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Managing socio-religious expectations in an intimate space: Examining Muslim-interfaith marriage amongst working class communities in Cape Town

by

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____

Signed by candidate

 _____ Date: **10 February 2012**

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Abstract

This study investigates how marriage norms are negotiated and constructed in the context of Muslim-interfaith marriage amongst those from primarily working class communities in Cape Town. It also explores the religious identity of individuals and its effect on the marriage. Interfaith marriage has become increasingly prevalent amongst Muslims in South Africa. Moreover, while it is often assumed that Muslims in whatever context follow Islamic law in their everyday lives, social practice often takes precedence. Interfaith marriage as generally 'atypical' marriage amongst Muslims provides a particularly informative lens with which to examine Muslim marriage. The findings of this research suggest that interfaith couples construct marriage norms through a balance of religious and social expectations, including their own, rather than a strict following of religious law. Findings also suggest that interfaith couples do not consider themselves to be independent from their community, and community has a distinct influence in the construction of identity. The research corresponds with previous research that characterises the nature of identity as shifting and hybrid. However, it contests the claim that traditional cultures have lost their influence on the life choices of Muslim-interfaith couples in modern contexts.

Keywords: Interfaith, Marriage, Muslim, Identity, Norms, Cape Town

A note on transliteration

I have not followed the conventional academic style for the transliteration of foreign words. I have used very few Arabic and local ‘Malay’ words; and, for the sake of simplicity, consistency, and accessibility, I have used italics to indicate the foreign source of a word.

Chapter I: Introduction

Research Problem

The assumption is regularly made that Muslim marriage is completely defined by Islamic law (*Shari'ah*), and that Muslims strictly adhere to its rules. Upon closer inspection, it is often the case that social practice dominates religious prescriptions (An-Na'im 1995; Mir-Hosseini, 2004). Marriage therefore has much to do with cultural derivations and practices, and the interplay of identities. When two people come together, their identities, drawn from different backgrounds, impact upon one another.

Using interfaith marriage as a lens, this study is generally concerned with the reasons why people come together and the way in which habitus, as invisible but powerful and influential structures that exist in particular social settings, affect the way in which marital norms are negotiated and constructed. It also considers the construction of religious identity in the face of these norms.

In the present study, interfaith marriage refers to marriage between two people from varying religious and/or cultural backgrounds where one partner has been born Muslim, or in the case of convert couples, where one partner has been Muslim for significantly longer than the other. Although it is considered rare amongst Muslims, interfaith marriage is becoming an increasing phenomenon, particularly in Muslim minority contexts where there are statistically less opportunities for same faith marriage (Aini, 2008).

The significance of studying marriage as a window into the social dynamics of society cannot be overlooked. After all, marriage brings together not only two individuals who must reconcile their differing cultural worlds and identities, but also that of their extended social networks. By examining what is happening in a marriage, one is able to understand what is going on in society. Moreover, marriage provides a good vantage point because it is a setting where the things that go against social, religious, and cultural expectations, tend to surface.

Interfaith marriage serves as a particularly informative lens with which to examine Muslim marriage as it is an intimate space offering an insightful look at how marriage is negotiated and constructed through relationship processes. Interfaith marriage exists within an arena of more complex and diverse differences as couples now have to reconcile not only their different cultural worlds as men and women, but also their disparate religious worlds (Breger and Hill, 1998). Interfaith marriage is engaged in a space where difference is enacted and

mediated on various levels ranging from the private to the public (Ata and Furlong, 2005). Moreover, the experience of converts adds a further dimension to the exploration of interfaith marriages. Converts often experience more complex difficulties as they may struggle to be accepted by the local Muslim community, face rejection or disapproval from their families because of their conversion, and may often have difficulty in reconciling their multiple identities (Jensen, 2008).

The value of studying interfaith marriage is cogently outlined by Ata and Furlong (2005: 200):

In engaging with this matter of difference at the local and interpersonal level, one is able to observe and actively consider a complex set of dynamics: how intimate relations exchange with the geopolitics of difference; how allegiance to the spiritual co-exists with the daily demands of practicality and compromise; how the private and public interpenetrate and jostle.

Interfaith marriage thus gives us an in-depth view into the lived experience of interfaith couples, that is, how personal constructions of reality are both developed and limited. It allows us to consider more deeply what the nature of marriage is, and why it is that people come together. In addition, it provides insight into existing group dynamics within extended social networks and the resulting impact on the construction of identity. Ata and Furlong (2005: 203) argue "...all marital unions entail multiple stakeholders and third parties". These stakeholders often play a significant role in the lives of the married couple.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to identify how religious identity is (re)constructed within the context of Muslim-interfaith marriage by identifying and exploring key challenges that interfaith couples face within the context of their socio-cultural environment, and resulting impact on identity. After completion of the interviews, it appeared that the study produced much more information on how marriage norms are negotiated and constructed, particularly highlighting the impact of social structures and divergence from Islamic law, which then became the primary focus of the study. This study therefore seeks to answer the following questions: What is the nature of Muslim marriage in Cape Town seen through the lens of interfaith marriage? What is the impact of social structures in marital norms? How is religious identity negotiated within these marriages?

Contribution to the Field of Study

This study analyses the way in which socio-religious expectations are managed in Muslim marriage and also explores the tension between Islamic law and social practice as defining elements in marriage. There is a dearth in the literature on Muslim-interfaith marriage in South Africa and Muslim-interfaith marriage in Cape Town has received little scholarly attention. Considering that marriages allow us to extrapolate on what is happening in families, and broader society more generally, and considering that interfaith marriage is an increasing reality that has implications for interfaith relations in general, the topic is an important one.

The conclusions drawn from this study delineate the way in which existing social structures impact Muslim marriage. It gives insight into the world of Muslim-interfaith couples in South Africa and also contributes to a general understanding of Muslim marriage. Taking into consideration the “cultural clashes” that have taken place in South Africa and across the globe, and the reductionist representations of Islam in the media, it is useful to have a deeper understanding of Muslim-interfaith marriages, how norms are constructed, and, how cultural differences are negotiated within this construction.

A General Understanding of Marriage

Marriage may be defined in different ways, across creeds and cultures. However, it can generally be understood to be an institution where a financially and sexually interdependent relationship exists, that is socially advocated and publicly recognised, and which is often entered into in order to have children that will be recognised as legitimate, to unite families, for personal satisfaction, to engage in a rite of passage, and, to avoid the social stigma attached to living out of wedlock (Turner and Frese, 1987; Braude, 1994; Ingher-Tallman and Levinson, 1995; Velioti-Georgopoulos, 2006). The marriage tie is usually considered to be fairly permanent across all societies. Legal dissolution of the marriage is possible and is known as divorce. Usually, consummation is required to have taken place in order for the marriage to be considered legally valid. However, in the case of South Africa, an unconsummated civil marriage is considered legally valid, and concerned parties may apply to have the marriage annulled or set aside. Marriage generally takes two forms: monogamy, where one person is exclusively married to another person, and polygamy, where one person is married to several persons at the same time (Turner and Frese, 1987).

Traditionally marriage has been viewed by society in functional terms and has mainly filled certain social needs such as maintaining family alliances or securing resources. “Love” marriages were not common but started to increase in Western society after the industrialization period which promoted a more fluid society, less focussed on social bonds as people relocated to cities away from their kin and were not as influenced by traditional structures (Goodwin, 2009). In many societies throughout the world, however, arranged marriages are still commonplace (Velioti-Georgopoulos, 2006).

Gender roles within marriage have changed over time. In modern societies where women have moved into the workforce, it has led to a change in the traditional family structure attributing a more egalitarian role to women (Goodwin, 2009). However, this is not necessarily the case in all modern societies, particularly for those in Muslim contexts (Ali, 2006; Goodwin, 2009).

Marriage and Muslim Societies

Marriage in Muslim societies is essentially a contract which is governed by Islamic law (*Shari'ah*). *Shari'ah* is entrenched in religious and moral injunctions drawn from the Qur'an and Hadith sources, and is essentially the codified interpretation of these by Muslim jurists (Mir-Hosseini, 2004). Implementation and understandings of the law have taken different forms in the context of different societies, continues to be a subject of debate in Islamic societies (Abdulati, 1977; Mir-Hosseini, 2004), including Muslim communities in South Africa (Moosa, 1996).

The Qur'an eloquently speaks of the marriage relationship and describes each partner as “garments” to each other (Qur'an, 2:187). Another verse attests to the tranquillity of the relationship:

It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When they are united, she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed). When she grows heavy, they both pray to Allah their Lord, (saying): "If Thou givest us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful." (Qur'an, 7:189)

While the spirit of the marriage is manifested in these verses, the Qur'an also possesses a legal dimension.

From a *Shari'ah* perspective, the main purpose of marriage is to render sexual relations lawful and make offspring legitimate¹ (Haskafi, 1992; Mir-Hosseini, 1993; Ali, 2003). The

marriage (*nikah*) literally meaning ‘sexual connection’ (Haskafi, 1992) necessitates a legal contract “of exchange” that entails a set of rights and obligations for both parties to the contract² (Mir-Hosseini, 2004). A dowry (*mahr*) is paid to the bride by the bridegroom in exchange for the right to exclusive sexual access³ (Ali, 2006). Moreover, the wife has a right to maintenance (*nafaqa*) for which she owes her husband obedience (Abdalati, 1978; Flueher-Lobban and Bardsley-Sirois, 1990; Mir-Hosseini, 2004) as well as sexual availability (Mir-Hosseini, 1993, 2004; Ali, 2006). She loses this right if she displays any form of disobedience (Abdalati, 1979; Mir-Hosseini, 2004; Schacht, 2003). The marriage contract thus appears to be centred on legitimate sexual access and remuneration.⁴

In terms of the nuptial relationship, in the Sunni tradition, a man may take up to four wives concurrently; and in terms of the Shi’i tradition, he may also engage in an unlimited number of ‘temporary’ (*mut’a*⁵) marriages (Mir-Hosseini, 2004). The temporary marriage is rejected by most Sunni jurists as a valid form of marriage (Sabiq, 1991). Muslim women are limited to one husband. The husband holds the unilateral right to repudiate the marriage. However, women may appeal for a divorce through a number of legal channels (Haskafi, 1992; Sabiq, 1991).

While Muslim jurists have been able to create a legal framework for marriage, they have failed to develop a social framework (Mir-Hosseini, 1993, 2004). While the moral impetus within the *Shari’ah* may be recognised, there are often socially and culturally specific mores that inform decisions around wedding ceremonies and the types of contracts that are engaged in. In fact, there is often a lack of congruence between the law and social practice as shown by Mir-Hosseni in her study of marriage relations in Iran and Morocco (ibid.). Moreover, the law often fails to be relevant to Muslims, in particular contemporary Muslims, with reference to the way in which they structure their everyday lives (An-Na’im, 2005) and how these are informed by issues such as class. For example, many Muslims work outside of the parameters of the law because their economic situation forces them to do. Often, stability is more important than strictly adhering to religious law. Therefore, what cannot be solved religiously is often appealed through the use of the secular court, in various Muslim contexts.

Interfaith Marriage and Islam

Interfaith marriage and relations in general seem characterised by a certain level of circumscription in Islam. According to Qur’anic prescription, both men and women are prohibited from entering into a marital union with idolaters:

Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe: A slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allures you. 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. (Qur'an, 2:221)

Men are however permitted to marry “chaste” women from the previously revealed religions (Jews and Christians) known as *ahl al-kitab* or people of the book:

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). (Qur'an, 5:5).

It has been a consensus amongst Muslim scholars that the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men (including Jews and Christians) is not licit. This position was drawn from the Qur'anic verse 60:10 which states that the non-believing husbands of refugee convert women are not legitimate partners for them (Sabiq, 1991; Ali, 2008):

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. (Qur'an, 60: 10)

While the verse under discussion prohibits marriage to non-believers for Muslim women, there is, however, no specific prohibition on Muslim women marrying Christian or Jewish men, despite its prohibition by Muslim jurists⁶ (Ali, 2008; Aini, 2008).

Interfaith Marriage: a General View

Before considering studies on interfaith marriage and the dominant themes related to it, a brief discussion of how inter-marriages have been approached is useful for placing the subject of interfaith marriage in a broader context.

Intermarriage studies often consider inter-racial/ethnic unions which may or may not include an interreligious component. The studies can be characterised by two main approaches: assimilation and social exchange. Intermarriage is taken as a measure of an immigrant group's ability to assimilate into a host society (see Dribe and Lundh, 2011, Gonsoulin and Fu, 2010; Gordon, 1964; Muttarak and Heath, 2010; Park, 1950), or as a means for groups to engage in social exchange (see Chen and Takeuchi, 2011; Farrer, 2008; Xing, 2007).

A collection of studies edited by Breger et. al (1998) titled *Cross-Cultural Marriages: Identity and Choice* explores intermarriage in a variety of contexts from Guyana to Denmark, and goes beyond ideas of assimilation and exchange. It pays particular attention to the voices of women and places emphasis on the notion of choice, viz., the personal choices of women. The studies also elucidate the type of persons that tend to marry out of their "traditional" culture. It ultimately explores the voices of women both as individuals and as part of particular social groups. Refsing, for example, considers the different interpretation of gender roles in Danish-Japanese unions, while Khatib-Chahidi, Hill and Paton, consider the common characteristics of women who marry "out" from diverse countries of origin. Shibata explores the way in which historical racialised politics in Guyana affects interactions between blacks and Indians, and the resulting negative impact on black-Indian marriages, particularly in relation to extended social networks.

Interfaith Marriage in Perspective

Studies on interfaith marriage have tended to have a particular set of foci, namely: marital stability/conflict; the faith identity of children; religious conversion; impact on religious identity; and, trends or patterns amongst status groups. These issues have been the central focus points because they elucidate the way in which interfaith marriage is being negotiated between couples, the problems that may arise, as well as the effect on the children born of that marriage. They also provide a broader view of how interfaith marriage is being received and experienced in a particular society. These studies and themes have placed emphasis on the fact that interfaith marriage involves not only two people who choose to enter into a particular relationship but also their extended social networks. Interfaith marriage is characterised as more prone to conflict or less stable than mono-religious marriages. Issues of religious identity and reconciliation have also been highlighted as something that is unavoidable for those in interfaith marriages. A common thread in all of these issues is that

interfaith marriage is marked by negotiation processes. This section reviews the traditional themes that have been outlined by other studies, and places this study in context.

Marital Stability/Conflict

A fair number of studies have been devoted to examining the marital stability/conflict in interfaith marriages. Bumpass and Sweet (1972) found that stability in a marriage was more likely if the couple was of the same faith. Glenn (1982) compared marital satisfaction levels for same faith and Jewish interfaith couples. He argued that men in interfaith marriages were less satisfied because women had a greater religious influence over the children. Heaton (1984), however, found that while religious sameness lead to marital stability, the religious identity of children did not negatively impact upon it.

A study by Shehan et. al (1990) found that religious heterogamy had no effect on marital happiness for Catholics who were married to a partner of a different faith. However, they did find that Catholics with similar characteristics were more likely to experience marital happiness. Ortega (1998), also exploring the theme of religious sameness and marital happiness, found that the greater the difference in religion, the greater the likelihood of unhappiness. Chinitz and Brown (2001), comparing same faith and Jewish interfaith marriages, found that agreement on religious issues was important for the marriage and that religiously uniform beliefs were more likely to produce stable marriages.

The underlying issue in studies focussing on this theme pointed to the idea that religiously homogamous were more stable and that interfaith marriages were far more likely to end in divorce (Bahr, 1981; Lehr and Cheswick, 1998). In contrast to these findings, Hughes and Dickson (2005) found that the most salient predictor of marital satisfaction and stability for interfaith couples was their ability to communicate effectively.

Impact on Religious Identity

Studies have also focussed on religious identity in the face of interfaith marriage. Petersen (1986) looking specifically at Catholic-interfaith marriage, explored the notion that interfaith marriage leads to a secularization of religious commitment and identity, while Winter (2002) investigated the effect of interfaith marriage on Jewish religious identity. Both studies found that being in an interfaith marriage did not necessarily affect religious identity.

Al-Youssuf (2006) and Bangstad (2004a) investigated Muslim-Christian marriages, with a particular focus on Islamically “transgressive” or “atypical” marriages. While al-Youssuf considered the British context, Bangstad considered a coloured township community in Cape Town. Both studies describe Muslim identity in marriages as hybrid.

Abdullahi An-Na'im's 2005 edited study titled *Inter-religious Marriage Amongst Muslims: Negotiating Religious and Social Identity in Family and Community* remains the only significant study on Muslim/non-Muslim marriage, and the resulting impact on religious identity as part of the social experience of being in an interfaith marriage. The research was designed by An-Na'im, and was carried out by different researchers in local contexts. The case studies explore the gap between the *Shari'ah* and lived realities in India, Senegal and Turkey and the effects on family life as well broader social interactions. They highlighted the strong impact on identity by multiple forces. In Bombay, Chopra and Punwani, found that couples in Hindu-Muslim marriages faced adversity negotiating their marriages within the context of Hindu-Muslim divide and the complex Indian legal system. Vardar's research amongst Sunni Muslims and non-Muslims in Istanbul suggested that marriage between different sects were received with severe social disapproval (religious minorities, namely, Christians, Jews and Alevis, still vividly remembered the way they had been marginalised, and in some cases, persecuted in the past by the Turkish state). It was, therefore, not easy to negotiate individual religious identity in this context. In Dakar, Thies, and Zuguinchor, Bop found that the Family Code in Senegal, which is a mixture of French colonial law and Islamic principles, tended to disadvantage women. In addition, Bop found that customs had a strong influence on the way families structured their lives, which transcended religious limitations and made interreligious marriage more acceptable. Across all societies in these cases, researchers found that interfaith marriages were based on “love” relationships.

The Faith Identity of Children

The religious identity of children is often an important and highly emotive part of the negotiations that take place between interfaith couples. Salisbury's 1970 study focussed on the religious identification and behaviour of the children of Catholic-Protestant couples. He emphasised the “mother-daughter” relationship as a key determining factor in religious identification. He also highlighted the varying impact of religion on sons and daughters. Similarly, Nelson's 1990 study, also amongst Catholic-Protestant families, identified similar themes. Nelson (1990) found that the Catholic parent in such marriages was more influential

with regard to the daughter's religious identification than for the son's. In the case where the mother did not claim a religious identity at all, the child was more likely to not subscribe to any form of religious identity. The mother thus played a central role in the religious identification of children.

While these studies highlight the important role that the mother plays in influencing the religious identity construction of their children, they do not clarify whether the mother intentionally makes a concerted effort to influence the religious identification of her children. This particular question will be explored in this study.

Religious Conversion

Religious conversion has also been an important issue in the study of interfaith marriage. Lazerwitz (1981) focussed on Jewish-Christian marriages in the US and which partner was more likely to convert. He found that the non-Jewish partner was more likely to do so, but that a large proportion of couples retained their respective religious faiths within their interfaith marriage. Musick and Wilson (1995) explored the link between marriage and religious conversion and maintained that marriage was a significant factor in religious conversion.

The gendered dimension of religious conversion has also been explored. Salisbury (1969) investigated the likelihood of religious conversion, based on religious affiliation and gender, amongst Protestants and Catholics. More recent studies have focused on gender and the socio-political and religious environment. Hawwa (2000), for example, explores this theme amongst Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, while Hacker (2009) looks at Jewish-interfaith couples living in Israel and the system of law that governs them. Hawwa and Hacker particularly look at the experience of conversion within specific environments embodying certain social structures.

Trends or patterns amongst status groups

Trends or patterns amongst certain status groups have also been a theme of study within interfaith marriage. O'Leary (2000) explored notions of class and education amongst Catholic-Protestant and Catholic same-faith marriages in Ireland, while Sherkat (2004) explored similar issues of status, as well as ethnicity and geographic distance amongst Protestant interfaith couples. O'Leary did not find a strong link between education and class for Catholic protestant husbands with Protestant wives, but found it to be significant in

Catholic homogamous marriage, while Sherkat found that the higher the level of education, the more likely the chance of intermarriage.

A study considering the general impact of interfaith marriage and the negotiating processes attached to it, on the marital relationship, was conducted by Abe Ata and Mark Furlong. The study, conducted in Australia, amongst one-hundred and six people in Muslim-Christian marriages from twenty different countries of birth, distinguished six patterns that emerged in the development of accommodating religious difference within martial relationships: converting to one partner's faith; withdrawal from or avoidance of religious activities; a firm commitment to and enactment of religious plurality; meeting halfway and the making of concessions; a basic adoption of a form of religious hybridity; and, fostering a respect and appreciation for 'otherness' (Ata and Furlong, 2005: 202). These patterns amongst the interfaith couples often cut across each other and in some cases were reported with conflicting elements (Ata and Furlong: 2005). These findings draw attention to the often ambivalent approach taken by mixed-faith couples in the balancing act they undertake in order to reconcile differences. On the one hand, they are pressured by existing social structures, while on the other, they wish to exercise their ability to choose their own life-paths.

The literature review sought to place this study in a broader contextual framework. As discussed above, the focus in interfaith marriage studies have tended to be preoccupied with particular themes that have contributed to an understanding of how interfaith marriage is experienced in various contexts. They have highlighted the high levels of negotiation that goes along with being in an interfaith marriage, and that marriage is as much about family and community networks, as it is about couples themselves. However, the predominant focus has been on non-Muslims. Few studies have been devoted to Muslim-interfaith marriage, and the studies by Ata and Furlong, and An-Naim, remain significant contributions. However, as Sikand (2006) points out, An-Na'im's study, while pointing to the need for an engagement with *Shari'ah* law to reflect contemporary Muslim realities, does not explore how Muslim interfaith marriage is being dealt with by Islamic religious authorities in the various geographic locations under analysis. Ata and Furlong's study, while very useful in identifying key challenges experienced by Muslim-Christian couples, serves more as a guide for social work practitioners on how to mediate conflict, rather than an in-depth analysis of Muslim marriage.

The present study incorporates several of the themes discussed in the review by looking at how social structures filter into the life-worlds of interfaith couples and influence their constructions of reality. In contrast to An-Na'im's study, this study engages with the experience of interfaith couples and religious authorities. It, therefore, both compliments and adds a richer perspective to An-Na'im study and the body of literature on interfaith marriage in general.

Methodology

Purpose and Design

The purpose of the research was to identify how religious identity is (re)constructed within the context of Muslim-interfaith marriage by identifying and exploring key challenges that such couples face within the context of their socio-cultural environment. The interview questionnaire was structured in order to probe these issues and consisted of a mixture of open-ended, flexible and closed questions. Semi-structured personal interviews were specifically chosen because of their perceived ability to successfully access individuals' viewpoints and belief-systems (Byrne, 2005; cited in Silverman, 2006). After completion of the interviews, it appeared that the study produced much more information on how marriage norms were negotiated and constructed, as discussed in the aim of the study.

The purpose of the research was thus to identify the way in which marital norms are both imposed and constructed in the context of interfaith marriage, and how religious identity is impacted in this environment.

In order to allow for the gathering of "richer" data, after all the questions on the interview sheet were asked, participants were asked to talk freely about anything they may wish to bring up concerning being in an interfaith marriage. They were also informed at the beginning of the interview that they could do so. This prompting enabled the researcher to have a further "reach" into the life-worlds of participants.

Participants

Fieldwork was carried out in Cape Town amongst Muslim-interfaith couples and individuals from predominantly working class neighbourhoods. Most of the inhabitants in these areas belong to the apartheid-designated 'Coloured' group. The interviewees also mainly identified themselves as such. The use of such designation is part of the fabric of both apartheid, and post-apartheid South African society. A total of 12 participants were interviewed. The

participants had a mean age of 33. The interviews were conducted over a period of two and half months from 13 June to 25 August 2011.

Participants were sourced in two ways. Firstly, an e-mail was sent out to various groups and networks on the Muslim Publics database at the University of Cape Town. The research project and aim were described in the e-mail and interested parties were asked to contact the researcher. Secondly, the researcher sourced participants through networking. Networking proved to be the most effective way of recruiting participants. In addition, because anecdotal evidence suggested that interfaith marriage was more common in “working class” neighbourhoods in Cape Town, couples from these areas were deliberately targeted in the process of networking. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, except three that were done telephonically via conference call.

Several prospective participants declined to be interviewed. A coloured Muslim-born female, who had converted to Christianity upon her marriage to a coloured Christian male, initially expressed some reluctance to be interviewed but agreed to be contacted and to be told more about the research project. After receiving more information about the project she indicated that she was very busy and would get back to the researcher but failed to do so. The researcher contacted her once more to find out her availability but she did not respond.

A coloured Christian male, agreed to speak to his coloured Muslim wife about being interviewed; after having discussed it with his wife, however, he declined the interview on behalf of both of them. A coloured Muslim convert, married to a coloured Muslim male agreed to be contacted for an interview; however, the researcher contacted her several times but she did not respond. Finally, a coloured Muslim couple (a Muslim male who had married a Christian female who had—according to the information received by the researcher—only “nominally” converted to Islam) expressed some reluctance to be interviewed at their home. The researcher then invited them to her home and offered to cover their petrol expenses, and a date was set for the interview. On the day of the interview, the couple did not show up.

The reluctance to be interviewed may indicate an unwillingness to readily speak about the issues related to interfaith marriages. The fact that most of the interviewees were sourced through networking may also be indicative of this. In addition, the fact that the former “Christian” spouse was pointed out to the researcher as a “nominal” Muslim (discussed in the previous paragraph), points to the religious norms set out by particular communities and the politics of belonging. It elucidates the way in which judgements are often made about people

that set them apart and may make them reluctant to talk about their “difference”. Despite this, the researcher successfully obtained a fair balance, in terms of interviews secured and completed, between typical and ‘atypical’ Muslim-interfaith couples, which provided a richer perspective.

Having myself assumed a particular identity, as a Muslim, and then wishing to study identity in another, in the context of a researcher, a potential clash was always a possibility. As a researcher in the Social Sciences one is taught that one’s personal choices and identifications should not impact upon one’s research and that one should remain neutral. While the researcher made every attempt to maintain this neutrality, the particular identifications of the researcher inevitably got drawn into the data collection process, which the following example illustrates. At the end of one of the interviews, with a coloured Christian couple (a Muslim-born female that converted to Christianity upon marriage and a Christian-born male), the researcher was asked what her personal view was—as a hijab-wearing⁷ Muslim—regarding the life-decisions and circumstances of the said couple. The researcher responded that she did not have any personal views on the life of the couple as her main task as a researcher in the Social Sciences was to collect data and interpret it. She further added that she conducted interviews solely in her capacity as a researcher, and therefore distanced herself from making any value-judgments, a skill she continuously worked on and strived towards in her several years of study and execution of many interviews. It was not clear to the researcher whether or not the couple naturally assumed that the researcher would judge them negatively because she displayed external religious symbolism such as the wearing of the *hijab* (in their personal experiences they had encountered such judgement) or whether they sought tacit approval from her regarding their life choices. The couple—in the opinion of the researcher—seemed satisfied with the response they were given and remained cordial.

The majority of participants indicated that they had at least one or several close family members involved in a Muslim-interfaith marriage (where both partners retained their respective religions or where there was a “nominal” conversion to Islam). This admission seemed to indicate the relatively common occurrence of interfaith marriages. It appeared that these marriages set the stage for other interfaith marriages to take place. Participants often casually mentioned that a parent or grandparent was initially of a different faith or that siblings had gotten married to someone of a different faith, and so they were accustomed to dealing with “difference.” Several participants also mentioned that they had parents or close

family members who had converted to Christianity, from Islam, while still incorporating many cultural and religious aspects of Muslim life, into their new religious identity.

Interfaith marriage was thus familiar and not out of the ordinary. Of course, that did not mean that there were no issues that arose in this context. On the contrary, the ordinariness of interfaith marriage seemed to bring to light the many problematic issues associated with these marriages, as well as the collective social anxiety often surrounding them. Couples were thus intimately aware of identified boundaries and the penalties for crossing them.

Instruments and procedures

The majority of interviews took the form of semi-structured personal interviews. Participants were asked questions relating to the processes of negotiation within the marital relationship. These included the following topics: religious affiliation, perceived challenges, marriage ceremonies, religious education of children, and religious holidays. Biographical information such as age and occupation was also included in the interview questionnaire.

All interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed. The interviews ranged from thirty to sixty minutes in length. Each participant was given a consent form to sign which explained the study, its confidentiality, where the study would be made available, as well as the participant's right to freely withdraw from the interview at any time. Each participant received a copy of the consent form.

The majority of participants did not speak English as a first language. This is often evident in the responses, which includes a mixture of English and Afrikaans. The responses may be difficult to read and understand for those not familiar with the syntax used. Where appropriate, a word or phrase has been given in brackets or explained in a note.

Data Analysis

The interview questionnaire was designed by focussing on issues that would draw out the processes of negotiation and construction in interfaith marriages. The interview data was thus analysed with the intent of extracting "themes" from the responses of participants. Several themes emerged, which were then tabulated and participants' answers were categorised within these themes. Similarities and differences thus became apparent and patterns in the research were then identified. The themes include: "Norms, class and authority"; "Race"; "Religious identity"; "Muslim self and community"; "Cultural and Religious norms"; "The faith identity of children"; and, "Food, identity, and social boundaries".

Potential limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are some potential limitations that need to be considered in this study. The interfaith sample was sourced over a broad geographical area. It may have been useful to focus on one particular community and look at the complexities within that community. It may also have been useful to have a target demographic, for example, focussing on interfaith couples with children. Both of these may have contributed to a stronger focus in the research.

Interviews with children of interfaith couples may have added another dimension to the research as they offer an insight into how difference is played out since children are subject to the negotiating and compromising processes of their parents. Children are the future leaders of an increasingly interconnected and multicultural society and it would have been valuable to look at their own attitudes and beliefs in the construction of religious identity, especially taking into account their mixed-heritage background. However, given that there was no long-term relationship built-up with interviewees, parents may not have been willing to grant permission to have their children interviewed and may have viewed this request negatively.

The themes identified in this study provide a good basis for further study of Muslim-interfaith couples. A study within a selected community with a target participant demographic would make for an interesting comparison to this study.

Chapter Outline

This introduction served to acquaint the reader with the subject matter at hand and to raise the relevant questions that are central in thinking about the way in which marriage norms are constructed within Muslim-interfaith marriage. It pointed out the common misconceptions about Muslim marriage, and how it is defined and discussed, and the usefulness of using interfaith marriage as an exploratory lens with which to study Muslim marriage. It also provided a review on the way in which interfaith marriage has been studied previously and highlights particular themes such as marital stability/conflict; the faith identity of children; religious conversion; impact on religious identity; and, trends or patterns amongst status groups. The review situated this study in a diverse body of literature and its conclusion stated that interfaith marriage is distinguished by high levels of negotiation that involve numerous stakeholders. In addition, it emphasised both the similar and unique attributes of this study, in relation to the studies under review. The methodology section outlined how the data was

gathered and analysed, and included a discussion of the problems encountered during the process of the research.

Chapter Two provides a general framework that underpins the theoretical foundation of the study. The concepts of “habitus” and “constructed identity” are discussed and their usefulness as a framework for analysing marriage norms and identity construction is delineated. A background to the study is then given.

Chapter Three and Four present and discuss the findings of the study. In Chapter Three it is argued that marital norms are both imposed by society, and challenged by individuals. In this way they are in a constant process of change. In relation to identity, in Chapter Four it is argued that interfaith couples have to deal with numerous negotiating processes that ultimately affect their identity, both within their marriages and the communities they form part of. It characterises their religious identity as hybrid.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I conclude the study. I assert that interfaith couples construct their marital norms and religious identity through a balance of community norms and personal constructions. I maintain that interfaith couples do not consider themselves to be separate from their communities, and despite their characterization as “different”, it is important for them to have a sense of belonging.

Chapter II: General Framework Of Analysis

The general framework of analysis that will be utilised in this study is guided by two main concepts: “habitus” and “constructed identity”. These concepts offer a way to investigate respective realities, as rooted in the past and engaging with the present. They are not static concepts and provide for the conceptualisation of reality as a movement between past and present. We will begin with a discussion of habitus which draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and this will be followed by a discussion of constructed identity which draws on the work of Anthony Giddens and Stuart Hall. A background to the study will then be given.

Habitus

Habitus is essentially a historical past that is rooted in the collective social experience but which also takes into account the particular experiences of an individual. The choices that an individual makes may be influenced by pre-existing norms but the individual at the same time holds the potential to reject these norms and create his or her own set of norms. Bourdieu (1977: 72) defines habitus as:

...structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at the ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.

Or, put more simply, habitus is “...a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures” (Bourdieu, 1977: 76). They are, the structures that exist in a particular social environment, that influence our behaviour although we are not necessarily conscious of them. At the same time our lived experiences are interpretations (albeit unconscious) of these structures.

Using habitus as a theoretical tool allows us to consider marriage norms as influenced by existing social structures. At the same time it allows for the agency of the individual to play a determining role in creating new conceptions. In this way habitus is able to capture the way in which people construct their realities both as individuals with past experiences, and as individuals as part of a particular set of social structures.

Habitus also allows us to recognise the way in which race, class, and gender are weaved into the realities of individuals. These constructs are part of a particular process of socialisation that influence the way of thinking and acting for individuals as part of social groups. Habitus thus provides a premise from which to consider the broader dimensions of individuals' social realities (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Identity

In terms of thinking through how religious identity for this research, a theory of identity as constructed allows us to approach identity as not merely fixed and given or imposed but as something that is continuously in a process of development. Anthony Giddens and Stuart Hall, although not considering religious identity, provide a useful theory of modern identity as constructed/reflexive (in contrast with notions of identity as fixed and given).

Anthony Giddens puts forward the theory of the self-reflexive identity where identity is not something permanent or fixed but is in a continuous process of negotiation. Giddens (1991) argues that in the late modern age, identity becomes a narrative of personal experiences and encounters. The individual, in a modernised and globalised world, has access to limitless possibilities and situations that may demand different behavioural responses. Identity is then constructed through the making of a personal narrative which is supported by the experiences enabled through diverse options. While recognising that these options and/or limitless possibilities are not open to everyone, Giddens only briefly considers the role that a lack of affluence may play in the ability to create one's narrative. He argues that although poverty may constrain the life choices of those affected, it is the very nature of being poor that can necessitate or trigger a creative response ultimately producing "a reflexive shaping of self-identity" (Giddens, 1991: 86). The ability to keep building and reworking one's personal narrative is thus applicable to all, though more accessible to some.

For Giddens, we are still in a period of modernity, albeit late modernity, and the pre-modern traditional cultures, which include religion, no longer have a stronghold on the modern individual. He acknowledges that the Enlightenment's project of rational knowledge has succeeded in eroding the influence of traditional structures; however, he also argues that the reflexivity of modern institutions which both forges, and is forged by, identities, undermines Enlightenment's exclusive commitment to rational knowledge (Giddens, 1991). He argues that "in the settings of modernity, by contrast, the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change"

(Giddens, 1991: 34). However, it is not necessarily about divided identity but about positive incorporation of multiple identities. Giddens (1991: 190) argues:

As the individual leaves one encounter and enters another he sensitively adjusts the 'presentations of self' in relation to whatever is demanded of a particular situation...Yet again it would not be correct to see contextual diversity as simply and inevitably promoting the fragmentation of the self, let alone its disintegration of multiple 'selves'...A person may make use of diversity in order to create a distinctive self-identity which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrated narrative.

Giddens' analysis suggests that truth is dependent on the specific circumstance; that we create the narrative of our lives in tension with, and in conjunction with, the social context. In the past, this narrative was already prescribed for us, but as traditional culture loses its influence on the modern subject, the narrative that is created is of one's own choosing.

Stuart Hall (1996) supports the notion of dynamic representations of identity. He argues that in modern times, the concept of an unchanging and inherent identity is no longer viable, particularly in light of the intimidating processes of colonization and globalisation. Hall (1996:4) states:

"...identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation."

He further argues that identity must be historically situated and must recognise modern processes such as globalisation that have disturbed the fairly "settled" disposition of many peoples and cultures. Identities are thus continued from this historical legacy; writing from a post-colonial perspective Hall (1996) recognises the changing nature of racial politics that has allowed for the process of "becoming" rather than "being". Identity was imposed on the colonised subject through racial terms and categories but in post-colonial times identity becomes a choice as these categories merge into one another. Identity thus continues from the past to the present and maintains its historical links. Hall (1996: 5) defines this process as "...the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects that can be 'spoken'." He also draws our

attention to the fact that the self can only be made in relation to the other ie. what it is not, and so it is also engaged with processes of inclusion and exclusion.

An interesting analysis to reflect on at this point is Richard Jenkins' differentiation between "group" and "category". Jenkins (1994) describes a category as a people defined from the outside, while a group denotes a people defined from within. Jenkins (1994: 218) argues "Social groups define themselves, their name(s), their nature(s) and their boundary(s), social categories are identified, defined and delineated by others". Both definitions have an influence on the formation of identity, as Stuart Hall has shown.

Giddens and Hall highlight the very adaptable and fluid nature of identity in contemporary times; however, there are differences in the intimations. Giddens emphasise the ever-changing nature of identity in modern times in opposition to the fixed and given identity of pre-modern times. Hall, however, though making similar claims approaches identity from a post-colonial perspective where collapsed racial categories make room for the creation of manifold identities that draw on history, culture and language (Hall: 1996). Tradition is thus not completely rejected because identity is a process of continuation. While Giddens also supports the view of manifold identities, he is unable to recognise the lingering influence of traditional structures or the possibility of a traditional identity as part of the personal narrative he advances.

Both Stuart Hall and Anthony Giddens do not adequately deal with religion in contemporary society. Approaching the formation of identity from an Enlightenment perspective—which claimed to emancipate people from the irrationality associated with religion—they do not see religion as having an overwhelming influence on individuals in the modern age. However, their theories of constructed identity remain a useful conceptual tool for approaching the way in which identity, and more specifically, for the purposes of the present study, the way in which religious identity, is formed in inter-faith marriage contexts.

Background to the study

Religion and Identity

Religion has persisted from tradition to modernity, providing meaning and guidance to the lives of many, despite arguments that it would lose its relevance. Berger and Luckmann (1974) argue that while religion may still be relevant, it is no longer as cardinal as it may once have been, in terms of its validation of society.

Similarly, as discussed in the general framework of analysis, Anthony Giddens and Stuart Hall, do not emphasise the importance of religion in their theories of identity construction. Nevertheless, religion has subsisted and the argument could be made that in some societies there has been a religious resurgence: as society has increasingly instilled secular values into the public space, some have interpreted this as a loss of morality. In addition, many have become overwhelmed in the 'global system' and have turned to religion as a means of salvation (Rukyaa, 2000: 194). And, for those in minority contexts, religion often becomes a defining characteristic in the articulation of identity.

But what do we mean by the term religion? The word religion is derived from the Latin *religio* meaning "respect for what is sacred"; the word *religio* in turn was influenced by the Latin *religare* meaning "bind" in terms of obligation (World Book Dictionary, 1990: 1766). From this we can understand that religion is something sacred that must be respected and from which obligations stem. William James described religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider divine (James, 1902: 31). James' definition however focuses on the very personal and private nature of religion but fails to recognise its strong public dimension (Larue, 2003). Religion is after all practiced in groups (Newman, 1974) and these groups often play a definitive role in forging religious identity.

The group dimension of religion was recognised by Emile Durkheim who emphasised that common beliefs, by mere virtue of their commonality, made people feel connected to one another and bound them together through the notion of "Church". He argued "A society whose members think in the same way in regard to the sacred world and its relations with the profane world, and by the fact that they translate these ideas into common practices is what is called a Church" (Durkheim, 1915: 43-44). He thus defined religion as "...a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim, 1915: 47).

Community is thus inseparable from religion for Durkheim and this community is made up of both religious clerics as well laymen. On the face of it, Durkheim's specific use of the word "Church" (despite describing the concept in neutral terms) may appear to limit his definition of religion. However, it is useful in helping us to think in general about religion's very social aspect, particularly as something that unites people in a very concrete way.

We have identified several elements that may be common to all religions but can religion be sufficiently defined in a way that is suitable to all? Talal Asad (1983: 238) has argued quite cogently that a universally applicable definition of religion cannot be established; he points out that:

...socially identifiable forms, pre-conditions and effects of what was categorised as religion in the medieval epoch were quite different from those so categorised in modern society. Religious power was differently distributed, and had a different thrust. There were different ways in which it created and worked through institutions, different selves which it shaped and responded to, and different categories of knowledge which it authorised and made available. A consequence is that there cannot be a definition of religion which is universally viable because and to the extent that the effects of these processes are historically produced, reproduced and transformed.

Taking Asad's argument into account, we may come to the conclusion that it may not be necessary or even worthwhile to have a specific definition of religion. At the same time however, we can recognise that it is worthwhile focussing on certain "themes" that reflect various elements of religion (Larue, 2003), which help to give us a broader understanding of religious phenomena.

Identity in turn, much like religion, has been a contested concept as its articulations have evolved from the rigid in pre-modern times, to the fluid in post-modern times. Religion, though argued to have lost its influence in the construction of modern identity, has continued to function as a powerful force in this construction.

Habermas (2008) reminds us of the veracity of Jose Casanova's argument that modern society's shift to individualism does not necessarily translate into religion losing sway in political and socio-cultural spaces nor in the private lives of citizens. Indeed, religion often acts as the main organising principle of life for many that allow access to the sacred and becomes an unparalleled coping mechanism for the excesses of modern daily life. However, religion is not only associated with the intangible; it also lays out a set of practical guidelines for people to live by.

Furthermore, it offers the adherent the security and protection of a community and acts as a form of social cohesion amongst believers of a particular faith tradition. It can however act in a divisive capacity, particularly in supporting certain political and religious dogmas; indeed, much blood has been shed in the name of religion, irrespective of whether or not it has been at the actual root of the conflict (Takriti et al, 2006; Baumann, 1999).

It is therefore quite apparent that religion would have a profound effect on the identity of the adherents of a particular religion. It is thus particularly unfortunate that minimal study has been devoted to the role that religion plays in the shaping of identity. Peek (2005) argues that while there has been extensive research done on the concept of identity in contemporary social research, the role of religion in the formation of identity has been grossly overlooked (see Cerulo, 1997; Frable, 1997; Howard, 2000: cited in Peek (2005: 218)). There has, been an emphasis on the role of religion in sustaining group identity (see Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000; Gibson 1998; Haddad and Lumis 1987; Hammond 1988; Herberg, 1955: cited in Peek (2005: 218)).

The disillusionment with secular modernity has served as a way of going back to tradition (Jhazbay, 2000). While Hall and Giddens remind us of the continually constructed nature of identities, the return of religion, or rather, the persistence of religion in modern times has re-introduced the idea of cultural communities as cohesive cultures (Baumann, 1999) resulting in the imposing of identities on individuals by religious groups. These groups may often be subnational or transnational. There is a definite tension that exists between the modern condition that has produced flexible identities, and the reality of religious identities that conform to norms and behaviours imposed by leaders and communities. In the latter case, identities are not constructed, but pre-determined and imposed from the outside.

In interfaith marriages, the tension surrounding the construction of modern religious identity becomes more pronounced. Couples are confronted with a complex set of dynamics. Existing as part of a community, they are forced to reconcile the religious and cultural norms of their community, with their own personal constructions, whilst also attempting to accommodate the religious identity of their partner. They are thus involved in a complicated process of identity construction that involves elements of both religious conformity and the rejection of norms.

Muslims in South Africa

Muslims worldwide have not managed to escape the prevailing forces of identity construction. Nilufer Gole provides us with a window into the life-world of the modern Muslim who finds himself much more visible and active in the public space. This has meant that processes of modernity have had to be reconciled with Muslim perceptions of the self which in turn have affected the way social norms and practices has been and continue to be articulated in the modern public space (Gole, 2002).

Despite the challenge brought on by modernity, however, Muslims have managed to hold onto the fundamental principles of their faith. According to Rippin (2001: 247) “The traditional definitional elements of Muslim faith – the summaries of belief and ritual “five pillars” – remain virtually intact in the modern context”. How Islam is practiced amongst different communities however, and how it is individually internalised, remains impacted on by modernity. The tendency to cast Muslims as uniform is a common practice, however, despite the fact that Muslims differ from society to society and even within a particular Muslim community difference is an obvious reality. Al-Azmeh (1993: 3) argues:

The hyper-Islamization of collectivities of Muslim origin has accompanied hardening tendencies to social involution premised on structural features of communities of Muslim origin. This representation, which assumes a homogeneity overrides differences between those of rural and urban origin, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, is by no means a reflection of social reality, which is one of stunning diversity.

These many differences have a profound effect on identity construction. Moreover, through these differences, a space for a multi-layered identity is created, and these manifold identities have been increasingly identified by scholars. Tayob (2009: 262), argues “...Muslims at any given time also share identities in relation to class, nationality, ethnic origin and gender”; similarly, argues Kecia Ali (2010: 615), “Muslim women’s life circumstances tend to closely parallel those of non-Muslims with similar backgrounds; a poor Indian Muslim villager has more in common with her rural Hindu counterpart than with a career woman in Mumbai who happens to be her co-religionist”. Muslim identity is, therefore, not shaped independently of its context and other social elements are just as likely as religion to impact the formation of identity (Ismail, 2004). Identity construction thus takes place under competing influences.

In South Africa Muslims make up approximately 2%⁸ of the population and are usually classified under the racial categories of “Indian”, “Malay” and “African”. Those categorised as “Malay” technically form a sub-category of the racial category “coloured” and constitute the majority of the Muslim population at 45.2 percent, with Indian and African Muslims making up 42.03 percent and 11.4 percent, respectively. Indian Muslims descend from indentured labourers from the Indian sub-continent, while Malay Muslims descend from slaves as well as political prisoners brought from the Indonesian Archipelago (Davids, 1980). There were also a significant amount of convicts who were imprisoned for crimes who later became religious leaders, or what Robert Shell terms “convict imams” (Shell, 1992). African

Muslims are those indigenous to Africa. There are also a small number of white Muslim converts making up approximately 1.3% of the Muslim population.

Despite occupying a minority position Muslims have managed to endure and overcome harsh realities such as “slavery, colonialism and apartheid” (Jhazbay: 2000: 370). The first Muslims to arrive at the Cape, in 1658, were Mardykckers from Amboyna. They were brought to the Cape as free Muslims and were recruited specifically to guard the nascent Dutch settlement from the indigenous population and also serve as a source of labour. The proliferation of Islam at the Cape, however, was most likely due to the slave population; Dutch colonists enforced a policy that kept those political exiles holding sway secluded—initially intended as a safeguard for colonists—which also greatly limited their ability to inculcate Islam at the Cape (Davids, 1980). Muslims in South Africa have managed to ensure their survival as a religious minority for over 300 years (Tayob 1995: 39).

South African Muslims enjoy a fair amount of religious freedom guaranteed under the constitution of the democracy within which they live. At the same time Muslims are also exposed to a secular public space that often conflicts with religious beliefs. It is however, as Vahed (2000; 2006) has pointed out, the secular nature of the constitution that allows Muslims their right to practice their religion without interference.

While the secular public space coupled with the minority context of Muslims has resulted in an inward withdrawal of many Muslims (Jhazbay, 2000) it has also allowed Muslims who choose to practice Islam in a way that is not strictly observant, the opportunity to do so. The constitution of 1996, markedly distinguished the right of a citizen to freedom of belief “and practicing that belief in a particular community” (Tayob, 2000: 83). This serves to highlight the very ambiguous nature of Muslim identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The secular public space often leads to an inward withdrawal of Muslims that induces conformist behaviour, but it also confronts Muslims with an excess of choices which lends support for new conceptions of identity.

Tayob (1995:80) argues that the emergence of a modern Muslim identity in the Cape can be traced back to the late nineteenth century and can be seen as a response to both developments in the Middle East as well as processes of modernisation within the South African state. The *‘ulama*⁹ being the main custodians of Islamic knowledge, largely influenced how Islam was practiced (Tayob, 1995).

Moreover, the resurgence of Islamic identity in the 1940s and 1950s led by the *'ulama* served to advance Islamic values in public life; which could be seen in the proliferation of mosques, madrasahs, Islamic publications and Islamic dress (Tayob, 1995). With the development of a modern Muslim educated elite this power structure was challenged throughout the 20th century in one way or another.

Modern Muslim identities in their origin and resurgence have thus been characterised by complexity and diversity on the one hand, while also being guided by religious leaders and a sense of belonging to national and global community (Tayob, 1995; Vahed, 2000). The nature of modern Muslim identity in South Africa— as has been illustrated above— is thus made-up of both constructivist and religiously conformist elements. Race, class, and gender, as socialization processes involving particular structures of influence, serve to guide the construction of identity in the struggle between imposition and choice.

Muslim Identity in South Africa is vulnerable to many conflicting influences. These influences, though sometimes contradictory, are incorporated into the life-worlds of Muslims as they carve out their space in a multicultural context. But this is not a closed and finalised process. Identities continue to be negotiated as the socio-cultural context develops and changes. Moreover, negotiating Muslim Identity in South Africa is a particularly challenging task because Muslims find themselves in an environment that promotes fluid/reflexive identities whilst also having notions of fixed identities projected onto them from the outside.

Race

Despite the rhetoric of the “rainbow nation¹⁰” often employed by the political leadership of South Africa (Tayob, 2000) and despite the hope that “South Africans would overcome historic divisions and build a common identity and solidarity while acknowledging cultural diversity” (Seekings and Muyemba, 2011: 656), race remains a very real issue (Seekings, 2008).

The majority of Muslims in Cape Town can still be found clustered in racially segregated areas (Vahed and Jeppie, 2005). Particular attention must be given to the racial hierarchy and class divisions amongst the different groups of people in South Africa that more or less subscribe to those put in place by the former apartheid regime (Erasmus, 2005). Vahed and Jeppie have drawn on data gathered on a sample of Malays (who fall into the “coloured” category) and Indians between the ages 18 and 65, and concluded that Indians are more

educated than Malays. In addition, based on average per capita income data for Muslim Indians and Malays in general, they have concluded that Indians have higher incomes (Vahed and Jeppie, 2005). Both Indians and Malays are distanced from Africans and there is a particular tension between Indians, and African Muslims, who resent Indians for being more concerned with the difficulties facing Muslims across South Africa's borders than the Muslims residing in black townships far closer to home (Itano, 2002; Vahed and Jeppie, 2005).

Furthermore, working class coloured people are more likely to harbour prejudice against black people, compared with more affluent coloured people (Seekings and Muyebe, 2011). Adhikari (2007) argues that the anti-African sentiment held by coloured people is a direct response to the marginal and vulnerable position coloured people continue to find themselves in, and it has much to do with resources.

In the apartheid era, the status held by coloureds was somewhat in-between, that is, they were not considered good enough to be classified as white but they were not considered quite as inferior as black people. In addition, their attempt to preserve this position of advantage—in comparison to their black counterparts—made them somewhat complicit in the prejudice directed toward black people (Erasmus, 2001; Adhikari, 2007). Adhikari does however concede that coloureds are “primarily victims of racism who, to a fair degree, had internalised the values of their oppressors” (Adhikari, 2009: 6). Similarly, Ruiters (2009: 114) argues “Broadly speaking, the coloured community does not easily accept the idea of being African, despite some attachment to Khoisan identities, which they tend to define as not being African”. Identity is thus developed and emphasised as not African. These tensions and modes of thinking ultimately set the stage for the ambivalence that would characterise the relationship between Africans and coloureds.

Tensions also continue to be present between Cape Malays and Indians who prefer not to interact because of their very different cultural traditions; even though Islam grew significantly under the oppressive apartheid regime, there was little interaction across racial lines (Mandivenga, 2000). It must be noted that generally, Muslims in Cape Town, readily identify themselves within the apartheid racial categories prescribed for them (Da Costa, 1994).

Race continues to be an issue of contention that affects social relationships in a fundamental way, intersecting quite often with dynamics of social class. Despite the general belief that

Muslims all form part of one community or “*ummah*” (Mandivenga, 2000) racial separateness as well as class divisions continue to define social relations in Muslim society. The authors above reflect the deep division existing within South African society in general, and amongst Muslims in Cape Town in particular.

Notes on Class and Gender

Class is a contentious term. While many people would readily identify with the term “middle class” for example, the term “working class” may be viewed as derogatory, though some may feel proud to be associated with this term (Ortner, 2003). Class thus takes on different meanings for different groups of people. But what is social class and what is its relevance? Class can be defined as a “sociological construct...assumed to be broad collectivities of families who share certain experiences and values” (Brown, 1997) that reflects “...assumptions about relations between various groups of people in society” (Hendricks, 2003: 6).

In terms of its relevance, scholars have argued that in a globalised society that avails more and more options to individuals, class is rendered obsolete (see Hendricks, 2003); however, a strong case could be made for the argument that people’s social contexts play an important role in shaping their views. In addition, class is often indicative of whether people have the available “cultural and material resources” to independently construct their identity (May and Cooper, 1995: 79).

What is considered socially acceptable within Cape Muslim society is often related to class. For example, Moosa (1997) argues that conceiving children out of wedlock is more commonplace amongst working class coloured communities in Cape Town and also has less of a social stigma attached to it than in more affluent Indian communities. Moreover, Erasmus argues that pre-marital pregnancy is considered a transgression of the boundaries of respectable conduct for middle-class coloured women in their youth, particularly because “respectability and shame are key defining terms of middle class coloured experience” (Erasmus, 2001: 13) . Class thus plays an integral role in the making of boundaries concerning socially acceptable behaviour.

Class and gender are also interlinked. Gender, like class, has been argued by numerous scholars to be a socially constructed concept which is given a particular meaning by various cultures (Boyarin, 1998). Although gendered identity has more to do with cultural

derivations, it is usually thought of as a natural disposition where roles have been pre-determined by biological differences (Refsing, 1998). Moreover, despite the sense of construction, the experience of gendered roles is very much real.

Couples from the same culture may often have similar expectations of gender roles within the relationship and this can help to alleviate potential conflict when dealing with one another's dissimilarities. However, cross-cultural couples often do not share the same expectations based on a common experience and a healthy marriage often depends on how gender roles are re-negotiated (ibid.). Amongst the Cape Malay Muslims, for example, in the social context, women are often seen as the equals of their male counterparts, as opposed to the Indian communities, where a more strict gender hierarchy is often observed (Mandivenga, 2000; Vahed, 2000). Culture, class and gender thus play a defining role in the way in which social norms are constituted and enacted. It is specific to a particular social context and therefore varies accordingly.

Religion has remained relevant as an influential structure in the making of identity. But it exists within the context of other structural influences such as race, class, and gender. Identity construction and social norms are largely constructed on the basis of these, and existing norms influence the construction of new norms, whether in rejection or acceptance of them.

Chapter III: Class, Race, And Interfaith Marriage

The findings and analysis portion of the study will be discussed in two separate parts. “Class, Race and Interfaith Marriage” deals with the way in which existing structures influence the creation of marital norms and intersects with individual agency to create new norms, while still maintaining some form of influence. The second part, “Constructing Identity in Interfaith Marriage,” deals with the impact on religious identity. The two, however, are not mutually exclusive. Norms most certainly have an impact on the way in which religious identity is constructed, and identity has an axiomatic influence in the challenging of and creation of marital norms. The findings in this section discuss how norms are determined by class and race, and the effect of participants’ own construction of norms. For example, class dictates certain types of gender relations and also dictates different concerns. It looks at the way in which norms limit the choices of participants, but how participants manage to create their own set of norms in the process of engaging with them. This chapter also discusses the way in which religion and culture mutually influence each other in the construction of norms, and how this often diverges from religious doctrine.

Norms, class and authority

The construction of marital norms in interfaith marriage is complex. Couples face the influence of social norms which they have to reconcile with their own constructions. Moreover, the impact of class on the creation of norms in married life is something that cannot be overlooked. People develop their norms through the way they are socialised, and class will often determine the way in which people deal with particular problems or issues, and the way in which they organise their lives in general. In addition, class is often indicative of the way in which gender relations are structured. All of these affect the marital relationship and how it will be conducted and ultimately how marital norms will be constructed.

The narratives that will be discussed below focus on working class women and their strong position of influence within the marital relationship, and the formation of norms. The narratives reflect the lack of male dominance in the marriage and the central place of women in the household. In other words, it challenges the traditional view of Muslim marriage as male over female dominion. It locates this alternative structure of Muslim marriage within class and gender dynamics.

For the purposes of this study, class is determined by the area/neighbourhood that participants grew up in. Other factors such as occupation and gender relations were considered to be co-determining, though less important, than factors of class. The reason for this approach was the assumption that one's background and, more specifically, the community in which one grows up plays a defining role in shaping one's attitudes and beliefs.

The majority of the sample grew up in predominantly coloured working class communities such as Bonteheuwel, Mitchell's Plain, Athlone, Kewtown, Malmesbury and Charlesville of Cape Town. All the women in the study were employed full-time, with the exception of one woman who was employed part-time. In addition, the women contributed to their own upkeep as well as to that of their families.

In some cases, marriage did not appear to be a pre-requisite for having sexual relations nor for having children. Of the five participants who had children (two couples and an individual participant), three participants conceived them out of wedlock, and did not relate any experience of being socially ostracized. One participant, with a working class background and currently working as a cleaner, however, indicated that she got married because she fell pregnant, which on some level denotes the social stigma attached to having a child outside of wedlock.

Male dominance in the marriage relationship was not apparent amongst any of the couples interviewed. In fact, all of the women participants displayed strong, independent personalities. Both women in the sample—who married Christian men while retaining Muslim their identity—indicated that they set the terms for their marriage, that is, the religious identity of their children was not negotiable. A pre-condition of getting married was the children had to be Muslim.

Negotiating the faith identity of children is probably one of the most challenging processes that interfaith couples face as this is where differences between couples often manifest themselves more prominently, and negotiation takes on an increased level of complexity (Maxwell, 1998). In this case, it appeared to be a situation of both complex negotiations as well as set terms. This demonstrates the agency used by these women in determining their future and to a certain extent that of their offspring, as the following narrative will demonstrate.

Zainab¹¹ is a coloured Muslim, married to a coloured Christian. She was raised in Bo-Kaap by her Muslim mother (who was never married to her father), and now resides in Bonteheuwel. She is thirty-five years old and currently works as a cleaner. She explained her reasons for getting married as well as the boundaries observed by herself and her husband:

Yah we went out first seven years for long because of he didn't want to turn a Muslim and I didn't want to turn Christian and the first boy came still we didn't want to marry because of the religion, I didn't want to marry, he want to marry me because he said that he stay Christian and I stay Moslem. I was first against it until the second girl come, and so me and him decide, okay, we going to married under er er court, and then he's going to stay Christian, and I going to stay Moslem, because for the children then they grow up with a mother and a father. And then I told him no more partying time you must respect that, and I going to respect that when you go to church Sundays, I told him...he say as long as the children have his surname...at first it was like a like a disagreement because the children is Muslim because he say one of the children can be mos Christian and one can be mos Moslem. So I say no I can't make my children confused. It's rather the two children is Muslim or it's rather we don't marry, we not going to marry.

[Interview with Zainab, 13 June 2011]

Both Zainab and her husband engaged in a fair amount of negotiation before settling on marriage. The fact that they could not reach an agreement for such a long time, speaks to the very real concerns both of them had about maintaining their religious identity and integrity. Zainab, while willing to accept a partner from a different faith, set limits to her tolerance. The religious faith of her children was a non-negotiable area which she did not feel conflicted about – she made this clear in no uncertain terms when she eventually decided to get married.

Later on in the interview, however, Zainab acknowledged that while her children were still young she had the power to choose for them. But when they were grown up she would allow them to choose for themselves which religion to adhere to. This seems to indicate, on the face of it, that religion is the motivating factor behind Zainab's actions concerning her children. In actuality, it has more to do with stability. Zainab's husband would have preferred that one of his children retain his Christian faith at the outset, but eventually acquiesced to the demands made by his wife.

For Zainab, marriage was not necessarily about fulfilling a religious duty, but rather served as a means to legitimate parenthood: to give her children a mother and a father and provide them with stability. Although Zainab and her husband had remained a couple while raising their firstborn child together as well as through the conception and birth of another child, getting

married was seen as a way to provide their children with both a mother and a father, which in some way speaks to societal norms. Zainab, however, created her own norms and secured what was most important to her, viz., stability. This reflects her individual agency (asserted in a community setting) and perhaps also her dominance in the household. It may also reflect that crossing certain boundaries in her community is not necessarily considered a flagrant act.

In the case of Wardiyah, a similar set of dynamics was at play: she demonstrated the same kind of independence, agency and need for stability. Wardiyah is coloured woman of Malay origin, who was married to her coloured Christian husband for thirteen years before he decided to turn Muslim. Wardiyah is forty-four years of age, works as a cleaner, and currently lives in the Bonteheuwel area where she also grew up. She indicated that her husband's decision to turn Muslim was a poor attempt to save their marriage, and that her marriage broke down not because of religious challenges, but because of her husband's addiction to gambling. Wardiyah was not as concerned about not marrying by Muslim rites or her husband's reluctance to turn Muslim, as she was about the religious identity of her children:

...before I get married I ask him: "Well if we going to be in court, you don't want to turn Moslem, but my children...the minute you said they must be Christian, I wouldn't get married". As simple as that. So he say: "No, you can".

[Interview with Wardiyah, 20 July 2011]

Wardiyah felt strongly about the religious identity of her children, and while this was a pre-condition for her agreeing to get married, her husband's conversion to Islam was not enough to automatically entitle him to another chance. This may indicate that her own religious identity and those of her children were something she felt she could control and had a right to, but her husband was not such an extension nor did their respective identities merge into one another after marriage. It also points to the importance of stability. Her husband's conversion to Islam did not coincide with a responsible and stable lifestyle, and that is one of the main reasons for her rejection of him.

Wardiyah seemed to display a role of dominance within her family and a particular firmness in taking decisions. Despite objections from her family, she was still not willing to negotiate on her position regarding her husband:

My brother was upset because my brother [said] I mean "He turn Islam and you just chase him away". For me is it, it didn't go about that. Why did you turn Islam? To

save our marriage, you didn't even practice it. Then why did you turn it? But the main part is it, it's not the practicing, it's the gambling, that's where our marriage was falling apart so. I'm not going to let my daughter see that, so just go to your mother and stay there.

[Interview with Wardiyah, 20 July 2011]

Wardiyah could not reconcile her husband's conversion to Islam with his continued vice of gambling. She saw his conversion as nominal, but this was entirely beside the point for her. While in some sense acknowledging that a Muslim must conform to certain ideals, being a responsible person and displaying good moral qualities was the example she wanted for her daughters, and this did not have to come from her husband as a Muslim. Stability was thus an important factor.

Wardiyah saw things from an ethical vantage point, rather than one steeped in religious norms. For example, she explained that she and her husband were separated for the past three years and that he lived with his mother. She then elaborated that her husband was a compulsive gambler and was not willing to rehabilitate himself, so she sent him to live with his mother. She made a point of emphasising that although this act may be considered somewhat heartless or cruel, love did not play a role when it came to practical matters and important life-decisions. Her initial relationship with her husband was based on a "love" match, but matters of practicality trumped notions of love. Although she wanted to get a divorce, she could not afford it. However, she did not consider herself to be married any longer:

He musn't think he is still married to me in Islamic no that doesn't work by me... You know what is Judicial Council doing? And that's what they do up 'til now. You get the husband and the husband say: "Yes, I still love her" they don't want to give you a *talaq*¹². Because I know about an *Imam*¹³ here in Bonteheuwel and he's the one that told me "Listen, three months without sex, you *talaq* in the eyes of Allah" so if he can't accept that then he must go and apply for a *talaq* not me because I know Judicial Council, they rather try to put you together as want to give you *talaq* papers and I don't want that.

[Interview with Wardiyah, 20 July 2011]

It seems that the experiences of other women in Wardiyah's community, has influenced her in deciding that it would not be in her best interest to apply for a divorce through the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), a non-profit religious organisation comprised of a body of Islamic clerics. Marriages appear to be reconciled at all costs by the office of the MJC, in the opinion of Wardiyah, and she is certain that this is not the outcome she desires. Technically, her

husband does not have to apply for a divorce as he holds the unilateral right to repudiate the marriage as discussed in Chapter One; he simply needs to pronounce the *talaq* (with some qualifications).

Wardiyah subverted what might be termed as male dominance and bureaucracy by rejecting the Islamic legal channel via the MJC and finding a solution through a local Imam, which is also considered a good Islamic practice. She was therefore able to reconcile the fact that she asked her husband to leave their home with her religious conscience, whilst also avoiding long procedures through religious bodies which she deemed a futile process. Wardiyah employed her religious identity in a practical manner.

Wardiyah cannot appeal for a divorce through the secular court either as she explained that divorce proceedings cost a lot of money which she does not have. She thus takes a common-sense approach and solves her marriage problem religiously, which also happens to be the affordable solution. It was evident that it was more important for Wardiyah to know that her marriage was absolved religiously compared with the need to have it absolved in a secular court. However, it is also important to consider that the court option was not really available to her.

Wardiyah rejects the authority of a bureaucratic religious body like the MJC in favour of the authority of her local Imam and ultimately constructs her own norms. Moreover, it may be argued that the MJC has lost legitimacy in her eyes because they seem to favour reconciliation between couples, regardless of the marital situation.

Both Zainab and Wardiyah seemed to have a dominant role in their respective households and did not conform to the traditional male dominant structure of the Muslim household (al-Yousuf, 2006). They took charge of their major life-decisions and continued to be at the centre of the household. One of the terms usually used to describe this phenomenon is “matricentrality”. Research suggests that amongst working class families, matricentrality is commonplace (Staples, 2000; Bangstad, 2004a).

As we have already discussed in Chapter One, one of the core functions of marriage in classical Islamic law is to make sexual relations lawful and legitimate offspring; from which springs rights and duties for both husband and wife. In exchange for his wife’s sexual availability and exclusivity, for example, the husband’s main duty is to maintain his wife. Whilst marriage as dominion may be relevant for many Muslims across the world, this

conception or model of marriage did not seem applicable to the Muslim-interfaith couples from working class communities in Cape Town, forming part of this study. It does not leave room for individual constructions, which as the present study shows, tend to play a determining role in the way marriages are conducted.

Saffiyah's narrative offers an alternative but similar view. Although she could not accurately be described as the centre of the household, she nevertheless exerts her influence when she feels it really matters. Saffiyah is a black Muslim convert, who is twenty-three years old and works part-time, as a waitress, while studying law at a college in the southern suburbs. She is married to Jamil, who is also a convert to Islam, although he has been Muslim for significantly longer than she has. She currently lives with her husband and his mother in Charlesville, a coloured township. Saffiyah has a multi-religious background: she was raised by her great-grandmother, grandmother and mother who have collectively exposed her to African traditional religion (with a particular focus on 'traditional healing') as well as Christianity.

Saffiyah's mother left her father when she was young because he took another wife. She thus has a negative view towards the idea of polygynous marriage. Being aware of the fact that Muslim marriages are potentially polygynous, as a condition to her marriage, Saffiyah made a verbal agreement with her husband preventing him from taking another wife. Should he do so, as far as Saffiyah is concerned, the marriage would be instantly dissolved, at least symbolically. She thus creates her own marital norms, influenced by her historical past, viz., the experiences of her childhood.

According to Mir-Hosseini (2004) Muslim women often find ways to work around their husband's legal right to take other wives, particularly through contractual agreement. In the case of Saffiyah, the assurance was given, in verbal form. Saffiyah used her initiative and set terms that make her position clear: she is not willing to tolerate polygyny and does not want to be in a marriage where the possibility for polygyny exists. While Saffiyah did not appear to be the dominant person in her relationship, she stood firm on matters that for her were not negotiable. From the outset, she expressed her will and set the precedent for the way in which the relationship would be structured. She would challenge norms that were projected onto her, and attempt to create her own.

The fact that 'marriage as dominion' does not apply to the interfaith couples forming part of this study, may well be related to class as suggested above. The majority of the women in this

study seemed to take important decisions, and made significant, if not equal contributions to their household income. In some respects they appeared to be the driving force in their respective households. Considering that interfaith marriages are not representative of 'typical' Muslim marriage, male over female dominance may therefore not be present in the marriage relationship, although these types of dominant relationships may also be peculiar to certain communities or societies. In this case, it proved to be absent.

An egalitarian conception of marriage and family, where women contribute equally to the family income and therefore have a more "equal" role within the family structure, as well as the motivations for getting married, seemed to represent the participants of this study. As discussed earlier, women took on a more dominant role. In cases where the man was seen as the "head" of the household, it was very much in a symbolic sense. The matrimonial relationship was therefore quite unlike the structure according to *Shari'ah* law, in the sense that the husband provides maintenance to the wife, while she provides him with unrestricted sexual access.

The narratives above reflect the way in which class affects norms in the marital relationship. The working class women in this study do not necessarily follow the structure of 'typical' Muslim marriage because their concerns dictate otherwise. They are primarily concerned with securing stability, and religion serves as a platform from which to do so. Moreover, the non-hierarchical gender relations that exist in their social environment allow them to assert themselves confidently within their marital relationships. Marital norms are thus formed under the influence of social factors related to class.

Race

Zimitri Erasmus has put forward the idea that race has no biological or natural roots but is socially constructed (Erasmus, 2005). Despite this argument however, Erasmus concedes the very significant impact that race has and argues "That race is not biologically real, does not make it an illusion. Racial meanings have real effects on people's lives (Erasmus, 2005: 10). Furthermore, recent research in racially plural working class neighbourhoods in Cape Town suggests that "...the dominant culture is a racialised but tolerant multiculturalism" (Muyeba and Seekings, 2011). In this study, issues of race came up in several interviews and did indeed seem to impact heavily on the lives of some participants. The narratives discussed below reflect the way in which norms regarding race can overwhelm religious prescription and impact on the marital relationship as well as relationships with extended social networks.

In the case of Widaad, dominant racial norms ascribed to religion, negatively affected the acceptance of her husband into the family. Widaad is a coloured Muslim of Malay origin and is twenty-four years of age. She works in the field of Engineering. She met her husband at their mutual place of work, and he subsequently converted to Islam. Widaad's husband is from Malmesbury, a rural working class neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cape Town. Widaad's parents got divorced when she was in her late teens and she lived with her mother since then. When she told her father of her plans to get married to a "coloured" with a Christian background (despite the fact that he had turned Muslim) her father was vehemently opposed:

My father was furious...like he was violently upset. He was very very angry and he didn't want me to get married and he thought if he just ignored me I would change my mind but it didn't work that way. Um he said to me how am I going to raise Muslim children if half their family is Christian. How do I explain to them what's right and what's wrong um I now have to teach someone else how to lead me and that just doesn't make sense um I'm gonna expose them, obviously his family is Christian and they gonna drink or whatever and why couldn't I just pick a Muslim man...I think it's got more to do with prejudice, like physical, like physical appearance than anything than like his actual religious beliefs or whatever. Coz um my granny's very religious on my father's side and like maybe one or two of my uncles but my father isn't that religious...it had to do with everything but Islam and it bothered me...you know it's the whole, it's the straight hair, those petty things that don't really matter.

[Interview with Widaad, 24 July 2011]

Based on Widaad's testimony, we can conclude that her father subscribes to the traditional family structure where the man heads the household, and could not conceive of how his daughter was going to manage in a relationship where she would have to teach her husband, presumably about Islam, and what the role of a Muslim husband should be. He also expressed concern about her future children's exposure to non-Muslims and their very different lifestyle. The consumption of alcohol was a particular concern and seemed to mark a distinction between "us" and "them". Widaad, however, rejected this line of argument and immediately saw it as an issue of racial prejudice disguised as religious concern.

She commented that her father had never been particularly religious but rather controlling and her father's attitude had more to do with the fact that her husband was "coloured" and did not have the right physical features to gain his approval. In particular, he did not have the right hair. Hair remains a divisive issue in coloured communities where the smoothness of one's hair persists as a measure of beauty (Erasmus, 2001). These types of classifications are not important to Widaad, who sees them as superficial and as a contravention of the ideals

within Islam. Widaad was particularly incensed because her father would be civil to her husband to his face but would then make derogatory comments about him to other members of Widaad's family. However, the fact that Widaad explicitly brings up race in the face of her father's perhaps legitimate concerns, may point to her own awareness of racial differences and of having been socialised in a particular way. She now rejects these norms in favour of her own norms.

Widaad's rejection of her father's disapproval may also be attributed to the fact that her father has not played a dominant role in her life since her parents got divorced more than a decade ago. She described her relationship with her mother as "close" but her relationship with her father as "distant". Her father's interference at that particular stage in her life may have seemed inappropriate to her on some level as he had not been fulfilling the traditional role as head of the household, which is a view that she subscribes to. It must, however, be noted that while Widaad expressed approval of the idea of the husband as taking the lead in the household, it appeared to be in a symbolic sense.

In the case of Waleed, norms regarding race led to an alienation from the Muslim community in general. In Widaad's narrative, she was alienated from her father because he would not accept her husband based on his physically different features. This kind of rejection for Waleed has come at a community level, and has caused him to seek out a partner that does not subscribe to these dominant racial norms.

Waleed is a coloured Muslim/agnostic who is thirty-four years of age. He is married to a Catholic coloured female, Michelle, who is thirty-one years of age. Both are practicing attorneys. Waleed met his wife while they were both students at university. Waleed's narrative on race, although only indirectly related to his marriage with Michelle, is used here to illustrate how norms regarding race can sometimes structure social relationships above religion. Social realities often take precedence over religious affiliation and prescription as we saw in Widaad's narrative: her husband's conversion to Islam was not enough to secure the approval of her father, and in her view, his attitude towards their relationship was rooted in racial prejudice.

Waleed grew up in Mitchell's Plain, a working class neighbourhood in the Cape Flats. Waleed had difficulty in identifying with a particular Muslim community because he did not fit into the categories that others normatively associated with Muslims in Cape Town. He stressed that he did not feel a need to belong but that he was made to feel uncomfortable

about his race, and in fact was prejudiced because it did not fit in with the categories that people were familiar with in their particular communities:

I have experienced that most of the prejudice in my life from Muslims in Cape Town, and I for one have a very difficult difficult, I have difficulty separating the way humans sort of reflect religion, and what the dogma of religion is. So I I can't separate Muslims from that and Muslims are just for me like innately prejudicial. And I just I I can't subscribe to a religion where people are prejudicial... The prejudice that I've encountered amongst Muslims in Cape Town was just was just the the the was the situation that broke the camel's back... Let me make a good example... when I went to university now this is at university level or you must understand that I'm I'm Muslim and I'm coloured. I'm not Malay, I'm not Cape Malay, I'm not Indian. So when I was at university, I had difficulty, not that I want to be accepted... I used to have difficulties defending that my name was Waleed and I didn't look Muslim. I mean at at at tertiary level I had a situation where people would tell me that "You don't look Muslim"... that's a good idea of the mind set of that community of Cape Town.

[Interview with Waleed, 25 August 2011]

Waleed felt alienated because he had to constantly defend his religious affiliation simply because he did not look like what people thought a Muslim in Cape Town should look like (what Waleed is referring to here is the differentiation between Muslims of Malay origin which falls under the bracket of coloured as discussed in Chapter Two, and those of Khoi-San heritage). Although there are a fair amount of Muslims from other groups, "Malays" and "Indians" are often seen as the only Muslim communities in Cape Town. In addition, there are coloureds who are Muslim, but a distinction is often made between coloured and Muslim, based on physical features (Erasmus, 2001).

Moreover, Jenkins (1994: 204) drawing on the work of Epstein (1978) argues "It is easy to imagine how primary socialization is likely to include an ethnic component. The child will learn not only that he is an 'X', but also what this means, in terms of self-esteem and worth or appropriate and inappropriate behaviour...". He continues his argument, drawing on the work of Goodman (1964), Milner (1975), and Troyna and Hatcher (1992), and states "This is emphatically the case, for example, in societies where 'racial' categorization is a powerful principle of social organization and stratification" (ibid.). People thus grow up being aware of how they are different from others and where they belong on the social hierarchy. We can certainly see these themes coming through in Waleed's narrative. Jenkins emphasises a clear distinction between race and ethnicity:

It is emphatically not the case that the difference between ethnicity and “race” is a simple difference between the physical and cultural, although it may be a difference between purported physical and cultural characteristics. Viewed from this perspective, ‘racial’ differentiation and racism should perhaps best be viewed as historically-specific forms of the general – perhaps even universal – social phenomenon of ethnicity.

It is the essentialising of Malay ethnic identity as Muslim identity in Cape Town that has excluded the idea of Muslims as being part of coloureds both as a community and a racial group. According to Adhikari (1989) Malay identity was fluid in that it incorporated people from other racial groups (cited in Jeppie, 2005).

It was the influential work of I.D. Du Plessis, who sought to both re-invent and reify Malay ethnic identity through the “innovation and reinvention of Malay tradition” (Jeppie, 2001: 85), which ultimately set Malays apart from the general coloured community. Du Plessis had a particular fascination with Malays and “wanted a specific space which Malays should identify as historically theirs” (Jeppie, 2001: 93). The creation of Malay identity and tradition as something outside of the coloured community has had a long-lasting effect. It has caused dominant racial norms for Muslims in Cape Town to be assumed with negative consequences.

While Waleed did try to assimilate into the Muslim community he ultimately did not feel like he could be part of something he felt was primarily based on discrimination. He was also repulsed by the fact that he had to defend his religious identity based on physical appearance at an institution of higher learning. He felt that educated people ought not to display such narrow-mindedness. Later on the interview he explained that he thought that certain kind of mind sets were related to a certain type or class of people. He felt that the uneducated or working classes were more likely to make negative judgments related to difference while the middle classes focussed more on “individual liberties” as he put it. He more easily identified with the norms of the middle class, than with those from the working class environment in which he grew up.

Waleed did not, however, pick up on the irony in his statement. While he may have experienced certain prejudiced attitudes within the working class community where he grew up, he nevertheless experienced prejudice from his university peers who by his own definition would be categorised as middle class and educated. Racial stereotyping therefore seemed to cut across class lines.

Unlike in Widaad's case, Waleed's marriage to Michelle was a space that did not require him to deal with issues of racial prejudice. He described how being in the company of his wife and her family provided him with an environment free of these kinds of judgments. Although his in-laws were initially concerned that he might attempt to convert their daughter to Islam, they accepted him as Muslim, without attaching any racial or other qualifications.

Norms pertaining to race permeates social relations, including family relationships. In Widaad's case, it caused a rift in the relationship with her and her father, and also between her husband and her father. Her marriage represented a contravention of social norms, primary based on dominant racial norms of who physically qualifies as a Muslim. In Waleed's narrative, these same norms resulted in his alienation from the Muslim community, and caused him to seek out a marital partner with an alternative set of norms, more similar to his own.

Cultural and religious norms

In marriage, culture plays an important role in the way marital norms are constructed. Couples have to act toward each other, and within their community, in the appropriate way that is determined by cultural norms. In an interfaith marriage, two different sets of meaning established by culture must be reconciled, viz., two sets of conflicting norms must be negotiated. In addition, religion and culture often overlap, and both tend to develop in tandem with one another and have a mutual influence on the construction of norms. Social norms, for example, may often take precedence over religious prescription. And religious law may often be contravened in accordance with social norms.

The word culture conjures up many different thoughts relating to different peoples and their shared values, beliefs, rituals and behaviours. Some may be familiar and others unfamiliar, and thus they may be regarded as 'good' and others as 'not so good'. Moreover, culture is often seen as something concrete. However, Gerd Baumann (1999) argues that while there may be certain identifiable characteristics common to a particular group, culture is not something that is static. Indeed, conceptions of what culture is may vary from generation to generation: older and younger generations often have differing views on its permanence and relevance, in which case it can act in a divisive capacity (Grewal, 2009). Whatever position one may take regarding culture, the one thing that is certain in a globalised and multicultural world, is that the culture of 'the other' will be encountered at one point or another.

Edward Tylor recognised the evolving nature of culture as well as the elements of culture that were common to all people. He argued that culture could be defined as “...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor: 1958: 1). While we can use Tylor’s definition of culture as a basis from which to work from, a contemporary definition which comprehends and reflects the residual and often shifting nature of culture is offered by Baumann. He argues “culture is two things at once, that is, a dual discursive construction. It is the conservative “re”-construction of a reified essence at one moment, and the pathfinding new construction of a processual agency at the next moment” Baumann (1999: 95).

Culture thus has both a core and derivative element: although culture has its quintessential essence, it is after all people who make the culture and people are in a continuous process of development, with a resulting effect on their culture. The focus should therefore be on “the dialogical nature of all identities and, consequently, that different cultural identifications can and will, in a multicultural society, cut across each other’s reified boundaries” (Baumann, 1999: 119). It is this cutting across that allows a recognition that is not concerned so much with difference but through a conversation with ‘the other’. Baumann (1999: 117) offers further clarity on this in his argument that “...the first thing about recognizing any culture is to recognize culture for what it is: not an imposition of fixed and normed identities, but a dialogical process of making sense with and through others. These others will, in time, become part of your own multicultural culture...” This, argues Baumann, is reminiscent of the African concept of Ubuntu, which recognizes all people on the basis of their humanity. Shutte (1998: 14) states “...in all African languages, there is the local variant of the Xhosa saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a person is a person through persons.” People thus articulate their humanity through their interactions with other people.

Culture can thus be understood to be a learned behaviour particular to a certain people or group, but one that is constantly in varying phases of reconstruction as we move through generations. The important point to stress here is that culture—although it may hold on to certain traditions— is not permanent but always in processes of change and adaptation both within and from generation to generation. Thinking about culture as something that is always evolving, and in particular as something that is to some extent constructed through the influence of others, allows us to fully appreciate its dynamic essence.

In the present study, culture had a distinct impact on the marital relationship. Culture was pervasive in establishing norms, and quite often, trumped religion (at least in the classical legal sense). Moreover, the two were not independent of one another but intertwined. For example, culture influenced the way in which religious norms were practiced and interpreted. Moreover, where two distinct traditions had to be reconciled for the sake of marital harmony, norms had to be renegotiated, as the following narrative demonstrates.

Jamil, the husband of Saffiyah, noted the tension between African tradition and the Islamic tradition. Jamil is thirty-eight years old and is a manager of a restaurant in a hotel. He converted to Islam several years ago. He explained that in order to get married to his wife, he was expected to pay *lobola*¹⁴. He was torn between his wife's family's need for him to pay *lobola* and his religious requirement to pay the *mahr* instead. His wife's family were quite upset and the issue remains unresolved, though the marriage was allowed to take place.

Jamil decided that in the future when he could afford it, he would pay a *sadaqa* (charity)—in lieu of the *lobola*—to his wife's family in order to keep the peace. In this way he could please his in-laws, while still being able to have a clear religious conscience. He described his religion as coming before, or more precisely, as taking precedence above his African customs. His norms were therefore directed based on religion and not his African culture.

It was for this reason that he chose to have only the religious ceremony. Saffiyah was not altogether happy with the idea of only having the religious ceremony but she was placated by Jamil's hope that the South African government would one day "respect" the way Muslims would like to get married and recognise the marriage as legal¹⁵. While he could negotiate this aspect with Saffiyah, it was more difficult to get around the issue of *lobola* with her family.

While Jamil was unwilling to compromise his religious integrity by paying the *lobola*, he was acutely aware of the strain he may put on his relations with his in-laws, should he not do so. Jamil seems to have shed many aspects of his African culture, for example, he no longer sees *lobola* as a legitimate requisite for marriage. He therefore finds a religious solution for his problem through the payment of *sadaqa* or charity.

Jamil grew up in a coloured township, and according to his wife, Saffiyah, was raised "as a coloured" speaking Afrikaans, and lacks experience with African culture and customs since his father died when he was very young. She also mentioned that he had a lot of support from Muslim friends when he converted to Islam. Having been exposed to coloured culture

throughout his life, and being surrounded by Muslim friends may have made his transition to Islam easier. It may also have made him more open to converting to Islam. For Saffiyah, it serves as an explanation for his inability to fully engage with African customs.

Saffiyah commented that while as a Muslim, she understood that the payment of *mahr* was an essential part of the marriage contract, and also appreciated that it was something that was just for herself. At the same time, she still felt connected to her African heritage and saw the payment of *lobola* as an important part of her tradition. It was something that she was willing to overlook, however, especially considering Jamil's upbringing, and the fact that he planned to pay the '*sadaqa*' to her family when he could afford to do so. Saffiyah and Jamil thus constructed their own marital norms, under the influence of existing norms, viz., while creating their own norms; they could not do so independent of their extended social networks.

Culture and religion seemed to overlap. Indeed, culture was part of religion for many in this study: there was no clear divide between the two. In the case of Andre, this overlap affected his perception of his role as a Christian father, of Muslim children. He lamented the fact that he would not be able to do certain things that he felt was his inalienable right as a father just because he was not Muslim:

...if you not Moslem whatever or your husband is is is Christian and maybe my daughter dies or or then you can't go to her her funeral I don't know I don't understand that. And then there's the other stuff like what now...yah if if if she get married yah. Hoe? (prompt from wife in background). Yah I can't be a *wakil* for her. If she get married I can't walk her down the aisle I mean I'm her dad...whatever. I'm Christian but I'm still her dad you see.

[Interview with Andre, 21 August 2011]

There is no religious ruling against a Christian father attending the Muslim burial of his daughter should she happen to die. It would perhaps be difficult for him to understand certain rituals but that is as far as it goes. Muslims generally get married in a mosque, and the wife may or may not be present. Generally they do not 'walk down the aisle' as is usually part of the Christian tradition, where the father will 'give the daughter away'. Rather the represents his daughter in the mosque. Andre develops his perception of norms relating to Christian fathers of Muslim daughters based on prevalent cultural norms and not religious doctrine.

The fact that Andre cannot be his daughter's *wakil* (legal representative) is somewhat more complicated. While Andre has used the term *wakil* he most likely means to refer to the term

wali (guardian). A distinction does indeed exist between the two and needs to be further elucidated. On the matter of “marriage guardianship”, ‘Abd al-‘Ati (1977: 70) argues:

It is the authority of a father or nearest male relative over minors, insane, or inexperienced persons who need protection and guardianship. There seems to be an overlapping of guardianship in this sense and other forms of legal representation and delegation. To clarify the issue as much as possible, a distinction must be made between the marriage guardian and an ordinary legal representative. The former is normally the nearest male relative in whose absence a community official may assume the responsibility...Moreover, a guardian is qualified only if he satisfies certain requisites. He must be a free Muslim male of sound mind, of full age, and of good character. A legal representative, *wakil*, on the other hand, is a person who has agreed, through private arrangement, to represent another party within the limits of authority delegated to him by the principal party. Such a delegated authority may include arrangements of marriage subject to the approval of the principal party and, in some cases, of the guardian.

Andre takes great offence to the fact that he may not act as his daughter’s guardian simply based on the fact that he is a Christian, and more plainly, because he is not Muslim. However, while he perceives this restriction to be based on religious affiliation only, it is in fact two-fold.

The fact that Andre’s daughter was conceived (and born) out of wedlock means that under Islamic law, he is not recognised as her father, as there was no legitimate basis for sexual intercourse between Andre and Zainab. He, therefore, is not able to act as his daughter’s guardian on this account as well. It did not seem apparent that Andre or Zainab were aware of this fact and this may point to the common occurrence and social acceptance of having children out of wedlock in working class communities. Community norms thus played a dominant influence in the construction of norms between couples. Having children out of wedlock was socially acceptable based on class, not religion.

While Zainab considers herself to be religious, she does not seem to be aware of these doctrinal issues. Fukuyama (1974) has pointed out that the less affluent and less educated amongst the religious, have significantly less religious knowledge than their more affluent counterparts, and that “different social classes differ not so much in the degree to which they are religiously oriented, but the manner in which they give expression to their religious propensities” (Fukuyama: 1974: 24). Religiosity and the development of norms are thus cultivated and manifested in different ways. However, certain practices are common to certain classes (Bourdieu, 1977).

If we return to Wardiyah's statement with regard to the Imam who had told her that three months without sex voids her marriage, we see another case of cultural knowledge versus knowledge drawn from religious law. According to Haskafi, in order for the marriage tie to dissolve, the husband must swear that he will not engage in sexual intercourse with his wife, and a period of four months must lapse without sexual contact (Haskafi, 1992). This was clearly not the situation in Wardiyah's case, as she asked her husband to leave their home.

It is unclear whether the Imam that Wardiyah spoke to used his own judgment, and applied the general principal of the rule in this case, in order to find a solution to Wardiyah's problem. This manifests the difficult role that Imams often find themselves in because people's lives do not fit neatly into the rules of law. Culturally, the opinion given by the Imam, was acceptable and something that the community was able to live with.

Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests that Imams in Cape Town sometimes 'bend' the rules so that people are not turned away from Islam, because of the many rules that are often perceived as too stringent. But Imams do not only 'bend' the law to suit the needs of their community, they often also advise against what is permissible within Islamic law, to fulfil the same purpose. Social norms thus take precedence above religious doctrine, as the next narrative illustrates.

In the case of Waleed, social norms regarding marriage resulted in the rejection of his own marriage, and excommunication from his family. While Waleed could not conceive of practicing religion outside of a community, he was unable to accept the pressure placed on his father to conform to certain norms and values, by his immediate family, and the broader religious community:

I think we would have potentially er had encounters if we were less say educated and we couldn't afford to live there where we where we living. I mean my father is a good example...to be honest...my father's a bit of a mad (whistles)...the problem with my father is that he's the youngest and he's about in his fifties, so you can imagine, his eldest brother is something like close to a hundred years old. So largely the way he responded to me getting married to Michelle was based on the fact, on how he was criticised by his, how his family responded to it, not my father and his own character. So if you live in those communities you pretty much dictated to how you have to respond.

[Interview with Waleed, 25 August 2011]

While recognising the community as central to religion, Waleed expressed grave concerns about its impositions. He displayed a fair amount of anger toward his father for not being able to stand up to his family and assert his independence. Michelle, Waleed's wife, discussed how Waleed's father was fine with the fact that she would remain Christian when they got married. But when he consulted his elder brothers, and reacted negatively towards the idea, his stance towards their situation changed. Michelle also discussed how they were forewarned that their particular type of marriage was something ill-advised:

We got married at a er um a sheikh's house because it's quite difficult to get somebody to marry us Islamically, and then a month later we got married in church.

Um why was it difficult to get someone to marry you Islamically?

Um you know even though theoretically um Muslim males are allowed to get married to er Christian women...Yah, Person of the Book, we just couldn't find someone that was willing to still do it. And a lotta...I remember phoning around, and a lot of the sheikhs that I'd spoken to, and religious leaders said that even though it is allowed culturally, it's practiced, and you know, it wasn't something that was well accepted within certain communities. So it would be difficult to find somebody, and they actually only pointed me out into the direction of two people that they believed were very progressive, and one of that one of those guys married us.

[Interview with Michelle, 25 August 2011]

Considering that Michelle and Waleed were warned against such a marriage and taking into account the reasoning behind this forewarning, it is clear that the acceptance of the community plays an important role in maintaining good social relations. The fact that they had to approach a "progressive" Imam, speaks to the very traditional stance towards interfaith marriage taken by most contemporary Imams in Cape Town.

The dominant position taken by Imams on interfaith marriage was well anticipated by some participants. For example, both Zainab and Wardiyah, who married Christian men, and therefore went against religious prescription, decided to have only civil ceremonies. The stigma associated with interfaith marriage, even when within the parameters of religious law, made Wardiyah and Zainab, who were acting outside of these parameters, particularly wary. Both indicated that at the time of marriage, they were not willing to approach an Imam to perform their respective ceremonies, because they knew that their marriages would not be accepted. It was only when Wardiyah's husband converted to Islam, several years after they were married, that she decided to have a religious ceremony.

We have already discussed the practical reasons for why Muslim jurists may have decided on advising/ruling against interfaith marriages in Chapter One. However, the persisting stance against such marriages (at least those allowable within the parameters of the law), despite its seemingly common occurrence in working class communities, speaks to the overwhelming influence of social norms in relation to, and in tension with, religious law.

Returning to the narrative of Waleed and Michelle, it is worth noting that while they were dating, as with many other participants, the varying religious affiliations were not an issue. It was only once they decided to get married that things became strained. To some degree, this expresses an underlying Islamic supremacy that is sometimes an undercurrent in interfaith relations between Muslims and those from other religions. Waleed brought this up in his interview and expressed his frustration with the fact that so many of his friends had dated non-Muslim girls (who had subsequently converted to Islam). It was not even a question of who was going to convert: it would have to be the non-Muslim. This speaks not only to notions of Islamic supremacy but also to the lines drawn by the community. These kinds of relationships are only acceptable until they reach a certain point,¹⁶ viz., as long as it results in the conversion of the non-Muslim spouse. This was the case in several other narratives. For some participants, marrying into Muslim families entailed an expectation that they would, and should, give up their particular faith identity and norms, and adopt those prescribed by Muslim communities.

In the first narrative concerning Jamil and Saffiyah, we saw the way in which tensions between two different religious traditions caused friction not only in the marital relationship, but in extended family relationships. Negotiation and flexibility was central in finding a tenable solution: norms had to be negotiated and recreated. The narratives that followed reflected the way in which cultural knowledge about religion and religious practices prevails in working class communities. Participants approached religion from the point of view of learned cultural knowledge, and what was culturally acceptable, rather than from religious law. In the last narrative, we saw a distinct departure from religious law, in favour of social norms. While religion may have defined culture to a certain extent, religion was also being defined by culture which is itself in a continuous process of change. Participants thus constructed their norms through an interplay and exchange between the two.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter suggest that interfaith couples construct their marital norms, in conjunction and tension with, social norms. Couples, while often rejecting community norms, often make concessions in order to accommodate them. While social norms maintain a distinct influence, interfaith couples largely favour their own constructions, above community norms.

This does not lessen the impact of social norms on the lives of interfaith couples. Class, for example, produced an alternative marital structure, particularly in terms of authority, that put women at the centre. Women took firm decisions in governing their family-life, and class also determined the concerns and reasoning that guide their decisions.

Social norms were also influential to the extent that they overpower religious prescription. In the case of the marriage of a Muslim male to a Christian female, for example, social norms determined the way in which sense was made of religious law: what was allowable within the limits set out by the law, was not necessarily so according to social mores. In contrast, having children out of wedlock, for example, though outside the parameters of religious law, was socially acceptable. Norms thus determined a particular way of being in the world, a particular way of living.

Chapter IV: Constructing Identity in Interfaith Marriage

In an interfaith marriage couples essentially have to change their religious identity in order to accommodate one another. At the same time, interfaith couples are part of a community, and there is a need to belong. The fact that they represent ‘difference’ often means that integrating into the community is not a simple process. Interfaith couples are therefore attempting to grapple with their religious identity as related to their own family dynamics, while negotiating identity as part of a community.

In this chapter of the thesis, the religious identity of participants will be the main focus: it hones in on the politics of identity and belonging for couples as individuals, and within a marriage. The discussion will centre on the way in which individuals construct their religious identity, how this identity is impacted upon and impacts the interfaith relationship, and how it is played out in a community setting. It gives insight into the way participants exist as part of a particular community—on an individual level—struggling with their religious identity, and how this is made more acute within an interfaith marriage, where they have to change their identity to accommodate their partner. This is further complicated by existing as part of a couple, going against community norms. Ultimately, it elucidates the way in which the conception of the self is tied to existence within a community.

Negotiating religious identity

Reconciling different religious identities is a complex process in an interfaith marriage. While participants seemed to be open to accepting the general morality of other faiths, they also had fixed ideas of what a person claiming a particular religious identity should embody. The construction of religious identity thus wavered between a degree of flexibility and fixed norms. In the same vein, participants rejected certain impositions on their identity from community, and favoured their own personal constructions, some giving the perception of conforming to these impositions. When it came to aligning this religious identity with the identity of their partner, participants at times projected their religious identity onto their partners, and attempted to prescribe a religious identity for them. In others, identities were negotiated and allowances made to accommodate differences.

Andre, the husband of Zainab was adamant about the fact that both he and his wife worship the same God, so it was not so important if they happened to call this God different names:

...it's because my belief is this ne: Our like a parent like parents ne they just need to teach the children ne what's right and wrong right so my belief is that er is that um we serve the same God so I don't have a problem they serving like Allah, I serve God, because it's the same man or I don't know it's the same it's the same it's just different names but to my feeling like, you know, because I'm brought up um Christian is that that's why I didn't you know change religion. If, I, maybe in the near soon I will change maybe my religion, but then I must feel wholeheartedly to change my religion, not for marriage, or not for because yah any other thing, whatever.

[Interview with Andre, 21 August 2011]

As can be seen from the testimony above, despite the obvious fluidity in religious identity shown by Andre, integrity was paramount. He could not conceive of changing religions without being wholeheartedly convinced. He did not reject this possibility in future. Despite Andre's openness, he did not appreciate expectations to convert to Islam or pressure placed on him to do so. His wife commented:

In my commu...they're fine with it. It's only, um, when the Muslim people came there, and like doing visitings, and that and then he came he's mos a Christian. They say "boeta" he say "No, I'm not a boeta, I'm a Christian guy". Then they ask him "When are you going to turn Muslim?" So he don't actually like that. He said "Don't tell me what must I do as long me and she understand each other, so don't tell me I must turn Muslim". It's only the Muslim people tell him that but if his Christian people come and visit there they don't tell me I must turn Christian, you see. As long me and him is happy with it they say they can't stand in in in that way.

[Interview with Zainab, 13 June 2011]

Andre rejected the imposition by the Muslim community and made it clear that he and his wife set their own norms, and would not subscribe to community pressure for him to convert. He was comfortable with his Christian identity and took particular offence to the term 'boeta'—an Afrikaans word, meaning "little brother," here representing a slang term usually reserved for older male Muslims—being directed at him. This indicates that while he may have been tolerant, he was not willing to have an identity thrust onto him by the Muslim community. Andre also had clear ideas of what it meant to be a Muslim although he was not particularly familiar with Islamic terms and practices:

...actually my brother was also Christian right with us but um he he turned for his wife Moslem. But sometimes I don't know if he's Christian or Moslem because he is confused, you see, because the end of the day um he doesn't he doesn't do what a Moslem is suppose to do, you see. So basically I see to my he he just got married because I don't know he turned Moslem because of the marriage. I don't know you see because he doesn't act like a Moslem, the things he do you know he doesn't act

like a Moslem. You see a Moslem he act like a Moslem, a Christian he acts like a Christian.

What do you mean by that? What does a Muslim act like and what does a Christian act like?

Like in the Qur'an they say, whatever, you mustn't drink, or you know, er, there's a lot of stuff they they say in in the Qur'an just like they say in the Bible. So if you don't abide to that whatever stuff, whatever you can't call you Moslem or you don't go to er um mosque or you you just don't respect the religion so then you can't expect the religion must respect you, you see, or people must respect you as a Moslem because your name is Anees or Ebrahim, you see. You suppose to act like a Moslem if you turn. If you turn to a other religion, you suppose to turn for the right reasons, not for the wrong reasons.

[Interview with Andre, 21 August 2011]

It was therefore not only about being Muslim in name only. There were actions that had to accompany a particular claim to a religious identity or affiliation. In particular, he struggled with an expectation of faithfulness to the rules relating to ethical conduct set out by religious texts. This expectation seemed to be more strictly directed towards those who converted to Islam. Since Andre's brother had chosen to convert to Islam, as far as Andre was concerned, he had chosen a particular faith identity and needed to show some fidelity and commitment. He himself need not do so.

Moreover, the idea of being part of a community seemed to go hand-in-hand with the construction of a religious identity. In contrast, Andre emphasised the fact that one's actions will determine whether one is respected as a Muslim. This indicates the centrality of community in perceptions of the self, and the legitimacy community gives to a claim upon a particular identity.

In the narrative of Sakina, we see a nuanced understanding of what it means to be a Muslim. While she recognised that Muslims represented certain things and behaved in certain ways, she rejected the projection of certain ideals onto Muslims. Sakina is an Indian woman, thirty-six years of age, married to a white man of Christian origin, who converted to Islam before marrying Sakina. She runs a cleaning business together with her husband. By Sakina's own account, her husband is only nominally Muslim: he was expected to convert to Islam by Sakina's family. Sakina is the only Indian in the sample, and grew up, and still resides, in a predominantly Indian, lower-middle class neighbourhood located in the Cape Flats.

Sakina seemed to have some pre-conceived ideas of what the researcher was expecting to find: she pointed out several times that her narrative might skew the results of the study. It

seemed apparent that she expected that the research would bring out that interfaith couples experienced conflict and held a strong sense of religious identity. Her narrative challenged this perceived assumption.

Sakina described her family as conservative but also somewhat atypical. Her father wanted the best education for his daughters and sent them to a Catholic school. She described her case as unusual in more traditional Indian families. Sakina seemed to identify more with the Christian values that she learnt at her Catholic school, than what she was exposed to growing up in a Muslim home. She described her family as more culturally Muslim than religiously so, although conceded that her father had become more religious in the last six or seven years. She also conceded that she would call herself Muslim mainly because her family called themselves Muslim. She felt disconnect to Islam because she saw it as extremely punitive in nature:

Even at something joyous like a wedding, the Imam will get up and not “This is an amazing day, look at these people who have chosen to spend their lives together. How amazing. I hope that Ismail you go through your married life loving your wife, as the Prophet loved his wife Ayesha”... They will not say stuff like that, or they’ll say one sentence about that. They will say “If you do not do this then you will burn in the fires of hell!” At a wedding or an engagement! Of course I’m going to go for the [Christian] notion of “Look, love you, stop being stupid, stop sinning like this, stop doing, stop this adultery, that’s bad, don’t like that but you I still love”. That’s not the idea get from the way I have been taught Islam....they see him as “The Punisher” not as this loving, I need to help you get on the right track parental God...if you step one step off the path that you are suppose to be on, then you will burn in the fires of hell. Burn in the fires of hell! What chance do we have?

[Interview with Sakina, 25 July 2011]

Sakina found it difficult to identify with a religion that did not seem to have a redemptive aspect. However, it seemed to be the way Islam was propagated that bothered her the most. She could not conceive of a situation where a human being was not flawed and did not make mistakes. The representation of Islam as a religion that did not allow any margin for human error alienated her. Sakina related an incident that took place at a family gathering where she was publicly chastised by an Imam for not wearing a headscarf:

I happened to have a pash [pashmina] around my neck and the pash wasn’t a scarf...and he said okay “I’m gonna start the *du’aa* [prayer]” and he stops and he says to me you know “Please can you put on your scarf” and I looked at him and I said “okay”...Instead of continuing he waited and everybody in the room is now watching me putting on this scarf and then I’ve got the scarf on now. Now he doesn’t start, now he preaches, now he goes on about you know “I see women in the street and I will

stop them and I will tell them you know they should be covering their heads and they tell me I know what I'm doing and I tell them yes but (you something you know about) God will have you burn in the fires of hell". Blah blah blah blah blah.

[Interview with Sakina, 25 July 2011]

Sakina seemed genuinely disturbed by the rhetoric of the Imam to describe those treading on the wrong path, and by the fact that this rhetoric was supported within Islam. Her use of the words "blah blah blah" seems to indicate her rejection of the words of the Imam. She seemed weary of religious rhetoric. It also seemed apparent that underlying her alienation was a fear that there was a slight chance the Imam might be correct in his interpretation of what might happen. She expressed that she hoped things were not really as the Imam and his contemporaries described, and that even if she had to be punished, she hoped there would be no eternal damnation.

She was reluctant to completely turn away from Islam and emphasised that it was the portrayal of Islam as "fire and brimstone," rather than Islam itself that was reprehensible. However, a thread of ambivalence kept running through the conversation. At one stage she related a story about how there was a poster in her Catholic school that read "If you were ever arrested for being Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" She then told the researcher that if she was ever arrested for being Muslim, she just didn't think there would be enough evidence to convict her. She also identified with the Christian faith and the idea of a loving God that was able to look past the sometimes fickle nature of human beings and love them in spite of it.

For Sakina, claiming a particular religious identity, needed to be accompanied by sincerity, and being able to relate more easily to the principles within Christianity, she was not able to claim an unwavering Muslim identity for herself. It was for this reason that she felt more comfortable with her husband. She discussed how she was able to talk to him about religion in a non-threatening environment, and that this endeared him to her even further. Not being the type of person who liked to "rock the boat", but also being the type of person that needed to speak her mind, her husband, who was only "nominally" Muslim, and who therefore suspended religious judgment, provided her with the appropriate support .

While Sakina seemed to independently construct her cultural and religious identity, she was willing to make some concessions. She realised that in order to keep the peace she would have to make certain compromises and that one could only "bypass traditions within reason"

and that “perception is a lot”. As long as one was seen to be doing the appropriate thing, one could manipulate various situations, viz., one did not have hold certain beliefs or value certain customs, one only had to give the appearance of doing so. She described her way of dealing with a particular Indian ritual that she was not prepared to fully observe:

Usually Indian women, you get a set of jewellery from your husband which wasn't part of his culture, obviously, and I mean you know newly weds you can't afford stuff like that unless you know it's coming...I said “I don't wanna spend the first three months of my married life living on, you know, coffee and toast and jam just because my family expects this gift”. So my cousin said “Don't worry, my set, I actually haven't, I don't think anyone's seen it since my wedding day, what twenty-one years ago...let's wrap that up, they can see it and be happy”. And then I just returned it afterwards.

[Interview with Sakina, 25 July 2011]

By finding a creative way to deal with the cultural requirements she was unable to meet, Sakina appeared to be conforming to the demands of her family. However, she was engaged in an act of resistance by finding an alternative solution that she could live with. She challenged and reinvented the norms that had to be observed within her family, but at the same time conformed to them. The fact that her husband had to convert to Islam to be able to marry her is one such example. She thus balanced between the traditional Muslim-Indian norms and those of her own, and did so successfully by having cultivated an understanding of which customs simply could not be openly challenged.

Sakina acts not only for herself but also for her husband. Because he is from a different culture, a space for compromise, negotiation, and reconstruction was created. She referred several times to the aspects of her culture that her husband did not understand and did not support – in some cases she made allowances for him, like in the example above, in others he learnt to live with it. They thus navigated the existing boundaries, and made compromises with one another. They created their own set of marital norms, but in tension with the expectations of her family. Their religious identity was therefore defined through various processes of negotiation, with each other, and Sakina's Muslim-Indian family.

In the case of Widaad, we see an alternative construction taking place. While she agreed that sincerity must accompany religious practice and favoured a more holistic view of Islam, she also had clear ideas of what it meant to be a good Muslim. Her religious aspirations as an individual ultimately resulted in her placing pressure on her husband to take on a particular religious identity at a certain pace.

Widaad's mother has played a pivotal role in Widaad's construction of religious identity. For Widaad, it is not about outward symbols but rather about what is being cultivated on the inside. At the same time, what you express to the outside world must match what you are on the inside. Wearing a scarf, for example, is something that must be accompanied by a certain way of life. There seemed to be an underlying conflict between what Widaad saw as a principled approach to Islam, and the normative views of being a good Muslim imposed from the outside:

In Moslem school¹⁷ I was very close to all the other girls, whatever, but I was always different in that I wouldn't constantly wear my scarf, because I was like fourteen and fifteen, and stuff, and those girls were already wearing completely covered. And my mom said: "If you don't feel like you are ready then don't. If you don't feel like you um you live up to your scarf then don't wear it" and I still don't feel like I live up to my scarf and I would feel like a hypocrite should I wear it now. But even then, I would wear my scarf when I went to Moslem school and then the Imam would always see me outside of Moslem school then I wouldn't have my scarf on and it was like "Yoh, you teaching Moslem school". There's that "you have to live like this" and it's obviously the right Islamic way.

[Interview with Widaad, 24 July 2011]

While Widaad seemed comfortable with her individual expression of Islam, she seemed to feel like an outsider for not conforming to 'normative' Islamic practice. While she mentioned that she would feel like a hypocrite if she wore the headscarf without espousing the values the headscarf symbolised, it was coupled with the notion that wearing it was the correct Islamic practice. A definite tension was therefore present: while Widaad considered herself to be a believing Muslim, she saw herself as less Muslim than those who strictly adhered to Islamic practice.

While Widaad identified herself as outside of the fold of the "right Islamic way," she also placed others outside of it:

In Paarl the domestic Muslim community is very strong but they not very um...it doesn't come with you know on Eid you have to wear this and you have to drive that. There's none of that, it's very plain and simple, there's no, it's not materialistic or prejudice or any of the rest of those things, there's just, they like to be Muslim.

[Interview with Widaad, 24 July 2011]

Widaad referred to the cultural elements that she feels have come to form part of what it means to be Muslim in Cape Town in a contemporary context. She rejects the materialistic element it has taken on and also the prejudice that attaches itself to those who do not buy-in

to this materialism. Again, Widaad is an outsider, but this time she views it in a negative sense.

Underlying Widaad's rejection of the materialistic values of Muslims in Cape Town is the idea the Islam is pure in principle. Muslims corrupt Islam, and more specifically, Islam is corrupted by those who do not follow a more simple way of life. These clear ideas of what "good" Muslims should embody were projected onto her husband, who as previously mentioned is a convert to Islam. He described the challenges he faced as a new Muslim within the marital relationship:

For me, it was making the *salaah* [prayer], I must lead the *salaah*. At the beginning I like struggled to make *salaah* and she had to like teach me how to make *salaah* and that was a big challenge, so we...we getting there...I struggle with English and Afrikaans and now I have to struggle with Arabic [laughs].

[Interview with Yasin, 24 July 2011]

Widaad then interjects:

It's because before we have kids, it's something we have to get down you know...you gotta...our basis has to be strong before we bring kids into the world and we got to do things right and he has to get into that before we bring anybody else into the world.

[Interview with Widaad, 24 July 2011]

While Widaad had did not consider herself to have reached an appropriate level of piety, it was evident that this was something she aspired to in the future. For her future life, a certain religious structure had to be in place, particularly regarding the family. It appeared that Yasin would have liked to progress at his own pace but was being pressured by Widaad to conform to the norms she believed a good Muslim followed, especially one who expected to take on the role of a father. Widaad, in this case, seemed to be leading the religious identity of the household by imposing certain practices on Yasin. While Yasin may in fact have wanted to cultivate these values, he was not being given the space to do so independently.

A similar experience was encountered by Saffiyah:

The other day he [Saffiyah's husband] was saying...“Babe you need to learn how to pray now even if it's just in English. When I'm not here, how do you pray?”...And I said “I have a lot of schoolwork and it's all just too hard”. And I know it's not an excuse but it's just so hard and I don't have that support base...I'm still finding my ground and I felt a bit pressured like I'm being forced to learn and we kinda had a disagreement but eventually he understood where I was coming from. And I told him “To begin with, I'm the one who chose to become Muslim, you didn't make that choice for me”.

[Interview with Saffiyah, 12 July 2011]

For Saffiyah's husband it was important that Saffiyah stay committed to Islam. He saw prayer as a way of gauging this commitment. The fact that Saffiyah could not engage in prayer independently, seemed to indicate to him that her commitment was waning, and he sought to remedy this by telling her that it was time she learnt to do so. Saffiyah felt somewhat overwhelmed, as was the case with Widaad's husband, Yasin, in the previous example.

Unlike Yasin, however, Saffiyah did not accept the imposition of her partner and reminded him that she chose to become Muslim, and would progress at a pace she felt was manageable. She rejected a pre-determined set of values of what it means to be a Muslim, imposed by her husband. While acknowledging his concerns, she made it clear that she would develop on her own terms. The act of prayer could also be seen as a private act (although something she engaged in with her husband), so Saffiyah may have felt that she could assert herself in this particular space. This kind of assertion would prove to be more difficult in other areas of her married life, where a particular kind of Muslim identity was being prescribed for her, discussed in the last section of this chapter, titled "Food, social boundaries and identity".

The religious identity construction of participants incorporated many influences. Some participants incorporated community impositions into their identity construction, for example, while at the same time adhering to their own personal constructions. In this way they could guarantee their sense of belonging to the community. Accepting family and community expectations that the non-Muslim partner would have to convert to Islam was part of this. In the case of Muslim convert participants, a projection of a particular type of Muslim identity, from their Muslim partners, constrained their ability to construct identity autonomously.

Community and the Self

Negotiating identity in the context of the broader Muslim community seemed to be a particular challenge for many of the participants of this study. Several participants asserted that they felt pressure to conform to a particular way of being Muslim that was deemed appropriate by their family and/or the broader Muslim community. In some cases, participants rejected these projected norms in favour of their own individual identity constructions. In others, adopting certain practices enabled a sense of belonging with the

Muslim community. Ultimately, participants could not conceive of their religious identities as separated from a particular community.

Wardiyah lamented the fact that she could not measure up to what was expected of her from the Muslim community despite the efforts she put into being a hard-working and productive person in society. She rejected these community-imposed norms in favour of her own personal construction of identity:

I'm not perfect but um when it comes to Islam I don't like challenge other people coz sometimes there's a lot about the Iss...the Moslems that um...they just look down on you, especially how you dress and I always say it's not how you dress. You're getting older and you're getting conscious about yourself...but sometimes what happen with our Islam people, people is, they just look down on the next person. You never good enough to to to to lift yourself up and I'm I can be proud of myself, I always say and that's what I always tell my son. I'm working alone for the girls, I'm baking to get, make extra make extra ends meet with that and I can always say it's my *salaah* that keep me up and about. And I always say I can just shukr Allah for that.

[Interview with Wardiyah, 20 July 2011]

For Wardiyah, Islam was not about external markers of religiosity like a modest mode of dress but about how the values were internalised and how one behaved privately. She worked hard to support her children and provide a stable environment and felt that she was able to do so successfully because of the prayer she engaged in. She clearly felt strongly about being judged and also about being kept down despite her attempts to progress.

Despite harbouring the feeling of being dragged down by the Muslim community, she rejected the value-judgments made on external markers of religiosity and evaluated herself based on what she thought constituted a person of value, viz., her own norms. It must be noted however, that despite her rejection of the community's judgment, she did allude to the fact that as she got older she became more conscious of herself and of what was appropriate. This shows that she was not entirely indifferent, regardless of whether this consciousness developed progressively with age. At the beginning of the interview, Wardiyah remarked that her mother was a convert to Islam, who only became religious in a strict sense in the later part of her life, despite not being very educated about the religion. Wardiyah seems to have taken a similar path in that she identifies becoming older with becoming more conscious about the appropriate ways of behaving in a religious context.

In the narrative of Shireen, we see another rejection of community norms in favour of personal identity construction. Shireen is coloured Muslim who converted to Christianity

upon marriage to her coloured Christian husband. She is thirty-seven years old and works as a junior accountant. Her father was Muslim and her mother converted to Islam upon marriage to her father. Shireen was excommunicated from her family and the broader Muslim community when she decided to turn Christian, with some exceptions. When Shireen and her husband decided to get married they agreed that it would be better to have one religious faith in their household.

Shireen was the one to offer to convert to Christianity, although her husband was willing to convert to Islam. He subsequently changed his mind when Shireen's uncles offered to pay for the wedding should he convert to Islam and also informed him that Islam was the better religion. Shireen felt that there was no real connection to the religion for her and more specifically there was no real connection to her father's Muslim family. She only wanted to raise her future children under one faith so as not to confuse them. Shireen commented:

I was born Moslem and then my father he was Moslem and my mother was Christian, she turned Moslem. And then my dad died when I was four years old and my mom still raised us in the Moslem faith. We used to go to Moslem school whatever but there was no real interaction from my father's side of the family okay.... when I decided to turn Christian then we told my mother and she says you know what the family's gonna say...she told my aunt and then she notified the family and then all the uncles came that day. They were all giving me the whole scenario of what they supposed to do. What's gonna happen and you won't be happy and whatever and that was that. They never ever came back and they cut me off from the family and there's like just a few of them that would like still make contact.

[Interview with Shireen, 24 August 2011]

The fact that Shireen's father's family did not really participate actively in her life as she was growing up, played an integral role in her future religious identity. She told the researcher later on the interview that they were never there for her, to even ask "Do you have a piece of bread?" as she put it. The fact that they did not provide any financial support clearly played a role in Shireen's alienation from her Muslim family. This, coupled with the fact that they did not check on her Islamic learning progress, confirmed for her that they were not truly concerned for her, nor did they take any interest in her life.

The attempt of her father's brothers to dissuade her from turning Christian was rejected by Shireen as she did not see them as having any legitimate authority over her. Her fluidity in religious identity at the time of converting seems a direct result of a lack of a supportive Muslim community. She was also repulsed by the sudden strong interest in her life on the

part of her father's brothers when she decided to leave the religion, when they were otherwise absent. The Muslim family, and community, could consequently not lay any claims to her as she constructed her identity outside of their influence.

The threat of social ostracism when acting outside of the established codes of ethical and moral conduct within religions, and the communities that practice them, was very real. What constituted crossing the line, however, was often selectively determined. While there were specific rules within Islamic law dealing with correct moral conduct, social norms of a particular community often prevailed:

My family um from my father's side, the my Moslem aunties and uncles, they totally cut me off. My one uncle, he's actually an Imam, and he actually took it the hardest that day coz he told me, you know, if he sees me in the street and I fall dead he has to spit on me. And that was very hard coz that was, he was actually my favourite uncle...if I see my aunts in the road they wouldn't greet me, they wouldn't look at me but then you'd get the one that will greet when she's alone.

[Interview with Shireen, 24 August 2011]

Shireen's narrative points to the highly emotive nature of religion. It also exposes the behaviour of an individual by his/herself versus the individual acting in a group situation. Shireen expressed her deep frustration with some "aunts" who would acknowledge her privately but not publicly (at least within their community setting).

The idea of practicing religion set apart from a religious community did not seem palpable to some. Waleed pointed out that Islam was a social commitment rooted in collective practice. This collectivism did not exclude diversity:

I don't have time to find...coz I Islam you can't really practice on your own and and to find a community that caters for me and my views about situations are rare and I'm not particularly prepared er er er to seek that out of Islam. I try, I try I like the principles of Islam. I try to approach it in my everyday living but the five times pray and and...Islam is Islam is just too many rules...it's all about what you can't do you know. And that's a impediment of my life so I can't do that and it's not something that's gonna change with time I mean I've tried long and hard you know I mean I I I've as a youth I was very active in the MSA [Muslim Students Association] please man I was active you know and I couldn't do any sport coz *madrasah*¹⁸ kept me busy at all spheres so I don't have time for it right now it's just too prejudicial, gees!

[Interview with Waleed, 25 August 2011]

While Waleed expressed his dissatisfaction with, and indeed rejection of, Islam as existing in a framework of general prohibition, this seemed to be of secondary importance when

considering his ambivalent relationship with Islam or Muslim people. Earlier on he acknowledged that he could not separate the religion from the people who practiced it. Because he saw Islam as being something that must be practiced as a group and not on an individual level, and because he did not hold orthodox or normative views, he did not feel he could fit in anywhere. He therefore actively rejected his Muslim identity.

In Sakina's case, the fact that her husband was not Muslim was not as much a problem as the fact that he was not Indian. However, the fact that her husband converted to Islam, made him more acceptable to her family. Sakina expressed how her proposed marriage was difficult for her father to deal with because he was not sure how his family would react. The opinion of the family was of utmost importance to him.

...Because we don't confront so how is he going to find out from the family about his oldest daughter wanting to marry a heathen savage....that was more about what are people going to say... "It's the school that he sent them to, if they had gone to a proper government school or Islamia, it's right down here". That's what he was worried about.

[Interview with Sakina, 25 July 2011]

Sakina's example reflects the importance of extended social networks but also ties in with issues of class. Because Sakina was sent to an elite Christian school, the underlying assumption from her extended family was that while she may have gained a good education, she would compromise her Islamic/Indian conservative values (and marrying a non-Muslim/Indian would certainly count as such a compromise, according to Sakina). Stepping outside the lines drawn by her extended family thus had consequences: one either did as they did, or one was "othered". Any differences were considered a direct result of the (wrongful) desire to be different.

As an outsider to Malay and Indian communities, Saffiyah's issues with community were somewhat different. While the narratives discussed above reflected ambivalence towards both belonging and the need to belong to a Muslim community, as well as the politics of inclusion and exclusion, Saffiyah's experience reflected these issues in an alternative manner. She perceived herself to be part of a black Muslim minority, and therefore subject to reservations from the broader Muslim community:

They actually first time they saw me and stuff in college, they had their reservations about it. I think there are not that many black Muslims around so that when you are

black and you are Muslim people have their reservations. They actually thought it was a fashion trend for me [laughs], no seriously they think it was a fashion trend and when they saw me you know wearing, being in *hijab* everyday...eventually somebody asked me and they said: "Are you Muslim?"... people still find it hard to believe there are a few black Muslims out there.

Tahir Sitoto has argued that the representation of African Muslims as converts in South African scholarship and elsewhere, relegates them to a secondary space within the Muslim community and tends to characterise them as "the other" (Sitoto, 2003). Saffiyah's narrative subtly illustrates this point. While her college peers who were Muslim (and not black) could not place her in their pre-conceived categories of what Muslims should look like, she herself saw the black Muslim community as a fledgling one, despite its long presence in South Africa.¹⁹ Saffiyah commented:

Being Muslim here in Cape Town is like very interesting. I think here you can actually, you can practice freely, you know, without any prejudice, you know, people just pointing at you. It's not funny here coz you see a lot of people looking like you. You can go to school, and you can go to the shops, and a lot of people look like you and you don't feel like an outcast...if I like go if I rock up in the East Rand there aren't that many Muslims at all not that I know of. Actually, now looking back growing up I don't think there are any at all in my you know my area and even anywhere near around there...if I came in *hijab* like this people are gonna look and say "Is she okay?". You know. "Why is she covering herself up like that?". That is like the old way of living, they see it as a man controlling you, or why do you need to cover yourself up and stuff...they see it as a threat.

[Interview with Saffiyah, 12 July 2011]

Saffiyah's narrative reflects the tension between individual constructions of identity and those imposed by communities. Saffiyah did not feel like an outsider of the Muslim community, but rather of the community she grew up in. While she may not have shed her African traditional roots, she embraced Islam, which set her apart from the people with whom she grew up. They no longer had a common way of living. Saffiyah feared that her new religious identity and way of life would not be seen as a legitimate choice by her African community. Rather, it would be attributed to her husband's perceived dominion over her.

Saffiyah not only had to reconcile her personal manifestation of identity with the values projected onto her by the African traditional community, but also by her husband. She explained, for example, that her husband discussed with her that she did not have to shake the hands of men, particularly Muslim men, as they would understand that this was not

permissible for her, as a Muslim woman. She found this difficult because in her African traditional upbringing, it was considered rude not to greet someone in the same way that they offered a greeting to you. She did not see shaking hands with men as something Islamically transgressive. She, in fact, considered it to be harmless, since it was simply a manner of greeting. While her husband did not forbid her to disengage from this practice, it appeared that he did not agree with her. This placed a particular strain on Saffiyah's identity construction, as she struggled to balance her connection to her traditional roots, her husband's expectations, and her own interpretation of religious values.

As Saffiyah noted, dress codes are also linked with gender. Wearing the *hijab* may be seen as an act of piety in some Muslim communities, while in others it is seen as a form of male oppression towards females. It is also worth noting how common forms of dress, engenders a sense of common identity and belonging, while at the same time creating an exclusive status. Seeing other women wear the *hijab* made Saffiyah feel as though she was part of the Muslim community. However, it also made her feel as though she was an outsider of her African community. She was thus caught between two different identities: the one she was born with, and the one that she chose.

In Wardiyah's narrative we saw that ways of dressing formed a part of a claim to group identity. Because Wardiyah ascribed to a Muslim identity, she was pressured by her community to adapt a certain form of dress. Similarly, in Saffiyah's case, her adoption of a different dress code is viewed as a threat in her African traditional community. It would thus appear that acting outside of what the group has determined to be appropriate sets one outside of that group, or at the very least places one on the margins. Moreover, dressing in a particular way establishes one as part of a particular group and sets one apart from other groups. Identity is thus constructed through similarities to one group, and oppositions, with another.

A common thread in the above narratives was the idea of the self as part of a community, despite individual constructions. Although many participants rejected the pressures placed on them to conform to certain ideals, they did not do so as individuals outside the influence of their community. This influence affected ways of thinking about the self as well as framing reactions to the community. There was also a clear sense that certain practices were characteristic of certain communities and boundaries were put in place. Acting outside of

those boundaries meant being placed outside of a particular community, but it also served as a way of defining oneself as part of a distinct community.

Being in an interfaith marriage, without conversion to Islam, clearly set participants outside of acceptable and established norms, and forced couples to negotiate their identity not only as individuals forming part of a community, but as part of a marital relationship. They therefore had to manage the expectations of the community as well as within their marriage. In some cases, this entailed a rejection of the community in favour of their marital choices and personal constructions of identity. In others, marital pressure to disengage from certain social norms was rejected in favour of the social. Identity was thus constrained both by social norms and expectations from spouses.

Moreover, where a non-Muslim partner converted for the sake of the Muslim partner's family, it reflected the constraints that exist on independently constructing identity within an interfaith marriage, on both the part of the Muslim and the convert partner. Both accepted that this would have to be done in order for their union to be acceptable to the family and extended social networks. Identity could be directed by the family in this way because of its centrality to conceptions of the self.

The faith identity of children

Deciding on the religious identity and upbringing of children born of interfaith marriages, and living the commitments made, may be a very difficult and emotional process for parents (Tvrtkovic, 2001). While children may be the ultimate manifestation of an interfaith couple's commitment to one another, tension can also be channelled through them (al-Yousuf, 2006). This is because the religious identity and the upbringing of children has much to do with parents' own issues of identity and belonging. While parents may agree on how to raise their children in principle, the reality may make their differences more pronounced and force them to confront issues of inclusion and exclusion, viz., to which communities they belong and with whom they share particular values, and with whom they do not. These values are often projected onto children who represent an opportunity to create stability in an environment characterised by difference.

In this study, the faith identity of children, whether it was related to a strong resolve to raise children under one particular faith, or whether it was to expose them to the influences of multiple faiths, was significantly related to issues of the parents' own experiences and

religious identity construction. They did not want their children to be rejected by society or be placed in the margins: they wanted them to have a sense of belonging to a particular religious community.

Parents' own faith narratives play an integral role in shaping the religious identity of their children. Even in cases where partial exposure to another faith tradition occurs (for example where one parent has converted) children tend to develop a sense of being 'other', and a 'hybrid' identity is quietly informed based on the mixed-heritage of the parents (al-Yousuf; 2006: 327). The concept of 'hybrid identity', while often celebrated in academic literature, as we saw with Hall and Giddens in Chapter Two, proved to be an issue of difficulty and contention for the participants in this study.

While participants' own identities could be described as hybrid, it was clearly something that they struggled with and wished to avoid for their children. It appeared that participants' life histories had made them aware of the confusion that a hybrid identity generates. Nurturing a monolithic religious identity in their children was therefore an important aspect of family life. But it had less to do with the actual religious identity of the children, and more to do with participants' own struggles with identity and their craving of stability.

If we consider Zainab and Wardiyah, for example, the idea of providing stability through adherence to the Islamic faith was central to their approach to the religious upbringing of their children. According to Judd (1990), it is difficult for interfaith couples to know whether their children will be accepted into a particular faith community. It may be the potential community rejection of a 'hybrid' identity, and the confusion that may accompany it, that Zainab and Wardiyah wanted to avoid for their children.

Both Wardiyah and Zainab felt that their children received sufficient exposure to the Christian tradition because they went to government schools that incorporated 'Christian' values, and that religiously, they should only identify as Muslims. Wardiyah in particular did not want her daughters to have any kind of exposure to Christianity on a spiritual level, but saw the value in "Christian school" as being able to grant them an opportunity to uplift themselves materially. Incorporating 'Christian' values into the lives of her children was tolerated for practical reasons, not to encourage a hybrid identity.

In Shireen's narrative, one of the main factors that contributed to her turning Christian was the fact that she did not want her children being raised in a multi-faith household. She was

open to the possibility of her children converting to Islam one day, should they so choose. She also positively recounted that her children would often wear Muslim prayer attire and act out the Muslim prayer (an influence created by her brother, one of the few people in her family who had not broken ties with her, although he did do so in the initial stages of her marriage and conversion to Christianity). However, as her children were growing up, it was important to her that they identified with one particular religion, and not feel torn between two disparate ones.

For reasons such as this, settling on the religious faith of one partner may have seemed the logical choice for interviewees. However, the consequences were not always positive. For example, while Zainab's husband, Andre, did agree to allow their children to adopt the Muslim faith (after several processes of negotiation), it was not something he was completely satisfied with, despite his declarations otherwise. According to Glenn (1982: 564), "It is likely that wives are typically more influential than their husbands in the religious socialization of children". Moreover, those who do not have an issue with their spouse being of a different faith may take issue with their children being of a different faith because they may feel like an "outsider" (Glenn, 1982). Andre, while outwardly expressing that he did not have a problem with his daughters being Muslim, seemed to have issues with belonging, as pointed out by Glenn. Zainab articulated the following:

Labarang²⁰ [Eid] time he bought mos we decide I going to bought when the second child come I going to bought for da um, for for da girl. I going to bought clothes and then he's going to buy for the boy clothes. But one day when Labarang come I say "You must bought for" it's mos the first Labarang he bought clothes so the second Labarang, Labrang Haji is came, so I say he must bought clothes for this one now coz it's for Labarang because all the children is going to look nice mos and they are your children so he say "But it's not my Labarang, why must I buy two times clothes for this child?". Because it's not his Labarang, so we disagreed a bit with that so I make him...we normally talk about that and then we sort it out and then he understand. You see? Like that.

[Interview with Zainab, 13 June 2011]

Zainab expressed her frustration with Andre for not wanting to fully participate in the Eid celebrations, but Andre seemed to have been struggling with some frustrations of his own. He had already bought clothes for one of the children for the first Eid celebration, and did not see why he had to do so again, especially considering it was not his religious celebration. This attitude, towards what is perhaps seen by Andre as a 'superfluous' event, suggests that he does, in fact, feel like an outsider and that he cannot fully identify with his family in the

context of their religious celebrations. All this may have been exacerbated by the obvious financial demand of buying clothes for two festivals. While it may be customary to buy new clothes for each Eid celebration, it was not something he could easily afford. It was at this point that issues of belonging came to the surface, and religious difference was emphasised.

Some participants manifested the need to raise their children under the influence of a specific type of community, and more particularly, under the influence of a certain kind of religious identity. One of Widaad's main reasons for wanting to move to Paarl, for example, was so that her children would not be exposed to the very "materialistic" Capetonian brand of Islam but rather to a more simple "untainted" form. Widaad subscribes to an idealised form of Islam which she connects with a particular kind of lifestyle and geographic location. Similarly, this position was implicit in Waleed's narrative. While he and his wife had agreed on raising their children as Catholic, it was evident that they avoided living in certain areas they felt possessed certain prejudicial or intolerant attitudes. They would not be comfortable raising their children in such environments. And yet, the idea of belonging was central to their narratives. A strong desire to live in a community that they could identify with, and belong to—void of the threat of rejection for being different—guided their choices of where to live and set-up their family life.

The majority of participants expressed that while they planned to raise their children as Muslim or Christian, they would nevertheless expose them to other religious traditions. Several participants expressed that this was inevitable because of the existence of their respective non-Muslim and Muslim families, and it would enable them to give their children an understanding of their own religious and cultural background. The difficulty of living in a multi-cultural context, and having to make the necessary adaptation to one's identity was made manifest. Participants lived in an environment that incorporated many different religions, and therefore promoted a flexible religious identity. At the same time, participants wanted to avoid this fluidity, in order to avoid confusion for the children.

The religious socialisation of children can indeed be a significant challenge for interfaith couples. Participants displayed varied attitudes in relation to this. On the one hand participants were adamant about creating a stable environment for their children by raising them under one faith, while on the other, participants while raising their children under a particular faith, felt that it was unrealistic to expect that their children would not be exposed to other religious traditions. According to them, it was in fact necessary to do so because they

lived in a multi-cultural context. Participants were thus torn between promoting the values of one faith in the household, while raising their families in a multi-faith context, and attempting to promote tolerance.

Of most importance to participants was not to confuse their children and provide stability. This confusion was related to not wanting to create an identity for their children as ‘hybrid’ or ‘mixed’ and put them at risk of not being accepted into particular faith communities. In other words, it was important for their children to belong. Moreover, agreeing on set terms for the religious upbringing of the children was fine in theory, but was more challenging when becoming a lived reality, as we saw with Andre. It was the actual lived experience that brought to the fore struggles with religious identity: it resulted in an acute awareness of differences, compromises made, and the notion of belonging. This manifested the way in which parents, replicating the communities that imposed values on them, projected their values onto their children.

Food, identity, and social boundaries

In her seminal work *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas argued that religious dietary laws served as a way of creating some kind of social order and setting social boundaries (Douglas, 1980). Similarly, in their collection of essays reflecting the significance of food in cultures of the Middle East, Tapper and Zubaida (2000), demonstrate how food plays an integral role in the shaping of both group and individual Muslim identity, as well its impact upon social relationships. In her foreword of the book, Roden (2000) argues “Food is about power. It is an expression of an identity and ideology. It touches on issues of class, gender, race and ethnicity”. Similarly in a study amongst Muslims in a coloured township in Cape Town, Bangstad (2004b) found that food was central as a means of enacting difference and superior social status amongst Muslims. Food thus plays a central role in defining and constructing identity, as well as defining both personal boundaries, and those within social relationships. A similar dynamic seemed to be present in this study. A social order regarding food was apparent and this took further shape in household relations.

Food seemed to form an integral part of identity for many of the participants. Family meals, and family gatherings where food would be shared, were an important aspect of socialization amongst participants. A common response was that compatibility between the interfaith couple was not really an issue, particularly because the non-Muslim partner never ate pork to begin with or did not grow up eating pork or having it in their household. One of the main

elements of compatibility was therefore centred on food. Many participants had one parent who had either converted to Islam or had converted from Islam. Those parents who had converted from Islam (as well as those who had remained Muslim) held onto Islamic dietary requirements and this seemed to have a significant impact on the dietary choices of their children. The religious identity of participants' parents thus seemed to be lingering from the past, into the present identity constructions of their children.

According to the normative Islamic tradition, the food that should be consumed by Muslims must conform to certain principles of purity which are defined through the concepts of *halal* (lawful) and *haram* (unlawful). The Qur'an sets out certain rules and regulations that outline the distinction between these (see Qur'an 2: 173; 5: 4; 6: 119; 6: 121; 6: 145; 16: 115). Generally, however, the blood of animals, the flesh of swine as well as the flesh of animals over which God's name has not been recited, are not permissible except in the case of absolute necessity. The consumption of alcohol also falls under the category of *haram* (see Qur'an 2: 219; 4: 43; 5: 93; 5: 94; 16: 67).

One particularly interesting finding of this study was the way in which it was naturally assumed that halal meat would be the only type of meat available for consumption in the interfaith household, despite making concessions related to the consumption of alcohol. For example, Muslim women who had married Christian men gave tacit and also explicit permission, for their husbands to consume alcohol both inside, and outside of the home, did not consider the issue of pork to be something that was up for discussion. It appeared that they were willing to make some allowances, particularly around alcohol, but pork was where they drew the line: their religious identity could not be pushed beyond the consumption of pork.

The majority of participants, both Muslim and Christian, recognised the consumption of pork as a boundary. In one case, despite the fact that the Muslim/agnostic partner drank alcohol, the prohibition of pork was still observed. In another case a participant expressed that while she would not go out of her way to eat or buy halal food; eating pork was a line she probably would not cross. It seemed that where alcohol was concerned, for some, the boundaries were somewhat obscured, but when it came to food, and more specifically prohibited food like pork, there was simply no grey area. The reluctance to consume pork was a reflection of the lines Muslims as individuals were not willing to cross.

Saffiyah provides a striking example of how food was negotiated between couples. As a convert to Islam, not having grown up in a Muslim environment and subject to the requisite dietary laws, she found regulations around food somewhat frustrating and also confusing. Her husband was quite strict about having only halal food in their house, and more specifically, food that had been approved by one or other halal certification body. So, while it was not easy for her to adapt, she had to work around the difficulties she encountered. Saffiyah and Jamil share a house with Jamil's mother, who also recently converted to Islam. Saffiyah expressed the following:

I remember about six months ago...um I bought stuff for them just before we got married. We went shopping and I was helping them buy groceries for the house and I chose wrong stuff and we had to send them away, we had to give them to people, and now even if his mother buys like wrong cheese or like wrong chicken, or the other day or even the other day, I like bought wrong stuff, and he was just saying no you guys need to look. It's a bit challenging coz the supermarket we live next to, is not halal and having to, it's like a jungle. It's, um, actually such a mission to shop. You know during the end of the month you stay away from the shops coz you know don't have time to go through everything and look for stamps, and you need to stick to what you know, and sometimes you find that actually when you go back, it's not halal anymore so you constantly have to check and re-check.

[Interview with Saffiyah, 12 July 2011]

In South Africa, despite the fact that Muslims make-up a small amount of the population, they hold significant consumer buying-power and thus are often courted by retailers through halal certification. Determining whether goods are lawful or unlawful is done by four *Halal Certification Bodies* namely the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), National Independent Halaal Trust (NIHT), South African National Halaal Authority (SANHA) and Islamic Council of South Africa (ICSA). In an article that appeared in the Cape Argus in June of 2010, a Muslim commentator, Shafiq Morton, argued that in South Africa, halal had become somewhat of an industry, to the extent that even something as benign as water was being certified as halal. He further argued that at the heart of Islamic law, lay the essence of permissibility, but halal certification bodies in South Africa had exploited the concept of halal and its approach to mean everything that was not permissible (Morton, 2010).

The current controversy points to the very real way in which food (restrictions and/or regulations) impact the construction of Muslim identity, something Saffiyah's narrative clearly attests to. As a convert, her identity was being directed by her husband, who set the rules regarding halal, and she was not given the space to make her own choices. Saffiyah did not want to get things wrong but was also pressured by the expectations of her husband, who

imposed a particular identity and set of values onto her. Moreover, she could not afford (financially) to make the wrong choices because it meant that she would have to give the food away: here religious prescription took precedence over practicality or affordability - even the cheese Saffiyah bought had to contain the halal stamp in accordance with her husband's preferences. It was clearly a very frustrating process for her. She found creative ways of solving it by consistently buying the same goods, and not going to shop during peak periods. However, this was not enough since products seemed to lose their certification. It was thus difficult for Saffiyah to manage the impositions from her husband, with a rapidly changing halal market.

It was evident that Saffiyah would have preferred a more relaxed attitude towards halal in her household: for example, she does not view items like milk and cheese to be problematic. But she could not manage—despite having a strong and independent personality—to secure this. The fact that her husband does not allow items that are not halal certified in the house constrains her ability to choose for herself. The implication are that in order to be a good Muslim, there are certain practices one must adhere to, and buying only halal items appeared to be one of these.

It seemed apparent that Saffiyah's husband, Jamil, used rules around food to direct the identity of the household. As a convert and newcomer to the Islamic religion, Saffiyah struggled to reconcile her own judgement, and the values imposed by her husband. This imposition impacted on her ability to independently construct her religious identity.

Food was clearly revealed to be concerned about social norms, and a particular ordering of society, in this study. A hierarchy seemed to underscore thinking about food amongst the majority of the participants (both Muslim and Christian), and Islamic prescriptions related to food seemed to be at the top of that hierarchy. This speaks to the norms set by community and its influence in directing the identity of individuals. Halal seemed to be the clear dividing line between the Muslim and "the other," and identities seemed to be constructed through the creation of boundaries vis-à-vis food. Religious toleration and fluidity could not be cultivated beyond this point. For some participants, where dietary rules were imposed, for example, this served to constrain religious identity construction. Again, there were others that showed the relative ease with which these food prescriptions (and lack of) were accommodated in interfaith marriages. The example of alcohol shows a significant level of religious toleration and fluidity in the construction of identity.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter suggest that interfaith couples engaged in multiple processes of negotiation, in the construction of their identity. They were able to do so because of a fluidity/reflexivity in their identity that can be characterised as hybrid. This hybrid identity, however, was not always viewed as something positive. This was elucidated by the way in which couples chose to raise their children. There was a clear determination to avoid a hybrid identity for children, as this might cause the children to be confused and to be rejected from the community. The faith identity of children thus reflected parents' own concerns about community acceptance and rejection. Research has suggested that many interfaith couples do not consider themselves as independent from the community within which they live (Ata and Furlong: 2005). This indicates the centrality of community in constructing identity and the genuine need to belong, as was illustrated by the findings of this study.

Moreover, interfaith couples in their individual capacities struggle with issues of identity and community acceptance, and this is exacerbated by the entry into an interfaith marriage. Interfaith couples essentially have to change their religious identity in order to accommodate one another. While they can make certain commitments to compromise in theory, when these become a reality, it can result in a piercing awareness of differences. In addition, couples may only be willing to compromise their identity up until a certain point. When they are put under pressure, their tolerance may start to wear thin.

In the case of converts, the difficulty of constructing identity was more acute, as converts had a particular religious identity imposed on them, by their partners. This limited their ability to independently construct their identity, while having to wrestle with negotiating their space within a new and unfamiliar environment. The negotiation of identity was thus a complex and frustrating process.

Moreover, identity was about community as much as it was about the self. While participants in many ways attempted to construct their identity independently, they did so in response to the community. In addition, many participants could not conceive of the self as distinct from a community, irrespective of whether they accepted or rejected impositions from the community.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Using the concepts of “habitus” and “constructed identity” as a guide, this study has attempted to delineate how Muslim marriage norms are constructed amongst some working class interfaith couples in Cape Town, and how religious identity is constructed in this context. The study may not be generalized, but represents a credible perspective on what happens among interfaith Muslim couples in the city.

In terms of marital norms, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, as a theory of social and cultural reproduction, proved to be particularly relevant to this study. While participants seemed to independently construct their respective social realities, social and religious norms played a large role in influencing the way they thought about being in the world, and as part of particular communities. In some cases, social and religious norms seemed to be in tension with one another and in other cases, they seemed to be conflated. Marital norms seemed to be more influenced by social norms, than by religious doctrine.

This accommodation can largely be attributed to class. Class created specific gender relations, an awareness of boundaries, and modes of acceptable social behaviour. Moreover, it engendered different interpretations of religious precepts and norms. As an illustration of this, we can consider the way in which marriage departed from the traditional Islamic conception of marriage as ‘dominion’, as characterised by *Shari’ah* law. In terms of the marital relationship, women were not dominated. In some cases, they appeared to be the dominant spouse or centre of the family unit. Moreover, women seemed to take important decisions and did not really negotiate on things that they felt would compromise, or put at risk, their core beliefs or value systems. However, there was at least one case where a Muslim convert’s ability to independently construct her religious identity was repressed, through the imposition of her husband’s values, despite her assertive nature.

While couples were in some way influenced by religious doctrine, social considerations played a more important role. A cultural interpretation of religious law seemed to be at play. While marriage appeared to take on traditional forms, couples seemed to feel strongly about marriage being the appropriate forum for which to raise children. Although having or conceiving children out of wedlock may have been socially frowned upon, it seemed to be socially acceptable as well as a common occurrence, amongst those who lived in working class communities.

Marriage was not only characterised by traditional norms but by the creation of modern norms. Marriage was based on “love” relationships, as opposed to arranged marriages or marriages based on financial gain or economic advantages. Marriage appeared to take on the form of a partnership rather than a contract of exchange as delineated in *Shari’ah* law. Moreover, marriage customs often did not follow the formula of *Shari’ah* law. While many couples did engage in a Muslim marriage ceremony, several participants (who married Christian men whom upon marriage did not convert to Islam) had only a civil ceremony. It was naturally assumed by the couple that they would not be married by an Imam as their marriage fell outside the parameters of Islamic law. Others experienced adversity from religious authorities even when attempting to get married within the parameters of Islamic law on the basis that interfaith marriage was not culturally well tolerated. There was also evidence to suggest that while some religious authorities seemed to make efforts to accommodate the social realities of participants, others were more resistant, particularly giving consideration to social consequences, not only to those of the *Shari’ah*.

Participants were affected by essentialist constructions of race harboured by the broader Muslim community, and other communities, including those in their social networks. There seemed to be a definite sense of “us” and “them” created by particular communities. Where participants did not share in these essentialist notions of race, they were placed in the same kind of “outsider” bracket.

In terms of marital relationships, research has shown that religiously homogamous couples are more likely to have higher levels of marital satisfaction (Glenn, 1982; Heaton, 1984; Heaton and Pratt, 1990; Waite and Lehrer, 2003) including those who engage in religious practices together (Call and Heaton, 1997; Marks, 2006) as well as those who cultivate religiosity (Hughes and Dickson, 2005; Dollahite and Lambert, 2007). In addition, it has been argued that religiously heterogamous couples are more likely to experience conflict in their marriages (Ortega et al, 1988) and are more likely to get divorced (Bahr, 1981; Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993; Grossman, 2002). The findings of this study, however, seemed to mostly contradict these suppositions. The majority of participants seemed satisfied with their marriages and the marriages seemed stable. While participants engaged in compromise around their different religious backgrounds and cultures, and while there was disagreement around certain religious issues, it was not something that seemed to spark any kind of protracted conflict. In fact, many participants pointed out that they argued about things in the secular realm like husbands engaging in too many social activities outside of the home, for

example, or to use another example, arguments arose because of a social vice that was destructive to family life. By and large, disagreements were resolved through continuous processes of negotiation and discussion. Moreover, disagreements could not be described as something characterising family life for interfaith couples. However, in the case of participants who had recently converted to Islam, it appeared that particular values were being imposed onto them by their spouse, and they were not given much space to cultivate their own religious identity. A certain way of being Muslim was thus imposed to a certain degree, and the expectations of partners had to be managed, while grappling with the demands of negotiating a nascent Muslim identity in an unfamiliar social environment.

It has been argued by Eaton (1994) that interfaith couples, who have families that are against their marriage, may not have sufficient social supportive structures in place, when facing adversity in their relationship. This could put additional strain on the relationship. Amongst participants who did not receive support from their extended families and social networks, and who perceived certain prejudices and pressures from the Muslim community—for example, the assumption or expectation that the non-Muslim partner would convert—conflict was not triggered. This could be due to the fact that where one partner was ostracised by their family and community, they were warmly received and accepted into their partner's social networks.

Most of the participants identified with a set religion and expressed some level of religiosity or religious orientation. They were either Muslim or Christian, but hardly agnostic or secular. The majority expressed a firm belief in their respective religious traditions, and although not adopting a strict adherence to religious doctrine, incorporated their religious values into their everyday lives. Moreover, where partners retained their disparate faith identities, they acknowledged the value of the other partner's beliefs, and cultivated an inward religiosity, resulting in an acute focus on the personal relationship with God.

In terms of religious identity, the findings of this study have characterised the construction of religious identity, both within and outside of the marriage relationship, as fluid and self-reflexive. However, Anthony Giddens' assertion of the modern identity as independent from the influence of tradition was not supported. Giddens' theory of self-reflexive identity ignores the persisting impact of cultural communities in identity construction which was a central finding in this study.

Stuart Hall's post-modern theory of constructed or fluid identity, where identities are constantly being re-constituted as interplay between self and society occurs, corresponds to Giddens' self-reflexive theory of identity. It is thus more relevant as it approaches identity from a historical perspective that continues from the past into the present, while incorporating change, which is often constructed in an environment of conflicting practices and processes. Participants in this study constructed identity through numerous processes of negotiation and compromise that involved going back to themselves, but also making changes within their religious identities. In some cases, this was done with ease, while in others it was a more contentious process. At the heart of identity construction, was the persistence of community impositions.

Although the theories advanced by Giddens and Hall do not stress the role of religion in identity formation, it was quite clear from this study that religion — often intersecting with community — influenced constructions of identity. Religion, with its ties to a cultural community, informed processes of group and individual identification. While these identifications took on forms of passive acceptance and aggressive rejection, as well as something in-between, the community in one way or another had an affective role.

The religious identification and upbringing of children proved a key area of negotiation in the marital relationship. However, these negotiations had much to do with the religious identity construction of participants, rather than that of their children. Participants were determined not to confuse their children and provide a stable environment, with the result that a hybrid identity was ardently avoided, despite its representativeness of parents' own identity. It appeared that since most of the participants either grew up in interfaith homes or had closely related family in interfaith relationships, they had first-hand experience of the confusion and marginality that a hybrid identity could engender. This confusion and marginality was circumvented by the projection of a monolithic religious identity onto children. At the same time, however, participants recognised that exposure to other religions, particularly Christianity was inevitable. Some saw it as a necessary exposure, as a means to an end, while others saw it as an inevitable part of living in a multi-faith society that could not be avoided. Ultimately marriage was seen as a stable structure within which to raise children which was largely influenced by social norms, but was not always a pre-requisite for having children. It seemed that the religious identification of children was simultaneously an issue of parents' identity and need for stability.

Negotiations around dietary requirements (and lack thereof) served as a way of setting up identities within a marriage and also set the tone for the marital relationship in terms of power dynamics and the imposition of identity. It served both a way of setting boundaries and as of a measure for what was negotiable. It also reflected a certain history and engagement concerning conversion to, and from Islam, within working class communities, and what was considered socially acceptable or reprehensible.

Culture seemed to be inseparable from religious identity as religion was often used to create culture. Culture, in turn, was used to construct new religious practices. Baumann has reminded us that culture is never a permanent fixture but always in a process of engagement and development. It appeared in this study that religion was also in a process of such engagement in terms of the lived experience of participants.

Despite the fact that many participants rejected the norms espoused by the Muslim community, it did not necessarily result in a rejection of that community. In fact, it seemed apparent that there was a definite need to feel part of the community, despite being pushed to the margins. While some felt alienated and rejected by the community, and did not agree with their commonly held beliefs, the community itself was still accepted as in some way legitimate.

The Muslim community also seemed to accept violations of societal norms to a certain point. Boundaries could be crossed and were overlooked, but there were limits: the crossing of boundaries was acceptable as long as they were a temporary violation. However, where certain interfaith relationships were not accepted by the community, and the couple had been socially ostracised for example, after some time had passed, a sort of re-admission into the community was allowed, but there was no large scale acceptance. This seemed to cause some participants to define their identity in opposition to the Muslim community, yet the need to be accepted by the community subsisted. Religious identity in these cases could thus largely be characterised as ambivalent.

The construction of marital norms and religious identity of Muslim-Interfaith couples in this study, proved to be a continual process of incorporating and negotiating change, and of recognising and crossing boundaries, all of which could not be determined independently of community norms, whether in defiance or acquiescence.

Notes

1. While the Qur'an does not deal with the issue of illegitimacy (Moosa, 1997), legitimacy of birth (*nasab*) is what underpins Islamic family law, as it is the legal basis for entry into the family unit. Because sexual relationships outside of a recognised legal basis (*zina*) can potentially lead to illegitimate progeny, the act carries heavy punitive measures (Coulson, 1979). Children born out of wedlock are usually subject to severe legal disabilities and social stigmas (Moosa, 1997).
2. The presence of a contract, however, does not completely separate marriage from aspects of the sacred. Muslim jurists have described it as a religious duty that is incumbent on those who can afford it, those who covet it and those not able to contain their sexual urges (Sabiq, 1991; Haskafi, 1992). Permissible sexual relations usually take two forms: marriage, and the ownership of slave concubines; ownership, however, is not relevant to a contemporary discussion (Coulson, 1979).
3. Abdulati (1977) argues however that although this is the general consensus amongst Muslim jurists, the dower may very well have been a symbolic gesture made by the groom to indicate his awareness of the financial obligations related to marriage and his willingness, preparedness, and capability to undertake such responsibility. An offer and acceptance must take place in the presence of two free male witnesses in order for the marriage to be valid; the acceptance must reflect the entirety of the offer (Haskafi, 1992). In addition, both parties to the contract must consent to the marriage (Sabiq, 1991) and "hear the words of the other, so that the consent of both may be established with certainty" (Haskafi, 1992: 9). Furthermore, not only should there be an intention of permanency (on the part of both parties) when contracting the marriage, it should also be made public (Abdulati, 1977).
4. According to Hamid (2007), however, in the family structure of Islam, marriage is considered the bedrock: the family makes up the essential component of society and provides a stable structure within which the human race can perpetuate itself and marriage therefore presents as the only logical choice for any society. This is, however, a very modern understanding of marriage.
5. According to 'Abdullah Kamaal (1997) *mut'a* marriage is not permitted in Islam although it has been given a false legality by certain Muslim scholars. He views it as a form of "legal prostitution" which has persisted into modern times. He argues that the prevalence of *mut'a* marriage is largely a result of the vast gap between physical and socio-economic maturity. Kamaal also recognises another form of "legal prostitution" that existed previously, namely the unchecked sexual access to one's female slaves. Kamaal argues that the unconditional right to have sex with one's slave is the result of an immoral custom prevailing, rather than a law inspired by the sacred texts. In fact, he states that it was a deliberate misinterpretation of the verses in the Qur'an pertaining to *ma malakat aymanukum* (what your right hands possess) during the Abassid era, primarily to serve the purposes of the elite. Kamaal argues that if one were to sexually desire one's slave, the only licit way to engage in sexual relations would be through marriage. Moreover, the slave in question would have to willingly submit to the marriage. Kamaal views these two forms of "legal prostitution" as interlinked: both represent a desire to find a religious reason to practice something immoral, without having to consider the rights of the female party.
6. 'Abd al-ati (1977) argues that Muslim jurists most likely, in their interpretation of the sacred texts, forbade the marriage of a Muslim woman to a Christian or Jewish man, for reasons including: Muslims consider Islam to be the perfected form of the previously revealed religions so the status of the wife might be negatively affected since her husband's subordinate religious status might be accorded to her; as head of the household she owed him obedience and her right to practice her religion could not be guaranteed; and, since men were given the responsibility of maintaining and protecting women (Qur'an, 4:34), jurists felt non-Muslims could not be entrusted with such a deeply personal matter.
7. *Hijab* is an Arabic word literally meaning 'curtain' or 'partition'. In the Qur'anic text, it takes on a metaphysical meaning of 'separation'. In contemporary cultures, *hijab* generally refers

to the head scarf or head covering worn by Muslim women, as well as to ‘modest’ forms of dress (Syed, 2001). There is no real consensus amongst Muslims about whether the *hijab* is compulsory religiously or whether its compulsoriness should be codified in Islamic law. The *hijab* has often been viewed by feminists, both Muslim and otherwise, as a form of male oppression. However, its persistence in modern times has led to a re-evaluation of this commonly held view. For competing viewpoints see Fatima Mernissi’s *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*, Addison-Wesley, 1991 and Katherine Bullock’s *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2001. See also Leila Ahmed’s article titled *The Veil of Ignorance: Have we gotten the headscarf all wrong?* Foreign Policy, May/June 2011.

8. The most recent census data available from 2001 indicated that Muslims made up approximately 1.5% of the population. Currently, the South African census for 2011 is underway but the results were not be available upon submission of this thesis.
9. Arabic word denoting the body of Muslim scholars trained in Islamic law, who are the interpreters of Islam's sciences, doctrines, and laws, and who often influence the way religion is practiced.
10. According to Michelle Ruiters “An official ANC document argues that the concept of the rainbow nation could ‘fail to recognize a healthy osmosis among the various cultures and other attributes in the process towards the emergence of a new African nation. For this reason the rainbow metaphor has been discarded as a viable political tool to unite South Africans” (Ruiters, 2001: 107).
11. The names of all participants in this study have been changed in order to protect their identity.
12. Arabic term for divorce. The Islamic legal rules concerning divorce are different for males and females as well as amongst Sunni and Shi’a Muslims. Generally, however, divorce initiated by males is an extrajudicial procedure (the male holds the unilateral right to repudiate the marriage as discussed previously), while divorce initiated by females is a judicial procedure, that is, she will need to approach an Islamic judicial body to grant her a divorce.
13. The Arabic term for “religious leader” who usually leads congregational prayers at a mosque and who may act as an adviser to the community he forms part of. The term Imam has also been given to exceptional religious scholars (mostly historical) as an “honorary” title. Amongst Sunni and Shi’a Muslims, “The origin and basis of the office of Imam was conceived differently....Among Sunnites, imam was synonymous with caliph (*khalifah*), designating the successor of Muhammad, who assumed his administrative and political but not religious, functions...In Shi’ite Islam, the Imam became a figure of absolute spiritual authority and fundamental importance” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2011). The conceptualisation of Imam therefore takes on completely different meanings in these respective branches within Islam. The majority of Capetonian Muslims follow Sunni Islam (Mandivenga, 2000). Considered in the context of this study, the Imam takes on the role of congregational prayer leader, community leader (symbolic) and adviser.
14. The isiXhosa word meaning “dowry” given as a token of friendship to the bride’s family as well as to indicate the ability of the husband to take care of his wife.
15. In South Africa, during the apartheid era, Muslim marriages were not legally recognised due to its potential polygamous nature; the monogamous Christian form of marriage acting as the ideal (Tayob, 2005; Amien, 2006). Non-recognition had resulted in much disadvantage for women and children, particularly amongst the less affluent who often did not register their religious marriages in a civil court and who could not get relief by appealing to Muslim clergyman applying *Shari’ah* law (Amien, 2006). The 1994 Constitution sought to alter the racist practice of non-recognition. However, while a solid case history was built up over the years, it was not easy for secular judges to reconcile Islamic law with the South African constitution (Tayob, 2005). Currently, a Muslim Marriages Bill, which will ultimately recognise Muslim marriage and provide a more stable platform for those seeking redress in court, and which has been a major bone of contention between the traditional Muslim clergy and Muslim progressives, has been put before the South African parliament. The proposed

bill has sparked much public debate and has received fervent support but also opposition by various stakeholders.

16. According to a study by Sahl and Batson (2011) exploring the attitudes of the parents of interfaith couples in the Bible Belt area of the US, the closer the interfaith couple become, the stronger the level of aversion towards the relationship by parents.
17. See note 18.
18. The Arabic word for “school”. In this case it refers to informal Muslim schools, often referred to in Cape Town as “Moslem school” which are usually run in the late afternoon as a Muslim educational supplement to secular education. This is to be distinguished from the Arabic *Dar al-‘ulum* which refers to a more formal institution of higher Islamic learning.
19. It must be noted however that African Muslims represent the most rapid growing section of Muslims in South Africa (Vahed and Jeppie, 2005). Moreover, Itano (2002) argues that the rapid rate of conversion to Islam amongst black Africans is largely due to the fact that Islam offers a reprieve from the violence, poverty and drugs that often plague black townships.
20. The Cape Malay colloquial term for Eid.

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Appendices

Appendix A

(Re)construction of religious identity in Muslim-interfaith marriage – Interview Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. I would like to formally introduce myself. My name is Naasiha Abrahams and I am completing my Master degree in Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town. The purpose of my research is to explore the (re)construction of religious identity in the context of interfaith marriage in Cape Town. I will be using a digital voice recorder to record your answers but I would like to re-assure you that all the data collected in this interview will be kept strictly confidential in that your anonymity is guaranteed. If you feel uncomfortable at any point in the interview, please alert me and we can move on to another question or we can take a break. Do you have any questions you would like to ask before we proceed?

Tell me a little about yourself...

How old are you?

Where did you grow up?

How did you grow up?

What is your religion?

Are you currently involved in an interfaith/interfaith marriage? (*adapt if the person is divorced*)

What is your partner's religion?

Do you have any children?

Let's talk a little about your children...

How do you approach the religious education of your children?

Have you decided to raise your child as Muslim/Christian/Other/both? How did you come to this decision?

What do you do on religious holidays?

Tell me about your relationship/marriage

How did you meet your partner?

How did you get married? *If prompted ask whether the marriage was conducted in court or whether there was only a religious ceremony/ies or whether they did both.*

Were there any requirements that you and/or your partner had to meet as a condition to your getting married? If yes, how did you feel about this?

Describe your marriage. Are there any special challenges in an interfaith/interfaith marriage?

Do you ever have any religious-based disagreements/arguments with your partner?

Do you ever feel like you have to downplay aspects of your faith in order to accommodate your partner or to 'keep the peace'?

Have you ever sought counselling to help you deal with these issues? If yes, what kind of counselling did you seek? If prompted, I will give categories such as religious or secular.

(IF no children, ask “What do you do on religious holidays?” at this point)

How often do you attend mosque/church or religious gatherings?

Do you have any religiously directed dietary requirements that your partner does not share? How do you manage this?

What kind of reactions do you get from friends/family/religious authorities?

Is there anything that I have not addressed that you would like to include in this interview?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B

**University of Cape Town
Department of Religious Studies**

The (re)construction of religious identity in interfaith marriage

Naasiha Abrahams
(078) 549 7971
Naasiha.abrahams@uct.ac.za

Abdulkader Tayob
(021) 650 3452

I am a student at the University of Cape Town, and I am conducting interviews for my Masters Thesis Research Project. I am studying the (re)construction of religious identity in interfaith marriages.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions relating to the reconstruction of religious identity in the context of interfaith marriage. This interview was designed to be approximately half an hour to 45 minutes in length. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

All the information will be kept confidential. I will keep the data in a secure place. Only myself and my thesis supervisor mentioned above will have access to this information. Upon completion of this project, all data will be destroyed or stored in a secure location.

Participant's Agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

I am aware the data will be used in a Master Thesis Research Project that will be publicly available at the University of Cape Town and which may be potentially used for further research and publication. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the thesis' submission. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I understand if I say anything that I believe may incriminate myself, the interviewer will go back and record over the incriminating information. The interviewer will then ask me if I would like to continue the interview.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher or the faculty adviser (contact information given above). I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in today's interview.

Participant's signature

Date

Interviewer's signature

Appendix C

Qur'anic verses dealing with *Halal* and *Haram* (dietary requirements) (Yusuf Ali translation)

Concerning Food

2: 173. He hath only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that on which any other name hath been invoked besides that of Allah. But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits,- then is he guiltless. For Allah is Oft-forgiving Most Merciful.

5:4. They ask thee what is lawful to them (as food). Say: lawful unto you are (all) things good and pure: and what ye have taught your trained hunting animals (to catch) in the manner directed to you by Allah. eat what they catch for you, but pronounce the name of Allah over it: and fear Allah. for Allah is swift in taking account.

6: 119. Why should ye not eat of (meats) on which Allah's name hath been pronounced, when He hath explained to you in detail what is forbidden to you - except under compulsion of necessity? But many do mislead (men) by their appetites unchecked by knowledge. Thy Lord knoweth best those who transgress.

6: 121. Eat not of (meats) on which Allah's name hath not been pronounced: That would be impiety. But the evil ones ever inspire their friends to contend with you if ye were to obey them, ye would indeed be Pagans.

6: 145. Say: "I find not in the message received by me by inspiration any (meat) forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, unless it be dead meat, or blood poured forth, or the flesh of swine,- for it is an abomination - or, what is impious, (meat) on which a name has been invoked, other than Allah's". But (even so), if a person is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits,- thy Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.

16: 115. He has only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and any (food) over which the name of other than Allah has been invoked. But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits,- then Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Concerning Drink

2: 219. They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: "In them is great sin, and some profit, for men; but the sin is greater than the profit." They ask thee how much they are to spend; Say: "What is beyond your needs." Thus doth Allah Make clear to you His Signs: In order that ye may consider.

4: 43. O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say,- nor in a state of ceremonial impurity (Except when travelling on the road), until after washing your whole body. If ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women, and ye find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands. For Allah doth blot out sins and forgive again and again.

5: 93. On those who believe and do deeds of righteousness there is no blame for what they ate (in the past), when they guard themselves from evil, and believe, and do deeds of

righteousness,- (or) again, guard themselves from evil and believe,- (or) again, guard themselves from evil and do good. For Allah loveth those who do good.

5: 94. O ye who believe! Allah doth but make a trial of you in a little matter of game well within reach of your hands and your lances, that He may test who feareth him unseen: any who transgress thereafter, will have a grievous penalty.

16: 67. And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, ye get out wholesome drink and food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who are wise.

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