (Darwaza, 1963; Sabuni, 1980). However, when a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man, Christians and Jews do not recognize the validity of Islam as a religion and these religions do not guarantee freedom of religion to Muslim women or protect their rights (Darwaza, 1963; Sabuni, 1980; Gomaa, 2011). Thus, it is assumed that, her husband might put pressure on her religious belief and undervalue her religious faith (Darwaza, 1963), and religious differences may cause problems for the family.

In the traditional Islamic view, the man is the head of household and he is the one who influences the religion of his family. Therefore, the Muslim woman would not be able to practice her religion freely in an interfaith marriage (Seamon, 2012). Numerous scholars indicate that these differences may cause a rift between a Muslim wife and non-Muslim husband (Abu Zahra, 1957; Darwaza, 1963). Muslim scholars also argue that although religious coercion is prohibited in Islam (the Qurʾān 2:256), there are not similar prohibitions in Christianity and Judaism (Darwaza, 1963). One of the common arguments against Muslim women's interfaith marriage is the possibility of Muslim women's apostatising. According to this argument, in a family dominated by its male members, the husband has a strong influence over his wife, so the non-Muslim husband may invite his Muslim wife to his religion or even use his authority and superiority in the marriage and family to compel his Muslim wife to abandon Islam (Sabuni, 1980; Kasani, 1997; Dalgin, 2005; Eskan, 2007; Azzam, 2015; Elmalili, n.d.). Moreover, if the husband is a polytheist, he may even force his Muslim wife to deny the existence of a theistic God (Sabuni, 1980).

Furthermore, another argument against Muslim women's interfaith marriage is mainly related to women's nature. Kasani (1997) argues that women are more open to being affected by their husband's thoughts and prefer to do what their husbands do in terms of religious choices and beliefs. In addition, traditionally and culturally, women usually obey what their husbands say (Gomaa, 2011). So, if a woman marries a non-Muslim she might leave Islam under the 'negative' influence of her Christian or Jewish husband and follow what her husband

believes (Kasani, 1997). In this reading, women need to be protected and, according to these Muslim scholars, Islam does not allow Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men for the sake of protecting her religion and that of her children (Philips, 2006).

On the other hand, Lambaret (2013) criticises this argument and argues that explaining the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages with reference to the 'natural weaknesses of woman' is a result of the absence of any proof to justify their opinion on the prohibition of interfaith marriages. In other words, since there is not any strong evidence that can be used against Muslim women's interfaith marriages, those conservative Muslim scholars generalise all Muslim women and consider them as weak creatures under the influence of their husbands and claim that women are not strong enough to keep their faith if they marry a non-Muslim. Similarly, Buisson (2016) argues that the patriarchal setting of social constructs and understandings of gender identities are behind these arguments focusing on women's nature. She says that the assumption of women as easily convertible through their marriage to a non-Muslim is:

> *based on the generally accepted traditional idea that a man should be responsible for his wife and act as both her tutor (waly) and mentor. Hence, it is understood that the husband holds a position of authority and leadership over his wife, financially, but also morally, intellectually and spiritually. Conversely, a wife is expected to internalize her position of follower and receiver with humility and obedience (ta'a). Within Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), it is a husband's duty to provide religious education to*

his wife, because, it seems, his greater knowledge is implied. (Buisson, 2016, pp.435–436).

2.2.2.1.2.2 Gender roles and hierarchy within society and family – The effect of understanding of 'qiwamah' in interfaith marriages

The second group of socio-cultural arguments for the prohibition of Muslim women's marriage to non-Muslims mainly stems from the hierarchical perception of women in society and gender roles within a family. Traditional Muslim exegetes and jurists argue that the Qurʾān assigned specific gender roles and characteristics to men and women in the family by referring the Q. 4:34, which says, 'men are in charge of women…' and establishes men's responsibilities as *qiwamah*, which is generally referred to a husband's authority over his wife (Hidayatullah, 2014; Azzam, 2015). Although the word *qiwamah* is used to describe men's position, the Qurʾān does not specify the details of *qiwamah* and it thus outlines the gender roles but does not clarify its social meaning (Hidayatullah, 2014). Therefore, commentators and Muslim communities interpret the verse (Q. 4:34) in terms of the effect or influence of social values attached to the differences between men and women in the society in which the various scholars live (Hidayatullah, 2014). Some commentators interpret the term as a natural tendency of men to exert authority over women (Gomaa, 2011; Azzam, 2015). Furthermore, the term *qiwamah* has become a key argument in the discussion on the prohibition of interfaith marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men because of its governing role in the Islamic perception of

the marital relationship (Gomaa, 2011; Azzam, 2015; Elmalili, n.d.)[10]. For instance, Ali Gomaa (2011), the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, along with many commentators and jurists refer to the Q. 4:141: 'never will Allah give the disbelievers over the believers a way [to overcome them]' and the Prophet's statement (assertion) that 'Islam is supreme and there is nothing above it - الاسلام يعلو ولا يعلى عليه' in their explanation of why Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men (Al-Sarakhsi, 1983; Eskan, 2007). In their interpretation exegetes' understanding of the concept of *qiwamah* has led to the perception that the wife is required to obey her husband (Azzam, 2015). For instance, Darwaza (1963) states that the husband has an authority and power over his wife and so he is in a superior position to her in the family. Also, in his commentary, Zamaksharī (1987), interestingly, uses the ruler – subject metaphor to explain the relationship between the husband and wife, and to compare the relationship between the two groups. He expresses that the husband has the authority over his wife as that of a ruler managing his subjects by ordering and forbidding them (Al-Zamakhsharī, 1987). After considering the classical and some contemporary scholars' opinions on the relationship between husband and wife, it is not surprising to see their argument about interfaith marriages that if a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim, this means that the non-Muslim husband will have power over his Muslim wife and he may exercise authority over her (El-Jercawi,

[10] For more information about the interpretation of the term *qiwamah* in the Qur'anic commentaries and its effect on the understanding of Muslim woman's interfaith marriage, see: Azzam 2015; and for a critical reassessment of the interpretations of Q. 4:34 and the term *qiwamah*, see Hidayatullah, 2014; Lamrabet, 2017; Welchman, 2017; Abou-Bakr, 2017.

2009; Gomaa, 2011). In other words, a non-Muslim would be the guardian of a Muslim. However, a non-Muslim's authority over a Muslim is not acceptable in Islam (Sabuni, 1980). For this reason, the scholars have arrived at a consensus that marriage of Muslim women to no-Muslim men is forbidden.

2.2.2.1.2.3 Children's religious identity:

Lastly, the gendering of the prohibition of interfaith marriage is also connected by some jurists to the issue of filiation (Darwaza, 1963; El-Jercawi, 2009). According to the traditional Islamic view, children are given the religion of their father, so a child will be a Muslim if the father is Muslim, where the opposite will not be possible if only the mother is Muslim (Sabuni, 1980; Dalgin, 2005; Shaikh Ramzy, 2016). Topcuoglu (2010) argues that one of the reasons for the prohibition for Muslim women's interfaith marriage is to protect Muslim women and their future children from the 'negative' impact of a non-Muslim spouse. Accordingly, in this marriage, Muslim women may not be able to raise their children in Islam and give them religious education (Topcuoglu, 2010). In addition, by using his mentioned authority in the family, a non-Muslim husband may influence their children and raise them as a Christian or Jew. From this point of view, marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man is considered impossible and unacceptable as it would produce non-Muslim offspring to a Muslim mother.

Buisson (2016) criticises this conservative understanding of the parents' role in children's religion and says that this argument is mainly the result of the patriarchal understanding of gender roles, and she indicates a paradox in the religious authorities argument. She argues that even though a mother is

considered as the primary caretaker of their children and she is ascribed the obligation to educate them, in the arguments about interfaith marriages, intermarried Muslim women are not recognised as having enough authority and responsibility to teach her children Islamic values, and raise them as Muslim (Buisson, 2016).

Considering these opinions, it is suitable to state that there is a contradiction in the conservative Muslim scholars' arguments about the children's religious education. Namely, as mentioned in a previous section, while a Muslim man's marriage to a non-Muslim woman is discussed, it is argued that as the mother has more influence on the children's religious education, Muslim men should assure that their children will be raised as Muslim. However, when it comes to Muslim women's interfaith marriages, these scholars consider a Muslim woman as if she is passive and does not have any role in their children's religious education.

In this context, 2011 UK Census data provides a remarkable result regarding the children's religious identity in Christian-Muslim relationships. According to 2011 UK Census, in Christian–Muslim relationships, only 28% of children are identified as Muslim, and the rest of the children are identified as Christian (33%) or 'no religion' (39%) (Voas, n.d.; Office for National Statistics, 2016). Given that the rate of Muslim men in interfaith marriages is higher than Muslim women (Voas, n.d.), this result refutes the common argument of children's religion in Muslim men's interfaith marriages. The data shows that, whether the man (father) or woman (mother) is the Muslim partner in the marriage, the majority of the children in Muslim-Christian marriages are identified either as Christian or 'no religion'.

Besides that, it should not be forgotten that in addition to the parent's religious identity, there are many other variables to be considered in children's religious education in interfaith families, which is a subject for further research.

2.2.2.2 Muslim women are allowed to marry Ahl al-Kitāb (the People of the Book)

Throughout the years, with the increased immigration of Muslims to non-Muslim countries, Muslims have started to come into contact with and interact with more non-Muslims. This increased social interaction has led to significantly higher numbers of civil marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men (Hoge, 1995) and has affected the number of converted Muslim women who want to remain married to their non-Muslim husbands (Ali, 2006). These changes to Muslim communities over time have led to new questions regarding Muslim women's interfaith marriages and to the emergence of a contemporary Islamic discourse on the subject.

Some contemporary Muslim thinkers have begun to re-evaluate and discuss the long-standing consensus among scholars that Muslim women are forbidden from marrying non-Muslim men regardless of his religion. They have aimed to reformulate this traditional position in the light of contemporary societal changes (Seamon, 2012) and presented some counterarguments against the traditional view of interfaith marriages in Islam. In this section, I will examine their arguments in two main groups: (1) arguments which are based on the critical reassessment of the religious references used by the traditional scholars, and (2) sociocultural arguments related to the changes in the perception of marriage and gender roles in society.

2.2.2.2.1 Critical reassessment of religious references:

As stated in the previous section, many Muslim scholars conclude that there is not clear permission or prohibition in the Qurʾān of marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men (who are followers of the other monotheistic religions) as there is for those of Muslim men to non-Muslim women (Dalgin, 2005; Azzam, 2015; Ates, 2016; Atay, 2016). While in the classical interpretations of this silence was heralded as a sign of the prohibition, nowadays a group of Muslim scholars have interpreted the silence as evidence for the permissibility of such marriages, and they aim to refute the traditional idea that the absence of specific authorisations in the religious text makes Muslim women's interfaith marriages forbidden and they criticise the consensus of earlier Muslim scholars that prohibit these marriages (Turabi, 2006; Hargey, 2016; Atay, 2016).

Khaleel Muhammad, professor of Religion and Islamic Law at San Diego State University, argues that scholars cannot simply conclude that since there is not any explicit permission mentioned in the Qurʾān such marriages are expressly forbidden (Mohammed, 2011). Therefore, he centres his argument on the possibility of Muslim women's interfaith marriage in the light of the *'*permissibility*',* which is a basic rule in the philosophy of law. According to this principle, 'the basic rule in things is that it is permitted', which means that all things are permissible unless expressly forbidden. Thus, everything in the category of '*ḥarām*' (forbidden) must be stated clearly (Mohammed, 2012, 2011). Mohammed (2012) also states a question that may come to mind: *'*if everything is inherently permissible, then why does God have to tell us in the verse Q. 5:5 that

Muslim men can marry the people of the Book?'. Mohammed (2012) explains that Islam and the Qurʾān did not emerge out of a vacuum, instead it did so in the context of the revolution of the Abrahamic faith. Within this Abrahamic tradition, it was specifically suggested that Muslim men's marriage to *ahl al-kitāb* women was permitted. Mohammed (2012) indicates that 'the Muslims had to raise a question about the matter at the time, since, with the backdrop of the law of the 'People of the Book' being *a* paradigm, the question of Solomon's marriages to women outside of his own community was an issue of importance. He married women who were from outside of the tribe of Israel and they supposedly introduced polytheism and idol worship into the tribe as that was their practice.' (Mohammed, 2012). Furthermore, Mohammed (2012) argues that the permission to marry *kitabī* women is explicitly stated in verse 5:5 as an answer to the question of interfaith marriage, because some companions of the Prophet thought that *ahl al-kitāb* women are prohibited to marry (also see Eskan, 2007). Therefore, the verse does not contradict with the idea of permissibility. However, the normative legal proscription of Muslim women's interfaith marriage breaks this basic rule (Mohammed, 2012). In this respect, Khaleel Muhammad and some other contemporary scholars argue that if Muslim women are not allowed to marry outside the faith the Qurʾān must exactly specify so and there should be clear and definite directives for this prohibition (Mohammed, 2012; Hargey, 2016). Similarly, Sudanese religious and Islamist leader Hassan al-Turabi (2006) concludes that since there is not any verse or rule in the Qurʾān or *Sunna* that dictates otherwise, marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men is

valid. Thus, it is not suitable to say that Muslim women's interfaith marriages are prohibited based on the accumulated teachings of past scholars (Turabi, 2006).

In addition, Bardakoglu (2016), the former head of the Directorate of the Religious Affairs in Turkey, emphasises that in Islamic jurisprudence marriage is considered to be an act involving interaction among people (*muʿāmalāt*), rather than a pure product of *ʿibādāt* (i.e. an act of worship). From this aspect, although it entails a relationship with religion at some points, it is not a completely religious phenomenon (Tuksal, 2016). For this reason, rules governing Muslim women's interfaith marriages should be reconsidered and the final decision should be left to the woman, as it is in Muslim men's interfaith marriages (Turabi, 2006; Tuksal, 2016). Well-known Turkish scholar Tuksal (2016) criticises the traditional scholars' attitudes towards Muslim women's interfaith marriages and points to a double standard in the evaluation of Muslim women's interfaith marriages. She (2016) argues that if the rules on Muslim men's marriage to *kitabī* women is reconsidered and changed in light of the new societal circumstances, the rules governing Muslim women's interfaith marriage also needs to be reconsidered.

2.2.2.2.2 Socio-cultural changes and their impact on the perception of marriages:

Contemporary Muslim scholars argue that many of the arguments put forward to justify the prohibition of interfaith marriages reflect the time and culture in which the early scholars were immersed (Erdogan, 2013; Tuksal, 2016; Hargey, 2016; Bardakoglu, 2016; Ates, 2016). We must acknowledge the fact that the

perception of marriage was different when compared to today. Considering that these discussions stem from the seventh and eighth centuries, the consensus on the prohibition of Muslim woman's interfaith marriage is perhaps inevitable. In that patriarchal society, when a woman marries she leaves her own family and lives with her husband's family or tribe under their religion and tradition. As such, it is almost impossible for her to retain her religious/cultural identity (Mohammed, 2012; Erdogan, 2013; Hargey, 2016).

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, earlier marriage and gender roles in families were likened to the relationship between rulers and subjects. Even the scholars' understanding of marriage was heavily influenced by the institutions of patriarchy and slavery (Ali, 2010; Azzam, 2015)[11] and also in this relationship it was the husband who dominated. Seen in this light, it is impossible for a woman to continue her religious identity and educate their children according to her religious beliefs (Ates, 2016; Tuksal, 2016). Thus, it was inevitable for scholars to unanimously interpret the silence of the Qurʾān as justification for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages (Tuksal, 2016; Bardakoglu, 2016; Hargey, 2016). Yet each rule (*fatwā)* should be considered as a product of the social context of its time (Erdogan, 2013). For this reason, relying on a *fatwā* or opinion about interfaith marriages from classical sources without reflecting on the subject in the light of the current societal needs and problems would be a deception (Erdogan, 2013; Tuksal, 2016).

[11] For more information about how Muslim scholars in early Islam conceptualised marriage using the similar statement of ownership used to describe slavery see Ali, 2010; Friedmann, 2003; Azzam, 2015.

Furthermore, Buisson (2016) argues that rather than the Quranic text, it is the Muslim community that prohibits Muslim women entering interfaith unions. As such, the consensus of Muslim scholars on the prohibition mainly depends on their understanding of marriage in that time. In addition, Mehmet Gormez, the former head of the Directorate of the Religious Affairs in Turkey, evaluates the prohibition of Muslim women's marriage and indicates that the prohibition was based on only the consensus of the Muslim jurists but not on the religious texts, the Qur'ān or *Sunna*. According to Gormez, the reason behind this consensus was the protection of Muslim women from cultural assimilation. They did not want Muslim women to be assimilated and therefore even though there is a permission for a man's marriage to a *kitabī*, they abolished this permission for Muslim women (Gormez, 2002, as cited in Eskan 2002, p.103)

With the impact of this, the arguments that classical Muslim scholars put forward to support the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages are not considered strong enough to be convincing (Ali, 2006; Abou El Fadl, 2011). For instance, in his response to a question about Muslim women's interfaith marriages, Abou Al Fadl (2011) confesses that the evidence and arguments used by Muslim jurists against Muslim women's interfaith marriages are not strong enough to be convinced. He says:

> *I am not convinced that the evidence prohibiting Muslim women from marrying a kitabī is very strong. Muslim jurists took a very strong position on this matter--many of them going as far as saying if a Muslim woman marries a kitabī she is as good as an apostate. I*

> *think, and God knows best, that this position is not reasonable and the evidence supporting it is not very strong. (Abou El Fadl, 2011)*

Similarly, in her study, Kecia Ali, a scholar focusing on the study of Islamic jurisprudence and women in early and modern Islam, emphasises the weaknesses in most arguments used by Muslim jurists against Muslim women's marriage to Jews and Christians (Ali, 2006). She specifically criticises the claim that interfaith marriage is prohibited for Muslim woman because in this marriage she cannot practise her religion. Ali (2006) argues that these arguments are not strong enough to justify the prohibition position, because in today's modern society men are not always dominant in the marriage and family, and men and women have equal rights and responsibilities. Thus, it will be correct to state that classical Muslim scholars' presumption about male supremacy in the home no longer exists and Muslim women have the same rights and freedoms to practice religion (Ali, 2006; Leeman, 2009). In other words, the main reasons and arguments used for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages no longer exist in interfaith families (Erdogan, 2013; Tuksal, 2016; Hargey, 2016; Turabi, 2006).

Considering the changes in society, and understandings of marriage, some contemporary scholars, like Hassan al-Turabi, suggest that the rule about Muslim women's interfaith marriages should be based on the individuality of each case, as it is for Muslim men's interfaith marriages (Turabi, 2006; Tuksal, 2016; Atay, 2016). Similarly, Recep Cigdem, a Turkish scholar in Islamic Law, argues that even though it would be better to marry a person from the same culture and religion

for both men and women, in some necessary conditions, they should reconsider their situation and possible difficulties of their decision and make an individual decision. He says:

> *It would be better to marry a woman or a man from the same culture and religion as suggested by the Hanafi scholars under the pretext kafā'at 'equality, suitability' (al-Marghinānī 1971, Vol. 1, pp. 200–202). Although some scholars may issue fatwās in favour of interreligious marriages, the couples should not forget that not only they but also their respective families and friends are involved in the marriage. As the prophet said, 'ask your heart' (Ahmed b. Hanbel 1992: Musnad 4: 228): if you are ready to challenge religious, legal and social issues, go ahead with your love. Otherwise think twice.*
>
> *One who has no choice other than marriage may follow the view of the scholars who permit such marriage. To put it another way, the marriage of a Muslim woman to an ahl al-kitāb man can be considered valid in dire necessity conditions. (Cigdem, 2015, p.82)*

2.3. Interfaith Marriage and Gender Equality:

Contemporary Muslim scholars also discuss the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriage in terms of gender equality (Lamrabet, 2013; Tuksal, 2016; Hargey, 2016; Atay, 2016; Ates, 2016; Imam Mustafa, 2016). First, they focus on the contradiction in the classical Muslim scholars' interpretation of Q. 2:221. As mentioned in the previous section, when exegetes explain the prohibition, they refer to the term 'disbelievers, *mushriks*' men, which is stated in Q. 2:221, as it encompasses both polytheists and the People of the Book (Sabuni, 1980). However, in the case of Muslim men's interfaith marriages, Christian and Jewish women are mainly considered as believers (Sabuni, 1980). The scholars who

discuss the permissibility of interfaith marriage for Muslim women point out this contradiction and criticise the traditional opinion. Lamrabet (2013) criticises the classical interpretation of the verse and says that it is not rational while women in the Christian and Jewish community are viewed as believers, men of the same religious community are not viewed as believers. She emphasizes that the Qurʾān sets the same rules, using an egalitarian language in Q. 2:221 (Lamrabet, 2013). In this context, it is suitable to say that the Qurʾān encourages both Muslim men and women to marry believers and allows Muslim men to marry *ahl al-kitāb* women since they are considered as believers in Islam. From this point of view, Hargey (2016) argues that as a gender-equal religion, the same rights in terms of marriage to the *ahl al-kitāb* should be given to Muslim women.

Furthermore, regarding the silence of the Qurʾān on Muslim women's interfaith marriages, Khaleel Mohammed (2012) argues that this silence stems from the cultural and social circumstances of the day. Accordingly, the Qurʾān is deliberately silent on the subject because in the seventh-century's androcentric society explicit permission would be harmful for Muslim women. However, the Qurʾān is a 'prophetic book' and it is supposed to be relevant for all time (Mohammed, 2012; Hargey, 2016). Taj Hargey (2016), a Muslim imam who performs religious marriage ceremonies in Muslim women's interfaith marriages, argues that the Qurʾān left the rule about Muslim women's interfaith marriages ambiguous so that scholars and jurists will interpret the verse flexibly in response to the needs of time and space (Hargey, 2016). Thus, it is possible to say that the lack of an explicit prohibition against interfaith marriage between Muslim women

and Jewish and Christian men suggests that permission for these marriages may be granted in certain circumstances today (Leeman, 2009).

Moreover, during our personal conversation, Imam Mustafa[12] who performs religious wedding ceremonies for Muslim women and non-Muslim men in the UK, discussed Muslim women's interfaith marriages in terms of one of the fundamental principles of Islam which is the idea that 'there is no compulsion in religion' (Q. 2:256) and gender equality. He argued that while Islam respects a non-Muslim wife's religious beliefs and gives freedom of religion to her in their marriage, according to the traditional Muslim scholars, the only way to get married to a Muslim woman is through conversion (Eskan, 2007; Dalgin, 2005). Thus, if a non-Muslim man wants to marry a Muslim woman he must convert to Islam before the marriage (Eskan, 2007; Shaikh Ramzy, 2016). Imam Mustafa (2016) expressed that that there is a fundamental principle in Islam regarding conversion and a person cannot be forced to change their religion in any way. If a non-Muslim man does not sincerely want to convert to Islam, and he does so just for the marriage, his conversion would be nominal. In the worst case scenario, it would also lead to hypocrisy in the beginning of the marriage, which goes against Islamic principles (Imam Mustafa, 2016). He said, 'I had a lot of *nikah* (marriage ceremonies), where the men take the *shahāda* (the Muslim declaration of faith) but it was clear that it was just a lip-saying… I felt I was forcing him and it is not right…' (Imam Mustafa, 2016). It must be acknowledged that, as an imam who performs religious ceremonies for Muslim women's interfaith marriages, Imam

[12] The name is pseudonymous as the imam did not want to be named in the study.

Mustafa's experiences are important to understand the subject from different perspectives. At this point his arguments related to compulsory conversion of a non-Muslim man right before or after the marriage shows us another aspect of Muslim women's interfaith marriages to be considered. During our interview, he stated his experiences with a Hindu man who wanted to marry a Muslim woman in order to explain the importance of the subject and show the contradiction in the traditional understanding and practice of conversion in the context of Muslim's interfaith marriages:

> *Sometimes I compromise because a Muslim family wants the guy to convert, to say shahāda and the other side say no, not to be forced... In one case, a Muslim woman and Hindu man came to me, they wanted to get married. Hindu man said at first, even in principle, he would recite the shahāda, he believed in one God and he had no problem with believing in the prophet. But later, his sister had married a Muslim man. He said his sister married a Muslim man and his [Muslim man] family did not force their daughter-in-law to become a Muslim. So, he said, why are you forcing me to become a Muslim? (Imam Mustafa, 2016)*

Apart from the counterarguments of scholars about Muslim women's interfaith marriages, it is important to indicate that even though many Muslim scholars have started to criticise the consensus on the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages and tried to show the weakness of their arguments in recent years, some scholars are wary and careful in their attitudes towards interfaith marriages of women. For instance Lamrabet (2013) and Khalid Abou al Fadl (2011) emphasise that their discussion and critiques about the traditional Muslim

scholars' attitudes and opinions about Muslim women's interfaith marriages is not meant to encourage young Muslim women to marry out of their faith or disregard family tradition. Lamrabet (2013) points out that her main aim in these discussions is to overcome taboos and uncover hypocritical social practices against Muslim women. In addition, they state that marriage is a decision that individuals should make by considering the priority in their lives and is not an issue to argue about in theoretical terms (Turabi, 2006). Especially for Muslim women, this is a matter of freedom of choice (Nomani, 2009). Furthermore, Abou El-Fadl (2011) maintains that it is not appropriate to accuse a Muslim woman who has married a non-Muslim of having committed a grave sin or to consider her as an apostate. He states that even though he does not advise someone to marry out of their faith, he also does not believe that those who have done so should be considered as an apostate. He says:

> *I am not comfortable telling a Muslim woman marrying a kitabī that she is committing a grave sin and that she must terminate her marriage immediately. I do tell such a woman that she should know that by being married to a kitabī that she is acting against the weight of the consensus; I tell her what the evidence is; and then I tell her my own ijtihad on the matter that it is makrūh [disapproved] for both men and women in non-Muslim countries. (Abou El Fadl, 2011)*

2.4. Conclusion and Discussion:

There is no doubt that the regulation of interfaith marriages in Islam and Muslim women's interfaith marriages is a broad subject which requires further research.

However, in order to gain a better understanding of Muslim women's interfaith marriages, it is important to see the scholars' arguments for and against these marriages and how classical and contemporary Muslim scholars discuss the subject. Thus, in this chapter, I have attempted to briefly explain how traditional Muslim scholars have approached the question of Muslim women's interfaith marriages in Islam. Then I have discussed the disagreement of contemporary Muslim scholars with traditional attitudes that it is forbidden for Muslim women to marry any non-Muslims.

In reviewing classical and modern Islamic resources it is clear that since early Islam, when Muslim scholars discuss interfaith marriages, they have mainly focused on the permissibility, or otherwise, of Muslim men's marriage to non-Muslims; in comparison with the prohibition of Muslim women marrying a non-Muslim. Accordingly, it is forbidden for either Muslim men or women to marry polytheists *(mushriks)* and both are encouraged to marry believers. Muslim scholars identify the 'believers' whom Muslim men can marry as *ahl al-kitāb* women, because of the clear statement in the Qurʾān, verse 5:5, and discuss the extent to which the definition of the '*ahl al-kitāb'* can be used to understand whether Muslim men can marry non-Muslim women living in newly conquered territories where they are not familiar with the local religion. Even though there is permission within the Qurʾān for Muslim men to marry out of their faith, Islamic scholars have discouraged men, especially those who were living in non-Muslim countries, from marrying non-Muslim women. On the other hand, they did not need to discuss whether a Muslim woman could marry a *kitabī* man. This

is because according to traditional Muslim scholars the term 'believers' does not refer to *ahl al-kitāb* men and encompasses only Muslim men when it comes to Muslim women's marriage. Thus, when they discussed Muslim women's interfaith marriages, they would maintain their arguments for the proscription of these marriages. This is mainly because of the fact that, in a patriarchal society, where the man has power over his wife in the family and the woman has a duty to obey her husband and leave her own family upon marriage – attitudes that are fundamentally different to those that prevail today – the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man was not acceptable.

Furthermore, subsequent Muslim scholars continued to refer to previous opinions on the subject and used the same arguments on Muslim women's interfaith marriages in their explanation for the prohibition. Thus, there has been a consensus among scholars on the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages. Surprisingly, in Islamic jurisprudence, there is no opposing view mentioned in classical Islamic resources, even though there is no explicit permission or prohibition in the Qurʾān. Notably, while Muslim men's interfaith marriages have been discussed since the seventh century, and in light of changes in societies, neither early nor contemporary traditional Islamic scholars have felt the need to reconsider the issues related to Muslim women's interfaith marriage. During my research, it appears that many classical and contemporary Muslim scholars prefer not to discuss the subject or repeat the previous opinions and act as if the issue is immutable or unchangeable. When jurists or scholars mention Muslim women's interfaith marriages in their works, they barely discuss the

arguments as to why interfaith marriage is not permissible for Muslim women. Interestingly, as seen above, the conditions that scholars ask Muslim men to fulfil before getting married to a non-Muslim are similar to their arguments for the prohibition of Muslim women's marriage to non-Muslims. While they advise Muslim men to consider some issues in their marriages, such as having a halal household, which does not have anything against Islamic law, and raising their children as Muslim, giving the same advice and imposing the same requirement for Muslim women living in a non-Muslim country if they want to marry a non-Muslim man is not considered to be an acceptable solution.

On the other hand, those scholars who discuss the permissibility of Muslim women's interfaith marriages mainly focus on the egalitarian aspect of Islam and the changes in understanding of marriage in today's modern societies. Accordingly, if Islam permits Muslim men to marry *ahl al-kitāb* women and identify them as believers, then Muslim women can also marry *ahl al-kitāb* men since they are believers the same as *kitabī* women. In addition, according to a basic principle of Islamic jurisprudence[13], the applicability of a rule can be changed through the years and so should be reconsidered to reflect the changing needs of society. Surprisingly, while this basic principle is considered in the discussion of Muslim men's interfaith marriages, when it comes to Muslim women's interfaith marriages scholars changed their attitudes and did not consider the subject according to this rule. It would be correct to state that these

[13] 'It is an accepted fact that the terms of law vary with the change in the times' (the Mejelle, 39), which is stated in the Mejelle, the Ottoman Court manual, as one of the maxims of the Islamic jurisprudence (Tyser et al., 2001).

scholars treat interfaith marriage as an entirely religious phenomenon, however it seems to me that we cannot consider marriage as a religious phenomenon in isolation and we need to think about its social aspect as well. However, the traditional scholars want instead to keep the rules and opinions from the seventh century and ask Muslim women to apply these rule, even though the understanding of marriage is totally different in today's societies.

Scholars who advocate the permissibility of these marriages emphasise that Muslim women living in Western countries enjoy the same rights as their husbands and freedom of religion as one of the essential rights in today's society. So, the decision to marry is a personal choice and Muslim women should evaluate the issue and decide what is appropriate for them. This is because they are the first group who will be affected by these marriages (Turabi, 2006). If a Muslim woman thinks that this marriage is suitable for her, and discusses with her prospective spouse in advance that her religious and cultural identities will not be an issue between them and they will respect each other, then she can marry an *ahl al-kitāb* man. In fact, regardless of gender, having a common interest at the intellectual and spiritual level strengthened by mutual respect towards other's beliefs and traditions is essential for a happy and successful marriage. Thus, in today's society, the ruling of contemporary scholars that marital choice should be left to the individual perhaps carries more weight, and is more closely reasoned through a reinterpretation of the texts.

At this point, I should state that social conditions of the time underlie the traditional understanding of the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith

marriages. There are circumstances where the reason for forbidding the interfaith marriages no longer exist and the modernists' arguments work; whereas there are also different circumstances where the traditional position is more appropriate. Therefore, when asked to consider the validity of either traditional or the modernist interpretation of the regulation of women's interfaith marriage in Islam, it is suitable to conclude that both arguments are equally valid in their certain conditions and cultures. In this context, under the traditional understanding of marriage and the husbands' role/position in a marriage, the attitudes of early Muslim scholars towards Muslim women's marriages can be considered rational, given this context. Thus, it is inevitable to have a consensus on prohibition of interfaith marriage in order to protect Muslim woman. Notably, even though the understanding of marriage is different in modern societies, a majority of the Muslim scholars do not want to consider these changes in terms of Muslim women's interfaith marriages and continue the early Muslim scholars' opinion on the subject. So, the consensus for the prohibition has continued throughout the years. However, it is important to emphasise that, as scholars indicate, marriage is not a purely religious phenomenon that can be discussed solely in theory. Even if a society or religious scholars allow or advise people to get married to a specific group of people, if they do not respect each other's cultural identity it will be difficult to make the marriage work, and neither women nor men should attempt to marry a person from these groups.

To sum up, in views of the arguments both against and for Muslim women's interfaith marriages, my position is that the discussions of Muslim women's interfaith marriages are similar to previous discussions on the marriage of Muslim convert women. The majority of scholars, contemporary and traditional, have considered the traditional rules and consensus about the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages as a certain truth which is not appropriate to review and discuss again. We can see the impact of this understanding in their position on converted Muslim women (Al-Judai, 2004), that they agreed that since Muslim women cannot marry a non-Muslim, a Muslim converted woman also cannot continue her marriage if her husband retains his religion. So, she has to divorce and leave the family (Ibn Qudamah, 1984). The traditional, conservative scholars have forced the convert women to make a choice between their religion and family depending on the consensus among scholars and have ignored the emotional and practical difficulties that this ruling created for them. After all, when scholars see the difficulties that Muslim women face because of this rule, and the respectful relationships that exist between converted Muslim women and spouses, they started to think about reconsidering the traditional rule (Al-Judai, 2004). For instance, as a result of his comprehensive research on the subject Abdullah al-Judai (2004) concludes that if some certain conditions exist in the marriage and a converted Muslim woman wants to stay with her husband then she does not have to divorce. In addition, The European Council for Fatwa and Research received a question about converted Muslim women's marriages and the difficulties they face (Al-Toma, 2017), and then it has

reconsidered the subject and changed the earlier *fatwā* in favour of converted Muslim women (Imam, 2001; Hasan, 2012; Al-Toma, 2017). Even though the *fatwā* caused a controversy among many Muslim scholars (Al-Siba'i, 2001), the council acknowledges the condition in which a married woman in the Western countries find themselves when they decide to convert to Islam but their husband chooses to remain with his religion[14]. I think that the issue of Muslim women's interfaith marriages will follow the same path; the number of interreligiously married Muslim women has increased in Western countries and these marriages will be more common in 5-10 years (Imam Mustafa, 2016; Hargey, 2016). Therefore, even though most Muslim scholars are hesitant to reconsider the issue and prefer to ignore it today, they will inevitably have to reconsider it, for the sake of the Muslim communities and Muslim women living in Western countries.

[14] For more information about the discussions on the issue and different opinions, see Qaradawi, 2003; Al-Judai, 2004; Hasan, 2012; Bin Bayyah, 2012.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will provide an overview of the research methodology used to fulfil the aforementioned research objectives of the study. It will discuss the methodological framework adopted to the study during the creation of the research design and analysing the data. In order to contextualize the research the chapter first introduces how the research methodology has guided data collection and which sampling methodology has been used to recruit the participants, as well as background information about the research sites. It also provides the detailed information about the participants interviewed. The chapter additionally assesses the role of the researcher in the fieldwork (the insider/outsider debate) and the ethical issues which arose during the research process. Lastly, the method used for the data analysis is also discussed in the chapter.

3.1 Research Design

A research design presents a framework that guides the researcher in the different stages of a study (Frankfort-Nachmias, Chava, Nachmias, 2000). For the purpose of this research, I used a qualitative approach which is particularly suited for exploring an area of study in which research is lacking or where much of the research work has been derived from concepts and theory from other areas.

A qualitative research methodology was useful in the study for two main reasons. Firstly, the qualitative approach is an excellent method for investigating family relationships (Ganong and Coleman, 2014). In this research, the main focus was Muslim women in interfaith marriages, including their experiences related to marriage and particularly how religious differences in their marriages impact their religious identity and family lives. Thus, qualitative research was more appropriate than quantitative research for this topic, as it focused on participants' perceptions and experiences and allowed for the exploration of their feelings and experiences (Creswell, 2014). Secondly, qualitative research allows individuals to share their stories (Creswell, 2007). This study was interested not only in how religious differences affect interfaith marriages, but also how these marriages impact on women's relationships with their families and communities, and how they reacted to the woman's decision to have an interfaith marriage. Therefore, qualitative research presented additional insights allowing for a better understanding of the personal experiences of Muslim women in interfaith marriages as well as social groups, such as family and friends, that affected these individuals both before and/or after their marriage (Creswell and Clark, 2011). In summary, qualitative research methods provide a platform to elicit rich data through the use of various techniques, such as interviews, observational methods and so on. Thus, by using qualitative methods, this study was able to capture information and understanding of the complex issues of interfaith marriage.

3.2 Method and Execution of the Field Work

Qualitative research encapsulates various methods, such as interviews, focus groups and observations, for collecting information. In this research, in-depth interviews were used as a tool for researching Muslim women's perceptions about interfaith marriages (Mellor et al., 2013). The main purpose of qualitative interviews is to understand and interpret participants' thoughts and conceptions of the research subject (Bremborg, 2011). In this research, conducting interviews allowed me to access detailed information about the intermarried Muslim women's experiences of marriage, such as how religious differences affect their family lives and relationship with their husbands, and to meet the key aims of this study. Further, conducting interviews with intermarried Muslim women is also of particular significance, because, as discussed in the previous chapter, classical Islamic views discuss interfaith marriages in terms of Muslim men's marriage to non-Muslim women and they neglect intermarried Muslim women and their experiences.

The field work for this research was completed over three periods. First of all, I applied for ethical approval for my study and my application accepted by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Committee on March 2016. The ethical implications of this research are discussed comprehensively further in the chapter, in section 3.8. After obtaining the ethical approval, I conducted the first group of interviews with intermarried Muslim women with whom I had met during my initial field work preparation between April and July 2016. I came to realise that the summer period was not an appropriate time to contact

intermarried women to continue the interviews, since potential participants were either abroad to visit their home countries or on holiday with their families. In October 2016, I attended a Muslim-Christian Marriage Support Group meeting in London which is discussed in detail in the previous chapter. This meeting was a good opportunity for me to identify and interact with potential participants. In the meeting, there were eight couples and three of them were not married, but were planning to get married soon. In addition, two Christian women whose fiancés were Muslims also attended to the meeting. Among the attendees there were three Muslim women married to non-Muslim men, two of whom consented to be participants. After the meeting, I contacted these two women who showed their willingness to participate in the research, by phone, and arranged an appointment for an interview in London. I conducted the second group of my interviews between October and December 2016. Although the majority of the interviews conducted with intermarried Muslim women from different ethnicities[15] were completed by January 2017 in the UK, I continued to invite additional intermarried Muslim women from different ethnic backgrounds in order to attain balanced interview data in terms of ethnicity. I received positive responses from three women, two of whom were White-British and one British-Pakistani. I interviewed these participants after January 2017, and completed my field research in various cities of the UK on July 2017.

[15] In the following section of the chapter, detailed information about the participants and their ethnicity will be introduced.

3.3 Research Sites

According to the 2011 Census Report by the Office for National Statistics, Muslims are the second largest religious group in the United Kingdom with 2.7 million people (4.8% of the population), after Christians who constitute 59% of the population (Office for National Statistics, 2012). The Muslim population is overwhelmingly concentrated in a few cities in the UK, and the highest Muslim population lives in London. According to the Census, the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Newham have the largest Muslim proportion of local population, with Muslims respectively constituting 34.5% and 32.0% of the total borough population. There are also several areas outside London in which Muslims constitute more than a fifth of the area population. These include Bradford in Yorkshire (24.7%), Luton in the South of England (24.6%), and Birmingham in the West Midlands (21.8%). Also, according to the Birmingham Population and Migration Topic Report (2013) there are some areas of Birmingham where the overall proportion of Muslims is more than half the population. For instance, in Washwood Heath (77.3%), Bordesley Green (73.9%) and Sparkbrook (70.2%) more than 70% of the population identify themselves as Muslim (Birmingham City Council, 2013).

Prior to the start of the field study, Birmingham was selected as the only research site for this project. Birmingham had been chosen mainly because it has an ethnically diverse Muslim community with a wide spectrum of people from countries in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe in addition to British-born Muslims (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Indeed, Birmingham is

considered to have the second most diverse Muslim community in the UK after London. However, restricting the study only to Birmingham proved to be challenging. During my initial fieldwork in Birmingham, only two intermarried Muslim women accepted to participate in the study. Although three other Muslim women expressed interest in the study through my friends, they did not respond to emails. Therefore, to access more participants, I extended the research site to include all areas in the UK. This would allow me to reach a wider and more diverse group of eligible participants. Although the majority of the participants were from London, Manchester and Birmingham, there were also participants from Bristol, Leicester, Oxford and Sheffield.

3.4 Background Population and Sampling Method

Identification of the sources of information, which are also called the unit of analysis, is pivotal in qualitative research studies. For this study, the unit of analysis was intermarried women who identified as Muslim and were married to a non-Muslim man who does not follow Islam, whether he believes in another religion or is not affiliated with any religions.

Consistent with the qualitative approach, participants were recruited through a combination of the 'purposive sampling' and 'snowball' techniques. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which 'the researcher selects individuals because they are available, convenient and represent some characteristic the investigator seeks to study' (Creswell, 2012). In this sampling method, the researcher thinks critically about the criterion of the population they

are studying and chooses their samples carefully on this basis (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008). The main aim of this type of sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest rather than to make generalisations to the whole population, an approach which will best enable one to answer research questions and to identify interesting themes for further study (Blaikie, 2009).

In a study which requires using purposive sampling technique it may be difficult to determine at the beginning of the study how many people the researcher needs to contact (Dawson, 2009). At this stage, I was concerned about having a decent sample size, which is difficult to determine since it depends on many factors such as the type and purpose of the study and the characteristics of potential participants (Dawson, 2009). Considering these factors, I aimed to ensure that intermarried Muslim women from different ethnic backgrounds were represented in the sample of the research. Therefore, I contacted various Muslim organisations and online groups. These groups were social forums which were open to the public and included people from different ethnic backgrounds.

In order to access potential eligible interviewees, I approached wide variety of organisations and groups whose members could have experiences of interfaith relationships and marriage. Specifically, I contacted Muslim-Christian and Interfaith Marriage Support Group (MC Marriage), Interfaith Marriage Network, Nisa-Nashim-Jewish Muslim Women's Network, Christian-Muslim Forum, British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD) Facebook Group, Muslims for Progressive

Values (MPV) Facebook Group , Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI)[16]; and Muslim community centres, including the London Central Mosque Trust & The Islamic Cultural Centre, Muslim Welfare House in London, Birmingham Central Mosque, Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford (MECO) and Islamic Foundation – Leicester. Even though I approached nearly twenty different groups, it was very difficult to make headway. I was able to both receive positive replies from and reach eligible potential interviewees through some of these organisations and groups, including MC Marriage Support Group, BMSD Facebook Group, MECO and Islamic Foundation in Leicester. From the remaining organisations and groups, I either received negative responses indicating that they did not know of any Muslim women who were married to a non-Muslim, or my emails remained unanswered.

Among the mentioned organizations, Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford (MECO) was different than the others as Dr. Taj Hargey, the director of the centre, is the only imam in the UK who openly performs religious marriage ceremony for Muslim women who want to marry a non-Muslim man (Bardsley, 2009; Hargey, 2016). Therefore, I thought the centre might help me to meet more intermarried Muslim women for my study. I first contacted the centre via email and they accepted my appointment request. They arranged for me to attend an interfaith wedding of a Muslim woman near London and also gave me

[16] These groups (BMSD, MPV, and IMI) identified themselves as progressive. They are large groups and have many interfaith couples, particularly Muslim women are married to non-Muslim men. I contacted them as they do not hold views opposed to Muslim women's interfaith marriages and they might help me to contact intermarried Muslim women willing to help me.

a contact detail of an interreligiously married Muslim woman who accepted to participate in my research.

Furthermore, I also advertised my study on Twitter and a personal blog named 'My Life as An Imposter', created by one of the interviewees which discussed various topics such as interfaith relationships, feminism, love and politics. She kindly posted a blog post about my research and encouraged intermarried Muslim women to contact me. Later on, when I asked her about the feedback to her blog post, she stated that although she got many messages on her previous blog posts on interfaith marriages, she only had one or two emails regarding the post about my research from women who were probably dating someone out of their religion and seeking advice.

In addition, although the Facebook and Twitter posts on this research elicited many comments, I received only three responses from intermarried Muslim women who were interested in participating in my study. However, among these women, one woman was based in South Africa and since the focus area of the research is UK I could not conduct an interview with her. So, I interviewed two of the intermarried Muslim women who responded to my request for help.

As discussed earlier, I contacted the Muslim-Christian Marriage Support Group UK as well regarding my research and requested help in identifying and reaching intermarried Muslim women. They were very helpful and invited me to a meeting they had organised for interfaith couples in London. In that meeting, interfaith couples, who were either married or in the process of getting married, came

together to share their experiences and hear about other married couples' experiences being an interfaith couple. During the meeting, I also briefly talked about my research and its aims. There were three intermarried Muslim women who attended with their non-Muslim husbands. At the end of the meeting, I talked to them in person and enquired whether they were willing to participate in my study. Two of them, whose husbands were Christians, agreed to participate.

Further to the aforementioned methods, I employed a snowball technique to access intermarried Muslim women. Snowball technique is a technique that allows a researcher to reach new research participants through existing participants (Vogt, 1999). This technique is especially beneficial for studies focusing on rare or sensitive situations in which the participants are hidden or hard to contact (Atkinson and Flint, 2001; Bremborg, 2011). Since the focus of this research involves the sensitive topic of marriage and Muslim women's interfaith marriages, something which is considered unacceptable from a classical Islamic view, and indeed among many contemporary Muslims, accessing intermarried Muslim women was challenging since eligible participants form a small, and in some cases, hidden group within Muslim communities. They do not want it to be known by everyone that their husbands are non-Muslim. Therefore, a snowball technique was useful in accessing potential participants. In order to contact intermarried Muslim women, I started with one or two personal contacts or organisations in each of the cities. Each of these individuals was asked whether they knew someone who might agree to be interviewed for the study. If these individuals knew anyone, I requested them to talk to the potential interviewees

about my study and ask them, on my behalf, whether they might be interested to participate. If they agreed, the gatekeepers provided me with their contact information. The same procedure was repeated with the next interviewee, who then asked the next respondent. Wiles *et al*. (2005) argue that in social research gatekeepers have an important role in determining 'the ways in which potential participants are informed about the study and the process of consent, which may influence potential participants' willingness to participate' (Wiles et al., 2005, p.19). Likewise, the gatekeepers played an important role in my research to access the potential participants and inform them about the study. In addition, using the interviewees as gatekeepers was also helpful in encouraging other prospective participants to participate in my study as they had attended to the study as well.

3.5 Interviews

In qualitative research, there are three prevalent interview techniques: structured, unstructured and semi-structured (Kumar, 2010). While structured interviews require questions to be predetermined and formatted, unstructured interviews give complete freedom regarding the content and succession of the discussion (Kumar, 2010). On the other hand, in semi-structured interviews, questions are more loosely worded than those of structured interviews, to allow for flexibility (Merriam, 2009). Although these interviews involve a framework consisting of some themes that should be touched upon as well as an interview guide (protocol), the flexible structure allows the interviewer to raise additional issues and questions during the interview (Bremborg, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study. Using both some predetermined questions and other more loosely-worded questions, ensured that the interviews remained within the parameters of my research and also that in-depth information about the Muslim women's interfaith marriages was extracted. A semi-structured interview format additionally allowed participants and me as the researcher the flexibility to expand on the specific questions proposed in the interview protocol. Also, the answers were kept open-ended to allow the interviewees to explain their experiences and elaborate on the opinions which they wished to share.

In the study, the participants were informed about the research in detail before asking for their consent to take part. A Participant Information Sheet was prepared and sent to the participants prior to giving their definitive consent for participating in the study (see Appendix I). By doing so, both the aims and objectives of the research, together with the details about the data collection process, were explained to the participants.

Before commencing the interview, participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Sheet that outlined what participation in the project involved (see Appendix II). The Informed Consent explained that the study was voluntary, and that individuals had the right to decline answering questions they did not wish to talk about, and withdraw from the study at any time up until a month after their interview, as the transcription and analysis of their interview was completed within a month.

Interviews were conducted in a convenient location identified by the interviewees. Some women chose to be interviewed at their home during daytime while their husband and children were at work and school respectively. Others preferred to meet at a café close to their workplace.

As will be discussed further, some participants are Turkish. Depending on participants' preferences, interviews with Turkish intermarried women were carried out in both Turkish and English. Interviews with non-Turkish speakers were conducted in English. The majority of Turkish women felt more comfortable speaking in Turkish. Only two of the ten Turkish speaking participants preferred using English in the interview. As a researcher and a native Turkish speaker, I encouraged the Turkish participants to use the language that they were most comfortable with to ensure that they could express their opinions and experiences easily.

I conducted one interview with each participant, which lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. To ensure the accuracy of the data collected, the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. All the participants accepted to be recorded. After each interview, I listened to the audio recording and took notes regarding the interviews on the same day. Then I transcribed the interview for analysis. When transcribing the interviews, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect their identity and maintain their confidentiality. Pseudonyms, rather than actual names, were also used during the data analysis and the discussion of the findings in the following chapters of the study.

During the interviews, the participants were open and willing to share their views and experiences on interfaith marriage. They all stated that they had readily accepted my invitation to take part in the study because they thought that this subject should be talked about and discussed by Muslims, especially by Muslim communities in Western countries, and that more Muslim women's voices are needed in this context.

In the study, interviews focused on gathering information about being in an interfaith marriage from the perspective of Muslim women. Semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions grouped into four main themes (for the interview template used during the interviews see Appendix III). First, the interviews began with introductory questions which were about the demographic profiles of both the participants and their husbands. To put the interviewees at ease in the interview setting, the interviewees were asked non-controversial questions which enquired about their age, ethnicity, how long they have been married for, and their husbands' ethnicity and religious belief. The second group of questions were mainly focused on the interviewees' experiences of interfaith marriage. This section included questions on how the couples met each other, how their families reacted to their decision to marry, as well as the interviewees' way to deal with their families' reactions before and after their marriage. These questions were important to understand the background of the decision of marrying a non-Muslim man and to explain families' impact on Muslim women and their attitudes towards Muslim women's interfaith marriages. In the third group of questions I mainly focused on the impact of interfaith marriage on

Muslim women's religiosity and family lives. These questions specifically enquired about whether the interviewees had faced any challenges in their marriage pertaining to religious differences in their family, and if so what were the strategies they used to handle these religious differences. In the final group of questions my focus was on children's religious education, and the questions revolved around having children in an interfaith marriage. Those who had a child were asked about their attitudes towards providing religious education to their child, while others were asked about their opinions and plans on providing religious education to their prospective children and raising them in an interfaith family.

3.6 Study Participants

Nineteen intermarried Muslim women were interviewed in semi-structured interviews to identify the impact of religious differences on their relationship with their husbands as well as their experiences of marriage. Table A in Appendix IV gives brief information on each participant along with their age, occupation, length of marriage, and the religious affiliation of their husband.

In this research, to enrich the research data I aimed to access intermarried Muslim women from different national backgrounds (see Table 1). The participants' self-definitions were used for ascertaining nationality. As Table 1 shows, in the study ten participants were Turkish. Of the remaining participants, four were British-Pakistani, two were White-British, and three were British-Indian, Indian and Malaysian, respectively.

Table 1: Nationalities of study participants

Nationality	Number of Participants
Turkish	10
British-Pakistani	4
White-British	2
British-Indian	1
Indian	1
Malaysian	1
TOTAL:	19

Notably, as discussed further below, the majority of the participants were of Turkish-origin. In my opinion, this was due to the fact that Turkish intermarried Muslim women tended to be more connected to other intermarried Turkish women and the Turkish community. Hence, the Turkish interviewees were more likely to identify further eligible participants who might accept to be interviewed for the study. On the other hand, during the study it appeared that non-Turkish intermarried Muslim women did not have many good connections with their communities or other intermarried Muslim women. From my point of view, the main reason for this lack of connection was the attitudes of these women's communities towards them and their interfaith marriage. Since interfaith marriage of Muslim women is not permissible among the majority of Muslim people it is likely for Muslim women to either be ostracised by their communities after their marriage to a non-Muslim man, or to minimise their interactions with both their community and other Muslim communities to avoid potential criticism

against their marriage[17]. Therefore, only one non-Turkish interviewee, Zahra, was able to refer me to other intermarried Muslim women who might be interested in participating in my study. Thus, despite my all efforts to access intermarried Muslim women from different ethnic backgrounds, Turkish participants constituted the majority of the participants in the study.

At the time of the interview, the average age of the participants was 38 years, while overall the ages ranged between 26 and 51 years. As Table 2 shows, more than half of the participants (10 out of 19) were between 31 and 41 years of age, and 89.5% of the participants (17 out of 19) were older than 30 years of age.

Table 2: Age distribution of the participants

Age Range in Years	Number of Participants
26-30	2
31-41	10
42-51	7
TOTAL:	19

In addition, the length of time the participants had lived in the UK differ. As Table 3 illustrates, the majority of the participants (79%) were either born and raised in the UK (6 out of 19) or had been living in the UK for more than 10 years (11 out of 19). Among the participants, two women two had moved to the UK for educational reasons before their marriage and another two women stated that they moved to the UK after they had met their husband and married.

[17] The participants' experiences regarding other peoples' attitudes in their community towards the interfaith marriage will be discussed in the following chapter.

Table 3: Distribution of the participants according to the length of time residing in the UK

Years	Number of Participants
<5	1
5-10	1
11-20	9
+20	2
Born and Raised in the UK	6
TOTAL:	19

Six out of nineteen participants first moved from Turkey to the UK to work and also to enhance their English language skills, and four participants came to the UK to seek higher education at undergraduate or postgraduate levels. All participants had attained at least an undergraduate degree, and five had completed postgraduate degrees. All participants, except for one, were in employment. The majority of the participants (18 out of 19) had professional employment; namely doctor, teacher, project manager, designer, and the remaining one was a cashier in a super-market.

The husbands of the participants were mostly White-British (11 out of 19). The remaining husbands were from different ethnic origins which were South Asian-British, Hong Kong-British (Chinese), Dutch, Spanish, Greek, Italian, Nigerian and South African. In addition, religious affiliation of the husbands also differed widely. In the study, I used broad definition of the term *non-Muslim* who is 'a person who does not follow the religion of Islam' (Collins English Dictionary, 2018). Therefore, I included the husbands who do not follow Islam whether they believe in another religion or are not affiliated with any religions, and the

husbands who are identified as an atheist or agnostic are also included as they do not follow Islam. In the study two participants indicated that their husbands were not affiliated with any religion. Also, two of the husbands were identified to be atheists. Lastly, while one husband was identified as Jewish, the majority of the participants identified their husbands as Christian (12 out of 19). However, although 12 Muslim women stated that their husbands were Christian, only three husbands were identified as 'practicing' Christians by their wives. Other Muslim women identified their husbands as 'non-practicing' culturally Christians. Table 4 illustrates the participants' husbands' religious self-identification.

Table 4: Religious affiliation of husbands

Religious Identification	Number of Participants
Christian	12
Agnostic	3
Atheist	1
Jewish	1
Not Affiliated	2
TOTAL:	19

Furthermore, at the time of the interviews, the average marriage duration for the participants was 9 years with a range of 2 months to 25 years, with 11 out of 19 participants having been married for 5 years or less. One participant, who was in her second marriage, had been married only for 2 months (see Table 5).

Table 5: Years of marriage

Years	Number of Participants
<1	1
1-5	10
6-10	2
11-15	2
16-20	2
20+	2
TOTAL:	19

Lastly, the majority of the participants (11 out of 19) had either one or two children. Two women were pregnant with their first child at the time of the interview. Six of the participants did not have children, including the women who was in her second marriage. Although she had children from her first marriage, I included her in the group of women who did not have a child at the time of the study, since she did not have any children with her non-Muslim husband. Note that her first marriage, from which she had children, was to a Muslim man.

3.7 Role of the Researcher

Wellington *et al.* (2005) emphasise that the researcher's background, including her social position and resulting perspectives, influences her research interests, the way she designs her research, her methodological preferences, as well as her interpretation of the results. Thus, the positionality of the researcher plays an important role in the research process (England, 1994). In this context, my personality, culture, experiences and beliefs have inevitably had an impact on the research I designed, particularly regarding the way I conducted the research and drew inferences from the study.

As a Muslim woman conducting research on Muslim women's marriages, the participants perceived me as an 'insider' who shares characteristics and experiences with study participants (Corbin and Buckle, 2009), because we had a shared religious background, and for Turkish participants we had a shared ethnicity too. Being an 'insider' allows a researcher to be more readily accepted by the participants, an advantage which can help the researcher easily access more participants and attain a deeper understanding of the sample population (Kanuha, 2000). This is because participants may be more open in explaining their views and feelings to an insider. As mentioned, when I talked to potential participants and gatekeepers about my research, they were very interested in the study. Indeed, they all agreed that more female voices needed to be vocalised and heard, and that the subject was of topical interest to Muslim communities in which there is a need to reconsider and discuss the traditional religious rulings on Muslim women's interfaith marriages. Therefore, they willingly accepted my invitation and shared their experiences.

On the other hand, my positionality as a Muslim woman doing research related to religion had some disadvantages. During the field work, when some intermarried Muslim women heard that I am a Muslim woman conducting research in a university's Department of Theology and Religion, they thought that the research would evaluate the level of their religiosity. Even though I explained that this was not the case, some of the women were not convinced. When gatekeepers asked intermarried Muslim women whether they might be interested to participate in this study, some women rejected the request and declared that although they

were Muslim, they were not practicing Islam, and therefore they had nothing to contribute.

Although I had explained the purpose of my research prior to each interview, I had a sense that some of the interviewees were hesitant to explain their feelings or opinions on some issues related to religion and religious practice. However, they became more relaxed and open with their views after I had reassured them that they would remain anonymous and that there would be no references at all that reveal their identities in the research. Further, when the participants felt I agreed with them on some of their comments regarding patriarchal views in Islamic tradition, they more readily talked about their experiences. This aspect helped me to have more in-depth interviews with the participants and to access more information about their experiences of interfaith marriage.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Since any study involving human participants has the potential to create 'harm, stress, and anxiety, and [a] myriad [of] other negative consequences' for the participants (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p.205) and it is the researcher's responsibility to evaluate the ethical considerations in a research project prior to conducting the study (Borg and Gall, 1983).

Similarly, Hammond and Wellington (2013) urge the researcher to treat the participants fairly, to follow ethical guidelines, to choose fair and honest methods, to refrain from misleading, to not manipulate data in order to reach desired results, to ensure that the anonymity of the participants are protected

during both the analysis of data and the dissemination of it, and to avoid mixing one's ideas and values with the conclusions drawn from the data. In this regard, this study was put into practice in accordance with the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice on Research Ethics in March 2016. Ethical approval was granted by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee. While conducting the fieldwork, I followed the standard steps required by the ethical codes, and I considered and addressed several ethical issues.

After obtaining ethical approval, the next step was to obtain the consent from the participants for participation in the study and to ensure that no harm would come to the participants, and all data would be treated confidentially. This step is considered essential before conducting any research since it serves to make sure that participants are fully aware of the aim of the study, what is expected from them, and what is going to happen to the data afterwards. In order to achieve this, I prepared information sheets and sent these to the participants during my initial contact along with the informed consent forms. Participant information sheets (see Appendix I) aimed to inform the participants about the aims and objectives of the study, that I was conducting the interviews as a part of PhD research with the approval of the University of Birmingham, the types of the questions they would be asked, and the approximate length of the interviews. The participants were asked to read these sheets and ask any questions they may have.

Later, when intermarried women agreed to participate in the study, I met them for the interview. Prior to the interview, the participants were requested to read and sign the Consent Form. As discussed, the written consent form emphasised that involvement in the study would be completely voluntary, and therefore the participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research until the data had been transcribed and analysed, which was within one month after the date of the interview. In addition, it was also emphasised that the research would be confidential and their identity would be anonymised in the data.

Since the issue of Muslim women's interfaith marriages is considered prohibited by many traditional Islamic views and many Muslim communities are strongly against these marriages, participants' privacy was of utmost priority. Although some participants did not have any problem with using their real identity in the study, a Muslim woman whose husband is Jewish specifically stressed the importance of her anonymity during the interview. She indicated that since there were not too many Muslim women married to a Jewish man any information about her life such as where she lives, and what she does for a living, would make it easy for people to identify her. Therefore, during the interviews she declined to answer the questions related their identities such as where they live and what is her and her husband's occupation and also she referred to her husband by his nickname which she uses in her web blog. She also indicated that in her web-blog she does not publish her posts under her real name but uses a pseudonym instead.

As stated, the privacy of all participants was a priority in the research. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure the anonymity of my participants. The participants were informed that their answers and opinions would only be used for the purpose of the research, and complete assurances were given regarding anonymity and protection of their identity. In order to ensure confidentiality of personal data, I took all necessary steps to protect the participants' identity. Any information that could jeopardise confidentially was not used in the study. Also, pseudonyms were used to maintain their confidentiality. Immediately after the interviews, all audio-recordings were downloaded onto my laptop, which is password protected and is accessible only by me. In addition, the recordings were also saved as encrypted files on my laptop to keep the data safe and the files named with pseudonyms to assure the anonymity of the interviewees.

3.9 Problems and Limitations of the Field Work

Over the course of this research, I encountered several obstacles and limitations. The biggest challenge I faced during my research was to access and contact intermarried Muslim women. As discussed earlier, since the subject is sensitive and these marriages are generally considered unacceptable by many Muslims, those women whose husbands are non-Muslims prefer not to interact with their community members or other Muslims to avoid negative judgements regarding their marriages. In addition, as mentioned there were some support groups for intermarried couples and some online groups, even though these were not all directly related with intermarried couples, they did help me to access some of the

participants. However, when I contacted these groups to ask their help, mostly it appeared that people in those groups knew more intermarried Muslim men than women, and if they knew any intermarried Muslim women, in most of the cases their husbands had converted to Islam for/before their marriages. Also, as one of the interviewees indicated, that even if a Muslim woman is married to a non-Muslim, they do not usually make it public since they desire to avoid getting any negative comments about their marriages in terms of the religious difference between them, and this also makes it difficult to identify intermarried Muslim women. In addition, due to a lack of a common platform for these women, such as an organisation, mosque, or social forum, it was very difficult for me to access more intermarried Muslim women.

When I asked some Muslims from different ethnic communities whether they know any intermarried Muslim woman whose husband is non-Muslim, they immediately reacted saying that these marriages were not allowed in Islam. They stated that even though they knew some Muslim women who were married to non-Muslims, the husbands of these women converted to Islam just before their marriages. A British-Pakistani Muslim woman indicated that even though there were few Muslim women she knew in their community who were married to a non-Muslim, their families ostracised these women for their decision. As a result, they had lost contact with these women, so they did not know where these women currently were.

This situation resulted in the second limitation in my study: having unbalanced data in terms of participants' ethnicity. As discussed previously, this research

includes predominantly Turkish women, due to the relatively higher interactions of many Turkish intermarried Muslim women with other intermarried Muslim women. Thus, through the snowball technique, I could access more Turkish women than non-Turkish women. As a result, I conducted interviews with 10 Turkish intermarried women and 9 non-Turkish intermarried women. In the data, all Turkish participants, except two, were far from their close family and relatives living in their home country when they decided to get married and all Turkish intermarried women are currently living away from their families. As discussed in the following chapter, this situation has possible effects on the result of the study as to whether or not living outside of the Muslim community impacts Muslim women's marital choice. Because Turkish women's experiences may differ significantly from their counterparts from different ethnicities whose communities and families live in the UK, they may experience/face less community pressure than the other participants.

3.10 Data Analysis

In the study, the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is explained as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.6) and it interprets various aspects of the research topics (Biyatzis 1998). In addition, it also 'provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.5). Flexibility is one of the advantages of thematic analysis, and it was useful in helping me to avoid pushing my expectations as a researcher into

the data, and to evaluate what might emerge from the data without prejudice as far as possible.

Furthermore, thematic analysis not only allows the researcher to identify the themes which are explicit in the data, but also helps the researcher to identify 'underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies' by using a *latent approach* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.13). As will be demonstrated in the findings chapter, the data yielded both explicit and latent themes that, all together, form a comprehensive understanding of the influences of religious differences in the family on intermarried Muslim women's understandings and experiences of marriage.

During the thematic analysis, I followed six basic stages which were identified by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- *Becoming familiar with the data* – Familiarisation with the interview data firstly takes place during the transcription process, which is an early and essential stage of data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Even though the transcription of the interviews was a tiresome task, and it took more time than I thought it would, it was extremely helpful in familiarising myself with the data. During the transcription process, I also started to take notes and make some initial ideas for coding, and this was useful when I returned to the data for the subsequent phases. After completing the verbatim transcription of the interviews, I checked the transcripts of each interview back against the audio-recordings for accuracy, re-read the data and made some further notes. In addition to transcription, my continued reading of the data was also helpful in

familiarising myself with the content, which provided the foundation for the remainder of the analysis.

- *Generating initial codes* - Once the transcription was completed, my data was ready for the next stage of the analysis: initial coding. At this stage, I identified numerous codes for as many potential themes as possible until all the interview data was gathered and coded. My initial notes during the transcription of the interviews were also helpful at this stage. In coding, I used some categories of analysis which are related to my research questions and based on particular theoretical approaches, mainly theories of partner selection (Kalmijn, 1998; Dribe and Lundh, 2011); Glock and Stark's (1965) definition of religiosity; Luckmann's (1967) theory regarding 'invisible religion' and Cerchiaro et. al's (2015) theory on dealing with religious difference in the family. Some of the codes included in the categories were 'family', 'friends', 'community', 'conversion', 'impact of interfaith marriage on religiosity', 'discussions before the marriage'.

In addition, for the initial codes, there are two methods that are usually used by researchers: the traditional method, which is manual coding, and using a software programme. In my study, although at the beginning of the research I planned to code my data using NVivo software to speed up the process, at the analysis stage I used both means of coding. When I started to code by using the software, I realised that some of the modern facilities, such as to highlight coding and applying colour to nodes, were not available in NVivo for Mac. Although I could also use the software in a desktop computer at the university, this wasn't enough because most of the time I work on my research during the night, and so I

needed the software on my personal computer. To solve this problem, first I coded my data manually using colourful markers and sticky notes, and then applied these codes to my data in NVivo. Using both ways of coding took time, but it was also helpful in thoroughly familiarising myself with the data. In addition, using NVivo was helpful for me in supporting my analysis and managing the interview data.

- *Searching for themes*: After the initial coding, the next stage was *searching for themes*. At this stage I re-read the data, grouped the codes into clusters of potential themes depending on the relationships between each other and between themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), such as 'family attitudes: difference between father and mother's attitudes', 'decision of interfaith marriage and previous concerns', 'definition of being religious', 'importance of religion in daily life', 'husband's attitudes toward religious difference', 'religious practice at home', 'children's religious education and interfaith marriage'. During this process, the codes were reorganized under these categories and some codes formed main themes, and others formed sub-themes.

- *Reviewing the themes* – This phase basically involved reviewing and refining the themes. After I defined the potential themes, I re-read the data to check whether the themes formed a coherent pattern with both the coded data and the entire data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition, I also created a 'thematic map' and I kept reviewing my codes and organizing the themes repeatedly until I was satisfied with the map.

- *Defining and naming the themes* – At this stage I worked and focused on the collated data extracts for each theme. I organized the themes to determine the essence of what each theme was about and named them for usage in the final stage of the analysis. For instance, 'parents' reaction and their attitudes towards interfaith marriage' was split into two main themes: (1) 'affirmative attitude' under which there were the following sub-themes: 'being respectful to the decision', 'character of son-in-law', 'faith in one God'; (2) 'negative attitudes' under which there were the following sub-themes: 'community pressure', 'religious concerns', 'personal concerns'. As Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise, when we assign a names to the themes, the names need to be 'concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about' (p.23). Thus, this phase of the analysis needed careful thinking and discussion in order to identify the most appropriate labels.

- *Producing the report* – After completing all the previous stages, the final stage of thematic analysis was presenting the analysis of the research. In the following chapters I will present the report of my analysis.

3.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the methodological approach adopted to conduct the research and the steps involved in managing the fieldwork study and analysing the data. In the research, in order to explain the influences of interfaith marriages on intermarried Muslim women's understandings and experiences of marriage, a qualitative interview method was deemed most appropriate. During the fieldwork of the study, I conducted 19 semi-structured

interviews with intermarried Muslim women from different ethnic backgrounds who are living in different cities in the UK. Nevertheless, contacting intermarried Muslim women was the biggest challenge to my study. Since Muslim women's interfaith marriages are considered unacceptable by many Muslim communities, many intermarried Muslim women prefer not to interact with their communities. This situation made the potential participants difficult to contact. In this context, a snowball technique was helpful to access the participants.

Semi-structured interview techniques were useful as it created a free medium for women to speak about their own experiences, other Muslims' attitudes towards their marriages, and their opinion on the traditional view on interfaith marriages in Islam. During the interviews, most women also expressed their interest in the study and its results. They willingly shared their experiences of being in an interfaith relationship and having religious and cultural differences within their families.

In addition, confidentiality was a major ethical issue during both the data collection and the data analysis process. The real names of the participants were changed to a pseudonym to provide confidentiality and these pseudonyms were used during the study to identify the interviewees.

In the research, the data was analysed by using the thematic analysis method. Using this method, after the codes were collated, themes were developed and reviewed alongside the interview data. When a set of fully developed themes from the data was obtained, final analysis was commenced and the results were written up.

In the following chapters, I will present the findings for the qualitative interview data and the results of the data analysis will be discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL FACTORS AND THE ATTITUDES OF OTHERS ON THE DECISION TO INTERMARRY

This chapter presents the first part of findings of the fieldwork which was conducted in the various cities in the UK in 2016 and 2017. It provides an analysis of the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data collection in the form of semi-structured qualitative interviews with intermarried Muslim women. In the chapter, the interview data will be presented in four sections. In the first section, background information about how and where each Muslim woman met her husband and the process of their decision for intermarriage will be identified. The second section will discuss the influence of both Muslim and non-Muslim families, as well as the friends' attitudes towards interfaith marriages and their influence on the intermarried couples' decision to marry.

4.1. How and Where Their Story Starts – Meeting with the Prospective Husband:

In the interviews, after gaining the primary information from the Muslim women relating to their age, ethnicity, education, their husbands' nationality and religious affiliation, the first part revolved around the beginning of the Muslim women's marriage story. The intermarried women were asked about how they met their husbands and how long they had dated before they got married or decided to get married. At this point, it is important to state that even though

arranged marriages are still regarded as a preferable marriage in many of Muslim communities represented by the participants (Pande, 2016; Shaw, 2006), in the present study, none of the participants stated that their marriages was an arranged marriage.

Although parental control and family influences may remain, people living away from their families have more freedom to choose their marriage partners. Living away from their family home before the marriage gives Muslim women independence that lessens familial influence on their decisions, or, for some cases, 'impact of parental threats of dissociation' (Romain, 1996). This research project validates this argument with regard to some of the case studies. In the study, sixteen participants were living apart from their families when they met their husband and made decisions about the future of their relationship. For Turkish participants, as discussed in the previous chapter, the majority of the Turkish women (8 out of 10) stated that when they met their husband they were living far away from their families, even from their native country, Turkey. As mentioned, most of them came to the UK to work and improve their language skills at the same time and one participant stated that she came to the UK to get higher education in a British university.

Similarly, all but two of the non-Turkish participants stated that they were away from their family studying at university when they started their relationship. Among non-Turkish participants, only two women, Maria and Maryam, said that they were living with their families when they met their husband. Before their marriages, Maria, who married for the second time, was living with her children

and family, and Maryam, whose father died years ago, was living with her mother. Interviews indicated that both Turkish and non-Turkish women who were living with their families did not experience negative familial attitudes regarding their decision of marriage and felt supported from the beginning. However, for other participants, living separately from their families facilitated the decision of marriage. For instance, Hanan and Aneesa, British-Pakistani women who grew up in the UK, clearly stated that if they had been living with their families when they met their husband, they would not and could not make the decision of marrying a non-Muslim man. Also, Laila, a White-British woman married to an Italian man, stated that as their relationship was getting serious, the religious differences between them, and their families' potential reaction to their decision became a key topic in their conversations, but as she lived away from her family in a different city, it was easier for her to put the issues aside for a while. Considering these narratives, it is possible to argue that being far from the family reduces the impact of familial attitudes on Muslim women. Also these women feel themselves strong enough to make a decision of intermarriage even though it is not common and acceptable in their families, as will be discussed below.

Romain (1996) states that in a multi-faith society, like Britain, children of religious immigrants are born in the host country or grow up in the same neighbourhood, go to the same schools and work at the same jobs as other citizens. In time, due to their education or economic circumstances, social interaction between different groups increases and they live and work alongside the members of

other faiths (Gordon, 1966; Barlow, 1977). Therefore, it is accurate to say that, in general, schools and workplaces are the primary places where people belonging to different religious and ethnic groups meet, contact and interact each other. In addition, it can expected that for some people this social contact between different religious and ethnic groups can develop into sexual attraction and emotional bonds (Romain, 1996). In line with this argument, in the research a majority of the participants (74%, or 15 out of 19) stated that they met their husbands at work (6 out of 19), at university or on a training course (4 out of 19), or through mutual friends who introduced them to each other (5 out of 19). The four remaining participants explained that they met their husband in her neighbourhood; in an interfaith meeting which she had been attending as a volunteer; through her cousin; and on an online matching website respectively. This result confirms the argument that the schools and workplaces are the primary places that the social interchange between faiths occurs (Barnett, 1962; Romain, 1996). In this sense, as the research findings indicate, people who meet in such places find that what they have in common is often more important than what divides them (Romain, 1996), and these shared factors also makes it easier to handle with the differences.

Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged that interfaith couples have to cope with a slightly different set of circumstances during their relationship than the couples in an intramarriage (Romain, 1996). Thus, it is a common trend within many interfaith couples to date each other for much longer than those who do not navigate the same issues or worries. Likewise, in the study, all the Muslim

women except the one who met her husband through her cousin, stated that before they got married they had dated their husbands for a while without telling their family members - particularly their parents - about their relationship. The average dating duration for the participants was 2.5 years with a range of 6 months to 7 years. Among the intermarried women, Anis, a 32-year-old Malaysian woman, stated that before they told their families about their relationship they dated for 7 years, which is the longest duration among the women interviewed. She said that they only told their families after they got engaged, and they got married within a year. In addition, some participants identified their relationship with a non-Muslim man as a 'massive secret', as Zahra, 32-year-old British-Indian woman stated, and they kept this 'massive secret' until they became more certain about their relationship. When asked about the reasons for concealing their relationship, those participants expressed that they did not want to tell their families because if their families knew their 'secret' they would either be against their relationship and force them to break up, or ask her boyfriend to convert or, conversely, make them get married as soon as possible. For instance, Laila explained her feelings about telling their relationship to her family:

> *I did not tell my parents about Adam until maybe about 4 years [...] I think the reason why I did not tell my parents is because if I tell my parents that I've met a somebody, then it must mean to them that the next stage is marriage immediately, which doesn't really happen in the UK, culturally speaking. If you are a Muslim, that happens […] So, I told them four or four-and-a-half years later, it gave us more time*

> *actually, really get to know each other properly, fully. [It was] kind of, taking the time separately to develop our relationship and make it stronger before we got to that stage of this big issue. I completely feel we needed to do that. (Laila, London, July 2017)*

As Laila's narrative shows, for these participants talking with their families immediately could be a real risk for their relationship because first they had to agree on what they wanted in the relationship. Also, as a couple they needed to be sure about their decision of getting married before telling their families, as they knew that their families would react negatively.

4.2. Big Dilemma: To Marry or Not To Marry?

Romain (1996) states in her research on interfaith couples that not only are the families surprised by mixed-faith marriage, but that the couples involved in this marriage can be surprised and worried about this marriage too, because for many people in this position 'marrying out of the faith was not just unintentional, but also went against their own principles' (Romain, 1996, p.82). Likewise, in the research, half of the participants clearly expressed that as their relationship was becoming more serious, they started to think more about the religious and cultural differences between them and their boyfriend. They emphasized that during those days they felt a conflict between marrying a man they loved and with whom they wanted to share their lives, and their familial and traditional rules that they had been taught since they were a child that a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim. For instance, in Nuray's, a Turkish woman who has

been married for 13 years, case, it is easy to see the conflict that she was in. During the interview she clearly expressed her dilemma by saying that:

> *My main criteria for my future husband was love. I was looking for someone who loves me and shows me his love. I saw THAT LOVE in my husband, in his eyes, but I had also a big dilemma. I remember when we were engaged or about to get married I felt myself really really bad about the situation, about our relationship. This marriage would be really difficult… Oh my God, what am I doing?! I know this marriage is not allowed but at the same time I really want to marry to this guy! I felt unable to make a choice between the two! (Nuray, London, May 2016)*

Similarly, Meral who has been married for 4 years, also once thought that she should not have entered into this relationship because of the differences between them. She stated:

> *When I first met my husband, I felt his interest in me, but before he made clear his intention to marry me, I told him that I was thinking to marry a Turkish man. I always had thought that an intermarriage would not work because of the cultural and religious differences. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

In addition, five participants stated that as a result of this dilemma, while they were dating, they broke up with their non-Muslim boyfriend. It was mainly because of their concern about their family's reaction and religious and cultural differences between them. Anis said that during the first years of their relationship, they thought many times that the relationship was not going to last because of the religious aspect. She said that 'even 6 years in, we were still

having arguments, we broke up few times because of it, and then got together' *(*Anis, London, November 2016).

Some interviewees also indicated that because of this dilemma regarding the influence of negative opinions surrounding Muslim women's interfaith marriage in their family and community, they felt regretful, and even sometimes sinful for marrying a non-Muslim man. For instance, Elif explained that previously she was thinking that people of two different religions could not be together and so she always had a feeling that she was doing wrong by continuing her relationship. She stated: 'because of the dilemma I had about my relationship and my religious beliefs, I was questioning myself: I am not a good enough Muslim?!' (Elif, Manchester, March 2016). In their narratives, these participants explained the dilemma they faced in wanting to marry a non-Muslim man despite the traditional prohibition on such a union, a prohibition they had been long taught to them by both their families and their communities. Furthermore, as seen in Elif's case, knowledge of this prohibition caused them to feel a stressful pressure and lead them to evaluate, and even critically doubt, their own religiosity.

In addition to their 'self-evaluation'/'self-verification', three participants stated that even though they were sure about their decision, negative comments coming from their family and community made them worried about whether the marriage would work or not, and these worries made them think again about the situation they were in. Therefore, to be sure that their decision was right and that the intermarriage had the potential to work as much as other marriages, some participants tried to access interreligiously married Muslim couples who had

walked on a similar path to them. In this context, the Muslim Christian Marriage group, mentioned in the previous chapter, was helpful for those intermarried Muslim women who attended a support group meeting and contacted other intermarried families/couples who had similar experiences. Salma, who attended the group's meeting with her husband, stated that:

> *I met people through the interfaith marriage group who are married to people of other faiths. But I guess it was nice to have people that I knew before my marriage. I think those people affected our decision, you know… because everyone told us it is not gonna work and it was good to see that it had worked for some people. I thought, it is just like, 'hang on, we can make it!' and actually, I realized that I could, I probably had more of a chance of getting this [marriage] to work than I have ever had with anyone else that I met before that. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

4.3. The Reason Behind the Decision:

There are some factors and reasons that potentially lead people to marry out of their religion and community. These reasons are mainly focused on four main points: the changes within wider society, developments within the religious communities, family dynamics and personal factors (Romain, 1996). Even though these reasons can apply for many intermarriages, it is suitable to say that there is no single specific reason which can be applied for all people. Everyone has their own reason(s), and different reasons and different combinations of them will apply to each individual (Romain, 1996). In this context, during the interview when the participants were asked about the reason behind their decision of interfaith marriage, all participants mentioned falling in love as the main reason

in their decision. So, in line with many mixed marriages (Khan, 1998), and particularly interfaith couples (Romain, 1996), love is the determining factor for the Muslim women in the present study. Participants stated that 'as many women do, [they] were looking for the love' (Maryam, London, January 2017), and '[their] main criteria for an ideal spouse was the love. He should be someone who makes you feel his love to you' (Nuray, London, May 2016). The most important thing is when they met their husband 'they fell in love' (Pinar and Betul). Therefore, it did not matter for them what their partner's religion, ethnicity, skin colour and so on was, because as Tayyibah, who has been married to an agnostic man for 8 years, said 'the heart is a heart, it is not under your control'. So, even though for many of the participants these marriages are not seen as acceptable by their community, family or even their own understanding of religion, their love has its own logic and law, and so the interfaith marriage has found a way to happen (Aini, 2008). The study's result is consistent with Sprecher and Hatfield (2017) who found that women regard love as a basis of marriage and they emphasize love as an essential point for their marriage. For instance, Zahra stated:

> *Once you are falling in love, it was pretty clear that there was no other option, and I think that made it easier. Because you just think that it does not matter what happens, I can't be without this person. (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)*

In addition to the love, during the interviews some other factors that helped or encouraged Muslim women to make their decision of marriage despite their dilemmas and all the potential difficulties they might face emerged. As one of

these factors 'good character' of the partner is specifically mentioned by half of the participants. It seemed apparent that the partner's character and his attitudes towards Muslim women had a positive effect on the Muslim woman's decision.

> *He is really good man, a very caring family-oriented person which fitted very much with my values. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

> *He is an honest person. When I met him and started to date I knew that he is a good person. I knew that he wouldn't put me in difficulty, and he wasn't a person who makes me regret getting married. Thus, I wasn't hesitant about how a marriage to a 'foreign man' would be or whether we could get along with each other. (Nuray, London, May 2016)*

> *My husband's good character made me fall in love with him. He has a really good character. I always tell him, maybe he did not say shahāda [the Muslim declaration of faith] but he has Muslim character traits. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

Furthermore, when the participants were asked whether having the same religious faith with their partner was important to them, a number of participants stated that being a good man, and having a good character were more important for them than believing in the same religion. Among the participants, two women stated that the religious differences between them were not in consideration. It is important to bear in mind that these women stated that religion does not play an important role in their daily life, and therefore they did not think that religious differences between them would cause any problems in the future. For instance,

when Oyku, a Turkish woman married to a White-British man for 16 years, was asked whether her husbands' religious background affected her decision, she said:

> *No, because as I said, he wasn't religious, and I am not a very religious person, practicing, definitely… I think, once both parties are not very religious and your views are not shaped by the religion, your practical daily lives are not shaped by religion, then also educated, and living in the western world, you develop certain personalities' views towards life and the world… I think those were in mind… I think it is more kind of around the humanism and human values, I think. That is why we were coming together. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

These narratives show that for those participants being a good man and having a good character are important characteristics for a potential partner. Meanwhile, it is important to state that in the study, while those participants have limited religious concerns and focus more on a character of their husbands, there are some other participants who still think that having a good character is important for a partner and at the same time also have some religious concerns. The latter group identify their husbands' character by using a phrase 'Muslim by nature' meaning that he has Muslim characteristics as a person in terms of being honest, caring for others and is trustworthy, but just is not affiliated with Islam .

Meanwhile, having faith and believing in God were still important for the majority of the participants in their decision. Many participants emphasised the importance of having a husband who has faith. They said that believing in one God is important even if they have a different religious faith, because for them as

a member of People of the Book, they believe in the same God, Allah, and it is in the centre of both their religions, but the differences are just how they experience him.

4.4. Influence of Family and Friendship Groups on Muslim Women's Marital Choice and Their Attitudes Towards Her Decision

When the Muslim women made their decision to get married to their non-Muslim boyfriend, the next step was to inform their families about their decision of interfaith marriage. During the interviews, intermarried Muslim women were asked about how their families and friends reacted when they learned of their decision of marriage and their family members' and friends' attitudes before and after they got married, and if there were any changes or differences between the two.

In this section, I will divide the participants' responses into three groups. In the first group, I will discuss the attitudes of close family members and relatives towards the interfaith marriage; in the second group the non-Muslim parent-in-law's attitudes toward their sons' decision of marriage to a Muslim woman will be analysed; and in the third group, the reaction of friends when they learned of their decision of marriage to a non-Muslim man will be examined.

4.4.1. Attitudes of Close Family Members and Relatives

Van Niekerk and Verkuyten (2018) argue that overall, Muslim families have more negative attitudes towards their daughters' interfaith marriages compared to the sons. This attitude is not surprising and it is expected as Muslim women's

interfaith marriages are considered prohibited among the majority of Muslims. In the present study, despite the expected opposition of the family, intermarried Muslim women decided to marry non-Muslim men and the majority of the participants expressed that family's opinion and their approval for the marriage is important for them. In this section I will discuss parents' and other close family members' attitudes towards Muslim women's interfaith marriage and their influences on Muslim women's decision.

4.4.1.1 Muslim women's parents' reaction to the interfaith marriage:

Interview data shows that there are different variables which have influenced families' attitudes towards their daughters' interfaith marriage. Those variables can be described as: the families' priorities and expectations regarding their prospective son-in-law; families' cultural backgrounds; and families' relationship with their communities. Hence, depending on these variables, attitudes of close family members and relatives differ from one family to another.

During the interviews, Muslim women put more emphasis on their parents' attitudes and reaction to their decision of interfaith marriage than to other family members. For many participants, telling their parents that they were in a relationship with a non-Muslim man was an important step. Therefore, as mentioned, they preferred to tell their families about their relationship with a non-Muslim man after they decided to get married. However, they still felt pressure to keep it a secret. Zahra, a 32-year-old British-Indian Muslim woman, explained her feelings when she told her mother about her relationship:

I told my mom on the phone one night when I was talking to her. Because she was telling me 'you need to get married', 'when you will get married?'. Something just happened where I just can't keep this massive secret anymore. Because it did feel like I was living two lives in a way. (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)

In the analysis of the parents' attitudes towards women's decision of interfaith marriage, I mainly considered their immediate attitudes and responses when they learned that their daughter wanted to marry a non-Muslim man, as their first reaction would show their real opinion about interfaith marriages. However, in examples where there were changes in parental attitudes after the women married, I will mention and discuss it separately.

The interview data shows that the parents' attitudes towards their daughters' interfaith marriage can be categorized into two groups: (1) Affirmative attitudes; and (2) Negative attitudes.

4.4.1.1.1 Affirmative attitudes towards interfaith marriage:

During the analysis of the interview data, three main themes were identified as being related with affirmative attitudes: being open-minded, supportive and respectful. These are the behavioural traits identified in the responses of intermarried Muslim women whose parents have positive attitudes towards their daughter.

During the interviews, five of the nineteen participants did not report any attitudes for their fathers since the fathers of two participants died years ago and three other participants stated that their parents are divorced and that they do

not have any relationship with their fathers since the separation[18]. The rest of the participants expressed both their parents' attitudes toward their decision and how these attitudes affected them.

In the study, two divorced mothers and two widowed mothers did not strongly oppose the interfaith marriage, and they supported their daughters in their decision. These participants (Derya, Nesrin, Elif and Maryam) stated that their mothers were supportive when they told them about their relationship with a non-Muslim man. For instance, Maryam, whose father died 10 years ago, stated:

> *I am very fortunate in that my family is very progressive …. I think particularly for my mom, it was important to her that her children found life partners that match them intellectually, and they have matched the way that they had been brought up… I don't think that religion was the only focus. I do not say it wasn't important but I don't think it was the only focus for having a successful match with somebody… (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

In addition, Elif, a 37-year-old Turkish woman whose father had died, also stated that in the beginning she was hesitant about her relationship because of the religious differences between them and she broke up with her boyfriend. At that time, her mother encouraged her to re-think her decision, telling her 'how could you ostracize a person just for his religion and regard him as inferior because of

[18] According to general Islamic view, once a child reach her/his puberty father has the right to custody rather than the mothers (Zahraa and Malek, 1998; Rafiq, 2014). In the present study, during the interviews it was indicated that the participants whose parents are divorced didn't have any connection with their father after they separated and also that they did not want to speak more about their fathers. This shows that these participants had already to a certain aspect stepped outside of the common Islamic practice regarding the child custody in case of divorce.

his religious beliefs?! This is a worse sin!' (Elif, Manchester, March 2016). Elif said that her mother's speech made her reconsider her decision and she re-contacted her boyfriend and therefore was saved from 'making a big mistake' (Elif, Manchester, March 2016).

On the other hand, in one case, even though a single mother accepted and supported her daughter's decision of intermarriage, this approval cannot be considered as her mother's real attitude since the mother was unaware that her prospective son-in-law was a non-Muslim. Nuray, who has been married for 14 years, said that after they had decided to get married she could not tell her mother that her boyfriend was a non-Muslim. She said that she could not take the risk of losing her relationship with her mother and family and therefore did not tell the truth. She expressed that:

> *My mother is a really conservative Muslim and she would definitely not accept him if I had told her the truth… I knew that if she knew that he wasn't a Muslim, she would be against my decision, and despite her disapproval I would still get married to him. I did not want that… I wanted to get her approval. I got her blessing by lying to her. May Allah forgive me for this... Even today, after 14 years of our marriage, she still presumes that he converted and he is a Muslim. (Nuray, London, May 2016)*

When it comes to two-parent families' attitudes towards their daughter's marriage decision, only two Muslim women expressed positive attitudes from both parents. One of them is Maria, who is an White-British Muslim convert. She stated that since her parents are also British Christians, obviously they did not

have a problem with her marriage to a Christian man. The other Muslim woman, Ruya, stated that even though her father was not happy with the idea of her living in the UK, far away from her family, both parents did not speak out against the decision, and supported her. She stated:

> *It was my cousin who introduced my husband to me, so my parents trusted him and did not show any negative attitudes. Above all in our wide family there are other people who are in a mixed marriage. So my marriage wasn't a new thing for them*. *(Ruya, London, June 2016)*

So, as seen in Ruya's case, having similar experience in the family made the acceptance of her marriage easier for the parents and they did not show strong negative attitudes towards their daughter's interfaith marriage. She expressed that there were intermarried relatives whose husbands/wives were not Muslim or Turkish, so her interfaith marriage wasn't considered as a new thing by her family. In addition to that, since they were introduced by her cousin, the parents thought that he would become a suitable spouse for their daughter. Therefore, they were affirmative and worried more about being far away from their daughter than her husband's religion.

In addition, the interview data indicates that there is a gender difference in parental attitudes towards interfaith marriage. For some participants, their parents' attitudes towards their decision differed. Two participants said that although their fathers were against their decision of marriage, their mothers did not show any negative attitudes towards them. Yasemin stated:

> *My mother did not oppose my marriage. She told me that you will live this life, so you know better. Being a good man was enough for her. It did not matter whether he is a Muslim or not. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)*

In addition, Aneesa said that even though her father was strongly against her decision of marrying a non-Muslim man, her mother supported her and her mother was threatened by her father because of her support. She expressed the difficulties that her mother faced by saying that:

> *My mother saw that he [my husband] was a good man and she supported me. It was very painful for her. My father threated to divorce my mom. He would divorce my mother if I married David, and he did not… she came to the wedding secretly… (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

On the other hand, for Pinar and Betul their experiences were quite opposite. In their families, while their mothers were against their daughters' decision of marrying out, their fathers supported them. Pinar, a 39-year-old Turkish woman, stated:

> *Even though my mother did not want a 'foreign' son-in-law my father was more tolerant. For him the most important thing was to marry his daughter to a good man, because I would live far from my family. (Pinar, Manchester, June 2016)*

In addition, some participants stated that their families' positive attitudes towards their decision of interfaith marriage does not mean that religious belief was not important for them. They said that religion and having religious belief is still important for their parents. For these families, if their prospective son-in-law

is not a Muslim, it is necessary for him to have a faith and believe in one of the Abrahamic religions:

> *For my parents, the emphasis has always been if you are not going to marry somebody that is Muslim, it needs to be somebody that, what they call them, of the faith. It would be any of the three Abrahamic religions. I am very fortunate for that, I realized that that is not the case for many Muslim women… (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

Maryam's narrative shows that even though Muslim women's interfaith marriages to all non-Muslim men are considered prohibited by the majority of Muslims, her family follow the view of the particular jurisprudences' opinion discussed in chapter two. They were coming to the same conclusion with those scholars that Muslim women are allowed to marry *ahl al-kitāb* as Muslim men. Thus it was not too difficult for them to accept their daughter's interfaith marriage and they approved it, which distinguish her family from other Muslim families who are against these marriages.

4.4.1.1.2 Negative attitudes toward interfaith marriage:

Barnett (1962) argues that persons marrying someone outside of their religion usually have negative experiences with their families, with their parents partially or completely rejecting their decision. In line with Barnett's arguments, in the present study interfaith marriage was not acceptable for many parents. When Muslim women told their parents about their decision of marriage to a non-Muslim man, the majority of the participants mentioned one of or both parents' opposition to interfaith marriage.

In the study, interview data shows that there is a difference between fathers' and mothers' attitudes towards the interfaith marriage. This gender difference can also be seen in the parents' negative attitudes towards their daughters' decision. When all parents, including the single mothers, are considered, 71% of fathers were against their daughter's interfaith marriage, compared to 47% of the mothers who showed negative attitudes toward the interfaith marriage. In other words, the interview narratives reveal that among the parents, fathers were predominantly against their daughters' interfaith marriage when they heard of their daughters' decision of marriage out of their religion. On the other hand, even if one of the parents (mother or father) were open to the interfaith marriages when they first heard their daughters' decision, the parents influenced each other and at the end they showed similar attitudes towards their daughters' interfaith marriage. This influence mostly came from the father's side and, as seen in the stated case of Aneesa's father, the influence sometimes turns to a threat. Similarly, Hanan also explained the difference between her father's and mother's attitudes:

> *I feel like my mum is more religious but my dad is more strict. […] I think if that was up to my mom, she would speak to me even though she disapproved of what I have done. But for my dad it is definitely more of that or [it is about] what the community thinks. Before that I was the first girl in the family who ever go to university… I think my dad thought that he was very progressive and quite proud of me and my brother's achievement. Now he feels… I don't know… he has been labelled in the family and the community, and [he worries about] what other people think… and stuff like that.. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

In addition, the interview narratives show that the father's reaction and opinion are also important for the mother. Some participants explained that their mothers were worried about their fathers' reaction to the marriage when they first heard of it. Zahra, a 32-year-old British-Indian woman, explains that when she told her mother that she was planning to get married to a non-Muslim, her mother's first reaction was: 'Zahra, what are you going to do? How will you bring this to your father?'

When the participants were asked about their parents' reaction to their decision of interfaith marriage, a majority of the participants (12 out of 19) reported negative attitudes from at least one parent. In the current study, four main themes were identified as the parents' reasons for being against interfaith marriage: religious differences, community pressure, cultural differences, and personal concern.

4.4.1.1.2.1 Religious difference:

The interview narratives show that religious differences between the Muslim woman's family and husband-to-be is the main reason for the family's objection. For the majority of the parents being a Muslim is the first and foremost criteria for their prospective son-in-law. The participants explained their parents' initial reaction and their criteria for the prospective son-in-law:

> *After he [my father] met him for the first or second time he really liked him. [He said]: 'oh, he is really nice person, really lovely BUT he is not a Muslim'. So, there was this contrast and clash of… what he felt inside*

was [that] he ticked all of those boxes but he did not tick the main box which is he is not a Muslim… (Laila, London, July 2017)

[…] My parent always brought me up saying we don't care where he is from, we don't care what he looks like, we don't care who he is, as long as he is Muslim. (Salma, London, November 2016)

My father, when he met the first time, he said, he is a lovely guy, it is just a shame he is not Muslim. They did not really want to acknowledge him for a while. (Anis, London, November 2016)

In the narratives, we can see that for those parents, being a Muslim is an essential criterion for the prospective son-in-law because they agree with the commonly accepted rule that a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim and this marriage is forbidden in Islam. With the impact of this thought, the parents did not want their daughter to marry a non-Muslim man and accept the marriage:

I think at that stage I realized that I just had to say my parents, look I am doing this and I still love you very much, I still regard you as my parents and I hope that you can accept it… [they said] 'we will never accept this.. you can't do this...' (Salma, London, November 2016)

[When] I told them I got married to this guy, they were just like 'this is ḥarām; you left Islam…' (Hanan, London, March 2017)

My mother did not want me to get marry him, because he is not a Muslim. Her major concern was his religion, he wasn't a Muslim. (Pinar, Manchester, June 2016)

Furthermore, the narration of intermarried Muslim women shows that according to many parents, if their daughters wants to get married to a non-Muslim man, then the prospective husband needs to convert to Islam first. The parents demanded his conversion because, as stated, they agreed with the rule that interfaith marriage is not permissible for a Muslim woman. Even though I will discuss Muslim women and non-Muslim husbands' attitudes toward conversion in the following section, it is worth stating here that when the parents learned that the prospective son-in-law to-be did not plan to convert, they became angry and reacted negatively even if the prospective son-in-law was suitable for their family as a person. For instance, Salma explained how her family felt conflicted when they met her husband:

> *[…] in the beginning I think they thought that Michael would convert, they just assumed that he would. When I started to explain to them that he wouldn't, they did start to get very angry, and very upset. And it is interesting because Michael fits with our family very well. … As I said, everyone is professionals [in the family], so he fits in very well, except for not being Muslim. They kept saying that, we really like him, he is wonderful, but if he is not Muslim, we cannot accept him and this marriage. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

4.4.1.1.2.2 Community pressure

In addition to the religious differences, community pressure is another main issue that affected the parents' attitudes towards their daughters' decision of marrying out of the faith. Interviews show that in some cases parents considered the

community's potential reaction about their daughters' interfaith marriage more than their personal feelings about the marriage. Six participants mentioned how community pressure and what other people would think about it affected their parents' attitudes. For instance, Tayyibah expressed that even though her family was not identified as religious, they were against the union because of the community's potential attitudes towards interfaith marriage. She said:

> *My parents were not religious. So, for them it was more cultural, it was the shame. 'Oh, my God! the humiliation that my daughter is marrying a western person'. Because of the community. In the community, it's seen as 'aaa!!', you know… (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

Aneesa similarly stated the power of the community, and the influence of the community members on her father. She explained how her father changed his mind after he had talked with other people, even though he had initially accepted their marriage:

> *He [my husband] met my father. Initially my father was positive, because David was ahl al-kitāb and he could see no reason why he shouldn't marry me. But that was his initial reaction, and then my father thought, actually said, theologically you can't…. I think, he spoke to a couple of other people in the community, not many. He also spoke to one of my brothers [who] was very very much against the marriage, very against. I think my father probably was persuaded by that. My dad said, he couldn't object to David as a human being. Because David is very very personable. He is not just polite, he is genuine, you see what you get. He does not pretend to be one thing*

> *and be something else. My dad had no objection to him as a person. I think he found it very painful actually. Because he knew that David was a good person… (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

As can be seen in Annesa's case, community pressure and what other people think about this union was important for the parents and had an impact on the father's attitudes towards interfaith marriage. So, even if they might accept this marriage at first as the prospective son-in-law is *ahl al-kitāb* (the People of the Book) and has a good character, with the impact of the others in their community and family, they could change their behaviour and be against their daughter's interfaith marriage.

Furthermore, when some families learned that their daughter had decided to marry a non-Muslim, they blamed their daughter for being selfish and not thinking about their family and community. For them, people's thoughts and reactions were important and they felt the pressure of what other people would say and think about this marriage. Therefore, they were worried about how they would tell other people in their community and wider family that their daughter was married to a non-Muslim. For instance, Hanan explained her experiences and the community's effect on her family by saying that:

> *I was told [that] I am selfish, I don't care about the family, I don't care about the community, I just think about me. […] I think if the community thought it was fine, they would think it's fine. But I do think it [their concern] is what people think and the pressure of what people would say. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

In these narratives, we see that for these Muslim families, in an interfaith marriage not only the couples but also their families are involved these marriages (Cigdem, 2015). Therefore, a Muslim woman's marriage to a non-Muslim will also have an impact on the families' position in their community where these marriages are considered unacceptable. The importance of the community and its influence on the families' attitudes can be seen even after the Muslim woman got married. Some participants stated that even though their families reluctantly accepted their marriages, they also asked them to say to their relatives and other people that their husbands were Muslim, having converted to Islam:

> *I remember my dad was saying 'what are the other people going to say?', 'what people gonna think?'. Or they said like 'when we go to this place, tell them that Adam [my husband] is a Muslim!'. I was like 'What! Why?! I don't want to lie'… (Laila, London, July 2017)*

> *My relatives don't know my husband is not a Muslim, nor do my friends. That is something that my parents have decided. I respect their decision, because it causes them more problems than it causes me. (Anis, London, November 2016)*

Furthermore, Aneesa's experience similarly shows that not only did the community pressure have an impact on the parents' attitudes before the marriage, the community's opinion continued to be of importance to the family even years after their daughter got married. Aneesa explained how their community was observing them secretly and how this affected their relationship

with the families and her family did not want to be seen together with them, specifically with their non-Muslim son-in-law, in public. She stated:

> *The local community is sort of the police. 'Oh that is the daughter, I saw her coming out the car and that was her husband?!'. You know, they still say that. […] At first, it was very difficult and it used to cause tension. I used to get really cross with. […] When I said 'Mummy, why do we have to come along secretly almost? Why did these people talk?!', and my mom said 'I am afraid we can't stop people talking. But equally you must still come to our house'… (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016).*

These narratives make it clear that even after considerable time, the impact of community attitudes prevails. Even after many years of the marriage, families still might feel that pressure to conform to community values and expectations. Aneesa also explained about her mother's attitudes when one of their relatives met her husband after 10-15 years of their marriage. She stated that even after all these years had passed, her mother was still concerned about the other's opinion. So, when a relative told her mother that he met with her son-in-law, 'she felt defensive about it. She had to explain to him that her son-in-law was a good man' (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016).

Regarding the community pressure, the interview data also revealed that living far from the community lessens its effect on people's attitudes. Among 10 Turkish participants living far from their country, only two women, Oyku and Meral, mentioned the community pressure and its effect on their parents' attitudes towards their marriages. Oyku stated:

> *I think for them [my family] it is the one thing they couldn't quite accept […] how would they then tell their relatives? Imagine that everybody would be quietly against him. Because in our community what others think about us is so important. Not me obviously, but for my mom and dad, my parents in short, it is very important as they are coming from very close traditional backgrounds. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

Similarly, Meral also explained how her family were worried about their relative's attitudes towards her interfaith marriage when they learned of her decision. However, other Turkish participants did not specifically mention any 'community pressure' that their families indicated that they had to consider. It is suitable to say the distance between where they live (the UK), and where their families live (Turkey) made the parents and families less worried about community pressure and community reaction.

4.4.1.1.2.3 Cultural differences:

Although three participants stated that there were already interfaith couples in their families before them, for the majority of the participants and their parents, interfaith marriage was a new phenomenon in their families. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the families were worried about how their relationship would be with their prospective son-in-law. In this context, cultural differences between the families and the future son-in-law also made the parents worry that he would not fit into the family or be able to be a part of it. So, in the study, cultural differences between the Muslim women's family and non-Muslim men are another common reason mentioned by the participants that the families put

forward for their opposition for the interfaith marriages. For instance Oyku expressed her families' thoughts about interfaith marriage:

> *They were very reactionary. Because for them it was a very new phenomenon, you know, to get married to someone outside of religion. I was the first one. […] I think for them it is the one thing they couldn't quite accept, because it was a very foreign idea, and secondly, they did not know how they would interact with him and how they would be, how he can be part of the family, and they can't see him as a part of family. Because they have got the language barriers, cultural barriers… (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

In the narrative of Oyku, we see that in addition to the cultural differences, any language barrier between the family and their prospective son-in-law was also an important issue for a majority of the Turkish families. In the research, all Turkish families except one live in Turkey and the parents have limited English proficiency. Therefore, for the families, the language barrier between them and their son-in-law was an issue to be worried about. They were not happy about the decision of their daughter, because they did not want their daughter to marry somebody who was unable to speak their language and communicate with them. Meral stated:

> *My father said that, 'OK, I will allow you to get married but how I'm going to talk with him then' [implying he does not speak English]. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

Yasemin also explained how her father was unhappy about her decision because of the language barrier:

> *My father became unhappy because of my decision of marriage to an English man. He did not reject it directly but he was very sad. He would prefer someone who can speak Turkish, and with whom he could communicate in Turkish. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)*

On the other hand, the interview narratives also revealed that a majority of the non-Turkish families living in the UK who were against the interfaith marriage had limited relationships outside their community. Even though they live in the same country and culture as their sons-in-law, this limited communication also affected their attitudes towards interfaith marriage. For instance, Zahra, a British-Indian woman who was born and raised in the UK, explained her families' relationship with others:

> *They never did have somebody like Jack, like my parents are so cut-off from the world. They have them, and their family and little community, and they live two minutes from the mosque. Everybody on the street is a Muslim, then next door neighbour on one side is my brother… they don't know any white people... (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)*

This narrative makes it clear that limited relationships of Muslim families with people outside their community negatively influenced their opinion and attitudes towards the prospective non-Muslim son-in-law. A possible explanation of this could be the bias that Muslim families have towards people outside their community. As they have limited relationship with them, Muslim families do not want their daughter to be a part of a marriage outside their community.

4.4.1.1.2.4 Personal concerns:

In the present study, interview narratives also show that in addition to the religious and cultural differences and community pressure, families' personal concerns about interfaith marriages and their bias against these marriages also influenced their attitudes towards interfaith marriage.

For Turkish families, the idea of their daughter's living in the UK after the marriage was an issue to be worried about and it negatively affected the parents' attitudes. As mentioned, the majority of the Turkish women came to the UK with the intention of staying temporarily. Therefore, the families always thought that after several years, their daughters would come back to Turkey, get married and live there. However, if they married a British man or somebody living in the UK, then their daughters would stay in the UK and no longer go back to Turkey to live there.

> *[…] Obviously I was always here on a temporary basis, so they were always going to have me back. But the very fact that, then I'm gonna get married to someone and live in the UK that means that, obviously, what comes with that is permanence, but it means that they are gonna lose that proximity. […] I think so many things come with that. They were worried about it. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

> *My father was unhappy about my decision and thought that if I got married there [UK] I wouldn't come back to Turkey… (Meral, London, June 2016)*

On the other hand, the fear of 'loss of their daughter' was a common fear for both Turkish and non-Turkish families which affected their attitudes towards the interfaith marriage. Participants expressed that their families were afraid of losing their daughter to the Western culture, or they were even worried that she would convert and lose her religion:

> *My father became depressed. Because he was like, 'oh this is gonna happen now. My daughter is gonna marry a non-Muslim, I am gonna lose my daughter'. That is what he fears. [Losing] me to another family, to another culture, to another background, she will change, she is gonna be somebody I did not grow up to be. [He thought] maybe I will convert to another religion! (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

> *I guess what was important for them is just losing their daughter to another culture... (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

Furthermore, it is argued that there is a relationship between having the same religious preference in a marriage and marital satisfaction (Alston et al. 1976 as cited in Glenn, 1982; Heaton and Pratt, 1990) and that interfaith marriages are more likely to lead to divorce (Bumbass, 1970; Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993). Thus, if a couple have the same religious preference, divorce is less likely and marital satisfaction is somewhat higher than those who have different faiths (Chinitz and Brown, 2001). However, other groups of scholars say that even though there are some divorces, there are also many successful and happy interfaith marriages (Barnett, 1962) and religious affiliation has no effect on marital satisfaction

(Parsons et al., 2007). In other words, there is no significant difference in the divorce rate for interfaith marriages compared to the general population (Vernon, 1962; Barlow, 1977; Parsons et al., 2007). In the study, interview narratives show that the Muslim women's parents agree with the first argument as they did not think that the interfaith marriage would work. They assume that this union will end eventually, and their daughter will get divorced. Therefore, they did not want their daughter to marry a non-Muslim man from the very beginning:

> *My father was worried about me. He knew that I would be far away from my family and his biggest fear was 'what are you going to do, if that man leaves you there?' (Pinar, Manchester, June 2016)*

> *My father said, 'Tayyibah if the marriage does not work out he will take the children'…] (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

> *My parents were saying this is not gonna happen, you are gonna end up divorced, you are gonna be miserable, he is gonna do this, and he is gonna do that… (Salma, London, November 2016)*

Also, for some families, their belief in the possibility of the divorce was so strong that they were expecting their daughter to come back to their family sooner or later:

> *In the beginning they said to me, 'oh, this will last in a couple of weeks … you will get bored and come back'. And then it went couple of months, and they said, 'ok, you will come back in a couple of months' […] and it has been almost 5 years now and when I last saw my dad,*

he was still like 'when are you coming home? It has been 5 years', I am like 'it has been 5 years, why would I come home?', […] they have this idea in their brain that she can come back home, we can all act like nothing happened and everything's fine. I don't know what world they are living in. How could that ever be possible that I have been married for 5 years and I will just come back home and what sort of life would I live. (Hanan, London, March 2017

In addition, most participants stated that their families had always expected their daughters to marry a Muslim. Thus, their daughter's interfaith marriage was a disappointing decision for them and definitely not what they had assumed about their daughter's future marriage:

I think my father was slightly worried about the community's reaction but it was lightly, but more, he was more worried about it as a Muslim. That is quite obvious [...] because my dad was really religious and he's practiced too, you know, fasting, praying 5 times a day. He was really devout. So, I let him down in that way … […] My mother was […] at the same time feeling disappointed, and you could see it easily. […] I think she felt that she was letting my dad down. Because [..] they brought us up as Muslim, that was the plan all along. We are going to be Muslim, we're going to get married with Muslims, but it did not work. (Laila, London, July 2017)

My father is very loving, I was like his princess, his only little girl. [...] so, I think because it had happened, we couldn't talk afterwards, because… well, it was so hurtful, but also because I think there is a lot of shame on his part that he could be pushed that far. I think he maybe realised that my marriage wasn't acceptable and so many people don't but he did, and I think maybe that is why he was so

angry, and he left [home when I told him my decision of marriage] until I was gone. (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)

4.4.1.2 Muslim women's siblings' attitudes towards interfaith marriage:

As it is generally acknowledged, after the parents' attitudes, siblings are the next group of close relatives who have influences on Muslim women's lives. When the participants were asked about their siblings' attitudes, Muslim women stated that they were expecting their siblings to understand their situation better than their parents and to support them. Likewise, many participants (12 out of 19) stated that their siblings were supportive and helped them to communicate with their parents, either from the beginning or later on. The siblings' support was important specifically for the women whose parents were against their marriage. For instance, among the participants, Salma expressed how her brother played an important role in their communication with their parents. She stated:

My brother had a really difficult job because he got stuck between my parents and I. So, my parents would say to him 'tell her, talk some sense to her' and then he would feel compelled to talk sense to me. […] I know, he was really stuck between the two. And for that reason, I did not want to put any pressure on him to come to our wedding, or to feel like he needed to take a stand or anything. […] you know, in the beginning, they [my brother and his wife] were always [helpful]. […] They loved having us over… the first time my parents met Michael, he met them at their house, you know, it was sort of neutral ground, you know, that was very important. They have always been very supportive. (Salma, London, November 2016)

The participants also explained the importance of having siblings with whom to share feelings and to cope with the problems when their relationship with their parents was going through a difficult stage. As Tayyibah stated:

> *I shared a lot of my feelings with my sisters, I talked to them a lot. … It is definitely important to be able to share your feelings at that time, because it is such a tough thing… because they were so supportive it became easier. If they were not supportive, I think it would have been very difficult. (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

On the other hand, four participants stated that their siblings, particularly their brothers, were against their decision of interfaith marriage and accused them of being selfish:

> *I think I told my brother a couple of weeks before I told my parents and he was like, if there is any way that he could stop from this happening to me he would…. my brother was just saying that 'unless he converts, this is not happening'. […] there's a lot of bitterness and then he said that I was very selfish and I behaved in a very selfish way… (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

Interview narratives make it clear that those brothers who were against this marriage had mainly the same concerns about the interfaith marriages, as their parents had. Similarly, their concerns were mainly about losing their sisters to another religion, whether she could stay in her religion or not, and how the community would react when they learnt of their sisters' marriage to a non-Muslim man. Aneesa stated that even though her brother's attitudes were very negative and sad for her, she admits that his concerns with regards to the community were also valid:

One of my brothers was really against. He wasn't actually living in the country at the time. ... He wrote me many letters, very long letters. He felt it wasn't good for the family, I think he had genuine concerns that it would take me away from my faith, and what about children, what would happen generally. […] One of my brother's concerns was 'well, you will be ostracised by the society'. And actually that was true. I know it was mixture of sort of family pride but also concern for me and how I would be perceived. You know, like in our family gatherings or community gatherings, how people would look at me. And he was very right [on his concerns about the community] in that time. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)

Furthermore, some participants mentioned that their siblings had also been in an interfaith relationships/marriages to a non-Muslim before and had a similar experience with their families. However, those siblings weren't fully supportive to their sisters' marriages since they had asked or made their spouse convert to Islam, which was different from the participants. For instance, Laila, whose brother and sister had also had interfaith relationships, explained how her siblings reacted to her decision to get married to a non-Muslim. She expressed her brother's attitudes as:

My brother, who is older than me, was really really against my wedding. […] He was dating with a British girl. They were together for 3 years but she did not want to convert so he broke up with her. So, for him, it's like a slap in the face. Because he sacrificed his relationship but we did not. He even said to me 'I sacrificed my relationship, why don't you?' I said to him 'sorry, we are different. You did that but I can't do that. It doesn't seem logical'... (Laila, London, July 2017)

Laila also mentioned her sister's attitude, who got married to her non-Muslim boyfriend after he had converted:

> *[My older sister's husband converted to marry her] We had a conversation about that [and] she said 'come on, why he [my boyfriend] did not do it! Robert [her husband] converted for me why did not Adam do it for you?' […] What he did, I think he did it for my parents. He [nominally] converted. […] I don't think he is a practicing Muslim. [...] I think she felt like, 'well, my husband did it [converted], but he [your husband] does not…' I told her, 'Look, if Robert wanted to do it, and you both happy with that, that is good. But this is not how we are gonna do it… (Laila, London, July 2017)*

In the narrative of Laila, we see that the siblings who had similar experiences and had relationship with non-Muslim boyfriend/girlfriend, asked their partner to convert to get married and this was what they were expected to do. Thus, they think that their sister also should do the same and ask her boyfriend to convert. Even if the conversion will be nominal, it will help make the acceptance of this marriage easy for the family. I think this is because of the fact that after the conversion, even if it is a nominal, the family will consider him as Muslim, and at that point they will not see any problem whether it was a genuine conversion or not.

4.4.1.3 Attitudes of other relatives towards interfaith marriage:

When it comes to distant relatives' attitudes towards Muslim women's decision of interfaith marriage, the interview data includes three types of attitudes: positive, negative and noncommittal. Most of the participants mentioned that

they did not face any negative attitudes from their relatives. They were basically positive about the participants' decision of marrying out:

> *I did not face any negative attitudes from my relatives. Everybody loved my husband and welcomed him to the family. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)*

> *I haven't had any direct experiences of negativity but I received a lot of positive reactions from my uncles or aunties. […] I think although the idea is so new to the community and my relatives, […] nobody really could get it negatively. Because otherwise I would have sensed it when I met them. […] I was told quite a lot of nice things about him. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

For those participants, it was a relief not to have any negative reaction from their relatives. For instance, Salma expressed her feeling about her relatives' attitudes:

> *What really amazed me was how welcoming all my extended family was about Michael. No one has ever said, 'What the hell have you done?! Why did not you go and marry someone who was Muslim?!'. They all were welcoming and really accepting. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

On the other hand, some relatives thought that since they were living in a non-Muslim country, in a multicultural and multi-ethnic environment, intermarriage should not be seen as an unforeseeable decision for their children. Thus, they also tried to convince the parents that interfaith marriage is an expected result of living in a Western country. For instance, Zahra expressed how supportive her aunt was and talked to her father to convince him.

I have one aunt who was actually very very supportive. She said to my dad 'it is not a disaster, it is happening all the time and it just the way what you expect if you have children in this country. It is not always going to be the way that you want it to turn out'. (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)

On the other hand, five participants stated that they experienced negative attitudes and behaviours from their relatives towards their marriage to a non-Muslim man. While some of these relatives clearly indicated that they disapproved of the interfaith marriage and they said their opinion directly to the Muslim woman, some other relatives considered this marriage as her parent's problem and continued their relationship with them even though they did not approve of the marriage.

My relatives were not very supportive, quite negative. […] One of them was very harsh and said that 'the person who did our marriage will answer to God'. He wasn't very nice. But then, to be honest, they [other relatives] never say anything to me directly, because they were always quite gentle with me. I mean, never directly to me. They were more direct with my parents. (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)

My uncle was against. He talked to me and he's made it very clear that he disapproves and doesn't think I've done the right thing but he still talks to me. […] they are the sort of like 'we don't care what happened. It is their parents who care'. (Laila, London, July 2017)

In addition, Aneesa expressed that when her uncle learned that she got married to a non-Muslim man, he asked her to force her non-Muslim husband to convert to Islam. She stated:

> *One uncle in particular was quite unpleasant about David and he actually said 'you know, you need to do the right thing', this is what he said to me, 'you need to do the right thing, you need to make him into a Muslim'. That was a really particularly unpleasant experience and that still is quiet upsetting for me. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

In the narrative of Aneesa, we also see her attitudes towards the conversion of her non-Muslim husband. Aneesa found her uncle's attitudes unpleasant because she thinks that her husband has his own religion and believes in it, that he is a Christian and it is not right to ask him to change her religion just for her or for the marriage. For her, conversion is a personal matter, and it must be willingly from the heart.[19]

In addition to all negative and positive attitudes from the relatives, a third group of the participants stated that their relatives were noncommittal about their marriage. During the interviews it appears that some of those relatives did not show clear attitudes, negative or positive, towards this marriage because either they thought that this was an issue that the women's parents should have cared about and therefore they preferred not to make any negative comments, or that they did not know that he was a non-Muslim. Those relatives who did not know the truth about the husband's religion presumed that he had converted to Islam before the marriage. For instance, in one case, Esra stated that she wanted to have an Islamic religious marriage ceremony before the wedding reception, as she thought that after the religious wedding her relatives might think that her

[19] More discussion on Muslim women's attitudes toward their husbands' conversion will be introduced in the following chapter, Chapter 5.

husband converted to Islam and become relaxed. In another case, as mentioned previously, Anis's parents asked her not to tell the other family members that her husband is a non-Muslim. Therefore, her relatives did not know that she married a non-Muslim, and assumed that her husband is a Muslim and so they were non-committal about her marriage.

4.4.1.4 Family members' behaviours and the women's way to deal with them

As discussed, some of the participants had negative experiences with their families regarding their interfaith marriages. Interviews show that if the families were against their marriages, they behaved in different ways to make the Muslim woman change her decision or make her husband convert. The participants expressed that the situation was a stressful and difficult time as for the majority of them it was important to gain their parents' consent for their marriage. Thus, those women tried to find a better way to convince their families and have their consent. For instance, Tayyibah stated that it took one year to convince her family and that finally they accepted her marriage conditionally:

> *You have no choice, you have to do what you have to do. It is not like 'oh! your parents give you such a hard time, and then you give up'. It was not an option. Neither was it an option to do something without my parents. It does not matter if it takes time. They will understand. For some people, they get married without their parents' consent. I did not want that... no happiness, no blessing... […] My parents were OK, after one year, talking, talking, talking, they became OK. They accepted it. They accepted on the basis that he would learn about the religion, and they trusted me in to stay within my own [religion]... (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

On the other hand, five participants clearly stated that when they told their families about their decision of marriage to a non-Muslim man, their families became upset and angry and stopped talking to them for extended periods, varying from 3 months to 5 years. For instance Salma stated:

> *[…] I think they were thinking about never talking to me ever again and after we got married, they did not speak to me for 3 months. They said to me that 'we can't talk to you at the moment, we are too upset. We don't know how long, we don't know if we will ever talk to you again'. I said to them, 'look, I am really sorry you feel that way, I will be thinking about you. You are still my parents. I will miss you. If anything happens I will let you know.. I respect that you need time and take the time that you need'. I just sort of left it… it was very hard. After 3 months my mother phoned me and she said 'why haven't you spoken to us!, why haven't you phoned us?, what is wrong with you?' Then, they have just carried on as normal. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

Aneesa expressed that after they got married her father did not talk to her and her husband for five years, and also forced her mother not to contact her. Her uncle became the person who eventually convinced her father to reopen communication with them:

> *My mother suddenly was very unwell and my father happened to be in Pakistan at the time. When my mom went to hospital, David and I went to see her, and an uncle of mine saw us at the hospital and he said 'hello' to David. And then my father returned from Pakistan. Then my uncle went to my father and said, 'you can either lose your daughter for the rest of your life, or you can just get on with life'. So, my uncle said, because he met David. David is very normal [laugh] and*

he said to my father, 'look, he was there when my sister was in hospital. So, what is your problem?' […] so, we then re-consult with my father. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)

As in the narrative of Aneesa, we see that it is often when parents or other close family members meet the non-Muslim husband, they change their opinion of him. Whilst some parents disapproved of the prospective son-in-law in principle because of his religion, as they came to know each other, they started to like him as an individual (Romain, 1996). Therefore, even if they were not initially happy about the marriage, for many parents 'it wasn't a big trouble after getting to know him' (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016). When the parents met their non-Muslim son-in-law in person and saw the way they (the son-in-law and daughter) lived in their home, they understood that their preconceptions about him and their marriage was not true. In some examples, reconciliation took years. Salma expressed how her family contacted them after three years of their marriage, and recalled the changes in her parent's attitudes towards her husband:

When they met, they liked him, they got along with him very well. […] When I got pregnant, my mother did come over. […] it was really nice to have her really. It did change things as well. I think she got to see what our house looks like […] There was religion in our house, you know, that we weren't doing anything unthinkable. […]. Now they love Michael. My dad and he have a very unique sort of relationship. […] I think my dad realized that Michael knows more about Islam than they expected and he has been more understanding about it and really knows the ins and outs. (Salma, London, November 2016)

These narratives indicate that even though these families are against and not happy about their daughter's decision of marriage to a non-Muslim due to the previously mentioned reasons, when they meet their son-in-law and see that he has a good person, who treats their daughter well and honourably and is also respectful to their religious identity, their thoughts changed positively.

On the other hand, some families, particularly fathers, were narrow-minded and even refused to meet their son-in-law:

> *They absolutely refused to meet up with Henry. They were like, 'oh, we don't want to see this horrible man!', type things… so they have never met him and they have no interest to meet him. They did not want to hear what he asked or said or anything. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

All these disagreements and discussions regarding their interfaith marriages affected the relationship between the women and their families. As a result, either Muslim women preferred to have a limited relationship with their families, as Anis did, or the family cut their whole relationship with the women, as if they disowned their daughter. As seen in Hanan's case, although the Muslim woman tried to continue her relationship with her family after her marriage, the family was very strict and did not want to communicate. As in Romain (1996) stated in her study, the parents, specifically the father, declared their daughter and her husband *persona non-grata* and forbade her siblings and other family members to have any further dealings with her. In the present study, Hanan told me about the difficulties she had with her family after she got married:

I kind of felt like things were getting worse. My mum was just not taking it well at all and the whole of my family… so, I felt like, I needed to go to step away from my family then I said to them; 'I'm not going to contact you anymore, but if you want to talk to me, this is my number, please call me' and they changed their address, they changed the number and no one told me. Even to this day I don't have the number. So, I get told things via my brother or via my sisters or via my uncle [secretly] but they don't directly communicate with me. […] After five years, I found out that my father had cancer. My brother and my uncle told me and I went to visit my dad in hospital… I went to see him again and again and then he was discharged from the hospital but nobody told me, so I went to the hospital and found out he had been discharged. Then my uncle gave me their house address because he said I should go and visit them and I did. But then my mum told my uncle to tell me never to go there again. That is sort of how we left it… it was her birthday last month, I sent her a birthday card but I haven't really had anything from them. (Hanan, London, March 2017)

Among the participants, Hanan's case can be stated as a prime example of the family's opposition to the interfaith marriage. Even though other participants' families started to reconnect with their daughter later on, after they got married or had a child, Hanan's parents totally rejected efforts to recontact her. From my point of view, the reason behind the family's strict opposition could be religious, as they think that Muslim women are not allowed to marry a non-Muslim in Islam, or it could be cultural, as this marriage is not acceptable in their culture and community. Thus they may refrain from the communities' attitudes towards them if they accept their daughter's interfaith marriage. Meanwhile, to better understand the reasons and dynamics behind the family's opposition,

intermarried Muslim women's families and their attitudes toward interfaith marriage merit scrutiny in further research.

4.4.2. Attitudes of Non-Muslim Husband's Family

In Western culture, the relationship within the family and family dynamics are different to Muslim families. This difference can be clearly seen in non-Muslim families' attitudes towards their son's decision of marrying a Muslim woman. Whilst in the majority of Muslim families, parents have an important role in selecting suitable marriage partners for their children, and this is an accepted custom among Muslims, in Western culture the parents' role in choosing a marriage partner is limited (Romain, 1996) and their sons and daughters have equal freedom to choose their own partners.

The majority of the Muslim women stated that there was no intervention from their parent-in-law against their decision to marry. However, this attitude did not mean that they were all in agreement with their son's decision of interfaith marriage. Some non-Muslim families were not happy about their son's decision, and implied that they were against this marriage and worried about whether their son would be forced to convert. However, despite the negative feelings of some of these families towards their son's interfaith marriage, the common attitude among those twelve families was the fact that they basically stated that their son was the one who should ultimately make the decision about whom he married.

For instance, in the case of Zahra, when her family put pressure on their son-in-law to convert to Islam, his family was not happy about this situation, and his mother, a devout Catholic, especially was worried about him. Zahra said her husband did not decide to become a Muslim to get married, but through time he started to think about the idea of conversion. At that time, even though his mother was not happy about this, she did not show clear negative attitudes toward her son and left the decision to him. Zahra explained her parent-in-law's attitudes towards her and their marriage:

> *They were very worried. His mom was very upset, but what they potentially understood unlike my parents [that] 'if we push and push that it can make the situation worse'... They said, 'we don't understand why you have to do this but if that is the only way, it is going to happen and you want to marry this girl, then we are not gonna say we are happy about it, but it is your choice'. And with me, they have never shown any hostility, you know… I know that I wasn't going to be their ideal for a daughter-in-law, and for them, I think they were feeling upset... […] but they were still very supportive as long as he did not feel that he was compelled to do anything [change his religion]. So, what was very important to them was that I wasn't forcing him to do anything that he wasn't happy with himself. (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)*

Similarly, Salma also mentioned her parent-in-law's concern about the conversion:

> *They sort of said to him [my husband] 'are you gonna convert?', he said 'no', 'is she gonna convert?', he said 'no'. then they said 'well, as*

long as you two work it out that is fine'. (Salma, London, November 2016)

In addition, those families who accepted their son's marriage to a Muslim woman and did not have any negative concern about the marriage were also respectful to their daughter-in-law's religion and her religious concerns, like eating habits:

While we have dinner/lunch together, they pay regard to their foods. They either cook fish, or make separately a vegetarian food for me. (Elif, Manchester, March 2016)

We lived with my parents-in-law for two years, they were really respectful to my religion. His mother bought halal meat for me. […] After we had a child, I had my son learn some prayers from Qurʾān by heart and I pray with him every night before he goes to sleep. Some days I might be out of city/country for work and our son stays with his grandparents. Several times, my mother-in-law called me and asked whether I would pray with my son before he goes to sleep and I prayed with him on phone. […] My son does not ask this from his grandmother, she calls me by herself. She knows we do pray every night and tells me he should read his bedtime prayers before sleeping. (Nuray, London, May 2016)

On the other hand, some other non-Muslim families were against their son's interfaith marriage and showed negative attitudes towards him and his wife-to-be. Those families can be divided into two groups. The first group of families were against the marriage because they were previously unfamiliar with Muslims and held some bias and negative views against Muslims based on what they read in

the newspapers and saw on television. For instance, Betul expressed her mother-in-law's attitudes and changes in those attitudes after they met:

> *My husband's parents are divorced, he does not see his father. At first, his mother was against me since I am Turkish and Muslim. Then we met and she liked me. I guess, she was expecting to see somebody who was orthodox, traditional, wearing a headscarf. If I were somebody like she had thought, I don't think she would accept me and our marriage. (Betul, Sheffield, May 2016)*

The second group of non-Muslim families were strongly against their son's marriage until the marriage occurred. However, after the wedding they reluctantly accepted the marriage and continued their relationship with their son and daughter-in-law. A number of participants stated that the main reason for their parent-in-law's strong opposition was their race. Hanan who is married to a Nigerian man expressed her mother-in-law's attitudes towards her:

> *I think his mother was against our marriage because I was an Asian and she thought that Henry would marry at least an African if [not Christian]… it was a race issue… I think in Nigeria it's quite common all Christians and Muslims to intermarry. Because it's almost fifty-fifty in their country. Henry has relatives who are Muslim and one of my friend's dad is Muslim and his mom is Christian, but they both are Nigerians[20]. So, their race is a bigger issue than religion whereas for my family religion is more important than race… (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

[20] This information indicates that Hanan's husband is probably from Yoruba extraction in Nigeria. For more information about interreligious relationship in Yorubaland, Nigeria see Nolte et al., 2018.

In addition, some participants also expressed that they had also experienced difficulties with their parent-in-law due to their own race and religion. Among these participants, Tayyibah, who has been married for eight years, explained her parent-in-law's attitudes towards her and her experiences with them which she described as painful and difficult to forget. She stated:

> *We love each other so deeply, but we knew that there was a very very big challenge, not just on my side, on his side as well. His parents are Dutch, in the Netherlands. There is quite a big anti-Islamic feeling there and also his parents are quite xenophobic. They don't know much about other cultures. […] His parents did not want ANYTHING Islamic. They did not know any Muslim, they thought when they met me, they realized that I was just a western girl. When we want to get married, I want to have a nikah, I want to have an aspect of my culture as well… so it wasn't just religion, it was culture as well. There was a lot of them, anti-religion, anti-culture feeling on their part. […] His parents were not gonna come to the nikah. […] Then all of things they said over the years… I cannot forget it ... whatever they say is in the back of my mind, like they don't really accept me. […] It is not that I hold the grudge, it is not that I don't forgive, I do forgive but it is painful. It is painful to forget. It is difficult to forget. You cannot forget everything. All of these things have settled down over the years. (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

It is suitable to state that most interfaith marriages are also interethnic marriage and in many cases it might be difficult to distinguish them. Thus, families focus on the racial differences between the couples as well as the religious differences. As a result of this, I think, for the families this it is not just all about the religion and there are other factors that contribute to the challenges that these families

faced. In the present study, interview narratives indicate that while for the Muslim women's family having the same religious faith is more important than ethnic similarity, for non-Muslim families ethnic similarity might be more important than having the same religious identity. I think the importance of the religion in the family's life plays an important role in the families' attitudes. In such a way that families who have stronger belief will be more against interfaith marriage, and those who have a lesser relationship with religious belief will focus more on ethnic similarity in the marriage. In this context, for these non-Muslim families marriage to someone from the same ethnicity is more important, and so they expect their son to have intraethnic marriage.

In addition to that, having negative impression about Muslims created by media and recently by some 'so-called' Muslim group like ISIS also impact non-Muslim families' attitudes toward their son's interfaith marriage to Muslim women With the impact of these negative images about Muslims, non-Muslim families showed negative attitudes toward this marriage when they learned of their son's decision.

At this point, it would be suitable to conclude that for both Muslim and non-Muslim families, mutual prejudice play an important role in both families' attitudes towards interfaith marriages. Interview data demonstrates that as it was in some Muslim families, the non-Muslim families who showed negative attitudes towards their son's marriage to a Muslim woman and their daughter-in-law had not had any close relationship or even contact with Muslims before, and similarly most of their knowledge came from what they learned from the news

and media. Therefore, it is suitable to state that lack of knowledge about the others and implicit bias affected their attitudes towards interfaith marriage.

Furthermore, it needs to be emphasised that both Muslim and non-Muslim families who had religious concerns were worried about the same issues regarding their children's interfaith marriage: the issue of their sons/daughters feeling compelled or forced to convert to another religion. This situation indicates that whether they are Muslim or not, both families have similar concerns about their son/daughter's interfaith marriages.

4.4.3. Muslim Women's Friends' Attitudes Towards Interfaith Marriage

Friends' attitudes can vary. As they are friends and share the same perspective, normally they are expected to be supportive (Romain, 1996). Likewise, interviews show that the participants generally expected more support and understanding from their friends compared to their families. This expectation became true for many participants and they received the expected support from their friends. Eleven participants indicated that when their close friends who are also Muslims learned about their decision of marriage, they were supportive. For instance Oyku stated:

> *I think they [my friends] were excited and happy for me... I think they liked him as a person. I think the fact that he is a very welcoming and warm person. I think anyone who see that goes beyond the nationality, ethnicity, religion and etc. and welcomes that... I think all my friends felt that way. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

Similarly, Maryam, who is married to a Jewish man, mentioned their positive experiences with their friends and a nickname they created for themselves:

> *They love it we call ourselves 'Mooish'*[21] *as a couple, they absolutely love it. That is hilarious. Yeah, I have never had an issue. All our friends are like us. And all my friends are like me. […] We are both quite open-minded and our friend groups and close social circles reflect that also. Yeah. When we were getting married, sort of everyone in my social circle knew that I was having a 'mooish'wedding'. Everyone was just really excited. (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

These narratives reveal that Muslim women's friends focus more on the characteristics of a non-Muslim man, rather than their ethnicity and religion. Also, during the interviews it appeared that even if their friends had negative attitudes towards Muslim women's interfaith marriages, these attitudes would not have any impact on Muslim women's decisions. Even though some of the friends did not agree with her decision, they were still supportive and did not show any negative attitudes.

However, not all the participants had positive experience with their friends regarding their marriage. Some participants explained negative attitudes they faced from their friends. Laila stated for some of her other friends this decision was huge and not acceptable:

> *I remember my friend Aisha, she said 'oh, I told our friend Saliha, she's Algerian, but she is quite strict, in comparison to me, anyway she said 'I told Saliha that you're getting married. And she asked me 'ohh is he*

[21] Mooish is a phrase used by the participant to express their relationship as a Muslim-Jewish Couple. She formulizes the phrase as Muslim + Jewish= Mooish

Muslim? She is marrying a Muslim? and I told her 'No she's not. She's marrying a non-Muslim'. She said 'Astagfirullah[22], it is ḥarām…' you know… it's quite a huge... you know, it's a big deal for people. (Laila, London, July 2017)

In addition, Elif also stated that when she told her friends that she was marrying a non-Muslim, they were happy but also said that they would be more happy if he were a Muslim. She was also surprised by the reaction of one of her friends who told her that their marriage is not valid:

When I talked with my close friend, roommate, she implied that even my 'religious' marriage [nikah] was not valid because my husband wasn't Muslim. (Elif, Manchester, March 2016)

Hanan also mentioned similar attitudes from her friends and emphasized that most of her friends are predominantly culturally Muslim, therefore were concerned more about the family situation and how they would react to each other as couples etc., than the religious side of her marriage:

I have a friend who is Pakistani and he is, I would call, a nominal Muslim, as he doesn't know a lot about the faith. He just knows the basics and calls himself Muslim based on that and he refuses to call me and Henry married. He doesn't recognize it as a marriage and he always says 'oh, your life partner' because he doesn't consider Henry as my husband and me as his wife. (Hanan, London, March 2017)

So, interestingly, even though some friends are culturally Muslim, and religion plays a limited role in their daily life, Muslim women's interfaith marriages are

[22] Astaghfirullah is an Arabic word literally translated to "I seek forgiveness in Allah". In daily usage, people typically use this phrase as an expression of shame or disapproval (wiktionary, 2018; urbandictionary, 2017).

still not seen as acceptable for them. It is suitable to state that this narrative also shows how Muslim women's interfaith marriage is considered in the Muslim community. Even though some people have limited religious concern in their life and are culturally Muslim, they consider Muslim women's interfaith marriages as taboo and unacceptable.

Furthermore, Schoen and Weinick (1993) argue that preferences in the partner choice differ depending on the level of their relationship. Compared to marriages, when people have a relationship, they show less propensity to choose a partner with the same religion and greater propensity to choose a partner with the same education (Schoen and Weinick, 1993). In particular, young adults seem to be more open to having interfaith relationships when they date compared to when they plan to get married (Barnett, 1962; Cila and Lalonde, 2014). In the present study, some of the friends' attitudes towards interfaith relationships is in line with this argument. During the interviews, some participants stated that some of their female Muslim friends also have interfaith relationships with their non-Muslim boyfriends, however, they are unwilling to take it a step further and marry to their non-Muslim boyfriends. For them dating compared to marrying to a non-Muslim man is different. Hanan expressed her friend's, who was dating a non-Muslim man, opinion:

> *I have lots of Muslim friends who dated somebody who was not Muslim. I feel like that's a very different thing, so that the girls date men who are not Muslim but then it will get to a point where then they can break it off because they see 'oh, there is no future in there...' and something like that. I've just said 'Why would you get into that*

> *relationship in the first place?' But they think dating and marriage are very different, I think… My friend already said she knows that whoever she is married, it is going to be a problem unless they are Sudanese and they are Muslim. Her parents would have a problem with that. [So] they [her family] don't know about her dating. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

So, even if some of their female Muslim friends are also in an interfaith relationship, they do not plan to marry to their non-Muslim boyfriend and plan to marry a person whom their family would accept. This was because of the fact that participants' negative experiences with their families make their friends rethink about interfaith marriage. For instance, Hanan explained how she impact her friend's thoughts about interfaith relationships. Hanan explained how her experiences with her family had an impact on her friend's thought about interfaith relationship . She said:

> *One of my friends, who saw what happened between me and my family, said that she would never marry him, a non-Muslim man, because she's saw what happened between me and my family. Although our marriage is good, my relationship with my family so deteriorated, she was like 'I saw what happened, I am not going through that'. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

It seemed apparent that even though, as Muslim women, they are not against interfaith relationships and some of them are already in an interfaith relationship, Hanan's friends do not want to marry a non-Muslim man. I think this is probably because of the fact that they know that their family will not accept this kind of

marriage and they do not want to put themselves in a position that they have to make a choice between their family and their husband-to-be.

4.5. Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have examined the background of Muslim women's decision of interfaith marriage and how their families and friends reacted to their decision. The interview narratives show that when Muslim women met their husband, they loved him as a person of good character, and the religious and cultural differences between them were not initially an issue. However, in time, when their relationship became serious, some participants started to think about the differences between them and how their families would react. All these thoughts caused a dilemma for the Muslim women, about whether they should continue this relationship and get married or break up.

Even though some participants stated that the religious differences between them and their husband was not an issue for their families, and that they did not have any problem regarding their families, for another group of participants their husbands' religion and religious differences between them were important issues for their families to be worried about. As the chapter demonstrates, those families were against the interfaith marriage for many reasons. At this point, it is important to state that religious concerns and community pressure on the families appear to be more influential than the other reasons. For some families, their community's potential reaction to their daughter's interfaith marriage was intertwined with religious concern, and sometimes it is seen as more important than their religious views.

As seen in the chapter, families living within their communities and whom had a closer relationship with other community members were strictly against their daughters' marriage because of community pressure. In contrast, within the Turkish families, as their daughters lived far away from them, it was easier for the family to ignore others' opinions about interfaith marriage, even if they had close relationships with other family members/people in their neighbourhood.

Having now examined the background information around the process of the decision of marriage, and the effects families and friends' opinions have on the Muslim women's decisions, in the following chapter I will discuss how religious differences in her family impact their marriage and how Muslim women deal with the religious differences within their family.

CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

As discussed in the previous chapter, a husband's potential impact on a woman's religiosity is one of the arguments used by scholars who are against Muslim women's interfaith marriages. According to this argument, when a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man, religious differences between them may affect their relationship negatively as the husband might put pressure on the Muslim woman's religious beliefs, thus jeopardising her freedom of religion in her marriage (Sabuni, 1980; Darwaza, 1963; Abou El Fadl, 2011; Gomaa, 2011; Dalgin, 2005). This argument also causes a widespread belief among Muslims against these marriages in that if a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man either the failure of the marriage is inevitable, or, if the marriage is successful, then the couple, or those intermarried Muslim women, do not have any concern for religion.

In this chapter, I will evaluate these arguments and social prejudices against Muslim women's interfaith marriages in the light of the interview data of interreligiously married Muslim women. In this context, I will focus on the religiosity of the participants and how they identify themselves and their husbands in terms of religious affiliation and religiosity. The conversion of a non-Muslim to Islam at the time of the marriage will be examined, as in these marriages non-Muslim men's and Muslim women's attitudes toward conversion

differ from the general expectation regarding non-Muslim men's conversion. Furthermore, I will also discuss the religious differences in Muslim women's interfaith marriages with a particular attention to (i) when religious differences matter to Muslim women and their family and (ii) what kinds of strategies they use to address religious differences in their marriages.

'Religiosity' is a term frequently used in works on the sociology of religion. However, it has turned out to be an amorphous term since both the definition of the term and the measurement of religiosity are difficult tasks (Vernon, 1962). Sociologists typically measure religiosity using indicators of belief, behaviour and belonging (Durkheim [1912], 1995). However since religiosity is a multidimensional phenomenon, from the early 1900s various dimensional models have been offered by scholars to understand and assess religiosity (Pearce et al., 2017; Wach 1944).

When looking at different frameworks for measuring religiosity and understanding its multiple dimensions, some scholars argue over the application of the traditional measures of religiosity to different religions. They discuss if these measures are more/mainly applicable to Christian contexts or if they can also be used to measure religiosity in other religions, such as a in Muslim context (Glock and Stark, 1965; González, 2011; El-Menouar, 2014). In this context, those scholars who aim to measure the religiosity of people affiliated to a different religion, other than Christianity, focus on different dimensions of religiosity, which they expect to exist for the focus of their research (Vernon, 1962; González, 2011; El-Menouar, 2014). On the other hand, Glock and Stark (1965)

state that even though there is great variation in detail, there is also considerable consensus among the world's religions because they all have general manifestations of religiosity. Accordingly, these general manifestations can be thought of as the core dimensions of religiosity, which are defined as the experimental (religious feeling), the ritualistic (religious practice), the ideological (religious belief), the intellectual (religious knowledge) and the consequential (religious effects) (Glock and Stark, 1965). These five dimensions give scholars a frame of reference for studying religion and measuring religiosity. However, in the literature, most researchers do not consider all five dimensions simultaneously, and they take a unilateral approach rather than a multidimensional one (Glock and Stark, 1965; Pearce et al., 2017; González, 2011). El-Menouar (2014) discusses a measuring instrument for Muslim religiosity drawing on Glock's multidimensional concept of religiosity. In her research, she offers five dimensions of Muslim religiosity by applying Glock's model. Those dimensions are 'basic religiosity, central duties, religious experiences, religious knowledge and orthopraxis (how orthodox Muslims are)' (El-Menouar, 2014, pp.74–75).

Considering the different dimensions of religiosity and el-Menouar's (2014) model for measuring Muslim religiosity, in my study firstly I have used religious salience, as in how important their religious identity and religious belief are for a person, to measure the religiosity of the participants; and used their own definition and self-described religiosity by asking how religious they consider themselves to be, and how important they feel religion is in their life. Even

though this approach might seem to be a limited way of measuring religiosity (Vernon, 1962), religious salience is also considered to be of crucial importance in assessing whether someone acts in line with religious values or frameworks (Pearce et al., 2017). In this context, I chose this approach as the first step in measuring the participants' religiosity because by this method the participants make their own definitions about themselves and it provided a measure of religious self-definition (Vernon, 1962). In addition, religious salience is found as a fundamental aspect of religiosity as it is consistently related to the other aspects of religiosity and demonstrates the potential level of influence that religion might have on other fields of life (Pearce et al., 2017).

Furthermore, since my research focus is on Muslim women, some standard features of religion, such as religious service attendance, are not sufficient to measure their religiosity. This is due to the fact that in traditional Islamic culture mosque attendance remains highly linked to gender (El-Menouar, 2014), and it is mostly expected from Muslim men more than Muslim women to go to a mosque. Thus, it is suitable to note that religious service attendance is generally associated with religious salience and experience for Muslim men only (González, 2011).

Therefore, in addition to religious salience, I exemplified the religiosity of the participants through two other aspects of religiosity: the ritualistic dimension that shows the participants' religious practices, and the intellectual dimension which is mainly concerned with what the participants know about religion. In terms of the religious knowledge, I focus particularly on the participants' knowledge about religious debates on Muslim women's interfaith marriage. This indicates whether

they had any religious concern when they decided to get married to a non-Muslim man.

5.1. Being Religious: How Do Muslim Women Define It?

Research on the relationship between religiosity and interfaith marriages suggest that the more conservative (religious) individuals were, the less open they were to taking part in interfaith relations (Cila and Lalonde, 2014). In this present study, all participants emphasised that they had faith, and believed in God and they identified themselves as Muslim. In addition, among the participants, three participants also specified that they are liberal Muslims. None of the participants showed any attitudes indicating that they were conservative Muslim, which reflects rigid orientation towards their own religion and the belief that their religion is the only true religion (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992).

In addition, when the participants were asked how religious they considered themselves to be, their responses differed. According to the interview data, 37% of the women (7 out of 19) stated that they are religious and devout Muslims and religion is important to them. Gordon (1966) stated that those intermarried people who have a good connection with their religion were named as 'the reluctants'. They are deeply religious and give importance to their religion. They do not support interfaith marriage in principle, thus when they meet the prospective spouse from a different religious background they have inner conflict. Similarly, in the study, these women, who identified themselves as religious, had similar inner conflicts and dilemmas when they met with a

prospective husband affiliated to a different religion, as they believed that this form of marriage is not allowed for Muslim women. Ultimately, they arrived at a decision to intermarry.

On the other hand, 47% of the participants (9 out of 19) said that they did not consider themselves 'massively religious' and they identified themselves either as a 'flexible Muslim', or 'cultural Muslim'; 16% of the women (3 out of 19) said that they are not religious Muslims.

In the study, the interview data shows that the self-described religiosity of the participants is mainly dependent on how they consider a religious person to be. Therefore, as every person has their own definition of being a religious or devout Muslim, during the interviews I also asked the participants how they define being a religious Muslim.

According to their responses, participants think that religiosity is mainly related to prosocial behaviour, altruism, which is some voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others (Howard and Piliavin, 2000) (4 out of 19), spirituality (10 out of 19) and practicing and showing your religion (5 out of 19). 4 out of 19 women stated that being religious is about having basic human values, 'being a good person', helping other people and having good intentions. According to the interviewees, being religious by definition means being a good Muslim and being a good Muslim by definition means being a good person. This is because of the fact that a person cannot follow the faith without letting the faith shape her/his motivations, attitudes and behaviour. In this context, the respondents indicate

that human values are important and being religious is mainly about personality and human and moral values. It is also about considering religious ethical values in daily life. For instance, Maryam, married to a Jewish man, defines being religious by saying that:

> *I think having religious morals in the forefront of my mind at all times makes me feel like, I'm religious […]. Everything I do, every decision I make I try to reflect on. Not necessarily what I want to do first. I reflect on what the right thing to do is. […] I pray every day for forgiveness for our trivial sins. I give to charity. Everything that I was supposed to do I do. But I am just…. I don't wear a hijab, I don't go to the mosque. I drink alcohol occasionally. So, I wouldn't say I am a strict Muslim at all, but I would call myself religious. And my mum would call me religious because I constantly think about how to be better, because that is how my parents raised me and that's how I want to raise my children. Accountability is something that resonates with me every day and that is something that I got from my religious upbringing. (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

In addition, a second group of women describe religiosity by a person's relationship with God and spirituality. According to this, if a person has a good connection with God, they could be identified as religious. For instance, Salma defines her understanding of being religious:

> *I would say religion is at the centre of things... I don't necessarily pray all the time, but I do think about God very often. […] So, that feels very connected for me. […] Looking at something beautiful makes me think that God is there. That is God showing me Himself. I think I experience it in lots of ways, obviously, everything I put into my mouth I'm thinking if it is halal. […] that is what I like about eating*

halal food. It makes you think about what you do. It makes you remember God. (Salma, London, November 2016)

For many of the participants (10 out of 19) spirituality is more important than 'being religious' and they also prefer to call themselves spiritual. For instance, Tayyibah states:

I am religious, I've started to use the word 'spiritual' more […] I feel like religion is not a right word, to be honest, but I am religious. I feel like I am beyond religion. Because I am moving a little bit beyond religion, I would say I am very spiritualist Muslim, spiritually Muslim. Like, the practice is important, I cannot give it up. There is something that draws me to the practice. [...] Let's put this way, you pray 5 times a day, at that moment you pray you have your connection to God, but it stops when you stop praying. Whereas for me, my spirituality is all day long. It is more than that. It is in my breath, and it is in my thought, in my world. (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)

On the other hand, the participants' initial responses about how they identify themselves in terms of being religious changed when they were asked to make their own definition of being religious. A number of Muslim women did not limit being religious to practising and they made a broader definition of being a 'religious Muslim'. After they made their own definition, a number of women, who do not observe religious practices regularly, changed their initial evaluation and identified themselves as religious. For instance, when Aneesa was asked if she identifies herself as a religious Muslim, she said:

Not very religious. But, no… how do you define [being] religious?! If people define someone who is Muslim as someone who says they pray five times a day, then I am not. But I think I am living my life in

an essentially Muslim way, then yes, I do. I think, I hope.. and you know, God is my judge. I am conscious of my behaviour and how God will judge me. So, I would say yes. Because I am, and I try my best … (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)

The last group of participants who identified themselves as non-religious stated that being religious is mainly about practising and performing all religious obligations. According to this, a person can only be identified as religious if she believes in God and partakes in outward practices, such as demonstrating her religion by wearing the headscarf or going to the mosque regularly. They said:

To be a proper Muslim, to be religious, I think you have to go your church or mosque or whatever once a week, twice a week. Do whole prayers five times a day or fast during Ramadan and so on... I think that is the proper dedicated religious person. I am not that… (Nesrin, London, May 2016)

The most important thing is whether she is a believer? Does she have faith? This is important. Secondly, does a person follow the five pillars of Islam? If she believes in and follows the five pillars, then she is a religious Muslim. Since I am not practicing, I don't define myself as a religious, proper Muslim. (Betul, Sheffield, May 2016)

Being religious I suppose, refers to, for me, I guess, people who do everything, you know… and the religion is in the centre of their lives and shapes everything, their daily life, their rituals… everything. But that is not the case for me… so, this is why I don't describe myself religious. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)

Furthermore, when focusing on the religious practices of the participants, we find that 5 women said that they pray five times a day, and 13 women stated that they either do not pray five times a day or seldom pray, limiting prayer to Friday night or holy days. Eight women said they fast during Ramadan and three women said they do not fast because of their health. In addition, among 19 participants, only one woman was wearing the headscarf at the time of the interview. Interview data indicates that among 19 intermarried Muslim women, five women are stricter in the observance of the religious practices than the other participants by both praying five times a day and fasting during Ramadan. I think this could be interpreted as the fact that those women could be liberal in terms of social ethics but they are devout in terms of their religious practice.

Hoge (1995) argues that people who are married out of their religion have weaker religious identity, on average, than others who are married in their religious group. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a similar presumption about Muslim women that intermarried Muslim women have a lower interest in religion than women married to a Muslim. However, during the interviews, a number of participants pointed out this common presumption and refuted it by emphasising that even though they are married to a non-Muslim man, religion is still important to them and plays a role in their daily life. For instance, Salma and Hanan specifically mentioned how people are biased in their opinions about intermarried Muslim women:

> *Some people I work with are really surprised that I follow a religion because I have married to someone who is not Muslim. So, they will*

be like 'Oh! Do you still fast?!' I say 'Yes, I do!' (Salma, London, November 2016)

I feel people look at me and they would assume that I'm not religious but surprisingly religion plays a big role in my life. I AM RELIGIOUS. I make an effort to pray 5 times a day, I make an effort to read the Qurʾān at least once a day, I fast… you know I do... I eat halal food and I've never drunk. And I think I just generally try to be a good person as much as I can. So, for me, I thought religion does play a big role. But I think other people may look at me and think it doesn't play a big role. (Hanan, London, March 2017)

Furthermore, the interview data demonstrates that seven participants did not do any research on what Islam says about Muslim women's interfaith marriage. This was because either the ruling on a Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim was not their concern or they had already been told that a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man, so they did not want to read something negative and preferred to ignore it.

On the other hand, 12 out of 19 participants stated that they did some research to get some information about what Islamic law and the Qurʾān says about Muslim women's interfaith marriages. Although those women also already had some previous information about interfaith marriages in the Islamic tradition and were aware that Muslim women are not allowed to get married to a non-Muslim man, they wanted to do their own research. Despite all the negative opinion they received about their marriage, they wanted to find some support and positive opinions about their marriage. Aneesa stated that:

> *I looked up verses in the Qurʾān, I then looked up women writers like Fatima Mernissi, Nawal El Saadawi, Laila Ahmed. I suppose maybe I was looking at writers who I knew for certain to support us… so, I tried to find some support in writing. So yes, I think we had decided that we were going to marry in any way, but it was just reassuring to know that there was some theological support. I think I did find some commentaries which did support that. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

Several women stated that when they did some research on the subject they saw that there wasn't any prohibition for marrying a Christian or Jewish man in the Qurʾān, and the asserted prohibition was for the marriages to *mushriks* who ascribe divinity to objects or believe in multiple deities (Esposito, 2003); however, other people still thought that marriage to Christian men is not allowed. For instance, Elif explained her research on Muslim women's interfaith marriage and the negotiation with other people about Muslim women's interfaith marriage:

> *I did research both on the internet, and from the Qurʾān and some commentaries. I also talked with other people during my religious class. However, I couldn't find any positive opinion in there, except the Qurʾān. In the Qurʾān, the decision of marriage was left to me. There was only prohibition for Muslim woman's marriage to a Mushrik. However, people are biased and prejudiced. When they start to negotiate, I tell them there is not any prohibition in the Qurʾān and don't argue. (Elif, Manchester, March 2016)*

On the other hand, some participants criticised the traditional text and the presentation of arguments prohibiting such marriages. Maryam, married to a

Jewish man, emphasised that when she read some opinions on Muslim women's interfaith marriage, the comments were very strong both in Islamic and Jewish sources. She said:

> *I think that a thousand year old text has been interpreted by people that are not intelligent enough often to be interpreting them. I just think it was very depressing actually. When we were planning our wedding, when we were researching how we would want to do this, it wasn't just from Islam, it's from Judaism as well. The amount of hateful crap out there where people will be incredibly vocal about how and why they thought this was something wrong. And when I was reading about it, honestly I felt like I was reading about someone committing a murder not starting a life together and I just thought that it is impossible to me that those two sins are equal that there is that much of sin for women to be marrying out and the issue that everyone splitting hands over there is a lot of disparity in meaning and in interpretation. (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

These narratives make it clear that these women have some religious concern, thus they wanted to learn the rules about interfaith marriages in Islam and to understand the reason behind the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriage, which they had always been told about by their families and communities. In addition, they tried to find some religious support, as they were worrying about whether their decision of marriage was wrong according to Islam.

5.2. Interfaith Marriage and Religiosity:

The effect of interfaith marriage on a couple's religious identity and religiosity has been an issue discussed by scholars in related literature (Hoge, 1995; Booth et al.,

1995; Hughes and Dickson, 2005; Sullivan, 2001). Research on interfaith marriages describe four cases seen in mixed marriages in terms of the impact of interfaith marriage on couples' religiosity: one partner can convert to the other partner's religion, both can convert to another religion, both can maintain their own religious faith, or both can lose their interest in religion and leave their religious community (Hoge, 1995; Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Hoge (1995) argues that among those options, conversion of one of the spouses to the other's religion is the most common behaviour among the intermarried couples. Conversely though, in recent years more couples either choose to remain their own religious group or they lose their interest in religion (Hoge, 1995).

Significantly, when it comes to Muslim women's interfaith marriages, the subject becomes more problematic. Even though there is not enough comprehensive research to definitely identify the impact of interfaith marriage on women's religious identity, scholars argue that being married to a non-Muslim will have a negative effect on a Muslim woman's religiosity. Hoge (1995) argues that interfaith marriages are considered as a threat for the future of religious identity by religious communities. People are against these marriages as they worry that interfaith marriage will destroy the identity of their own group (Hoge, 1995). Notably, in the study, participants also referred to the similar biases of their families and friends about the effect of interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religious experiences. A number of participants stated that people around them predicted that their marriages to a non-Muslim man would negatively affect their

religiosity. For instance, Salma clearly mentioned the biases against her marriage and explained the incorrectness of others' assumption about it:

> *When you marry out of your religion people assume that you throw your religion away. I let them think that… I think my parents thought as well, I think they thought that when we got married I wouldn't fast anymore and pray anymore, and that all will go out the window. I think, in nine years of our marriage and everything still carries on, nothing has changed and you know, like fasting. Even though we fast longer here [I observe Ramadan]. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

Significantly, other participants' responses also refute the arguments related to the direct effect of interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religiosity. When participants were asked how the interfaith marriage affected their religiosity, then to identify the differences from before and after their marriages, a few women stated that there were some ups and downs in their religiosity and religious experiences throughout the years. However, it is not correct to say that these changes were directly correlated with their marriages to a non-Muslim man. They were mainly about their life experiences throughout their marriages:

> *I can't say that I became more [or less] religious after my marriage. Sometimes I become more interested in religions, sometimes not. I can say, those changes are mostly related with tough times I've had in my life, such as depression, difficulties I have faced… mostly some psychological experiences… or sometimes my friends make me think more about religion... All these kind of things… but it is not about my marriage... (Ruya, London, June 2016)*

Furthermore, during the interviews, nine Muslim women stated that there were not any differences in their religious views or in their religiosity before or after

their marriages; ten Muslim women stated that their marriage had an effect upon their religiosity, either in terms of their religious practices, or their understanding of religion.

In the study, intermarried Muslim women who said that their marriages had no effect on their religiosity can be grouped into two categories: (1) those women who identify themselves as a 'cultural Muslim' or 'not religious'; and (2) those women whose spiritual journey had already started before their marriage. The first group of intermarried Muslim women who identified themselves as a 'cultural Muslim' said that there were not any differences, either negative or positive, in their religious life before and after their marriages. This is due to the fact that religion played a limited role in their daily life, meaning their marriage to a non-Muslim man did not have any effect upon their religiosity in terms of their religious practice. In addition, even though they identified themselves as a cultural Muslim, for the majority of these women it was important to maintain their Muslim identity to some extent. For instance, if they fasted or went to the mosque during Ramadan before they got married, they continued to do so after their marriage.

Muslim women in the second group indicated that there were not any differences in their religiosity that could be related to their marriages as their spiritual journey had already started before they met their husband. They emphasised that when they met their husband they were already interested in religion and spirituality and had experienced changes in their religious views. Thus, we may conclude that interfaith marriage had nothing to do with their

religiosity. For instance, when I asked the participants to explain how their marriages affected their religiosity, two participants said:

> *The change in my religious understanding and view is not about my marriage, it is about my spiritual journey. I am a person who became an atheist [first], then an agnostic, then a deist, then a Sufi and finally I have become only a Muslim. My marriage came across my spiritual journey and specifically at the time when I was a deist, Sufi. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

> *When I was 15, I'd started to become interested in religion. Then I was at the university and I became very interested in religion. Then I've lost a lot of my interest and intensity around working, and for 7 to 8 years I wasn't very interested in religion, then again it came back in very very strong manner. So, it was more to do with me than anyone else. […] It has got nothing with my marriage. It is actually quite unrelated.* (*Tayyibah, London, November 2017*)

5.2.1. Changes in Religious Practice:

During the interviews, ten participants stated that their marriages to a non-Muslim man had influenced their religiosity and there had been changes in their religious practices since they got married.

Among those participants, only two mentioned negative effects of an interfaith marriage upon their religious practice, specifically the frequency of their religious practice. They said that before their marriage or during the first years of their marriage they went to the mosque during Ramadan, or prayed more often. However, over the years these practices lessened. Here, it is important to state

that when the participants talked about some negative effect of an interfaith marriage, they mainly focused on the negative effect of sharing life with someone who believes in a different religion or is not practising. According to this, the negative impact was not explicitly coming from their husbands themselves, which means the husbands did not prevent their wives from practices their religion; instead it was mainly about sharing their life with someone who did not share their religious belief nor practice the same religion. The participants stated that if they were sharing the same religion, then they might practice more as their husband would encourage them to do so:

> *I sometimes wonder if I would be more outwardly Islamic, actually Muslim if I was not married to David. Sometimes I wonder if I would do more… I wonder if I was in a Pakistani family, I would pray more... because I don't pray five times a day. I wonder if I would more… I don't know if I would. Maybe it would depend on what kind of family I had married into, and would that actually be sincere prayer? Or would it be because everyone else around me does? […] So, I don't know... spiritually, I think probably I would be similar, I don't think it makes a difference. Sometimes I say David would have made more effort go to church if he wasn't married to me. Because if he married a Christian, he would have done more things as a family. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

As mentioned, interfaith couples are often seen as being careless about their religion and shallow with their religious beliefs. However, some research on interfaith marriages argues against this. Susan Katz Miller (2013) found in her research on interfaith marriages and families in the US that being in an interfaith marriage makes participants more interested in their religion and allows them to

become closer to their identity. Similarly, in the current study, when Muslim women talked about the changes in their religiosity, eight women stated that their marriages had a positive effect on their religiosity. For those women, being married to a non-Muslim man made them think more about the importance of the religion for them and it brought them back in touch with their religion. For instance Maryam said:

> *I would say, personally, marrying somebody that wasn't a Muslim has actually brought me closer to my own faith. For me, it made my faith stronger. […] I wasn't even massively religious before. […] In my very early 20s after losing my friend, I was less connected to the religion. So, I do think my father's death and my husband brought me back to [the religion]. (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

In the narrative of Maryam, we see that being a part of interfaith marriage and living with a spouse from a different religious background makes these participants closer to their religion as their religious identity became more perceivable and they started to think about religious subjects more. I think this is an important point as it refutes the common perception about Muslim women's interfaith marriages that this marriage will lessen Muslim women's connection to their religious identity.

In the interview data, three main themes were identified as the reason for this positive effect of an interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religiosity: (a) feeling responsible as an ambassador of Islam in the family, (b) feeling guilty and (c) the husband's religiosity and his questions on Islam.

5.2.1.1 Feeling responsible as an ambassador of Islam

In an interfaith marriage, each spouse represents their religion. The level of this representation changes depending on the religiosity of the couples. In the study, six Muslim women clearly stated that they feel responsible to represent Islam in their family, and they identify themselves as an ambassador of Islam in their marriage. For instance, Maria said:

> *I want to pray more, yes… Because on some level I feel I need to be an ambassador a little bit. So… not too much, but there is an element that I want to be the best representation of it… (Maria, London, July 2017)*

Interview data shows that with this feeling of being an ambassador, those participants aimed to be a role model for their husbands and their family. They wanted them to be interested in Islam, making them more careful in representing Muslims in a good way. In addition, if they had a child, those intermarried women feel more responsibility in being a good model to their child as a Muslim mother. The data indicates that all these feelings brought Muslim women closer to their religion and they became more conscientious in practising their religion, and aimed to extend their knowledge about Islam. For instance, Nuray and Elif explained their thoughts about being a role model in their family:

> *I should say when I met my husband, I was like a regular Muslim or should say cultural Muslim. Now, I still look like a regular person, as I don't wear the headscarf, but I am also practising my religion, in terms of observing religious obligations, like praying 5 times a day, fasting… Because I think that if you become a role model, and do*

what you need to do as a Muslim, then he [your husband] will see you. He would believe in or not, it is up to him but you should be a role model. (Nuray, London, May 2016)

I thought that if I will be a part of this marriage, engage in an interfaith marriage, then I should be more dominant, and more knowledgeable about religion. Thus, I thought, I need to learn more about Islam. […] Because the more I learn about Islam and be a role model for my husband, the better I represent Islam, and benefit to him... (Elif, Manchester, March 2016)

5.2.1.2 Feeling of guilt:

Four participants said that when they decided to get married to a non-Muslim man, they received some negative opinions about their marriage and their religiosity, either from their family or the community. These negative opinions and the family pressure made them feel guilty for their decision of having an interfaith marriage. To release themselves from this feeling of guilt, they started to become more careful and more serious about their religion and more connected to their religious identity in order to refute the communities' and other Muslims' negative conception and bias regarding Muslim women's interfaith marriages. Participants explained how they became more connected to the religion to overcome the feeling of guilt after their interfaith marriages:

I feel like I have to be careful about my prayers and fasting because I don't want anyone ever to say that I've lost my faith because I married a Christian. So, I kept on it, maybe more strongly than I would have. (Hanan, London, March 2017)

I still have a feeling like 'am I doing wrong?', 'Did I disobey Allah?', 'Won't Allah love me because of this marriage?'… As an intermarried woman, I think all these kinds of things, willingly or unwillingly. Thus, I aim to be in a state of peace and awe bodily and spiritually in prayers, and I am more careful in my religious practice. (Elif, Manchester, March 2016)

This marriage has become the most beautiful thing I have ever done in my life and it is also my biggest mistake. I feel both at the same time… […] I felt regretful and it made me more connected to my religion. […] some of my Turkish friends told me that I would leave Islam and convert to Christianity after I got married, but mine was opposite. My marriage made me more connected to my religion... whilst I wasn't a practising Muslim before, now I pray, I fast... I am more meticulous in observing religious commandments... (Nuray, London, May 2016)

5.2.1.3 Husband's religiosity and his interest in religion:

Ali (2017) found in her research on interfaith marriages that being with a partner who has a different ethnic or religious identity makes people more conscious of their own identities. In other words, the differences between the partners can be beneficial in being more aware of their religious identity (Al-Yousuf, 2006). In my study, Muslim women's responses also support these arguments and dispute the traditional view that if a Muslim woman married a non-Muslim, this marriage would take her from her religion (Dalgin, 2005). In the research, five participants emphasised that being married to a non-Muslim and their husband's interest in

religion, and the discussion between them about religious issues, made them more conscious of their Muslim identity and encouraged them to learn more about Islam. For instance, Hanan and Meral explained how their husbands' religiosity encouraged them to learn more about their own religion:

> *I think it was him who made me take my religion seriously. Because as he was looking into his religion, I then started looking into mine. And because we've always discussed ideas and had quite in-depth conversations about spirituality and like that. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*
>
> *My husband asks me some questions, some key questions about Islam and it makes me search more and more for the answer and read the Qurʾān more. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

5.2.2. Changes in Religious Understanding:

In addition to the effect of the interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religious practices, a number of participants also mentioned how their marriages affected their understanding of religion. A 28-year-old White-British woman and a Malaysian woman I interviewed said that before they got married and had a relationship with a non-Muslim family, they were stricter on certain religious issues and they saw them in 'black-and-white'. This was mainly because of the way they were raised by their families and their belief that there was only one judgement to be made in many religious issues, with Muslim women's interfaith marriages being one of them. However, when they met people from different religions, and did some research about religious issues, they saw that there are different interpretations and judgments about many issues like interfaith

marriage which are not black-and-white. All these experiences made them more relaxed on religion and they identified themselves as liberal Muslims.

It is important to note that our results on the impact of interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religiosity counter the general assumption among Muslim scholars and Muslim communities that interfaith marriage has a negative impact on Muslim women's religiosity or it causes loss of interest in their religion and that it can even eventually cause them to leave Islam. Nevertheless, it should be noted that people may lose their interest in religion or convert to another religion when they become a part of an interfaith marriage, or it may be the opposite as asserted by many of the participants in the present study. These participants indicated that being in a relationship with someone who had a different religious background made many Muslim women more aware of their own religious identity and more interested in their religion and religious subjects. Also, some participants think that this marriage made them more tolerant to other beliefs and customs. In addition, none of the participants mentioned that their interfaith marriage caused them to have a loss of interest in their religion. It is important to stress that people might be more connected in their religion or have weaker religious commitments during their life. There are many factors affecting people's relationship with their religion and marriage out of faith may be only one of the factors that need to be considered. Therefore, it is not suitable to deduce that a Muslim woman's marriage to a non-Muslim man will eventually affect her religiosity negatively. Rather, more research should be conducted on Muslim

women's interfaith marriages to understand its potential impact on the intermarried Muslim women's religiosity.

5.3. Non-Muslim Husband:

As discussed, the interview data indicated that being married to a person who is of a different religion does not mean that religion is not important for those women. The data also shows that a Muslim woman's marriage to a non-Muslim man should not be interpreted to mean that they do not have any concern about their partner's religious views. In the study, the majority of the participants (11 out of 19) stated that their husband's religious view or the level of his religiosity was an important criterion for them when they decided to get married. The interview data shows that when participants decided to marry their non-Muslim husbands, they distinguished between having a husband believing in the same religion and having faith in one God. As mentioned in the previous chapter, for many of the participants having a husband who has faith in one God was more important than believing in the same religion in terms of their husband's religiosity. This attitude, giving importance to the faith in one God, was shared by both religious Muslim women and cultural Muslim women. For instance, Pinar, who identifies herself as a cultural Muslim and Elif, who is a practicing Muslim, explained their opinions about their husband's religion with the following statements:

> *What's important for me is that he has something he believes in. […] I do not mind if he goes to mosque or church… At the end, both are the house of Allah. He believes. If he were an atheist, I could not accept*

[to marry] him. Because there would not be anything that he believes in. (Pinar, Manchester, June 2016)

Pinar's narrative is important to show that even though she identifies herself as cultural Muslim and religion plays a limited role in her life, having faith in God is important for her and also it is an important criterion for a prospective husband.

Having a husband who has faith is more important for me. If he did not have any faith or did not believe in anything, it would be hard for me. I guess it would not happen [I would not marry him]. When people ask me about how we deal with religious differences in the family, two difference religions, I tell them if he did not have faith, did not believe in God, it would not happen. Because we would believe in different things. But now, I have faith in God, he has too. We believe in one creator, so things may be easier… (Elif, Manchester, March 2016)

These narratives indicate that for the majority of the interviewees marriage to a non-believer is also not acceptable. Considering the discussions among the scholars on Muslims interfaith marriages in the chapter two, it is suitable to note that these participants attitudes correspond with the majority consensus about Muslims' interfaith marriage in Islam: Muslims, both men and women, are encouraged to marry believers.

Research argues that in most Western nations nominal affiliation remains high and attendance to religious services is very low (Gorski and Altınordu, 2008; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). This argument is in line with the religiosity of the non-Muslim husbands in the study. Among the participants whose husbands are Christians and Jewish, only three participants said that their husbands are practising and religion has an important role in their life. Ten participants said

that their husbands are cultural Christians or Jews, and religion does not play any role in their lives.

5.3.1. The Conversion of Husband:

Hoge (1995) argues that conversion is an efficient way of resolving the religious differences in an interfaith family. Researchers who examine the conversion in interfaith marriages indicate that nearly half of the interfaith marriages result in conversion of one of the spouses (Hoge, 1995). Similarly, Cerchiaro et al (2015) mention 'conversion' as one of the strategies that intermarried couples rely on to deal with the religious differences in their family. Partners think that the homogeneity of religious affiliation in the family will be obtained through conversion (Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Hoge, 1995).

In individual cases, the situation that the couples encounter, couples' religious affiliation and their relationship with their family all affect the intermarried couples' attitudes towards conversion. This is to say that the partner with the weaker religious commitment and less family pressure converts in the direction of the other (Hoge, 1995). Likewise, in an interfaith marriage involving a Muslim woman, the most common pattern is for the non-Muslim partner to convert. This is mainly because greater family and community pressure comes from the Muslim woman's side due to the traditional opinion against Muslim women's interfaith marriages. As discussed, according to traditional Islamic view, if a Muslim woman wants to marry a non-Muslim her husband has to convert to Islam. Otherwise, their marriage is not valid, as a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry to a non-Muslim man. Because of this common understanding of Muslim

women's interfaith marriages, when a non-Muslim man wants to get married to a Muslim woman, he is expected to be a Muslim by conversion in order to marry her.

In this study, contrary to the general expectation, Muslim women did not stipulate that their non-Muslim husband should convert to Islam to get married. Among 19 participants, only three women stated that conversion of their husbands to Islam was important to them, and thus they openly asked their husband to convert at the beginning of their relationship. However, their husbands did not accept this demand to convert to Islam. Nevertheless, Muslim women continued their relationship and got married. At the same time, during their marriages, they also continued their effort to persuade the husband to change his opinion about the conversion:

> *My husband was born and raised as a Christian, but later he did not believe in Christianity. […] After he met me, especially during the first years of our marriage, I intensely forced him to convert Islam. When we decided to get married, I even asked him openly and said, 'I want you to convert to my religion.' At first, he reacted strongly and told me: 'if you marry me for that, please do not marry me thinking that I will convert to Islam. I am not saying I will or will not. This is religion, give it some time. I do not know either'. (Nuray, London, May 2016)*

> *I really wanted him to learn our religion, and I tried really hard for years... I was hopeful for about 10 years or so, I was praying by saying 'Oh Allah, please help me guide this man'. I bought books, brought them to him and I even read them out loud. So, I spent a*

good ten years putting a lot of effort into this. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)

On the other hand, even though those participants continued their relationship with their non-Muslim boyfriend and decided to get married, his being non-Muslim was still an issue for their families. When the families learned of their daughters' decision to marry a non-Muslim man, they demanded that the prospective son-in-law convert to Islam, and they said only then would they approve of their daughter's marriage.

In the study, the participants whose families were against their daughter's marriage to a non-Muslim, and did not accept their marriage unless the husband converted to Islam, explained how their family's attitudes put Muslim women in a dilemma: on one hand, they wanted to get married to the man they loved and, on the other hand, they did not want to disobey their families and lose them as they would not accept the marriage unless he converted to Islam. During the interviews, it appeared that to solve this dilemma and overcome the difficulty and to convince their families, either Muslim women had to lie to their family about the conversion of their husband (2 out of 19), which was already discussed in the previous chapter, or their husbands converted to Islam (3 out of 19) just for the purpose of marriage.

In the study, non-Muslim husbands can be divided into three broad categories regarding their attitudes towards conversion: (1) non-Muslim husbands who converted to Islam of their own free will, (2) non-Muslim husbands who had a

nominal conversion, (3) non-Muslim husbands for whom conversion was out of the question.

Regarding the conversion, only one husband converted to Islam of his own will several years after his marriage. Hoge (1995) argues that conversion in interfaith marriages either take place at the time of the marriage or before their first child is ten years old. Children's religious identification and thoughts about giving religious education to them precipitate the decision of conversion (Hoge, 1995; Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Similarly, in the study, the conversion was not just for the marriage or to convince the family. Nesrin, who was married for 25 years, said that even though at the beginning her mother had wanted her husband to convert, the conversion was not an issue between them at the time of their marriage. However, she said that two years after they had their first child, her husband decided to convert of his own will. One summer, while they were in Turkey, he got circumcised and decided to convert to Islam. Regarding the reason for her husband's conversion, Nesrin stated that having their first child might have had an effect on her husband's decision, because they thought that believing in the same religion was important to make the family bond stronger. This idea might have affected her husband's decision to convert specifically after their daughter was born. She said:

> *We never spoke about conversion at all. We just thought it was the best thing to do after we had our first child. Because you get married, but you are not really married unless you are bonded by the same religion as well. So, this [his conversion] was the proper way to do it. (Nesrin, London, May 2016)*

In the narrative of Nesrin, we see that even though the couple thought that believing in the same religion was important for good family bonding, they were always attempting to not make religious differences a problem in their family. However, after they had a child the husband changed his attitude towards conversion. They thought that a religiously united family would be better than the one which was religiously divided for their children (Hoge, 1995). So, having a child and their healthy psychological and religious development in the family became the main reason for the conversion of the non-Muslim husband (Iannaccone, 1990; Kirman, 2003)

There were four non-Muslim husbands in the second category whose conversion was described by their Muslim wives as 'nominal'. Here, it is worth mentioning that the term 'nominal' does not suggest that the partner wasn't serious in his attitude (Chopra and Punwani, 2005). In line with Chopra and Punwani (2005), I have used the term 'nominal' in the context of Muslim women's interfaith marriages to explain that the partner continues to perceive himself as having his own faith or having a general orientation towards religion.

In the study, the narratives showed that four husbands converted to Islam nominally and recited the *shahāda* (testimony of faith) as a gesture of their respect for their in-laws. This behaviour helped the Muslim women's families to accept the marriage. For instance, Pinar explained her husband's conversion by saying that:

> *My mom asked him to convert, and I said OK. I told him what he needed to do, and I mentioned that it was not mandatory, I was not*

> *forcing him to do anything, but to show respect to my family he could at least say the shahāda. He accepted it and he did that for me. I said, 'you pray or not, it is up to you. It is also up to you what you believe in and what you do. You believe in something and that is what matters to me the most'. (Pinar, Manchester, June 2016)*

Zahra, a 32-year-old British-Indian woman, stated that her husband's conversion was not a real conversion, but she had to ask for a conversion to Islam as it was the only way to deal with the difficulties she would face from her own family when they learned that she wanted to get married to him. She said:

> *He officially converted to get married, but we have always been very honest. I think it was a formality rather than conviction. […] I was very honest with him when we met that it is not necessarily that my faith was very important, but I have to manage my family's expectations, and that [his conversion] was a way that we could make it work, and make sure that everybody could come to terms with it, but there was only one real way that that could happen and that was for him to convert. Otherwise, I would stand to risk losing everything. (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)*

Notably, those husbands who accepted to convert to Islam or recite the *shahāda* during/for the religious wedding were the husbands identified by their wives as not religious, and religion did not play any role in their lives. For this reason, saying *shahāda* or converting to Islam did not mean anything for these non-Muslim husbands and after the conversion there were not any changes in their religious identity. In other words, it was not a sincere conversion, and it was mainly for the purpose of having a religious wedding ceremony and to make the family happy. Yasemin also explained her husband's conversion:

> *It is not nice to say this but my husband ostensibly did it [converted to Islam]. He did it to please my family. Otherwise, he is not a person who practices his own religion either. So, it did not matter to him in changing his religion. He said he would do it to make my family happy. I accepted that to get out of that [bad] situation [we had tension between me and my family]. (Yasemin, London, June 2016*)

In the study, Muslim families' attitudes towards their prospective son-in-law's 'nominal' conversion was important in order to see the effect of traditional views on Muslim women's interfaith marriage. The participants said that after their husband's conversion, their families did not talk about his conversion, nor did they ask anything about his religious practices; whether he prays, fasts, etc or not. From my point of view, this attitude can be interpreted in two ways: (1) the families were also aware that the prospective son-in-law's conversion was not a sincere conversion, and he did so nominally only to make the marriage acceptable to them. Even though it was nominal, by the conversion he did tick the main box in which he is Muslim now and this was the family's main concern as they think that their daughters' interfaith marriages are now acceptable according to Islam; or (2) they thought that their son-in-law needed more time to adjust to the new religious thought, and practice religious rituals, thus they gave him space and time to observe his new religion. However, the interviews show that those women have been married at least 5 years, and the families' attitudes have not changed. This situation makes the first interpretation more likely and it indicates that, due to the traditional view, the conversion of the non-Muslim son-in-law was important for these families, even if it was only for the marriage, and

did not mean anything to him. In addition, the prospective son-in-law's conversion was important to the family, regardless of whether it was nominal or not. Because by his conversion the family saved face in their community and extended family by being able to say their daughter had married a convert.

Two Turkish women, married for 13 years and 5 years respectively, stated that they had to lie to their parents about their husbands' conversion due to the family pressure on them regarding their husband's religion. Even though they knew that their husbands recited the *shahāda* just during/for the religious marriage, and it did not mean anything to him, they had to tell their parents and families that their husbands had converted to Islam and they were Muslim from then on. Women emphasised that they felt they had to do so because otherwise, their family would not accept this marriage, and the family would even disown them. Nuray stated that they have been married for thirteen years, and her mother still does not know the truth and she has felt remorse since then.

For the third group of participants, the conversion was out of the question for non-Muslim husbands. However, it had still been an issue to be discussed among some couples when they decided to get married. Four participants stated that after they had introduced their husband to their family, they insisted on asking him to convert. So, due to family pressure, those Muslim women had to discuss the idea of conversion with their husband and ask him to convert. However, their husbands were unwilling to convert, even nominally. Hanan explained how her family put pressure on her to convince her husband for the conversion and how her husband reacted:

> *When we first got married, there were lots of pressure from my family, everyone kept saying to me it [his conversion] is the easiest way to get this situation resolved. Even from my friends who were just like 'can he just say it?' Like, it doesn't need to mean anything. So, I did ask him. I think I put some pressure on him to do so. And he was just like, 'no because it is like me asking you to be a Christian and you wouldn't do it. So, why would I do that?' (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

As seen in Hanan's case, even though these women had to ask their husband to convert for their family, they did not insist on it in their demand. This is because they agreed with their husbands and they would not convert just for the marriage as well.

Among the participants, nine Muslim women stated that they did not ask their husband to convert to Islam or change his religious view when they decided to marry. Regarding the Muslim women's attitudes towards the conversion of their husbands, three main themes were identified in the study: (1) compulsion: there is no compulsion in religion, (2) personal choice: conversion is a matter of personal choice and belief, and (3) hypocrisy: conversion must be sincere.

A number of participants stated that a person could not be forced to convert to another religion and this is one of the basic principles of Islam which is 'there is no compulsion in religion' (Qurʾān 2:256). Thus, if they asked their husband to convert to Islam for marriage and forced him to become Muslim, this would be against a fundamental principle of Islam. For instance, Meral explained how her

family and friends insisted that she could make her husband convert but she rejected this:

> *When I decided to marry my husband, some of my friends told me to ask him to convert to Islam. They said, 'everything is up to you, if you ask, he will accept'. I found myself constantly pondering over that. It would not be truly sincere if he recited the shahāda for me. If I asked him that, it would be compelling but there is no compulsion in religion. Only Allah knows if my husband would be granted the shahāda and guidance. I cannot change that… I could only influence him [invite him to my religion] with my behaviour and my stance on religion without forcing him. I cannot do anything else… That is why I did not find it right to ask him to convert [to Islam]. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

Similarly, two participants also explained that previously they thought that if they insisted they could make their husbands convert to Islam. However, as time went on, they realised how they were incorrect. They said that they understood that nobody can control anyone and so they cannot make their husband convert to Islam, nor force them to do so. For instance, Nuray explained her attitudes towards the conversion:

> *The biggest mistake I have ever made was that, as I understand only now, you should never say 'I will convert that person to Islam.' I clearly understood that our hearts were in the hands of Allah. If it was possible with one's effort, it would happen to our prophet's uncle, right? When I look back, I see how ignorant I was thinking that I would convert him to Islam. (Nuray, London, May 2016)*

In addition, a number of Muslim women emphasised that religion is a matter of personal choice and a person believes in a religion which he feels himself close to. Thus, making their partner change their religion was not something they ever considered. For example, Maria explained her opinion about the conversion comparing her experiences as a Muslim convert:

> *I am a convert, I would not ever tell anyone to convert. It is not right. It needs to be between you and God and needs to be from your heart. I would never ask anyone ever to convert other than because they want to be closer to their Creator. So there was absolutely no way. Again, it is just to suit society… just to make people happy. That is not about making God happy, for me. So, no, I could have never asked anyone to do it, not as a convert, that would be outrageous. (Maria, London, July 2017)*

Similarly, some women think that forcing the husband to convert to Islam just for the marriage does not mean anything, because conversion is a personal choice and the decision/demand should come from their husband. For instance, Tayyibah said:

> *I haven't asked my husband to convert. No… You cannot ask somebody to convert. What does it really mean Ayse?! Nothing. It means nothing. For me, from my perspective, it should come from inside of your heart. Nowhere else. If it is not there, it won't be a true conversion. No. (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

On the other hand, Hanan was one of the participants who asked her husband to convert due to the family pressure. However, during the interview, when she

evaluated the situation, she confessed that asking her husband to convert to Islam and forcing him to do so was not the right attitude. She said:

> *I think now I'm looking back on it and I understand that it was quite an unreasonable thing for me to ask him to convert. Because I certainly wouldn't do it for him. But because of the pressure, I was facing [from my family and friends] I did ask him to do it. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

Furthermore, several participants emphasised that a person should be sincere in their conversion if they decided to do so. Thus, nominal conversion done to please the family or to make things easier during the marriage process could not be considered as a real and sincere conversion. Non-Muslim husbands also considered that as being dishonest. Salma's conversation with her husband made it clear that those non-Muslim husbands considered this kind of nominal conversion to be dishonest behaviour:

> *We talked about conversion. Because in the beginning a lot of people were saying, 'just convert for the day. Just say the word… Just nominally convert, get through the nikah and then do what you want!'. He said to me 'How can anyone, how will you ever trust me again? It will be such a lie and it will be such a lie to God. How can I do that?' and I really understood and respected that. I did say to him, 'it would be really easier,' he said, 'yeah, I know it would be really easy if I could. But I can't… I couldn't live with myself if I did that'. I think a lot of people looked at him and thought why wouldn't he just do it for the day. You know there are lots of people who did it that way. And that is fine. It works for them. You know… they kept their parents on board the whole way through. I think their parents know that it is a bit of a lie, but no one questions it too much and they all*

> *get along with life. But it did not feel right for us. And I really respected what he said about it would be a lie to God [if he had converted for the day of marriage], as well. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

As discussed in previous chapters, in many Muslim women/non-Muslim man marriages, couples consider the nominal conversion of the non-Muslim husband as the first option to deal with the family pressure on Muslim women, and to please their families and get through the marriage. However, in the study, the majority of the participants do not agree with this common thought that nominal conversion is the proper and easiest way to deal with the difficulties interfaith couples face during the process. For them, (nominal) conversion is not an acceptable way to deal with the difficulties unless the husband really wants to do so. Thus, they were comfortable if their husbands rejected their family's demands for the conversion. Laila explained that she was happy that her husband had been honest when she asked him to convert as her family wanted to do so:

> *[When I asked him] he did not want to convert for my family, because he preferred to convert for the sake of converting, to become the religion that he wanted to be, not to please somebody else. Because, you know, when you say shahāda you have to feel it from your heart. So, he did not want to say the shahāda without feeling fully committed to the religion, which I really respect. I do think if he wanted to say the shahāda just to please my parents, I don't think I feel happy about it. (Laila, London, July 2017)*

Furthermore, in the study, the response of Hanan's husband's, who is a conservative Christian, to her demand can be considered as a useful example to

understand the issue of conversion from a non-Muslim husband's perspective. Hanan, a Pakistani Muslim woman who has been married for 5 years, said that when she told their family about her relationship with a non-Muslim man, her family opposed her decision and she was ostracised by her parents. During that time, everyone in her family asked her to make her husband convert for marriage but this was problematic for her non-Muslim husband:

> *Everyone kept saying to me it [conversion] is the easiest way to get this situation resolved […] so, due to the pressure, I was facing I did ask him. I think I put some pressure on him to do so. But for Henry, it was a big thing. He was like, 'This is my faith and I'm not going to reject my faith to satisfy anybody.' I think we did argue about that. Because for me it was like, I'm going to lose my family and everything over there but for him, it was like 'this is my faith, this is the one thing I can't like shift on.' (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

These narratives make it clear that if a non-Muslim husband is not interested in religion, and being affiliated to a religion and religious identity are not important for him, the conversion for the sake of marriage and to make the process easier does not mean anything to them. Therefore, conversion is not an important decision for them and they consider it as a symbolic act to please their wife's families. On the other hand, for those non-Muslim husbands who value religious belief and their religious identity the conversion is not a decision to make just to please the families or to get married. In this respect, the latter group's attitudes is important to consider the nominal conversion for the marriage from the perspective of the non-Muslim husband.

5.4. Dealing with the Religious Pluralism:

Religious pluralism in interfaith marriages and how intermarried couples deal with the religious differences in their everyday life are some of the major issues discussed in the related literature (Romain, 1996; Kaplan, 2004; Froese, 2008; Miller, 2013; Cerchiaro et al., 2015). This subject is more controversial when it comes to identifying Muslim women's interfaith marriages (Friedmann, 2003; Dalgin, 2005). This is mainly due to the common arguments about possible negative effects of interfaith marriage on a Muslim woman's religiosity/religious identity, and the impact of the religious differences between the couple on their marriage and family life (Leeman, 2009; Yasir Qadhi, 2009).

In interfaith marriages, the couple might embody several differences, such as racial-ethnic, cultural or socioeconomic differences, in addition to the religious differences. Nevertheless, in these marriages, the religious dimensions in the family are assumed to be strong (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Understanding the impact of religious differences in family life and the negotiation of religious identities in interfaith marriages is important, and it requires consideration of several significant situations in the family. In this context, this primarily surrounds how having different religious backgrounds affects Muslim women's marriages, and on which subjects religious differences appear in their marriages. Furthermore, the strategies used by the couples to deal with these differences should be examined. Therefore, in this section, the strategies related to the process of construction of the common space in interfaith marriage will be examined to gain an understanding of how Muslim women and their husbands

deal with religious diversity in their family and which strategies they adopt to do so.

In this present study, the Muslim women who identified themselves as religious, or indicated that they had some religious concern, stated that although they noticed religious differences in their family life, in time, they learned how to navigate the differences in their marriage. However, six of the eleven participants with children emphasized that religious differences between them and their husbands were surmountable until they had a child. After they had a child, the situation in the family changed and religious identities became more visible. This will be discussed in the following chapter. Even though having a child affected the couples' attitudes towards religious differences in the family and the importance of their religious identity, many participants mainly considered religious identity and having a religious belief as a personal phenomenon. For instance, Aneesa stated:

> *Religious differences are more important when you have a child. It might be a problem in the family. If you do not have a child, it depends on how you feel about each other and how you respect each other. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

As can be seen in Aneesa's narrative, the participants distinguished between the impact of having a different religious identity on their marriage before and after they had a child and emphasised that mutual respect was crucial to having a good relationship in an interfaith marriage. Therefore, an intermarried couple should

respect each other's religious identity and religious belief, as by doing so, they would be able to manage the religious differences in their family.

In addition to the mutual respect for religious identity within the marriage, the couples also individually rely on different strategies to deal with the religious differences and negotiate multiple identities in their marriage. Cerchiaro *et al.* (2015) argue that in interfaith marriages, partners aim to remove religious differences by reaching a new dimension which overcomes the religious pluralism in the family. To achieve this aim and to solve the religious pluralism, they use several strategies in their marriage. Based on in-depth interviews with 15 couples in Christian-Muslim families in Italy, characterised by Muslim male immigrants married to Italian women, Cerchiaro *et al.* (2015, p.48) found that four main strategies were used by the couples to deal with the religious differences in their families: 'renunciation, conversion, closeting, and spiritualization'. According to their research, to minimise the religious differences in the family in interfaith marriages: one partner becomes the decision-maker for the family and the other accepts the decision (the renunciation strategy), one partner converts to the other's religion (the conversion strategy), the couple can privatize their religions and remove the discussions from the family context (the closeting strategy) or they aim to find new ways of experiencing religion beyond institutionalised practices (the spiritualization strategy). Whereas in the first strategy the partners do not construct a new dimension for themselves and overcome the religious pluralism, in the other three types of strategy, religious pluralism is no longer experienced in the family life (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). This result might suggest

that Cerchiaro *et. al*'s (2015) study is, unintentionally, in agreement with the classic Islamic position that interfaith marriage should not be allowed for the fear of renunciation, conversion or closeting. As previously discussed, Muslim scholars state these arguments as reasons for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages. However, ironically, in Cerchiaro *et. al*'s (2015) research, the interfaith marriages were between Muslim men and non-Muslim women and they discussed the strategies that Muslim men and non-Muslim women used to deal with religious differences in their marriage.

In this present study, the participants explained how they dealt with religious differences in their family and what strategies they used for resolving these differences. Even though the participants in this present study discussed similar strategies to the couples in Cerchiaro *et al.*'s (2015) study at some point, the conversion strategy was not considered as a true/acceptable strategy by the participants, which differs from previous studies. In this current research, three main themes were identified as the strategy that intermarried Muslim women use to deal with religious differences within their family: pre-marriage discussion, creating a balance, and conflict avoidance.

5.4.1. Pre-marriage Discussion:

Al-Yousuf, who was the former family specialist on the Christian-Muslim Forum, emphasises that open communication is vital in interfaith relationships as it helps couples to interfere with many problems (Elbaum, 2006; Al-Yousuf, 2016). This present study's results corroborates the ideas of Al-Yousuf. The interview narratives show that discussion before the marriage about the potential

difficulties was considered by intermarried Muslim women as an important and effective way to deal with religious diversity in their family. Thinking and having a discussion about some issues before the marriage means that the couples confront the potential difficulties rationally and logically and they overcome the challenges in advance.

Romain (1996) argues that many mixed-faith couples gain more knowledge about each other in advance. They negotiate with each other in potential subjects affected by the difference between them. By doing so, they became more prepared for the issues that confront all couples and many other issues (Romain, 1996). Similarly, the majority of the participants stated that they discussed the issues before they got married, which helped them to overcome the negative results of religious differences in their family. The subjects discussed were mainly their future children, how they should raise them, whether they will give their children religious education, and religious observance and dietary habits in their home. Intermarried women emphasised that before their marriage, they talked about all these issues which were considered as potential problems for an interfaith marriage. The participants stated that the discussion and clarification of these crucial topics before the marriage was important for marital stability and the happiness of their marriage. They suggested that the biggest benefit of a pre-marriage discussion with their future husband is the fact that they agree on most of the sensitive and hot topics, such as which religion their future children will follow and what type of food will/will not be consumed in their home, before they

get married. The participants explained the importance of these pre-marriage discussions and mentioned the main topics of the discussions/conversations:

> *We were talking about how we would raise our children, possibly even a month into our relationship. I think if we hadn't… my sister, for example, my sister is not very religious at all and she and her fiancé, they haven't even talked about how they would raise their kids, if they want kids... you know… it's different things for different couples I think. With me, I needed to know we were on the same page at the beginning because if we weren't, then the book would have been closed. It's just fruitless. So yes, we talked about children very early on. It was nice to be able to talk openly… (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

> *[...] If there was anything religious, we talked about it. I think what we realised before we got married was that it wasn't so much the decisions that we made, whether they were right or wrong, it was more how we spoke to each other, how we disagreed with each other, and our ability to work problems out. That was important. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

In the narratives, we can see that the participants considered these pre-marriage discussions as a beneficial way of helping them to settle some of the important issues in their marriage/future family before they got married, as by having these discussions, they would find out their partner's attitudes towards the subjects associated with their religious identity/belief and whether they had a similar perspective on these subjects at the beginning of their relationship. Furthermore, by having these pre-marriage discussions, they could see their ability to resolve the problems that might arise during their marriage.

During the interviews, it appeared that the participants discussed not only how they would raise their future children or the dietary restriction at home as a Muslim, but also other subjects that they thought might be against their religious beliefs or tenets. For instance, Salma described the subjects discussed before their marriage as follows:

> *We talked about the food, how we would do food at home. How we would do alcohol, whether we would allow alcohol. We talked about where we would have a space for me to pray, when we got a dog, where it would be allowed to go, as it would not be allowed to go upstairs because I pray upstairs. It would be allowed downstairs. We talked about all of it… and we were very good about it. We talked about things and I said, 'I can't do that because in my religion, that is not gonna work'… […] We talked about stuff like money, our finances, in terms of interest. We talked about it… I kind of said to him, 'Look. Interest is not gonna happen. I am gonna donate it all, so do not bother looking for high rates'… because all our finances are together, so I keep the interest separately, and I donate it all. That pretty much is fine. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

On the other hand, several participants stated that in addition to having a verbal discussion, they prepared a marriage contract including all the issues that might cause a problem in their family in the future. They think that having a contract is a helpful strategy to deal with the potential problems in their marriage. According to those participants, when people get married, they are in love and everything goes well. Consequently, during this time, couples do not think about all the potential difficulties/challenges in their future family or postpone talking about these sensitive topics until after they are married. Therefore, these women

wanted to prepare a marriage contract and have all these issues on paper (for an example of a marriage contract prepared by one of the participants, see Appendix V).

Regarding the subjects mentioned in the marriage contract, Hanan's husband could not understand the idea of writing them on paper like a prenuptial agreement as he already agreed on most of the issues and he would not do any of them even if they did not draw up a marriage contract. However, Hanan still wanted to put all these issues in their marriage contract. She said:

> *It was important to me have a nikah contract, a marriage contract… Therefore, we went to the website, I cannot remember the website now, but it was like a template for a marriage contract. Then we got it and we sat down and we had a discussion about what we wanted in there and then we put that in there and we got it signed and my friend and his friend were witnesses that we signed […] [We added that] we won't interfere with each other's religious practices. So, like during Ramadan if I am fasting, he is not gonna force me to have dinner or anything like that… Also, there were things I put in there which Henry did not understand why I put them in there, because he felt 'I'm never gonna do this anyway'. Oh, I also put in that he can only have one wife. Henry again said, 'this wouldn't apply to me because in Christianity I can only have one wife', but I was still like 'no, I want it there'. So I think that's about it. There were a few like main points but it wasn't really… like… I do not think Henry really thought it was realistic for him, it was like 'ok, these are things that I wouldn't do anyway'. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

The interview narratives indicate that by having pre-marriage discussions or preparing a marriage contract, intermarried Muslim women wanted to ensure

that religious differences in their family would not affect their marriage/family life and they would have freedom to practise their religious rituals. Even though they were aware that circumstances might change, this strategy made them less concerned about religious differences in their family.

Moreover, three participants facing challenges in their marriage stated that they did not talk to their husband about their future family, such as how they will raise their children, how their life will be after the marriage, etc., in advance. They emphasised that if they had had a pre-marriage discussion with their husband about all these issues before their marriage, their relationship would be different and they would probably not have argued about most of the matters they had already argued about. For instance, Derya, a Turkish woman who had been married for four years, explained how having a pre-marriage discussion would be helpful for intermarried couples:

> *Actually, for the partners it is better to talk and discuss in advance. I recommend discussing and settling things in advance. You should talk and agree or disagree on the subjects beforehand. But no matter how much you talked and discussed in advance, things might change later. I do not even know if you should write everything down to protect yourself or make a contract, but this way, by talking and having a discussion, you might have an idea of what you might expect from each other. So you could have more solid information than just a guess, you would have an idea. That would be a more logical path to follow. (Derya, Bristol, November 2016)*

5.4.2. Creating a Balance:

The second type of strategy used by intermarried Muslim women in their marriage is creating a balance between two religions by negotiating with their non-Muslim husband. In this present study, the interview narratives indicate that Muslim women and their husbands talked to each other to understand the differences in their religious beliefs and mainly focus on the commonalities of their religions rather than the differences. They think that the differences are mainly related to institutionalised forms of religion:

> *I think we've made a big effort to understand each other. So if there are differences in religion or there is something we have to work out, we will talk it through … (Salma, London, November 2016)*

Cerchiaro *et al.* (2015) found in their research that to deal with religious differences, intermarried couples reinvent new ways of experiencing religion beyond institutionalised practices and dogmas, which they refer to as 'spiritualization strategy' (p.54). Similarly, in this present study, several participants stated that they prefer to focus mainly on the spiritual aspect of religion to reduce the negative impact of religious differences in their family. In this context, even though they emphasised that their religious identity is still important, their desire to reach a compromise beyond religion that leads (or might lead) Muslim women to abandon their public practices, such as going to mosque, or leads the husbands, who have religious beliefs, to reduce their church attendance. This result is in line with the research indicating that interreligiously married couples have considerably lower rates of religious involvement than same-faith couples (Hoge, 1995).

> *Sometimes, I say David would have made more effort go to church if he wasn't married to me because if he had married a Christian, he would have done more things as a family. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

As can be seen in the interview narrative quoted above, to create a new religious dimension beyond religious institutions within the family context, both Muslim women and their husbands, as partners, either abandon their public practices or reduce their attendance at mosque/church (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Even though the participants do not feel that their religious identities are separated from their communities, they do not want to attend religious ceremonies, such as Eid celebrations, or meet with their community or they are reluctant to send their children to the Islamic Sunday school of their communities. However, it is important to stress that, in this current study, this was not only due to the fact that the participants wanted to create a new religious dimension to share with their husbands. The interview narratives show that Muslim women do not want to attend religious events as they do not want to attend these events alone or force their husbands to attend with them. Likewise, intermarried Muslim women do not want to interact with other people in their community who are likely to show negative attitudes towards their marriage.

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that in this present study not only the Muslim women who identify themselves as cultural Muslims, but also other women who identify themselves as devout Muslims, mentioned their tendency not to attend religious events in their community or in a mosque. This result aligns with the religious individualisation theory, which indicates that there is a

distinction between attendance at public practices, in church, mosques, etc., and religious belief/religiosity (Luckmann, 1967; Davie, 2007; Pollack and Pickel, 2007). According to religious individualisation theory, there is no correlation between the demise of traditional public practices and the loss of religiousness (Luckmann, 1967; Davie, 2007; Pollack and Pickel, 2007; Cerchiaro et al., 2015; Ertit, 2017). Therefore, abandoning their public practices and trying to create a new religious dimension within their family context does not mean that their religious identity is no longer important for the participants and there is a decrease in the impact of religion in their lives (Luckmann, 1967; Ertit, 2017). As stated earlier, some of the participants still identify themselves as practicing, religious Muslims and they have just freed themselves from institutional guidelines in their religious behaviours. However, it must be acknowledged that even though the demise of public practices or attendance to religious meetings might not directly impact a persons' religiosity, it will affect their connection to their religion negatively. In the present study, the interview narratives show that as Muslim women give up the attendance to religious meetings in the mosque or in their community, their connection to the religion might grow tenuous in time as they will have limited interaction with other Muslims. In addition, it is important to state that not only will this impact Muslim women's connection to their religion, it also might affect their children's connection to the religion and their Muslim identity as they learn best from experiences. The limited relationship with other Muslims makes it difficult for children to feel themselves as a part of the religious community.

In line with Cerchiaro *et al.*'s (2015) findings, in the current study, ten participants prefer to use this strategy and they define their religious views in their family by their personal relationship with God, which goes beyond dogmas and religious institutions. The interviews suggest that the Muslim women felt that the religious differences in their family are mainly related to the institutions rather than to the single God in which they and their husbands believe in. Therefore, they both focus on this common base to deal with their religious differences. Accordingly, even though they are affiliated to different religions, what makes their marriage possible is the fact that they have faith in the same God but use a different path (following different religions doctrines) to reach him. For instance, Salma explained her opinion about the religious differences:

> *We are on different paths to the same destination but both experiencing the same thing, and then God is there and God brought us together through different journeys. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

In addition to their faith in the same God, following an Abrahamic religion is considered as an important commonality between Muslim women and their husbands to create a balance in their family. Among the participants, Maryam, who is married to a Jewish man, specifically described how being married to a Jewish man was helpful for her to deal with religious differences in their family as they have a lot in common. She stated:

> *I think that if I was with someone who was secular or had not been brought up in one of the Abrahamic religions with a very similar value system, I am not sure how successfully cooperating in religion would*

work for us. It helps a lot that he is Jewish. I actually think our religions have more in common than if I had married a Christian man, for example. […] Our issues of great discussion like, you know, dietary restrictions, are the same in Islam and Judaism. The practices and customs when you have a baby boy, for example, with circumcision, are the same in Islam and Judaism. […] Those make things run a bit more smoothly for us, I would say […] If I was married to someone who did not follow any religion, I am not sure how our life would have worked together […] It is easier to be a Jewish-Muslim couple than it would be for me to be with somebody who did not have any faith at all. It is even easier for me being a Muslim-Jewish couple than a Christian-Muslim couple. (Maryam, London, January 2017)

Moreover, many Muslim women asserted that sharing similar moral values with their husband was important to create a balance and commonality in their family. They indicated that even though there were some differences between their religions theologically, there were also more similarities in their moral values and ethical principles, which are more important to them. Maria stated:

We do not have any difficulties in terms of religious differences. I think it is just semantic, he might express things differently, and deep down, it is pretty much all the same in theology […] I think the differences are more as people, you know, like someone likes chocolate ice cream, someone likes strawberry or someone likes comedy films, you know, rather than that… religion is not really a huge [difference]… it shouldn't be anyway… there shouldn't really be any differences in terms of… ok, theologically, but in a marriage that is a practical thing. As you live your life, your principles would be the same in that you do not lie, you do not cheat … all of those things… there should be a lot more similarity. […] For me, [it] is more about

moral differences, so we haven't had religious differences. (Maria, London, July 2017)

At this point, it should be stated that Maria is not quite correct about the commonality between Islam and Christianity as there are significant theological differences between the two religions. Obviously there is some similarity between them as both are considered to be Abrahamic religions, but I think that Maria overestimates the theological similarities between the faiths.

Furthermore, the narration of intermarried Muslim women suggests that in terms of religious practices, they try to find a common celebration and share Eid and Christmas in their families. They said that as their husband tried fasting for a few days and celebrated Eid with them, they celebrated Christmas with their husband and his family. At this point, it is important to state that Muslim women accept celebrating Christmas as a cultural celebration. Many participants emphasised that they do not consider Christmas as a religious institutional practice. It is a cultural celebration for the family to get together; therefore, its cultural aspects are more meaningful for the participants as interfaith couples in a Western country:

I must say, initially, we were far more active as David kept Ramadan as well for quite a few years […] I always used to observe Ramadan quite strongly so [...] Equally, at Christmas, we would... Christmas in England, I am afraid you can't get away from. But, you know, the spiritual aspect, as I said… (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)

> *Christmas is something we do not celebrate. But there is celebration which is not real [celebration] at all. The whole celebration is around consumption and coming together, family, being together… there is not any religious ritual that is combined into that within their family. So for me, it is like going to visit them. So there is all eating together. That is what it is. Some presents are exchanged. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

However, only one participant stated that she went to Midnight Mass, which is a special Christian religious service in church held on Christmas Eve. Anis said:

> *My husband tries to do Ramadan with us. We also try to celebrate Eid and Christmas as a family. We go to the Catholic Midnight Mass as a family. My daughter likes the Anglican church because they sing songs. We go to the Anglican church for songs. For Eid, I grew up in a culture where the women did not go to mosque. So I rarely go mosque but we do a lot of family ceremonies, we sit together and pray together, we do that. (Anis, London, November 2016)*

5.4.3. Conflict Avoidance:

In the present study, during the interviews, participants highlighted their attempt to avoid any conflict related to their religious identities in their family. Some participants emphasised that there are no arguments about religious issues and religious differences in the family and said, for example, 'we've never had an argument really about that kind of issue' (Laila, London, July 2017), while several other participants stated that they discuss religion and religious subjects with their husband but do not argue:

> *We have a different understanding of religion. I can feel the differences but I don't have an argument with my husband about religious subjects. He does not argue and defend his religion either. (Ruya, London, June 2016)*

Bearing in mind, it does not mean that everyone who married outside their faith and does not argue with their spouse about religion are socially progressive. It should be thought that there could be several explanations for the couples' attitudes in terms of why they discuss the religion and do not argue about religious subjects. One explanation could be that they both do not care about the religion, or one part of the family, either husband or wife, does not care about religion, so they do not need to argue about it. Also, they might prefer thinking things through rather than getting angry and arguing. Lastly, this attitude of being tolerant and not aggressive might be part of their characteristics.

The participants who identify themselves as cultural Muslims and their husband as a cultural Christian[23] also indicated that they do not argue about any religious subjects in their family. They prefer to consider religion as a container of universal/human values or as fixed points in their lives, but considered in terms of cultural heritage (Cerchiaro et al., 2015). Oyku, a Turkish woman who had been married for 16 years, said:

> *In terms of religious differences, I haven't been put into a position where I had to compromise my religion. So, as I said, although they*

[23] There might be some people who would say that when both parts of the family are culturally religious then their marriage is not a genuinely interreligious. However, as I discussed in the section 1.1., there is an argument that the definition of interfaith marriage mainly depends on which dimension of religion is considered. If religious belief is considered rather than their religious experiences, then marriages of a cultural Muslim and cultural Christian would be still interfaith marriage.

> *describe themselves as Christians, there are not any particular rituals that I had to attend and I did not have to change the way I am, so there is not any problem there. My husband is not very religious… so for me, there is not any problem there. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

Furthermore, the majority of the participants privatise religion by removing it from the family context and consider their religious beliefs and identities as a private/personal issue and an individual choice that need to be separated. Accordingly, each partner, the Muslim woman and her husband, has their own space to practise their religion. Hanan, who has been married to a practising Christian for five years, said:

> *I think the [religious] differences are huge, but I think we've learned how to navigate the differences so they are not that big a deal […] I think the way we deal with it is that the religion is very separate, so like, I pray in our house and Henry just prays on his own before he goes to bed or leaves. When I'm reading the Qurʾān, he is just there, and while he is reading the Bible, I'm just there. I guess we don't really interact with each other's religions that much. So he's just left to do what he wants to do and I'm just left to do what I want to do. There are a couple of ground rules that I established, such as I did not want non-halal meat in the house and alcohol, things like that… but generally we don't, I mean… there is not really a conflict because I have never imposed anything on him and he has never imposed anything on me. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

As can be seen in Hanan's case, she and her husband consider their religious identities as separate. Accordingly, their religious identity is important for both

partners and neither partner interferes in the other's religious life in the family. In this way, they can deal with the religious differences in the family.

5.5. Religious Practice at Home:

Religious practice in an interfaith marriage, and particularly intermarried Muslim women's freedom of practice in their marriage, is another controversial issue discussed by scholars in terms of Muslim women's interfaith marriages. There is a common assumption held about interfaith marriages that those who marry out of their religion are rejecting their faith and/or not observing their religion (Romain, 1996). Romain (1996) disputes this argument by saying that there are many interfaith couples who have a strong relationship to their faith and still want to observe their religion. For them, 'marrying out does not mean opting out' (Romain, 1996, p.167). Likewise, in this present study, the participants stated that they did not give up practising their religion after marrying out. This part will discuss Muslim women's experiences of practising their religion followed by the husbands' attitudes towards their religious practices in their family.

When the participants were asked about their religious practices at home, the responses differed depending on their level of religious commitments. If in an interfaith family both the Muslim woman and her husband practice their religion or want to follow religious rules in their daily lives, the couples mostly show mutual respect to each other and they both have the freedom to enact their religious practices. Furthermore, they even remind or encourage each other to do some religious practices. For instance, Salma explained how important it is for them to practise their religions and their efforts to accommodate that:

> *Good Friday is always a bit funny because Friday I want to do my Friday stuff, but it is also a religious day for Michael. So there is little bit of awkward thinking around. If we are going to someone else's house for Easter or doing something in particular, how am I gonna pray and do what I want to do on Friday in terms of worship, and how am I gonna accommodate Easter. We do that for Christmas as well, you know, how are we gonna make sure that you can go to church and I can do this… or even on Sunday when he wants to go church. All sort of things, how do we accommodate them. I guess we know how important it is for the other one, so we always do accommodate it. I often say to him 'are we going to do this on Sunday afternoon?', 'do you want to go to church in the morning, then…', [he says] 'oh, yes, ok, I will go in the morning instead of the evening'. So, we worked very hard to make sure because we know how important it is, to make sure that those important things happen for each other. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

During the interviews, the participants whose husbands are identified as cultural Christian or not affiliated to any religion also described their husband's positive attitudes towards their practising of their religion. The participants who are more religious or have more religious concern than their husband also stated that their husbands are always respectful towards them. Some husbands even help their wives practise their religion:

> *He is so respectful towards my religion. Even today, after all these years of our marriage, when I fast, not only during Ramadan, but also at other times when I want to fast, he prepares the suhoor [morning meal] for me. His working hours are different to mine, and his shift starts at noon. So he sleeps late to wake me up for the suhoor and prepares it for me. He has done this since we got married. I don't*

remember even one suhoor that I prepared for myself. (Nuray, London, May 2016)

My husband is respectful. He never interferes in my practising of my religion […] He even says, 'your prayers and fasts or seeing you praying give me peace, I feel more comfortable, safer'. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)

He is very supportive if I want to practise my religion. When I am praying, he never says anything, never ever. (Laila, London, July 2017)

Statements like these were repeated in most of the interviews. The participants emphasised how respectful their husbands were in their family and how supportive they were of their wives. However, a few participants stated that they faced some difficulties in their marriage due to disagreements on subjects related to the religious and cultural differences between them and their husband. The interview narratives show that these disagreements arose between the partners while they were expecting their first child or after they had a child. As will be discussed in the following chapter, having a child influenced each partner's attitude towards the other's religious and cultural differences in the family. Even though in these families, both the wife and the husband have limited religious concern and religion does not play an important role in their lives, when they needed to make a decision for their child on a subject related to their religious background, they became more conscious of their religious and cultural

backgrounds. As noted I will discuss this phenomenon in more detail in the final chapter.

In the present study, the interview narratives demonstrate that all non-Muslim husbands, regardless of whether they have religious concern, are respectful and even supportive regarding their wife's religious identity and her demand to practise her religion when she wants to pray, fast, etc. For instance, Meral stated that her husband fasted in solidarity with her to understand how she was feeling during Ramadan. Furthermore, she mentioned how supportive her husband was about her eating habits. She said:

> *He is always supportive. For instance, I don't have to tell other people that I don't eat pork. He either emails in advance or calls the people we are having dinner with. He organises it. If we go somewhere together, he asks before me 'What kind of meat is used in this meal? What are the ingredients?'. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

During the interviews, participants were also asked about their attitudes/reaction if their husbands showed any negative attitudes towards their religious identity or the practising of their religion. Their responses indicated that, as mentioned earlier, Muslim women discussed these issues before they got married and knew that their husbands would not have any problem with their religious identity. If there were any problems, they would not continue their relationship. For example, they said:

> *I wouldn't marry him if we had [any difficulties because of the religious differences between us]. So for me, no. I don't know if other people*

have done different things, but for me [I wouldn't marry him] … he knows how important my faith is to me... (Maria, London, July 2017)

My husband always supported my practising of my religion… he was always supportive. With someone who is not supportive, life would be very different. We might not have been married this long. We would not… I could not live with a man who is against my religion, who interferes with me. No, I definitely would not live with him, I couldn't because my religion is the place where I find peace. If I practise my religion secretly, then there is no meaning to being married. Does not marriage mean being open with each other? If I could not live my life as I wanted, then there would be no meaning… nobody can take my religion, my religious belief, away from me. It is up to me whether I practise it or not, but when I want to practise it, nobody can tell me what I can or cannot do. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)

These narratives make it clear that having freedom of practice and being respected for their religious and cultural identities and religious beliefs was important for the participants. Therefore, if their husband showed negative attitudes towards their religion or cultural identity, the participants started to reconsider their relationship and they clearly stated that they would not have married their husbands if they were against their religious and cultural identity or showed negative attitudes towards them. If they got married, their marriage would not last long. Similarly, two participants confessed during the interview that because of their husbands' changed attitudes to their cultural identity, his breaking his promises and doing the opposite of what he had said he would do before, they started growing apart emotionally and they even started thinking

about divorce. As discussed by Romain (1996), this indicates that it is not only the religious differences between the partners that cause a divorce, but a range of other, unrelated aspect of their relationship. Religious differences are often used as a scapegoat in marital difficulties which in reality are caused by other factors in many interfaith marriages (Vernon, 1962).

5.6. The Role of Religious Understanding in Interfaith Marriage: Being Conservative or Married to A Conservative Man

As discussed in the previous section, the interview data shows that in the majority of the marriages, non-Muslim husbands are either not affiliated to any religion or identified as cultural Christian or Jewish. Regarding the Muslim women's religiosity, even though a number of participants indicated that they have some religious concern and identified themselves as religious Muslim women, none of them are orthodox Muslim and identify themselves as a strictly religious or conservative Muslim. This result indicates that in Muslim women's interfaith marriages, one partner (mostly the Muslim woman) has more religious concern than the other, or they both have a similar religious understanding or for both partners, their religious affiliations come from their culture. Neither intermarried Muslim women nor their husbands showed any attitudes that could be interpreted as religious conservatism indicating that they believe their religion is the only true faith. This result was expected in the study as people having strong religious identification and strong religious conservatism would be less open towards interfaith marriage (Cila and Lalonde, 2014).

Furthermore, based on this finding, it can be claimed that the religiosity level of the partners and their religious understanding affects marital happiness and stability. As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, research on the impact of the partners' religion on marriage stability indicate that religious unity between husband and wife at the time of marriage has an influence on marital stability (Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993). Even though some scholars argue that religious affiliation has no significant impact on the marital satisfaction (Vernon, 1962; Parsons et al., 2007), it is commonly argued that marriage outside the religion has a negative effect on marital happiness and stability (Bahr, 1981; Heaton, 1990; Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993; Bisin et al., 2004). For instance, a group of researchers found a higher divorce rate for interfaith marriages and they argue that religious heterogamy, unions where the partner is selected with different religious characteristics (Bulcroft, 2000), is generally associated with a higher likelihood of marital dissolution and divorce, as there will be more conflict between the spouses due to them having different religious preferences (Glenn, 1982; Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993; Romain, 1996; Yinger, 1968a; Chinitz and Brown, 2001). Hoge (1995) states that religious differences in the family lessen the sense of companionship in a marriage and this affects the marital happiness. The more similarity between the partners' religious beliefs and understandings, the higher the marital satisfaction and more marital stability (Chinitz and Brown, 2001).

Moreover, in many studies, it is argued that interreligious marriages are not as successful on average as religiously homogamous marriages (Glenn, 1982; Romain, 1996). Glenn (1982) states that although there has been a widespread

ideal that in an interfaith marriage the religious preferences of the partners should agree, many people want to marry someone from a different religion and change their religion to that of their spouse. In this present research, the partners, Muslim women and their husbands, at some point have this ideal relationship where the husband and wife agree on their religious preferences. In addition, interfaith marriages can require an extra degree of tolerance to make them work (Romain, 1996). I believe that this is one of the factors that enable intermarried Muslim women to deal with religious differences in their family and explains why Muslim women's marriages in the study are successful, while it was assumed that Muslim women's interfaith marriages will not last long and divorce would be inevitable. However, in the present study, Muslim women and their husbands have a similar religious understanding, or for some couples, even though the husband does not have any religious concern, he respects his wife's religious identity, and they show sensitivity to each other's religion so they are able to deal with the religious differences in their marriage. Therefore, it can be stated that dealing with the religious differences is not purely about being affiliated to a religion, but is mainly about how the partners see the world. If the couple have a similar understanding, their problems regarding the religious differences will be surmountable. This is consistent with Hoge's (1995) argument that when people marry outside their religion, the partners often come from a religiously similar group. Meaning that, for example, if the person is liberal Muslim, then she/he marries a liberal Christians or Jewish, or a liberal Muslim, rather than an orthodox Christian or a traditional Muslim. Likewise, Lehrer and

Chiswick (1993) discuss in their research on religion as a determinant of marital stability that religious compatibility between the partners is a more important factor in marriage stability than the similarity in religious background. The greater the difference between the religions and the religious understanding of the partners, the less durable the marriage (Hoge, 1995). For instance, among the interfaith marriages, marriage between conservative and modernist is considered as the least durable marriage (Hoge, 1995). I think a possible explanation of this argument could be that in a relationship when one member of the couple is more strict on his/her religion, and the other is more progressive on their religion, over time each couple might expect their spouse to have similar attitudes towards religious issues. For instance, the conservative partner might put pressure on her/his spouse. In this context, religious compatibility between the partners at the time of the marriage and thereafter prevails any negative effects of difference in their religious backgrounds, so it has influence on marital stability in interfaith marriages (Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993). For example, Chinitz and Brown (2001) discussed in their research on marital conflict and stability in same-faith and interfaith Jewish marriages that the degree of agreement/disagreement on religious issues indicates marital conflict and stability in marriages, whether it is a same-faith marriage or an interfaith marriage. In other words, it is not the 'type' of marriage that leads to conflict in a marriage, but rather disagreements on some religious issues and differences in the religious understanding.

Likewise, during the interviews, some of the participants expressed their opinion about what their marriages would be like if their religious preferences and

religious understanding were different. For instance, Hanan, who has been married to a Christian man for five years, stated that her understanding of religion is fairly liberal, so if she had married a conservative Muslim and there were no religious differences between them, she would have had similar problems to those that they currently have in their marriage. Moreover, if she were a conservative Muslim, she would not have married her husband as their religious understandings would contradict each other and there would be many more problems in their family. She said:

> *Henry is a quite conservative Christian and I am a fairly liberal Muslim. So I feel like if I'd married a conservative Muslim, I would have the same problems that we have because it's not really about religion, it is about how you see the world.* [Laughing] *Because I can imagine just marrying a conservative Muslim, who thinks everything is fitnah*[24], you know… *so it's almost the same thing. […] I think that would be problematic if I wasn't a liberal… You have to be ok in the presence of the differences and if you are very uncomfortable or you feel you cannot be in the presence of… for example, when Henry prays, he does say in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and I'm ok with that because in my head, I am like 'he's your Lord, not my Lord'. But I think, if I were more conservative, I would feel that I had to make a point about that and probably argue about that and then ask him not to say that. But, you know, if I say 'Salam Alaikum' or 'Allahu Akbar' or anything, he is fine with that. So, I should allow him the same freedom. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

[24] Fitnah is defined as 'trial or testing, temptation; by extension, treachery, persecution, seduction, enchantment, or disorder resulting from these things.' (Esposito, 2003. p. 87).

A number of participants stated that having a husband who is not strict or conservative in his religion is helpful for the participant in making their marriages work. They emphasised that as their husbands are not very strict and conservative in their religion, they do not have any problem regarding the religious differences between them. If they were strongly religious, then they would be conflict with one another. For instance, Ruya, who has been married to a Christian man for 11 years, mentioned the potential conflicts that they might have faced if her husband were a religious Christian:

> *[In terms of following the rules of his religion] My husband is easy going [he has a relaxed view on religion]. But if I was married to a man who is rigid about religion, we would definitely be in conflict with each other. If one of the spouses strictly adheres to their religion, there will be an inevitable conflict in the marriage. For instance, when my child was born, I said: 'she won't eat pork.' Both my husband and his family respected my decision. If they said 'no, it is nonsense, she will eat it...', then we would clash. (Ruya, London, June 2016)*

Furthermore, some non-Muslim husbands expressed a similar opinion on the importance of similarity in the understanding of religion in their marriage. Derya, a Turkish woman who is a cultural Muslim, stated that she was more interested in spirituality and was not a practising Muslim. In one conversation with her husband, he said 'if you were a strict Muslim, conservative, I would not have married you'. These narratives indicate that for both Muslim women and their non-Muslim husbands, having a similar religious understanding to one another

and being tolerant of each other's religious identity is more important than being affiliated to the same religion for marital stability.

5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the impact of religious differences on intermarried Muslim women's religiosity and their family life, focusing on the strategies they use to deal with the religious differences in their interfaith family. It has been shown that intermarried Muslim women experience changes in both their religious practice and religious understanding during their relationships. This study demonstrates that for many intermarried Muslim women, marriage to a man from a different religion affects their religious observance in two ways -non-impact (neither negative nor positive) and positive impact in terms of practicing their religions and enhancement of their religious knowledge. Accordingly, for some participants being in an interfaith marriage did not have any effect on their religiosity. If they were practising before marriage, they kept observing their religion even after marriage. For others, interfaith marriage affected their religiosity in a positive way. After their relationship with a non-Muslim man, they started becoming more interested in religion and more conscious of their religion. The interview narratives show that the main reason for this positive change was Muslim women's feelings of being an ambassador of Islam and Muslims in their family; hence, they became more conscious of practising their religion, and aimed to be role models for their husbands. This result of the study problematises the existing literature on Muslim women's interfaith marriage. In many studies, it was indicated that a Muslim woman in an interfaith marriage

would lose her interest in religion and that she could not practice her religion as her non-Muslim husband would impact her negatively or would not allow her to practise her religion. However, this study shows that there is a mutual idea in their family that religion is a private/personal issue and an individual choice. Thus, neither the non-Muslim husband nor the Muslim woman interferes in the other's religious identity or religious practice. Some participants asked their husbands to convert to Islam but this demand was mainly due to the pressure from the Muslim woman's family. If her family did not put pressure on the couple regarding the husband's conversion to Islam, she did not ask him to do so. For Muslim women and their non-Muslim husbands, having a similar religious understanding and sharing similar world views and values was more important than sharing the same religious beliefs.

This study demonstrates that Muslim women use certain strategies to deal with religious differences with their husbands. By using these strategies, they aim to overcome religious pluralism in their families. Pre-marriage discussions are the most common and effective strategy among Muslim women, they discuss potential problems in their future families and express their expectations and priorities. Muslim women who have religious concerns and for whom religion plays an important role in their lives discuss their priorities and concerns about the future in an interfaith family with their husband before getting married. By doing so, they gather their partner's attitudes towards subjects associated with their religious identity and, most importantly, identify whether they have a similar perspective on these subjects at the beginning of their relationship.

The interview narratives show that dealing with religious differences in their family was not difficult for Muslim women and their husbands during their marriages, as they respected each other's religious identities and privatised religions by removing them from the family context. They mainly considered their religious beliefs as a subject outside of the scope of discussion. However, when they have a child, their attitudes towards the role of religion in family life changes. In the following chapter, I will discuss how having children affects Muslim women's interfaith marriage and the partners', both Muslim women and their non-Muslim husbands, attitudes towards giving religious education to their children.

CHAPTER SIX

RAISING CHILDREN IN INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

Parents are more effective socialisation agents of children's religiosity than other socialisation agents like peers and schools, because religious beliefs are taught to children during their childhood and adolescence by their parents (Voas and Fleischmann, 2012; Gecas, 2000; Van De Pol and Van Tubergen, 2014; Hunsberger and Brown, 1984; Sherkat, 1998). Parents provide their children with a basis for a religious worldview, set examples of religious behaviour and decide on religious education and participation in religious events (Bao et al., 1999; Regnerus et al., 2004). Thus, they play a critical role in the development of their child's religiosity (Bao et al., 1999). Similarly, Petts (2011) argues in her study on parental religiosity and religious homogamy (marriage between spouses having same religious belief) and their impact on children's well-being that a family's faith and religious practices influence young children's attitudes towards religion, and may shape their lives.

As the role parents play in their children's religious identity is widely accepted, religious education in an interfaith family is a controversial issue. The nub of the question is: if both mother and father have an essential role in the transmission of religious faith to their children, how do the couples who have different religious backgrounds deal with their religious differences when it comes to the religious education of their children?

Children's religious identity and their religious education are of primary concern in any discussion of interfaith marriage among different religious groups (Gordon, 1966; Caballero et al., 2008; Nesbitt, 1993). Likewise, the issue of children's religion is often put in the centre of the discussion about marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims. As discussed in the second chapter, according to the traditional Islamic view, children are given the religion of their father; therefore, the father's religion has the main role in children's lives. In light of this traditional understanding, the marriages of Muslim women to non-Muslims have become controversial and children's religious education is considered one of the main concerns in these interfaith marriages. According to the 2011 UK Census, children of interfaith marriages are more likely to be religiously classified as 'none', meaning that either 'no religion' or 'religion is not stated' has been selected (Voas, n.d.). As was mentioned in the second chapter, for Muslims' interfaith marriages this data does not vary dramatically. While only 28% of children in Muslim-Christian relationships are identified as Muslim, 39% of the children are classified as 'none' (Voas, n.d.). This result shows that the rate of the children classified as 'none' is strikingly very high. It is suitable to note that it simply represents the unwillingness on the part of parents to disagree on their children's religious identity. I think, a possible explanation for this rate could be that interfaith couples whose children are young, under ten years old, might think that their children will decide their religion when they get older. So, they did not want to have any arguments about this issue when they filled in the UK Census form and so did not want to declare the religion of their child. Nevertheless, this UK

Census result indicates that the majority of children in Muslim-Christian unions in the UK are not Muslim. However, since in the UK Census Muslims are classified under the group of 'other religion' in the data for 'religion female/male resident by religion of spouse (male or female) and by religion of youngest dependent child in family' (Office for National Statistics, 2016), despite my efforts I could not find information on how many of these unions involved the mothers as the Muslim partner. Thus, it is difficult to make an assumption about the impact of a Muslim mother in children's religious identity in the interfaith marriages in the UK. In this chapter I will mainly focus on children's religious education and raising children in an interfaith marriage from the perspective of intermarried Muslim women.

As mentioned in chapter three, in the present study, among 19 participants, the majority had one or two children, two participants were pregnant with their first child, and six participants did not have any children at the time of the interview. Regarding the ages of these children, only two children were 18 years old or older, two children were between 10 and 15 years of age, and ten children were younger than 10 years old. In other words, as Table 6 shows, the majority of the participants (12 out of 19) had children younger than 15 years old.

Table 6: Distribution of the participants according to their children's age

Age	Number of Participants
<5	7
6-10	3
11-17	3
18 and older	2
Total:	15[25]

It is important, therefore, to point out that this age range limits the results of the study regarding children's religion and religious education in interfaith families, because young children, especially younger than 10, can often be persuaded to do almost anything by their parents. For this reason, it is difficult to explain the impact of interfaith marriages on those children and their religion. With this limitation in mind, I will mainly discuss the parents', particularly the Muslim mothers', attitudes towards the religious education of their children, and their experiences raising a child in an interfaith family to discuss if the arguments related to children in Muslim women's interfaith marriages are true in practice or not. Also, the benefits and drawbacks of raising children within interfaith families will be examined.

6.1 Impact of Having a Child in an Interfaith Marriage

Kurttekin (2017) argues in her study on the religious education of children in interfaith marriages that interfaith couples often have an agreement on some cultural and religious subjects before their marriages. However, after they have a

[25] The participants who have two children were added to more than one age groups according to their children's age.

child, these subjects that the couple agrees upon tend to become overshadowed by subjects that the couple are in disagreement over, and the couple focuses more on issues where they differ than those where they hold a consensus opinion. This argument is in line with some of the non-Muslim husbands' attitudes in the present study. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the interview narratives indicated that having a child had an impact on couples' relationships. For some participants, having a child became a game changer concerning the religious and ethnic differences in their family and in the children's religious education. In the study, two participants out of nine who had children at the time of the interviews had clearly stated that their husbands' attitude changed after they had a child. At first glance this number might seem too small to draw conclusions from or to make an analysis from, but it should be considered that 10 out of 19 participants did not have any children when we conducted the interviews. Therefore, even if a few participants expressed changes in their husbands' attitude, the impact of having children on Muslim women's interfaith marriages is an important subject to be examined in the context of seeking to understand these marriages.

In the study, two intermarried Muslim women (Betul and Derya) clearly stated that, after they had their first child, they both realised the importance of their cultural and religious identity and the transmission of their religious faith and culture to their children. Even though each had already discussed some critical issues with their husband before their marriage and had a 'silent agreement' in which they preferred not to argue about their religious backgrounds, after they

had a child, cultural and religious differences between them came to the fore, and the intermarried couples started to discuss the subject (Cerchiaro et al., 2015).

For instance, Betul, a Turkish woman married to a Greek man, said that their son's circumcision became a controversial topic between them. She said that when they got married, her husband identified himself as an atheist and he still does not have any religious concern. Before they had a child, they talked about the circumcision and he accepted her demand about getting their son circumcised. However, he reviewed his stance after their son was born. She said:

> *I told him before our son was born that I am not a strict Muslim, but there are some religious values I believe in and I also have a cultural background so I will get my son circumcised. He said, 'Ok!'. However, after our son was born, he sidestepped as if he had not agreed to it previously. (Betul, Sheffield, May 2016)*

Even though most male circumcision is done due to religious traditions, it also has a cultural aspect. Given that religion and culture are tied up in this tradition, all the participants, whether they have a religious concern or not, agreed on the idea that their son (or if they have a son in the future) should be circumcised. This is either due to the fact that they thought that it is a religious obligation or considered it as a cultural tradition they would like to uphold. In addition to its dual aspect, their son's circumcision is not an issue related only to the Muslim women or their religious practices, like praying or fasting, and both husband and wife have a right to make a decision about it. Therefore, it is not accurate to interpret a non-Muslim husband's attitude towards circumcision as his attitudes

towards Muslim women's religious practices. Additionally, the interview narratives show that some Muslim women consider the circumcision as a part of their cultural tradition, rather than a religious obligation. Thus even if some participants said that religion plays a limited role in their life, they still want their son to get circumcised.

Furthermore, the interview narratives show that having children compels Muslim women and their non-Muslim husbands to renegotiate how they will raise their children and the role of their cultures and religions in the child's education. It would, however, be incorrect to say from the evidence of this study that this changed attitude arises from the husbands' strong relationship with their religion, because the husbands in this study who changed their attitudes toward their children's religious education were not identified as religious, and their connection with their religious identity was limited and/or only at a cultural level. After they had their child, their main focus was their desire to transmit their cultural values and identity to their children, and some of these cultural values were related to religion.

As Cerchiaro *et al.* (2015) argued in their studies that at the beginning of their marriage, the partners thought that religious and cultural identities were something related only to themselves and are not subjects open to negotiation. However, this attitude changed after having a child, because they soon realised religious and cultural identities no longer relate only to the partners but also to their children. For instance, during the interviews, Betul, who has been married

to a Greek man for five years, expressed the changes in her husband's attitudes after they had a son:

> *There weren't any differences [between us] until we had a child. When we had our child, then some issues came up, like 'my space and your space … my traditions and your traditions'. […] For instance, he always told me that he was an atheist, but when Ali [our son] was 6 or 7 months old, he got him baptised. Of course, this makes you think, wasn't he an atheist? What happened? What has changed? (Betul, Sheffield, May 2016)*

Derya too had a similar experience in her marriage. In these narratives, we see a pattern that even when the husband identifies himself as an atheist and does not have any connection with the religion of his childhood, he starts to give importance to some religious traditions (such as baptism) because those traditions are also part of his culture. These participants also stated that when they taught or showed anything to their children related to their religion (Islam) or their culture, their husbands countered them by equally suggesting a religious or cultural practice of their own that they also want their child to imbibe. So, both husband and wife focus on the transmission of their cultural heritage to their children and this causes some sort of 'clash of the cultures' in the family. For instance, Derya, who has been married to a White-British man for four years, expressed that their religious or cultural difference was never a problem from the very start and they did not negotiate about the differences between them in their marriage. However, when they were expecting their first child, the differences suddenly became more pronounced. Her husband's attitudes changed even

before their son was born. He started to attach much importance to the idea of transmission of his religion and culture to their son:

> *Having a child changed everything, because we started to discuss about some issues. Now we have a common thing [our child], we both have rights on him. [Previously] he was following his culture, his things, I was following my culture and there wasn't any big clash. But, once we learned that we would have a baby, many things changed. He wants him to be his side and I object to that... then the negotiations start. (Derya, Bristol, November 2016)*

Similarly, Betul's experience also shows us the competition in her family regarding cultural transmission. She said:

> *Whatever I do, like Turkish stuff ... no matter the subject, he always tries to find a counterpart of it in his culture. Regardless of what it is … For instance, about the language. I have many Greek friends and they always say that my husband's Greek accent is really bad. His English accent is perfect. But he talks to our son in Greek … I always talk to my son in Turkish, always since he was born. Then he started to talk to our son in Greek. It is a good thing my son can speak three languages, but if I hadn't talked to him in Turkish, my husband would not have talked to him in Greek. Unfortunately, we found ourselves in competition with each other. Whatever I do, he finds an equivalent of it in his culture and does it. (Betul, Sheffield, May 2016)*

The interview narratives make it clear that among those participants the discussion between the couples was mainly about the transmission of their culture to their children rather than the transmission of actual religious belief.

This is because their husbands are not strongly affiliated with their own religion, thus their religious knowledge is limited. Therefore, as their husbands want to make their culture dominant in their children's education and even don't want them to learn their mother's culture, Muslim women are left with no choice but to have a very strong discussions with their husbands.

During the interviews, it appeared that all the pressure and intense discussions on the transmission of culture and religion even made Muslim women reconsider their marriage — to the point of thinking about divorce — because for Muslim women mutual respect is a foundation for marriage. When their husbands change their attitudes, and they don't respect their wives' cultural or religious background, it damages the relationship. These changes make Muslim women think about divorce because if their husbands don't respect their culture and religion, it will be difficult to continue in the marriage and raise their children. To deal with these difficulties, Muslim women seek to learn their husbands' opinions about the religious and cultural differences between them and how these differences will affect the marriage and the education of their children.

6.2. Discussions Before the Marriage and the Decision on Religious Education

For the majority of participants, the issue of how, as a couple, they would raise their children was one of the major issues to be agreed about with their future family. In the study, 89% of the participants (17 out of 19) stated that before their marriage they discussed with their husband how they would raise any future

children, what their children's religion would be, and the nature of their children's religious education.

> *We were talking about how we would raise our children possibly even a month into our relationship. (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

> *Before we had a child I talked with my husband and said, 'If we have a son, he will get circumcised. If this won't happen, then forget about having a child. We will not have a child'. And he accepted. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)*

In the study, the interview narratives indicated that some Muslim women are decisive about raising their children as Muslim and they don't want to leave the discussion of this for later. Both Muslim women and their husbands discussed and agreed on how they would raise their children regarding religious education. During the interviews, all participants except two stated that their husbands did not change their attitudes towards the children's religious education after they had their first child; in other words, it appeared that if they had agreed on raising their children as Muslim, their husbands did not oppose them after their children were born. However, it should be stated that not all the participants and their husbands had agreed to raising their children Muslim — some participants indicated that they had jointly decided to raise their children in both faiths or in neither faith.

The pre-marital decision of Muslim women and their non-Muslim husbands about their children's education shows us how they will raise their children in terms of

religious education. In the study, three main themes emerged regarding the children's education: (1) raising them in 'one' religion; (2) embracing two religions — i.e. raising them in both parents' religions; (3) giving them a secular education — i.e. not giving any specific (or direct) religious education.

6.2.1 Raising in 'One' Religion

When the participants were asked about how they raised their children regarding religious education or what they thought about giving religious education, 31.5% of the participants (6 out of 19) stated that they preferred to raise their children in 'one' religion. Having said that, when they mentioned 'one' religion, all participants were referring to Islam. Those Muslim women had an agreement with their husbands to raise their children as Muslim and to educate them in Islam.

In their study on Christian–Muslim couples in Italy, Cerchiaro *et al.* (2015) suggested that the transmission of their religious belief to their children is more important for Muslim male partners and it becomes a non-negotiable issue in continuing their relationship with their non-Muslim partners. In the present study, similarly, many Muslim women were more willing than their non-Muslim husbands to pass their religion on to their children and to raise them in their faith (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010; Cerchiaro et al., 2015). As an example, when I asked Salma how important it was to her to raise her children as Muslim, she said: 'VERY, VERY im-por-tant. What else is there in my life to do!'

For participants like Salma, the transmission of their religious faith and giving their children an Islamic education were important, and the subject was not open to disagreement. Therefore, they discussed the subject in advance and even stipulated raising their children as Muslim before they got married (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010). For instance, Aneesa, who has been married to a Christian for twenty-four years, stated that she and her husband agreed on raising their children as Muslim before marriage and they did not have any problem later:

> *We came to the decision that we would bring up any children of ours as Muslims, but would be very respectful of the fact that their father was a Christian. We had no problems with that. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

Nuray also explained how she urged her husband to accept her conditions regarding their future children's religious education:

> *At the beginning, I asked him to promise and said, 'When we get married, if we have children, none of the religions will be taught to them except Islam. There won't even be any attempt to teach them any other religion. They will be raised with my religion, and I will teach them my religion.' He said, 'OK, as you wish.' I said, 'What if they come to you and ask a religious question, what will you do?' [and he replied] 'I would say go and ask your mother!' So, I had his word. (Nuray, London, May 2016)*

When we consider Nuray's case and the other participants' narratives who wanted to teach their children only one religion (Islam) and raise them as Muslims, we can see that those women were more connected to their religion than their husbands were to theirs. Those participants identified their non-

Muslim husbands as cultural Christians or Jews, or not interested in religion. Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) suggested in their research on the religious identity formation of children in interfaith families that the spouse who is more connected to their religion wants to teach their religion to their children and raise them in it. Similarly, in the present study, in families that had decided to give religious education in 'one' religion, non-Muslim husbands left the decision and the role of giving religious education to their wives, and they accepted their wives' demand to bring up their children as Muslims.

Furthermore, these participants agreed that they would raise their children as Muslim. However, regarding teaching their husbands' religion, two opinions came up during the interviews. The first group of Muslim women raising their children as Muslim emphasised that there would not be any problem for them if their husbands wanted to teach their children his religion because they had agreed that, in the end, their children would be Muslim. For instance, Tayyibah, a British–Pakistani woman who has been married for nine years, expressed her opinion about her husband's stated intention to teach their children about his religion as well:

> *That is fine. [...] I said to him 'OK, if you want to teach them about Christianity, I have no problem with that.' […] I think it is only a good thing to engage their mind in any religion, I have no problem with that. […] I know the Lord's Prayer, just like I know the Surah Fātiḥa. There is not that much difference. Look at the*

> *Lord's Prayer, look at the Surah Fātiḥa.*[26] *There is not that much difference … I did say that to him when we got married. Because that was his condition. [He said] 'If you want to raise our children Muslim, then I want them to know also about their father's background. Their father's religion.' I said, 'That is not a problem, but THEY WILL BE MUSLIM.' You cannot confuse the child by saying 'Oh, you are Muslim and you are Christian'. (Tayyibah, London, November 2017)*

Similarly, Yasemin, a Turkish woman married to a Christian man for 16 years, stated that she would not oppose her husband if he wanted to teach his religion to their children but, in this case, she would work harder to learn about Islam so that she could tell their children more about Islam. As the interview narratives indicated, while those Muslim women who wanted to raise their children in one religion (as a Muslim), they also did not see any problem if their husbands wanted to teach their own religion to their children, because they accepted that it is their husbands' right to do so.

The second group of Muslim women felt that teaching their children their husbands' religion along with Islam and along with wanting them to be Muslim would be confusing for the children. They stated that if children are taught both

[26] The participant refers the similarities between the Lord's Prayer: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' (Matthew 6:9–13) and the Surah Fātiḥa:
'[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds; The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Recompense. It is You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path – The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray.' (Q.1:1-7)

religions, it would be difficult for them to make a distinction between them. For instance, Nuray, who is married to a White-British man and has an eight-year-old son, stated:

> *If you raise your children in two religions, and expect them to learn both, they will be confused. If you do so [raise them in two religions], then it will be like saying 'There are two truths, and you can choose one of them.' But there are not. There is only one true religion, and you will teach it. You will tell your child the alternatives of that true religion, but you should tell them with their wrongs, so that the child will learn those [the other religions] are not true. The truth is the one you teach your child. Of course, I won't tell my son that there is no Christianity or no Judaism. I will tell him about them and will explain why we don't believe in those religions. (Nuray, London, May 2016)*

As seen in Nuray's case, these participants disagree with raising children in both religions. They raise their children as Muslim and teach them some major subjects considering their children's ages, such as the main principles of Islam, believing in one God, the life of the prophets, along with how to pray and eating habits in Islam. In addition, these participants also argue that children will learn other religions later, but in their early years it would not be right to teach them other religions as it would cause them confusion.

6.2.2. Raising in Two Religions

In the study, seven of the participants stated that they preferred to teach the principles of both religions and that they were raising their children in two religions, Islam and Christianity or Islam and Judaism, and when the children

grow up they will make their choice and decide which religion they want to follow. Participants stated that being married to a non-Muslim did not mean that their children would not know Islam or their knowledge about Islam would be limited. Rather, they felt a responsibility to teach them their religion. For instance, Hanan explained her opinion about their future children's religious education by saying that:

> *I think it's essential. I take the responsibility quite seriously, and I don't want just the fact that I am married to a Christian to be the reason why my children can't understand the Islamic faith, in the way that I understand it. It might be different, but I want them to understand the faith, and I think that is more important, more than being a Muslim, as long as they can understand it and they know what Islam is. (Hanan, London, March 2017)*

During the interviews, participants indicated that it was not correct to behave as if the child belonged to one part of the family, husband or wife, and should be raised according to that person's religion. Rather, both spouses had the same right to teach and raise their children in their faith. Therefore, those Muslim women had an agreement with their husbands that they would raise their children in both religions:

> *We have discussed how we would raise our children and it is very much interfaith. It is both […] I want my children, you know, inshallah [God willing], to be both. I don't want them ever to think or feel that they are half of anything. […] But I'm not going to teach them only about Islam, and I certainly wouldn't want them just to be taught only about Judaism. Because that would*

> *be like having two Jewish parents or two Muslim parents. That is not who we are. (Maryam, London, January 2017)*

> *We decided it before we even planned to have a child before we got married. We decided we wanted our children to feel like they belonged to both faiths. We wanted them to experience both. And we wanted them to feel like they belonged to both. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

Also, these participants emphasised that being in an interfaith family and being raised in two religions would be an advantage for the children, provided neither parent pushed them to follow his/her religion and culture and that both parents understood the importance of each other's culture and religion. Otherwise, living in an interfaith family and being a part of it could be tiring for children. Derya said:

> *For me, raising [my children] in two religions is a positive thing. The children will learn how to empathise with others and what others think. They will learn that you don't have to choose a side, you can be both. They would learn this. It is perfect for children. But this can only happen if the parents follow a correct method and respect and understand each other. If not, and if there is conflict on how they will raise their children and what they will teach regarding religious education, then the children will be mixed up and confused. (Derya, Bristol, November 2016)*

As seen in Derya's narrative, the participants thought that being raised in both religions would have some advantages for the children. That is in line with the research indicating that being raised by parents from different religious

backgrounds appears to provide some benefits to children (Petts and Knoester, 2007; Miller, 2013). Petts and Knoester (2007) argue that religiously heterogamous families may have a higher level of tolerance and that this contributes to positive development in children's behaviour early in life (Petts and Knoester, 2007; Petts, 2011).

Furthermore, Suzan Kath Miller (2013) discusses in her book the feasibility of raising children in more than one religious tradition and its benefits for both couples and children. She asserts that raising children in interfaith marriages in both religions is good as both religions are represented in the union, meaning that the children know both religions and understand them. Educating children in both faiths will help children share in both religious traditions. Miller (2013) also emphasises that those children will serve as bridges between two faiths and this will be the most important outcome of being raised with two religions.

Regarding the negative impact of being raised in two religions, the common argument is that it will be confusing for children. This is because of the fact that while some children may take this dual identity as natural, others will want to know which one they belong to (Romain, 1996). Similarly, Petts (2011) argues that when parents have a different faith, this difference may send children conflicting messages about religion, and may make them confused about what religion they should believe or how they should behave. In the present study, when I asked about the children's reaction to the religious differences in the family, none of the participants mentioned any confusion. Those participants who educate their children in two religions disagreed with the opinion that two-faith

education would be confusing for the children. On the contrary, they stated that being raised in two religions makes the children open-minded and helps them learn how to respect others. They added that giving moral education to their children is more important than whether it is affiliated with a specific religion:

> ***Laila:*** *I think [raising children in two religions] is a positive thing, definitely. Other people might think: 'No! That is like you are confusing them. Why would you confuse them?' [According to that view] you have to give them, feed them, one thing and that is it, so that they are not confused. But I think that is just limiting them. I think they will be more confident if they are raised in different religious backgrounds.*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *In which way would it be positive?*
>
> ***Laila:*** *To open a discussion about the different possibilities so that when they get older, they can respect other people's opinions. (Laila, London, July 2017)*

As seen in the interview narrative, participants argued that children in an interfaith marriage should not be limited to only one religion. From this perspective, two-faith education would not confuse the children; on the contrary, it would not limit them to one faith and would make them tolerant and open-minded to different religious views. The interview narratives are in line with Miller's (2013) arguments. She reports that those arguments and evidences used by people and clergy who are against raising children in both family religions date from an era when there were no interfaith communities and little interaction with other faiths (Miller, 2013). Therefore, living with someone from a different religion and raising a child in two different belief systems was not something that

was conceivable. Hence, the prospect was commonly considered as too confusing for children. It should be stated that Miller's essential argument is accurate to some degree and it can be used in the discussion about why traditional scholars were against the interfaith marriages — i.e. that limited relationships with others made people prejudiced towards interfaith and inter-ethnic marriages. However, when we consider her arguments in terms of Muslim women's interfaith marriages, it might be refutable, because today many Muslim people are living in the Western countries and have good relationships with people from other religions and ethnicities, and yet, as mentioned, some of our participants whose husbands are non-Muslim still think that raising their children in two religions would be too confusing for the children. For instance, Yasemin stated:

> *Raising children in two faiths is not good for children. They can get confused. Because there are already some confusing, obscure topics in religion, such as the life after death. We don't exactly know them but just accept it. I think if you teach children different information from two different religions then that will be too confusing for them. (Yasemin, London, June 2016)*

In this context, during the interviews, I asked Muslim women whether their children asked them about the religious differences between their parents, and, if so, how they explained/would explain their different religions to their children. A group of participants whose children were 11 years old or older stated that their children did not question the religious differences in the family:

> *No, they did not actually [ask any question about the differences between my husband and me]. They did realise it, but they never actually asked. That might be part of their personalities. (Aneesa, Birmingham, May 2016)*

Similarly, Oyku, a Turkish woman with a 14-year-old son, explained her son's attitudes about religious differences in their family:

> *I think he has just taken it as normal because they don't think about it. They grow with that. OK, my mum is Turkish, my dad is British. That is how our family functions. As I said, that is normality for him, and also where we live. He has friends who are half-French, half-Irish, half-this, half-that, so it is a concept that he is familiar with because it is a part of living in a multicultural society. (Oyku, Birmingham, October 2016)*

As seen in the interview narratives, the main reason for not getting any questions from their children regarding the differences in the family is the fact that those children were growing up in an interfaith family and exposed to both religions and this had become their norm.

On the other hand, the participants who did not have a child or whose children were younger than 10-years-old explained their response/potential response to their children's (possible) questions on the religious differences in the family. For instance, Anis, who has a 4-year-old daughter, stated:

> ***Anis:*** *She is asking me more questions, like about death, about God. She's now started to ask why I don't eat pork.*
>
> ***Interviewer:*** *How do you answer that?*

> ***Anis:*** *I say 'mummy and daddy believe in slightly different things.' I also say, 'mummy does not eat pork because Mummy believes that pork is not clean meat. Daddy eats pork because in his religion they think pork is OK. It is the same thing as mummy and daddy drinking coffee, but you don't drink coffee.' So, she is getting to understand that we are still family [and] we might like different things. And she seems to be comfortable with that. (Anis, London, November 2016)*

As seen in the narrative, those participants consider believing in different religions is a matter of preference, and they explain the differences in the family to their children by comparing them with choosing to consume different foods. Similarly, Salma expressed the differences by using the food-preference metaphor, but she also stated that she would explain the differences by focusing on the idea that the essence of both religions is the same: one God. She said:

> *I'm never gonna tell them that Michael is wrong in his religion … and I would like to think that he won't do the same. […] I think I would put it in terms of that is what makes sense to me and that is what makes sense to your dad, and it is a bit like, your dad likes chicken, and I like pasta [laughs]. It is a preference, and it means that God is in the middle of both religions, but it [the difference] is just how we experience him, the language, and the symbols, everything that we have used to experience him. (Salma, London, November 2016)*

Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) found in their research on the religious identity formation of young people in interfaith families that parents who feel less connected to their religion want their children to have more than one option of becoming a member of a religion, whether it is their religious tradition or not.

Therefore, they want to introduce both religions to their children and leave the decision to their children whether they become part of their religious tradition or a different one. However, this argument is not entirely pertinent to the findings of the present study. In the study, it is not correct to say that all Muslim women and their husbands who support raising their children in two religions are less religious or have a limited connection with religion. On the contrary, nearly half of the participants who are inclined to raise their children in two religions also identified themselves as religious, and emphasised how religious belief is crucial to them. Besides, for the majority of the husbands teaching their religion and culture to their children is essential, whether they identify themselves as religious or not. Thus, it is possible to state that the husbands' connection to their religion and culture is pertinent in the decision to raise the children in two religions. Muslim women, whether they are religious or cultural Muslims, all want their children to learn their religion and culture (Islam). Nevertheless, when the non-Muslim husband wants his children to learn his religion, two attitudes appear. First, if the intermarried Muslim woman is religious, she teaches her religion and also accepts her husband's demand as she thinks that her husband has the right to teach his religion too. Secondly, if the Muslim woman is a cultural Muslim, she accepts her husband's demand as well, but since she does not want to leave religious education only to her husband, she teaches her religious culture too.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasise that among those participants only two out of seven Muslim women had a child. This number limits my research regarding intermarried Muslim women's attitudes toward their children's

religious education, because, as discussed previously, and also as indicated by many other studies, the intermarried couples' behaviours usually change after they have a child. Therefore, as might be expected, those Muslim women and their husbands may change their attitudes towards how they will raise their children. However, their responses in the study are still valuable to understanding Muslim women's interfaith marriages as they reflect their thoughts and attitudes toward children's religious education in interfaith marriages.

6.2.3. Secular Education

In the study, while 68.5% of the participants raise/plan to raise their children either as Muslim or in two religions, 6 out of 19 participants stated that they did not/would not raise their children in any specific religion, whether it be Islam, Christianity or Judaism. Among these participants, 4 out of 6 Muslim women had a child at the time of the interview.

The participants stated that they wanted their children to learn their parents' culture, but they did not want to force their children to believe in any particular religion — theirs or their husband's. Thus, they did not raise them in a particular religion or teach them anything about religion, unless they asked. They leave the decision to their children about which religion they will follow in the future:

> *We want to make sure that we don't deprive our children of knowing about both heritages, and that means that they have to have access to both families' beliefs and religions. But we don't necessarily drag them into it. […] they can decide whether [Islam] is the way they want to go, or if they want to go down the Catholic road, or if they want to go down the Jewish road,*

> *you know, whatever makes sense to them. Because I am very much like my husband, I just think that religion is such a personal thing and it has to make sense to you, and you cannot assert a certain religion for other people, or hold other expectations over people, and that, necessarily, there is not one right way here. (Zahra, Birmingham, December 2016)*

Some of the participants also indicated that they would not raise their children according to Islam or any specific religion; rather they preferred to give them a moral education. For instance, Maria, who had her second marriage with a non-Muslim man, said, 'I think it is essential for them to have a moral education'. Similarly, Meral stated that even though she would be an example of a Muslim woman at home, and their children would see her practising her religion, they would not give their children any specific religious education. She said:

> *I am not planning to give any religious education, I am planning to give them a moral education. I want to raise a virtuous child. I will play my role as an example of a Muslim woman. If they like it, they will follow me, or they will go their own way. But I will not command them on religion, either Christianity or Islam. Of course, I will talk about Allah, but I will not orient them in terms of religion. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

Romain (1996) argues that raising children with no religious education is an attempt at raising children in a 'natural' environment. Parents expect their children to make their decision in adulthood without having parental influence. In my opinion, as discussed in the previous section, even though Muslim women and their husbands agree on not giving any religious education to their children, it is difficult to create a natural religion-free environments in their home, especially if their religious identities play a role in their own lives. Because it is

expected that children will observe their parents' religions, and their extended family members' connection to their religions, and the family influence will always be there. On the other hand, this expectation might have an unexpected result for the parents as their children may not choose at all and they may not have any religious affiliation in later life (Romain, 1996). At this point, it should be stated that as the participants in this group either had children younger than 7-years-old or did not have any children at the time of the interview, it is not possible to examine whether Romain's argument is valid or not for the children in Muslim women's interfaith marriages in this study.

Furthermore, a number of the participants thought that, even though they would not give any religious education to their children, the children would nonetheless be born Muslim in a broader sense and remain Muslim unless they changed their religion and believed in a different one. This opinion comes from one of the *hadith* sayings: 'Every child is born on fitrah [as Muslim], and his parents convert him to Judaism or Christianity or Zoroastrian' (Al-Bukhari, Book 23, Hadith 138). Meral, a Turkish woman who is married to an agnostic man, explained that although she and her husband decided to give their future children a moral rather than religious education, she still had some questions in her mind about raising them as Muslim. One day her husband asked her a question about when she became a Muslim, and his question made her think about being Muslim. The answer relieved her worries on their future children's religion. She stated:

> *My husband asked me: 'Meral, when did you become a Muslim?' I asked him, 'What does that mean!' He said, 'You said*

> *[a person should take] shahāda [to become a Muslim], when did you recite the shahāda?' I said there wasn't an exact time; it was always like this … of course I have recited shahāda, but there is not any specific time that I became a Muslim. I also asked my mother, and she said: 'There is not anything like that. We were born Muslim.' Then I did some research and learned that everyone is born Muslim. So, unless you convert and become a member of another religion, you are already a Muslim. This finding solved my problem [regarding our children's religion]. When we have children, they will not get baptised — this is definite, indisputable, and unless they decide differently, they will remain Muslim. (Meral, London, June 2016)*

On the other hand, during the interviews, it emerged that, even though the participants stated that they did not give any religious education to their children, these participants admitted that they still teach religious rituals and values to their children directly or indirectly. Accordingly, these participants can be divided into two groups. In the first group, the participants do not teach any religion to their children directly, but they show their children some religious rituals, as these rituals form part of the Muslim women's cultures and daily routines. Also, they are aware of the fact that even if they do not give them any specific religious education, their children will see them practising and learn religious rituals by watching them. For instance, Maria said:

> *In terms of teaching prayer, they would see me praying. That's how you learn, not by teaching but by seeing people doing it. Reading the Qurʾān. If I read the Qurʾān, my kids will hear the Qurʾān and I will then translate it to them, and if they ask Mummy what that means, I tell them. I am in the mosque, or I*

> *am giving charity. Mummy is giving money, what are you doing? I am giving zakāt[27]. I do it. And not theoretically teaching about it, you know. And then what does daddy do? Daddy prays differently, and daddy is reading the Bible. What does the Bible say? The Bible says this and that... […] Daddy also gives to charity, and daddy might be going off to Jerusalem. I think if you do it, kids learn from seeing people do things, not teaching about something abstract. (Maria, London, July 2017)*

Similarly, Betul stated that even though she agreed with her husband about not giving any religious education to their children, her daily religious routine would affect her son. She said:

> *Regarding religious education … yes, we left the decision to our son. We think he should decide on or select which religion he believes. But I did not know how we could practise our decision. Maybe it is a small thing, but in my daily life I pray for my son. I feel good and pray feeling that he will be protected. So, I pass this religious practice to my son indirectly. (Betul, Sheffield, May 2016)*

In the second group, similarly, the participants did not give any religious education to their children, but during the interviews they admitted they secretly wanted their children to become Muslim in the future. These women have a good relationship with their extended family. They visit them frequently and expect that their children will learn Islam and religious culture from their grandmother and grandfather and other family members:

[27] Zakāt is the compulsory almsgiving which is one of the five pillars of Islam (Esposito, 2003).

> *That is one of the reasons I go to Turkey with my children. I mean I go to Turkey every year to have my children see religious rituals specifically from their grandmother, like she is praying. I want my children to see her and learn how she prays, what she does as a religious practice and what their meaning is. (Pinar, Manchester, June 2016)*

For some of the participants, even though they were in agreement with their husbands about not giving any religious education, they still felt that they had more impact on their children's religious identity than their husbands, because their husbands were cultural rather than practising Christians. For instance, Ruya, a Turkish woman who has a 7-year-old daughter, explained her daughter is raised as Muslim even though they do not give her any formal religious education as parents:

> *Yes, we have agreed that our daughter will decide about religion when she grows up. But my father recited adhān[28] in our new-born daughter's ear secretly. I told him [my husband] you won't do anything religious [like baptise]. Our daughter will make the decision, we have agreed on this. So, I don't give any religious education, but she copies whatever she sees from her grandmother, my mother. We want her to decide about religion later, but I guess the Muslim side has a stronger influence. (Ruya, London, June 2016)*

[28] *Adhān* is the ritual call to prayer in Islam (Esposito, 2003). The recitation of *adhān* in a newborn baby's ear is a traditional religious ceremony among Muslims, and is regarded to be a *Sunna*, the established custom and cumulative traditions mainly based on the actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Esposito, 2003; Oxford Islamic Studies Online, 2018).

As the narratives indicated, the intermarried Muslim women who had children at the time of the interviews stated that, even though some of them did not give any religious education to their children, the children would follow their mother's religion, as the mother religiously influences the children more than the father, meaning they make their children learn Islam and raise them as Muslim either directly or indirectly. Their fathers' religious influence is more limited. This result is in line with the previous research on the mothers' impact on children's religious education, suggesting that as the primary caretaker of the children mothers have more influence on children's religious education and religiosity than the fathers (Hoge, 1995; Miller and Stark, 2002; McGinity, 2009; Petts, 2011). Notably, 'whatever might have been the pre-marital agreements, the most common policy was that the mother took all responsibility for the religious training' (Gordon, 1966, p. 152). In other words, in the intermarriages where the children are raised in both faiths or not given any religious education, children more frequently follow the religion of the mother than that of the father (Gordon, 1966).

6.3. Conclusion

In this penultimate chapter of the study, I have discussed the intermarried Muslim women's attitudes towards their children's religious education, focusing on what kind of religious education the Muslim women and their husbands give or plan to give their children. It has been shown that for the majority of the participants raising a child who has faith and believes in Allah is important. While they agreed on this, the participants' attitudes differ in whether children in an

interfaith marriage should be raised in one religion, both religions or neither religion.

During the interviews, Muslim women expressed three main attitudes towards giving religious education to their children. For the first group, raising their children with Islamic principles, as Muslims, is essential. They feel responsible for raising their children as Muslims, and they spent time teaching their children Islam. Those participants expressed that they did not face any opposition from their husbands regarding raising their children as Muslims, because they had discussed the subject in advance and agreed that this would happen. The second group of participants stated that they raise or plan to raise their children in both religions. Accordingly, these Muslim women and their husbands teach their faiths to their children together. They do this because they think that both parents have the right to raise their children in their faith. However, whether being raised in two different religions will be confusing for the children or not became the main discussion for this group. It was argued that when children are raised in two different religions in an interfaith family, it might be confusing for them. Also, the children may feel that they are in a dilemma when it comes to choosing between their father's religion or their mother's religion. In the study, the participants who are raising their children Muslim also agreed with this opinion. However, the rest of the participants refuted this argument by saying that being raised in two different religions and having knowledge of both religions would make children open-minded, more tolerant to other religions and cultures and they would have less prejudice about others. In addition to these two groups, the third group of

participants stated that they did not give any religious education to their children. They considered that moral education was more important than raising children in a specific religion. Some of the participants in this group stated that raising a child in a particular religion would limit the children. Thus, making them open-minded in regard to religions in general is more important.

Furthermore, all participants agreed that as a mother, they have more influence and play a more significant role in their children's religious education than their husbands do. Therefore, even though some participants said that they raised their children in both religions, or did not give any religious education, as the mother, they and their families nonetheless have more influence on their children and thus, their children will likely follow them in terms of religion.

Most of the participants in the third group emphasised that the parents' choices for their children's religious education cannot guarantee a particular religious outcome for the children. As the parents, their influence will be limited. Therefore, no matter which religion they raise their children in, the children will be the ones who will practise that religion in their lives and so they will make their own religious choice when they grow up (Miller, 2013). The parents' role in children's religion is to provide opportunities for learning and education but no pressure of any kind (Hoge, 1995). Meanwhile, in addition to offering education and opportunities, parents also serve as role models for their children and reproduction of religious/cultural values and behaviour happens unconsciously (Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). For some participants, being a role model is the best way to give their children a religious education. They stated that if as Muslim

women they practised their religion and acted accordingly, then their children would see them as an example (role model) and follow them. Similarly, it was argued that Muslim woman are more efficient in raising their children as Muslim when she married a non-Muslim, than when a Muslim man married to a non-Muslim (Aini, 2003). In his study conducted in Indonesia, Aini (2003) demonstrates that more children of interfaith marriage were identified as Muslim if their mother was Muslim (up to 62%) than if the father was Muslim (13%). This data also indicates that the Muslim mother has the more influential role in the initial faith identification of children than the father. Even though religious identification of children of interfaith marriages in the UK context merits further scrutiny, it is suitable to conclude that as the mother and primary caretaker, Muslim women have more influence on their children's religious behaviours and the result of the present study supports this by suggesting that if in Muslim women's interfaith marriages the spouses decide to give a religious education to their children, the women believe that their children are (and will be) more influenced by their Muslim religion than the non-Muslim religion of their husbands.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.1. Main Findings:

This research has investigated Muslim women's interfaith marriages, including how religious differences affect their family lives and their relationships with their husbands. In the first part of the study, I presented the theological background of the discussion about Muslim women's interfaith marriages in Islam. The study revealed that in Islamic tradition, both Muslim men and women are prohibited from marrying *mushriks*, and are required to marry only other believers (Q. 2:221). As expected, there is not any opposition to this idea; however, the specific definitions of 'believers' and '*mushriks*' are the issues that trigger the discussion about interfaith marriage in Islam. Depending on verse 5:5, early commentaries in Islamic tradition assert that *kitabī* women, who are Jews and Christians, are among the believers to whom Muslim men can be married. However, the classical exegetes did not interpret this verse in terms of the principle of the reciprocity of lawfulness. It is worth noting that there is a double standard in the classical exegetes' definitions of the terms 'believers' and '*mushriks*' regarding interfaith marriages: when Muslim scholars define these groups, their definitions differ for men and women (Chapter 2, Section 2.1). As stated above, while they claim that *kitabī* (Jewish and Christian) women are not *mushrik*, but belong to the groups defined as believers that Muslim men are allowed to marry, when it comes to *kitabī* men, Muslim jurists indicate that

Muslim women are not allowed to marry them because they are not believers. It is interesting that, while *kitabī* women are accepted as believers, *kitabī* men, who believe in the same religion as *kitabī* women do, are not accepted.

In the Qurʾān, while it is clearly stated that Muslim men are allowed to marry *kitabī* women, there are not any statements about Muslim women's marriages in this regard. Nevertheless, the majority of classical Muslim scholars viewed this silence as an implication of the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages to non-Muslim. So, a consensus (*ijmāʿ*) has thus been established that Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslims and this consensus has become the primary basis for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages.

In the discussion of Muslims' interfaith marriages, classical Muslim scholars considered the changing circumstances in their society and they re-discussed the religious rule (*fatwā*) regarding Muslims' interfaith marriage. However, these discussions took place around only the issue of Muslim men's interfaith marriages and their impact on the Muslim community, even though these marriages are allowed explicitly in the Qurʾān (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1). Many Muslim scholars, both classical and contemporary, have agreed on the idea that, taking into consideration the times and circumstances that Muslims and their families live in, some restrictions might be applied to Muslim men's interfaith marriages. For instance, if he lives in a country where Muslims are a minority, and there are potential difficulties around raising his children as Muslims and living his own life as a Muslim, then a Muslim man should not marry a non-Muslim woman.

However, similar discussions regarding Muslim women's marriages have not emerged until recent years, when they have first started to be considered by a group of contemporary Muslim scholars.

This study illustrated that classical Muslim scholars and contemporary Muslim scholars who take a traditional approach have treated a ban on Muslim women's interfaith marriages as an immutable rule. Thus, they have not discussed the subject in terms of the changing situation in their societies or communities, as they have done for Muslim men's interfaith marriages. However, as seen in the discussions that have been mentioned in Chapter 2, it is clear that the concerns raised as reasons to restrict Muslim men's marriages to non-Muslim women are similar concerns to those that Muslim scholars have traditionally cited as the reasons for the prohibition of women's interfaith marriages. This similarity shows that there are no differences between Muslim men's and women's marriages in terms of the main principles or the expectations of Muslims' marriages. This research revealed that it is expected in Muslims' interfaith marriages, whether they are women or men, that any children should be raised as Muslims, that the family members will live their lives according to Islamic principles, and that they should have the freedom to practise their religion. However, while classical Muslim scholars have emphasised these principles in their discussions of Muslim men's interfaith marriages, when it comes to Muslim women's marriages, they do not ask Muslim women to consider this principle, evaluate their situation and then decide.

In addition, there is also another contradiction in the Muslim scholars' arguments for the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages. When they re-evaluated Muslim men's interfaith marriages, they stated that if a Muslim man living in a Western country marries a non-Muslim woman, as the mother, the non-Muslim woman has the main role in the children's religious education at home (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1). In contrast, the same scholars oppose Muslim women's interfaith marriage with the claim that they would not have any role in their children's religious education. In other words, while they give non-Muslim women the main role in their children's religious education, they do not envision the same role and position for Muslim women.

This research indicates that the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriage mostly comes from the cultural and social understanding of marriage and gender roles in the family, rather than from strictly religious sources of reference (the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*). It also seems that, based on the influence of the patriarchal nature of their understanding of marriage, Muslim scholars ignore Muslim women's right to the freedom of practising their own religions in their marriages; thus, they claim to give protective attention to the Muslim women by keeping them out of interfaith marriages.

Even though many contemporary scholars prefer not to discuss this issue openly, but rather prefer to refer to the established consensus, some modern Muslim scholars, such as Kecia Ali, Khaleel Muhammad, and Hasan al-Turabi have started to discuss Muslim women's interfaith marriages publicly, because of the impact of increasing rates of this type of union in Western countries (Chapter 2, Section

2.2.2.2). They primarily argue that the Qurʾān does not explicitly prohibit Muslim women's interfaith marriages and the prohibition is instead based on the consensus of earlier Muslim scholars, which is open to question. Accordingly, they assert that the consensus on the prohibition mainly stems from early scholars' perceptions of marriage and also from the patriarchal interpretation of the verses. Therefore, alongside changing times and evolving modern contexts, changing rules is inevitable and Muslim women's interfaith marriages should be re-discussed in the context of the changes in conditions and gender roles in today's world.

In addition, contemporary Muslim scholars, who object to the prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriage, also criticise the arguments related to the absence of explicit permission for Muslim women's interfaith marriages in the Qurʾān. They argue that consideration of the egalitarian aspect of the Qurʾān should indicate that its silence on the subject should not be interpreted as a prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriage. On the contrary, the absence of any explicit prohibition in the Qurʾān indicates that Islam leaves the decision regarding whom to marry up to the Muslim woman: she should consider her conditions and her prospective husband's attitude towards her religious faith and then she should decide for herself.

Considering the discussions and arguments put forward by the scholars against and for Muslim women's interfaith marriages, it can be concluded that there is a prohibition of Muslim women's interfaith marriages in Islamic tradition and this prohibition mainly based on the consensus of the scholars. This consensus has

continued throughout the years without having a discussion on the subject. In my opinion, whether marriage is a religious phenomenon or not is the key point of the subject. Even though the majority of classical Muslim scholars consider the marriage as a part of *muʿāmalāt* (the sphere of social relationship), many scholars approach Muslim women's interfaith marriages as a purely religious phenomenon that can be discussed solely in theory and they are hesitant to reconsider the issue. My position is that marriage is not a solely religious but also a social phenomenon. Therefore as it is in Muslim men's marriages to non-Muslim women (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1), Muslim women's marriages to non-Muslims should also be re-discussed by the scholars considering the time and condition that Muslim women live in and the final decision should be left to the woman.

Furthermore, despite the ongoing theological discussions among scholars and their consensus on the prohibition of interfaith marriages, many Muslim women are entering this type of interfaith union. Therefore, Muslim scholars will inevitably have to reconsider it for the sake of Muslim communities in Western countries. In the study, after providing a theological context, I analysed interview narratives of 19 interreligiously married Muslim women living in various cities in the UK to provide insights into the interfaith marriages of Muslim women. In this context, it should be stated that, as discussed in detail (Chapter 3, Section 3.9), having unbalanced data in terms of participants' nationality has been the limitation of my research. During the research it was revealed that while Turkish women have higher interaction with intermarried Turkish women, other

intermarried women have limited connection with their communities. For this reason, despite my all efforts to access intermarried Muslim women from different communities in the UK, by using the snowball technique, this research includes predominantly Turkish women.

This study has revealed that 'love' is the main reason for Muslim women's decision to intermarry (Chapter 4, Section 4.4). Many Muslim women decide to get married to non-Muslim men because they have fallen in love and want to spend the rest of their lives together, which is similar to the reasons for most marriages. However, we should consider what has caused the rate of interfaith marriages involving Muslim women to increase, while previously it was predominantly men who married outside the faith.

Romain (1996) describes a relationship between the emancipation of women and the increased rate of interfaith marriage, and the findings of the current study are in line with Romain's arguments. In previous centuries, even until the mid-twentieth century, Muslim men had greater mobility than Muslim women through their education and jobs, so they were more likely to interact with members of other faith groups in Western countries. The tremendous recent advances in women's access to higher education and rights of employment have given Muslim women more freedom and opportunity to interact with other people from different religious and ethnic groups in the UK. They are more likely to live away from their families, either to gain higher education or for work, as their financial independence makes this possible. It is argued that this increased interaction with members of other groups can lead to relationships with people

outside the Muslim faith. The majority of the participants in this study indicated that they were living away from their family when they met their future husbands and decided to get married (Chapter 4, Section 4.2). They also confessed that it would have been more challenging to make the decision about their interfaith marriage if they were living with their family. However, it would not be correct to consider living away from the family as a major reason for entering an interfaith union and conclude that Muslim women living away from their families would marry non-Muslims, as there are many Muslim women who live away from their families for education or work and do not marry non-Muslims. At this point, it is important to state that as in many other qualitative studies, the aim of this research is not to generalise but rather to present a contextualized understanding (Polit and Beck, 2010) of some aspect of Muslim women's interfaith marriages through the intensive research of intermarried Muslim women's cases in the UK. In this context, the present study demonstrates that living away from the family might not be a major reason for interfaith marriages but it decreased the family's influence on women's decisions to marry outside the faith is correct to some degree. However, this does not mean that it completely eliminated the family's impact as family approval was still important for majority of the participants.

Muslim families, like families from the other faiths, have concerns about their daughters' decisions to enter into interfaith marriages and usually oppose such marriages. The study revealed that religious differences and community pressure can be considered as two main reasons for a family's objections (Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1.1.2). In this case, many families believe that Muslim women are not

allowed to marry non-Muslims and thus that their daughter's marriage to a non-Muslim man will not be valid, so they ask their prospective son-in-law to convert to Islam. Some families are very strict about this demand, and may cut off their relationships with their daughter for years or even disown her if her husband does not want/accept to convert to Islam, even nominally. The study has illustrated that community pressure is another major reason for families' opposition (Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1.1.2.2); in some cases, it has more influence on the families than on their Muslim daughter who is planning to marry a non-Muslim man. For families who have a close relationship with their communities, community approval is crucial for their daughters' marriages, which requires that their future son-in-law must be a Muslim. Thus, some families asked their daughters to make their future husbands convert to Islam even nominally, just for the day of the wedding, even some families who were identified as culturally religious by their daughters. After analysing the responses of the participants for their families' attitudes, I came to the conclusion that the following reasons may have led the families to show this behaviour. Firstly, the nominal conversion would save the family's pride within their community and extended family: they can say that their daughter has married a convert, not a non-Muslim. In addition, even though some families are cultural Muslim, defined as Muslim due to the family background or social environment in which they were raised, conversion of their future son-in-law is essential as they want their daughter to have a socially approved marriage. Although religion may play a limited role in their private lives, in public, where they interact with the other members of their community, they

behave according to other people's expectations and seek others' approval (Goffman, 1971). In the end, family pressure and strict attitudes towards their husbands' conversion led some of the respondents to lie to their family about their husbands' religion. These women acted as if their husband had sincerely converted to Islam because otherwise their family would not have accepted the marriage or may even have disowned them.

On the other hand, the study showed that the majority of the participants agreed that conversion is a personal matter that their husbands should decide for themselves (Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1). Therefore they do not want to force their husbands to be Muslims, as they also would not comply if their husbands asked them to convert. During the interviews, it was revealed that the non-Muslim husbands' religiosity was shown to play an important role in their attitudes to conversion. For those husbands who are not interested in religion and do not view their religious identity as important, or just see it as a cultural tag, converting for the sake of the wedding and to make the process easier does not mean anything to them. However, for practising couples, i.e. a practising Jewish or Christian husband, nominal conversion to please their wife's family members would be dishonest and insincere behaviour, and they may even consider it be hypocritical. Thus, they did not accept or even think about the conversion. The majority of Muslim women were respectful to their husbands' thoughts about conversion because for them believing in one God, being respectful to their religious and cultural identities and having a good character are crucial criteria for a prospective spouse.

It is frequently argued that as Muslim women's interfaith marriage is not allowed in Islam, women who enter such a union would not be religious and that religion would not play any role in their lives. However, the primary findings of the study revealed that religious identity and practising their religion are important for these women who have decided to marry outside the faith (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.). In this study, while only 16% of the women said that they are not religious Muslims and religion does play only a limited role in their lives, 37% of the participants identified themselves as religious and devout Muslims, observing their religion, praying five times a day and fasting at Ramadan. They emphasized that religious identity and the transmission of their religion to their future children are also important to them. In this context, pre-marriage discussion between the partners plays an essential role in dealing with the religious differences in the family (Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1). The majority of the women said that they discussed the major issues or potential problems in their families with their husbands in advance and reached an agreement before they got married. Further, some participants prepared a marriage contract addressing the problems that might cause issues in their future families, such as dietary restrictions and their children's religious education. These pre-marriage discussions and prenuptial agreements play an essential role in dealing with religious differences as they ensure that important issues are discussed in advance.

The most important finding of my research on intermarried Muslim women was that on a personal level, Muslim women feel that being married to a non-Muslim

man has a positive impact on their religiosity as they focus more on their religion, working to enhance their religious knowledge (Chapter 5, Section 5.2). The participants emphasised that they do not face any opposition or difficulties regarding practising their religion, and they have freedom of practise. For some Muslim women, their husbands are also supportive in practicing their religion. This result refutes the key arguments against Muslim women's interfaith marriages – that if a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man, she will be oppressed by her non-Muslim husband, will not have freedom to practise her religion, or may even be influenced to leave her religion. It should be highlighted that in the modern world, particularly in Western countries, being oppressed by a non-Muslim husband, or having limited freedom of religion in an interfaith marriage, are no longer such a concerning issue for Muslim women's interfaith marriages, as this research has illustrated. This is mainly because of the fact that in the modern Western world, the principle of gender equality is enshrined as constitutional rights.

Meanwhile, regarding the impact of interfaith marriage on Muslim women's religiosity, the results suggest that Muslim women's families and the social community have more impact on these women's religious practice, such as going to the mosque or attending community events, than their husbands do. The present study highlighted that interfaith marriage can have a negative impact on Muslim women's religious practice via dilution and being removed from their religious community or institutions (Chapter 5, Section 5.4.2). Community pressure, community members' negative attitudes towards their marriages, and

other people's bias about inter-religiously married women can lead to intermarried Muslim women having only limited relationships with their community and even ending relationships with some people.

As Luckmann argued in his religious individualisation theory, abandoning public practices like going to the mosque or attending religious meetings does not mean that their religious identity no longer means anything to these Muslim women (Luckmann, 1967). However, this present study also illustrated that intermarried Muslims' limited attendance at the mosque and in the organisations of the religious community can lessen their connections to their religion and that community. It must be remembered that this situation also impacts upon their children's religious identity. Not being accepted within a religious community may cause stress, anger and resentment between interfaith couples and all of these issues also potentially affect their children's well-being and their relationship with the religious community and more broadly with the religion as a whole (Sullivan, 2008).

Furthermore, the responses to this study indicate that intermarried Muslim women want their children to know Islam and Islamic culture on different levels (Chapter 6, Section 6.2). Meanwhile, the attitudes of Muslim women towards children's religious education differ: while some women see raising their children in Islam as crucial and give only an Islamic education, another group teach both Islam and their husband's religion, and the final group of women prefer giving a moral education rather than a specific religious education. However, despite the differences in their attitudes, intermarried Muslim women all agree that their

children will be allowed to make their own choices and practise the religion they decide upon when they grow up.

In conclusion, the number of Muslims married to non-Muslims in Western countries has increased in recent years; and a considerable amount of those Muslims are women. Muslim women's interfaith marriages have become a new phenomenon to be taken into consideration for many Muslim minority communities in the West; however, it has been neglected or even purposely ignored by many Muslim community leaders and Muslim scholars. This study has provided a window into the hidden lives of Muslim women who have intermarried, investigating their marital lives and how the religious differences in their families impact their marriage and family life. Inter-religiously married Muslim women's voices often remain unheard. This research gives a voice to those women by enabling a detailed understanding of Muslim women's interfaith marriages and addressing a gap in the literature on the subject. By listening to their ignored stories, this research project can be seen as the first step towards enhancing our understanding of interreligiously married Muslim women's marriages, their family lives and the ways in which they deal with religious diversity, rather than simply making assumptions.

7.2. Future Research:

The work undertaken in this study highlights the necessity for further research on some issues related to Muslim women's interfaith marriages and suggests that more could be said about these marriages.

Firstly, this study only investigated a limited number of intermarried Muslim women from different ethnic groups in the UK. The result of the study should be validated by a larger sample size. Future research into Muslim women's interfaith marriages also could be conducted in different countries, both in Muslim countries and in other Western countries where Muslims are a minority group. The comparisons between different countries and different ethnicities could yield different results and give wider perspectives on Muslim women's interfaith marriages. Also, it could give further insights into the significance of the type of society and its impact on interfaith marriages.

In addition, in this study, Muslim women's interfaith marriages were discussed only from the perspective of Muslim women. However, every story has two sides and to better understand interfaith marriages, the perspective of non-Muslim husbands in Muslim women's interfaith marriages should also be explored. In this context, further research needs to expand the understanding of the husbands' experiences, as investigation of this aspect of Muslim women's interfaith marriages would also be of value to the study of this area, providing a different perspective based on their roles as husbands and sons-in-law.

Thirdly, in this study my focus has been on Muslim women who have a successful marriage and are currently living within an interfaith marriage. Meanwhile, there are other intermarried Muslim/non-Muslim couples who have not been successful and are divorced; including some of these couples may show a different side of interfaith marriages. Conducting research involving divorced Muslim women who were in an interfaith marriage will be helpful to gain a sense

of the difficulties that Muslim women can face in this type of marriage, and what the role of religious differences between them played in their decision to get divorced.

APPENDIX - I

Participant Information Sheet:

Title: *Interfaith Marriages in the UK: Perspectives from Muslim women experiencing marriage to non-Muslims*

You are being invited to take part in a research project conducted by Ayse Elmali from the Department of Theology and Religion in the University of Birmingham. This project is part of a PhD thesis, which is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Haifaa Jawad.

If you agree to be in this project, I will conduct an interview with you. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the aim of the research?

Although there is considerable research into interfaith marriage in Islam in general, there is nothing comprehensive from the perspective of Muslim women marrying non-Muslims. The focus of this project will be on interreligiously married Muslim women living in the UK. The main aim is to investigate how different religious and cultural backgrounds affect Muslim women's understanding and experiences of marriage. It will also explore to what extent the arguments of Muslim scholars about Muslim women's interfaith marriage are relevant to current situations in the countries these women live in.

Who can participate?

The participants will be chosen based on being part of an interfaith marriage. Any intermarried Muslim women who had different faith with her husband at some point in their lives will be included in the research.

What will you be asked in the interview?

The interview will include questions about your experiences as an intermarried Muslim woman before and after the marriage. There will be also some questions about your family and community's reaction on your decision to intermarry. Interviews will take about 45-60 minutes; I will record the interview with your permission.

Will the interview be anonymous and confidential?

During the project, the researcher will be sensitive in handling the participants' information. All the information collected during the course of the research will

be anonymized and kept strictly confidential in accordance with Data Protection Act 1998 and the Code of Practice for Research. Any information that may lead to the identification of the participant will not be used in the project.

What if a participant changes their mind and wants to withdraw from the study?

If a participant wishes to withdraw, he/she can do so at any time without having to give a reason, by contacting the researcher. In such a case, their data will be removed from the study and destroyed. However, participants will be unable to withdraw from the study once data analysis has begun, after a month from the interview, because data will be in aggregate form.

What will happen to the results of the project?

As well as contributing to my PhD thesis, the results may also form the basis for journal articles and conference papers.

Research Ethics:

The project has been approved by the University of Birmingham's Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Review Committee.

Contact information:

If the participant has any complaints about the conduct of the research, they may contact either the researcher or the supervisor.

Name: Ayse Elmali Position: PhD student and researcher E-mail: Phone Number:	Name: Position: E-mail: Phone Number:

APPENDIX - II

Informed Consent Sheet:

Participant Consent Form

Interfaith Marriages in the UK: Perspectives from Muslim women experiencing marriage to non-Muslims

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with interfaith marriage in the UK at the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham. The information, which you supply, will be entered into a filing system and will only be accessed by authorized persons involved in the project. Furthermore, the information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research. By supplying this information you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purpose stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Statements of understanding/consent

- I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information leaflet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the interview without giving any reason. I also understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time until the end of data collection, within one month from the interview. After that time, the withdrawal will not be possible. If I withdraw, my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed.
- I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study.

Name, signature and date

Name of participant ..... Date..... Signature.....

Name of researcher/
individual obtaining consent ..... Date..... Signature.....

APPENDIX - III

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Intermarried Muslim Women:

Questions about basic personal information:

- How old are you?
- What is your nationality?
- How do you identify yourself ethnically/racially?
- How long have you or your family been in the UK?
- When did you get married? How old were you then?
- What are you doing for a living? What is your current occupation?
- What is your husband's nationality?
- What is your husband's religious preference? What is your husband's religion? In what religion was your spouse raised?
- What is your husband's current occupation?

Questions about intermarried Muslim women's experiences of marriage:

1. How did you meet your husband?
2. What are the most important criteria for you in a potential spouse/husband when you decide to get married?
3. How did your husband's religious background affect your decision of marriage?
4. What do your parents think about your decision of getting married to someone who does not have the same religious beliefs that you have? How did they react? Do you think that they were expecting you to marry a certain type of person?
5. Have you ever experienced negative attitudes towards you for deciding to marry a non-Muslim? If so, can you give an example? How did you cope with it?
6. How did your friends react to your decision? How were their attitudes towards your decision to get married to a non-Muslim?
7. Do you have any Muslim friends who are married to someone who has a different religion?

8. When do you feel the religious differences within your marriage? Can you give an example? How do you deal with the religious diversity within your family?

9. Tell me about some cultural differences between you and your husband. How do you deal with cultural differences within your family?

10. What do you think about the advantages and disadvantages of having cultural/religious differences in a family/marriage? Which differences are more surmountable for you? Can you give an example?

11. To what extent does your interfaith marriage impact upon your social relations with your family, relatives, friends etc.? Can you give an example?

12. Do you have any children now?

- If yes,

    a. How many children do you have? How old are they?

    b. How did you choose a name for your children? Who was involved in the decision?

    c. Who is/was the primary caretaker of your children?

    d. Do you give religious education to your children?

        i. If so, can you explain how you give them religious education? Do you want them to learn your religion or their father's religion? Do you want your children to practice your religion's rituals with you, such as Eid, prayer, fasting during the Ramadan?

        ii. If not, what do you think about giving religious education to children?

    e. As an intermarried Muslim woman what kind of difficulties do you face when you raise your children? Please give an example.

    f. How did having a child change your life? Your marriage? Did it make the cultural/religious differences more visible or more surmountable? Can you give an example?

- If no,

    a. Do you think religious differences in your marriage will have any positive or negative effect in your relationship with your children?

b. Do you plan to give any religious education to your child?

c. Do you think the religious differences can influence the way you raise your child?

d. How important is it to you to raise your children according to your religion?

13. How would you react if your children decide to get married to someone who has a different religion/culture? What advice would you give your children about intermarriage?

14. How important is religion to you in your daily life? How would you say that religion/spirituality has played a role in your life?

15. Tell me about your religious life. How did it changed after you get married? Has religion become more or less important for you?

16. What do you think about the advantages or disadvantages of living in the UK as an interreligiously married Muslim woman?

17. What do you think about the traditional view of interfaith marriage in Islam?

18. Is there anything else that I have not asked and you feel that it is important for me to know about your marriage? Anything you would like to stress?

APPENDIX - IV

Table A: Details of the Muslim women interviewed in the study.

*All names are pseudonyms

	Name*	Brief Information
1	**Aneesa**	Aneesa is a 51-year-old British-Pakistani woman. She was born in the UK, and is working as a teacher. She is married to a Christian man who is White-British, and they have been married for 24 years.
2	**Anis**	Anis is a 32-year-old Malaysian woman. She has been living in the UK for 14 years, and is working as a teacher. She is married to a Christian man who is British Asian, and they have been married for 6 years.
3	**Betul**	Betul is a 40-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 10 years, and is working as a teaching associate. She is married to a Greek man who is an atheist, and his family is Christian. They have been married for 5 years.
4	**Derya**	Derya is a 36-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 4 years, and she is a tourist guide. She is married to a Christian man who is White-British, and they have been married for 4 years.
5	**Elif**	Elif is a 37-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 15 years. She is working as a specialist in a private company. She is married to a Christian man who is White-British, and they have been married for 3.5 years.
6	**Hanan**	Hanan is a 26-year-old British-Pakistani woman. She was born in the UK, and she is working as a project manager. She is married to a Nigerian man who is a Christian, and they have been married for 5 years.
7	**Laila**	Laila is a 28-year-old White-British woman. She was born in the UK, and is working as a designer. She is married to an Italian man who is agnostic, and they have been married for 3 years.

8	**Maria**	Maria is a 45-year-old White-British woman. She was born in the UK, and she is working as a manager. She was previously married to a Muslim man. After their divorce, she married her current husband who is a White-British Christian man. They have been married for 2 months.
9	**Maryam**	Maryam is a 34-year-old British-Pakistani woman. She was born in the UK, and is working in the field of law. She is married to a Jewish man who is White-British, and they have been married for 3.5 years.
10	**Meral**	Meral is a 41-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 14 years. She is currently a housewife. She is married to a Dutch man who is agnostic, and they have been married for 4 years.
11	**Nesrin**	Nesrin is a 43-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 35 years, and is currently working in a supermarket. She is married to a White-British man who was not affiliated with any religion at the time of their marriage. However, he converted to Islam just after they had their first child. They have been married for 25 years.
12	**Nuray**	Nuray is a 44-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 16 years, and is currently working in an export company. She is married to a White-British man who was raised as a Christian but is currently not affiliated with any religion. They have been married for 13 years.
13	**Oyku**	Oyku is a 45-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 15 years. She is currently a researcher. She is married to a Christian man who is White-British, and they have been married for 16 years.
14	**Pinar**	Pinar is a 39-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 18 years, and she works as a travel agent. She is married to a Christian man who is a Hong Kong- British (Chinese), and they have been married for 5 years.
15	**Ruya**	Ruya is a 45-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 11 years, and she is currently working for a travel agency. She is married to a Christian man who is White-British, and they have been married for 11 years.

16	**Salma**	Salma is a 41-year-old Indian woman. She has been living in the UK for 15 years, and she is working in the medical field. She is married to a Christian man who is South African, and they have been married for 9 years.
17	**Tayyibah**	Tayyibah is a 34-year-old British-Pakistani woman. She was born in the UK and she is currently as a banker. She is married to an agnostic man who is Dutch, and they have been married for 8 years.
18	**Yasemin**	Yasemin is a 42-year-old Turkish woman. She has been living in the UK for 18 years, and she works as a teacher. She is married to a Christian man who is White-British, and they have been married for 16 years.
19	**Zahra**	Zahra is a 32-year-old British-Indian woman. She was born in the UK. She is a project manager. She is married to a Christian man who is White-British, and they have been married for 3 years.

APPENDIX - V

Marriage certificate* prepared by Hanan and Henry before their marriages.

*The personal details in the certificate was altered to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity.

Marriage Certificate

The *nikah* (Muslim marriage) contract has been concluded between the bridegroom and bride, as per terms and conditions listed overleaf

	Bride	Groom
Full name:	Hanan xxxxx	Henry xxxxxx
Date of birth:		
Nationality:	British	British
Place of birth:	Lahore, Pakistan	London, UK
Address:		
	LONDON	LONDON
Marital status:	Unmarried	Unmarried

The bride and bridegroom undertake to act properly toward each other in their marital life and in particular as per terms and conditions listed overleaf.

The marriage certificate was signed on **10th May 2012**

We, the undersigned, put our signature to this contract, being of sound mind and without compulsion or duress.

Signed by:

Hanan xxxxx

Henry xxxxxx

The partners are expected to base their behaviour not just on legal rights and duties but on the spirit of goodwill, generosity, consideration and sympathy, taking into account each other's beliefs, and individual likes and dislikes. They are expected to conduct all family affairs through mutual consultation in the spirit of giving more than less.

Mutual rights and obligations:

Marriage is a union for life having mutually inclusive benefits and fulfillment for the contracting parties including the following:

- Preservation of chastity
- Companionship inside and outside home
- Emotional and sexual gratification
- Procreation and raising of any children by mutual consultation
- Agreement to live together in a mutually agreed country and establish their matrimonial home therein
- Working collectively towards the socio-economic welfare and stability of the family
- Maintaining social contacts with family and friends mutually beneficial for the family
- Managing their individual activities/roles inside and outside the home by mutual consultation

Obligations of the husband:

In addition to the mutual duties and obligations, the husband undertakes not to:

- Abuse his wife/child(ren) verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually
- Desert/be absent from the marital home for more than 60 days unless by mutual agreement
- Withhold economic contribution towards his wife/family
- Sexually transmit disease or other transmissible diseases

Obligations of the wife:

In addition to the mutual duties and obligations the wife undertakes not to:

- Abuse her husband/child(ren) verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually
- Desert/be absent from the marital home for more than 60 days unless by mutual agreement
- Sexually transmit disease or other transmissible diseases

Special conditions

- Both parties reserve the right to amend/alter the contract through mutual written agreement.
- Both parties undertake to stay loyal to each other and never to engage in extra-marital affairs with the opposite or same sex.
- The husband is not to enter into formal or informal *nikah* contract in the UK or abroad with another woman.

- The husband will not eat pig meat from now on (the exception being pepperoni on pizza).
- The wife will maintain her physique for her husband, both before and after child birth.
- The wife will not interrupt the husband more than 5 times in a heated exchange. If the wife interrupts the husband more than 5 times in a heated exchange, the husband has the freedom to not speak to her again that night.
- Similarly, the wife can leave to stay in a hotel if the husband gets angry with her more than three times in one exchange.
- All sons from this marriage will be circumcised.
- All girls from this marriage will have their ears pierced by the age of 5.
- Both partners will give the other freedom to practice their religion to fulfil their own personal spiritual needs.
- The wife can ordain a sacrifice to God at the birth of a child, and the husband can ordain someone to pray for the child at its birth. Neither partner needs to support the other in these situations, but it would be nice if they did.
- Religion will not be imposed upon any child from this marriage. Children will learn about both faiths and will be given the freedom to decide which religion they want to adhere to when they have come of age.
- If a child asks Parent Z a religious question concerning Parent X's religion, then Parent Z is allowed to give their own opinions and interpretations to the child. In addition, Parent Z must stress that the child should also ask Parent X for their opinion on the religious matter.

Arbitration and adjudication

- All differences between husband and wife pertaining to this contract, its interpretation, and implementation should be amicably resolved between themselves.
- However, failing satisfactory resolution of differences, both parties undertake to settle their differences through a mediator.
- In matters of child(ren), custody and property possession/division the decision of a British courts will be acceptable to both parties.

Termination of marriage contract

- Parties to this contract undertake to endeavour to do their best to uphold the terms of this contract.
- Neither party will end this contract unilaterally without recourse to arbitration/reconciliation by an independent professional body.
- Failing to resolve differences through arbitration/reconciliation they seek legal redress through a British civil court depending on their circumstances.

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